The project explores the image culture of Japan, and its transnational application analyzed through a postmodern framework. The primary focus is on the global production and consumption of *anime* and *manga*, and how through a postmodernist lens, there is now a blurring between simulacrum and ‘the real’ within Japan’s image-scape. The findings from this project establishes a correlation between global capitalism, Japan’s cultural policy (Cool Japan/Gross National Cool, Ambassador(s) of Cuteness, Anime Ambassadors for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, etc.), and the transformation of Japan’s image-scape into what Jean Baudrillard refers to as a “Disneyland,” arguing that in a postcolonial cultural climate, national identities becomes codified into a database for fetishized production/consumption.

The international demand for Japanese popular culture (anime, manga, film, and video games) has influenced federal, prefectural, and local municipal levels of government to change the image-scape of Japan into hyperrealities. The ‘blurring’ between simulacra and ‘the real’ in Japan’s image-scape come from the fact that various cities/towns, famous landmarks, and/or general locations are now being featured in various popular *anime* and *manga* as primary settings. And to capitalize on this exposure, tourism companies, prefectural governments, and even the locals have started to transform their ‘featured’ homes to better simulate its popular fictional representations. For example, from my experience of having visited *Gongendo* and *Washinomiya Shrine* (as well as the temples of *Asakusa* and the electronic ‘Disneyland’ of *Akihabara*), I realized how these two specific locations have transformed into hyperrealities which simulate the image-scape of the 2003 anime-manga *Lucky Star*. Taken from the Japan National Tourism Organization’ own website:

When an event is held [in these two locations], stalls are set at the shrine’s parking lot and sell a variety of Lucky Star goods like character prayer plaques and cell phone straps. And people line up in front of each stall. Also, there are stalls for Lucky Star related food and beverages such as fried noodles and sausages ["Lucky Star (Raki☆Suta)." Japan National Tourism Organization. Web].

As shown above, one method of achieving said ‘transformation’ is to have the fictional characters reside in the actual physical spaces through their depictions in merchandises, as well as artworks all over the towns. Through this perpetual translation of real image-scapes into anime, and then the sequential simulation of anime in real life, ‘the real’, through this layering of representation, becomes lost.

This project contributes to a discourse which examines the vulnerability of identity and representation in a postcolonial world. It will reveal the counter-intuitiveness of Japan’s ‘soft power’ cultural policies, and how rather than promoting culture, it is cannibalizing culture and regurgitating a hyperreality created through the process of production and consumption. Also, taking in the fact that Japan will host the Olympics in 2020, thus putting international spotlight back into the country, it is the perfect time to reevaluate Japan’s global identity and test the resiliency of the country’s neologism with popular culture.

Work Cited

"Lucky Star (Raki☆Suta)." Japan National Tourism Organization. Web. 18 Nov. 2016.

Allan Park is a first-year East Asian Studies M.A. student at the University of Toronto. His research interests are in popular culture, tourism, gender politics, body politics, diaspora, and memory (trauma). Before his M.A., Allan worked as an independent arts curator for the City of Toronto, collaborating with local emerging artists to build an infrastructure to support artists who are still in school. His initial interests in East Asian art has allowed him to engage more critically with art works, artifacts, and image-scapes in his studies, providing him with the experience and tools to deconstruct modern-Eurocentric temporalities in East Asia (as an ‘area studies’), and analyze the transnational value in Japanese aesthetics and popular representations. Allan is now engaging with cultural anthropology, hoping to acquire the skills and knowledge required for the discipline.