Writing in the wake of the Cold War, the respected historian of American foreign relations, Akira Iriye, lamented that ‘the phenomenon of cultural transmission and diffusion has been studied more extensively by anthropologists and art historians than by diplomatic historians.’ The dry historiography of post-war international politics was, he inferred, dominated by narrative studies of the exercise of military power and diplomacy between otherwise autonomous nation states. At the same time power has largely been understood in conventional strategic or economic terms as an expression of identifiable separate national interests. Yet as recent debates over US foreign relations implicitly acknowledge, cultural processes are deeply enmeshed in the exercise of its international power.

Although difficult to analyse or assess, incessant cultural exchanges have long complemented international linkages encoded in treaties, military cooperation or trade agreements. Indeed, it might be argued that cultural interactions carried by culture – from its ‘political’ to its ‘popular’ dimensions – provide the substrata on which more formal bilateral or multilateral associations are built. NATO and NAFTA for example, reflect underlying cultural or symbolic interactions as well as shared strategic or economic interests. Attempts by historians to trace the role of these interactions on formal relations between states are bedevilled by the infinite complexity of ‘culture’ and by the difficulty of defining the nature or effects of transcultural relationships. Cultural influences or inferences are frustratingly difficult to demonstrate. In contrast, analyses anchored to conventional archival sources provide accessible narratives little troubled by such challenges. Nonetheless, as the triumph of the so-called American Century has merged into discourses about globalisation, culture and ‘soft power’ have surfaced increasingly as analytical tools in the historiography of international relations and US foreign policy. Indeed, as Uta G. Poiger noted in Diplomatic History, ‘recent scholarship on [US] foreign relations focuses increasingly on its cultural dimensions.’ Much of this work is informed by new intellectual currents in cultural history and cultural studies. This article traces the emergence of these changing historiographical paradigms, most of which centre on the implications of US power and example abroad during the so-called American Century.

Before September 11th much scholarship accepted that overwhelming economic power, technological strength and cultural appeal underpinned the unrivalled power of the US abroad. Yet, given the nation’s pre- eminent authority in the post-war world generally and the ubiquitous presence of its popular culture abroad, it is surprising that US diplomatic historians were slow to discover cultural transfer and reception as central to understanding the United States and the world. ‘Ideally’, Poiger suggested in 1999, ‘work on American cultural relations abroad speaks to both sides in cultural transmission, to both the US and the receiving nation.’ And, she concluded, researchers are ‘increasingly realizing that in order to assess the American impact abroad, including the successes or failures of American foreign policies, they need to pay close attention to social and political conditions within recipient nations.’

Anticipating Poiger’s plea, Michael Hunt in Ideology and American Foreign Policy, published in 1987, attacked the ‘naı̈ve positivism’ and archival fixations that dominated conventional diplomatic historical narratives. More recently, another prominent international
relations scholar, Walter L. Hixon, has expressed concern that subtle cultural analysis remains marginalised in most work on US foreign policy. ‘One thing is sure’ he argued: ‘the United States can never be fully understood as a world power’ without ‘consideration of the appeal of its lifestyles and consumer and popular culture abroad. Nor can the nation’s approach to world affairs be understood in isolation from domestic culture’.

However Hixon’s assessment underestimates significant paradigm shifts which have influenced much recent scholarship. As Anders Stephanson argues, diplomatic history is now a greatly expanded field: ‘Diplomatic historians…seem less and less interested in the history of diplomacy.’ Interstate relations, the sovereign state and the very idea of the diplomatic subject are ‘in every sense in question’. In the light of a ‘vastly expanding world of signs and media, increasing commercial and popular mobility, new and fluctuating identities and, most strikingly, the decline of the sovereign along with the geopolitical,’ Stephanson claims, the diminishing importance of conventional international relations study is readily explained. He might have added that these influences are compounded by the scholarly popularity of ‘cultural studies’ and a broad recognition that the ‘nation’ is dissolving and fragmenting in an increasingly ‘globalised’ world.

Writing of the shifts towards ‘theoretical eclecticism’ in international relations scholarship more generally, Samuel M. Makinda notes that recent work builds on a variety of paradigms, including critical theory, feminism, post-modernism and post-structuralism. Typical of this change in US diplomatic history is Emily Rosenberg’s explicit use of ‘cultural critique’ to revisit American dollar diplomacy in which she argues somewhat opaquely ‘that many of the concerns of recent critical theory have relevance to the history of US international relations: attention to cultural narrative, the analytical decentering of states, performativity and social drama, gender and racial codings.’

Not surprisingly, the trajectory of this new cultural emphasis in US diplomatic historiography reflects recent re-theorising in the humanities and social sciences more generally – a change often referred to as the ‘linguistic turn’ or as post-structuralism. For example, Marxist informed constructs of Open Door expansion and cultural imperialism have been challenged and largely displaced. The end of the Cold War, and with it a recognition of the triumph of the American Century is now written about in cultural as well as politico-strategic terms. Like critical work on American ideology, cultural imperialism and the transforming influences of consumer capitalism which characterised ‘New Left’ and ‘revisionist’ historiography from the 1960s, much recent scholarship also focuses on the effects of American cultural exports and values abroad. Yet, overwhelmingly, recent scholarship is far more sanguine than are earlier revisionist arguments about the implications of a more open world in which American exports and capital travel freely. Accusations of ‘cultural imperialism’ still resonate in public discourse – especially in protective receiving societies like France – but these have little purchase in current scholarly discourse.

Rather than imply that an emphasis on cultural factors is unique to recent scholarship or restricted to a dated ‘New Left revisionism’, it should be acknowledged that culture and ideology have been central to a range of interpretations of US diplomacy published throughout the Cold War – especially those concerned to explore the domestic origins of US policy. A variety of topics have been explored through a cultural lens – including such themes as Wilsonian internationalism; ethnic, religious or regional influences on domestic tensions over isolationism or intervention; racial discourse on US involvement in conflicts in the Asia-Pacific; or most obviously the role of American ideology in the Cold War. More specifically, historians like Iriye, Rosenberg, Ninkovich, and Christopher Thorne, as well as a host of
revisionists influenced by William A. Williams’ Open Door arguments, placed culture and/as ideology at the forefront of varied interpretations of US foreign policy and diplomacy.10

Nationalist historiography written against the background of the early Cold War generally reflected the lament of conservative American scholars over the limits to US efforts to confront communist propaganda as socialism spread and closed much of the world to American influence and commerce. At the same time a critical historiography labelled American ideology and cultural exports as vehicles of a vast informal empire. In both conservative and radical interpretations, ‘ideology’ and ‘culture’ were often used interchangeably and remained vague polemical terms. In a field dominated by American academics and supported by bodies like the United States Information Service, the State Department and the CIA, debates were shaped by the partisan politics of the Cold War. A substantial body of literature followed Walt W. Rostow’s celebration of the transforming power of the American model of modernisation, and implicitly promoted the ideology of the US abroad from the late 1950s. In the Cold War against Marxist prescriptions for development in newly emerging states, Washington’s agencies and scholarly conscripts to its cause, attempted to exploit the social and economic achievements of their nation to guide the post-colonial world towards an American model of progress, democracy and free enterprise. ‘Claiming that the lessons of America’s past “demonstrated” the best route to genuine modernity’, Michael Latham suggests, they confidently believed the US ‘could push “stagnant” societies toward the universal, evolutionary endpoint represented by an America that had already arrived there.’11 These efforts were deeply frustrated, not least because this scholarship failed to address national differences and the complex reception accorded America’s ideological prescriptions and economic pressures abroad.

Not until the 1960s was the reception of American ideas and institutions given serious consideration. Initially European scholars led this response. Often this work was labelled anti-American and by implication as sympathetic to America’s enemies in the Cold War. Commenting on the rise of anti-Americanism, Paul Hollander has concluded that it expressed ‘an aversion to American culture in particular and its influence abroad…a rejection of American foreign policy and a firm belief in the malignity (sic) of American influence and presence anywhere in the world’.12 The historiographical equivalent of these reactions surfaced in a sustained ‘left’ critique of American ‘cultural imperialism’ – a force allegedly responsible for eroding national differences and organic culture as US-sponsored Open Door multilateralism spread the ‘American model’ and consumer capitalism. As in New Left historiography more generally, the sources of this critique were both political and intellectual: they reflected disillusion with the Vietnam War, the role of the CIA abroad, racial and urban disquiet at home, as well as the influences of the Frankfurt School and Neo-Marxist writers including Jurgen Habermas, C. Wright Mills and William A. Williams and later Noam Chomsky. No book was more important than Williams’ The Tragedy of American Diplomacy in providing a new framework which situated economic and cultural ambition at the heart of an expanding informal empire. The drive for an open world was interpreted as a euphemism for imperial expansion rooted in the economic and cultural dominance of America internationally. Emerging from this literature, ‘Cultural Imperialism’ became the central claim of a widening popular and scholarly discourse critiquing America’s dominant world role.13

John Tomlinson has argued that the cultural imperialism thesis comprised four related scholarly sub-species – those centred on media influence, the erosion of national cultural differences, the rise and dominance of global (largely US) capital, and the critique of
modernity as westernisation/Americanisation imposed on reluctant receiving societies. In recent work, ‘cultural imperialism’ is often understood as ‘an instance of internationally circulating ideology’ which serves the interests of the greater power – interests that are both material and cultural. Ideas embedded in the concept of ‘cultural imperialism’ were often expressed – in the public, political and intellectual domain…in terms linked to the dependent status of smaller states at the ‘periphery’ of power which radiated from the ‘metropolitan’ centre, the US. So-called ‘satellite societies’ (including Canada, Australia, or various states of Latin America) were usually understood as victims of unequal power relations in a shrinking world subject increasingly to American authority. ‘Americanising’ influence and interests abroad were served by the consent that consumer capitalism and/as ideology both engineered and expressed.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall the US celebrated its ideological triumph and conservative pundits spoke of the end of history (as conflict). Surprisingly, at the same time, overseas concern with American cultural imperialism and hegemonic power declined – at least in parts of Europe, Canada, Australia and much of Latin America. This change should not be over emphasised, as anti-Americanism remained a powerful force, both intellectually and politically, especially in non-Christian societies. Nonetheless, the persistence of national and local differences, coupled with the disorder of the post-Cold War world and deep conflict rooted in religion and ethnicity, undermined the appeal of arguments which stressed the unidirectional transforming influences issuing from an American ‘centre’. If radical critiques had earlier exaggerated US cultural influences abroad, in the 1990s prominent conservative nationalist commentators did likewise. For example, Francis Fukyama and Joseph Nye Jr. in different ways delighted that their nation’s culture, technology and example now underpinned America’s international triumph. In Fukyama’s ahistorical hyperbole, US power was reflected in the alleged victory of democracy, consumer capitalism (free enterprise), and liberal internationalism – the very forces targeted by an earlier generation of New Left commentators as the agents of Open Door imperialism. While not fully echoing Fukyama’s nationalistic hubris, Nye was equally convinced of his nation’s triumph and the reasons for it. Defining US culture abroad as ‘soft power’, Nye wrote enthusiastically of his nation’s desire and ability to sustain its pre-eminence in a world in which people, technologies, capital, products, images and ideas flowed incessantly across national borders. Disproportionately, these influences flowed from America to the world. ‘American popular culture, with its libertarian and egalitarian currents, dominates film, television, and electronic communications’, he wrote: ‘American leadership in the information revolution has generally increased global awareness of an openness to American ideas and values’. Yet American triumphalism exerted only a passing influence on interpretations of culture transfer and foreign policy. Most conservatives remained dismayed by the constrained impact of the American model abroad and by the unfulfilled promise of a new world order centred on US authority. By the time Bill Clinton assumed office, optimistic assessments of the New World Order were eclipsed by discourses bemoaning the New World (Dis)order.

Following Nye, it might be accepted that technological strength and cultural forces helped to maintain America’s international pre-eminence. Yet this is not to argue that US cultural exports and values have ‘Americanised’ other societies or conditioned the soil in which its foreign influence flourished. Ironically Nye’s arguments implicitly reinforced the claims of scholars concerned by the export of US culture and ideology as weapons in the Cold War. In general, these scholars were critical of Washington’s ambitions and drew attention to its
efforts to foster democracy and capitalism through cultural diplomacy and state instruments like the United States Information Agency, Voice of America, the Fulbright Foundation and the Peace Corps as well as the CIA. The pursuit of US Open Door ambitions from the early 1940s always relied on more formal instruments than the anticipated appeal of its mass/popular culture and the so-called ‘American model’. These instruments ranged across support for multilateralism and free trade, overt and covert efforts to promote ‘regime change’ abroad, and the linking of economic and development aid to military alliances or trade agreements or loans. Predictably, in the wake of September 11th, President George W. Bush has moved to reinvigorate the Peace Corps and to link foreign aid to prescribed school curricula in developing countries as he aggressively champions the virtues of American ‘civilization’. More broadly, Wilsonian Open Door rhetoric survives. In US Secretary of State, Colin Powell’s words: the American example of ‘democracy and free markets work’ and are ‘helping to reshape the entire world’.17

The terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon have undoubtedly dented the triumphalism which shaped much US public discourse in the decade after the Cold War. At the same time, these acts resuscitated a discredited debate over what Samuel P. Huntington claimed in the early 1990s was the inevitably of ‘The Clash of Civilizations’ in the post-Cold War era. Published in 1993 amidst increasing discussion of the New World (dis)order, Huntington joined those seeking to define the nature of the new international environment. Instead of the end of conflict – whether ideological or economic – Huntington found in the ‘West’ and ‘Islam’ the source of fundamental ‘cultural’ conflict. ‘It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic’, he wrote: ‘The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.’18

Within the crises of the unstable 1990s – the Gulf War, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and the Middle East – Huntington’s simplistic ahistoricism won limited scholarly support. Instead most analysts emphasised the shifting, plural and fragmentary nature of identity and nationality; the incessant migrations of peoples and ideas; the tenacity of cultural resistance and difference; and the porous nature of boundaries, whether these be cultural, ideological, political or geographic. Nonetheless events of September 11th have resuscitated the appeal of Huntington’s gross generalisations, especially in conservative American circles which refuse to recognise the persistent pluralities within so-called cultures, religions, ethnicities and nationalisms. Vast abstractions purportedly reflecting Huntington’s ‘civilisation identities’ have resurfaced. As Edward Said and others have observed the crude ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis is little more than a restatement of ‘the basic paradigm of west versus the rest’.19 Despite polemical clashes over ‘civilisation and culture’, scholarly attention has not been diverted from more subtle interpretations of the complex and unanticipated consequences of American cultural power and reception abroad – interpretations which emerged, as did Huntington’s claims, as attempts to comprehend the nature and limits of American influences abroad.

However, by the end of the Cold War, definitions of ‘Americanisation’ were always deeply contested, especially abroad. They focused to varying degrees on political and ideological issues, American values, ‘Open Door’ economics, as well as popular culture and mass media
(issues which largely mirrored the four features of cultural imperialism identified by Tomlinson above). ‘Americanisation’ was increasingly understood in the context of an expanding modernity, global economic and cultural integration and later, in terms of the international implications of ‘soft’ US cultural power in the ‘American century’. Jean Baudrillard cleverly anticipated this understanding in his 1989 study *America*, where he claimed: ‘America is the original version of modernity. We are the dubbed or subtitled version’.  

In Cold War discourses, both scholarly and popular, ‘Americanisation’ was often identified as the agent of ‘cultural imperialism’. Edward Said expressed this connection unambiguously nineteenth century, but it was in the second half of the twentieth, after the decolonisation of the British and French empires, that it directly followed its two great predecessors.” While Fukuyama has welcomed this fundamental change, most studies were alarmed by it, especially those written from abroad. In much scholarly and popular debate, ‘Americanisation’ was a pejorative label for a range of threatening incursions into the values and identities of receiving societies. Anti-Americanism, expressed most vociferously in western Europe and Latin America from the early 1950s, reflected a deep resistance to US influences.  

Australian nationalistic responses to putative ‘Americanisation’ in these years typified the rhetorical resistance of small societies to an expanding American presence internationally. In the mass media especially Australian fears were voiced by those who interpreted their small nation as a ‘satellite society’ of metropolitan America, an ‘American satellite’, a ‘client state’ of the US, or the victim of ‘Americanisation’ or American cultural imperialism. Journalistic clichés often saw Australia as the ‘fifty-first state’ or to cite Phillip Adams as ‘the ventriloquist’s dummy on the American knee.’  

America’s present was often characterised as Australia’s future. Australia was interpreted as a docile recipient of America’s informal empire or more subtly as the future America – a smaller, slightly retarded nation following the American path to modernity.  

Scholarly references to concepts linked to the blanket term ‘Americanisation’ declined in the 1990s, although anti-Americanism and fear of ‘Americanisation’ remained strong in popular discourses. Increasingly, the international reach of the United States was interpreted as a process embedded in wider currents of modernisation and globalization. At the same time, the new world (dis)order which surprisingly followed the collapse of Soviet communism, served to highlight the limits to ‘Americanisation’ as a homogenising international force. By the late-twentieth century most scholarship acknowledged, as did Peter Worsely and others, that nationalism, regionalism, ethnicity, gender and class divisions remained ‘far more important than internationalism’ or an ‘Americanised’ homogeneity. It was now widely accepted that America’s ‘soft power’ had not and would not remake the world in its own image. Cultural interrelatedness, exchange and diversity, not ‘Americanised’ uniformity, remained. American ascendancy, in Said’s words, was ‘unstable’, confronting fragmentation and difference (even within the host culture).  

And, to return to the Australian example, today few nationalist pundits or scholars remain disturbed by what Phillip Adams still sees as a ‘growing penetration’ by a form of US ‘cultural imperialism which makes past imperialisms look puny.’ In contrast to such protective nationalism, overwhelmingly, understandings of cultural reception and transformation now accept that complex processes of negotiation and adaptation are involved, not powerless imitation or uncontested domination.  

Three works written from very different national perspectives and published coincidentally in 1993, situated ‘Americanisation’ within these broader emerging debates over global
change. These studies were Rob Kroes, R.W. Rydell and D.F.J. Bosscher’s large two volume edited work on Europe, Bell and Bell’s study of Australia, and Kuisel’s award-winning work, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanisation.* Reflecting shared arguments, Kuisel wrote that:

> The issues raised by this study bear on a global phenomenon of basic economic, social and cultural changes that has unfolded during the second half of the twentieth century...There is a kind of global imperative that goes by the name of Americanization. Although the phenomenon is still described as Americanization, it has become increasingly disconnected from America. Perhaps it would be better described as the coming of consumer society. Whatever the case, the phenomenon to be observed in post-war France has parallels all over the world in recent decades.

Nonetheless, Kuisel’s work emphasised that ‘Americanization has made Europe more like us [the US]. And the transformation continues.’ Despite Kuisel’s claims, in general since the early 1990s’ interpretations stressing cultural imperialism, American hegemony and unidirectional influences from the metropolitan centre to the periphery have been eclipsed by more subtle interactive paradigms. Most recent interpretations stress not ‘Americanised’ cultural domination but shared national experiences of modernity and consumerism within an increasingly globalised community. In this view, as Bell and Bell argued in *Implicated* in 1993: Western societies share many characteristics typical of modernising states, including mass advertising, consumer credit, a commercial mass media, advanced levels of education, technology, individual mobility, suburbanisation, mixed economies, increased leisure and large middle classes. In these societies, a broadly interventionist liberal-pluralist state supports education, health and general social infrastructure. ‘Instead of attributing such developments to American causation and even influence’, they argued ‘both America and other interdependent western capitalist nations moved into the “modern” era for similar reasons.’ These correlated developments ‘need not be interpreted as caused by the US imposing its own image on other imitative cultures.’ Thus, rather than emphasising the cultural effects of American power abroad, it is possible to interpret the recent histories of most western societies ‘as following the US along a similar, if slightly retarded, road toward post-industrial status, passing through the modernising stages characteristic of all western capitalist nations during the twentieth century.’ In this view, developments linked to such changes as the motorcar, radio, television, or advertising are vehicles of a shared modernity not expressions of Americanisation. ‘National boundaries are irrelevant to the process,’ Bell and Bell claim. ‘The local and the traditional and communal are being “modernised” regardless of their geographical or ethnic origins.’

Yet the modernisation thesis knows many varieties – some of which continue to stress American intention, influence and benefit. Recently, for example, Poiger has suggested that the ‘modernization paradigm’ should be understood in terms of America’s dominant role in the post-war world. In this view, modernisation ‘links American culture to economic development and political democratisation and presents Americanisation as a process by which the United States, through its political, economic and cultural presence, manages the development of liberal democracies, market economies and consumer culture abroad.’ (President George W. Bush’s attempts to link Open Door economic reform and American economic aid to ‘democratisation’ abroad is but the most recent articulation of American intention which Poiger identifies.) Other analyses interpret modernisation as (potentially) global in scope and substitute the broader concepts of ‘globalisation’ for neatly deterministic ideas centred on cultural imperialism and Americanisation. In Tomlinson’s view, for example,
globalisation has undermined the ‘cultural coherence of all individual nation-states, including the economically powerful ones – the imperialist powers of a previous era.’

While broader studies of western cultural influences and globalisation are now common, disagreements remain over both the relative influence of the US within these processes and over the importance of explicit manipulation of receiving societies within wider processes lumped together as globalisation.

This emphasis on globalisation is not isolated to new scholarly paradigms. Today within administration circles in Washington, for example, US ambitions are routinely acknowledged as linked to globalisation. ‘I am not afraid to say that globalization is good for the US’ US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman observed on 26 March 2002.

Paradigms stressing Americanisation have not been erased by those centred on globalisation. Americanisation is still an important focus of much recent research. However, in general newer studies of cross-cultural transmission argue that resistance, not powerless emulation, characterises the response of other nations and communities to US culture and ideology. Influenced – albeit implicitly – by post-structural theory, these studies stress the varied and transforming receptions given cultural imports – from the ‘popular’ to the ‘political’. A range of studies of the US and post-war Europe have in Rob Kroes’ words, emphasised that ‘receiving cultures have constructed ‘American’ culture dialectically, incorporating it into local debates over identities past and future; and appropriated cultural modes into forms of cultural resistance and hybridisation’. A docile Europe was (is) not incorporated into an Americanised global village.

The very title of the first major scholarly debate of the ‘Americanisation’ of Europe – Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe – succinctly captured this new emphasis. Interaction replaced domination at the interpretive centre of this work and in most studies published subsequently. Richard Pells, who along with Kuisel has dominated US writing on Europe’s ‘Americanisation’, invoked theories of cross-cultural fertilisation, mutuality, cultural exchange and selective cooperation to ground his recent analysis. Under the title Not Like Us, Pells wrote in 2000, ‘the issue…is not so much the absorption of one culture by another, but how to make sense of diverse and conflicting impulses inherent in contemporary western culture as a whole’. While Kuisel’s earlier study of France placed greater emphasis on America’s capacity to seduce and change a foreign culture, Pells wrote of How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since WWII. Cultural studies influences are even more evident in other recent work. Much of this emphasises linguistic metaphors and fluid dialogical cross-cultural interactions and borrowings. Additionally, they refer to ‘creolisation’ and ‘hybridisation’ not Americanisation. To cite Bell and Bell again:

If one thinks of Australian culture and society as structured like a language….then one might think of ‘Americanisation’ as like linguistic infiltration. It does not so much replace or displace the local lexicon as supplement it and change its elements…change is effected throughout the whole structure even though no obliteration of a previous lexicon may occur…

In this model the United States itself might be interpreted as a dialogical response to European culture – a ‘creolised’ version of deep historical interactions rather than the dominant force in unbalanced centre-periphery relationships. And, as Kroes has written, if ‘America’s culture has become an unavoidable presence’ abroad, its ‘reception knows many varieties’. In a related claim, Arjun Appadurai and C. Breckinridge write that ‘most societies
today possess the means for the local production of modernity’, and through processes of cultural contestation, influences from an Americanised and modernised centre ‘become a diversely appropriated experience’.  

It might be objected that it is naïve to imply that because American influence abroad is adapted and transformed by receiving cultures it is simply one nation in an international community of equals. While the consequences of US power are complex and contradictory, few would dispute Geir Lundestad’s assessment that the ‘American Century’ distinctly reflects one nation’s particular and unprecedented power. And Lundestad argues: ‘America’s message to the world – in the form of democracy, the market economy, free trade, and American mass culture – has rarely, if ever affected the world more than today.’ Echoes of the ‘cultural imperialism’ thesis remain – although even these interpretations are now tempered by more subtle ideas about cultural transfer, reception and vernacularisation. If explicit charges of cultural imperialism are no longer widespread in scholarly discourse, the central transforming international role of the United States and ‘Americanisation’ remain lively concerns. In seeking to explain why the United States ‘seems to be the partner of [alliance] choice for all the major powers’, Lundestad suggests that this is probably because its power is both overwhelming and complex, and also because its power is of a different nature from that of traditional super powers and imperial states. His conclusion is reminiscent of much earlier revisionist discussions of Open Door empire and echoes ideas of American exceptionalism: ‘Rarely does the United States conquer; it rules in more indirect, more American ways.’ At the same time, American practices and ideas are so inextricably enmeshed in broader processes of modernisation, globalisation, and consumerism that is widely accepted as simplistic and misleading to identify Americanisation as an unproblematic process (re)making the world in the image of the United States. Such broad concepts are at the centre of debates on US diplomacy and foreign relations, and increasingly shape scholarship in a field long dominated by narrow empirical narrative historiography.

NOTES


2. Attempts to define culture have increasingly incorporated ideology and popular/mass culture into ever broadening understandings which no longer see culture as a discreet analytical or historical category. For Iriye culture includes (political) ideology, shared beliefs and customs (ibid, pp. 99-107). Most recent work finds the concept deeply problematic and takes as its starting point Raymond Williams’ concern that culture is ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’ (Williams in John Tomlinson *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*, London, 1991, p.4). For details of changing conceptions of culture in a modern international context, see Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, London, 1992. 

3. Uta G. Poiger, ‘Beyond “Modernization” and “Colonization”’, *Diplomatic History*, 23: 1, 1999, p. 45. For very different examples of this trend, see Emily Rosenberg, ‘Revisiting

4. Poiger, op. cit., p. 49.


22. See note 12 above.


30. Poiger, op. cit., p. 45.
31. Tomlinson, op. cit., p. 175
36. Bell and Bell, *Implicated*, op. cit., p. 11.