

Introduction

On the evening of March 29, 1951, an expectant audience filled the seats of the St. James Theater in New York City for the opening of Rodgers and Hammerstein's newest musical, *The King and I*. As the show began, the audience settled in to enjoy the unfolding spectacle of Rodgers and Hammerstein's songs, Jerome Robbins's choreography, and Irene Sharaff's costumes. One scene in particular stood out for many viewers that first night, as it did for subsequent viewers of the 1956 film version. Set in the palace schoolroom, it presents Anna Leonowens as teacher to the King of Siam's numerous children and wives; a large map, ornately framed and free-standing, serves as the backdrop for the scene (Figure 1). The map is unfamiliar, however, and hard to decipher: the land mass that dominates it only vaguely resembles Asia. The King's head wife, acting as Anna's assistant, begins the geography lesson in a proudly nationalistic vein: she contrasts wealthy and powerful Siam, a large red area of the map onto which a fierce-looking military figure has been superimposed, with its weaker and poorer neighbor Burma, a smaller green area accompanied by a pathetic naked figure. Anna quickly takes over the lesson and, explaining that the map they have been using is outdated, pulls down a new map—"just arrived from England"—that completely covers the old one. This map, a Mercator projection, centers on Europe and depicts the world's countries in a size and relation that theater and movie audiences would instantly recognize. When Anna points out Siam, now quite small (Figure 2), the crown prince becomes out-raged and refuses to accept his country's decentering and diminution; he relents only after Anna compares it to the even smaller England. At this point Anna introduces a song as a way of reinforcing her cartographic lesson. Seated in front of the map with the royal children ringed around her, she sings "Getting to Know You." The children and wives join in at the refrain, and they all sing together about the pleasures of transforming strangers into friends. At the song's conclusion, the opening-night audience at the St. James Theater broke out into spontaneous cheers and applause.¹



Figure 1. Anna (Deborah Kerr) and the old map of Siam in the film *The King and I*, 1956. (Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive)

The King and I belongs to a distinct cultural moment in which Americans turned their attention eastward. Between 1945 and 1961 American cultural producers churned out a steady stream of stories, fiction and nonfiction, that took Asia and the Pacific as their subject matter. Journalist John Hersey documented the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan (*Hiroshima*), playwright John Patrick brought U.S.-occupied Okinawa into Broadway theaters (*Teahouse of the August Moon*), novelist James Michener probed the merits of the Korean War (*The Bridges at Toko-Ri*), travel writer Lowell Thomas Jr. explored Tibet (*Out of This World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet*), Hollywood director Richard Quine put contemporary Hong Kong onto movie screens (*The World of Suzy Wong*), and photographer Margaret Bourke-White framed views of India (*Halfway to Freedom*). Diplomat Chester Bowles (*Ambassador's Report*) and former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt (*India and the Awakening East*) described the political changes that were sweeping the region, while political observers such as David Bernstein traced the historical roots of these revolutionary transformations (*The Philippine Story*). Alan Watts (*Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen*) and Columbia University lecturer D. T. Suzuki popularized Zen Buddhism; Jack Kerouac (*The Dharma Bums*) and other Beat writers inflected it with a bohemian cachet. Motels, restaurants, and cocktail lounges surrounded their patrons in Polynesian chic, even as Chinese-born and Chinese American writers such as Lin Yutang (*Chinatown Family*) and Jade Snow Wong (*Fifth Chinese Daughter*) introduced readers to their fellow Americans of Asian heritage.²



Figure 2. Anna (Deborah Kerr) locates Siam on the new map of the world in the film *The King and I*, 1956. (Photofest)

Why did Asia and the Pacific hold such a fascination for so many Americans in the late 1940s and 1950s? Why did Americans want to produce and consume so many stories about this part of the world?

This interest was not wholly new, of course: Americans had been producing and consuming Asia symbolically for the previous century and a half. In the late eighteenth century wealthy Bostonians decorated their homes with Asian textiles, pottery, and objets d'art brought to them through the newly opened China trade. In the nineteenth century Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman dipped into Hindu and Buddhist scriptures for literary inspiration, Herman Melville narrated his own and the nation's adventures in the Pacific, and Christian missionaries published firsthand accounts of life in China, Japan, and India. World's fairs brought millions of Americans, including architect Frank Lloyd Wright, face to face with Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino culture between 1876 and 1915. The modernist sensibilities of Ezra Pound, like those of Wright, found stimulation in Asia, and his poetry in the 1910s and 1920s, such as *Cathay* and *The Cantos*, displayed his immersion in Confucian aesthetics and philosophy. This cultural fascination with Asia increased during the 1930s and 1940s, as war in the Pacific turned from a possibility into a reality. In 1931 Pearl S. Buck published her novel *The Good Earth*, which became the most influential American representation of China: it sold more than two million copies, appeared on Broadway as a play, and attracted twenty-three million viewers in a 1937 movie version. During the war publisher Henry R. Luce used his *Time-Life* empire to disseminate positive stories about America's Chinese allies, even as propagandists in Washington and Hollywood depicted the Japanese as a faceless mass of subhuman enemies worthy of extermination. Lowbrow mass culture had its own investment in Asian material, and the pulp novels and serial movies of the 1930s and 1940s were filled with the Oriental villainy and detective heroics of Fu Manchu, Ming the Merciless, Charlie Chan, and Mr. Moto. Postwar representations of Asia thus constitute a chapter within a much longer history.³

Part of the reason why Americans were especially interested in Asia after World War II was that the Cold War made Asia important to the United States in ways that it had not been before. Between 1945 and 1961 the United States expanded its political, military, and economic power in the region to an unprecedented degree, making its presence felt throughout the great arc that stretched from Korea in the north, down through the Chinese mainland and Taiwan, along the offshore island chains of Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia, out into the Pacific, across the Southeast Asian peninsula, and up into the Indian subcontinent. Hundreds of thousands of Americans flowed into Asia during the 1940s and 1950s as soldiers, diplomats, foreign aid workers, missionaries, technicians, professors, students, businesspeople, and tourists. Never before had American influence reached so far and so wide into Asia and the Pacific. This expansion of U.S. power did not occur in a smooth and uncontested fashion, however. It coincided—and existed in tension with—the revolutionary process of decolonization. Inspired by Japan's wartime victories against the West, nationalists throughout Asia launched independence movements after the war that succeeded in driving out the colonial powers. The Philippines gained independence from the United States in 1946, India and Pakistan from Great Britain in 1947, Indonesia from the Dutch in 1949, and Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from the French in 1949 (nominally) and 1954 (actually). “Between 1945 and 1960,” Geoffrey Barraclough has noted, “no less than forty countries with a population of eight hundred million—more than a quarter of the world's inhabitants—revolted against colonialism and won their independence. Never before in human history had so revolutionary a reversal occurred with such rapidity.”⁴

This book is an attempt to explain the relationship between the expansion of U.S. power into Asia between 1945 and 1961 and the simultaneous proliferation of popular American representations of Asia. I take as my starting point the end of the Pacific war in 1945, when the United States began extending the position of political and military dominance achieved during the previous four years. The year 1945 makes a logical starting point for an investigation of the cultural sphere as well, because the end of the war also prompted changes in American attitudes towards Asia. I conclude at a point when this expansive material and symbolic investment in Asia and the Pacific began to

narrow down. After 1961 the war in Vietnam increasingly consumed the attention of Washington's policymakers to the near exclusion of the rest of the region, while the domestic tumult unleashed by the civil rights movement, the urban crisis, and the antiwar movement absorbed the interest of the nation's artists and intellectuals. At the same time, race relations conceived in black- and-white terms nudged Asian Americans off the nation's cultural radar screen. As the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' obsession with Vietnam deepened, Asia gradually—and perhaps ironically—faded from the bestseller lists and the Broadway stages. American interest in Asia did not disappear in the 1960s and 1970s, of course, but it found expression in different social and cultural forms.

One of the ways in which I explore the relationship between postwar foreign policy and popular culture is by breaking down the sharp division that is often assumed to separate the material from the representational. The exercise of political, economic, and military power always depends upon the mechanisms of “culture,” in the form of the creative use of language and the deployment of shared stories. Throughout this book I interpret political speeches, White House memos, National Security Council deliberations, foreign policy analyses, and State Department publications—as well as specific policies themselves—as rich texts worthy of cultural analysis. At the same time, works of culture are always embedded in concrete material and social relations. Following Raymond Williams, I believe they are most fully understood not as free-standing aesthetic objects, but as component pieces of larger cultural formations. In my interpretation of individual cultural texts I am interested in the intricacies of literary, cinematic, and theatrical form and how they work to create meaning. I am also interested, however, in the particularities of any given text's production, circulation, and reception. I explore how popular representations of Asia took shape in relation to specific cultural institutions, to the political commitments of their authors, to the legal structures regulating race and statehood, to the ebb and flow of social attitudes, and to the shifting political discourses and policies that defined Asia. Biographies matter here, as do conventions of genre, sales figures, foreign-language translations, theatrical casting practices, editorial assistance, advertisements, and reviews. In reading individual texts as part of a cultural formation, I explore how meanings do not reside exclusively within the texts themselves, but are also generated through their intersections with other meaning-making discourses and activities. A combined focus on these imaginative, social, and material processes, which, taken together, constitute a cultural formation, helps to bridge the gap that divides the realm of foreign policy from the realm of popular culture.⁵

As a second method of exploring the relationship between the material and the symbolic investment in Asia, I also investigate the cultural work that these texts performed. Working with a model of cultural hegemony, I explore the role that representations of Asia and the Pacific played in reinforcing the famed “Cold War consensus,” the domestic hegemonic bloc that supported the postwar expansion of U.S. power around the world. The realm of culture, far from being wholly separate from the realm of politics, offers a privileged space in which politically salient meanings can be constructed and questioned, where social categories can be defined and delimited, where shared values can be affirmed and contested. Cultural texts perform a hegemonic function to the extent that they legitimate a given distribution of power, both within and beyond the borders of the nation. Education and participation play a crucial role in this process. The working of hegemony requires teaching the various members of a particular historical bloc, or alliance of social groups, how their interests intersect and why a certain arrangement of power serves their needs. It also requires creating opportunities for people to feel that they are taking an active part in building a viable social and political order. These processes of education and participation foster new loyalties and affiliations and thus help to secure new social and political alliances. Cultural hegemony also works by developing what Raymond Williams has called “structures of feeling.” In a structure of feeling, the ideological principles that support a given arrangement of power are translated into regularized patterns of emotion and sentiment. A structure of feeling brings these principles to life in the form of affective relationships, real or imagined, which can be lived as everyday experience and consciousness.⁶

Much of the popular interest in Asia found expression within the cultural formation that sophisticated intellectuals of the 1940s and 1950s dismissed as middlebrow, and it is on that formation that this book focuses. It explores how middlebrow intellectuals, texts, and institutions

tried to educate Americans about their evolving relationships with Asia, and how they created opportunities—real and symbolic—for their audiences to participate in the forging of these relationships. Middlebrow intellectuals often presented the Cold War as something that ordinary Americans could take part in, as a set of activities in which they could invest their emotional and intellectual energy. By foregrounding these processes of education and participation, the middlebrow cultural formation imagined and facilitated the forging of a new set of affiliations—nationally, among diverse social and political groups within the United States, and transnationally, between the United States and the noncommunist parts of Asia. Middlebrow culture brought these alliances to life by translating them into personal terms and imbuing them with sentiment, so that they became emotionally rich relationships that Americans could inhabit imaginatively in their everyday lives.

This book devotes its attention both to cultural institutions, such as *Reader's Digest* and the *Saturday Review* magazines, and to those individual works that reached the largest audiences, had the widest influence, and managed to retain a measure of their popularity over the succeeding decades. The chapters that follow analyze William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick's novel about foreign aid in Southeast Asia, *The Ugly American* (1958); Dr. Thomas A. Dooley's two nonfiction accounts of his experiences in Laos, *The Edge of Tomorrow* (1958) and *The Night They Burned the Mountain* (1960); James A. Michener's collection of travel essays, *The Voice of Asia* (1951), and his novel *Hawaii* (1959); and Rodgers and Hammerstein's trio of Oriental musicals, *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), and *Flower Drum Song* (1958). Extraordinarily popular and widely circulated, these are the bestsellers, the book club main selections, the Academy Award winners, and the Broadway record-breakers of their time—the greatest hits, as it were, of the postwar fascination with Asia. In their themes, styles, and attitudes they are also representative of the larger body of middlebrow texts produced about Asia during this period. Like the vast majority of middlebrow cultural productions, these texts explore the noncommunist parts of Asia: mainland China, North Korea, and North Vietnam remain largely beyond their purview. James Michener and Rodgers and Hammerstein receive particular attention because each of them produced a sustained body of work about Asia and the Pacific—eleven books for Michener, a trilogy of musicals for Rodgers and Hammerstein—and because each ultimately linked the American presence in Asia to the story of Asian Americans at home. This is not an exhaustive study of all postwar images of Asia, but an argument for thinking about U.S. global expansion and the culture of the Cold War in new ways based on an in-depth investigation of one particularly rich representational vein.

The texts that I explore do not exist in a cause-and-effect relationship with the Cold War foreign policies pursued by Washington: they did not simply reflect those policies, nor did they determine them. Rather, they served as a cultural space in which the ideologies undergirding those policies could be, at various moments, articulated, endorsed, questioned, softened, and mystified. Nor were the texts I examine unambiguous or internally coherent ideological broadsides. Instead, they provided an arena in which the multiple voices of allied, but still distinct, social groups could be heard. They served as a forum in which ideas associated with residual, emergent, and alternative models of international engagement could find expression alongside affirmations of the dominant ones of the Cold War. A genuine utopian impulse often resided within them and suggested the potential for challenging the global arrangements of power that Washington pursued.

The texts that I look at performed a certain kind of cultural work: they helped to construct a national identity for the United States as a global power. Although the United States had been a world economic power since the end of the nineteenth century, and a world political and military power since the end of World War I, not until after World War II did it displace Great Britain as the world's most powerful nation. Because this was a new role, and because it required repudiating a longstanding intellectual tradition (if not a political reality) of isolationism, this rise to power demanded a reworking of national self-definition. The task of national identity formation was complicated by the fact that this rise to global power took place at the very moment when nationalist leaders throughout Asia were in the process of throwing off Western domination. The political and cultural problem for Americans thus became, How can we define our nation as a nonimperial world

power in the age of decolonization? This was also a problem of collective subject formation: How can we transform our sense of ourselves from narrow provincials into cosmopolitan citizens of the world who possess a global consciousness?

In grappling with these problems, middlebrow texts often continued patterns of representation that earlier generations of Americans and Europeans had developed. Sometimes they told the same stories: *The King and I*, for instance, was indirectly based on a pair of books that the real Anna Leonowens published in the 1870s; other times they recycled familiar images, tropes, characters, and attitudes. Yet these postwar texts also differed from their predecessors in significant ways. Some of these distinctive features can be seen by comparing postwar texts with those of the prewar period, such as *The Good Earth*. Buck set her novel about Chinese peasant life during an unspecified period in the nineteenth or early twentieth century and focused it exclusively on Chinese characters, whose daily life and routines she painted in minute, ethnographic detail. Postwar representations of Asia, in contrast, tended to take the geopolitics of the Cold War as the ground for their narratives, either directly or implicitly. They often figured Asia as a contested terrain caught in the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, or explored the tensions between U.S. expansion and Asian decolonization. Even those texts set in the past and wrapped in an air of fantasy, such as *The King and I*, resonated self-consciously with contemporary political issues. Second, postwar texts tended not to focus exclusively on the people, histories, and cultures of Asia, as Buck did with China. Rather, their interest lay with the Americans (or, in the case of *The King and I*, Americanized Western characters) who lived, worked, and traveled in Asia. They devoted their energies to exploring how these Americans came to Asia, what they were doing there, and whether or not their presence was justified. Ultimately, these texts were not interested in Asia per se, but in America and its relationship to Asia.

A third, and most distinctive, feature of the postwar texts lies in their treatment of race and the ways they linked questions of race to U.S. expansion. Numerous cultural historians have shown how constructions of racial differences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries played an integral role in America's expansion across the continent and in its acquisition of a territorial empire. They have explored how the geographical extension of American power was enabled by the myth of the frontier, by popular narratives of savage war and Indian hating, and by domestic narratives that imagined expansion as a process of expelling racial Others from an ever-expanding nation figured as home. Edward Said made a related argument in his groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1978), in which he proposed that European representations of the Middle East had enabled the exercise of European imperial power in that part of the world for centuries. Said defined Orientalism as a pervasive Western discourse about the East that found expression in everything from painting to literature to scholarly treatises. At the heart of Orientalism, he argued, lay an ideology of difference. Orientalism constructed the "East" and the "West" as internally coherent and mutually exclusive entities; it insisted that "there is an 'us' and a 'them,' each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident." Orientalism worked as an instrument of Western domination, according to Said, by defining the East in relation to the West through a series of oppositions, each of which located the East in a subordinate position. It presented the West as, for example, rational, progressive, adult, and masculine, and the East, in turn, as irrational, backward-looking, childish, and feminine. This binary logic constructed the East as an inferior racial Other to the West, and legitimated European imperialism by overdetermining the idea of Western superiority. Said extended his argument to encompass American culture as well, arguing that when the United States displaced France and Britain as global powers after World War II, it adopted their discourse of Orientalism as well.⁷

While many American representations of Asia produced before World War II fit comfortably within Said's model of Orientalism, many postwar representations of noncommunist Asia do not, although they do not contradict it entirely. The reason for this lies in the evolution of the American understanding of race. Scientific thinking about race began to change in the early twentieth century, when anthropologist Franz Boas moved away from the idea of immutable biological difference as a way to explain the diversity of the world's people and developed a more flexible model of cultural difference instead. A pluralistic model of society gradually followed from Boas's work: if intergroup differences resulted from relatively superficial cultural factors rather than essential biological ones,

then these differences could be more easily accommodated within a relatively flexible social order. During World War II, when the United States fought against a Nazi regime espousing racial purity, the Boasian culture concept found wide acceptance. Washington defended democracy during the war as a universal political philosophy applicable to all peoples regardless of race, and by doing so it helped move into the mainstream the idea of America as a harmonious nation made up of people from diverse ethnic, racial, national, and religious backgrounds. After World War II, as Penny Von Eschen, Nikhil Singh, and Mary Dudziak have shown, Cold War ideologues mobilized this idea of a racially and ethnically diverse America in the service of U.S. global expansion. The United States thus became the only Western nation that sought to legitimate its world-ordering ambitions by championing the idea (if not always the practice) of racial equality. In contrast to nineteenth-century European imperial powers, the captains of America's postwar expansion explicitly denounced the idea of essential racial differences and hierarchies. They generated instead a wide-ranging discourse of racial tolerance and inclusion that served as the official ideology undergirding postwar expansion.

8

Middlebrow intellectuals eagerly embraced these ideals of tolerance and inclusion, and largely framed their representations of noncommunist Asia within them. Let's return for a moment to the "Getting to Know You" scene in *The King and I*, and read it as a representative instance of a hegemonic middlebrow culture. At one level the scene produces a hierarchical relation between West and East: Anna is an adult who dispenses knowledge, and her students are ignorant children subordinate to her authority. When Anna replaces the old Siamese map with the new English one, she replaces the local and implicitly inferior knowledge of the Siamese with a metropolitan and implicitly superior knowledge derived from European models. In the best Orientalist fashion, she denies the Siamese the ability to represent themselves and insists that they can only truly know themselves through a Western and literally Eurocentric system of knowledge. But something else is going on here as well: Anna is more interested in forging connections between East and West than she is in demarcating racial and cultural differences. Anna introduces a new worldview that defines Siam—which has never been colonized by Europeans—not through its traditional enmity with neighboring Burma, but by its heretofore unrecognized geographical similarity to distant England. She presents a world in which East and West can be understood as related to one another outside the coercive ties of empire. A shared history of political independence, as well as small size, implicitly connects England and Siam. Anna animates this vision of interconnectedness by infusing it with emotion: as she sings "Getting to Know You," she translates the map's geography lesson into a playful song about the intimate bonds of friendship that can reach across national and cultural divides. More important, Anna opens up a way for the children to participate in the forging of these emotional—and international—ties when she invites them to sing along. These ties are thus not imposed on the children, but created by them through the pleasurable process of singing in unison. By the end of the number the hierarchical differences that structured the scene at the outset—teacher and students, adult and children, European and Asian, Western knowledge and local knowledge—are looser, although they do not disappear entirely. Anna and the children sit together on the floor, laughing and hugging each other: through the processes of education, participation, and the cultivation of emotions, they create a new community that includes Asians and Westerners.

I want to read Anna as an idealized self-representation of the middlebrow artists and intellectuals who form the subject of this book. In addition to inculcating the ideal of East-West friendship, Anna also teaches the children a new way of understanding their relation to the world: in changing maps, she replaces their national consciousness with a global one. Just as Anna directs her students' attention beyond the borders of Siam and Burma, so middlebrow intellectuals of the late 1940s and 1950s saw themselves as educating Americans about their changing relationship to the world at large. Like Anna, middlebrow novelists, travel writers, memoirists, editors, and lyricists used mapping as one of their preferred cultural strategies. Their texts are full of maps, both literal and figurative, of an Asia being transformed by hot and cold wars, nationalist revolutions, and shifting political alliances; in the context of the Cold War, these mappings of Asia implied new mappings of America as well. Middlebrow cultural producers sought to replace the old nationalist map that Americans carried in their minds, in which the United States filled the frame, with a new

internationalist one, in which the United States and “free” Asia alike were embedded within a larger world system. Like Anna, they wanted to replace a national imaginary based on separation with a global imaginary based on connection. On stage, the British schoolteacher mediates between her students and this new representation of the world, managing the children's access to it, helping them to locate themselves within it, and explaining the laws according to which it works. The producers of middlebrow culture performed a similar function: they sought to situate their audience in relation to a world increasingly understood as interconnected, whose ligatures were defined by the logic of the Cold War. From this perspective, we can see that the true audience for Anna's global lesson is not the nineteenth-century Siamese children on stage, but the postwar American adults sitting behind them in the theater.

Also like Anna, middlebrow intellectuals repudiated imperialism as an acceptable model for East-West relations. Instead, they produced what Mary Louise Pratt has called “narratives of anti-conquest,” which legitimated U.S. expansion while denying its coercive or imperial nature. Middlebrow intellectuals tended to denounce all forms of internationalism based on religious conversion, territorial appropriation, or the direct rule of one people by another. Instead they envisioned U.S. global expansion as taking place within a system of reciprocity. In their view, America did not pursue its naked self-interest through the coercion and subjugation of others, but engaged in exchanges that benefited all parties. In keeping with this view, middlebrow texts are full of exchanges between Americans and Asians: intellectual exchanges of conversation, economic exchanges of shopping, emotional exchanges of love, physical exchanges of tourism and immigration.⁹

These middlebrow narratives of anticonquest were often produced within a sentimental framework. “Sentimental” is often used as a pejorative term to denote a false or shallow emotionalism, but it is better understood as a name for a complex cultural mode. The sentimental reached its peak of cultural currency during the early nineteenth century, but its roots stretch back to the writings of Rousseau and Adam Smith, and its branches reach forward into the “Lifetime” movies of the present day. Postwar middlebrow texts, such as *The King and I*, can be seen as sentimental not because they tell a particular type of story, but because they tell a variety of stories in a particular way. The sentimental mode has a number of defining features that make it an ideal vehicle for narratives of anticonquest. First, sentimental narratives tend to focus not on the lone individual but on the “self-in-relation”; they uphold human connection as the highest ideal and emphasize the forging of bonds and the creation of solidarities among friends, family, and community. Second, a sentimental text explores how these bonds are forged across a divide of difference—of race, class, sex, nation, religion, and so on; the sentimental is thus a universalizing mode that imagines the possibility of transcending particularity by recognizing a common and shared humanity. Third, these sentimental human connections are characterized by reciprocity and exchange, often of a personal, intellectual, or material nature; the paired acts of giving and receiving serve as the mechanisms through which differences are bridged. Fourth, emotions serve as the means for achieving and maintaining this exchange; the sentimental mode values the intensity of the individual's felt experience, and holds up sympathy—the ability to feel what another person is feeling, especially his suffering—as the most prized. Finally, the violation of these affective bonds, through the loss of a member of the community or the rupture of communal ties, represents the greatest trauma within the sentimental universe.¹⁰

It is not surprising that middlebrow intellectuals would use the sentimental mode to think about questions of the Cold War and U.S. expansion: the sentimental has a long history within the United States, and the West more generally, as a politicized discourse. Because of its emphasis on recognizing the humanity of socially marginalized groups, sentimentalism in the nineteenth century underwrote a wide range of reform movements, including temperance, child protection, urban reform, prison reform, and, above all, abolitionism. The real Anna Leonowens, for instance, used the sentimental mode in her books to make a case for the abolition of slavery and the harem in nineteenth-century Siam. The power of sympathy could be a double-edged one, however: in forging emotionally satisfying bonds across the divides of difference and in providing access to another's subjectivity, the sentimental could serve as an instrument for exercising power. Pratt has argued that

sentimental narratives of anticonquest facilitated the colonization of South America, while others have suggested that sentimentalism underwrote social control projects such as the education of Indians in the American West and served as an instrument of American colonialism in the Philippines. As a politicized discourse, then, the sentimental carried both a progressive and an expansionist legacy that postwar intellectuals could tap into.¹¹

The pervasive sentimentalism of middlebrow depictions of Asia in the postwar period complicates their relation to Said's model of Orientalism. Their sentimental insistence on bridging differences, in combination with their liberal disavowals of racial hierarchy, suggests a need to extend the definition of Orientalism beyond the confines that Said first established for it. A number of scholars have begun this work. Lisa Lowe has shown that Orientalism is a heterogeneous rather than a monolithic discourse, and that it takes multiple and often contradictory forms. Melani McAlister, in turn, has argued that post-World War II American culture is better understood via a model of what she calls post-Orientalism. In her analysis of the relationship between expanding U.S. interests in the Middle East and popular media representations, she discovered that the meanings the Middle East has carried for Americans over the past fifty years have been "far more mobile, flexible, and rich than the Orientalism binary would allow." Instead of a consistent discourse of opposition, she found a complex cultural logic of American investment in, affiliation with, and appropriation of the Middle East for a diverse range of purposes. Instead of working to separate the United States from the Middle East, she suggests, American culture has struggled to bind them together in myriad ways that sometimes supported and sometimes challenged the expansion of U.S. power. The representations of Asia that I explore in the following chapters work in similarly complex ways, sometimes following Said's model of difference and hierarchy, and in other ways contradicting it.¹²

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said proposed some alternatives to Orientalism. He suggested that producers of knowledge could extricate themselves from Orientalist discourse, and the power relations it constructs, by acknowledging the inextricable "interdependence" of East and West, by recognizing the inescapably "hybrid" nature of all forms of culture, and by developing the ability to think "sympathetically" about "others" rather than just about "us." Only by becoming aware of the progressive "integration" of East and West that imperialism set in motion, Said argued, can the imperialist logic of difference be undermined. In fact, however, the Cold War Orientalism produced by middlebrow intellectuals and policymaking elites deployed the very discursive strategies that Said saw as oppositional. These texts narrated the knitting of ties between the United States and noncommunist Asia, and were infused with a structure of feeling that privileged precisely the values of interdependence, sympathy, and hybridity. These narratives and structures of feeling, far from undermining the global assertion of U.S. power, often supported it. The distinctive form of Orientalism that middlebrow Americans produced and consumed during the early Cold War period must be seen, then, as working through a logic of affiliation as well as through one of difference.¹³

The ideal of U.S.-Asian integration functioned as one of the foundational concepts of Cold War Orientalism. Revisionist historians of the Cold War have begun to view the period between 1945 and 1991 not as a unique historical era defined by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, but as a chapter in the ongoing process of globalization. From this perspective, the Cold War was as much about creating an economically, politically, and militarily integrated "free world," as it was about waging a war of attrition against the Soviets. Within the United States, the concept of U.S.-Asian integration manifested itself in the reform of U.S. immigration and naturalization laws in ways that eased the entry of Asians into the United States and facilitated their naturalization as citizens, thereby opening up the way for the gradual integration of Asian Americans into the social and political mainstream. I want to suggest that Cold War Orientalism had this dual concept of integration—international and domestic—embedded in its core. Together, middlebrow intellectuals and Washington policymakers produced a sentimental discourse of integration that imagined the forging of bonds between Asians and Americans both at home and abroad.

Different kinds of expansion demand and produce different legitimating discourses. Because U.S. expansion into Asia was predicated on the principle of international integration rather than on territorial imperialism, it demanded an ideology of global interdependence rather than one of racial difference. The Cold War Orientalism generated by middlebrow intellectuals articulated precisely

such an ideology. In texts such as *The King and I*'s "Getting to Know You," cultural producers imaginatively mapped a network of sentimental pathways between the United States and Asia that paralleled and reinforced the more material pathways along which America's economic, political, and military power flowed.

Copyright 2003. University of California Press.
All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.