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Neoliberalism, and Cultural Citizenship

In *American Woman: A Novel* (2003), Susan Choi fictionalizes the “missing year” of unknown events following the 1974 kidnapping of Patty Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army, a radical political group loosely connected to the Weather Underground Organization.¹ Choi’s version features Japanese American protagonist Jenny Shimada as an antiwar activist of the militant New Left variety who has bombed a government draft office in California and gone underground in upstate New York as Iris Wong. Soon, Jenny summons inspiration to follow her political conscience from the history of her father’s internment, draft resistance, and incarceration during World War II, and returns to the West Coast. While Jenny is arrested in California, she continues to explore politics in feminist separatist and cultural nationalist communities and joins her father in a pilgrimage to Manzanar.

A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in fiction, Choi’s second novel is a bracing indictment of US imperialism, capitalism, and Orientalism that draws connections between World War II and the American war in Viet Nam, not only through an unequivocal challenge to US foreign policy and militarization in Asia but also through a condemning representation of the racialization of Jenny as immutably foreign in the United States. *American Woman* thematizes, in fact, the orthodoxy in Asian Americanist critique that Asian Americans and especially Asian American women are invisible in the United States as citizens or understood only as racial Other, alien, or even enemy.² As the title implies, the novel undertakes a corrective, which it accomplishes through an excavation

of the historical struggle for Japanese American citizenship. Moreover, *American Woman* details how national belonging may also be claimed outside of liberal citizenship, through radical political movements and even armed struggle for international justice, especially because the book is based on what Choi calls the “odd footnote” of Wendy Yoshimura’s actual involvement in the SLA (Hong 2). Yoshimura, an artist who was born in the Manzanar War Relocation Center in 1943 while her family was interned, was arrested with Patty Hearst in 1975 but quickly disappeared from headlines. Although she denied involvement in key activities, a garage rented by Yoshimura under an assumed name contained a pipe bomb and a machine gun and led to a conviction on explosives and weapons charges. She served about a year in prison.

Through the use of the underground as a literal space and time outside the nation, as a vantage point from which to survey discourses of belonging, and as a metaphor for a citizenry invisible to a larger public sphere but sharing at least some of its terrain, *American Woman* interrogates the dominant terms of political participation and affiliation. It provides a trenchant assessment. It is also quite critical of radical and underground organizations. The racism and sexism of Jenny’s comrades painfully grate against her sense of social justice, and she concludes that “bombing a building that ‘ought’ to be empty was not so different in type, if very different in scale, from bombing a village that ‘ought’ to house only enemies and not any civilians” (Choi 351). *American Woman* represents Jenny as deeply engaged but clearly constrained both by a narrowly delimited mainstream political culture and by a counterculture that is not all that alternative. When she begins to write her own version of the politics of the late 1960s and 1970s, Jenny redefines citizenship for herself, and *American Woman* highlights redefinition as an important practice, indeed the most salient, of her belonging.³ Recasting citizenship as both cultural practice and expression, and far from being a footnote to a more famous political figure, Jenny, with her deeply political imagination, is centralized. Indeed, *American Woman* artfully attests to how “the subject becomes, acts, and speaks of itself as ‘American’” through culture (Lowe 3). Choi’s novel may well be placed among Asian American *bildungsromane* that function as “strategic interventions in American literary constructions of race, ethnicity, and gender” (P. Chu 11). “Because it has been accorded a place of honor in literary curricula that are, in turn, used to socialize pupils in approved American values,” Patricia Chu contends, “the literary genre of the *bildungsroman* is a central site for Asian American re-visions of American subject formation,”

with gendered stories of authorship conspicuously replacing the well-married hero plot (11).⁴

In many ways *American Woman* addresses the contemporary reformulation of US citizenship or belonging that *Asian American Women's Popular Literature: Feminizing Genres and Neoliberal Belonging* takes as a primary concern, especially since the novel seems to challenge the invisibility of Asian American women to the larger body politic. But Choi's rendition of the development of cultural citizenship ultimately revives what I would call "the citizenship of the past," a nostalgic and deeply seated liberal conception of American political culture that purportedly existed outside commercial culture. Further, although *American Woman* fits the pattern of generic revision for bildungsromane that Chu identifies, it remains firmly attached to a highbrow literary culture that largely disavows the market forces that also created the contemporary shift toward cultural citizenship. As refreshing as the direct treatment of Asian American women's political subjectivity is, in the end *American Woman* is a conventional text that tells readers little about social belonging within contemporary neoliberal capitalism, relying on the allegory of growth in the bildungsroman for its form, preapproved literary craft for its technique, and familiar scripts of citizenship for its content.

This opening discussion of Choi's novel is intended to briefly highlight the limitations of writing and reading practices that remain tethered to canonical genres and aesthetic theories of value. But what becomes of Asian American literature when canonicity and the hallmarks of quality in individual character development, figurative language, and psychological interiority are no longer the exclusive currencies of value in the symbolic economy of cultural production? In what ways does Asian American literature contribute to or intervene in the notions of political subjectivity and contemporary belonging that are practiced and produced in popular culture, which functions, Mimi Nguyen and Thuy Tu write, as the daily "battleground for fantasies of desire and identification, as well as anxieties about alienation and incursion" (6)? Finally, what role does gender play and what can we say of the textual effects—subjective, political, or aesthetic—of contemporary Asian American women's writing when it participates in a literary culture with overt popular and commercial functions?

Motivated to more fully chart Asian American women's political subjectivity and to understand the "changing form and ethics of citizenship" in the United States, where the political rationality of neoliberalism has been reshaping governance, economic policy, and subjectivity for forty

years, this study reframes several of the concerns that *American Woman* narrates in the fine-grain textures of realist literary fiction (Ong, *Neoliberalism* 14).⁵ Its underlying premise is that definitions of citizenship and citizenship practices are displayed, communicated, and revised through a vast array of commercial media that speak the lingua franca of the marketplace, and through the particular idiom of neoliberal consumer culture. More specifically, the book examines cultural citizenship, which has become increasingly important in the neoliberal era (1970–present), to pursue questions about the legibility of Asian American women's belonging, the gendered racial constraints of contemporary discourses of citizenship for Asian American women, and especially the ways in which Asian American women writers negotiate the reformulation of belonging within popular narrative genres. Building on recent citizenship studies, I define cultural citizenship as “the imperative to prove and claim Americanness” through the consumption or production of mainstream cultural narratives that circulate in the neoliberal marketplace in popular or commercial media (S. J. Lim 10).

Asian American Women's Popular Literature focuses on innovative genre fiction written by Asian American women—mother-daughter narrative, chick lit, detective fiction, and food writing—works that are intended to reach an Asian American and a broader audience and that engage public dialogue about belonging. Because these are crossover texts, both in the sense that they extend themselves to multiple reading publics and in the sense that they are self-conscious of connections between contemporary popular media culture and literary culture, I refer to them as “popular literature,” although they have not all enjoyed critical and commercial success in equal measure.⁶ Troubling the false opposition between the popular and the literary and recognizing the imperatives of neoliberal belonging through the mobilization of popular genres, the eight Asian American women writers whose novels I consider participate in the fashioning of new literary cultures and contribute to the reformulation of cultural citizenship within neoliberalism. But even as the works demonstrate their authors' cultural citizenship, they are not uniformly or unequivocally affirmations of Americanness.

My readings show how these texts negotiate discourses of neoliberal belonging under the limelight of popular culture, illuminating the limitations of cultural citizenship and other highly recognizable dimensions of belonging that also operate within neoliberalism, including biological, consumer, cosmopolitan, and transnational citizenship. In chapter 2, I situate the mother-daughter novels of Patti Kim and Lan Cao in relation

to Asian American women's cultural citizenship practices and consider how *A Cab Called Reliable* (1997) and *Monkey Bridge* (1997) contend with aspiring, white, middle-class motherhood and participation in consumer culture. Chapter 3 explores how Michelle Yu and Blossom Kan's *China Dolls* (2007) and Sonia Singh's *Goddess for Hire* (2004) recombine the fantasy and reality of neoliberal consumer culture in an innovative form of chick lit to reveal the fluidity of identification within the cultural fantasies of postfeminism, as well as the substantial labor required in the model of the citizen as romantic consumer. Examination in chapter 4 of Sujata Massey's *Girl in a Box* (2006) and Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* (2003) contends that detective fiction effectively addresses the ethical claims of neoliberal cosmopolitanism, which purports to transcend boundaries of nation, gender, and culture but more accurately appropriates the gendered racial subject by denying her status outside the global market. The explosion of culinary narrative in contemporary culture is considered in chapter 5 through analysis of Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998), which both acknowledges food writing as a complex site of social belonging and comments upon its circulation within a global media capitalism that produces subjects as transnational citizens with taste distinctions that hew toward the United States.

Taken together, the novels analyzed in this study disclose neoliberalism's rearticulation of gendered racial citizenship and demonstrate various ways in which social belonging is an object of contest for Asian American women. They impart the specific implications for Asian American women of citizenship models that demand that "good citizens" conform to mainstream cultural narratives of Americanness and normative femininity while simultaneously calling on the female subject to balance and regulate a revised combination of marketplace activities: managing family and fertility, gaining qualifications and expertise for employment, working in the global economy, and participating in consumer culture (McRobbie, *Aftermath of Feminism* 54).

Although debates about citizenship's waning or waxing relevance continue, there is near consensus that neoliberal globalization has inaugurated an especially dynamic and generative period of reformulation, one in which citizenship has been destabilized, with elements of citizenship shifting and multiplying. Instead of being static, definitions of citizenship are understood as historically contingent, continually organizing and reorganizing categories of difference and inequality.⁷ Citizenship not only determines who is legally included and excluded from membership, it is also a normative ideology that dictates "how members

of a given nation-state should behave depending upon particular social markers including race and gender” (L. Park 5). To be sure, formal, legal citizenship retains importance for social belonging, but contemporary formations and frameworks have enabled a more complex recognition of citizenship as culturally inflected. Since the emergence of cultural citizenship studies in the 1990s, citizenship has become widely accepted, Lok C. D. Siu explains, “as a set of cultural and social processes rather than simply a political status or juridical contract—a set of rights, entitlements, and obligations. Feminists and critical race theorists have long understood that citizenship is not universal and that one’s gender, race, class, and sexuality, among other categories of difference, all shape experiences of citizenship” (7). But this understanding is certainly not limited to progressive ethical projects, and forms of cultural citizenship have been articulated consistently through neoliberalism as well. As Lisa Duggan observes, “During every phase, the construction of neoliberal politics and policy in the U.S. has relied on identity and cultural politics. The politics of race, both overt and covert, have been particularly central to the entire project. But the politics of gender and sexuality have intersected with race and class at each stage as well” (xii). Indeed, the recent reconfiguration of citizenship has created new exclusions in the United States, exclusions that have placed additional constraints on Asian American women’s belonging. At the same time, changes and particularly the ascendance of cultural citizenship within neoliberalism have simultaneously encouraged its heightened visibility. Although this may seem paradoxical, the genealogy of cultural citizenship I present later in this chapter shows how cultural citizenship, now with attendant mandates for publicity, has become a primary component of neoliberal belonging in the United States as an additional constraint. For the moment, I emphasize that the development of cultural citizenship undergirds my theorization of the proliferation of popular novelistic genres and generic transformations in the category of Asian American women’s literature.

Popular Literature

The novel is perhaps not the first form that comes to mind with the mention of popular culture, and in Asian American studies film, fashion, and music have attracted considerably more attention from scholars than has contemporary popular literature, with the exception of the most celebrated works, such as those by Henry David Hwang, Maxine Hong Kingston, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chang-rae Lee, Amy Tan, and Gene

Luen Yang,⁸ *Asian American Women's Popular Literature* addresses this imbalance not simply because it is a gap in the scholarship but instead because the book is now more socially influential than it has been for some time, as evidenced by such phenomena as Oprah Winfrey's Book Club and Hollywood's current dependence on the adaptation of best-selling books and canonical classics for a ready and willing fan base. And as my reference to famous Asian American authors and their popular works above indicates, Asian American women are a significant part of the renewal of the book, as author-producers and reader-consumers. Moreover, I tend to agree with the feminist cultural studies dictum that "the genres of literature and popular entertainment we take least seriously are precisely those that best chronicle how we think about ourselves," as Linda Mizejewski puts it in her recent study of the woman detective in popular culture (15).

Rather than diminishing in popularity or social significance, as some observers feared when new information technologies threatened a "digital revolution," in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the book, and specifically the novel, has adapted to a multimodal age (J. Collins 13) to become an important component of a "synergistic media environment" (Negra 9). Arguably, the novel is centrally located in the complex media landscape that has emerged within neoliberalism. Recent concerns about the novel's demise are part of a historical pattern of cultural anxiety in which any new technology threatens the literary establishment and the privileged subjects who inhabit it (Fitzpatrick 4–10). Such concerns are always specious, even in the very recent context of economic crises and budget cuts that target the arts and cultural projects as "luxuries," but this was particularly the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Borders and Barnes & Noble outlets polka-dotted the United States in a manner resembling Verizon and AT&T service provider maps. The confusion should now be clarified as the e-reader phenomenon shrinks superstore bookstores, and Amazon.com blasts past competitors with its bestselling Kindle and the capacity to deliver downloadable electronic books in less than a minute: "Old media are not being displaced. Rather their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies" (Jenkins 14).

Recognizing the relationship between the novel and electronic technology is crucial because it highlights the mechanisms of media convergence, in which media collide and coexist, and the dynamics of re-mediation, in which new media arise when each medium "responds to, re-deploys, competes with and reforms other media" (Bolter and Grusin

35). It also acknowledges how global media conglomerates have savvily placed booksellers physically and especially virtually in the center of a sophisticated, media-driven consumer culture, creating new modes of access, delivery, and circulation for rapidly cycling markets. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick reminds us, "These merchants are not striving . . . in some altruistic fashion to promote the Arnoldian cultural uplift of literacy against a debasing mass culture but are responding to existing markets and creating new ones" for a ten-billion-dollar-a-year industry (4). Merchants are especially interested in devoted female book buyers, who predominate in every category of fiction and who purchase more books than men in the United States, across race/ethnicity, by a margin of 3 to 2.⁹ Booksellers and publishers (and authors) are keenly aware of the novel's reliance on female readers, historically and especially in our own time, for, as Ian McEwan observes, "Reading groups, readings, breakdowns of book sales all tell the same story: when women stop reading, the novel will be dead" ("Hello"). In the context of women's overall increased participation in the workforce and the rapid emergence of new media, publishers have internalized this story and deployed a variety of mechanisms to ensure that women do not stop reading, with marketers both horizontally segmenting female readerships into niches by ethnoracial group, life cycle, religion, and a host of other categories, and "developing" these consumer markets to cross categories and to purchase adjacent media products and technology. According to *Romance Writers of America*, in 2010, US women surpassed men as e-book readers, fueling popular literary culture in significant ways. Sales drivers that also help to produce popular literature (and can be read as measurements of popularity) include a broad variety of phenomena: online book clubs such as those of *RealSimple*, *Jezebel*, and *Martha Stewart Living*; Amazon's "Best Books of the Month" selections and NPR's "First Read" selections; reader-generated reviews and fan fiction; as well as the more traditional accolades of literary awards, well-placed or positive reviews in major newspapers and magazines, and appearance on bestseller lists.

While contemporary convergence culture cultivates relationships among old media forms such as the novel and new media technology such as the electronic book for the dynamic production of popular media texts, it also revises forms of sociality, the function of culture, and older and more recent ideological constructions of the gendered, raced, and classed subject. In *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*, Jim Collins asserts that the contemporary novel has been "shaped by the increasing convergence of literary, visual,

and material cultures” to such an extent that it is now integrated into popular visual media, so reading literature has become, far more than it previously was, an “exuberantly social activity” (8, 4). Further, “whether experienced on the page, or on the screen, or on the laptop,” the contemporary novel may be used for a variety of social purposes (10). Perhaps most germane to this examination of Asian American women’s literature and neoliberal citizenship is how the narratives in current popular literary culture complexly combine models of subjectivity inherited from the past and those that have emerged more recently to produce the figure of the empowered reader, a subject whose novel reading is a therapeutic “self-cultivation” project (10):

This culture may indeed rely on twenty-first-century technologies of scanning, storage, and downloadability, but it also draws on early nineteenth-century notions of reading as self-transformation, filtered through late twentieth-century discourses of self-actualization, all jet-propelled by state-of-the-art forms of marketing “aesthetic experience.” (23)

Crucially, such work on the self is necessary for other forms of labor and consumption in contemporary models of subjecthood. The recent popular novel and popular literary culture are linked in function then to individual subject formation and the interpellation of ideal American citizens, processes that were commonly performed through canonical literature and modern national education in the industrial era.

In the postindustrial United States, popular literature is connected specifically to neoliberal political rationalities, which scholars suggest enlist commercial media as socializing agents to instruct citizen-subjects in appropriate conduct.¹⁰ In her study of the televisual production of consumer citizenship, Sarah Banet-Weiser asserts that “commercial media play a pivotal role in creating cultural definitions about what it means to be a citizen—indeed, our sense of ourselves as national citizens emerges *from* (not in spite of) our engagement with the popular media” (2, emphasis in original).¹¹ It may be that the media is now the most important storyteller in and about society, but without a doubt commercial popular culture is a primary site of US citizen-subject formation.¹²

One important lesson communicated in popular media, Collins recognizes, is the necessity of self-governance or disciplined work on the self. But, as others have pointed out, the primary target of contemporary makeover culture in the United States, from self-help manuals to reality TV to inspirational novels, is women.¹³ Micki McGee argues

that “changes in the nature of the labor market have made efforts at self-making and self-invention increasingly urgent,” and she frames the contemporary preoccupation with the self in the United States as illustrated in makeover culture through an analysis of the production of the “belabored self,” a phenomenon in which workers, and especially female workers clustered at the low end of the wage scale, are required to continually work on themselves in an effort to remain employable (16, 12). Feminist media studies scholars who draw on Michel Foucault’s ideas about governmentality and modern technologies of power, especially his notions of “biopower” and the “care of the self,” have rigorously interrogated the aggressive address of female audiences in commercial popular culture.¹⁴ In analyses of the advice-driven forms of women’s magazines, talks shows, and reality TV, but also of fictional forms, such as Hollywood romantic comedies and dramedies, scholars pay particular attention to how texts position women and girls as newly empowered workers and consumers, and how they communicate neoliberal modes of female citizenship that carry with them normative gender, racial, and sexual ideologies.

Although the understanding of the media as a tool of social pedagogy that tacitly and with varying degrees of subtly instructs female audiences in individual conduct, extensive marketplace knowledge, and neoliberal values may simply update for some the long-standing view of popular art forms or mass culture primarily as reflections of dominant beliefs, my analysis of a selection of Asian American women’s popular literature is more nuanced and intends to show how popular literary culture may simultaneously illustrate, chronicle, and provide commentary on the blurring of cultural, commercial, and political practices under neoliberalism. Still, within this context, and since I do not presume an epistemic homogeneity among Asian American women writers or the oppositionality of racial, ethnic, and gender identity, I consider how novels may participate in the discursive production of preferred citizen-subjects. The phrase “feminizing genres” of this book’s subtitle refers to how popular genres participate in the gendered and racialized processes that comprise belonging and to how Asian American authors use popular genres to engage discourses of citizenship.

As will become clear, the popular literature I discuss is in dialogue with public discourse that frequently positions Asian American women as ideal neoliberal female citizens. This is part of a new round of racialization, one that extends the model minority or honorary white racial stereotype that has been firmly established in the United States and combines with

the normative femininity and domesticity with which Asian American women have been required to conform for entry and belonging. In a recent controversial instance, the June 2012 Pew Center report titled "The Rise of Asian Americans" includes Chinese, Filipina, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese American, and "Other Asian" women in aggregate statistics that praise Asian Americans as "the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States." The first chapter of the 215-page report features a "portrait of Asian Americans" celebrating the fact that in 2009 Asian immigrants overtook "Hispanic immigrants" in number and highlighting the fact that most Asian adults come to the United States with college degrees. Add to this the citation of documented or papered entry and formal permanent resident (green card) acquisition, the report pits Asians against Latinos in a "good immigrant" versus "bad immigrant" hierarchy of foreigner racialization. In certain ways, the report constructs Asian Americans as better or more successful neoliberal citizen-subjects than everyone else in the United States since it emphasizes that, compared to other racial groups and the general population of US adults, they are more likely to have college degrees and higher median household incomes. The report claims that Asian Americans "place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success" (Taylor 3). A response from the Association for Asian American Studies points out that this kind of rhetoric implies "an Asian Invasion," perpetuating another stereotype that pulls in a different, less welcoming direction but one that is equally destructive with regard to the potential for backlash.¹⁵

While Asian American women are included in the Pew Center report in aggregate statistics for education and income and some attention is paid to the exclusion era and family reunification, when they are identified by gender Asian American women are praised for high rates of out-marriage: "When newly minted medical school graduate Priscilla Chan married Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg last month, she joined the 37 percent of all recent Asian American brides who wed a non-Asian groom."¹⁶ Further broadcasting a heteronormative bias, the report also praises Asian American women for their regulation of fertility, particularly for their higher rates of childbirth within marriage, as compared to the general population, and for valuing family and parenting. Crucially, all of the positive traits attributed to Asian American women also somehow include their value as workers or productive contributors to society. Early in the report, just after a bar graph quantifying "The Asian-American Work Ethic," a section asks "Who's a Tiger Mom?" referring

to Amy Chua's 2011 memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, in which the author writes that Chinese parents are better than Western parents because they assume strength and expect their children to achieve success (Taylor 4). Of course, such positioning disregards differences among Asian ethnic groups and obscures the struggles of many Asian American women and children, particularly impoverished women without higher education or employment skills that would help them secure a livelihood, education for their children, and neoliberal belonging. In this decidedly public light, however, "the Asian American woman" may be seen as a constitutive figure of neoliberalism, a discursive construction that compels rigorous interrogation of neoliberal citizenship.

Despite the "regulatory pedagogy" of a popular media culture that "teaches subjects through unspoken means how to conduct themselves," and a broader public discourse that operates similarly but is often more explicit, I join those cultural studies scholars who recognize that popular culture does not simply produce social conformity, and who also emphasize the polysemic nature of all texts or the possibility for "open spaces" where both reader and authorial negotiations take place (Weber 9). With regard to the print mode of popular literature, just as "the multiculturalist publishing boom has not turned writers of color into unwitting pawns of the system, unaware of the rules of the game" that continue to commodify and fetishize Asian Americans (Mannur 85), neither have they become perfectly disciplined subjects, thoroughly incorporated into the regulatory strategies of neoliberal governance. Just as cultural texts are not to be taken as representative reflections of Asian American identity, social experience, or history, neither are they seamless reflections of neoliberal capitalist rationality. Moreover, while neoliberalism aspires to totalization and "seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market," it is still incomplete and is not without contradictions (Harvey 3). As Brenda Weber has remarked, neoliberalism is "an ideological mandate that mutates—it can itself both make over and be made over" (52).

Asian American Cultural Politics

In the field of Asian American studies, culture, and particularly aesthetic expression, has been understood as the privileged site for the articulation of politics and the demonstration of subjectivity, both pan-ethnic and ethnic. Most scholars, and indeed the prevailing narrative of Asian American cultural politics, attribute this to the field's origins in the activism of the late 1960s, when students, community activists, and

intellectuals self-consciously created a politicized racial group identity and formed an Asian American panethnic coalition in which cultural nationalism was often employed to challenge American racism and capitalist exploitation. Wendy Ho's description outlines a primary front in this strategy: "In situating an oppositional stance, cultural nationalists deconstructed the history of dehumanizing and debilitating characterizations of the 'Oriental' in popular and elitist representations. They realized how dominant cultural discourses could contribute to the inequitable circulation of power within mainstream society and within their own ethnic communities" (86). Decrying the exclusion of Asian American self-representation, analysis focused on distorted images and the critique of stereotypes in mainstream American popular culture, upbraiding "over a century's worth of dragon ladies, lotus blossoms, enigmatic assassins, black-clad guerillas, rapacious drug addicts, and sex-starved nerds" (Nguyen and Tu 6). Critics of literature contested Anglo-centric portrayals, the canon, and aesthetic theories of value that caricatured, exoticized, or entirely excluded Asian Americans. In short order, intellectuals incorporated an oppositional stance toward racism and the capitalism that operates through it in the critical framework of Asian American studies, developing a practice of evaluating texts for their "accommodation or resistance" (V. Nguyen, *Race and Resistance* 4).

The other major front in the strategy was the reclamation and production of cultural works that would politically empower ethnic communities and Asian Americans generally. In this political aesthetic, cultural production would stake a clear position against American racism and the exploitation of Asian Americans. It would also showcase the cultural expressions and aesthetic values of Asian ethnic groups in the United States, as well as assert a collective and distinctive Asian American culture, as in *Aiiieeeee!*, the 1973 anthology of Asian American literature edited by Jeffrey Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong. The emerging category of "Asian American literature" became, in fact, a primary site for enacting this cultural politics, and here the parameters of "valuable" work were sharply delineated. As Josephine Park summarizes, "From its inception, Asian American literature limited the kinds of expressions that could be accommodated under its banner: Chinese and Japanese American experience took precedence, and left out of the canon were all those works which did not strike a note of defiance and whose literary expressions were illegible to the stated aims of the movement" (17). In addition to the numerous Asian ethnic groups whose writing was entirely excluded from the new ethnic canon, works by women and gay

men who were a part of included groups were at times ignored, or, in cases of commercial success or mainstream critical acclaim, maligned.

This history of Asian American cultural politics is well documented; however, there were also departures from and challenges to the cultural nationalist strategy, the conception of who and what “counts” as authentic in Asian American cultural politics, and the prevailing model of binary critique in Asian American studies.¹⁷ Best known among the cultural controversies in Asian American literary studies are the Maxine Hong Kingston–Frank Chin debates, which were centrally concerned with the role of popular literature.¹⁸ It was resoundingly clear, Sau-ling Wong points out, that the commercial success and popularity of Kingston’s 1976 best seller *The Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* automatically marked the text as being “ideologically suspect” to some critics simply by way of association with commodity capitalism (“Necessity and Extravagance” 3). *The Woman Warrior* became the site of a protracted maelstrom that swirled around several tensions in the field’s political claims and practices, especially ambivalence about popular forms and the ideological heterogeneity of Asian American cultural production.¹⁹

To summarize briefly, the debates concerned the tendency of ethnic autobiography toward ethnography or the “Chinatown book,” emasculating fetishism, and Orientalism; questions about Asian American identity, sameness, and difference; tensions between cultural nationalism and feminism; and definitions of authentic forms of Chinese American culture and Asian American masculinity.²⁰ Laura Hyun Yi Kang observes that the decades-long controversy over *The Woman Warrior* initiated in the mid-1970s—the “autobiographical controversy”—has often been treated as “the” defining debate within Asian American literary studies (*Compositional Subjects* 54). Given that Kingston conceived of her book as a novel, but that the publisher (Alfred Knopf) believed it would sell better as an autobiography, one might imagine a very different critical dialogue had critics taken up any number of questions, beyond capitalist objectification and gender war ideology, related to the apparently easy move from one classification to the other (31). Kang regrets that the generic terms of autobiography in which the memoir is typically mapped have confined the literature in ways and have distracted critics from examining the construction and function of “Maxine Hong Kingston” or the “Asian/American Woman” as a writing self within the constraints of larger discursive struggle (56).²¹ Inspired by this insight and confident that yet another rehearsal of the Kingston–Chin debates

is not necessary, I turn attention toward a range of highly visible fictional narrative genres, historically feminized or gendered, with the aim of tracing the cultural work of contemporary Asian American women's popular literature within the constraints of discourses of neoliberal citizenship and squarely within the context of consumer culture.

The adaptation of popular narrative genres, including not only the maligned autobiography but also and especially the frequently discredited mother-daughter narrative, has played an undeniable role in the emergence of "Asian American women's literature" as an identifiable category in both contemporary literary and popular culture.²² While no doubt imbedded in many readers' cultural essentialism, the authority granted first to Maxine Hong Kingston and then Amy Tan on the mother-daughter relationship in America was extended to Asian American women writers generally. Some authors capitalized on the market that Kingston and Tan famously helped create by expanding into other feminized forms or "women's genres" of fiction that had the potential to also cross over, reaching a broad female readership and an Asian American "niche" audience.²³ Publishers happily obliged, and titles penned by Asian American women have steadily made their way into the romance, detective fiction, food writing, and travel sections of the bookstore.²⁴ In fact, one doesn't burst onto the public sphere or "go public," as Michael Warner writes, "simply as an act of will—neither by writing, nor by having an opinion, nor by exposing oneself in the marketplace. The context of publicness must be available, allowing these actions to count in a public way" as demonstrations of and contributions to the meaning of belonging in neoliberal America (6). The social movements of the 1960s, the individual and collective efforts of Asian American authors, and favorable cultural and market forces both inside and particularly outside the academy, created an environment in which "Asian American women's popular literature" would emerge in the contemporary period and participate in the reformulation of cultural citizenship. Changes in political practices and subjectivity brought about by neoliberalism, namely the increasing importance of cultural citizenship, played a part in popular recognition of Asian American women's literature—at least as large a part as Asian American cultural politics or the talents of individual authors.

The rest of this chapter is divided into sections that outline neoliberalism, sketch the development of neoliberal cultural citizenship, and identify recent approaches in Asian American literary and cultural studies that help me theorize a way of understanding genre fiction as chronicles

of gendered racial belonging and contributors to discourses of citizenship. In a final section, brief chapter summaries provide a sense of how different genres engage neoliberal citizenship.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism became influential as a theory of political economy or market ideology among economists in the United States in the 1960s at the University of Chicago, began to explicitly inform government in the 1970s under the Carter administration, consolidated as economic orthodoxy that guided public policy in the 1980s, and became hegemonic as a social philosophy in the 1990s (Harvey 22).²⁵ By 2005, David Harvey writes, an emphatic turn toward the policies and logics of neoliberalism can be seen “everywhere,” although the development is decidedly uneven and geographically scattered, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and China as the most devoted subscribers (2). The policies of the neoliberal nation-state promote the privatization of public- or state-owned institutions, as well as strong private property and contract rights; the deregulation of industries and trade markets for unfettered competition both domestically and globally; and the withdrawal of the welfare state from social provision in favor of individual market behavior or “freedom” and “choice,” responsibility, and entrepreneurialism.²⁶

For many, neoliberalism is a synonym for the global consolidation of national economies into a single market system dominated by the liberal democracies of the North. Through macroeconomic policies—trade agreements, loans, and “structural adjustment programs”—of international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, and led by the United States and the United Kingdom, the powerful capitalist states of the North have forced open smaller and less powerful national markets to a neocolonial form of resource exploitation by transnational monopoly capital that has devastated the global South, spawned major new labor migration patterns such as the feminization of migration, and deindustrialized “advanced” economies. In short, neoliberalism is “the latest stage of capitalist global structural and hegemonic domination” in which the disparity between the rich and poor is dramatically increasing (Ong 11). This understanding seems accurate given the “accumulation by dispossession” that is evident on a frighteningly massive scale (Harvey 159).

But neoliberalism as a global condition of inequality does not take analysis very far and may even occlude new power relations. Aihwa

Ong convincingly argues that a North-South geographical axis has limited value for specifically understanding the emergence and mutation of neoliberal political rationality in very different postcolonial, authoritarian, and postsocialist settings, including in the economically dynamic region of Asia, an important backdrop for analyzing Asian American women's negotiation of contemporary changes in US citizenship (12). Associated with the British governmentality school, Ong emphasizes in *Neoliberalism as Exception* that neoliberalism is a technology of governing and that neoliberal reasoning is "based on both economic (efficiency) and ethical (self-responsibility) claims," adapts marketplace values to specific locations, and realigns the organization of society, governance, and models of the citizen-subject (11). In this understanding, neoliberalism is a type of governance that centralizes the transformation of ethical systems, deploying dynamic techniques to "remake the social and citizen-subjects" (14). Conceptualizing neoliberalism in this way—as an episteme of mutating governance and subjectivity—is particularly helpful for analyzing the destabilization of and concern for citizenship in the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

One need not subscribe to a theory of neoliberalism as a *unified* global empire of economic exploitation to be deeply troubled by its devastating economic calculations, specifically the presumption that the market is "an appropriate guide—an ethic—for all human action," and by its efforts to organize every dimension of social life according to market principles or values (Harvey 165). Since neoliberalism "holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions," globalization has been characterized by a dramatic increase (although uneven flow) of capital, labor, and goods across national borders, zones, and markets (3). In addition to the financialization of everything, or marketplace fundamentalism, the emphasis on commodification in neoliberalism entails the concomitant development of consumerism, or a system that fosters the desire to buy products by promising that they will bring abundance, happiness, and unlimited pleasure. Further, production and what counts as a product expands, since neoliberalism is particularly adept at commodifying knowledge, ideas, identities, and practices—in a word, "culture."

Remaking the social, neoliberal modes of governing rely heavily on the social system of consumer culture, a type of material culture in which people relate to each other through the mediation of market commodities (Lury 1). In this system, commodity consumption signifies

or may even constitute modernity, evidencing rationality, free will or choice, and the possession of individual rights (Slater 8–9). Moreover, the definition of political subjectivity or citizenship in consumer cultures includes or is even primarily defined by consumer practices. According to Banet-Weiser, “Consumer citizenship indicates a certain willingness to participate in consumer culture through the purchase of goods as well as a more general affirmation of consumption habits” (73). In addition, Celia Lury argues that consumer culture is “a source of the contemporary belief that self-identity is a kind of cultural resource, asset or possession,” but one that is not equally available to all (9).

For some, neoliberal consumer cultures fully replace the political subject with an empowered consumer who acts (by buying or not) only in the best interests of the individual rather than in relation to a larger polity, so the possibilities for democratic political community and collective struggle are greatly diminished. For those like myself who are dubious of the liberal discourse of a strict citizen/consumer divide, the dynamic relationship between citizen and consumer is remade in the formation of neoliberal consumer culture.²⁷ The national ethos of meritocratic upward mobility in the United States and the very definition of prosperity in the American Dream are predicated in large part, of course, on consumerism, with Americanness or belonging signified specifically in this narrative through home ownership and all of the material goods that come with it. Not surprisingly, the American Dream as a national cultural myth and narrative is experiencing significant instability under neoliberalism and is undergoing revision or rearticulation to accommodate expanded expectations for citizen participation in US consumer culture, a phenomenon I discuss more closely in chapters on mother-daughter narrative and chick lit.

As much as neoliberalism reorganizes the social order and citizen-subjects around consumption, it also reorganizes the labor or production of social life, including the tricky but essential tasks of government. “Responsible” wage earning and self-sufficient family life have come to define full citizenship status and have been codified into public policy in the United States, such as the federal “welfare reform” or the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act that excluded noncitizen immigrant families from public support (Fujiwara 38–43). Private individual acts that sustain the self or self-care comprise one leg of the tripartite base of cultural values upholding the neoliberal model of the citizen, with entrepreneurial reinvention or paid labor and market freedom or consumption providing the other primary supports.

The rhetorics of deregulation, privatization, and the wholesale elimination of public programs often suggest the repudiation or “shrinking” of government. But rather than abandoning “the will to govern,” neoliberalism is actually concerned with inventing strategies of government, which joins the work of remaking the social with the work of remaking the individual citizen-subject (Rose, “Governing” 53). Following Foucault, Nikolas Rose explains that neoliberal strategies of rule “ask whether it is possible to govern without governing *society*, that is to say, govern through the regulated and accountable choices of autonomous agents—citizens, consumers, parents, employees, managers, investors—and to govern through intensifying and acting upon their allegiance to particular ‘communities,’” such as ethnic and racialized communities (61, emphasis in original).²⁸ In fact, priority is placed on the “regulation of conduct” or shaping self-disciplining subjects who will enact neoliberal market values and perform “good” citizenship roles as both enthusiastic consumers and responsible workers (58). Foucault theorized, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, how political authorities in Europe who sought to manage life in the name of the well-being of populations developed biopower or “power over life.” Providing a genealogy of biopolitics or political power over life, Foucault identifies how the strategies that seek management over the bodies of individuals (discipline) and those that seek management over the collective body of a population (regulation) came together by the nineteenth century to create new technologies of power and concomitantly new forms of struggle (Rose, *Politics of Life Itself* 52–54).

In our current era, biopolitics has become increasingly sophisticated with neoliberal models of political subjectivity requiring “populations to be free, self-managing, and self-enterprising individuals,” or “entrepreneurs of the self” who can take care of the self and shield the state from responsibility and liability.²⁹ Repeated emphasis on individual market access as “freedom” and responsibility enables the denial of structural inequalities and social problems, so those who do not succeed purportedly fail by their own shortcomings and their “choices” or conscious departures from neoliberal cultural values, rather than as a result of systemic inequality or even unfortunate circumstance. All are “author of their own misfortune” (Rose, “Governing” 59). In this context, the disavowing ideologies of postracial and postfeminist discourses that claim political movements for racial equality and gender justice are no longer needed have gained currency and flourished alongside the revival of social Darwinism and resurgent American bootstrap ideology. They

deny that transnational capital and post-Fordist (nonunion) production create racialized, ethnicized, and gendered spaces, networks, and flows of labor that result in or magnify hierarchies of power and differential access to belonging (Ong 124–32).

More insidiously, the deficiencies of the individual subject have become the object of social preoccupation, rehabilitation, and industry. Neoliberalism posits not only that citizenship is an ongoing project of the self and that individuals carry the responsibility of self-care, but also that all individuals have the full capacity for improvement and are obliged to reinvent or transform the deficient self without public resources or supports. The primary strategy of shifting the goals and obligations of the state to the individual by translating them into “the choices and commitments of individuals” is largely accomplished indirectly through mechanisms that do not carry the imprimatur of “the State” (Rose, “Governing” 58–59) but nonetheless convey neoliberal standards or “templates” for citizenship, especially including commercial media (Ouellette 224). Hailed across neoliberal consumer culture, the deficient yet fully self-reliant subject whose happiness and success, defined in relation to the marketplace, has been compromised, presumably because of the individual’s less-than-judicious choices, must strive nonetheless for a better life. Given neoliberalism’s politics of “freedom,” it is ironic at best, deceptive at worst, and in any case contradictory that neoliberal governmentality maintains a strict morality about the proper distribution of tasks, a specific epistemology of what should be governed, and a particular style or aesthetic of reasoning (Rose, “Governing” 42). Indeed, it is more accurate to say, as Ong puts it, that neoliberal governmentality deploys “a politics of subjection and subject-making” (12).³⁰