



# Civet Cats, Fried Grasshoppers, and David Beckham's Pajamas: Unruly Bodies after SARS

**ABSTRACT** This article discusses the viscosity of consumption; in particular, consumption-as-eating and consumption-as-spending as a set of heterogeneous, contestatory discourses and practices of identity production and subject formation. To do so, I bring together two intersecting events: the Chinese government's ban on wild animal markets during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak, and Chinese and European media frenzy over the visit to China by the Spanish football club Real Madrid in the wake of the epidemic. In discussing these events, I pay specific attention to unruly bodies—both human and nonhuman—as consumables and those who consume them. In examining translocal encounters of these unruly bodies, I suggest that, in post-SARS China, discourses and practices of consumption produce emergent socialities that at once refigure racialized Orientalist tropes and conjure up discrepant neoliberal imaginaries of lifestyle and consumer choice. [Keywords: viscosity, narrative of transition, consumption, neoliberalism, subjectivity]

## ENCOUNTERING UNRULINESS

This article is organized around two intersecting events of potential global scale: first, the banning of wild animal markets in spring 2003 as a measure to eradicate and prevent Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in China; second, the Chinese and European media frenzy over the visit by the Spanish football club Real Madrid in July 2003,<sup>1</sup> shortly after the World Health Organization (WHO) lifted its warning against traveling in China. I examine both events with a focus on bodily encounters of nonhumans and humans mediated through “consumption”; in particular, I am interested in the proliferation of both bodies-that-consume and bodies-as-consumables as a means of critically examining entangled Orientalist and neoliberal discourses in and about China—especially those involved in translocal subject formation. I suggest that, rather than emblematic of China's participation in global capitalism or its “transition” to neoliberalism, consumption as a set of visceral practices at once refigures persistent Orientalist tropes and conjures up discrepant “neoliberal” imaginaries.

The description of human–nonhuman encounters that I offer here is, thus, neither about seamless circulations nor mere coincidences: I find *circulation* alone too vague to convey the workings of power and agency, whereas *coincidence* leaves the disparate and unexpected out of serious critical analyses. As I draw on Bruno Latour's idea of actor-

networks in describing the entanglements of humans and nonhumans, I also want to highlight ruptures where things do not stick to themselves, and people refuse to socialize among themselves (Latour 1993). As I will show, the encounters of civet cats, grasshoppers, David Beckham, and other human and nonhuman beings are always fraught, sometimes contentious, and, on occasion, even violent.

Furthermore, these translocal bodily encounters provide occasions for the production of contestatory knowledges and practices of nature, culture, tradition, modernity, and cosmopolitanism. Differences, as anthropologists have argued, have not disappeared because of “globalization” (Rofel in press; Tsing 2004). Neither can differences be readily relegated to the realm of the receding past and out of our anticipations of futures. As Michael Fischer puts it, the current age is not one of the erasure of the past through the various postmodern tactics of late capitalism, and “legacies of the past continue to haunt, constrain, reroute, and interact with the present” (2003:7). Fischer and others have embraced the concept of the “emergent” to talk about the increasing complexity of interactions and differentiations in everyday life today. Donna Haraway, for example, argues that an analysis of emergent “naturecultures” would take into account “vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together nonharmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories

and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures" (2003:7). In this article, I take the emergent seriously: Rather than focusing solely on the new, I foreground the contested ways in which dynamic imaginaries of pasts and futures interact to create various emergent socialities. Neither necessarily utopic nor dystopic, these entangled, effervescent socialities not only deserve critical analytical attention but also are conditions with which many of us live.

Focus on such emergent socialities and the bodily encounters enabling them allows me to critically examine technologies of consumption and discourses of consumer choice as a means of intervening in discussions of neoliberalism. Analyses of neoliberalism have counted the emergence of the consumer-subject—self-regulating, choice-savvy—pivotal to the workings of neoliberal governmentality (Rose 1996, 1999). Nikolas Rose, for example, argues that neoliberal discourses of consumption locate an individual "within a certain form of life" through the identification of consumables and those who consume them (1999:86). Whereas Rose highlights the discursive and transformative nature of consumption in the production and transformation of the self, I want to complicate our understandings of consumption by foregrounding its viscosity. Feminist anthropologists have long argued against the prevailing vision of corporeal bodies as prediscursive: Instead, they see these bodies as intimate projects and processes of subject formation that produce multiple, fractured selves through politics of desires, emotions, and pleasures. At play in these projects and processes are contestatory practices of race, gender, class, and other imaginaries of difference (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Butler 1993; Ebron 2002; Kondo 1990, 1997; Rofel 1999, in press; Stoler 2002). Drawing on these insights, I here emphasize that the visceral is *already* discursive. In examining consumption-as-eating and (conspicuous)-consumption-as-spending, I suggest that, through bodily encounters of various humans and nonhumans during and after SARS, the uneasy conflation between these two types of consumption have refigured Orientalist tropes, while at the same time positioning them vis-à-vis neoliberal discourses of lifestyle and consumer choice.<sup>2</sup>

I am, therefore, not only interested in bodies at large but also, specifically, in both human and nonhuman bodies as "consumables" (Rose 1999:87). However, rather than assigning the consumables to "the world of goods" that shapes the consumer-subject within "the sphere of self" (Rose 1999:85), I want to understand consumption—in its visceral and discursive dimensions—as heterogeneous and unruly discourses and practices that foreground and challenge the pervasiveness and seamlessness of neoliberal discourses of subject formation. I suggest that, although seemingly discrepant, both the banning of wild animal markets and controversies surrounding Real Madrid's China tour—especially the frenzy from the Chinese public, as well as Chinese and European media, over the star player David Beckham—are dense moments of translocal encoun-

ters through which consumption, as a set of heterogeneous visceral and discursive practices, proliferates. Furthermore, these bodily encounters and proliferating practices of consumption provide occasions for the (re)production of a set of contested hybrid identities and subjectivities. At stake in the production and representation of Chinese bodies of both human and nonhuman sorts are not just imaginaries of China's past but also visions of cosmopolitan futures—futures that depend not so much on the transition to a new stage of consumption, globalism, or neoliberal governmentality as on situated, contestatory projects and processes out of which unruly subjectivities and identities emerge. I hope to understand these unruly emergences by taking a close look at the proliferation of consumables and those who consume them—as well as their historical entanglements and displacements. I begin with stories of two banquets and the unruly human and nonhuman bodies they brought to the table.

### PROLIFERATING HYBRIDS

The first banquet story begins with Real Madrid's purchase of David Beckham. In July 2003, Real Madrid, the New York Yankees of the football world, purchased David Beckham from the English club Manchester United for 35 million euros (about \$40 million). Beckham, the captain of the English national team, is perhaps better known for his good looks, his marriage to Victoria Adams (a.k.a. Posh Spice of the British pop group Spice Girls), and for the reference to him in the film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), which enjoyed transatlantic popularity. The transaction was completed just weeks before Real Madrid's tour of East Asia, where Beckham's metrosexual and athletic image was immensely popular, especially among young women and men: Even youth who do not follow football can recognize Beckham's image instantly.

Real Madrid's first stop in Asia was Kunming, a scenic city in southwestern China. The trip was the most ambitious marketing project ever undertaken by a football club anywhere in the world. The football club was expected to receive over \$9.9 million in appearance fees alone for their 18-day tour of China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Thailand (Vanden Bussche 2003).

This trip generated much public frenzy and media attention in China also because it was the first visit to China by a major foreign sports team since the SARS epidemic. During the SARS epidemic, the international football governing body FIFA had decided to move the 2004 Women's World Cup, scheduled for September 2003, from China to the United States. During Real Madrid's trip, a series of SARS charity events were to be staged between trainings and exhibition matches in mainland China and Hong Kong.

Even before their arrival, reports of Real Madrid's trip began to flood newspapers, TV channels, and websites and forums in Europe, Asia, and even the United States, where football (or soccer as it is known here) is less popular. Chinese websites, in particular, followed and publicized every move of the team. Sina.com, one of the most popular

websites among the 87 million Chinese Internet users, created an interactive webpage with updated news exclusively regarding Real Madrid's visit. The news included Real Madrid's training and match schedules, "cultural" activities such as banquets and sightseeing, as well as stories of Chinese fans' enthusiasm for the team and, especially, Beckham.

After Real Madrid's landing in Kunming, however, reports of "China Salutes Beckham" (Vanden Bussche 2003) quickly gave way to titles such as "Real Madrid Face PR Disaster in China" (Agence France Presse 2003). While Chinese media mumbled about the lukewarm manners of Real Madrid players, their European counterparts made outright accusations of Real Madrid's "disrespect" for their hosts' customs and culture. The first crime on the list was the team "[snubbing] the ancient Chinese rite of passage for first-time guests, leaving a meticulously prepared banquet in their honour a mere 15 minutes after its start" (Agence France Presse 2003). The media expressed "shock" over the fact that the team left the banquet early without eating anything and before the provincial governor, who was the host of the evening, could present them with a welcoming gift. Whereas French and English presses elaborated on how Real Madrid made their hosts "lose face," Chinese media focused on Beckham, who was reported to have done nothing during the banquet except play with his cell phone.

The fiasco took on an even more sensational aura after the British tabloid the *Sun* published a news report entitled "Becks Snubs Chinese Grub."<sup>3</sup> It reported,

[The] first course consisted of stinky Tofu, described as "hell to smell but heaven to taste." It was followed by a succession of dishes, including crispy deep fried grasshopper, fried bamboo worms, which looked like maggots, and glazed bees. The main course of boiled chicken with mushrooms was served with noodles and a bowl of chicken fat. [*Sun* 2003]

These wildly exotic dishes, the *Sun* concluded, were simply "indigestible" for Beckham and his teammates (*Sun* 2003). Emerging out of the encounters between Real Madrid and their Chinese hosts—especially the media reports of these encounters—is the embodied imaginary of a traditional, exotic Chinese culture out of sync with a cosmopolitan world represented by the globetrotting Real Madrid. The first point I want to make about this imaginary is that it is not the residue of a preglobalized world waiting to be wiped out by the rational and homogenizing forces of the global market; rather, it is precisely through encounters generated by transnational projects and processes of marketization and consumption, such as Real Madrid's Far East tour, that such an imaginary is sharpened and given a visceral form.

Second, these encounters of human and nonhuman bodies and objects are as much about circulation and connection as about rupture. The *Sun's* description of the grasshopper as a "local delicacy" indexes an exoticized bodily continuity between the wild animal and the Chinese people who readily consume it. At the same time, this continuity, whether real or imagined, is the condition for the

production of another kind of visceral *discontinuity*: that the grasshopper is simply "indigestible" for—and therefore incommensurable with—Beckham's healthy, athletic, globetrotting body. This bodily incommensurability, once in place, sets Beckham and his teammates apart not only from the grasshopper but also from their Chinese hosts. Indeed, the banquet fiasco, together with the media frenzies that ensued, crystallizes the kind of translocal visceral encounters in which boundaries of nature and culture, human and nonhuman, tradition and modernity, local and global are produced, contested, and reconfigured.

What we have in hand here is a case in which things do not stick to themselves, and people refuse to socialize among themselves. In their places are "hybrids" that reshuffle and realign the boundaries and contents of nature and culture through unruly behaviors (see, e.g., Haraway 1991, 1997; Latour 1999; Mitchell 2002; Raffles 2002). This is what Latour (1993, 1999) calls "the paradox of the modern": the proliferation of "hybrids" and the simultaneous rejection of the ontological presence of these hybrids by assigning them either to nature or culture, premodern or modern.

Yet the biggest irony of the Real Madrid banquet fiasco is that it took place after China banned the consumption of "wild animals" at the height of the SARS epidemic. Did the *Sun* embellish or simply fabricate the exotic menu? Or did the Chinese hosts in Kunming defy the Chinese central government and stage this exotic banquet to impress their cosmopolitan guests? Sina.com did not list the menu in their exhaustive coverage of the Real Madrid tour; they simply mentioned that the banquet included "local delicacies," a term that usually carries an exotic flavor.<sup>4</sup>

Whether the menu was real or fabricated, these stories themselves draw my attention: Why did exotic animal food become a centerpiece in the media coverage of a sports team's commercial tour? What I am interested in is the heterogeneous, sometimes competing, ways in which particular hybrid bodies and subjectivities are produced through encounters generated by projects and processes of marketization and consumption. In popular and academic discourses, "consumption" has been a particularly relevant point of entry into descriptions and understandings of transformations in postsocialist China. In what follows, I offer a cautionary note on the entanglements of discourses of consumption in China with imaginaries of globality and emergent neoliberal subjectivities.

## NARRATIVES OF TRANSITION

Celebratory popular and academic discourses have invoked images of lively markets and mass consumption as convenient tropes for China's transition from a production-based, planned economy toward economic and social progress. Some are even hopeful that China's market economy, in producing enthusiastic consumer-subjects and cultivating horizontal relations of consumption, will create a more democratic everyday sociability (Davis 2000). Even as these discussions can help bring neoliberal discourses into

focus in understanding China's transformations, I suggest that they also run the risk of privileging consumption as an unmistakable sign of modernity and globality and that they perhaps too readily translate consumption into the (anticipated) production of neoliberal subjectivities and identities.

In a recent article, Wang Hui (2004) argues that we cannot fully understand the historicity and contradictions of neoliberalism in China if we speak the untroubled language of "transition" or "development." He points out that such narratives of transition are in fact "ahistorical" precisely because they ignore the specific historical conditions for the emergence of "Chinese neoliberalism" in the 1980s and 1990s: China does not fit the model of neoliberal transition through which consumption and market economy would be neatly lined up with private ownership, consumer choice, and, eventually and naturally, liberal democracy.

Sharing Wang's concerns, I argue that, without problematizing the linkages between the market, consumption, and neoliberal subjectivity, we may inadvertently reproduce narratives of transition that relegate to the background other kinds of translocal networks and encounters by which meaningful bodily practices and subjectivities are produced, while at the same time leaving these networks and encounters relatively intact from critical analyses. It is necessary, I think, that we talk about transformation-through-consumption without falling back on narratives of transition that oppose tradition to modernity, local to global, production to consumption.

One useful strategy of intervention against narratives of transition has been bringing "production" back into the picture in understanding economic and social transformations as well as emergent subjectivities and identities in China. This strategy insists on understanding mass consumption and the emergence of neoliberal subjectivity in China as partially constituted, open-ended projects and processes that are necessarily entangled in relations of production and labor practices (Anagnost 2004; Pun 2003; Yan 2003).

I also suggest that an important rupture of narratives of transition comes from within consumption as a set of heterogeneous discourses and practices that are at the same time visceral and discursive, persistent and anticipatory. Fascinations with the consumption of "wild animals" became a focal point in European and Chinese media coverage of Real Madrid's China trip precisely because these discourses of "wild" consumptions simultaneously refigured Orientalist tropes of exotic epicurean traditions and neoliberal imaginations of the enthusiastic and savvy consumer-self. As a new middle class emerges in urban China, their choices of consumption—and desires for certain consumables—have also become subjects of international scrutiny as well as government regulation. To further discuss ambivalences toward and ruptures within consumption, I now turn to my second tale of a banquet in which "wild animals" again figured front and center—this time, however, through their conspicuous absence.

### CONTESTING THE "WILD"

My second banquet story is itself the product of interrupted circulations and unexpected encounters. I had planned for a field trip to Shanghai in summer 2003 to conduct follow-up research on traditional Chinese medicine. My aspirations for transnational traveling, however, were thwarted by the travel of something else: In spring 2003, the SARS epidemic broke out in mainland China and Hong Kong and within a few months had spread to 30 countries; SARS visited every continent except Antarctica. I had no alternative but to postpone my trip until late August—after the WHO and the U.S. State Department lifted their sanctions against traveling in China.<sup>5</sup>

On my arrival in Shanghai, I was overwhelmed by post-SARS "feeding frenzy": As my friends put it, people felt as if they had just been released from prison and returned to consumption with a vengeance. Tourism again became favorite weekend and holiday activities after the Chinese government lifted the ban on interregional traveling, once-empty shopping malls were filled with bustling crowds scouring for things to buy, and restaurants were busy making up for the business lost during the SARS outbreak.

A few days after my arrival, I joined some friends from high school for a sumptuous dinner at a recently opened restaurant. It was located in the Hongqiao area, which used to be a suburb but is now an affluent and bustling commercial area. The restaurant was on the third floor of a commercial high-rise: In the last few years, an increasing number of new, upscale restaurants have been set up within commercial complexes such as shopping malls, rather than stand-alone buildings. We took an elevator to reach the restaurant. The interior of the elevator was spotless. The carpet read "Monday," indicating that it was changed daily. Next to the buttons on the wall was a large sign that read "has been disinfected today"—a new practice in Shanghai's public buildings beginning during the SARS epidemic.

At the entrance of the restaurant, we were greeted with a wall-to-wall fish tank containing a stunning school of red tropical fish, which were intended for viewing, rather than culinary pleasure. There were so many fish that they effectively formed a fluid red screen shielding the interior of the restaurant from the visitors. Once the beautiful *qipao*-clad receptionist chaperoned us around the fish tank, I found myself in a spacious "exhibition hall." In the middle of the hall was a large table where vivid plastic samples and price tags of main dishes were displayed. A deli was set up on the left side of the hall, where various cold appetizers were showcased. The other two walls were lined with fish tanks that contained a wide variety of live fish, shellfish, crabs, and shrimps—most of which I had never seen before. Unlike the fish tank at the entrance, these animals were destined to be eaten. Taking notice of my awed expression, my friends told me that they selected this restaurant because of its dazzling array of live freshwater and marine animals.

As we sat down to order, I noticed that there were no snake dishes on the menu. Although not a big fan of eating snake, I was nevertheless puzzled by its absence because

snakes—fried, braised, or stewed—were ubiquitous in Shanghai’s restaurants during my visit in 1999.<sup>6</sup> My friends told me that snakes were no longer sold in restaurants because they could not be “farmed”—that is, humans cannot regulate the reproductive activities of snakes while keeping them in captivity—and were, therefore, listed among the “wild animals” that the Chinese central government banned during and after SARS.

Snakes were not the only “wild animals” that disappeared from the dinner table because of SARS. Among competing explanations for the origin of SARS, the hypothesis of *zoonotic origin*, meaning “animal-borne origin,” was most strongly favored by research scientists in and outside of China and, furthermore, was the theory most widely spread through mass media, the Internet, and rumors. In late April 2003, at the height of the SARS outbreak and under mounting international criticism for its lack of action, the Chinese Forestry Administration and the Chinese Industry and Commerce Administration announced the banning of hunting, selling, purchase, transportation, import-export, and marketing of all “wild animals” with the exception of necessities for scientific research (*People’s Daily* 2003). The term *wild animal*, however, was both vague and all encompassing. Without any clear definition of which animals were considered “wild” and why, the “farmed tiger frog”—another delicacy and one of the best sellers at live animal markets—was singled out as the only “wild animal” exempt from the ban (*People’s Daily* 2003). Moreover, although land animals—including most amphibians—were strictly banned, the status of freshwater and marine animals was less clear. Restaurants in Shanghai, for example, stopped serving *drunken seafood*—a culinary method in which small, live freshwater or marine animals such as shrimps and clams are dumped into a pot of rice liquor and then eaten almost immediately. Whether an animal was “wild,” it seems, also depended on whether it was raw or cooked for consumption.

In May 2003, research scientists in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, working on civet cats isolated viruses similar to the human SARS virus and suggested that the civet cat was the likely animal host of the SARS virus (Guan et al. 2003). It is noteworthy that although some of these civet cats may have been captured, most were commercially farmed. Almost all were destined to be eaten, at restaurants, rather than home. However, the isolation of the civet cat as the animal host of the SARS virus did not ease the ban on—or lessen people’s fears of—other “wild animals.” It was only in August 2003, well after the last SARS patient was released from the hospital, that the ban was relaxed to exempt Chinese deer, African ostrich, turkey, scorpion, and a total of 54 assorted land animals (Chinese Forestry Administration 2003). Most of the animals on the list were commercially farmed. Many were exotic or novel food items. The Chinese Forestry Administration explained that the rationale for their exemption was that the farming technologies for these animals were “mature” enough so that they could be domesticated and bred “for commercial

purposes” (2003, emphasis added)—even as the administration admitted that there was no guarantee of control of germs that could potentially jump species.

The ambiguity of the term *wild animal* was also one of the topics at my dinner with high school friends. We argued over which animals were “wild” and therefore banned—and whether the banning of “wild animals,” indeed, made much difference in dealing with SARS. Our discussion ended, not in a consensus but with the arrival of our food, along with white towels soaked in disinfectant to clean our hands (only at the end of the meal did I find out that we were to pay for these towels, even though they were mandatory at restaurants in Shanghai). In spite of the absence of the snake, our dinner did not suffer from the lack of exotic food: In addition to novel varieties of shrimps and shellfishes, I had my first taste of sturgeon—commercially farmed and braised to perfection.

In the subsequent weeks, the topic of “wild animals” kept crawling back in various forms into my interviews with medical professionals in Shanghai, as well as my conversations with other friends: when we were eating at restaurants, debating the origin of SARS, or talking about football. Even though the “wild animal” was at the center of everyday conversations and government regulations of SARS, the meaning of the “wild” was by no means reductively “natural,” nor could it be structurally defined in opposition to “domestic” or “farmed.” I do not imply here that anything goes as far as the meaning of “wild animal” is concerned. To the contrary, I suggest that, through the act of banning certain animal foods and markets during the SARS outbreak, the “wild” was marked with a set of heterogeneous meanings specifically and intimately related to, if not produced by, human consumption—consumption in its visceral and discursive dimensions. The wildness of the civet cat came under scrutiny when research scientists, the Chinese government, and international media identified the animal as the likely animal host of the SARS virus and, at the same time, an item on the Chinese dinner table.

These human entanglements in the production of the “wild animal” suggest that what needs to be analyzed in understanding SARS is more than the physical body of the civet cat or the generic sequence of the SARS-like virus it carried. We also need to pay critical attention to the enmeshment of civet cats and other “wild” creatures deep within everyday life. In what follows, I argue that it was during a medical, social, and political crisis of potential global scale that the “wild” took on contingent and contested forms through a variety of actions that were at once biological, political, legal, historical, social, transnational, and visceral. Elusive and heterogeneous, the “wild” emerged as a temporary point of convergence in discourses of SARS and, as I will show, at the same time resisted any identification of it as the readily accessible point of origin of the SARS epidemic. To make this point, I first turn to the competing origin stories of SARS, with a focus on the perhaps most sensational actor in these stories: the civet cat.

### ALTERNATIVE ORIGINS AND DISPARATE ROUTES

One day in April 2004, as I was in the process of writing this article, I was confronted with, on the one hand, reports of a new case of SARS originating from a laboratory in Beijing and, at the same time, a new article in *Far Eastern Economic Review* entitled "Why SARS Didn't Return" (Pottinger 2004). The argument of the article, in short, is that the virus disappeared because of the successful elimination of wild animal markets in south China, including the killing of thousands of civet cats. Although, contrary to the claims of the article, the elimination of wild animal markets did not eradicate SARS, the Chinese government immediately responded to the new SARS case by announcing the plan to slaughter 10,000 more civet cats (Bradsher and Altman 2004). What, I wondered, makes the civet cat Public Enemy No. 1 in the battles against SARS, in spite of obvious possibilities of alternative origins and routes of transmission?

To begin, SARS was indeed a very bad disease for biomedicine. Between November 2002 and the end of the epidemic in June 2003, an estimated 8,422 people in over 30 countries were infected with various strands of the virus, and 916 died as a consequence (WHO 2003). However, given that the 11 percent mortality rate of SARS is slightly above that of the influenza, SARS was nowhere near a plague and the panic over SARS seemed to have bordered on paranoia. This panic was compounded by the fact that, even as more and more people fell sick and died, biomedical science was late in coming up with an authoritative explanation or effective treatment. Scientists were not able to identify the virus as a novel coronavirus until April 2003,<sup>7</sup> five months after the appearance of first clinical cases (Holmes 2003). Even now, there is no effective treatment, definitive prognosis, or reliable preventive measures against a potential future outbreak. In fact, scientific communities around the world responded in diverse ways to the question of what should be done when facing such a rapidly spreading epidemic that threatened to reach a global scale. Whereas some labs immediately delved into the sequencing of the SARS genome (Peiris et al. 2003; Webster 2004), others rushed to develop a vaccine (Marshall and Enserink 2004). In the second case, some scientists conceded that, first, it would be extremely difficult to develop an effective vaccine given the unusually high evolving rate of the coronavirus; second, even if scientists managed to produce a vaccine, it would take a second large-scale outbreak to test whether the vaccine actually works (Marshall and Enserink 2004). In short, SARS called into question the efficacy of biomedicine in containing infectious diseases and threw into sharp relief the uncertainties and frailties of the standardized tools and narratives that produce and authorize biomedical knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

However, the "inadequacy" of biomedicine was not the only factor that fueled the anxiety and paranoia over SARS.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that speculations over the origin of SARS did not simply originate from the lab or the Chinese government but had entangled roots in repercussions of recent world events. The sudden explosion of media coverage of SARS in and especially outside of China coincided

not with the outbreak of the epidemic, but with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq at the end of March 2003. Although some earlier speculations in and outside of China suspected the natural and nonhuman origin of SARS, others spoke of biological weapons: Was SARS a mysterious biological weapon? (News24.com 2003). Rumors of SARS being a "foreign" biological weapon spread through Chinese websites, and some claimed that the novel and highly unusual virus was designed to target Chinese genes (Tong 2003). Debates about the origin of SARS continue until today—for example, whether the virus jumped from animals to humans or the other way around—long after the story of the civet cat as the animal culprit prevailed in research communities and mass media.

Even as competing origin stories abounded, medical, sanitary, and everyday practice in China targeted multiple routes of transmission, especially respiratory transmission. The possibility of respiratory transmission of SARS was emphasized by several different sources. In May 2003, the WHO released a conference report claiming that the major mode of transmission of SARS was respiratory, although the potential for infection by ingestion must also be considered. Medical professionals on the ground also noted that infection rates were much higher at high-tech locations such as hospitals with centralized ventilation (Lee et al. 2003; Masur et al. 2003). In China and Hong Kong, many of those who came down with SARS were doctors and nurses who worked at high-tech hospitals such as the Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong and the People's Hospital in Beijing, both of which remained quarantined for months during and even after the outbreak. Some doctors and nurses who risked their lives fighting SARS declined to be interviewed on television; others agreed to be interviewed, on the condition that the interview would not be conducted at their home and that their faces would be obscured so that friends and neighbors would not recognize and avoid them.

In Shanghai, there were only eight confirmed cases of SARS. However, "fever clinics" for anyone who had a temperature higher than 37.5° Celsius (99.5° Fahrenheit), and quarantine wards for potential SARS patients were set up in all major hospitals. A doctor who worked at one of these wards told me that, on entering the ward, he did not know whether he would get out again. He explained,

I volunteered for the squad [to combat SARS] in April, and stayed in the ward without going home for more than four weeks. The top floor of our hospital was quarantined for potential SARS patients. There were 15 beds in there. We had no idea how many beds we would eventually need. At one end of the ward were the patients' beds, at the other the beds for doctors. There were three beds in between that were kept vacant. When I checked on my patients, I wore two protection suits, three pairs of disposable surgical shoes, three masks, and a pair of goggles. Even so, I knew that I was still exposed to air when I used the stethoscope. I tried to use it as infrequently as possible. Otherwise I just had to take the risk. Luckily none of the patients in the ward had SARS, although some turned out to have measles.

It was such a relief to be home eventually. While I was inside (the hospital), I heard stories about taxi drivers refusing to take people coming out of the hospital. One of our nurses had to call us from her cell phone so that we could tell the driver that she did not have SARS. So it was just as well that I did not leave the hospital for four weeks. [conversation with author, September 4, 2003]

Although medical and everyday practices—such as wearing masks and frequent disinfection of surface areas with disinfectants, including vinegar—worked against multiple and especially respiratory routes of transmission, it was the civet cat that became the most infamous creature in the origin stories of SARS. In what follows, I focus on the one origin story that became ubiquitous and dominant in discourses of SARS—that of the civet cat and China's wet markets.<sup>10</sup> Why, among all the competing origin stories and suspected routes of transmission, did the civet cat draw the most intense scrutiny from researchers and media in and especially outside of China? Why does the civet cat, along with other “wild animals,” continue to be the target of aggressive government regulation and media controversies even after SARS? Why, while images of masked faces on magazine covers became symptomatic of the spread of SARS,<sup>11</sup> did scientific and popular discourses zero in on practices of China's wild animal markets in their narratives of origin?

### ENTANGLED CONSUMPTIONS

Underlying the fear of the civet cat was the assumption—popularized by research scientists and mass media in and outside of China—that it was only when humans came into physical contact with the wild animal that the virus jumped species and started a deadly epidemic. The story of the “zoonotic origin” of SARS was not only boosted by the identification of the SARS virus as a coronavirus similar to flu viruses but also by the speculation that the initial site of the outbreak was Hong Kong or the Guangdong Province of southern China, both famous for their bold appetites for exotic animal foods. Moreover, the first identified SARS patient was reportedly an animal handler who worked in the wild animal food markets in Guangdong Province (Bradsher and Altman 2003). The argument about the link between human appetites and the nonhuman origin of the virus was further consolidated by reports of the discovery of large quantities of SARS antibodies among animal dealers in Guangdong (Altman and Bradsher 2003). In May, research scientists in Guangdong and Hong Kong identified the civet cat, a delicacy in southern China, as the original animal host of the SARS virus (Guan et al. 2003). In the meantime, research scientists pleaded for the immediate closing of wet markets in China and other Asian countries as a measure to stop SARS in its track and prevent future outbreaks (Guan et al. 2003). These pleas were quickly and widely publicized in scientific and medical journals as well as through mass media in and especially outside of China. As discussed earlier, the Chinese government responded by banning the consumption of almost all wild land animals.

At play in the frenzies surrounding the “zoonotic origin” is the translocal scientific and media representation that the Chinese, in indulging their appetites for exotic “wild animals,” transgressed proper barriers between human and animal, the domestic and the wild, and culture and nature. In other words, the story of “zoonotic origin” did not blame nature itself for the SARS outbreak; what went wrong was the Chinese people's uncanny affinity with the nonhuman and the wild. This affinity was enabled not only by the highly mutable virus that was crafty enough to move between Chinese bodies of both human and nonhuman sorts but also by the visceral act of consumption.

In fact, in both media and scientific origin stories of SARS, the civet cat and the wet market in which it was sold were often conflated. European, North American, and many Chinese newspapers and websites were replete with narratives linking the “age-old tradition” of eating wild animals with SARS. These sensational reports portrayed the strange entanglements of human and animal bodies, and the deadly filthiness of such entanglements (Lovgren 2003; Rosenthal 2003; Sperry 2003; Webster 2004; Yardley 2004; York 2003). The following is a vivid description of wild animal markets in Guangdong by Reuters:

Two little boys giggle as they play hide and seek among hundreds of filthy cages packed tight with civet cats, dogs, porcupines and squirrels. . . . Amid the stench of death and decay, traders of exotic animals—a culinary delight for many southern Chinese—haggle over prices with customers, occasionally turning their attention to their children, pinching their cheeks or tousling their hair. Narrow passageways are strewn with animal dung, urine, entrails and grimy fodder. “What's there to be afraid of?” asked Mrs. Huang, carrying her three-month-old daughter on her back. “We have been working and living here for years and we have had no problems.” A few steps away, men with iron pipes clubbed a dog unconscious and slit its throat. Others squatted around another dead dog, plucking it clean of hair with their bare fingers. Virologists believe that such markets in China and farms where people live in very close proximity to animals are fertile breeding grounds for disease and viruses. [Reuters 2003]

This excerpt is littered with interspecies bodily entanglements: “cages tightly packed” with various animals, human adults pinching the cheeks of their children and tousling their hair as they haggle over the prices of animals, narrow alleys strewn with animal parts, and a dead dog and humans who touch it with their “bare fingers.” These voyeuristic images of the “local culinary tradition” were then contrasted with and condemned by the sanitized, authoritative voice of an abstract “virologist”: Unnatural interspecies bodily encounters breed disease and viruses. And the unnatural affinity with animals through eating, the stories go, lies in a Chinese way of life “that has existed for as long as anyone can remember” (Lynch 2003). As a logical consequence of this kind of reasoning, many scientists cautiously recommended the eradication of wet markets, while at the same time identifying Chinese people's culinary taste as a public health hazard *and* a deeply rooted cultural tradition that needed to be “respected” (Bradsher

and Altman 2004; *Nature* 2004; Watts 2004:134; Webster 2004).

These accusatory ambivalences and voyeuristic curiosities toward visceral entanglements of Chinese bodies of both human and nonhuman sorts should come as no surprise to my readers: Similar discourses plague wet markets and restaurants in Chinatowns in the United States. In his article "Fish Stories: Environmentalist Disgust and the Viscerality of Race," Timothy Choy (1997) examines environmentalist discourses surrounding "fresh kills" in the wet markets of San Francisco's Chinatown and what he calls the "racial signification" of the accusation, "You eat fish!" He argues that the identification of the Chineseness of certain food practices begs a critical analysis of race that takes into account the visceral qualities of racial discourse.

I find Choy's observations useful for thinking through similar accusations: You eat dogs! You eat civet cats! You eat grasshoppers! The proliferation of these "you-eat-(animals)"s in everyday discourse of Chineseness (and even Asianness) underscores the viscerality of racialized Orientalist tropes that produce various exotic Others through their excessive pleasures and enjoyments. In the case of scientific and popular discourses of SARS, we see the recurrence of a familiar narrative strategy that visceralizes the traditional and the uncanny as the origin of a culturally specific disease that—if not contained—threatens to destroy the global. The civet cat, in particular, became a protagonist in the origin stories of SARS because it conjured up familiar Orientalist representations in which the wildness and exoticness of Chinese bodies—of both human and nonhuman sorts—emerged out of visceral acts of consuming. Although these tropes are nothing new, I am intrigued, first, by their obsession with the viscerality of consumption, and the effectiveness of the visceral in producing racialized bodies, identities, and subjectivities. Moreover, I suggest that, while mass media and scientific representations constructed a visceralized ancient epicurean tradition of China as the "real origin" of the SARS outbreak, they also did so by locating narratives of excess squarely within the sphere of the market and mass consumption, which is not an emblem of "ancient Chinese culture" but a product of recent economic, social, and political transformations in China.

As has been pointed out by Judith Farquhar, the large-scale marketization and consumption of food in China today has as much to do with the general "deficiency" of the Mao era, as with the "excess" of a post-Mao China in which desires for consumption are discursively cultivated and embodied (Farquhar 2002). Farquhar argues that the practice of excess in postsocialist China is a response to the general state of deficiency—if not hunger itself—of the Mao era. She further points out that such excess is often localized: Compared to the pervasive state of deficiency that characterized the Chinese state and society in general during the Mao era, the excess in consumption has so far been restricted to urban areas and the emerging middle class. It is no surprise, perhaps, that the SARS outbreak was at its worst in the prosperous Guangdong Province and the capital city Beijing.

I am interested, then, in how persistent strategies of Othering are refigured for discourses and practices of middle-class lifestyle and consumer choice. I suggest that, in contrast to Orientalist representations that conjure up the familiar image of one uniformly exotic China, a closer look at the heterogeneous discourses and practices of consumption suggests a more elusive and fragmented picture of "China" and "the Chinese." Rather than being emblematic of an anonymous "Chinese culture," visceral practices of consumption in China today are intimately entangled in the emergence of an urban middle class. The rest of this article, then, is a preliminary examination of the ways in which competing visions, understandings, and practices of cosmopolitan bodies and subjectivities are produced in the wake of the SARS epidemic. Instead of discussing marketization and consumption strictly in terms of China's participation in the global domination of neoliberalism, I now want to focus on how competing visions and practices of the cosmopolitan are produced through consumption: in particular, the production of contested middle-class, cosmopolitan subjectivities mapped onto racialized, disciplined, healthy bodies.

### COSMOPOLITAN IMAGINARIES

Let me now return to Real Madrid and David Beckham's tour of China. Although the European media's interest in Real Madrid's China tour waned after the welcoming banquet fiasco, the Chinese media and public, in contrast, continued to be fascinated by every move of the team, and Beckham, in particular: Is he getting along well with his new teammates? He lets his hair down today: Is this a new fashion statement or is he in a bad mood? One report asserted that Beckham has such an extraordinary body that even his sweat-drenched jersey smelled fragrant. All these observations were duly posted on Sina.com and further proliferated through chat rooms and personal websites.

In contrast to Beckham, his teammate Ronaldo, one of the most famous Brazilian football players today, received comments on his body that were far less favorable. The Chinese media joined European commentaries on Ronaldo's weight problem, giving him the nickname *feiluo* (lit., *fei* means "obese" and *luo* is the first character in the Chinese translation of Ronaldo's name). The Chinese reports during the Real Madrid tour, moreover, focused not only on Ronaldo's weight but also, more importantly, on the presumed lack of control over his appetites. Sina.com gave Ronaldo an amount of attention second only to Beckham: It suggested that Ronaldo's "decadent" lifestyle during his summer vacation on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia made him "fat"; he was "always hungry and looking for good food"; and he had become so overweight that "he could barely run on the pitch" (Sina.com 2003).

The contrast between the Chinese media's treatment of Beckham's and Ronaldo's bodies is indicative of incongruous visions for cosmopolitan bodies and neoliberal subjectivities. Whereas Beckham's body was blond, disciplined, healthy, and sexy, Ronaldo's racially ambiguous



body was depicted to embody failures in disciplining an excessive appetite—which, as we recall, was blamed for the outbreak of SARS. The Chinese media, then, was already steeped in racialized Orientalist and neoliberal discourses of the body: Unlike their European counterparts, however, their anxieties over delayed modernity were palpable in the salient juxtapositions of Beckham and Ronaldo. Ronaldo is, perhaps, as cosmopolitan as Beckham. But, in choosing unwisely, he proved not to be a very good neoliberal consumer, which also made him not a very good neoliberal consumable.

The ridicule of Ronaldo further set up the disciplined Beckham as the neoliberal poster boy and a very good consumable at the same time. The desire for Beckham's body reached its climax not during Real Madrid's China trip but after. After Real Madrid's departure from Beijing, which was the last stop of their China tour, a number of memorabilia were publicly auctioned. The most curious items were things used by David Beckham at the hotel: slippers, pajamas, and bed sheets—unwashed. The slippers and pajamas were auctioned at 2,800 yuan (about \$350) apiece, reportedly purchased by a Chinese father for his daughter (Sina.com 2003). The money, ironically, went to a charity fund for children orphaned by the SARS epidemic (British Broadcasting Company 2003).

Here, the fear of germs was apparently forgotten: Beckham's body was not seen as a pollutant but something, when consumed, that could contribute to the fight against virulent germs. This moment of identification, mediated by the consumption of fragments and peripheries of Beckham's body, crystallizes a particular anticipatory discourse of neoliberalism: one in which China and Chinese desires are to be articulated and included, not exoticized and Othered.

In this last story of encounters of bodies as consumables, the distinction between the world of goods and the sphere of human identities were again called into question: This time the Chinese human body was not aligned with the civet cat and the grasshopper but David Beckham. Emerging out of this realignment of human and nonhuman bodies is a different vision and articulation of the cosmopolitan world and China's place in it. Persisting anxieties over a world of out-of-place, unruly bodies are subdued by the aspirations for membership in an emerging middle-class, cosmopolitan world of disciplined, healthy, sexy bodies, even as these anxieties make such aspirations all the more urgent.

## CONCLUSION

Instead of subscribing to the view that pitches tradition and culture against neoliberal subjectivities and practices, I have endeavored to understand the heterogeneous discourses and practices of consumption in relation to persisting Orientalist tropes as well as neoliberal imaginaries in post-SARS China. Rather than assuming or anticipating the flourish of a more or less uniform neoliberal subjectivity in post-SARS China, I have focused on the divergent, compet-

ing, and embodied visions and practices of identity production and subject formation. I have argued that the unruly human and nonhuman consumables and those who consume them challenge us to critically rethink the ways in which nature and culture, wild and domestic, traditional and modern, past and future are invoked and refigured in diverse and meaningful ways.

By focusing on consumption-as-eating and consumption-as-spending, I have brought to the foreground the importance of the visceral in contemporary knowledge production. By arguing for the "visceral," I am not proposing a phenomenological approach to the body. Nor am I interested in setting up eating or tasting as non-Western ways of knowing and being. Rather, what I want to highlight here is that the visceral is already discursive.

As noted by Gary Shapiro (2003), Michel Foucault's notion of "disciplinary power" is intimately connected to the technology of the vision, a notion that is itself visualized through Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's design of the "panopticon," the idea of which hinges on "a fictional gaze, a simple architectural equivalent of the traditional eye of God" (2003:298). Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, then, has its own genealogy of vision, which has been a privileged position of modern knowledge production. I here think of, for example, Haraway's critique of "the God's eye view" that authorizes the universality of a masculine science (1991). I also think of voices from within medical anthropology that tell us that vision is but one of the senses through which we have come to know the world. However, these Other senses—taste, hearing, touching, and smelling—have often been relegated to archaic or non-Western modes of knowledge production and subject formation.

In his article on cassette sermons in contemporary Egypt, Charles Hirschkind (2001) argues for an ethnography of the sensorial that considers listening as a disciplinary practice and its role in subject formation. Likewise, Miyako Inoue (2003) has described the ways in which listening shapes Japanese women's language and their emergence as modern, gendered subjects. I find these discussions tremendously helpful in broadening our understanding of knowledge production and subject formation in the contemporary world. In placing the visceral at the center of this piece, then, I have tried to draw attention to the ways in which the visceral is already discursively produced and cultivated. If the civet cat is not always good to eat, it is still good to think.

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## NOTES

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1. I here adopt the more widely used term *football*, rather than the U.S. term *soccer*.

2. The Oxford English Dictionary has a long list of alternative definitions for *consume*, all of which involve connotations of degeneracy, wastefulness, or exhaustion—a far cry from rational *consumption* circulated through neoliberal discourses. Relevant to my topics in this article are *consume* (2), "to spend (goods or money), esp. wastefully"; and *consume* (3b), "to make away with (food), devour, swallow, eat up, drink up."

3. "Becks" is a nickname for Beckham.

4. Sina.com did include, however, images of heavily made-up young women clad in ethnic minority clothing welcoming the Real Madrid players, who looked bewildered or bored.

5. During my trip, I found that SARS, still fresh in people's memories, was a recurring theme in my conversations with medical professionals as well as other friends and acquaintances who lived through the epidemic. Even the most mundane daily activities—taking the elevator, for example—somehow turned into a conversation about SARS. In this article, I juxtapose personal stories with articles from science journals, popular magazines, newspapers, and websites to examine the lingering presence of SARS, and how it speeded up consumption activities. The form of this article, then, also serves as a reflection on the media of circulations, encounters, and ruptures.

6. The popularity of snakes at restaurants in Shanghai was related to the rise of medicinal food and female beauty products in urban China. Snake is considered a good source of yin energy (the cool, feminine, descending, and nurturing energy). It is commonly recommended for women as a medicinal food to nourish their yin energy and, thus, give them smoother and more beautiful skin. Fried snakes are not recommended for beauty purposes because the frying process depletes yin energy.

7. A *coronavirus* is a type of virus that contains single-stranded RNAs and is shaped like a crown when seen under a microscope. It is a main cause of respiratory infections among humans and animals.

8. As biomedical researchers struggled to identify the virus, practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine used SARS as one of the opportunities to advertise the clinical efficacy of traditional herbal medicine in contrast to biomedicine (Zhan 2001). For example, students at Beijing University were given herbal packages that contained eight different herbs as a preventive measure. "The Jade Screen," a Yuan Dynasty prescription, was used to treat patients with SARS symptoms before the virus was identified. Proponents of traditional Chinese medicine argued that, because traditional Chinese medicine uses "syndrome differentiation" to treat patients, it does not rely on the identification of the pathogen as a prerequisite for reliable diagnosis and effective treatment.

9. Medical professionals in Shanghai told me that they believed that the first cases of SARS probably occurred as early as November 2002. However, the international media explosion over SARS did not happen until the end of March 2003. There have been several explanations for this delay. One explanation—especially from North America and Europe—is the cover-up by the Chinese government. North American and European scientists and media criticized the Chinese government for its "authoritarian" and "secretive" approach to the epidemic and urged for more "democratic" ways of handling the crisis. In China, however, some suggest that the public disclosure of SARS and the subsequent

intervention by the Chinese government were not only because of "international pressure." Some medical professionals pointed out to me that the clinical symptoms and autopsies of SARS patients were easily confused with those of pneumonia; on the other hand, it was impossible to keep SARS a "secret" because of the fast rate at which the disease spread—causing entire hospitals to be quarantined.

10. *Wet market* is a term that describes markets in which live-stock and wild animals are sold alive, especially as food items. The word *wet* emphasizes the wet and slippery floors—and filthiness, by association—of these markets. Interestingly, although *wet market* had been used to describe markets in Chinatowns of the United States, its popularity in English usage soared during media coverage of the SARS outbreak.

11. For example, the April 26, 2003, issue of *The Economist* adopted on its front cover an image of Chairman Mao wearing a mask. The May 5, 2003, issue of *Time* presented on its cover a blond-haired, blue-eyed young woman wearing a mask to alert the readers to the "global threat" of SARS. Most images, however, depicted not individuals but masses of Asian bodies wearing masks. This focus on the spread of SARS through sneezing and other forms of contact, thus, also played on an old Orientalist image of China—and East Asia—as a densely crowded place where contamination is spread very easily.

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