

Shark fin soup is a cultural dish that originated in China and Southeastern Asia during the Sung Dynasty, the consumption of shark in this form being over 2,000 years old. Since its inception, shark fin soup has made itself a staple in Asian cuisine, especially in regards to wealth and social status as it was once the food of royalty. An expected dish at large events, shark fin soup is typically an expensive consumer product, of which the consumption has lessened over the past decades. It is also seen as a part of Traditional Chinese Medicine as a *bu* food, one which can transfer its properties (in this case power and strength) to its consumer. Shark fin soup is akin to the Western chicken soup, used as a type of cure-all which supposedly slowly remedies chronic illness. Sea food is said to bring fortune and prosperity to its consumers, and shark fin is a show of respect when served to guests.

Sharks become an object, or commodity, in this way. Shark fin itself is essentially tasteless and only garners its flavour from broths. The shark is merely an object of human benefit with little to no concern for their wellbeing, especially from older generations who continue to perpetuate these traditions. There is growing concern among younger groups in the East, as well as conservationists in the West. However, the West sees a type of saviour complex in their efforts - shark fin soup is a foreign, exotic food composed of an animal the West would feel is inappropriate to consume. They take no issue in shaming the East for their practices, but the West also fails to recognize its own bias and objectification of sharks regarding entertainment. Sharks are villainized in Western media, making the average person fear them and be less inclined to care about their survival. The West profits off of this fear, more often peddling falsities about sharks than factual accounts that would make the shark appear to be the necessary apex predator in an ecosystem that it actually is.

Now, concern has been raised about the ethics and sustainability of shark fishing and finning, with international groups attempting to establish guidelines for the practices. Enabling these practices can be hard because of cost, especially considering that most fisheries are small (about ten people) and unorganized. There have been proposals of bans across the twelve major countries that operate in the industry, but a ban on finning can end up in the loss of sustainable practices that can be mimicked by other countries, or result in the waste of the shark's body. Bans do *not* ban the fishing of sharks as a general practice wherein they can be finned once caught, they merely regulate how their bodies can be used and treated. Actually managing these fisheries is a worthy investment, even if from the wealthier fisheries in the United States, because making these fisheries sustainable will at once protect sharks from extinction and ensure that the use of shark in traditional dishes can continue. Not protecting the sharks is actually more harmful to the economy because if they can no longer be fished due to total extinction, the entire industry surrounding the practice will collapse, and along with it numerous jobs and a rich cultural background. Culture is integral and should see priority on the world stage alongside environmental concerns, but managing these environmental concerns is how culture can remain a part of tradition for centuries to come.