



Shark advocate targets Chinese fin soup lovers

Eating shark fin soup compared to Thanksgiving turkey dinner

BY JEREMY SHEPHERD, SPECIAL TO VANCOUVER COURIER MARCH 24, 2010

Shark fin soup is a staple for many celebrations in Chinese culture, but a Vancouver group is attempting to change that culture by creating the same sympathy for sharks that Bambi engendered for deer.

According to a report submitted to the UN earlier this month, as many as 73 million sharks are killed by humans every year, mostly for their fins.

Inspired and horrified by the documentary *Sharkwater*, Claudia Li founded Shark Truth to confront the problem of shark finning from a cultural perspective.

A recent Simon Fraser University graduate, Li said she was partially motivated by the ineffectiveness of campaigns that came from outside the Chinese community. "Our people saw it as an attack," she said.

Sherron Soo, a mental health worker who lives in Vancouver, said she has a difficult time imagining Chinese banquets without shark fin soup. "The meal would not be complete without it," she said.

Soo described the soup as a rich delicacy and an integral part of weddings and milestone birthdays.

Soo said even the generation of Chinese people born in the 1970s would be unlikely to move away from the "quite flavourful" soup.

Li, who had eaten shark fin soup only a few months before campaigning against it, compared the culture of eating shark fin soup to Thanksgiving dinner. Li suggested Westerners might not be responsive if an outsider told them eating turkey was barbaric.

Li said her group's goal for this year is to stop shark fin soup from being served at 28 weddings in and around Vancouver.

Stephanie Yuen, a food writer originally from Hong Kong, said shark fin soup is "more about status than about food."

While several Vancouver restaurants in Vancouver offer shark fin soup for around \$15 a bowl, Yuen said the soup served at weddings is usually in the \$50 range. "There are certain things that you have to do... to prove it's going to be an ideal marriage," she said.

Yuen said the lavishness of many Chinese weddings is meant to show the bride is marrying into a worthy family. Yuen said the fin itself has "no taste," and the flavour of the soup is provided by the broth.

Dr. Nick Dulvy, an SFU biological sciences professor who acts as scientific adviser for Shark Truth, said the removal of predators often has a severe effect on the ecosystem.

He cited an instance where a lack of large sharks resulted in an abundance of medium-sized sharks. With fewer predators to deal with, the medium-sized sharks ate excessive amounts of bay scallops, and the net effect was the ruin of the fisheries formerly provided by the scallops.

Li's organization, Shark Truth, recently received a \$3,500 grant from the Save Our Seas Foundation in Switzerland.

Li said her non-profit group will use that money for a contest scheduled to begin at the end of March.

With a trip to Mexico to swim with whale sharks as the prize, contestants will explain what they plan to eat instead of shark fin soup and their reasons for abstaining from the controversial dish in video entries.

Shark Truth is scheduled to officially launch today, March 24, at Ken's Chinese Restaurant at 1:30 p.m at 1097 Kingsway.

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