

Activity: Shark Fin Soup



TIME ESTIMATE
20-30 minutes



MATERIALS
Printed or digital copies of articles

PURPOSE

To examine how notions and social constructions of race are implicated in various discourses such as sustainability.

DESCRIPTION

Sustainability can often overlook the importance of cultural sustainability in addition to environmental, economic and social pillars. Using a case study, participants will examine the debate around shark fin soup (an important dish served at Chinese weddings) and unpack how various discourses of sustainability impacted the Chinese Canadian community in this case study.

FACILITATOR NOTE

It is important to highlight the tendency to villainize the Chinese Canadian community in this case study. The point is not to debate whether or not de-finning sharks is morally right or wrong. Rather, it is to examine how notions of race are implicated in discourses such as sustainability and the impacts of racism on racialized diasporic communities in the food system.

STEPS

1 Provide some brief context on the case study.

- “Chinese Canadians are one of the largest ethnic groups in Canada. In the 2016 census, 1.8 million people reported being of Chinese origin. Despite their importance to the Canadian economy, including the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), many European Canadians were historically hostile to Chinese immigration. A prohibitive head tax restricted Chinese immigration to Canada from 1885 to 1923. From 1923 to 1947, the Chinese were excluded altogether from immigrating to Canada. Since 1900, Chinese Canadians have settled primarily in urban areas, particularly in Vancouver and Toronto. British Columbia has been a location of Chinese diaspora for over a century.”¹
- “Shark fin has been a delicacy in Chinese cuisine since the Sung dynasty (AD 960-1279), and during the Ming dynasty (AD 1368-1644) shark fin soup was a traditional dish for the emperor. At the time, many traditional dishes gained a higher reputation if they contained ingredients that were difficult to obtain. Thus, the risk involved in catching sharks served as a tribute to the emperor. The consumption of strong or fierce animals, such as sharks, was believed to give strength, and thus was considered suitable for the imperial family. The connection between shark fins and beliefs about health and vitality also plays an important role in shark exploitation. In traditional Chinese culture shark fins are considered as a tonic and as an aphrodisiac, which stems from the traditional belief of *bu* foods, which are considered as those foods that provide tonic benefits to those whom eat them. These traditional beliefs are reflected in contemporary Chinese culture, as consumption of shark fin soup is associated with prestige, and although it was originally included only in southern menus, shark fin soup is now a standard dish at weddings, banquets, and corporate functions throughout China. On these social occasions, shark fin soup represents a “must have” dish.”²
- Learn more about [the history of Canada’s early Chinese immigrants](#).

1 Chinese Canadians | The Canadian Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-canadians>

2 Dell’Apa, A., Chad Smith, M., & Kaneshiro-Pineiro, M. Y. (2014). The influence of culture on the international management of shark finning. *Environmental Management*, 54(2), 151-161. doi:10.1007/s00267-014-0291-1

MODULE 3: DIASPORIC FOODWAYS

- 2 Divide the participants into small groups of 3-5 people. Provide each group with the following articles:
 - [CBC - After years of legal wrangling, Ottawa moves to ban imports of shark fins](#)
 - [The Star - Shark fin soup divided this Vancouver man's family for decades. How Canada's ban could bring everyone back to the table](#)
 - [hua foundation - Shark Truth Legacy](#)

- 3 Have participants assign one notetaker for each group and provide the following prompts for discussion:
 - Who are the groups/ people involved? What is each group concerned about?
 - What are the different perspectives presented?
 - Are any perspectives not represented in the article?
 - Whose knowledge is valued and why?

- 4 Regroup as a class. Have each group present their findings to the rest of the class.

ASSESSMENT: OP-ED

After conducting research and formulating your own opinion, write an opinion editorial (op-ed) addressing the debates presented in this case study. The op-ed should:

- State your position/opinion on the debate
- Delineate the reasons behind your position
- Identify and address the tensions between conflicting perspectives
- Include backed up arguments with at least 5-10 academic, community or news sources.

Facilitator Note

You are encouraged to create your own statements for learners to choose from. Ensure that your statements are adapted to your local context. You are also encouraged to provide resources on how to write an op-ed, including [Op-ed Writing: Tips and Tricks by The OpEd Project](#), as well as samples for learners to refer to.

NOTES: