

# Without a Fin to Stand On:



How environmental and cultural perceptions are driving sharks to extinction for a bowl of stringy shark-fin soup

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SFSU, Spring 2012

# Research Questions

- What is driving the dramatic and recent rise in the practice of “finning” for shark-fin soup?
- What is the best way to study the environmental and cultural perceptions around this alarming trend?



# Methods

- Literature Review -- mostly popular references
- Journalistic Inquiry - wrote Orion-style magazine article

*Rationale: Limited effectiveness of previous survey work*



# WHAT IS SHARK FINNING?

## ENDANGERED RATE

AN ESTIMATED **32%** OF OPEN OCEAN SHARKS ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION



SOME SHARK POPULATIONS HAVE DECREASED BY **99%** OVER THE LAST **50 YEARS**



## WHAT'S HAPPENING?

AN ESTIMATED **100 MILLION SHARKS** ARE KILLED EVERY YEAR

**73 MILLION** OF WHICH ARE FOR **SHARK FIN SOUP**

## WHAT IS FINNING?

SHARKS ARE CAPTURED AT SEA



HAULED ON DECK

AND ARE OFTEN STILL ALIVE WHEN THEIR FINS ARE SLICED OFF



THE MAIMED ANIMALS ARE USUALLY TOSSED OVERBOARD TO DROWN OR BLEED TO DEATH

UP TO **98%** OF THE ANIMAL IS WASTED, SINCE THE FINS ARE MORE VALUABLE THAN THE REST

## THE BUSINESS OF SHARK FINS

FINS CAN SELL FOR AS MUCH AS

**USD \$880 PER POUND**

**\$100**

A BOWL OF SHARK FIN SOUP CAN SELL FOR AS MUCH AS \$100 USD PER BOWL



IN HONG KONG, **89%** OF PEOPLE SURVEYED HAVE EATEN SHARK FIN SOUP AT A WEDDING BANQUET

**145**

COUNTRIES ENGAGE IN THE TRADE OF SHARK PRODUCTS

**BIGGEST CATCHERS:** SPAIN, SINGAPORE, TAIWAN, INDONESIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES

**50% to 80%** OF FINS COME THROUGH HONG KONG



## THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARKS



SHARKS ARE AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN. THEIR DEPLETION CAN DRASTICALLY AFFECT THE ENTIRE MARINE ECOSYSTEM

SHARKS ARE SLOW GROWING, LATE MATURING, LONG-LIVED AND GIVE BIRTH TO FEW YOUNG, MAKING THEM ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO OVERFISHING

**\$2 MILLION DOLLARS** THE TOURISM VALUE EACH INDIVIDUAL REEF SHARK CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A COASTAL COMMUNITY OVER ITS LIFETIME

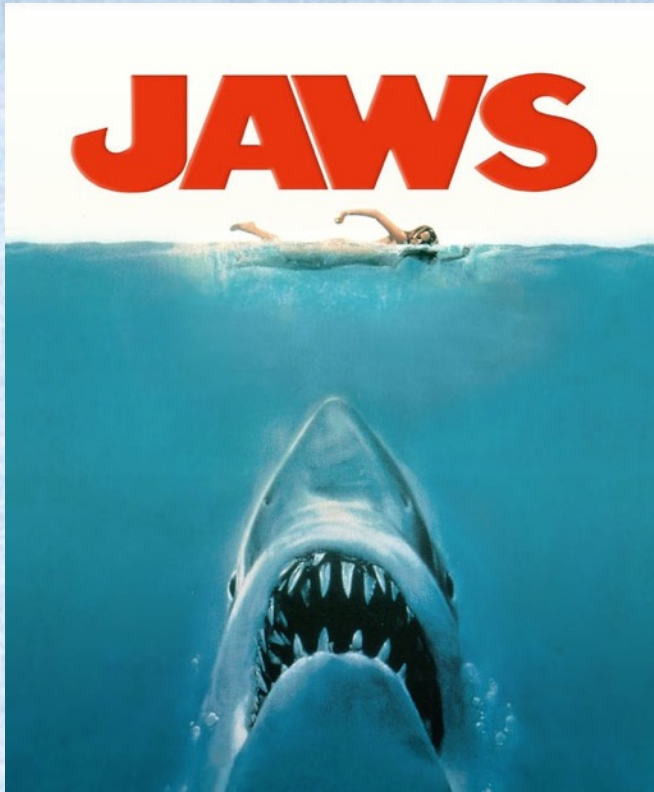
**\$108 DOLLARS** THE VALUE OF A SHARK KILLED FOR CONSUMPTION

**80 Hg MERCURY**

CONTRARY TO THE MYTH THAT SHARK FINS ARE NUTRITIONAL, SHARK FINS HAVE MERCURY LEVELS UP TO **42X** HIGHER THAN THE SAFE LIMIT



# Popular Perception of Sharks



“There is no animal on Earth more vilified than the shark.” (Ling, 2008)

“We are scared of sharks and that makes it easier to justify both their indiscriminate slaughter. We seek to punish sharks because they are the very incarnation of our fears... it's not human nature to protect what [we] fear.” (Kettles, 2011)



# Alt-Perception of Sharks

## Sharkwater: The Truth Will Surface

“You're underwater, and you see the thing that you were taught your whole life to fear...and it doesn't want to hurt you, and it's the most beautiful thing you've ever seen... and your whole world changes.” (Thomas, 2006)





# Shark Perception: Impact on Finning

“No doubt if the soup was made from dolphin dorsal fin or panda ears, the campaigners' success would be a fait accompli.”  
(Kettles, 2011)



“Can you imagine if it was Yellowstone Park and people were shooting up grizzlies? No one would ever get away with it. But this ocean, because it's out of sight - out of mind, [shark finning] carries on.” (Knight, 2007)



# Exhibit A: Slaughtered for Fins





# Exhibit B: Carnage Out to Dry





# Exhibit C: Hong Kong Rooftops



Shawn Heinrichs for the Pew Environment Group



# Exhibit D: Bottled for the 1%



春勾翅  
Shark Fins  
\$280.00/LB

有沙勾翅  
Shark Fin  
\$268.00/LB

金山勾翅  
Shark Fins  
\$250.00/LB

SHARKS FIN

SHARKS FIN



# Shark-Fin Soup: Ancient History

“For a couple of millennia this soup was a regional delicacy in the Guangdong province of China... a steaming luxury for a rich and powerful few who, charmed by its rareness and exclusivity, imbued it with all manner of mythical virtues. It's said to nourish the blood, strengthen the waist, improve a woman's complexion, and make a soft penis hard.” (Miles, 2006)



*Guangdong Province*



# Modern China: A Rising Tide



“The pace and depth of economic change in China over the last 25 years has been profound.

In the next 10 years there will be up to 250 million relatively middle class urban-living people with disposable income in a highly aspirational culture, where the need and social benefits of showing off wealth are high.

This will mean a potentially higher demand for shark fin soup because of the status it confers on both the giver and receiver.” (Kettles, 2011)



# Shark-Fin Soup: Current Perceptions

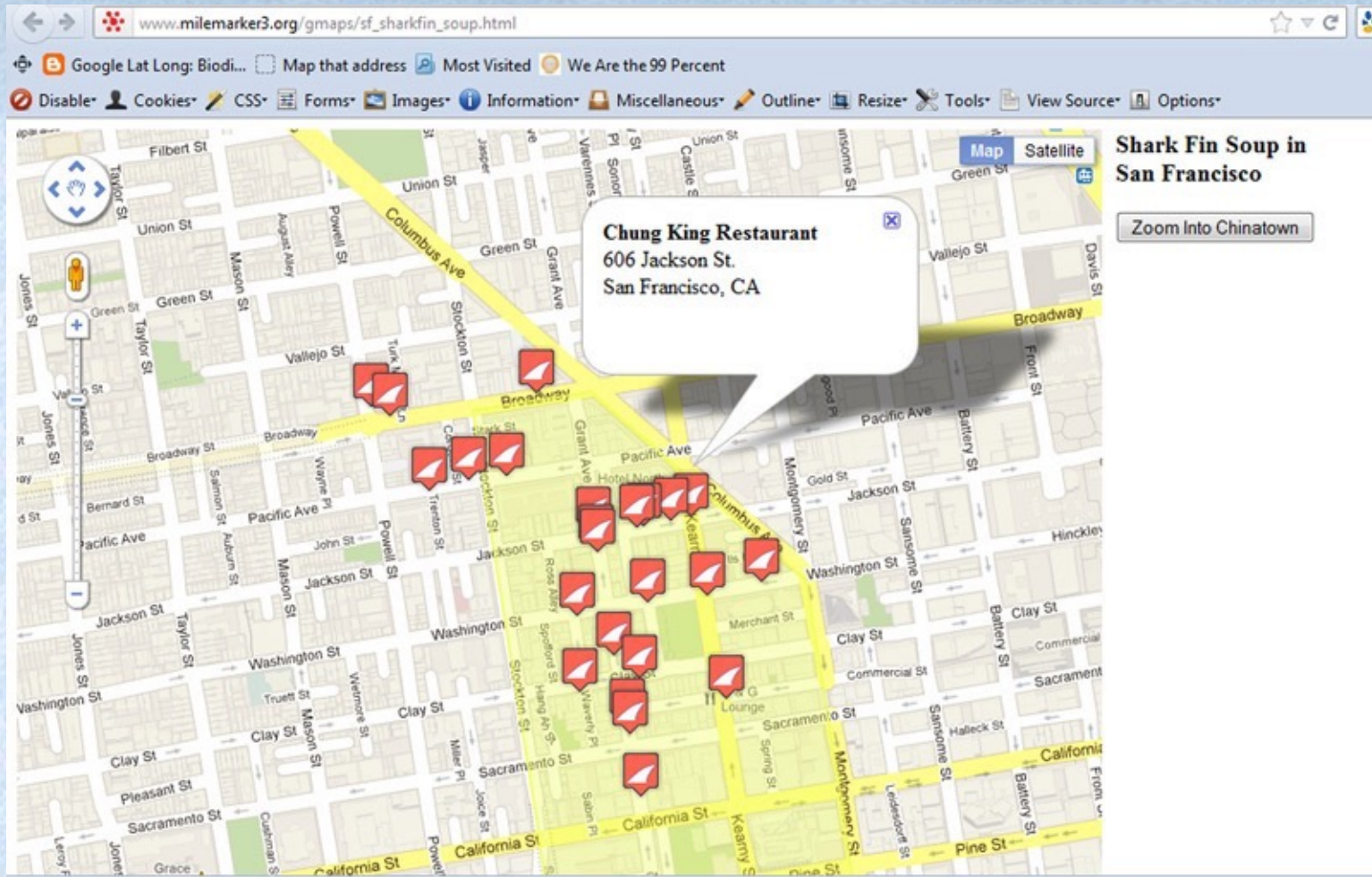


“In Asia and Asian communities worldwide, [shark-fin soup] remains a popular dish because of an association with prestige and privilege...

Despite growing attention, it still continues to be popular and prevalent in Asia, taking center stage in a culture where food symbolizes a great number of things, among them prosperity, virility, health and happiness.” (Tan, 2011)



# Shark-Fin Soup Bay Area





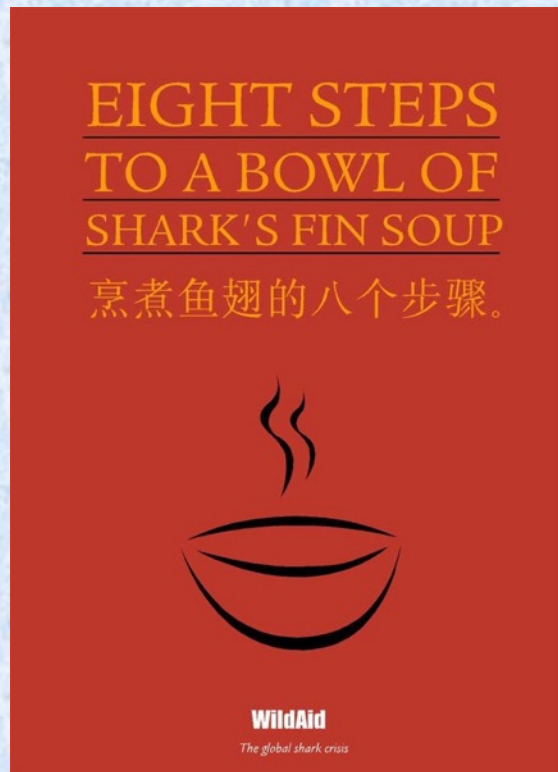
# Finning Legislation

Supply Side	Demand Side
<p><b>Fishing Bans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Usually require that all sharks be landed in port with their fins attached</li></ul>	<p><b>Sale and Trade Bans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Banning the possession, sale, trade and distribution of shark fins</li></ul>
<p><b>60 nation-wide bans include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ United States (2000)</li><li>➤ Costa Rica</li><li>➤ Taiwan (2012)</li></ul>	<p><b>U.S. state and local bans include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Washington</li><li>➤ Oregon</li><li>➤ Hawaii</li><li>➤ California (2013)</li></ul>



# Conservation Campaigns

“When the Buying Stops, the Killing Can Too.” (WildAid, 2011)





# Changing Cultural Perceptions



“The younger generation, the couples who are getting married, would prefer to steer away from shark's fin; But for their parents or in-laws would prefer to have the shark fin.”

(Whiteman, 2011)

“You must be having some effect, because the last three weddings I've been to [in Asia] didn't serve shark-fin soup. Which is like saying that the last three Thanksgiving dinners in America I attended didn't serve turkey.”

American, 2011)

(anonymous Chinese-



# Conclusion

➤ Chinese cultural perceptions are the primary driver of shark finning, enabling the economics of supply and the accompanying ecological impacts.

➤ Shark Finning is a demand-driven practice:

“People wouldn't go out and fin sharks if no one wanted to buy shark-fin soup. Just like the drug trade, it's difficult to stop... without stopping the demand.” (Knight, 2007)



# Proposal for Further Study

- **Focus Group study format preferred over surveys.**  
(more in-depth discussion is more apt to get at the root of the perceptions)
- **Select a multicultural study site for cross-cultural comparisons.**  
(San Francisco, CA seems a perfect candidate)
- **Elicit buy-in from, participation with Chinese cultural groups.**
- **Build Chinese-language translation capabilities into the study.**





# Shark Finning: More Information

- WildAid Shark Campaign

[www.wildaid.org/sharks](http://www.wildaid.org/sharks)

- Sharkwater: The Truth Will Surface

[www.sharkwater.com](http://www.sharkwater.com)

- Gordon Ramsey eats Shark Fin Soup for the first time

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=r65FgUYdB0c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r65FgUYdB0c)

- Save Our Seas Foundation

[www.saveourseas.com](http://www.saveourseas.com)



