

On Shark Fin Soup

by Pat Wong

I didn't join in the shark fin soup debate in a timely manner because my desktop computer's legacy motherboard finally gave out and I was in mourning. I empathize with Louis Lee since my boycott of shark fin soup has not been well received by fellow Bay-Area Lighters. In fact, they have purposely staged dinners in Hong Kong Flower Lounge Restaurant in Millbrae where all group menus have shark fin soup in them. Last time they specially ordered an egg-drop soup just for me which was totally beside the point. I shall refuse to go to that restaurant next time. Be warned!

The pictures in the original email depicted a whale shark which is a gentle giant with no teeth and eats only plankton. It was mutilated and left to die so that the Chinese can eat shark fin soup. Now that the Chinese are building up the middle class, more and more of them eat shark fin soup many times a week just to show that they can now afford such a coveted status symbol. Believe it or not, this is one of the major reasons that the shark population is dwindling and soon they will be an endangered species. They have survived many waves of global species extinction through the eons so that the emerging Chinese middle class can kill them off. No matter how fearful they are to us, they are an important part of the ecology of the oceans, and their loss will bring irreparable harm [1].

I disagree with Pang's argument that boycotting shark fin soup is passive and ineffective and that the only effective way is to pass laws so that the officials can prosecute the fin shavers. His philosophy is at odds with that of Gerard Lam's Libertarian one -- passing as few laws as possible to free the people from excessive bondage. Our boycott movement, though passive, is not unlike the non-violent protests of Gandhi and Dr. King half a century ago. I hope Pang doesn't belittle the recent Muslim countries' peaceful passive demonstrations as ineffective. They have achieved in weeks what al Qaeda couldn't do for decades. So, please, join us to boycott shark fin soup.

Pang's equating the act of harvesting shark fin to that of catching salmon is appalling. Let me see if I can depict the difference between the two. The former is like hacking off a person's arm just to rob him of a few dollars; the latter is like shooting a deer for food. If one doesn't see the cruelty involved in shark fin shaving, whatever I say will not make him see it. It is beyond me. Yes, we must kill, directly or indirectly, to sustain ourselves. That is how we are made. But we don't have the right to inflict cruelty in the process. We are all creatures on this Earth, we all have the right to be here. Pang further cited cars kill people; but, those are accidents. I fail to see the relevancy under the current context.

Once I switched to a TV channel on hunting. It showed a magnificent bull elephant emerging from the wood facing the hunter. He fired one shot with his elephant gun. The strong bull immediately dropped dead motionless. The entire group jumped up and down in joy congratulating each other. I could have vomited.

One of my brothers-in-law who is a preacher, enjoys gun play and hunting. I shall ask him next time how he can reconcile killing God's fellow creatures just for the fun of it? I suppose the commandment of Thou Shalt Not Kill applies only to fellow humans. Perhaps it should be translated into Thou Shalt Not Murder instead. Christianity seems to be much less benevolent than Buddhism in that respect.

[1] "Demon Fish" by Juliet Eilperin; Pantheon, June 2011.