

The Marine Literacy Construction in University's Humanistic Education

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Abstract: China's Maritime Power Strategy and Maritime Silk Road Initiative require that new generations of students have sufficient marine literacy. Marine literacy refers to the sum of knowledge, values, essential qualities, and key abilities related to the ocean, and marine literacy construction relies on humanistic education that aims to improve students' general knowledge and awareness about marine history, literature, art, and so on. To achieve the educational goals, comprehensive methods are needed that include systematic teaching design, extensive reading of multi-media marine-related texts, combination of classroom learning and extracurricular practice, and critical understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western marine histories and cultures, so as to equip the students with both textbook and practical knowledge about the ocean.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is the century of the ocean. Ocean has become a critical platform for showcasing national comprehensive strength and international competitiveness. China has proposed to build itself into a maritime power and develop the Maritime Silk Road during the first decade of the 21st century. The Chinese president has emphasized the need to care for and understand the ocean. In 2016, the Chinese State Oceanic Administration issued a document "The 13th Five Year Plan for National Marine Literacy Promotion, Education, and Cultural Construction" in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, stating that enhancing the public's marine literacy and awareness plays an important role in China's Maritime Power Strategy construction. In this process, universities are expected to improve students' marine literacy as the younger generation is regarded as the future builder of the maritime economy, future creator of marine science and technology, and the future executor of marine rights protection [1]. Particularly, the ocean and maritime universities will shoulder greater responsibility as their academic education is largely related to the ocean. In the past, the ocean-related courses in these universities were mostly in the domain of science and technology, with less emphasis on humanistic field. Since the release of "The 13th Five Year Plan for National Marine Literacy Promotion, Education, and Cultural Construction", more universities are paying attention to humanistic courses to enhance students' marine literacy.

2. What is Marine Literacy and How to Improve It by Humanistic Education

UNESCO has proposed the idea of “ocean literacy” and started The UNESCO Ocean Literacy Programme. “Ocean literacy” is based on seven principles: The earth has one big ocean with many features; the ocean and life in the ocean shape the features of the Earth; the ocean is a major influence on weather and climate; the ocean makes Earth habitable; the ocean supports a great diversity of life and ecosystems; the ocean and humans are inextricably interconnected [2]. Inspiring as they are, the UNESCO idea of “Ocean Literacy” and the seven principles mainly start from the natural characteristics of the ocean, treating the ocean as a natural object, and emphasize the mutual relationship between humans and the ocean, while ignoring its social, political, and aesthetic attributes. When analysing these principles, we need to be aware that these perceptions and practices are applicable to marine education in developed countries, as there are significant differences in the understanding of ocean literacy between developed and developing countries due to differences in national conditions and social environments. And we need to build the marine literacy education with an international perspective and a Chinese stance based on our own national conditions and cognitive characteristics.

The corresponding idea to UNESCO’s “ocean literacy” is “marine literacy” in China. Proposed by Professor Liu Xunhua, this idea refers to “the sum of knowledge, values, essential qualities, and key abilities related to the ocean that are formed by the people in their daily lives, reflect the characteristics of China’s development, and adapt to the needs of personal and social development” [3]. Liu suggests translating the Chinese “Hai Yang” into “marine” in English instead of “ocean,” since China’s marine literacy not only covers natural attributes like the UNESCO’s “ocean literacy”, but also includes humanistic, social and other attribute features, pointing to the rich sociality and humanity possessed by the ocean. And “marine literacy” is supported by four principles: social participation, humanistic awareness, scientific action and ecological sharing, each principle with three more sub-divisions that point to more detailed requirements.

Under the principle of “humanistic awareness,” a sub-principle is historical and cultural knowledge which includes a knowledge of both marine history and marine literature. In marine history, citizens are required to learn the knowledge of how people make use of the ocean from ancient to modern times both domestically and internationally, to research heritages related to maritime activities, to learn about famous explorers from ancient to modern times around the world, to understand the history of maritime development, and finally, to cultivate an emotional connection to the ocean. In maritime literature, citizens are expected to foster an interest in marine literature, to read, share, and try to create maritime literary works, to learn the wisdom in marine literature, and other forms of artistic creation. It is reasonable to deduce from these principles that for to acquire and increase “marine literacy”, in schools, especially universities, humanistic courses such as history, literature, art, etc., should be provided for students.

3. Existing Problems in Humanistic Courses in Marine Literacy Education

China has a long history of agricultural civilization while sea and ocean in most of the time are beyond the imperial government’s major concerns despite the equally long history of maritime trade and maritime explorations represented by Zheng He and his fleet. During certain period, sea and everything connected with it were even regarded as the source of dangerous influences (such as pirate and rebel forces) so that from Yuan, Ming to Qing Dynasty, “sea ban” policy was now and then issued and implemented to cut off the connection between mainland and overseas countries. Hundreds of years’ fear and neglect of the sea caused a severe ignorance of the situation overseas so much so that Emperor Daoguang of Qing Dynasty was both horrified and puzzled about the English armed fleet that invaded the southern coast of China. Though Chinese people realized through a series of wars

the importance of sea and navy, the extreme poverty in the following hundred years not only prevented the nation from building modern navy to defend its maritime interests, but also caused a high level of illiteracy, which naturally led to a lack of marine literacy in the whole Chinese society. After 1949, China started to assert its maritime interests and rights. However, marine literacy education in China's general education still suffer in terms of quantity and quality. In higher education in recent decades, humanistic courses also have many problems despite the implementation of the marine power strategy and the growing awareness in recent years.

First, students lack interest and necessary academic foundation with regard to the maritime knowledge. The central government admits that basic marine literacy education in is extremely weak in all levels of schools since a systematic understanding about the sea/ocean is not required in the national teaching syllabus, apart from some scattered stories or brief introductions. Such deficiency further adds to the difficulty for university students who want to take advanced courses. And this is also the reason why the government now puts top priority in marine literacy courses in the national ocean strategic education [4].

Second, the marine education in universities put a significant emphasis on marine science and technology and marine engineering courses, while ignoring humanistic ones. And among the very few courses offered in humanistic education, most of them are about ideological and political theory or a brief introduction to marine culture that lack professional teaching staff. As a result, the country now suffers a lack of qualified talents in humanities and social sciences in relation to marine studies. For example, even in many maritime universities, very few courses are offered about marine literature and culture.

Third, as some scholars point out, the marine literacy education suffers from a lack of sound scientific knowledge system, a lack of unified knowledge framework and standardized teaching practices at all levels [1]. The current marine literacy courses in universities are designed and carried out based on different institution's preferences. What's worse, there is no unified teaching system nor standardized textbooks in universities in the country. Universities tend to choose teaching materials that they believe suitable for the courses, without national curriculum guidelines. Therefore, the teaching content is often scattered and superficial, making it difficult to achieve a certain depth and breadth nor arouse students' interest in these fields. In the long term, these courses would leave students a negative impression about these courses to the extent that when they graduate, their marine literacy level is still disappointing.

4. The Ways to Improve Marine Literacy Education in Humanistic Courses: Taking Two Courses in SHOU as Example

Shanghai Ocean University (hereby referred to as SHOU) is one of the ocean universities in China. Originally a fisheries school founded in 1912, it was renamed as Shanghai Ocean University in 2008 from Shanghai Fisheries University, and is now a multidisciplinary, applied research university. As the change of the university's name may suggest, it used to focus on fishery and marine industry and related researches. But with the development of the country and with the growing need for studies in various fields concerning the ocean, the university has expanded the scope of education and grown into a multi-disciplinary university featuring disciplines such as the marine science, fishery, economics, management and law, and arts. At the same time, as an ocean university, it also pays great attention to students' marine literacy level by humanistic education.

In SHOU, there are two kinds of elective courses: public elective course open to the students of all majors and specialty elective course open only to certain majors. To improve marine literacy, students are required to earn credits in humanistic elective courses, such as World Marine Literature, Marine Civilization and History, English Marine Literature, The Sea and Ancient Greek Mythology,

etc. In the following analysis, two elective courses, World Marine Literature and Marine Civilization and History will be used as examples to show how marine literacy education is carried out in humanistic education. In these two, World Marine Literature is a public elective course open to all students, and Marine Civilization and History is a specialty elective course open to English majors in SHOU. And these two courses also represent the university's efforts to standardize and systemize the marine literacy courses since both teaching teams compiled and published textbooks for the courses, which is a response to the third problem mentioned above.

4.1. World Marine Literature Course

Compared with the common introductory courses to marine culture or the ideological and political theory, World Marine Literature mainly focuses on both Chinese and Western literary texts, including Ancient Greece, Britain, Germany, France, America, Australia, New Zealand, etc. With regard to the way the course is designed and taught, a complete curriculum system is put in the first place [5]. And under the curriculum system, three aspects are to be highlighted in teaching.

First, the appreciation of marine literature works is the fundamental practice in this course. Students are required to read classic works of marine literature from ancient to modern times in both China and West. The Chinese classics include *Shan Hai Jing* from Pre Qin period that tell the ancient tales of sea gods, poems from Tang and Song Dynasty that express poets' emotion through their connection with the sea, and novels from Ming and Qing Dynasty that contain various marine activities, customs, and stories. The Western classics include Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, etc. In reading these materials, students can gain a relatively thorough understanding of marine culture, broaden their horizons, and cultivate an interest in learning things related to the sea. Reading the colourful marine literary works can in the first place help students understand life by/on the ocean from an aesthetic perspective, arouse their love and longing for the ocean, and form a basic understanding and grasp of a series of issues such as sea resources, marine sovereignty, overseas relations, ocean trade and so on.

Second, the teacher will make use of The Flipped Classroom strategy by assigning after-class tasks to the students and inviting them to discuss and give presentations in the next class to arouse students' enthusiasm. The assignments are usually a general question for students to work out in groups with certain researches such as: "What were changes of English people's attitude to the sea from *Beowulf*, *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Moby Dick*?" "How did Christianity influence navigators in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*?" "Can you trace the development of whaling industry exhibited in *Moby Dick*?" and so on. Students are encouraged to express their opinion and gradually form their individual understanding of the historical/cultural phenomenon behind the literary works, thus try to grasp the laws of evolution of maritime civilizations around world. Though most students have little experience with the sea/ocean, through reading and discussing the classics, they can learn the ways in which the ocean affects people's spiritual life in various historical stages.

Third, students are invited to make comparisons between China and the West with regard to the marine history to establish a correct worldview. It is true that since ancient Greece, Western civilization has been utilizing the ocean, on which the modern world is built, whereas marine culture has stayed at the background of Chinese civilization. And yet, students are encouraged to explore further into the problems caused by such civilization: colonialism, slavery, inequality, exploitation, destruction of biodiversity, etc. reflected in the literary classics. By systematically and comprehensively comparing the history of marine literature in China and the West, students can understand more specifically the history of the development of different marine cultures, the transformation and changes of marine cultures, the glory and difficulties experienced by people around the world in the process of developing and exploring the ocean, and truly understand the

universal significance and value of the ocean for human survival.

4.2. Marine Civilization and History Course

Marine Civilization and History is a specialty elective course open to undergraduates and graduate students in the English Department of SHOU. Adopting bilingual materials in teaching, this course is divided into several units, covering a number of topics such as ocean legends, ocean expedition, marine arts, ocean economy, maritime rights and interests, etc. And the teaching is characterized by the following features:

First, the curriculum system of marine culture establish a two-dimensional teaching platform that focuses on both classroom teaching, and is supplemented simultaneously by social practice sessions. That means, apart from the classroom teaching, learning and discussion, this course also requires students to participate in certain social practices, such as museum visiting, translation practice, etc. The purpose of such requirement is to combine marine cultural resources from different regions with practical ability cultivation so as to conduct marine literacy education through rich and diverse practical teaching. For example, in the past several terms, students visit China Maritime Museum which is 2km away from SHOU. As the first national maritime museum, China Maritime Museum has six halls with different themes, such as Chinese navigation history, maritime affairs and sea safety, seafarers and military navigation, ships, etc. When visiting the museum, students can combine the textbook knowledge with the real objects displayed. For example, they learn about Zheng He's adventure in Ming Dynasty and they can also see for themselves the ship models of the fleet, thus forming a vivid impression about historical events. Based on the museum visiting, students will write a report to reflect on the knowledge they have learned. Such teaching organization is to make sure students have access to any experiences connected with the ocean in order to stimulate students' interest and initiative in learning. What's more, students are encouraged to do researches about regional cultures about the sea in their hometown, for example, Mazu worship. Regional marine culture is an important component of China's traditional marine culture and an extremely valuable marine cultural resource. Utilizing regional cultural resources for traditional cultural education and pushing it into the field of social practice is an important way for marine literacy education. China has a long coastline and vast coastal areas with a long and unique marine civilization and rich marine cultural heritage. Studying the marine culture of different regions can further enhance the recognition of the entire Chinese nation's marine culture.

Second, teaching materials should be updated, adding the latest marine cultural content in today's society, integrating the latest cutting-edge marine technology content, and fully utilizing various channels such as the social media, short videos, film cut, etc. For example, students are encouraged not only to read literary works and academic articles in the textbook or assigned by the teacher, but to form teams to search materials from APPs such as Rednote and Bilibili. These platforms are popular among the young, and students are very quick in finding materials. For example, when learning about maritime museums in Europe, students can quickly find blogs or vlogs posted by tourists on social media, providing detailed descriptions with pictures and videos about the museum tour. It has been observed that when using such multimedia teaching and learning, students are more excited and more active in performance, and can produce better research reports after class.

5. Conclusion

In 2017, Wang Hong, Director of the State Oceanic Administration, pointed out at the first China-Europe Blue Industry Cooperation Forum, that the current Chinese economy is highly dependent on the ocean as an open economy [5]. Contemporary university students should have a sense of responsibility and sufficient corresponding literacy that is in line with the goal of building a strong

nation of marine power.

From the two courses introduced above, we can see that in order to improve students' marine literacy, humanistic education plays a pivotal role as it has a unique dual effect: the learning of cultures is the basic approach, while the effectiveness of cultivating marine literacy is the ultimate goal. In teaching such courses, standardized and systematic teaching design, extensive reading of multi-media texts, combination of classroom learning and extracurricular practice, and critical understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western marine histories and cultures, can together achieve the educational goal. University humanities teachers should strive to become more familiar with marine culture, improve their teaching abilities, and keep in contact with the latest development in marine studies. They should infuse the promotion of ocean culture and the dissemination of ocean spirit into literary works and literary history, so that students can not only improve various language skills but also achieve the educational goal of understanding and loving the ocean.

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