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Reading the Archive as a Learning Tool: Qualitative Interpretations of the HMS Centurion's Encounters in Xiangshan

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Abstract: This paper investigates the events of 1742–1743 between the British warship HMS Centurion and the maritime communities and governments of Xiangshan (Zhuhai Macau) based on a qualitative case study. The study incorporates the analysis of various primary archival materials such as British naval logs, Qing administrative records and Portuguese/Spanish correspondence, as the main data collection method as the primary data collection method. The purposive maximum variation sampling was used to select documents that represent different attitudes or perspectives, such as the naval, local government, and commercial perspectives, with the aim of not only covering all the aspects of the encounter but also having a broad spectrum of views. The analysis of grounded theory involves the use of open coding initially to determine the initial themes, and then the use of axial coding to determine the relationship between the initial themes. The results show how the interactions were molded through cultural misunderstandings, jurisdictional tensions, and communication barriers. Such categories of themes as the importance of local knowledge systems (fishermen and pilots), the influence of power asymmetries, and the importance of procedural and bureaucratic practices are noted. The paper brings out the pedagogical nature of archival records, showing how the records can be used to provide insights into intercultural learning and historical explanation. This work is relevant to our comprehension of the contact zones of the world and provides a pedagogical solution to the teaching of critical thinking, the ability to take perspectives, and historical literacy at the school level.

Keywords: Qualitative Document Analysis; History Education; Intercultural Learning; Maritime Knowledge; Global Contact Zones

1. Introduction

The South China Sea of the eighteenth century was an active area of travel, negotiation and cultural experience. The arrival of the British warship, HMS Centurion, at the waters of Xiangshan (modern Zhuhai and Macau) in 1742–1743 is one of the few episodes in the history of the world that provides a multidimensional perspective of early world contact. The crew on board the ship reported on their experiences with the Chinese fishermen, the sailors, the Qing local authorities, the Portuguese and Spanish communities that were in the area. Their journals, diaries, and travel accounts, along with Chinese county records and European archival records, represent a rich but little-studied source that conveys not only the geopolitical tensions, but also minute-to-minute cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural miscommunication, and cross-cultural learning [1–3].

Although much is known about the circumnavigation of Anson and its diplomatic implications, little has been done to determine the usefulness of the episode to educational research, especially to demonstrate how people perceive new worlds to be, how they make sense of them, and how they adapt to cultural differences. Those archival

materials are an invaluable chance to consider how the qualitative interpretations of the past can be applied to modern learning procedures. The experiences in Xiangshan expose fishermen and coordinated system of signals, pilots and communication through gestures, the British officers and the practices of cultures that were being unfamiliar and the Qing officials and bureaucracy that was measured in negotiation. These interactions reveal the sophisticated types of community knowledge, intercultural understanding, and place-based learning that echo well with the current sociocultural and intercultural educational paradigms. Over the past few years, scholars of qualitative research in the education field have stressed the role of applying historical documents in developing critical reading, multiperspectivity, and intercultural competence. Archival narratives as qualitative data challenge the viewpoint and encourage a learner to analyze authorial bias, assess the meaning across cultural and linguistic lines. However, there are few examples of how such historical materials can be used as learning tools. The episode of HMS Centurion provides a perfect example with the help of which to reveal how the analysis of the qualitative documents can shed light on the historical processes, as well as educational ones [4–6].

The Xiangshan encounters thus this article places the Xiangshan encounters as not just a historical event but a learning site as well a contact zone where cultural knowledge was cultivated, challenged and negotiated. Based on the qualitative analysis of documents, the study question is as follows: What do we learn about the past by reading these archival materials qualitatively and how can such understandings apply to modern-day educational practice? Using British, Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish histories, this study documents the interpretive efforts needed to reconstruct meaning out of the partial, biased or conflicting stories. This way, it provides a reflection of how the reading of the archive can be an effective learning process that fosters historical literacy, intercultural competence and critical thinking abilities [7,8].

Finally, the article can add to the qualitative research in education by illustrating that archival sources, specifically the cross-cultural maritime experience, can be deployed as a teaching resource. The trip of the Centurion across the waters of Xiangshan helps us see beyond the aspects of geopolitical games; it goes to create a portrait of learning in action, which is shaped by the community practices, the negotiation between cultures, and the challenges of the interpretive process of sense-making in response to unfamiliarity. In this light, the archive is not only seen as a space that preserves what happened in the past, but it is also an active instrument that enhances our knowledge on how people learn, communicate, and perceive the world within the boundaries of different cultures.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper takes the HMS Centurion incidents in the Xiangshan waters (1742–1743) to be a historically framed group of events where individuals organized action, negotiated meanings, and learnt amid the circumstances of linguistic difference, practical urgency, and unequal power. The archival account recursively focuses on incidents of signaling, pilotage, lack of understanding, and administrative protocol. Instead of considering them as secondary facts, the current analysis interprets them as opinions on how learning and communication are structured in social life. Based on this, the theoretical framework is a composite of the sociocultural learning theory and intercultural communication/global citizenship education to understand how knowledge was generated, disseminated, and challenged in this maritime contact zone, and why the processes are still educationally important in the present [9,10].

2.1. Sociocultural Learning Theory

The sociocultural learning theory views learning as a process that arises as a result of engagement in a social practice. In this sense, learning is not mainly the internal process of information accumulation of isolated individuals, but competence growth through interaction with others in situations in which the knowledge is in use. In mediating meaning, cultural tools, such as language, gesture, symbols, routines, and artifacts, and learning are made visible in how people acquire to recognize, interpret, and act in terms of the tools.

The Xiangshan maritime world of the archival sources is one that has received a very clear interpretation in terms of sociocultural analysis due to the fact that much of the coordination that was required to ensure survival and mobility relied on common practices as opposed to common speech [11,12]. The fleets of fishermen had familiar systems of signal and general movement, and pilots relied on local place-knowledge acquired by years of repeated experience in moving along reefs, currents, and channels. A flag, a horn blast, or a gesture, in these contexts, is not just a signal, technically speaking; it is a communicative act that has meaning since it is part of a set of signals

that are practiced by a community. The initial perplexity of the British crew, their efforts to read what they saw and to make inferences, and the growing dependence on the local directions portray a model of learning that is influenced by involvement and need. Even though the crew came with the power and belief of naval training, their ability to operate in these waters was limited to their ability to reach in some way or other an existing local system of knowledge that was grounded in the Xiangshan maritime community [13,14].

Another theory that attracts attention is the sociocultural theory, which focuses on how learning is organized through access, position, and constraint. The archival sources give the impression that pilots and intermediaries worked in a risky land. Their work was influenced not only by sea prowess, but by the pressure of jurisdiction and the result of being caught to be seen to aid a foreign war vessel. Sociocultural, what could appear to British writers as hesitation, inconsistency, and evasion can also be viewed as accountability being undertaken in a limited system of accountability. Studying in this sense encompasses studying to manage authority just as much as it involves studying to manage waterways. Competence, therefore, as can be seen in the Xiangshan case, is relational and situated: it is determined by who is allowed to act, what can be safely expressed, and how the dissemination of knowledge works when two authorities are located in the same territory.

The encounters were experienced as being both historical and moments in which knowledge was being enabled, negotiated, and transformed, and therefore, the encounters can be understood within the frame of socio-cultural learning theory. The objective of the learning into action becomes the archival record as a window into how people can make sense of new practices, how we can transmit and share experiences, and how our practical coordination across difference holds a demand on our ability to keep on producing interpretations [15].

2.2. Intercultural Communication and Global Citizenship Education

In case the sociocultural theory of learning emphasizes the way in which learning happens as a result of practice and mediation, the intercultural theory of communication explains the reason why misunderstanding and misrecognition persist so actively with the Xiangshan encounters. The intercultural interaction is influenced by the reality that party members usually frame each other by using culturally specific requirements regarding what constitutes proper behavior, reliable information, or legitimate authority. British officers in the archival sources repeatedly make readings of the local practices in terms of the naval hierarchy and imperial confidence, and Qing officials in the archives did the same in terms of the administrative regime and territorial rights. Portuguese officials in Macau were bargaining under the limitations imposed by their political reliance on Qing rule, and Spanish traders perceived that the Centurion had repaired and anchored as a sign that he intended to disrupt the local business security [16].

These stratified views show intercultural communication as an interpretive one and not a mere exchange of dialogue. It is not only because of weak translation that misunderstanding occurs, but also because of the clashing assumptions of meaning, responsibility, and power. The episode can therefore serve as a historical example of a contact zone where the actions of people were influenced by limited information and conflicting interests. The benefits of reading the archive in this sense can serve the educational purposes of global citizenship education since it offers actual material to discuss perspective-taking, ethical interpretation, and social implications of hastily made judgments. Such materials can be used in classroom settings to facilitate a learning that does not just concentrate on what happened but on how stories are constructed, how power influences what gets documented, and how intercultural competence is engaged in observing the boundaries of self-perception [17].

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative Historical Inquiry

Archival records are understood as texts that have meaning that can be viewed as a qualitative historical inquiry. This is contrary to the interpretations of the positivist approaches, which consider the historical sources as clear carriers of fact. The political and spatial imbalance of power and perception in the British naval writing, a reaction of the Qing administration, and the multilingual misconception are the direct conditions that determine the writing of the events in the account of the Centurion. The Chinese fishermen and pilots are sources of hindrance, curiosity, or suspicion to the travelogue *A Voyage Round the World*—compiled by the crews of the ship—and the other records. An example is the British officers, who wrote that they had witnessed some 6000 fishing boats surround them in

the first predawn hours, and that the fishermen neither understood any English nor any Portuguese, and thus, they could not understand when the crew asked them to direct them to Macau, but instead, they believed that they were misjudged and lost in disorientation. Among the easy signs, there was the act of fishermen hauling fish at the sound of the word Macau, which the British construed as an amusing misjudgment, although scholars think that this might have expressed the belief of the fishermen that the crew fancied mackerel, since it was phonetically similar. These examples indicate the primary assumption of the qualitative historical investigation, according to which archives are perceived as the experience that has been filtered through the lens of the worldview, prejudices, and biases of the interpretative methods of the writers. Imperial expectation, the apprehension of the Spanish move, and lack of knowledge in the assessment of the Chinese usage of the sea are reflected in the British documents [18].

In relation to this, the arrival of the Centurion was a local government, jurisdiction, and order matter in the administrative texts of the Qing. Zhu Niangao, the magistrate of Xiangshan County, who joined the ship on December 19, 1742, wrote about the need to verify the allegations of Anson and also to verify the ship with carpenters to aid it, the logic of bureaucracy, and not of an emotional reaction. These contradictory representations enlighten scholars and learners on the methodological importance of reading in these perspectives [19].

3.2. Research Design: Qualitative Case Study

The design of the case study is suitable, as it will provide an opportunity for a profound treatment of one context-specific phenomenon and, at the same time, focus on the vagueness of social interaction and sense-making. The arrival of the Centurion and the long anchorage off Macau left a rich documentary tradition through which scenes of contact with fishermen and pilots, negotiation with the local officials in Qing, and responses of Portuguese and Spanish participants working in the area are captured. The fact that these events are treated as a limited case allows considering the episode as a system, relating micro-level interaction (signals, gestures, pilotage, inspections) to macro-level structures (jurisdiction, diplomacy, maritime commerce). The object here will not be to generalize statistically, but to create a rich account analytically, which will illustrate the ways learning, communication, and perspective are constructed in terms of documentary residues of cross-cultural encounter [20,21].

3.3. Data Collection Method: Document Analysis

The data was collected by using the document analysis method, which is a systematized approach of qualitative study of text as a socially situated object. In this work, the documents are not only considered as reports of events but also as documents that were produced under certain circumstances, such as the role of an author, his/her institutional position, the target audience, and assumptions about cultures. The data is comprised of the contemporary or close-to-contemporary records, which outline the Centurion treatment of the waters of the Xiangshan, its relations with the maritime community in the area, and the administration and diplomatic procedures that ensued. Based on the historical sources, these documents encompassed British naval records and crew accounts, Qing local administration documents that dealt with inspection and negotiation, and Iberian documents that dealt with Macau government and Spanish business issues [22].

Since the research issue is learning and meaning-making in a contact zone, special focus was placed on the passages describing communicative activities (e.g., signalling, gesture, translation attempts), local expertise (e.g., pilotage, navigational knowledge), institutional procedure (e.g., inspection routines, taxation issues, jurisdictional language) and evaluative judgments that exhibit bias or point of view. The organization of documents was chronological to maintain the dynamic nature of the encounter, and subsequently resorted to reading in cycles to facilitate the interpretation of the data thematically [23].

3.4. Secondary Literature as Interpretive Support

Only the interpretative and comparative discussion was conducted with the use of secondary literature, but not as an empirical dataset. Academic literature was used to contextualize historical terms, explain institutional contexts, and assist in the ability to interpret vague passages, especially where the archive is an expression of cultural misunderstanding or where there is an uneven source of the documentary record of groups. Secondary scholarship in the article thus serves as a form of reinforcing interpretive plausibility and placing the case in a wider discussion, although whatever is claimed in the analysis is supported by the primary documentary sources, which the data of the study is made up of.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

These were analyzed qualitatively by conducting document analysis and interpretation in a cyclic fashion. The documents were first read as a whole to develop a context, chronology, and the roles of key actors. Second, coding of the texts was done to define recurring meanings and patterned descriptions of the study focus, e.g., knowledge practices of the community, mediating tools (signals, gestures, language), lack of understanding, authority negotiation, and positioning through narratives. Third, the analysis entailed a constant comparison of the perspectives that compared the similarity of the episodes as represented by different authors with respect to their positions. This comparative reading was vital in establishing what is being said in the documents and the manner in which they are forming the encounter by selective attention, evaluation, as well as omission. Lastly, themes were summarized into meaningful interpretations that relate (micro-level documentary excerpts) to large-scale educational implications, such as historical literacy, intercultural competence, and acknowledgement of community-based knowledge [24].

4. Findings: Axial Coding Categories and Their Relationships

The analysis was started by grounded theory, which consisted of open coding of the archival documents that described how the approach of the HMS Centurion into the Wanshan-Xiangshan waters, its anchorage at Taipa/Macau and the interactions between the British naval officers, Chinese fishermen and pilots, Qing local officials and Portuguese/Spanish actors followed. Using a process of constant comparison between documents and between perspective a set of initial incident-level codes (e.g., seeking pilot, signal as warning, gesture as navigation, inspection before assistance, tax exemption dispute, intelligence about Spanish ships, merchant ships saluting, etc.) was gradually organized into higher-order categories. These categories were then organized with the help of axis coding, which specified the relationships between conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences. The resulting structure elucidates the way learning and meaning-making were created during the encounter and how the archive captures that [25].

4.1. Central Phenomenon: Learning to Navigate Difference in a Maritime Contact Zone

Throughout the data set, the most integrative category to appear was a middle phenomenon, which may be defined as learning to find a way to negotiate meaning, power, and trust through cultural and institutional borders. The documents revisit again and again instances when the involved parties are to interpret practices that they are not familiar with, and choose to take actions in the absence of a shared language and shared assumptions. This could be observed through the reliance of the ship on local crew age, the efforts of the British crew members trying to figure out the signals of fishermen, and the requirements of Qing officials who insisted on checking and verifying the procedures before providing help.

Axially, the encounter is no longer described as a one-dimensional event but as a sequence of emerging interpretive issues. Every difficulty creates learning difficulties: the British have to know the local navigation and jurisdiction; fishermen and pilots have to know how to handle foreign demands without being locally punished; Qing officials have to know what a foreign ship is and what its object is without forfeiting its sovereignty and order. It is quite a central phenomenon, then, and a situational, relational phenomenon, which comes up as a result of the interaction of a variety of actors, the knowledge systems of which do not necessarily fit smoothly together [26,27].

4.2. Causal Conditions: War-Time Urgency, Material Vulnerability, and Communicative Asymmetry

Axial coding determined a group of causal conditions that recurrently led the encounter into motion. The first one is wartime urgency, which was defined by British strategic intentions towards Spain and the necessity to collect intelligence in the disputed world of the seas. Second is material vulnerability: the Centurion has come after a long time at sea and is coming, damaged, requiring immediate repair and provisioning, which limits the choices of the crew and makes them more reliant on local resources. Third is communicative asymmetry, in which an interaction starts in conditions of linguistic distance and doubtful intelligibility. The archaeological account points to recurring initial failures at achieving pilotage and recurrent misinterpretations during initial contact, such as the attempts of the crew to speak Portuguese and the reactions of the fishermen that the British see as confusion.

The significance of these causal conditions is that they describe why learning to navigate differences is the

organizing phenomenon. The practical necessity of interpretation is created by the necessity of the crew to take immediate action and the lack of local knowledge, and the lack of a common language that would allow the crew to delay the process. The records indicate the British to swing between seeing local actors as needy informants and seeing them as untrustworthy: a swinging, in the terms of grounded theory, as an organized reaction to vulnerability and uncertainty, and not exactly an attitudinal aspect [28].

4.3. Contextual Conditions: The Xiangshan Maritime Ecology and Jurisdictional Landscape

The second axial category is the context in which the encounter is taking place. The documents portray Xiangshan waters (particularly, the Wanshan Islands and the approaches to Macau) regularly as densely populated and intensely structured maritime space. Fishing teams seem to be on the increase; local pilotage is a time-honoured industry, and the rivers are a route in transregional commerce. Meanwhile, the geography of politics is stratified: Macau, as a Portuguese possession, formed a small territory with limited jurisdiction; the waters and centralized control around it remain in communication with Xiangshan County, under the rule of the Qing [29,30].

This situation is serious since it lays out the types of learning that are possible and what types of action are dangerous. Local expertise is also salient in the same maritime space as governance and sovereignty. The British belief that naval ships are not supposed to be subject to local obligations and practices conflicts with a situation where Qing authorities base their treatment of foreign vessels on the concept of the latter as objects of inspection and administrative decision-making, and where Portuguese authorities are required to mediate and not to entirely control the result. The grounded analysis reveals that the interpretive conflict is not an interpersonal conflict only; it is a result of a context that creates an overlap of a variety of systems of authority [12,23,31,32].

4.4. Intervening Conditions: Mediational Tools, Intermediaries, and Power Asymmetry

Factors that influence the manner in which actors react to the core phenomenon came into the limelight in the analysis, which are intervening conditions. The most noticeable intervening condition is that there are mediational tools that facilitate coordination without using shared speech. The use of flags, horns, and other signaling activities by fishermen and the use of gestures by pilots seem to be used over and over again as what enables communication despite the inability to use words. These instruments are not mere techniques, and they are culturally constructed systems whose sense relies on common practice at local levels [33].

The second intervening condition is the intervention of intermediaries. Mediation between worlds is done through pilots who board the ship, Portuguese pilots who are sent by Macau, and written works created by Qing officials. These intermediates are, however, limited actors. The papers explain how pilots bargain over fees, how they compete to get a job, or how they incur punitive measures afterwards- a sign that mediation is not only needed but is dangerous as well [34,35].

The third intervening condition is that of power asymmetry, which determines who has their interpretations prevail in the archive. British descriptions tend to describe domestic actors in evaluative terms, e.g., greed, fraud, inefficiency, and Qing procedures are described as a delay or impediment. Axial coding considers such evaluative framings as belonging to the interactional setting: they affect later decisions (who to believe, where to coerce, what to archive) and they determine the documentary trace which later readers are left with [36].

4.5. Action/Interaction Strategies: Negotiating Guidance, Legitimacy, and Information

Under the circumstances mentioned above, actors use patterned strategies. The records on the British side reveal recurrent tactics of taking directions (offering silver, seeking out pilots, trying to communicate with the Portuguese, trying to read signs as navigating signals) and tactics of claiming rights (demanding not to pay taxes, being impatient with bureaucracies), and on a few occasions, the use of coercion in navigation disputes.

Local fishermen and pilots are seen to be using pragmatic mediation strategies. Fishermen organize these fleets and even pass messages or warnings by use of agreed signalling systems, and in some cases end contact when foreign contact is apparent to be disruptive. Pilots are involved in transactional negotiations, where they sell services at a certain price and insist on documentary evidence of an employment practice that signifies both opportunity and the necessity to protect themselves in a politically sensitive place [37,38].

Strategies of bureaucratic documentation and procedural verification are utilized by Qing officials, which include the boarding and inspection of the Xiangshan magistrate. Carpenter inspection, written history of questions,

and the insistence of probing are all strategies of administrative legitimacy in case of uncertainty. Portuguese officials seem to be using balancing and containment strategies, in which they are trying to find an anchorage known to lessen the immediate confrontation, but still be confined within the sovereignty of the Qing. Spanish traders use some measures of threat and dissemination of intelligence, positioning the status of the ship and its purposes as a protection of business lines and the notification of Manila.

Axial relationships are especially evident in this case: mediational instruments and intermediaries (intervening conditions) facilitate such strategies, whereas power asymmetry informs the way strategies are justified and told. British sources refer to it as a delay, which, in the reasoning behind the case, can be interpreted as a Qing procedural strategy; British sources refer to it as fraud, which can be interpreted as fishermen or pilots acting out of necessity to manoeuvre in the unknown [39,40].

4.6. Consequences: Partial Learning, Institutional Tension, and an Archive of Competing Meanings

The consequences category takes the practical consequences and the documentary consequences. In practice, the ship anchors itself and sails again, as well as the experience of an encounter that generates a decorum of continual tension of legitimacy, procedure, and control over movement. The middlemen are at greater risk when they are punished, as well as at the time when they are leading a foreign war vessel, contrary to the expectations of the jurisdiction. The maritime contact area still has economic life: merchant ships of other countries are found in the book, but the arrival of the Centurion brings about fears, particularly among Spanish businessmen and local authorities, which thinks of sovereignty [41,42].

The encounter documentarily creates an archive of conflicting meanings. The British records retain clear descriptions of fishermen, pilots, and officials, but include evaluations that would have to be interpreted critically by the subsequent reader. The wonderful documents of the Qing courts are faithful to procedure and authority, though of a different order than shipboard accounts. The Portuguese and Spanish writings maintain economic and territorial interests. The implication, in the terms of the grounded theory, is not simply what was happening, but what was made recitable, which is an archive conditioned by unequal power and the dangers of mediation, but conditioned also by institutional interests that informed writing [43–45].

4.7. Integrating the Axial Model: How the Categories Relate

The coherent sequence of explanation between the axial categories is a coherent connection. Urgency in wartime, material exposure, and asymmetry of communication (causal conditions) give rise to the necessity to learn to negotiate difference (central phenomenon) in a maritime ecology in which local knowledge and stratified jurisdiction are inevitable (context) [46,47]. The mediational tool and the intermediaries, coupled with the power asymmetry features (intervening conditions), determine the type of encounter and how actors are guided, establish legitimacy, disseminate information, and document (action/interaction strategies). Such methods produce biased learning, increased tension in the institution, and a history of rival interpretations that would have to be negotiated by future readers (consequences).

Through the display of the findings, which are provided by means of the axial coding, the analysis prefigures the inductive contribution of the grounded theory: the themes and their interrelationships do not manifest themselves as a priori headings, but emerge as a result of repeated comparative reading of documents, describing the same episode in different vantage points. The model that follows helps to explain that the Xiangshan encounter can be interpreted as an educationally significant example of learning and communication across difference, the dynamics of which are maintained and complicated by the very documents in which it becomes knowable [48].

5. Discussion: Educational Significance of the Historical Episode

Viewed through the lens of qualitative research in education, the HMS Centurion's encounters in the waters of Xiangshan reveal a complex tableau of learning, interpretation, and cultural negotiation. The archival record—consisting of British naval logs, Qing administrative notes, Portuguese correspondence, and the travel narrative *A Voyage Round the World*—captures a moment when different forms of knowledge, different worldviews, and different communicative traditions converged in a shared maritime landscape. What emerges from this convergence is a

vivid demonstration of how individuals make sense of the unfamiliar, how communities organize and transmit expertise, and how narrative perspectives shape the meaning of events. In this discussion, the educational significance of these findings becomes clear: the Xiangshan episode offers rich opportunities to illuminate historical thinking, intercultural competence, and community-based knowledge, while also serving as a powerful example for teaching early globalization and cross-cultural interpretation.

5.1. Historical Thinking and the Interpretive Work of Reading Archives

The most interesting scholarly lessons offered by this research pertain to how the archival content may encourage the readers to think historically. The paperwork does not have one unified narrative; instead, it superimposes the views that contradict, overlap, or diverge radically. British officers defined Chinese fishermen as being so easily misdirected, or evasive, that as toddlers of their catch enquiring about Macau, they held up their catch in a way that caused laughter. Qing officials, in their turn, recorded the measure procedures adopted by themselves in the face of an unexpected foreign warship, procedures which Anson read as an indecisiveness or incompetence. Spanish traders, who were observing the Centurion with expectancy at Guangzhou, saw him as a danger to the trade connections and composed warnings that were to be delivered at Manila. Portuguese rulers tried to compromise between British demands and their own subject position to Qing authority and create the language of diplomacy that could hide the internal conflicts.

These opposed descriptions provoke the reader to consider the underlying questions of historical literacy: Whose voice is being told? Whose is absent? What role do cultural, political and institutional contexts play in defining the meaning of events? The Xiangshan case then emerges as a location where students learn to view sources not as transparent representations of the world of reality, but as contextualized accounts determined by the posts of the authors and their agendas. Instead of treating the archive as evidence that could be passively read, students are engaged to read the archive critically and question the assumptions in each piece of evidence [49,50].

5.2. Intercultural Competence and the Educational Value of Misunderstanding

The Xiangshan encounters are also a unique chance to view the intercultural communication in details. Confusion between the Centurion crew and the local communities is repeated throughout the archives and many times it influenced the progress of the events. British officers misunderstood warnings signals of fishermen as submission signs or disorder signs. A fisherman who provided wrong information on Spanish ships was soon categorized as a liar, yet such action had many possible motives, as fears of other ships coming, or hopes of being paid. Even the diplomacy of the Portuguese Governor, which Anson interpreted as evasion, was based on the limitations of local governance by the Qing. And, as Qing magistrate Zhu Niangao stepped on board the Centurion in a state ceremony, in solemn enquiry, and escorted by carpenters, the British beheld unnecessary obstinacy; because to the magistrate these were all material obligations, necessary to maintain jurisdictional validity. These misunderstandings are not mere historical curiosities, but also have profound pedagogical implications. They show that cross-cultural experiences are hardly smooth, and communicative clarity cannot be presupposed even in cases when good intentions are at stake. These instances enable teachers to explain to students the role of assumptions, expectations, and power imbalance in interpretation. The distance in time of the events is thus a safe environment in which students can examine their own interpretations, their own cultural intuition, and the dangers of assessing the unknown in the light of the familiar. The Xiangshan incident is therefore an asset in inoculating intercultural competence that is based on reflection, humility, and acknowledging personal perspective [9,51,52].

5.3. Community Knowledge and Informal Learning in Maritime Worlds

Besides intercultural communication, the archival material points out another aspect of learning that has long been neglected in the traditional educational discourses, which is the expertise and community-based knowledge of non-elite groups. The fishermen and pilots of the Wanshan Islands had their complicated systems of knowledge accumulated over many generations of experience—which the British naval training could never recreate. Their flag language, drum language, horn language, and conch shell language, formed a common sea language, which made them organize fleets, evade dangers, and locate paths, even in unpleasant circumstances. Their work shows how learning takes place in place and practice: new members of the community joined the community slowly and learned not by being taught, but by taking part, observing and imitating [53].

The Xiangshan waters soon showed up the boundaries of the British knowledge to the British crew. They could only survive by picking up bits of this local knowledge, of learning how to understand gesture, how to know when danger was near, how to trust the pilots whose language was confined to neither English nor Portuguese. These interactions depict the process of situated learning: people do not study as single entities but through interacting with and depending on the knowledge of a community. These scenes provide interesting models of collaborative knowledge-making, indigenous knowledge and ideas about the importance of learning in ways beyond the school system to educators [54].

5.4. Maritime Encounters as a Window into Early Globalization

Lastly, Xiangshan episode shows how maritime history can be used to teach early globalization. As the British got repairs, the waters about Taipa were busy, Dutch ships going to Batavia, Portuguese ships going to Cochin or Manila, Danish ships going to Guangzhou, and Chinese junks doing coastal trading. All these observations wove a web of the eighteenth-century South China Sea in which, rather than being a distant border, it was a contact zone, a place where there was the intersection of goods, people, languages and political interests. This dynamic space was further complicated by the presence of the Centurion, which had the Portuguese worried, the Spanish alarmed and the Qing administration intervening. The meaning of such interactions provides educators with a tangible means of educating students on interdependence in the world. The Xiangshan water is turned into a classroom in which the problems of sovereignty, mobility, negotiation and commercial rivalry were interplayed on cultural boundaries. This complexity of the episode allows learners to analyse globalization as not an abstract phenomenon but as an experience that was lived by ordinary fishermen, local pilots, communities of merchants, and state authorities among others [11,55].

Collectively, these observations support the high educational importance of exploring the archival remnants of the Centurion using a qualitative approach. The encounters of the Xiangshan reveal the way historical documents can be used as an instrument to develop interpretive sophistication, intercultural sensitivity, and admiration of various types of knowledge. It is the archive itself that is a learning site- a place where students have the opportunity to study how people negotiated the world of difference, how they coped with uncertainty, and how they interacted with the realities of world history as a whole. In this regard, the historical episode is not just an interesting account of the eighteenth-century sea encounter, but a strong example of how a library collection can enhance the contemporary educational process [56].

6. Pedagogical Applications

The documents of the archive on the visit of the HMS Centurion to Xiangshan are rich in the pedagogical possibilities. Both when these materials are introduced in educational contexts not as dead historical facts but as a living text that needs to be decoded, they are presented as challenging the learner to work intensively with issues of point of view, cultural engagement, and knowledge-making. This part describes how the qualitative knowledge gained after the Xiangshan case can be used to inform classroom practice, facilitate active investigation, and promote the development of historical and intercultural knowledge. It is not to recommend strict methods of teaching but to show how the story and interpretive complexity of the archival source led to several possibilities of valuable educational interaction [57].

6.1. Using Archival Narratives to Model Interpretive Inquiry

The ability to model the interaction between researchers, learners, and readers with archives is one of the highest pedagogical applications of the Xiangshan materials. The many and even conflicting versions of the same, the descriptions by the British of the system used to signal the British by the Chinese fishermen, the records of the Qing administration on the procedures followed by Magistrate Zhu Niangao, or the Portuguese records in showing how to get the Centurion to Taipa, are encouragement to students to always be in a critical and questioning posture when reading historical documents [58].

When students explore the ways in which British sailors read gestures awry or ignored Chinese warnings as being the result of confusion, but the sources of Qing show that there were indeed systematic ways of maritime procedures and ways of governing people, they start to comprehend what it takes to consider the archive as a dialogic

space and not a storage of neutral facts. In this regard, archival materials will be triggers of interpretive thinking. Reconstruction can be encouraged by juxtaposition, by underlining gaps, and asking students why one point of view, rather than another, is presented so much. To see the voices of the Tanka fishermen go unheard, students may pose the question why this is so. This kind of inquiry nurtures habits of historical thinking that extend beyond the eighteenth century: learners internalize the importance of reading carefully, questioning authorial intent, and situating documents within broader social and political contexts [59].

6.2. Cultivating Intercultural Sensitivity through Historical Distance

The experiences of the Centurion provide a very special position through which intercultural sensitivity can be developed. Due to the distance between the events, learners are able to evaluate the misunderstandings without being emotionally charged the way the intercultural conflict is nowadays. The scene in which fishermen displayed their catch on answers to British queries about the name of the place, Macau, gives a readily available and unforgettable illustration of how easily meaning can get distorted on a linguistic and cultural frontier. In the same manner, the story of the fisherman who gave inaccurate information on the topic of the Spanish ships puts learners to the test of questioning snap-judged judgment: Was the man lying? Was he trying to please the foreign demands? Or was he finding his way in new power relationships whose meaning was left to make within his own cultural world? The questions of this kind provoke the students to empathize, hold no judgment, and think of several interpretive options, which are the main areas of intercultural communication skills.

Besides, the relationships between Anson and Qing magistrate Zhu Niangao help to see how cultural constructs affect the understanding of competency and power. Although the British also viewed the fact that Zhu followed the protocol of the bureaucrats as the sign of indecision, even a closer look at the norms of the Qing administration highlights a completely different situation. These instances offer deep learning opportunities to teachers to take the learners through the process of exposing them to how cultural expectations would influence interactions and how misunderstandings can lead to heightened tensions [43,60,61].

6.3. Illuminating Informal and Community-Based Knowledge Systems

The other dramatic pedagogical input by the Xiangshan episode is the chance to learn about informal learning and traditions of community knowledge. The fishermen and pilots who work in the Wanshan Islands represent a complex maritime epistemology that has developed over the generations, a knowledge system that is programmed in the motions of the ships, the application of colour flags, and the beats of the drums and gongs to control navigation of the fleet. British seamen, having been accustomed to the formality of the Royal Navy, were at first mistaken in the interpretation of these manners, but did not long remain of opinion before they saw their utility, as they sailed the reefs and islands of Macau [62,63].

Educational application of such examples can assist students to recognize the importance of community-based knowledge, especially those forms of knowledge that are not necessarily written form. Students are able to study the way these systems evolve, how they are taught to them by observation and involvement, and what they do not resemble Western scientific or military models. This creates a sense of respect towards various knowledge traditions and assists students to recognize the strong aspects of local and indigenous knowledge.

Besides, the gradual acculturation of the British crew to the local practice depicts the process of learning in real-life situations. It will allow students to follow the way the knowledge of the crew changed, and they rejected it but then became reliant on fishermen and pilots to avoid dangers. This story presents an interesting point of reference where the theories of situated learning, apprenticeship and communities of practice could be discussed and a learner could be able to relate the theoretical constructs to the tangible historical examples [64,65].

6.4. Using Maritime Encounters to Teach Global Interconnectedness

Batavian-bound Dutch merchant vessels were busy in the Xiangshan waters of 1742–1743, along with Portuguese shipping trading in the ports of Macau, Cochin and Manila, Danish ships sailing between Guangzhou and the world and Chinese junks plying the Pearl River Delta. The fact that this network exists with the incorporation of the Centurion places the maritime world as an early instance of a globally connected world. To teachers, these movements offer an expressive passage into the teaching of early globalization. Students can examine how European, Asian, and Southeast Asian maritime networks intersected, how global trade altered local communities and

the ways colonial rivalry was being spread across oceans. By following the route of how Portuguese officials tried to sail between the British will and the Qing power, or how Spanish merchants risked the Centurion attacking Manila galleons, learners obtain a tangible understanding of the diplomacy, rivalry, and intercountry dealings, which have organized the interactions between the world long before the modern period [66,67].

These activities assist students to step past Eurocentric or nation-centered accounts of globalization, and allows students to recognize how participants on all levels such as fishermen, pilots, merchants, and magistrates were involved in and contributed to global processes.

6.5. Integrating Narrative Reconstruction and Experiential Engagement

Xiangshan is introduced to support pedagogical methods that require the student to recreate the narratives or enter historical perspectives. The documentary account is sufficient to enable students to recreate experiences: by imagining what the Centurion must have felt as the signals of fishermen had been misunderstood; by speculating on the predicament of a pilot whose orders had told not to direct a warship but whose pressures had forced him to call in at Macau; or by reading about the terror of a Spanish merchantman who feared that a British warship would arrive in to repair, thereby upsetting the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade [68,69].

Such reconstructions prompt students to empathically interact with actors in history, comprehend contradictory motives, and discover the interpretive work needed to make sense of partial or biased history. This kind of exercise highlights the significance of narrative in the interpretation of history and is consistent with qualitative educational practices that emphasize on the importance of reflection, perspective-taking, and moral involvement with history.

Throughout these applications, the Xiangshan episode shows how historical texts can be mobilized into a pedagogical tool that brings about interpretive sophistication, intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of the variety of knowledge traditions. The archival record is not simply a record, but it creates an active space in which learners can investigate the way in which individuals and communities learn, negotiate meaning and cope with cultural encounters. By doing so, the presence of the Centurion in Xiangshan turns out to be not just a point in maritime history but a very fruitful lesson on enriching the qualitative study and the world knowledge [70–72].

7. Conclusion

The main educational value of the study is to demonstrate that the process of archival reading is teachable and learnable and can be interpreted as the learning to negotiate difference, or the fundamental category to which the case belongs. The grounded theory analysis shows in this qualitative case study of the Xiangshan encounters (1742–1743) of the HMS Centurion that historical records are not just accounts of cross-cultural encounters; they contain the sense of how individuals make sense of unfamiliar practices, negotiate authority, and organize action in the face of uncertainty.

There are axial categories that have been found in the findings, which link to this core category. The urgent conditions of war, material vulnerability, and communicative asymmetry caused an instant necessity of interpretation and adaptation. Xiangshan maritime and jurisdictional setting, along with the intervening conditions (mediational tools, gestures), intermediaries (pilots, translators), and power asymmetry, conditioned interactional strategies, which involved seeking guidance, establishing legitimacy, risk management, and intelligence dissemination. These plans yield educational outcomes: there was part-learning among groups, recurring misunderstanding, tension in the institution, and a record of rivalrous meanings. Selective coding terms would lead to the relationship of these relationships reducing to a single claim: the encounter can best be described as a process of learning to negotiate difference that is sustained, and the archive is the record of that learning.

This main category can then be operationalized at the pedagogical level in classroom work with concrete learning activities that reflect the demands of the case about its interpretation. As an example, students may be asked to do a signal-to-meaning exercise based on a brief passage about fishermen's flags and sound signals: they are asked to suggest what they think the signals might signify, and then update their interpretation of this meaning by reading something that contradicts this interpretation, writing how and why they changed their minds. Equally, an act may put a discursive shipboard passage of administrative description of obstruction within a Qing-style description of inspection and verification; then the students provide two short memos as a naval officer, and as a local authority,

of the impact of institutional role in defining the sense of what is what can be done reasonably. The third activity can replicate the risk of the intermediaries by requiring the students to model the constriction of the pilot (economic incentive, jurisdictional fear, foreign pressure) and then suggest two other possible judgments the pilot could have made and the consequences that might have likely happened in each situation. All the tasks make the intercultural competence, historical literacy, and community-knowledge recognition tangible because they involve the students' reasoning in a multi-perspective way instead of merely learning facts about the episode.

Overall, connecting the categories of grounded theory with the essential category of learning to navigate difference, this analysis provides a logical conceptual framework of how to make the transition between the archaeological facts and the learning practices. The Xiangshan example offers educators a historically based model of how educators can teach the creation of meaning in contact zones and how archives could be utilized to develop critical interpretation, perspective-taking, and ethical judgment in qualitative research and history education.

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