

The cultivation of youth sportsmanship through traditional ethnic sports: a case study of Sanda

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Abstract. Taking Sanda, a traditional ethnic sport, as its analytical vehicle, this study examines its unique value in fostering sportsmanship among adolescents. Through literature review and field investigation, the research reveals the points of convergence between the cultural connotations embedded in Sanda and the essence of sportsmanship. It further proposes developmental pathways for cultivating youth sportsmanship based on Sanda practice. The findings indicate that Sanda serves as a highly effective medium for nurturing sportsmanship in adolescents: it can significantly temper willpower, transmit appropriate values, and cultivate strong psychological resilience. Accordingly, the study suggests optimizing Sanda curricula through a dual-module framework integrating "technique + culture", strengthening the development of teaching staff, and expanding cultural dissemination.

Keywords: traditional ethnic sports, adolescents, sportsmanship, Sanda, cultural inheritance

1. Introduction

Spirit constitutes not only the foundation of individual development but also a critical determinant of national strength [1]. In the context of rapid globalization, China is striving toward the realization of its Second Centenary Goal. As the future of the nation, adolescents must continuously strengthen their cultivation of sportsmanship. Traditional ethnic sports, as a treasure of Chinese sporting culture, represent a projection of national spirit. The inheritance and promotion of these traditions by young people will inject renewed vitality into the spirit of Chinese sports, while simultaneously enhancing cultural identity, improving cultural literacy, and fostering strong willpower. Sanda, with its long history and rich cultural heritage, serves as a representative case for examining the role of traditional sports in cultivating youth sportsmanship. This study aims to promote the development and campus dissemination of traditional ethnic sports culture, strengthen the cultivation of sportsmanship among adolescents, expand the cultural dimension of physical education theory, and provide references for the reform of school physical education curricula.

2. Research methods

2.1. Literature review method

Using keywords such as "traditional ethnic sports", "sportsmanship", and "adolescents", relevant literature was retrieved from databases including CNKI and Wanfang. Based on the analysis of these sources, the study systematically evaluates current research frontiers and trends in the field, thereby establishing a solid theoretical foundation for this research.

2.2. Field investigation method

Fieldwork was conducted at Yunnan Normal University and Yunnan Minzu University. Data were collected through questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews to examine the current status of Sanda course implementation in higher education institutions. The questionnaires focused on students' cognition and experience of key dimensions of sportsmanship in Sanda, such as "ritual propriety", "fighting spirit", and "cooperative awareness". The interviews, in turn, explored teachers' intentional instructional design and the actual effectiveness of sportsmanship cultivation in teaching practice. Drawing on expert recommendations, the study proposes practical pathways for cultivating youth sportsmanship through Sanda.

3. The theoretical relationship between traditional ethnic sports and sportsmanship

3.1. The core connotations of sportsmanship

In 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping, during a meeting with representatives of nationally recognized advanced sports units and individuals, articulated the essence of the Chinese sports spirit as encompassing "striving for national honor, selfless dedication, scientific rigor and pragmatism, adherence to discipline and the rule of law, unity and cooperation, and tenacious perseverance" [2]. These concise expressions encapsulate the core connotations of sportsmanship and provide a clear value orientation for cultivating sportsmanship among adolescents. Within traditional Chinese sports culture, the principles of "cultivating virtue through martial practice", "defending the nation", and "ceaseless self-improvement" represent an ancient interpretation of the Chinese sports spirit. This intellectual lineage has been continuously transmitted, functioning as an enduring and generative cultural source.

3.2. The ethnic characteristics of Sanda

Chinese Sanda has evolved on the basis of inheriting and developing traditional Chinese martial arts. It represents both a continuation and an innovation of Chinese cultural traditions, embodying a distinctive spirit of inclusiveness and integration [3]. Characterized by the technical integration of kicking, striking, and grappling, Sanda adheres to the philosophical principle of "restraining violence as the essence of martiality". It emphasizes overcoming strength with skill and hardness with softness, resulting in a rich technical system imbued with strong national characteristics and Chinese cultural identity. Through the practice of Sanda, adolescents can develop qualities such as endurance, perseverance, and resilience. These attributes enable them to better confront challenges in both academic and daily life, while also enhancing their philosophical understanding and cognitive depth.

4. Mechanisms through which Sanda cultivates youth sportsmanship

4.1. Tempering character through technical and tactical confrontation

From the perspective of energy supply, Sanda competitions are characterized by frequent and unpredictable transitions between aerobic and anaerobic energy systems, with brief durations of sustained anaerobic states following each transition [4]. Additionally, the sport exhibits high technical complexity and diversity, involving intricate combinations of punches, kicks, and throws, as well as demanding strong situational adaptability. In daily training, athletes must not only maintain high-intensity physical conditioning but also engage in the systematic study of tactics and strategies. Partner-based drills require cooperation and mutual support, fostering collective improvement. Such training processes contribute to the development of consistent exercise habits, teamwork, and a range of positive psychological traits, including courage, resilience, initiative, self-challenge, and the pursuit of excellence.

4.2. Value transmission through the learning of ritual and cultural norms

The restoration of moral cultivation among Sanda practitioners, the reaffirmation of sound competitive values, and the strengthening of legal and regulatory frameworks for the sport can collectively promote its development at the level of cultural ecology [5]. Sanda is not merely a physical discipline but also a moral practice: it seeks both competitive success and the refinement of personal character. Whether in training or competition, athletes are required to perform the traditional baoquan salute toward opponents, coaches, and referees, embodying respect for teachers and adherence to ethical norms. Furthermore, the martial ethics encapsulated in the traditional virtues of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness" (*ren, yi, li, zhi, xin*) constitute lifelong moral pursuits for practitioners.

4.3. Shaping spirit through competition preparation

With the increasing popularization of Sanda, intercollegiate exchange competitions, championships, and national-level tournaments among university students have become more frequent. In pursuit of competitive success, athletes must undergo prolonged periods of pre-competition preparation. During this phase, they are required not only to endure physically demanding training but also to confront internal psychological pressures and fears. Stable mental states and strong psychological qualities are crucial determinants of competitive performance [6]. Such experiences not only enhance athletes' technical and tactical competencies but also temper their willpower, fostering a fearless and combative spirit. They contribute to the development of psychological resilience and strengthen the capacity to withstand setbacks, thereby playing a vital role in the cultivation of sportsmanship among adolescents.

5. Optimization pathways and recommendations

5.1. Optimizing the curriculum system

With the continuous deepening of educational reform, the integration of sports and education (*ti-jiao ronghe*) has emerged as a central issue in contemporary pedagogy. This approach seeks to transcend the limitations of traditional educational models by organically combining physical education with broader educational objectives, thereby promoting the holistic development of students' physical and psychological capacities. It emphasizes the coordinated advancement of competitive sports and mass participation, fostering not only athletic skills but also psychological resilience, teamwork, and individual willpower [7].

Accordingly, Sanda instruction should move beyond the conventional paradigm of "prioritizing competition over holistic education" and instead develop a dual-module curriculum integrating "technique + culture". On the one hand, advanced information technologies can be employed to construct a comprehensive instructional system for Sanda. Through multimodal delivery—combining video and verbal explanation—cultural contexts can be vividly represented, transforming abstract cultural concepts into tangible and accessible learning content. This approach enables students to experience the cultural richness of Sanda firsthand and to deepen their cultural understanding and identification through daily training. Case studies of distinguished athletes should be incorporated to highlight the decisive role of cultural literacy and moral character in achieving success, thereby encouraging students to "cultivate virtue through martial practice" and uphold moral integrity. At the same time, critical analysis of athletes who have deviated into misconduct or criminal behavior should be conducted to examine underlying psychological factors, serving as cautionary examples that reinforce the importance of discipline, legality, and ethical conduct. On the other hand, each instructional unit should incorporate one to two sessions of value-oriented education. These sessions should help students clearly distinguish martial arts from violence, establish a correct understanding of Sanda, and internalize the dialectical relationship between effort and reward—illustrating principles such as "diligence compensates for deficiency" and "constant effort yields success". This, in turn, can strengthen students' confidence and courage in training and competition. Philosophical concepts of combat strategy should also be integrated into technical training. For instance, the classical military treatise *The Art of War (Sunzi Bingfa)* offers strategic insights from the perspectives of timing, terrain, human factors, and method, emphasizing both awareness of the opponent and the formulation of one's own tactical approach [8]. The incorporation of such principles can significantly enhance both technical proficiency and the cultivation of sportsmanship. Instruction should be differentiated according to individual characteristics: students prone to over-aggression should be guided to adopt adaptive, opponent-oriented strategies and to act only after careful planning; those with advantageous physical attributes, such as height and reach, should be trained to stabilize control and leverage their strengths efficiently; while physically smaller or less robust students should be encouraged to emphasize strategic awareness and unconventional tactics. In this way, students' philosophical reflection on Sanda is deepened, their technical competence improved, and their appreciation of the essence of sportsmanship enriched.

5.2. Strengthening and innovating faculty development

The information age has profoundly reshaped both the form and content of education, particularly within higher education, where faculty development and individual professional growth face unprecedented opportunities and challenges [9]. Within the broader context of sports–education integration, it is imperative to strengthen the construction of Sanda teaching staff in universities. Institutions should actively recruit interdisciplinary professionals who possess both high-level athletic expertise and substantial cultural literacy. A normalized teacher training mechanism should be established, with training content encompassing Sanda cultural theory, modern pedagogical technologies (such as VR/AR-assisted tactical simulation), sports psychology, and methods of moral education. This comprehensive approach is essential for enhancing teachers' capacity for holistic student development. At the same time, attention must be paid to teachers' individual growth and advancement through the establishment of an effective performance evaluation and incentive system. Evaluation should integrate both absolute quantitative indicators (e.g., the standardization of students' technical movements, competitive achievements) and relative indicators (e.g., improvements in students' performance over time, as well as their affective development and cooperative abilities). In addition, student feedback mechanisms should be incorporated, with satisfaction surveys covering teaching competence,

instructional attitude, and pedagogical effectiveness, thereby emphasizing students' longitudinal development. To fully motivate faculty engagement, a robust reward and accountability system should be implemented, guided by the principles of "equal pay for equal work, performance-based compensation, and distribution according to contribution", as well as fairness, justice, and transparency. Ultimately, a multi-tiered and composite performance-based incentive system should be established to promote sustained excellence in teaching and professional development [10].

5.3. Expanding cultural dissemination

5.3.1. Stimulating interest through student associations

Against the backdrop of the "Double Reduction" policy, the rapid development of sports clubs has become a key channel for advancing the integration of sports and education [11]. Characterized by diverse formats and rich content, sports club activities serve as an important complement to students' extracurricular life and enjoy widespread popularity. Establishing Sanda-themed student associations can effectively ignite students' enthusiasm for physical exercise, foster the concept of lifelong engagement in sports, and promote their holistic physical and psychological development [12]. In addition, activities such as performance showcases and bulletin board exhibitions can be utilized to strengthen promotion and outreach, vividly presenting the rich cultural heritage and educational significance of Sanda. Such initiatives can attract a broader student population to participate in the sport.

5.3.2. Expanding influence through competitive platforms

From the perspective of cultural value, competitive events in higher education institutions function not only as arenas for athletic performance but also as platforms for cultural exchange [13]. Organizing a wide range of competitions on campus and strengthening inter-university and inter-college interactions can significantly enhance the visibility and dissemination of Sanda. Moreover, such events facilitate the interaction and integration of traditional folk culture with contemporary culture, fostering dynamic cultural exchange and mutual enrichment.

5.3.3. Deepening cultural foundations through campus culture

In the process of cultivating distinctive campus culture, universities must ground their efforts in their own educational characteristics and the developmental patterns of students, thereby constructing a coherent and innovative cultural system [14]. With its millennia-old cultural heritage, Sanda provides a rich resource for this endeavor. Educators can collaborate to develop teaching materials that integrate local cultural elements, thereby preserving and promoting regional traditions while enhancing the cultural depth of the institution. This approach not only strengthens students' cultural confidence and identity but also enables campus culture to fully realize its educational and guiding functions, ultimately contributing to the high-quality development of the university.

6. Conclusion and future prospect

6.1. Research conclusions

Taking Sanda as a representative case, this study systematically explores the distinctive value and practical pathways of traditional ethnic sports in cultivating sportsmanship among adolescents. The principal findings can be summarized as follows: The technical–tactical structure of Sanda, characterized by the integration of kicking, striking, and grappling, its philosophical principle of "restraining violence as the essence of martiality," and its ritual tradition of "respecting teachers and upholding moral propriety", are highly aligned

with the core dimensions of the Chinese sports spirit—namely, perseverance, teamwork, and adherence to discipline and the rule of law. As such, Sanda constitutes an effective medium for fostering sportsmanship among youth. Through high-intensity technical and tactical confrontation, systematic instruction in martial ethics and ritual norms, and experiential training during competition preparation, Sanda establishes a multi-dimensional framework for the cultivation of youth sportsmanship. This framework effectively tempers adolescents' willpower, transmits positive value orientations, and enhances psychological resilience. To fully realize the educational potential of Sanda, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive approach encompassing the optimization of a "technique + culture" dual-module curriculum, the development of interdisciplinary teaching staff, and the expansion of cultural dissemination through student associations, competitive events, and campus cultural initiatives.

6.2. Future research prospects

While this study provides a systematic examination of the pathways through which Sanda contributes to the cultivation of youth sportsmanship, certain limitations remain. In particular, the field investigation was primarily confined to universities within Yunnan Province. Future research could expand the sample scope and conduct cross-regional comparative analyses to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the findings.

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