

A Fusion of Chinese Five Elements and Steampunk in Enhancing the Gaming Experience

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Abstract: In the present era, due to the increasing influence of globalization, individuals from around the globe have the opportunity to select and engage with a greater variety of cultures. Further, the theory of cultural fusion was proposed and further expanded upon during a period when video games were increasingly delving into the concept of cultural fusion. Nevertheless, the number of games that successfully blend Chinese and Western cultures is limited. Furthermore, the incorporation of traditional culture in game design tends to be simplistic in terms of visuals and gameplay. To address this, we have developed a game called Element Gears: Chronicles of Balance. This 2D survival adventure game combines traditional Chinese five-element philosophy with steampunk aesthetics, creating a new benchmark for thematic and cultural integration. Our game Gears integrates cultural elements and futuristic ideas into both the gameplay and narrative, rather than merely focusing on them. This fusion is not only visually pleasing, but also intricately integrated into the game mechanics, encompassing aspects such as resource allocation, manufacturing, and strategic survival problems within a dynamically evolving setting. The incorporation of cultural topics extends beyond surface-level depictions, offering players a more profound and engrossing educational and entertainment encounter. By comparing our Element Gears to similar games in the genre, this article highlights how its innovative approach to cultural fusion increases player engagement and creates a deeper and more meaningful gaming experience.

Keywords: Cultural Fusion, Chinese five elements, Steampunk, Gaming experience

1. Introduction

Globalization introduces novel cultural encounters and options. In addition to selecting musical, culinary, and literary activities from different cultures, individuals also have the option to partake in events that blend multiple cultures together [1]. In the constantly changing field of video game creation, the quest for original topics and varied cultural portrayals has become increasingly important. However, the gaming industry has always struggled with adequately representing a variety of ethnicities and origins, sometimes focusing solely on the dominant popular culture [2]. Both the presence of diverse characters and the portrayal of diversity in both on-screen and off-screen aspects are essential in order to foster inclusivity in the gaming industry [3]. Therefore, we highly value the importance of such innovative cultural fusion in game. We design a game called “Elemental Gears: Chronicles of Balance” and delves into the conceptualization exploring how the amalgamation of

these distinct cultural and aesthetic elements enhances player engagement, promotes cultural understanding in this paper, and show the potential pipeline of culture fusion for future game design. Given our game pattern, narrative structure, and comparative advantages over existing games in the genre, we aim to innovate cultural fusion games, and improve the domain of game design combining traditional culture at the present stage.

2. Literature review

2.1. Chinese five elements

The Chinese five elements are described by the Five Elements Theory, which is a Chinese philosophical framework used to explain the interactions and relationships among various entities. The five elements, namely wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, are considered to be the essential constituents of all phenomena in the cosmos, and it is thought that interactions take place among them [4]. Therefore, each of the Five Elements symbolizes a facet of a dynamic process, specifically the many stages of change within that process. Wood, in this context, refers not only to the physical material derived from trees, but also encompasses the qualities, the ever-changing nature, and the fundamental energy associated with this element. Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water are identical. The Chinese five elements have a lengthy historical background, originating during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). These practices gained popularity and became widely utilized, particularly in the domains of Chinese medicine, philosophy, fengshui, fortune-telling, and martial arts [5].

The greatest difficulty for the globalization of Chinese games is the culture gap between different country. The game developers should open up opportunities for Chinese games with Chinese traditional elements into the world. In North America and Southeast Asia, there is significant number of people interested in Chinese culture [6].

Characteristic	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Direction	East	South	Center	West	North
Heavenly Creatures	Azure Dragon	Vermilion Bird	Yellow Dragon	White Tiger	Black Tortoise
Color	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
Virtue	Benevolence	Propriety	Fidelity/Honesty	Righteousness	Wisdom
Represents	Creativity, luxuriance, blooming, and flourishing	Enthusiasm and passion	Nurturing, stability, and security	Ambition, progress, persistence	Aptitude, brightness, agile mind

Figure 1: The direction, Color, Virtue, and representation of the five elements Astrology Associations identified [4]

2.2. Steampunk style

The Steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction that incorporates retrofuturistic technology and aesthetics inspired by, but not limited to, 19th-century industrial steam-powered machinery.

Steampunk works are often set in an alternative history of the Victorian era or the American "Wild West", where steam power remains in mainstream use, or in a fantasy world that similarly employs steam power [7].

The steampunk genre presents numerous benefits for independent game producers, such as: The fusion of history, technology, and fantasy in the genre provides creators with the opportunity to explore novel concepts and craft distinctive gaming experiences that distinguish themselves in the competitive indie market. Steampunk's devoted fandom offers a pre-existing audience for independent developers, who may create games that fully embrace the genre's concepts and aesthetics to cater to this specific market. As for artistic expression, the steampunk style provides abundant artistic opportunities for game developers to craft visually captivating gaming worlds that captivate players' imagination. Steampunk exhibits a high potential for cross-genre integration, enabling indie developers to craft innovative and captivating gaming experiences that challenge conventional genre limitations. This can be achieved by seamlessly blending steampunk elements with other genres like horror, fantasy, or science fiction [8].

Recently, there has been a notable increase in the popularity of independent video games with a steampunk theme. The genre's distinctive amalgamation of history, technology, and fantasy provides game developers with a plethora of creative opportunities, thereby accounting for its appeal. Indie developers have successfully created immersive game worlds, captivating storylines, and creative gameplay mechanics by adopting the steampunk style, distinguishing their products from the conventional gaming market [8].

2.3. The state of survival gaming nowadays

Several survival games face criticism for prioritizing repetitive tasks above strategic prowess. Players frequently commence with limited resources and must engage in repetitive and time-consuming crafting and construction activities, which can be exasperating. New gamers may find this component particularly intimidating as they have to compete against individuals who have accumulated several hours of gameplay [9]. Survival games frequently lack a cohesive objective or storyline. This can lead to a gameplay experience that is devoid of purpose or without clear guidance [9].

Games sometimes incorporate traditional Chinese aspects, including Buddhist and Taoist beliefs. However, they occasionally lack a coherent narrative or profound cultural integration. This can lead to a shallow portrayal of Chinese culture [6]. The game plot, as the essence of a game, is of utmost importance. Nevertheless, several Chinese games lack the ability to successfully include captivating narratives, resulting in a lack of interest among players [6].

Despite its creative potential, steampunk has faced criticism for its aesthetic and thematic limitations. Some critics, like William Gibson, view steampunk as a "least angry quasi-bohemian manifestation," implying a lack of depth or critical edge in its portrayal. Others have noted that steampunk's specific visual style, which can sometimes appear kitsch and self-referential, may limit its broader appeal, particularly to those with less esoteric interests [10-11].

3. Elemental Gears: Game Design and Concept

3.1. Overview

We design a game called "Elemental Gear: Chronicles of Balance". This game is a 2D survival adventure that seamlessly combines the old Chinese theory of the five elements with the steampunk environment of the West. The game takes place in a modified version of the 19th century, where Eastern mysticism and the Western Industrial Revolution intersect. A society emerges in which the Five Elements and Steampunk technology coexist and mutually impact one another. Nevertheless, as a result of the excessive utilization and exploitation of the Five Elements through steampunk

technology, the planet is currently undergoing turmoil and disharmony, resulting in environmental calamity and the appearance of legendary animals. The fundamental gameplay of the game is around the objective of surviving in a world that undergoes constant and unpredictable changes. Players are required to uphold equilibrium among the five elements while utilizing steampunk technology in order to endure and unravel the narrative of the game. This encompasses the creation of distinct objects including both elemental and steampunk characteristics, the construction of shelters and machinery, participation in battles involving elemental forces, exploration of a constantly changing world, and forming alliances with diverse groups that have contrasting views on the harmonization of elements and technology.

3.2. Theme Integration

The game creatively combines the traditional Eastern philosophy of the five Chinese elements with the futuristic steampunk aesthetic of Western culture. The integration of several components is evident in the environmental design, as the game's sceneries are adorned with steampunk technology and architecture, while also representing the five elements. The combination of classical Chinese attire with steampunk gear is evident in the character design. The game mechanics enhance the idea by allowing players to create various pieces and utilize steampunk gadgets to combat enemies and modify the surroundings. The narrative and missions center on the restoration of equilibrium between these elemental forces and technology.

3.3. Narrative Structure

The game is structured into several chapters, each of which serves to enhance the player's comprehension of the world's mythology and thematic fusion.

The prologue, "Age of Imbalance," presents a world where the five elements and steampunk technology reside together peacefully. However, this harmony is disrupted when the overexploitation of elemental forces for technological advancement leads to the onset of the Age of Imbalance.

Chapter 1 - Awakening in Chaos: The player commences their journey in a village that is afflicted by disruptive elemental phenomena, acquiring essential survival abilities and gaining insight into the imbalances of these elements. The player experiences minor environmental obstacles, such as the inability to regulate plant growth caused by an imbalance in the wood element.

Chapter 2 - Pursuing Equilibrium: The player embarks on a mission to restore equilibrium in various habitats that have been disrupted by elemental disorder. In order to address mechanical defects, players are need to create specialized gadgets that enable them to navigate and fix machinery.

Chapter 3 - Factions and Alliances: Within the Centre City, players engage with various factions, each promoting a distinct method for addressing the imbalance. The decisions made by players have a direct impact on the accessibility of resources and assistance.

Chapter 4 - Heart of the Elements: Players will encounter age-old Elemental Temples, each offering distinct difficulties and puzzles to the player. Every temple presents the player with a unique difficulty, such as the need to solve heat-related tasks in the Fire Temple.

Chapter 5 - The Fusion of Steam and Myth: This chapter represents the climax of the entire adventure, as the player confronts the primary opponent in a vast industrial facility that utilizes the energy of the elements. This chapter comprises a compilation of all the abilities that necessitate the player's utilization of meticulously designed gadgets, profound understanding of elemental principles, and astute partnerships forged during the course of the game.

Epilogue - A New Dawn: The conclusion of the game is determined by the decisions made by the player, resulting in either a world that achieves a newfound balance or one that remains in a state of imbalance.

The storyline is characterized by its dynamic nature, as it evolves in response to the players' interactions with the various elements and groups. This serves to strengthen the thematic integration of supernatural aspects and technology that permeates the entire game.

4. Core Gameplay Mechanics

4.1. Innovative Mechanics: Fusion of Elemental Balance and Steampunk Technology

First, Elemental Crafting and Building. Players can craft items and buildings by combining steampunk technology with the elements. Each element (wood, fire, earth, gold, and water) has unique properties that affect the function of the item or structure. For example, fire-based engines provide more power but risk overheating, while water-based mechanisms provide cooling or hydraulics without the use of additional cooling and increased durability.

Second, Dynamic Environmental Interaction. The gaming world undergoes transformations in response to the equilibrium of elemental forces. The overutilization of a certain component might result in ecological disasters such as deluges, forest fires, or metal erosion, all of which can impact the game. Players must employ elements carefully to prevent further worsening of these imbalances in environmental characteristics and to act as a reminder in a world that is progressively deteriorating.

Third, Elemental Combat System. Combat entails the utilization of steampunk weaponry imbued with elemental energy, offering a wide array of combat tactics. Players must select the suitable elemental weapon or defensive method according to the enemy's elemental affinity.

Fourth, Elemental Alliances and Factions. Players have the option to form alliances with many factions, each advocating a distinct ideology of elemental equilibrium. These factions have an impact on quests, the advancement of the story, and the ability to utilize particular technologies and elemental abilities.

Fifth, Steampunk Gadgets and Transportation. Unique Steampunk gadgets, such as mechanized suits or airships, are available for exploration and combat. These gadgets require balancing elements for optimal operation, integrating the theme into exploration and mobility.

4.2. Player Engagement: Enhancing Experience through Novel Mechanics

First, Strategy in Crafting and Building. The fusion of elements and technologies in the process of crafting amplifies the complexity of construction. Players must carefully consider the elemental qualities of the materials they use in order to have a distinctive building and crafting experience. They will not achieve success if they utilize building materials that have incompatible properties with the environment in locations that have diverse attributes.

Second, Adaptive gameplay that interacts with the environment. Players must demonstrate adaptability in a game world that undergoes regular changes as a result of elemental utilization. The ever-changing nature of this ecosystem ensures that the game remains stimulating and demanding, requiring players to continuously adapt their methods.

Third, Versatile combat experience. The elemental combat system ensures that no two encounters are the same. Players must constantly adjust their tactics according to the elemental strengths and weaknesses of their opponents, thus making battles more engaging and less repetitive, with restrained attributes causing extra damage and restrained attributes reducing damage.

Fourth, Narrative and gameplay integration with factions. Aligning with different factions can change not only the storyline but also the gameplay experience. This fusion of story and mechanics deepens player engagement as player choices have a tangible impact on the game world, increasing the mind-stream experience.

Fifth, Exploring and moving with steampunk technology. Transport and exploration using steampunk gadgets introduces novel ways to travel through and interact with the game world. This

not only adds to the novelty of the game, but also gives the player a sense of progression and power as they unlock and master new technologies.

5. Artistic Considerations

In visual and artistic aspects, "Elemental Gears: Balanced" Chronicles is a game that combines Eastern mysticism with Western industrial motifs. The game's aesthetic appeal lies in its unique art style, which blends ancient Chinese elements with Victorian steampunk design.

Besides, in visual representation of the five elements, the game meticulously visualises the five Chinese elements (gold, wood, water, fire and earth) in the environment. Each element has unique colors, textures and patterns. For example, the "Wood" area is lush and full of ancient trees and wooden structures.

As for steampunk design, the game's architecture, gadgets and clothing all reflect the steampunk aesthetic. This includes brass and copper machinery, steam-driven contraptions, and Victorian-style clothing, all of which are designed without fail to embody the concepts of primitive physics.

In the character and creature design, characters incorporate traditional Chinese clothing and steampunk accessories to create a unique look that symbolises the game's thematic fusion. The recombination of the beasts representing the five elements identified by the Astrological Association with mechanical elements adds to the fantasy appeal of the game and emphasises the concept of cultural fusion.

In terms of environmental dynamism, the game environment will change according to the balance of elements, visually reflecting the impact of the player's behaviour. And will be in the operation of the edge of the screen with the different appearance of each attribute, such as the fire scene, the edge of the screen will be hidden small flames. This dynamic visual change enhances the game experience.

6. Comparative Analysis

The gaming industry has a variety of themes, but few have attempted to blend Eastern philosophical concepts with Western industrial aesthetics." Elemental Gears: the Balanced Chronicles was born out of this general context.

Initially, the Dynasty Warriors series by Koei Tecmo focused on Chinese history and culture, but did not delve into the philosophical intricacies of the Five Elements or their environmental impacts. Furthermore, the storyline of these games was not particularly captivating. In contrast, this game effectively incorporates a more profound cultural fusion into its storyline. The game in the series is Dishonored, developed by Arkane Studios. These games are renowned for their steampunk aesthetic and focus on storytelling mostly centered around Western themes. This game expands upon that concept by integrating aspects of Eastern philosophy, offering a more equitable cultural viewpoint that diverges from the constraints of prior themes. Furthermore, in terms of comparative analysis, Elemental Gears stands out because to its thematic Fusion. Unlike the other games described, Elemental Gears combines Eastern and Western elements, presenting a unique and innovative approach. Furthermore, Elemental Gears distinguishes itself by integrating thematic elements into its fundamental principles, resulting in a dynamic and adaptive game environment.

The strategic gameplay in Elemental Gear is characterized by the harmonious integration of elements and technology, resulting in a profound level of strategic complexity and gameplay diversity that surpasses the typically linear and less engaging mechanisms found in other games.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, the author presents a game-based study of how to enhance the gaming experience with cultural fusion. The paper concludes that the game "Elemental Gears: Chronicles of Balance," which

fuses Chinese Five Elements philosophy with steampunk aesthetics, offers a unique and immersive gaming experience. This combination enriches the game's narrative, gameplay, and mechanics, enhancing player engagement and cultural understanding. The study emphasizes the potential of integrating diverse cultural elements in games to create more innovative and culturally informative experiences. We still need more academic surveys to proof the culture fusion of our game pipeline among public. For temporarily, the game is on the theoretical stage.

To improve this study, future research could delve deeper into player feedback and engagement metrics to assess the game's impact more comprehensively. Additionally, exploring the integration of other cultural elements or themes could further enhance the game's appeal and educational value. The prospect for the culture domain lies in exploring and refining the blend of cultural elements in gaming, potentially leading to innovative gaming experiences.

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