Defining the Global Ludo Polychotomy

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the established East-West Dichotomy and attempts to explain its role in the games industry while examining if it can even be accurately applied to it. In an attempt to find out, a games design model (B. James et al, 2013) was used to quickly and efficiently break down a variety of popular and/or relevant video game titles from recent years in order to better understand their design and targeting systems. These games were then compared and analysed in order to determine their exact place in the market as well as their place in the Global Ludo Polychotomy, freeing the industry from a dichotomy based perception.

These comparisons have indicated that the original east-west dichotomy theory (S. Meštrovic, 1994), while appropriate for the initial subject matter, may not be entirely suitable for defining the global state of games, their design and their marketing. These differences are quite noticeable and, as such, warrant further investigation.

Keywords
Game Studies, Video Game Culture, Dichotomy, Global Ludo Polychotomy, Eastern, Western, Reward Systems, Game Design,

INTRODUCTION

From the outset, it may seem that defining something which is "global" as a dichotomy is an extremely vast assumption as it would seem illogical that in something as large and diverse as the world, there could only a single case of contrast.
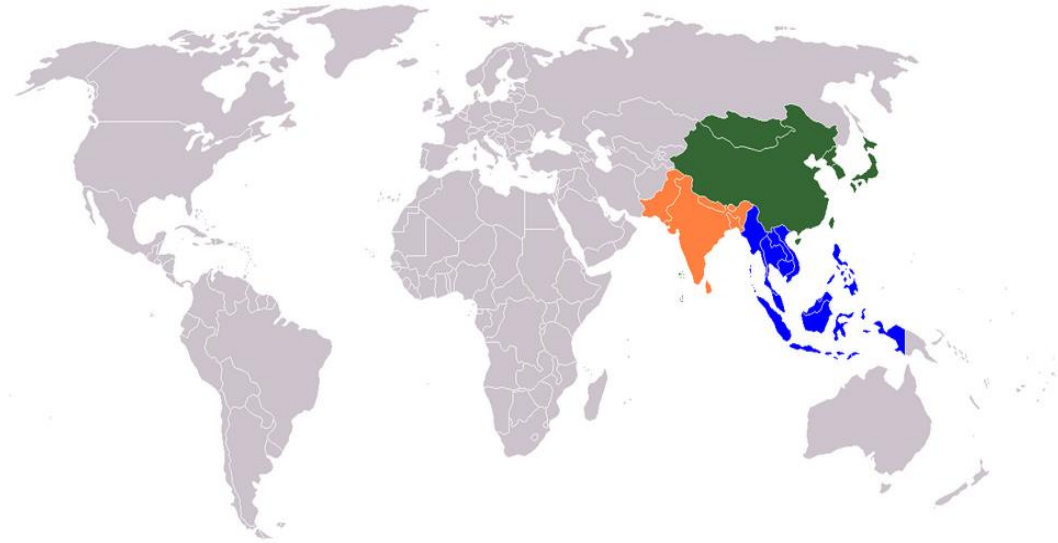
Figure 1: The East/West divide; the grey areas are considered "western" and the coloured areas are considered "Eastern".

The above picture sheds some further light on the issue. The darker/coloured areas show what is currently defined as "Eastern"; as theorised by S. Meštrovic (1994) and furthered by F. Macgilchrist (2007) who concluded that Russia was western country from the basis of S. Meštrovic's work, the rest is defined as "Eastern".

This established split is referenced most prominently by T. Pattberg (2009) who describes the differences between the two regions; "The East-West dichotomy is a philosophical concept of ancient origin which claims that the two cultural hemispheres, East and West, developed diametrically opposed, one from the particular to the universal and the other from the universal to the particular; the East is more inductive while the West is more deductive. Together they form an equilibrium."

This equilibrium has been mostly referenced in various other cultural study areas, as seen in politics (S. Meštrovic) and various psychological studies (G.Leech (2005) and J.R.Averill et al (2001)), and has been used as a means to segregate the global population into two groups. This makes it easier to correlate qualitative and quantitative data in differing forms into easier to manage parts; a large boon for researchers. However this theory has rarely, if ever, been academically discussed in the area of games and their design.

This is not to say however that is not frequently referenced in ludology based papers; researchers often use the term "Eastern and Western" in their subject titles or descriptions. They use it to describe, or to better explain, their findings from various studies from across the globe more efficiently. Depite this, a common theme among these pieces is that lack of an explanation of what exactly that particular writer(s) is referring to when they say Eastern and Western, even after all these years of game academia. For example, C.J. Ferguson et

al (2010) refers to the Eastern/Western divide in their paper examining the effects of violent video games around the world, yet the crux of the paper does not discuss what and where these regions are; it relies on the assumption that the reader knows this information beforehand. This occurs again with C.A. Anderson et al (2010) who looked at the psychological effects of video games. While the researchers in this particular study explore various aspects of psychological and sociological impact via games, they rarely touch upon how it affects the Eastern/Western countries and instead reaches a conclusion which (is assumed) expands over both regions.

THE GLOBAL LUDO POLYCHOTOMY

An obvious question to pose right away would be the necessity of even having a specific Polychotomy for video games. While this does have some validity in its premise, the necessity comes from the extreme variation of the medium itself. Video games have a unique ability to be enjoyed globally with little pandering to other regions; the main example of this is the love of Japanese Role Playing Game's (JRPG's) in the Western regions. While these games are naturally designed with an Eastern market in mind and by Eastern developers, many Western consumers enjoy these games and, even though the market is a niche, the titles sell well outside of Eastern regions.

These variations of cultures and designs, combined with a near global acceptance, is present in more titles than the average consumer would recognise and, as you would expect, is not specifically exclusive to one genre or system. Therefore, examining video games which have crossed and even overcome these boundaries in the last few years would be paramount.
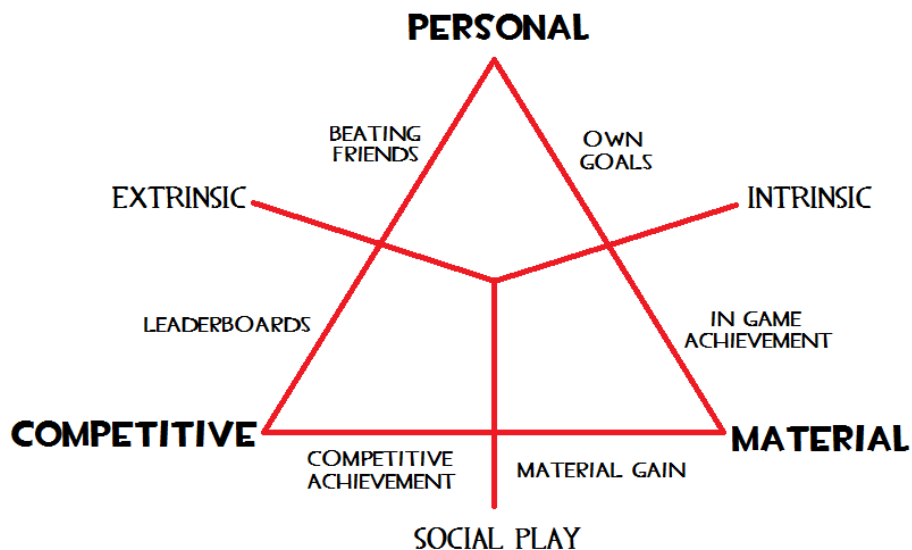
**Figure 2:** The 3 Corners of Reward diagram.
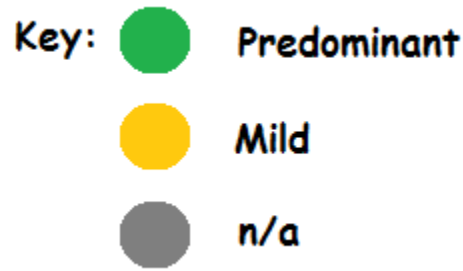
Figure 3: Key for the 3 Corners of Reward diagram.

In order to correlate the systems employed in the video games designs, the Three Corners of Reward (B. James et al, 2013) model will be used to represent the games appeal to the audiences around the world. Since the precursor for this model is based on an initial comparison of Eastern and Western game design and it has a large use in identifying target audiences, it is the ideal choice in this situation.

It also is useful for identifying the main design strengths of a video game. This data has a use in determining the finer details of the Global Ludo Polychotomy, meaning that the specific regions could be further identified by their games designs as well as their gameplay.

## Case Study 1: Western Design (Call of Duty: Ghosts/Assassins Creed IV:Black Flag)

The Call of Duty series has always been an extremely popular set of games in the West since the series hit critical acclaim in 2007 with *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward, 2007) as it was one of the first major titles to take the FPS genre out of the World War eras; a big deal at the time. The games appeal lied in their fast paced reward systems and bringing the FPS into a "realistic" modern setting and then, in future titles, the near future.
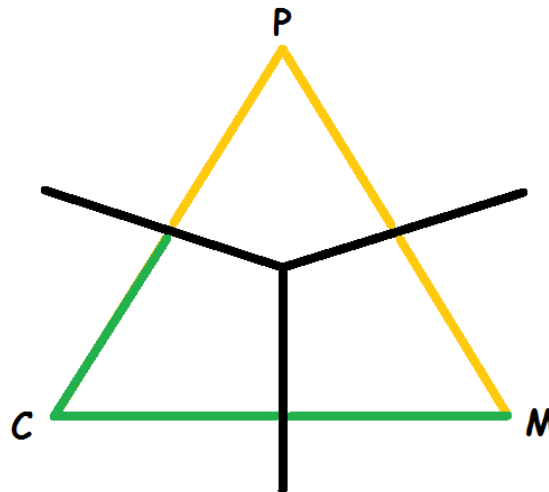
Figure 4: Triangle applied to *Call of Duty: Ghosts*.

Since the series focuses on America and its soldiers (at least more predominantly than any others) it naturally has an extremely large Western presence. This is mirrored in its design (as shown above), focusing on multiplayer and constant material gain for players to keep them interested and enticed to keep playing.

Similarly, the Assassins Creed series has become a much enjoyed series since its first title in 2007. The action based gameplay mixed with stealth elements are the main attraction, but it is the constant rewards presented to the player during progression that keeps them motivated to keep exploring the worlds and storylines up to and including one of the most recent titles in the series, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (Ubisoft, 2013).
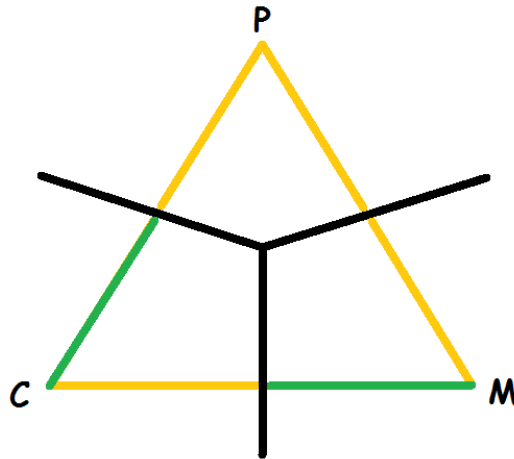

Figure 5: Triangle applied to *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag.*

This, again, is reflected in its design. The focus on rewarding the player with material gain so they can move forward is more evident than before when placed within a pseudo-sandbox world which locks the player out of specific areas until they obtain key items/skills in order to progress. The multiplayer is present again and it is, just as before, action packed and filled with fast paced reward systems designed to lengthening the individual's play session.

In short, the Western design seems to focus on speedy rewards and giving the player incentives to keep playing. This is then supported with lots of opportunities for them to showcase these gains via an online service which, in most circumstances, concentrates on how the individual performs.

## Case Study 2: Eastern Design (Pokémon X and Y/ Super Mario 3D World)

In the way that Call of Duty was designed for Western audiences, the Pokémon series has always been designed with more Eastern ideals. Pokémon is a worldwide franchise and is widely regarded as one of the most popular RPG series' in video games and is made by Japanese developers Gamefreak. Pokémon has always had a lot of Eastern values and settings injected into its design but despite this (and some clever marketing outside of Japan); the games have still sold well in the West and *Pokémon X and Y* (Gamefreak, 2013) was no exception.
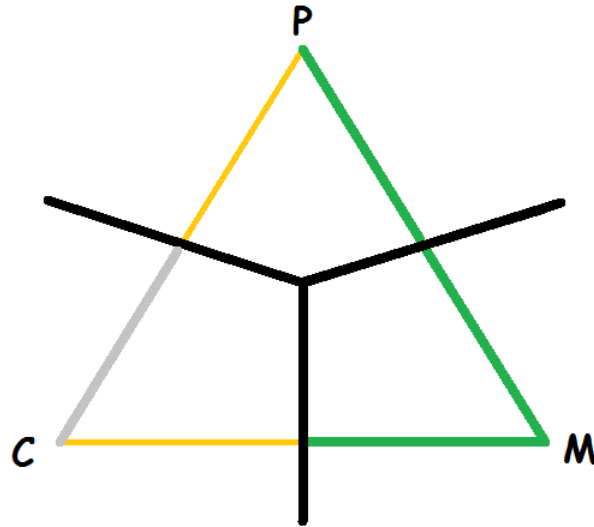
Figure 6: Triangle applied to *Pokémon X and Y*.

This Eastern design is mirrored in its reward systems, choosing to focus on the players own goals and achievements rather than involving other players (although that is still a part of the franchise in the game's online services).

This pattern is continued with *Super Mario 3D World* (Nintendo, 2013), while game may have a larger focus on co-op multiplayer, it still has a lot of Eastern values in its design despite its worldwide appeal. The Mario series may have always been designed for a global market, looking at its reward systems, but the Eastern element is still present and more prominent.
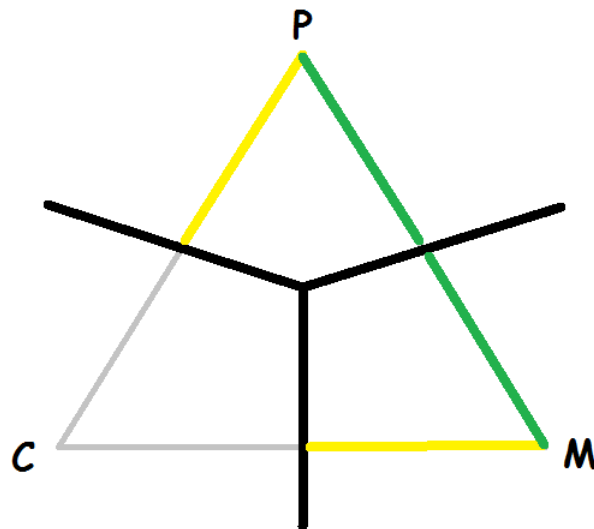

Figure 7: Triangle applied to *Super Mario 3D World*.

While *Pokémon X and Y* focused on the player and what they gain, *Super Mario 3D World* takes another route and incorporates a more focused look on co-op and beating friends as well as its other intrinsic systems. The biggest difference is the lack of material gain when

compared to other eastern games as this was reduced in order to allow other designs and systems to be easily displayed.

After implementing the triangle to the most recent and acclaimed East and West game titles, a pattern has emerged.
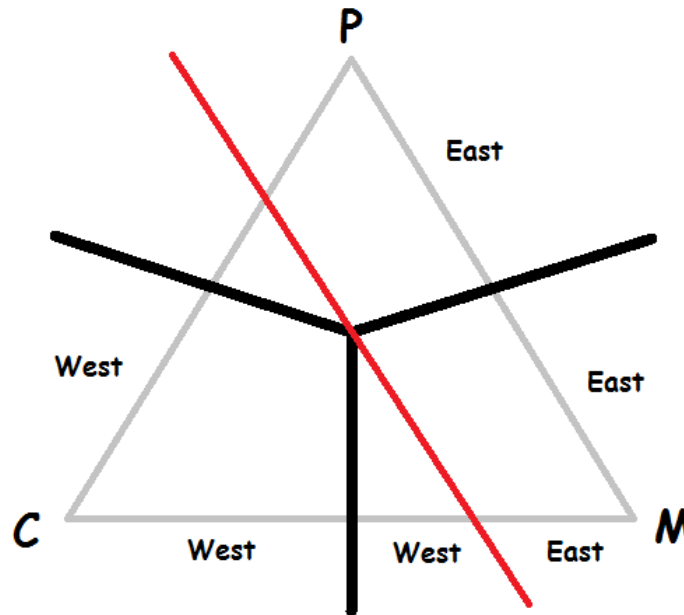
Figure 8: East-West difference average.

This diagram shows the main differences; western game design seems to be more extrinsically based, choosing to empower the player through a mixture of fast paced material gain and then letting the player display this gain via multiplayer elements, while eastern game design takes an opposite standpoint, selecting to focus on the player and their own goals in game and using what they achieve to further their progress rather than, effectively, show it off.

Naturally, not all games follow this pattern exactly. Genre plays a big part in the design process and some genres obviously cannot/do not include some of the areas in the triangle. However, as an average, this diagram is supported by existing theories of East/West design; D. Cuthbert (R. Winterhalter 2007) summed up Eastern game design as precise, leaving nothing haphazard (or oozappa, in Japanese), and all about the effects on the players in abstract worlds, while Western game design is a corporate culture, focusing on a more gritty and realistic setting and very "American". He does however admit that there are rare cases where games can "break the mold" citing Crash Bandicoot as an example of a Western game that, despite the unappealing nature of Western games in the East, did well in Japan.

This view is mirrored in varying areas of other research; K. Ito (2005), while looking at amateur Japanese designers, noted that they do in fact take longer to produce a product due to the focus on precise design (among other things) and other Western orientated researchers examining design culture, such as H. Warmelink (2011) and O.Sotamaa (2007), have also noticed the "corporate nature" in the West, albeit in differing scenarios.

However, there are some games that have been produced in the Western world that do not follow this average pattern, even when design and marketing is considered.

Case Study 3: Design Anomalies (Grand Theft Auto V/ Battlefield 4/Lego Marvel Super Heroes)

Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar North, 2013) was released to critical acclaim; the game recieved high scores around the world and is being hailed as one of the greatest games ever made. The game was developed by Rockstar North, a British video game developer based in Edinburgh; this is important when you consider the games design and reception.

The Grand Theft Auto series has always succeeded in creating worlds based on Western/American culture but twisting the morals and ideals of these worlds to create an acceptable and surreal gameplay experience for players. As such, Liberty City, Vice City and San Andreas (which are the equivalent of New York City, Miami, and Southern California, respectively) are a satire of their realistic counterparts which not only make fun of American culture, but also its various citizens and systems. This level of satire is commendable because of its successes in the Western countries it parodies.
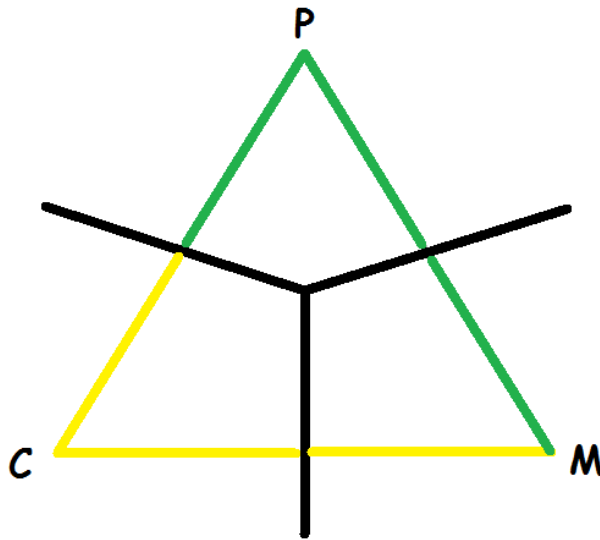

Figure 9: Triangle applied to *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Baring this in mind, after applying the triangle, it is clear that the main areas of *Grand Theft Auto V* are in the own goals - beating friends (based on the games two modes; sandbox single player and online multiplayer) and material gain. This is a noticeable difference from the previous titles as western games usually try to include more intense multiplayer elements to encourage competition. *Grand Theft Auto V* does this in a more personal setting, placing smaller numbers of players in its online world thus making it more personal to them as they compete.

This focus on "beating friends" is also seen in the Battlefield series. This series, like the Call of Duty series, is a military based FPS with a large emphasis on realism and has a sizeable presence in the Western market.
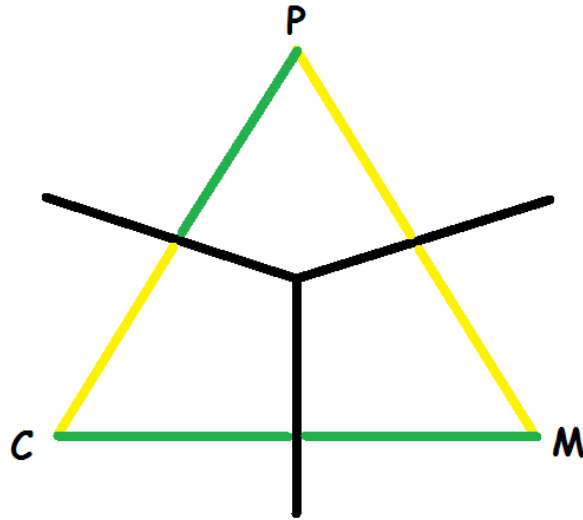
Figure 10: Triangle applied to *Battlefield 4*.

However, after we apply the triangle, beating friends again sticks out due to *Battlefield 4's* (DICE, 2013) focus on squads. Teams in the game can reach up to 62 players, but instead of focusing on who is the top of the rather large leaderboard, the game encourages players to utilise the squads (small groups of a maximum of five players) to work together for the overarching objective. At this point it becomes a competition to see who can be the best in your squad, rather than overall; a very different approach compared to the Call of Duty series.

Even further away from the Western based design these anomalies continue; *Lego Marvel Super Heroes* (TT Games, 2013) is, like *Super Mario 3D World*, a platformer with focus on co-op-multiplayer and designed for a worldwide appeal. However, unlike its Eastern rival, its focus is different.
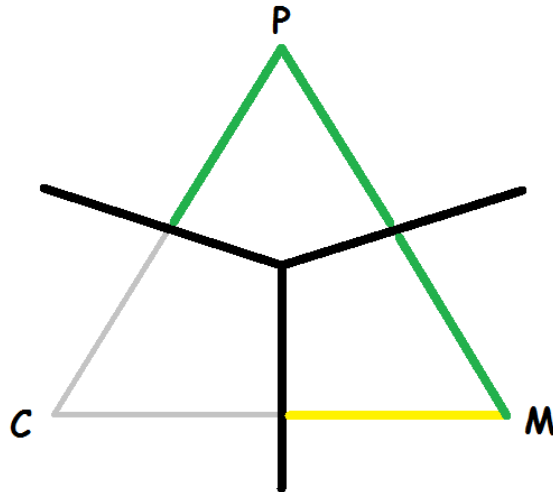
Figure 11: Triangle applied to *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*.

Yet again, beating friends prevails over the other features in the game; while *Super Mario 3D World* did include a co-op element, the levels could still be played in the exact same way and at the same efficiency. However, *Lego Marvel Super Heroes* is instead designed so that playing co-op is actually preferable to the single player as it removes the constant switching of characters and streamlines the gameplay experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER WORK

Without any doubt this paper has shown that, using some of the most recent and renowned video game titles, the Eastern/Western dichotomy is relevant in the games industry. However, it is a false assumption that the games industry is as black and white as the East-West dichotomy, as a theory, presents. The terminology "Global Ludo Polychotomy" suits this phenomenon better; while there are differences in western and eastern markets, there are more factors involved which extend out of the precursors discussed by S. Meštrovic and F. Macgilchrist.

Something to note though, is that while the paper reveales the existence of the Global Ludo Polychotomy, there were other anomalies that could not be explained using the triangular model. These games, their genre and their design warrant further study as it seems that, in the field of game design, the East and West may not be the only regions that effect the global game market.

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