

Game Mechanic Analysis for:

Ghost of Tsushima



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Stance Mechanic Description

Ghost of Tsushima is an open-world action-stealth game set on the island of Tsushima during the first Mongol invasion of Japan. The game follows the journey of Jin Sakai, the only samurai to survive the Mongol's first attack.

One of the core mechanics in Ghost of Tsushima is its combat. The combat system is designed to allow the player to face enemies in a head on challenge and emerge victorious. One of the most interesting combat mechanics is the stance mechanic. This mechanic allows players to target their fighting style towards specific enemy types, therefore allowing their attacks to be more effective when the stance is paired correctly with the current enemy. There are four different stances in the game described in Table 1 below.

Stance	Description
Stone Stance	Effective against sword enemies.
Water Stance	Effective against shield enemies.
Wind Stance	Effective against spear enemies.
Moon Stance	Effective against brute enemies.

Table 1: Samurai Stances

Correctly pairing a stance against a certain enemy type will allow the player to break the enemy's defense more easily and with further skill upgrades, perform special attacks against those enemy types.

Why is this mechanic interesting?

The stance mechanic is interesting because it is the most unique aspect of the combat system and enhances the player's experience of feeling like a samurai while playing the game. It greatly enhances the fantasy of being a skilled sword master who is capable of overpowering enemies through superior knowledge and techniques. The stance mechanic allows the player to target their attacks against certain enemy types, fighting more effectively and breaking the enemy's defense more easily. This mechanic adds another tactical component to the gameplay, further emphasizing the fantasy of being a battle-savvy samurai.

The way in which the four stances are unlocked further supports the feeling of being a proficient and skilled sword master. Stances are unlocked by observing or killing enemy leaders which perpetuates the story that Jin is able to observe his enemies in combat, and through these observations, develop effective counter techniques against each enemy type.

Much like a real samurai, the stance mechanic allows players to feel like they are in control of the battle, and effectively use their opponents' techniques against them through superior tactical knowledge and sword abilities. Therefore, this mechanic uniquely enhances Ghost of Tsushima's main fantasy of feeling like an incredible samurai warrior who is skilled enough to fend off an entire invasion singlehandedly.

What is the mechanic's biggest issue?

The biggest issue with Ghost of Tsushima's stance mechanic is that switching between the different stances can be a little clunky, especially in the heat of combat. In order to switch stances, the player must hold down R2 and then select their desired stance with either square, triangle, circle or x depending on which stance they're after. Even for more skilled players, it is easy to mistime the execution of this sequence and end up using the wrong stance or performing another unintentional action and in the heat of combat, one wrong move can lead to death which is especially frustrating when the intended action would have been effective.

Other contributor to disrupting the flow of switching stances is the location of the stance wheel. When the player holds R2, the stance wheel appears in the bottom right corner of the screen. This location requires the player to divert their attention from the ongoing battle to look at the stance wheel to ensure that they are selecting the desired stance. This diversion of attention can often lead to the player missing an enemy attack and consequently taking damage. This can often be frustrating since the ideal samurai combat is fluid and uninterrupted with Jin dominating the battlefield as a skilled samurai. While taking damage is a very important aspect of the difficulty of the game, it can be frustrating for the player to take damage as a result of the way the game mechanics are designed as opposed to the player's decisions. This frustration can be attributed to the fact that realistically a samurai would fluidly be able to switch between sword stances and would not need to glance away from their opponent in order to verify their next technique.

However, this issue can be overcome with a lot of practice and patience on the part of the player, therefore any potential improvements should be optional as they make lower the difficulty of the game too much for some players while making the game more accessible to others.

Stance Mechanic Potential Improvements

One method to improve the usability of the stance mechanic would be to add a "Battle" section of the pause menu. In the heat of battle, the player is already capable of pausing the game, navigating to the Gear section and changing their armour and long-range weapons. However, stances can only be changed through the stance wheel. Long-range weapons can also be switched through a wheel in the exact same way as stances but they can also be chosen in the Gear menu unlike stances. Therefore, adding an option to switch stances to the pause menu would not only match the other combat mechanics, but also provide the player the option of taking more time to select which stance they need if they need a moment to think. The Battle menu could also be expanded upon by including a more concise way of selecting long-range weapons, throwables, armour, and charm builds. It may also be beneficial for the Battle menu to open by default when the player hits the pause button while they are in combat as opposed to the Map menu. Of course, the Map menu should open by default when the player is not in combat.

Another potential improvement would be to move the location of the stance wheel from the bottom left of the screen to overtop Jin. This way the player's attention is still focused on the centre of the battle and they will likely be able to see incoming attacks more easily and will therefore be able to react more quickly. This alteration however would need to be precisely executed to avoid having the stance wheel block or cover any of the action happening in the battle and would also need to accommodate the long-range weapon wheel.

Thirdly, Ghost of Tsushima could implement a colour system to help players more easily identify enemy types and which stances are stronger against those enemy types. Each stance symbol would be a different colour in the stance wheel and when that stance is selected, enemies who are weak against that stance would flash that colour. For example, the wind stance could be green with the wind stance symbol and associated button being green in the stance wheel. When the wind stance is selected, all nearby spear enemies would flash green, pointing out to the player that their current stance is effective against those spear enemies. This would be replicated for the other three stances but with each stance having its own unique colour association. The player should have the option of turning this colour system on or off since some players may find the colours distracting or that they make combat too easy, whereas other players may find this system greatly enhancing their enjoyment and the overall accessibility of the game.