



Hacktivism

A Theoretical and Empirical
Exploration of China's Cyber Warriors

红
客

Michael Yip & Craig Webber
17 June 2011

ACM Web Science 2011
3rd International Conference on Web Science,
Koblenz, Germany, 14-17 June 2011

Hacktivism

- Hacktivism: hacking + political activism (Denning 2001)
- Wikileaks and Anonymous
- Lack of academic research on the “why”
- Reasoning the emergence of “freelance” Chinese hacktivism



Honkers – “Red Hackers”

Forums are used to:

- organise attacks
- attract public support
- attract volunteers
- offer free technical training to gain loyalty

Hackvitiist groups deface
websites and display their
results on their forums

Symbolic targets and high
profile attacks preferred to
seek public support



Defaced websites are often left
with a message

This is just a little warning, Japan please self-respect...

Theoretical Framework

R.D. is a *sense* of deprivation and not necessarily an objectively measurable entity (Runciman 1966).

Relative
Deprivation

Proposed by Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) that ingroup members need to positively distinguish themselves from an outgroup and this is enough to cause conflict.

Social
Identity
Theory

Chinese nationalism is not just about celebrating the glories of Chinese civilization; it also commemorates China's weakness. (Callahan 2004)

Chinese
Nationalism
and
Humiliation

ressentiment

Following Nietzsche and Max Scheler, this is an emotional state distinguishable from resentment due to its long-term and the inability to find satisfaction.

Effects of Patriotic Education

- Reminding of Chinese superiority + national humiliation + negative portrayal of foreign nations (Wang 2008)
 - educated to feel relatively deprived to foreign nations
- Increased sense of national identity:
 - stronger urge to distinguish from foreign nations
- Increased personal experience of *ressentiment* (hate + despising of foreign nations)
- Need a way to vent out emotions but physical protest restricted (Hughes 2000)

Empirical Study

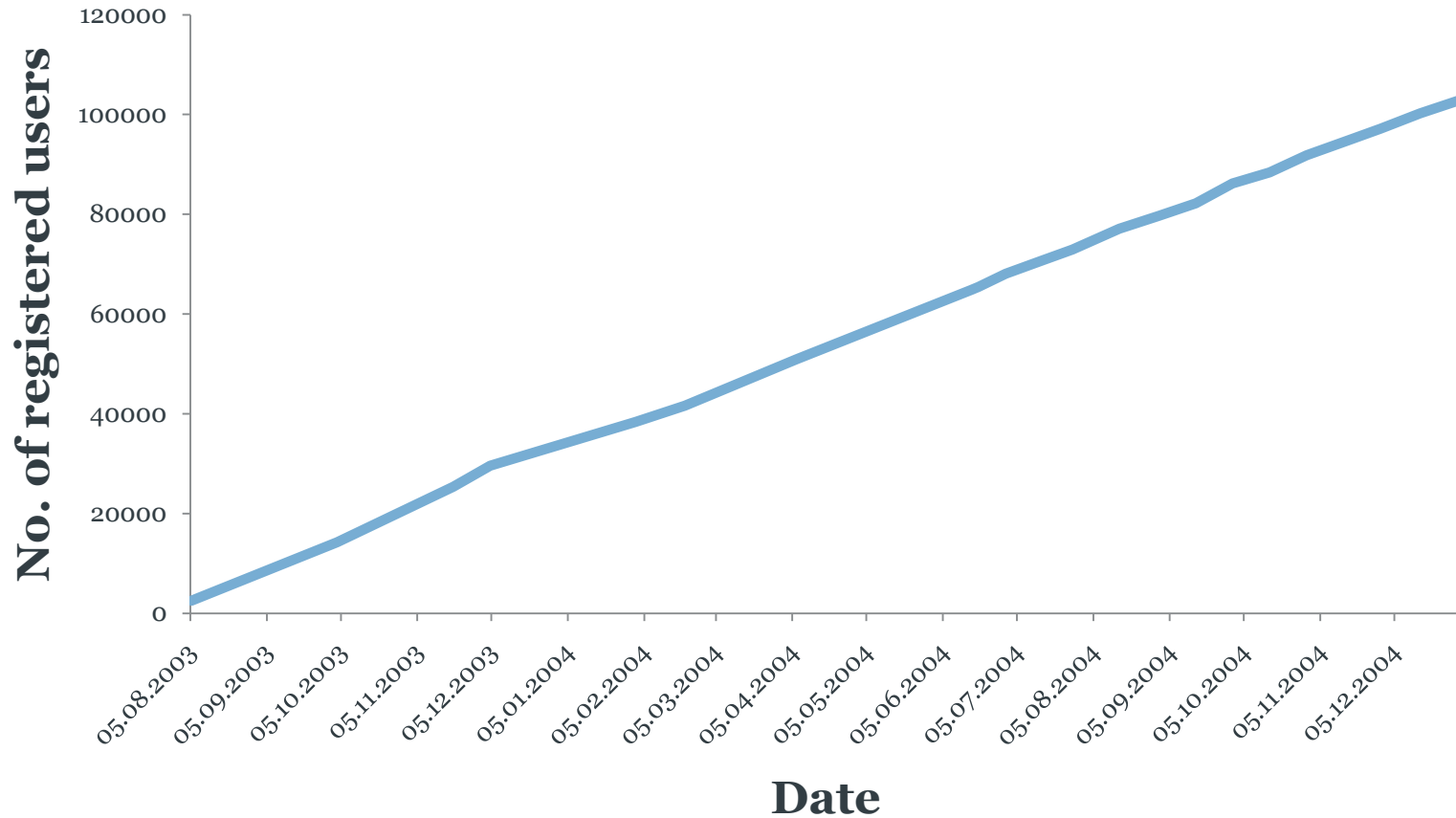
- Set out to examine the forum membership growth patterns of Honkers Union of China (H. U. C.)
- Data: archived pages from the Internet Archive
- Study covers the period 2001 – 2010
- Membership growth patterns are correlated with political events
- **Hypothesis:** membership surges at the times of political conflicts, hence a relative increase in the no. of freelance hacktivists

2001: Tension with U.S. and Taiwan



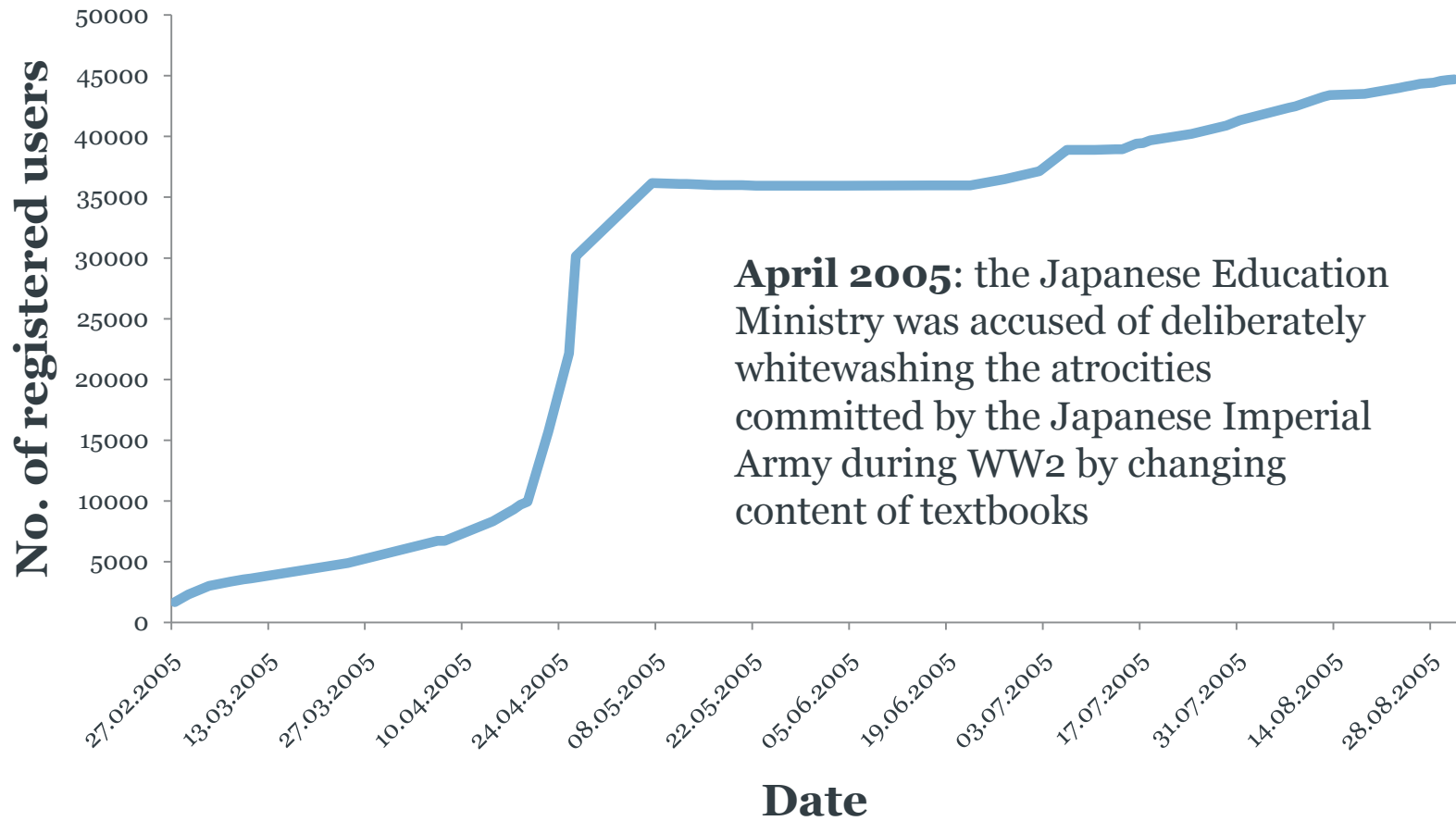
Membership growth pattern of the Honker Union of China hacktivist group in 2001

2003-2004: Stable Foreign Relations



Membership growth pattern of the Honker Union of China hacktivist group in 2003–2004

2005: Japanese Textbook Incident



Membership growth pattern of the Honker Union of China hacktivist group in 2005

2010: Diaoyu Island Incident with Japan



Percentage of global Daily Reach which arrived at honker.net and cnhonkerarmy.com over the part 12 months

honker.net experienced much higher surge in reach due to appearance on news (see paper)

Average time spent on site on honker.net and cnhonkerarmy.com over the part 12 months

This shows that people do more than just merely becoming a member



Conclusion

- A theoretical framework combining Relative Deprivation, Social Identity Theory, Nationalism and *ressentiment* fits
- The lack of physical ways to express *ressentiment* and availability of the Web drives people to hacktivism
- Membership growth patterns of hacktivist forum supports the proposed framework

THANK YOU

Michael Yip
my2e09@ecs.soton.ac.uk

<http://ecs.soton.ac.uk/people/my2e09>

Twitter: @michael_yip