# Weibo Anti-ultranationalism Digital Campaign

### I. Background of the project

With the in-depth development of Internet social media platforms, the speech environment of some public issue platforms has gradually deteriorated due to the speech mechanism of low threshold, immediacy, and high degree of freedom. Among them, Weibo, which is the king in the number of users, is the most serious. Extreme and irrational patriotic posts can be seen everywhere on Weibo, which has become a hotbed of Internet ultra-nationalism.

On the basis of finding the prevalence of Internet ultranationalism in Weibo, we explored the reasons behind this trend of thought, and adopted corresponding interactive methods to improve the environment of extreme speech. In our search, we found that the "DiBa Expedition" in 2016 and 2019 were symbolic events that triggered online ultranationalism.

## The Event of "DiBa Expedition"

In December 2015, a picture of Taiwanese member of the South Korean girl group Twice, Zhou Ziyu, holding a flag of the Republic of China sparked a hot debate; in January 2016, Tsai Ing-wen was elected president of the Republic of China. These two "Taiwan independence" events triggered strong discontent among mainland netizens. On January 20, micro-blogger "Zhao Ritian No. 233" released a post of "marching to Facebook tonight at 7pm", which was then forwarded over 10,000 times, forming a sizable "marching team". DiBa anti-Taiwanese independence QQ group released detailed notes about the "march" and successfully organized the first "DiBa Expedition". Four days later, the People's Daily (Overseas Edition), an official media outlet on the mainland, published a commentary, saying that the "DiBa Expedition" showed the possibility of sincere communication between youths across the Taiwan Strait. At this point, "DiBa Expedition" was officially recognized and entered the sight of the whole Internet platform.



(The state media's affirmation)

"DiBa" originated from the "Liyi Ba", which was originally a small community of soccer fans on Baidu Tieba, created in 2004 with only a few dozen people. Later, due to the comments of soccer player Li Yi, the "Liyi Ba" turned into a soccer community for netizens to spoof Li Yi and vent their frustration with Chinese soccer. A netizen once wrote *Li Yi Da Di Ben Ji* (李毅大帝本紀), a parody of Sima Qian's *Historical Records* (史記). This is the origin of the name "DiBa". <sup>1</sup>

In 2007, under the influence of the overall network atmosphere, the topic of discussion in "Liyi Ba" gradually shifted from soccer to social and current affairs. Netizens called "DiBa" as "Baidu Louvre", and the influence of community "connotation culture" reached its peak. It is worth noting that "Liyi Ba" started as a football fan community, and its senior members were mainly active netizens with a certain degree of political awareness. The patriotic passion of these football fans not only influenced the overall viewpoint of "Liyi Ba", but also paved the way for the subsequent "Diba Expedition". In 2014, the abolition of Tieba membership application system and the popularity of the Diaosi culture made the generation after the 90s and 00s join, which caused the explosive growth of "DiBa" community size from millions to tens of millions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jianghua Yang, and Ling Chen. "The Formation, Development and Evolution Mechanism of Online Community: Based on the Case Study of DiBa Community." *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication.* 41, no. 3 (2019): 133. accessed April 18, 2023. http://cjic.ruc.edu.cn/CN/Y2019/V41/I3/127.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jianghua Yang, and Ling Chen, "The Formation, Development and Evolution Mechanism of Online Community: Based on the Case Study of DiBa Community," *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication*, 41, no. 3 (2019): 128-129, accessed April 18, 2023. http://cjic.ruc.edu.cn/CN/Y2019/V41/I3/127.

Before the first "DiBa Expedition", the management organization of "DiBa" used Baidu Tieba and QQ Group as the main activity platform. After 2016, with the rise of Weibo and the decline of Baidu Tieba, more and more DiBa members moved from Tieba to the Weibo platform. The activity platform of the DiBa organization began to change. In February 2019, DiBa opened its official Weibo account "@DiBa Official Weibo". After the violent incident in Hong Kong, DiBa officially completed the construction of the Weibo platform community and organized the second "expedition".



(DiBa publicity picture)

This event helped the number of likes on the posts of "@DiBa Official Weibo" soared from 3-4, when it was first established, to 10,000. At the same time, the "DiBa Expedition" once again won the "like" of the Communist Youth League and the People's Daily. Because of the positive attitude of the official media, Weibo's speech environment further deteriorated. After that, during the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 and the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, many netizens made extreme statements in the name of "patriotism" and formed a community under the leadership of extreme patriotic bloggers.

# The Development Path of Internet Ultranationalism

Weibo, short for microblog, is a platform for information sharing, dissemination and access based on users' social networks, and is a kind of broadcast social media. Sina launched the internal beta version of Sina Weibo in August 2009. As of the first half of 2013, there were 536 million registered users on Weibo, making it one of the main activity platforms for hundreds of millions of Chinese netizens. As a platform for public discourse in mainland China, Weibo plays a significant role in mass communication

and social publicness. Since 2019, the official Weibo account of "DiBa" has 1.59 million followers, with a total of 87.81 million retweets, likes and comments, and 1.20 billion video plays. The "DiBa" super-talk (Weibo fan community) has 24,000 followers.<sup>3</sup> These figures are very impressive for an online community born in Baidu Tieba. The slogan of "DiBa is on the march, who can compete" enhances the effect of DiBa's communication on the online platform.

But is the "DiBa Expedition" event completely positive? After the Hong Kong incident in 2019, the content released by @Diba official Weibo gradually began to focus on the country and military, rather than the original style of social and current affairs flirtation. The ideology, emotions and values in the posts have a specific purpose of agitation and propaganda, and the establishment of fan groups and super-talk has created a "patriotic" discourse system. At the same time, in addition to "DiBa", many extreme patriotic bloggers, such as @God's Eagle\_5zn(上帝之鷹\_5zn), @DiguaBearLaoLiu(地 瓜熊老六), and @TaiwanFoolishThings(台灣傻事), have become the leaders of new extreme patriotic clusters, building their own Weibo discourse space.

In the case of @God Eagle \_5zn, the blogger set up his Weibo account in 2009, and the initial posts received almost no likes. As the words became increasingly extreme and fierce, by May 2019, the blogger's posts had reached about 300 likes. In Yuen Long violence event in 2019, the blogger followed the footsteps of "DiBa Expedition", earning an unimaginable amount of traffic. In July 2019, every post of @God Eagle \_5zn received between 2,000 and 4,000 likes, with some posts even getting 24,000 likes. By this time, insults and irrational remarks were already appearing in the comments section of his Weibo. Later, during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, the blogger directed his followers to abuse Japanese and Korean athletes and Ukrainian soldiers. This deliberate act of provoking confrontation between the two sides has revealed the implication of traffic monetizing.

As of April 20, 2023, @God\_Eagle\_5zn had 2.44 million followers and 193 million retweets, comments and likes. Although it is impossible to verify the extent of the increase in fans during the "DiBa Expedition" period, such an extreme patriotic blogger will inevitably influence the position of netizens when national sentiment is high. More importantly, one successful case of traffic monetization will only lead to more similar

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "DiBa Official Weibo," *Weibo*, accessed April 18, 2023, https://weibo.com/CHINAD8?display=0&retcode=6102.

extreme patriotic bloggers, which is one of the reasons for the rapid deterioration of Weibo's speech environment in recent years. Moreover, on some national events, the official media consciously launched "patriotic" guidance, which have further stimulated the blind and irrational patriotic trend of thought and accelerated the growth of Internet ultra-nationalism.

十三太饱iii 她是美国人养的猪				
作死先锋侠:?她有🐱那么值钱吗? 共 32条回复 >				
19–8–31 18:13			மீ 945	
凉B1O 刚刚有个人在制作汽油弹的时候烧到自己了。 😂 😂 这脑子,不知道你们看到没有?				
我爱 jessica: 死了没有? wlin 瓦尼: 只关心死了没 ًً 共53条回复 >				
19–8–31 18:13			凸 596	

(Screenshot of comment section: Hong Kong 7.21 incident)

	逸轩冬雪 🔮🔤 接下来就会说我们欺负她,蝁	霸凌她	了			
	庄·秋水依燃等人 共10条回复 >					
	21–7–29 12:54			占 83		
LaChaaaaaaat (新國國) 被亲妈骗了啊,可怜的,小王八羔子						
	性感的帅的发呆等人 共5条回复 >					
	21–7–29 12:53			占 99		
	喧闹的好山好水 <b>活该</b>					
	21–7–29 12:57			台 66		

(Screenshot of comment section: Insults at Japanese competitors)

It is "ultra-nationalism" to take patriotism and nationalism as the emotional orientation, place high emphasis on safeguarding national interests and national dignity, and resolutely resist foreign invasion. It has an extreme national and ethnic concept, with an obvious tendency to blindly exclude foreigners.<sup>4</sup> With the virtual and anonymous nature of the Internet, the influential ultra-nationalist sentiment and thoughts which are expressed through the Internet is "Internet ultra-nationalism. This is the latest manifestation of extreme nationalism in the Internet era.<sup>5</sup>

#### Weibo: a platform for social and public discourse

Since its inception in 2009, Weibo has gradually become a public issue platform with the largest number of daily active users and the largest number of users in mainland China. In the special context of China, Weibo is like a Chinese version of Twitter.

First, the high degree of freedom of Weibo provides the soil for the development of nationalism, as well as a source of information and an anonymous, virtual space for communication. Individual users can create the public opinion field more actively by them. Second, the threshold of Weibo users is low, and there is an imbalance between the ability of some netizens to participate in politics and the degree of awakening of civic consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Especially for the topic of "patriotism", the gathering of the Internet masses is very likely to generate herding and clustering mentality, thus generating emotional and irrational remarks. Finally, Weibo has powerful synchronous communication effectiveness, which can realize the effect of "point-to-point" and "point-to-counter" communication and achieve multiple echoes of discourse.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, for the narrative of "Internet ultra-nationalism", Weibo, as an easily disseminated, free and low-threshold online space, meets the demand of ultra-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ye Sun, "The Manifestation Form, Breeding Way and Governance Strategy of Network Populism," *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology(Social Sciences Edition)*, no. 6 (2022): 12, accessed April 18, 2023, https://doi.org/10.19406/j.cnki.cqkjxyxbskb.2022.06.014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Youmou Luo, and Zia Li, "Agitation and Confluence: Populism and Nationalism in Cyberspace," *Journal of Suihua University* 11 (2018): 50, accessed April 18, 2023, https://www.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2018&filename=SHS Z201811013&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=nUX3tEqxY9DFUw-Qk\_pC-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Lichen Shi, and Yi He, "The Soil and Background of Populism in Contemporary China," *Qinghai Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2015): 47-48, accessed April 18, 2023, https://doi.org/10.14154/j.cnki.qss.2015.01.008.
<sup>7</sup> Yang Liu, "The Populist Tendency of Microblog Discussion Discourse: A Case Study of Sina Weibo," *Southeast Communication*, no. 07 (2011): 48, accessed April 18, 2023, https://doi.org/10.13556/j.cnki.dncb.cn35-1274/j.2011.07.044.

nationalism fermentation. In terms of the nature of the online platform, compared with other public issue platforms, Weibo is superior in terms of huge volume of users and convenient dissemination chain. Moreover, Weibo is currently in a critical public opinion environment. Not only the issue of "patriotism", but also the overall speech environment is irrational, confrontational, and inefficient in communication. This is the reason why we chose Weibo as the activity platform for our digital campaign.

## II. Campaign goals and targeted audience

Taking "DiBa" as an example, the Internet ultra-nationalism in Weibo is created by a combination of market traffic demand (extreme patriotic bloggers) and government pushers (official media approval). Considering the unique context of China and the gradually tightening vetting policy, this digital campaign will not adopt an aggressive strategy different from the case of the "Feminist Five."<sup>8</sup> Our ultimate goal is not to stand in the opposition camp with ultra-patriotic bloggers, but to show a rational and neutral attitude, gradually "penetrate" the Internet ultra-nationalist discourse circle, and carry out strong camouflage activities.

### Target audience

Weibo users can be simply divided into the following three categories: ordinary users who mainly receive information, bloggers who produce content views, and sticky followers who focus on interaction. Accordingly, in the ultra-nationalist field, they can be defined as ordinary Weibo users (passersby), ultra-patriotic bloggers and their fans.

Considering the marketability (traffic realization) of extreme patriotic bloggers and the strong sticky qualities of their fan base, this digital campaign tends to focus on general users as the key target audience. This user group is likely to browse to ultra-nationalist discourse, and although they will not take a stand or interact, they are also unaware of the concept and narrative characteristics of online ultra-nationalism. Thus, the potential for incitement also exists.

In addition to ordinary Weibo users, the following interactive methods will also focus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Jia Tan, "Digital Masquerading: Feminist Media Activism in China," *Crime Media Culture* 13, no. 2 (2017):
171–186, accessed April 18, 2023, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/174165901771006.

on rational patriotic bloggers and their fan base who are willing to accept "anti-internet ultranationalism" propaganda. Later, we will launch specific digital operations for these three types of Weibo users, such as developing reflective contents, building bots, and operating fan communities.

## Campaign goals

Therefore, the main goal of this digital campaign is to make ordinary Weibo users understand the concept of "ultra-nationalism" through a rational and neutral attitude, and then be alert to the typical narrative of ultra-nationalism on the Internet. Through the propagation of relevant theoretical knowledge, we aim to reduce the possibility of ordinary Weibo users being incited and prevent them from being drawn into the whirlpool of extreme patriotism.

With long-term operation and publicity, we expect more and more Weibo users to pay attention to rational patriotic bloggers and bot. Eventually, not only the extreme nationalism on the Weibo platform, but other extreme speech in cyberspace can be guided, truly realizing a rational and harmonious online communication environment.

### **III. Methods**

### Method One: Reflective Label

The preliminary method to the campaign is to post reflective blog posts under relevant hashtags.

Take the most popular hashtag phrase among ultra-nationalists on Weibo "colonized people ( 殖人)" as an example, which is short for "colonialism" + "people". It is used to refer to "people who have been colonized intellectually and spiritually." The phrase was invented by a blogger with the id of @Creamy Jiao (@Creamy ). According to him, the word was invented under the influence of the HK political turmoil in 2019. During the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, the phrase was widely spread by the rising nationalist sentiment on the Weibo platform, and almost became a buzzword.



# 警惕你身边的<mark>殖人</mark>!



( The phrase "colonized people" has been widely spread on the Internet)

#### Full Text of the Reference Post (@Creamy Jiao)

Resource: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/XfwmeVat1Lr2itUkAim9qQ

我最早用「殖人」这个词大概是在半年前的一条随手转发,单纯灵光一现。所以这个词其实挺新的,半年而已, 就流传开了,我当时也想不到的。刚开始用这个词的时候,我主要是自己使用。有网友开玩笑说这词不错,会火,类 似硕帝创造的"白左",让人一看就知道是精确指向哪个群体,将来会是互联网一个特色词汇,只能说他/她们当时很 有先见之明(不一一艾特了)。之后就是一些跟我互动比较频繁的博主也开始使用,到现在的几乎全网使用这么一个状态。

既然这样了,那我也有必要以一个"发明者"的身份,稍微详细地介绍一下这个词的由来,以及具体的意思,一方面算是给还不明白这个词意思的人做一个简单的科普,另一方面也是再强调一下原意,提供一个算是官方 reference,尽量避免他人滥用。

虽然殖人这个词很新,但我在微博上使用「脱殖」这个词已经两年多了,从 19年就开始了。脱殖对应

decolonization,去殖民化,这个相信大家一眼就能看明白是什么意思,也能猜出为什么我在 19 年就开始说"脱殖", 没错,就是因为 IK 的事。我个人的文风是喜欢把一些长语、长词缩短,废话少说,能精简就精简,所以我把殖民主义 这四字就缩写成一个"殖"字来代替。当然这也不是没有先例,比如我们常说的"反帝",帝是指帝国主义 imperialism。中文的一个普遍趋势就是能简化的时候就简化,增加每一个字的信息量,当然其他语言也是如此的,使 语言用起来更方便、更有效率。

虽然脱殖的英文对照 decolonization 很简洁很精确,但殖人不是。我之前也和网友讨论,怎么样用一个单词对标殖人,有网友说可以用 colonizee,但这个词在英文里面其实不算常见词,而且在早先的使用中一般特指非洲人,指 house slave 之类的意思。所以我当时并没有采用。我个人还是觉得用 colonized people 或者 mentally colonized people (因为现在物理殖民的时代基本快结束了,剩下的主要还是精神和文化上的殖民,也就是新殖民主义 neocolonialism)来描述,更准确。所以殖人的意思,大家看到这里应该已经明白了,就是被殖民了的人。放到当下 这个语境,就是思想上被殖民了的人。

有一点可能大家已经注意到了,我时常被打上"爱国"的标签。这其实是因为那些扣这个标签给我的人,一则不 愿意了解我,二则它词汇匮乏,三则它找不到反对我"脱殖"立场的办法,只能用"爱国"这样在当下有点被污名化 了的词来攻击我。但如果你关注我很久了,或者你去翻我所有的微博,你会发现,我从来不是以"爱国"来标榜自己 的,我经常抨击"殖人",也不是为了把这个词指代给"恨国者"。虽然两者之间可能会有一些重叠,但出发点不同, 这一点还是该说清楚的。

如果你翻遍我两千多条微博,你会发现我所有创作的立足点主要是两个,一个是反殖民主义,一个是反歧视。

这两点其实是紧密相连的,殖民的一个主要原因就是种族区别,同时殖民这一过程也带来更强的种族主义。这也 解释了为什么殖人 colonized people 往往会是自恨的 self-loathing,被殖得越深的人越会相信诸如"白人就是比黄 人高贵"之类的种族主义论调。所以脱殖和反歧视,也是一对分割不开的概念。

那有人可能会问,殖人这个概念,有具体的例子吗?具体的例子其实很多,我随便举一点:

1) 比如渴望回到 British colony 状态的香港人。

2)比如各种 X 独支持者。因为这个归根结底继承了 partition of China "瓜分中国"这么一个理念,通过让中国四分五裂再安排代理人政府,来达到一个列强殖民中国的目的。

3) river elegy, 认为欧美文明优于中国文明。

4) 人种论者,认为白人高贵,国人低劣。

5) "国民性"论者,同上。

6) 各种各样的精神 X 国人,各种想要 run 或者 remake 到某国的人,张嘴闭嘴"支"来"支"去的人。

7) "子宫道德"教,认为需要找白男改善基因,这当然本质上是人种论。

8) 认为殖民带来了"先进技术"所以被殖民地需要一直被殖民下去的人。

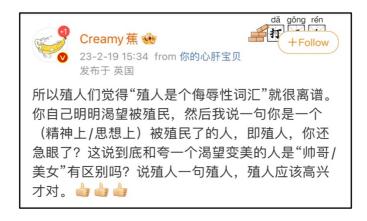
9) 认为"黄祸脸"就是中国人真正模样的人。

10) 认为"国外的一切都是更好的","中国的一切都是更差"的人。

诸如此类,不一而足。

所以大家可能会发现,其实殖民余毒存在于社会里的角角落落,仍然被殖民的人也不少。古墓派公知是殖人,喜 欢人肉网友的神蛆是殖人,白男崇拜的女拳是殖人,等等,其实大家早都看在眼里,只是可能以前缺少一个精确又简 短的词来概括这些人。这也解释了为什么"殖人"这个词出现短短的时间就会流传开,因为其实是填补了这一块的空 白。

最后我想说说为什么殖人不是对同胞的侮辱。你就想想你在英文里说 you're colonized 会不会是侮辱?不会。 其实在英文语境里我们经常也可以看到各种给自己民族 decolonize 的材料,比如夏威夷土著反抗美国,比如印第安人 要 decolonize thanksgiving。这些事情的第一步就是指出一个人或者一件事是被殖了 colonized。归根结底,"殖" 这个字是殖民主义的意思,本身是中性的。如果你被说是"殖人"colonized people,你觉得你受到了冒犯,在我看 来,这更像是你恼羞成怒,被人说中了。更搞笑者,说"殖人这个词白人都不敢对你说,你却敢对你同胞说",废话, 白人殖民侵略了中国,白人对中国人说 you are colonized (by us)这当然是一种冒犯甚至侮辱。但我作为同胞,为 什么没有权利指出中国近代史半封建本殖民地的事实?为什么没有资格指出殖民遗毒流传至今?为什么没有资格点明 有的人受到了殖民主义的影响?为什么?因为你觉得白人不能说,我黄种人也不能说是吧?这也挺殖的。



(@Creamy Jiao accused those targeted by the label of feeling insulted in a mocking tone.)

In terms of mass communication strategies, firstly, like many Internet buzzwords, this phrase has the characteristics of simple expression and easy understanding, so it has strong one- sidedness when used as a label to refer to others. The difference is that the phrase also has a certain academic packaging. It comes from the narrative of the elite intellectuals, and after academic packaging, it is disguised as a seemingly "rational" expression. And this superficial "rationality" attracts more people to default to its justification in the process of using this phrase, and lose their critical awareness.

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荞麦橙子茶 💁 💀
                        十关注
   22-5-8 19:22 来自 Samsung Galaxy S8+
   发布于 陕西
今天来教大家写一下殖八股:
"过度/高压/一刀切"——说不出政策哪里不对但就是想
说两句的针毡时弊场合可用
"自由/民主/爱"——被问解决办法但其实想不出办法的
时候可用
"痛苦/想死/麻木"——渲染情绪必用词汇,可配合省略
号使用,并在句段结尾以称北欧或阿美莉卡爹妈为结束
"辣脆/你支/等国人"——当有人与你意见不和且粉丝数
不如你时可直接使用
那么接下来我们带入殖人身份使用这些词汇来练习一
下:
今天吃撑了,很难受,看到聚餐的其他人都很快乐,我
只觉得痛苦得想死。就想问一下光盘这种一刀切政策是
什么吃饭爱好者提出来的。高压执行导致我不得不吃
撑,节约大于一切的做法是正确的吗?春耕很辛苦我就
必须吃完吗? 这种过度俭省到底填了谁的金库? 我已经
撑得麻木了,因为在你国我没有自由吃或饿死的权利,
我捧着肚子真的不知道刚刚问我要不要加菜的人和辣脆
比谁更恶毒。算了,撑死我吧,正好下辈子让北欧妈妈
接我回家。
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(A blogger defined the specific expression style of "colonized people" as "猶八股")

In fact, it is precisely because of the anonymity among the users on the network platform that people will use the tagged words without thinking to put the label on a group of abstract hostile targets. Academic words, which are inherently neutral and have complex meanings, are degraded to be one-sided and flat on mass social media platforms.

So, for this specific set of strategies, what we do is to **tag their tag**: posting reflective content under the hashtag #colonized people# and other relevant tags. This method mainly considers two problems. One is the validity of Tag. Actually, the Weibo platform has launched a certain degree of supervision measures to limit the using of some terms related to ultra-nationalism sentiment. For example, the hashtag #<u>ad</u>人大赏# has been banned, but other variations such as #<u>mainfad</u>; #

therefore benefits the platform as well. In this situation, our method is aimed at Tags that are still valid, using such hashtags which easily stir up nationalist sentiment, publishing content that really conveys what we think under this kind of guise, that is, reflections on online ultra-nationalism.



(Some other related hashtags which are still valid)

The second problem to be considered is the style of the posted content. As such terms are popular with rational packaging, we will also use rational packaging to post a rational analysis of the emotional traps behind those words, taking some Kols who have always been overusing those words as examples to reveal the fact that academic terms are used as stigmatized labels.

More specifically, the plan is to publish a short reflection within 140 characters each day, pointing out, for example, the ultranationalism aspects of a particular Kol's post and showing what the proper rational expression should be; Each week, we will publish a long reflection of within 1,000 words, which is usually about the analysis of a specific event that has caused the upsurge of ultra-nationalist sentiment. Those posts will analyze the reasonable and unreasonable part of the transmission and discussion process of the event, and reconstruct the process of stirring up public sentiment. Considering the characteristics of Weibo platform suitable for short text communication and the tendency of Weibo users to prefer short reading, long text reflection should also be limited to 1000 words, so as not to consume the audience's patience and affect the communication effect.

The most intuitive way to measure **the effectiveness of Method One** is to look at the number of views, reposts and likes, and to judge the audience's attitude (positive or negative) towards the content of the post from their comments. We will also immediately adjust the content planning based on the audience's feedback, extract the popular content for element analysis, and imitate similar expressions in future releases. But it's always important to note that, our goal is not to set up another opposition, but as a kind of neutralization to alleviate the radical degree of the current network expression, so although we adopt a similar approach to the other side, the rationality of the content is our unmovable bottom line.

This strategy is to deliver content by topic, so its target audience is a broad, fragmented coverage of those who are used to using hashtags, as well as Weibo users who are not using, but already know something about it, to achieve a more subtle but large-scale impact. The next two approaches are more specific to groups with different characteristics.

#### Method Two: Building New Bots

The second method of our campaign is to gather the power of ordinary users on Weibo by setting up new accounts in the form of "bot".

The original bot account is an automatic time announcing robot [@big\_ben\_clock] on Twitter, posting absurd content (such as a parody of Big Ben ringing the bell) and other performance art. After this account became popular on Twitter, many individuals and institutions, driven by traffic, started to follow suit and develop bot accounts. The vast majority of local bot accounts on the Chinese internet nowadays are supported by commercial institutions and directly run by real people, and have developed a fan contribution mechanism based on it. Each bot has its own criteria for screening and posting fan contributions in order to form its own regular audience. For example, the ultra-nationalism bot would post political and nationalistic content. This mechanism is highly interactive and therefore resulted in a very sticky fan base. But where the Ultra-nationalism Bot differs from other bots is that it has created a group identification among ordinary users of Weibo, and that is based on opposition to another group of people, which is why we defined it as "ultra". The representative accounts are @利維坦

bot<sup>9</sup> and @紅磚畫手速遞 bot<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, we plan to create one or more new bots, drawing on the experience of these existing ultra-nationalism bots on the platform, to dissipate the online extreme political sentiments and disputes caused by these ultra-nationalists.



(By 22.04.2023, @利維坦 bot 五號機 and @紅磚畫手速遞 bot respectively had over 20,000 and 5,000 followers.)

Since the new account has no traffic base, the goal of the first phase of operation is to **direct traffic** to the new bot. To cause confusion and thus take advantage of the most famous bot's visibility, the specific approach we will take include: 1. naming the new Bot similar to @利維坦 bot 五號機, such as @利維坦 bot 六號機, or@利維坦 bot (清醒 版), or @真的利維坦 bot, etc.; 2. using the same profile as @利維坦 bot 五號機. In This way, anyone searching for [利維坦 bot] is likely to click into our account. In addition, our bot will also post 1 to 3 pieces of content per day under tags related to #殖人# as mentioned above, to increase the exposure of our account on the platform square.

The measure of **the effectiveness in phase one** is the number of followers. Once the bot has accumulated around 500 followers, we will move to the second phase of operation, which primarily interacts with them through the fan contribution pattern. We will also consider the number of likes, comments and reposts under each post to ensure that the majority of our followers are natural users rather than zombie accounts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> 利維坦 bot had been banned from the platform for breaking the Weibo community conventions, and is now available with the new account @利維坦 bot 五號機 (https://weibo.com/u/5715608920).

<sup>10</sup> https://weibo.com/u/6201197209

In terms of selecting content, our bot will post contributions that are specific to the content of @利維坦 Bot. According to our research, followers of @利維坦 Bot usually call themselves "Pinker" (品客), showing position against so-called "colonized people"(殖人), and mostly represent them in a derogatory and mocking narrative. There are mainly three types of fan contributions posted by @利維坦 Bot:

1. Content related to red elements. Contributors share their visits to political memorials or martyrs' cemeteries, or share quotations from Mao, as well as the national flag and party emblem to show their identity;



(Fan contributions released by @利維坦 bot 五號機.)

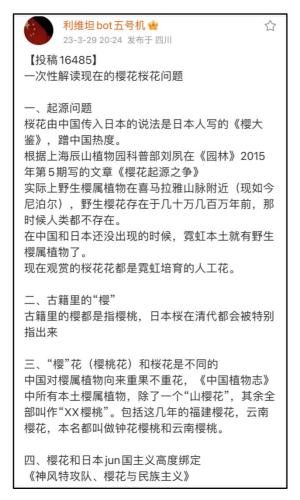
2.Judgements on social affairs. Putting non-political social issues, and even personal daily life on trial for nationalism. A recently debated case is about combining the cherry blossoms with Japanese militarism, thus criticizing Wuhan, Wuxi and other places for planting and publicizing this flower;



(The contributors of @ 利維坦 bot 五號機 regard the cherry blossom as a symbol of the Japanese nation, and denounce the promotion by some official media.)



(One contributor of @*利維坦* bot *五號機* expressed a more neutral view of cherry blossom, but received many opposing comments and eventually opted out of the platform.)



(A contributor of @ 利維坦 bot 五號機 explained the association of cherry blossoms with Japanese nation and militarism through a textual examination.) 3. Posting conflicts between contributors and dissidents to arouse sympathy within the group, thus to deepen exclusionary sentiments. Weibo has been offering the 'fans-only' function since 2019, which means that when posting, users can choose to have the content visible only to their followers. It prevented some sensitive or controversial posts from being seen by non-followers, limiting the discussion within the established group of people and deepening their sense of group identification.



(A follower of @ 利維坦 bot 五號機 contributed experience of being cyber-violated, and other followers showed their support in the comments section."高柱" means the contributor "稿主".)

In response to stigmatizing mockery and nationalistic narrative of daily life, our bot will try to clear up some misconceptions through daily Q&A posts. For example, if a fan contributes questions about "what is colonized people" or " whether sakura is a symbol of militarism", we will post the contribution with a basic explanation and encourage other users to supplement and discuss rationally in the comments section. If a fan contributes about conflicts with the ultra-nationalists, we will direct people to give suggestions on how to refute their points of view rather than meaningless quarrels.

In addition, we have also observed that 利維坦 bot has launched some polling activities, such as voting for "joke of colonized people". The polling format is highly interactive and its content further reinforced labeling and stigmatization. In contrast, our bot will regularly launch polls such as "Pick the five labels that are most biased", to emphasize the existence of bias and increase engagement.

合 仅粉丝可见	利维坦bot五号机 ☆ 23-3-3120:39 已编辑
利维坦 bot 五号机 23-3-30 19:46 已编辑 发布于 江西	发布于江西 【投稿16596】 第一季度殖左笑话大赏,票选出你心目中的最佳!
【2023年第一季殖左笑话大赏征集】	单选,八进二
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季度赛将采取八进二的形式,每季度前两名会参加 年度决赛。还有几个空余名额将在评论区征集,以 点赞数(重复的话取最高)为依据,数量够了之后	⑧你不是推上那个二逼吗.jpg 407
会在周末开一个为期48h的投票 🔞	3186人参与 投票已结束 @利维坦 bot 五号机 创建

(@利維坦 bot 五號機 launched a public poll after a call for content within its follower base.)

Furthermore, some contributions posted by @利維坦 bot are Memes, spreading outward on a teasing way. The comics posted by @紅磚畫手速遞 bot are basically the same approach. Then Our bot will also post memes and comics besides text, but the content will be designed to against labeling and over-politicization. At the same time, we will selectively comment on social hot spots, especially those that have been over-nationalised, and encourage our followers to post and comment with these hot tags by quoting our textual views, memes and comics to promote rational thinking.



(Some of memes released by @利維坦 bot 五號機 from contributions.)



(Comics and nationalist painter posted by @紅磚畫手速遞 bot, also from contributions.)



(Samples of meme that our bot are going to release.)

The positive polls, memes and comics mentioned above will be designed and produced by ourselves at the beginning, as a demonstration and guidance. After arousing fans' enthusiasm for creating, these and other activities will operate on a consistent basis by accepting fan contributions. We will measure **the effectiveness in phase two** of bot operation by the number of daily contributions the bot receives, in which creative ones, such as memes, will prove that the content we post is inspiring and impactful.

The overall effectiveness of Method two will be measured by follower stickiness and public attention received by the new bot, whether discussion of followers is rational and diverse, and the impact on the ultra-nationalism bot. We will regularly 1.count the growth of our new account's followers, as well as the amount of fan contributions and interactions (comments, likes, and reposts); 2.assess the rationality of discussion through the specific content of contributions, comments and reposts; 3. observe whether posts of @利維坦 Bot and @紅磚畫手速遞 bot engage with us, for example, by raising objections or arguments to our posted content.

### Method Three: Counterattack Agglomeration Effect

We draw inspiration for our campaign from the methods of agglomeration effect commonly caused by ultra-nationalists to achieve control of public opinion in dissemination.

In response to current issues, the Weibo ultra-nationalists have taken the approach of

grouping together to express similar opinions, resulting in a large and rapid spread of biased views. Our campaign will be based on Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's "The spiral of silence" hypothesis. She argues that public opinion is not formed as a result of "rational discussion" by the public, but the product of the irrational process that the pressure of "opinion climate" acts on people's fear of isolation and forces people to take the convergence action on the "dominant opinion". Mass media has a great influence on people's environmental cognition. One of the important theoretical premises of the "spiral of silence" is the "individual's" fear of social isolation, and the convergence of "majority" or "dominant" opinions generated by this "fear".<sup>11</sup>

In the context of the social media platform Weibo, this is achieved through the "resonance effect" of reporting on posts with similar content, the "cumulative effect" of the persistence and repetition of the message, and the "Omnipresent Effect" of the breadth of reach.<sup>12</sup>The campaign will be designed to address the above features of the Weibo platform.

Firstly, our campaign will refer to the common Weibo tactic of @multiple bloggers forward the same content in large numbers to create the effect of taking over the page, thus showing the power of the group and using the herd mentality to increase credibility and recognition. The campaign will also try to contact rational patriotic users to confront public opinion, using the quick, easy and convenient technical operation of copying and forwarding to achieve a rapid spread of text and images in a short period of time. In response to the fact that herd mentality arises mainly due to cognitive dissonance and fear of isolation, the campaign will try to generate a pluralistic trend of opinion, where people can balance the dissonance by switching groups rather than herding.

The specific operation is that we will counter the moment when a hot topic triggers a mass forward by extremist nationalists, preventing them from occupying the Weibo page and creating a trend of public opinion. By contacting rational patriotic users and hiring waterarmy, we will control public opinion through the cumulative and omnipresent effect of short one-sentence comments and mass forward of the same repeated content.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The spiral of silence, a theory of public opinion," *Journal of communication* 24.2 (1974): 43-51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Zhang Xunshuo, "A study of the application of relevant principles of communication in times of crisis," *SCIENCE* · *ECONOMY* · *SOCIETY* 4 (2004): 93-94.



(Posts being forward by ultra-nationalist bloggers)

(Our campaign model)

Secondly, focusing comments on the same hot topic at the same time, thus quickly creating a wave of public opinion in a short period of time; as well as providing evidence from different perspectives to complement each other, forming a complete logical chain of evidence is an effective way of dissemination. This method is used by extreme nationalists to whitewash comments on related topics from a seemingly radical and one-sided image to a rational and comprehensive trend of public opinion. Our campaign will take a relative approach to creating a rational and patriotic public opinion.

The specific operation is contacting rational patriotic users and pairing them up with active KOLs in groups for targeted confrontation when a hot topic triggers extremist nationalists to focus their comments on shaping public opinion from multiple angles. As the stance and comments of a well-known KOL are often personally oriented, the group will focus on tailoring counter-posts based on their statements and follow up immediately after their original posting to create a targeted combat effect. At the same time, the team will check the direction of public opinion on the Weibo platform, focusing on communities and bloggers where hot discussions are taking place, and paying attention to the consistency and rationality of the logic of the different battle zones.

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#### (Ultranationalist bloggers on the topic of the wandering Earth)



(Our campaign model)

Thirdly, Weibo verified certification is a proof of identity and status, usually the fans in more than 500 thousand bloggers called "Big Verified." It requires the number of fans, followers and the certain level of friends when each other fans. Most of the big Vs are celebrities with a certain level of popularity. Their Weibo account is always followed by a large number of followers and has thus become the centre of public discussion. Actions such as forwarding and commenting by big Vs spawn new hot topics, which sometimes guide the discourse and conversation on the platform. However, as it is connected with the chain of profits, there are many chaotic phenomena.

Most of the ultra-ethnic bloggers are Internet celebrities with a large number of fans. Along with the official certification of Weibo platform and eye-catching soaring data honor, viewers are easy to create a sense of trust, forming a "star effect". The rapid spread of information in a short period of time requires a certain impetus, which is associated with the secondary communication process exemplified by "opinion leaders" such as "Big Verified."

The theory of "Two-Step Flow of Communication" is an important idea put forward by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz in the mid-1990s, who pointed out that the process of information dissemination is a secondary process of communication from the mass media to the opinion leaders and then to the followers. As the central concept of this theory, the "opinion leader" has a certain appeal among the public.<sup>13</sup> In the Weibo platform, once some information is released, the KOLs will become several small secondary communication centres, in order to promote the dissemination of online information from point to large areas.<sup>14</sup>

A noteworthy phenomenon is that the identity of similar bloggers is often vague, such as "funny humor blogger", "original author of long articles", "water ecology expert", "military blogger", and other vague titles that have nothing to do with nationalism. This kind of digital masquerading makes it easy for similar KOLs to pass the censorship and makes viewers relax their vigilance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld Paul Felix, *Personal Influence, The part played by people in the flow of mass communications* (Horowitz: Transaction publishers, 1964).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Song Wenzhong, "Analysis of communication principles of online fake news," *Western Radio and Television* 5 (2018):35.



("Two-Step Flow of Communication" model) (Extreme nationalist "Big Verified")

We will take reference from the "Two-Step Flow of Communication" theory and look for suitable rational and patriotic "Big Verified" on Weibo, gain their trust through private messages as well as by joining their fan groups, and invite them to participate in our campaign. As similar bloggers also form related communities, for example, a blogger will often have friends who follow each other with similar value orientation, and when linked to a group, a cluster of opinion leaders will be formed, thus increasing the effectiveness of our campaign.



(Our campaign model)

Fourthly, Ultra-nationalists often use the practice of bloggers commenting on each other, to create a "Character set" together, and then banning those who do not support their comments, similar to vouching for the reliability of each other's statements, to increase the effectiveness of Two-Step Flow of Communication.



(Comment on each other)

#### (Ban objector)

Our campaign will take a similar approach to confrontation. Exposing the underlying purpose of their profit-oriented lead generation and persona creation, and the nature of the company's operations behind it. Using online history research and other methods to expose the false personas of ultra-nationalists and their two-tier treatment methods, as well as actively building the image of the rational patriotic groups.



(Ultranationalist Kols sell advertising)

A case of self-exposure by an ultranationalist blogger:



(Weibo@ 那個丸丸; self-exposure blogger@ 巴普洛夫實驗)

The effectiveness of Method 3 is measured by observing whether the majority of Weibo users' opinions are shifting. Firstly, whether the diversity of opinion created by copying and forwarding is actually changing the opinion orientation of the majority who are in the neutral swing position. Specifically, we need to observe the number of users who join the likes and forward as well as the orientation of the comments underneath,

so as to avoid the dichotomy from one brainwashing herd to another. Our goal is to see rational commentary from a variety of perspectives, and we will contact forwarding bloggers and use water armies to steer opinion in the diverse direction we want.

Secondly, the promotion of rational patriotism from different perspectives requires observation of the soundness and validity of the evidence and logic. We will contact the big Vs for discussion and organise the timing of posts and the coherence and complementarity of content, to avoid the one-sided opinion-led implication of too much elaboration from one angle or the neglect of public opinion from less elaboration at one level. Actively observe the number of clicks, forward, likes and replies immediately after a post is made, and focus on posts that have received particularly high levels of attention and those that have generated a lot of controversy, adopting a strategy of expanding publicity and adjusting content.

Thirdly, the attention of rational patriotic big Vs is an important measurement point for the effectiveness of the campaign. We need to observe whether the feedback is positive within a certain period of time after the post is sent out, and pay attention to the historical research and long-term monitoring of the quality of followers of the selected big Vs. Fourthly, we need to observe whether the unmasking of the persona of the opinion leader of the ultra-nationalist views triggered a decrease in the number of followers, a decrease in the popularity of their post, questionable comments from neutral Weibo users, and whether it brought about trust and attention from Weibo users to our campaign.

### **IV. Campaign Limitation**

As mentioned earlier, Internet ultra-nationalism on the Weibo platform has been accelerated by the economic demand of the traffic market and the tacit approval of the government's patriotic political discourse. We have researched and statistically discovered the traffic cashing behavior of extreme patriotic bloggers: the vast majority of extreme patriotic bloggers do not fully agree with their own words, but rather focus on follower interaction and data traffic growth triggered by extreme statements. On the other hand, in China's particular context, the national government's emphasis on patriotism has led it to acknowledge and even praise extreme nationalist events like the "DiBa Expedition". This in effect strengthens the discourse of extreme patriotic bloggers and sets off another wave of extreme democratic sentiment on the Internet.

With China's tightening of online surveillance and censorship, Weibo, as the largest public issue platform in mainland China, has undoubtedly become an important target for online speech regulation. It is worth noting that Weibo's speech regulation is aimed more at "foreign forces" than extreme nationalist sentiment. Only when extreme patriotic bloggers' words have a very bad impact will Weibo regulators deal with requests from rational netizens to report them. (For example, @God\_Eagle\_5zn was once banned for three months after his words insulted a woman who lost her family member in Wuhan during the Covid-19 epidemic outbreak, sparking strong opposition from netizens.) Weibo is much more generous in reviewing this type of speech compared to pornography and offshore content.

Of course, due to the strong influence and untouchability of the market and government, this campaign will not confront the market and government head-on, but will be directed at ordinary Weibo users. However, we also have to consider the limitation of this campaign, that is, the effectiveness of this campaign will be weakened under the environment of national surveillance and censorship, and the restrictions of Weibo's existing regulation and operation. In addition, building a new bot is an important method, and the operating funds and management personnel required for it need to be further refined during the project implementation process. But ideally, we still hope that this campaign can bring more rationality to the Internet speech environment and minimize the negative impact of Internet ultra-nationalism.

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