Dynamics of Image Meme: Creation, contention, and control on the Chinese Internet

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Image meme, a visual genre of mimicry and imitation, has emerged as a significant part of digital culture. Of the many characters of internet image meme, one of the most important but yet least understood and theorized is its contested and contentious one. To advance the understanding, this subproject explores internet image meme as a site of everyday contestation and resistance in repressive regimes. It takes the internet image meme on the Chinese internet as an example and investigates RQs as: *what kind of image memes has been created and distributed, through which digital platforms, with what meaning and discourse, and against which mechanism of control and censorship.*

The study draws its theoretical framework from James Scott and take internet image memes as a “hidden transcript” – the *offstage*, *low-profile but powerful* forms of political expression and struggle on the Chinese internet – as internet image meme has grown into a key, creative means by which Chinese people not only engage in content creation and distribution of politically sensitive topics, but also evade the censorship to spoof or even criticize the authorities. It employs ethnography in virtual worlds and content and discourse analysis and contributes to a nuanced picture of (co-)production, diffusion, and (re-)interpretation of images of conflict in repressive regimes.