An APT Trojans Detection Method for Cloud Computing Based on Memory Analysis and FCM

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Abstract—With memory information as characteristic, a classified method to detect APT (Advanced Persistent Threat) Trojans in cloud computing is proposed in this paper. Memory analysis and fuzzy C-means (FCM) algorithm based on the optimized initial cluster centers detects the similarity of the APT Trojans. Without influence normal operation of virtual machine in cloud, the classifier can determine whether it is malware or not. The method can overcome the shortage of feature scanning technology which could not recognize unknown Trojans, and could significantly improve the detection speed since it does not need to unpack, decrypt, and other complex operations. Experiment results show that the detection method has good accuracy, so there is a certain practical value.

 ${\it Keywords-cloud\ computing;\ APT\ Trojans;\ memory\ analysis;} FCM$

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cloud computing based on the development of virtualization technology and high-speed network is regarded as the important revolution of the development of the Internet era in the future. However, with the landing of the cloud computing, the security issues faced by people in the internet become more and more serious. Hackers could carry out professional APT(Advanced Persistent Threat) attacks for cloud computing in order to get the core confidential data. APT attack is a computer crime which is the information theft or destruction for country or major commercial interests. And they have caused real damage for cloud computing, such as the attack for Sony. APT Trojans are the important tools for these crimes. They could hide and spread themselves in cloud computing.

Generally, Trojans for APT attacks cannot spread widely, which means that they are still unknown for antivirus and intrusion detection system (IDS) products in cloud computing [1]. Using Zero-Day vulnerabilities or valid digital signatures, Trojans can easily escape from the detecting of security software [2]. The IDS has the capability of automatically detecting abnormal traffic in a specified network, but for some special Trojans, it is almost incapable. And APT Trojans usually have the mechanism to check the working of security software and evade the detection of security software. Furthermore, APT Trojans usually use

encryption, DLL hiding, http disguising techniques. So it is difficult for existing methods to detect unknown APT Trojans in cloud computing.

Memory forensics analysis is the forensic analysis of computer's memory dump. Its primary application is investigation of advanced computer attacks, which are stealthy enough to avoid leaving data on the computer's hard driver. Many researchers have developed techniques for extracting invalid information [3-4], such as registry command lines [5] and registry keys and values [6-8]. And with the development of memory forensics, it is possible to use this technique to detect Trojans [9].

In this paper we give a new APT Trojans detection method for cloud computing based on the memory analysis and fuzzy C-means (FCM). This method is following: firstly acquire the memory of cloud computing, then obtain the virtual machine memory by memory analysis; secondly analyze the virtual memory and select the important information of the running program as the feature, then cluster information through data mining and obtain the classifier for unknown Trojans; finally use the classifier to detect the unknown program to determine whether it is malware.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents our APT Trojans detection method in cloud computing based on the memory analysis and FCM. Section 3 shows empirical results of our method on some datasets. Finally, Section 4 presents our conclusions.

II. DETECTION BASED ON MEMORY ANALYSIS AND FCM

At present, VMware, XEN and KVM are the more popular virtual machine platform. Based on the platform all kinds of cloud environment can be built. The key of the APT Trojans detection in cloud computing is the Trojans detection of virtual machine in cloud computing. Here, we take the KVM virtual machine platform as an example to introduce our Trojans detection method. This method can also be applied to other mainstream virtual machine platform under necessary adjustment. The structure of detection method is shown in Figure 1. The method is composed of three parts: memory analysis, construction of classifier, and Trojan detection. The principle is following: Memory analysis modular is used to analyze the memory image from the cloud and obtain the training set for the Trojans detection;



Construction of classifier modular is used to extract feature information from the training set and store the data in the database, and it could use the FCM algorithm to cluster analysis for the feature of the training set; the Trojan detection modular is used to classify the unknown programs and determine whether it is the malware.

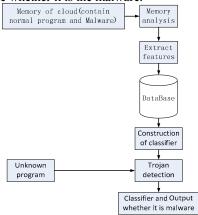


Figure 1. Structure of detection model

A. Memory analysis of KVM

The whole framework of memory analysis in a KVM environment is consisted by five phases: host machine information capture, virtual machine detection, VMCS data structure validation, virtual machine memory acquisition and virtual machine memory analysis. In [10], the first step to the fourth step has been given. Here, we mainly focus on the extraction of information in virtual machine. Taking the windows system for example, we present the processes of extracting prerequisite factors from the memory image, such as: process information, DLL loading information for each process, the API for each process, and so on.

Firstly we give the method for extracting the process information. Extraction of process information is based on the analysis method of KPCR structure. It could be divided into the following steps: 1) Acquisition of KPCR structure; 2) Acquisition the address of CR3 register; 3) Address translation; 4) search of kernel variable. After memory mapping technology, the base address of system process is obtained and the KPROCESS structure of each process is mapped. The running process can be obtained by traversing the double-linked list.

	Offset (P)	Name	PID	PPID	PDB	Time created		Time exited
2	0×00000000000201#da0	NIMMODD EVE	2260	1492				
- 4	0x000000000002011440	XLLivelin.exe	1820	504	0x21b82000	2015-05-29 13:45:11	UTC+0000	2015-05-29 13:45:12 2015-06-01 00:36:41
	0x000000000002881768	XLL1veIID.exe	1532	384	0x24d64000	2015-06-01 00:36:40	UTC+0000	2015-06-01 00:36:41
	0x00000000002887020							
-	0x00000000002897338	TEXPLORE . EXE	2032	332	0x23d5d000	2015-06-04 09:44:21	UTC+0000	2015-06-10 07:37:46
8	0x0000000000289e630	SGTool, exe	4020	2260	0x2eb34000	2015-06-12 01:30:13	UTC+0000	
	0x00000000028d7cd0	XLLiveUD.exe	2264	384	0x14a16000	2015-06-10 07:38:02	UTC+0000	2015-06-10 07:38:09
10	0x00000000028d9020	se wdto.exe	3876	196	0x0c148000	2015-05-29 13:43:3	UTC+0000	2015-05-29 13:43:38
11	0x000000000290c020	ThunderPlatform	228	504	0x08a2c000	2015-06-01 00:34:03	3 UTC+0000	
12	0x0000000002919b98	sychost.exe	2184	724	0x2ed6d000	2015-05-29 13:42:02	UTC+0000	
13	0x00000000002ce2c08				0x15f94000	2015-05-27 14:09:31	UTC+0000	
14	0x0000000002ce3990	matlabserver.ex	1336	724	0x20705000	2015-05-27 14:10:10	UTC+0000	
16	0x00000000002cefc70			2388	0x06506000	2015-05-29 13:42:05	UTC+0000	
	0x0000000002d20128	carss.exe		580	0x14f5f000	2015-05-27 14:09:3	7 UTC+0000	
17	0x0000000002d43020	SogouCloud.exe	3888	2260	0x09fdd000	2015-06-12 01:25:23	UTC+0000	
18	0x0000000002d5f6f0	svchost.exe	1208			2015-05-27 14:09:43		
1.5	0x00000000002d84758 0x000000000002e7d390	xmp.exe	368	1744	0x24782000	2015-05-27 14:09:5!	UTC+0000	
20	0x00000000002e7d390	ZhuDongFangYu.e	1440	724	0x186f2000	2015-05-27 14:09:42	UTC+0000	
21	0x00000000002e8f670	explorer.exe	1492	1468	0x1885e000	2015-05-27 14:09:43	3 UTC+0000	
22	0x00000000002e92558 0x000000000002eaac08	svchost.exe	1124	724	0x17554000	2015-05-27 14:09:43	UTC+0000	
23	0x00000000002eaac08	vmacthlp.exe	904	724	0x168f7000	2015-05-27 14:09:39	UTC+0000	
24	0x00000000002ecc8d0	jusched.exe	204	1492	0x1da84000	2015-05-27 14:09:50	UTC+0000	
25	0x00000000002edc7d0	alg.exe	2568	724	0x04717000	2015-05-29 13:42:00	5 UTC+0000	
20	0x0000000002f0e3c0 0x00000000002f17978	ctfmon.exe	152	1492	0x1dc0b000	2015-05-27 14:09:50	UTC+0000	
27	0x00000000002f17978	smss.exe	580	4	0x1398f000	2015-05-27 14:09:3	5 UTC+0000	
20	0x0000000002fd33b0	VMUpgradeHelper	620	724	0x298b1000	2015-05-27 14:10:2	7 UTC+0000	
22	0x0000000000302e488	winlogon.exe	680	580	0x15965000	2015-05-27 14:09:3	7 UTC+0000	
								2015-05-29 13:42:15
	0x00000000030dcda0					2015-05-27 14:09:49		
	0x00000000030deda0		936			2015-05-27 14:09:40		
	0x00000000030eb9b0		212			2015-05-27 14:10:2:		
	0x00000000030f18e8		1904			2015-05-27 14:09:40		
	0x000000000317bda0					2015-05-27 14:09:38		
20	0x0000000003223c10	svchost.exe	1028	724	0x1748d000	2015-05-27 14:09:40	UTC+0000	
27	0x0000000003237020 0x000000000323d848	Thunder.exe	384	1492		2015-06-01 00:36:3		
						2015-05-27 14:10:10		
	0x0000000003263020					2015-05-27 14:10:2		
	0x00000000032719e0					2015-05-29 13:42:0		
	0x000000000327b888		2700			2015-06-12 01:26:0		
	0x00000000032a5900					2015-05-27 14:10:2	UTC+0000	
	0x000000000033b87c0		4		0x00039000			

Figure 2. Process information of system

Secondly we give the method for extracting the DLL loa ding information for process. Normally, when the LoadLibra ry function is called by the process, DLLs are automatically loaded to the double-linked list consisting of LDR_DATA_T ABLE_ENTRY. So DLL loading information for each process could be obtained by traversing the double-linked list poin ted by PEB's InLoadOrderModuleList. The steps are as following:

- Find the address of EPROCESS structure for the process in the memory;
- acquire the corresponding PEB structure through EPROCESS;
- find the _PEB_LDR_DATA through the PEB;
- find the list header LIST_ENTRY loading the DLLs in the PEB LDR DATA;
- obtain the loading DLL through traversing the _LDR_DATA_TABLE_ENTRY structure in LIST_ENTRY.

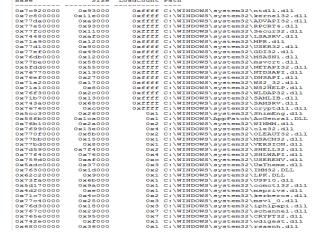


Figure 3. DLL information of some process

Thirdly we give the method for extracting the API for process. The API loaded by the process can be obtained by the analysis of PE file. However the packing and encrypting technologies are used by Trojans to avoid static analysis. Since these, we use the way that obtain the assembly code of loaded process in the memory to deal with these difficulties. The steps are following: a) acquire the assembly code of

process in the memory; b) analyze the code to find the address of import function table; c) obtain the API of process through the structure of table.

API	Process	Address
AssocQueryKeyW	Explorer.EXE	0x010048A2
PathFindFileNameW	Explorer.EXE	0x01005D6F
AssocQueryStringW	Explorer.EXE	0x01021C87
PathParseIconLocationW	Explorer.EXE	0x010236D9
SHRegGetValueW	Explorer.EXE	0x0100655B
StrDupW	Explorer.EXE	0x01008C88
SHRegDuplicateHKey	Explorer.EXE	0x010094CD
AssocCreate	Explorer.EXE	0x01009A2F
StrRChrW	Explorer.EXE	0x01009A3B
StrToIntW	Explorer.EXE	0x01021C87
PathUnquoteSpacesW	Explorer.EXE	0x010236D9

Figure 4. API information of some process

Similarly, we can also obtain the registry information and system path information of process from the memory which would not be shown here.

B. APT Trojans classifier based on FCM

First we will give the feature extracting method of APT Trajans. Similar to most normal program, Trojans also need to call the interface and API to carry on a variety of operations. But they usually call some special API which is few called by normal program to destroy. The special operations include: read or write the specific registry key, information hide, encryption of communication, modify the critical path of the system, inject the hook into the process of the system, and so on. So the detection whether these special APIs are included in the process can be regarded as the features of APT Trojans. Of course since these APIs also are called by the normal programs, it would be low accuracy that only uses APIs to detect the APT Trojans. Compared with the data, the same type of Trojan has a certain similarity in function. Although they often use the technologies of packing and encrypting to hide themselves, the process of the API call for special function is often similar. If an unknown program is similar to the information in the feature database in DLL information, registry information, API information, and system path, it may be a variant of malware.

Above all, we would extract the below information as the feature: called DLL file name and number, called special API function name and number, special register information and system path in process memory. Part of the feature vector is shown in TABLE I.

Category	Feature		
DLL	Kernel32.dll, User32.dll, Shell32.dll,		
	Advapi32.dll, GDI.dll, Imm32.dll, Ole32.dll,		
	Msvert.dll, Comdlg32.dll, Oleaut32.dll,		
	Setupapi.dll, Urlmoon.dll		
API	Accept, AdjustTokenPrivileges,		
	AttachThreadInput, bind, BitBlt,		
	CallNextHookEx, CerOpenSystemStore,		
	CheckRemoteDebuggerPresent, connect,		
	ConnectNamePipe, ControlService,		
	CrypyAcquireContext, EnumProcess,		
	FindResource, GetKeyState		

Kev	HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\Cur
registry	rentVersion\Run, HKCU\Software\Microsoft\
informatio	Windows\CurrentVersion\Run, HKLM\SOFT
n	WARE\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersio
	n\Winlogon\[Shell], HKLM\SOFTWARE\Mic
	rosoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion\Windows
	\[AppInit_DLLs]
System	C:\windows\system32, C:\windows\system32\
path	drivers, C:\windows\system32\dllcache, C:\Do
_	cuments and Settings\Administrator\Applicati
	on Data

TABLE I. FEATURES OF SAMPLES

Then we would give the method of constructing the classifier. In this paper, define the sample set $U=\{U_1,U_2,...,Un\}$, the vector of each sample is $U_i=\{x_{i1},x_{i2},...,x_{im}\}$ (i=1,2,...,n), where x_{im} is the m^{th} feature of sample i. We will use the FCM to classify the sample set. The FCM clustering algorithm was first introduced by Dunn [11] and later was extended by Bezdek [12]. The algorithm is an iterative clustering method that produces an optimal c partition by minimizing the weighted within group sum of squared error objective function J_{FCM}

$$J_{FCM} = \sum_{k=1}^{n} \sum_{i=1}^{c} (y_{ik})^{p} d^{2}(u_{k}, v_{i}),$$

where $y_{ik} \in [0,1]$, c is the number of clusters with $2 \le c \le n$, y_{ik} is the degree of membership of u_k in the i^{th} cluster, p is a weighting exponent on each fuzzy membership, v_i is the prototype of the centre of cluster i, $d^2(u_k, v_i)$ is a distance measure between object u_k and cluster centre v_i . The solution of the object function J_{FCM} can be obtained via an iterative process, which is carried out as follows:

- a) Set values for c, p, and ϵ ;
- b) Initialize the fuzzy partition matrix $Y=[Y_{ik}]$;
- c) Set the loop counter b=0;
- d) Calculate the c cluster centers $\{v_i^{\text{(b)}}\}$ with $Y^{\text{(b)}}$:

$$v_i^{(b)} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{n} (y_{ik}^{(b)})^p u_k}{\sum_{k=1}^{n} (y_{ik}^{(b)})^p};$$

e) Calculate the membership $Y^{(b+1)}$. For k=1 to n, calculate the following: $Ik=\{i|1 \le i \le c, \ dik=\|uk-vi\|=0\}$; for the kth column of the matrix, compute new membership values:

if Ik=
$$\Phi$$
, then $y_{ik}^{(b+1)} = \frac{1}{\sum_{j=1}^{c} \left(\frac{d_{ik}}{d_{jk}}\right)^{\frac{2}{(p-1)}}};$
else $y_{ik}^{(b+1)} = 0$ for all $i \notin I$ and $\sum_{i \in I_k} y_{ik}^{(b+1)} = 1$; next

f) If
$$||y^{(b)} - y^{(b+1)}|| < \mathcal{E}$$
, stop; otherwise, set b=b+1 and go to step d).

Although FCM algorithm has good clustering effect, the deficiency of this algorithm is sensitive to its initial values. In most cases, it is easy to the local optimum for some initial values. So we need to improve the FCM algorithm to avoid this case. We give the following method. The principle is to choose the initial clustering center to make the distance between the initial clustering centers more than the set threshold. Then the algorithm would solve the clustering problem in several feasible regions. It could avoid the case that the algorithm is convergence to local optimum. The choice of initial center is as following:

- a) compute the distance between any two samples and generate the distance matrix D. Set the nearest two samples to one class and take the midpoint of the two samples as the first clustering center.
- b) select the distance threshold a. Use the distance matrix D to find all of the samples whose distance to the first category is greater than a. Set the nearest two samples to one class and take the midpoint of the two samples as the second clustering center.
- c) similarly find all the samples whose distance to the found samples is greater than a. Set the nearest two samples to one class and take the midpoint of the two samples as the clustering center.
- d) repeat c) until C class is found.

The above algorithm can make the clustering center to reasonably distribute in the sample space. It can avoid the excessive concentration and effectively improve independence of the classifications. It could help the FCM to achieve the global clustering effect.

C. Detection of unknown APT Trojans

By clustering the training set, C clustering center is obtained. Let's give the definition for sample similarity. The similarity of U_i , U_j is:

$$D_{U_{i}U_{j}} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{m} \frac{\left| x_{ik} - x_{jk} \right|}{\max(x_{ik}, x_{jk})}}{n}$$

When the similarity of two samples is high, the value of D is near to 1; conversely it is near to 0.

The system could compute the similarity between each detected sample and the clustering center. If the similarity reaches a certain threshold, we could think it belongs to a class and we can know whether it is malware. If the sample is not match to all the clustering, it will be a new clustering center and marked as a failure identification class stored in feature base. For all the unknown class, the system could determine whether it is the Trojan combined with their behavior characteristics, and decide to remain it in the feature base or remove it. In order to maintain the timeliness of the information in the feature base and reduce time consumption, the system need to periodically delete entries in database that the number of clusters is few and no new features for a long time.

III. EXPERIMENT

We would carry on the test on the build inspur server. The server configuration is as following: CPU models: Xeon E5-2620 GHZ 2GHZ*6; Memory capacity: 8G DDR3*2; system: Fedora host operating 4.Fc16.X86 64), KVM virtual machine (qemu-KVM-0.15.1); Install the virtual machine operating system: Windows XP SP3 32-bit, Windows 7 64-bit. There are 200 samples for experiments, which are divided into normal programs and malicious programs. The distribution is shown in TABLE II. The normal programs are selected from the new virtual machine with windows XP or windows 7 in KVM platform. The malicious programs are collected from internet, including Trojans, backdoor procedures, etc.

iternet, merading frejans, eachaeer procedures, etc.				
	Sample	Training	Testing	
	set	set	set	
Normal	100	80	20	
program				
Malicious	100	80	20	
program				
total	200	160	40	

TABLE II. EXPERIMENTAL SAMPLE DATA

The main purpose of the experiment is to verity the classification and recognition of the unknown Trojans and other malicious programs in the virtual machine of the cloud platform. There are four results for the detection, including: 1) the normal program is considered as normal, recorded as NY; 2) the normal program is considered as malicious, recorded as NN; 3) the malicious program is considered as normal, recorded as MY; 4) the malicious program is considered as malicious, recorded as MN. The variable H1 is the probability of correct classification for test sample; the variable H2 is the probability that the normal program is considered as malicious. The formula is as following:

$$H_{1} = \frac{NY + MN}{NY + NN + MY + MN}$$

$$H_{2} = \frac{NN}{NY + NN + MY + MN}$$

The results of the experiment are as following:

category	number	H1	H2
Normal program	20	92.9%	3.7%
Malicious	20	90.1%	4.7%
program			

TABLE III. RESULT OF CLASSIFIER DETECTION

In TABLE III, we can see that the detection method in this paper has high accuracy and low false rate. So it can have good effect in practice.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper, a new detection method for APT Trojans in cloud is present. The method has high accuracy and low false rate for Trojans detection. It could obtain the program information by analyzing the memory of the cloud platform and use the improve FCM algorithm to detect and identify the APT Trojans in cloud. The memory analysis method could extract the DLL information, API information, registry information, system path of system without affecting the virtual machine users. It could effectively deal with the difficulties that packing and encrypting technology challenge to detect. The improved FCM algorithm instead of the traditional feature code are used to classify and detect for the program, which could effectively find unknown Trojan. The method could be used to detect the implanted APT Trojans and reduce their damage and unnecessary losses. It would be a good solution for cloud security.

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