

Personality Grooming: A Special Type of Honey Trap

XING Cheng

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China

SU Chang

Macao University of Science and Technology, Macao SAR, China

Honey trap is a really common type of stratagem which can be seen in many fields such as military, politics, diplomacy, and business. You can easily find many examples of it in the historical books of many different countries. As time went by, because of the changes of human thinking, just relying on the beautiful appearance could not ensure the success of a honey trap. Therefore, there appeared a new type of honey trap called personality grooming. As a matter of fact, the original form of personality grooming appeared a few centuries ago. However, at the very beginning, personality grooming was not directly related to honey trap. It is an interesting feature of honey trap that its forms will change due to the changes of the times. In this process, honey trap and personality grooming gradually integrate, developing a new type of honey trap. Compared with the traditional ones, this type of honey trap is much harder to guard against.

Keywords: personality grooming, honey trap, *In the Name of People*, history, society

Introduction

Honey trap, many people describe it as a kind of really insidious stratagem. Its core ideology is making full use of human's desire. In history, even some great figures still inevitably fell into such a trap. For example, Julius Caesar (102-44 B.C.) once fell into the honey trap of Cleopatra (69-30 B.C.), helping her win the political struggle and become the virtual ruler of Egypt (Abbot, 2019). In ancient China, some military strategists introduced a similar stratagem named using seductive women to corrupt the enemy in a military book named *Thirty-Six Stratagems* (Cheng, 1999). However, the stratagem introduced in *Thirty-Six Stratagems* is not equal to a common honey trap or sex trap. It is a kind of special tactic, making full use of human's desire to confuse the enemy. In this situation, everything that can be used to confuse the enemy can be compared to a beauty or a seductive woman (Xing & Su, 2025).

Compared with the stratagem introduced in *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, personality grooming is not so complex. We can directly describe it as a type of honey trap or sex trap which means the seductive women in this situation are the women that actually exist. The appearance of personality grooming answers two important questions. Will seductive women be created artificially? How to create seductive women artificially? The core of this paper is also the research about these two questions.

XING Cheng, Master, Department of Chinese History and Culture, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China.

SU Chang, Bachelor student, Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Macao University of Science and Technology, Macao SAR, China.

In brief, personality grooming refers to the deliberate shaping and embellishment of an individual's personality traits such as character, cultivation, and cognition for specific purposes. Its essence is a kind of personality pretense. At present, the research about this kind of honey trap is still in the initial stage.

This paper is an in-depth study on personality grooming, including its history, forms, and development. More importantly, through this research, we will understand how this special type of honey trap influences our society.

The Personality Grooming in *In the Name of People*

It is really interesting that the name of personality grooming does not come from military works or political works. It was introduced in a political novel written by Zhou Meisen (1956-), a contemporary Chinese writer (Zhou, 2022). This novel is called *In the Name of People*. The plot about personality grooming in the novel is as follows.

Gao Xiaofeng and her elder sister Gao Xiaoqin came from a poor family, working as protocol hostesses in the company of Zhao Ruilong, a businessman coming from an official's family (Zhou, 2022). In order to win over Gao Yuliang, a senior official of Handong Province (a fictional province in the novel), Zhao took advantage of Gao Yuliang's interest in the history of the Ming Dynasty (1369-1644) of China, planning to carry out personality grooming on Gao Xiaofeng (Zhou, 2022). He arranged for professionals to teach her etiquette, conversation skills, and literary cultivation (Zhou, 2022). He also found an instructor of history from a university to strengthen her study of the history of the Ming Dynasty, enabling her to recite *1587, a Year of No Significance*, a famous historical work about the Ming Dynasty written by Ray Huang (1918-2000) (Zhou, 2022). Through this, Gao Xiaofeng successfully transformed from a poor fisherman's daughter into an elegant woman with rich knowledge of the Ming Dynasty, successfully attracting Gao Yuliang (Zhou, 2022). Eventually, Gao Yuliang divorced his wife Wu Huifen (working as a professor of history) and married Gao Xiaofeng (Zhou, 2022). During Hou Liangping's (a former student of Gao Yuliang, working as an anti-corruption official) last meeting with Gao Yuliang, when Gao Yuliang asked Hou for his impression of Gao Xiaofeng, Hou pointed out that Gao Xiaofeng was someone who had experienced personality grooming and would finally remove her makeup (Zhou, 2022).

According to the plot of this novel, with the help of Gao Xiaofeng, Zhao Ruilong and one of his business partners named Du Bozhong also gained some indecent photos of Gao Yuliang, totally controlling him (Zhou, 2022). In history, this method was widely used during the Cold War (Lewis, 2015). Those indecent photos were always used to threaten the targeted people (Lewis, 2015).

The plot in *In the Name of People* describes the situation of businessmen using honey trap on officials. In reality, there also appeared the situation of officials using honey trap on businessmen (Pang & Zhang, 2004). In a word, in the situations of collusion between officials and businessmen, using honey trap is a really common phenomenon.

According to the theory of some modern Chinese military scientists, using seductive women to corrupt the enemy is just a supplementary means (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). After confusing and weakening the enemy with it successfully, it is still necessary to defeat the enemy on the battlefield (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). We can use this train of thought to explain the basic logic of personality grooming. Personality grooming is also a supplementary means. It can just help those trained women get close to their targets. If they want to totally control the targets, they still need to adopt some other methods. It is the basic logic of personality grooming, such a special type of honey trap.

The related plot in *In the Name of People* vividly describes a complete process of a modern-style honey trap. However, though the concept of personality grooming was introduced by *In the Name of People*, a related example had appeared in a much earlier period.

The Personality Grooming in History

During the Ming Dynasty of China, a special group named Yangzhou skinny horses appeared in the Yangzhou area (today's Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, China) (Wei, 2019). They were the girls who came from poor families. After a series of training, they would be sold to rich men as maid servants or concubines (Wei, 2019). By the way, in a Chinese martial arts film named *Brotherhood of Blades 2* (2017), the female lead named Beizhai was from this group. During the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911), this phenomenon still existed in the Yangzhou area (Wei, 2019).

According to some historical records, the training of these girls included many contents such as etiquette, calligraphy, painting, singing, instrumental performance, embroidery, and so on (Wang, 1981). However, according to the records of some other scholars of that era, this kind of training was not quite professional (Shen & Yang, 2012). The skills of these girls such as instrumental performance, singing, and calligraphy could only support them in completing a short performance (Shen & Yang, 2012). This phenomenon confirms the plot in *In the Name of People*. The girl who experiences personality grooming will finally remove her makeup.

In a word, the training of these girls from poor families can be seen as a kind of original personality grooming. However, this kind of personality grooming was nothing about the honey trap. It was actually a kind of immoral business behavior.

The Forms of Personality Grooming

From the examples introduced before, a previous question has been answered. We can easily draw a conclusion that seductive women can be created artificially. Then, let's discuss another question. How to create seductive women artificially?

Pandering to the targeted people's likes is very important for every kind of honey trap (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). Sometimes, it can be finished by the artificial construction of seductive women. The artificial construction of seductive women is the core idea of personality grooming.

From the examples of *In the Name of People* and Yangzhou skinny horses, the importance of the training of some specific skills is really clear. The training of some specific skills can help these women attract the targeted people. However, this form of personality grooming has an obvious disadvantage. It requires the trainees to have strong talent and learning ability. Otherwise, such a kind of "seductive women" will immediately remove their makeup if the targeted people are real professionals, simply because proficiency in a specific skill cannot be attained through short-term training.

Does it exist some other forms of personality grooming? The answer is yes. These methods should be called the pretense in personality. For example, if a woman pretends to be adoring or obedient to a man, she may let this man fall into her honey trap more easily. Besides, pretending to be ignorant may also let the targeted men's guard down. These are simple psychological tactics. These kinds of psychological tactic can be called covering the dagger with a smile, a stratagem recorded in *Thirty-Six Stratagems*. Its basic usage is as follows. When someone is facing an enemy, firstly, he or she can confuse the enemy with pretended flattery (Cheng, 1999). After gaining the enemy's trust, he or she can move against him in secret (Cheng, 1999). The methods of pretense

in personality introduced before are the situations of females using the stratagem of covering the dagger with a smile.

Here, we need to think about another question. Can the degrees of universities especially famous universities become the tools of personality grooming? It is obvious that in most cases, the answer is yes. It is a kind of modern-style personality grooming. However, this behavior is the trampling of educational fairness. Even worse, when it becomes a large-scale behavior, the higher education system will suffer a major blow.

Interestingly, these forms of personality grooming can be adopted at the same time when carry out a single personality grooming.

Besides, in modern society, with the help of mass media, the image of females in a specific region can be artificially constructed. It is a kind of high-level personality grooming. The contents of this kind of personality grooming such as its motivations and methods are worth being researched in detail.

The Further Analysis of Personality Grooming

As moral people, we may see personality grooming as a despicable plot, but we still have to admit that it is really useful in many different fields. That's why we need to research its forms, methods, and related history.

According to the theory of some modern Chinese military scientists, the stratagem of using seductive women to corrupt the enemy recorded in *Thirty-Six Stratagems* can be seen as a kind of classical strategic deception which may help the military strategists gain victory (Gao & Zhang, 2015). Other forms of honey trap also have this function during the wars.

However, in peacetime, the prevalence of honey traps will greatly do harm to our society, because its essence is a kind of deception. As a matter of fact, no matter in history or in reality, compared with the field of military, honey traps are much more common in some other fields such as diplomacy, political struggle, and commercial warfare.

According to the theory of some modern Chinese political scientists, in official circles, corrupt practices can be simply divided into seven types (Wang, 1990). Two of them (favoritism-based corruption and lust-based corruption) are about sex or the romantic feelings between men and women (Wang, 1990). The plot about Gao Yuliang and Gao Xiaofeng in *In the Name of People* is a story about favoritism-based corruption. In Chinese, this phenomenon is called Quan Se Jiaoyi, translated as trading power for sex. According to an article written by a Ming Dynasty's official named Wang Shih-chen (1526-1590), in the Ming Dynasty, honey trap had become a few senior officials' and senior military officers' method of consolidating political alliances (Huang, 1981). About Wang's contentious statement, many later scholars chose to ignore it (Huang, 1981). As a matter of fact, until today, there are still many arguments about his statement. Compared with ancient times, honey trap is much more common in modern society's official circles and business world. You can easily find many related examples from the records about modern society's corruption cases (Pang & Zhang, 2004; Yang, 2005; 2006; H. J. Li, 2006; H. G. Li, 2009; Compilation Group of *The Series on Legal Education for Combating Corruption and Promoting Integrity*, 2012). This phenomenon shows that the social atmosphere is gradually deteriorating.

Why does it appear personality grooming, such a special type of honey trap? According to some scholars' records about Yangzhou skinny horses, in the Ming Dynasty, some businessmen adopted this method to raise the prices of some girls who were not outstanding in appearance (Shen & Yang, 2012). In modern times, because of the rise of the plastic surgery industry, being outstanding in appearance is no longer the only element that can make sure the success of a honey trap which means the traditional beauty trap is gradually losing its power. That's

why personality grooming is becoming more and more common.

From previous contents, we can summarize that in peacetime, personality grooming has two obvious harms, damaging the trust in human relationships and undermining social fairness, simply because it is a kind of deception. Here, some readers may ask a question. How to defense personality grooming, such a kind of deception? In fact, if you are cautious enough, every kind of honey trap will be totally useless (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). Besides, it is also important to see through the personality grooming or the honey trap. When a person is sensitive about the topic of personality grooming or honey trap, avoiding the main point by talking about something else or even launching verbal attacks on the one who brings up this topic, he or she may probably is just using this sinister method on someone. By the way, the ones who attack this paper are also the ones who are in the habit of using this sinister method.

Conclusion

Personality grooming is a type of special honey trap which also can be seen as a kind of deception. In peacetime, as a kind of deception, its prevalence will undermine the social atmosphere. As moral people who live in an era of relative peace, of course we will not accept this behavior, but it is still necessary for us to research it, including its history, forms, and influences. Only in this way can we guard against being plotted against. Besides, if everyone has the ability to resist this type of honey trap, letting it become useless, those chaos resulting from personality grooming will finally disappear.

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