

# The Research on Beauty Trap and Related Psychological Tactics

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Beauty trap is a kind of traditional stratagem originating from ancient times. This stratagem is a type of strategic deception, making full use of human's desires and weaknesses. No matter whether you are a genius or a fool, you will have the opportunity to fall into a trap, especially if the trap is intended for you. Because of this characteristic, beauty trap was usually seen as a kind of effective non-military method, appearing in the war history of many different countries. With time going by, compared with its original form, this stratagem has greatly changed, developing many new forms. Some of them need to be adopted flexibly, combining with different kinds of psychological tactics. Except the field of military, this stratagem can also be seen in political struggles and commercial warfare. After coming to modern society, the beauty trap does not vanish. It seems that this stratagem will accompany the entire process of humanity, simply because the desires of humans will never disappear.

*Keywords:* beauty trap, stratagem, psychological tactic

## Introduction

When seeing the word beauty trap, most of the readers will think of a man named James Bond. In the movies, this legendary agent of MI6 always needs to face the female spies who want to get close to him. As a matter of fact, letting a beautiful woman get close to the targeted person is a kind of beauty trap which can be commonly seen in historical stories, novels and movies. We'd better describe this stratagem as sex trap. We need to admit that beauty trap is equal to sex trap in most of the situations. However, in war history, sex is not the only element of beauty trap.

According to the theory of some modern military scientists, beauty trap is a kind of strategic deception (Gao & Zhang, 2015). The beauty trap introduced in their theory is a special one called using seductive women to corrupt the enemy. This stratagem is recorded in *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, one of the most famous military works of ancient China (Cheng, 1999). It is a kind of strategic level's beauty trap, making full use of psychological tactics. This kind of beauty trap appeared many times in ancient war history, offering many examples to us. We will introduce two of them in this paper. As a matter of fact, when beauty trap combines with psychological tactics, everything that can disturb the enemy's mind can be called beauty. It can be a sword, a fine horse or some other things. In a word, beauty is just a concept introduced by ancient Chinese people. They wanted to let the readers understand this stratagem more easily. Here, we can summarize that the beauty is not the core of the

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stratagem while the trap is.

However, not each of the beauty traps that appeared in history could be seen as strategic deceptions. Many of them should just be seen as sexual bribery. This kind of beauty trap is really common in history, but it is not the main point of our research. Our research mainly focuses on the beauty traps combining with psychological tactics.

In war history, the stratagem of the beauty trap appeared in many different countries. Because of the different cultural backgrounds, the forms of this stratagem in different countries were also different. This paper is a summative research about this stratagem. We will try to find as many forms of beauty trap as we can. After that, we can analyze them combining with some examples that really happened in war history.

### **An Attractive Woman and a Bait: The Most Common Beauty Trap in War History**

As mentioned before, most of the beauty traps in war history should be called sexual bribery. Why did ancient people adopt the method of sexual bribery? They wanted to wheedle someone of the other side. About this tactic, the most famous example in ancient war history was the love relationship between Cleopatra (69-30 B.C.) and Julius Caesar (102-44 B.C.). With the help of Caesar, Cleopatra finally won in the political struggle with her brother Ptolemy XIII (62-47 B.C.), becoming the virtual ruler of Egypt (Abbot, 2019).

The story of Cleopatra and Caesar was an example of beauty trap's application in the field of politics. During wars, this tactic will be useful when the belligerents are more than two. In the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.), the Numidians became the tempting targets of Carthage and Rome, the two main belligerents of this war. Both of them wanted to gain the elite light cavalry of Numidia. At that time, Numidia was divided into a few kingdoms. The most powerful one is called Masaesyli (Miles, 2016). In order to consolidate the alliance between Carthage and Masaesyli, Hasdrubal Gisco (?-202 B.C.), a general of Carthage let his daughter Sophonisba marry Syphax (?-203 B.C.), the King of Masaesyli (Miles, 2016). After that, Masaesyli became a stalwart ally of Carthage. Hasdrubal successfully won this diplomatic battle with a beauty trap.

The examples of Cleopatra and Hasdrubal showed the basic usage of beauty trap. The beauty trap of this level is the utilization of desires which should not be seen as a kind of psychological tactic. At the level of psychological tactic, the utilization of desires needs to be changed into the utilization of gratefulness. In history, some experienced strategists would take this method to ensure the loyalty of their followers.

A classic example of this psychological tactic also happened during the Second Punic War. When a general of Rome named Scipio Africanus (253-183 B.C.) was warring in Spain, his army once captured a noble maiden of surpassing beauty (Frontinus, 2016). Scipio restored her to her betrothed named Alicius (Frontinus, 2016). At the same time, the gold which the maiden's parents had brought to Scipio as a ransom was given to Alicius as a marriage gift by Scipio (Frontinus, 2016). Overcome by this manifold generosity, the whole tribe of Alicius leagued itself with the government of Rome (Frontinus, 2016). Alexander of Macedon (356-323 B.C.) also experienced a similar event. His army once captured a maiden betrothed to the chief of a neighbouring tribe (Frontinus, 2016). After the maiden was returned to her fiancé, Alexander secured the attachment of the entire tribe (Frontinus, 2016).

These two examples showed the effect of making full use of gratefulness. However, these two examples were accidental because the armies would not always have the opportunity to capture an engaged noble maiden.

Will the gratefulness be created artificially? The answer is yes.

In the war history of ancient China, a famous example of this psychological tactic happened during the war between Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) and the Western Xia Regime (1038-1227). In this process, some nomadic tribes became the middle forces. The chief of the most powerful tribe was called Mu'en (Huang, 1986). Once, a general of the Song army named Chong Shiheng (985-1045) invited Mu'en to attend a private banquet. During the banquet, Chong asked a beautiful maid to pour the drink for his guest. After a while, Chong left the banquet, observing the behavior of Mu'en from outside the door. When Mu'en was whispering with the maid, Chong suddenly entered, making Mu'en very scared (Huang, 1986). After seeing the fear of Mu'en, Chong was really satisfied, knowing that his goal was nearly achieved. Finally, Chong forgave Mu'en, marrying the maid to him. After that, the tribe of Mu'en became the loyal army of Chong, helping him defeat many rebellious tribes (Huang, 1986).

As a matter of fact, the whole thing was the deception of Chong. His real purpose was to make full use of the gratefulness of Mu'en, letting the whole tribe become his loyal army. As a result, he successfully achieved the goal with a well-designed beauty trap.

### **Indirect Beauty Trap**

The examples introduced before are direct beauty traps. However, if your enemy is cautious enough, this stratagem will lose efficacy. In this situation, it is necessary to think about a kind of indirect beauty trap.

Indirect beauty trap means we need to pay attention to the women beside the enemy. Usually, his wife is a really good choice. As an old Chinese saying goes, there is nothing more influential than the wife's pillow talk. It means that many men will trust their wives. Sometimes, it will become the breach if we want to find the enemy's weakness.

In 615, during the battle of Yanmen (located in today's Dai county, Shanxi Province, China), Sui Dynasty's (581-618) emperor named Yang Guang (568-618) and his army were surrounded by the cavalry of Eastern Turkic Khaganate (583-630) led by Shibi Khan (?-619) (Sima, 2007). Xiao Yu (575-648), the brother-in-law of the emperor suggested that they could turn to the queen of Shibi Khan (Sima, 2007). Luckily, the queen of Shibi Khan was the relative of the emperor. She deceived Shibi Khan that the northern border of Eastern Turkic Khaganate was attacked (Sima, 2007). Shibi Khan finally chose to retreat.

After reading the description of this battle, some readers may say that the stratagem of Xiao could be useful because the queen of Shibi Khan was the relative of Emperor Yang. Without this condition, this stratagem will be useless. In this situation, it is necessary to adopt another method.

In 200 B.C., because of taking the enemy lightly, Western Han Dynasty's (202 B.C.-8 A.D.) emperor named Liu Bang (256-195 B.C.) and his little army were surrounded by the Xiongnu cavalry led by Modu Chanyu (234-174 B.C.) (Sima, 2007). In Chinese war history, this event was called the siege of Baideng Hill (located in today's Datong, Shanxi Province, China). According to an adviser named Chen Ping's (?-178 B.C.) stratagem, the diplomat of Liu found the queen of Modu secretly, giving her lots of gifts (Sima, 2007). After that, the queen of Modu started persuading her husband to retreat. Before the battle, Modu had contacted two warlords named Zhao Li (?-?) and Wang Huang (?-195 B.C.), asking them to cooperate with the Xiongnu cavalry (Sima, 2007). However, Zhao and Huang just halted the troops and waited. Because of that, Modu started to doubt whether these two warlords had collaborated with the Han army (Sima, 2007). After hearing the suggestions of his wife, Modu firmly chose to retreat.

These two examples showed the usage of indirect beauty trap. This psychological tactic makes full use of the trust between husband and wife, showing the diversification of the beauty trap.

### **Making the Enemy Unable to Be United: Beauty Trap Combining With the Stratagem of Killing Someone With a Borrowed Knife**

The stratagem of killing someone with a borrowed knife is a stratagem recorded in *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, one of the most famous military works of ancient China. The basic usage of this stratagem is as follows. When you are not powerful enough to attack your enemy directly, you can use the strength of others to attack him (Cheng, 1999).

When talking about beauty trap combining with the stratagem of killing someone with a borrowed knife, most Chinese people will think of a story. In late Eastern Han Dynasty (184-220), the government of Han Dynasty was controlled by a warlord named Dong Zhuo (?-192). One of his political opponents named Wang Yun (137-192) wanted to kill him. However, the army of Dong was really powerful. What's worse, Lyu Bu (?-199), the adopted son of Dong was an excellent body guard with formidable battle efficiency. It was impossible for Wang to kill Dong directly.

In order to drive a wedge between Dong and Lyu, Wang designed a beauty trap. He found a beautiful singing girl named Diao Chan, letting her become his adopted daughter. After that, during a private banquet, Wang introduced this seductive woman to Lyu, promising that he would marry her to Lyu. After a few days, Wang secretly married his adopted daughter to Dong. When meeting Lyu, Wang explained that he was cheated by Dong. In order to gain this woman, Lyu finally killed his adoptive father.

It is just a fictional story in a classical Chinese fiction named *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* written by Luo Guanzhong (1330-1400), a famous novelist of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Luo, 2006). However, this story has its historical prototype. According to *The Records of the Three Kingdoms*, in history, Lyu had an affair with a maid of his adoptive father, fearing of being found out (Chen & Pei, 2006). Besides, he was once almost killed by Dong because of some small things. After knowing this, Wang persuaded him to kill Dong. That's what happened in real history. Also because of a woman, a wedge between Dong and Lyu was driven.

The key to letting beauty trap combine with the stratagem of killing someone with a borrowed knife is creating internal contradictions for the enemy. The fictional story shows how to make full use of envy while the historical event shows how to make full use of fears. In a word, with the help of a seductive woman, some emotions will become carefully crafted traps.

As mentioned before, when beauty trap combines with psychological tactics, everything that can disturb the enemy's mind can be called beauty. The essence of the beauty trap is utilizing the opponents' desires to confuse them. So, let's think about a simple question. If the desires just come from seductive women? Of course not. The desires may also come from some other things, such as money and power. The next example is about the utilization of greed for power.

During the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280), an important part of the Wei Kingdom's (220-265) politics was the struggle between the royal family and some powerful political families. In 254, a powerful minister named Sima Shi (208-255) dethroned emperor Cao Fang (232-274), proclaiming a figurehead emperor named Cao Mao (241-260) (Chen & Pei, 2006). The behavior of Sima immediately caused political instability. At the moment, the Sima family had become the leader of political families. However, in Huainan area (the area from

the south of the Huai River to the coast of Yangtze River), many officers who were loyal to the royal family did not want to obey the commands of the Sima family. Two generals named Guanqiu Jian (?-255) and Wen Qin (?-258) rose in arms after hearing about the news of a new emperor.

Clearly knowing the power of the Sima family, Guanqiu planned to tear apart it. He wrote a report to the emperor, claiming that his sole aim was Sima Shi and speaking highly of other members of the Sima family (Chen & Pei, 2006). Besides, he also suggested the emperor putting Sima Zhao (211-265, the younger brother of Sima Shi), Sima Fu (180-272, the uncle of Sima Shi), and Sima Wang (205-271, the cousin of Sima Shi) in important positions (Chen & Pei, 2006).

This report finally became a bomb. Being afraid of being betrayed by his own family members, Sima Shi had to go on an expedition by himself though he had a serious eye disease. Shortly after the end of the battle, Sima Shi died because of disease progression (Fang, 2014).

We can easily see that Guanqiu wanted to drive a wedge in the Sima family with greed for power. His plan was partly successful. Though the other members of the Sima family did not have the thought of killing Sima Shi and taking his place, Sima Shi did not dare to trust them, which greatly weakened the power of the Sima family. The psychological tactic of Guanqiu was an open conspiracy of really high level.

### **Using Seductive Women to Corrupt the Enemy: The Beauty Trap Recorded in Military Works**

The beauty traps introduced before are the stratagems of tactical level. Does a kind of beauty trap exist, which is at the level of strategy? The answer is yes. This kind of beauty trap is called using seductive women to corrupt the enemy. According to *Six Secret Teachings*, a famous military work of ancient China, beauty trap is one of the twelve non-military methods that can be adopted to weaken the enemy country (Cheng, 1999). The seductive women have the ability to confuse the leaders of the enemy country, letting them no longer be hostile (Cheng, 1999). According to *The Thirty-Six Stratagems*, the target of this stratagem is to corrupt the important people of the other side, letting them lose their morale (Cheng, 1999). In a word, it is a kind of strategic deception which should be adopted before counterattacking, being useful when it is necessary to hide the intent of attack. As mentioned before, about this strategic deception, there are two famous examples in the war history of ancient China.

In the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), there appeared a master of beauty trap whose name was Gou Jian (?-464 B.C.). He was the king of the State of Yue (2032-333 B.C., located in the central and northern regions of today's Zhejiang Province, China). After his army was defeated by the Wu army, he and his advisors started to plan to counterattack. In this process, two beauty traps were of great use. Firstly, they offered eight beauties to Bo Pi (?-?), a senior official of the State of Wu (?-473) (Zuo & Wei, 2015). After that, Bo Pi started to say nice things about the State of Yue. His words successfully confused Fu Chai (?-473 B.C.), the king of the State of Wu. Fu Chai started to believe that the State of Yue was really loyal. Then, two seductive women from the State of Yue were sent to the palace of the State of Wu (Wu & Mu, 2016). Besides, the whole State of Yue tried everything to show its loyalty to the State of Wu. During this process, another senior official of the State of Wu named Wu Zixu (?-484 B.C.) saw through the plot of the State of Yue (Zuo, 2009). However, because of the beauty traps and bribery of the State of Yue, the upper class of the State of Wu did not believe him. In 484 B.C., Wu Zixu was killed by Fu Chai because of the calumny of Bo Pi (Sima, 2006). Eleven years after the death of

Wu Zixu, the State of Wu was subjugated by the Yue army.

Another example happened in the Period of Warring States (475-220 B.C.). Nearby the State of Qin (770-207 B.C.), there was a state named Yiqu (?-272 B.C.). In history, in order to become the overlord of western China, these two states had a series of wars. Finally, the struggle was ended by the beauty trap of the State of Qin. During the regency of Empress Dowager Mi Bazi (344-265 B.C.), she changed the strategy adapted by previous governors of the State of Qin. Firstly, she successfully let the King of Yiqu become her lover (Sima, 2006). Because of it, the king of Yiqu no longer saw the State of Qin as a powerful enemy. Then, noticing the king of Yiqu did not have an alert mind, Mi started the action of subjugating the State of Yiqu. She easily killed the king of Yiqu in the palace of the State of Qin (Sima, 2006). After that, the Qin army successfully occupied the territory of Yiqu (Sima, 2006).

From these two examples, we can see the power of this strategic deception. The results of the losers were their countries' downfalls. The key to this strategic deception is hiding the intent of attack with a series of beauty traps and bribery, letting the enemy no longer be hostile. After that, you will get the chance to defeat the enemy.

### **How to Counterattack When Facing a Beauty Trap**

As a matter of fact, no matter the beauty trap is adopted in which fields, its basic idea is unchanging. Adopt the beauty trap to confuse the enemy, and let him lose the faculty of judgement. After that, the strategic object such as conquering a country or acquiring a company will be achieved. Here, the beauty trap can be summarized as a kind of bait. Of course, it can be a real beauty. It can also be many different things such as money or an opportunity for business cooperation.

In a word, as a kind of stratagem, beauty trap is commonly seen in many different fields such as military, politics and commerce all around the world. No one can deny its widespread existence. However, it should not be seen as a kind of omnipotent stratagem. Besides, too many deceptions in peacetime will damage social customs. How will the widespread existence of beauty trap ruin the moral atmosphere of society? It is a good topic of the field of sociology.

As mentioned before, beauty trap can be seen as a kind of psychological tactic. Of course, it can be defeated by other psychological tactics.

As a matter of fact, the beauty traps without real bribery are the ones of high level which are rarely seen in history or reality. Most of the beauty traps we need to face usually consist of real bribery including sex bribery and monetary bribery. If you are cautious enough, this trap will be useless (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). At the same time, if one of your teammates is in the trap, it will also be a big problem. Actually, it is not quite difficult to see through it. From some examples of war history, we can easily see that the ones in the beauty traps are psychologically different from ordinary people. For example, they will be sensitive about some special words or things, going berserk about them easily. It will help us make a judgement. By the way, if someone goes berserk after reading this paper about beauty trap, he or she may probably be in the beauty trap.

After making sure about the existence of the beauty trap, it will be the time to prepare for the counterattack. According to the experience of the older generations, the tactics of the counterattack also come from *The Thirty-Six Stratagems*.

The first tactic that needs to be adopted is a psychological tactic called feigning madness without becoming insane. Its basic usage is hiding behind the mask of a fool to create confusion about your intentions and motivations (Cheng, 1999). When facing a beauty trap, you should pretend that you know nothing about it after

finding out the beauty trap of the enemy.

The second tactic is called extracting the firewood from under the cauldron. Its basic usage is weakening the powerful enemy (Cheng, 1999). When facing the beauty trap of the enemy, you need to pretend to be really greedy, weakening the enemy by charging a lot of money. Since the enemy needs to hide the intent of attack, he has to accept your requirement. It is also a kind of psychological tactics, combining the stratagems of feigning madness without becoming insane and extracting the firewood from under the cauldron.

The last tactic is called sowing discord among the enemy. This tactic will be useful when you need to face a sex trap (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). You can buy over the beauty who comes from the enemy, directly invalidating the beauty trap (In-Depth Military Editorial Board, 2019). Besides, this beauty may become your own eye which can see the secrets of the enemy.

### Conclusion

Beauty trap is a stratagem which can be seen in a variety of fields. It has many different forms, letting it become really complex. However, its basic idea is unchanging, offering us an opportunity to see through it. This stratagem appeared at the very beginning of the history of mankind. It develops with the development of human beings. It will also appear in the future. Therefore, the research about this stratagem and related psychological tactics will never come to an end.

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