

Smashing through the gossip

When celebrity scandals arise, loyal fans seek 'solid hammers', Web slang for evidence, to confirm the rumors

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Celebrity gossip is bread and butter to Internet users everywhere. From dating to births, engagements, weddings, breakups, divorce and death — every detail of a celebrity's life can become a trending topic.

Once caught in scandals, celebrities will quickly find themselves the subject of an online carnival. As idle netizens feast on the flesh of the fallen, a weak but angry voice, usually from still-loyal fans, can be heard pleading:

It's just a rumor! There's no solid hammer at all!

Zhè dōu shì yáo yán, gēn běn méi yǒu shí chuí!
这都是谣言，根本没有实锤！

However, do not be confused: You do not need to carry heavy tools to gossip. "Solid hammer" (实锤 shí chuí) is Web slang for "iron-clad evidence". No hammer, no cry, say the diehard fans.

Though its origin seems almost untraceable, this expression is simple to understand, because inarguable proof of a wrongdoing can smash the reputation and even career of a celebrity, just like a strong hammer.

In an era dominated by the Web, "solid hammer" usually refers to a photograph, voice chat, screenshot or video that confirms the rumor. If you do not have any of these, you will be labeled a 黑子 (hēi zi, anti-fan, someone who defames others on purpose), who literally 黑 (hēi, "blacken") slanders a celebrity. Fans may defend their controversial idol by saying:

Those anti-fans have no solid hammer at all. They are just randomly blackening his name!

Hēi zi men gēn běn méi yǒu shí chuí, wán quán shì zài luàn hēi.
黑子们根本没有实锤，完全是在乱黑。

Usually, fans and *heizi* belong to rival camps. However, a fan's defense of an idol can backfire.

In September, a woman named Li Yutong, who claimed to be singer Xue Zhiqian's ex-girlfriend, accused Xue not only of swindling her out of money but of cheating on his wife.

Xue's fans were outraged: They demanded Li post "solid hammers". Li was happy to comply. The following week, she drip-fed fans a series of damning evidence, including bank transfer records, voice messages, and even a photocopy of their business contract — hammers so solid that Xue's reputation was irreversibly destroyed.

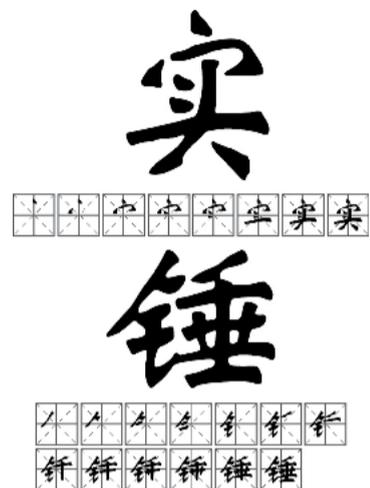
This story generated a whole new

expression to describe the fate of Xue's fans: 求锤得锤 (qiú chuí dé chuí, seek hammer and receive it), derived from the Confucian saying 求仁得仁 (qiú rén dé rén, seek virtue and receive it).

In many cases, though, fans believe that anti-fans are not just ordinary netizens, but professionals hired by people to vilify their beloved star. These mercenaries, or 水军 (shuǐ jūn), literally "water army", not only make money from blackening celebrities but also accept payment for hyping them.

Paid shills are called 职粉 (zhí fěn), short for 职业粉丝 (zhí yè fēn sī, professional fans). In contrast, impartial netizens who have no particular ax to grind are known as 路人 (lù rén, passers-by).

Among fans, the saying goes: "Once you join the discussion, you are no longer a passer-by". Underneath an



shí chuí,
solid hammer

article relating bad news about a star, one can frequently see loyal fans firing back at someone who leaves negative comments:

You are obviously the water army. Why are you pretending to be a passer-by?

Nǐ yī kàn jiù shì shuǐ jūn, zhuāng shén me lù rén a?

你一看就是水军，装什么路人啊？

The effect of solid hammers is overwhelming, but they cannot smash everything, at least not the strong faith and love of particularly crazed fans. A minority of worshipping fans — similar to Western-style "Beliebers" (fans of Justin Bieber) or Beyoncé's "Beyhive" — believe their idols can do no wrong and find excuses for any and all misbehavior.

Such an unreasonable attitude has won these diehards a derogatory title — 脑残粉 (nǎo cán fēn, brain-damaged fans), indicating that they lose all critical thinking skills where their idol is concerned. Their defense of a "guilty" celebrity is called 洗白 (xǐ bái, whitewash). When this happens, a *heizi* or righteous passer-by might point a finger and say:

These brain-damaged fans have come to whitewash again!

Zhè xiē nǎo cán fēn yòu lái xǐ bái le!

这些脑残粉又来洗白了！

One thing is clear: When you take part in any discussion of a celebrity scandal, your identity will always be questioned. Blame the star, you are a *heizi*; defend them, you are a brain-damaged fan or greedy water army. And if you try to be an impartial passer-by? No way, you must be a liar!

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