Rethinking Boundary: The Loyalty of Odysseus in Ancient Greece and Present-day China

Wenhui Qing*
Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100032, China
*Corresponding email: cathyobeliaking@163.com

Abstract

This paper compares the ancient Greek perspective of Homer's *the Odyssey* with contemporary Chinese views to explore the evolution of "boundary" in the context of loyalty. Based on the theoretical framework of the boundaries of loyalty in marriage, the study first analyzes how the patriarchal system in ancient Greece shaped the ancient Greeks' perception of Odysseus' loyalty: Although Odysseus had sexual relationships with the goddess Circe and Calypso, he was still regarded as loyal to his wife Penelope. Because the gendered social hierarchy of ancient Greece allowed men to have sexual freedom, while women needed to be absolutely loyal. Moreover, the irresistible power of Greek deities further provided justification for Odysseus' behavior of obeying the goddesses, viewing such behavior as a survival measure rather than an act of betrayal. To explore the viewpoints of modern Chinese people, this paper studies the reinterpretation of *the Odyssey* on the social media platform BiliBili. By analyzing works created by influential content creators, and users' comments in the bullet screens, this study reveals that contemporary Chinese audiences, under the guidance of modern gender equality concepts and legal norms, criticize Odysseus' extramarital behavior as going beyond the boundaries of loyalty. This contrast highlights that the boundaries of loyalty are not fixed but dynamic, shaped by historical background, cultural values, and social progress. By combining traditional text analysis with modern social media research, this study fills the gap in cross-cultural and cross-temporal research on boundary concepts. It contributes to the understanding of how traditional cultural symbols like Odysseus are reevaluated through a contemporary perspective and reveals the role of digital platforms in expressing and promoting the transformation of social values.

Keywords

Loyalty boundaries, *The Odyssey*, Gender equality, Cross-temporal comparison, Cultural value transformation

Introduction

Boundaries are everywhere. They are an important part of social life, helping us understand social and collective identities and influencing interpersonal relationships. According to Charles L. Whitfield, MD, in healthy relationships, everyone has their own space and boundaries [1]. Thus, the concept of personal boundaries reflects the level of self-awareness, self-esteem, and interaction of the individual with the surrounding world [2]. Through the tapestry of time, the definition of different boundaries evolved, diversifying between culture and even individuals. Sometimes the exact location of a boundary, meaning that the precise partition position that separates one entity from another, is unclear or otherwise controversial [3].

Boundaries reflect one's awareness of the inner life, set by the self [4]. Likewise, the concept of loyalty is also closely connected to the idea of "mine or ours", associating with one's own values [5]. Loyalty, in this context, is demonstrated by adhering to the boundaries one set; and the show of loyalty is the representation of one's concept of

personal boundaries.

Some scholars have proposed that loyalty exists to maintain or revive the relationship, the boundary of loyalty is that of no exit and neglect behaviors that are destructive to relationships [6]. Their further research provides specific evidence for this proposal: They found that individuals with a secure attachment style score higher on measures of loyalty, precisely due to their stronger sense of commitment [7]. This commitment drives them to actively adhere to the boundary of "not exiting and not ignoring destructive behaviors", thereby aligning more closely with the nature of loyalty as defined by scholars [8].

In Blake's study, in the perspective of long-term relationships of couples, the relationship is of mutual trust, which is based on love, commitment and shared experiences [9]. Moreover, by drawing on legal and moral cases that analyze loyalty under different cultural and historical backgrounds. It further elucidates that in the realm of loyalty, in addition to merely maintaining a relationship, outsiders cannot claim equal treatment with those who are objects of loyal attachment.

Previous scholars have significantly contributed to the concept of boundary from the perspective of personal psychology as well as moral and legal cases. Yet the cross-cultural concept of boundary between ancient Greece and present-day China remained underexplored. However, such cross-cultural view is significant as it helps to understand how the concept of boundary changed across different times and space, since the concept of boundaries evolved between culture and even individuals. To shed new light on the boundary of loyalty, this paper explores how the reframing of Odysseus' loyalty reflects present-day Chinese perceptions of boundaries. To address this question, this paper first uses *the Odyssey* as a primary source to elucidate ancient Greek views on boundaries. Subsequently, by examining the reinterpretation of the *Odyssey* by scholars and influencers in China, I aim to reveal how perceptions of Odysseus' loyalty have evolved across time and space. This approach not only fills the gap in cross-cultural and inter-temporal research on boundaries between ancient Greece and modern China, a relatively underexplored area, but also highlights how Odysseus, as a cultural symbol, manifests the shift in contemporary Chinese societal views on boundaries.

Ancient Greeks' perception

The Odyssey is an ancient Greek epic poem by the poet Homer around the eighth century BCE, composed of 24 books in total [10]. The edition I used is a translated version by Stephen Mitchell published in 2013 by Atria Books, with an introduction and notes to enhance reader's understanding, offering a modern-day perspective on the classic text.

The narrative of *the Odyssey* is in third person, beginning at Odyssey's hometown Ithaca, where his son Telemachus sets out on his own journey to search for news of his father and to assert his place as the rightful heir to Ithaca, with the help of the Goddess Athena. Odysseus himself, on the other hand, narrates in first person, his ten-year journey to return home after the Trojan War to King Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, and his wife Queen Arete during his captivation in Phaeacia. Odysseus tells the story of the challenges he encounters on his way home, such as the one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus, the enchanting sirens whose songs can lure sailors to their doom, and the sorceress Circe who turned his men into animals, and the sea god Poseidon, who cursed him for blinding Polyphemus. Meanwhile back in Ithaca, Penelope cleverly stalls the suitors who believed in Odysseus' death by weaving a shroud by day and unraveling it by night. In the end, with the help of his son, his men, and the Goddess Athena, Odysseus fends off the suitors after his return home and establishes long lasting peace in Ithaca.

Speaking of the hero Odysseus of Homer's epic poem *the Odyssey*, scholars have the image of a man of outstanding wisdom, courage, and endurance

[11]. Odysseus claims that he resisted the allure of Calypso and Circe while recounting his journey to the Phaeacians, as no foreign splendor could match that of his homeland [12]. In the introduction by Stephen Mitchell, the author points out that "Odysseus' refusal of immortality is surely the greatest and most moving tribute that any marriage has ever received in literature, for turning down the offers by the two goddesses, choosing Penelope instead."

This sentiment is further encapsulated in Odysseus' own declaration: "There is nothing sweeter than one's own country and parents, even if one lives in a rich house in a foreign land, far away from one's parents."

Apart from his powerfulness, he is also considered by ancient Greeks, as someone who is very loyal to, and maintains a healthy romantic relationship with his wife Penelope, for he went back to Ithica to her, resisting the temptation of the goddess Circe and the nymph Calypso. Odysseus' refusal to the two Goddess' offer not only demonstrates his loyalty to his wife Penelope, but also represents his strict adherence to the boundary he sets for himself in relationships. By turning down the company, comfort, and immortality provided by the two Goddess, Odysseus draws a clear border separating his loyalty to his wife Penelope and any external temptations. In the face of tempting alternatives, Odysseus' choice which shows his loyalty to Penelope, also indicates that his own definition of personal boundaries in romantic relationships didn't waver.

Odysseus's behaviors directly support the scholarly view proposed by Karimi, Mahmudulhassan and Loh H. Morrow, that the boundary of loyalty is that of no exit and neglect behaviors that are destructive to relationships [13-15]. Odysseus's choice to come back to his legal wife Penelope is within the modern boundary of loyalty. However, Book 10 of the poem does contain content of Odysseus having sex with females other than Penelope, such as the goddess Circe and the immortal nymph Calypso, which contradicts with Fletcher's definition of the boundary of loyalty, for he gave equal treatment of sex to not only his legal wife Penelope but also two goddesses. Circe kept him for a year while Calypso kept him for seven years and he even fathered a child of hers.

This transgression of modern loyalty norms is concretized by Circe's explicit invitation to Odysseus: "But come now, sheathe your sword, and let us go to bed together, that we may put our trust in each other through intimacy and love."

Despite the things Odysseus did, Ancient Greeks still saw Odysseus as loyal. Two explanations can be presented about why Odysseus was considered loyal by the ancient Greeks.

First, the ancient Greek patriarchy itself. In ancient Greek perceptions, women were regarded as a lower order of beings, neglected by nature in comparison with man, both in point of intellect and heart [16]. They were considered incapable of taking part in public life, naturally prone to evil, and fitted only for propagating the species and gratifying the sensual appetites of the men.

The marriage system of ancient Greece was also deeply influenced by patriarchy [17]. In marriage, Men, most known as rulers of regions and heroes of ages, they had the rights to fulfill their lust: It was common for married men to have sex outside their marriage, often with prostitutes. While men had this freedom, women's lives were very restricted by the men in their lives. Specifically, if a woman was guilty of having sex with another man, she would be banned from participating in public religious ceremonies. This would basically mean that she was excluded from all public life. Generally speaking, patriarchy in ancient Greece created a gendered hierarchy of loyalty: Women were held to a far stricter standard of sexual loyalty, while men were not.

In *The Odyssey*, Penelope stands as the quintessential embodiment of women's loyalty. Throughout Odysseus' absence, she exhibits unwavering faithfulness, remaining true to her

husband despite the pressure to get remarry from numerous suitors who invade her home. She weaves a tapestry by day and unravels it by night, promising the suitors that she will choose a new husband once her weaving is complete.

This deliberate ruse, a hallmark of her strategy to fend off the suitors, is explicitly documented in the epic narrative: "There she wove on the great loom all day long, but at night she would unpick the work by torchlight. She fooled the Achaeans in this way for three years and persuaded them. But when the fourth year came with the seasons, one of her women, who knew the truth, betrayed her, and they caught her unraveling the splendid web."

Acts like this are her clever strategies to delay remarriage. Facing the pressure of invaders from other countries, threatening to kill her son and inheriting Odysseus' properties by marrying her, Penelope stood straight and became the one who protected the family. Penelope's motivation to wait for twenty years is intrinsically connected to her loyalty to Odysseus. Her loyalty is displayed by her ability to survive on her own in the absence of Odysseus, her complex motivations to protect Telemachus, and out of genuine love and loyalty to her husband [18].

Homer depicts Penelope as the epitome of the Greek wife for that she is a housewife, faithful and loyal to Odyssey. Under ancient Greek content, marriage was perceived as the culmination of a young woman's socialization [19]. All women were expected to marry because there was no respectable role in society for single women. During the marriage process, a woman was not given the ability to choose her husband; decisions about the marriage were made by the woman's parents (mainly her father) and their future son-in-law. Women were often married a few years after they reached puberty to ensure that they were young enough to be molded into an ideal wife for the husband, yet old enough to produce children. These young brides were expected to carry children not long after experiencing childhood themselves. Because of the often-large age-gap between husband and wife, love between the couple was not always initially present in ancient Greek marriages. The main purpose of marriage was for the creation of the home and children, and love did not have to be a part of that process [20].

The unbalance of gender rights contributes to the difference between boundaries of love and marriage in ancient Greece between men and women [21]. Loyalty is an important manifestation of boundaries. The ancient Greeks believed that Odysseus' rejection was loyal, which was essentially due to the patriarchy of ancient Greece. The patriarchy of ancient Greece held that the boundary for men should allow sexual freedom while maintaining relationship and family commitment. While the boundary for women should be of absolute loyalty, with no tolerance of any deviation. Under this content, it is reasonable for ancient Greeks to consider Odysseus as loyal according to the patriarchal boundary rules, and these rules in turn reflect Odysseus' own concept of boundaries.

Second, the non-negotiable and inescapable nature of immortals' offers to men. Toward the goddesses and immortals, it is true indeed that sometimes sex is not love, it serves as a way of devotion and sacrifice, for Odysseus to go home safely without irritating the gods even more. In Greek mythology, mortals do not directly turn down a god's offer, and many heroes in Greek mythology relied on the gods for help and guidance during their quests. This is partly because many heroes relied on divine assistance and guidance during their quests. Thus, acknowledging the power of divinities, Greek heroes, in subtle ways, need to negotiate the limits of their own personal boundaries under pressure.

Under this content, Odysseus' agreement to the sex offerings given by the two Goddesses can be seen as a submissive devotion, with the intention of satisfying the immortal beings and coming home in one piece. Gods' offerings are actually requests and demands cloaked in temptation, being put in the face of powerless mortals, making them to

initiatively please the gods. This is presented in the phase where Odysseus meets Calypso.

A paradigmatic illustration of this divine coercion unfolds in the encounter between Calypso and Hermes: Calypso, a daughter of the Titan Atlas, is a nymph living alone on the mythical island of Ogygia. Hermes was sent by Zeus to inform Calypso of Odysseus's arrival, telling her that she will be entertaining Odysseus, and she shouldn't provoke Zeus, also emphasizing that "truly no god can ever evade or cancel the will of Zeus."

Hermes further reinforces this divine mandate in his response to Calypso, reiterating Zeus's inescapable authority: "But truly no god can ever evade or cancel the will of Zeus. He says that you have a man here who has suffered more than all others who went to Troy."

Having established Zeus's unchallengeable will, Hermes then shifts to explicit intimidation, laying out the punitive repercussions of noncompliance: "Good. See that you do it. And don't provoke Zeus - or you will be very sorry."

The threat and command here indicate the power of the Gods, even to other immortal beings. To survive, Odysseus has no choice but to stay with the Goddess on the island. The inescapable nature of immortal offers in *the Odyssey* reveals how divine power fundamentally diminishes mortal boundaries of consent and loyalty, leaving heroes with survival tactics rather than acts of free will of moral boundaries.

The retold Odyssey

But the contemporary Chinese audiences do not perceive Odysseus as the perfect resemblance of loyalty, due to the changing criteria of boundary from ancient Greece to present-day China.

In many countries today, most people believe that love and marriage go together; that we should marry the person we love [22]. Romantic love, defined by Raja Halwani, is the type of love that people have for each other, and it usually exists between two, not more, people. It usually has, or at least begins with, a sexual dimension, involving very strong emotions and desires between the lovers, eventuates in marriage and procreation. In the present day, love is considered by most, the foundation of marriage, and sex is the desire of lust, also a result of love. The modern concept of boundaries in romantic relationships shifts its center on emotional commitment rather than the hierarchical boundaries of ancient times. Men and Women will all be considered unloyal if they have sex with a third party, breaking the boundary of romantic relationships. Thus, when retelling the story of Odysseus, people started noticing that Odysseus may not have been a flawless hero.

A Chinese social media platform for short videos called BiliBili [23]. As a company that mainly faced the younger generation, it is recognized as the fourth largest video website giant, with average daily active users of 54.0 million and monthly active users 202.0 million in 2020. Scholars believe that BiliBili will likely take the most significant status in China or even substitutes YouTube in the future. On Bilibili, influencers focus on the part where Odysseus slept with the two goddesses and enjoyed their company each for years, as reflected by the original text in the Odyssey:

Specifically, in their content dissemination, these influencers have adopted diverse translated expressions for the relevant original text, which include "spending a year with the goddess", "the goddess inviting him to her bedroom to keep her company", "his exceptional skills in the bedroom", or straightforwardly stating "sleeping with the fairy".

For example, one uploader briefly summarized the story of Odysseus's journey home, from when he won the Trojan War to when he finally reached the land of Ithaca. The video contains events happening in Ismaros, the land of the lotus-eaters, the layer of the cyclops Polyphemus, the island Aeolia, Telepylus, Aeaea, the island of the Sirens, the layer of Scylla, the island Thrinacia, and Ogygia, Scheria, and finally Ithaca.

At 5 minutes and 12 seconds, the narrator claims

that "But Odysseus conquered the goddess. The goddess threw herself at him of her own accord, and he was forced to live with the goddess for a year." Within the fifteen seconds of the narrative of Odysseus' story with the goddess Circe (out of the entire 13 minute video), there are 12 bullet screens (out of the overall 469 bullet screens of the video) targeting the narrator's comment on Odysseus' relationship with Circe. The content of the bullet screens includes the expression of surprise and amusement, as well as lines of vulgar teasing of Odysseus' experience on Aeaea. This indicates that these 15 seconds grasps high attention from viewers. Mocking bullet screens such as "666", "forced", "???", and "I would be willing to 'create' another army!" uses verbal irony, irony that expresses the opposite meaning of what was literary said, to express disapproval.

Another example shows that using a total of 36 minutes, another uploader briefly explained the story of Odysseus, from the creation of the wooden horse in the Trojan war to finally reuniting with his family, with an introduction and conclusionary analysis about the significance of the story in Western literature and history.

At 20 minutes and 52 seconds, the narrator points out "Circe invited Odysseus to her bedroom and promised to fulfill any of his wishes if he spent one night with her. Odysseus was completely enchanted by Circe's exceptional skills in bed. Meanwhile, Odysseus' crewmen were also warmly entertained by Circe's maids. They indulged in this realm of pleasure for a whole year." The results were similar to that of example one, with viewers also claiming, "Odysseus slept with more than one goddess according to Homer's Epic" on the bullet screen.

Focusing on Odysseus' actions, influencers' act of retelling and commenters' words of mocking criticism become assertions of the modern values, pointing out that loyalty is not a gendered duty. Rejecting the ancient patriarchal perception, they instead establish the new boundary of romantic relationship as a genuine physical and mental commitment of both parties. This change in the concept of boundary proves that boundaries are never static but evolve with the societies' interpretation and expectation.

An interesting phenomenon also occurred, which users started to argue in the bullet screens that whether the phase of Odysseus having sex with Circe is justifiable in the original story. People defending Odysseus' loyalty claim the event to be made up and isn't in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. However, based on the analysis and evidence I provided, the event is true and credible. Users' attempt to defend Odysseus, in fact, shows their recognition and acknowledgement that a married person engaging in sexual activity outside the boundary of loyalty in marriages goes against what is right and moral.

The title of the third example, "Odysseus: Do you know how I've spent these ten years? Sleeping with Goddesses?" is very straightforward and eye-catching, clearly introducing the discussion of Odysseus having sex with the two Goddesses that will be presented later in the video.

The narrator claims to be a reader of the translated version of the original story. Specifically, he read the translation by Chen Zhongmei published by Shanghai Translation Publishing House in 2018. Using a casual tone, the creator claimed the content of the book is simple and easy to understand, but the sentence structures and wording are somewhat puzzling. The names of the characters in the book are also long, making them difficult to remember and distinguish. Moreover, there are numerous and exaggerated rhetorical devices used. Despite these characteristics, the narrator points out the significance of the book, then starts a brief explanation of the plot of *The Odyssey*.

At 13 minutes and 33 seconds, the narrator says, "Let's look at the ten years of his wandering. During that period, there was one year when he was sleeping with the beautiful goddess Circe." Then at 13 minutes and 50 seconds, directly claiming the goddess invited Odysseus to make love with her.

Odysseus asked the goddess to transform his men back from pigs, and then they lived comfortably in the goddess's home and enjoyed themselves for a whole year. It wasn't until his crewmen couldn't stand it any longer and said, "Odysseus, it's time to wake up. Don't forget your homeland." These words finally touched his "noble" heart. Following that sentence, the narrator adds, "This was one year, and eventually, he spent another seven years on a scenic island, sleeping with another beautiful nymph, Calypso." This is also when an interesting bullet screen appears, ironically pointing out that, "How is it (Odysseus' action) not noble? He never goes against a woman's will. Those who are willing to comply don't even want to leave."

According to the three videos, whether it is a figure of ridicule for driving traffic on social media platforms or is what the influencers truly believe, the action of Odysseus sleeping with the two Goddesses being mockingly pointed out indicates the aspect of loyalty of Odyssey being brought into attention and questioned out loud.

The reason of the attention brought to the question whether Odysseus is loyal is because of the difference between ancient Greece and the present-day Chinese perspectives on the topic of loyalty boundaries in the understanding of sex. The sarcasm expressed by modern Chinese BiliBili users is a tangible embodiment of the collision between modern China's "boundaries of loyalty under gender equality" and ancient Greece's "dual standards of loyalty under patriarchy" [24,25]. Social media, furthermore, has become an important passage and indicator for observing the evolution of such boundaries.

Considering that under ancient Greek content, marriage serves purposes beyond just sex. To Odysseus, love is something spiritual but not entirely physical, and his marriage with Penelope, from his perspective, serves as a feeling of nostalgia, urging him to go home.

With the poem *the Odyssey* being exposed to more readers and scholars in recent years, more and more in-depth analyses are presented, and people tend to focus on minor details that may change the whole picture. Thus, while some argue that sex is not love in the presence of immortals but a way of devotion and sacrifice, in other words Odysseus is compelled to fulfill the Goddesses' requests. This explanation is valid under ancient Greek's focus, which is presented in the previous section "Ancient Greeks' perception", but invalid in the present because of deeper analyses focusing on Odysseus' initiative attitude.

In the original work, he has to be reminded by his crew that it's time to leave. His loyal companions took him aside and said, "Captain, enough of all this. It is time to leave now if we ever hope to return to our own dear country."

This exhortation from his crew is echoed in the epic's more detailed account of the same episode, which underscores the passage of time and Odysseus's delayed resolve: "But when the year rolled round in which the Gods had ordained that I should return home, the seasons turned, and the months waned, and the long days were accomplished. Then my trusty fellows drew me aside and said - Sir, now at last remember your native country, if it is Heaven's will that you are to be spared to see your home and country again."

For a year Odysseus has been enjoying the company of the goddess, having only a few thoughts of his homeland. The evidence for this is that with the help of Hermes, Odysseus is immune to any kind of sorcery of Circe, so him staying on Circe's Island is not, if any, because of her powers.

This immunity to Circe's magic is explicitly corroborated by Hermes' direct intervention and explanation in the epic, as recounted in Odysseus' own narrative: "Hermes came up to meet me, taking the form of a young man with the first slight traces of hair on his lips and cheeks, in the loveliest prime of youth. He walked up briskly and clasped my right hand and said, 'Where are you going, poor fellow, across these hills, alone, without knowing the country? Your comrades are here in the house of

Circe, penned in the pigsty like pigs. And you have come here to save them? It is more likely that you will get caught yourself. But don't be worried: I will protect you and give you a magic herb that will make you immune to any witchcraft that Circe tries to bind you with."

Present-day Chinese perception of Odysseus' loyalty illustrates the change in understanding of boundaries in romantic relationships. Ancient Greek norms of patriarchy create unequal boundaries in love and sex, but modern audiences, with the idea of gender equality, considers Odysseus as flawed, which they express through social media creations as well as comments. In contrast to the strict constrictions for ancient Greek females, in modern China, legal framework guarantees equal rights for all citizens in education, marriage and property. As society continues to develop, women in China can enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, including political, cultural, economic, social, and family life.

Centuries ago, ancient China was also a patriarchal society, where women must follow the inhuman ethical code of obedience to male family members. Chinese history developed from the matriarchal society, in which women suffered very little gender oppression, to patriarchy, due to the differences in physical sizes and energy levels of men and women, which persisted for many centuries. By Tang Dynasty, women experienced a period of relative freedom and equality, which was then again followed by a period of suppression under the long-standing tradition of foot binding [26]. In the twentieth Century, as global interactions were forced upon China due to wars and exploitation by the imperialist powers, foreign ideologies were brought into China [27]. This brought about a greater intellectual awakening for both men and women in Chinese society, which prompted them to overthrew Qing Dynasty and establish the Republic of China. But the awakening of the Chinese people extended far beyond resisting foreign aggression and saving the nation. It also permeated deeper into the fabric of societal thought and individual consciousness, with one aspect focusing on gender equality [28]. After the Revolution, the People's Republic of China outlined the promotion of equality between both men and women as a basic state policy. For example, specifically in marriage: Though marriage still promoted a husband's control over wife, the social consensus had begun to reject these desires and pressures, increasingly working to eradicate existing unfair norms and advance gender quality. With the liberation of mind and collective struggle, the voices that had been suppressed for hundreds of years by women have finally been heard.

The tremendous impact of this has led to a transformation in the social mindset, which can be reflected through social media, specifically in videos' creative contents, comments, as well as bullet screens. Today, the outcomes of this long struggle are evident: Women in China are not only equal under the law but are active agents in shaping cultural discourse. In addition, men and women alike continued to advocate for eradicating unfair practices.

According to The Fourth Survey on the Social Status of Chinese Women in December 2021, people's recognition of the equality of social status between men and women has reached an unprecedented new height [29]. With approximately 97% of the respondents believe that the Party and the state have created increasingly favorable conditions for the development of women. The proportion of those who believe that the social status of men and women in our country is roughly the same has increased by 15 percentage points compared to 2010.

This indicates that men and women have a high degree of consensus on the development of women and their capabilities, demonstrating societal support for gender equality, and reflecting how modern Chinese society embraces the idea that men and women should enjoy equal standing in all spheres, including marriage, shapes public moral

judgments [30].

In terms of marriage and loyalty, article 1042 of the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China clearly stipulates that "Bigamy is prohibited. Cohabitation of a married person with any third party is prohibited."

If one spouse has an extramarital affair and cohabits with another person during the marriage, the aggrieved party may directly file for divorce in court and demand that the party at fault bear the liability for damages arising from the divorce. This manifests that loyalty, as one of the legislative spirits of China's Marriage Law, is a strict boundary in marriage in present day China. Anyone crossing the boundary will receive both moral and legal denouncement. And with the development of social media, new generations of Chinese people are also beginning to increasingly express their attitude toward inequalities between men and women on social platforms. It can be presented in how they posted interpretations of marriage in foreign literary works like *the Odyssey* on the platform BiliBili.

Today, the outcomes of this long struggle are evident: Men and women in China are not only equal under the law but are both active agents in shaping cultural discourse, with a shift of mind in various fields including marriage. When contemporary Chinese social media users encounter Odysseus' extramarital interactions in *The Odyssey*, their strong belief in modern loyalty boundaries leads them to criticize such behavior, as it violates the loyalty expected within a marriage under today's values.

Therefore, retellings of *the Odyssey* reflect society's shifting boundary values: What was once seen as heroic loyalty is now critiqued. This proves that the concept of "boundaries" is a product of its historical moment and does not have a definite and changeless range.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of "boundaries" in relationships, particularly in relation to loyalty, has changed from ancient Greek times to the present-day China. What is once considered a hero loyal to his wife under the influence of the patriarchal society, is critiqued by Chinese social media users as they frankly pointed out and mocked at Odysseus's behavior that violates the idea of loyal boundary in present days under the content of gender equality.

Through the changing interpretations of Odysseus, we see that the boundaries of loyalty are not fixed, but rather a dynamic reflection of the evolving values and beliefs of society: Particularly, how it is reshaped through the modernity of gender roles, gender ideology and legal right advancements, with social media as the platform for the expression and advocation of the change in these boundary ideas.

This study makes a significant contribution to the cross-cultural and trans-temporal research on the concept of boundaries between ancient Greece and modern China by integrating classical texts with modern social media. It enriches the research on the evolution of cultural concepts, offers insights into how traditional notions interact with contemporary social discourses, and provides a new perspective for understanding the transformation of social values in the digital age.

Funding

This work was not supported by any funds.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to show sincere thanks to those techniques who have contributed to this research.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Crawford, M. (2021) Blurring the boundaries: public space and private life. *Public Space Reader*, 26-33.

[2] Chernata, T. (2024) Personal boundaries: definition, role, and impact on mental health. *Personality and Environmental Issues*, 3(1), 24-30.

[3] Harasymchuk, C., Fehr, B. (2019) Responses to dissatisfaction in friendships and romantic relationships: an interpersonal script analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(6), 1651-1670.

[4] Ferguson, H. (2018) How social workers reflect in action and when and why they don't: the possibilities and limits to reflective practice in social work. *Social Work Education*, 37(4), 415-427.

[5] Shu, S. B., Peck, J. (2018) Solving stewardship problems with increased psychological ownership. *Psychological Ownership and Consumer Behavior*, 227-237.

[6] Mahmudulhassan, M., Abuzar, M. (2024) Harmony in the family: indicators of marriage success in cultural and religious foundations in Bangladesh. *Demak Universal Journal of Islam and Sharia*, 2(03), 221-230.

[7] Čopková, R., Lörincová, E. (2021) The dark triad, love components, and attachment styles in romantic relationship experiencing during young adulthood. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 15(2), 212-232.

[8] Campbell, L., Stanton, S. C. (2019) Adult attachment and trust in romantic relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 25, 148-151.

[9] Blake, S., Janssens, A. (2023) Through "thick and thin" as long as it is healthy: shared meanings of commitment in long-term couple relationships, whether married or not. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(2), 595-611.

[10] Cè, M. (2022) The secondary incipit of the Odyssey (Od. 9.39): quotation, translation, and adaptation in the ancient reception of Homer. *Classical Philology*, 117(3), 411-437.

[11] Al-rikabi, A. D. H. (2025) Character development and "the hero's journey" in Epic Narratives: Homer's The Odyssey. *Path of Science*, 11(4), 9001-9007.

[12] Pinto, A. P. (2024) Reaching out and escaping from other: Odysseus. *The Process of Becoming Other in the Classical and Contemporary World: Philosophical, Cultural, and Humanistic Perspectives on Communication Across Difference*, 35-52.

[13] Karimi, R., Bakhtiyari, M., Arani, A. M. (2019) Protective factors of marital stability in long-term marriage globally: a systematic review. *Epidemiology and Health*, 41, e2019023.

[14] Dudziak, U. (2022) Religiousness of spouses as a factor contributing to shaping a successful marriage. *Teologia i moralność*, 17(1 (31)), 119-144.

[15] Loh, H. S., Gaur, S. S., Sharma, P. (2021) Demystifying the link between emotional loneliness and brand loyalty: mediating roles of nostalgia, materialism, and self-brand connections. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(3), 537-552.

[16] Tsakiropoulou-Summers, T., Kitsi-Mitakou, K. (2018) Introduction: the ideological construct of the "inferior female". *Women and the Ideology of Political Exclusion*, 1-30.

[17] Cremer, D. J. (2021) Patriarchy, religion, and society. *Exploring Gender at Work: Multiple Perspectives*, 25-44.

[18] Zhang, C. (2016) Loving boys twice as much: Chinese women's paradoxical fandom of "boys' love" fiction. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(3), 249-267.

[19] Matsui, T., Sato, M., Kato, Y., Nishigori, H. (2019) Professional identity formation of female doctors in Japan-gap between the married and unmarried. *BMC Medical Education*, 19(1), 55.

[20] Kapur, R. (2023) Understanding the institution of marriage. *Indian Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism (IJMCJ)*, 2(4), 23-28.

[21] Das Gupta, S. (2024) Equalizing gender imbalance in a globalized world - the issue of transnational abandonment of women. *Understanding Women's Empowerment in South Asia: Perspectives on Entitlements and*

Violations, 199-223.

[22] Lawrence, D. H. (2018) Women in love. *Medicine and Literature, Volume Two*, 177-204.

[23] Li, L., Zhang, J., An, X. (2023) Using social media for efficient brand marketing: an evaluation of Chinese universities using Bilibili. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 88, 101645.

[24] Gupta, G. R., Oomman, N., Grown, C., Conn, K., Hawkes, S., Shawar, Y. R., Darmstadt, G. L. (2019) Gender equality and gender norms: Framing the opportunities for health. *The Lancet*, 393(10190), 2550-2562.

[25] Ummataliyevich, A. K. (2022) The Importance of marriage in modern society. *European Scholar Journal*, 3(6), 151-152.

[26] Fan, X., Wang, J., Xiao, H. (2021) Women's travel in the Tang Dynasty: gendered identity in a hierarchical society. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 89, 103231.

[27] Hui, W. (2020) Twentieth-century China as an object of thought: an introduction, part 1 the birth of the century: the chinese revolution and the logic of politics. *Modern China*, 46(1), 3-48.

[28] Niu, L., Liu, M., Fan, L., E, Y. (2024) The moderating effect of gender equality consciousness on environmental concern among males and females. *Work*, 79(1), 191-202.

[29] Sczesny, S., Nater, C., Rudman, L., Lohmore, A., Malayeri, S., Sakallı, N., Gustafsson Sendén, M. (2025) How women and men should (not) be: gender rules and their alignment with status beliefs across nations. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 49(2), 243-263.

[30] Storozhuk, S., Hoyan, I. (2018) Gender equality in the context of social relations. *Bulletin of the Cherkasy Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University. Series Philosophy*, (1), 3-16.