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Female Characterization in the Stage Adaptation of Green Snake through Freudian Structural Theory

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Abstract: Tian Qinxin's 2013 stage adaptation of Green Snake places bodily desire, intimate commitments, and Buddhist belief within the contrasting experiences of two female serpent spirits. This article examines its characterization through Freud's structural model, drawing on the Hong Kong Arts Festival programme, production accounts, and dialogue and staging descriptions reproduced in published scholarship. A review of studies on subjectivity, embodied performance, and religious narrative establishes the debate over the relationship between female agency and spiritual resolution. The analysis traces continuing interactions among the id, ego, and superego across the characters' choices and relationships. White Snake's aspiration to become human combines emotional gratification with ideals of wifehood and motherhood; Green Snake's desires acquire expectations of reciprocity through imitation, rejection, and perseverance. Stage juxtaposition, bodily training, repeated vows, and changes of performed identity turn psychic conflict into a problem of relationships and recognition. The pagoda, prolonged waiting, and rebirth reorganize these relationships without removing the authority that constrains them. Drawing selectively on gender performativity, religious agency, and mutual recognition, the article distinguishes the capacity to act from emancipation and spiritual meaning from psychic maturity. The production gives women opportunities to articulate and reconsider their wishes, while making recognition conditional on domestic responsibility or religious cultivation. Female characterization emerges through this continuing tension between desire, chosen commitments, and the norms that determine whose choices receive a response.

Keywords: Green Snake; Tian Qinxin; Freudian Structural Theory; Female Subjectivity; Embodied Performance

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1. Introduction

Tian Qinxin's Green Snake asks what becoming human entails when a character can learn human gestures but cannot secure the relationships those gestures appear to promise. Its female protagonists enter a world in which love offers recognition, household life offers social identity, and religious cultivation offers an explanation for suffering. These possibilities carry different obligations. A wish for intimacy may lead to marriage, rivalry, waiting, or withdrawal. The consequences of changed conduct depend on the authority that defines an acceptable life. The play therefore provides a setting for examining how desires and norms coexist within characterization, and how a woman's capacity to choose depends on other people's responses.

The Hong Kong Arts Festival programme identifies the production as an adaptation of Lilian Lee's novel, with Tian as

playwright and director and An Ying as co-writer. Qin Hailu and Yuan Quan play Green Snake and White Snake; Xin Baiqing and Dong Chang play Fahai and Xu Xian[1] (p. 12). This article examines the 2013 production through the festival programme and published accounts. The White Snake tradition, Lee's novel, and Tsui Hark's film provide its adaptive context, while the documented staging supplies the evidence for individual scenes. The distribution of bodies, speech, and attention gives an action its meaning within the production. Keeping that context visible links the interpretation of female characterization to the theatrical form through which the characters become recognizable.

Freud's structural model explains how competing demands converge within the women's actions. White Snake's search for a household joins emotional satisfaction to an ideal of recognizable feminine identity. Green Snake's pursuit of intimacy develops expectations concerning continuity and response. Their choices involve accommodating reality, protecting an attachment, and responding to judgments they have partly made their own. The interaction among these demands also shapes the interpretation of the ending. White Snake's confinement, Green Snake's perseverance, and the prospect of rebirth acquire meaning through spiritual responsibility and renewed understanding, as well as through the burdens the women bear. Religious narrative gives an action a vocabulary of value; reciprocal recognition concerns the response that action receives within a relationship. The two can reinforce one another or produce different outcomes. Accepting a norm can also create a course of action whose consequences remain structured by unequal authority. The relationship between choice and regulation therefore emerges through the circumstances in which a choice becomes available, the alternatives it displaces, and the answer it obtains. This approach follows the women's changing commitments while keeping their practical consequences central to the evaluation of female subjectivity. It connects the psychological investment in an ideal with the conditions under which another person can recognize, refuse, or redirect the claim made through that ideal.

This article asks how Green Snake and White Snake negotiate bodily desire, relationship commitments, and internalized ideals, and how theatrical form makes these negotiations visible. It argues that their different choices emerge through the relationships in which they pursue recognition and negotiate competing demands for gratification, adjustment, and commitment. The play exposes unequal obligations within intimate life while giving responsibility and perseverance a spiritual value. Its representation of female subjectivity is consequently conditional: the women express wishes and revise conduct, but their opportunities remain organized by domestic and monastic institutions. The following sections establish the literature and evidence base, clarify the theoretical distinctions, and examine becoming human, reciprocal promises, and the religious ending.

2. Literature Review and Materials

2.1 Psychic Conflict and Female Subjectivity

Research on Tian's production connects characterization with desire and gendered ethics. Wang Jingting organizes the play through binary oppositions and associates Green Snake with the id and White Snake's human aspiration with the superego[2] (pp. 39-40). This distribution foregrounds differences between the protagonists. Examining the interaction among agencies within each woman brings their competing investments into view: White Snake seeks pleasure through an ideal, while Green Snake judges intimate relationships against an expectation of continuity. Liu Sijia's account of female subjectivity emphasizes Green Snake's independence and self-love alongside White Snake's domestic self-discipline[3]. It shifts attention toward the women's different ways of inhabiting their situations. Cui Zongchao's abstract locates desire, identity, and transcendence within tensions between older and newer ethical positions[4]. Together, these studies identify the psychological and ethical dimensions of the women's choices. The present article develops their implications through the passage from wish to commitment: what each woman expects an identity to offer, how another person answers the commitment made through it, and what costs accompany that answer. This approach makes the evaluation of subjectivity depend on the interaction between a character's investment and the conditions of its recognition. It also provides a way to compare the protagonists while retaining the mixture of gratification, adjustment, and ideal obligation within each one's conduct.

Subjectivity, agency, and emancipation identify distinct dimensions of the characters' participation in relationships. A character may speak her desire without controlling the relationship in which it is expressed. She may question a norm while continuing to depend on the recognition it provides. She may endorse a demanding commitment while having few

other acceptable opportunities. The present analysis therefore uses female subjectivity to denote the characters' capacity to articulate wishes, reconsider expectations, and undertake action within their relationships. Agency concerns how that capacity is exercised in a particular situation. Emancipation concerns whether the inequalities shaping the situation are reduced. These distinctions connect each moment of expressive intensity to the relationships, choices, and consequences through which the narrative gives it meaning.

2.2 Embodied Performance and Religious Interpretation

Research on theatrical form explains how bodily and religious meanings acquire a staged organization. Sun Yunfeng examines bodies in Tian's productions and relates physical action and visual arrangements in Green Snake to desire and gendered relations[5]. Learned posture, bodily restraint, and proximity to another performer participate in the presentation of a character's psychological condition. This approach directs attention to how staged comparisons make a relational conflict perceptible, especially when the protagonists occupy contrasting positions at the same moment. Fang Guilin and Huang Aihua's abstract connects Tian's engagement with Chan thought to theatrical aesthetics, including minimalist space, acoustic narration, and the coexistence of solemnity and humour[6]. Their aesthetic emphasis provides a further point of entry into the production of religious meaning on stage. In the present interpretation, Buddhist imagery organizes dramatic values through its placement within the narrative: it can authorize a judgment, redirect attention, or connect experiences previously kept apart. The analysis therefore follows the work done by a religious term or image in a particular scene. Its significance for female agency emerges through the arrangement of action, response, and authority. Bringing bodily expression and religious aesthetics into this inquiry allows the visible form of a scene to carry analytical weight alongside its stated moral meaning.

Contemporary criticism makes the relationship between action and religious meaning a central issue. Gu Haihui reads the play as an experience of learning to be human and interprets White Snake's entry into the pagoda through responsibility[7]. Liao Juncheng questions the incorporation of female desire into a religious explanation centered on Fahai[8]. Bai Huiyuan's study across media connects the theatrical pagoda with women's ethical burdens and self-discipline[9]. Each account highlights a different relation between a woman's action, the conditions under which it occurs, and the authority that describes its value. The present article brings those relations into the same scene-based argument. Its contribution is to connect psychic categories, female consciousness, bodily expression, and religious narrative through the mediation of relationships. Desire encounters reality through another person's promise or refusal; an acceptable role supplies an ideal through which a woman judges herself; spiritual resolution changes the value assigned to endurance. These connections establish separate criteria for evaluating self-expression, self-discipline, and freedom. They keep the ending's spiritual promise and its distribution of costs visible together. The literature supplies both the material and the interpretive disagreement through which this relational account develops, allowing each claim about female subjectivity to be assessed through the particular commitment and response on which it rests.

2.3 Sources and the Boundaries of the Production

The evidence consists of the 2013 festival programme, accounts by the production's creators and institutions, and dialogue and staging descriptions reproduced in published scholarship. The programme establishes credits, narrative events, and the director's stated concerns. Wang and Liu provide quoted passages and descriptions for close reading. Secondary descriptions are used at the level supported by their dates and venues: accounts without that information document the 2013 production lineage, while precise claims about a particular Hong Kong performance require a corresponding performance record. Sun's discussion is consulted through a public journal-channel reproduction, and Bai's argument through accessible reproduced sections. Cui and Fang and Huang are used at the level of their available abstracts. This corpus anchors an interpretive study of documented characterization and staging. Keeping its different forms of access explicit allows the analysis to distinguish a source's description of an action, its interpretation of that action, and the level of performance detail available for comparison. The National Theatre of China's account of the 2014 Edinburgh tour documents changes from a three-hour production to a two-hour American version and then a ninety-minute Edinburgh version, alongside changes in the actors playing Green Snake and Fahai[10]. These alterations establish distinct contexts for the sequence and emphasis of the performances. The present article uses the tour account to define those contexts and reads its principal scenes through the programme and accounts

associated with the 2013 production lineage. Within this evidence base, the analysis proceeds from a documented event to its theatrical organization and then to its interpretive implications. Differences between sources remain part of the argument. A programme's summary of confinement and a critic's account of voluntary responsibility can emphasize different aspects of agency within the same dramatic situation. Creator statements similarly document an intended effect, whereas claims about spectators' experience belong to reception research grounded in audience material. Preserving these levels keeps the analysis focused on how characterization is organized through staging and interpreted through published accounts. It also makes disagreement productive: the sources show how the meaning of a choice changes when attention moves between the authority imposing a situation and the character's response to it.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Coexisting Psychic Agencies

In The Ego and the Id, Freud distinguishes instinctual demands, mediation with external reality, and requirements formed through identification. The id presses toward gratification; the ego deals with competing demands under the conditions of reality; the superego incorporates prohibitions and ideals. These are coexisting agencies, rather than a hierarchy of moral worth or successive stages replacing one another. Ego activity can be unconscious, and the superego can exert severe pressure through guilt[11] (chs. II, III, V). Their interaction allows a single action to serve satisfaction, self-protection, and fidelity to an ideal. Human and nonhuman identities, meanwhile, establish the play's dramatic world. Psychological interpretation concerns the conflicts enacted within that world: a demand for gratification meeting resistance, an adjustment that sustains attachment, or a requirement becoming part of a character's judgment of herself. These distinctions give the structural model its analytical precision. White Snake's search for a household is pertinent because she invests an identity with value; Green Snake's insistence on lasting companionship is pertinent because an expectation becomes a measure of whether intimacy is adequate. Their bodily habits provide the theatrical context in which those demands acquire expression. The analysis follows the interaction between a documented action and the wishes or standards it makes intelligible, keeping the characters' different kinds of demand active within the same scene.

Ego mediation takes shape through the course of action a character adopts. Remaining in a relationship, moderating a demand, or revising conduct can protect a wish while also preserving an unequal arrangement. White Snake's use of her resources to maintain marriage joins emotional desire to a practical strategy whose consequences depend on the response it secures. Identification gives that strategy a further investment in the social world represented on stage. A domestic ideal becomes attractive because it promises a stable place from which a woman will be seen and valued. Once invested with that promise, the ideal can continue to govern conduct as the partner's response becomes unreliable. Commitment then sustains attachment while protecting an identity threatened by rejection. The psychological and relational dimensions reinforce one another: further effort appears to preserve both the relationship and the meaning attached to becoming human. Assessing the strategy therefore requires attention to how these purposes coexist and how its outcome affects the woman's opportunities. The structural vocabulary describes the conflict, while the terms of recognition support the ethical assessment of the solution. This reading treats attributed wishes and documented choices as elements of artistic characterization through which competing demands become intelligible across successive encounters.

3.2 Performed Identity and Situated Agency

Butler explains how repeated bodily acts make gender socially intelligible and distinguishes theatrical enactment from the sanctions attached to conduct outside the theatre[12] (pp. 519-520, 525-527). Her account complements the analysis of psychic demands by showing how an ideal of womanhood takes a recognizable form through practice. In Green Snake, learned gestures and repeated domestic identities make the performance of a norm available for examination. The theatrical display operates through conventions different from those governing everyday gender conduct. Its analytical significance lies in how the production presents the role and the burdens attached to it. Repetition can expose those burdens, display the attraction of an accepted identity, or show both meanings together. The question is how a recognizable feminine role becomes a route through which a character expects to receive recognition.

Mahmood examines the formation of agency through practices undertaken within an authoritative religious tradition. Her

analysis gives endurance a meaning connected to its aims and conditions, while treating resistance as one possible exercise of agency[13] (pp. 203, 210-212, 217-223). The ethnographic setting is an Egyptian Islamic movement. The present article adopts her distinction between agency and emancipation to examine the purposes and consequences of commitment within the drama. This distinction directs attention to what a character accomplishes through perseverance, the capacities the practice develops, and the constraints within which those capacities operate. The interpretation remains grounded in the documented conduct and religious vocabulary of Green Snake. Its account of agency takes persistence seriously as an action, while the evaluation of emancipation examines changes in the inequalities shaping the relationship.

Benjamin's account of mutual recognition concerns acknowledgment of another person as an independent subject and examines how complementary positions of acting and being acted upon organize interaction[14] (pp. 5-11). It directs attention to the response given to a woman's expressed wish within relations of unequal power. A partner or religious interlocutor can acknowledge her as someone whose claims affect the terms of the relationship. This form of acknowledgment is distinct from acceptance into a valued social role. A woman recognized as a wife can still encounter a partner who disregards her wishes. The distinction makes the quality of response central to the evaluation of her opportunities: what she can express, which claims the other hears, and how their conduct changes. The four perspectives clarify separate steps within this inquiry. Freud identifies conflicts among desire, practical adjustment, and internalized requirements; Butler examines how gendered roles acquire recognizable bodily forms; Mahmood separates the exercise of agency from emancipation; Benjamin sharpens the question of reciprocal acknowledgment. Together, these steps organize a reading of what the women want, how they pursue it, and how others answer. They connect the documented scenes to an assessment of relationships while maintaining the distinction between the production's religious meanings and the article's criteria for evaluating female subjectivity.

4. Becoming Human through Bodies and Social Ideals

4.1 Learning a Recognizable Feminine Identity

In the scenes described by Wang, White Snake adjusts her gait and tongue to resemble a human, while Green Snake questions the abandonment of familiar bodily habits[2] (p. 39). This exchange distinguishes resemblance from participation. Learning a gesture gives the serpent a human appearance, opening questions about the wishes she will pursue and the treatment she will receive. The bodily lesson opens onto a social question: what kind of human identity will make her presence acceptable? Her transformation develops through a negotiation over recognition, as bodily resemblance opens a possible identity within the practices of human life.

White Snake's imagined household gives that recognition a definite form. Her desire to be a "respectable woman" connects intimacy with domestic identity[2] (p. 39). The aspiration includes pleasure, security, and an intelligible place in a shared life. These elements reinforce one another before the marriage exists. The domestic ideal gives desire a recognizable destination from the outset, joining emotional satisfaction to a role through which it can be acknowledged. From a Freudian perspective, the value placed on the imagined role helps explain why its subsequent disappointment affects more than a romantic expectation. It threatens a way of understanding what becoming human was supposed to achieve. White Snake's willingness to learn also gives her conduct an active dimension. She selects a desired life and undertakes changes that might make it possible. Her investment in this future gives bodily adjustment the purpose of a chosen commitment. Yet the apparent coherence of the domestic ideal conceals dependence on another person's recognition. She can alter posture, establish a household, and care for Xu Xian, but she cannot unilaterally make him accept her identity. The more successfully she performs the role, the less intelligible his rejection becomes within the promise attached to it. The resulting conflict concerns the terms on which humanity and feminine respectability are granted.

Green Snake's resistance to the bodily lesson makes those terms available for scrutiny. Her familiar sensations supply a point from which human habits can be questioned. The difference between the women emerges through their responses to the learned practices of human life. Their exchange places a learned norm beside the experience it reorganizes. A norm that appears natural when followed by humans becomes conspicuous when a serpent must practice it. Green Snake's questioning reveals the contingency of habits whose authority appears self-evident to those already living by them. Her capacity to ask why a habit is necessary is itself part of the characterization. The women's mutual observation complicates this opposition

further. Green Snake can challenge White Snake's bodily adjustments while learning from her expectations of love. White Snake can pursue a stable identity while encountering the doubts voiced by her companion. Their positions develop through comparison rather than remaining separate psychological types. This relation matters because an ideal is transmitted through an emotionally significant example. Green Snake's imitation of human commitment is mediated by White Snake's apparent success. She acquires an image of how another woman expects to be valued, giving a rule about conduct its emotional force. The model becomes vulnerable when similar conduct does not receive a similar response.

4.2 Space and the Material Conditions of Adaptation

The premiere report gives this problem a spatial dimension. Stage designer Merle Hensel associates water with female and serpent existence and the built environment with a male human world. She describes the set's height as overwhelming for an arriving animal spirit[15]. Hensel's design concept situates bodily adaptation in an already organized space, joining the difficulty of entering human life to the material structures that give its relationships form. The female form encounters structures whose shape it has not determined, and learning how to inhabit them becomes part of entering human life. Read alongside White Snake's domestic aspiration, the design concept raises a question about accommodation. Fluidity can signify a capacity to move, respond, and take different forms; it can also signify the expectation that women adjust to structures established elsewhere. These readings place accommodation at the intersection of bodily capacity and the demands of a structured environment. The interpretive issue is whether adaptation allows a woman to alter her surroundings or chiefly requires her to become suitable for them. White Snake's pursuit of household recognition exemplifies this ambiguity. Her efforts have a purpose she endorses, but the terms of acceptance remain vulnerable to a partner's judgment. Material form and psychic investment converge around the cost of fitting a desired identity.

The performers' preparation locates embodiment in craft. CCTV connects Qin Hailu's and Yuan Quan's Peking Opera training with their performance of the serpent roles, and records Xin Baiqing's temple stay and participation in monastic routines while preparing Fahai[15]. Serpent movement and religious discipline thus acquired stage form through different kinds of learned bodily practice. The comparison makes both desire and restraint available as performed qualities. For the Freudian analysis, the relevant unit is a gesture within a relationship: its timing, the response it receives, and the opportunity for action it opens or closes. This approach connects the work of performance to the conflict an action makes intelligible. Fahai's authority likewise depends on a bodily presence produced through rehearsal and performance. The embodied religious interlocutor brings discipline into the same theatrical world as the women's visible efforts to learn or question human conduct. His position becomes part of the play's examination of how desire is regulated and how a character acquires the authority to guide another's choices.

Sun's discussion supplies a further comparison: the same production presents Xu Xian's partly exposed exercising body alongside the female protagonists' trained movement and the use of umbrellas to articulate intimacy[5] (sec. III). Bodily display is therefore distributed across the relationship. The man's visible body can become an object of attraction while his status as a human partner retains the power to grant or withhold acceptance. Erotic visibility and the authority to accept a partner remain unevenly distributed within the relationship. The evidence also supports Sun's positive reading of women's direct expression of desire. The question carried into the later analysis is whether that expressive capacity enables the women to determine the terms on which intimacy continues.

The body's changing intelligibility makes becoming human a question of participation in a social world. They enter a social world from a different kind of existence, and the play uses that estrangement to make ordinary expectations visible. White Snake's deliberate imitation and Green Snake's questioning expose the effort required to become legible within a gendered relation. Their desires remain active throughout. What changes is the form in which those desires are expressed and the standards against which they are assessed. The human identity offers recognition while demanding practices that can constrain the women who pursue it. The comparison brings the costs of both routes into view. White Snake's accommodation displays commitment but can deepen dependence on a vulnerable ideal. Green Snake's questioning displays distance from that ideal but does not free her from the wish to receive its promised recognition. Each position contains an achievement and a difficulty. The play's two-protagonist structure lets the difficulties illuminate one another: conformity does not guarantee

acceptance, and transgression does not guarantee reciprocity. Female characterization develops through these uneven routes into human relationships, with each woman negotiating a combination of wishes, practical adjustments, and valued ideals.

5. Promises and the Conditions of Mutual Recognition

5.1 Stage Juxtaposition and Unequal Commitments

Wang describes the Broken Bridge scene as a juxtaposition of White Snake's romantic encounter with Xu Xian and Green Snake's questioning of other men. Screens, umbrellas, and contrasting movement distinguish the encounters[2] (pp. 37-38). The arrangement makes two experiences of a promise comparable within one dramatic space. White Snake appears to obtain the lasting commitment Green Snake is unable to secure. Their simultaneous presentation puts the apparent reliability of the successful encounter under pressure from the refusal occurring beside it. The two scenes ask what a promise commits someone to do.

The recurring expression "for a lifetime" offers a measure of intimacy that extends beyond immediate satisfaction. Its force depends on more than the sincerity of the person who speaks it. A promise requires a future response and some continuity between present speech and later conduct. White Snake treats commitment as the basis of a shared life; Green Snake's repetition seeks access to a comparable future. The spatial comparison consequently makes desire relational in a precise sense. A woman can express a wish and identify the relationship she wants, but another person's conduct determines whether that wish can become a durable arrangement. The contrast also distinguishes speech from recognition. Being addressed as a beloved can confer a valued identity without making the speaker accountable to that identity's future claims. Green Snake's questioning tests this gap directly. Her effort to obtain duration from intimacy adds a requirement concerning how the other person responds to bodily desire and the future it promises. The ideal of continuity can coexist with physical gratification, and disappointment can concern their failure to coincide. In this scene, Green Snake's articulation of an unmet expectation forms part of ego mediation, bringing continued response into her negotiation over intimacy.

Read retrospectively through Xu Xian's withdrawal, White Snake's initial success becomes less secure. The vow promises recognition of the woman, but the species distinction allows the partner to revoke that recognition. Her accepted human appearance does not permanently authorize her place in the relationship. The scene's earlier juxtaposition prepares this instability: verbal commitment can be accepted in one encounter and evaded in another, yet both depend on conduct beyond the moment of declaration. The play makes the feminine ideal attractive before exposing the contingency of its fulfillment. White Snake's subsequent suffering thus follows from an unstable relation between a promise and the identity invested in it. Costume designer Chen Gufang's explanation reinforces the ambivalence of the human partner. She links Xu Xian's deep blue and grey clothing to an ordinary appearance and an uncertain, imperfect human nature[15]. The intended ambiguity links a partner's human identity to the instability of his response: he can confer social recognition while remaining uncertain about the terms on which he offers it. The women's adaptation to the human world consequently brings them into contact with authority that is effective without being ethically reliable. The costume concept gives this ambivalence a visual form, joining an ordinary appearance to the instability of the relationship it seems to promise.

5.2 Domestic Investment and Internalized Obligation

White Snake supports the household and takes risks for Xu Xian, while his dialogue associates wifehood with fidelity, obedience, and care[2] (pp. 40-41). These actions place her desire within practical obligations. From the structural perspective, household maintenance can mediate between a wish and the conditions required to sustain it. The same conduct can also confirm an ideal through which she judges her worth. Its meaning therefore depends on how she understands responsibility and how Xu Xian answers her investment. Reciprocity turns on how the partner responds to care and shares the practical obligations that sustain the relation.

One cost of this arrangement is the possible convergence of two different failures. If the marriage falters, White Snake risks experiencing both rejection by a partner and failure to inhabit the human identity she wanted. Internalized obligation becomes particularly powerful when maintaining the relation appears to maintain the self. Further sacrifice can then promise to repair more than the practical household. It can protect the meaning attached to becoming human. This investment explains the persistence of an unequal commitment by connecting emotional attachment to the valued identity the marriage sustains.

Her decisions respond to a situation in which emotional attachment and a valued identity have become difficult to separate. The asymmetry lies in the different consequences borne by the participants. Xu Xian can retreat from the relationship when the serpent identity becomes unacceptable, whereas White Snake's investment makes withdrawal a threat to the life she has constructed. Recognition that remains revocable imposes a continuing demand on the person seeking it. The distribution of sacrifice turns on whether the burdens of maintaining commitment are shared and whether her claims can modify his behavior. A Freudian reading identifies the investment in the ideal; attention to recognition establishes why its relational conditions matter to the evaluation of her agency.

The cross-gender domestic passage extends this predicament beyond White Snake alone. Wang records performers playing monks taking on several female domestic roles[2] (p. 41). The transitions make a recognizable feminine identity appear through different bodies. In relation to Butler's distinction, the passage directs attention to the repeatability of the practices through which wifehood and motherhood become intelligible. The theatrical comparison presents responsibility as a role repeatedly assigned and enacted, locating White Snake's personal burden within obligations carried by several performed identities. This device also connects religious and domestic spaces without making their rules identical. The same performers carry different identities across the stage, allowing an institutional body associated with discipline to present bodies burdened by household expectations. The resulting comparison can expose a shared demand for self-regulation while leaving the aims and powers of the institutions distinct. The device places different institutional forms of discipline in a shared space, making their demands available for theatrical comparison. The modern production makes inherited ethical roles available for examination by rendering their recurrence visible through theatrical transformation.

5.3 Desire and Responsibility between the Women

Green Snake's encounter with Xu Xian connects her pursuit of desire to the claims of another woman. The programme recounts the resulting estrangement between the women and their later cooperation to rescue him[1] (p. 14). Her pursuit of desire affects another woman's attachment. The consequence makes the effect of her agency on White Snake's relationship part of the ethical problem developed through characterization. Expressing a wish brings her into contact with claims capable of changing her conduct, and each woman encounters the difficulty of preserving an attachment while responding to the other. Cooperation carries their attachment through the rupture, showing a capacity to respond to one another after competing wishes have disrupted their intimacy. From the article's perspective, these capacities provide another possible basis of recognition: a woman can be acknowledged by a companion who has shared the difficulty of entering human life. The play's attention to both protagonists makes this relation available even when the marriage and monastery dominate the narrative's declared resolutions.

The sisters' comparison consequently exposes the limits of both conformity and transgression. White Snake's chosen commitment has consequences Green Snake initially fails to recognize; Green Snake's questioning discloses the insecurity White Snake's ideal can conceal. Their comparison brings the consequences of conformity and transgression into the same relational field. They reveal a problem of how to preserve one's wishes while admitting that others have claims capable of changing one's conduct. This is the relational dimension of the psychic conflict: competing requirements are encountered through people with whom the women remain emotionally involved. An analysis of female characterization must therefore follow those interactions as well as the internal demands they make intelligible.

6. Confinement and Waiting in the Religious Ending

6.1 Responsibility under Constraint

The ending reorganizes these conflicts by placing them within religious time and space. White Snake's entry into Leifeng Pagoda is especially contested. The festival programme describes suppression by Fahai, whereas Gu emphasizes her acceptance of responsibility[1] (p. 14)[7]. These accounts concern different aspects of agency. One names the authority that imposes the situation; the other interprets how White Snake inhabits it. Together, the accounts locate agency within a coercive arrangement: White Snake gives her action a purpose while Fahai retains authority over the conditions in which she acts. Through Gu's interpretation, entry into the pagoda can be considered a revision of White Snake's investment in marriage. She no longer pursues recognition from Xu Xian by the same means. Yet relinquishing a particular expectation and obtaining

freedom are different outcomes. Confinement removes her from ordinary relations and gives the revision an institutional form. The interpretive question is what opportunities remain within that form, who controls them, and how responsibility is allocated. If the suffering of the woman becomes the principal means by which the narrative restores ethical value, the cost of resolution remains uneven even when she gives that suffering a purpose of her own.

Bai's discussion of the theatrical pagoda makes the association with moral burden pertinent[9]. The tower is both a consequence within the story and a structure through which the woman gives her changed life meaning. Spatial separation can redirect attention inward, but it can also restrict access to reciprocal relations. The difference matters for the structural model. Internalization describes how an external requirement becomes a demand the character places on herself, making its felt authority part of the conflict under analysis. The pagoda can therefore signify cultivation while retaining the question of why a woman's desire must be answered through confinement. Mahmood's distinction situates agency in the aims and practices through which a person inhabits a demanding commitment. Accepting a demanding practice can cultivate capacities and express an aim. Those capacities develop within relations whose authority, alternatives, and distribution of harm remain open to assessment[13] (pp. 210-212, 224-225). For White Snake, responsibility names an action through which she gives her situation a purpose and responds to its consequences. Its assessment still depends on the situation: responsibility for what, imposed or chosen under which conditions, and directed toward what future? The religious explanation supplies a value for the action, while the character's circumstances determine its practical limits.

White Snake's subjectivity emerges through her response to the cost of a spiritually valued outcome. She gives a changed life significance within an arrangement that assigns her both a demanding task and a restricted range of relationships. Her response carries an endorsed purpose whose costs connect cultivation to the earlier domestic scenes. Both involve an ideal through which her effort becomes meaningful, and both require attention to the authority that recognizes the ideal. The ending changes the vocabulary of value without automatically equalizing the relations behind it.

6.2 Perseverance and the Response to Green Snake

Green Snake's five hundred years on a temple beam give duration a different dramatic form[2] (pp. 38-39). The lifetime promise is displaced into an interval that exceeds ordinary intimate time. Perseverance can make an attachment visible after bodily access and immediate response have been withheld. It can also make the woman's capacity to endure the chief evidence of her sincerity. The duration gives attachment a form whose value depends on what Green Snake seeks, the response she receives, and the requirements attached to that response. Desire persists as Green Snake changes the means of sustaining an attachment whose object remains emotionally significant. Waiting mediates between the persistent wish and an external prohibition while confirming an ideal of constancy. These demands continue to interact throughout her attachment. Endorsement emerges through the relation between a chosen aim and the obligations under which it is pursued. A demanding action may be chosen, but its narrative valuation also depends on whether endurance becomes an obligation required for the woman to deserve a response.

Liu cites Fahai's concluding instruction that, once human, Green Snake must achieve liberation through her own efforts[3] (p. 24). The instruction attributes a future task to her, affirming a capacity for self-directed effort within a relationship organized by religious guidance. Yet the instruction is voiced by Fahai, and her perseverance remains oriented toward him. The scene therefore joins an affirmation of self-directed effort to an unequal distribution of interpretive authority. Both aspects are necessary to assess the ending. The recognition of a capacity to act may open a possibility while preserving the other's position as the person authorized to define that possibility. Benjamin's emphasis on mutual recognition sharpens the distinction between assigning a woman a future task and responding to her as a partner whose claims can alter the relation[14] (pp. 5-6). Religious guidance constitutes a particular form of response to Green Snake's wish. Mutual recognition brings its terms into question: can her claim alter the relationship, or does guidance chiefly translate it into an authorized path? The production makes a response possible through a change in the conditions under which she can seek it. Its significance depends on how self-directed effort and the authority to guide that effort coexist within the renewed relation.

6.3 Rebirth and the Authority to Interpret Desire

Tian's signed director's statement recounts her intention to reconsider Fahai's inherited antagonist role and her uncertainty

about where a narrative of desire could lead[16]. Her account places religious mediation within the creative problem of giving desire a destination through the relation among its human, serpent, and Buddhist dimensions. Its unsettled quality is therefore consistent with a declared creative problem. The arrangement of characters and authority gives that creative problem its dramatic form, connecting the direction offered to desire with the person authorized to define it. The programme similarly presents desire, love, and faith as concerns shared within human existence[1] (p. 17). Rebirth reopens relationships that the earlier world made impossible and gives their unresolved wishes a changed setting for action. Freud's superego names an internal agency; Buddhist liberation and rebirth supply meanings within the production's religious world. These concepts have distinct analytical tasks: religious imagery values prior actions and defines a possible future, while the structural model follows how the characters pursue that future through wishes, practical adjustments, and internalized ideals. Their relation makes a changed configuration of desire and obligation intelligible.

The disagreement between Gu and Liao is therefore retained at the conclusion of the analysis. Gu's emphasis on renewed human experience makes another encounter possible[7]. Liao's emphasis on Fahai's central interpretive position asks who authorizes its meaning[8]. The two readings identify different stakes in the same openness. A future can be reopened while its desirable form remains guided by an authority already present. Likewise, a woman can obtain recognition for perseverance while the cost required to obtain it remains questionable. Religious resolution expands the meaning of love, but its distribution of effort and explanation keeps the issue of female subjectivity active. The ending gives the earlier relational problem a new form through the spiritual value assigned to responsibility and perseverance. White Snake's desire becomes answerable through responsibility, and Green Snake's attachment through perseverance and a future practice of liberation. The women have acted and revised their expectations. Their recognized identities are still conditional on norms that have not originated with them alone. The religious form of responsibility gives action a new vocabulary of value while preserving the unequal distribution of effort and explanation. That distribution connects the spiritual ending to the earlier conflicts over who defines an acceptable commitment and whose desire receives a response.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis revises the use of Freudian structural theory by locating psychic conflict within relationships. White Snake seeks gratification through an ideal of human domestic identity; Green Snake acquires expectations of continuity while testing bodily desire against refusal. The ego's negotiation with reality and the superego's internalized requirements coexist with desire in both women. Their difference concerns the form of the ideal and the circumstances of recognition. This account explains why commitment can remain attractive when it becomes costly, and why a challenge to one norm can coexist with dependence on another. Their actions make the interaction among psychic demands visible through successive encounters, as the same wish acquires different possibilities of response. The theatrical evidence shows how these conflicts become comparable. Learned bodily habits expose the practices attached to becoming human. The Broken Bridge juxtaposition tests a successful vow against refused promises. Changes into domestic roles make gendered obligations repeatable across bodies, while the pagoda and temple give responsibility and perseverance spatial and temporal forms. These devices organize the spectator's possible comparison of claims and responses. Character interpretation follows the form in which an action is presented, linking the meaning of a woman's choice to the spatial comparison, duration, or change of identity through which it becomes perceptible.

The distinction between agency and emancipation is central to the conclusion. Choosing a household, challenging a promise, accepting responsibility, and undertaking cultivation each display a capacity to act. Their value depends on the conditions of the relationship: recognition can remain revocable, costs can fall unequally, and another person can retain the authority to explain a woman's future. Auxiliary perspectives on performed identity, situated agency, and mutual recognition clarify those conditions while Freud remains the principal account of psychic conflict. The contribution is to connect the existing debate about subjectivity to the theatrical mediation of relationships, showing how a recognized identity depends on the response an action receives. Tian's production gives female desire a sustained voice while reorganizing its possibilities through domestic responsibility and religious cultivation. Further study with a dated script and recording could trace how pauses, transitions, and responses develop those possibilities across performance versions, extending the analysis of how a staged

choice acquires its relational meaning. Its women become intelligible through wishes they pursue, norms they partly endorse, and relationships that answer them unevenly. The unresolved relation among those elements is the basis of their dramatic complexity.

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