**Book Review of *Pop with Gods,*** ***Shakespeare and Ai: Popular Film, (Musical) Theatre, and TV Drama***

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The book I will be reviewing is, *Pop* *With Gods,* *Shakespeare and Ai: Popular Film, (Musical) Theatre, and TV Drama,* by Iris H. Tuan, which is a monograph of Film and Performance Studies looking into diverse cultural ideas that intersect into Film, TV, and Dramas. The monography is split into 8 chapters, concerning Shakespeare, Korean film, Taiwan Musicals, Pop Music, Face and identity Transformation, Asian Theatre, Hakka Theatre, Robot Theatre and AI Films.

The structure of the book is appealing as it has clearly refined chapters and each chapter has its own defined synopsis, giving readers clarity. There is also a list of figures section which gives a brief description of each media being discussed. The tone has a commentative feel, and it is clear the author Iris H. Tuan, who is a professor at National Chiao Tung University area of expertise is in Asian Theatre and Film. Therefore, in chapters straying from her range her tone is a little less captivating and more of a bibliography of critics.

Each chapter focuses on different recent literary adaptations, beginning with abundant portrayals of Shakespearean rhetoric and ideas that have found a place in the modern media, exploring how, “Romeo and Juliet” became the unquestioned cultural shorthand for romantic love’[[1]](#footnote-1).This is further explored then in the authors commentary on the musical, *West Side Story*, inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*. Tuan notes how the change of protagonist’s names to Tony and Maria and the added, ‘issues on race, teenager struggle, immigration problems and cultural shock’[[2]](#footnote-2),subverting themes of the traditional Shakespearean play made it a tremendous success for its relevancy to contemporary issues. However, this chapter does not delve into the impact of using established playwrights like Shakespeare to project modern issues and instead, readers are eft slightly clueless. For a chapter named ‘Canon, Kitsch, Simulacra, Classics, Representation,’ You would think commentary on the presentation of immigration in *West Side Story* is vital as to why they chose such an iconic play to take themes from. There is a disparaging lack of commentary on a play thatis an iconic portrayal of unreasonable prejudice, which correlates directly to the gang of Puerto Rico immigrants versus the gang of Americans.

The next chapter which focuses on the Korean film, *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds,* with less referencing and more opinion this chapter seems to appeal to the authors interests, with lengthy discussion about the cinematography of Korean filmmaking. The author points out that for Korean filmmaking to keep up with Hollywood, *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds,* ‘use of CGI to create a large-scale spectacle, which is comparable to that success found in current Hollywood Blockbusters’[[3]](#footnote-3), I found this was an interesting commentary on the film industry; Korean films are often disregarded and must follow similar algorithms to Hollywood in order to create financial gains in the box office. The monograph is abundant with information concerning film and occasionally literature. Tuan discusses established playwrights like Shakespeare, then discussing *Story of Yanxi Palace,* to AI Robot Films creates a dichotomy for the reader to navigate. Each chapter is vastly different, some with references every line to others more barren. The author uses the comparison between films that are either established or well-known to others that are less popular. For instance, the Japanese adaptation of the classic *Jekyll and Hyde*, now *Jekyll and Hyde and So On,* compared with *The Lion King* and *Cats*. The author uses these to present the ongoing dispute ‘for Asian actors to be able to play the lead authentic Asian role’[[4]](#footnote-4), which I thought was a well thought out and meaningful discourse. Overall, the book has a varied range of critical and theoretical discussion, managing to integrate a more diverse show of Asian TV and Film as well as Classics.

Bibliography

Tuan H. Iris, *Pop with Gods,* *Shakespeare and Ai: Popular Film, (Musical) Theatre, and TV Drama*, (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

1. Iris H. Tuan, *Pop With Gods, Shakespeare and Ai: Popular Film, (Musical) Theatre, and TV Drama*, (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020),p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tuan, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tuan, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tuan, p .88. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)