BOOK REVIEW

SINGAPORE MEDIATION HANDBOOK*
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1 The title of the book is Singapore Mediation Handbook. What is a handbook? The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “a book that contains instructions or advice about how to do something or the most important and useful information about a subject”. As a mediation practitioner, a mediation teacher as well as a frequent speaker on mediation-related subjects, I think using the term “handbook” is an understatement because the book, in fact, is a mini-encyclopaedia on mediation given that the authors, through the book, have brought together the principles, process and practice of mediation with reference to Singapore dimensions. Mediation students may read the book from the first page, while mediation advocates, mediators and mediation trainers may use the book as a quick reference to support their practice.

2 The book has 11 chapters. Those who are familiar with mediation books in the Asian market may notice that the layout of the book has some resemblance to another book, Hong Kong Mediation Manual (which is also an 11-chapter book), by one of the co-authors, Professor Nadja Alexander.1 However, this review is not intended to compare the two books. I take the simple approach of sharing my thoughts on what I have read.

3 At the beginning of each chapter, there is a mediation situation in italics. While I am not sure whether these situations are real cases or authored scenarios, I am fascinated by most of the situations because they make me reminisce about some of the cases that I have mediated in my mediation journey, mainly outside of Singapore. These situations will definitely boost the reader's appetite and are vivid illustrations of some of the points made in the chapter. Another feature of the book is the “Mediator Learnings” section at the end of each chapter (except chapter 7, which has a slightly different name – “Mediation Advocate Learnings”). This part of each chapter helps the readers further understand the practical usefulness of the contents of the chapter. I would not be surprised if some shrewd readers preferred to read this part first before

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1 Nadja Alexander, Hong Kong Mediation Manual (LexisNexis, 2nd Ed, 2014).
reading the rest of the chapter in the conventional way. However, "Mediator Learnings" are not the only takeaways from the chapters. Read the whole chapter!

4 One may group the first four chapters as background knowledge and cultivation of the right mind for mediation. The first two chapters of the book provide knowledge on what mediation is; mediation as a conflict resolution process; how the facilitative mediation process is different from other processes; the legal definition of mediation under the Singapore Mediation Act; objectives and core values of mediation such as confidentiality, self-determination, impartiality of the mediator, etc.

5 The authors have made it clear that "the book will focus on facilitative mediation." Those who approach mediation as a new subject will also find the book easy to understand, with footnotes being good sources for further reading.

6 Chapter 3 is on "The Mediation Meta Model", which "is based on the parties' interaction dimension and the mediator intervention dimension" and the description of "six contemporary practice models of mediation as represented in the Mediation Meta Model". One may say that this part of the chapter is another way of presenting the Conflict Resolution Wheel and other different processes, which have already been covered in Chapter 1. I am inclined to say that this chapter has presented a deeper insight into the models with a useful guide at the end of the chapter: "Mediator Learnings: How Successful Mediators Use the Meta-Model".

7 Culture or cultural differences is a big issue in mediation, and "understandings of culture and cultural dynamics are essential for effective, reflective practice as a mediator." It is difficult, if not impossible, to illustrate the importance of cultural issues without reference to examples. Chapter 4 is well presented with a balance of knowledge and illustrative Singapore examples which can also be understood by non-Singaporeans.

8 The second group of chapters comprises chapters 5 to 7, from which mediators, mediators-to-be and mediation advocates will benefit because they will be guided through the usual process of mediation from different perspectives.

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9 Chapters 5 and 6 are the two chapters which take the readers through the different phases of mediation from the beginning to the end and then to the post-mediation phase. Readers will certainly notice the frequent appearance of the word “skills” in these chapters. While the book is not a training manual, as a mediation teacher, I am confident that these two chapters will serve as background reading for those who are about to start a 40-hour mediation training and help to organise the thoughts of those who have just finished the training. Some of the contents of these two chapters may have been touched upon in the previous chapters: for example, both chapters 4 and 5 discuss seating. I do not see overlapping but better cross-referencing might be more helpful.

10 Lawyers are parties’ legal advisers and advocates in the courtroom. Mediation is not litigation, but assisted negotiation. The role of lawyers in mediation is and must be markedly different from their traditional role. Chapter 7 is written as a guide for mediation advocates on what their roles are in mediation and how to perform them, with clear skills and guidelines together with some practical tips in diagram boxes.

11 The third group of chapters (that is, chapters 8 to 10) explores mediation in the context of Singapore with emphasis on the regulatory framework for mediation. As Singapore is keen to promote mediation domestically and internationally, these chapters have provided those who are keen to take advantage of the Singapore mediation market (whether as users or service providers) with an overview of its regulatory framework, which covers accreditation of mediators, the law of confidentiality relating to mediation, court-related mediation, the legal status of a mediation agreement, etc. Non-lawyers and those who do not practise law and mediation in Singapore will find these chapters of great value.

12 The last chapter is on online dispute resolution (“ODR”). The focus of this chapter appears to be more on online mediation. This chapter is informative, and it provides the readers with a snapshot of the development of ODR generally with reference to the Singapore context.

13 I would like to conclude this book review with a confession. I have not read a book from beginning to end for a long time. This book is not only worth reading from page one to the end but also a good handbook for reference purposes.

14 Despite my efforts to think of a creative conclusion, I am conscious of sharing my true view. As such, I have decided to adopt the learned conclusion of the Foreword written by the Honourable Justice

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Andrew Ang⁸ and say that “I recommend it to mediators, mediation advocates, teachers and students alike.”

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