

BOOK REVIEWS

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ASIA: Mediation and Other Cultural Models. *Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Asia*. Edited by Stephanie P. Stobbe; foreword by Paul Redekop. Lanham; Boulder; New York; London: Lexington Books [an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.], 2018. xii, 272 pp. (Tables, graphs, figures, map.) US\$105.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-4985-6643-8.

In this timely and important work, editor Stephanie P. Stobbe sets out to explore “how mediation and other conflict resolution processes continue to be used in different communities and how they are being adapted and implemented alongside formal court systems” (252). This exploration occurs across nine case studies (Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, and India). The breadth of the work is impressive, as is its willful disregard of the binaries that often close our eyes to the empirical richness of mediation. Not only is there a wide range of countries and cultures represented but individual chapters explore both formal and informal practices from the role of parents through to state-sanctioned alternatives to court systems. Sometimes indigenous practices come to the fore whilst elsewhere we encounter hybridized approaches, drawing on both Western and non-Western models.

Each chapter offers a significant contribution, but it is in the grand sweep of the work as a whole where the greatest value can be found. The reader is powerfully reminded of both the diversity of mediation as a practice and of Asia as a region. Perhaps the most important argument that the work presents is that there is no simple relationship between indigenous and external modes of conflict resolution. Instead, different countries are taking very different paths. Some seek to fuse together models based on Western formalism and the law with their own cultural values. Others have retained or re-established more traditional forms of mediation that work in parallel with legal structures. Here we find a textured and detailed account of the multifaceted way that the twin forces of Westernization and globalization are encountered, understood, and responded to. The links that the individual chapters probe between mediation and the cultural context in which that mediation is embedded serves both to provincialize overly dominant Western approaches to mediation whilst simultaneously opening our eyes to the variability of mediation and the influences upon it.

Stobbe and her contributors are almost entirely concerned with documenting the diversity of laws, institutions, and practices that together constitute the kaleidoscopic reality of mediation in Asia. This resulting

diversity is both the biggest strength of the work and, simultaneously, the cause of its more frustrating aspects. The work lays the foundations for the necessary conceptual innovations that peace and conflict studies needs as it fully embraces the stories of non-Western societies, but does not itself engage in that discussion.

Those approaching the work from a political science context may well be left wanting a more systematic exploration of the themes that shape the book. As noted, the tension between Western and non-Western approaches is found across the chapters, but it is only in Joel Lee's discussion of Singapore that we find a systematic presentation of what exactly is in tension and what the results of those tensions can be for mediation. It would be fascinating, and important, to develop these insights across the case studies into a fuller account of the core tensions that shape mediation in Asia.

So strong is the desire to document and present mediation practices that an opportunity is missed to critically evaluate them. Stobbe's chapter on Laos, together with Charles Crumpton's chapter on Vietnam, opens a conversation on the potential issues of local mediation practices alongside an analysis of their strengths. Yet to more fully appreciate mediation we need to not only account for its presence and positive role but also the ways in which it may produce unintended outcomes. Are all approaches to mediation equally good? How does mediation intersect with existing social and political power structures and with what consequences? Are there better and worse ways to integrate Western and non-Western approaches to mediation? Underlying all of these is the fundamental question of what metrics can we use to meaningfully judge what is good? These questions emerge after reading the book, but only in a very few instances are explicit answers provided.

A particularly fascinating opportunity presents itself if we approach mediation through a gender lens. This is picked up in the chapter on Indonesia by Fatahillah Abdul Syukur and Dale Bagshaw, but is of crucial importance throughout the case studies. Not only do we need to more fully consider the role of gender in terms of participation in mediation, but also how it may be that mediation can challenge and/or reproduce gendered structures of power.

The book is the first installment in a new series focusing on conflict resolution and peace building in Asia and as such the work is as much a statement of intent for an ongoing conversation as it is a discrete work. In its breadth and quality the work has opened the door for a range of studies that hopefully not only push our awareness of the myriad ways that conflict is resolved, but will also make decisive steps in how peace and conflict studies specifically, and political science more generally, understands these practices. Stobbe and her contributors are to be congratulated on providing such a decisive step towards these ends.