Conducting mediation and arbitration meetings by remote means is no new to mediators, arbitrators, and practitioners. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings have been replaced with video conferences, remote or virtual participation in arbitration sessions, arbitration hearings, and even court trials have become a new normal.

Founded in 2018, eBRAM International Online Dispute Resolution Centre (“eBRAM”) aims to draw together the strengths of Hong Kong professionals and the business sector to provide a credible, cost-effective and sustainable platform for resolving cross-border commercial and trade disputes and for facilitating deal-making with the aid of state-of-art technology.

I am delighted to talk to Thomas So, JP, Chairman of eBRAM, on how digital disruption has fostered the growth of online dispute resolution (“ODR”).

Thomas is the immediate past president of The Law Society of Hong Kong, a veteran arbitrator, and a PRC specialist lawyer since 2006. He is also a Barrister and advocate appearing in all levels of the civil courts in Hong Kong.

Thaise: Over the past decades, Hong Kong has consistently been ranked as one of the world’s most preferred international arbitration jurisdictions and financial centres by virtue of its high-quality and efficient legal services, alternative dispute resolution and government policy supporting dispute resolution, and the ease of reaching out to its global networks worldwide. Hong Kong has a solid platform to continue to be an international legal and dispute resolution services hub.

TK: In respect of eBRAM’s development, could you share with us your road map as well as how eBRAM’s innovative adoption of technology supports your mission?

Thomas: eBRAM has trained more than 150 mediators and arbitrators for the COVID-19 ODR Scheme so far. They come from diverse jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Australia, India and Singapore.

Since the qualifications are set forth, and certain procedures have been completed, we will train them with our curricula and ready them for participation in our mediator or arbitrator panels and qualified for automated case management services provided by a seasoned team.

We welcome all eligible legal practitioners, mediators and arbitrators to join our panels. They just need to submit personal and professional certificates as per regulations.

eBRAM has trained more than 150 mediators and arbitrators for the COVID-19 ODR Scheme so far. They come from diverse disciplines, including law, engineering, surveying, accounting, architecture and academia, and different jurisdictions, including the United Kingdoms, Australia, India and Hong Kong.

Thaise: Striding towards the next stage of development, eBRAM devised an integrated strategy to further the objectives of ODR and mission to provide a credible, cost-effective and sustainable platform for resolving cross-border commercial and trade disputes and for facilitating deal-making.

TK: Can you introduce us to the mediators and arbitrators on your panel?

Thomas: Our aim is to develop Hong Kong to become the leading arbitral centre and strengthen its position as an international legal hub of deal-making, dispute avoidance and dispute resolution by utilising innovative technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Mediators, we strive to provide the use of ODR to resolve disputes in the region, improve the accessibility to justice for the general public and MSMEs, and at the lower costs, build capability by meeting and providing demand for legal and dispute resolution services across the world.

The Chief Executive’s 2020-2023 Policy Address has recognised the importance of developing LawTech in Hong Kong’s long-term legal and ODR development.

We thank the tremendous support from the HKSAR Government and the Department of Justice. Without their support, the project would not have been possible.

TK: Talking about the legal and technology, how could eBRAM leverage the latest technologies, say Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Chatbot and Big Data to promote ODR?

Thomas: Digital disruption is nothing new to the legal industry. International law firms have invested heavily in IT development to enhance productivity, while other firms have embarked on innovative avenues of the results or online methods to dispute parties. You would agree that robots cannot replace human interaction, which is the key to successful mediation, but technology could be a catalyst for speeding up our processes.

eBRAM utilises the latest technologies to enhance the user experience in ODR. We are currently the only organization in Hong Kong and one of the few worldwide that has the capacity to develop technologies barely deployed in a platform catering to the demands for ODR and online dispute resolution services.

We facilitate mediations and arbitration hearings with our secure video conferencing and professional case management services provided by a seasoned team.

Conceived and established by the Government, eBRAM launched the “COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution Scheme” in 2020 to offer the public, especially MSMEs, a speedy and cost-effective means to resolve disputes arising from or relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We keep integrating state-of-the-art technologies, such as facial Machine learning on Tuesday, AI, Blockchain and Chatbot, etc., on our ODR platform to enrich our global platform to meet different needs of local businesses (especially MSMEs) and cater to cross-border one-stop dispute resolution for enterprises worldwide.

In addition to this, eBRAM has been actively participating in the development of the APCE Collaborative Framework for ODR of Cross-Border Business to Business Disputes (APCE ODR Framework) and joint workshops on LawTech issues organised by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (“UNCITRAL”) and the International Institute for the Uniform Commercial Law (“UNIDRR”).

On June this year, we launched our mediation and arbitration ODR rules under the APCE Collaborative Framework, marking a key milestone for eBRAM’s development.

We need to expand our ODR service provider for APCE countries under the APCE ODR Framework.

TK: If our readers wish to send to the mediator panel, are there any details they should be aware of?

Thomas: All mediators are eligible legal practitioners, mediators and arbitrators. To join our panel, they just need to submit their personal and professional certificates as per regulations.

eBRAM has trained more than 150 mediators and arbitrators for the COVID-19 ODR Scheme so far. They come from diverse disciplines, including law, engineering, surveying, accounting, architecture and academia, and different jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Australia, India and Singapore.

TK: It is the first stage of development, could you share your road map with us and how you see the future of eBRAM?

Thomas: The backbone of this new digital platform is its capability in the technology to provide the knowledge to pass through generations, and provide them with practical experiences, the hasn’t been exploring collaboration opportunities with the business sector to generate more business opportunities for our ODR mediators and arbitrators.

We are looking into the feasibility of establishing an ADR training academy, aiming at creating a sustainable platform for resolving cross-border commercial and trade disputes and for facilitating deal-making.

TK: In respect of eBRAM’s development, could you share with us your road map as well as how eBRAM’s innovative adoption of technology supports your mission?

Thomas: eBRAM devised an integrated strategy to further the objectives of ODR and mission to provide a credible, cost-effective and sustainable platform for resolving cross-border commercial and trade disputes and for facilitating deal-making.

TK: In respect of eBRAM’s development, could you share with us your road map as well as how eBRAM’s innovative adoption of technology supports your mission?

Thomas: Striding towards the next stage of development, eBRAM devised an integrated strategy to further the objectives of ODR and mission to provide a credible, cost-effective and sustainable platform for resolving cross-border commercial and trade disputes and for facilitating deal-making.

TK: In respect of eBRAM’s development, could you share with us your road map as well as how eBRAM’s innovative adoption of technology supports your mission?

Thomas: Striding towards the next stage of development, eBRAM devised an integrated strategy to further the objectives of ODR and mission to provide a credible, cost-effective and sustainable platform for resolving cross-border commercial and trade disputes and for facilitating deal-making.

TK: In respect of eBRAM’s development, could you share with us your road map as well as how eBRAM’s innovative adoption of technology supports your mission?
in our upcoming features, such as e-bundling, an online deal-making platform, AI legal translation and legal cloud to provide safer, more secure and convenient ODR services in the region and worldwide.

As well as optimisation of eBRAM platform’s features, we will continue to enhance collaborations with fellow mediation and arbitration institutes, legal professional bodies and chambers of commerce in different jurisdictions through collaborative projects, partnerships, interactive communications initiatives, etc.

Furthermore, we aim to make eBRAM a specialist in cross-border ODR and a meeting place for eminent dispute resolution experts to exchange and obtain updated and relevant market intelligence to assist them in career development.

TK: Thank you, Thomas, for the most engaging talk. I believe readers will be inspired by your messages and now have a better understanding on the importance of LawTech and its benefits to dispute resolution practitioners.