Those who have studied and written on big river development in the past few decades have certainly noticed the continuing release of publications - many redundant and unnecessary - filling whole shelves in bookstores and libraries. Most of these books bore readers by focusing on technical discussions of dams, political and legal aspects of displaced people and scientific solutions for the environment, the same topics over and over again. Despite overwhelming amounts of information and case studies, they make conventional arguments and deliver one-dimensional narratives: mainly opposing large dam constructions. These typically include extensive accounts of the ecological and social impact of large dams and their reservoirs, critiques of the technical and economic justification of the dams, and the political flaws of the dam industry and the development enterprise. Conventional inhabitants, and Medha's attempted suicide was meant to draw attention to their plight.

On the other side of the issue, Don Blackmore, a dam advocate from Australia, sees dam technology as the only practical answer to the continent's water shortage. Don encouraged the government to develop the continent's largest river basin, the Murray-Darling, through dams and modern hydrological technology.

Finally, the book gives an account of American anthropologist Thayer Scudder, who has focused on the relocation of local inhabitants due to dam construction in many cases throughout the world. He has seen much bad dam construction over the years. At the age of seventy-one, however, Scudder still believes in large dams, and still looks for one good one to be built in this world.

Seeing through ‘Deep Water’
Book reviewed by Jakkrit Sangkhamanee, The Australian National University

accounts of dam development are thus repetitive and written from a limited perspective.

For those who are tired of the same old storyline, Jacques Leslie's Deep Water introduces a new way of looking at the issue. Rather than endless details of particular geographical sites, we travel along with the author and converse with three of the foremost actors in the global drama of large dams. The book focuses on the lives and works of three members of the World Commission on Dams, one a leading dam opponent, one a leading proponent, and one who stands in the middle.

The first account is of Medha Patkar, a hardheaded anti-dam activist from India. This year, Medha tried to drown herself in the dam reservoir as a protest against dam construction in her country. The past few years, monsoon season has led to increasing water levels in new emerged dams in India which have caused further relocation of the local inhabitants, and Medha's attempted suicide was meant to draw attention to their plight.

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This book goes beyond generic books about dams, because it isn't really about dams per se. Rather, the book deals with those who play important roles in shaping the face of the world's dam enterprise. Through the lively portraits and dynamic involvement with Medha, Don, and Scudder, the author reminds us not only to consider the challenges posed by the construction of large dams, it also shows how those that have crafted the world's water management systems, live and think. The book should be read especially by scholars and activists working on the issues of dams and the affected peoples and allows one to see the issue from multiple angles.