have evidenced different components of discursive power—from weaving narratives, labelling peoples and conjuring up meta-justifications—in debates over water resources development and management in the Mekong region” (394). As would be expected with a book like this, some minor factual errors are evident, but overall, the book is well researched.

Probably the most disappointing thing about this volume is its cost. Although the hardcover book is over 400 pages, at US$146.00 it will certainly not sell well in Southeast Asia, and most scholars elsewhere are unlikely to add it to their personal collections due to its price tag. In fact, I largely agreed to review the book because I wanted a copy, but could not afford one! Hopefully university libraries will take the plunge and purchase it. The quality of the volume certainly justifies making it available to everyone interested in better understanding the debates and key issues linked to hydropower development and related topics in the Mekong region.

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Due to a protracted separatist conflict that haunted Aceh province for almost three decades until the signing of a peace agreement in 2005, balanced discussions of Acehnese politics and society have been scarce. This volume, which comprises a total of 17 chapters, seeks to amend this situation. It targets three audiences in particular: foreign aid and reconstruction workers, Acehnese interested in international scholarly approaches to Aceh, and international students interested in a “scholarly introduction into a variety of aspects of Acehnese history, politics and culture” (x).

The book is subdivided into four parts. The first part, “History,” deals with particular aspects of the Aceh Sultanate, the Dutch colonial war, and the transition from colonialism to independent Indonesia. Sher Banu A.L. Khan provides an interesting account of the succession of Acehnese queens in the seventeenth century, which convincingly contests the idea that these were relatively “weak” rulers. Anthony Reid, in his chapter on Acehnese diplomacy and the “Turkish connection,” successfully challenges the still prevalent view that Aceh in the nineteenth century was an “isolated” place. Subsequent contributions by Antje Missbach, on the Aceh War and the role of the Dutch orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, and Fritz Schulz, on the revolution and the Darul Islam rebellion, extend the narrative to the 1960s.

Part 2, “Contemporary Economy and Politics,” starts with contributions by Nazamuddin, Agussabti and Syamsuddin Mahmud (on economic modernization), and Manfred Rist (on the relationship between economic
development and the conflict). Both chapters point out the tensions between economic modernization and the “traditional” makeup of Acehnese society. How these tensions played out on the ground, however, and how they relate to conflicts and contestations taking place within Acehnese society, remains unclear. This part of the book is completed with chapters by Patrick Ziegenhain and Damien Kingsbury, respectively, on the separatist conflict and the Helsinki peace talks. While these chapters are descriptive rather than analytical in nature, they do introduce the reader to the separatist conflict and give a valuable insider’s perspective on the Helsinki talks that finally led to the peace agreement.

The two remaining parts deal with religion and culture. Susanne Schröter offers a good introduction, in which she reminds the readers that, while Aceh is widely known as “orthodox” or “staunchly Islamic,” in fact it is far from homogeneous. Instead, the region comprises a variety of ethnic groups, and many different religious and cultural modes of identification. Driving this point home, Werner Krauss and Wolfgang Marschall contribute discussions of, respectively, the history and current status of the Syattariyya Sufi brotherhood in Aceh and some of the cultural particularities of the island of Nias. Unfortunately, much of the nuance reached here is undone by two articles written by Hasan Basri, one dealing with the historical position in society of the ulama (religious scholars), and the other with the regional implementation of Shari’a law since 2002. The implementation of an Islamic penal code, and the connection of this process to a historical trajectory of scholarly debate, inter-elite struggle and the evolution of the postcolonial state is a highly complex and contentious subject matter. Yet, these two chapters are largely limited to the reproduction of tenacious myths (for example, that of an Acehnese “Golden Age,” in which Islam was still held high), leading to a biased, and in my view actually rather dubious, argument for the need to strengthen normative Islam in order to deal with past tragedies.

The chapters by Arndt Graf and Edwin Wieringa are somewhat similar in approach. While Graf investigates an August 2005 sample of “letters to the editor” in the largest local newspaper Serambi Indonesia, Wieringa directs attention to Islamic interpretations in Indonesian tsunami poetry. Both authors make the claim that, at least to a certain extent, these writings may be viewed as reflecting the Acehnese vox populi. Graf asks how the traumatic impact of the 2004 tsunami and the 2005 peace talks affected public opinion. However, I found the empirical data in this chapter to be somewhat thin in relation to the conclusion, which connects religious concerns about public morality to the complaints in these letters about corruption and failing government services. Wieringa’s piece is interesting, as it contextualizes (and thereby usefully de-essentializes) religious explanations for the tsunami in the (apparently quite extensive) Indonesian tradition of disaster poetry. Finally, there are two chapters that deal with art, both of them in relation to the post-conflict, post-tsunami reconstruction process. Bethany J. Collier’s
chapter discusses musical initiatives for collecting aid resources. Centre stage is taken, however, by Kenneth George’s chapter about the painter Abdul Djalil Pirous (born in West Aceh in 1932). Beautiful reproductions of his colourful work illustrate the struggle of an artist who became detached from Aceh in his youth, returned to his cultural roots in the 1970s and 1980s, and, his past compromised by the New Order politics of regulating and deploying artistic expressions, ended up in a complex reengagement with his place of birth after the fall of Suharto in 1998.

Making available knowledge about Aceh in a way that integrates the complexly related fields of history, culture, economy and politics is a laudable enterprise. However, while some articles are certainly of high scholarly value, the overall quality of this volume is disappointing. The book lacks analytical coherence, depth and sophistication, and is riddled with disturbing mistakes, such as situating the Istiqlal mosque in Banda Aceh instead of in Jakarta (127), or confusing the Islamic terms *jihad* and *syahid* (186). Some chapters contain grotesque simplifications, such as Manfred Rist’s attempt to reduce the separatist conflict solely to economic deprivation. Overall, the book pays only limited attention to the complex dynamics that have taken place within Acehnese society in recent decades. As a result, there is a structural overemphasis on the perceived conflict between “Aceh” and the “world outside.” These points of criticism notwithstanding, I believe that those who are interested in Aceh, its history and culture in particular, will find plenty of reason to consult this volume carefully.

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**SINGAPORE IN GLOBAL HISTORY.** *ICAS Publication Series Edited Volumes, 14. Edited by Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied.*  
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011. 317 pp. (Tables, figures.)  

In approaching the history of Singapore, there are good reasons for examining its past through global lenses. Much of Singapore’s history had been shaped by patterns of exogenous interaction that were already evident in pre-modern times when the island first came to note as a trading emporium operating either independently or, more likely, under the aegis of some larger regional powers. This interfacing continued into its modern history when the island operated as the political centre and commercial hub of various global and regional powers. Small in size, lacking natural resources, and cut off after 1965 from its traditional Malayan economic hinterland, Singapore had no choice but to adopt a global outlook—its continued survival depended on it. Today, the intensification of global connectivity commonly associated with the current phase of globalization has also heightened the vulnerability of the