

**Heather Streets-Salter.** *World War One in Southeast Asia: Colonialism and Anticolonialism in an Era of Global Conflict.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xii + 236 pp. \$99.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-13519-2.

**Reviewed by** Xu Guoqi

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**Commissioned by** Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Many volumes have been published recently about the First World War in commemoration of the war's centenary. Yet nearly none are available specifically about Southeast Asia's involvement in the war. One obvious reason for this neglect is that historians tend to think that the war was not important in the national development of this area and that Southeast Asia did not have a pivotal role. However, Heather Streets-Salter's *World War One in Southeast Asia* demonstrates that this region indeed was affected by the war in multiple and profound ways in the course of political, economic, and social developments and that it played some significant roles. Moreover, this book successfully provides a rich and fascinating transnational and international history—currently a healthy trend in historical studies—of the First World War through the lens of colonialism and anti-colonialism in Southeast Asia, a place that deserves closer study. Streets-Salter also argues persuasively that we need to study the history of empire and colonialism from a global instead of national perspective. To a great extent, this is a book about empires as well as the war, and it contributes to our new understanding about the history of empires and the First World War.

*World War One in Southeast Asia* focuses on two major objectives: global history of the war

and empire in Southeast Asia. Streets-Salter successfully argues that in Southeast Asia, “global and trans-regional forces such as the alliance system, Pan-Islam, revolutionary nationalism, and international diplomacy shaped the choices, actions, and fortunes of both anticolonial activists and colonial administrators in Southeast Asia” (p. 10). With broad and ambitious themes in mind, the author selected interesting case studies to deliver her message and central arguments. The cases include the 1915 Indian troop mutiny in Singapore; the Dutch East Indies and the war; and Siamese, Vietnamese, German, and Indian roles in organizing anti-French and anti-British actions and intrigues. Through the detailed examinations of these case studies, she skillfully weaves her arguments through a global perspective.

In the two chapters dealing with the Singapore mutiny, Streets-Salter argues that the mutiny had something to do with German and Pan-Islamic influences as well as the global webs that brought the war to Southeast Asia. She further suggests that the suppression of the mutiny had a strong international background and forces since Japan, France, Britain, Russia, and China, among other international factors, were all involved. She concludes convincingly that “the Singapore mutiny was not an anomaly but rather was just

one of the more dramatic events in which the War made itself felt around the region” (p. 13). The author further points out that only by looking beyond the national and regional backgrounds can we understand that the mutiny was part of a much broader and larger context of German-Indian-Turkish intrigue in Southeast Asia during World War I. Streets-Salter is right to suggest that the mutiny “represents in microcosm the ways global currents set in motion by World War I played out over a wide swath of Southeast Asia” (p. 214).

Streets-Salter argues that the neutral states in this region, such as Siam and the Dutch East Indies, also played key strategic roles in facilitating and enabling anti-colonial activities. In the chapters dealing with the Dutch East Indies, she maintains that although the Dutch East Indies was supposed to be neutral, its neutrality became a convenient place for Pan-Islamic, Indian, and German propaganda and operatives. She argues that the war indeed had a massive impact on the Dutch East Indies and brought hostile forces into action in the colony. Economically the war negatively affected trade between the Indies and the Netherlands, and “contributed to unrest and volatility in the islands” (p. 110). The war also negatively affected the Dutch governance of the Indies due to the sandwiched position the Dutch were in, between the war’s two belligerent sides.

Through the examination of the fates of the American-made SS *Maverick* and *Henry S*, both of which were in Dutch waters during the war, the author further explains the global nature of hostile activities in this area. The British suspected that both ships were used by Germans to carry arms and ammunition to be delivered to India for fueling the revolutionary movement. The Dutch authorities were forced to move quickly to stop the ships, and therefore the global nature of the German-Indian conspiracy of the ships forced the Dutch East Indies to be dragged into action. The author once again argues that the war and the on-

going German global conspiracy necessarily brought the war to the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch authorities responded accordingly.

In the chapter about Siam, Streets-Salter explores the role of neutral Siam in facilitating German attempts to foment unrest in the British and French empires in Southeast Asia and examines what happened to Siam after it declared war on Germany. She suggests that Siam, like the Dutch East Indies, became a convenient place and training ground for anti-Allied activity in the region although the Siamese government was pro-British. She argues that although Siam was neutral until 1917, during the first two years of the war Siam was an “important theater for the various anti-Allied intrigues staged by the Central Powers and their revolutionary anticolonial conspirators from both Vietnam and India” (p. 167). The author concludes that “it is clear not only that the war came to Siam in multiple ways but also that Siam was integral to schemes designed both to undermine and to uphold Allied rule in colonial Southeast Asia” (p. 168).

The last chapter of the book focuses on Vietnamese anti-French activities and German involvement as well as China’s role in it. According to Streets-Salter, Germans were determined to undermine the French role in Vietnam and collaborated with Vietnamese nationalists in their anti-colonial activities. In both China and Siam, Vietnamese nationalists and German agents used neutral states as launching points for anti-colonial movements in the region. Although eventually in vain, this collaboration clearly indicated the global nature of the war in this region.

The volume’s key intention is to demonstrate that the First World War indeed was a world war, an international and transnational war, and that Southeast Asia was an important part of the war. The book is also about complicated empire history in Southeast Asia. Anyone who is interested in the global history of the war and empire should read it, especially since we are now commemorating

the war's centenary legacy. By and large, this book has achieved its purpose to demonstrate the importance of the war in Southeast Asia as well as the complicated nature of modern colonialism and anti-colonialism in this region. As I have written elsewhere (*Asia and the Great War: A Shared History* [2017]), the First World War and Asia were closely linked. For many Asian nations, the war was also an important part of a shared history. The story of Southeast Asia clearly is part of this shared history. As a historian of the First World War, I enjoyed reading this well-written book and even hoped it could have covered more. For instance, the book devotes substantial amount of space to German intrigues in Southeast Asia, but it could have provided a more balanced treatment if the author also examined in more detail the propaganda and anti-German activities in Southeast Asia launched by the Allied side. Of course, I understand no book can cover everything, but this direction could be a great next project for the author, which she clearly is qualified to pursue.

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