

Abstract

Historiography on Australian Nationalism and the Commemoration of the World Wars in the Context of the ‘British World’

By HIROSHI TSUDA

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba

Anzac Day, which began as a memorial to the First World War’s Gallipoli campaign, is a symbolic occasion in Australia during which the nation state commemorates its losses all wars since. This essay examines the transformation of Australian nationalism from the interwar period through to the 1970s by tracing the national integration through war memory in the context of the ‘British world’: Australians’ perceptions of the imperial wars in which they participated and of their own national history have been defined by their country’s identity as a former British dominion. The nationalist historiography that arose following the Second World War encouraged a trend to emphasise a dichotomy between Australian nationalism and British imperialism. In this conceptualisation, the experiences of the two World Wars are the moment at which Australia’s identity separated from that of the Empire. The analysis on Anzac Day, however, suggests that the imperial identity generated within the ‘community of culture’ prevailed even after the Second World War. The decline of traditional British solidarity coincided with Australia’s gradual decolonisation and the subsequent self-examination that occurred during the ‘new nationalism’ of the 1960s–70s. The emergence of a nationalist historical discourse and the reinterpretation of war narratives reflected this reformation of national identity, which was not as self-evident as supposed in nationalist historiography.