

## **“TAIWAN’S ALLY TUVALU TO SOON BECOME A WATER WORLD”: LANGUAGE, PLACE, AND TAIWAN’S POPULAR DISCOURSE ON TUVALU**

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Carol Farbotko has argued that the “islands of Tuvalu, largely absent from Eurocentric imaginings of the Pacific region, have become meaningful spaces in cosmopolitan discourses only as they disappear” (Farbotko 2010, *Wishful Sinking: Disappearing Islands, Climate Refugees and Cosmopolitan Experimentation*; *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 51 (1): 47–60). Similarly, although Tuvalu is more present in Taiwan because it is one of Taiwan’s few diplomatic allies, Tuvalu has also become more significant in Taiwanese discourse with increased coverage of climate change. However, whereas in the West, Tuvalu and climate change are mainly linked to (often self-serving) environmentalist narratives, in Taiwan, Tuvalu and climate change are tied instead to anxiety concerning Taiwan’s contested sovereignty. In this article, I outline how Taiwan’s diplomatic ethnocentrism and its media’s fixation on climate change have filtered into popular discourse that connects Tuvalu to Taiwan’s sovereignty concerns. I also consider how examining Taiwan’s popular discourse on Tuvalu further engages themes of language/translation and love of place critical to the field of Pacific Studies.

### **Introduction**

IN SEPTEMBER 1979, TUVALU, a Pacific Island nation north of Fiji, and Taiwan (or the Republic of China, ROC), an archipelago off the southeast coast of mainland China, formally established diplomatic relations (*United Daily News* [UDN] 1979). Tuvalu is geographically composed of nine islands/atolls.

However, two of these islands are recognized as representing the same community, and, thus, Tuvaluan citizens commonly refer to Tuvalu as having eight islands. Because each island maintains a distinct identity, Tuvaluans express affiliation with their island and/or the nation as a whole depending on their global positioning and the communities with which they interact. For its part, Taiwan is composed of at least twenty-two islands or archipelagoes and is described as a multicultural society with four officially recognized groups. Three of these groups are ethnically Han Chinese, and one represents the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, who belong to the same broad Austronesian language group as Tuvalu. However, it is important to note that Taiwan's indigenous populations now include at least sixteen distinct peoples. That these groups are reduced to one ethnic category (whether this category be termed "indigenous Malayo-Polynesian" or "Austronesian"; see Government Portal of the Republic of China [Taiwan] 2020) while Han populations are subdivided indicates, to some extent, the ethnocentrism that populates Taiwan's views on Tuvalu. This is discussed later in the paper (Blundell 2011; Damm 2012).

Although seemingly a simple case of diplomatic recognition in the Pacific, Tuvalu and Taiwan have invested their relationship with multilayered discursive meanings. In a recent article, I addressed Tuvalu's discourse on Taiwan (Marinaccio 2019), but it is important to note that Tuvalu has continued to strongly support Taiwan to date, especially with the election of pro-Taiwan Foreign Minister Simon Kofe (Y. Lee 2019; Strong 2019). Here, I examine Taiwan's<sup>1</sup> discourse on Tuvalu and its connections to themes in the Pacific Studies field.

Since the late 1940s, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have both claimed to represent the legitimate government of China and have competed for international recognition as such. In the 1970s, however, it became increasingly apparent that Taiwan was losing out in this competition for recognition, and now only fifteen nations formally accept Taiwan as the government of China.<sup>2</sup> Although most nations have unofficial relations with Taiwan, and the country and its people very much participate in global society, Taiwan is typically considered an ambiguous diplomatic entity, not a sovereign China. Even large portions of the Taiwanese population see Taiwan as having a distinct social, cultural, and political identity from China rather than as the seat of the Chinese government. Yet, regardless of whether Taiwan is viewed as representing China, as part of the PRC, or as an entirely separate entity, its independence and sovereignty are contested, and it is not recognized in international organizations such as the UN.

Tuvalu is currently one of four Pacific nations (i.e., Tuvalu, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, and Palau) that maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan instead of the PRC. This is usually the extent to which Tuvalu is discussed in

international relations scholarship on Taiwan (Hu 2015; Wesley-Smith and Porter 2010). However, given disturbing trends in Taiwan's popular discourse on Tuvalu that are tied to both Taiwan's contested sovereignty *and* Tuvalu's official recognition of Taiwan, there is a pressing need to explain how Taiwan portrays Tuvalu at the official and popular levels. This need is also directly linked to two threads in Pacific Studies: the crucial status of language in developing comprehensive understandings of the Pacific region and the importance of cultivating a "love of place" in Pacific Studies pedagogy that allows critical awareness of Pacific locales (Case 2019). Having lived in Taiwan for the past decade and worked with Pacific communities there, I feel obligated to outline these issues. This is not to convince readers that Taiwan's discourse on Tuvalu is disturbing but to argue that this discourse *can* be changed and that it has developed unchecked partially through ignorance of Sinophone Pacific places in Anglophone Pacific Studies.

### **Climate Change, Translation, and "Love of Place"**

Farbotko (2010, 48) has argued that the "islands of Tuvalu, largely absent from Eurocentric imaginings of the Pacific region, have become meaningful spaces in cosmopolitan discourses only as they disappear." Similarly, although Tuvalu is more present in Taiwan because it is a diplomatic ally, it has also gained significance in Taiwanese discourse only with increased coverage of climate change. However, whereas in the West, Tuvalu and climate change are linked to (often self-serving) environmentalist narratives, in Taiwan, Tuvalu and climate change are tied instead to anxiety concerning Taiwan's contested sovereignty. That is, recent opinion pieces, short stories, and films in Taiwan forward narratives where Tuvalu and Taiwan are united as one country not only to overcome environmental threats to Tuvalu's territorial sovereignty but also (and more importantly for Taiwan) to ensure Taiwan's *de jure* sovereignty or legal independence. In this article, I outline why Taiwan has reduced one of its few diplomatic allies to a mere signifier of sovereignty concerns. I illustrate Taiwan's negative/ethnocentric attitudes toward its diplomatic allies; Taiwanese media fixation on Tuvalu and climate change; and the expression of these themes, as well as anxiety about Taiwanese sovereignty, in popular Taiwanese imaginings of Tuvalu.

This article does not deal with discourse from a place typically included in the Pacific region—although I would argue that Taiwan is a settler colony as much a part of the Pacific as New Caledonia, Guam, French Polynesia, or Rapa Nui. However, it does deal with how a "non-Pacific" (and non-Western) location talks about Pacific places, specifically Tuvalu. It also relies heavily on acts of translation to make Taiwan's Mandarin-language discourse on Tuvalu legible to broader audiences. Thus, this paper highlights the importance of language

to research in the Pacific (see Gegeo 1998; Panapa 2014; Powell 2019). Here, acts of translation are key to empowerment rationales in Pacific Studies (see T. Teaiwa 2010) because they reveal underlying assumptions about the region held in locations rarely addressed in the Pacific Studies field. As described below, Taiwan's popular discourse on Tuvalu is jarring. This is partially because it is "unusual" (or, perhaps, unexpected) but also because Pacific Studies as conducted in Anglophone nations like New Zealand consistently fails to account for non-Anglophone colonial languages, including French, Spanish, German, and Mandarin. Thus, the importance of language to Pacific Studies comes not only from the necessity of accounting for languages indigenous to the Pacific but also from the need to better understand *all* non-Anglophone communities that participate in regional affairs.

Furthermore, this article engages the pedagogy of "love of place" advanced by Pacific Studies scholar Dr. Emalani Case (2019) to consider how Taiwan's inability to cultivate a "critical awareness" of Tuvalu, or a love of Tuvalu as place, has reduced its ability for compassion toward and/or appreciation of Tuvalu. The "love of place" advanced by Case (2019, 4) mainly focuses on eco-activism and "the betterment of [Pacific] environments." However, it also allows "students [to] turn far-away and unfamiliar spaces into places of meaning," which I believe entails not only bettering Pacific environments but also cultivating empathy for people who live in Pacific places and the lives they lead. This empathy then, in turn, demonstrates why protecting Pacific environments is so critical (see Hennessy and K. Teaiwa n.d.; Jolly 2018). In the Taiwan example, Tuvalu is seen as a location that can be easily sacrificed if this sacrifice will remedy Taiwan's international predicament. This indicates that, when no critical awareness/love of place for Tuvalu is cultivated, Tuvalu only ever exists as a blank signifier that reflects the identity and concerns of those speaking of it (see Farbotko 2010; Klein 2014; Peiser 2005). Even if Tuvalu as blank signifier becomes a rallying cry for action against climate change (which it *does not* in the Taiwan case), this still undermines "the actual work of making the Pacific better" (Case 2019, 22). This is because, if Pacific environments are never made familiar or meaningful, the danger remains that destruction will still be enacted in these places even if climate change is remedied.

Bearing in mind themes of climate change, translation, and love of place, in what follows, I outline how I understand the development of Taiwan's popular discourse on Tuvalu, climate change, and sovereignty and what this discourse entails. In the conclusion, I reflect back on emerging opportunities in Taiwan through which love or understanding of place can be developed for Tuvalu. I also reconsider the importance of language and translation in this particular case study and Pacific Studies more generally.

### **Taiwanese Conceptions of Diplomacy: (Dis)Loyalty, Quality, and Austronesia**

Although Taiwan possesses a diverse cultural history that undoubtedly influences diplomatic conceptions, the context that has most distinctly affected Taiwanese understandings of diplomacy is not culture but, rather, Taiwan's diplomatic competition with the PRC. Below, I examine how the PRC's growing international influence, and the pressure this has exerted on Taiwan's diplomacy, has led Taiwanese diplomats and citizens to understand diplomatic allies as disloyal, low quality, and needing "improvement." This fuels negative/ethnocentric views of diplomatic partners. I also briefly explore Taiwan's "Austronesian diplomacy," a discourse unique to Taiwan's Pacific allies that has sometimes compounded negative/ethnocentric attitudes.

#### *The PRC and Taiwan's Disloyal Allies*

As noted in the Introduction, a diplomatic phenomenon unique to Taiwan is that, in the 1970s, many of Taiwan's diplomatic allies, which had recognized the ROC after it reunified mainland China in 1928, began severing ties with the ROC (which had by then retreated to Taiwan) in favor of the PRC. At present, Taiwan has fifteen diplomatic allies. Thus, over the past fifty years, numerous allies have ended official relationships with Taiwan, while only a limited number have retained formal ties.

Given this, in discussions with Taiwan's ambassador to Tuvalu, a contradiction emerged. The ambassador explained his view that Taiwanese and Tuvaluan cultures were similar because of the kindness and hospitality common to both nations. The ambassador saw these similarities as beneficial to developing close diplomatic ties (4/25a Interview). However, the ambassador also explained that similar values could not guarantee lasting diplomatic relationships, referring to national interest as most directly determining diplomatic decision-making. Here, he also conspicuously referred to the PRC and its influence on Taiwan:

[Similar values] are a very important part. . . . [Tuvaluans] think that being with Taiwan feels a bit better. This is a very important part, but it's not an absolute. You know, because, actually, diplomacy also has these vital interests, because diplomacy is still . . . national interest. . . . Now, at present, the two sides are cooperating very well. Right. In the present situation, that's how it is. . . . Taiwan has a unique situation, which is the PRC, the PRC over there, the massive PRC. And then recently it has become stronger and stronger. Right. So, when

cross-strait relations are not so cordial, are not so good, you would feel that the pressure is . . . greater (4/25a Interview [Mandarin])

The explicit contrast the ambassador draws between the importance of shared cultural values and national interest in determining diplomatic relationships and the implicit connection he indicates between national interest and the rise of the PRC suggest conflict in Taiwanese views of diplomacy. That is, given the enhanced strength, and especially the increased wealth, of the PRC, although cultural values may draw certain countries to Taiwan, from the perspective of national interest, the PRC will always prove more attractive to Taiwan's allies, motivating them to switch allegiance.

Given this socio-political context, Taiwan's government and citizens see a lasting diplomatic alliance as meaning loyalty and true friendship because it requires allies to stay with Taiwan regardless of benefits offered by the PRC (Yan 2018; Zheng 2018). Yet, again, because of pressure from the PRC and the frequency with which allies sever relations with Taiwan, Taiwanese officials and citizens assume that allies can never be real friends because they can be lost to the PRC at any time. In this vein, a 2016 *Taipei Times* editorial commented:

Recent weeks have seen intensifying efforts from China to poach Taiwan's remaining allies. Beijing's economic clout and international prestige make it an irresistible attraction. . . . China offers huge amounts of financial assistance that Taiwan can never match. (J. Lee 2016)

Although Taiwan still sees diplomatic alliances as relationships that have to be maintained (11/8 Interview; Hu 2015, 8), because it is not recognized as sovereign, Taiwan's conception of diplomacy is relatively unique: the discontinuity rather than the continuity of alliances is taken as a given. Socio-political conceptions of foreign relations, then, center on negative views of an inconstant official diplomacy where diplomatic allies are inevitably disloyal.

Ideas of allies as disloyal are also linked to a second phenomenon where Taiwan's allies are described as of low socio-economic quality both because they can potentially be bought by the PRC and because the PRC has not yet chosen to purchase their allegiance. As a Taiwanese medical volunteer noted,

China will always take our friends, right? Now, similarly, for [Tuvalu], it seems, in the past, there were some rumors . . . Now, we can't take the initiative here. It all depends on whether China wants to spend money or not. If they want to spend, I think Tuvalu would be taken very quickly. . . . [It's] just that, to China, Tuvalu has no value, no value whatsoever, none, not worthy (4/14 Interview [Mandarin])

*Aid, Humanitarianism, and Taiwan's Low-Quality Allies*

Because of the frequency with which Taiwan's allies sever relations, a common conception in Taiwanese society is that if allies stay with Taiwan, they do so only because of money or aid (Cao 2017). As the final quote in the previous subsection demonstrates, citizens even argue that Taiwan's remaining allies are simply those unworthy of the PRC's attention, demonstrating that allied nations are viewed as underprivileged countries that do not provide even symbolic benefit to Taiwan.

Consequently, in interviews, Taiwanese citizens consistently commented on the perceived low quality of allies:

A lot of people say that our allies can be described using three words: black, poor, small. To a certain extent, to a certain extent, that reflects the reality (11/10a Interview [Mandarin])

[There] are people who say, "Why don't your allies have [a contemporary concept/contemporary ideas]?" I think I also really want to ask why they don't have these [ideas], why the people in our allied countries don't really have that type of civilization, that type, that type of thing emerging. (11/22 Interview [Mandarin])

Taiwanese diplomats and citizens not only see allies as inevitably disloyal, but citizens also emphasize the low quality of allies. Given this, citizens have even criticized government aid to allies because, if allies are destined to leave Taiwan and only of insignificant international status, giving aid wastes resources (Cao 2017; Zheng 2018).

However, despite these considerations, the Taiwan government still seeks to maintain official diplomatic relationships to retain some level of international recognition, especially at the UN. Accordingly, the government has restructured discourse on providing aid to allies to placate negative domestic views. In this restructuring, the government highlights how assisting allies represents humanitarian diplomacy that enhances Taiwan's international reputation. Therefore, in 2007, then Vice President Annette Lu "proposed replacing checkbook diplomacy with 'development diplomacy' and using Taiwan's experience [to] boost its allies' economic development" (*Taipei Times* 2007). Yet, in emphasizing Taiwan's superior development status and ability to "improve" allies, this more "positive" framing of Taiwan's allied relations never questions the assumption that allies are of low quality. For instance, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official described government programs in diplomatic allies as follows:

I saw, on Facebook, that one of the students [who worked with us] said he thought—he was proud of Taiwan. . . . He felt that Taiwan wasn't just engaged in dollar diplomacy like everybody said. We are really engaged in . . . international projects [to] improve the welfare of people in allied countries. (11/8 Interview [Mandarin])

This discourse is reminiscent of the development ideology Australia promotes for the Pacific (Fry 1997), as well as New Zealand's emphasis on remedying "the plight of its less fortunate neighbours in the Pacific" rather than envisioning a "neighbourhood of equals" (T. Teaiwa 2012, 246). This discourse also creates another layer in Taiwan's socio-political conceptions of diplomacy. Namely, the loyalty of allies is not only uncertain but the benefit of even having allies must also be constantly justified, and, regardless of how diplomatic relationships are portrayed, allies are assumed to be of low quality and requiring "improvement."

*Marginalization of Pacific Allies through Taiwan's Austronesian Diplomacy*

Finally, compared with its other alliances, Taiwan has established a special context for relationship-building with its Pacific allies: Austronesian diplomacy. In this context, because the languages of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and Pacific peoples belong to the Austronesian language group, linguistic similarities are used to strengthen diplomatic ties (Blundell 2011; Guo 2017). This is similar to how the New Zealand government sometimes strategically asserts Pacific and/or indigenous identities to bolster its Pacific diplomacy (Goldsmith 2017; T. Teaiwa 2012). Yet, the term "Austronesian" is multiply understood from the perspectives of both Taiwan and Pacific allies, leading to contested views of how effective Austronesian diplomacy is in cementing relations.

More importantly for this article, however, instead of cultivating Taiwanese affinity for Pacific allies, Austronesian diplomacy has sometimes compounded negative/ethnocentric diplomatic ideas, especially among Taiwan's Han majority. This is because indigenous populations in Taiwan are still highly marginalized (Munsterhjelm 2014: 1–30) and comparisons between indigenous and Pacific peoples under the umbrella term Austronesian enables a similar marginalization of Pacific allies. For example, when discussing Tuvalu, a Taiwanese volunteer made the following statement:

Now, about the people, . . . [they] lead lazier lives. For example, you don't see many people fishing. . . . If you said—a hypothetical, if *Taiwanese people* lived here, they would definitely always, always be fishing, but you don't see the people here fishing. Instead, they sell



their exclusive economic zone to other people. . . . So, maybe that's just the nature of the *Austronesian people* (4/14 Interview [Mandarin]; emphasis added)

Here, the interviewee separates the industrious Taiwanese from the lazy Austronesians, indicating marginalization of Taiwan's indigenous peoples through the suggestion that they are not Taiwanese (for parallels to New Zealand, see T. Teaiwa 2012, 254). The quote also demonstrates how the term Austronesian is used to simultaneously discount and stereotype indigenous *and* Pacific peoples.

Furthermore, the international application of Austronesian diplomacy has led to extreme backlash from conservative portions of Taiwan's Han population. For example, during current President Tsai Ing-wen's 2017 visit to the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and former ally Solomon Islands, official references to the trip as a 尋親之旅 (search for relatives) (Cui 2017), generated intense debate about Tsai's perceived attempt to de-Sinicize Taiwan. An editorial from the time captures major concerns posited in this debate:

What relatives are we searching for? Why do we have to search for relatives? . . . [Whether] from the perspective of race, blood, language, culture, or other aspects, Taiwan's majority [population] moved from mainland China to Taiwan and has been Han Chinese for generations. . . . If, to achieve the political goal of shaping a "new Taiwan ethnicity" and the "historical perspective of an independent Taiwan," only . . . Austronesian culture is presented, how can we look the twenty-three million people of Taiwan in the face? . . . That [Tsai Ing-wen] has . . . traveled far across the ocean to find a disproportionate and distant relative is not only illusory . . . , but, even more, it sends the wrong signal. (*China Times* 2017)

More inflammatory reactions to Tsai's trip included that by a Taiwanese actor-singer who proclaimed that Tsai, who is a quarter indigenous, "is perhaps an aborigine of the South Seas and wants to go [there] to search for relatives, but this has nothing to do with us! We are Chinese!" (*Liberty Times* 2017).

Consequently, rather than overcoming negative conceptions of allies, in some cases, Austronesian diplomacy amplifies negative feelings. Here, in addition to ideas of disloyalty and low quality applied to all of Taiwan's diplomatic partners, ambivalent views of Taiwan's indigenous populations are linked to Pacific allies. Moreover, when portions of Taiwan's Han population see Austronesian diplomacy as reconfiguring Taiwanese culture and ethnicity, indigenous peoples and Pacific allies are further ostracized. Given the above discussion, in the next section, I consider how negative/ethnocentric diplomatic rhetoric is reflected in media and popular discourse on Tuvalu.

### Taiwan's Media and Popular Discourse on Tuvalu: Climate Change, Ethnocentrism, and Taiwanese Sovereignty

Popular coverage on Tuvalu in Taiwan is widely varied. Especially in Taiwanese news outlets, Tuvalu has been linked to a number of shifting themes, with Taiwan's attempts to join the UN and climate change most consistently tied to Tuvalu. Here, I focus on media and popular fixation with Tuvalu and climate change not only because it is a common theme in newspapers spanning Taiwan's political spectrum but also because interviews conducted for a larger research project revealed climate change as a major factor shaping how Taiwan knows Tuvalu. Importantly, though, this knowledge does not cultivate the "love of place" advocated by Case (2019)—it furthers rather than impedes ethnocentrism and environmental destruction.<sup>3</sup>

Below, I first explore how climate change dominates reporting on Tuvalu in Taiwanese media and how this coverage dovetails with negative/ethnocentric diplomatic attitudes discussed above. Subsequently, I outline how diplomatic ethnocentrism, media fixation on climate change, and anxiety regarding Taiwanese sovereignty have filtered into popular imaginings of Tuvalu. This occurs through popular narratives where Tuvalu's sovereignty, soon to be lost to climate change, is transferred to Taiwan. Finally, I discuss two works on Tuvalu and climate change that attempted to expand popular understandings of Tuvalu but were unable to achieve this goal because of Taiwan's socio-political contexts.

#### *Representations of Tuvalu in Taiwan's Media*

Articles in three major newspapers spanning Taiwan's political spectrum, 聯合報 (*United Daily News*; UDN), 中國時報 (*China Times*), and 自由時報 (*Liberty Times*),<sup>4</sup> show that climate change is a dominant theme in reporting.<sup>5</sup> For example, UDN's earliest coverage on climate change and Tuvalu's potential disappearance appeared in a 1991 article entitled "Global village: Island crisis, Facing terror of being swallowed by the sea." The article begins by stating that "The South Pacific Island nation of Tuvalu . . . became independent twelve years ago but might disappear . . . forever a hundred years from now." It goes on to describe Tuvalu's low elevation above sea level, small population, and lack of economic resources, which have, the article relates, motivated immigration to Australia or New Zealand (*United Evening News* 1991). Although *China Times* began covering Tuvalu and climate change much later than UDN, it printed a remarkably similar series of articles beginning in 2000 and 2001. One of these articles, "Tuvalu to be submerged," explains that a U.S. policy society has announced that Tuvaluans will begin leaving their country in the next year in the hope of migrating to New Zealand (*China Times Express* 2001b).<sup>6</sup>

This early coverage on Tuvalu potentially disappearing because of climate change is characteristic of subsequent articles on the topic frequently published in UDN, *China Times*, and *Liberty Times*. Reporting not only continually reminds readers that, since the 1990s, Tuvalu has always been about to disappear but has also become tied to what reporters see as Tuvalu's negative qualities: small size, small population, and low development level (see 11/10a Interview). For example, in an article on then Taiwan President Chen Shui-Bian's visit to Tuvalu, former ally Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands in 2005, *China Times* described the poor telecommunications situation in the three countries. The newspaper noted that "[this situation] is especially bad for Tuvalu, which only has 10,000 people and is on the verge of being submerged into the sea" (S.-L. Lin 2005). Writing on the same presidential visit, UDN explained not only that Tuvalu would disappear in several decades due to climate change but also that, compared with the relative "civilization" of the Marshall Islands, the most remarkable characteristic of Tuvalu was that it had "no wars and no malaria" (H.-Z. Li 2005). Furthermore, in a 2009 article on Tuvalu donating 1 percent of its GDP to help Taiwan recover from Typhoon Morakot, UDN rapidly undermined Tuvalu's generosity:

Tuvalu has a population of only approximately 12,000 and its land-mass is only twenty-six square kilometers. Tuvalu's coastline is subject to severe erosion and the greenhouse effect has caused the sea level to rise without stop. . . . International media predicts that in the next several years, Tuvalu will be unfit for human habitation (G. Wang 2009).

If Tuvalu has made an impression in Taiwanese media, it is because of climate change, and relevant reporting on Tuvalu often betrays ethnocentric views of the country as small, poor, and vulnerable. These views reflect themes in Taiwanese diplomacy where allies are seen as low quality and needing "improvement."

#### *Popular Imaginings of Tuvalu in Taiwan*

Because Tuvalu's imminent disappearance is so frequently reported in Taiwan, Tuvalu and climate change have also become a vehicle for citizen reflections on international/domestic problems plaguing their country. One of the most intriguing and troubling ways in which this issue has surfaced in popular discourse is in musings on the possibility of combining Tuvalu and Taiwan into a single country to solve Tuvalu's climate-change problem and Taiwan's sovereignty dilemma.

For example, in 2007, a hospital administrator, Lai Youzhe, published an opinion piece in *Liberty Times*. Lai explained that the Taiwan government was

not paying enough attention to the fact that one of its allies, Tuvalu, had almost disappeared due to climate change. Lai suggested that, if the Tuvaluan population moved to Taiwan and the two nations merged, this problem could be easily solved. Furthermore, through the formation of the new country of 台灣吐瓦魯 (Taiwan-Tuvalu), Taiwan could gain independence from the PRC *and* access to Tuvalu's membership in the UN, the Commonwealth, and other international organizations (Lai 2007). Interestingly, Lai's letter was published the day after *Liberty Times* and UDN ran articles respectively titled "Taiwan's ally Tuvalu to soon become a water world" and "Global warming, Tuvalu soon to be submerged"; many of the details in the *Liberty Times* article are repeated in Lai's piece (*Liberty Times* 2007; UDN 2007). Lai's letter indicates how reporting on Tuvalu shapes public opinion and has made Tuvalu a convenient medium for contemplating Taiwan's contested sovereignty (for a recent example, see J. Lin 2016).

This phenomenon is also apparent in recent Taiwanese literary production. For example, in a 2017 untitled short story, award-winning author Huang Chong-Kai seems to build on Lai Youzhe's proposal outlined above. Huang's story imagines a future in which Tuvalu has already disappeared and citizens have evacuated to settlement areas on Taiwan's eastern coast. The story centers on the reunification of an estranged Taiwanese family after the protagonist's father marries a Tuvaluan widow named Anna and adopts her three daughters. However, it also sketches debates in Taiwan over whether and how to merge Taiwan and Tuvalu so as to engineer Taiwan's independence from the PRC.

As Huang himself has explained, in the story, Tuvalu is merely a conduit for the true focus of the work: dissatisfaction with Taiwan's current international situation (C.-K. Huang, personal communication, 20 December 2019). Thus, in a thirteen-page story where Taiwan's socio-political issues are depicted with clarity and frequency, Huang (2017: 32, 39) reduces Tuvalu and its people to the following descriptions:

[The] Tuvaluans seemed like they didn't care [about losing their country], as if it didn't matter if they couldn't return to their homes.

The Tuvaluans mainly lived as they always had: groups congregated together chatting, holding ukuleles, and happily singing songs. The gist of the lyrics was that, before, they had always sung about Taiwan being very, very far away, but now Taiwan was right before [their] eyes.

[Anna's] eldest daughter said she liked her life in Taiwan better; it was more convenient, and she could ride the train. . . . The youngest

daughter said that the beach in Taitung was very different from the fine, white sand in Tuvalu.

As the story unfolds, descriptions of Tuvaluan characters also focus more on their assimilation into Taiwanese society than on reflections on Tuvalu. As the Mandarin and Hokkien<sup>7</sup> language skills and food preparation abilities of the Tuvaluan characters rapidly improve, the narrator remarks that “I almost couldn’t tell they were foreigners” and “it was as if Tuvalu had never existed” (C.-K. Huang 2017: 39, 42).

Consequently, Huang’s engagement with Tuvalu reflects a common trend in Taiwanese media and society: contentment with understandings of Tuvalu that begin and end with climate change and that concentrate more on Taiwan than Tuvalu. This trend again indicates links to Taiwan’s negative/ethnocentric socio-political conceptions of diplomacy because the suggestion that Tuvaluans would be better served if relocated to Taiwan is an extreme example of Taiwan’s discourse on “improving” allies. The intertwining of Tuvalu with Taiwanese sovereignty issues via climate change also shows how Taiwan’s fraught national status affects its imaginings of allies.

#### *Promoting Understandings of Tuvalu through Climate Change*

I conclude this section by considering two well-known Mandarin/Hokkien-language works on Tuvalu and climate change that have aimed to overturn portrayals of Tuvalu as a climate-change victim or a vehicle for remedying sovereignty concerns. However, I also describe how these works have been undermined in their aims either because they ultimately foreground Taiwan instead of Tuvalu or because the messages they promote have been co-opted by Taiwanese media/politics. This indicates the strength of the discursive trends outlined in the previous subsections.

沈沒 (尸亡 亡亡) 之島 (*Taivalu*<sup>8</sup>), a documentary produced in Taiwan in 2010, was awarded First Prize at the Taipei Film Festival in 2011. After the destruction wrought on southern Taiwan in 2009 by Typhoon Morakot prompted Tuvalu to donate 1 percent of its GDP to Taiwan for disaster relief, the film’s director Huang Hsin-Yao traveled to Tuvalu to collect evidence of climate change. However, in the film, Huang chides himself for his foolish attempts to find conclusive evidence of sea level rise and strives to feature what he sees as more pressing issues (e.g., trash disposal problems<sup>9</sup>), thereby broadening understandings of Tuvalu. Yet, as the film’s English title *Taivalu* indicates, the focus of the documentary is not actually Tuvalu, and it instead uses Tuvalu to reflect on Taiwan’s own environmental protection problems.<sup>10</sup> In a scene toward the end

of the film somewhat reminiscent of Huang Chong-Kai's 2017 short story, the director even notes that, given its technological talents, Taiwan can undoubtedly develop an artificial island for Tuvaluans to live on; when Taiwan inevitably sinks as well, the people of Tuvalu and Taiwan can live there together (H.-Y. Huang 2011: 1:10:21–1:10:34).

The second work considered here is the Yamamoto (2008) illustrated book 日漸沉沒的樂園吐瓦魯，你最重要的東西是甚麼？地球暖化篇 (*Tuvalu, the island nation sinking because of global warming—The most important thing for you*). Based on its title, the work seems an extension of typical Taiwanese discourse on Tuvalu's disappearance. However, it is more complex than it first appears. The book, which was authored by Toshiharu Yamamoto, then president of the nonprofit organization Earth the Spaceship, consists mainly of pictures drawn by Tuvaluan children after they were asked what was most important to them. While these pictures do center on climate change, they also reflect the importance to children of Tuvalu's beaches, sunsets, people-to-people relationships, schools, water availability, and trash disposal issues.

Yet, the fate of this work in Taiwan is particularly interesting: from 2009 through 2011, then first lady Christine Chow Mei-Ching gave readings of the book throughout Taiwan. In media coverage of these readings, the book becomes a prop secondary to reporting on Chow's charitable visits to remote and indigenous schools and her own comparisons between Tuvalu and Taiwan (Pan 2011). Furthermore, in reporting, the book is briefly summarized as discussing "the helplessness of Tuvalu, a small country in the Pacific, in the face of climate change" (You 2010) and is sometimes barely mentioned at all (Hua 2011).<sup>11</sup> Clearly, despite the book's content, its integration into the Taiwanese press through the first lady's fame transformed it and Tuvalu into mere signifiers of climate change, tools more important for forwarding political agendas than anything else.

To summarize, in Taiwan's popular discourse, Tuvalu is consistently mediated through discussions of climate change; this mediation involves linking Tuvalu to ethnocentric and often negative descriptors, as well as reflections on Taiwanese sovereignty. These phenomena are indicative of themes in Taiwan's socio-political conceptions of diplomacy and highlight distinctive articulations in popular Taiwanese rhetoric on Tuvalu. They also clearly demonstrate how Taiwan's inability to cultivate a "critical awareness" of Tuvalu, or a love of Tuvalu as place (Case 2019), has reduced its ability for compassion toward and/or appreciation of its Pacific ally.

### Conclusion

Farbotko (2010: 47–48) has argued that, in the West, discourse on Tuvalu "[inscribes the country] as a location where developed world anxieties about global climate change are articulated" and where "the urgency of climate

change” will be finally proven when Tuvalu disappears. In this article, I demonstrated how, in Taiwan, discourse on Tuvalu and climate change instead links to diplomatic ethnocentrism and anxieties about Taiwan’s contested sovereignty. Given the simultaneous existence of these divergent discursive articulations, it is clear that both are constructed and based on differing concerns in the West and Taiwan.

However, comparatively analyzing these constructions also indicates that the strongest discursive link in both is that between Tuvalu and climate change. That is, in the West and in Taiwan, before being tied to other discourses, Tuvalu is always first linked to climate change, which creates a situation where other issues in Tuvaluan society and culture are seen as less pressing and, by extension, less important. In both instances, it is clear that a “critical awareness” of Tuvalu as place has not been broadly cultivated. For Taiwan, this is reflected in the fact that Taiwan often uses Tuvalu’s struggle against climate change to achieve nationalistic goals, which hinders the environmental action Case (2019) seeks when she advocates for love of place. It is also reflected in the fact that Taiwan reduces Tuvalu to a signifier rather than an embodied location, which renders empathy for the Tuvaluan people all but impossible. Regardless of whether this use of Tuvalu might serve a “greater good” (for Taiwan), it runs directly counter to environmental and empathetic action that would “[make] the *Pacific* better” (Case 2019, 22; emphasis added). Thus, in this case, Taiwan’s use of Tuvalu undermines moves toward empowerment in Pacific Studies, and remedying this issue is critical to the field.

Resolution, perhaps, comes when people are actually “[provided] opportunities . . . to give Pacific spaces meaning” (Case 2019, 19) and understand Tuvalu not *as* climate change but as a lived/living place *affected by* climate change. In 2017 and 2018, I was able to conduct numerous interviews with Taiwanese youth who had traveled to Tuvalu as part of Taiwan’s cultural diplomacy in its Pacific allies. These young people often did not have the opportunity to stay in Tuvalu over a long period and did not return from Tuvalu completely free of ideas developed based on Taiwanese discourse. However, many were struck by their highly positive experiences in Tuvalu and the extent to which climate change, while certainly having a major influence on the country, was not the only factor in Tuvaluan life and society (10/6a, 10/20b, 11/9, 11/19a, 2/27, and 3/8 Interviews). Consequently, although not unproblematic, in this instance, Taiwanese youth were able to give spaces meaning and, in developing something approximating love of place, valued Tuvalu as having its own agency while also appreciating why its struggle against climate change was so very critical. Notably, this example is similar to the experiences of Australian National University students who participate in the university’s Pacific Islands Field School. When these students are taught in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa,

or Hawai'i, they reimagine "the place of Australia in Oceania" and undergo an "affective learning journey" that challenges visions of the Pacific "as conflict-ridden, vulnerable, resource-lacking and a general threat to regional stability" (Hennessy and K. Teaiwa n.d.). They are also able to recognize "gross material appropriation of . . . lands and resources" in Pacific locales (Jolly 2018, 357), which may motivate action, especially environmental action, based on critical awareness of place.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the significance of language and acts of translation to the discussion conducted in this article and Pacific Studies in general. For over twenty years, scholars have pointed to the absolutely critical place of indigenous languages in the development of Pacific Studies or research on the Pacific region (Case 2019; Gegeo 1998; Panapa 2014; Powell 2019). Despite this, Taiwan's discourse on Tuvalu has thus far escaped attention in Anglophone Pacific Studies because nonindigenous and non-English languages prevalent in the Pacific are largely ignored. English-language framings of the region have long been the target of Anglophone Pacific Studies (Fry 1997), but the Pacific is influenced by framings effected in numerous languages. If these ideas are not made legible through translation and are not better understood, our capacity to develop a holistic conceptualization of these framings will be reduced and our ability to speak back to them weakened. Just as lacking a critical awareness of place hampers our capacity to value the Pacific, lacking language, or cognizance of multiple languages (indigenous and nonindigenous), negatively impacts our ability to comprehensively understand the Pacific and how it is multiply imagined and construed.

## NOTES

1. I do not specifically include indigenous voices from Taiwan in this article (although it is important to note that being an indigenous person does not preclude someone from espousing the discourse I outline). However, for a larger research project, I did conduct various interviews with indigenous peoples from Taiwan who had participated in cultural exchange in the Pacific. This exchange is extremely active, especially during events like Festival of Pacific Arts. Based on interviews, it is clear that indigenous Taiwanese highlight close ties with indigenous peoples from Pacific settler colonies (and vice versa) while not as directly emphasizing links with Taiwan's Pacific allies (9/30, 11/9, 11/16, 11/24, and 12/19b Interviews). This dovetails with major trends in Taiwan's diplomatic discourse on the Pacific (Marinaccio n.d.).

2. As of September 2019, Taiwan's diplomatic allies are Belize, Eswatini, Guatemala, Haiti, the Holy See, Honduras, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Nicaragua, Palau, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tuvalu.

3. See 10/13, 10/14, 10/20b, 11/9, 11/19a, 3/8, and 8/30a Interviews; Wu (2012, 108), back cover. It is important to emphasize that Tuvalu is *not* widely known in Taiwan. Consequently, the relationship between climate change and Tuvalu is not recognized by all Taiwanese citizens but is known to those familiar with Tuvalu.



4. UDN and *China Times* are seen as supportive of the Nationalist Party (KMT) and *Liberty Times* the Democratic Progressive Party.

5. All three newspapers have keyword-searchable databases with digitized articles available for UDN from 1951 to present, *China Times* from 1950 to present, and *Liberty Times* from 2003 to present. For 2009 to 2016, when reporting on Tuvalu and climate change was most prevalent, 49 percent of *China Times* articles, 48 percent of UDN articles (including articles from the affiliated *Economic Daily News*), and 24 percent of *Liberty Times* articles on Tuvalu were about climate change.

6. See *China Times* (2000); *China Times Express* (2001a); T. Liu (2001).

7. Hokkien is a Southern Min Chinese dialect prevalent in Taiwan.

8. “Taivalu” is a portmanteau of “Taiwan” and “Tuvalu” (or “Tai” + “valu”).

9. The Tuvalu government has since addressed trash disposal issues and they are now less of an urgent concern.

10. See M. Li (2011); X. Liu (2011).

11. See also Z. Lin (2009); Y. Wang (2010).

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