

Rethinking Tuvalu climate [im]mobility

From the perspectives of human-nature relatedness
and culture

Fumiko Noguchi

Research Fellow

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and

Development (JICA-ORI)

Noguchi.Fumiko2@jica.go.jp



Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (2023)

Ensuring cultural protection of the Pacific climate migrants



6. *The Framework delivers on the Pathways in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent to ‘[e]nsure the protection and practice of the rights, cultural values and heritage and traditional knowledge of Pacific peoples in global and regional protocols for climate and disaster risk reduction, and mobility including relocation, migration, and displacement’.*

Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union

The Falepili Union is an agreement between sovereign nations to a more advanced, integrated, and comprehensive partnership. Safeguarding Tuvalu's future lies at the heart of our Falepili Union.



What is the Falepili Union?

The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union is a landmark treaty between Australia and Tuvalu, as well as some shared attributes in a joint judicial institution and a joint border management arrangement, signed by Prime Minister Albanese and Prime Minister Tuvalu on 29 November 2022.

On 9 May 2024 Tuvalu Prime Minister Tofanai Talake and Foreign Minister David Tait signed a joint Statement of Intent on the Government of Tuvalu's commitment to support and assist Australia through the Falepili Union. This statement sets out the joint plan of action for the Falepili Union, which is a key component of the Falepili Union. This was signed by Foreign Minister Wong and Tuvalu Prime Minister Tait on 9 May 2024.

The key features of the Falepili Union are:

- establishing a border visa programme for Tuvaluan citizens to visit, work and study in Australia;
- investment to support and promote each other's culture, society and economy, including through creative content such as support for content, such as film and television rights;
- mutual support for Tuvalu's development and economic wellbeing, such as the Australia-Tuvalu Partnership for the South Pacific Adaptation Project (STAMP) and
- investment to support Australia's border protection and wellbeing, such as the Australia-Tuvalu Partnership.

In the spirit of the Falepili Union, we are committed to work on each other's economic and social challenges, including climate change and energy. It will also strengthen our ability to respond to regional crises, disaster, and the collective responsibility of the Pacific Islands.

'Falepili'

In the Tuvalu term for neighbours who live in close houses.

It reflects the duty of neighbours to care for, share with, and protect each other. These values, along with respect for each other's sovereignty and independence, underpin our Union.



How will the Falepili Union work?

The Falepili Union will be implemented through the Australia-Tuvalu...



#MyWaytoWork in Tuvalu

Tuvalu and Australia will work together to support Tuvalu's labour market. This includes a visa and work permit program for Tuvalu citizens to work in Australia. This will be supported by a joint visa and work permit program for Tuvalu citizens to work in Australia. This will be supported by a joint visa and work permit program for Tuvalu citizens to work in Australia.



Supporting business viability with dignity

Tuvalu and Australia will support Tuvalu's small, remote economy. This includes support for Tuvalu's small, remote economy. This includes support for Tuvalu's small, remote economy. This includes support for Tuvalu's small, remote economy.



Supporting our codes of practice and security

Tuvalu and Australia will support Tuvalu's security and safety. This includes support for Tuvalu's security and safety. This includes support for Tuvalu's security and safety. This includes support for Tuvalu's security and safety.



Supporting our partnership

Tuvalu and Australia will support Tuvalu's partnership. This includes support for Tuvalu's partnership. This includes support for Tuvalu's partnership. This includes support for Tuvalu's partnership.

The image and other content are available at www.dfat.gov.au/au-tv

DFAT (2023)

Comprehensive policy package for building resilience in the Pacific

- Climate adaptation project such as land reclamation in Funafuti
- **Special permanent residency visa** (no limitation, no expiry date) to 280 Tuvaluans every year -> 90% population applied in 2025.
- Provision of support for Tuvaluans to retain their **cultural identity**



Tuvalu and Sinking Island Narrative

Fongafare , Funafuti Atoll, Tuvalu, 2025



Photo © Shuichi Endo 2025

Tuvalu: 9 Atolls

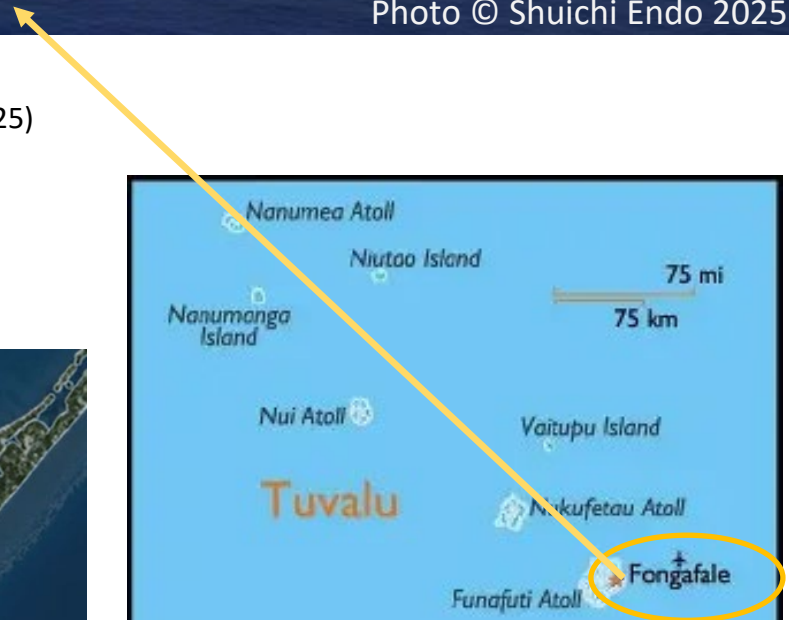
Capital: Funafuti

Population: 9,853 as of 2024

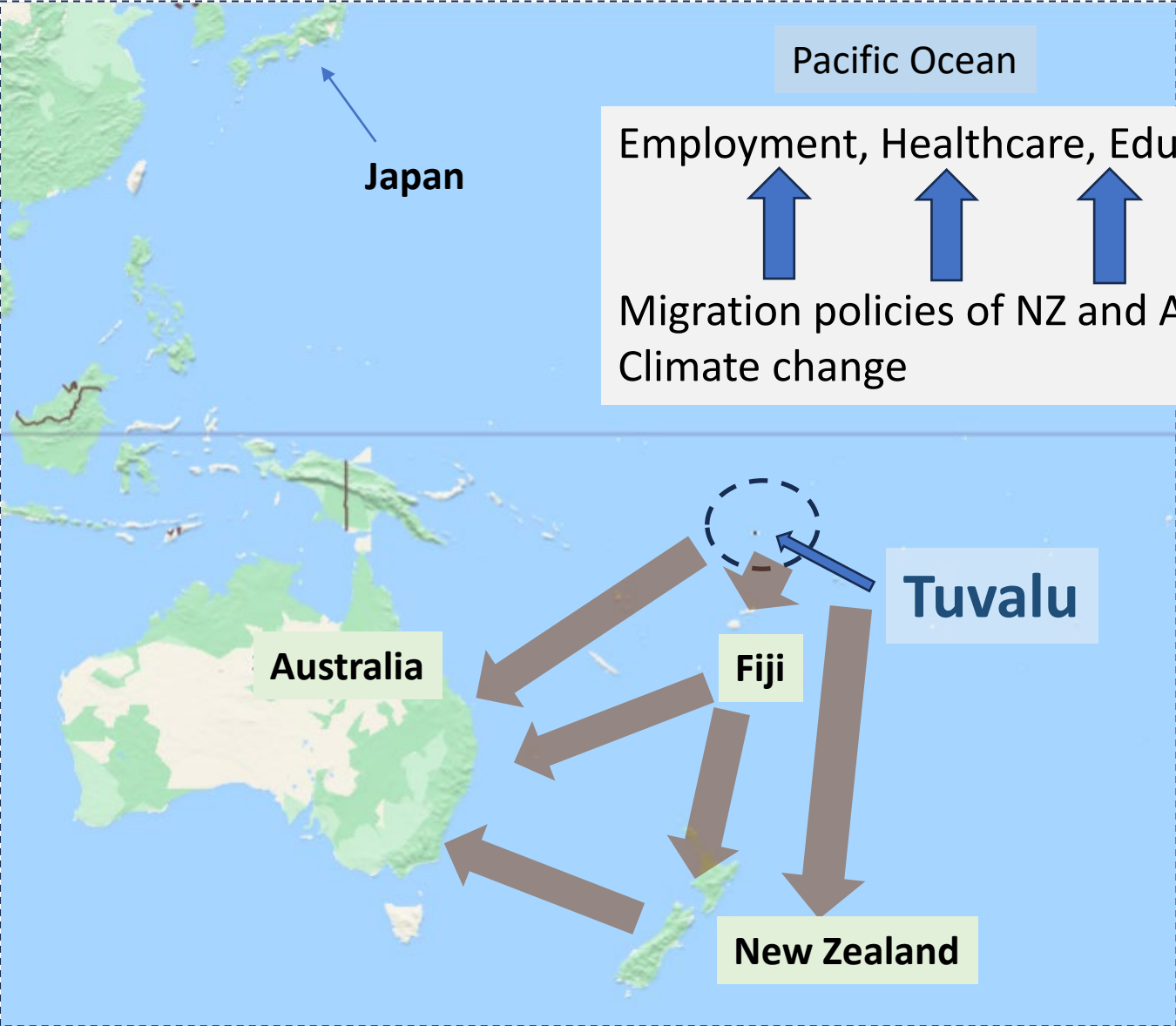
Main industry: Self-sufficient livelihood

Main national revenue: ODA (80%), and remittance

Tuvalu government (2025)

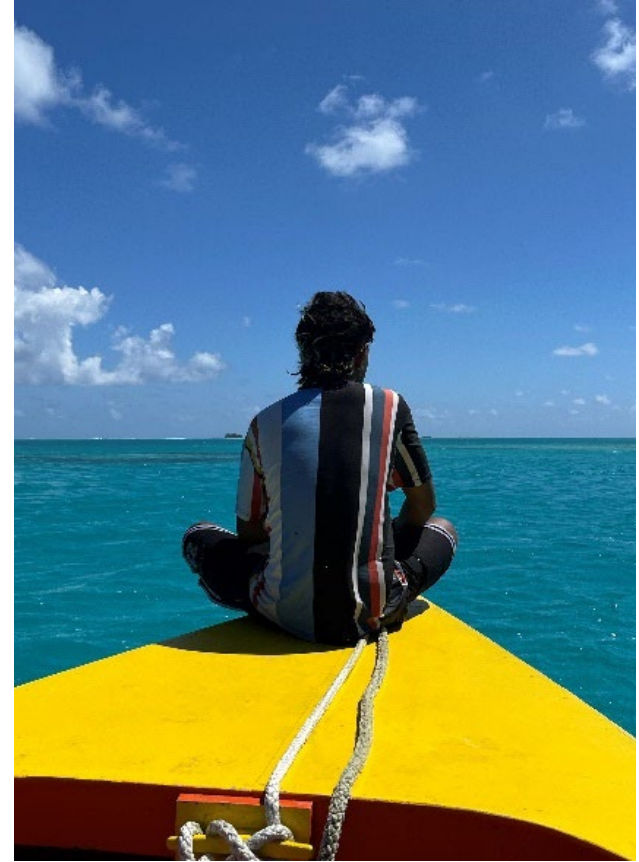


Tuvalu migration pattern



[Tuvalu Study] Two implications of cultural identity

- People have developed life, culture and society based on local natural resources, and indigenous knowledge is at the centre.
- People develop their cultural identity and knowledge based on social, and spiritual connections with the surrounding land and sea



1. **Place attachment** – Tuvaluans cultural identity is place-based. Indigenous knowledge is the source of their dignity.
2. **Inseparability** – Society and culture have evolved through human interactions with the surrounding natural environment

[Fiji Study] **Place** is essential to retain and update the cultural identity of migrants

- Places for church, ceremonial place, decision making, child-raising, farming - taro potato and bread tree)
- While being influenced by Fiji culture, politics, and education, Tuvaluans maintain and update their culture and knowledge in the Pacific value system (time, land and climate)



Places allow them to hold **agency** to protect and maintain their cultural identity, by using language, practising indigenous knowledge and sharing the values

[Australian Study] **Agency** matters in quality cultural identity

- Living scattered and no communal space for social gathering
- Emotional and social insecurity drives migrants to drug, drinking, outside marriage relationship

“Every day is like a fight to protect ourselves and our culture.”

“I don’t want to live here, but I cannot go back.”

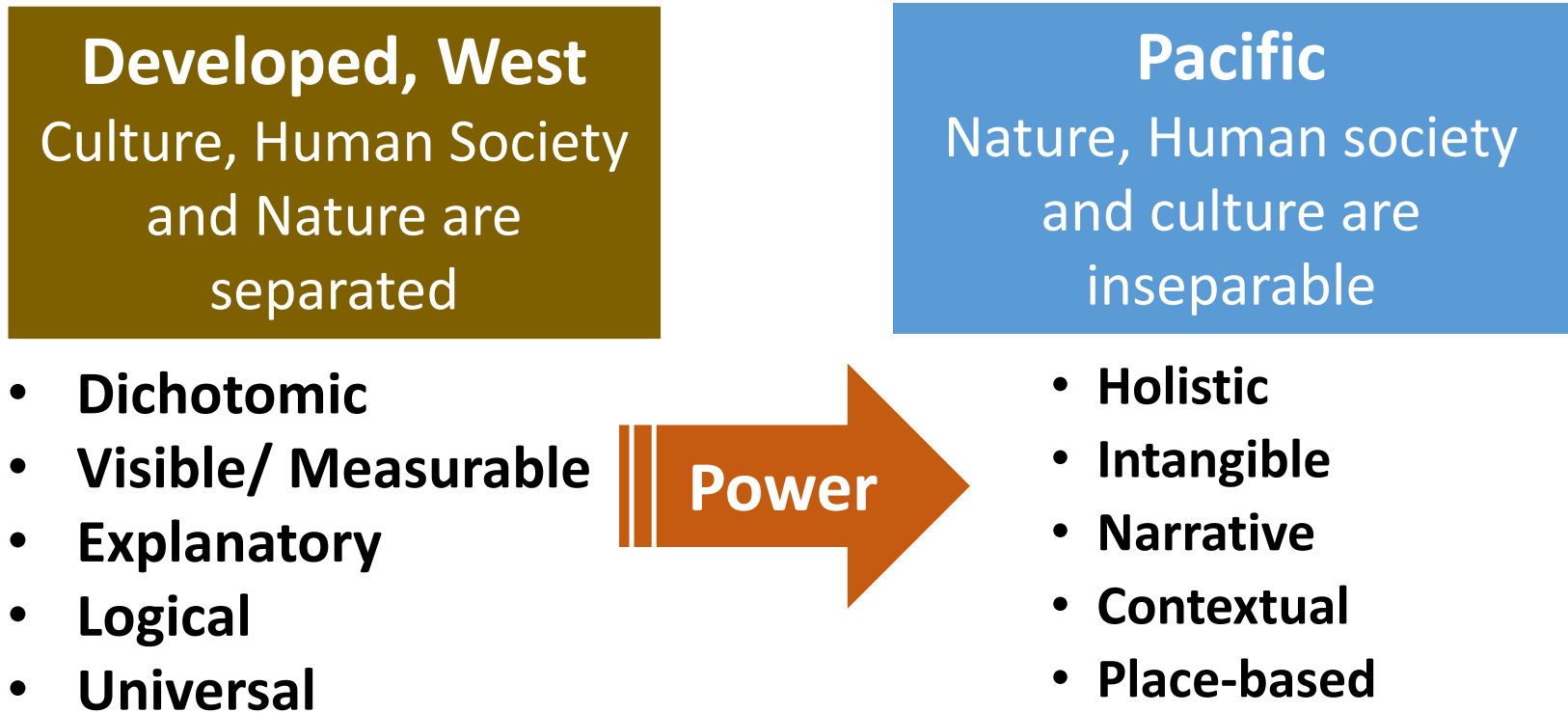


Fewer agency and a lack of place may lead to disempowerment, low self-esteem and a lack of dignity

“Falepili is a special treaty. But we cannot make it too special.”

At this moment, the Australian government is not planning to provide common land/space for the Tuvaluans’ cultural gathering or living together under the Falepili Union Treaty

Analysis from the views of Human-Nature Relationship (IPBES 2025)



- **Epistemological differences** and **power** exist in policy and everyday life
- More Tuvaluans try to fit into the modern Western standard of living. More depopulation in the remote islands of Tuvalu will be accelerated. Harder to sustain indigenous knowledge and life

Possible way-out

- Empowerment-driven intervention is needed.
- Educational interventions for both Tuvaluans in/outside Tuvalu, particularly Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), can play.
- Strengthening Human Security initiative of the Japanese ODA Policy in the Pacific will be important
“HS advances the nation and community building through **empowerment and protection** of individuals to live happily and in dignity, free from fear and want.” (MOFA 2021)

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Thank you ありがとうございます Faafetai