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New Caledonia and French Polynesia: New Opportunities Amid Great Power Competition

BY
RAIHAAMANA TEVAHITUA





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Executive Summary

Raihaamana Tevahitua

New Caledonia and French Polynesia, like to other Oceanian nations, are gaining heightened significance within the Indo-Pacific framework. Consequently, both non-sovereign territories have improved leverage to assert their priorities in relation to the central French state. Simultaneously, they are increasingly engaging with foreign partners under the guidance of France.



Photo: Alexis Rosenfeld

By endorsing the concept of the Indo-Pacific in 2018,¹ France has given new strategic importance to its island territories in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. This predominantly maritime regional anchorage and the status of resident power that France derives from it, however, is not intangible and is subject to the backlash of the political-economic relations that it maintains with its distant communities. Such fluctuations are moreover subject to global geopolitical developments dominated by the growing rivalry between China and the United States in the region. This is particularly evident in Oceania, where Beijing's diplomatic-economic activism is undermining regional balances and the Pacific Way,² while the traditional powers—first and foremost France, Australia, and New Zealand—strive to redefine relations of trust with the island micro-states. For the United States, the Pacific zone and its extensions are a priority in its confrontation with China. This is evidenced by the organization of the first US-Oceania summit by the Biden administration

in Washington in September 2022.³ This meeting echoes the signing of a highly controversial cooperation agreement between China and the Solomon Islands in April 2022, which allows for the dispatch of Chinese police officers and offers possible logistical facilities to Chinese warships on site. China is positioning itself as a major developing country, offering investment and an alternative model of growth and government. It has included 11 Oceanic states in its Belt and Road Initiative⁴ (BRI) project. Amid this polarizing confrontation, France's Indo-Pacific strategy presents itself as a third way, multilateral in essence and refusing bloc policy, while recognizing the rise of Chinese assertiveness. Like that of the European Union, on which it intends to rely,⁵ being the only member state present in the region, the French approach is focused on cooperation and multilateralism necessary for the management of global challenges, such as climate change and good governance of the oceans; two crucial issues for the Oceanian archipelagos.

Within the "Francoceania," the development of New Caledonia and French Polynesia has similar characteristics. Each has a population of about 285,000, 75% of which is concentrated in one political, administrative, and economic center (the South Province in New Caledonia and the island of Tahiti in French Polynesia), while they are endowed with an immense maritime territory (more than 7 million km² combined, i.e., 63% of the national EEZ) with high

¹ French strategy for the Indo-Pacific, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. Indo-Pacific: 9 questions to understand France's strategy in the region - Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (diplomatie.gouv.fr) France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific (diplomatie.gouv.fr).

² Aspiration of the Pacific islanders to establish an Oceanian regionalism, based on consensus building.

³ Marianne Péron-Doise "US-Pacific Summit," Geopolitical Observatory of the Indo-Pacific, IRIS, 22/10/2022. Geopolitical Observatory of the Indo-Pacific | IRIS (iris-france.org)

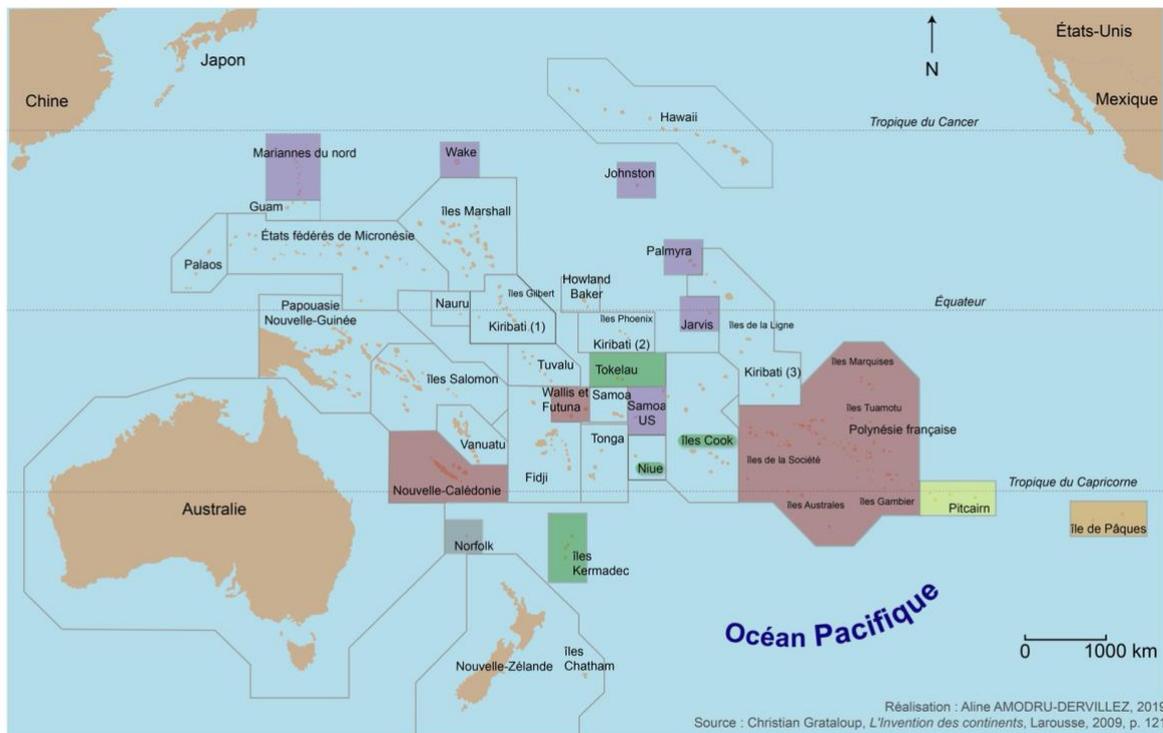
⁴ New Zealand, Cook Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Samoa.

⁵ *Indo-Pacific Cooperation Strategy*, 21/09/2021. UE, Joint communication on the Indo-Pacific | EEAS Website (europa.eu).

potential for development. Otherwise, the status of advanced autonomy of these overseas collectivities (Collectivités d’Outre-mer or COM) gives them executive and legislative bodies, weighted by the Central State's sovereign competences in matters of

Vulnerable and coveted, these communities, often ignored by the international community, are now propelled forward by contemporary global issues such as Sino-Western geopolitical competition and the management of common goods. This raises the

L'Océanie une région avec des territoires à statuts politiques multiples



Statut du territoire non souverain et le pays dont il dépend

- Territoire non incorporé, États-Unis d'Amérique
- Territoire autonome, rattaché à la Nouvelle-Zélande
- Territoire rattaché au Chili
- Collectivité d'outre-mer, rattachée à la France
- Territoire d'outre-mer rattaché au Royaume-Uni
- Territoire autonome rattaché à l'Australie

Les territoires souverains

- État indépendant
- État en libre association avec la Nouvelle-Zélande

Figure 1. Political status of Oceania territories

foreign policy and defense. Moreover, their economies ⁶ are confronted with isolation and dependence on the external market (China absorbs three-fifths of New Caledonian nickel and Polynesian pearls, their top export products), compensated by annual transfers from the state (2.7 billion euros cumulative).

question of how these non-sovereign territories defend their political and economic position in relation to the power game in the Indo-Pacific region. This paper provides some elements of an answer.

⁶ *New Caledonia and French Polynesia: Two growth trajectories (2001-2018)*, IEOM Thematic Studies.

The Readjustment of the Relationship of the COMs to the Central State

As essential parts of the French Indo-Pacific—between Paris, Washington, and Beijing—the two communities find themselves in a strong position to make their claims heard. This is particularly true for the French central government, which relies on them to give credibility to its Indo-Pacific strategy and its stature as the world's second largest maritime power. Thus, the link to the mainland is more than ever a subject of central political debate, between supporters of remaining within the republic and those seeking, on the contrary, a thorough separation. The challenge is therefore to make existing expectations on both sides coincide.

Coordination of Local and National Perspectives

At a time when France's Indo-Pacific strategy is intended to be internationally inclusive, local elected officials may regret not having been consulted by the state before its adoption. Some would have learned of its officialization by the head of state through the press. Although this lack of consultation on a national strategy is not specific to these Oceanian communities, it is nevertheless thanks to them that France can claim to be “Pacific.”⁷ Moetai Brotherson, a Polynesian pro-independence deputy (Tavini), wonders if the people have the right to a say, when they see themselves transposed into a broad

geostrategic dynamic. According to him, this “confirms the Tavini's thesis that, despite the autonomy granted to the territory, things are always imposed from the outside.”⁸

It is true that the populations of the French overseas collectivities (collectivité d'outre-mer in French, hereafter referred to as COMs) and their representatives have imperatives⁹ that often overlap with those of the state (climate change, maritime security), but these can sometimes come up against the persistence of the competencies held by the state in matters of foreign relations, for example. To get out of the angle centered on the state's priorities, the actors of these COMs wish to take part in the acclimatization of the strategy through the various interfaces linking them to the metropolis: meetings with the metropolitan executive, work of the national legislative chambers, hearings of political parties and leaders, and university symposiums. Through these multiple meeting points, the COMs seek ¹⁰ to influence certain state positions as much as possible.

Thus, in June 2022, the Assembly of French Polynesia created a commission of inquiry on the impact of France's strategies in the Indo-Pacific region on the French communities of Oceania. In collaboration with the assemblies of New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna, it is responsible for gathering the sentiments of the local populations to develop a local

⁷ Christian Lechery (former French ambassador to the Pacific Community), “French Polynesia: The Far East of the Indo-Pacific,” *The main files of Diplomacy*, 1/10/2019.

⁸ Sémir Al Wardi, *The Indo-Pacific axis: a new imperative over the Oceanians?* Colloquium The Indo-Pacific and the New Silk Roads, 5-7/11/2019.

⁹ Nic Maclellan, *Stable, Democratic and Western: China and French Colonialism in the Pacific*, in *The China Alternative - Changing regional order in the Pacific Islands*, edition Australian National University, 2021.

¹⁰ Sarah Mohamed-Gaillard, *The Indo-Pacific, a new paradigm for France's policy in Oceania?* Colloquium The Indo-Pacific and the New Silk Roads, 5-7/11/2019.

strategy,¹¹ if necessary. Ultimately, the recommendations of the three assemblies together have the potential to move the lines, since they will have to be considered by local governments and even by the State.

The Institutional Future of New Caledonia

New Caledonia's history is marked by the events of 1984-1988, during which bloody clashes between supporters and opponents of New Caledonian independence led to the declaration of a state of emergency. In their wake, the 1998 Nouméa Accord established a decolonization process that provided up to three referendums of self-determination between 2018 and 2022, "Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?" Three times—on Nov. 4, 2018, Oct. 4, 2020, and Dec. 12, 2021—most of the participants voted to remain in the Republic. Not without controversy, for the last consultation.

Indeed, in early September 2021, Caledonia experienced a pandemic peak. The Oceanian communities were the most affected, reflecting the socio-economic inequalities of the territory. Therefore, the pro-independence parties asked for the postponement of the referendum to avoid contagious gatherings. Nevertheless, the state decided to go ahead with the third referendum scheduled for Dec. 12, as the health situation

improved and on the grounds of the economic interests of the territory. In response, pro-independence supporters abstained, to the point that the "no" vote won by 97%. While the consultation was validated legally by the Council of State, it was a failure politically, due to the abstention of the majority of the "first settlers," the Kanaks.

The separatists are now more distrustful of what they see as the state's implicit bias towards the loyalists, who wanted to keep the date of the vote and refuse to participate in the "Convention of Partners" convened by the state to define the institutional future. This was in addition to the exacerbation of antagonism between the pro-independence and loyalist blocs over the composition of the electorate.¹² Despite this, all stakeholders aspire to find a lasting agreement,¹³ with a view to strengthening living together and giving visibility to businesses.¹⁴ At the end of a transition period in search of consensus, a "project" referendum should take place.

The Recognition and Reparation of the "Nuclear Fact"

The nuclear tests carried out by the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP) at Moruroa and Fangataufa (1966-1996) in Polynesia, allowed the French government to acquire a nuclear deterrent force, in a context polarized by the Soviet-American relationship. The human "cost" of these tests on the

¹¹ Lucie Ceccarelli, *An APF mission on French strategy in the Indo-Pacific*, Tahiti Infos, 24/07/2022.

¹² To put an end to this explosive situation, the Nouméa Accord (1998) derogates from the principle of equality of the Constitution and recognizes a Caledonian citizenship, with the effect of limiting access to local voting rights (to Kanak and residents for at least 20 years).

¹³ F-N. Buffet, P. Bas, J-P. Sueur et H. Marseille, Information report on the *Institutional future of Caledonia*, Senate, 27/07/22.

¹⁴ Interview by the author with Bastien Vandendyck, international relations analyst specialized in the Pacific, in Paris 30/08/2022.

local population was long-ignored. Initially, as compensation for the cessation of the CEP in 1996, Jacques Chirac decided to create a fund for the conversion of the local economy. However, it was not until the Morin Law of 2010 that compensation for victims of radiation-induced diseases was recognized.¹⁵ Nevertheless, associations defending the interests of nuclear victims criticize the slow and cumbersome administrative procedures for individual compensation.

In May 2021, Polynesian President Edouard Fritch set up a *Reko Tika*, Truth and Justice delegation, to present the country's grievances to senior government officials. For his part, President Macron, during a visit to Polynesia in July 2021, affirmed that France was not fully aware of the risk presented by radioactivity and, as a sign of goodwill, promised to facilitate access to archives formerly classified as secret due to defense. A team was sent to the islands to help the populations constitute their files, the state committed itself to reimburse victims for their care and to support the creation of a Cancer Institute of Polynesia. All this demonstrates the good will of the state to repair the after-effects of radioactivity.

This sensitive memorial work testifies to a paradigm shift in the recognition¹⁶ of the “nuclear fact” in Polynesia by the French state. Nevertheless, the local government, anti-nuclear associations, the pro-independence party, and the Mā'ohi Protestant Church expected the president to make a symbolic

repentance for the many deaths and illnesses resulting from the tests. Without making an official apology, he asked the victims to forgive him. At the time he was running for re-election the following year, he could not have allowed himself to believe that the military had knowingly endangered the health and lives of CEP personnel and the civilian population.

The Question of Chinese Investment

With 20% of the world's population, China is the leading producer and consumer of fisheries resources. With its stocks dwindling in its territorial waters, which are also polluted to the detriment of its food security, China has decided to outsource the catching of fish through its fishing fleet and aquaculture abroad. Thus, the Chinese group Tian Rui International signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Polynesia in 2014 with the intention of building a mega aquaculture farm¹⁷ on Hao Atoll (900 km from Tahiti). This activity promises to provide a growth area after the pearl farming sector (the leading local export product), has faced difficulties over the last 20 years and addresses the chronic trade deficit.

However, whether French Polynesia is legally competent, the state is involved in any large-scale project, especially if there are potential geopolitical implications. Because the state cannot accept China's unchecked expansion of its influence in a French

¹⁵ By submitting a file to the CIVEN (Comité d'indemnisation des victimes des essais nucléaires).

¹⁶ *Opening of the International Symposium on the Nuclear Fact in Paris*, The Presidency of French Polynesia, 19/01/2022.

¹⁷ Martine Valo, “In Hao, French Polynesia, a controversial project of giant aquaculture farm,” *Le Monde*, 22/02/2022.

community, President Macron has clearly opposed the Hao project. He has highlighted several well-founded risks (environmental impact, suspect financing, and undocumented job creation). Instead, a counter-project was implemented as of June 2022 with the aim of reconciling strategic interest and island needs: the installation of the 4th company of the RSMA-PF,¹⁸ which will build an eco-lodge intended for the training of the archipelago's youth, relating to the islands' food and energy autonomy.

As a response, the Polynesian government is claiming its own narrative¹⁹ of a truly autonomous collectivity attached to its relations with China (like Reunion Island). The local presidency therefore avoids appearing antagonistic to Chinese views of the territory, as do the independent Oceanian countries, which prefer to cooperate with multiple development partners²⁰: "enemy to none, friend to all." Many of them reject the idea that they would not be able to identify²¹ the impact of concluding contracts with Chinese actors. Between the mistrust of the president of the republic and the commitments already made, the local president finds himself somewhat at odds. The question of the economic relationship with China and its gray areas remains.

Insertion in the Regional and International Space of the Oceanian Com

¹⁸ Marau Biret, *RSMA in Hao: food and energy autonomy*, Radio 1, 07/03/2022.

¹⁹ Paco Millhiet, *Geopolitics of Overseas. What competition from France and China in FP?* Diploweb, 14/11/2021.

²⁰ Carol Li, *The Belt and Road Initiative in Oceania: Understanding the People's Republic of China's Strategic Interests and Engagement in the Pacific*, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 07/2022.

²¹ Deputy Moetai Brotherson suspects the use of disproportionately large diesel tanks to make Hao a refueling base in the center of the EEZ, allowing fishing around Polynesia.

Historically, overseas territories have long remained focused on their relations with the mainland. However, in recent years, the local public authorities, supported by large companies, have initiated several cooperative ventures in the region, thanks to their jurisdiction over international negotiations. Although not independent territories, French Polynesia and New Caledonia have interesting margins of maneuver to interact internationally and conduct their own foreign policy in multiple fields of activity with the support of the State.

The Diplomatic Exploitation of Environmental Capital

Pacific people are among the first in the world to be exposed to climate change: the intensification of cyclones and rising sea levels threaten habitats and coastal infrastructures,²² and the rise in temperature and acidity of the seas disrupt fish migrations. These phenomena, combined with intensive industrial fishing, impacts human security, the local economy, and the political stability of island territories. Since then, Papeete has worked to facilitate the development of international declarations on climate change and maritime preservation ahead of COP 21 in 2015, the release of the Blue Pacific Strategy²³ in 2017, and the Boe Declaration in 2018. All this de facto strengthens its position in the region.

Author's interview with Moetai Brotherson, President of the Delegation for Overseas France of the National Assembly, 16/08/2022.

²² Julia Tasse, researcher, Videoconference, *On the margins of the Indo-Pacific: what strategies for France and the European Union in the island Pacific?* IRIS, 05/2022.

²³ The Pacific Islands Forum's *Blue Pacific* (2017) promotes a global security approach (human, environmental, geopolitical), based on the ocean as a driver of socio-cultural political and economic change. The *Boe Declaration* (2018) identifies the climate emergency as the primary threat to Oceanians.

In 2021, Polynesia successfully amplified its ocean diplomacy via its “Great Blue Wall of the Pacific”²⁴ project, which aims to ban destructive fishing techniques (drifting fish aggregating device, purse seine, drift net), with the state's maritime surveillance. Thanks to these measures, it has received the MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) label for sustainable tuna fishing. To mobilize other actors in the region, it has requested the support of Peter Thompson, Fiji's Special Envoy for the Oceans of the UN Secretary General. In this way, Polynesia hopes to bring about a rational management plan for fishery resources in all the EEZs of the Pacific, to collectively optimize the tuna catches.

In parallel, Polynesia actively participates in international events and has for example organized the first global edition of the Blue Climate Summit in May 2022. This is one of the largest events organized in situ, that brings together scientists, policymakers, project developers and investors. The objective for the local presidency was to demonstrate that island countries were “territories of opportunities and solutions²⁵” in carbon neutrality (seaweed farming to capture CO₂, wave power, deep sea water cooling), in particular to attract funding for local initiatives for sustainable development of marine potential.

The Breaking of Isolation by the Digital Tool

²⁴ Report on a draft resolution concerning the Ambition Te Moana O Hiva - the Great Blue Wall of the Pacific, Ecology Committee, Assembly of French Polynesia, 10/2/22.

²⁵ Blue Climate Summit, Results Report - French Polynesia 2022, Tetiaroa Society, 2022.

²⁶ There are 450 active or newly installed fiber optic submarine communication (call, internet) cables in the world. 95% of the world's data

The South Pacific suffers from a weak transpacific cable²⁶ network (5 links) compared to the North (13 cables). Most cables in island Oceania are regional. Given the low population density, the commercial logic of private actors is not always feasible. In the case of archipelagos with scattered inhabited islands, this implies the use of a public service mission to install the cables, as some sections have no prospect of profitability. For this reason, each of the two Oceanian communities relies on a historical public operator, the *Office des Postes et Télécommunications* (OPT), which combines its own funds with those of the EU, the State and AFD, to connect the islands.

In 2008, New Caledonia and French Polynesia installed their first bilateral international fiber optic cable: the *Gondwana I* (2008) between New Caledonia and Australia, then the *Honotua* in 2010 between the Society Islands (Polynesia) and Hawai'i. The installation of a high-speed cable is a response to the ambition²⁷ to open the territories, for the benefit of their integration in regional exchanges and their economic attractiveness to external companies. Moreover, digital development irrigates the economy (telecommunication, online services), reduces the digital divide of the outlying islands (telemedicine, distance learning), and therefore the cost of inter-island travel.

The dependence on a single cable, however, exposes the risk of accidental damages. This was highlighted

flows (including 10,000 billion dollars per day) pass through them. These are strategic infrastructures. Camille Morel, PhD thesis: *The State and the global network of submarine communication cables*, Université Lyon 3, 18/11/2020.

²⁷ Aline Amodru-Derville, *What are France's chances in the digital battle in Oceania?* Diploweb, 10/01/2021.

by the digital blackout caused by the malfunction of Tonga's only international cable in 2022, which resulted in economic disruptions lasting several weeks. In the face of these disruption risks, satellite back-up remains slow, weak, and expensive. True digital resilience²⁸ relies on redundant cables and providers, allowing traffic to be rerouted as needed. To this end, in anticipation of the amplification of internet usage (5G), the COMs have drawn a second cable based on a multilateral partnership: the *Manatua* cable (2020) that connects Polynesia to Samoa via Cook and the *Gondwana II* (2022) that connects Caledonia to Fiji.²⁹

New Caledonia's Control of Nickel Recovery

New Caledonia has an estimated 7.1 million tons of nickel deposits, or 25% of the world's resources. This makes it the 4th largest supplier in the world after Indonesia, the Philippines and Russia. The island has 35 mines and 3 metallurgical plants. Originally a strategic metal in the military field, nickel also acquired great value in other industrial applications (stainless steel, alloy, battery) at the heart of high technologies (digital, electric vehicle, green energy) that are highly prized. This explains China's capture of half of the world's extraction of this mineral³⁰ (this is useful for Made in China 2025, its industrial development plan).

²⁸ Camille Morel, researcher at the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, *Reports of the mission of information on the seabed*, Senate, 15/03/2022.

²⁹ Jean-Tenahe Faatau, *New Caledonia: Gondwana-2 and Picot-2 submarine cables put into service*, *Outremers* 360°, 26/8/22.

³⁰ Nickel is a crucial component of electric vehicle batteries for which China wants to become the world leader. Mark O'Neill, *In New Caledonia, China and France fight over nickel*, *Ejinsight*, 17/01/2022.

³¹ The *small miner* has local family capital and is focused on extracting and exporting raw ore. In contrast, the three metallurgical plants, whose capital intensity requires the contribution of the "financial surface" of multinationals, transform the ore and export semi-finished smelted

The territorial government has long refused to sell any ore to China because some Chinese factories use low-grade ore to produce low-grade steel, or "nickel pig iron," which lowers the price of nickel. However, due to pressure from transporters and small miners,³¹ and due to the 2016 bankruptcy of the Queensland Nickel (QNI) smelter in Australia, a major customer for Caledonian laterites, the government eventually granted temporary export permits to China, which in fact became the only outlet for low-grade ores. In 2010, the Chinese share of New Caledonian exports was 4%. Today it is 57%. Beijing will absorb³² two thirds of New Caledonian exports by 2020.

This turnaround benefits above all the North Mine and the Société minière du Sud Pacifique (SMSP). Its development strategy³³ is to develop high quality ore on site (2.3% nickel content) through a metallurgical plant set up in joint venture³⁴ with the Anglo-Swiss conglomerate Glencore. For the lower grade ore, the company has entered joint ventures with South Korea and China, in which it has a symbolic 51% stake to process in so-called Caledonian smelters. The company therefore only supplies China with smelted ore rather than selling raw ore directly, at lower cost.

The Polynesian Effort to Capture Post-COVID Tourist Flows

products (mattes, ferronickels). Séverine Bouard, Claire Levacher, Yann Bencivengo, Louise Decottigny, Christine Demmer, et al. *Small and medium-sized mining companies in New Caledonia*, CNRT Nickel and its environment, 2019.

³² Giorgio Leali & Stuart Lau, *Chinese bogeyman looms over New Caledonia's independence vote*, *Politico*, 9/12/2021

³³ Nic Maclellan, *Stable, Democratic and Western: China and French Colonialism in the Pacific, The China Alternative - Changing regional order in the Pacific Islands*, Australian National University, 2021.

³⁴ Jean-Michel Rodrigo & Marina Paugam, *Reportage Andrea Dang Van Nha - A Caledonian fight*, France Télévisions, 2018.

Polynesia is composed of 118 islands, 43 of which are equipped with airfields, and 10 of which are tourist islands. Its tourism benefits from the myth of a paradise populated by “good savages,” conveyed by the first European arrivals, combined with the French cultural imprint. However, there is a gap³⁵: Despite the increase of tourism in the world and in Oceania (17 million pre-COVID), Polynesian tourism has experienced a certain decline linked to the cost of transport and the destination in the face of competition, notably from the Fijian Islands. As a result, local tourism has been destined to target the high end of the market.

Over the past decade, the destination marketing strategy has pivoted from the positioning of overwater bungalows dedicated to honeymoons to the *Tahiti and its islands* brand, which is based on cultural capital and a sustainable and inclusive approach as levers of attraction. This movement has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the most serious crisis in the sector for 70 years—the number of visitors has dropped from 250,000 in 2019 to 50,000 in 2021. This health crisis has also highlighted the vulnerability linked to the concentration of tourists from North America and Europe, hence the incentive for greater diversification.

This requires campaigns to promote the destination, which *Tahiti Tourisme* conducts through a network of representatives abroad. From this perspective, the

broadcasting of the surfing event to be held in Tahiti during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games to a television audience of 3 billion will provide exceptional visibility. Although this choice of site is contrary to the 2020 agenda on sustainability of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Tahiti was chosen rather than Biarritz for political reasons: it is a question of attaching the Overseas Territories to this historical experience and to boost their development.

Conclusion

For Nouméa and Papeete, the Indo-Pacific strategy of France and the EU brings development potential as much as the promises of the Chinese BRI or cooperation with the United States as long as it corresponds to their aspirations to be heard, supported, and respected. However, local positioning is sometimes undermined by contradictory political demands, as in the case of New Caledonia, which poses a risk of internal destabilization. On the other hand, it should be noted that in Polynesia, the central government's consideration of the request for reparation for damage related to the nuclear tests has created a favorable climate for the latter. This concession has freed up room to maneuver and strengthen the state's opposition to substantial Chinese investment in the region.

In addition, the two communities can rely on their competences in foreign relations to deploy sectoral strategies that allow them to benefit from the

³⁵ Caroline Blondy, Université de La Rochelle, *Tourism and covetousness in Oceania: the case of Bora-Bora, the “Pearl of the Pacific,”* The coveted Oceania, p 392, Éditions CNRS, 2017.

financial flows of globalization, although not without some dangers and possible hazards. Faced with China's entry into competition for secure access to mineral resources, New Caledonia has implemented a strategy to protect its nickel production. Similarly, drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, Polynesia aims to expand its tourist clientele through its destination marketing. The two COMs are also forming a common front with their island neighbors and regional and international development partners to fight climate change and illegal fishing, and to strengthen digital connectivity.

Coveted for their wealth and strategic position, the COMs know how to play their assets, like their neighbors, while remaining sheltered within the French Republic. Unlike some of them that have difficulty resisting Chinese pressure,³⁶ they can rely on the financial and security guarantee of France, whose military forces are deployed on their territory, and maintain partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, the traditional powers in this region. Whatever the case, the evolution of the status of the communities, and consequently their relationship with the State and with external partners, will undoubtedly be marked by the weight of France's global interests in the Indo-Pacific. It is up to the islanders to evaluate their choices and to continue to assert their own interests.

Proposals

Economy

- Prospect the needs of neighboring states (digital maintenance, waste management in an island environment, prevention of vector-borne diseases, seawater air conditioning) that our companies, technicians, and scientists could satisfy.
- Promote the installation of a third fiber optic cable (Chilean cable) to create digital hubs in Oceania under the banner of the "Pacific French Tech."
- Invite travel influencers from East Asian markets to promote our local destinations and use visitor-generated content (social networks).

Environment

- Direct national and European funding towards scientific research projects on the seabed to be able to advise on the possibility of a sustainable form of monetization (biotechnology, energy, minerals).
- Join the scientific organizations (IFREMER, IRD) to the scientific bodies of the region to encourage the use of longline vessels instead of seiners in the establishment of a "Great Blue Wall."
- Develop yachting tourism against the "tyranny of the carbon footprint," by offering reliable internet connectivity, opening an information desk in the countries visited

³⁶ Anne-Marie Brady, "China in the Pacific: from 'friendship' to strategically placed ports and airfields" | The Strategist (aspistrategist.org.au) 20/04/2022.

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beforehand, and organize a trans-Pacific race.

Cooperation

- Promote school and language exchanges with Commonwealth countries inspired by the Erasmus program.

Fund bilingual press reviews (Flash d'Océanie) dealing with the development of island countries in the region to inform political decision-makers and representatives of civil society about opportunities for cooperation and sources of inspiration.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RAIHAAMANA TEVAHITUA is a graduate student in geopolitics and public law, Raihaamana Tevahitua has been involved in import-export prospecting and the tourism sector. He is particularly interested in overseas para-diplomacy, sustainable island development, climate and environmental issues, technological advances, multifaceted security, and strategic competition. His life's mission is to promote the interests of Pacific islanders in the Indo-Pacific context. He was a Pacific Forum research intern in 2022-23.