Middle Power, Status-Seeking, and Role Conceptions: the cases of Indonesia and South Korea[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines how role theory can enhance the middle power literature in understanding the role preferences of middle powers. Rather than treating it as merely a function of material capability or good international citizenship, this paper resituates middle power as a concept of international status that states aim to pursue through the enactment of role conceptions. Thus, it reinstates a conceptual distinction between 'Middle Power Status' and 'Middle Power Roles'. The paper suggests that the notion of role conceptions can analytically connect the status-seeking behaviour of middle powers with their foreign policy agenda. In so doing, it provides a more nuanced explanation of middle power behaviour, which might differ between one middle power and another. Using Indonesia and South Korea as case studies of middle power, this paper contends that foreign policymakers have strategically conceptualised and enacted several main roles that aim to capture historical experience, as well as ego and alter expectations in order to pursue middle power status. These role conceptions determine the foreign policy agenda of states in articulating their middle power status.

Introduction

Given the emergence of non-western states that increasingly play a greater role in the international order, the notion of middle power has been widely used to explain the behaviour of these states. However, middle power as a concept is hardly convincing in explaining the foreign policy of emerging powers. Many countries that, materially, can be defined as middle powers and self-identify as such do not strictly follow the foreign policy behaviours theorised by the mainstream middle power literature. This is due to the literature relying heavily on traditional western middle powers as a source of its theorising. Hence, we need to approach middle power from a different theoretical point of view to revitalise the concept so that it can better explain the pattern of middle powers' foreign policy.

This paper suggests that role theory approach can further enhance the middle power literature by examining middle power states' role preferences at the regional and global level. To do so, this paper resituates middle power as a concept of international status that states aim to pursue through the enactment of role conceptions. It reinstates a conceptual distinction between 'middle power status' and 'middle power roles'. Using the concept in this way will enable us to understand why some states pursue middle power status by enacting particular roles and not others. The paper contends that the notion of role conception can analytically connect the status-seeking behaviour of middle powers with their foreign policy agenda. In this regard, the construction of role conceptions could explain states' foreign policy in their search for the middle power status. To illustrate the argument, a comparative analysis of Indonesia's and South Korea's foreign policy agenda

in pursuing and translating middle power status provides an excellent venue to develop and explore how role theory can enhance the middle power literature.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. Conceptually, it aims to discuss further how role theory could enhance middle power literature. There is a tendency in much of the middle power literature to lean towards the use of key terms of role theory particularly role and status. However, there is relatively scarce attempt to explicitly discuss the relations between the two notions within the context of middle power. To contribute to the endeavour, the paper aims to better understand middle power behaviour by situating role conception as an intermediary that links the status-seeking behaviour and foreign policy agenda of emerging middle powers.

Empirically, it analyses Indonesia's and South Korea's pursuit of middle power status. Due to their material capability as well as how policymakers see their systemic position, much of the literature has firmly established that Indonesia and South Korea are categorically treated as middle powers (Roberts, Habir, and Sebastian 2015; Shin 2016). However, less attention has been paid to Indonesia's and South Korea's role preferences in articulating their aspiration for such status.

This paper discusses how Indonesia's and South Korea's aspiration for middle power status is translated into the enactment of several main role conceptions. Both countries are interesting in terms of a comparative study, not only due to their increasing use of multilateral forums and summitries as venues for their middle power diplomacy but also because of their increasing self-identification as middle powers by their respective policymakers as well as expectations from the international community that they will

behave in such a way. Yet, the roles they have taken in playing a greater role at the global level as middle powers are varied. What can explain this variation?

By analysing the construction of role conceptions in each country, this paper reveals that Indonesia's search for middle power status is performed through its role as a regional leader, the voice for developing countries, an advocate of democracy, and a bridge-builder. Meanwhile, in the case of South Korea, its search for middle power status has been achieved through the role of a regional balancer, an advocate of developmentalism, and a bridge-builder. However, these roles are by no means stable given that they are constantly changing. By comparing the two countries, the paper shows how different historical roles, egos and alter role expectations, as well as the emergence of role conflict, explain the differences in how Indonesia and South Korea have articulated their role conceptions in their search for middle power status. Moreover, both countries have diverged when it comes to self-identification as a middle power. While South Korean policymakers have strong and extensive experience in its self-identification with a middle power status, Indonesian policymakers have just recently self-identified Indonesia with the status. Thus, Indonesia appears to have a lack of ambition in status-seeking activity while South Korea exhibits an ambition that goes beyond a middle power status.

This paper is structured as follows. It begins with a review of the mainstream approaches in the middle power literature and their limitations in examining current middle powers' behaviour. It then provides a conceptual discussion on how literature on role theory and status-seeking behaviour in international relations can contribute to the advancement of the middle power literature by conceptually distinguishing between middle power status and the middle power role. The third section examines how the differences in the

construction of role conceptions can explain the divergence in Indonesia's and South Korea's pursuit of middle power status. This paper concludes by discussing the potential of role theory in understanding the status-seeking behaviour of emerging middle powers and the need for the middle power literature to pay more attention to the construction of role conceptions as in-between variables to understand middle power behaviour.

The limits of middle power theorising

In order to analyse the current behaviour of emerging powers at the regional and global levels, the growing mainstream International Relations literature uses the middle power concept in explaining the behaviour of emerging powers (Emmers and Teo 2015; Öniş and Kutlay 2017). A middle power state is generally defined as a state that is "neither great nor small in terms of their power, capacity and influence and exhibits the capability to create cohesion and obstruction toward global order and governance" (Jordaan 2003, 165). Throughout the years, the notion of middle power as a concept and theory has been refined to enhance its explanatory power to explain the behaviour of countries that are considered middle powers. As suggested by Carr (2014), there are three main strands of middle power literature namely position, behavioural and identity approach.

During the Cold War, the realist approach to power shaped the concept of middle power by situating it within the hierarchical structure of the international system. This strand of the literature, known as the hierarchical or position approach, emphasises state capacity and geopolitical position in the international system in defining middle power (Chapnick 1999). A focus on material capabilities in conceptualising middle powers might help in

providing a rigorous definition of what a middle power is. For instance, one can decide whether countries are middle powers by quantitatively assessing their GDP, population, military expenditure, trade, etc. Although not as powerful as major powers, middle powers can be treated as secondary states whose possession of material capabilities can, to some degree, influence the international system through their active engagement in global governance (Holbraad 1984).

Analysis of middle powers by looking at their material power has its merits precisely in offering useful analytical certainty in defining middle power. The approach also enables the term to be more than just a tool for the classification of states but also treats the term as a status with particular attributes (Chapnick 1999, 79). However, as concluded by Ravenhill (1998, 325), the approach has no value in explaining the behaviour of those states classed as middle powers. For instance, this approach seems to lack insight in regard to how a middle power behaves. It cannot explain why not all states that have middle-sized power are willing to take a greater role in the international order. Many third world countries that could be classified as middle-sized powers in terms of their material capability have not tried to play a greater role at the global level while, at the same time, many small-sized powers seem eager to play a greater role in the international order.

To overcome these weaknesses, a growing amount of literature in the Post-Cold War era has tended to reconceptualise middle powers in terms of their behaviour in the international order. This strand of the literature is known as the behavioural approach. In a nutshell, their middle power theorising focuses more on foreign policy behaviour and diplomacy than on the structural definition of power, which depends primarily on material capabilities. Whilst having middle power capability is necessary, on its own it is not

sufficient for states to be a middle power. According to this approach, middle power is not only defined by material capability as a constitutive part of middle power but also by the behaviour of states as materialised in their foreign policy towards the international order. As Cooper, Higgott and Nossal (1993) argued, international politics is not merely a game of power determined by size, power and capabilities, but is also a game of skill in which the players are identified by virtue of good international citizenship, which translates into a notion of internationalism and multilateral activism. Hence, while the functional approach focuses on material aspects to define middle power, the behavioural approach deals more with the normative foundation and morality that drive the middle powers to pursue a greater role in the international order.

However, the behavioural approach to middle powers is not without its limitations. It has been criticised for being too biased towards the traditional middle powers such as Australia, Canada, and the Nordic countries since the theorisation of the concept mainly come from the analysis of Western industrialised and high-income countries, which predominantly have strong preferences on liberal values. Given this limitation, many scholars tend to criticise the middle power theory given that the current emerging middle powers do not share similar traits with these traditional middle powers (Jordaan 2003; Patience 2014). As shown by Jordaan (2003, 165), there are stark differences between the traditional middle powers and the emerging middle powers, which might behave differently. While the traditional middle powers are "wealthy, stable, egalitarian, social democratic and not regionally influential", the emerging middle powers tend to be "semi-peripheral, materially inegalitarian and recently democratised states that demonstrate much regional influence and self-association". Furthermore, by treating middle power behaviour as merely a result of good international citizenship, the behavioural approach

tends to ignore the variety of motivations among middle power states by reducing their behaviour to being merely driven by similar normative purpose and thus downsizing the power of agency within the state to influence state behaviour.

Given the review above, many scholars seem to agree that the middle power literature is arguably at an impasse (D. A. Cooper 2011) As stated by Beeson and Higgott (2014), the idea of middle powers as a distinctive category within International Relations has so far remained problematic. However, the basic characteristic of middle power remains the same; that is, the ability and aspiration for medium-sized states to have agency and aim for a meaningful leadership role within international politics as well as its willingness to deploy ideational resources to generate influence at the global stage despite the material constraints. Hence, to make the concept more relevant to understand the behaviour of recent emerging middle powers, a reconceptualisation of middle power is needed. To do so, we need to accept that the efforts to produce a rigid conceptual tool to predict the behaviour of middle powers as a defined category characterised by 'one size fits all' behavioural traits is elusive and may not lead to a nuanced understanding of the foreign policy of emerging middle powers (Robertson 2017). The discussion of middle power should be moved forward towards how policymakers in emerging middle powers articulate their aspiration for middle power status.

The incorporation of a constructivist approach has, to some extent, enhanced our understanding of this quest. For instance, Neack (2003) sees the possibility of treating 'middle powers' as a 'constructed identity.' She shows how constructivism can explain middle power behaviour by investigating the extent to which the notion of middlepowermanship has been internalised by policymakers. Following Neack, studies

on middle power have incorporated the importance of identity formation of middle power. Easley focuses on national identities trajectories in explaining the differences in the foreign policy of middle powers (Easley 2012). Shin (2016) further conceptualise middle power identity construction by focusing on the agential level of analysis through the notion of the framework of self-conceptualisation, self-identification and intersubjectivity. Building upon Shin, Teo (2017) focuses on the conceptualisation of middle power identity through constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models. However, the middle power identity approach is not without its limitations. Given identity is something that is relatively fixed and statist, treating middle powers as a constructed identity is also problematic. Although the political elites try to self-identify their states with middle powers, this does not mean that middle power can be seen as a state identity, given that the claims made by political elites, by nature, are politically driven. Thus, middle power should not be seen as a state identity as state identity is usually a semi-permanent feature of a state and is rooted in social, political and historical beliefs that exist in the society (Katzenstein 1996; Hopf 2002). Moreover, middle power literature mobilising identity approach rarely clarifies the dynamic relations between identity and foreign policy agenda precisely on how middle power identity translates into foreign policy agenda. Hence, treating middle power as an identity would not provide a meaningful understanding of how the concept could explain the behaviour of the countries self-identified as a middle power.

Despite the caveats, the constructivist approach to middle power has provided a new direction, suggesting that middle power should not be treated as a fixed concept or categorisation; rather it is a more a constructed concept being pursued by policymakers. This approach might be seen as unsettling for those scholars trying to provide a more

sustainable definition of middle power (Carr 2014). With the constructivist turn on the middle power literature, a growing number of studies have shifted their focus to unpacking the state by taking agency levels analysis into account in analysing the activism of the middle powers. For instance, recent studies on middle power have tried to understand the variations in middle power behaviour by analysing the differences between states in terms of their resource availability and governance capability (Öniş and Kutlay 2017), regional strategic environment (Emmers and Teo 2015), the projection of societal values (Westhuizen 2013), as well as other domestic issues, such as the role of political parties and elites in stirring middle power behaviour (Sandal 2014). While those factors may affect the behaviour of middle powers, by focusing only on specific factors, such as domestic sources or the structural constraints of the regional and global environment to middle power roles, these studies seem partial in explaining the behaviour of middle powers.

Building upon the constructivist approach in the middle power literature, the variations in emerging middle power foreign policy as well as its determinants can best be understood by incorporating the growing literature on role theory in International Relations. Through the lens of role theory, we can better understand emerging middle powers by capturing both agential and structural variables. The next section will elaborate how role theory could enhance our understanding of the concept middle to better explain the variation of the foreign policy of middle power.

Middle power as a status and middle power as a role

To incorporate role theory into the middle power literature, we need to conceptually distinguish between "middle power status" and "middle power role". A further discussion to clarify the relations between status and roles is also important given that it is not unusual to find multiple uses of status and role within the literature. Many literature on middle power tends to treat middle power as a status. This can be found in the early writings on middle power such as of Soward (1963), Cox (1989), and Ravenhill (1998). There also abundant of literature that extensively explores the notion of middle power roles (Carsten Holbraad 1971; Chapnick 2000). The middle power roles sometimes could be interchangeable with the notion of middlepowermanship developed as a foreign policy platform to justify roles taken by middle power states which can be easily modified to accommodate current foreign policy needs of western states (Ping 2005, 3–8). For instance, Peyton Lyon and Brian Tomlin emphasise the roles of middle power as peacekeeper, mediator and communicator (1979:12-13) while Cooper et al. (1993:24-25) focus on three key roles such as catalyst, facilitator, and manager, as the main roles of middle power. Apparently, the literature on middle powers tends to conceptualise middle powers' roles based on the observation of western middle power behaviour.

Despite the increasing amount of international relations literature that engages role theory, surprisingly there is a no serious attempt to incorporate role theory into the analysis of middle power behaviour. There are some studies that attempt to mobilise conceptual tool from role theory particularly the notion of national role conception (Easley 2012; Öniş and Kutlay 2017). However, they rather touch upon the concept

without providing a systemic examination of middle power through the framework of role theory.

Role theory, which was imported from other disciplines such as social psychology and sociology, can provide a rich conceptual tool to describe specific foreign policy phenomena while at the same time engaging and incorporating different levels of analysis as well as supplementing other theoretical approaches (Thies and Breuning 2012). In regard to the middle power literature, role theory can capture the varieties of roles taken by emerging middle powers in the international order through specifically examining how both structure and material interests, as advocated by the position approach, as well as norms, as championed by the behavioural approach, motivate them to pursue middle power status. Moreover, it can also capture the political dynamics within the state, which also affect the status-seeking behaviour of middle powers, as suggested by the recent literature.

Role theory is not a new theory in the literature of International Relations. It has been widely used by the student of foreign policy analysis. The role theory was brought to IR scholarship by KJ Holsti in the 1970s to analyse the foreign policy behaviour of the states in the international system. One of the basic concepts in role theory introduced by Holsti (1970) is national role conception. Role conception can be defined as a set of norms that drive foreign policies, which include the attitudes, decisions, responses and functions of, and the commitment made by, the government (Holsti 1970, 245). In general, role conception refers to foreign policy-makers' perceptions of their states' positions in the international system. As an independent variable, role conception can be an explanatory variable with regard to the behaviour of states in the international order. As a dependent

variable, role conception is formed through the dynamic interactions between the states and the international system as well as changes in the domestic political constellation within the states. Arguably, the notion of role conception is important in bridging the status-seeking activities and foreign policy agenda.

In sociology, it has long been established that status and roles are distinct concepts despite being closely connected. While status is conventionally defined as a relative social position within a group, a role can be defined as a behaviour expected of those who occupy a given social position or status (Thompson, Hickey, and Thompson 2016). As stated by Ralph Linton (1936), we occupy status, but we play a role. A role represents the dynamics aspect of status. In other words, roles bring status to life. Drawing on the sociological understanding of status, the International Relations literature generally defines status as "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organization, and diplomatic clout)" (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 2).

Both the position and behavioural approaches have attempted to define middle power status through their respective theoretical points of view. Through the lens of position approach, middle power status is defined through physical attributes such as population size, or capabilities such as the size of the military forces. Although incomplete, this is a starting point to objectively assess middle power status in terms of position in the hierarchy of the international system. This definition of status fits with the sociological concept of ascribed status, in which states occupy relatively fixed positions based on their material endowments. The behavioural approach tends to define middle power status according to foreign policy behaviour. This approach tends to equate middle power status

with its roles. This has caused the behavioural approach to be criticized for its circular reasoning. The approach describes middle power behaviour as the actions of states it already assumes to be middle powers. In other words, the behavioural approach ignores the distinction between status and roles and convolutes the two. However, rather than equating middle power status with behaviour, through this approach, we can treat middle power status as an achieved status, whereby states require such a status as a result of their active involvement in the international order. By combining the two approaches, middle power status can be identified within two common consensus criteria; an objective measurement, such as a state's medium ranking in terms of their material capabilities, as suggested by the position approach, and their greater engagement and activism through multilateral forums in the regional and global order, as suggested by the behavioural approach.

The existing scholarship on status-seeking in international relations has established that states' concern about their relative status in international politics can be a motivation for their foreign policy behaviour (Freedman 2016; Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014). States as social actors pursue status due to a desire for more superiority in the hierarchical structure of the international system (Onea 2014). However, status is often assumed to be interchangeable with power. This is due to the prevalent realist reading of status, which tends to define status as a function of material capability. But this does not entirely explain how status is pursued by states in international relations. By employing a constructivist approach, Larson and Shevchenko (2010) argue that status-seeking behaviour can be largely symbolic, in that it does not require an expansion of greater material capability, but rather focuses on influencing others' perception. Conversely, status-seeking can also

be influenced by alter expectations which drive states to seek particular status. The alter expectation is mainly in the form of recognition by other states in the international system.

Other than alter expectation, self-identification is also important in driving status-seeking behaviour in regard to middle power status. Unlike great power, middle power status requires not only others' expectation but also self-identification, in order for middle power status to be regarded as some sort of prestige. Self-identification for middle power is as important as status accommodation for aspiring great power. Given that great power status comes with certain special rights and duties, it is also achieved through the approval of other great powers, through what the literature calls status accommodation (Freedman 2016). Status accommodation occurs "when higher-status actors acknowledge the state's enhanced responsibilities, privileges, or rights through various status markers such as summit meetings, state visits, speeches, strategic dialogues, and so on" (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014, 11). In the case of middle power, the state's self-identification as a middle power is essential, given that unlike great power status, middle power status does not come with certain special rights and duties. Indeed, Holmes (1976), for instance, equated middle power as a greater status that non-great power states can justify their pursuit of international initiatives beyond traditional small state capabilities. However, as argued by Holbraad (1984), while other states recognise great powers as having a certain status in the international society, middle powers do not enjoy any such formal standing. Moreover, states that have regional power status may be uncomfortable with the middle power label (Gilley 2016). Hence, like status accommodation for great powers, self-identification is an integral part of the status-seeking behaviour of middle powers, since not all states are willing to be identified as middle powers. Furthermore, the pursuit of such status could be ceased to exist when the policymakers are no longer self-identified

the country with such status. Self-identification, thus, becomes an essential feature of middle power status.

However, despite being able to understand middle power status in objective and social terms, there is no consensus on what middle powers' roles are. Unlike status, which is mainly static, roles are dynamic, as they are not only induced by alter expectation but also emerge through interactions with others. While middle power status can be easily defined, the roles of middle powers are varied. Robert Cox (1989, 825) has stated that "the middle-power role is not a fixed universal but something that has to be rethought continually in the context of the changing state of the international system". As further echoed by Ravenhill (1998), although the behaviour of middle powers can be identified, such behaviour does not reflect a state's behaviour all of the time. Middle power roles are assumed to be generated from the same normative expectations; even though, in practice, normative expectations may vary among individual states that aim to pursuit middle power status. Indeed, certain roles such as coalition-builder, mediator and bridge-builder are highly associated with middle powers. However, other roles are performed by states in their pursuit of middle power status. Therefore, roles enacted to achieve middle power status are different not only between traditional middle powers and emerging middle powers but also among emerging middle powers. Instead of differentiating middle power behaviour based on a distinction between traditional and emerging middle powers, the variations in middle power behaviour can best be understood by examining each state's role conception. Here, the notion of role conception can bridge the foreign policy agenda of states and their status-seeking behaviour in their pursuit of middle power status.

Rather than treating it as merely a function of material capability or good international citizenship, this paper aims to show that middle power behaviour is driven by role conceptions enacted by policymakers to play a more significant role in the international order. Therefore, role conceptions could be an in-between link for middle powers' status-seeking behaviour and their foreign policy agenda. Doing this will provide a more nuanced explanation of middle power behaviour, which might differ between one middle power and another.

Within the role theory literature, role conception is constructed through two processes, namely, alter expectation and ego expectation. Alter expectation can be treated as a structural element of the role conceptions that states have. In line with the constructivist approach, role expectation captures the essence of the intersubjective international structure, which contributes to the preference of actors and has an impact on their future roles. Thus, third parties' expectations and understanding of the role that might be taken by an actor will shape that actor's practice. The process whereby third parties within the international system locate a suitable role for states is called the role location process. Role location can be equated with the process of socialisation in the constructivist literature (Thies 2012). The role location process is mainly conducted by significant/ important others, such as great powers within the system as well as international institutions.

Ego expectation can be seen as a domestic source of role conception. The source of ego expectation could be rooted in changes in the domestic political constellation (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012). A change in ego expectation is more likely to happen within democracies that have a more dynamic domestic political environment. Recent studies on role theory

have also treated the historical experience as an explanatory factor that might explain the current role conception of states (Beneš and Harnisch 2015). Historical experience can be a significant factor for states in constructing their current role conceptions given that political elites usually invoke historical experience to justify their foreign policy agenda. Thus, historical role conceptions are usually stable and continue to be enacted while newer role conceptions might be easily contested and diminished, especially if they are not compatible with historical role conceptions.

Furthermore, states may have multiple roles in the international system. Since distinct roles can co-exist at the same time, there is a possibility that these roles might contradict each other. A contradiction between the roles that states hold will lead to role conflict (Karim 2017). Role conflict can be defined as a situation in which states have multiple roles that contradict each other. Role conflict might explain the seemingly contradictory role of emerging powers in the regional and global order. The literature on role conflict has put forward four different patterns of role conflict. Role conflict is more likely to appear if: (1) role expectations from others are vague or inconsistent; (2) there is a lack of resources to fulfil the role; (3) states are in a situation where there are diverging norms and expectations; and (4) there is incompatibility between the interests or goals of states and external expectations of a nation's role in international relations (Harnisch 2012).

Having discussed how the role theory literature in International Relations can provide a more nuanced understanding of middle power behaviour, the next section will illustrate the theoretical argument by examining Indonesia's and South Korea's role enactments in their pursuit of middle power status.

Role enactments and the pursuit of middle power status

As countries that self-identify as middle powers and are expected to behave as such, Indonesia's and South Korea's roles in their pursuit of middle power status are varied. This section substantiates how role conceptions determine the extent to which middle powers behave as they do. By looking at the construction of role conceptions to play a more significant role at the regional and global levels as a middle power, this paper shows how historical experience, ego and alter expectations can explain the different roles enacted by these states in seeking middle power status.

<u>Indonesia's role enactment as a middle power</u>

Just like other emerging powers, the impetus for Indonesia to play a greater role at the global level is a logical implication of its material capability and its recent political and economic development. Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world in terms of population as well as the largest country in Southeast Asia in terms of area and the size of its economy. Since 2004, the Indonesian economy has shown significant development. Besides its economic rise, under Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) presidency Indonesia has enjoyed greater political stability with a smooth process of democratisation. Furthermore, as the most populous Muslim country in the world, and at the same time being considered a stable democracy, Indonesia has become a model for functioning democracy in the Islamic world and developing countries. These achievements have resulted in increased international expectations towards Indonesia to play a more significant role at the global level.

During SBY's presidency (2004-2014), Indonesia has sought to strengthen its international status through greater involvement in global governance and multilateral forums. Under his leadership, Indonesia has hosted several high-profile international summits, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP-17 in 2007 and the 9th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial meeting in 2013, in which Indonesia was, to some extent, able to set the agenda and influence the outcome. In the same period, Indonesia also hosted the Asian-African Conference Commemoration in 2005 and 2015, where it sought to play a leading role among developing countries by reviving the Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership. Indonesia's increasing involvement in global governance shows generalised tenets of status-seeking behaviour, as it has played a greater role in the international order. While in terms of its material capability, Indonesia can be categorised as a middle power, this concept has rarely been used in the political discourse among Indonesian foreign policy circles in explaining Indonesia's greater aspiration for engagement in global governance. The Indonesian foreign policy circle prefers to perceive Indonesia as "a regional power with global interests and concerns". This is because many in the establishment perceive that defining Indonesia as a middle power is patronising and reduces its position to merely a medium-sized power. Only during the second term of Yudhoyono's presidency (2009-2014) did Indonesian policymakers officially start to use the term Middle Power as a status that Indonesia aims to pursue. However, Yudhoyono himself has rarely used the term in his official speech. Finally, it was only during Joko Widodo's Presidency (2014-2019) that the term middle power became incorporated into the official mid-term development plan 2014-2019. According to the strategic plan for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia's foreign policy will be directed to enhance Indonesia's global role as

a middle power that places Indonesia as a regional power with selective global involvement by giving priority to issues directly related to the Indonesian national interests (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia 2015).

Since the second term of Yudhoyono's administration, Indonesia's pursuit of middle power status has been performed through four main role conceptions, in line with its historical experience, domestic changes and international expectations. These roles are a regional leader, a voice for developing countries, an advocate of democracy, and a bridge-builder.

Within Southeast Asia, due to its material capabilities, strategic position and identity change from an authoritarian state to a democratic one, Indonesia has been regarded as a *primus inter pares* in the region both by countries within the region and external actors that are actively involved in the region. With this position, Indonesia is expected to play the role of an active regional leader by keeping the importance and relevance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the institutional building process in Southeast Asia.

Under Yudhoyono's presidency, Indonesia did not aim to enact its role as a regional leader in the region *per se* but further used its regional leadership role in the region to pursue middle power status at the global level. Indonesia's regional leadership has increased its leverage as a middle power in several notable fora. In the G20, for instance, Indonesia always acts as a representative of the ASEAN countries. In 2009, it proposed the establishment of the ASEAN G20 contact group in order to consolidate the ASEAN member countries' interests, which Indonesia then brought to the discussion in the G20 forum. Furthermore, under Indonesia's chairmanship in 2011, ASEAN adopted the Bali

Concord III, which would transform ASEAN as an international actor in the global community. The Bali Concord III would enhance ASEAN's engagement as an international actor in the UN framework and substantiate its representation in the G20 as well as other international bodies and processes, including APEC, the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO (Nguitragool and Rűland 2015). In the wider Asia-Pacific region, Indonesia is expected to maintain the balance of power in the region by taking a role as a regional balancer, given the systemic changes due to the rise of China and the decline of the US in the region (Karim and Chairil 2016). To do this, Indonesia pursues a strategy that involves embracing external actors within ASEAN-centred multilateral initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), and the latest one, the East Asia Summit (EAS). Given the above discussion, we can see that Indonesian policymakers do not reconfigure Indonesian international roles in order align Indonesian foreign policy with its growing self-identification with middle power status. Rather, policymakers continue to enact Indonesia's role as a regional leader by enhancing the scope into a global arena. Thus, although the conception as a regional leader was incepted long before Indonesian policymakers self-identified Indonesia with a middle power status, since the second period of Yudhoyono administration, arguably, Indonesian policymakers have utilised its role conception as a regional leader to strengthen its growing self-identification as a middle power.

Indeed, the literature on middle power behaviour tends to characterise middle powers as more global-minded than focused on a regional level (Higgott and Cooper 1990). This might be true for traditional middle powers, which tend to have the entrepreneurial capacity and technical skills and therefore can exercise their niche diplomacy at the global

level (Ungerer 2007). However, in the case of emerging middle powers, like Indonesia, enacting a leadership role in the region is key to increasing their leverage at the global level. As argued by Nolte (2010, 890), "while traditional middle powers are first and foremost defined by their role in international politics, the new [emerging] middle powers are, first of all, regional powers and also middle powers on a global scale". Thus, emerging middle powers may exercise their middlepowermanship through taking the role of a regional leader. In the case of Indonesia, its pursuit of middle power status through the role of a regional leader is also a result of its historical experience. Its role as a regional leader has become Indonesia's historical role, institutionalised during thirty-two years of Suharto's authoritarian regime (1968-1998). This historical role needs to be enacted by Indonesia even though it aims to play a more significant role at the global level. Thus, to avoid role conflict, Indonesia's middle power status should be achieved through this role.

Furthermore, due to its lack of resources or willingness to spend more resources, Indonesia's greater role in regional and global affairs cannot be attributed only to its material capabilities or its technical capacity to conduct niche diplomacy, as might be argued by the functional approach. Indonesia's growing international role is heavily based on its ability to harness the country's normative and moral authority in international institutions, which has boosted its involvement in international affairs (Laksmana, 2011).

In the post-authoritarian era, the normative ideas that Indonesia aims to harness are human rights and democratic norms (Sukma 2011). Given its successful democratic transition, which has led to a greater expectation that Indonesia will play an increasing role in the region, Indonesia has taken up the role as an advocate of democracy in the region. During Yudhoyono's presidency, promoting democracy in the region through socialising the

democratic and human rights norm within ASEAN mechanisms became the Indonesian main foreign policy agenda in ASEAN. Since 2008, Indonesia has initiated the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF), an Asia-Pacific cooperation forum for promoting democracy.

While in the region, it seems that Indonesia has supported the western liberal order by emulating western liberal norms through its role as an advocate of democracy, Indonesia's attitude towards the western global order is still ambivalent. Indeed, although it is still highly supportive of the liberal order, rhetorically it hopes for a rearrangement of the global order, just like other BRIC countries. This aspiration has caused Indonesia's stance to be considered as soft revisionist (Santikajaya 2016). Indonesia's stance can be interpreted as a way to manage the tension between its historical role and its current expectations. Indonesia's historical role as a voice for developing countries, initiated by Sukarno during the formative years of its nation-building, has caused it to take a slightly oppositional stance towards the western global order. Indonesia's experience, of rejecting colonialism through physical struggle, has also played a significant role in making the spirit of anti-colonialism an integral part of Indonesia's foreign policy objectives, which are enshrined in the preamble to Indonesia's constitution. This historical role has consistently been translated into Indonesia's stance in many international fora such as the UN and G20. Within the UN, Indonesia still voices its criticism towards the US-led liberal order and calls for a reform of the liberal world order.

Despite its role as a voice for developing countries, which shows its soft revisionist stance, Indonesia also continues to play a role as bridge-builder in dealing with various problems in the international community. To do so, it is consistently positioning itself as a country that prioritises efforts to build a consensus, bridge differences, and highlight

the convergence of interests more than differences, while at the same time prioritising the interests of developing countries in general. Indonesia's bridge-builder role can be seen as one of the roles associated with conventional middle power role. However, its role as bridge-builder sometime conflicts with its other roles, such as advocate of democracy. Here, Indonesia aims to balance its role as bridge-builder and its aspiring role as a voice for developing countries. As shown by Karim (2017), Indonesia's role as an advocate of democracy has been hindered due to its role as bridge-builder between democracies and non-democracies. At the global level, Indonesia's role as a voice for developing countries sometimes requires it to defend abusive regimes from developing countries despite positioning itself as an advocate of democracy in the region.

Indonesia's role enactment in its pursuit of middle power status is also greatly influenced by changes in ego expectation rather than alter expectation. The election of Joko Widodo - who is known as a populist president focused on domestic issues, with a more nationalist outlook - has to some extent restrained Indonesia's pursuit of middle power status despite the concept being officially adopted during his tenure. While Indonesia's role as a voice for developing countries has increased under his presidency, its role as an advocate of democracy has significantly reduced under Joko Widodo's presidency, due to the perceived lack of benefit in taking on such a role. This also shows that a newer role conception enacted to pursue middle power status such as the advocate of democracy is less likely to be stable compared with a more institutionalised role, such as a voice for developing countries, which has become Indonesia's historical role. As a result, under Joko Widodo, Indonesia tends to voice a more revisionist stance based on its role as a voice for developing countries and seemingly neglect the project of emulating the western liberal order in the region through its role as an advocate of democracy.

As suggested by the empirical discussion above, it appears that the fundamental foundation of Indonesian self-identification is a lack of ambition in status-seeking activity. Indeed, as shown in the analysis, Indonesia has hosted some major events, but the robustness association with Bandung Conference has long gone. This is due to Indonesia's self-identification with the middle power status has merely driven by the alter-expectation from international community particularly after the inclusion of Indonesia as one of the members of G20 instead of being driven by ego-expectation. Although Indonesia is a putative middle power, it has been restrained by its focus on the regional level. It is evident from its persistent in taking the role as a regional leader in order to showcase its global outlook.

South Korea's role enactment as a middle power

While since the beginning of its greater engagement at the regional and global levels Indonesia has been reluctant to self-identify with a middle power status, South Korea has self-identified with such status to justify its greater involvement at the global level since 1991, when President Roh Tae-woo used the term middle power to represent South Korea's aspiration for international status (Shin 2016). From a historical point of view, South Korea has been sensitive in regard to its regional and global status given that it was humiliated by being occupied for half of the 20th century and was a victim of great power rivalry for the other half of the century (Mo 2016). This created an impetus within South Korea's collective mind to achieve prominent status in the international order. Unlike Indonesia, South Korea exhibits an ambition that goes beyond a middle power status. This can be traced back from South Korea's stronger self-identification with middle power

status since the mid-1990s. Given its remarkable economic development, which has transformed South Korea into a developed country, symbolised by its admission to the OECD in 1996, middle power status has become the primary concept with which the contemporary South Korean foreign policy circle wants the country to be associated.

South Korea's ambition to enhance its status as a middle power in the international order finally gained traction under the presidency of Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003). Under his leadership, the South Korean economy successfully recovered after the Asian economic crisis hit the country. With his economic success, Kim saw an opportunity to enhance Korea's international status by playing a more significant role as a regional player. To do so, he proposed the establishment of the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) during the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) meeting in 1998, which would further institutionalise the East Asia cooperation process (Cho and Park 2014). He also initiated the sunshine policy, through which South Korea's foreign policy applies a more accommodative strategy towards North Korea. Kim did fundamental work on the South Korean foreign policy, which emphasised being a regional player.

Under the presidency of Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008), the pursuit of middle power status continued to be South Korea's foreign policy objective. In enhancing South Korea's middle power status, Roh Presidency focused on playing a greater role at the regional level. Roh's vision for South Korea's regional leadership can be seen as a continuation of the vision put forward by the Kim administration. However, while Kim's vision of South Korea's regional role was much broader, involving an initiative for East Asian regionalism, Roh chose to narrow South Korea's regional role in the area of Northeast Asia and within the scope of political and security issues. Roh's vision for South Korea's

middle power roles within a greater regional focus in Northeast Asia was primarily driven by several factors, namely uncertainty about a rising China, a nuclearising North Korea, and a remilitarising Japan. Roh articulated the regional focus of his agenda by enhancing South Korea's middle power status as a regional balancer (*gyunhyungja-ron*) which aimed to make South Korea a hub of regional economy and politics in Northeast Asia (Cho and Park 2014). This vision required South Korea to strengthen its relations with China and seek greater autonomy from the US.

To enhance its middle power status in the region, Roh also aimed to take the role as a bridge-builder by trying to mediate in the North Korean nuclear issue, peacefully manage the strategic distrust between the US and China, and lessen the impact of the great powers' rivalry in the region (C. Chun 2016). While the role as a voice for developing has been entrenched within Indonesia foreign policy establishment which force it to keep a certain distance with the US, South Korea has long embraced the US-led global order and is one of the faithful allies of the US in East Asia. Hence, South Korea has less revisionist stance towards the US-led global order. However, South Korea's role conceptions as a regional balancer and bridge-builder were seen as a strategy for Roh's administration to depart from its historical role as a faithful ally of the US and regional-subsystem collaborator. The enactment of the role of regional balancer in its foreign policy agenda was indeed unsettling for the US. This could be seen in South Korea's refusal to join the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Missile Defence (MD) system, which were intended to put pressure on the DPRK and China, despite its relentless efforts towards the de-nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula (Reiss 2009). Given that this role conception is incompatible with South Korea's historical roles, this role enactment has been

contested domestically by the opposition party, the Grand National Party, which thinks that the role being taken will endanger its alliance with the US.

Furthermore, unlike Indonesia, which is expected by third parties, mainly the US, to play a more significant role as a regional balancer, there is a lack of such impetus for South Korea. As South Korea's significant other, the US does not expect South Korea to act as a regional balancer. Its regional balancer role is perceived by the US not only as South Korea's departure from strong relations with the US in the region but also as a move towards closer relations with China (Shin 2016). Given the contested enactment of the role as a regional balancer due to role conflict with historical role, and the negative alter expectation, particularly from the US, under the leadership of President Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013), South Korea prefers to enact roles that enable it to playgreater roles at the global level. Lee declared at the UNGA in September 2009 that, "We are striving to become a 'Global Korea,' harmonizing our interests with others and making our well-being also contribute to the prosperity of humanity" (Lee 2009a).

During his presidency, South Korea hosted the G20 leaders' meeting (2010), the Fourth High-Level Forum (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness (2011), and the Nuclear Security Summit (2012). President Lee's focus on a global level can be interpreted as a way of reducing the chance of role conflict with its historical roles as well as with the expectation of the US as a significant other. In the case of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis, given the regional constraints that hinder South Korea from playing a greater regional role in mediating the crisis, South Korea took on a greater role at the global level by supporting the non-proliferation initiatives. To show its commitment, the South Korean government hosted the nuclear security summit in 2012. The aim of this was to showcase South

Korea's growing global influence while at the same time showing that it does not challenge the US initiatives at the regional level (Cho 2013).

Here the notion of role conflict introduced by role theory can better explain why South Korea has shifted away from its previously incepted middle power role as a regional balancer. While the self-identification with a middle power status is still intact and more entrenched, however, there is a shift through which South Korea enact its role conception to achieve such status. The changes in enacting its role conceptions are driven by the needs to avoid the emergence of role conflicts. Having differentiated between middle power as a status and middle power as a role, we can provide a more nuanced understanding of the changes in middle power behaviour throughout the time.

Moreover, under Lee, South Korea has invoked its remarkable transformation from a third world country to a first world one within one generation. To reflect this transformation, Lee administration aimed to pursue middle power status by enacting the role as an advocate of development that promotes South Korea's own model of development. The role as an advocate of development was translated into South Korea's leadership in pushing the discourse of green growth, as an alternative to the sustainable economic growth model, and its growing role in development cooperation. During the East Asia Climate Forum in 2010, Lee announced the establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute. Two years later, South Korea finally won a bid to host the Green Climate Fund. In promoting the idea of green growth, South Korea used its experience as a developing country that had recently become a developed one as a development model template (Blaxekjær 2016). Through the green growth model, South Korea also engaged in the climate change issue by treating the climate change industry as a new growth engine. In

practice, South Korea has provided finance for green environmental projects through foreign aid in developing countries and pledged to invest in the renewable energy sector.

Its role as an advocate for development can also be seen in South Korea's growing assertiveness in development cooperation. South Korea has mobilised its successful developmental state model, which transformed South Korea from a donor-recipient to a major donor in international development cooperation (Kim, Kim, and Kim 2013). Indeed, since 1977, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Korea (MOFAT) has started to provide development assistance to other developing countries. Even before joining the DAC in 2009, South Korea had become one of the leading donors among non-DAC countries. However, under Lee's presidency, South Korea's development assistance was utilised as a part of its global role as an advocate of development in its pursuit of middle power status. Traditionally, South Korea's development assistance has focused mainly on Asian countries (H.-M. Chun, Munyi, and Lee 2010). Under Lee's leadership, it became a tool for South Korea's global engagement in other parts of the world outside Asia.

To achieve its middle power status, South Korea also enacts the role as a bridge-builder in many global issues by actively providing a proposal that can be accepted by both developing and developed countries. The role as a bridge-builder also stems from South Korea's achievement to be a part of the group of advanced nations on the strength of its successful experience as a developing economy (Lee 2009b). For instance, in regard to development cooperation, South Korea has actively promoted the notion of "development effectiveness" as opposed to "aid effectiveness" as a paradigm for evaluating international development programmes (Snyder 2016). While its bridge-builder role

within Northeast Asia has been challenged by negative alter expectations from the US due to role conflict with its historical role conception as a faithful ally of the US, its bridge-builder role at the global level has not met the same contestation, given that the enactment of this role is in line with the US alter expectation as well as South Korea's historical roles.

The analysis of South Korea's role preferences in pursuing middle power status shows how significant historical roles are in affecting role conceptions enacted in pursuit of middle power status. Some role conceptions that are incompatible with historical roles are more likely to be abandoned or challenged by domestic audiences. Furthermore, South Korea's significant others, in this case, the US, also plays a significant role in its enactment of role conception as a middle power. The change in South Korea's role conception, from a heavy regional balancer towards an advocate of development, shows that both historical and alter expectations are crucial factors that drive its role preferences as a middle power.

Conclusion

This study aims to shift the focus of middle power theorising, from treating it mainly as a rigid categorisation with specific behaviour towards a discussion of the importance of role conceptions in shaping the role preferences of middle powers in regard to playing a greater role in the international order. Although not unique to middle powers, role theory can contribute to understanding the variation of roles enacted by middle power. While focusing on how specific material capabilities shape middle power behaviour and

assigning specific diplomatic traits to middle power states seems like a problematic quest, role theory can arguably provide a better understanding of emerging middle powers. Specifically, this paper has developed the link between role conception, status-seeking, and the foreign policy of emerging middle powers. Its modest objective is to connect works on status-seeking and roles to a broader debate on middle power. The analysis suggests that role conception can analytically connect the status-seeking behaviour of middle powers with their foreign policy agenda. The strength of role theory in understanding the status-seeking behaviour of emerging middle power states is twofold.

First, by looking at the construction of role conceptions, we can analyse the different trajectories of emerging middle powers at the regional and global levels. This paper has demonstrated in detail how particular roles enacted to pursue middle power status have been composed through historical experience, ego and alter expectations. The differences in these three processes of role conceptualisation might mean that emerging middle powers enact different roles in their quest for greater status at the global level. Thus, by understanding the construction of the role conceptions of middle powers, we can understand the differences in the role preferences of emerging middle powers.

Second, the analysis above shows that the incorporation of role theory can provide a more nuanced explanation regarding the tension between emerging middle powers' pursuit of a greater role at the global level and the constraints of domestic and regional considerations. This tension can be attributed to different role expectations regarding emerging powers that might hinder their pursuit of middle power status. The emergence of role conflicts that might lead to a contestation from domestic audiences as well as negative expectations from significant others can reduce the enactment of some roles and

increase the enactment of others, which leads to changes in states' roles preferences in their pursuit of middle power status.

In the case of Indonesia, middle power status is pursued through the enactment of four main national role conceptions, namely a voice for developing countries, a regional leader, an advocate of democracy, and a bridge-builder. In the case of South Korea, middle power status is achieved through the enactment of the roles of the regional balancer, an advocate of development, and a bridge-builder. However, as shown in the empirical analysis, these roles are not fixed. They change due to challenges from domestic audiences and negative international expectations as well as the emergence of role conflict, which requires policymakers to reconceptualise their role conceptions in the pursuit of middle power status.

This study has a modest theoretical objective, which is to explore the potential of role theory in enhancing our understanding of middle power behaviour in the international order. There is a need for a more rigorous study that incorporates the burgeoning role theory literature in the study of middle powers to understand the process. For instance, the further research agenda could also be directed towards understanding the extent to which alter expectations affect the way in which middle powers pursue their status. Also, due to its comparative nature, this paper does not further analyse the dynamics between ego and alter expectations or the mechanisms through which historical roles affect states in pursuing middle power status. The growing literature on role theory would certainly enrich the discussion on middle power.

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