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Middle power, status-seeking and role conceptions: the cases of Indonesia and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This article 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 article 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 article 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 article 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.

KEYWORDS

foreign policy analysis; Indonesia; middle power; role conception; role theory; South Korea

Introduction

Given the emergence of non-Western powers 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 article suggests that a role-theory approach can further enhance the middle-power literature by examining middle-power states' role preferences at the regional and global levels. To do so, this article 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 article 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 middle-power status. In order 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 article is twofold. Conceptually, it aims to discuss further how role theory could enhance the 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 a relatively minimal attempt to explicitly discuss the relations between the two notions within the context of middle power. In order to contribute to this endeavour, the article 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 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 aspirations for such status.

This article discusses how Indonesia’s and South Korea’s aspirations for middle-power status are 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 summits 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 assumed 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 article 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 article 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 South Korea’s 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 article 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 of 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. The article concludes by discussing the potential of role theory in understanding the status-seeking behaviour of 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 concept of 'middle power' to explain the behaviour of emerging powers (Emmers and Teo 2015; Öniş and Kutlay 2017). A middle-power state is generally defined as one 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). Over 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, the position, behavioural and identity approaches.

During the Cold War, a 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 a state's 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 to provide a rigorous definition of what a middle power is. For instance, one can decide whether countries are middle powers by quantitatively assessing their gross domestic product, 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 by 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, and 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 with 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.

In order to overcome these weaknesses, a growing amount of the 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, this 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 position approach focuses on material aspects to define middle power, the behavioural approach deals more with the normative foundation and morality that drive 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 comes from the analysis of Western industrialised, high-income countries, which predominantly have strong preferences for liberal values. Given this limitation, many scholars tend to criticise this 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 a 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 (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 characteristics of middle power remain the same—that is, the ability and aspiration for a medium-sized state to have agency and aim for a meaningful leadership role within international politics, as well as a willingness to deploy ideational resources to generate influence on the global stage despite material constraints. Hence, in order to make the concept more relevant to understanding 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 are 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 aspirations for middle-power status.

The incorporation of an identity approach informed by constructivist paradigm 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 the identity formation of middle powers. Easley (2012) focuses on national identities trajectories in explaining the differences in the foreign policy of middle powers. Shin (2016) further conceptualises middle-power identity construction by focusing on the agential level of analysis through the framework of self-conceptualisation, self-identification and intersubjectivity. Building on Shin, Teo (2018) focuses on the conceptualisation of middle-power identity through the notion of constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models. However, the middle-power identity approach is not without its limitations. Given that 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 the social, political and historical beliefs that exist in the society (Hopf 2002; Katzenstein 1996). Moreover, middle-power literature mobilising identity approach rarely clarifies the dynamic relations between identity and foreign policy agenda particularly 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 countries that self-identify as a middle power.

Despite these 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 more of 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 in the middle-power literature, a growing number of studies have shifted their focus to unpacking the state by taking agency-level 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) and projection of societal values (Westhuizen 2013), as well as other domestic issues, such as the role of political parties and elites in causing middle-power behaviour (Sandal 2014). While these 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 only partially to explain the behaviour of middle powers.

Building on 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 on how role theory could enhance our understanding of the concept of middle power to better explain the variation of the foreign policy of middle powers.

Middle power as a status and middle power as a role

In order 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 relationship between status and role is also important given that it is not unusual to find multiple uses of ‘status’ and ‘role’ within the literature. Much of the literature on middle power tends to treat middle power as a status. This can be found in the early writing on middle power, such as that of Soward (1963), Cox (1989) and Ravenhill (1998). There is also an abundance of literature that extensively explores the notion of middle-power roles (Chapnick 2000; Holbraad 1971). For instance, Lyon and Tomlin (1979, 12–13) emphasise the roles of middle powers as peacekeeper, mediator and communicator, while Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1993, 24–25) focus on the three key roles of catalyst, facilitator and manager as the main roles of middle powers. It appears that 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 with role theory, there is, surprisingly, no serious attempt to incorporate role theory into the analysis of middle-power behaviour. There are some studies that attempt to mobilise conceptual tools from role theory, particularly the notion of national role conception (Easley 2012; Öniş and Kutlay 2017). However, they only touch on 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 variety of roles taken by 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 students of foreign policy analysis. Role theory was brought to international relations scholarship by K. J. Holsti in the 1970s to analyse the foreign policy behaviour of 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 drives foreign policies, which include the attitudes, decisions, responses and functions of, and commitment made by, the government (Holsti 1970, 245). In general, role conception refers to foreign policymakers' 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 states and the international system, as well as changes in the domestic political constellations within states. Arguably, the notion of role conception is important in bridging status-seeking activities and foreign policy agendas.

In sociology, it has long been established that status and role 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 Linton (1936), we occupy a status but we play a role. A role represents the dynamic 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 the position approach, middle-power status is defined by physical attributes, such as population size, or capabilities, such as the size of 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 attributes. The behavioural approach tends to define middle-power status according to foreign policy behaviour. This approach tends to equate middle-power status with a state's roles. This has caused the behavioural approach to be criticised for its circular reasoning. The approach describes middle-power behaviour as the actions of states that it already assumes to be middle powers. In other words, the behavioural approach ignores the distinction between status and roles. However, rather than equating middle-power status with behaviour through this approach, we can treat middle-power status as an achieved status, whereby states acquire 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 its material capabilities, as suggested by the position approach, and its 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 system 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' perceptions. Conversely, status-seeking can also be influenced by alter expectations, which drive states to seek a particular status. The main alter expectation is recognition by other states in the international system.

Other than alter expectations, self-identification is also important in driving status-seeking behaviour in regard to middle-power status. Unlike great-power status, middle-power status requires not only others' expectations but also self-identification in order for middle-power status to be regarded as some sort of prestige. Self-identification for middle powers is as important as status accommodation for aspiring great powers. Given that great-power status comes with certain 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 powers, 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. As argued by Holbraad (1984), while other states recognise great powers as having a certain status in 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 a status could cease to exist when policymakers no longer identify their country with such a 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 expectations but also emerge through interactions with others. While middle-power status can be easily defined, the roles of middle powers are varied. 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 pursue 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, the 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 article 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 domestic political constellations (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 historical experience as a 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 coexist, 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) the 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 the 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 article shows how historical experience, ego expectations and alter expectations can explain the different roles enacted by these states in seeking middle-power status.

Indonesia's role enactment as a middle power

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 South-East 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 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 for Indonesia to play a more significant role at the global level.

During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's presidency (2004–14), Indonesia sought to strengthen its international status through greater involvement in global governance and multilateral forums. Under his leadership, Indonesia hosted several high-profile international summits, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Thirteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties in 2007 and the Ninth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference 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 the 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 to engage in global governance. The Indonesian foreign policy circle prefers to perceive Indonesia as 'a regional power with global interests and concerns' (Natalegawa 2014). 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 (2009–14) did Indonesian policymakers officially start to use the term 'middle power' as a status that Indonesia aimed to pursue. However, Yudhoyono himself rarely used the term in his official speeches. Finally, it has only been during Joko Widodo's presidency (2014–19) that the term 'middle

power' has been incorporated into the official mid-term development plan. 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 and to position Indonesia as a regional power with selective global involvement by giving priority to issues directly related to Indonesia's national interests (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia 2015).

Since the second term of the Yudhoyono 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 South-East Asia, due to its material capabilities, strategic position and identity change from an authoritarian to a democratic state, Indonesia has been regarded as the *primus inter pares* in the region by both 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 maintaining the importance and relevance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the institutional-building process in South-East 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 forums. In the Group of Twenty (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 United Nations framework and substantiate its representation in the G20, as well as other international bodies and processes, including Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (Nguitragool and Rūland 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 USA 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, ASEAN Plus Three, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting and the East Asia Summit. Given the above discussion, we can see that Indonesian policymakers are not reconfiguring Indonesia's international roles in order align Indonesian foreign policy with its growing self-identification with middle-power status. Rather, its policymakers continue to enact Indonesia's role as a regional leader by extending its scope into the global arena. Thus, although the conception as a regional leader began long before Indonesian policymakers self-identified Indonesia with a middle-power status, since the second period of the 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 globally minded than focused on the regional level (Higgott and Cooper 1990). This might be true for traditional middle powers, which tend to have entrepreneurial capacity and technical skills, and can therefore 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 32 years of Suharto's authoritarian regime (1968–98). This historical role needs to be enacted by Indonesia, even though it aims to play a more significant role at the global level. Thus, in order 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 on 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 position 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 of 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 Indonesia's main foreign policy agenda in ASEAN. Since 2008, Indonesia has initiated the Bali Democracy Forum, 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 (Brazil, Russia, India, China) 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 its constitution. This historical role has consistently been translated into Indonesia's stance in many international forums, such as the United Nations and G20. Within the United Nations, Indonesia is still voicing its criticism of the US-led liberal order and calling 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 a 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 a conventional middle-power role. However, its role as a bridge-builder sometimes conflicts with its other roles, such as an advocate of democracy. As shown by Karim (2017), Indonesia's role as an advocate of democracy has been hindered due to its role as a 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 expectations rather than alter expectations. 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 Joko Widodo's presidency, its role as an advocate of democracy has significantly reduced under his 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 neglects 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. This is due to Indonesia's self-identification with middle-power status being driven by the alter expectations of the international community, particularly after the inclusion of Indonesia as one of the members of G20, rather than ego expectations. Although Indonesia is a putative middle power, it has been restrained by its focus on the regional level. This is evident from its persistence in taking the role of 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 a 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 aspirations 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 twentieth 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 a prominent status in the international order. Unlike Indonesia, South Korea exhibits an ambition that goes beyond middle-power status. This can be traced back to 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 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 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 financial crisis hit the country. With his economic success, Kim saw an opportunity to enhance South 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 during the ASEAN Plus Three 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 accommodating strategy towards North Korea. Kim did fundamental work on South Korea's foreign policy, which emphasised being a regional player.

Under the presidency of Roh Moo-hyun (2003–8), the pursuit of middle-power status continued to be South Korea's foreign policy objective. In enhancing South Korea's middle-power status, the 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 to the area of North-East 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 on North-East Asia was primarily driven by three 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 North-East Asia (Cho and Park 2014). This vision required South Korea to strengthen its relations with China and seek greater autonomy from the USA.

In order to enhance its middle-power status in the region, Roh also aimed to take the role of a bridge-builder by trying to mediate in the North Korean nuclear issue, peacefully manage the strategic distrust between the USA and China, and lessen the impact of the great powers' rivalry in the region (Chun 2016). While Indonesia has been entrenched in its role as a voice for developing countries, which forces it to keep a certain distance from the USA, South Korea has long embraced the US-led global order and is one of the USA's most faithful allies in East Asia. Hence, South Korea has a 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 the Roh administration to depart from its historical role as a faithful ally of the USA and a regional subsystem collaborator. The enactment of the role of regional balancer in its foreign policy agenda was

indeed unsettling for the USA. This could be seen in South Korea's refusal to join the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative and missile defence system, which were intended to put pressure on North Korea and China, despite its relentless efforts towards the denuclearisation 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 USA.

Furthermore, unlike Indonesia, which is expected by third parties—mainly the USA—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 USA does not expect South Korea to act as a regional balancer. Its regional-balancer role is perceived by the USA not only as South Korea's departure from strong relations with the USA 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 its historical role, and the negative alter expectation, particularly from the USA, under the leadership of President Lee Myung-bak (2008–13), South Korea preferred to enact roles that enabled it to play greater roles at the global level. Lee (2009a) declared at the United Nations General Assembly 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 Lee's presidency, South Korea hosted the G20 leaders' meeting (2010), the Fourth High-Level Forum 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 USA 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. In order 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 conceived middle-power role as a regional balancer. While self-identification with a middle-power status is still intact and more entrenched, however, there is a shift through which South Korea enacts its role conception to achieve such a status. The changes in enacting its role conceptions are driven by the need 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 during this time.

Moreover, under Lee, South Korea achieved its remarkable transformation from a Third World to a First World country within one generation. To reflect this transformation, the Lee administration aimed to pursue middle-power status by enacting the role of 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.

South Korea's role as an advocate for development can also be seen in its growing assertiveness in development cooperation. South Korea has mobilised its successful development-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, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Korea has provided development assistance to other developing countries. Even before joining the Development Assistance Committee in 2009, South Korea had become one of the leading donors among non-Development Assistance Committee countries. However, under Lee's presidency, South Korea's development assistance was utilised as 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 (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.

In order to achieve its middle-power status, South Korea also enacts the role of a bridge-builder in many global issues by actively providing proposals that can be accepted by both developing and developed countries. The role as a bridge-builder also stems from South Korea's achievement in becoming 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 programs (Snyder 2016). While its bridge-builder role within North-East Asia has been challenged by negative alter expectations from the USA due to role conflict with its historical role conception as a faithful ally of the USA, its bridge-builder role at the global level has not met with the same contestation, given that the enactment of this role is in line with US alter expectations, 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 the pursuit of middle-power status. Role conceptions that are incompatible with historical roles are more likely to be abandoned or challenged by domestic audiences. Furthermore, South Korea's significant other—the USA—also plays a significant role in its enactment of its 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 to 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 powers. 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 middle powers. Specifically, this article has developed the link between role conception, status-seeking and the foreign policy of middle powers. Its modest objective is to connect work 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 middle-power states is twofold.

First, by looking at the construction of role conceptions, we can analyse the different trajectories of middle powers at the regional and global levels. This article has demonstrated in detail how particular roles enacted to pursue middle-power status have been composed through historical experience and ego and alter expectations. The differences in these three processes of role conceptualisation might mean that 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 middle powers.

Second, the analysis above shows that the incorporation of role theory can provide a more nuanced explanation regarding the tension between 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 a 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 article 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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