Collaborative Platforms and Diversifying Partnerships of South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation: Middle Powers' Struggles for Nation Branding

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This study illustrates collaborative platforms and diversifying partnerships for South-South and triangular cooperation in development. The English School's pluralism-solidarism spectrum is applied as a tool to explain transformative features of the changing international society in times of crisis. The study focuses on the intermediary pluralist-solidarism phase that shows dynamics of middle power coalitions using nation branding and collaborative governance as key strategies. The transitional phase is exemplified by two approaches. One is the bilateral approach to coalition shown through the case of China, whereas the other is the inclusive-multilateral approach demonstrated through the case of South Korea. Implications are given toward relatively loose networks that have the potential to evolve into platforms with institutional grounds, especially for middle powers seeking opportunities in the new normal.

Keywords   South-South cooperation (SSC), triangular cooperation (TrC), middle powers, pluralist-solidarism, nation branding, collaborative governance

Introduction: Middle Powers Under the New Normal

The international development community has witnessed a significant expansion on the extent to which levels of partnership patterns diversified over the past decade. Such diversification led to a gradual shift in aid practices and change in modalities of joint action, particularly with the amplified range of multi-stakeholders since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, for developing countries, relying on traditional forms of donors' support no longer guaranteed the closing of development gaps. Instead, as a breakthrough, partnerships are taking forms of not only bilateral and multilateral, but also regional, subregional, interregional, and horizontal modes of coalition across

the global South, alongside middle powers as pivotal players that glue members together. With the formation of multi-channels to orchestrate and negotiate development needs, middle powers have emerged as enablers that play a catalytic role in strengthening the existing South-South cooperation (SSC) and forming new modes of coalitions in triangular cooperation (TrC).

Simply put, middle powers can be identified as a cluster of secondary powers. The concept is not new, and its semantic usage has transformed through three distinctive phases since the postwar era: the first wave was when middle powers were regarded as parties who sought derivative benefits from the system using their legitimized role as a buffer within the global political-economic structure; the second wave was when they were acknowledged as emerging challengers who bargain against and attempt to reform the existing architecture with the advent of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa); and the third wave that was stimulated by the 2008 financial crisis and the formation of the MIKTA partnership (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia) that diluted previous notions of multipolarity (Cooper and Dal 2016; Jordaan 2003). These middle powers are organized on the meso-level, who "fill the capacity vacuum and strengthen global governance" by tackling critical challenges and including neglected regions and countries (Schiavon and Domínguez 2016, 495). These intermediary groups cut across the traditional donor-recipient relations and often exert a more significant influence over intra-regional affairs by supporting marginalized members through alternative regional institutions with reciprocal functions.

Against this backdrop, assessing the role of middle powers as intermediary-level actors has become more critical than ever with the outbreak of the latest global pandemic. The sudden change prompts us to accept the influx of world risk society and pressures us to embrace the ripple effects in the forthcoming post-COVID-19 era. Such a pandemic not only resets every corner of governments' statecrafts but also goads them to change the design and principles of governance currently operating at both global and national levels. Indeed, it ushers a "new normal" in which the equilibrium of power is reshuffled, and forges a new standard of civilization as a cosmopolitan outgrowth of reflexive modernization beyond the unwarrantedly extreme neoliberalism (Bain 2003). As the world risk society encroaches on the rules and tools for maintaining order formerly run under neoliberal capitalism, tasks lie ahead in dealing with accumulated risks that now pass the threshold, creating knock-on effects (Beck 1999; Matthewman 2015). Witnessing contrastive actions against the pandemic across countries, the question no longer lies on whether democratic or non-democratic settings prevail over one another in handling risks (Blühdorn and Butzlaff 2020).

It is uneasy to accurately compare and assess the responsiveness of political systems in times of global crises. Breaking the long-trusted belief, no substantial evidence shows that democratic countries perform better than authoritarian ones

in arresting the virus (Kleinfeld 2020; Laishram and Kumar 2021; Slipowitz 2021). Instead, citizens' confidence in their government's capacity or expertise, and faith in the highest authority are factors that determine unity and policy efficiency (Fukuyama 2020). In this context, navigating new standards under junctural times enables discovering novel explanatory tools with a reflective perspective for better global governance. The COVID-19 pandemic can be regarded as an apparent driving force that stimulates reformative shifts, which provides room for exposing the temporary phase where "existing plurilateral forms of cooperation can transform into an issue-specific coalition" under times of crisis (Paris 2019, 1). In order to identify the transformative phase, this study examines diverse forms of collaborative platforms in SSC and TrC. This includes the traditional partnership for counter-multilateralism of the Group of 77 (G77) led by the global South, and two middle power coalitions including MIKTA represented by South Korea and BRICS represented by China.

Each cooperation type is conceptualized using the pluralism-solidarism framework from the English School Theory: a praxis of emphasizing the temporary pluralist-solidarism phase. The English School theory is applied specifically since it distinguishes the social structure of the international *society* from the international *system*. The basic idea is that states are "embedded in the international society where membership and legitimacy are constructed with normative framing," and the "degree of order within that society varies across a spectrum from thin pluralist coexistence … to a thick solidarist institutionalized cooperation" (Buzan 2018, 450). As boundaries of the international society are questioned with the shift towards a new normal in the post-COVID-19 era, examination of middle power coalitions is deemed crucial to identify transitional modes of cooperation at times of crisis. Implications are given toward relatively loose networks that have the potential to shift toward collaborative platforms with firm institutional grounds for partnerships in the new normal (Hafner-Burton and Montgomery 2006).

Conceptual Framework: The Standard of Civilization in International Society

International Society of the English School Theory

The "standard of civilization" is a term used for definitive or implicit standards that distinguish members of a society from those who are not. It "applies to individual societies, as well as to systems of states or international societies of states" (Gong 1984, 4). Here, the English School's notion of international society is a middle ground between the realist idea of the international system and the liberal conception of world society (Bull 1977). While the international *system* exists when more than two states engage strongly enough to influence

each other's statecraft, the international *society* functions under global norms and values, implicit rules, and shared institutions. The international society is a systemic boundary that enables members of a similar standard of civilization to form partnerships under mutually agreed rules while preserving a certain level of independence that allows nationalism. This core feature of the English School is useful to explain why the collective identity of SSC or TrC cannot fully hinder members from seeking excessive national interest parallel to binding them to engage in concerted action.

The inquiry into the shape of such international society has dichotomized into the spectrum between two poles of pluralism and solidarism (Buzan 2004). Pluralism represents relatively conservative features that recognize state sovereignty as autonomous and independent. Accordingly, interactions are limited to realist boundaries and considered as collective security within the international system. Order is prioritized over justice, and motivation for national interest is allowed for specific development policies. On the other hand, solidarism is entrusted with a progressive nature, where norms and institutions for solving common problems are more valued than preserving the independence of individual state autonomy. Justice is emphasized over order, enabling solidarist donors to promote development aid for solely humanitarian purposes. The humanitarian aspects of development cooperation inherently depend on how well solidarism spills over into state pluralism for mainstreaming universalist spirits. However, solidarism does not entirely rule out the domain of states seeking national interests (Hurrell 2007). For example, promoting human rights-centered policies cannot always be generalized as a Good Samaritan act. Incorporating humanitarianism as an overriding national interest can also be understood as explicit motives that stimulate actions of aid nationalism, as shown by many Nordic countries (Kim 2021; Brysk 2009).

The genesis of international society can thus be illustrated with factors that affect where we stand in between the pluralism-solidarism spectrum. The English School has used the spectrum to examine the humanitarian motives of intervention among states, including subnational and supranational entities (Bain 2003; Buzan 2014). Positing this idea onto the scope of development cooperation, the recent trend becomes states' quest to establish a solid national identity that reinforces its legitimacy of the role that it takes in the global community. Next to the pre-given rightfulness of humanitarian needs based on global norms, new standards are sought to incorporate symbolic resources, brandwagoning based on cultural contexts, and transposing from allegiance to collective representation (Aronczyk 2013; Kaneva 2012). These approaches can be filtered by the prism of nation branding and collaborative governance that characterizes the intermediary phase on the pluralism-solidarism spectrum.

'Pluralist-Solidarism' with Nation Branding and Collaborative Governance
Traditional means of locating societies on the pluralism-solidarism spectrum
was primarily based on state interests, values and norms, and humanitarian
universalism, all of which led to distinct categories. With this approach, solidarism
can be explained by how strongly (thick) shared values exist among members
of interstate societies. Based on this understanding, solidarism begins with
pluralism where a weak (thin) number of values are shared between states, then
gradually builds into stages from asocial, power-political, towards coexistence.
The thick-thin characterization is based on scales from coercion, calculation, and
belief. Entering the phase of solidarism—"pluralism-plus," in Buzan's terms—
thicker values support cooperative and convergent forms of societies, where the
utmost level of shared norms would even lead to projection of a confederative
model as exemplified by the formation of the European Union (Buzan 2004).
Likewise, pluralism and solidarism must be repositioned into the continual
spectrum instead of sectional phases divided with clear-cut borders. Still,
pluralism-solidarism can be roughly dissected and labeled into hybrid sub-groups
depending on collaborative governance among participating entities, as shown in
Figure 1.

    Due to the rebirth of aid nationalism since the late-2000s and with the recent
outbreak of the pandemic, the international society has reversed from somewhere
between cooperation and convergence under solidarism back to coexistence
under pluralism. Amongst this revert to the last stage of pluralism, aid policies
based on national interests are being condoned to a certain extent. This elucidates
the section of hybridity where the thickest level of pluralism and the thinnest
level of solidarism are found to be combined, as indicated in the middle zone in
Figure 1. Reconstructing standards of civilizations under a new normal requires
an additional angle to observe current modes of interaction among states
that will prolong even after the pandemic. An intermediary stage of *pluralist-
solidarism* portrayed with "coalition based on nation branding and collaborative
governance" is proposed as a conceptual tool that expresses the transitional phase.

    Collaborative governance is a term used to describe the ways in which

Figure 1. Intermediary Pluralist-Solidarism Phase: Collaborative Platform for SSC and TrC
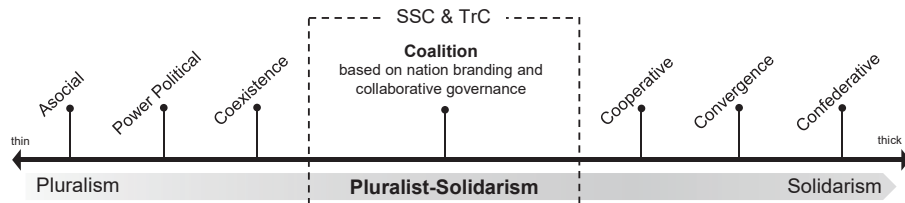
Source: Rearranged by the author based on the pluralism-solidarism idea from Buzan (2004,
    159).

participating actors across all spheres constructively cooperate in a forum to settle disputes and solve problems, in order to achieve a public goal that would not be attainable without such "processes and structures of public policy decision making" (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, 2). This forum can be understood as collaborative platforms on which actors create acts of cooperation to carry out collaborative initiatives based on networks that are either independent or subunits of larger organizations (Ansell and Gash 2018, 20). As an instrumental body, a collaborative platform must be created with active collaboration dynamics coupled with strong levels of partnership among actors sharing common objectives, principled engagement, and joint capacity (Thomson and Perry 2006; Thomson, Perry, and Miller 2009; Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Lundin and Söderholm 1995). The critical outset of such a collaborative governance regime (CGR) lies in using external networks to execute internal agreements, which has a thread of connection with literature that explains cooperation principles using jointly procured resources (Gray 1985; Margerum 2011; Olson 1965; Axelrod 1984).

Meanwhile, collaborative platforms are not tightly binding in principle. Due to the theme-specific and time-sensitive nature of CGR that is heavily dependent on norms and constructive values, participating members pursue an additional layer of motive: nation branding. Nation branding is about the state's valuation of branding as an asset for tangible benefits (Anholt 2007). In general, nation branding involves four stages: (1) evaluating where the current perception on the nation stands both internally and externally; (2) consulting with both public and private stakeholders to envision branding directions (which at times spans from a temporal horizon of almost two decades); (3) identifying the essence of the subject for branding—where a wide range of agendas and corresponding audiences exist, specifying the central idea of differentiation must be examined; and (4) implementation through communication, which is the heart of diffusing the branded image. The most effective channel for publicizing is to target the general public of peer countries through public diplomacy, instead of traditional diplomatic channels on the government-state level (Aronczyk 2013, 69-80). A comprehensive strategy for blending branding techniques to the state would be to gain international legitimacy or strengthen financial rewards such as foreign direct investment by using symbolic resources (Kaneva 2012).

Identity framing for membership of or loyalty from its target group is a competitive quest. Yet, by incorporating the nation branding concept, the framework expands the traditional means and forms of public diplomacy into a working forum that explains states' motives to participate in the expanded partnership types of SSC and TrC. The chief intention is to promote specific power that stems from collective entity and organization, of which the formation of group identity is realized with "brandwagoning" (van Ham 2002). Valuation of country image and its investment in enhancing future reputation has been increasingly affecting the behavioral aspects of states in performing niche

diplomatic tactics (Teslik 2007; Anholt 2007). By introducing this kind of CGR approach into the SSC and TrC context, an alternative lens is taken to see how collaborative governance operates on the inter-state level where incentives for national interests are clearer under difficult times. In this regard, nation branding can be a new axis for the catalysis of solidarism among the global South and middle powers in the post-COVID-19 era. Hence, coalitions led by middle powers deserve attention for their reflexive patterns of nation branding and collaborative governance, with progressive methods of adapting to the times of the new normal.

Alternative Movements of the Global South: Counter-Multilateralism and New Opportunities for Coalitions

Counter-Multilateralism and South-South Cooperation of G77
Development of unity among the Third World against the Western orders of the Bretton Woods system began as early as 1955, with the Afro-Asian Summit. Twenty-nine representatives from mostly newly independent Asian and African states gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, to seek partnership in the global South. The Non-Aligned Movement was borne out of the Bandung Conference, and held its first summit in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961. This was a coalition of countries that were neither explicitly allied with nor utterly opposed to any significant power bloc. In 1964, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was established to boost collaboration among developing countries with an essential focus on economic cooperation. Since then, developing countries have started exchanging knowledge, skills, and experience to accomplish objectives for development via coordinated efforts. The initial forum for SSC began when the G77 was established, with Latin America joining the group at the inaugural UNCTAD session (IFAD 2017).

A plan of action for increasing technical cooperation among developing countries was formed in 1978 as the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA), which contained thirty-eight specific ideas for improved technical cooperation (TCDC). The broad framework for SSC was comprised of political, economic, social, environmental, and technological dimensions. Later in 2009, the United Nations endorsed the Nairobi Outcome Document as the global policy framework for SSC. Improvements in SSC include increased South-South economic exchanges, investment flows, regional integration, and technology transfer. In recent years, paragraphs of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (paragraphs 44, 45),[1] the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (paragraph 56),[2] the New Urban Agenda (paragraph 146),[3] the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (goal 17, targets 17.6 and 17.9),[4] and many other international

agreements now show that the significance of SSC and TrC deserves attention (United Nations General Assembly 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2016).

As shown, the current needs for SSC and TrC platforms require a variety of additional partnerships to maximize mutual benefits. Based on traditional modes of SSC that mainly functioned as counter-multilateralism, cooperation with the global North has started to form other modes of SSC and TrC, like in the examples of the trilateral Africa-China-Europe dialogue, the inclusive dialogue for peace between the OECD (INCAF), and the g7+ group of fragile states (Stahl 2018). Global agencies have become more devoted to declaring their future commitment towards promoting triangular cooperation. This is evident with the creation of the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Co-operation in 2016 with OECD as a core group member, and the launch of the Second United Nations High-level Conference on South-South Co-operation (BAPA+40) in 2019. However, an embracing form of aligned engagement with an umbrella coalition is still absent, and discrepancies in interpretations on perceived levels of cooperation at times cause dissonance among participating members.

Opportunities for New Modes of Cooperation

Multilateralism, represented by the United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions, is the long-standing postwar global governance framework that regulates the international community. Donor groups and multilateral institutions maintained the international society through mutual control over whether community members comply with the ground rules based on normative values. However, the legitimacy of such global governance seems to be recently weakening with the COVID-19 pandemic that evolved throughout the past two years. The often-sanctified multilateral institutions (e.g., WHO) were criticized for their incompetence to provide health-related global public goods and unite member countries to tackle the unexpected crisis. States were brought back in with nation-centric measures including border closures, lockdowns, or vaccine diplomacy. The logic of multilateral oversight for humanitarianism seemed to be tearing down, no longer functioning as a stronghold of the international society we lived in before the pandemic, at least in terms of preserving rights for basic health for all.

Modes of countermeasures against existing rules under ubiquitous risk of such kind can be narrowed down into three strands: denial, apathy, and transformation. The emergence of the BRICS and MIKTA, the establishment of the New Development Bank, and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) have expedited the shift from neoliberalism to new standards of cooperation through transformation since the early 2010s. This countermovement can be understood as an expression of challenge towards the institutional density of existing international bodies (Wang 2019; Morse and Keohane 2014; Lipscy 2017; Helleiner 2019). Although this challenge may have

undermined the authority and legitimacy of current institutions, this does not directly signify that existing bodies are to completely fade away with the advent of these new rival organizations. In fact, the global South's counter-multilateralism efforts are not far off from how international organizations were initially formed based on the "O-I-T (orchestrator, intermediary, and target) model" (Abbott et al. 2015, 4). The model creates focal organizations as intermediary actors to achieve governance goals by offering incentives to forum shoppers and eventually lowering governance costs by locking them in (Fioretos and Heldt 2019). Some even argue that the latecomer's act of imitation in terms of institutional formation paradoxically proves the solidity and focality of existing multilateral organizations (Lichtenstein 2018; Heldt and Schmidtke 2019).

Under such circumstances, the international society's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has passed the stages of denial or apathy and has moved onto the stage of transformation, with its spread prolonging for years without signs of an end. Therefore, we now face the turn of the paradigm, where the governance model in the post-COVID-19 era brings in new standards of civilization (Crouch 2020). Challengers attempt to seize the opportunity by engaging in the new normal based on national interests while paving different ways with reflexive perspectives (Zhang 2011). Countries that successfully identified themselves as emerging donors have shifted their roles into development partners that led SSC to inherit the Bandung sprits and are expanding coalitions into the domain of TrC (Woods 2008; Mawdsley 2012). Such movements are mostly well represented by two coalition schemes based on nation branding and collaborative governance, led by two countries of East Asia: South Korea and China. As the top provider of development aid in the region, China is a hegemonic facilitator of an expanded form of SSC leading BRICS using a bilateral-coalition approach. South Korea is a leading actor of the middle power group MIKTA taking an inclusive-multilateral approach for a transformative form of SSC with TrC. The approaches can be read as attempts of paving the path for a new normal through coalitions led by such middle powers.

Paving the Path toward a New Normal through Middle Power Coalitions

China's Bilateral-Coalition Approach: Partnership with Africa and SSC
The initial counter-multilateralism movement opened doors for emerging donors to form an expansive yet novel type of cooperation with the global South in earnest. At the turn of the new millennium, much spotlight was shed on China following its line of conduct mainly on the African continent, with its distinctive form of bilateral-coalition within the scope of pan-regional multilateralism. This approach dates back to 2000, since China's initiation of the Forum on China-

Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Up to date, there have been in total seven rounds of FOCAC with summits held every three years, and each adopted a three-year action plan to realize critical goals set in the previous meeting. FOCAC is regarded notably as a cooperation forum, both in its inclusiveness of countries within the same region by establishing diplomatic ties with fifty-three African countries (except for Eswatini) alongside the Commission of the African Union.[5] Aside from political support by reinforcing some of the neglected institutions, including the New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD), forums such as FOCAC that are explicitly established to serve as cooperation mechanisms are particularly advantageous to building economic ties and cementing relationships for bilateral assistance (Strange 2019; Bräutigam 2009).

Some may relegate China's partnership efforts simply as a tool for taking an advantageous position in resource diplomacy, bilateral trade, or foreign policy. Nonetheless, a similar perspective may overlook the intangible values such as trust, solidarity, and sense of community (Du Plessis 2014; Taylor 2011; Herman 2021). Likewise, through decades-long partnership-building, China has branded itself as a supporter of the African continent with the official inauguration of FOCAC, which opened a new chapter of the political-economic relations of their bilateral partnerships (Akyeampong and Fofack 2019). In fact, many donors have exerted efforts to seize the initiative over Africa, like that of the US-Africa Business Forum under the Obama Administration and the Prosper Africa Initiative under the Trump Administration. Others include the Russia-Africa Summit, the Africa-EU Partnership based on the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, and Japan's Tokyo International Conference of African Development. Despite aforesaid efforts to build partnerships with countries of the global North, an independent level of nation branding and collaborative governance among the global South was regarded vital for sustaining long-duration coalitions.

The bilateral-coalition approach gradually expanded towards other parts of the world, with China taking the role as a facilitator of the new partnership model. There was confidence that the forum could potentially become a cornerstone to build successive models of SSC in the new era. A few examples of the expansion of the approach include the China-ECLAC Forum with Latin America and the Caribbean States, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum with countries of the Middle East, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation with Southeast Asian countries of the Indochina Peninsula, and 17+1 Cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe (Jakóbowski 2018; Ciurtin 2019). Similarly, China progressively broadened its ambitions toward building bilateral relations in regions of the global South. As a means of nation branding, institutional mechanisms for SSC were facilitated and positive state images were crafted with large sums of aid and investment undertaken by President Xi Jinping. Simultaneously, institutionalizing leaders' summit and high-level ministerial meetings provided transnational cooperation frameworks. As a collateral channel, weight was gradually shifted from the

existing multilateralism towards a retroverted bilateral-coalition approach, as shown from China's tactics in the global South.

Based on such examples, China's nation branding can be evaluated as being tilted mainly on the investment angle of the Nation Branding Hexagon suggested by Anholt (2007): tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people. China is now attempting to expand its brand features into other areas as well. In order to combat the pandemic, China has announced three priority areas of cooperation, which can be summarized into "vaccine cooperation, economic recovery, and transformative development to build a new consensus on solidarity and new ground for cooperation" (MOFA PRC 2021). The top spot of concern among diverse areas includes the so-called "vaccine diplomacy" patterns that produce significant geopolitical dividends. Fair distribution of vaccines in the global South has been controversial as the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) program seems not to be thoroughly confronting vaccine inequality in underdeveloped parts of the world (Smith 2021). China attempted to fill this gap by taking the lead in the global South to become its biggest vaccine provider. China's vaccine distribution in the global South began in late January 2021. The first vaccine shipment was made to Zimbabwe in mid-February, and a total of nineteen African countries were subsequently promised with delivery in due course (MOFA PRC 2021). Although China is facing competition as COVAX initiated its vaccination in African countries starting with Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, donations from the emerging economies including Russia, India, and United Arab Emirates are pacing the vaccine rollout in countries that do not fall under the COVAX scheme (Mwai 2021).

Devoted to expectations, in December 2020, China aided the project for building the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) headquarters in Ethiopia, with plans to expand Regional Collaborating Centres in Egypt, Gabon, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia (Opali 2020). The eighty million USD worth amount of construction project was to fulfill China's pledge for commitment during the 2018 Beijing Summit and the seventh Ministerial Conference at FOCAC (Devonshire-Ellis 2021; MOFA PRC 2018). The forum also displayed a strong level of solidarity for joint action against COVID-19 with China's commitment for support and approval for debt cancellation. Before the construction of Africa CDC, the Joint Statement of the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19 was released in June 2020 to solidify Sino-Africa cooperation into a "Health Silk Road" (MOFA PRC 2020; Lancaster, Rubin, and Rapp-Hooper 2020). China has been establishing air paths and distribution points, along with a supply chain for temperature preservation of thermosensitive vaccines (Parkinson, Deng, and Lin 2021). The Health Silk Road aims to strengthen public health governance in countries of strategic partnership. Thus, the 2019 Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement is not a temporal coin-

cidence but instead can be perceived as a slight twist in the extension of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Hillman 2021).

Nevertheless, China's image-crafting as a benevolent partner to Africa is evaluated as a high-risk investment. Further bilateral ties can only be expected if Chinese vaccination using Sinovac Biotech (CoronaVac), Sinopharm, CanSino, and Anhul turns out to be effective. Reinforcement of Sino-Africa cooperation in return for gratitude toward China's vaccine procurement will depend upon whether these vaccines are accessible and affordable (Campbell 2021). The question remains whether the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Yi's visit to African countries in January 2021 was a direct barter for economic benefits: Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed the BRI MoU; Tanzania contracted a 340 km railway construction to Chinese infrastructure companies; Nigeria established an inter-governmental committee; Seychelles was granted support for the protection of ocean environment and to foster tourism; China-Mauritius free trade agreement was signed (Devonshire-Ellis 2021).

In the meantime, China is undoubtedly clearing names by participating in the G20 COVID-19 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). Loans were forgiven to over a dozen African countries, acknowledging the global blame for causing debt traps. Still, its solidarism on the continent is primarily reaffirmed with bilateral coalitions, where the economic-investment-focused approach now expands with nation branding strategies. China seeks to live up to this role by maintaining and strengthening relationships with individual leaders, managing the partnerships collectively in the forum, while actively promoting bilateral diplomatic visits that support economic ties (Lin, Yan, and Wang 2017). As such, knotting Africa into China's global South leadership on collaborative platforms such as FOCAC and its nation branding of the Health Silk Road with solidarist spirit against the pandemic exemplifies the bilateral coalition approach during the transitional pluralist-solidarism phase.

South Korea's Inclusive-Multilateral Approach: TrC Hub for Global Public Goods
In the early stages of its inception in 2013, MIKTA was considered a residual, nominal type of coalition rather than an active platform to execute solidaristic diplomacy among participating members. It was featured as a transregional group of middle powers with a certain level of GDP among the G20 and non-members of the BRICS. Specifically, MIKTA participating countries value democracy, an open and resilient economy that promotes free trade and investment, a robust domestic market, and an increase in the purchasing power of the population, all of which were considered necessary common denominators to suffice as a joining member of the coalition. Since its mission and vision were not at first convincing enough to seek a higher level of strategic partnership on definitive terms, the launch of the coalition was doubted from both inside and out. Nevertheless, overcoming the initial drawback of such a vague group identity, MIKTA member

countries fruitfully gained a reputation as members of a "pivotal middle power coalition" within the international political network through the past decade.

Over time, using informal, flexible, and issue-oriented operational mechanisms, MIKTA has firmly positioned itself as a crucial intermediary actor who bridges between the global South and North while promoting democracy, economic growth, and agenda-based support in developing countries (MOFA ROK 2013). MIKTA also expresses the will to contribute constructively to global problems based on both their soft and hard power capabilities, which retains their pivotal role as mediators in the international community (Cooper 1997; Holbraad 1984). This shows that compared to the expanded form of SSC through the bilateral-coalition approach, MIKTA's inclusive-multilateral approach of collaborative governance opens doors for a more transformational type of SSC and new modes of TrC. Witnessing how the least developed countries can be marginalized from the provision of quasi-global public goods in times of crisis (i.e. prompt vaccination and healthcare services under COVID-19), the role of these pivotal countries has become ever more significant. In this way, MIKTA is well-placed to alleviate the imbalance between global North and South in issue-specific areas.

In particular, South Korea is noteworthy not only since it received global attention for its quick response to the pandemic during the earlier phase of COVID-19, nor simply because it is one of the leaders of MIKTA. Instead, it holds a vast range of experience with engaging in, as well as taking the lead in, international initiatives that garner collective support in addressing global risks. In early April 2020, Seoul took the initiative of drafting the MIKTA Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic and Global Health, in which key solidarist messages were delivered. This included, "full solidarity among members and the international society in tackling the global threat and rebuilding a more resilient future" and, "full support for the World Health Organization (WHO) in coordinating the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic" (MIKTA 2020). Two weeks later, on April 17, the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 adopted the "Declaration of the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 on maintaining essential global links." The declaration was designed for multilateral communication and collaboration in response to COVID-19, acknowledging that vaccines should be treated as global public goods, not a target of nationalistic preoccupation. The endorsement was confined to a small group of countries but was inclusive and multilateral in nature, as it encompassed several middle power countries, including Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, South Korea, Singapore, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (German Federal Foreign Office 2020).

Shortly after, in May 2020, the South Korea-led UN Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security was launched to stimulate a collective responsibility toward global health security. The establishment of the Group

was led by South Korea, in cooperation with Canada, Denmark, the Republic of Sierra Leone, and the State of Qatar (UN 2020). In addition, a high-level meeting themed "Protraction of the COVID-19 Crisis: Mitigating the Impact and Protecting Future Generations" was held as a side event during the high-level week at the session of the UN General Assembly in September later that year (MOFA ROK 2020). Increasing its budget allocation to humanitarian assistance via multilateral organizations, South Korea co-led to launch COVAX, which coordinates the vaccines facility, a mechanism designed to share risk and pool procurement globally to secure equal distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Its role as a critical middle power became even more evident when the WHO declared in February 2022 to base a global biomanufacturing training hub in South Korea to deliver mRNA vaccine technologies into Southeast and South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Serbia, Vietnam, etc. The establishment is a continuum from the WHO's success in building a similar transfer hub in South Africa to create positive network externalities to its neighboring countries (WHO 2022).

Indeed, South Korea's attempts to become a facilitator through developing the modes of partnership by linking countries of both the global South and North solidifies its seek for a new standard of civilization using middle power coalitions. The inclusive-multilateral approach differs from the bilateral approach taken by China. Coalitions are attempted on a web of partnerships with an inclusive principle while putting weight on the collaborative platform of MIKTA. As for these types of middle power coalitions, each platform's members are smaller than traditional forms of multilateralism, and overlapping members are confined to only a handful of leading partners. Yet, they are still more inclusive and multilateral than the bilateral approach to coalition, as shown from the Chinese case. With an inclusive-multilateral approach with the slightest sense of exclusive boundaries of MIKTA, Australia can be a potential key partner for South Korea among the group. Both countries take a similar stance in emphasizing the importance of enhancing inclusiveness in partnerships (Clark 2015). Moreover, bridge partners from the global South, such as Vietnam, can stimulate the effectiveness of TrC fostered by such coalitions as a vehicle that links other developing countries with middle powers (Dinh Tinh and Thu Ngan 2021).

In this sense, South Korea has a clear opportunity to enhance existing pluralist interests while having the potential to galvanize a more robust global response to the pandemic under MIKTA's partially multilateral framework (Corben 2020; Botto 2020). For the betterment of global governance that in the long-term aims for solidarism using middle power coalitions, core partners may collaborate for nation (group) branding of MIKTA as a buffer zone for preventing side effects arising from exclusive features of bilateral coalitions or any other types of protectionism that hinder global partnerships. This exemplifies the second type of coalition using nation branding and collaborative governance during the

Figure 2. Bilateral-Coalition and Inclusive-Multilateral Approaches under Pluralist-Solidarism
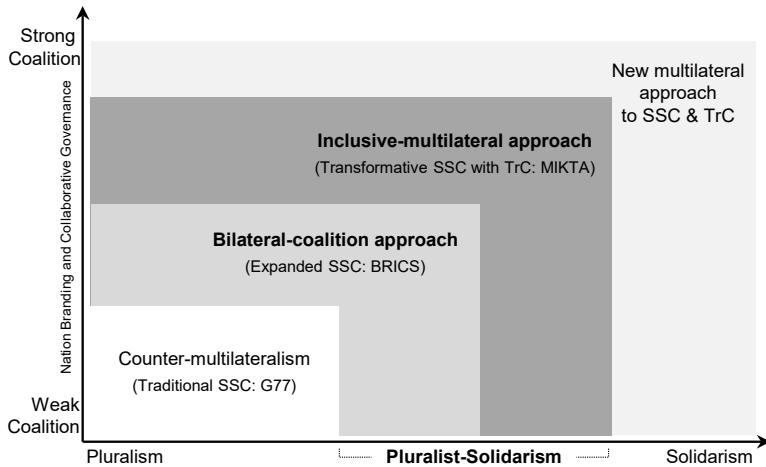
Source: Author.

transitional phase of pluralist-solidarism. South Korea's inclusive-multilateral approach can be featured as relatively more solidaristic in nature within the pluralist-solidarism phase, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 depicts how expansion from the traditional forms of counter-multilateralism undergoes a transitional phase of pluralist-solidarism, illustrated by the bilateral and inclusive-multilateral approaches to coalitions. Explained with examples of China and South Korea, the two approaches display how countries are engaging in a new normal using different nation branding strategies and modes of collaborative governance during the changing times. To summarize, the two countries are paving different ways for adapting to new standards of civilization through reflexive perspectives. China exemplifies how nation branding marketizes its partnership with developing countries in the form of an expanded SSC through the delivery of COVID-19 aid with bilateral approaches to countries on a continent level. On the other hand, South Korea strives to cultivate its role within the middle power coalition to propose an alternative engine to foster a transformative yet inclusive form of SSC and TrC with its nation branding as a leader of MIKTA. It embraces the pandemic as a critical chance to prove how middle power coalitions can heal ruptures generated under the risk society. Implications can be given to seeking what would come next as a new multilateral approach to SSC and TrC in the post-COVID-19 era by tracing the movement from the conventional forms of SSC to an expanded form of SSC led by China, and a more transformative type of SSC with TrC led by South Korea under MIKTA.

Concluding Remarks

Global transformations have gradually shifted the standard of civilization, as states no longer strive to enter the European international society like in the 19th Century, nor do they have blind faith towards American neoliberal orders of the 20th Century prior to the 2008 financial crisis. Nevertheless, the thread of connection creates distinct standards that may form smaller boundaries within a larger international society in implementing development policies. Furthermore, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 generated a new critical juncture where global governance should be renovated by creating novel standards of civilization. However, when it comes to the standard of civilization, it can be unclear to determine who the legitimate actors are to lead the transformation, and shifting global governance mechanisms can be tricky as well. At least one message is clear: we are in search of better partnership models that can function in the new normal, going beyond existing club governance such as the G7, G2, or G20, in order to encompass new modes of cooperation in SSC and TrC.

The malfunctioning of democracies in handling pandemics has caused doubts in traditional forms of multilateral cooperation and neoliberal governance to withdraw its powerful prescriptions that deter government engagement. The resurgence of big government has been endorsed by its isolationist returns to protect sovereign territories from the pandemic. Assembling middle powers that collectively support the core values of multilateralism while having proven successful in response to the pandemic would be necessary to reset the standard of civilization in the era that will arrive (Kim 2020). In this context, this study aimed to navigate an alternative approach using nation branding and collaborative governance in development cooperation to explain that democratic mechanisms are not the only way for solving collective issues under the global risk society. Since early 2020, states were left to devise countermeasures, including government control under social distancing, complete lockdown, or herd immunity without medical support. Donors could not afford to weather this storm by providing benevolent aid to the global South, as most hands were tied with facing domestic needs to settle the contagion.

Under such a global risk society, challengers of East Asia have entered the scene. They are grabbing the opportunity to become the new standard of transformation by introducing various approaches to coalitions using nation branding and collaborative governance strategies. For nation branding in terms of development cooperation, China is taking a bilateral-coalition approach in global South leadership. Its nation branding is based on the slogan "Health Silk Road," which can reinforce global South solidarity. On the other hand, South Korea is attempting to lead a new normal by seeking collaboration with key middle powers as a leading group under MIKTA's inclusive-multilateral approach. Likewise, recent attempts in East Asia to serve as intermediary actors

in development represent new coalition schemes in times of transition under a new normal. This provides novel insights toward existing collaborative platforms and implications for potential platforms with a new multilateral approach to SSC and TrC in the coming era.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1.   Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, Paragraph 44: "North-South cooperation, complemented by South-South and triangular cooperation, has proven to be key to reducing disaster risk and there is a need to further strengthen cooperation in both areas. Partnerships play an additional important role by harnessing the full potential of countries and supporting their national capacities in disaster risk management and in improving the social, health and economic well-being of individuals, communities and countries;" and Paragraph 45: "Efforts by developing countries offering South-South and triangular cooperation should not reduce North-South cooperation from developed countries as they complement North-South cooperation."

2.   Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paragraph 56: "South-South cooperation is an important element of international cooperation for development as a complement, not a substitute, to North-South cooperation. We recognize its increased importance, different history and particularities, and stress that South-South cooperation should be seen as an expression of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South, based on their shared experiences and objectives. It should continue to be guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit."

3.   New Urban Agenda, Paragraph 146: "We will expand opportunities for North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation, as well as subnational, decentralized and city-to-city cooperation, as appropriate, to contribute to sustainable urban development, developing capacities and fostering exchanges of urban solutions and mutual learning at all levels and by all relevant actors"

4.   Sustainable Development Goals, Target 17.9 (Capacity Building): "Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation;" and Target 17.6 (Technology): "Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and

international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism."

5.   FOCAC. *African Members of FOCAC*. http://www.focac.org/eng/ltjj_3/ltffcy/ (accessed November 21, 2021).

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