

EWIS 2019 Call for Papers
Conceptions of Greatness in the Foreign Policy of Major Powers

Workshop convenors:

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Workshop summary

Regional and global great powers stand at the centre of the analysis of international politics. Their greatness, however, is too often reduced to an objectively given, measurable characteristic, thus disregarding the importance of the different ways in which states make sense of their own greatness (Sagar 2009; Suzuki 2014). These conceptions are culturally and contextually informed, historically changing, and play a major role in shaping these countries' actions (Hobson and Sharman 2005; Keene 2013; Reinert 2013, Varouxakis 2007).

This workshop investigates the evolving conception(s) of greatness which states possess, and which in turn shape the way they exercise their influence on world politics through their foreign policy or other forms of external action. By focusing on the idea of greatness, our aim is to build a bridge between studies of national identity (Köstem 2018), social status (Jones 2014; Neumann 2007; Onea 2014) and power capabilities (Brooks and Wohlforth 2016), as well as to integrate recent investigations of exceptionalism, into a broader analysis of major states' self-conceptions (Nymalm and Plagemann 2018).

We propose that states develop their conceptions of greatness in three analytically distinct, but practically intermingled directions. First, greatness can be understood in terms of an inner quality that validates itself independently of the relation between the self and the external world (e.g. a sense of civilizational or religious centrality) (Kritzman 1995; Neumann 2017). Second, greatness can be conceived as a social status that depends on recognition by a relevant audience (e.g. being recognized as belonging to the club of great powers) (Clark 2014). Third, a conception of greatness can emerge as states try to make sense of and justify their material or ideational capacity (or lack thereof) to shape their environment (e.g. having a responsibility to defend or spread certain values) (Wilson 2005).

Different states in different time periods might place their emphasis on one or the other of these dimensions, combine them in different ways, or find that they are conflicting, questioned or lost. Some of these might be taken to be securely possessed, others aspirational (Clunan 2009; Schell and Delury 2013), nostalgic (Volfová 2016), or emerging (Gardini 2016).

We particularly welcome contributions on new, emerging or regional great powers that are under-researched relative to traditional or global great powers. We expect papers for this workshop to engage with one or more of the following questions:

1. How do major regional or global actors understand, articulate, and perform their own greatness?
2. What is the relative emphasis they place on the internal, social, and power aspects of greatness, and how do they combine them?
3. What implications do states' conceptions of their greatness have for their foreign policy?
4. How does internal contestation over the meaning or role of greatness shape foreign policy directions?
5. How have conceptions of greatness available to actors in international politics change over time?
6. How can the link between greatness and foreign policy be approached theoretically?
7. Conceptual histories of greatness in international politics

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