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ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Comparative Exceptionalism: Universality and Particularity in Foreign Policy Discourses

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Existing research on exceptionalism in foreign policy suggests a number of confrontational features making it a threat to peaceful international relations. Largely based on US and European cases, and hardly ever taking a comparative approach, this literature overlooks a variety of exceptionalisms in non-Western countries, including so called "rising powers" such as China and India. A comparison between exceptionalist foreign policy discourses of the United States, China, India, and Turkey shows that exceptionalism is neither exclusive to the United States, nor a "new" phenomenon within rising powers, nor necessarily confrontational, unilateralist, or exemptionalist. As a prerequisite for comparative work, we establish two features common to all exceptionalist foreign policy discourses. In essence, such discourses are informed by supposedly *universal* values derived from a *particular* civilization heritage or political history. In order to systematize different versions of exceptionalism, we then propose four ideal types, each of which reflects exceptionalism's common trait of a claim to moral superiority and uniqueness but diverges across other important dimensions, with implications for its potentially offensive character. The article concludes by formulating a research agenda for future comparative work on exceptionalist foreign policy discourses and their repercussions for great power relations and global politics.

Keywords: discourse, exceptionalism, foreign policy

Introduction[1]

A steady tradition in international relations (IR) scholarship studies and attributes exceptionalism to the United States (US) as a particular characteristic

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informing and constituting its foreign policy (Cha 2015a; Lepgold and McKeown 1995; McCrisken 2003; McEvoy-Levy 2001; Restad 2012; Walt 2011).[2] While American exceptionalism is not to be understood as a "unified body of thought," it is usually described along the lines of "an unwavering belief in the uniqueness of the United States and a commitment to a providential mission to transform the rest of the world in the image of the United States" (Nayak and Malone 2009, 260). Most of these studies, especially contemporary ones on American exceptionalism since the G. W. Bush presidency, suggest a number of confrontational features (Hodgson 2009; Monten 2005; Nabers 2009; Nayak and Malone 2009; Patman 2006; Wheeler 2003; Widmaier 2007). Consider Holsti's definition of an exceptionalist foreign policy consisting of five criteria: a mission to "liberate" others in the pursuit of a universal "common good," a sense of being free from external constraints, the need to have an external enemy in a hostile world of "universal threats," and perceiving oneself as an innocent victim (Holsti 2010, 384, 394). Correspondingly, American exceptionalism is often equated with unilateralism or even *exemptionalism*, namely the belief that the United States is not bound by rules and norms governing the "unexceptional rest." Exemptionalism thus legitimizes the transgression of international law, for example through interventions like the Iraq War in 2003 (Ruggie 2004).

Contemporary American exceptionalism has largely been read as informed by both the historical belief in America's exceptional character since the first puritan settlements on the continent, as well as by its global superpower standing since the end of WWII (Holsti 2010; McCrisken 2003; Onuf 2012). Regardless of whether the United States is truly unique or not, to study American exceptionalism as constitutive of US foreign policy is regarded as meaningful essentially because of these two traits: the persistent prevalence of exceptionalist thinking in the United States, and of US power abroad. It is therefore not surprising that so far the scant IR-literature on exceptionalism in contemporary foreign policy beyond the United States has mostly started to consider Chinese exceptionalism.[3] Both the scholarly interest in, and the articulation of a Chinese exceptionalism itself, are typically attributed to China's outstanding status as a "rising power" (Zhang 2011, 306; see also Callahan 2012, 50–51; Bradford and Posner 2011, 5; Wang 2015).

However, as we show in what follows, several other countries apart from the United States (and China) do have a long history of exceptionalist discourses. These foreign policy discourses have hardly ever been looked at comparatively, despite both their family resemblance and relevance for debates on international politics in a world composed of ever more self-confident foreign policy actors outside the transatlantic orbit.[4]

The purpose of this article is to, first, engage in a comparative study of exceptionalism that draws attention to historical and contemporary exceptionalist foreign policy discourses beyond the United States and, second, debate their domestic sources as well as repercussions for global politics. In contrast to the prevalent understanding of US exceptionalism, we argue that exceptionalism is not confrontational, unilateralist, or exemptionalist per se. Although not independent from the capacity to

[2] In this article we focus on exceptionalist *foreign policy* discourses, not on commonly covered domestic features, such as voter behavior, economic development, or state-society relations in the United States and elsewhere (Bengtsson et al. 2014; Prados de la Escosura 2004; Whitehead and Hoffmann 2007).

[3] For an exception to the rule, see a recent piece on Russia's "missionist exceptionalism" in foreign policy, including a comparison with Israel, the United States, Serbia, and Poland (Humphreys 2016). As will be seen in later sections on Turkey and India, there are several interesting studies on exceptionalism and foreign policy within individual countries, none of which, however, *systematically* compares its findings to other cases.

[4] In one of the few comparative pieces on exceptionalist foreign policy, Holsti questions the exceptionality of exceptionalism by conceptualizing it as a distinct *type* of foreign policy. Yet, in his article he compares the United States only to the (historical) cases of postrevolutionary France and the Soviet Union, which makes his conclusion about the exceptionality of US exceptionalism as lying in its longevity (2010, 400, 402) not entirely convincing.

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project (material and social) power abroad, we also challenge the assumption that exceptionalism is only and naturally a feature of great or rising powers.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, by drawing from existing literature on exceptionalism in foreign policy, we propose criteria according to which one can compare exceptionalist foreign policy discourses both within and across states. Here, we engage in "concept reconstruction" (Sartori 1984, 41–50) with the aim of identifying those elements of integral importance to a given concept (exceptionalism). Whereas all exceptionalist discourses by definition refer to a certain (moral) superiority that legitimates their foreign policy, they differ across two key dimensions: Exceptionalisms are either of a *missionary* or *exemplary* character. Moreover, exceptionalist discourses can be either *exemptionalist* or *nonexemptionalist.* In a second step we propose four ideal types of exceptionalism. Third, we illustrate our ideal types by looking at exceptionalist foreign policy discourses in the United States, China, India, and Turkey. Fourth, we draw conclusions regarding exceptionalist foreign policy discourses concerning both their domestic sources and implications for global politics. Finally, we delineate core elements of a future research agenda on comparative exceptionalism.

Conceptualizing Exceptionalist Foreign Policy Discourse

We conceptualize exceptionalism as foreign policy discourse that is part of a society's debates around its identity as a nation. Exceptionalist discourse expresses a paradoxical relationship between universality and particularity: the exceptionalist state claims particular and exclusive access to the universal good—in terms of its comprehension and the disposition to realize it beyond its own borders.

Exceptionalist discourse is articulated and enacted through states' foreign policy. Accordingly, our notion of discourse encompasses linguistic and nonlinguistic elements (Skonieczny 2001, 438), or "ideas and acting" (Holsti 2010, 382). Especially with regard to foreign policy statements, uttering them is practically enacting foreign policy. Foreign policy discourse functions as a set of rules, structure, or frame of intelligibility that is both constraining and enabling in that it makes certain courses of action necessary, desirable, and possible and others unacceptable or inconceivable (Epstein 2010, 181). In other words, it implies engaging in some types of external action and not others (Browning 2007, 28).

While we understand all exceptionalist discourses as a form of identity construction, not all identity construction is necessarily exceptionalist, nor do we find exceptionalist elements in every country's foreign policy discourse (see below). Although certain *kinds* of exceptionalism may be unique to individual states in historical periods in time, exceptionalism as foreign policy discourse is not. Much to the contrary, as our cases illustrate, their family resemblance demands comparisons throughout history and across cases and world regions.

Exceptionalist discourse expresses a peculiar link between a state's foreign policy and its self-understanding as a unique society or civilization that is related to some form of higher order revelation or spiritual or otherworldly character. This link is peculiar because it establishes *uniqueness* as a foundation for, first, a conviction of moral superiority over virtually every other society, based on which the self-ascribed exceptionalist state pursues an allegedly *universal* common good in its foreign policy conduct. Second, exceptionalism based on uniqueness implies the belief in an exceptional state's disposition as impossible to be replicated by others. This interplay between uniqueness (or particularity) and universality is what constitutes the paradox of exceptionalism: A unique insight into supposedly universal values and their foreign policy implications is derived from a particular civilizational or spiritual heritage, political history, and/or geographical location. In this understanding, the impossibility of replicating the exceptional state makes the realization of these values (like peace, democracy, individual rights) contingent upon the exceptional

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state's success in foreign policy. In other words, the universal global good is dependent on the unique and particular history of the exceptionalist state.[5] This distinguishes exceptionalism from *nationalism*, a related yet distinct strain of thought that also involves a strong feeling of superiority and, more often than not, exemptionalism (see below). Whereas exceptionalism refers to universalism, nationalism tends to be particularistic and exclusive in nature. Nationalist discourses define superiority first and foremost in ethnic or cultural terms with "finite if elastic boundaries" (Anderson 1983, 7), less in moral or spiritual ones. By contrast, exceptionalist discourses refer to a morality that all humankind should ideally adhere to.[6]

In our understanding, not all countries' foreign policy discourses are exceptionalist. Neither are all those with claims to a foreign policy guided by supposedly universal moral norms. To illustrate this point, recall the debate around Canada or Australia as "good international citizens" (or "Global Good Samaritans"; Brysk 2009). This very concept, as put forward by Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans in the early 1990s, implies that all states should and are—in principle—capable of fulfilling their moral duties as global citizens. Such duties typically include the defense of human rights, participation in peacekeeping missions, and generally the contribution to the solution of collective action problems globally. Special responsibilities for certain states may arise from certain capabilities or resources; yet, responsibilities in principle are not based on a distinctive status or unique domestic qualities. In fact, the terminology of citizenship incorporates the belief that moral duties and responsibilities are both intelligible and applicable to all members of international society.[7] Moreover, the good international citizenship in its official (i.e., Australian or Canadian) variant was motivated at least partly by strategic considerations with regard to an external audience. The result was an exercise in public diplomacy as much as in actual foreign policy. This contrasts with our notion of exceptionalism, which, although routinely serving as a legitimating device for specific foreign policies, is hardly ever directed primarily at foreign audiences (McCrisken 2003, 4).[8]

Thus, exceptionalism as foreign policy discourse goes beyond what former US president Barack Obama insinuated in 2009, that is, the banal claim for uniqueness virtually every country can legitimately make (see also Hughes 2015, 538).[9] Importantly, the question for us is not whether states *are* truly exceptional. This is an issue dealt with primarily in historical research focusing on US exceptionalism (as for instance Lepgold and McKeown 1995; Lipset 1997; Shafer 1991; Wang 2015) and often brought forward in political commentaries or opinion pieces (e.g., Walt 2011, 2012). Instead, in terms of identity construction, we consider how certain states *understand* themselves as exceptional and how this not only constitutes their foreign policy discourses but ultimately also—among other factors—their "being"

[5] What has been called the "chasm between universality and particularity" means that the universal has no "content" of its own but is always a particular that has become dominant at some moment (Laclau 1992, 87). Seen from this perspective, exceptionalism is merely one particular "combination" of the universal and the particular.

[6] Liberal types of nationalism, as put forward by statists in international political theory such as David Miller or Thomas Nagel, do refer to a universal morality while at the same time claiming that a given political community's allegiance is primarily with its own people. Such theories, if reaching foreign policy discourses at all, are not exceptionalist because of the second criteria above: civic virtues such as solidarity or democratic participation are not conceived as impossible to replicate by other political communities.

[7] Similarly, Costa Rican claims to exceptionalism (no standing army) are based on universal principles not uniqueness (Brysk 2009, 95–118). Bhutan, another contender for qualifying as exceptionalist, in fact, does not satisfy our criteria for inverse reasoning: although claims to uniqueness inform its social and political domestic set-up, such claims do not extend beyond Bhutan's borders. That is, the particular is *not* universalized.

[8] We discard claims to a Nordic exceptionalism popularized in the 1980s for similar reasons (Adler-Nissen and Gad 2014). Whereas the exceptionalist discourses considered below are expressions of political *identities*, what has been termed Nordic exceptionalism, in large parts, was a deliberate and strategic attempt in forging a foreign policy brand (Browning 2007, 31).

[9] Barack Obama in 2009: "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism" (quoted in Schlesinger 2011). This statement expectedly brought him a large amount of domestic criticism.

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as foreign policy actors.[10] Although we are aware of the importance of accounting for mismatches between how policies are framed and how they are implemented, we concur with scholars who speak out against treating exceptionalism as either "mere rhetoric" or as just a "manipulative tool employed by policy makers" (Holsti 2010, 382; Hunt 1987, 15; McCrisken 2003, 17; Widmaier 2007, 782, 785). Instead, we follow the understanding that exceptionalist beliefs "frame the discourse of foreign policy making by providing the underlying assumptions and terms of reference for foreign policy debate and conduct" (Khong 2013, 41). As such, exceptionalist discourses come in many forms and nuances that can be more or less overt and more or less explicit. For instance, in many cases the content of a speech or certain policies flow out of an exceptionalist self-understanding, without explicitly (or even consciously) being framed as exceptionalism.

Finally, the claimed insights into a universally valid morality as the exclusive domain of a particular exceptionalist state (or civilization) feed into a conviction of being *exempt* from those norms, rules, and conventions governing the international relations of all other—unexceptional—states. However, as will be seen in our case studies, a wider sense of exceptionalism does not necessarily mean exemptions from concrete international rules such as laws or treaties but may instead apply to an expanded notion of logics or "laws of history" (i.e., great power politics, cycles of "rise and fall," or civilizational conflicts). Here, our conceptualization of exceptionalism differs from those arguing that exceptionalism is necessarily exemptionalist, meaning the attitude that the exceptionalist country is not bound by multilateral regimes and agreements to the same extent as other states are or that international treaties should apply to all states except for the exceptionalist state (Ignatieff 2005, 4–6; Bradford and Posner 2011, 7). Instead, we take exemptionalism as only one of several potential characteristics. Thereby we may risk our framework to be understood as an attempt in diluting an established concept.[11] This, however, would be a misunderstanding. First, we maintain that one can hardly speak of exceptionalism as an "established concept" that goes beyond the case of American exceptionalism. Far from employing a widely accepted definition of exceptionalism, the existing literature is ambiguous about whether exceptionalism and exemptionalism necessarily go hand in hand, or whether the latter is just a possible trait of the former (e.g., Holsti 2010; Bradford and Posner 2011; Patman and Southgate 2016; Wheeler 2003; Hughes 2015). One of our motivations behind writing this article is precisely that one needs to look beyond American exceptionalism to be able to say something about exceptionalism per se. Second, at the core of (almost) all exceptionalisms considered in the literature is the unequivocal belief in a *particular* insight into the *universal* good that is understood as vital for international society/mankind/progress in international relations. As a result, all exceptionalist discourses do exhibit a certain exemptionalism in the sense that the respective society is understood as being exempt from the "ignorance" other societies and nations suffer from. Yet, as illustrated below, this exceptionalist characteristic—or epistemic exemptionalism—does not necessarily translate into the renunciation of international rules and norms. In fact, the opposite may be true. If we simply equated exceptionalism with exemptionalism, we would lose sight of exceptionalism as one amongst several potential *motivations* behind exemptionalism in international law (Bradford and Posner 2011).

To probe the argument, what would happen to our nonexemptionalist discourses (as in our cases of Turkey and India) if we did not count them as truly exceptionalist? Besides the fact that discourses in those countries have explicitly and

[10] Without being able to go into detail here, we adhere to what has been called a relational-processual understanding of "the state" in terms of it being constantly produced through discourse/practice/performance (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 309, 316–19).

[11] We owe this thought to Patrick Thaddeus Jackson.

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throughout history articulated their foreign policy as exceptionalist themselves, discarding them as nonexceptionalist, in our view, would be both nonproductive and problematic: Nonproductive, as we might then overlook the potential of these nonexemptionalist foreign policy discourses to eventually become exemptionalist. By contrast, our typology allows us to consider and learn more about shifts in variants of exceptionalism over time. Equating exceptionalism with exemptionalism would also be problematic, as such a narrow definition that largely concurs with American exceptionalism and the confrontational features commonly ascribed to it bears the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy that is already haunting some of the scholarship on Chinese exceptionalism: this is what rising/great powers (like the United States) do, which is why they will *necessarily* become confrontational (like the United States). Again, in order to challenge this conventional wisdom, one needs to move beyond a US (and Western) -centric concept of exceptionalism.

Common Criteria, Ideal-Types, and Cases

The unsystematic incorporation of complex historical events is one of the pitfalls in the development of international theory from empirical research. Here, the ideal type methodology is particularly helpful as it reduces complexity of the empirical by accentuating only certain characteristic traits and by bringing together a number of individual events in order to expand its applicability (Plagemann 2015, 43; Haugaard 2006, 9).

As Max Weber notes with reference to ideal-type economic theory: “In reality, action takes exactly this course only in unusual cases, as sometimes on the stock exchange; and even then there is usually only an approximation to the ideal type” (Weber 1978, 9). Thus, the ideal type “does not in itself constitute an explanation of the individual historical cases to which it is applied. [It] merely provides the conceptual frame and suggests the point of entry for the actual historical explanation” (Kedar 2007, 341–42). In other words, the ideal type is not a means for generalization of empirical patterns. Once established convincingly, ideal types not only help in *understanding* (rather than describing) the “empirical reality” of individual cases (Lawson 2012, 219); importantly, they also facilitate the theorization of their interplay. In contrast to a merely descriptive list of occurrences confined to particular instances, our exceptionalist ideal types both speak to each other and invite their application to more cases than the ones considered in this article.

Common Criteria

All exceptionalist states understand themselves as fundamentally different from other states. However, exceptionalist foreign policy discourses are not only about difference from otherwise comparable states but also about superiority in moral terms (see also Holsti 2010, 384). As we will illustrate below, articulations of exceptionalism regarded the United States as different from, and morally superior to, feudal Europe; China as different from and superior to its neighbors and the West; and both India and Turkey as different and superior to the Western great powers. Superiority in each case can take a slightly different connotation; but all forms of superiority involve a moral or spiritual element. This latter element only becomes relevant to foreign policy due to the belief in its universal validity beyond a respective nation’s borders. The discourse of moral superiority may have different sources, among which a given state’s civilizational or spiritual heritage and/or comparable economic or social success stand out. Yet, as our examples show, exceptionalist discourses have surfaced and prevailed even in states relatively inferior

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Table 1. Four ideal-types of exceptionalism (authors' compilation)

	Exemplary Character	Missionary Character
Exemptionalist	*Civilizational* Exceptionalism	*Imperialist* Exceptionalism
Nonexemptionalist	*Internationalist* Exceptionalism	*Globalist* Exceptionalism

in terms of economic progress, welfare, or technological advancement.[12] All exceptionalist discourses evolve around the paradoxical relationship between universality and particularity: the exceptionalist state claims particular and exclusive access to the universal good. The universal becomes visible only through the lens of that one particular political history or spiritual or civilizational heritage.

Ideal-Types

Beyond this common thread of superiority due to a unique insight into a universal morality, exceptionalism may take different forms along two dimensions.

First, exceptionalist states may understand their superiority in moral terms as a call for an either *missionary* or *exemplary* foreign policy. In a missionary self-understanding, moral superiority comes with a duty to "proselytize and convert" others.[13] In practice, the means of conversion may vary greatly. This is exposed in the next section, which compares, among others, Jawaharlal Nehru's India and the United States under President G. W. Bush. By contrast, a self-understanding as exemplary may entail the same degree of moral superiority without the desire to convert others. Again, in practice reasoning behind this varies from essentially moral arguments against the praxis of conversion, skepticism with regard to the success of missionary engagements, to a general disinterest in the wider (uncivilized) world. In the Chinese case, throughout history we see variations of and between the exemplary and missionary character. For instance, contemporary China explicitly distances itself from having a missionary aim toward the outside world and claims to be essentially different from the West in this regard (Zhang 2011, 319).[14] On the other end of the spectrum, being exemplary may feed into isolationist desires, as was the case in the United States of the 1930s.

Second, exceptionalism may go along with either *exemptionalism* or *nonexemptionalism* in global politics. Nonexemptionalism emphasizes engagement and dialogue over confrontation, and multilateralism over unilateralism, as will be demonstrated by the cases of pre-2016 Turkish discourses and of India under Nehru. In both cases, adherence to international law, international cooperation amongst equals, and a conflict-mediating role in international politics were traits attributed to the exceptional character of each country. However, exceptionalism may also result in exemptionalism in dealing with international law and institutions, as defended by US neoconservatives of the 2000s.

Based on the above we discern four ideal types of exceptionalist foreign policy discourses (see Table 1). As noted, ideal types are "self-ironic" (Kedar 2007, 332) abstractions of historical events; concrete foreign policy discourses, as discussed below, only resemble one ideal type more than the other.

[12] Phillips (2014, 715–16) argues that the understanding of Western technological supremacy in the nineteenth century as a "self-evident vindication of claims of civilisational superiority" was a genuinely distinctive trait of the Western civilizing missions when compared to otherwise similar activities of the non-West.

[13] According to McCrisken, American exceptionalism is driven by the idea that "inside every foreigner there is the potential, even the desire, to be an American," whether they realize it or not (McCrisken 2003, 11; Restad 2012, 62).

[14] However, Beijing's policies in Xinjiang, in Tibet, and toward Taiwan clearly have an active missionary component (although not classified as "foreign" policy by China; see Callahan 2008, 756). Also historically, China has not ruled by example only. According to Callahan "many [Chinese scholars] feel that it is the duty of patriotic Chinese to spread Chinese values, language and culture not just in Asia, but around the world" (Callahan 2008, 757).

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Imperialist Exceptionalism is characterized by a missionary foreign policy discourse and exemptionalism in questions of global politics. Imperialist exceptionalism comes with a proselytizing aim to convert and liberate others in the pursuit of an allegedly universal common good that the exceptionalist state stands for and has a particular access to. This exceptional duty in principle justifies transgressing international law and conventions binding the unexceptional rest.

Civilizational Exceptionalism stands for an exemplary foreign policy discourse combined with exemptionalism in questions of global politics. Civilizational exceptionalism, a self-understanding as the world's center and most advanced civilization, comes with a general disregard for the barbaric, underdeveloped or otherwise inferior others. The aim is to stay out of entanglements with the unexceptional rest while pursuing the perfection of one's own society. Thus, civilizational exceptionalism comprises an isolationist foreign policy.

Internationalist Exceptionalism fuses an exemplary foreign policy discourse with a nonexemptionalist approach to international rules and a general appreciation of egalitarian multilateralism as a modus operandi of world politics. The exemplary character is based on specific geographical, historical, or cultural circumstances that make the respective society an example for those situated at a lower level of political development. Internationalist exceptionalism comes with a claim for special (leadership) status, a self-confident foreign policy, and a paternalistic approach vis-à-vis the unexceptional rest.

Globalist Exceptionalism reflects a missionary foreign policy discourse with nonexemptionalism in questions of global politics and multilateralism. Here, the missionary aspect, however, is not intrusive or interventionist but goes hand in hand with respect for binding international norms. Globalist exceptionalism is characterized by moralizing in international fora and narcissism at home. Due to this type's missionary zeal, the unexceptional rest is the object of tutoring and paternalism. On the other hand, this type of exceptionalism proactively defends equal principles for all states and considers a diverse yet unified world society as a long-term goal to strive for.

Cases: Exceptionalism, Power, and Ambition

The prominence that exceptionalism enjoyed—and continues to enjoy—in US discourses (both academic and in policy practice) may suggest that exceptionalism is essentially a phenomenon exclusive to states with outstanding global power. In this reading, exceptionalism is only a symptom of de facto superiority in (material and nonmaterial) power resources: from British colonialists in the late nineteenth century to US American neoconservatives, the exercise of power politics was disguised—and legitimated—in the garb of exceptionalism. As noted above, this "conventional wisdom" has been applied to China as well.

We argue that in spite of obvious interrelations with power resources and potentials, exceptionalism is not necessarily a great or super power phenomenon per se.[15] Consider that its origins can be found in seventeenth century US history, when America was far from being a great power. On the other hand, exceptionalist foreign policy discourses have been absent in several other regionally important powers. Germany's foreign policy since reunification, for a number of reasons including historical and strategic ones, refuses to occupy any exceptional role.[16] Whenever Berlin deviated from its alliance partners (e.g., on interventions in Libya or Iraq), it

[15] From a realist perspective both US and Indian exceptionalism have been criticized as "idealist" and as constraining both countries in acting according to the principles of realpolitik (Cha 2015b, 3; Lepgold and McKeown 1995, 369; Karnad 2015, 64).

[16] In German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier's words: "Our historical experience has destroyed any belief in national exceptionalism—for any nation" (Steinmeier 2016).

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did so with great pains, constantly reiterating its otherwise "normal" role as a reliant transatlantic and European partner.

As will be illustrated below, a comparative view suggests that *ambition* to power and influence, not actual capacity, is a necessary, but not a sufficient, characteristic for exceptionalist foreign policy discourses as we conceptualize them. Ambition refers to the domestic ideas of a state's envisaged foreign policy capacities and/or its legitimate place in global politics. It corresponds to the paradox of exceptionalism: the idea of a *particular* entitlement to pursue and realize a *universal* goal. This makes the study of exceptionalism relevant for debates around a posthegemonic or "multinodal" world and explains our selection of illustrative cases below: ambition to power and influence in world affairs, rather than actual capacity.[17] By looking into the cases from the world's two most prominent "rising powers"—China and India, with greatly diverging (material and social) capabilities in power projection—we show that the persistence of exceptionalism is not unique to the United States, as claimed by Holsti and most other scholars on American exceptionalism. By covering a so-called "middle power"[18] (with great power past)—Turkey—we further expose the variety of exceptionalism across world regions. As will be seen, the variety of exceptionalisms also supports our second critique of the existing (US-centric) literature, which has focused on the confrontational features supposedly inherent to exceptionalist foreign policy discourses.[19]

Reviewing Exceptionalist Foreign Policy Discourses in the United States, China, India, and Turkey

American Exceptionalism[20]

American exceptionalism is commonly traced back to the colonial period. Historically, it refers to the puritan settler John Winthrop's pronunciation of a "city upon a hill" in 1630 and the American Revolution with the Declaration of Independence in 1776 committed to "freedom, morality and the betterment of humankind," in distinction from Europe at that time. Alexis de Tocqueville is typically taken to be the first author to use the term American exceptionalism as such in his *Democracy in America*.[21]

Two main strands of US exceptionalist thought are commonly identified: First, the exemplary strand that goes back to the "city upon a hill," and became widespread since the founding of the republic and further enhanced by Enlightenment ideals, including the rule of law, private property, representative government, freedom of speech and religion, and commercial liberty (Patman and Southgate 2016, 223). Until today, it refers to the central principles of the Declaration of Independence upheld by the Constitution. As quoted by President Obama in his second inaugural address: "We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional—what makes us American—is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their

[17] "The advantage of 'multinodal' as a term for the new era is that it points to a pattern of asymmetric international relationships shaped by economic convergence and globalization. A post-hegemonic world is not simply de-centered or multiply centered, it is re-patterned" (Womack 2014, 172).

[18] Middle powers are commonly understood as nations without the capacity and ambition to cover all or most fields of global governance but whose foreign policy nonetheless is capable of making a difference in certain fields or regions (Cooper 1997). An often-noted example is South Korea.

[19] We do not claim that the cases looked at here are the only ones falling under our conceptualization. Instead, the typology and cases stand at the beginning of future comparative research.

[20] Parts of this section build on Nymalm (2015).

[21] For a forceful critique of the common (historical) reading of US exceptionalism as a "product of US identity," rather than power, see Hughes (2015).

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Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" (The White House 2013). Second, the missionary strand that relates to the belief in a "manifest destiny," which became more influential after the 1840s and the westward expansion (McEvoy-Levy 2001, 24; Monten 2005, 129; Nayak and Malone 2009, 266; Wheeler 2003, 206). From both strands, McCrisken (2003, 8) discerns three main elements in American exceptionalism: (1) that the United States as a special nation has a special destiny, (2) that it is different from the rest of the world (historically, first and foremost from Europe), and (3) that contrary to other (great) nations the United States will not rise and fall.[22] Onuf in turn distinguishes between "liberal" and "conservative" exceptionalism, the former one envisioning "the end of history" in terms of "the ultimate Americanization of the world," whereas conservative exceptionalism insists on the United States always being different and superior to all others (Onuf 2012, 81).

Scholars on US exceptionalism in general classify it as part of American identity deeply embedded within elite and popular circles (McCrisken 2003, 2, 4, 17; Patman 2006, 965).[23] Restad even argues that "American identity is most usefully defined as American exceptionalism because the belief in American exceptionalism has been a powerful, persistent, and popular myth throughout American history, and furthermore, it has been used in formulating arguments for ever more internationalist and expanding foreign policies" (Restad 2012, 55).

Both the exemplary and missionary strands converge in the view that American political values are universal in their nature (McCrisken 2003, 5, 8). Yet, they also exhibit a tension between universality (in terms of its universal, missionary claims) and particularity (in terms of the United States being exemplary and always different) within American exceptionalism. Advocates of the exemplary strand have maintained that the United States must lead by example and have peaceful diplomatic and trade relations, but stay out of other countries' affairs. Proponents of the missionary strand, in turn, contend that the United States must actively assist others to become like them (McCrisken 2003, 11). The missionary strand includes the reasoning of the United States occasionally having to transgress prevailing norms in order to fulfill its "exceptionalist" duties. Accordingly, the "liberation" of other peoples and societies as part of a global "struggle for freedom" has been a persistent goal of US policy makers since the founding fathers. Examples from history include the wars against Mexico and Spain, as well as the forced "opening" of Japan and China in the mid-nineteenth century (Holsti 2010, 382, 385). The most cited examples of a clash between these two strands are president Woodrow Wilson's proposal for the League of Nations in 1919, its ultimate rejection by the US senate, and the continuation of the debate between "isolationists" and "internationalists" during the interwar years (McCrisken 2003, 15).[24]

Both strands in American foreign policy discourses may include a strong sense of exemptionalism. Examples range from the refusal of treaty and protocol ratifications (e.g., the Kyoto protocol, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea) to actual violations like the 2003 Iraq war (Holsti 2010, 389; Hughes 2015, 528; Bradford and Posner 2011, 4). According to Ruggie, and in line with the above cases, exemptionalist resistance is found most

[22] Nayak and Malone differentiate between American Orientalism, directed toward non-Western countries, and American exceptionalism, directed toward Western—particularly European—countries (2009). Siobhan McEvoy-Levy argues that during the Cold War American, exceptionalism was extended to include Western Europe in what he calls "Transatlantic Exceptionalism" (2001, 29).

[23] According to polling results in 2011, the belief of America being greater (38%) or greatest along some other countries (53%) was held by nine in ten US-Americans (Onuf 2012, 1). On American exceptionalism as an "informal ideology" see Robert Patman (2006, 946). Jonathan Monten speaks of liberal exceptionalism as a doctrine (2005, 116).

[24] Historians criticize the common understanding among political scientists that US foreign policy has been isolationist as inadequate and Euro-centric, as it does not take US policies on its own continent and in the southern hemisphere into account. See Restad (2012) and Hughes (2015, 541).

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forcefully in Congress (2004, 2). Yet, the Donald Trump administration, too, has adopted a pronouncedly exemptionalist line, most prominently displayed by withdrawing the United States from the Transpacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Agreement in 2017. An example for being exempt not from concrete laws or treaties but from alleged "laws of history" is the third component noted by McCrisken above, that is, the belief that the United States will not rise and fall, like other great powers.

American exceptionalism continues to play a central role in US politics (Hughes 2015, 257). President G. W. Bush frequently articulated the promotion of democracy and spread of "liberty and freedom" by the United States (Monten 2005, 112). Exceptionalism and the question whether the then sitting president Barack Obama adhered to it also featured prominently in the 2012 presidential election campaign (Patman and Southgate 2016, 231).

While US foreign policy under G. W. Bush according to our typology comes closest to the variant of *imperialist exceptionalism*, this has not always been the case. Patman and Southgate refer to US foreign policy in the early 1990s as being "based on a reasonably inclusive conception of US exceptionalism that envisaged an expanded US leadership role, albeit one through either partnership with multilateral institutions or in coalitions that enjoyed a wide measure of international support" (2016, 226). In our typology, this latter discourse comes closest to the ideal type of *internationalist exceptionalism*.

Although being constantly criticized domestically for not believing in American exceptionalism, President Barack Obama has frequently referred to the United States' "indispensable role" internationally. This happened for example when advocating policies that were partly unpopular within his own administration, such as intervening in Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2014 (Hughes 2015, 528; Jaffe 2015). However, in 2011 Obama also emphasized that "the burden of action should not be America's alone [. . .] Real leadership creates the conditions and coalitions for others to step up as well" (quoted in Patman and Southgate 2016, 230). Patman and Southgate thus analyze Obama's "refashioning of US exceptionalism" as, again, directed toward a more inclusive type of exceptionalism. By contrast, the foreign policy discourse of the Donald Trump presidency so far includes *exemptionalist* as well as nonmissionary (or isolationist) elements, as illustrated most prominently in its "America first" slogan.[25]

Chinese Exceptionalism

Like US exceptionalism, Chinese exceptionalism should not be taken as a unified body of thought expressed under this very label. Instead, it has exhibited different characteristics in different time periods. Although China and its foreign policies have commonly been understood and classified as "distinctive" by most scholars, it is only since the beginning of the last decade or so that they have been analyzed under the rubric of Chinese exceptionalism (Zhang 2011, 305–06; Ho 2014, 165).

The common denominator of Chinese exceptionalism throughout its history from ancient times to the present is a belief in Chinese supremacy and goodness (Ho 2014). Exceptionalism in imperial China was expressed through claims about China's centrality and superiority and the "benevolent and magnanimous nature of its foreign policy," reflected in concepts such as *Zhongguo* (the middle kingdom) and *Tianxia* (all under heaven) and practiced through what has been called the Chinese tributary system (Zhang 2011, 308).[26] Although not deriving from an institutionalized religion, in imperial China there was a clear sense of a country and

[25] See Beinart (2017) for a debate about whether Trump himself believes in or acts according to American exceptionalism.

[26] For a critical discussion of Zhao Tingyang's popular rearticulation of the Tianxia concept see Callahan (2008).

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its ruler being "chosen by Heaven,"[27] not unlike the US understanding of "manifest destiny" (Ho 2014, 166). After the downfall of the last dynasty (the Qing in 1911) during what is still referred to as the "century of humiliation," and the founding of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China's distinctiveness was maintained in the form of a widely shared feeling of entitlement to great power status.[28] In addition, a persisting moral authority was and continues to be derived precisely from China's "unfair treatment" by the Western powers. Meanwhile, China sees itself as sticking to its immutable principles of equality and justice (Ho 2014, 165; Zhang 2011, 309). Mao Zedong, in turn, propagated China's own way of realizing world communism in differentiation from the West, an approach termed revolutionary sinocentrism/*tianxiaism* by Zhang (2011, 310). "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" became the official ideology of the communist party since the 1980s, while the notion "with Chinese characteristics" continues to be used by policy makers in different contexts (Ho 2014, 165). Contemporary Chinese exceptionalism entails the claim of being a "different great power" from the West (Wang 2015, 51). According to this narrative, a peaceful and harmonious state China represents an alternative model of development and order in world politics. These alternatives are expressed in what is understood as "benevolent pacifism" and "harmonious inclusivism" (Alden and Large 2011, 21). Further characterizations include the terminology of a "Confucian great power" following the principle of "harmony with difference" (Nordin 2016; Zhang 2011, 311–14). In essence such claims include not being (nor historically having been) expansionist, and acting in a status-quo oriented, benevolent, and morally informed way (Wang 2015, 52). Peacefulness is understood as differentiation from the West, in particular the United States and the not so peaceful Pax Americana (Callahan 2012, 34).[29]

Chinese exceptionalism is a potentially important source of foreign policy ideas (Zhang 2011, 305) that deeply resonates with the broader public (Ho 2014, 167–68). Alden and Large (2011), in their case study on China in Africa, point out that here Chinese exceptionalism has been promoted explicitly. In line with Zhang, they characterize China's claim to being exceptional as "a claim to entitlement by virtue of China's ontological status rather than its behavioral characteristics" (Alden and Large 2011, 23 citing Stephen Levine). Legitimacy is based on claims to moral or ideological superiority, rather than on actually delivering successful policies (Ho 2014, 169). However, Alden and Large also emphasize that exceptionalism is more than mere rhetoric (see also Ho 2014, 167). China's presence in Africa shows that the claim to offer a different set of policies than the West, based on "political equality, mutual benefit, sovereignty, non-interference and win–win cooperation" actually constrains Chinese foreign policy if these ideals cannot be met. After having served as a door opener to engagement with Africa, China cannot simply drop its rhetoric of exceptionalism. As a result, conflicts between commercial interests and the moral high ground emerge (Alden and Large 2011, 23, 29, 31).

The past decade's political and academic debate on a "China model" (Bell 2015) has also exhibited different exceptionalist features, as for instance, China's policy toward developing countries (also dubbed the "Beijing Consensus"; see

[27] The common translation of the Chinese *tian* in *tianxia* as "heaven" has been criticized by Sinologists as being misleading because of the transcendental religious connotations of the Western term, which they argue is not aligned with Chinese understandings of *tian* (e.g. Hall and Ames 1998, 233). We owe this reference to Astrid Nordin.

[28] On how this may feed into Chinese nationalism see Ho (2014, 168).

[29] Callahan criticizes the attribution of Chinese exceptionalism by Chinese and non-Chinese scholars as "Sino speak" and simply new Orientalism. He argues against historically contrasting the "war mongering Westphalian Europe" with a "peace-loving imperial China," as this would rest on a narrow understanding of war as interstate war. Callahan points to numerous violent interactions along China's frontiers, for instance during the last Qing dynasty (Callahan 2008, 755). In this sense, Zhang classifies Chinese pacifist self-attributions as "a vast underestimate of the complexity of Chinese history accomplishable only through heroic reductionism and essentialism" (Zhang 2011, 318). Wang in turn claims that China has and will simply behave like a "realist great power" (Wang 2015, 71).

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Ramo 2004), it's domestic system as a mixture between socialism and capitalism that has received labels such as "authoritarian capitalism" or "illiberal capitalism" (Rachman 2008), and the interrelation of both (Halper 2010). While these labels originated in outside attributions, a China model is also occasionally promoted by Beijing under this very notion (e.g., Pan 2014). Other contemporary examples of official self-descriptions as exceptional without necessarily calling it exceptionalism can be found in Chinese discourses on its "peaceful rise" and "harmonious society" in a "harmonious world" (Callahan 2008, 758; Nordin 2016). The Confucian principle "harmony with difference" refers to the understanding of "acknowledging differences while harmonizing their relationships," which is characterized as contributing to "China's exceptionalist problem-solving approach" (Zhang 2011, 312). In this sense Zhang classifies Chinese exceptionalism as "in part a product of the ideological discourse to facilitate China's rise," but also as "an example of the use of history and culture to discursively counter structural pressures from the international system" (Zhang 2011, 317).

China's deliberate and selective employment of its history of ideas has become particularly visible in the promotion of official readings of Confucian and other ancient sources (Noesselt 2015). According to Bai (2012), Confucian philosophy not only continues to be deeply engrained in Chinese ways of thinking, it also contributes a number of arguments for defending Chinese exceptionalism in terms of its political system and foreign policy. A key element is Confucianism's purported defense of hierarchy, both domestically and externally. Hierarchy domestically—that is inequality in terms of political rights—is typically defended with reference to meritocracy's superiority over liberal democratic systems in terms of efficiency or output legitimacy. Externally, Bai defends a hierarchy of states with reference to the Confucian distinction between "barbaric" and "civilized" states (Bai 2012, 44–45). He concedes that, like Western states, China throughout its history was imperialist at times. However, in Bai's words, China "transformed people into Chinese and rendered their land Chinese not simply by killing or oppressing them, in the manner of many Western nation-states and empires, but by 'converting' them through the soft power of a purportedly superior culture" (Bai 2012, 45). Independent from its historical accuracy, this specific reading of history entails a strong sense of hierarchy based on Chinese civilization as a unique model for other peoples. Historians who have studied China's imperial past under the rubric of colonialism—in particular the Qing era (1644–1912) as one of the largest territorial expansions in seventeenth and eighteenth century world history (Di Cosmo 1998, 288; see also Hostetler 2005)—contest these kinds of "soft power" interpretations.[30] In fact, Qing colonial rule looked very different depending on the region. Whereas in the case of South China and Taiwan the local population was subject to a rather forceful "civilizing process," this was not necessarily the case in the "outer provinces," Tibet, Central Asia, and Mongolia (Di Cosmo 1998, 289, 293, 294). Perdue characterizes the different modes of rule as perpetuation of a universalist ideology in different guises (Perdue 2009, 95, 96). He also points out that the contemporary Chinese leadership struggles with controlling different historical discourses that mix China's "imperial past, its defeat by other colonial powers and its revolutionary nationalism," which all contradict each other as well as the "peaceful rise" discourse (Perdue 2009, 102, 103). Accordingly, in our typology, China is an example that not only shifted between different dominant types of exceptionalism but where they were also present simultaneously. Hence—depending on the historical period and region looked at—China in our typology comes closest to *imperialist* and/or *civilizational exceptionalism*.[31]

[30] We are grateful to one anonymous reviewer for pointing us toward this literature.

[31] See Kellog (2016) for a discussion on a potential Chinese exemptionalism regarding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on China's claims in the South China Sea in 2016.

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Indian Exceptionalism

Sometimes described as “moral exceptionalism” (Smith 2012), Indian exceptionalism in foreign policy was most forcefully expressed in the period immediately after India won its independence (1947) under Prime Minister Nehru who simultaneously acted as foreign minister. In fact, India’s diplomacy, from independence until today, is renowned for its “moral tone,” centering on the idea that India possessed a “unique capacity to offer moral leadership in world affairs” (Sullivan 2014, 640).[32]

Indians’ struggle against colonialism took up and reinforced the idea that India was a spiritually different species, a new nation in a world dominated by realpolitik. Whereas the West was culturally closer to India’s elite, socialized both by British colonial practice and academic institutions, it was nonetheless politically and morally discredited. By contrast, India’s “‘spirit of assertive nationalism,’ as it came to be defined in the context of international affairs, centered on a belief in India’s unquestioned civilizational moral pre-eminence and was felt as a sense of mission that encouraged the projection of ‘moral conduct’ into the international sphere” (Sullivan 2014, 650). In Nehru’s own words, throughout the 1920s and 30s “Congress[33] gradually developed a foreign policy which was based on the elimination of political and economic imperialism everywhere and the co-operation of free nations” (Nehru 1956, 423).

Indian nationalism at the time of independence came in three powerful variants: Gandhi’s syncretic and inclusive spirituality based on India as a territorial space; Nehru’s liberal understanding of a modern, secular Indian state “rooted in a glorious spiritual past and drawing on Vedic traditions” (Sullivan 2014, 644; Nehru 1956); and Hindu nationalism, equating India’s identity with Hinduism exclusively. For all three variants, a historical claim—that India possessed a unique source of religion and spirituality—supported a *missionary* claim that India had the capacity and obligation to provide moral leadership in world affairs. The Gandhian and Nehruvian variants incorporated a third claim for Indian superiority, a unique “capacity to synthesize different and conflicting perspectives and merge with other modes of thought and belief” (Sullivan 2014, 650).

The diversity across South Asia ensured a long intellectual tradition accustomed to integrating elements from diverse sources and explicitly treating the question of how to reconcile the particular—cultural, religious, linguistic, and political—within a universal normative framework.[34] According to Sullivan, “implicit in this discourse of synthesis and universalism was of course a sense of superiority: the idea that Indians—or a certain type of Indian—were innately predisposed to engage in the task of conflict resolution and, therefore, morally above those who were repeatedly drawn to violence” (2014, 651). Congress’s victory over imperialism, a victory relying on disciplined nonviolence and mass support, contributed to a widely shared belief in the “potency of ideas alone,” also in the foreign policy realm (Nayar and Paul 2003, 140), as did the territorial integration of more than five hundred princely states in a liberal-democratic federal polity through peaceful negotiations within the first three years of independence (Guha 2007, 35–58; Nayar and Paul 2003, 122).

Exceptionalist elements in India’s foreign policy discourse were particularly visible throughout the early post-independence years from 1946 to 1954, during which direct challenges to India’s security were more abstract than in the years prior to the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 (Nayar and Paul 2003, 116). Then, the belief in India’s diplomatic prowess—Nehru’s “zeal for diplomacy that would be difficult to overstate” (Kennedy 2012, 142)—was based in large parts on the very conviction

[32] Also see Cohen (2001), Narlikar and Narlikar (2014), Datta-Ray (2015).

[33] The Indian National Congress was a liberation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru; Congress became India’s predominant political party after independence.

[34] The most prominent representative of which is Rabindranath Tagore.

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that India was destined to play a key role in global politics regardless of its actual material power capabilities (Nayar and Paul 2003, 115).

In combining an activist foreign policy with frequent references to moral principles, Nehru translated the notion of moral exceptionalism into his foreign policy conduct. Its key principles—"India should serve as a model of principled action, shy away from using force in its international relations, and respect international law and institutions" (Smith 2012, 374)—were not only publicly defended by the prime minister himself but also widely shared across the small foreign policy-making elite. Their "belief in India's unquestioned civilisational moral pre-eminence [. . .] was felt as a sense of mission that encouraged the projection of 'moral conduct' into the international sphere" (Sullivan 2014, 650). The self-understanding of moral superiority was further reinforced by comparisons with both the Western and Eastern camp in the early Cold War period. In Indian eyes, the adoption of ruthless power politics by both camps stood in marked contrast to India's nonalignment policy. Nehruvian critiques of balance of power politics, a key theme of India's foreign policy, have been informed and legitimized at least partly by India's moral exceptionalism in foreign affairs. Today's doctrine of "strategic autonomy"—the principled rejection of binding alliances—stems from this body of thought.

Despite its insistence on autonomy, independent India invested heavily in crafting ties across the postcolonial world. New Delhi provided substantial support in establishing the UN and drafting the Universal Declaration. According to Bhagavan, Nehru's India sought a "post-sovereign nation state" in "a world of states governed by the meta-sovereign institution of the UN" (2010, 313). Nehru refused an American offer for a permanent seat in the UNSC, arguing that China merited the seat, and publicly supported communist China's international recognition as part of his wider agenda of giving voice to the Asian and African countries (Khosla 2014, 311). The idea of "morally-derived self-restraint" (Sullivan 2014, 652) also featured prominently in India's nuclear weapons policies. Throughout nonproliferation negotiations in the 1960, for instance, "India emphasised its technical capacity to engage in nuclear weapons proliferation alongside its moral decision to refrain from doing so" (Sullivan 2014, 653).[35]

Nehru regularly pushed issues such as decolonization, racial equality, and opposition to white settler regimes in Southern Africa; aid for development; and a restructuring of the UN to give Asia and Africa a greater say onto the international agenda—all issues close to India's own colonial and developmental experience (Nayar and Paul 2003, 136). However, missionary elements in his foreign policy discourse were particularly visible in his vocal campaign for nonalignment, both domestically and internationally, which sought to include as many postcolonial states as possible—at the cost of complicating New Delhi's relations with Washington for years (Kennedy 2015, 101).[36] Just like noninterference did not imply passivity, nonalignment implied neither neutrality nor isolation; instead, India under Nehru pursued an activist foreign policy that "sought to bring to world affairs what it thought was a distinctive voice and approach from a newly emergent Asia" (Nayar and Paul 2003, 135). For instance, in 1950, India refused to sign the Treaty of Peace with Japan in San Francisco—despite the fact that it had been accepted by Japan itself—on the ground that it did not honor Japan's sovereignty and independence sufficiently.[37] India's exceptionalist foreign policy discourse of the Nehru era thus combines a missionary intention with an nonexemptionalist approach to

[35] Although the refusal to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty in 1967 carries a sense of exemptionalism, discourses legitimating India's stance typically include calls for a different nonproliferation regime, rather than an exemption only for India (Sullivan 2012).

[36] India's contribution to the establishment of and subsequent leadership in the Nonalignment Movement illustrates the missionary component of Nehru's foreign policy further.

[37] India negotiated a separate peace treaty signed in 1952 (Sato 2005).

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global rules and norms that is characteristic of and comes closest to what we term *globalist exceptionalism.*

The low salience of foreign policy in electoral contests means that there is little incentive for fundamental change. For instance, even though Narendra Modi as prime minister surprised observers with his diplomatic activism,[38] foreign policy played close to no role in his election and his party program offered very few details. Particularistic narratives—"moral exceptionalism"—flourish in settings such as this one. In fact, official foreign policy speeches throughout the 2000s continued to include claims for an "ethical exceptionalism" (Hansel and Möller 2015, 85). The most prominent foreign policy manifesto in recent years, published by a group of well-connected intellectuals, takes up the idea: "All of India's great leaders—Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar—had one aspiration: that India should be a site for an alternative universality. India's legitimacy today will come from its ability to stand for the highest human and universal values" (Khilnani et al. 2012, 69; also see Tharoor 2012, 428). The current prime minister, Narendra Modi, frequently claims the role of "vishwaguru"—or world teacher—for India (Mohan 2015, 177).

Despite the continuities in foreign policy thought, recent developments may have reduced the salience of exceptionalist discourses in India. Indo-US rapprochement since the late 1990s has gradually undermined an orthodox understanding of nonalliance and strategic autonomy. For instance, US calls for India to play a greater role alongside the US Navy in maritime security have been met with sympathy by Indian strategic circles (Singh 2015). Today the Indian Navy exercises with the United States, Japan, and other regional navies fearful of Chinese expansionism. In this regard, great or rising power status—including an apprehension for related responsibilities—seems to limit, rather than foster, exceptionalist notions in Indian strategic thought.

Turkish Exceptionalism[39]

Claims for Turkish exceptionalism both academically and in the official discourse are commonly based on a unique relation between Islam and the state that had evolved throughout the Ottoman Empire, survived the foundation of the Republic (1923), and reemerged vigorously with the ascendance of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) government under Tayyip Erdoğan in the early 2000s. Besides the Turkish polity's specific institutional relationship between the state and Islam, termed *laiklik* after the French term *laïcisme* (Davison 2003), Turkish exceptionalism typically refers to two other related elements: first, Turkey's Ottoman past and, second, its geographical location between Europe and Asia.

According to Mardin the "specifics of Turkish history have endowed the Ottomans and the Turkish Republic with characteristics that have worked cumulatively to create a special setting for Islam, a setting where secularism and Islam interpenetrate" (2005, 148). Influential modernist Turkish poets of the early Republic promoted a "renewalist Islam" that blurred the distinction between secular nationalism and Islam, and therefore was attractive for "a new generation raised in the Republican nationalist tradition" (Mardin 2005, 155). Contrary to conventional and many official representations of Turkish history as a struggle between secularism, modernism, and nationalism, on the one hand, and Islam, tradition, and Sultanism, on the other, Mardin traces the evolution of a distinctively Turkish third force which has greatly influenced Erdoğan's governing AKP today. Represented

[38] Modi combines frequent references to Hindu thought with economic pragmatism. He not only recycles Hindu nationalists' claim for status and India's exceptional role in world politics but also refers to Gandhi and his unique moral leadership frequently (Datta-Ray 2015).

[39] Besides the quoted literature, this section is indebted to an ISA conference paper presented at the Annual Convention in Atlanta 2016 by Emel Parlal Dal and Ali Murat Kurşun entitled "Reassessing Turkey's Multi-Exceptionalism(s) in the 21st century: A four-layered analysis of patterns and types".

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by, for instance, former prime minister Necmettin Erbakan, this third force neither regarded the (secular) state as an enemy per se nor did it embrace radical Islamism (Mardin 2005, 158). Instead, Erbakan and others underlined Islamic values and authenticity, on the one hand, and the "national interest" including an appreciation of the state's means for action, on the other.

This sense of historical exceptionalism is linked to what some scholars termed Turkey's "geographic exceptionalism."[40] Turkish policy-makers have promoted Turkey as a mediator between East and West as well as between Islam and Christian civilizations, particularly so after 9/11. The mediator role has commonly been formulated with reference to Turkey's "hybridity" in both its geography and its (political) history: Turkey's location between Europe and Asia is the fundament of portraying Turkey as a meeting place of differing cultures and regions—as a "bridge" between civilizations.[41] Evoking Istanbul's unique locality also reminds internal and external audiences of the Ottoman past and its imperial grandeur and multicultural heritage under a "pax-Ottomana." Such references expose what Yanık called a "yearning for a hybrid past," under the label "neo-Ottomanism," which emerged in the early 1990s and increased in the 2000s (Yanık 2011, 84–85).

A particular reading of history influenced a renewed exceptionalism in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government, which in turn was fueled by a widespread self-understanding as a country in transition from middle to great power (Yanik 2011, 80). Most prominently, former foreign and prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu equated Ottoman conquests with "Ottoman globalization" and declared the Ottoman Empire a unique source of multiculturalism. In his view, the turn of the century marked a crisis of *Western* civilization (rather than Islam). Whereas "the Chinese and Indian civilizations could never become global," core attributes of the Ottoman Empire had become particularly suitable for politics in a globalizing world (Davutoğlu quoted in Yanık 2011, 86). Less triumphalist, President Abdullah Gül (2007–14) habitually referred to Turkey as an "inspiration" for Middle Eastern countries.[42] In this sense, "hybrid constructions of geography and history not only pave the way for 'exceptionalism.' Such representations also turn exceptionalism into a strategy of resistance and paradoxically, a claim of superiority against the 'West' as part of the quest to become part of the West" (Yanik 2011, 83). Accordingly, when being tasked with forming a new government in November 2015, Davutoğlu (then as prime minister and head of the AKP) described one of its tasks at a press conference as "to make a new Turkey which surpasses the level of contemporary civilization."[43]

All three elements of Turkish exceptionalism—geographic, historical, and the relationship between the state and Islam—feed into an understanding of Turkey as an exemplary, model—or "inspirational"—state to other Muslim and developing countries under current conditions of globalization, religious conflict, and the rise of "new" powers. A supposedly Turkish inclination to peaceful mediation between multiple ethnicities and religions, based on the "pax-Ottomana" metaphor, has been repeatedly quoted by Turkish leaders as a model for the pacification of internal and external conflicts in neighboring states (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015, 313–14). Likewise, as the only competitive party system in the former Ottoman lands (Angrist 2004), the Turkish polity represented a model to others. The Turkish path

[40] For the important role accrued to geography in Turkish post–Cold War security ("geographic determinism") discourses, see Bilgin (2005, 185–87).

[41] For instance, then president Abdullah Gül in interviews with the *Guardian* (2008) and the *Telegraph* (2011).

[42] For instance in the *Guardian* (2008). We owe this and several other specifications in this section to an anonymous reviewer.

[43] "Turkish PM Davutoğlu forms 64th government of Turkey." *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 24, 2015. Accessed September 13, 2016. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-davutoglu-forms-64th-government-of turkey.aspx?PageID=238&NID=91592&NewsCatID=338.

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toward modernity coupled with recent economic successes provided further elements for the official portrayal of Turkey as an exemplary—and exceptional—state.

Exceptionalist elements have been particularly prominent in Davutoğlu's statements as foreign minister but also informed the broader AKP government's discourse around Turkey's quest for a new role in international politics since its first victory in parliamentary elections in 2002. For instance, in their qualitative content analysis of Erdoğan's speeches as prime minister, Benhaïm and Öktem find that "it is the overarching importance of the Ottoman Empire and the role of civilization (read religion) that makes for Turkey's 'unique' place in the world" (2015, 18). By reiterating Turkey's own standing, not as a Western but as a Turkic *and* Islamic nation with an important role to play as model to other countries, Davutoğlu and others precipitated Ankara's reorientation toward the Middle East as well as attempts to strengthen ties with African countries.[44] Although put in doubt given the more recent developments in Turkish politics, traditional Turkish insistence on inclusive multilateralism and mediation as modus operandi in global affairs, together with the belief in its exemplary role to other nations, suggests that important segments of the AKP's pre-2016 understanding of Turkish exceptionalism comes closest to our ideal type of *internationalist exceptionalism*.

Indeed, 2016 can be regarded as a turning point in Turkish foreign policy discourses. With the limitations to Turkish regional power ambitions already apparent, Prime Minister Davutoğlu's dismissal in May that year and the attempted coup in July precipitated a "more "transactional," unplanned, ad hoc type of foreign policy" (Dalacoura 2017, 2).[45] This entails a markedly more anti-Western discourse and less reliance on Turkey's civilizational heritage as a mediator between East and West, which was most visibly illustrated in the Turkish government's tacit approval of allegations of US involvement in the attempted military coup itself (Arango and Yenginsu 2016). Populist nationalism, it seems, has replaced exceptionalist elements in Turkey's foreign policy discourse.

Comparative Exceptionalism: Types and Sources

Exceptionalism in foreign policy is and always has been more common than a reading of the most prominent case, US exceptionalism, suggests. Based on a comparative view—that is so far missing from the literature—on exceptionalist foreign policy discourses in China, India, Turkey, and the United States, we argue that exceptionalism necessarily entails the conviction of superiority in moral (or spiritual) terms, taken to be impossible to replicate by other states. Typically, this conviction is conveyed in discourses expressed primarily in a domestic context, not directed toward international audiences. As such, exceptionalist discourses are part of a society's debates around its identity as a nation. The conviction of moral superiority may then feed into several kinds of exceptionalism, which for heuristic purposes we tentatively distinguish as four ideal types inspired by the four cases laid out above. The ideal types differ with regard to denoting either an exemplary or a missionary approach to world politics. Moreover, types of exceptionalism differ with regard to being either exemptionalist or nonexemptionalist. The fluidity of domestic foreign policy discourses and their interrelation with reformulations of national identity in a changing international context means that distinct exceptionalist discourses are not static. Figure 1 illustrates the changing nature of exceptionalist discourses from our four cases along the two axes developed in our typology.

[44] See, for instance, Davutoğlu (2012). Other AKP politicians, such as Abduallah Gül, continued to locate Turkey as part of Europe (*Telegraph* 2008).

[45] Also see a quantitative analysis of the "rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse" throughout the AKP years prior to Davutoğlu's departure from government (Benhaïm and Öktem 2015).

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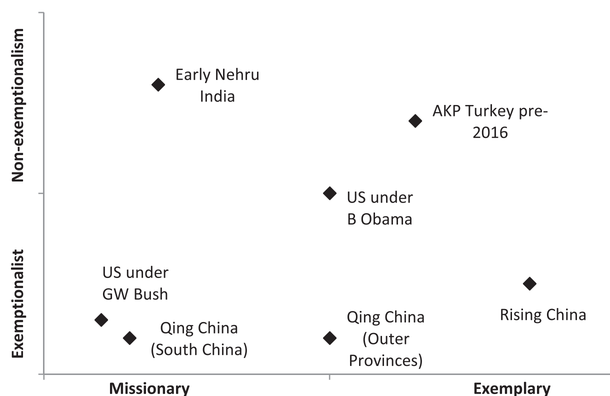

Figure 1. Exceptionalist discourses (authors' compilation)

As argued above, distinct exceptionalist foreign policy discourses can be located on two continuums. First, an exceptionalist discourse that is dominant within a specific episode recognizes the binding character of international agreements to a certain degree, that is somewhere between the extremes of nonexemptionalism and absolute exemptionalism (vertical axis). Second, a dominant discourse expresses a missionary or an exemplary understanding of exceptionalism (horizontal axis); again, specific discourses may exhibit both traits to varying degrees. The complexity of exceptionalism as foreign policy discourse is illustrated by two US and three Chinese discourses depicted in Figure 1: Competing variants of exceptionalism may be prevalent at one and the same time (here Qing China in different regions); moreover, the same country may exhibit differing types of exceptionalism at different points in history (here the United States and China).

Future comparative research on exceptionalism should find answers to two sets of questions on two levels of analysis. First and domestically, we should learn more about the sources and precise manifestations of exceptionalist discourses from different and so far unexposed cases beyond the United States. Is there a common cause for exceptionalist elements in foreign policy? In how far are distinct types of exceptionalisms linked to distinct distributions of material and social power? The enhanced visibility of and attention paid to "rising powers" in world politics makes this question particularly relevant. Linked to the distribution of material or other sources of power is the question, under what conditions do proponents of exceptionalism select from and employ history as a source and legitimator of foreign policy behavior (and what are the prospects of such a choice)?

A second set of questions concerns the evolution of global politics in an age of "multi-nodality." Does the new imminence or enhanced visibility of exceptionalisms in world politics—if found to be accurate—pose a hindrance to closer and more peaceful cooperation between respective states?[46] What type of exceptionalism favors cooperation over competition, and under what circumstances can the potentially offensive traits of exceptionalism (exemptionalism in particular) be balanced by its nonconfrontational features?

Regarding the first set of questions, can we discern why some countries adopt exceptionalist discourses and others do not? Although a generalizable answer to that question would call for a comparative treatment of exceptionalist and nonex-

[46] Consider Tanvi Madan's characterization of current US-India relations as a "phenomenon that one might call India-US exceptionalism: each of the countries involved not just thinks that it is exceptional, but that the other should make exceptions for it. Each also expects more from the other than perhaps any other of its allies or partners and expects that, as a fellow democracy, the other should understand its constraints. Each also seems to believe that the other does not understand its exceptionalism, leading to doubt and disappointment" (Madan 2014).

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ceptionalist cases, and the purpose of this article lies elsewhere, we may infer three common traits found in all of the four cases. First, our presupposition that only those countries with the *ambition* to play a major role in international politics are likely to adopt exceptionalist discourses seems convincing. India in the early Nehru years exemplifies the mismatch between ambition and material power capacities, as does the United States in its early settlement period. In the Indian case, in fact, Nehru explicitly justified his missionary foreign policy activism with India's destiny as a major power.

Second, references to the respective country's unique civilizational heritage, and, indeed, its self-understanding as a civilization rather than a mere nation state, emerged as another trait shared across three of our four cases. In Turkey, for instance, references to the Ottoman past typically included a romanticized version of Turkish civilization beyond today's state boundaries. Such references became increasingly frequent after 9/11 and often included the claim that Turkey was particularly suited for mediating in Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*.[47] The civilizational aspect is also very present in the Chinese case, not least in the notion of *Tianxia*. By contrast, civilizational aspects are less prominent in US discourses. This may be a little surprising, as the very genesis of American exceptionalism relied to a considerable degree on America's difference from and superiority over (feudal) Europe. References to a common civilizational heritage in American exceptionalism tend to be confined to the values of the Enlightenment and, hence, to civic rather than culturalistic arguments as in the Chinese, Indian, and Turkish cases.

Finally, all four cases exhibit a certain self-centeredness that seems to be characteristic for relatively large countries. China, India, and the United States are the world's three most populous countries; Turkey with its seventy-nine million inhabitants is still among the world's top twenty and by far the most populous country within its immediate neighborhood. In his treatment of the Chinese strategic community, Edward Luttwak, for instance, claims what he calls a "great state autism" (2013, 13–23). Relatively resilient regarding the (foreign and domestic) activities of other states and preoccupied with domestic developments themselves, political leaders in states such as China or the United States are less inclined to consider foreign intelligence in detail (except in times of crisis) and tend to interpret international politics in categories derived from their own respective national history.[48] Presumably, the low salience of foreign policy in India's domestic discourse mentioned above is at least in part thanks to the country's continental size. Relatively marginal media treatments of foreign countries and relations, in turn, facilitate the universalization of the particular in all four cases.

In addition to these common traits, our comparative perspective exposes the variety of sources for exceptionalist discourses—from geography (Turkey), to multiethnicity (India, Turkey), spiritual heritage (India, China, the United States), imperial past (China, Turkey), and political history or state formation (India, the United States). From the above, can we infer anything regarding the factors contributing to one or the other variant of exceptionalism? Again, the cases in this article are merely illustrative and may therefore suggest rather than confirm what factors best explain variation in exceptionalisms. Yet, the prominence explicitly assigned to multiethnicity in Indian and Turkish foreign policy discourses suggests that it supports mediating, nonexemptional forms of exceptionalism. Recognizing diversity as an integral aspect of a nation's exceptionalism allows for greater complexity in terms of normative principles, and it shifts the attention toward mediating processes and institutions. Intense debates around the eventual incorporation of legal pluralism within a federal polity in newly independent India's constitution exposed a pronounced sensitivity toward religious, linguistic, and cultural

[47] We owe this thought to an anonymous reviewer.

[48] See Womack on large states' "tendency toward inattention" (2015, 204).

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differences. Arguably, Indian exceptionalism's reference to Indians' unique capacity to synthesize religious and cultural differences fed into Nehru's ambition to mediate in international conflicts as well as his support for both the UN and developing countries' voices within it. Likewise, in Turkish discourses, a Turkish capacity and responsibility to mediate in Middle Eastern conflicts was derived from an image of the Ottoman Empire as a multicultural and multireligious political entity.

By contrast, representing an ancient civilization, spiritual heritage, and/or history as an imperial or great power seems to involve more ambiguous factors, especially when it comes to our second set of questions, the "effects" of the different types of exceptionalism. Whereas all factors mentioned above contribute to the universalization of the particular, the essence of exceptionalism, they may feed into both missionary and exemplary as well as exemptionalist and nonexemptionalist foreign policy discourses. This can be most prominently seen in the "missionary" and "exemplary" strands of American exceptionalism and the debates around "isolationism" and "internationalism" that continue until the present day. Furthermore, quotes from Bai above exemplify how a "benign" (and historically inaccurate) interpretation of Chinese imperial history, in combination with its supposedly superior civilization, turns into a discourse sustaining an exemplary but exemptionalist approach to foreign relations. By contrast, Davutoğlu and his disciples idealized Turkey's Ottoman heritage and may have overplayed its contemporary attraction, yet references to the "Pax Ottomana" suggest a decidedly benign and mediating form of exceptionalism making exemptionalism unlikely. Similarly, whereas references to India's pride in its ancient, multiethnic civilization fueled a missionary approach to international relations under Nehru, they also helped in portraying India as a defender of equal rights and thus contributed to a nonexemptionalist foreign policy discourse.

References to the relatively more recent nation state in US and Indian discourses also exhibit ambivalence in terms of their justification of distinctive types of exceptionalism. A long tradition of foreign policy thought in the United States interprets its independence and state formation as a victory of Enlightenment values in the United States over (European) feudalism and imperialism; yet, discourses underlining the uniqueness of America's founding and its special mission as "chosen by God" frequently contributed to a decisively exemptionalist foreign policy discourse, as vividly displayed under G. W. Bush. However, exemptionalism played a much lesser role throughout the Obama years. Again as exemplified in his second inaugural address, he emphasized that "our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity," which is why the United States responds to "the threat of climate change" and "America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe" (The White House 2013). In India, the establishment of a nation state against all odds and across a widely diverse territory, again, contributed to Nehru's missionary and nonexemptionalist foreign policy activism and discourse. On the other hand, Indian foreign policy after Nehru tended to downplay missionary elements in favor of a more exemplary approach—as illustrated in India's characteristically fervent opposition to democracy-promotion abroad.

Finally, we maintain that exceptionalism per se is neither a mere product of growing material and social power capabilities, nor is it linked to an absolute threshold of power in world affairs. Exceptionalism itself is not a new phenomenon in "rising states." Against the backdrop of long histories of exceptionalist discourses in China, India, and Turkey, actual rising power status (and status seeking) may in some cases contribute to their revival. Arguably, the consciousness of enhanced power capabilities in twenty-first century China, the United States under GW Bush, and pre-2016 Turkey intensified exceptionalist foreign policy discourses. However, external attributions of status in global politics may also effectively *undermine* exceptionalist elements in foreign policy discourses. In India, a growing understanding of international interdependence on behalf of the foreign-policy-making elite has made

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exceptionalist elements, such as an orthodox understanding of nonalignment, more difficult to uphold. Adopting a position in global politics that is more in line with India's ambitious aspirations has made New Delhi more susceptible to accepting the unexceptional nature of this position. Thus, exceptionalism draws on a history of discourses with origins in times in which great power status was merely aspirational, rather than real. Ostensibly, enhanced material and social power may then work both ways: by intensifying and undermining exceptionalist foreign policy discourses.

However, at least when looking at more contemporary developments, a relative superiority in the capacity to project material and social power *globally* seems to coincide with exemptionalist forms of exceptionalism, in both the missionary and exemplary combination. Exemptionalist and exemplary discourse ("civilizational exceptionalism") has become prominent in Chinese foreign policy in the wake of what is characterized as China's rise to global power status, second only to the United States. "Imperialist exceptionalism" was a major component of foreign policy discourses throughout the G. W. Bush years and is considered today as the epilogue to the "unipolar moment" of the 1990s (cf. Wohlforth 1999). In contrast, Nehru's nonexemptionalist foreign policy activism may have overestimated the power of diplomacy but was keenly aware of India's limitations in terms of economic development and military capabilities. And despite Turkey's economic boom, growing diplomatic outreach, and political attraction in the AKP years before 2016, Ankara's understanding of its relative position vis-à-vis global powers such as the United States and China remained largely unchanged. For instance, since 2013, Turkey is a member of the MIKTA, a consultative forum also including the (partially self-declared) middle-powers Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Australia.

Conclusion and Outlook

Our findings expose that exceptionalism is neither exclusive to the United States nor is it necessarily confrontational, exemptionalist, or a natural feature of great or rising powers, as suggested by the prevalent IR literature on US (and partly Chinese) exceptionalism. Whether (historically) justified or not, discourses in China, India, and Turkey tend to underline their respective exceptionalist foreign policies' mediating characteristics. When compared to states without exceptionalist foreign policy discourses, nonexemptionalist types of exceptionalism are potentially making international negotiations more cumbersome. Nevertheless, they are peaceful in character. Nonexemptionalist types of exceptionalism's reference to general moral sentiments, from peace to equality and dialogue, may in fact contribute to greater cooperation in those fields of global governance desperately in need of common solutions. By contrast, imperialist exceptionalism, with its missionary and exemptionalist traits, is the most conflict prone combination—but it seems by no means to be the most prevalent form of exceptionalism. Even exemptionalist types in their exemplary form of civilizational exceptionalism are not necessarily confrontational. On the contrary, they may stand for an isolationist foreign policy, which however also inhibits cooperation.

In future research, our distinction between imperialist, civilizational, internationalist, and globalist exceptionalism will be instrumental for a more detailed comparative analysis of exceptionalisms in foreign policy than provided in this article.[49] Such analyses ought to pay attention to the historical dimension in two ways. First, different types of exceptionalism may be prevalent in a given country at the same time, and throughout different phases of its history. Our typology will be helpful in categorizing, comparing, and visualizing the varieties of exceptionalisms across time

[49] Given our interest in aspiring powers and varieties of exceptionalism more cases from other world regions would be desirable. South Africa, Ethiopia, or Brazil come to mind.

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and world regions. A closer inspection of exceptionalist discourses must also shed more light on the important question as to under what circumstances what type of exceptionalism possibly emerges. In other words, does exceptionalism—no matter how nonexemptionalist it is at one point in time—necessarily come along with a tendency toward exemptionalism and, thus, the conflict prone characteristics of the imperialist type? How resilient are benign forms of exceptionalism? Second, all exceptionalist foreign policy discourses rely on particular readings of (national) history. Clearly, the interpretation of history remains a key ingredient of foreign policy discourses across the world and, particularly so, within "rising" or "aspiring" powers. The structural differences and commonalities in the politicization of history through foreign policy discourses can only be revealed through a comparative enquiry, thus—also here—exposing the universal within the particular.

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