

# **International Law and Political Concepts in Early Twentieth Century Tibet and Mongolia**

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## **Abstracts**

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### **Hosting the Sovereign: Bataille, Excess, and Mongolia's Double Independence from the Qing and Tibet (1904–1913)**

This paper reframes Mongolia's 1911 independence by foregrounding Georges Bataille's notion of sovereignty as *dépense* (expenditure/excess) alongside a Mongolian political ontology of hosting (*ejen yos*). I argue that separation from the Qing and from Tibetan clerical authority emerged not from ontological difference but from the breakdown of prior intimacy: the Manchu and the Tibetan hierarchies each sought to convert a historically proximate alliance into an absolute, universal sovereignty. The Dalai Lama's 1904–1906 sojourn in Outer Mongolia exposed both dynamics: Qing abandonment of the old Inner Asian compact and a Tibetan bid to subordinate Mongolian religious and economic life within a Lhasa-centred order. The Jebtsundamba Khutuktu's much-maligned "jealousy" is reinterpreted here as a performance of hosting sovereignty—the right to regulate, seat, provision, and, if necessary, expel the guest—made visible in disputes over protocol, seating, and welcome in Urga.

The second strand tracks Bataillean sovereignty through the economy of offerings, pilgrimage, and debt that followed the Dalai Lama's visit—an extraction of surplus that impoverished Mongol princes and banners, revealing sovereignty as the capacity to organize (and enjoy) collective expenditure. This "sovereignty of excess" collided with Mongolian claims to host and to protect local resources, catalysing a religious-political disentanglement consummated in the mutual recognition of heads of state in the 1913 Mongolian-Tibetan Treaty.

Dakpa Kunga, Sarah College, Norbulingka Institute, Dharamsala

### **The recreation of the Manchu imperial style nation-state model proposed by Qing court minister Fiyanggū in 1902**

In the early twentieth century, the Qing Empire—once the preeminent power in Asia—was entering a period of profound crisis and disintegration. Amid these challenges, a number of educated Manchu and Mongol loyalists and concerned members of the broader populace, engaged in vigorous debate over potential strategies to preserve the Empire. Among these figures was the Qing court minister Fiyanggū (1856–1915). Although not a prominent statesman and largely neglected in modern Qing scholarship, Fiyanggū composed a remarkable work in the Manchu language that remains little known today. In this work, he records his

deliberations with fellow officials and articulates his own vision for the empire's renewal. Fiyanggū proposed a fundamental restructuring of the Qing polity along the lines of the modern nation-state model, which he regarded as essential for accommodating political reform and embracing modernity. This paper introduces the content of Fiyanggū's manuscript and situates his thought within the broader intellectual and political transformations of the late Qing period.

Batsaikhan Ookhnoi, Institute of International studies, Mongolian Academy of Sciences

### **Restoration of Mongolian Statehood in 1911 and Buddhism: The 8th Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu**

On 29 December 1911, Mongolia declared its independence from the Qing (Manchu) Empire and enthroned the 8th Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu as *Bogd Khaan*, thereby restoring Mongolian statehood. This paper examines the origins, dynamics, and outcomes of Mongolia's 1911 National Revolution, with a particular focus on the political and spiritual role of the Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu in imagining and legitimizing the Mongolian state. Drawing upon archival sources from Mongolia, Russia, Japan, and other countries, as well as the memoirs and reports of contemporaries such as Magsar the Witty, L. Dendev, and G. Navaantseren, the study situates the Bogd's leadership within the broader geopolitical context of early twentieth-century Inner Asia.

By exploring how the Bogd Khaan's Buddhist authority intersected with emergent concepts of sovereignty and nationhood, the paper contributes to understanding how religious charisma and international law interacted in the political reconfiguration of the region. The restoration of Mongolian statehood in 1911 not only marked a crucial transition from imperial subjecthood to national self-determination but also reflected competing visions of order pursued by neighboring powers Russia, China, and Japan.

Despite his pivotal role, the 8th Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu was long marginalized in modern historiography, particularly during the socialist period, when he was portrayed as a "yellow feudal" and reactionary figure. Yet contemporary observers, such as the Russian Consul General Liuba, recognized his decisive leadership, noting in January 1912 that "the history of Mongolia will underline, with gratitude, the brave and resolute initiative of the eighth Bogd Gegeen." Revisiting his contribution thus not only restores historical balance but also illuminates the complex entanglement of religion, politics, and international law in the reimagining of Mongolian sovereignty.

This paper builds on the author's earlier monograph *The Last Emperor of Mongolia: The 8th Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu: Life and Legends* (2008 [2011, 2014]) and offers new reflections on the interplay between Buddhist kingship and modern statehood in early twentieth-century Mongolia.

Scott Relyea, Appalachian State University, Boone

### **A Political History for Tibet: Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa and the Dalai Lama's 1913 Proclamation**

In the course of writing *Tibet: A Political History*, Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa drew on an extensive collection of government documents and other sources previously unavailable to global researchers of Tibet, its history and society. Perhaps most notable among these was a

proclamation issued by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in February 1913, which Shakabpa identifies as a formal declaration of independence. Celebrated annually only since 2013 by Students for a Free Tibet, this proclamation was unknown until its publication in his 1967 book—whether among British, Chinese or officials from other countries at the time or among Tibetans since. Witnessing India’s path toward independence from British rule, a spirit Shakabpa perceived during a rally at Bombay’s Chowpatty Beach in 1946, may have informed his vision of independence. But perhaps more formative was his interaction with the United States Embassy in India in 1950-51 as he attempted negotiations with representatives of the People’s Republic of China, and especially his experience observing the United Nations General Assembly debate on ‘The Question of Tibet’ in 1959. Coupled with the sweep of decolonisation and the burgeoning independence of peoples across the globe, especially in Asia, from the time Shakabpa began writing in Tibetan in 1951 through his expanded manuscript’s final English revisions in 1965, these experiences together perhaps inspired his late decision to highlight the proclamation. This paper seeks to explore the meaning and significance of Shakabpa explicitly identifying this proclamation as a declaration of independence, as well as situate his decision in the geopolitical context surrounding the writing and revision of his manuscript, and its ultimate publication by Yale University Press.

Ugyan Choedup, Yale University, New Haven

### **Mi Rigs: The Early Emergence of Tibetan Nationalist Vocabulary**

*Mi rigs*, now the standard Tibetan translation of the modern English term nation and the Chinese *minzu*, first emerged in the Tibetan-speaking world during the early 20th century as Tibetans encountered modern Western ideas, institutions, and practices through various imperial circuits. Soon recognizing that the new international order—shaped by ideas of international law—was a “world of nation-states,” where, as Benedict Anderson observes, “even the surviving imperial powers came dressed in national costume,” Tibetan elites gradually adopted its language. Over time, what may have begun as a tactical adoption evolved into an epistemic framework that reshaped how Tibetans understood themselves and the world around them. Today, the term *mi rigs* is central to Tibetan nationalist discourse, shaping their views of the past, present, and future. Yet, despite its centrality, scholarship on the history of *mi rigs* remains largely unexplored, with almost no dedicated studies apart from a brief discussion in a single source.

This paper addresses that gap by offering a concise history of the term. It explores *mi rigs* in its pre-modern context and highlights the significant discursive shift it underwent during the early 20th century. The paper traces its modern emergence to bilingual diaspora Tibetans in British India and late Qing China, where nationalist discourse was already well-established. Finally, it aims to offer tentative explanations for why, despite its early introduction, *mi rigs*—like other neologisms—remained relatively marginal in the Tibetan imagination until the 1950s.

Zumber Orluud, Institute of International Culture, Showa Women’s University, Tokyo

### **Mongolian Independence and International Law, 1911–1914**

The outbreak of the 1911 Chinese Revolution created the opportunity for the Khalkha Mongols and nationalist Inner Mongols to declare independence and establish the Bogd Khan Regime. This regime had a clear awareness of international law and consciously

referenced it in its diplomatic activities. Notably, the Mongols translated the Chinese version of Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* (*Wanguo gongfa*) under the title of *Tümen ulus-un yerüde-yin čaγaĵa* (*TUYČ*), and referenced it in their negotiations with Imperial Russia between 1912 and 1914.

This paper investigates the translation and application of *TUYČ* by the Mongols during 1911–1914, arguing that *TUYČ* was an important source for the Mongols in their efforts to gain international recognition as an independent state. Firstly, it analyzes the Mongolian terminology of *TUYČ* by comparing it with the 18th century Manchu Pentaglot Dictionary (*Wuti qingwen jian*) and Khaisan's 1917 Chinese-Mongolian Dictionary (*Mongyul kitad bičig-iyer qabsuruysan tabun jüg-ün aquu ayalu bičig*). Secondly, it examines the application of *TUYČ* by comparing its expressions with those found in the official documents of the Bogd Khaan Regime. Finally, it explores the connections between *TUYČ*, Tsyben Zhamtsarano's *Ulus-un erke* (*Power of the State*) and the Mongolian establishment of a bicameral advisory parliament in 1914.

Darig Thokmay, MIASU, Cambridge University, UK

### **From Priest–Patron to Nation-State: Shifts in Tibetan Political Language**

The Tibetan political concepts of the dual system and the priest–patron framework remained central to the Ganden Phodrang for centuries. However, the actual balance of power within these frameworks, from time to time, diverged from the ideals they were meant to embody. To examine this dynamic and its gradual transformation, this paper undertakes a comparative analysis of two significant proclamations: the decree issued by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the fifth month of 1679 appointing Desi Sangye Gyatso as the regent of the Ganden Phodrang, and the public declaration made by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in the first month of 1913—commonly known as the Declaration of Independence—aimed at regulating the overall governance of the Ganden Phodrang. This paper demonstrates that although the overall political framework remained consistent, the language and intended audience of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's decree gradually diverged from those of the Fifth Dalai Lama's decree. This shift occurred under the influence of the Eurocentric concept of the nation-state, which was introduced to Inner Asia by colonial powers.

Bianca Horlemann, independent researcher

### **The Gansu Mission to Lhasa in 1919/20 and how Tibetan Independence is Reflected by the Language Used in Contemporary Sources Dealing with or Stemming from This Mission**

In 1919, the Chinese and British governments started a new initiative to finally solve the Tibet Question and to conclude the Simla Convention of 1914 which China had initialled but not signed. However, the Chinese government wanted to test the ground in Lhasa before it continued negotiations with the British, and to this end, a peace talk delegation was sent from Gansu to Lhasa to confer an invitation for direct talks in Beijing.

The delegation consisted of four special envoys, namely two Chinese and two Tibetans from Gansu Province. Li Zhonglian 李仲莲 (n.d.) was counsellor to the Gansu military governor in Lanzhou, but Zhu Xiu 朱繡 (1877/84–1928), the Gelukpa reincarnation Lab Skyabs dkon rin

po che and the Rnying ma pa hierarch, the Third Dgu rong tshang, were all close to Xining's warlord Ma Qi.

On the surface, the delegation returned after three and a half months in Lhasa without any tangible results apart from some goodwill demonstrations on the part of the Tibetan government (see Smith 1996 and Tuttle 2005 following Bell 1946 who depreciated the mission's results and importance), but behind the scenes there were many formal and informal meetings between the delegates and Tibetan secular and monk officials.

My presentation will examine whether the Tibetan self-image as an independent state/ nation is reflected by the language used in contemporary Chinese and Tibetan sources dealing with or stemming from the understudied Gansu Mission.

These sources include Zhu Xiu's accounts of his journey to Lhasa and his 'Chronicle of Important Events in Tibet in the [Last] Sixty Years (*Xizang liushi nian dashiji* 西藏六十年大事記)', the biographies of the Third Gurong, of Geshe Sherab Gyatso and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

Makoto Tachibana, Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, Kobe University, Kobe

### **Imagining the Territory: International law, Effective Control and Custom Duties**

Following its declaration of independence from the Qing after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, it was imperative for Mongolia to establish a new legal framework for state governance. While certain indigenous Mongolian laws, such as the *Qalq-a Jirum*, were applied in Mongolia during the Qing period, the primary legal structures in force were the *Great Qing Legal Code* (*Da Qing lüli* 大清律例) and the so-called *Mongol Code* (*Menggu li* 蒙古例), including the *Mongolian Legal Code* (*Menggu lüli* 蒙古律例) and the *Regulations of the Lifanyuan* (*Lifanyuan zeli* 理藩院則例). Legislative efforts for the new Mongolian state commenced shortly after independence. However, the so-called *Statutes of Mongolia Granted by Decree* were not finalized until around 1918 and were only published circa 1920, raising questions about their actual effectiveness and practical implementation. Nevertheless, a close analysis of their content offers valuable insights into the vision of state-building that Mongolia pursued during this formative period. While many provisions in the Statutes appear to have been inherited from the Qing-era Mongol legal tradition, several new articles were introduced—particularly those relating to international law, such as the regulation of diplomatic missions. This presentation focuses on the provisions concerning customs duties among these newly added regulations, in order to explore how Mongolia imagined and sought to control over its territory.

Lobsang Yongdan, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

### **Sacred Bonds: Reinterpreting the *Chö-yon* Relationship between Tibet and the Qing**

In 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682), and the Fourth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen (1570–1662), decided to send Sechen Chinpa Gyatso (a Tibetan lama also known as the Ilakuksan Hutuktu) to Mukden, the capital of Manchuria, to establish the *chö-yon* (priest-patron) relationship and to recruit Hong Taiji (1592–1643)—the founder of the Qing dynasty—as a “patron” (Tib. *spyin bdag*). From the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, Tibetans consistently described their political relationship with the

Qing in terms of *chö-yon*. After China's 1911 Revolution, when describing Tibet's relationship with the Qing, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Tubten Gyatso (1876–1933), explicitly declared that the *chö-yon* relationship had ended, as the Qing dynasty had collapsed and the emperors were no longer Tibetan Buddhists.

Tibetan historians such as Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa (1907–1989) have emphasized the nature and importance of this relationship. In contrast, Qing historians, who have mostly operated within the context of a Sinocentric, empire and “Altaic” model, have neglected this type of relationship. Moreover, even some Tibetologists, such as Elliot Sperling (1951–2017), have argued that the *chö-yon* relationship was a later construct. In light of this, what was the nature of the *chö-yon* relationship?

By examining the terms *chö* and *yon*, I explore how the *chö-yon* relationship was understood, practiced, and maintained within the contexts of Tibetan Buddhist theology, ritual, and social practice. I also analyse how Tibetan religious elites such as the Dalai Lamas and the Panchen Lamas employed this concept in their interactions with non-Buddhist rulers including Qing emperors and Inner Asian leaders. In doing so, I argue that the *chö-yon* relationship must be understood on its own terms—as a set of religious, ritual, and political rights grounded primarily in the Buddhist teacher-student relationship. Failure to do so violates the nature of the Qing-Tibet relationship and misrepresents the original function and significance of *chö-yon*.

Zolboo Sandagjav, Bern University, Bern

### **A State of “*Jinkeni Arad*” (Genuine People): Rise and Fall of “Mongolian National Democrats” in 1924–1928**

The early Republican period in Mongolia, spanning from 1924 to 1928, has not been adequately explored in Western academic circles. It is often regarded merely as a transitional phase leading to the formation of socialist Mongolia, a satellite state of the USSR.

With this article, the author aims to question this generalized interpretation of the modern Mongolian socialist history by asserting that so-called “Mongolian National Democrats”—identified as the “rightist” leaders in the official socialist narrative—attempted to promote and sustain a sense of Mongolian nationalism. This collective, consisted mostly of the Buryat-Mongol intellectuals and the Russian educated Khalkha-Mongol nationalists, played increasingly important role in “imagining” a new state, a state of “*Jinkeni Arad*” (genuine people/commoners), and constructing a new identity for the Mongols through step-by-step reforms in state governance, religion, society, and education, which directly challenged the USSR's control over Mongolia.

Proceeding from the guiding concept that a case study of the early revolutionary scholars and nationalists illustrates the driving forces around the formation of their network driven by nationalist sentiments during the early days of revolutionary Mongolia, the author seeks to investigate the historical foundations of this collective and address the main research questions such as “Who were these individuals?”, “How did they imagine the future of Mongolia?”, “What role did they play in the rise and development of Mongolian nationalism in the early Republican period?”, and “What factors contributed to their emergence and subsequent decline?”

Methodologically, it is committed to historical discourse analysis and micro-historical approaches with studies of discursive formulations of a nascent Mongolian nationalism through the prism of the life and work of the Mongolian intellectuals of the early revolutionary period.

Ling-wei Kung, Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei

### **Information, Translation, and Power: Iuming Suez (1881–1940) and the Transformation of Sino-Tibetan-Indian Relations**

This article examines the life and work of Iuming Suez (史悠明, 1881–1940)—a Chinese diplomat who bridged the late Qing and early Republican eras—as a lens through which to reconsider the transformation of Sino-Tibetan-Indian relations and the formation of modern Chinese sovereignty. Drawing on newly compiled documents from the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, together with other archival sources in China, Japan, and the U.K., the present study reconstructs Suez’s trajectory from his appointment in Tibet, as English Secretary and Superintendent of Post and Telegraph at Gyantse in 1911, to his subsequent service in the Beiyang Ministry of Foreign Affairs, revealing how a frontier translator evolved into a theorist of sovereignty and economic rights. Suez’s experience illuminates the convergence of information, diplomacy, and borderland agency at a historical moment when Qing imperial infrastructures gave way to the bureaucratic rationality of the Republic. His memoranda—especially the *Proposals for Governing Tibet*—conceptualized sovereignty not as an abstract legal category but as an operational practice linking commerce, intelligence, and ideology. By tracing Suez’s engagements with British, Tibetan, and Chinese actors from Gyantse to Kalimpong and through the Simla Conference, this study argues that the negotiation of modern Chinese sovereignty was inseparable from frontier knowledge and the mediating work of sub-imperial intermediaries. Reconstructed through diplomatic dispatches, telegrams, and customs reports, Suez’s career offers a microhistory of the borderland origins of the modern Chinese nation.

Wada Daichi, Waseda University, Tokyo

### **The 13th Dalai Lama’s “Diplomacy” with Buddhists in Beijing**

In 1904, the 13th Dalai Lama fled Lhasa to escape the Younghusband Expedition and arrived in Beijing at the end of September 1908 after staying in Khalkha Mongolia, the Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai Province, and Wutai Mountain in Shanxi Province. Among the Dalai Lama’s activities in Beijing, the most historically significant was his audience with the Qing emperor. The 1908 meeting between Emperor Guangxu and Empress Dowager Cixi was the first such meeting in 155 years since the 1653 meeting between the 5th Dalai Lama and Emperor Shunzhi. It also symbolised the breakdown of relations between Tibet and the Qing Dynasty.

In recent years, however, outstanding researchers have begun to focus on the Dalai Lama’s diplomacy with the great powers in Beijing. With the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907, Britain and Russia recognised the suzerainty of the Qing Dynasty and decided not to interfere in Tibetan affairs and not to negotiate directly with Tibet. This made it even more difficult for the Dalai Lama to conduct diplomacy with other countries as a ruler of a sovereign state Tibet in the modern international community. In addition to Russia and Britain, foreign missions from Japan, the United States, and other countries were also established in Beijing. For the Dalai Lama, who had few allies, visiting Beijing was a valuable opportunity to find new diplomatic partners. Previous studies from this perspective have analysed the degree of “modernity” and understanding of the international community that the Dalai Lama was acquiring through his diplomacy with foreign dignitaries.

However, it is insufficient to explain the Dalai Lama's diplomacy in terms of a dichotomy between the severance of old relationship with the Qing emperor and a shift to a new form of modern international diplomacy. The religious interrelationships between Buddhists in Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Russia, which transcended ethnic and national boundaries, and their religious worldviews continued to exert strong energy and political influence. This paper therefore seeks to clarify the "diplomacy" that the Dalai Lama conducted with Buddhist parties other than the Qing emperor based on the traditional values of Tibetan Buddhists. Specifically, by analysing reports by Qing officials who monitored the Dalai Lama and Japanese documents that showed interest in him, this paper reveals that during his stay in Beijing, the Dalai Lama received an extremely large number of pilgrims from northeastern China and Inner Mongolia, as well as Mongols and Manchu princes. This study demonstrates that the exchange and influence based on traditional Tibetan Buddhist values ensured the autonomy of the Dalai Lama's activities in dealing with the great powers, while also making the Dalai Lama himself recognise that the prosperity of Tibetan Buddhism was the foundation for maintaining the traditional Tibetan state and the network among Tibetan Buddhists, which placed him at the highest position.

Fabienne Jagou, EFEO/CCJ-CECMC, Paris

### **The Making of Modern Tibetan Diplomacy: Sovereignty, Negotiation, and International Recognition (1888–1914)**

From the late nineteenth century onward, Tibet was confronted with the presence of the British along its borders, and a first agreement—the Calcutta Treaty—was concluded between Great Britain and China in 1890 concerning the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet. Twenty-three years later, Tibet took part alongside the British, on an equal footing with China, throughout the negotiations and the conclusion of the Simla Convention in 1914—which, in the end, China did not ratify. In the span of roughly twenty-five years, Tibet had thus moved from a vague and largely unrecognized status in international affairs to that of a nation capable of conducting multilateral negotiations alongside Western powers. This process, which required Tibetans to abandon their traditional politico-religious system of interstate relations, gradually came to be understood by Tibetan actors themselves. Drawing on primary and secondary sources written in the languages of the parties involved, this presentation analyses the development of modern Tibetan diplomacy by examining British and Russian relations with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876–1933)—that is, relations mediated through their respective ties to the sovereign—as well as the ways in which this new diplomatic framework was perceived and enacted by Tibetan religious, aristocratic, and governmental elites. It further explains how the political hierarchy of Tibet—where the sovereign receded in order to allow his emissaries to manage international affairs—was reshaped in the context of the negotiations that led to the signing of the treaties. Finally, it seeks to determine whether the emergence of nationalism necessarily entails the rise of a new form of diplomacy.

Yumiko Ishihama (*in absentia*), Waseda University, Tokyo

### **Support for the 13th Dalai Lama by the Japanese Buddhist community**

On January 19, 1912, Hioki Mokusen (日置黙仙), a Japanese monk of the Sōtō sect who was visiting India on a pilgrimage to Buddhist sites, met the 13th Dalai Lama, who was staying in

Darjeeling to avoid the advancing Chinese army. He was accompanied by Sōgen Yamagami (山上曹源), a fellow member of the same sect and a lecturer in Pali at Calcutta University—then a hub of the Indian nationalist movement.

At that time, there were only two or three Japanese residents in Calcutta. The centre of this small community was Tomoo Hirata (平田知夫), the Japanese consul, who was also a member of the Genyōsha (玄洋社) and a close friend of Sōgen Yamagami.

In January 1912, shortly after the Xinhai Revolution, Consul Hirata, at the request of the 13th Dalai Lama—who was preparing to return to Tibet—approached the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to seek the provision of weapons. It was Yamagami Sōgen who facilitated the contact between Hirata and the Dalai Lama. Zen Master Hioki Hioki Mokusen, moreover, returned to Japan on the same ship as Ottama, a Burmese independence activist.

Ottama also taught Pali at Calcutta University, where Yamagami Sōgen was a professor, suggesting that the two became acquainted through the university.

Given that Zen Master Hioki Mokusen, representing the Japanese Buddhist community at the time, met the Dalai Lama during the politically sensitive period immediately following the Xinhai Revolution; that Yamagami Sōgen was closely associated with both the Dalai Lama and Ottama; and that Tomoo Hirata, a Genyōsha member and the consul in Calcutta, had been approached by Tibet regarding the supply of arms—it seems likely that these figures were informally supporting the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet through private channels.