


**Toward the Study of the History of  
Koguryō: Koguryō Relics Listed as  
World Cultural Heritage**

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The Koguryō cultural heritage forms an important and valuable academic resource for knowledge of the kingdom. The heritage is scattered over a vast area, covering much of present-day China and North Korea, and many other Koguryō relics in South Korea are also waiting to be listed. Therefore, research into the history and culture of Koguryō needs to deal with the relics scattered across many countries in a comprehensive manner. The researchers will need to cross many of today's national borders, and focus on the ancient history of Koguryō by covering a vast area ranging from China's northeastern region to the central part of the Korean Peninsula.

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### **Introduction**

At the 28th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee held in Suzhou, the People's Republic of China, from June 28 to July 7, 2004, the committee listed the complex of Koguryō tombs in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the relics of the Koguryō capitals and tombs of her royals and aristocrats remaining in China as part of the World Cultural Heritage. For North Korea, the listing of Koguryō relics as a world cultural heritage attracted international attention because it was the first listing since the country signed the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in October 1998.

It is well known that the complex of Koguryō tombs in North Korea was placed under consideration by the UNESCO committee during the previous year. Frankly, I was personally quite relieved at the news because the candidacy of the North Korean relics had been declined either because of the Koguryō relics in China or, according to some, because of opposition from Chinese delegates. The reason behind the Chinese opposition can, as far as I can gather, be attributed to the controversy over the authenticity of both the mausoleum of King Tongmyōng, the founder of Koguryō, located in the outskirts of P'yōngyang, and the concrete structures built in and around the site.

I cannot be the only person who had the odd feeling that the application was passed without any clear explanation of the reasons that had seen the same application denied in 2004. If one stretches the wings of one's imagi-

nation to a certain extent, it instantly becomes clear that this issue is related with the “Northeast Borderland History and the Chain of Events Research Project” or the Northeast Project, a vast five-year research project that was started in 2002 by the Chinese Academy of Social Science jointly with the three Northeastern Provinces. In other words, China has been trying to treat the history of Koguryŏ as the history of a Chinese ethnic group, and put it into the frame of Chinese history, while preparing to add Koguryŏ relics in China to the World Heritage list before North Korea could do so. It seems that, for China, what was at stake with the registering of the Koguryŏ relics for the World Heritage list was the need to save face.

### The Complex of Koguryŏ Tombs in North Korea

There are across North Korea a large number of tomb complexes containing over 10,000 Koguryŏ tombs built between the late first century BC, during which period the kingdom was founded, and its fall in 668. As it is recorded in the chapter on Koguryŏ in *Dongyi-zhuan* of *Wei shu in Sanguo-zhi*, early Koguryŏ people “made mounds by piling up stones, creating stone-mound tombs fitted with stone chambers in either a vertical or horizontal digging style.

The style of the tombs eventually changed between the late fourth century and early fifth century to tombs marked by an earthen mound containing stone chambers in the horizontal digging style. It is these chambers that contain mural paintings. The murals of the mid-fourth century and the fifth century were created by painting images on the lacquered surface of the stone chamber walls, although those done between the sixth and seventh centuries were painted on plain walls. The theme of the murals changed, too, from that of genre paintings to Sasindo, or Paintings of the Four Guardian Deities.

The Koguryŏ tomb complex — listed as a World Heritage Site in 1994 — consists of sixty-three tombs scattered among four sites, P’yŏngyang, Namp’o, and Taedong-kun in P’yŏng’annam-to, and Anak-kun in Hwanghaenam-to. Among these, sixteen tombs feature murals. Meanwhile, it is known that currently there are about seventy Koguryŏ mur-

al tombs in North Korea.

The oldest mural painting of the Koguryō tombs discovered so far is in the Third Anak Tomb in Hwanghaenam-to. Characterized by a horizontal digging style stone chamber built under a square earthen mound, the tomb contains murals painted on almost the entire surface of the walls, which were prepared by lacquering. The burial chambers, consisting of a "passage chamber," antechamber, and rear chamber, are linked with the outside world via an entrance passage laid out from south to north. The main burial chamber, which is also the rear chamber, is complete with galleries at the eastern and northern ends, and there are three octagonal stone pillars between it and the antechamber in the lower level. Each chamber has an intersecting triangular ceiling, and contains a rich collection of wall paintings including the portraits of the couple buried in the tomb, those depicting various aspects of daily life including a chariot parade, and decorative patterns. Historians have inferred from an ink inscription on the western wall of the antechamber that the owner of the tomb was Tongsu, a man who died at the age of 69 in 357. Tongsu was a political exile who fled to Koguryō from Yan China, although some scholars argue that the occupant of the tomb was King Kogugwōn of Koguryō. Apart from the divergent views on the tomb owner, the architectural structure, mural paintings, and the ink inscription of the Third Anak Tomb reveal the close interrelationship between Koguryō and China. The tomb is also regarded as an important source of knowledge about the origins of Koguryō mural tombs.

As well as the First and Second Anak Tombs, built in the fifth century on a hilly site some six kilometers to the northeast of the Third Anak Tomb, there is a third tomb located in a well-preserved natural environment (a pine forest), whose inner structure, guarded by protective devices, is open to the public.

The Chinp'a-ri Tomb Complex in P'yōngyang's Yōkp'o area, which contains the tomb of King Tongmyōng, was a cemetery for a group of fifth century Koguryō royals. The tomb complex contains twenty-one tombs of which Chinp'a-ri Tomb 10 is the tomb of King Tongmyōng. This tomb is marked by multiple stone chambers, a rectangular antechamber with small rooms attached to it and a rear chamber that links with the outside world via a hor-

izontally dug entrance tunnel. The square rear chamber, which was made by piling up cut stones, has a six-tier “parallel-support ceiling” featuring a distinctive Koguryŏ style and side walls painted with lotus patterns, which archaeologists have identified as being very rare.

Scattered over a site at the center of a dense pine forest, the Chinp’a-ri tombs have been preserved in perfect condition in a well-protected natural environment. The tomb of King Tongmyŏng as well as the First (former Fourth) and the Ninth (former First) Chinp’a-ri Tombs are currently closed for the preservation of the murals, but the Fourth Chinp’a-ri (former Ninth) Tomb is always open, disclosing its stone structure to the public. What is remarkable for visitors to the Tomb of King Tongmyŏng is that they are able to perceive a temple site at the end of their hand when they raise an arm straight to the south at about shoulder height. An inscription on an earthenware shard recovered from the temple site revealed that the temple was once a shrine attached to the royal tomb for the offering of the king’s *bodhi*. The temple site currently boasts a restored temple, and has become part of a history park along with the tomb complex.

Most of the mural paintings in the Tŏkhŭng-ri Tomb of the Kangsŏ Zone, Namp’o City, depict scenes of daily life, and bear ink inscriptions which reveal that it is the grave of a man named Chin (鎭) who was buried in 408. The record of the tomb’s occupant and the date of construction make it an important historical asset. The record also reveals that the occupant, Chin, was a Buddhist who came under Taoist influence, offering a valuable item of knowledge on the development of Buddhism and Taoism in Northeast Asia.

The mural paintings of Koguryŏ tombs suffered a dramatic change in the sixth century. It was in this period that the portraits of the tombs’ occupants and genre paintings disappeared, to be replaced by the paintings of the Four Guardian Deities. A representative example of the period is Sasinch’ong of Honam-ri in the Samsŏk Zone, P’yŏngyang. Built on the southern foot of a hill as one of seventeen tombs forming a complex, the tomb consists of a 4-meter-high mound erected on a square base with each side measuring 20 meters in length. The base of the mound is protected by rectangular stones which are in turn surrounded by a floor of stones 3

meters in width. The layout of the tomb is similar to that of the Tomb of King Tongmyōng, although it has just one rectangular burial chamber made by digging horizontally and an entrance passage that opens broadly outwards. This shows that the tomb was built at a later period than the Tomb of King Tongmyōng, which is characterized by multiple chambers. The painting of the Four Guardian Deities (*sasindo*) also reveals that the former is younger than the royal tomb that carries various lotus murals.

The greatest masterpiece of all the Koguryō *sasindo* murals discovered so far can be found in the Third Kangsō Tomb located in the Kangsō Zone, Namp'o City. Located in a pine forest in the middle of a wide, open plain, The Kangsō Tombs consist of the "Great tomb" (Taemyo, with each side of the base measuring 52 meters), the "Middle Tomb" (Chungmyo, 45.5 meters), and the "Small Tomb" (Somyo, 41 meters), each of which is characterized by an entrance passage leading to a single burial chamber in the horizontal digging style, and all built with cut granite blocks. The burial chambers of the Taemyo and Chungmyo Kangsō tombs exhibit magnificent mural works including the Sasindo on all four walls and designs featuring honeysuckle vines and flying heavenly maids on the ceiling.

The tomb complex is currently under careful management and visitors are allowed to view the burial chamber. The surrounding natural environment — rice paddies framed by mountains and fields — a vestige of the Koguryō period, is well preserved, too. There is also a management office at one corner of the tomb complex.

As detailed above, the Koguryō mural tombs are not just an excellent heritage representing the ancient cultural achievements of the Korean peninsula, but also a great source of knowledge about the cultural exchange that took place in the entire Northeast Asian region including China, which impressed its influence upon the peninsula, and the Japanese archipelago, which received influence from it. The mural tombs as well as the surrounding natural environment are generally kept in excellent condition, and are properly managed with some of them remaining open to the public.

## The Capital Cities of Koguryŏ and the Tombs of Royals and Aristocrats in China

As Koguryŏ's capitals from the early and middle periods can be found in China, so China's northeastern area ranging from Liaoning province to Jilin Province contains numerous relics of the kingdom, including capitals and tombs. Some of these relics were listed as World Cultural Heritage items under the title, "Capital Cities, Imperial Tombs, and Tombs of the Koguryŏ Nobility."

The heritage associated with these ancient Koguryŏ capitals includes three fortified cities, Onyŏ sansŏng in the city of Hwanin (C. Huanren), Liaoning Province, and Kungnae-sŏng and Hwando sansŏng in Chiban or Jian in Chinese, Jilin Province.

Onyŏ sansŏng is known to have been the capital of early Koguryŏ. As it was a mountain fortress built for use in times of emergency, it is believed that the earthen fortress of Hagosŏngja (C. Xiaguchengzi), seven kilometers southwest of Onyŏ sansŏng, had been the kingdom's capital in peaceful times. Onyŏ sansŏng was built on a rugged mountain peak 800 meters above sea level to the right of the Hon'gang (C. Hunjiang), a tributary of the Amnok (C. Yalu) River. The mountain-top fortress, running 120-130 meters from east to west and 600 meters from south to north, can be divided into two areas. The first of the two, which forms the central part of the fortified capital, was excavated in 1996-1999 and in 2003 by the Liaoning Archaeological Institute (遼寧省文物考古研究所). Archaeologists discovered a group of relics including an observation post, a palace building, and military barracks, a well, and a stone fortress wall complete with eastern and western gates at the southwestern part of the hill. Part of the fortress wall was restored.

Kungnae-sŏng, the second Koguryŏ capital which is known to have been moved from Onyŏ sansŏng in the early third century, is located on a stretch of flat land where the Amnok River, a waterway bordering China and North Korea, meets the Tongguo River, thus offering the central part of Koguryŏ in the middle period. This walled capital is almost a square with each side measuring 700 meters in length, creating a 50-ha space, with the western and northern parts of the fortress wall being comparatively well pre-

served. Several hundred houses occupying the western part of the fortress have recently been demolished to reveal the full scope of the site. The excavation work, conducted from 2000 and 2003 by the Jilin Archaeological Institute (吉林省文物考古研究所) in association with the Jian City Museum, disclosed a large group of structural remains including a new fortress gate at the west of the northern wall, an excellent drainage system, and a building site with foundation stones. The site is currently packed with buildings that form a downtown area, and the local authorities have a long-term plan to restore its original shape by removing all the structures occupying the site over a period of fifth or 100 years.

Hwando sansōng is located on a site about 2.5 km northwest of Kungnae-sōng. Historians believe that the mountain fortress was used as a shelter in times of emergency, whereas Kungnae-sōng was a capital in times of peace and stability. One may conclude, therefore, that the two fortifications were two faces on the same coin. Hwando sansōng, a huge mountain fortress containing a flat land area covering 290-ha, was protected by a stone wall some 7 to 8 meters long. This site, too, underwent full-scale excavation work conducted by the Jilin Archaeological Institute (吉林省文物考古研究所) in tandem with the Jian City Museum between 2000 and 2003. The excavation revealed many structural remains that had been preserved in a good condition, including a palace site containing immense foundation stones, an observation post, a pond, and fortress gates. The palace site also disclosed the remains of an octagonal building, the first of such relics to be discovered in Jian, which was the capital of middle Koguryō.

Some of the important artifacts collected from the excavation were put on exhibition at the Wunu-shan Fortress Exhibition Hall and the Jian City Museum, drawing keen interest from researchers worldwide. In June 2004, the excavation team published three reports, *Wunushan Fortress*, *Huandoshan Fortress*, and *Guonei Fortress*, each of which is thought to constitute a new step forward in the study of Koguryō. The two excavation sites, Onyō sansōng and Hwando sansōng, were listed as Historical Sites by the Chinese authorities after their excavation, drawing many visitors.

The tombs of Koguryō rulers and aristocrats that have been listed as part of the World Cultural Heritage are scattered around Tonggou in Jian.

The tomb complex, which is located in Jian's Tonggou Plain to the right of the Amnok River, contains about 7,000 tombs, of which twelve are royal tombs including T'aewangnŭng, Changgunch'ong, Sōdaemyo and Imgangch'ong, as well as a tomb subordinate to Changgunch'ong, the Hot'aewang Monument, and twenty-six tombs of the Koguryō aristocracy including Kakjōch'ong, Muyōngch'ong, Hwanmunch'ong, First Changch'ōnch'ong, T'onggu Sasinch'ong, and Ohoibun. Fourteen of the twenty-six tombs of the nobility contain mural paintings. This site also underwent full-scale excavation and restoration work conducted by the Jilin Archaeological Institute (吉林省文物考古研究所) jointly with the Jian City Museum from 1990 to 2003. The excavation was brought to its conclusion with a huge report published in 2004 under the title, *Koguryo Royal Tombs in Jian*. The Koguryō cemetery in Tonggou was first used to house tombs in the 3rd century when the kingdom moved its capital to Kungnaesōng, and continued to house new tombs after the capital had been moved to P'yōngyang in 427 up until the seventh century. Accordingly, the tombs built here show changes in style. As I mentioned earlier, the style of Koguryō tombs began to change from the stone-mound to earthen-mound type of tombs in about 400.

The tomb complex at the foot of Hwando sansōng, for instance, displays this progress in style, from a stone mound without a foundation to one with a foundation and then to a multi-tiered mound. The stone-mound tomb style reached its peak with T'aewangnŭng and Changgunch'ong, and then suddenly the mound began to be made by piling up earth in the early fifth century. One might conclude from the stone chamber in the horizontal digging style, the earthen mounds, and the murals painted onto a lacquered surface depicting various aspects of daily life, that the new features of the Koguryō tombs had been adopted under the influence of the Liaodong Region.

The change in the mound style, from stone to earthen mound, may reveal clues about the growth of Koguryō as a state as well as the kingdom's ruling class, while the murals painted on the walls of the burial chambers help to better understand the life and customs of Koguryō people. The earthen-mound tombs built in the sixth and seventh centuries are characterized

by a burial chamber built with elaborately cut and processed stones, while the paintings of the Four Guardian Deities show one of Koguryō's distinctive cultural features.

Meanwhile, uncertainty surrounds the mausoleum of King Kwanggaet'o owing to the different views of archaeologists. Some argue that T'aewangnŭng is the tomb of King Kwanggaet'o, basing their view on the tiles inscribed with the word "T'aewangnŭng" (literally, "royal tomb of the high king"), which were continually unearthed at the site, as well as the relationship between the tomb and the king's huge monumental stone located 360 kilometers to the northeast of the site.

During the latest research, archaeologists found at the southern foot of the mound a tiny copper bell bearing the inscription, "King Hot'ae in the Sinmyo Year ...", and concluded that the T'aewangnŭng tomb was indeed that of King Kwanggaet'o. They instantly felt that the tomb and the stele make a pair, and that if they could remove the village houses covering the area between the tomb and the stone stele, then both monuments would be seen standing face to face at the same eye level.

The great gem of the earthen-mound tombs is the mural paintings contained in them. For instance, the First Changh'ŏn Tomb built in the early fifth century features murals of a Buddha, a prayer meeting, the "lotus child," and A transformed being, thus revealing that the tomb's occupant had been a devoted Buddhist.

The mural paintings in the Tonggou tomb complex have been preserved in a good condition, but the safe preservation of the murals is still regarded as an important task. Some murals are tightly enclosed to protect them from the tomb visitors, while six tombs still admit visitors under protective measures. The guiding principle is, however, that the mural paintings should not be open to the public. As for the Fifth Ohoibun Tomb, visitors can gain access to the mural paintings in the burial chamber via a monitor in the manager's office.

The Chinese authorities have made extraordinary efforts to preserve the tomb complex through such measures as the removal of private houses and telephone poles, and to protect the surrounding environment. I am quite impressed not just by the results of their academic research activities but

also the measures they have taken for the protection of this precious heritage.

### **Conclusion: Historical Significance of the Koguryŏ Relics Listed as World Heritage OBJECTS**

I have focused my discussions so far upon the relics of Koguryŏ, its capitals, its tombs and, above all, its mural paintings. Needless to say, Koguryŏ established a powerful state in the area, ranging from China's northeastern realms to the middle part of the Korean Peninsula. People of the kingdom gained the necessary resources for their daily life by farming, stock farming, hunting, fishing, and plant gathering, and expanded their territory using powerful cavalry units. In particular, between the late fourth century and the early fifth century, when Koguryŏ was under the rule of King Kwanggaet'o, the kingdom acquired vast territories, as is succinctly represented by the ruler's royal title (Kwanggaet'o literally means "opening up expansive lands"). His successor, King Changsu, moved the capital to P'yŏngyang, and ushered in the kingdom's most prosperous era in the fifth century. It was also one of the most turbulent periods for Koguryŏ, during which it established a tributary relationship with the Former Yan and Former Qin dynasties, fought against the Kōran (C. Khitan) forces and against the various northern dynasties of China. Koguryŏ fought with many states, Paekche in particular, located in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, and suppressed Kaya to support Silla, its ally. In about 400 when the kingdom was under the rule of King Kwanggaet'o, Koguryŏ entered into conflict with Wa on the Japanese archipelago over Silla and Kaya. Even with this brief introduction, one can easily understand how important was the position of Koguryŏ with regard to the international affairs in Northeast Asia at that time.

The land of Koguryŏ was spread over the territory of part of modern day China and the two Koreas. That is why today's China regards the kingdom as having been established by a Chinese ethnic minority, treats Koguryŏ history as part of Chinese history, and attaches great importance to the areas dominated by the ethnic minority of Chosŏn as a core part of its border management policy. It is also why China has conducted large-scale excavation

projects combined with in-depth research into Koguryō relics, and exploits the heritage after completing the preservation and restoration activities. It is a well-known fact that the Chinese position over Koguryō invited strong disapproval from both South Korea and North Korea, as both states treat Koguryō history as a core part of Korean history. The opposition from South Korea in particular was so fierce that they raised it as a political issue and made a formal request to the North during the thirteenth South-North Ministerial Talks held in early 2004 to take joint steps to tackle China's sense of history. And, indeed, a group of historians from both Koreas issued a joint statement at the opening ceremony for a South-North joint photography exhibition held in Kūmgang-san on September 11, 2004, as a celebration of the Koguryō relics listed as World Heritage objects, making it abundantly clear that the history of Koguryō, which had always been a sovereign state, belongs to the history of the entire Korean people. Having said all that, I believe that the parties concerned need to handle the issue in a manner so as to surmount the intentions of the current international political scene.

Views and interpretations differ, and debates continue to be held among the historians of China, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan over various issues, including a passage of the inscription on the stone monument to King Kwanggaet'o which states that Wa crossed the sea in the Sinmyo Year (391), as well as interpretations surrounding the Japanese rule over Paekche and Silla, the dispute over whether the occupant of the Third Anak Tomb was a Chinese political exile named Tongsu or Koguryō's King Kogugwōn, and another controversy over whether the owner of the Tōkhūng-ni was a Chinese named Chin (C. Zhen) or a Koguryō man.

Archaeologists are now attracted to an excavation project recently begun on a Koguryō site in Acha-san, a hilly mountain located in the outskirts of Seoul, which has thrown up artifacts related with a Koguryō fort and the borders of the kingdom in the later period. The relics excavated from Koguryō sites that are scattered over such a huge area are now in the hands of collectors in China, North Korea, and South Korea. In addition to these collections, there are materials — though small in number — that were researched by Japanese archaeologists before 1945 and are still held in Japan.

One of the common elements concerning all the Koguryŏ relics listed as World Heritage objects is that sufficient consideration was given to the preservation of the surrounding environment, thus securing an extensive buffer zone. The methods used for the preservation of the listed sites generated productive suggestions, although individual sites exhibit different features. For example, some of the mural paintings in China are completely closed, while others are open to the public via a TV monitor despite the principle not to open. In North Korea, by contrast, six out of sixteen mural tombs are accessible, and may even be photographed, although that would cost a considerable sum of money. I think, judging from the difference between the two, that both parties might benefit from an exchange of views and cooperation concerning preservation techniques and the methods of opening the murals to the public. At the same time, I believe that Japan and South Korea could contribute to the heritage with their technology and finance. Thankfully, Japan's Foundation for Cultural Heritage and the Art Research Foundation (chaired by Ikuo Hirayama) have a plan to give 300,000 USD of financial support to the 800,000 USD project for the Koguryŏ Mural Tombs Preservation Center which is now being built in North Korea.

Finally, the recent registration of Koguryŏ relics as World Heritage needs support programs to increase people's interest in, for instance, joint research into the history and culture of Koguryŏ, joint exhibitions of Koguryŏ relics, and the exchange of preservation techniques. The creation of a joint infrastructure between the related parties in Northeast Asia—China, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan—is also desirable.

The last World Heritage registration was limited to ancient tombs and capitals, but there are other Koguryŏ heritages that are worthy of being included on the World Heritage list; the Chŏngnŭng-sa temple site and P'yŏngyang-sŏng, the fortified city that served as Koguryŏ's last capital. In South Korea, there is an opinion that the Ach'a-san fort mentioned above also needs to be included. At the 28th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in 1994, the Koguryŏ relics of North Korea and China were listed as separate items. I also heard that the committee had requested both countries to consider joint registration. Furthermore, I earnestly hope that

the Chōngnŭng-sa site, along with P'yōngyang-sōng and the Ach'a-san fort, will be listed under a single name.

Currently, North Korea is making preparations for listing the relics of the historical city of Kaesōng, the Koryō capital, as the country's second World Cultural Heritage. South Korea is actively supporting this plan and, in 2005, related workshops were held in Seoul and Tokyo. I sincerely hope that the cultural activities in North Korea and the movement to construct a network by which neighboring countries in Northeast Asia can cooperate with each other will help raise a common sense of history for the region and create a truly friendly, peaceful, and prosperous community.

### Supplemental Remarks

#### **Toward the Study of the History of Koguryō**

It is widely known that Koguryō was one of many ancient Northeast Asian states that were established through the growth of complex political and economical relationships, a group that included numerous kingdoms and states on the continent as well as those on the Korean Peninsula. This means that Koguryō had, and still holds, an important position in this history of state formation in Northeast Asia.

Koguryō left fortified capitals, mountain fortifications, temples, stone-mound tombs, mural tombs, and other distinctive cultural assets. These relics of Koguryō have been well preserved, and were ultimately listed as UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage in 2004.

The Koguryō cultural heritage forms an important and valuable academic resource for knowledge of the kingdom. The heritage is scattered over a vast area, covering much of present-day China and North Korea, and many other Koguryō relics in South Korea are also waiting to be listed. Therefore, research into the history and culture of Koguryō needs to deal with the relics scattered across many countries in a comprehensive manner. The researchers will need to cross many of today's national borders, and focus on the ancient history of Koguryō by covering a vast area ranging from China's northeastern region to the central part of the Korean Peninsula.

I hope that an occasion awaits us in the near future wherein many

neighboring countries in Northeast Asia will gather together, conduct in-depth studies of Koguryō's history, and via such activities lay the foundations for raising awareness of our common history.