

Tudor queenship: rethinking how power affect Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I with foucauldian theories from a feminist perspective

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Abstract. In the annals of English history, the Tudor Dynasty is one of the most captivating eras. Within this dynastic tapestry, few women figures have left as indelible mark as Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of King Henry VIII, and the Virgin Queen--Elizabeth I. One that steps into the sphere of marriage and reproduction, facing the conflict of showing political talent and being the beloved wife of King Henry VIII. The other, a consistent formal dominant of England, remained a virgin throughout her life. Although they had slightly different monarchical roles, they faced similar challenges to the power structure in medieval Tudor. Thus, it is valuable to examine their roles by reconsidering the relations between gender, power, and monarchy. Also, examining how they survive and resist while maximizing their autonomy of power could provide a novel insight into the collaboration of the study of gender history and sociology. This essay attempts historical sociology to scrutinize the role of their queenship in the centre of the patriarchal and monarchical domain of the House of Tudors. There is a notable surge in applying Michel Foucault's approach to theories of power in gender study by feminists. One of the aims of this research is to fill the vacancy of application of Foucault's theories into medieval history as well. It aims to investigate the category of gender and its symbolism concerning queenship in the historical period. Most importantly, to redefine, reclaim, and re-evaluate the meanings and values of women figures throughout the traditional historiographical pattern of queenship, which the male chronological historians have largely created at the time. It is found that the two queenships sprout comprehensive sociological meanings of a parallel consideration of gender, power and body in such particular political spectrum of monarchical field.

1 Introduction

There is a positive turning point of re-focusing on Catherine of Aragon from other famous Tudor figures like Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn parallelly. However, as Theresa Earenfight highlights, scholars oversee her pivotal contribution in shaping future sovereignty models for Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I. Meanwhile, the exploration of queenship has been lacking, as evidenced by John Carmi Parsons' oversight despite the expansion of feminist scholarship.

In queenship studies, Anna Riehl Bertolet covers a wide spectrum of early modern queenship, while Theresa Earenfight employs Foucauldian theories to interweave power and gender within the context of Tudor Queenship. Retha Warnicke delves into the role of noblewomen and gender politics, underscoring the impact of motherhood on Tudor Queenship.

The discourse surrounding women's reproduction has posed challenges for feminist scholars. Leclerc's concept of femininity highlights how an idealized image of motherhood has upheld patriarchal gender distinctions. The body emerges as a pivotal focal point for gender, power dynamics, and queenship, acting as a site where

patriarchal disciplinary power operates. This perspective aligns with Foucauldian theories, emphasizing the relevance of discursive practices.

Examining two prominent female figures, Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I, separate studies have emerged. Theresa Earenfight advances Catherine of Aragon's exploration to transcend the usual focus on her divorce and reposition her as a multifaceted queen. Carole Levin's study delves into Elizabeth I's position. However, historians often dwell on Catherine's divorce, neglecting her broader queenship role. The conventional binary portrayal of Catherine's power can be expanded through Foucauldian power theories, enabling a more nuanced understanding. In Elizabeth's case, the debate over her virginity has constrained her gender portrayal within a limited framework. Viewing virginity as a 'third gender' maintains binary thinking and fails to dismantle the overarching gender paradigm. This is evident when contrasting the fates of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, revealing the misogynistic discourse of the era.

Revisiting Catherine of Aragon's legacy alongside other Tudor figures marks a significant shift. A feminist perspective sheds light on the intricacies of queenship, while Foucauldian theories enrich the exploration of

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power dynamics. Unravelling the constraints of traditional gender roles provides a more comprehensive understanding of these iconic women and their impact on history.

2 Explaining power and gender theories of Michel Foucault

2.1. Definitions and categories of power by Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault disentangles the characteristics of power. The dynamics of power are deeply rooted in Western history by its discursive nature. In this way, his elucidation of power suggests relevant and fresh angles to examine the gender and power of the Tudor Queenship. The first feature is 'the uniformity of the apparatus', that is, the nature of the omnipresence of power over sex [1]. It is immensely relevant in the patriarchal rule of monarchy as such inheritance has been lying upon the ancient laws, as Foucault clarifies as a crucial historical reason. Monarchy itself is a language of power and manipulates power as well. He notices that it is a typical institution of power that developed in the Middle Ages, establishing based on 'a multiplicity of prior powers' and applies to its many oppositions [1]. To schematize, there is a formal homogeneity among the figures of the monarchy, in this case, which represents authority. It is the fathers, the kings, who embody power in a juridical way. Thus, it reveals a traditional form of power consisting of 'the subject' and the obedience group. Although before the eighteenth century, the interplay of the juridical and monarchic zone was not deterministic, historians can still capture concrete evidence of power behind the pre-modern monarchical pattern. At the same time, Foucault does not mean that the decisive form of power is a general system of domination generated by one subject over another; rather, he emphasizes that power is set on the multiplicity of force relations that comes from everywhere. An institution could symbolize power, but it does not equally define power as an institution. In this way, Foucault's notion of power could offer an innovative attempt to apply such power findings to broader historical sources. Apart from the macro representation of power, Foucault suggests another key proposition on articulating power. He notes that 'where there is power, there is resistance.' Historians will thus be able to flexibly identify the existence of power from the reaction of resistance. The variety of resistance reflects the variety of power. Although resistance could reveal strength from the perspective of the object, Foucault still makes a negative assertion that it always shows passivity. These findings reveal some tentative explanations for the nature of gender and power in Tudor queenship, considering how power affects the queens and how they assert power. Thus, by employing Foucauldian sociological theories, a full spectrum of possibilities to explain the autonomy of queens and how severely gender saturates power is demonstrated.

2.2 Foucault's opinions on theories of the relationship of gender and power

This study primarily attempts to combine Foucauldian and feminist sociological theories on explaining Tudor Queenship. One deterministic link between Tudor queenship and Foucauldian power theories is women's bodies, motherhood, and queenship. First, his theory of body has guided feminist scholars to rethink an approach of conceiving the body as a pattern without eliding its materiality with a presumption of biological gender essentialism [2]. Second, it suggests a conflict within women's body of noblewomen.

The body is more than a medium and centre of the study of women and power but provides a tridimensional space for applying sociology to queenship research. The aforementioned dual discussion over body and power has revealed the trend that the body here could bring more possibilities and choices, according to Elizabeth's case. The queens have both tried to maximize their autonomy while being stimulated by patriarchal discipline both socially and biologically. They both face the controversial reflexivity identity in the House of Tudor domain.

In this case, the duty of motherhood becomes inevitable for both the queens' consort and regnant in the House of Tudors. It interplays womanhood and femininity. In the chapter on Power, Body, and Experience, the biological sex of females inevitably interprets presumptions about femininity as symbolic expression and performance, for example, being a faithful, subordinate, and piety wife of the king. These gendered significations are rooted in social practices.

Warnicke elevates the prime duty of noblewomen to produce a male heir to continue their husband's line [3]. In the House of Tudors discourse, it means the Tudor Dynasty's future succession. To date, the understanding of gender expands to the apparatus of production upon the biological sexes. Such a scheme of fertility reveals the biopower of women's reproduction. Thus, in Foucault's words, the female body is placed 'in organic communication with the social body, the family space and the life of children'[2]. He argues that sex is no longer an independent agency but in contact with power. The rule for reproduction runs identically in monarchical families, especially for queens, consort, and regnant.

3 Catherine of Aragon in Tudor Dynasty

3.1. The life and historical background of Catherine of Aragon

Theresa Earenfight offers a vivid demonstration of the life of Catherine of Aragon composed of multiple characters from a bride to a wife, a queen consort and eventually a dowager princess. Catherine of Aragon was born in Spain, and she was the Princess of Wales, initially married to Henry VIII's elder brother, Arthur Tudor. After the death of Arthur, Catherine got married to Henry VIII on 11 June 1509 and became the queen of England. She was well educated as she studied

arithmetic, canon and civil law, literature, history, and philosophy. Catherine was also religiously pious in the Roman Catholic faith. Although the early stage of her marriage was peaceful, she was troubled by a series of failures of reproduction and only had one surviving child, Mary Tudor. Her life turns challenging after Henry became enamoured of Anne Boleyn in 1525, pushing her to the edge of divorce. Her story does not end immediately at the moment when her marriage is abandoned, and it goes on until her death on 7 January 1536.

3.2. Catherine's political position in Tudor Dynasty

Warnicke suggests that Henry VIII's marriage with Catherine of Aragon is related to his diplomatic intention. For the queen, Catherine deploys multiplex portraits of the king's beloved wife and as a brilliant political and diplomatic figure. Earenfight noticed that in the early stage of her marriage with Henry, she showed strong influence as an advisor to Henry in a series of her contributions. She is credited for her age experience and the social position of the network of her family and allies. The successful work of Anglo-Iberian diplomacy is highly valued by Henry [4]. Besides, her remarkable role as regent at the Battle of Flodden in 1513 brought victory to England. She was appointed as Henry's regent to govern England, Wales, and Ireland on 11 June 1513 and kept as a key negotiator in the running of the government [4]. In this way, Catherine has gone beyond the boundary of motherhood and entered the sphere that male figures have traditionally dominated.

3.3. The role of gender of Catherine in power structure

Her portrait was vivid and multiple, just like how Earenfight described her. However, throughout the narrativity of the Tudor Dynasty, Catherine was often bound to the title of 'the widow of Arthur Tudor', the 'first wife of Henry VIII' and the 'divorced queen'. Her role is permanently attached to a male figure in history. In addition, there is an evident conflict between her motherhood and her political persona. During the Tudor Dynasty, motherhood was the consorts' primary duty, whilst the birth of a male heir was crucial to solidifying their position and perpetuating the patriarchal line [3]. Essentially, no matter how successful and helpful Catherine is in assisting Henry in the political and public sphere, all her creditability would be quickly challenged by her failure to produce a son. Timothy G. Elston's paper suggests that it is no longer an exaggeration to assert that the expectations of aristocratic women on the appropriate decorum of women in a patriarchal society have already gone beyond womanhood and femininity according to the English at that time. This sets a typical dilemma of women being disciplined at the centre of the monarchical and patriarchal domain, even as an aristocracy. Catherine displays multiple strategies, combining her sovereignty to fight against the pressure

of patriarchal reproductive discipline and the derived divorce tragedy.

4 Elizabeth I of Tudor Dynasty

4.1. The life and historical background of Elizabeth I

Born as the child of Anne Boylen, who was beheaded, Elizabeth went through a very different journey from her mother. She became the formal and the last ruler of England and Ireland as a queen regnant. Due to Henry VIII annulling his marriage with Anne Boylen, the restoration of the line of succession for the Tudor Dynasty was not realized until the Third Succession Act in 1543 when Elizabeth was ten. She succeeded to the throne after Edward VI and her half-sister Mary in November 1558. Elizabeth I is credited in both political and religious fields. During the early stage of her reign, Elizabeth refused to yield the virtues of women with modesty, obedience, and simplicity manifested in the Second Book of the Homilies by her bishops [5].

4.2. The political and religious position of Elizabeth I

Max Weber's notion of using religious conventions contributes to the ruling legitimacy. This enlightens scholars to focus on Elizabeth I's religious power and how it replenishes her self-conception. It is worth discussing that Elizabeth received the title of 'Supreme Governor over the Church of England' rather than the title of 'Supreme Head' traditionally held by previous kings. The court pressured Elizabeth, forcing her to accept such a secondary title. This reflects the intellectual norms of the monarch as the head does not include the perception of blasphemy that a woman fits this role in the sixteenth century. Norman Jones suggests it stimulates Elizabeth to seek the title of Governor instead of negotiating the social acceptance of a female head of the church. However, historical evidence also explains that Elizabeth insisted on playing an active and severe role in rejecting relinquishing the power over the church that she admits belongs to her by right [5]. The religious functions as a sacred monarch went far beyond the Supreme Governor [6]. Furthermore, the strategy of Elizabeth reveals an interpretation of the relation of the monarchy and its derived symbolic value. The monarchical depiction reflects divine representation on earth and further secures her subjects' union. This is primarily demonstrated in her ceremonies. She possesses strength in prestige in her coronation in London [5]. She has flexibly continued kingly practices and women saints' images flexibly through her Maundy ceremonies and royal touch. Royal touch is a representative example, as it traditionally belongs to the power of kings. The power to cleanse and cure people from diseases could consolidate Elizabeth's power in religious functions, gaining much discourse on her self-representation as the Virgin Queen [5]. Thus, she overlaps her role with the

Virgin Mary to fill the vacancy of the public imagination of such a divine figure.

4.3. The role of gender of Elizabeth I in power structure

Elizabeth I's body is understood as a pure medium of project, which requires long-term shaping. She invokes a fluidity of gender performance to satisfy her different political needs. Levin's work brings an insightful examination of her 'heart and stomach of a king'. Her flexible display of combining musculinity, femininity and virginity helps her to rule and consolidate governance ruling. This fits well into the medieval political, theological concept of the two bodies. It is thus intriguing to discover Heath's description of owning two gendered identities, both with sovereignty and power at the same time. The strategy also benefits her to expand her right to natural rule. In a modern way, Elizabeth is probably in the category of an androgynous or a gender-fluid, but she has already managed to reconstruct the gendered form in the sixteenth century.

Unmarried status helps to expand the gendered definition as well, but also troublesome to Elizabeth socially and from the discipline of her councillors. Levin points out that the cross-dressing phenomenon shows sexual freedom instead in the medieval drama of the Elizabethan era. It fueled the charge on women who wore men's clothes as monsters and prostitutes discovered by R. Mark Benbow [5]. However, the metaphor of Queen Elizabeth in drama under Shakespeare's description gains renaissance. The illusion of gender in Renaissance culture vividly displayed in the bodies of heroines in courts, and this is also laid the foundation for Elizabeth's rhetorical strategy [7]. This consolidated her shape perception by the power of language in drama, melding and crediting her femininity that has been traditionally challenged by societal norms.

5 Comparing Catherine and Elizabeth's sovereignty

First, to scrutinize the queenship of Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I, it is crucial to clarify that Catherine lays fundamentally as the queen of Henry VIII whilst Elizabeth I is the queen and the formal ruler of England. Historically, it means that Catherine is the queen's consort whilst Elizabeth I is the queen's regnant [8,9]. Catherine got married to Henry VIII as the widow of his brother and as the first wife, while Elizabeth is the daughter of Anne Boylen, the second wife of Henry.

In *A Lifetime of Power*, Theresa Earenfight generalizes that 'queens-regnant generates public and political masculine forms of power, while queens-consort exercises private and familial feminine forms of power'. This understanding is not even assertive enough, as power does not seemingly hold in their hands permanently. Power does not even belong to a queen-regnant, as she is still expected to give up governance and return to motherhood. Essentially, the disciplinary power of patriarchy and the monarchical paradigm locks

women and restricts their bodies in the sphere of reproduction.

An indisputable distinguishment between them is marriage and reproduction issues under patriarchy. Catherine encountered six pregnancies, and the only surviving child was Mary Tudor. In Elizabeth's circumstances, Levin argues that queenship is controversial when involving the legitimacy of female rule during the age of religious instability, especially during the age of her succession. The misogynistic demonstration of a 'monstrous regiment of women' by Scottish reformer John Knox reflects the social atmosphere of the time [5]. Religiously speaking, it did not meet God's willingness either. Earenfight clarifies that power still 'retains much of its association with masculinity in front of subjective monarchical political power. At least in the pre-modern era, such power was set in kingship rather than queenship. Catherine and Elizabeth both tried to challenge such gender essentialism. Catherine was required to bring a male heir to continue the line of Henry VIII, while Elizabeth was expected to get married immediately and transfer the power to governance to her future husband. According to the earlier surge of feminist thoughts on understanding motherhood, it is usually explained as the consequence of the compulsory heterosexuality under patriarchal domination and reinforcing strongholds of feminine identity that determine women's destiny [2]. Elizabeth apparently holds more autonomy outside the marriage system, while Catherine gets married very early as the Spanish princess in diplomatic strategy. From the very beginning, they have experienced different destinies. However, it does not mean that Catherine is powerless, as she has been contesting actively and trying her best in the sphere of the queen's consort. This is discussed in her manipulation of power in detail above.

6 Explaining the effects of the power of Tudor Queenships by Foucauldian theories

6.1. Explaining Catherine's queenship by Foucauldian theories

Theresa Earenfight presents a sequence of stages of her queenship throughout her life. With respect to power, it is found that power is generated in various forms and in different ways, in the case of Catherine. After the death of Arthur Tudor, Catherine positively held the potential power of her identity before her marriage to Henry VIII. This is primarily contributed by her portrait of youth and beauty, the responsibility of her divine queenship, and her fruitful education foundation [4]. In this way, her physical characteristics appear to be a prized quality and capital in such a political marriage. Besides, her privilege is rooted in the background of her natal family. Thus, Catherine, at this moment, does not need to use power intentionally but it is more considered that her demonstration of power has already been automatically

working behind. In other words, the symbolic power of Catherine is rather successful at this stage.

Her power encounters a relatively big transformation during the second stage of her life, after her marriage to Henry VIII. First, she possesses sufficient intellectual and social background from her education and family tree and stands well in politics. This not only shows how important her background socially supports her authority in the political domain, but also it reflects a great transformation of Catherine entering a public sphere that is traditionally male-dominated. Her brilliant diplomatic power is also credited to her contribution to the Anglo-Iberian relationship [4].

Nevertheless, despite the significance of the Battle of Flodden in 1513, her powerful portrait appears to be easily challenged by her failure to produce a male heir in the monarchical domain under the patriarchal paradigm. This also reveals how severe the reproductive role of motherhood affects and gradually threatens her queenship after six pregnancies.

The later stage creates more obstacles for Catherine as her main power changes from political to maternal. This is also very relevant due to Henry's insistence on denying his marriage to Catherine and marrying Anne Boleyn. Although she lost most of her power, she still showed a certain degree of resistance, and she was not powerless. Examining from a micro-perspective of the time of 1520-1532, Catherine flexibly manipulated her left queenship to survive and try to protect her marriage [10]. Considering her resistance as a 'countervailing way of power' is valuable. This fits well with Earenfight's examination of power in terms of its nature, scale, and characteristics. Catherine's resistance, in another way, reveals the existence of power opposite that is pressured by Henry VIII and the competitive social intervention of Anne Boleyn, the lady-in-waiting of Catherine, but as the next potential queen to take her place. In addition, she also makes use of her tragic portrait of a faithful wife at her legal trial on 21 June 1527. Such a display puts her on the same level of the severity of moral confrontation with Henry VIII as she gained more public support. She left the court despite a formal summon, also putting Henry under great pressure. Furthermore, she enhanced her determination by refusing to accept the cursory demotion of the title 'princess dowager'. Catherine insisted on her role as the Queen of England [4].

The existence of power in the eventual period of Catherine primarily lies in Henry's intention to separate her from her daughter, Mary. In such circumstances, though Catherine is seemingly imprisoned, it could also symbolically reflect that the potential power of Catherine still exists. The fact that Catherine is strategically placed as a hostage instead further signifies that her capital is real, and it would hardly vanish until her death.

6.2. Explaining Elizabeth's queenship by Foucauldian theories

For Elizabeth, it is crucial to rethink her unique gender portrait. The dual conflict of biological and social gender still remains debatable, especially in such a late medieval

context. According to Foucault, he tends to avoid simply defining autonomy with essentialism that is decided upon one's pre-discursive potential; rather, he believed that social construction is more convincing [2]. Similarly, when considering Judith Butler's demonstration of gender performance, such a post-modernist approach also immensely applies to Elizabeth's case.

The appeal above of Foucauldian analysis emphasizes the nexus of power and discourse. What is crucial about his theories is that they tie the self-possessed individual and the entire system of power together, and by disciplinary power, women's bodies were seemingly controllable under such life politics. Examining the history of the body, it is found that the transformation of discourse reveals the changes in its target, objects, and range. He asserts that no power relation comes before the constitution of the domain of knowledge [2]. It is a complementary and non-contingent relationship. He categorizes power and knowledge into material and non-material fields [2]. It is believable that Foucault tries to explain that the body is not only received meanings from discourse but almost completely constructed by discourse.

Thus, it is evident in Elizabeth's religious practices. She treated the royal touch process seriously and overcame the restriction that only kings could produce such power to cure people. Elizabeth adjusted the rule of royal touch independently, and in other words, she sent the message that a queen could equally share the same power as a king could do. People did not acknowledge sufficient experiences and understanding of the queen involving royal touch ceremonies until Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I. This novel knowledge stabilized the intellectual atmosphere for the Elizabethan subjects, bringing the science of truth with its produced discourses. These all spread her discursive power in terms of religious operation, as she has gone through the stages of being questioned as an exception and, eventually, her efforts being normalized as a queen. What is more, another significant establishment of Elizabeth's power shows that the image of queenship is produced by cultural narrativity. This also involves how the discourse of drama language and visual production, like Shakespearean, describes and metaphorizes the image of the queen. Although there have been many criticisms of Foucault's notion of power and discourse, it is undeniable that these two concepts contribute to the element of the body in feminist studies, and Foucault certainly admits such difficulties of abandoning gender essentialism in the History of Sexuality [2]. This still guides the way for the important branch of gender politics of queenship from both micro-social and micro-physics of power lying inside body politics. Power is exerted, embodied, and disciplined in queens' bodies. This further controls their performance and social interactions under Tudor paradigms.

6.3. Explaining Elizabeth's queenship by Foucauldian theories

Guided by Theresa Earenfight, scholars manage to distinguish different forms of power. The binary relation and contradiction of kingship and queenship is found by scrutinising the gendered construction of monarchical power. King represents a formal, normative, and the strongest power in the monarchical system, whilst queenship represents a second-rate power. This is also highly related to the conventional bonding of masculinity on kingship and femininity on queenship. The king would not need to play the role of a father, but queens are crucially glued by motherhood and, more precisely, the biopower of the reproduction mechanism of patriarchy. Earenfight claims that power exercises more than simply repressive; it is an inherently latent and potential force from a micro-perspective. Monarchical power is displayed in diverse means. From the example of Catherine of Aragon, it is found that power can be expressed as dynastic in familial means, as latent when involving an heir; it could be governmental and political as a regent, and it also produces special meanings for a hostage [4]. Earenfight defines her power as agency power, which means to play full use and capacity to affect her destiny. As demonstrated above, Catherine did not have the right to choose her husband and was tied to marriage as a queen consort. Compared to Elizabeth, who intentionally kept single and a virgin, which means that Catherine has less freedom in the marriage system. Another noticeable question is the discourse of the description of the women rulers. For example, agency is often associated with a soft form of personal power akin to autonomy [4]. It is a second tier of power that traditionally lies in the sphere of femininity [4]. When examining the situation of noblewomen in the regime of patriarchy, scholars tend to use the discourse of influence, agency, and autonomy to reflect gendered gradations of power. Women rulers became 'the other' in the history of the ruling, and they are stuck to such symbolic narrativity.

7 Conclusion

To conclude, applying the concept of power to the cases of Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I in the Tudor dynasty offers illuminating perspectives to reconstruct the strength of queens in the systematic domain of patriarchy and monarchy in historical narratives. Michel Foucault has provided scholars with a novel way to dismantle gender norms.

It will be a weakness if scholars continue restricting Catherine's narrativity as the wife, the widow, and the dowager in the subordinated sphere. Rethinking herself with the support of Foucauldian sociology drags her out of misogyny and her so-called miserable fate. Besides, Elizabeth presents a powerful Queen regnant of the Tudor Dynasty, paving the way for the diversity of queenship ruling. Her gender fluidity has shown that she has already lived a post-modernist way of life. The body is not the prison of power. Those two brilliant women figures have challenged the patriarchal system in their own way.

Nevertheless, it is still noticeable that despite successful figures like Elizabeth I during the Tudor Dynasty, the real social condition of English women was not improved practically. In some way, the queens did show an alternative of strength as a gifted and ideal exceptional, but they are only representative in monarchical discourse. Essentially, it is not even exaggerated to say the monarchical system is further consolidated and ties with patriarchal practices. For feminist scholars, it is thus important to first admit the privileges of noblewomen and deconstruct the monarchical paradigm. By comprehending and deconstruct the facets of the Tudor queens, scholars will be expected to foster the strength of intersectionality of gender politics in queenship study which diminish the stereotyped legacy of queens in gender history.

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