

## Study on Female Artist Culture's Influence on Ci in Five Dynasties

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**Abstract:** Female Artists, including the female singers and dances, played an important role in society with their beauties and talents in singing and dancing. They not only witnessed the transformation of China's political system from primitive public ownership to private ownership, but also developed themselves in the context of polygamy. The period of Five Dynasties (907AD—960AD) was the continuation of late Tang Dynasty (618AD—907AD), frequent changes in the state made aspiring people devoted themselves to female artists culture. However, in fact, female artists culture became the shelter of scholars, they regarded girls in the whorehouse as metaphor target to express the loneliness, helplessness and indignation of literati. Therefore, I think that female artists culture had great significance to the development of Ci.

### 1. About Female Artists Culture

#### 1.1 Origin and Definition

In primitive society, people adopted the group marriage system, which had no exclusiveness of women, or the restriction of ethics and women's morality. However, with the change of the times and the development of male's social role, the marriage system has changed from group marriage to polygamy, and it maintained for thousands of years. We can know from that the status of women in ancient social was always low. Female artists culture used to be regarded as a kind of entertainment for men. Lin Yutang once said that prostitutes began in Warring States Period, this saying has not been approved. But *Guanzi·Light and Weighty Armour* recorded: In the period of Emperor Jie (last emperor of Xia Dynasty), there were thirty thousand female artists. Every morning they sang together, people could hear them from three miles away. It proved that female artist existed in slavery society. The *Discussion on Salt and Iron·Plough* Chapter mentioned “Once the female artists were full of palace with beautiful close...”, which proved that female artists had a large scale from an very early time.

Female artists mean the female musicians and dancers who served the ruling class in ancient times. *Liezi·Zhou King Mu* in Warring States period recorded that “Treating him like a king, give him best accommodation, best dishes and female artists to entertain him.” After that the boundary of female artists and prostitute is more and more ambiguous—*Shuowen Jiezi* recorded that prostitute, means female artist was like a small thing. [1] *Annotation on Shuowen Jiezi* written by Duan Yucai recorded: “It is used as the same as prostitute now.” It proved that prostitute had the same meaning with female artist. *Kun Cang* written by Zhang Yi, in late East Han Dynasty explained that prostitute as beauties. With the development of time, prostitute gained more meanings. *History of Chinese Prostitute*, written by Wang Shunu, regarded that the meaning of prostitute started from Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties.[2] *Qieyun* written by Lu Fayuan in Sui Dynasty: Prostitute, female artist. *New History of Tang Dynasty·Biography of Yuanzai* recorded: The famous female artists from foreign areas enjoyed great fame. *Ji Yun* written by Ding Du in Song Dynasty recorded: Prostitute, for fun. From those records from Warring States Period to Song Dynasty we can know that female artists gradually became prostitutes after Sui Dynasty, the they had played an important role in ancient society.

## 1.2 Classification and Variation

Prostitutes could be divided into three types according to their living environment, beauties and talents: geisha, sex prostitutes, and combined. There was another classification according to the class nature: official prostitute, private prostitute and operating prostitute. *Strategies of the Warring States* recorded: Duke Huan of Qi had seven hundred Lv(an ancient unit) imperial palace maids, at that time, a Lv equaled five Bi(an ancient unit), a Bi equaled five families. So an Lv equaled twenty-five families. Guan Zhong had seven hundred Lv maids, which equaled 17,500 families. This kind of behaviour was regarded to donate flowers.[3] From this we can know, the official prostitute formed its foundation in Warring States Period, aiming to meet the demand of Imperial people and increase national revenue. No matter good or bad, the developed female artists occupied an important part in the various society. The second chapter in *Cipin·Fangqu* written by Yang Shen recorded accurately: In Tang Dynasty, Fangqu meant the place that female artists lived. From this, we can know that female artists had some relationship with Fangqu. Jiaofang meant the place that girls learned singing and dancing which started Emperor Yang in Sui Dynasty. “Emperor Yang ordered every county in Henan Province to send an artist to East Capital to assist existing 3,000 artists, and those new comers were accommodated in the south of Luo River.” [4]The preface to *Jiaofang Record* [5]written by Cui Lingqin in Tang Dynasty mentioned: “At the beginning period of Tang Dynasty, the activities of commemorating the morality of ancestors had not been started, so Emperor Gaozong command the artists to make new songs and tunes for it.” And *Jiaofang Record* showed that two Jiaofang could supplement each other: “Right Jiaofang was in Guangzhafang, Left Jiaofang was in Yanzhengfang in West Capital. The left one had more singers, while the right one had more dancers, they both had their own advantages.” We can see that Jiaofang had gained some social status which was used by the ruling class. *History as a Mirror* recorded: “In the past, the joy of elegance and popularity were both very normal. People who were good at music could be chosen as the leader of rites and music. While circus was not so promoted. The emperor set left and right Jiaofang to teach dancing and singing, nominated the general Fan Ji as the manager...Selected some female artists in suitable place, awarded them to the people with great contributions. [6] At this time, the ruling class used female artists as the tools to draw over ministers. Emperor Xuanzong in Tang Dynasty renovated the institution of Jiaofang, made Pearl Park independent. This kind of system continued into the Five dynasties as mentioned.

Gu Xuanzeng, Ci writer in Five Dynasties, wrote *Telling of Innermost Feelings·Where is the man who abandoned me?* “Telling of Innermost Feelings” was one of the names of Fangqu in Tang dynasty. Wang Jian’s *Palace Ci, the 48<sup>th</sup> Ci* in Former Shu Dynasty wrote: “The girl in whorehouse wears a long dress, her name appears again and again in Jiaofang. The famous dancing team in front of the imperial palace often invite her to join in.”[7] It showed that the Jiaofang system was still used by ruling class. Later, *Pozhenzi*, written by Li Yu, mentioned: “The most embarrassing thing was when they left the temple, and the orchestra of the Jiaofang played the farewell song. I only had tears on my face, facing palace maids.” This Ci showed that Jiaofang in Five Dynasties had strong symbol functions. The prosperity in Sui Dynasty and Tang Dynasty, the emotions of palace people and girls became a kind of sadness in Five Dynasties. In Song Dynasty, female artist culture got further development, the official prostitute as well as private prostitute got rapid development. *Dream of East Capital*, written by Meng Yuanlao, mentioned that Tune Street means the whorehouse, “All whorehouses in the west direction are called Tune Street.”[8]

Why were there so many whorehouses?

I think there are four reasons: The first one is the continuous influence of late Tang Dynasty, people at that time were used to the luxury living environment and entertainment of female artists. Even in Song Dynasty, people still “Regard Hangzhou as Bianzhou”. [9] The second one is that official prostitute and private prostitute were not only the functions of entertainments, but also helped the host to treat guests. Their talents could earn money for their owner, they also wrote some poems to help their owner to gain scholarly honour. The third one is the steady environment and sprouting of market economy provided more space for people to have leisure activities. For

example, “Washes” was the site of official prostitute. Therefore, poets in this social environment are subtly influenced by female artist culture. They wrote lots of images in their poems as their characteristics. The last one is that scholars at the end of Five Dynasties and beginning of Song Dynasty felt hopeless for their own futures because of the turbulent era. They could only put their hearts in entertainments. This is also the “Double Context” put forward by scholar Ye Jiaying. The big environment is the crisis moment for the whole country while the small environment is the entertainment place.

## 2. About Huajian Ci

### 2.1 Origin and Development of Ci

#### 2.1.1 Origin

*Chinese Literature History*, [11] written by Japanese Sinologist Naoto Kanano [10] mentioned that Ci originated from the folk ballad in Tang Dynasty. In *Old History of Tang Dynasty-Records of Music*, it recorded: Since the emperor Xuanzong, musicians had used many tunes from overseas and folk. *Records of My Learning*, written by Wang Yinglin, wrote: “Ci and song originated from the late Yuefu (An music institute built in Han Dynasty). Scholar Wang Guowei agreed with his ideas, he wrote that in his *Opera Research*: “Ci originated small Yuefu in Qi and Liang dynasty.” The accuracy of these two ideas have not been proved. However, they both regarded the relationship between Ci and music, the lyrics with tunes were the source of Ci. We can also see that Ci was an appendage of music rather than an independent literary genre at its beginning period. The entertainment function of Ci had been recognized by the society. Ci, as a separate literary form, rose in the late Tang Dynasty.

#### 2.1.2 Development

The first chapter in *Biji Free Record* wrote: “Since Sui Dynasty, so-called song became popular.” However, Ci was still a kind of tool to express people’s emotions in daily lives. Ci was not so brilliant in Sui and Tang dynasty. Even *Zhuzhici*, written by Liu Yuxi, had some folk taste. After Ci was developed by Wen Tingyun and Li Yu, Ci gradually became important after late Tang Dynasty. After the Dunhuang song & Ci were found in the last century, *Collection of Dunhuang Song & Ci-Preface*, written by Wang Chongmin, wrote that “There were a lot of topics in Cis, including the emotions of wanderer, the aspirations of royal ministry, leisure lives of hermits, enthusiasm and sadness of young learners, praise of monks and songs of doctors. But the women’s emotions and whorehouse topics are only little. Those Cis expressed a variety of topics, patriotism and unification were the main keys. If we see them separately. *Collection of Dunhuang Song & Ci* had nine *Huanxisha*, five *Dingfengbo*, five *Seeing Regions of Yangtze River*, Four *Thank Emperor’s Grace*, and fifteen *Pusaman with one fragment*. *Pusaman* came from *Jiaofang Record*, and the *North Dream Words* recorded: “Emperor Xuanzong in Tang dynasty loved the Ci *Pusaman*, so Ling Huxun ordered Wen Tingyun to make new Cis *Pusaman*. It is not hard to see that the contents about emotions between men and women. After that Wen Tingyun established Huajian Ci Genre indicated the promotion of reforming. Wen Tingyun had written over five hundred Cis with eighteen people, and he was regarded as the ancestor of Ci. The poems became all similar with low humble tune in the late Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties. But the Ci at that time had delicate words that any other type of literature can not exceed it in later dynasty. This was said by Lu You.” [12] There were two reasons that the Huajian Ci could reach such a high status, on the one hand, its writers were almost scholars, on the other hand, the compiling had its own purpose. *Preface-Collection of Huajian Ci*: “This book has collected many songs and Cis...for joy, for entertainment in banquet, for expressing emotions of different people. In this period, the functions of Cis were entertaining the banquet. The Cis, written by scholars this period, which contained the beauties and loves, were sang by female artists Those Cis had transformed from “Lyric Ci” into “Poem Ci”.<sup>[13]</sup> Ouyang Jiong evaluated that “The beautiful Ci was like the beautiful buildings and flowers.” It showed that literati explored the

new forms of Cis to make it more delicate, while the female artist culture helped a lot for the development of Ci.

### 3. Female Artist Culture's Influence on Ci

#### 3.1 Social Background

In the *History of Chinese Literature* [14], Scholar Lin Geng mentioned two aspects of the dawn of the new literary world since the late Tang Dynasty. One is the color painting of literature and art, which broke the traditional habits; the other is the approaching of spoken language, which aroused new grammar. The combination of the two aspects and the free form of Yuefu Cis were the formation of Ci. Of course, this dawn is inseparable from the social background. The late Tang Dynasty generally ranged from late Tang Dynasty to the seventy to eighty years after Tang Dynasty. At that time, there were many crises. Huang Chao armies' uprising and warlords' melee exhausted people physically and mentally. Scholars also knew that there was no way out in imperial examinations and official career. During the Five Dynasties, wars were frequent in Central Plains, while the region centered on the south of the Yangtze River became the preferred place of refuge. In addition, beautiful scenery, material abundance, song and music were known as flourishing, and the monarch was fond of literature and art, so etiquette and religion were relaxed and enjoyment and leisure were prevalent. The literature and art of men had been exaggerated to some extent, and the gentleness of women can be adjusted, so the love between men and women naturally became the focus of people's empathy. The creation of Wen Tingyun and Wei Zhuang, the poets of Huajian, showed us that Ci played a great role in expressing personal feelings. In the preface to *Huajian Ci*, it is said that "a lady of feast and embroidery, handing leaves and flower pads, selecting silks, her fingers were like jades, knocking the desk slightly. There was no lack of clear words to show her beauties." From this we can see that what it pursued was aesthetic literature, and the main audience of Ci was court nobles. Scholar Ye Jiaying mentioned in *Seven Talks of The Notes and Comments on Ci Poetry* that "the emergence of small words in *Collection of Huajian Ci* broke the literary traditions of 'expressing Tao' and 'expressing ambition' in the past, and concentrated and bold to write about beauty and love." [15] The growth of literary form and content of Ci can not be ignored in the development of the Five Dynasties without the impetus of nobles and even monarchs. Li Juan, Prime Minister Feng Yanji and Li Yu, the emperor of Southern Tang Dynasty, those three masters all made great contributions to the development of Ci.

#### 3.2 Creations of Literati

Scholars' creation at this time was not to praise merits, but to express their own feelings consciously. Female artists culture in the poem text belonged to the humble class. Literati should change the previous style, then it can be updated from then on. Wang Guowei mentioned in his *The Notes and Comments on Ci Poetry* that "the elegance of Ci lies on its spirit not the form," "Ci can speak what poetry can not". Female artist culture is not good in people's impression, but we can see the mentality of scholar-bureaucrats and even emperors from these Cis. In the above background, the Five Dynasties is a turbulent period. Yang Shen's *Ci Pin* in Ming Dynasty: "Kings in The Five Dynasties are real scholars instead or monarch, Wang Yan of Shu, Meng Chang, Li Juan, Li Yu of Southern Tang Dynasty, Qian Chu of Wu Yue Dynasty, all of which were able to write small Ci." Here we would like to mention two people who played a very important role in the development of Ci.

The first one is Wen Tingyun, [16] who described women in a lively form, whose style was mainly bright and beautiful. As the originator of Huajian Ci, he initiated a new way of expressing emotions, such as through photographic lens description. In his most famous Ci *Pusaman*:

Sunlight shimmers on a picture, Carved in perspective on bed-screen.

The hair on her temples appear—As clouds which, against her cheeks, lean.

Slowly she rises from her bed; Paints her brows like a crescent moon.

She takes her own time, unhurried; Completes her toilet none too soon.

Her flowered head between two mirrors— Interlay with face in beauty made.

On a jacket, tastefully cut—Are two partridges in brocade.

This Ci not only a described the woman's gesture, but also expressed a metaphor of loyalty between the monarch and the minister. Zhang Huiyan, a poet of the Qing Dynasty, commented on the meaning of “The first four sentences in this Ci are like *Lisao*”. Judging from this evaluation, the writer did not merely stay in a superficial and gorgeous description, but brought his own emotions into it. In the previous narrative, it is known that the Cis at this time were mainly written by scholar-bureaucrats. Since the Han Dynasty, Confucianism was established as a orthodoxy, it had a certain impact on scholars at any time. Even if it was impossible to realize the idea of “Running the country through talents”, it would remain in the consciousness of scholars all the time. In addition, it is also very historical for men to associate themselves with beautiful women and prostitutes. Sima Qian in the Western Han Dynasty has already mentioned in the book *Writing to Ren Shaoqing* that “People might look down on those people who keep many prostitutes, singers and dancers just for entertainments.” Dongfang Shuo, Sima Xiangru and others were not escaped from similar fates, so Zhang Huiyan's evaluation had certain reference value.

The other one was Li Bing [17], the king of the Southern Tang Dynasty, he described a woman's infinite emotions including worries, missing, fears and her helplessness in his “Drizzle brings me to the boundary area and songs of Sheng from the small tower makes me feel cold”, [18] the war made women suffer a lot. These sentences revealed their worries about the country's peril on the pretext of missing women. There is a close relationship between war and female artist culture. Zhao Yi's words in Qing Dynasty “National Unfortunate is Poets' fortunate” [19] got proved. *Ancient and Modern Ci* [20] described Xue Langzhai's diary: “King Jinggong asked Huang Shangu which one was best among Kings of Southern Tang Dynasty. The Huang Shangu answered “a spring river flowing eastward”. Jing Gong said: it can not compare to Li Bing's “Drizzle brings me to the boundary area and songs of Sheng from the small tower makes me feel cold”. Although there are some mistaken elements in this book, it is enough to see that Wang Anshi also tended to write beautiful poems.

From this we can see that female artist culture can not only be the satire of “A singsong girl, not knowing the bitterness of a conquered kingdom, sings Flowers of the Backyard on the river's other side.” it can also be the “jealousy of all the women”. It could play different roles in the end of different dynasties, or as the principal of the monarch's indulgence, or the object of the scholars who worry about the country.

### **3.2.1 Female artist culture promoted the spread and development of Ci from the perspective of form**

“The lyrics sung by whorehouse girls are mostly made by musicians in Jiaofang or folk writers. They sing a lot for the good rhyme.” [21] We can see that geisha can sing many poems and Ci, such as the story of “Qiting Painting Wall”—Wang Zhihuan, Wang Changling and Gao Shi consulted, “Today, we can closely observe what all the singers like to sing. Whose poems are sang more, who will be the winner”. Judging the poems by the popularity of singers showed that female artist culture had great influence on scholars' creations as a kind of spread as well as recognition. For those singers, what they need was the easy-memorized and understandable sentences, after all, singing one tune is just a few moments. The long and short sentences of Ci coincide with the ups and downs, and the rhyme of the sentences makes Ci both pleasant to hear and easy to remember. These characteristics of Ci made the singers choose this genre, which was easy to spread in society and could also make the noble and high officials imperceptibly influenced by Ci when they supported prostitutes. They felt the new social tendency, and scholars would change their creative style and form accordingly. The Ci titles can be attached with melody, and everybody could chant it. As mentioned above, Pusaman, written by Wen Tingyun used the title of “Pusaman”, which was originally the title of Tang Jiaofang Opera. The literati's introduction of the old and the new made the tunes have new vitality and easy to sing. In addition, female artist culture enabled poets to create more beautiful sentences, such as Wen Tingyun's *The Waterclock*: “A Leaf, a sound, empty steps

drip to the dawn.” This kind of tenderness and melancholy is very difficult to appear from the male perspective, and it is not common in later literary works.

### **3.3 From its contents**

#### **3.3.1 Female artist culture provided creation contents for literati**

There are two reasons for that the content of Ci in the Five Dynasties and the Early Song Dynasty was mostly about the love between men and women and the joy of boudoirs. On the one hand, poetry played a role of carrying Tao. Literati can not write love in the orthodox language of poetry and prose. But Ci was like a breakthrough that could make it free from the bondage of the outside world, and give full yearning for love. On the other hand, literati could not rely on imperial examinations to get an official position, nor could they be the staff of high-ranking officials. The deterioration of the whole social atmosphere made literati have to flee this dirty land and maintain their inner purity. The pioneer of Huajian Ci genre Wen Tingyun got the evaluation in *Old History of Tang Dynasty·Biography of Wenyuan*: “He did not care too much about his appearance, but he could play many kinds of instruments and write gorgeous Cis.” What kind of instruments could he play? *Poetry of Wenxuan & Yanyan recorded*: “Thousands of people played stringed instruments and wind instruments”. Lv Yanji annotated: “Blowing stringed instruments, including stringed and wind instruments.” It showed that Wen Tingyun had studied the tunes, instruments, and Ci, he can hear numerous people including officials and normal people from prostitutes when contacting with them. In other words, the literati's creative themes were more extensive, their vision was more unique, and they could write Ci from a deeper perspective, so that the role of Ci became unique and irreplaceable, very close to life. In the process of creation, female artists often appeared at banquets to provide inspiration for scholars.

#### **3.3.2 Female artist culture made the contents of Ci more close to folk loves**

Female artist culture could promote nobles to understand the folk and transform the content of Ci creation from palace literature to folk literature. After the literati finished their creation, female singers usually played the role of spreading. As mentioned in the previous part, private prostitutes and official prostitutes in China had a long history and a large number. They often tried to show their talents to win the important persons by performing their talents such as famous songs or new songs. The nobles were refreshed and aware of the dynamics of the folk people. However, because of the singing of the prostitutes, Ci, sang by prostitutes, mostly had implicit means, beautiful and fluent words, harmonious and beautiful rhythm, narrating love and boudoir thoughts and all kinds of feelings of life at this period.[22]

#### **3.3.3 Female artist culture became literati's refuge**

The prostitutes' helplessness and involuntariness coincided with the literati's psychology, so there were many images of prostitutes in their works. For example, *A Confession*, written by Du Mu in the late Tang Dynasty: “With my wine-bottle, watching by river and lake. For a lady so tiny as to dance on my palm, I awake, after dreaming ten years in Yangzhou, Known as fickle, even in the Street of Blue Houses.” Here “Blue Houses” means the whorehouse that female singer lived, the author made a comparison with the whorehouse with the royal court to express the author's regret for indulgence in the whorehouse and his political loss. We know that after the fall of Tang Dynasty, there were over ten relative steady states in the southern area, so the culture of Tang Dynasty got to continue in these areas. On the other hand, the Yangtze River area had abundant materials and food, numerous literati put their hearts in the singing and dancing to avoid the war. For instance, *Sidixiang*, written by Wei Zhuang: “Here I am, on a spring excursion, with apricot flowers blown full on my head. In that young fellow in yonder path—More than romance and love, I have read. If I could just be married to him, My destiny would be forever set. Granted: he might at last forsake me. I'd have nothing whatever to regret.” This Ci used the technique of traditional delineation to depict the situation of girls wanting to marry men, breaking through the fetters of feudal ethics. At the

same time, many male writers used the image of female singers to express their own emotions, such as *Spring in Jade Pavilion*, written by Li Yu: “In spring the palace maids line up row after row, Their evening dress revealing their skin bright as snow. The tunes they play on the flutes reach the waves and cloud; with songs of “Rainbow Dress” once more the air is loud. Who wants to spread more fragrance before fragrant spring? When drunk, I beat on rails as vibrates my heartstring. Don't light on my returning way a candle red! I'd like to see the hoofs reflect moonlight they tread.” This Ci showed the magnificent and luxurious scenes of the banquet as well as the joy and excitement of the people in the royal court at that time by means of the brilliant singers and dancers at the banquet. Or the *Slow Tune Of Yangzhou*, written by Jiang Kui used the above images in Du Mu's work to express the sad emotions: “No matter how good the poems are or how sweet the dream is, the deepest emotions still can not be expressed.”

For the first one, in terms of the mentality of literati, Tang Dynasty's poetry had reached an unattainable peak. Their creative materials were basically stereotyped, which made the poets in the five generations less innovative, so they focused on describing functional experience and want to break through the limitations in the scope of literature to free themselves, such as Wen Tingyun and others mentioned above. Of course, on another level, we can also say that this is exactly the direction of exploring new literary creation. Just as Li Yu wrote the sentences of “Farewell to the palace maids with tears, listening to the Farewell Song from Jiaofang” without writing regret or pain after being captured, the meaning of “Palace maids” does not only mean indulging in luxury lives and beauties, but also the recall of the dynasty. In such a turbulent era, both the ideals of literati and the ambitions of the monarch to unify the Central Plains had been disillusioned, which changed the mentality of literati fundamentally.

For the second one, from the emotional color of the literati, we can see that the serious key of the Ci in the late Tang Dynasty became light and bold in the early Southern Tang Dynasty. Chen Shixiu's *Preface-Sun Spring Collection* mentioned: “In the prosperous period of Nanjing, people likes to invite their friends to banquet, they invite many female singers to sing the new Cis with stringed and wind instruments for entertainments.” The entertainment function of Ci was reflected here. In the second part of this essay, we mentioned that Wen Tingyun in late Tang Dynasty and the king Li Bing of Southern Tang Dynasty took advantage of the female artist culture to make new contributions to the development of Ci. However, in the period of Southern Tang Dynasty, because of the turbulent social environment, although the contents of Ci was no longer so serious, it still hid a kind of helplessness and ademonia. The “Double Environment” put forward by scholar Ye Jiaying was an important factor that female artist culture could have such a great influence. From the macro environment, the emperors and ministers of the Southern Tang Dynasty had a fear but can not do anything for the rise of the Later Zhou Dynasty and the crisis of the Southern Tang Dynasty. They had to banish themselves in a small environment, and the mood of the royal court singing and dancing and timely enjoyment still accounted for the main part. As a result, the role of female artist culture had become a superficial escape of the ruling class. Ci in the late Southern Tang Dynasty was actually a fusion of blood and tears.

In conclusion, female artists culture and political, cultural activities supplement each other. In the early period, it had the function of singing merits and praising virtues, feasting and entertaining in the banquets. In the turbulent period such as Five Dynasties, it became the channel of spreading Ci and pouring out the sufferings of literati. Inadvertently, it had a great influence on the integration of Ci and popular culture, the transformation of the content and form of Ci writing. So its special position can not be ignored.

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