Volume 3, Chapter 15:
The Method for Putting on the Strings

Translator's note: This chapter presents a general method for the traditional way of putting on one string using both hands, where the left hand has several tasks including tuning the new string to a previous string, and the right hand focuses on pulling and wrapping the string around a wild goose foot. The next chapter talks about how to put the strings on in succession and how to tune the "next" string to a previously strung string, usually string five. It should be noted that this methodology is non-trivial in the extreme. The translator is not fond of this procedure and has memories of watching previously placed strings be knocked askew about the time the last string is put on. In this case, practice will indeed make perfect. Some current qin makers using nylon/metal hybrid strings provide a "machine" that uses zither pins from the piano world. This machine does make the act of putting on new strings or changing individual strings much easier. It may however not be safe for the traditional silk string as the edges of the zither pins may be too sharp. Stephen Dydo has built equivalent boxes for silk strings using violin pegs.

First thread the string so that the "fly-head" becomes tight against the fastener.[1] Make the upper part (of the "fly-head") face up, and make the back face down. *[The part with a nose faces up and the crossed-over part faces down]*. It is best if the fastener reaches the inside of the bridge (towards the nut). If it goes over too far then the strings when played will be mute and not clear.[2] If (the fastener) does not reach (the bridge), then the tones will be too strong and not smooth.

The technique starts with first taking the qin and standing it up straight on the middle of a stool. The tail is up and the head is down. Use a cloth to protect the head (on the stool) so it does not slip. Take the strings and hang them up on the mouth of the dragon gums (fn: nut area).[3] Arrange them in an equal and separated fashion in their respective positions. Pull them towards the wild geese foot area. Take the end of a string and wrap it first around the right-hand little finger, coming out beyond the ring finger, entering in by the middle finger, and then finally employ the thumb and index finger to pinch the string tight. *[If two fingers pinch a string, it cannot hurt the fingers]*.[4] Using your strength pull down. Use the thumb and index finger of the left hand to tightly hold the string at the front of the qin and gently pull towards the area of the nut. This helps the string go in the direction of the qin back and makes it easier for the right hand to pull the string tight. Some may use a goose feather tube to protect the nut and thereby avoid sharp places on the nut harming the string, or to avoid having the string harm the nut.

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[1] "Fly-head" means the knot at the end of the string. See volume 3, chapter 14, "How to Tie the Fly-Heads" for more information. Fastener refers to the cord used to "fasten" the string at the bridge. See volume 3, chapter 12, "Making Cords" for more information.
[2] The string/fasterner combination needs to rest on the bridge.
[3] The nut area.
[4] A handkerchief or piece of cloth may also be used here to protect the fingers.

Moreover it makes (the string) slippery, and much easier to move. To check the strings, use the left hand ring finger to press a string and the thumb for plucking. Examine the sound (to see if it is high enough) and then fix the string accordingly. The left hand is also used to grasp the tail of the qin. The right-hand takes the string and pulls it tight on the wild goose foot. Do not let the string slip. With this method, although the string is wrapped around the little finger, the main strength resides with the thumb, index, and middle fingers pulling the string tight. Therefore the small finger will not be hurt. Some use cloth or a handkerchief for wrapping the strings. Follow the method to place the strings. When you start out to study, you may not know your string. Avoid hurting yourself. With every string wound on a wild goose foot, be sure and make it tight against the qin bottom. Do not leave any space. At the conclusion of winding the string, take the string tail and stick it through (other parts of the string), and pull things tight. Do not let it become knotted up.

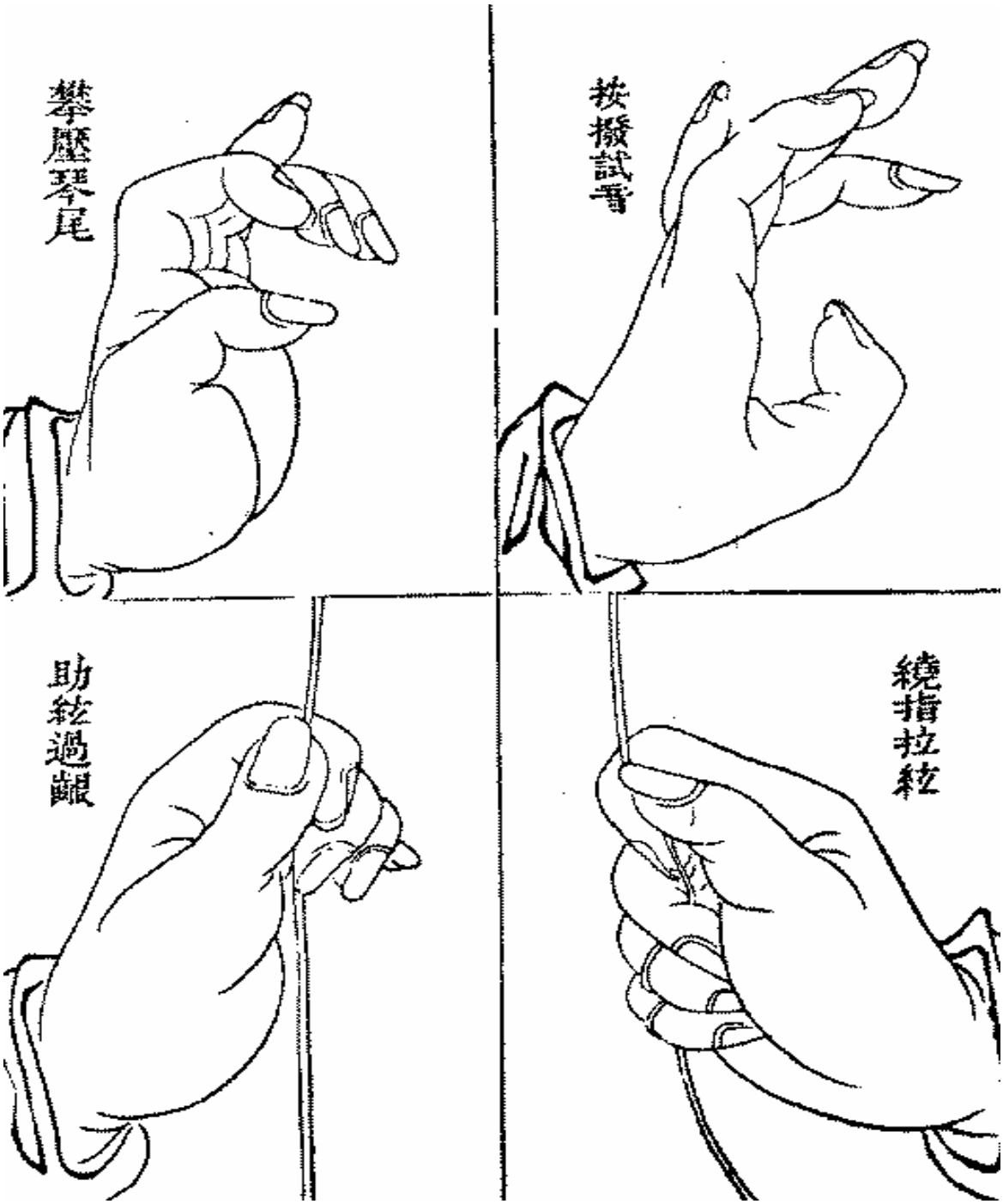

Figure 1: (From right top clockwise) Pressing and Plucking to Test the Sound, Wrapping the Fingers to Pull the String, Helping the String to Pass the Nut, Holding Down the Qin Tail.

Figure 2: Putting on Strings – Front View

Figure 3: Putting on Strings – Back View