Volume 3, Chapter 8: Distinguishing Quality in Strings

As for the workmanship of strings, look at the outer layer wrapped around strings one to four. It should be flat (without bumps), and tight, wrapped right up next to the inside part like they were one whole. From the head to the tail, it should be rounded without overly thick or thin places, and without rejoined sections, knots or scars. Strings five to seven also should be tight and strong like a string of pearls. Also they should be bright and clear like glue. If the outer wrapping is too ample and loose, then it may separate with the inside. If the wrapping is done unevenly, then a division into smaller and larger sections will result. If the outer part has any broken places and they are rejoined, then knots will result. These then are the defects in workmanship.

The best strings are made in the provinces of Kiangsu, *[Soochow]* and in Chekiang, *[Hangchow]*.[1] In the Chia-ch'ing (嘉慶) period (1796-1821) and the first few years of the Tao-kuang (道光) period (1821-1851), there was a Mr. Shen I-hsien (沈軼先) who made excellent strings of three varieties, T'ai-ku (太古) (extreme antiquity), Chung-ch'ing (中清) (middle purity), and Chia-chung (加重) (increased heaviness).(3) Chung-ch'ing was the best. His strings were a deep dark color, taut, round, bright, and lovely. Unfortunately his son did not inherit his enterprise and it has not been passed down to us. In recent times there is a Mr. Lu (魯) of Shaohsing,[2] who together with Mr. Shen studied with Li Shih-ying (李世英). Mr. Shen was known to have excelled his teacher and Mr. Lu was not their equal. The Li family are famous for making strings from (as early as) the time of the Northern Sung. They transmitted this art for hundreds of years. Now their descendents no longer keep up this art. The ch'in is used to play ancient melodies and nowadays those who are fond of it are few. As a result few strings are sold per year. Thus few have studied string making and the art has been handed down in none too masterly a fashion.

[1] Sericulture areas. Strings from the Hangchow area were available in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1970s.
[2] Shaohsing in Chekiang province.