WRITING THE ADVANCED GUZHENG PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES INTRODUCTORY
HANDBOOK FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT AT JIAYINTANG LIUXING GUZHENG
TRAINING SCHOOL

FU YASUN<sup>1\*</sup> and NAYOS SARTJINPONG<sup>2</sup>

#### **ABSTRACT**

This study used a qualitative method approach with the following objectives: (1) to study advanced Guzheng performance techniques from key informants at Jiayintang Liu Xing Guzheng Training School, and (2) to develop an advanced Guzheng performance techniques introductory handbook. Qualitative data were collected through interviews from key informants by using the interview form which was evaluated by experts, with score of 0.86.

The findings showed that training the basics of playing the guzheng is an important component of advanced techniques, such as sitting position, hand placement, left and right hand use, hand shaking, finger use, etc. There are 10 important techniques for high school students include: (1) Fan Yin (overtones), (2) Pa Yin (four note arpeggio), (3) Pa Yin (seven note arpeggio), (4) Shuang Shou Pa Yin (two hand arpeggio), (5) Dao Pa Yin (reverse arpeggio), (6) Lun Zhi (circular finger), (7) Da Zhi Yao (single finger shaking), (8) Shuang Zhi Yao (double finger shaking), (9) Sao Yao (sweeping shaking), and (10) Dian Zou (dotting). The introductory handbook on advanced Guzheng performance techniques is divided into 3 chapters: Chapter 1, Overview and background of the Guzheng; Chapter 2, Fundamentals and advanced playing techniques of the Guzheng; And Chapter 3, Advanced Guzheng performance techniques, which includes explanations of playing symbols, playing methods, practice methods, song applications, demonstration clips, music notes from user suggestions, and other important information.

Keywords: Advanced; Guzheng Performance; Techniques; Handbook; Jiayintang Liuxing Guzheng Training School

#### INTRODUCTION

Guzheng, a plucked string instrument, is a traditional Chinese musical instrument and an ancient Hethnic instrument of the Han ethnic group. Over thousands of years of development, four major schools of Chinese zheng have emerged: Hakka zheng, Chaozhou zheng, Shandong zheng, and Henan zheng. The Guzheng is commonly used as accompaniment for

solo, ensemble, instrumental ensemble, as well as in song and dance, opera, and quyi. Due to its wide vocal range, beautiful and melodious tone, rich playing skills, and strong expressive power, it is known as the "King of Music" and also known as the "Eastern Piano". It is one of the unique and important national musical instruments in China. (MengLu, 2024)

The technique of playing Guzheng is the fundamental part of Guzheng learning and the basic

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1-2</sup> Bangkok Thonburi University, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding Author, Email: fu.yasunbkk@gmail.com

skill of Guzheng performance. Advanced Guzheng techniques refer to the combination of basic Guzheng techniques to develop more complex Guzheng techniques. For example, basic finger movements can form quick finger sequences, finger movements can be combined with sweeping to form sweeping movements, and multiple strings can be quickly played.

At present, students who study advanced Guzheng do not have enough Guzheng basic skills, so they often encounter complicated technical problems. Lack of accurate knowledge and understanding of certain techniques can prevent students from showing the desired results of advanced Guzheng techniques, resulting in a significant decrease in performance, emotion and musical technique. Moreover, improper practice not only leads to a lack of proficiency in techniques, but also increases the risk of injury, often requiring double the effort. (SongJin, 2020)

Jiayintang Liuxing Guzheng Training School is an influential Guzheng training institution, known for training many outstanding students and achieving excellent results in many competitions, such as the "Star Band" of Jiayintang Liu Xing Guzheng Training School in the 7 th Beijing International Ethnic Instrumental Music Competition of "Dunhuang Sound". Organize high-quality Guzheng concerts, such as the 10th anniversary.

This study can serve as a reference for students studying Guzheng, helping them learn complex or demanding Guzheng techniques. At the same time, a workbook on Guzheng performance techniques can also effectively assist students' practice. It can assist students in achieving their learning results through practicing exercises, and provides clear, step-by-step instructions.

# Research Objectives

- 1. To study advanced Guzheng performance techniques from key informants at Jiayintang Liu Xing Guzheng Training School.
- To develop an advanced Guzhene performance techniques introductory handbook.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative research methodology. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, especifically Guzheng teachers at Jiayintang Liuxing Guzheng Training School. The interview forms were used to collect data, then it was analyzed, synthesized, and used to develop an introductory handbook on advanced Guzheng performance techniques for high school students. Experts were consulted to evaluate the interview forms and collected data, and handbook to ensure they were effective and aligned with the research objectives.

#### Research Scope

This research focuses on studying advanced Guzheng performance techniques through interviews with key informants, specifically teachers at Jiayintang Liuxing Guzheng Training School. The scope of the study is limited to advanced Guzheng performance techniques that are appropriate and suitable for high school students.

#### RESEARCH RESULT

The researchers summarized the research results according to the objectives as follows:

1 . Studying advanced Guzheng performance techniques from key informants at Jiayintang Liuxing Guzheng Training School

The researcher found that, according to the key informant who is a Guzheng teacher at Jiayintang Liuxing Guzheng Training School, having a good foundation in basic techniques, one can start with advanced techniques. Advanced Guzheng techniques refer to the combination of basic skills and more complicated Guzheng techniques, including some guzheng playing techniques that, despite being simple, can achieve a high level of expression and application in advanced performances. Advanced Guzheng techniques include the combination of complex techniques, such as basic finger movements that can form a quick finger sequence. The same finger can quickly and coherently play a note to form a continuous long note, which is called finger shaking. The index finger, middle finger, and ring finger can quickly dial the strings inward, which is called sweeping. The combination of sweeping and shaking fingers can also form sweeping strings. The ring finger, middle finger, index finger, and thumb can play the same string as the ring finger, which is called the ring finger. Playing from low to high notes in sequence is called arpeggios. There are also some Guzheng performance techniques that are simple and easy to learn, but often play an important role in Guzheng music. In some complex musical works, these techniques can be used very skillfully. When used effectively, they can greatly improve the expressiveness of the music, such as Slippery, vibrato, overtone, pointillism, clapping, etc.

Good Guzheng performance begins with good ground practice, here are some key recommendations:

# Sitting Posture and Nail Attachment

Sitting Posture: Sit upright, keep an appropriate distance between the Guzheng body and your body, and place your center of gravity on the right side of the bridge.

Nail Attachment: The artificial nails (false nails) should be attached at an angle that naturally conforms to the fingertips. The artificial nail of the right thumb should be slightly inclined outward, while the nails of the other fingers should be straight.



**Picture 1**: Sitting Posture and hand shape when playing Guzheng

Source: Youyou Chuanzheng (2024)

#### Guzheng Performance Basic Method

**1. Shake your finger;** It is a very important method. The method is as follows:

Basic concepts: Shaking fingers is a crucial and unique fingering technique in Guzheng performance, which involves rapidly and evenly moving the fingers left and right on the strings to continuously produce sound, resulting in a coherent and long-lasting sound effect. It is equivalent to simulating the performance effect of long notes on string instruments on the Guzheng, greatly expanding the expressive power of the Guzheng. Main categories and performance methods was;

#### Thumb shake

### 1) Shake your wrist

Posture points: Gently pinch the big finger with the index finger, press the base of the palm lightly on the zither head at the foot of the front mountain to serve as a fulcrum, and slightly arch the wrist.

Power generation method: Using the wrist as the axis to drive the big finger to move, the big finger



quickly alternates between outward "support" and inward "splitting" movements on the strings. When playing, tilt the tip of the big finger slightly to touch the string, which can make the tone of the supporting and splitting as balanced as possible. This finger shaking method is more suitable for beginners because it has a pivot point as a support, which can make the movements of the wrist and fingers more stable.

### 2) Pile tying and shaking

Posture points: Use the little finger as a support and place it at the bottom of the front beam where the strings are to be played, with the wrist slightly lower than the palm and the big finger slightly higher than the index finger.

Power generation method: When playing, the big finger needs to strike the lower string to stabilize it, and when holding the finger, apply a little force without relying on the string. During the playing process, the support of the little finger can help stabilize the hand and make the movement of the big finger more comfortable, making it suitable for playing paragraphs that require continuous finger shaking.

### 3) Hanging wrist shake

Posture points: The entire arm is naturally raised, the wrist is completely suspended, without relying on any support from any part, the big finger and index finger are gently pinched, and the other fingers are naturally relaxed. Power application method: Relying entirely on the strength of the wrist to drive the big finger to perform a rapid chopping motion, with the front of the big finger nail touching the string. This finger shaking method breaks free from the limitations of tying stakes, and the wrist is more flexible, allowing for finger shaking at different positions on the strings, thus enabling free control of sound quality anywhere from Qianyue Mountain to the code.

### 4) Quick support and shaking

Posture key points: Use the root joint of the big finger (where it connects to the palm) to pluck the string, driving the full movement of the big finger. The index finger rests against the big finger, while the other fingers relaxed.

Power generation method: When playing, the movement speed of the big finger is very fast, and the alternating movements of support and splitting are achieved through the rapid flexion and extension of the finger root joint. When playing long notes quickly or with longer duration, tying stakes are generally used; When playing short notes with constantly changing values, there is no need to tie stakes, which allows for flexible adjustment of the playing style according to the needs of the music.

# Shake with two index fingers

Posture points: Use the big finger and middle finger to strike and pick while alternating rapidly from inside out. Double finger shaking generally adopts the wrist suspension method, where the big finger and middle finger are kept at or close to the third degree chord position, the finger joints naturally bend and remain stationary, and the other three fingers naturally relaxed.

Power application method: It mainly relies on the coordinated movement of the wrist to drive the big finger and index finger to perform fast chopping and lifting movements simultaneously. During the movement, attention should be paid to maintain equal strength and speed in both fingers to make a harmonious and unified sound.

#### **Buttons shaking**

Posture points: When playing the string with the right hand, press the left thumb tightly on the pronunciation string or gently pinch the string with the index and big fingers, and move left and right between the front beam and the code according to the requirements of the music.

Power generation method: The shaking motion of the right hand is the same technique as introduced earlier. The left hand moves while pressing the strings, and changes the pitch by changing the tension of the strings, thus producing special sound effects. This finger technique is mainly used to render atmosphere or simulate special musical situations such as the sound of wind.

# Sweep Shake

Posture points: The middle finger quickly sweeps the string within the octave interval and combines it with the big finger shaking. Firstly, make sure to be proficient in the motion of shaking the fingers, and then incorporate the sweeping action of the middle finger.

Power generation method: While shaking the big finger, the middle finger performs a fast-sweeping motion on the corresponding string segment. The force and speed of sweeping the string should be adjusted according to the needs of the music. The rhythm of sweeping the string should be coordinated with the rhythm of shaking the finger to achieve a harmonious effect.

# Multi Finger Scanning and Shaking

Posture key points: Multi finger sweeping is different from the usual sweeping techique. It is not based on wrist swinging, but on quick support and swinging. It requires the index finger, middle finger, and sometimes ring finger to sweep the strings alternately to combine with the thumb's swinging.

Power application method: While the big finger is rapidly supporting and swinging, the index finger, middle finger, and ring finger take turns to sweep the strings according to a certain rhythm. This finger technique is difficult and requires high coordination and cooperation between each finger.

The important thing is to do it in a relaxed manner, using

Wrist relaxation; gently rotating the wrist, swinging the wrist up, down, left, and right, to let the wrist adapt to the feeling of movement.

Arm relaxation; the arm should naturally droop and not be lifted or clamped forcefully.

Finger relaxation; avoid affecting the movement of the entire hand due to finger tension.

Hand Type; the hand shape can make the fingers more natural and comfortable during movement.

Angles; avoid inserting the big finger too deeply into the string, and the tip of the fake nail should touch the string to reduce the resistance and allow smoother shaking.

Over Strings; at the same time as plucking the strings, immediately pluck them back and keep the distance that the nails are walking about the thickness of the strings.

Music application; can be used to play variety of Guzheng pieces, including traditional songs such as "Fishing Boat Singing at Night"

2. Writing advanced Guzheng performance techniques introductory handbook

The introductory handbook onadvanced Guzheng performance techniques is divided into 3 chapters: Chapter 1: Overview and background of the Guzheng; Chapter 2: Fundamentals and advanced playing techniques of the Guzheng, and Chapter 3: Advanced Guzheng performance techniques, including explanations of playing symbols, playing methods, practice methods, applications in musical pieces, demonstration clips, music notes from user suggestions, and other important information.

The above content is required for high school students. There are various fundamentals of playing the Guzheng that can be performed with both the left and right hands. In this guide, we focus on advanced techniques for high school students, as shared by key

informants who are experts in advanced Guzheng playing. The summary is as follows:

### 1. Fan Yin (Overtones)

Picture 2 Finger Notation of Fan Yin (Overtones)

Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The left hand gently touches the 1/2 or 1/3 position of the string (the harmonic point), and immediately leaves the string after the right hand plucks the string, producing an ethereal, bell-like sound.

Key Points: The string - touching position needs to be precise, and the leaving - string speed should be fast, pursuing a pure timbre.

Application: In "High Mountains and Flowing Water" to imitate the clear spring in the mountains, and in "Mooring by the Maple Bridge at Night" to create the artistic conception of the bell sound.

# 2. Pa Yin (Four - note Arpeggio)

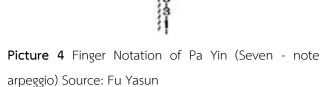
**Picture 3** Finger Notation of Pa Yin (Four – note arpeggio) Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The right hand quickly plays four strings in sequence, forming a coherent broken chord.

Key Points: The finger strength should be even, and there should be seamless connection between notes.

Application: In "Evening Song of the Fishing Boat" to depict the rippling water waves, or as accompaniment in lyrical passages.

# 3. Pa Yin (Seven - note Arpeggio)



Definition: An extended continuous plucking of seven strings, spanning a wider range.

Key Points: The wrist drives the fingers to move horizontally, maintaining a granular feeling and fluency.

Application: In the modern piece "Mingshan" to create a grand atmosphere.

### 4. Shuang Shou Pa Yin (Two - hand Arpeggio)



**Picture 5** Finger Notation of Shuang Shou Pa Yin (Two - hand arpeggio)

Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The left and right hands alternately or simultaneously play arpeggios, enhancing the stereo effect.

Key Points: The string - touching times of the two hands need to be precisely aligned to avoid timbre breaks.

Application: In "Capriccio in the Western Regions" to imitate the harmonic layers of Western - region musical instruments.

# 5. Dao Pa Yin (Reverse Arpeggio)

i 6 5 3

**Picture 6** Finger Notation of Dao Pa Yin (Reverse arpeggio)

Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: It is a reverse arpeggio, playing from the high - pitched to the low - pitched strings in sequence.

Key Points: The playing order is opposite to that of the forward arpeggio.

Application: As a decoration for the downward melody in "Dance of the Yi People"

## 6. Lun Zhi (Circular Finger)

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Picture 7 Finger Notation of Lun Zhi (Circular finger)

Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The index finger, middle finger, and ring finger quickly and alternately play the same string.

Key Points: The fingertips should exert even force, and the frequency should be stable, like "pearls falling on a jade plate".

Application: Used in "General's Command" for dense rhythm, and in "Telling of Cloud - like Dresses" to render sad and affectionate mood.

# 7. Da Zhi Yao (Single - finger Shaking)

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**Picture 8** Finger Notation of Da Zhi Yao (Single - finger shaking) Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The thumb continuously and quickly performs "Tuo Pi" on the same string, imitating a long - note line.

Key Points: The wrist should be relaxed, swinging with the wrist as the axis, and the strength should be consistent.

Application: Featured in "Autumn Moon over the Han Palace" for the long - drawn - out plaintiveness, and in "Regret of Lin'an" for the narrative melody.

# 8. Shuang Zhi Yao (Double - finger Shaking)



**Picture 9** Finger Notation of Shuang Zhi Yao (Double - finger shaking)

Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The thumb and middle finger alternately and quickly play adjacent strings, increasing the density of the shaking finger.

Key Points: The two fingers should touch the strings with the same depth to avoid sudden changes in timbre.

Application: Used in the modern piece "Ballad of the Khou - hou" to imitate the sound of wind.

# 9. Sao Yao (Sweeping shaking)



**Picture 10** Finger Notation of Sao Yao (Sweeping shaking) Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: While the thumb is shaking, the middle finger or ring finger sweeps the string inward, forming a composite effect of "melody + rhythm".

Key Points: The strength of the shaking finger and the sweeping string needs to be balanced, highlighting the main melody.

Application: Used in "Fighting against the Typhoon" to express the intense scene of a violent storm.



# 10. Dian Zou (Dotting)



Picture 11 Finger Notation of Dian Zou (Dotting)

Source: Fu Yasun

Definition: The finger quickly presses the string and then immediately leaves the string, producing a short decorative note.

Key Points: The movement should be light and precise, like a dragonfly skimming the water, without being dragging.

Application: As a lively embellishment in the Hakka Guzheng piece "Lotus Emerging from Water", or to imitate the chirping of birds.

The Advanced Guzheng Performance Techniques Introductory Handbook consist of 3 Chapter: Chapter 1 Overview of Guzheng; explains the origins of the Guzheng and its development, Chapter 2 Basic and Guzheng Performance Techniques; explains the basics and techniques of playing, and Chapter 3 Advance Guzheng Performance Techniques, explains advanced Guzheng playing practice, includes sheet music examples and demonstration videos. As an example of a technique described, it is called "FAN YIN (Overtones)"

# 1. Finger notation



- 2. Performance method: Overtones are produced by lightly touching half of a string with one finger, and then playing the string with the other hand. While playing, the finger holding the string moves away, causing it to produce an ethereal high octave pitch.
- **3. Practice method:** Start practicing with one string, for example, searching for overtones on the strings in the mid range, repeatedly plucking the string with your right hand and pressing the overtones with

your left hand until you can produce clear overtones steadily, and then gradually switch to different strings for practice.

The plucking of strings with the right hand and the pressing of overtones with the left hand should be performed simultaneously. During the practice, you can slow down the speed, first find the rhythm of the hand movements, and gradually increase the speed as your proficiency increases.

# 4. Key and difficult points:

Key point: The characteristic of overtones is their ethereal tone, so when playing, it is important to produce overtone ethereal tones as much as possible. In music performance, it is also necessary to use overtones appropriately according to the emotions and context of the music.

positioning of the finger on the string. If the position is not correct, it may result in the inability to produce overtones or impure overtones. If the force of pressing the string is too light to trigger overtones, and too heavy, it will become a pressing sound, just lightly apply it. It is necessary to cooperate with both hands in a timely manner, with one hand pressing a specific position and the other hand plucking the string, and the other hand leaving after playing with one hand. The connection should be timely and accurate.

5. Music application: In traditional music, overtones are often used to create an ethereal and distant atmosphere, such as the overtones in "Fisherman's Boat Singing at Night", depicting the tranquil scene of the shimmering lake surface and fishing boats gently drifting on the water in the evening. In 'The Plum Blossoms', the overtone is crystal clear and ethereal, vividly depicting the pure and elegant charm of plum blossoms

In modern music, the application of overtones is more diversified and can be used as a special sound

effect to add layers and fantasy colors to the music. For example, in "Fantasia", it is used to depict the wonderful scenery of twinkling stars and changing light and shadow. It is also used in "Mingshan" to create a profound and peaceful atmosphere.

#### 6. Fan Yin Exercise

#### 泛音练习曲

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Picture 12 Practice key point for exercises:

# Practice key point for exercises:

This exercise is adapted from "Plum Blossom Trio", known for its melodious melody. Attention should be paid to the angle of the overtones when touching the strings, and fingers should be pressed on half of the strings to produce the sound effect of overtones. Generally speaking, it takes 5 practice sessions or more to become proficient.

This guide on advanced techniques of Guzheng performance will help students understand and practice Guzheng correctly.



Picture 13 Fan Yin technique Demonstration

Source: Fu Yasun

#### **DISCUSSION**

Cultivating students' advanced guzheng playing abilities is not only about transmitting important Chinese musical techniques but also preserving and inheriting the value of national culture. This process helps learners develop their thinking in the modern world while preserving traditional customs. As Mengyue Cao (2023) said, the high-level development of Guzheng playing techniques reflects the exchange, integration, development, and coexistence of the cultures in the context of cultural globalization. This kind of communication and integration have a great influence on the preservation and evolution of national culture. Creating a manual serves as a teaching medium that can be applied in practice. Everyone can access it easily. This will help develop knowledge, understanding, practice, and performance in the right way, allowing students to develop their playing skills. In addition, students can improvetheir techniques while also developing their skills in reading notes, seeing different sounds, and expressing emotions. As Ning Jing (2018), and Chaipruck Mekara have noted, students at the high school level are developmentally prepared in terms of physical coordination, muscular control, vision, and emotional responsiveness. Additionally, advanced Guzheng technique must start with a solid playing foundation, as Nuttika Soontorntanaphol (2 0 1 5) emphazied. The first important step of basic Guzheng playing is playing posture, followed by knowing the basic playing signs and finger usage such as Gou (middle finger plucks in), To (middle finger plucks the flower), and Too (thumb plucks in (plucks towards the player's hand). With these things, students can progress to the advanced techniques that bring color, texture, and emotional depth to the song--for example, Fa Yin (Fa Yin), wherethe middle finger of the left hand is placed lightly on the strings and left immediately when the

right hand plucks the strings or Sao Xian (Sao Xian), where the back finger of the left hand is used to sweep along the 3 strings. Through learning and practicing these techniques, students not only engage deeply with the culture of China but also can develop Guzheng playing skills. In addition, it is beneficial to foundation to their continued artistic and personal development in the future.

#### SUGGESTION

#### Theoretical Recommendation

In theory, practical teaching in music education should combine both theory and practice to achieve quality learning outcomes. Approaches such as Dalcroze's method, which uses physical movement development of music, or Orff's approach, which emphasizes repetition of rhythms and melodies, can help students become familiar with musical concepts through direct engagement.

#### Policy Recommendation

Policy recommendations for advanced Guzheng for high school students should emphasize strengthening the basics of practice, as this forms the foundation for advancing to higher-level techniques. A solid grounding in fundamentals provides students with

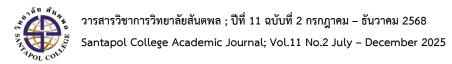
clear principles and guidelines that improve the quality of performance, enhane the beauty of the music, and deepen emotional expression through the instrument. Students will gain knowledge and understanding by themselves, be able to practice in real life, and feel relaxed while learning, which will greatly affect their memory and the quality of their practice.

#### Practice Recommendation

Advanced guzheng practice requires a lot of time and practice skills to become proficient. Teachers should provide detailed explanations and communicate in clear, simple languageand design activities that are easy for students to understand., songs, and enough time for practice, which will lead to better understanding. If students have knowledge and have ability to apply it in practice, their Guzheng performances will become more effective and will more clearly show the aesthetic beauty of both theinstrument and the music. In addition, developing proper technique helps reduce the risk of incorrect practice and keep students away from injuries during their practice. Teachers are also encouraged to incorporate modern or local cultural songs into their lessons, allowing students to engage with meaningful cultural expressions and absorb valuable local traditions alongside their music developent.

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