

Introduction to Guzheng

Guzheng is a Chinese musical instrument that has a history dating back to 500 B.C. It has many descendants all over Asia, such as the *koto* of Japan, the *kayagum* of Korea, and the *dan tranh* of Vietnam. It is a plucked zither string instrument with 12-26 movable bridges. The standard one used today has 21 movable bridges.

Originally, silk strings were used, but these are now replaced with steel strings or steel core wrapped with nylon instead. The player plucks the strings on the right hand side of the bridge with the right hand, while the left hand presses the strings on the left hand side of the bridge to produce glissando bending tones and variation of vibrato.

In the 20th century, the guzheng has achieved historic development. Throughout the history, the guzheng keeps its vitality by interweaving its music with rich folk foundation and creative performers in each generation. In the late 20th century, with the tremendous change of social and cultural environment, besides being continuously popular in the mass, guzheng music began to be taught in professional music conservatories. The mix of professional musicians and folk musicians produces an unprecedented improvement and enrichment in guzheng music. The most outstanding example is the emergence of numerous new pieces. At the end of the 20th century, the guzheng has become the major Chinese instrument with richest pieces and documentaries.

Tuning of the Guzheng

Guzheng is generally tuned in the pentatonic major scale. The pentatonic major scale is a scale where an octave has only 5 notes, do re mi sol la, or C D E G A when it's in the key of C. With 21 strings, this instrument covers 4 octaves.

The music score is written in *jianpu*, or numbered musical notation, where the numbers 1-7 represent the music notes. They are read as **1 = do, 2 = re, 3 = mi, 4 = fa, 5 = sol, 6 = la, and 7 = ti**. In the key of C, **1 2 3 4 5 6 7** will be **C D E F G A B**. An octave higher is noted by adding one dot above the number, two octaves higher is noted by adding two dots above. An octave lower is noted by adding one dot below the number, and two octaves lower is noted by adding two dots below.

The most common tuning for the guzheng is the pentatonic scale in D major.

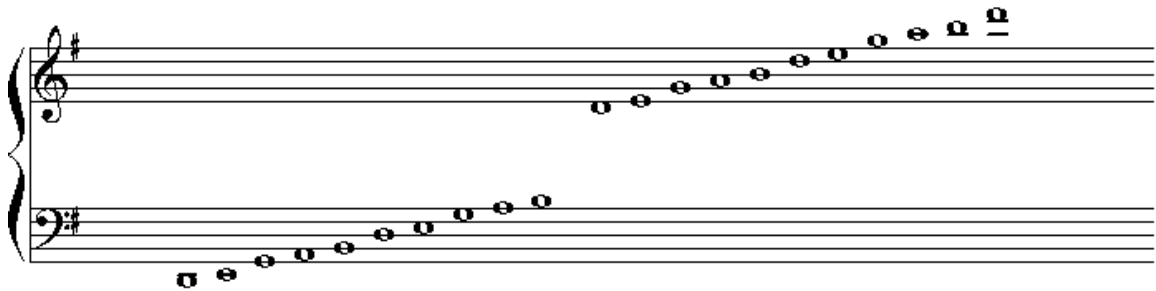
In D major, 1 (do) = D, 2 (re) = E, 3 (mi) = F#, 5 (sol) = A, 6 (la) = B

String#21 String #1

1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1
 : : : : : ' ' ' ' ' : : : : :

Another common tuning is pentatonic G major.

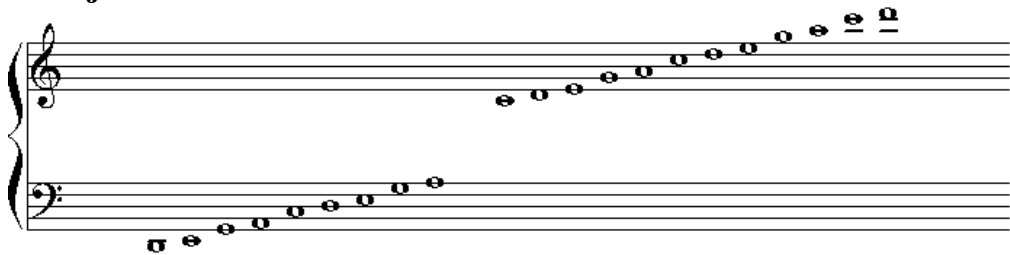
In G major, 1 (do) = G, 2 (re) = A, 3 (mi) = B, 5 (sol) = D, 6 (la) = E



5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5
:
: :

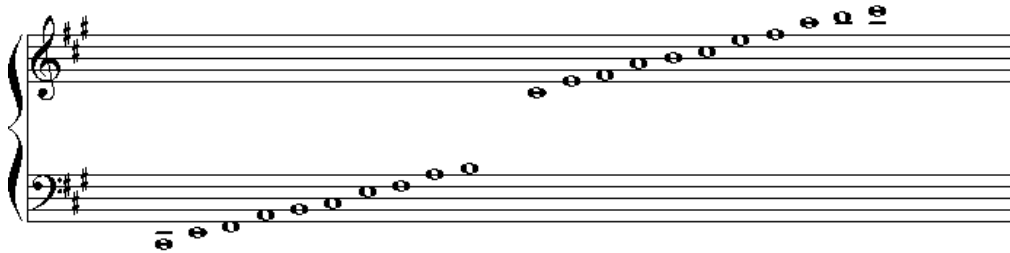
Some other common tunings are:

C major



2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2
:
: :

A major



3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3
:
: :

F major

6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1̇ 2̇ 3̇ 5̇ 6̇
: : : : : : ' ' ' ' ' ' : : : : : :

Once you are familiar with the strings, you can also be creative in the tuning. By changing a string to a half note sharper or flatter makes a big difference in the scale.

Please refer to the “Sound of China Guzheng User Manual” for detail on tuning instruction and setting up the instrument. If you do not have a copy, you can download the user manual at the Sound of China website resource page, www.chinesezither.net/technique.html.

Numbered Music Notation (Jianpu)

Guzheng music scores is written in numbered musical notation, where the numbers 1-7 represent the music notes.






1 = do 2 = re 3 = mi 4 = fa 5 = sol 6 = la 7 = ti

An octave higher is noted by adding one dot above the number, two octaves higher is noted by adding two dots above. An octave lower is noted by adding one dot below the number, and two octaves lower is noted by adding two dots below.

Chords are written in a vertical line, where the highest note is on the top and the lowest note is at the bottom. E.g. do mi sol chord is written as :

5
3
1

Note length is indicated by adding lines at the bottom of the number or adding dashes to the right of the number. A plain number represents a quarter note. One underline represents an eighth note. Two underlines represent a sixteenth note, etc. A dash adding to the right of the plain number equals to a half note. Two dashes adding to the plain number equals a dotted half. Three dashes adding to the number equals to a whole note.

1 - - - =  1 - = 
1 =  1 =  1 = 

A **dot** adding to the number increases the length by half. A rest is represents by the number "0".

1 · = 1 + 1 1 · = 1 + 1

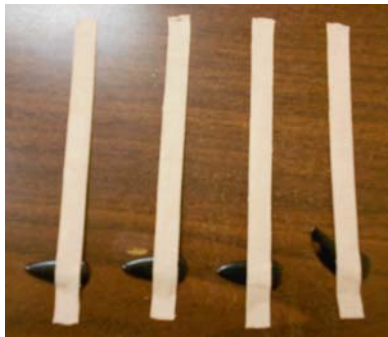
For more detail about the *jianpu* notation, please visit Wikipedia under "numbered musical notation".

Before you start

Wear the picks

There are four picks in a set. A curving one is for the thumb, and the rest three straight ones are for index, middle and ring fingers. The right size pick is the one that is equal in length or 1-2mm longer than your first finger joint.

First, you cut 4 strips of the adhesive tape enough to wrap the tape around your finger two times (approximately five to six inches), and tape on the picks to the adhesive tape.



Second, tape the thumb pick on to the thumb. The curve of the pick should face out at a 45-60 degree angle. The purpose of taping the thumb pick in this manner is that when you put your hand naturally above the string, the curve is facing downward perpendicularly to pluck the string, so you don't have to twist your arm and wrist in order to pluck.



Third, tape the remaining three picks on to index, middle and ring fingers. Tape each pick 2-3mm above the first joint of your finger. The purpose is to make sure the tape and the pick do not hinder the flexibility of your first finger joint.



Sitting position and Chair Height

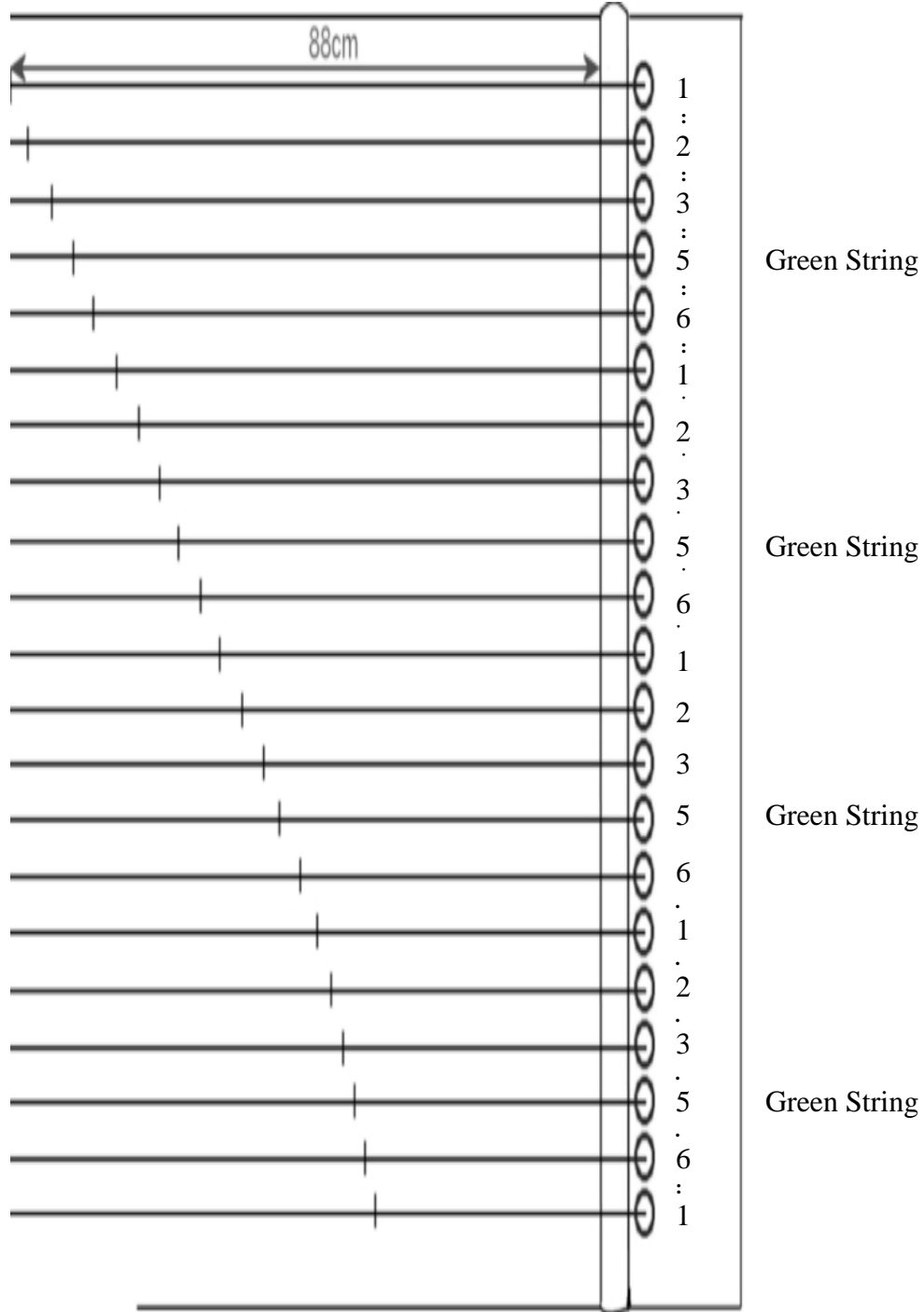
Please sit on the playing side (right hand side) of the guzheng, your body centered at the first bridge. When you sit properly, it's like your stomach is facing the first bridge. The proper distance to sit is about 5 inches away from the guzheng. Do not sit too far that your hands have problem reaching the bass strings, and do not sit too close that it's awkward to pluck the treble strings.

The perfect chair height is the one that let you play naturally. If you feel you have to raise your arms in order to reach the strings, that means the chair is too short. If you feel you have to lower your elbow in order to play the strings, that means the chair is too high.



D-Major Music Notation for Each String

Far Side



Body Side