

*L-M BRIC News Illustrated Instruction: Kute-uchi 03/31/2004 ©*

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## ILLUSTRATED INSTRUCTION

### KUTE-UCHI Basic Procedures

#### INTRODUCTION

This INSTRUCTION SERIES deals with technical aspects of the HAND-HELD method of KUTE-UCHI discussed in the News. For more information, please refer to note (1).

KUTE-UCHI belongs to the loop-manipulation (l-m) braiding technique. It had been used in Japan since the 7<sup>th</sup> c. or earlier, had been used continually throughout the Middle Ages and survived, though meagerly, until the early modern age. By the time the last practitioner of the technique died around the year 1900, it had already become such a minor technique that few cared about its demise.

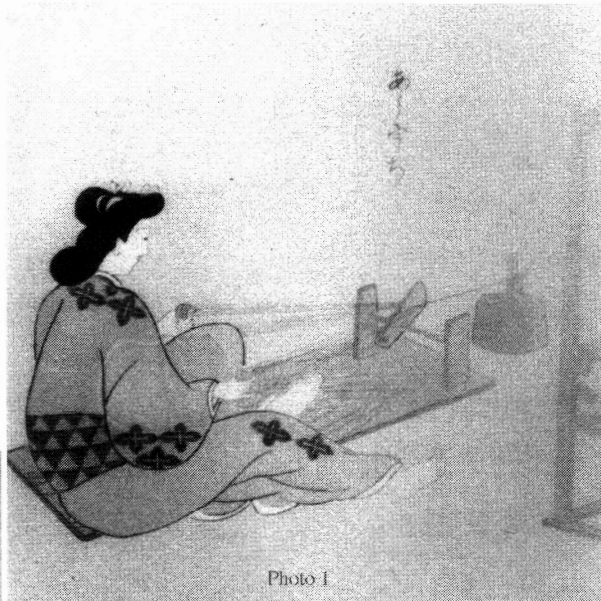
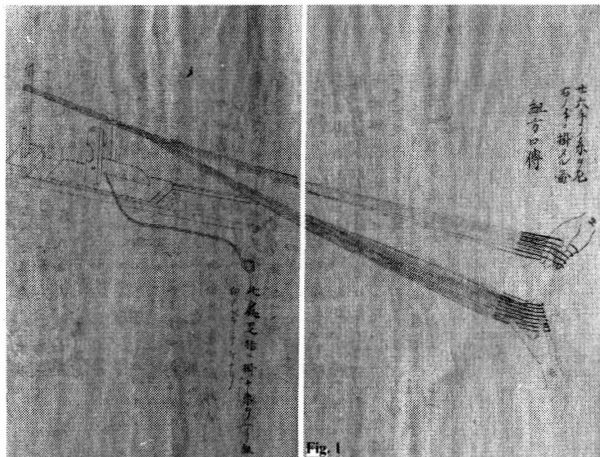
Kute-uchi is a pure hand-braiding technique requiring no assistance of tools except for a human or mechanical beater when making long braids.

Whereas the l-m techniques so far known are predominantly finger-held (f-h) methods, kute-uchi and a method used in Oman distinguish themselves by being the hand-held (h-h) method. Kute-uchi is unique in including both finger-held and hand-held methods.

The name "kute-uchi," coined by Masako Kinoshita, has been selected out of several names found in a few documents from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The names used at the time, however, do not reflect the wide range of the techniques that had developed in the Middle Ages because most of them had long been lost by then.

(Photo 1. Courtesy of Adachi Kumihimo Museum. Artist unknown. Photo by H. Nosé © 1994)

KUTE  
 means  
 HAND  
 STRAPS.  
 In



kute-uchi, the loops are slipped on around the hands and held in a sequential order. It is essential that the sequential order not be disturbed while the loops are manipulated. When using smooth and fine yarns, such as silk or cotton embroidery yarns especially in multiple-end strands, replacing the portion of the yarn held in the hands with kute, hand straps made of substantial material, becomes necessary. If woolly yarns are used, this does not pose much of a problem once one has attained a certain dexterity in handling the loops. This is the

case in Oman, the only other country we know of where the h-h l-m is practiced, where thick camel hair yarns are used.

(Fig. 1: from "Notes on Braiding." *L-M BRIC News* © 2004)

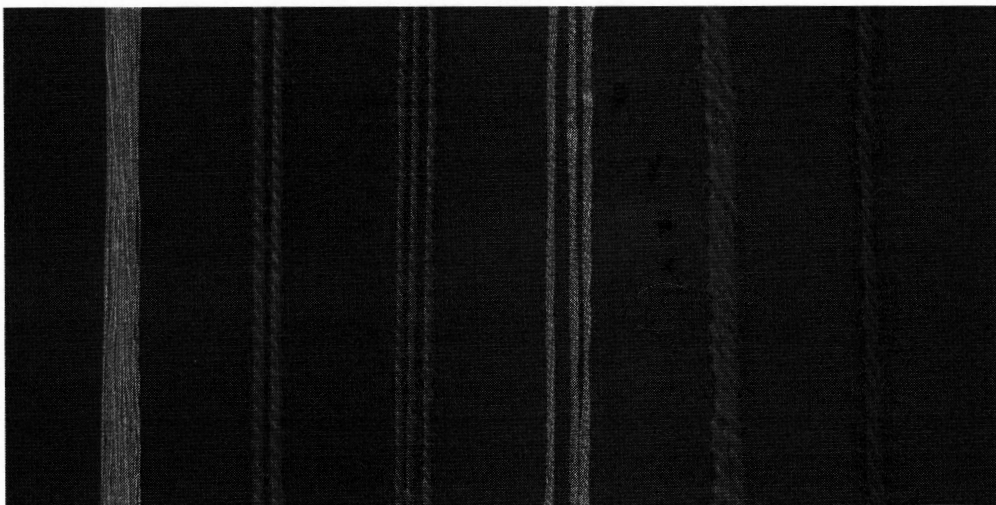
The old English records do not mention the method for tightening the braid structure. Several Japanese illustrations from the 16th to 18th c. depict a braider using a foot-operated beater. None, however, seem to work as depicted because they all lack the mechanism essential to the beating operation. This could have been done to protect the proprietary technique, which kute-uchi had been at the time.

Today it is more common to have another person beat the fell (2). Frieda Sober reported a beater stand used in Morocco (3). The Moroccan beater stand is easy to build and practical. Illustrations of the method similar to the one used in Morocco have been seen used in Egypt and Bulgaria in the 19th c (4).

## MATERIALS

Silk is the traditional material for braids. Many strands of fine threads are used to make the necessary thickness. You may use cotton, rayon, linen or synthetic yarns as long as they satisfy your need and can withstand the stress while it is worked. You must use kute when using fine smooth yarns.

You may also use medium to heavy weight wool yarns, for instance, crewel yarn and two- or three-ply rug wool. You don't have to use kute for wool yarns. You may or may not need kute depending on your dexterity when using multiple ends of fine worsted yarn.



(Photo 2. Examples of yarns from left to right: 27-end strand of 3Z fine silk, pearl cotton embroidery yarn S2 no.3, S2 no, 5, and S2 pearl cotton 6-strand floss, S2 crewel embroidery wool 3-strand, S3 rug wool.)

## PREPARATION OF THE LOOPS

Wind the yarn as many times as needed, accounting for the number of ends for color design, around a warping device to the required length.

When using a multiple number of colors, count the number of loops required for each color and wind accordingly. There is no need to wind in the color sequence.

When using two-color loops, count the number of shanks for each color. Remember that two shanks are needed to make a loop.

The length of the finished braid x 1.8 is needed when using kute:

The length of the finished braid x 2 is needed when not using kute.

Tie at one end of the skein and constrict it at the tie once the skein has been wound.

Remove the skein off the warping device and attach the constricted end to a support.

About 1/4" away from the attached end constrict bunched skein with a piece of cotton string to prevent the individual yarn ends from getting pulled out.

Tying the warp ends to kute

Prepare as many kute as required for the braid to be made.

You do not have to use kute when using woolly yarns. You may make "easy kute" by taking advantage of the fuzzy nature of woolly yarns.



(Photo 3: Kute examples: using linen rug warp, machine-made braids, rug wool, and plastic.)

Make sure that the all cut yarn ends are more or less equal in length. Tie the cut ends of the loops very securely to the bridging strings of kute so that they don't untie while you braid. It is important that the all loops are nearly equal in length after the yarn ends have been tied to the kute.

When making a one-color loop, it is less confusing if you keep the loop end of the wound skein uncut and cut the loops one by one as you tie the ends to the kute.

When making multi-colored braids work following the color sequence. Pay attention not to disturb the sequential order of the tied loops as you work along.

When not using kute

Simply slip on the one-color loops one by one around the hands while making sure that they are in the designed color sequence.

With loops consisting of one shank in the color different from the other shank (two-color loops), pick up the pair of warp yarn following the color sequence and securely tie the ends to form a two-color loop. Pay attention not to disturb the order of the tied loops as you work along (5).

Divide the loops into the numbers assigned to each hand. Slip on the loops around the hands. By convention the loop transfer begins from left to right, and so the number of the loops allotted to the left hand is either equal to or larger than that on the right.

Hold them as shown in Fig. 2 at right.

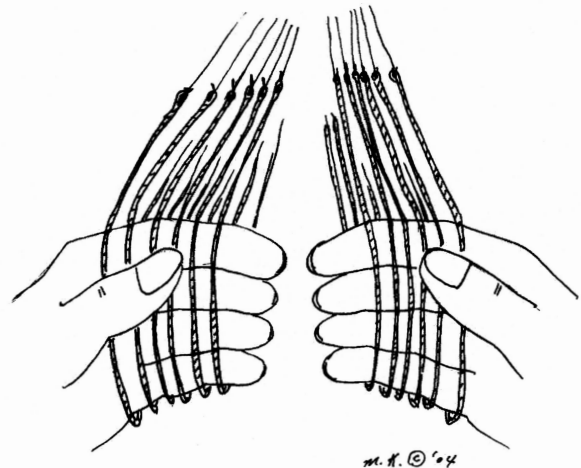
OUTER and INNER loops, and UPPER and LOWER shanks. When the loops are held as shown in Fig. 2, the loops held closer to the wrist are here called outer loops and those closer to the finger tips inner loops.

The shanks of the loops are separated into two layers. We will call those at the top layer the upper shanks and those at the bottom the lower shanks.

In the kute-uchi basic procedures, the outermost loop on one hand is transferred to the innermost position of the other hand.

Loops are transferred either going THROUGH THE INSIDE (IT) or AROUND THE OUTSIDE (OA) of the rest of the loops on the same hand.

Transferred loops are called ACTIVE loops (AL) whereas those through or around which an active loop passes as



it is transferred are called PASSIVE loops.

Loops may also be transferred "OPEN" or "CROSSED."

OPEN transfer does not change the positions of the upper and lower shanks after the transfer. CROSSED transfer interchanges the positions of them after the transfer thus the two shanks CROSS inside the braid structure.

**FOUR MODES OF LOOP TRANSFERS**

I have assigned a letter A, B, C or D to each of the four transfer modes that occur in kute-uchi procedures. (Fig. 3)

Mode A: OA OPEN  
(Fig. 3 top)

Mode B: OA CROSSED  
(Fig. 3 second from top)

Mode C: IT OPEN  
(Fig. 3 third from top)

Mode D: IT CROSSED  
(Fig. 3 bottom)

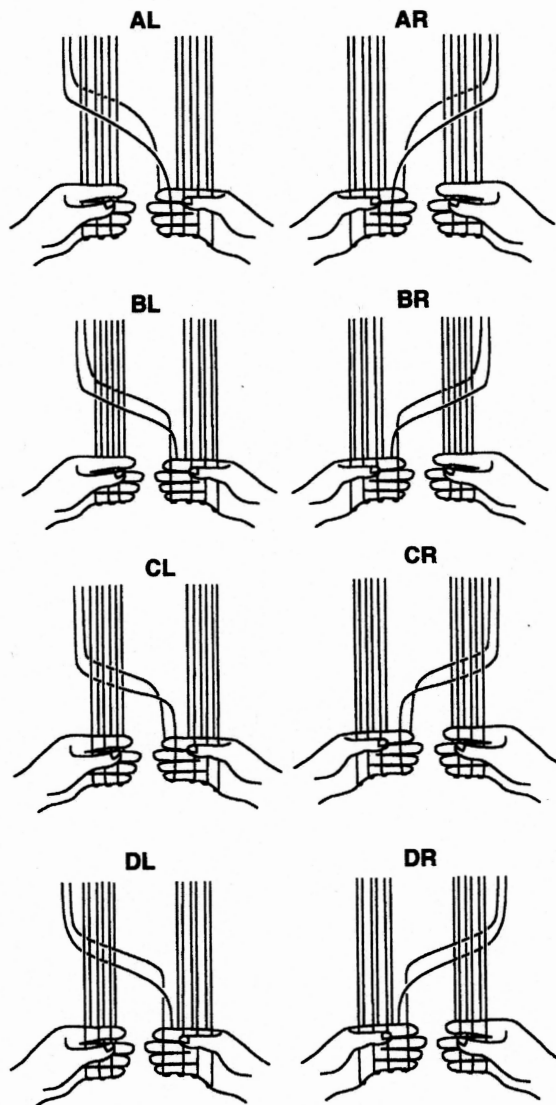


Fig. 3

**PRACTICAL ADVICE: How to transfer a loop**

Since the existing records give no detail of how loops were actually handled, instructions described here are of my own method to make the process easier. In this respect, if you come up with an easier way for you, feel free to use it.

Here we explain that the active loop is transferred from the left hand to the right hand. The opposite transfer is the mirror-image to what is described.

The thumbs are not used except for holding down sequentially aligned loops on the hands by pressing them against the side of the index finger. Help with the right hand whenever needed.

The "OUTSIDE AROUND (OA)" transfer:

Hold the loops around the four fingers (the index, middle, ring and small fingers) as shown in Fig. 2.

When OA transfer is called for, slip the left index finger out of the loops and reinsert it into the leftmost loop. The rest



passive loops.

Bring the right hand above the left hand and take the active loop, while the passive loops are pinched down tightly against the middle finger by the index finger.



The "INSIDE-THROUGH (IT)" transfer:

When IT transfer is called for, slip the index finger out of the loops, skip over the outermost loop (the active loop) and reinsert the finger into the rest of the loops on the same hand. Now, AL is held around the middle, ring and small fingers and is isolated from the rest of the loops which are held around the four fingers. (Fig. 4 right) Pinch the lined passive loops down against the index finger by the thumb.

Take AL by the right hand reaching through inside the passive loops.

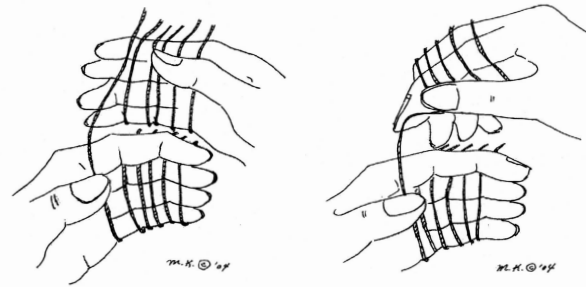
The "OPEN" transfer:

Using the right hand, take the upper shank of AL (on the left hand) as if scooping it up and bring it out through the inside or around the outside of the passive loops. The upper and lower shanks remain the same after the transfer.

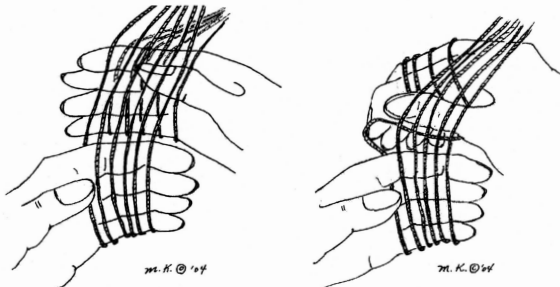
The "CROSS" transfer:

In the same manner, except grab the upper shank of AL from above with the four fingers of the right hand curled like a hook and bring it out through the inside or around the outside of PLs. Turn the right hand while holding AL to normal position and the transferred loop becomes the innermost loop on the hand. The upper shank of AL has become the lower shanks and vice versa.

The right two drawings (Fig. 5-1, 5-2) show how to transfer a loop in Modes A (left) and B (right).



The  
right  
two



drawings in (Fig. 5-3, 5-4) show how to transfer a loop in Modes C (left) and D (right).

The OA mode of transfer is not merely another alternative to the IT in the h-h method. The combination of IT and OA and the ability of handling the larger number of loops are the main factors to the unique development of the h-h method.

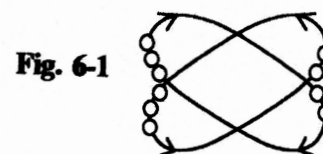
**BRAIDS RECONSTRUCTED FROM THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY RECORDS:**

## BRAIDS RECONSTRUCTED FROM THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY RECORDS:

Track-plans accompany the procedures presented here (Figs. 6-1 to 6-9). The track-plan represents the structure of a braid by tracking the movements of the elements, the building components of the braid. The arrows added on the tracks point to the direction of the movements of the elements.

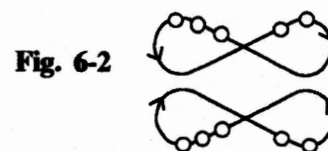
## TWO-STEP PROCEDURES using "OA"

1. (BB): Square braid = Four-ridge tubular braid with a twill pattern. (Fig. 6-1) Number of loops: not documented in the records.

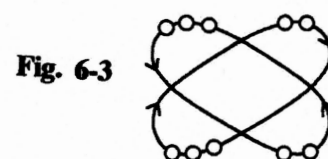


## TWO-STEP PROCEDURES using "IT"

2. (CC): Twin two-ridge flat braids with a twill pattern. (Fig. 6-2) Number of loops: not documented in the records.



3. (DD): Square braid = Four-ridge tubular braid with a twill pattern. (Fig. 6-3) Number of loops: not documented in the records.



4. (DC): Four-ridge flat braid with a twill pattern. (Fig. 6-4) Number of loops: 13 and 7 according to a late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> record.

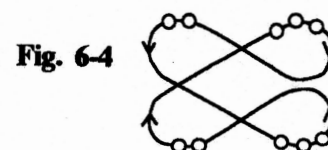


Photo 4: From left, BB (Square braid), CC (Twin 2-ridge twill flat or pigtail braids), DD (Square braid) and DC (4-ridge twill flat braid).

Of the 9 relevant two-step braiding procedures that are possible from the combinations of two of the four modes of manipulations, only above four were found from the records. Of these four, only one recorded the number of loops used. We have learned, however, from actual braid artifacts such as the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Shosoin braids, that both odd and even numbers of loops were used.

**FOUR-STEP PROCEDURES:**

The following four combinations of the four modes comprise the kute-uchi FOUR-STEP PROCEDURE: the first two either A or B and the last two either C or D, while the first and the third transfers are from left to right, and the second and the fourth from right to left.

In the four-step procedure, not only the selection of the basic manipulations needs to be specified but also the number of loops held in each hand. The crucial point is whether they are an even (E) number or an odd (O) number.

A procedure is denoted as (AACC?5-5), for example.

The former half is called QUASI PROCEDURE (QP) and the latter half INITIAL ALLOTMENT OF LOOPS (IAL). A combination of the two determines a procedure.

5. Twin four-ridge tubular braid or Two square-braids at one shot (Fig. 6-5)

Procedure: (AACC·O-O)

Number of loops: Not recorded, but must be odd + odd = even

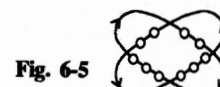


Fig. 6-5

6. Double-square braid (Known in kumihimo "Mitake-gumi"). (Fig. 6-6)

Procedure: (AADD·O-O)

Number of loops: Not recorded, but must be odd + odd = even

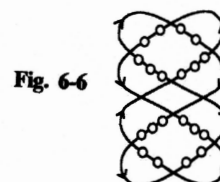


Fig. 6-6

7. Eight-ridge flat braid with a twill pattern ('Lacing braid'). (Fig. 6-7)

Procedure: QP: (AADC·E-O)

Number of loops: even + odd = Odd. Records show 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, or 17.

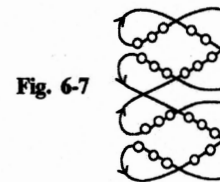


Fig. 6-7

8. Genji-uchi (8-ridge solid round braid) (Fig. 6-8)

Procedure (BBCC·E-E)

Number of loops: even + even = even. Record shows 16.

Genji-uchi is a combination of a square braid and twin 2-ridge flat braids. It shouldn't be confused with "MARU GENJI-GUMI," a kumihimo braid, which is structurally different.

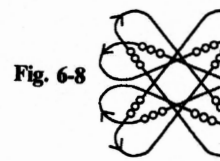


Fig. 6-8

9. Pseudo-Genji braid (Nise Genji-uchi) (Fig. 6-9)

Procedure (BBDD·E-E)

Number of loops: even + even = even. Record shows 16.

Pseudo-Genji braid is a combination of two square braids. It also is structurally different from "MARU GENJI-GUMI."

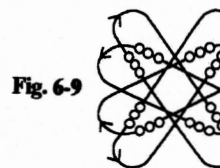


Fig. 6-9

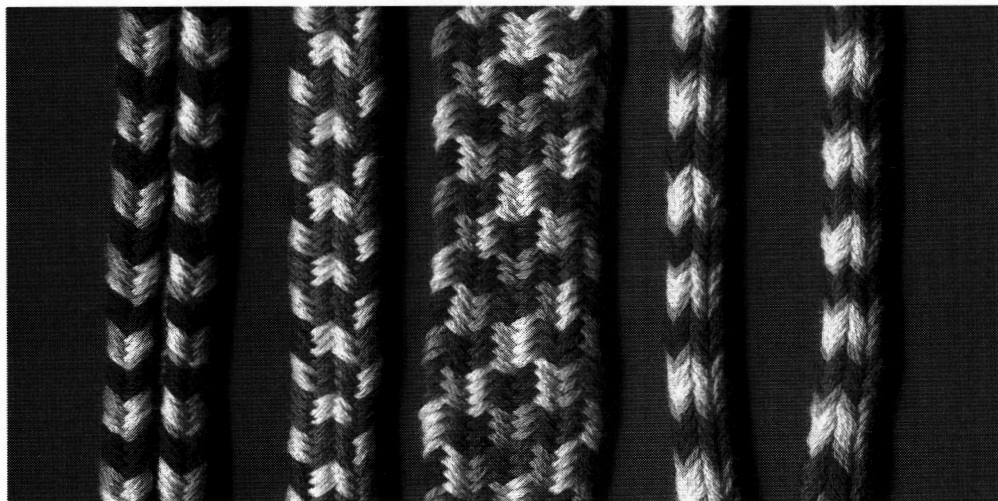


Photo 5: From left Braids 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9

There is no record of the braiding procedures other than those presented above. Other possible procedures can be figured out by making combinations of the four basic manipulations, A, B, C, and D, and IALs.

We surmise through analysis of the medieval braid artifacts that the braiders in the past have known the procedures, such as (AACC·E-E), (AADD·E-E) or (AADC·O-O).

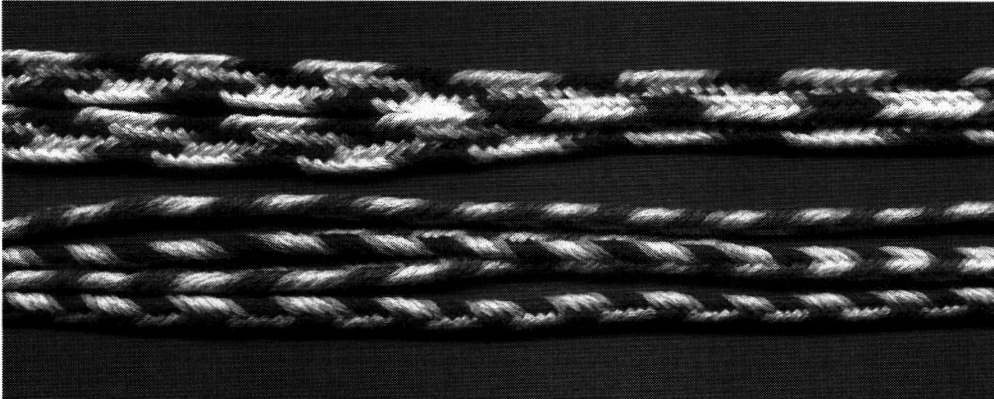


Photo 6 Top left (AACC·E-E), top right (AADD·E-E), bottom left (AACC·O-O), bottom right (AADC·O-O)

### SUPPLEMENTARY BASIC MANIPULATIONS (SBM)

The four basic manipulations, A, B, C and D, need to be supplemented by several more for replicating certain existing braid artifacts. For these the letters E, F, G and Z have been assigned. Whereas the former four have come from written records, the latter have been figured out as necessary manipulations to restore some braids. Here only two of them are presented.

F: REVERSE IT-O (Fig. 7 top)

The innermost loop is transferred to the outermost position of the other hand. The loop is not twisted.

Practical advice: Temporarily transfer all the loops on the right hand to the left hand, while paying attention that the sequential order of the loops doesn't get disturbed. Then the right hand goes through the inside of the temporarily transferred loops and scoops the loop originally the innermost on the left hand. Take back the replaced loops to the right hand, placing the taken loop at the outermost.

G: C-OA (Fig. 7 bottom)

The loop to be transferred is first twisted a half turn and then transferred OA-O

Practical advice: Temporarily transfer all the loops except the one on the outermost on the left hand to the right hand, while paying attention that the sequential order of the loops doesn't get disturbed. Give the loop on the left hand a half twist. Put back the replaced loops to the left hand with the twisted loop at the outermost. Then transfer the loop using A.

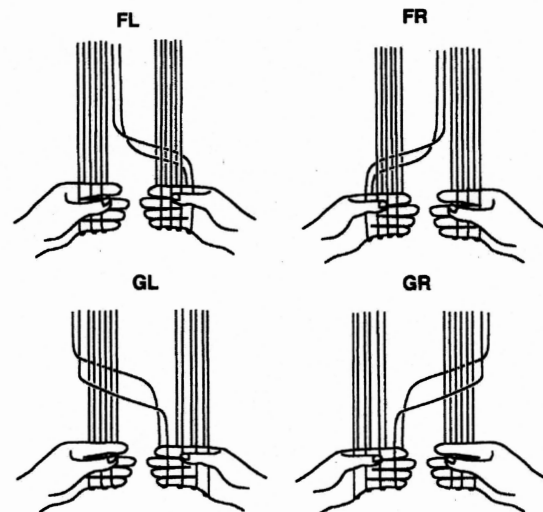


Fig 7