

# Lessons in Manchu Archery -

## Loading and Nocking Arrows

by Scott M. Rodell

Unlike target archery, Qing era Manchu archery was a martial art. In practical terms, what that meant for the archer, was that he trained to shoot at a target that was shooting back. And that target, constantly changed its position. So just as Bannermen on the battlefield of Qing China, those practicing the Manchu style of archery must draw, nock and shoot without ever taking their eyes off their opponent. This method is the same for both mounted archers and those on foot.

From the beginning of this sequence, through having loosed one's arrow, one's eyes never leave the target. Standing with feet slightly wider than shoulder width, torso perpendicular to the target, hold the bow level in front of the torso at just above waist level. Then the string hand reaches back and, grasping an



**Nurhachi leading his Bannermen into Combat.**



**Image 1- Detail from Ma Chang lays low the enemy ranks.**

arrow at midsection, draws it from the quiver. (See image 1, this Manchu archer is using a quiver, but sometimes arrows were thrust in the belt).

Next the string hand carries the arrow forward underneath the bow and into the bow hand, placing it in the notch formed by your thumb and bow. (See image 2 and 4). Once there, it is grasped with the index finger of the bow hand. If the grip of your bow is too thick to hold the arrow securely with just your index finger,



**Image 2 - Detail from Qianlong Hunting Rabbits.**

then you can also use your thumb to hold it in place. Make sure you apply pressure directly onto the bow with the grasping finger or the arrow may slide out of place.

With the arrow now held in place against the bow, slide the string hand back down the length of the arrow and over the fletching. As your hand glides over the feathers, feel which way the nock is oriented and turn it into proper alignment with the string. This is easy to do because Manchu arrows are typically fletched with the feathers aligned with the nock with a noon-3-6 feather configuration, like the tail of a plane.

With the arrow properly



**Image 3- Detail from Qianlong Hunting a Bear.**



**Image 4 - Detail from Qianlong Hunting Rabbits.**

string hand to apply pressure from the side of the arrow to hold it in position against the bow and release the pressure on the arrow that was being applied by the bow hand index finger. Having released its grasp on the arrow, the index finger of the bow hand is pointed straight, and forward at the target. Holding the arrow in position against the bow with the index finger of the string hand, one can now raise the bow for the draw.

Upon releasing the arrow towards the target, the string hand opens backward in a vertical arc, and then circles downward to where it can easily draw another arrow & repeat the process.

**For more information about Manchu Archery, please see:**

<http://www.grtc.org/manchuarchery/>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/ManchuArchery/>

aligned with the string, slide it forward with the string hand and nock it. Once nocked, release the pressure of the bow hand finger on the arrow for a moment and draw the arrow an inch or so, just enough to so that there is adequate pressure between the nock and bow grasp of the bow hand fingers to hold it in place on the string. (See image 3). Then, with the index finger of the bow hand holding the arrow in place, the thumb of the string hand can wrap around the string, just below the nock, so that the thumb ring is against the string and the bottom of the arrow nock. The index finger of the string hand then wraps over the thumb and rests atop the upper edge of the thumb ring. With the string hand in this position, use the index finger of the