Upgrading Imported Guitars
Most of the larger American guitar makers, and many that are not American, now have less-expensive product lines that are made in Asia. Many of these guitars are contract manufactured, meaning that they’re not actually made by the company whose name is on the headstock, but instead are made by independent factories. These factories make guitars for many different brands, and put any name on the headstock that is desired.

Some companies have separate brands for these products (Fender has the Squier brand, and Gibson has the Epiphone brand), while others market their imported guitars under the same brand as their premium guitars.

Quality
There was a time when some of these imported guitars were of very dubious quality. Fortunately, we’re seeing manufacturing standards rising significantly, such that today many of the very affordable guitars that are made in China - for example - are of very nice quality. This has been a boon to American and European players, as there is now a plethora of affordable, high-quality guitars from which to choose.

That said, where these products often do fall down is in the details. Especially, the electronic components are usually of sub-par quality. Fortunately, these are easily changed!

What’s Involved?
The components that come in these guitars will have metric threads, while the American brands (CTS, Switchcraft, CRL, Oak-Grigsby) will have UTS threads, or will use UTS-threaded screws. Any of the holes in the guitar that were originally drilled for metric threads will likely need to be enlarged. Jackplates; pot holes in bodies, pickguards, or control plates; screw holes for 5-way switches.

We say likely, because we have seen some guitars (certain Squier models, for example) where the holes were drilled large enough for UTS threads. But most guitars will need their holes drilled. If your original pots are roughly the diameter of a U.S. dime - rather than a U.S. quarter - then it’s a given you’re going to need to enlarge the holes.

Enlarging The Holes
A twist drill is only acceptable for plastic or metal parts; use a drill press if available, and make sure metal parts are securely held so that they don’t spin around and cut your hands.

Do not use a twist drill on your guitar’s body, almost certainly damage will result! To enlarge the holes in your body, a repairman’s reamer may be used, or a Unibit as shown below. Either of these will allow you to enlarge the holes in a safe and controllable way without damaging your guitar. Pot and jack holes need to be 3/8”, while toggle-switch holes need to be 1/2”.

Removing Original Parts From Guitar

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Wiring Kits
Fitting Into Import Guitars

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If Original Pots Are Close To Cavity Wall...
Then you may need to provide clearance for the larger pots included in our kits. This will be worth the trouble. If your guitar has the smaller imported pots, then they are significantly inferior in quality to the CTS pots that we use. But some effort will be required to make the CTS pots fit.

As stated previously, the first step is to remove the old pots:

Once this is done, enlarge the control holes using a reamer or Unibit as shown. As previously discussed, use a twist drill only on plastic or metal parts. **Be sure to read the previous warnings about using twist drills on your guitar!**

Finally, install the pots and wire it up. Whatever method you’ve used to create the clearance, the effort will have been worthwhile. You’ll now have pots in your guitar that will almost surely last a lifetime. Enjoy!

Next, use a milling machine to undercut a recess to provide clearance for the larger CTS pots. We realize that most consumers won’t have a milling machine in their garage, but many repair shops will have one, and this sort of work is quick and easy to setup and perform. It shouldn’t cost a lot of money to have this done.

Note that you could also do this with a Dremel tool or similar, though obviously the work won’t be as clean. A handheld router could also be used, but routers can cause real problems real quick, so be sure you know what you’re doing if you go this route!