

Qigong  
Ba Duan Jin  
The Eight Pieces of Brocade



by Col and g Hamilton

Yiheyuan Martial Arts

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## Introduction

The Eight Brocade is an ancient qigong set and over the centuries many different variations and interpretations have been developed. When practiced carefully and slowly, they can help to improve and maintain health and well-being.

The movements are demonstrated by Colin on a video clip. This set of notes is intended to accompany the video as supporting information to assist with your practice and explain some of the health benefits you may expect. It is not, in itself, a detailed “how to” guide.

*You are advised to practice only those movements which are suitable for your own needs and capabilities. Please consult your doctor before attempting them if you are unsure.*



### Preparation – Rest in Wu Chi

Before starting a qigong sequence, rest in Wu Chi – the silence and stillness underlying everything – and allow the attention to settle into the dantien, the centre of the lower abdomen, about an inch below the navel.

### Gather Energy into the Dantien

Circle the arms three times, as if gathering up energy from the universe and showering it down through the body; washing away any aches and pains and tensions, any negative thoughts and feelings, and releasing them out through the soles of the feet and into the earth. You can then imagine new positive energy calming the mind, healing the heart and being stored in the dantien, ready for your use.



## 1 Hold up the sky



Stand with your back straight and your body relaxed and upright.

Breathe in as the hands are raised, palms upwards, past the dantien and breathe out as you push the palms up towards the sky, and

then slowly inhale as the hands come back down, on either side of the centre line, following two of the body's main energy channels or "meridians".

How far you can reach comfortably will depend on your own individual capabilities, so don't worry if at first you can only raise your hands level with your forehead or nose or chin. As with all of these qigong exercises, your body needs time to adjust to new ways of moving, rather than be forced to exceed its limits. Regular gentle practice, over a period of a few weeks, can be expected to yield much better results than an occasional strenuous session.



As a variation of this exercise, you can bring the arms down by the sides, forming a circle as they are lowered.

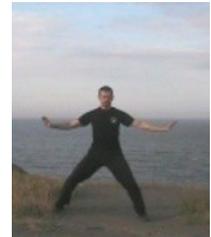
These movements can help to improve posture by stretching and straightening the spine, and they can also help to improve the flexibility of the shoulder joints and arms. By stretching the torso, they relieve pressure on the internal organs and can prevent them from sticking together, thereby allowing them to function more efficiently. The deep breathing and lifting of the arms helps to increase lung capacity by allowing them to open up more fully.

## 2. The Archer



Imagine that you are drawing a bow and releasing an arrow. To begin with, keep the exercise very soft, coordinating the breathing with the movements by breathing in as you draw the bow and breathing out as you release the arrow. Let the breath come all the way down to the dantien and release the arrow smoothly on the out breath as the tailbone tucks slightly under.

Relax the arms and bring them down to the dantien, then lift the hands and draw the bow to the other side.

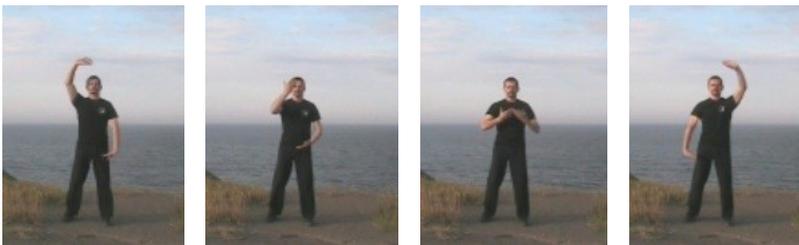


It can feel as though the breath is the arrow, flowing towards its target. To explore a more dynamic version of this exercise, you can expand the chest more deeply as you breathe in and allow the bow to twang as you release the arrow.

These exercises improve the general circulation of blood and chi and exercise the heart and lungs as well as the arms and chest muscles.

### 3. Join Heaven and Earth (Push High and Low)

There are many variations of this exercise. The fingers of both hands can point inwards, towards each other or the fingers of the top hand can point backwards, towards the body, while the fingers of the bottom hand point forwards, away from the body. Keep the movements soft and comfortable at first, keeping the elbows a little bit bent, and don't be too concerned if they drift out to the sides a little as you push up.



Co-ordinate the breathing with the movements: breathing out as you push high and low and inhaling as the hands pass the dantien.

Straightening the arms more fully along a vertical line requires more effort and you may wish to explore this version once your body becomes accustomed to the exercise. However, we recommend performing the movements in a manner which is relaxed and pliable, relying on internal power rather than hard, physical strength. Keep your back straight and your shoulders relaxed throughout the exercise.

These movements stretch the sides of the body, increasing the circulation of blood and chi in these areas and relieving pressure on the stomach, liver and spleen.

#### 4a. Turn and Look over the Shoulder



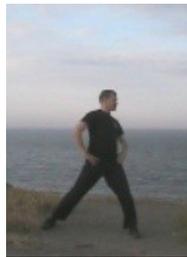
This is a simple exercise but it must be done very carefully. Stand with your back straight, abdominal muscles firm and shoulders relaxed. Turn your head slowly to the side, allowing your waist and shoulders to turn, without twisting your knees or over-straining your neck. Breathe out gently while turning to look over the shoulder and breathe in while returning to the central line.

## 4b.Variation: Turn and Gaze at the Moon



In this variation, while turning to look over the shoulder, raise the hands in front of the face with palms turned outwards and look through the space between the fingers and thumbs. Both versions of this exercise are thought to stimulate the kidneys and strengthen the neck and shoulders while increasing the flexibility of the spine.

## 5a. Rotate the Body and Sink



In this exercise, place your hands at the top of your thighs, keep the shoulders back, bend the knees and let the circle come from the hips as you bend forwards and come up to one side and then pause and go back the other way.

Breathe in while the body is upright and breathe out as you roll forwards. This allows the diaphragm to rise as you bend and avoids creating too much pressure within the abdomen.

This exercise massages all the internal organs and stretches the sides and back.

## 5b. Variation: The Ferris Wheel

A variation of this exercise is the Ferris Wheel, also found in the eighteen Tai Chi Qigong set. Instead of resting at the hip joints, the hands are held with palms outwards at head height as the body moves in full circles, (rather than swinging in semi-circles as in the exercise above).

## 5c. Variation: Lean to the Side

A less physically demanding alternative is simply to bend to the side with one arm raised while looking forward or looking at the upper hand. The hand can be turned inwards or outwards to increase the stretch down the side of the body. After bending, straighten up and allow the spine to find its natural alignment before leaning to the other side.

## 6. Punch with Fists



Taking a wide stance and keeping your back upright, “sit down” into your legs with the knees softly bent and drop your tailbone, as if you are riding a horse. Punch slowly forwards with the right fist, thumb on top, turning your waist a little to the left.

As you punch, sink down a little more into your legs and allow the tailbone to tuck under a little. The other fist rests, palm upwards, above your hip bone. Then punch with the left fist as your waist turns to the right. This can improve the flexibility of the spine and improve the circulation.

As a variation, you can punch directly forwards from the centre line and rotate the fist as you punch (palm down).

The fist can be either tense (to develop external strength) or loose, allowing the use of whole-body energy and the development of internal power. These exercises are therefore very useful in martial arts training.

## 7. Lift the Heels and Shake the Kidneys



The kidneys remove toxins and excess water from the body. The vibration and massage of this area, with the backs of the hands or loose fists, helps to increase the circulation of blood and chi and also helps to relax the muscles of the middle and lower back, bringing relief from some types of back pain. Keep the knees soft and slightly bent as the heels lift an inch or two from the ground and drop back down again.

## 8a. Circle the Arms Forwards (Row the Boat)



In this exercise, keep your back straight and your abdominal muscles firm and allow your knees to softly bend a little as you circle the arms forwards.

Only go down as far as you can go comfortably, without putting undue strain on your knees or lower back. Breathe out as you go down and in as you come back up. This exercise strengthens the muscles of the lower back and legs and is believed to stimulate the kidneys and organs of the lower abdomen.

## 8b. Bend Forwards to Press the Earth

This is a more demanding version of the previous exercise. It is not recommended for older people and should not be undertaken by anyone with back problems.



If you do practice it, only go down as far as you can go comfortably, keeping your knees unlocked and slightly bent as you go down, aiming your hands towards a patch of ground just in front of your feet. As you come back up, tuck your tailbone under a little and “roll” back up carefully, one vertebra at a time.

Breathe out as you go down and in as you come back up, to avoid creating too much pressure in the abdominal cavity.



This exercise can be progressive, slowly increasing the reach each time you go down, as the muscles gently relax and stretch, until you can touch the floor with your finger tips and eventually lay your palms flat on the floor.

You can make the exercise easier by placing your feet wider apart and bending your knees a little more. The closer together your feet, the further you have to bend to touch the floor. Clearly, the full version of the exercise may not be suitable for most people and you should not, under any circumstances, try to force yourself into this position.

Like all of the Eight Brocade, the exercises are designed to improve health and flexibility by patient, regular practice, over a period of time, and it is essential that you protect your back and that you are comfortable at all times.

## Gather the Energy and Return to the Tao



At the end of your training session, you can return to stillness, gather positive energy from the universe and return it to the dantien, bringing the body to a state of restful balance and equilibrium and allowing the mind to rest for a moment in Wu Chi before continuing with the rest of the day, perhaps feeling deeply at peace, refreshed, alert, inspired and revitalized.

