

Eight Pieces of Brocade

八段錦 Ba duan jin translates to “**Eight Pieces of Brocade**”

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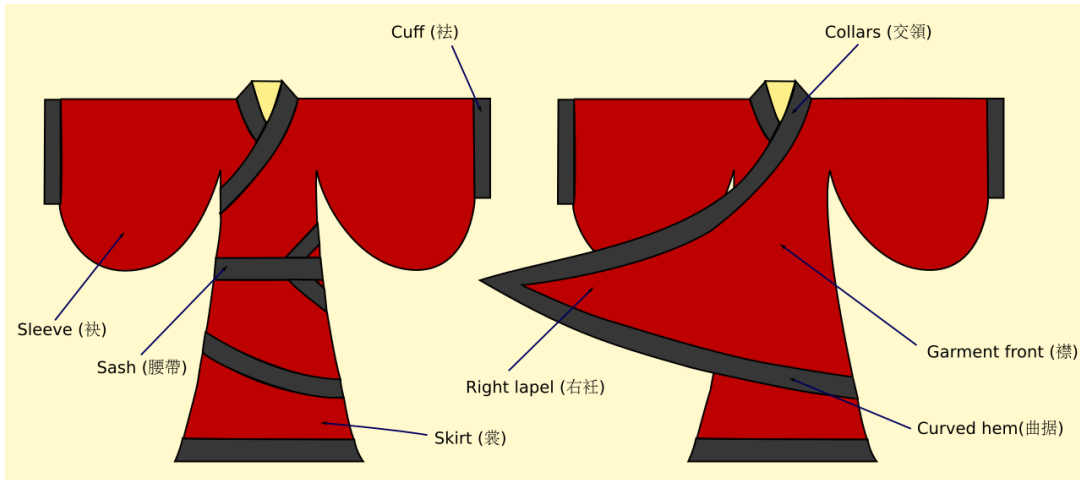
Recently, a dear friend and colleague was asking questions relating to the “Eight Pieces of Brocade” Qigong.

I would like to share an extract of the conversation with you and hope it is of interest.

Firstly, what is brocade?

Brocade is an extremely beautiful fine silk fabric.

Where does the eight come from? Chinese ancient garments are called Hanfu and were mainly made for the rich and wealthy Chinese. There are eight main features of a Hanfu. Hence the name “Eight Pieces of Brocade”.



In this Qigong form, the word brocade is used to highlight the intricate, interwoven, soft, gentle, movements and stretches that are similar to making silk brocade.

Silk brocade is wonderfully warm, soft, but extremely strong – similar to the goals for practicing this Qigong set.

This Qigong set looks incredibly simple from the outside – but internally contains multifaceted concepts, which is similar to that of making silk brocade fabric. Hence, within the Eight Pieces of Brocade Qigong form there are threads of learning where particular emphasis is placed on certain postures giving rise to strength, smoothness, beauty and health to your body.

Meaning? When you complete this form you will feel amazing, beautiful, colourful, wonderfully warm, relaxed and strong, the same as you would if you were to wear a garment made from this silk fabric.

Founder: Marshall Yue Fei – Chinese army
Yue Fei developed Eight Brocades as a simple easy to remember set of movements to support his army’s physical and mental health ...
circa: (1127-1279 a.d.)



NOTE: Used today as an exercise program for people who seek ongoing health benefits.

Two sets

1. Standing (more for strengthening) - designed for healthier people (soldiers) who could stand up.
2. Sitting (more for maintenance) used for people (soldiers) who could not stand up more for maintenance

NOTE: When practicing this Qigong form it is important to understand the movement completely and to perform each movement with intent.

For example: **Drawing the Bow**

Why does this movement exist? Because this is a basic training skill many infantry soldiers had to learn, bows and arrows were the main weapon used against their enemies.

The form starts with:

- Bow stance
- Sink your chest inwards slightly
- Raising of the bow and arrow in a slow movement above your head and opening your chest at the same time
- Slowly twisting your body to either side
- Horse-riding stance
- Slowly lowering your arms to stretch the string of the bow to aim arrow towards their target.

At this stage your body has stretched by:

- Raising arms above your head
- Twisting to your side
- Opening your chest by stretching the bow string
- Stretching leg muscles in horse riding stance.



This is a major stretch.

Soldiers needed strong muscles to shoot hundreds of arrows per day.

This movement requires the following:

- Strong bow stance – lowering your centre of gravity with weight placed correctly into the ground via kidney point in foot. Kidney 1 (Yongquan)
- Stretches your lower back as arms are raised and lowered
- Chest is stretched by firstly collapsing chest inwards at the beginning and then extending your chest when stretching the bow and arrow
- Body twisting to your side when lowering the bow and arrow – this massages the kidney on the appropriate side
- Lungs are stretched inside by breathing in and stretched again by breathing outwards (inhaling and exhaling)
- Builds up strength of the waist area, which takes pressure off the vertebrae. Waist area is one of the first areas of the human body that becomes weak during the aging process.
- Horse-riding stance is used, as many soldiers would ride horses in battle and use bows and arrows at the same time, this is a major means of stretching and strengthening leg muscles.

Below are the eight Brocade exercises along with their associated health benefits:

1. **Raise palms to Heaven** – stimulates the endocrine system and reduces chronic fatigue.
2. **Drawing the Bow** - benefits the kidney and strengthens upper and lower body.
3. **Separating Heaven and Earth** - supports the spleen and stomach improving digestion.
4. **The Wise Owl Gazes Backward** – relaxes the spine.
5. **Shake Head and Swing Tail** - regulates heart and lung function.
6. **Punching with Angry Eyes** - strengthens the function of the liver.
7. **Press the Earth, Touch the Sky** - loosens waist.
8. **Bouncing on Heels** - facilitates healing and maintains the immune system.



Dr. Anthony Shing
TCAA - Committee Member
Tai Chi Master
Acupuncturist
Chinese Medicine Physician
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Want to know more?
Please contact
Anthony
0411051188
email: taichitraining@yahoo.com.au