

The **Ba Duan Jin** as a whole is broken down into eight separate exercises, each focusing on a different physical area and qi meridian. It traditionally contains both a standing and seated set of eight postures each. In the modern era, the standing version is by far the most widely practised. The particular order in which the eight pieces are executed sometimes varies, with the following order being the most common.

Standing

Two Hands Hold up the Heavens (Shuang Shou Tuo Tian)

This move is said to stimulate the “Triple Burner” aka “Triple Warmer” or “Triple Heater” meridian (Sanjiao). It consists of an upward movement of the hands, which are loosely joined and travel up the centre of the body.

Drawing the Bow to Shoot the Eagle / Hawk / Vulture

While in a lower horse stance, the practitioner imitates the action of drawing a bow to either side. It is said to exercise the waist area, focusing on the kidneys and spleen.

Separate Heaven and Earth

This resembles a version of the first piece with the hands pressing in opposite directions, one up and one down. A smooth motion in which the hands switch positions is the main action, and it is said to especially stimulate the stomach.

Wise Owl Gazes Backwards or Look Back

This is a stretch of the neck to the left and the right in an alternating fashion.

Sway the Head and Shake the Tail

This is said to regulate the function of the heart and lungs. Its primary aim is to remove excess heat (or fire) (xin huo) from the heart. *Xin huo* is also associated with heart fire in traditional Chinese medicine. In performing this piece, the practitioner squats in a low horse stance, places the hands on thighs with the elbows facing out and twists to glance backwards on each side.

Two Hands Hold the Feet to Strengthen the Kidneys and Waist

This involves a stretch upwards followed by a forward bend and a holding of the toes.

Clench the Fists and Glare Fiercely (or Angrily)

This resembles the second piece, and is largely a punching movement either to the sides or forward while in horse stance. This, which is the most external of the pieces, is aimed at increasing general vitality and muscular strength.

Bouncing on the Toes

This is a push upward from the toes with a small rocking motion on landing. The gentle shaking vibrations of this piece is said to “smooth out” the qi after practice of the preceding seven pieces or, in some systems, this is more specifically to follow Sway the Head and Shake the Tail.