

A Shadow on Fallen Blossoms

The 36 and 48
Traditional Verses of
Baguazhang

Compiled and translated, with commentary, by Andrea Mary Falk
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I have practiced kungfu since I was a teenager, and have learned baguazhang in Shanghai and Beijing off and on since 1980. I am now sixty years old, which is the age in the Chinese martial arts that you are expected to take more responsibility for passing on your style. Since the verses apply to all branches of baguazhang, and there are few translations, I thought I might be well placed to translate them. Although my skill and understanding is ordinary, I am lucky to have learned from masters of five main lineages – Cheng, Fan, Liang, Yin (Ma Gui), and Zhang (Jiang). I learn Cheng baguazhang with Xia Bohua and Lu Yan, Jiang baguazhang with Cai Yuhua, Huan Dahai, and Cheng Jiefeng (and briefly with Su Zifang, Zhao Yun, and Zou Shuxian), Ma Gui baguazhang with Li Baohua, Liang baguazhang with Di Guoyong, and lately Fan baguazhang with Philip Morrell.¹ They have taught or are teaching me this ‘magical skill’.

Although this is a written translation, the learning is passed on from one person to another. This feeling is nicely encapsulated in this four-generational photo taken over brunch of Jiang Rongqiao’s adoptive daughter and great-grand-daughter, and I (lineage grand-daughter), enjoying my translation of Jiang Rongqiao’s book.



I publish this book with love and gratitude for the people of baguazhang. I started out by wondering what were the linking factors between the branches and I found out – they are the people of baguazhang. From the teachers who answered my questions, to my friends who found mistakes and suggested improvements, to my students who insisted each verse made sense, to the people worldwide who contributed to the crowd funding – we all do our bit to continue the tradition.

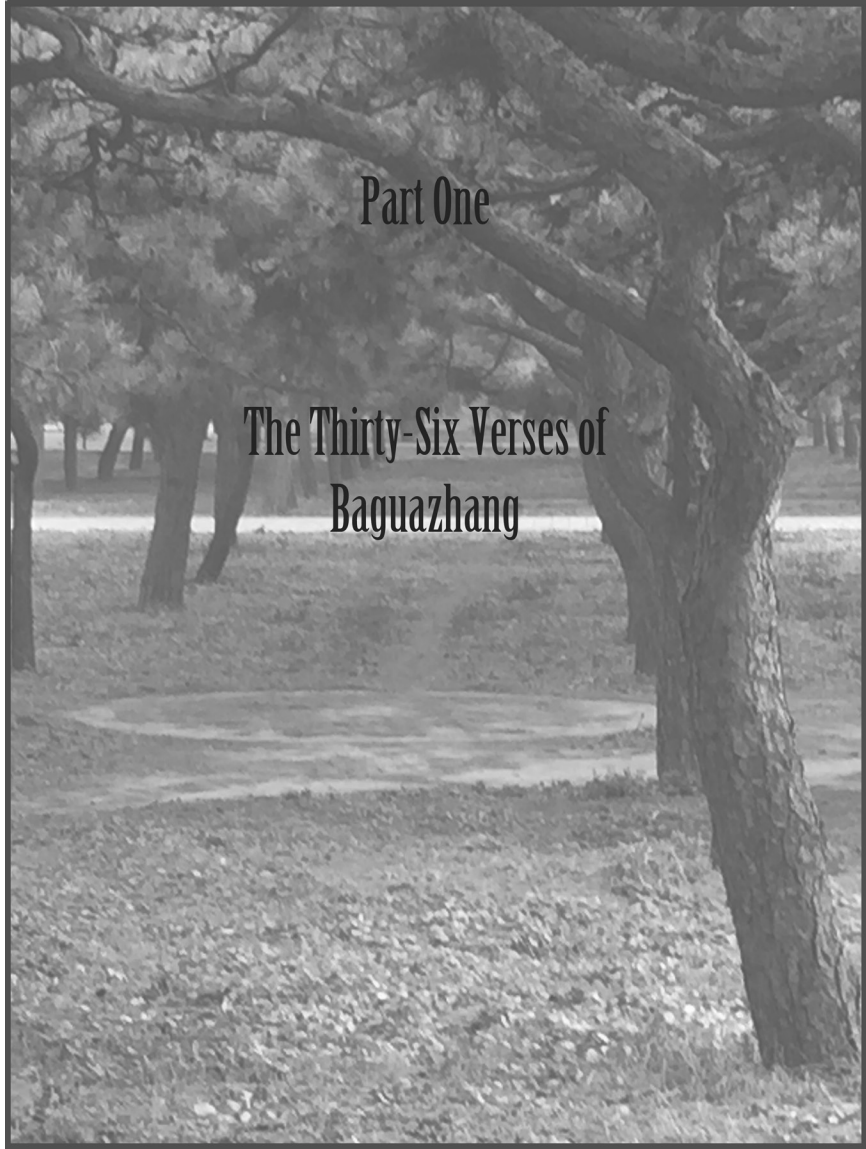
I would like to thank my brilliant baguazhang teachers and friends. I have been lucky that my teachers unreservedly shared their knowledge and maintained high standards, and fully expected me to get it. I have also been very lucky that I have met and learned from fellow women. My continued lack of understanding and ability is entirely my fault.

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Andrea Mary Falk, Morin-Heights, Québec, Canada, June, 2017.



Part One

The Thirty-Six Verses of
Baguazhang

TRANSLATION OF THE THIRTY-SIX VERSES OF BAGUAZHANG
 (THE ORIGINAL VERSES DO NOT HAVE TITLES)

One: Foundational Structure

Leave the chest empty, pull up the crown of the head, settle down the waist,
 Twist within the stance, brace the knees, and grasp the ground firmly.
 Settle the shoulders, weigh down the elbows, extend the forward palm,
 The eyes must look out through the tiger's mouth.

Two: Dragon Stretches its Talons

The rear elbow first folds in so the elbow covers the heart,
 Then the hand rolls over to settle and press its heel forward.
 It presses towards the forward elbow with a closing, wrapping power,
 The front and rear hands are united in spirit.

Three: Circle-walking

The stance is flexed and each foot extends straight as it reaches forward,
 Walk just like you were pushing a millstone.
 The knees bend, the hips go along, and the waist twists fully,
 The eyes see in three directions with no wavering of the body.

Four: Both Sides

It is not remarkable to strike a pose like Single Whip,
 It is better to move freely side to side.
 Changing from left to right and from right to left,
 Withdraw and switch your stance to take what opportunity presents.

Five: Connections in Spearing Strike

As the footwork turns the hands follow,
 As the rear hand spears out the lead hand returns.
 (The hands) go and come, come and go, there is no difference (between them),
 They should fly like bolts from a crossbow.

Six: Model for Spearing Strike

When doing a spearing strike, straighten the palm and slide alongside the elbow,
 The rear shoulder takes on the role of the leading shoulder.
 Don't leave any gaps and don't hesitate,
 Gauge your strike to enter your foot between your opponent's legs.

Seven: Internal Structure

The more the chest is emptied the more the *qi* will sink down,
 Tauten the upper back, drop the shoulders, and extend awareness forward.
 Settle the *qi* in the *dantian* and draw in the 'grain path',
 Draw the crown of the head straight upwards, and the vitality will pass throughout.

Eight: Circle Walking Basins

When walking, there must be no extraneous movement anywhere in the body,
 All depends on the crisscrossing of the lower legs, from the knees down.
 Although we talk of the low basin (walking), where the knee and hips are level with each other,
 The middle basin (walking) should also lower the legs and back.

Nine: Breathing

Purse the lips lightly, close the mouth, lick the roof of the mouth with the tongue,
 Breathe in and out entirely through the nostrils.
 When using force to the fullest, give vent with a *heng* or *ha* sound,
 This is how to obtain full original *qi*.

Ten: Palm Shape and Use

For the palm shape, brace the tiger's mouth so it is rounded,
 Spread the space between the middle and ring fingers.
 First poke then hit using the wrist bone,
 Release the shoulder girdle and lengthen the waist, use a follow-up step to drill in.

Eleven: *Koubu* and *Baibu* Stepping

Gather the knees when stepping forward, brace them when reversing,
 Lower the entire body to change palms and change stance.
 To advance and retreat, retreat and advance, and take what opportunity presents,
 You just need to skillfully arrange your waist and legs.

Twelve: Special Footwork

This palm differs greatly from the others,
 Our advancing step picks up the front foot, and so gets results.
 Our retreating step first retreats the rear foot,
 Our sidestep gets to the (opponent's) outside, away from the centre.

Thirteen: Special Deep Power

This palm differs greatly from the others,
 The shoulder girdle takes the offensive before the hand has moved.
 Before extending forward, first gather back,
 When you breathe in fully then 'spit' it out you have our unique and plentiful power.

Fourteen: Special Connections

This palm differs greatly from the others,
 The power connects between the front and rear palms.
 To use the tip, first move its root,
 All techniques must be thus – do not neglect any.

Fifteen: Special Tactics

This palm differs greatly from the others,
 Before hitting to the West we first make noise in the East.
 Pointing high and hitting low – who can figure us out,
 Rolling up (a hanging curtain of) pearls and flowing in reverse is even more remarkable.

Sixteen: Triple Spearing Palm Strikes

Even skilled martial artists fear the triple spearing palms,
 It is more effective if I move to his outside doorway.
 But if he moves to my outside I move to his inside,
 Extending my hand I easily get what I want.

Seventeen: Triangulation

Being only able to use one side of the hand is incompetent,
 You need to be thoroughly proficient on at least two sides.
 With one across and one straight, the hands triangulate,
 It is as if I embrace my adversary to my breast.

Eighteen: Waist Power

When high prepare to lower, when low prepare to rise,
 If you angle the body and step around, you don't need to rush.
 Use the power of the waist to roll at angles and wheel back,
 When you turn to the furthest reach (of your waist), then use hard power.

Nineteen: Hard and Pliant

People say that our palm wins by its hard strikes,
 Guo the elder used to say that pliancy is hidden inside.
 There are some who understand this flavour (secret),
 That our real forte is hardness and pliancy working together.

Twenty: Hardness and Pliancy in the Waist and Footwork

When hardness is foremost, pliancy is hiding within,
 When pliancy is foremost, hardness is drawing back.
 The pliancy of others is in their waist and hands,
 But we suck in the waist and our footwork is stable and agile.

Twenty-one: Trade the Body for a Shadow

When you have gone to the fullest you must turn the body,
 Shed the body and trade it for a shadow without leaving a trace.
 How we change unpredictably is all in the footwork,
 Going in and out, back and forth – the waist first extends.

Twenty-two: Spirit Shown in the Neck

The spirit of our turning palms is transmitted in the bones of the neck,
 Turn the nape of the neck, twist the nape of the neck, the hands take the lead.
 Retract the neck when changing, extend when emitting power,
 You should be connected like the mystical dragon is connected from head to tail.

Twenty-three: Gaining Distance

Striking someone depends on the shoulder girdle acting as the root of the hand,
 The arm is attached to the distal end of the shoulder and cannot extend any further.
 So when you want to enter, take an advancing step with the front foot,
 If you step through with the rear foot your effort will be in vain.

One

空胸拔顶下塌腰，
扭步掰膝抓地牢。
沉肩坠肘伸前掌，
二目须从虎口瞧。

Leave the chest empty, pull up the crown of the head, settle down the waist,
Twist within the stance, brace the knees, and grasp the ground firmly.
Settle the shoulders, weigh down the elbows, extend the forward palm,
The eyes must look out through the tiger's mouth.

The thirty-six verses do not have titles as do the forty-eight methods verses, so I took to giving them my own, just for ease of reference. I call this one Foundational Structure. The verse describes the fundamental posture of the body. In this first verse you can see the importance of the foundational posture as the sources differ, as if searching for just the right word to express the posture and feelings. Because each segment is dealt with very specifically in this verse, I have gone through the postures in great detail in the line by line discussion below. As with all things baguazhang, the words themselves are not set in stone. Using the knees as an example, the variation of words chosen to describe the knees depends on how the person copying interpreted what is being described – the reaching out of the leg or the landing. Reaching out, the knees are held together, thus closing or hugging. Landing, the knees are firm, thus bracing or engaging. Done properly, gripping with the feet firms the knees – the knees are together yet each is set separately. Gripping very firmly with the feet and ankles without engaging the knees can cause a collapse through the lower legs. The engaging, or bracing with the knees ensures that they stay aligned with the feet during any movement. There is a phrase that describes this connection nicely: 'to turn around with the folding step, you must first move the foot, then brace the knees, and then twist the hip joints'.¹³

Looking at the upper body, 'the shoulders' and 'the elbows' mean the entire structure around the joints. Discussion of any joint includes the bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments of the fairly large area that is involved in the movement of that joint, both distally and proximally.

The extension and height of the forward hand describes the most standard position of baguazhang. No other circle-walking posture is described in the verses.

Does this mean that different postures were not done at the time the verses were created? Not necessarily, though since the early books also did not mention any other positions, it is possible the other positions were latecomers. The structure of the body and movement of the legs is the same for all postures in any case, only the positioning and power/energy flow through the body changes.

The last line shows that right from the start, baguazhang treats the body and spirit as one. The basic structure of baguazhang is all there – nothing is left out. The focus of the eyes is not something we can leave until later, when we 'get the moves'. There is no separation of external and internal. Everything we need to do is in this verse. If we follow the instructions while we circle-walk, our body will naturally balance and centre erect, *qi* will sink to the *dantian*, the tendons of our lower legs will be strengthened, the tendons of our shoulders and arms will open up, and our spirit will rise and focus. If we train just this it is enough to give us a long healthy life.



36.01.1 Leave the chest empty, pull up the crown of the head, settle down the waist,

空 胸 拔 顶 下 塌 腰,
kòng xiōng bá dǐng xià tà yāo,

The exact wording for the verbs describing the chest and head is agreed on by almost all sources (Huan, Li, Lin, Luo, Tu, Wang, and Wu). The use of 空胸 kòng xiōng means to ‘leave the chest empty’, neither puffed up with air nor collapsed inward. The character 空 kòng is a verb, as this line consists of verb/noun phrases, and means ‘to leave empty’, i.e. let the breath settle down to the belly. It does not mean to collapse the chest, which triggers a sunken chest and hunched back.

The use of 拔顶 bá dǐng: ‘pull up the crown of the head’ is quite standard in internal martial arts, and describes a lengthening of the neck through its middle, like pulling up weeds. This is best thought of as pulling up a bit, then settling the waist while maintaining the lift. It is definitely not holding the neck stiffly.

For the verb describing the waist, six sources (Huan, Li, Lin Luo, Tu, Wang) use 塌腰 tà yāo: ‘settle the waist’, which is an action of settling and expanding until the lower back is straight. Liu uses 拓腰 tuò yāo: ‘to open up, expand the waist’, as does another Cheng lineage source (Xiang).¹⁴ This is very close to the more common ‘settle the waist’, but with more of a feeling of expansion than a settling. This character 拓 tuò is also pronounced tà with the meaning ‘to make rubbings’. So perhaps a little used character, pronounced wrongly, became written as the more commonly used 塌 tà? Sometimes one dissenting version gives a new outlook on a common phrase, and as such should not be immediately discarded or seen as a mistake in copying or typesetting. The phrase 塌腰 tà yāo has come to be the standard way to say ‘release and settle the waist and sit into the hips’. The Cheng lineage, however, tucks in more on the push while walking, because of the longer step. Wu and Zang have 单腰 dān yāo: ‘make the waist single’, which is a phrase that usually refers to the action of settling one side of the back firmly into each leg, keeping the whole back erect, as you set onto the leg.

The character 腰 yāo: ‘waist’, is always difficult to translate, as it encompasses so much – the entire area between the hips and the costal region, both front and back, through the middle. In the past I have sometimes translated this as ‘lower back’ and ‘lumbar sacral area’ but this suggests it is the back alone. I have returned to ‘waist’ because this includes the front and middle of the trunk and is easier to think of moving. Power comes from ‘the waist’, but this is not as simple as turning the waist.

36.01.2 Twist within the stance, brace the knees, and grasp the ground firmly.

扭(拗) 步(胯) 掰 膝 抓 地 牢。
niǔ (ǎo) bù (kuà) bāi xī zhuā dì láo.

Throughout the verses, 扭 niǔ and 拗 ǎo are both used to refer to a stance where the hips and shoulders are turned, or reversed, in relation to each other (opposite hand and foot forward) rather than 顺 shùn: ‘smooth’ or ‘aligned’ (same hand and foot forward). This is often translated as a cross stance, reverse stance, or twisted stance. The character 拗 ǎo is also pronounced niǔ, with the meaning of stubborn or obstinate, which may be why it came to be written 扭 niǔ from an oral tradition. After going through all the thirty-six and forty-eight verses, I came to count the use of 扭 niǔ or 拗 ǎo as an agreement in this context, as the sources consistently used one or the other in the same place (Huan, Li, Lin, Luo, Tu, Wang, and Wu tend to use 扭 niǔ, Liu and Zang tend to use 拗 ǎo). The meaning is that, to walk in a circle looking into the circle, the body is ‘twisted’ or ‘crossed’ in relation to the feet, which follow the circle. The ‘front’ is the centre of the circle, so when the feet and hips are following the circle and the upper body is facing the circle, the stance is ‘reverse’. The outside shoulder pulls around toward the centre of the circle, twisting the body so the feeling is of crossing. Even when the outside leg is forward, its hip joint has a feeling of cutting, not of releasing smoothly into a *shunbu*, or smooth stance.

As well as being split between the use of 扭 niǔ: ‘twisted’ and 拗 ǎo: ‘crossed’, to describe the stance, the sources are split between the use of 步 bù: ‘stance’ and 胯 kuà: ‘hip joints’. Four sources (Lin, Liu, Luo, and Wang) have 步 bù: ‘stance’. Five sources (Huan, Li, Tu, Wu, and Zang) have 胯 kuà: ‘the hip joints’. Instead of twisting the ‘stance’, the emphasis is on twisting in the hip joints, which makes sense in the feeling. The 胯 kuà: ‘hip’, refers to the entire area around the deep hip joint, including the thigh bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments – it does not mean the pelvis.

When the pelvis is the intended meaning, the word is 髀 kuān. When looking for the feeling, it is often found in a cut at the inguinal crease¹⁵, so the hip joint is often translated as ‘inguinal crease’.

There is again a searching among the sources for a word to describe the feeling of the knees. Two sources (Wang and Liu Jingru) use 掰 bāi: ‘brace’, or ‘pry’. The dictionary meaning of 掰 bāi: ‘brace’, is the action of pulling something apart with the hands, which calls for a bracing on both sides, thus a connection of power. Huan has 摆膝 bǎi xī, ‘open the knees’. The word 摆 bǎi is usually used in baguazhang to mean the opening out step, with 步 bù, step, not 膝 xī, knee, so it would seem the wrong verb to use here, except that this source uses the same word again in the same context. The two words 掰 bāi: ‘brace’ and 摆 bǎi: ‘open’ normally refer to distinctly different actions with different joints. I mention this because in verse 36.11 Huan uses the term 摆 bǎi instead of 掰 bāi, so it is intentional. Wu and Liang Shouyu use 拿膝 ná xī: ‘to have a firm grasp at the knees’, which is a good descriptive verb for engaging the knees. (In verse 36.11, Liang uses this term again instead of 掰 bāi., while Wu uses 合 hé.) Two sources (re-edited Li and Liu) have 合膝 hé xī: ‘join the knees’. Wu comments that 拿膝 ná xī: ‘grasp’ and 合膝 hé xī: ‘join’ differ in that ‘grasp’ has the connotation of lifting, while ‘join’ does not. Five sources (Li, Lin, Luo, Tu, and Zang) have 掰膝 gé xī: ‘hug the knees’. The knees are not referred to as ‘joined’ or ‘hugging’ elsewhere in the verses, except in verse 36.11 in reference to moving forward with a *koubu* step. In verse 36.08 they are referred to as ‘intersecting’, which implies that they are close.

In what I see as a very informative case, Gao(2) quotes this line as 合 hé: ‘join’ when discussing moving the foot forward, but quotes it as 掰 bāi: ‘brace’ when discussing grabbing the ground.¹⁶ I think this is what is going on in this line – those who think the description is of the knees landing have used a more ‘setting’ meaning, and those who think the description is of the knees moving have used a more ‘joining’ meaning. The action of ‘prying’ involves both an opening and a closing, and is relevant to both the reaching and the gripping phase, like when you pry apart an apple, your fingers are first pushed together then open out. This is why I chose to use 掰 bāi: ‘brace’, or ‘pry’ as the best word. You can see that when an experienced person copies the lines, they think about them and sometimes change them.

All sources agree on the phrase for grasping the ground firmly. Combined with the extended leg of verse 36.03, a flat foot landing may be inferred.

36.01.3 Settle the shoulders, weigh down the elbows, extend the forward palm,

沉 肩 坠 肘 伸 前 掌,
chén jiān zhuì zhǒu shēn qián zhǎng,

All sources have the identical wording of the shoulder placement and the hand placement. The shoulders always remain settled within the body, never shrugging up. The hand placement is further described in verse 36.02.

Seven sources (Li, Lin, Luo, Tu, Wang, Wu, and Zang) agree on the wording on the elbow structure. Huan uses 裹肘 guǒ zhǒu: ‘wrap the elbows’. This wrapping power is an emphasis of the Zhang style, so this may have been deliberately changed to describe the wrapping feeling at the elbows in his style. Liu uses 坠肘 duò zhǒu: ‘sink the elbows’. The character 坠 zhuì is the simplification of 墜, not 堕 duò, so I suspect this may be a misprint, using the wrong character. The placement of the elbows is caused by a rotation within the shoulder joint, so that the elbow crease is always settled as much as possible in any position, and there is always a twisting power in the arms.

Although all the sources have the same phrase for the extension of the front palm, Li Ziming comments that there are two understandings of this phrase. One – to extend the arm to almost full straightness. Two – to extend the shoulder joint, the root of the arm, forward, but to leave the arm slightly bent. Settling of the elbow usually infers that the arm remains slightly bent. Different styles interpret this either way.

36.01.4 The eyes must look out through the tiger’s mouth.

二 目 须 从 虎 口 瞧。
èr mù xū cóng hǔ kǒu qiáo.

The exact wording of this line is agreed on by seven sources (Li, Lin, Liu, Luo, Wu, and Zang) while three differ in a minor descriptive way on the exact action of the eyes without changing the meaning. The re-edited Li and Wang use 二目须冲 èr mù xū chōng: ‘the eyes must look with *vigour*’. Tu has 二目须向 èr mù xū xiàng: ‘the eyes must look *in the direction of*’. The meaning may be interpreted as looking towards the hand but context makes it clear that it means in

the same direction that the hand is reaching. Huan has 两目随从 *liǎng mù xū suí*: ‘both eyes must follow’. The phrase keeps the same meaning, with the emphasis on the movement as the eyes follow the hand in looking through the tiger’s mouth.

The tiger’s mouth is the thumb/ forefinger web. We are so used to this term that we tend not to think of it, but once someone has come into your ‘tiger’s mouth’, they are under your control. In one old text, the front hand is referred to as the ‘tiger’s mouth’, and the rear hand is referred to as the ‘ox tongue’.

None of the differences change the meaning of looking past, following the movement of the hand. In addition to the gaze, it gives the placement of the hand at eye height, so that the head can remain upright in all movement. Verses 36.03 and 48.32 clarify that the gaze takes in the entire surroundings.

Two

后肘先叠肘掩心，
手再翻塌向前跟。
跟到前肘合抱力，
前后两手一团神。

The rear elbow first folds in so the elbow covers the heart,
Then the hand rolls over to settle and press its heel forward.
It presses towards the forward elbow with a closing, wrapping power,
The front and rear hands are united in spirit.

I call this verse Dragon Stretches its Talons. It adds the details to the circle-walking position described in verse 36.01. Nowadays the hand positioning of different schools varies a bit, as does the name. It is variously called 青龙探爪 *qīng lóng tàn zhuā*: ‘dragon stretches its talons’, 推转掌 *tuī zhuàn zhǎng*: ‘pushing turning palm’, 推磨掌 *tuī mò zhǎng*: ‘millstone pushing palm’, 推磨式 *tuī mò shì* ‘millstone pushing posture’, 转身掌 *zhuàn shēn zhǎng*: ‘turning body palm’, 推掌 *tuī zhǎng*: ‘pushing palms’, 鸿雁出群 *hóng yàn chū qún*: ‘swan leaves the flock’, 搭掌势 *dā zhǎng shì*: ‘contacting palms stance’, 穿掌 *chuān zhǎng* ‘spearing palm’, and 龙形 *lóng xíng*: ‘dragon structure’.

To the details of the body described in verse 36.01, this verse adds how to use the rear elbow and hand to connect through to the front hand and give power to the posture and prepare for a potential strike. There is more agreement on the words in this verse, perhaps because the posture of the arms is easier to describe. With very slight differences, the sources agree on the meaning that the rear elbow tucks in to protect the solar plexus and ribs. It is more important that the posture joins the arms together through the back than that the elbow actually tucks onto the solar plexus. This stance connects the power and feeling through the body, and is also a practical defensive position.

In the first two verses, the position and power lines of the body are established. Other authors have described this, but no one so succinctly.

Yin Yuzhang, for example, describes the walking posture as “Standing with the feet pointing in the *xun* direction, facing to the *li* direction... place the right hand to the *qian* direction with the elbow slightly bent and the palm at eyebrow height. Take the sight line of the index finger. Place the left hand under the right elbow, with its elbow at the solar plexus. Bend both legs, press up the neck, empty the chest, stretch the upper back, tuck in the buttocks, and tuck the jaw in towards the hollow of the right shoulder. Close the mouth and breathe through the nose, settling the *qi* to the *dantian*.” In the further notes at the back of the book, it says, “The point in the middle of the circle is very important, it is the key because as soon as you start to walk, the positioning of your elbows, hands, and jaw is very easily lost. This first position is the template. If the template is lost then you might as well not bother to train.”¹⁷

Throughout the verses, the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ intertwine and flow together. The wording of the last line is important, as it shows that there is no dichotomy between body and soul in baguazhang.

The sounds of *xin*, *gen*, and *shen* are close, but not exact rhymes. There are so many words that sound exactly the same in Chinese that, to avoid the triteness of ‘the moon in June’, the pattern of rhyming is to have words almost the same. The verses come from the words of Dong Haichuan but were put into rhyme later, so the pronunciation is much as spoken in Beijing today.



36.02.1 The rear elbow first folds in so the elbow covers the heart,

后 肘 先 叠 肘 掩 心，
hòu zhǒu xiān dié zhǒu yán xīn,

Seven sources (Li, Lin, Luo, Tu, Wang, Wu, and Zang) have this exact line. Huan and Luo use 迭肘 *dié zhǒu*, which, although not the official simplified character for 叠 *dié*, can be assumed to be the normal shorthand, as it occurs consistently throughout the verses. The ‘heart’ refers to the solar plexus.

Two versions differ slightly in the elbow action. In Huan, the hand is referenced instead of the elbow 后手 *hòu shǒu*: ‘the rear hand’, perhaps just to not repeat the word ‘elbow’ in the same line, perhaps describing a slightly different hand position, and perhaps as a copy error. Liu and another Cheng source, Xiang, have 后肘前叠 *hòu zhǒu qián dié*: ‘the rear elbow folds forward’. This puts a bit more emphasis on the fact that the rear elbow folds towards the front in order to cover the heart. I think 先 *xiān*: ‘first’, fits better with the following line, which says 再 *zài*: ‘then’.

36.02.2 Then the hand rolls over to settle and press its heel forward.

手 再 翻 塌 向 前 跟。
shǒu zài fān tà xiàng qián gēn.

Seven sources (Huan, Li, Lin, Luo, Wang, Wu, and Zang) have this line exactly. Of interest here is the use of 跟 *gēn*: ‘follow-up’, as a verb applying to the hand. Tu has 向前伸 *xiàng qián shēn*: ‘reach forward’, instead of ‘press into the heel of the hand’, and his branch, the Ma Gui school, does tend to reach the rear hand forward quite a lot, leaving it fairly flat, so this may be a deliberate change.

The Cheng sources again (Liu and Xiang) have an interesting variation in one character in the four character phrase 手再翻拓 *shǒu zài fān tuò*: ‘the hand then rolls and expands’. The character 拓 *tuò*: ‘expand’, is an excellent word to use. This is the same character they used for the waist in verse 36.01. The character 拓 *tuò* has a secondary pronunciation of *tà*, so it may actually have been the original word, and the other 塌 *tà* a substitute, as a character more commonly seen in the martial arts and very commonly used with this meaning. The use of 翻塌 *fān tà*: ‘roll and set’, is common in Baguazhang, Xingyiquan, and Chen Taijiquan. It is an internal rotation of the forearm coupled with a settling action of the wrist, turning the fingers upwards while settling the wrist downwards, putting power forward.

36.02.3 It (the hand) presses towards the forward elbow with a closing, wrapping power,

跟 到 前 肘 合 抱 力，
gēn dào qián zhǒu hé bào lì,

This phrase is agreed on word for word by all sources.

36.02.4 The front and rear hands are united in spirit.

前 后 两 手 一 团 神。
qián hòu liǎng shǒu yī tuán shēn.

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