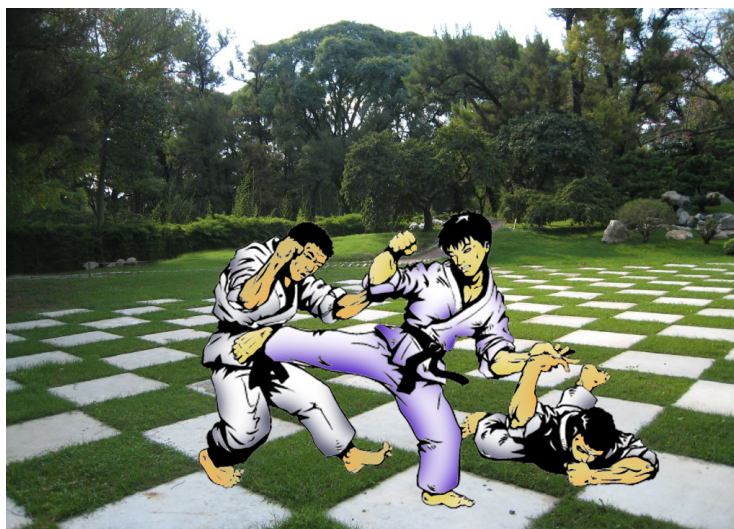




## The Doctrine, Strategies, and Tactics of Cuong Nhu



A fight can be likened to a game of chess, the basic moves of chess representing the various movements of the combatants. When playing chess, it is one thing to know how the pieces move, and another to be familiar with the strategies and tactics of the game. If you lack a coherent strategy, you will find yourself, at best, at a tremendous disadvantage, and, at worst, uselessly flailing around the board. With many variables to consider, the chessboard, like a fight, can be very confusing, making you easy prey for a more experienced opponent.



First and foremost, a chess player must realize that the objective of the game is to capture the opponent's king. Many novice players make the mistake of concentrating instead on capturing as many of the opponent's pieces as possible. While this approach might eventually win you the game, an experienced player can usually read the situation and take advantage of your two-dimensional strategy and defeat you. In the same way, many martial artists focus on scoring as many "points" on their opponent as possible, not on delivering a swift and decisive blow that ends the fight.

The chess expert sees things differently than the beginner. He or she knows how and when to apply certain moves, but, more importantly, how to "see ahead" several moves. It's not that they actually see the future, mind you, but rather they see the possible outcomes of a given situation and prepare for them, essentially taking control of the game. A skilled martial artist works in much the same way. Through hours of diligent training, he or she learns specific common reference positions.

Reference positions are recognizable positions in which you and your opponent find yourselves, from which there are effective ways to proceed, if you train them. For example, if an opponent attempts to shoot your legs, and if the shoot has become a reference point for you, you will quickly and *intuitively* recognize the attack and know how to counter it effectively. As a martial artist training for reality-based self-defense, you must learn how to quickly read a situation, find a reference point, and successfully execute a logical flow of techniques to its final conclusion. Learning what the possible outcomes are for any particular reference point allows you, in effect, to see ahead and prepare your next move or series of moves. Doing this gives you the initiative and lets you take control of the situation, just like the chess master.

So where do we start? How do we learn tactics and strategy? How do we work them so that they become second nature and part of our intuition? It all starts with doctrine.

*"All martial arts are based on doctrines developed by those who founded them. The term 'doctrine' can best be described as a set of broad and general beliefs. For our purposes, I'm referring to martial doctrine, the doctrine of personal combat, rather than the many others such as religious or political doctrines.*

*The concept of martial doctrine is closely related to strategy and tactics, but the terms aren't synonymous. Strategy consists of the general or 'broad brush' plans for fighting, developed according to the beliefs of a chosen doctrine. Tactics, on the other hand, are the specific techniques and maneuvers employed to carry those plans out. Although doctrine, strategy, and tactics are different concepts, the warrior's choice of a doctrine has a very direct effect on the strategies he will develop and the tactics he will use in combat."*

Forrest Morgan, Living the Martial Way

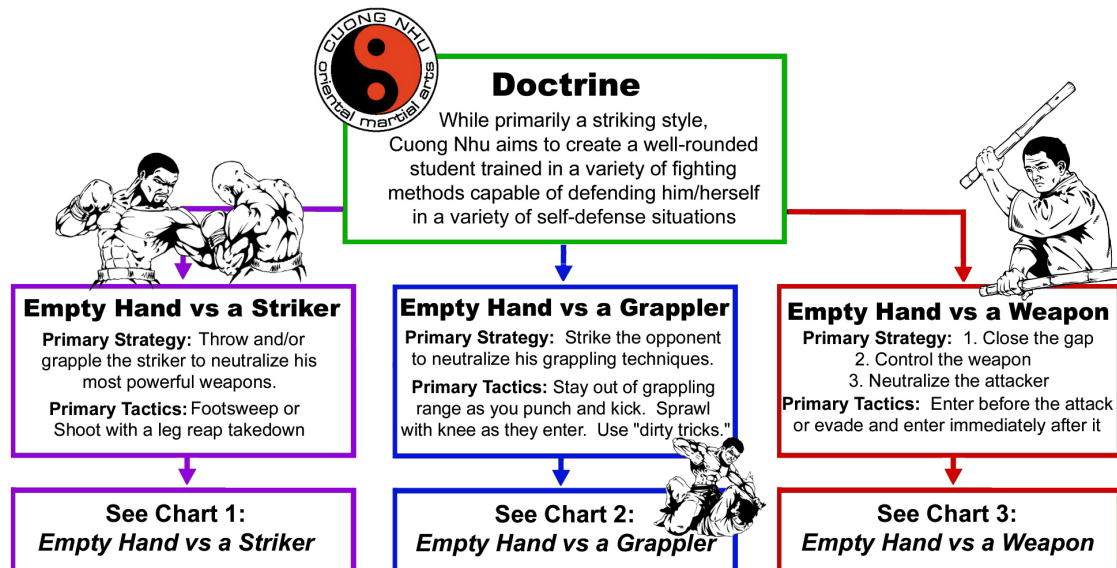
So what, then, are the doctrines or core beliefs of Cuong Nhu? Cuong Nhu finds its strongest roots in the hard style of Okinawan Karate-do, yet we also train in soft style techniques, joint locking, throwing, and grappling. Why? Because effective self-defense is based in reality, and in reality an opponent can attack with a punch, kick, grab, or even try to hit you with a weapon. Different types of attacks require different types of responses, as do differing circumstances. For example, dealing with an unknown assailant in a dark stairwell is different than handling an out of control situation with an overly angry or drunk friend. In the same way, your response to a driver with road rage will likely differ from your response to a mugger who is after your money or a gang of kids looking to give you a bad day. Each situation is different and an infinite amount of possibilities exist.

We must also take into consideration that if someone gets seriously injured, the authorities are very likely to get involved. It is important to understand how the law works and what the rules are regarding physical confrontations. In short, the law generally states that self-defense is the use of *reasonable* force to protect yourself

given the comparative size and strength of your attacker. The definition of reasonable force is different if weapons or multiple opponents are involved, and the totality of circumstances is weighed differently for men and women. *You subject yourself to the possibility of a civil lawsuit for monetary damages and/or criminal prosecution with imprisonment, for using excessive force.* With this in mind, all students would do well to familiarize themselves with “Cuong Nhu and the Law”, a section of the Cuong Nhu Oriental Martial Arts Instruction. Written by an attorney, it provides general guidelines and an overview of the potential legal ramifications, both civil and criminal, that you could incur from the actual use of martial arts techniques.

So there is a lot to consider when training for reality-based self-defense. O Sensei believed that it was not inferior technique that lost a fight, but an inferior *mindset*. In order to best prepare us for the many possible scenarios we may face, Cuong Nhu aims to create a well-rounded, knowledgeable martial artist capable of effectively and appropriately defending him or herself in a variety of different situations against a variety of different attacks. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu states that if you know only yourself, you will win only half your battles. Know only your opponent and you will also win only half your battles, but if you know yourself *and* your opponent, you will be able to win all of your battles all of the time. O Sensei’s solution to this was to familiarize himself and his students with a variety of styles. This gives us knowledge of ourselves: our strengths and our weaknesses. It also gives us knowledge of our opponent; our experience with a variety of fighting styles allows us to read the opponent early and apply an effective counter strategy.

The next question, then, is what strategies do we adopt to accomplish our mission? If an attacker attempts to punch you, it is reasonable to assume that his strength lies in that type of attack. The same can be said for an attacker whose first instinct is to grapple or wrestle you. You fall into your opponent’s trap if you adopt his strategy, therefore it does not make sense to play the attacker’s game. It is often best to counter such attacks with a contradictory fighting style, grappling a potential striker and striking someone who attempts to grapple you. Using this philosophy as a general guideline, we can then begin to develop specific tactics aimed at helping us make our strategy a reality. To keep track of multiple scenarios and their relation to each other, we can map out some of the most common situations in an algorithm or flow chart illustrating the most likely tactics employed to deal with each situation (see the chart below).

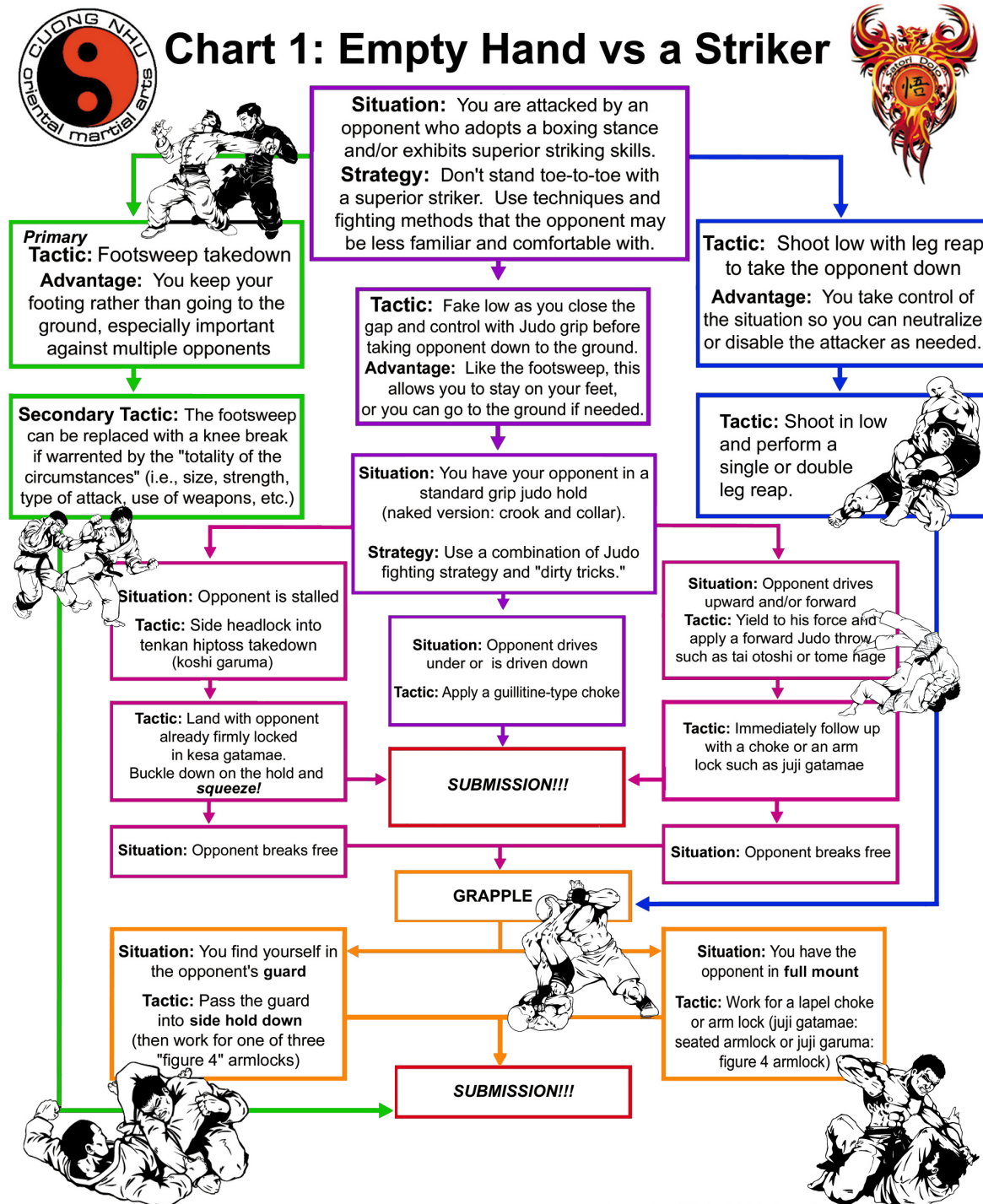


Reality based self-defense training needs to account for a plethora of variables, too many to include in a useable chart. For example, a good martial artist will always try to avoid engaging in a physical confrontation, escaping and running away whenever possible. When forced to fight, a good martial artist will utilize the environment to its fullest advantage. For example, should a would-be attacker approach you on your way to your car when you have your car keys in your hand, you could take advantage of your environment by turning your keys into a weapon that might quickly deter the attacker. Similarly, if you have the opportunity to push an attacker down an embankment in order to get away, that's completely acceptable and encouraged.

Unorthodox fighting techniques are usually banned from ruled competition, but if you find yourself with an opportunity to employ "dirty tricks" such as jamming your thumb in the opponent's eye or grasping and twisting his fingers or toes, you should not hesitate to do so. However, these represent specialized circumstances, whereas the algorithms, or flow charts, presented here represent only a generalized, overly simplified view of the situation. While it is important to train in free form fighting using improvised weapons and the environment to your advantage, by studying the more commonly experienced reference positions and their possible outcomes, you can begin to build an internal mental framework upon which to organize your techniques. If you prepare for the most likely outcomes of the most likely scenarios, you will be well on your way to understanding strategy and tactics, and more importantly developing your own set of reference positions and flow of techniques.

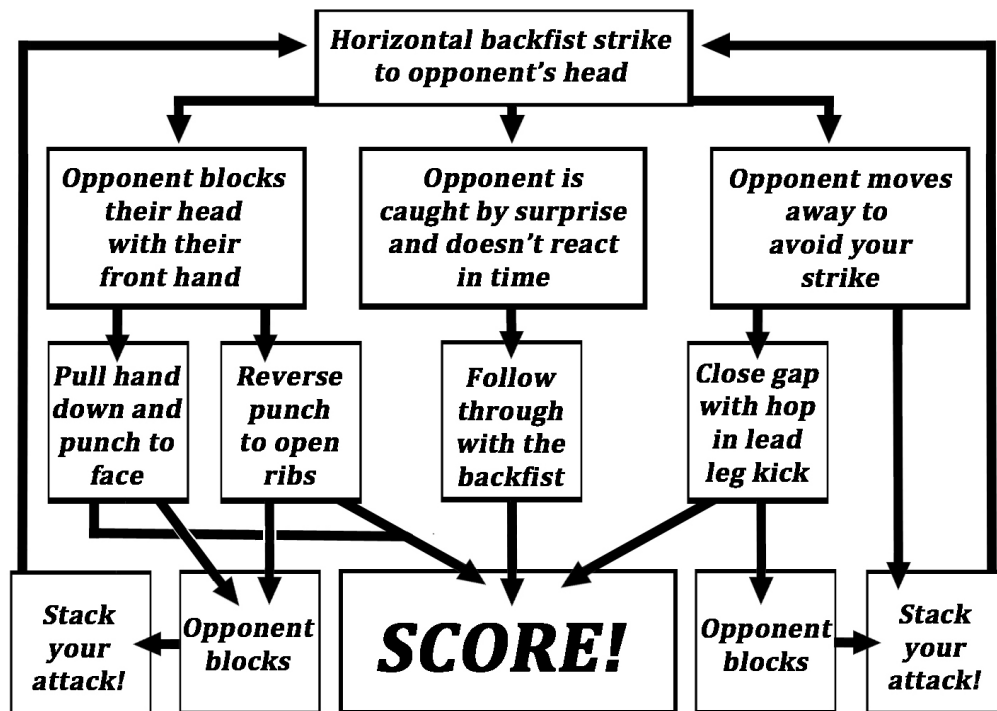
In their totality the following charts can look a bit overwhelming, but if you take the time to investigate and study each path individually, step-by-step, you will begin to see and understand the overall flow. When you understand flow and the specific tactics used to cope with various situations, you will have begun to develop

reference points that let you know, in essence, where you are in the encounter, and, once you know where you are, you can decide what direction to take to get you where you want to go. With that in mind, let's look at the possible situations that could arise when confronted with an opponent intent on hitting you with his fists. Remember, you are not limited to what is listed here! The chart is just a map to let you know where you are at, and where you can go from that point.



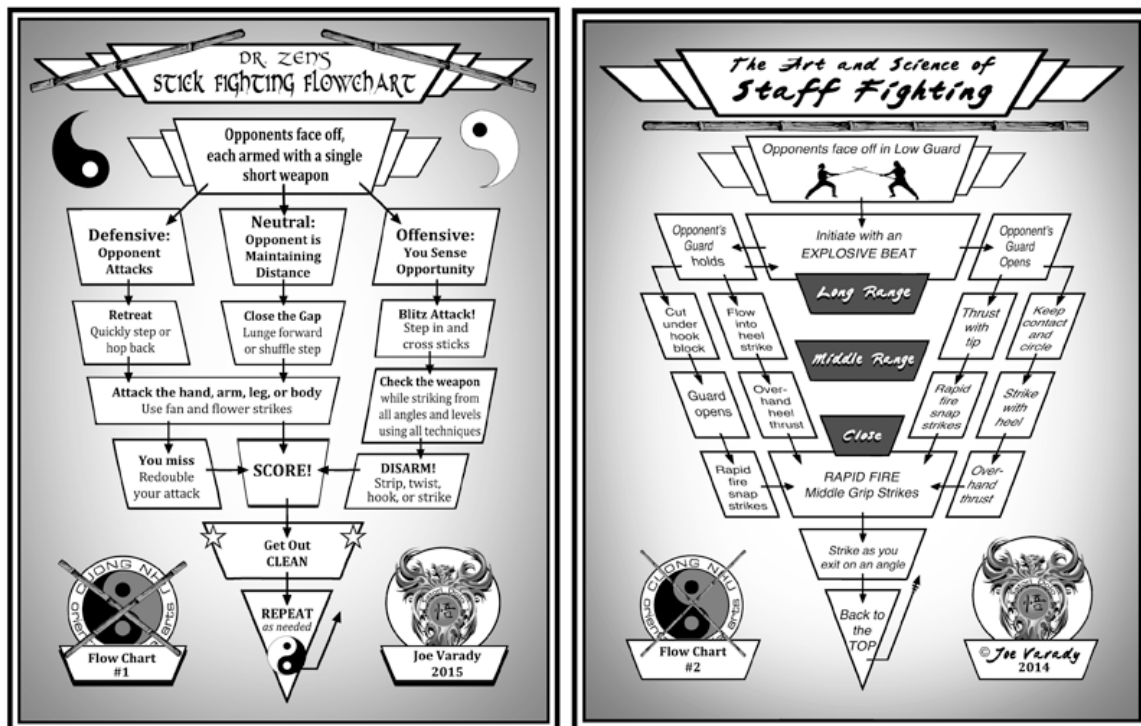
So how does one go about establishing reference points and learning the flow of techniques? The answer lies in simplification. Instead of looking at the chart as a whole, explore each path separately. In fact, you need to first learn the techniques, drilling them in isolation before moving on to the next technique. In the case of Chart 1, we could take the right path, which begins with shooting the opponent's legs. Students need to drill shooting the legs with a partner over and over again, trying for a single or double leg reap depending upon how their opponent reacts. While one partner practices shooting the legs, the other partner should be practicing the defenses against the shoot, starting with the sprawl. Gradually, the students will become familiar with both the technique and the defense, at which point you can move on to the next step, gaining control on the ground. Working the techniques first in isolation before adding them to the previous technique, students should learn the positions of the guard, side mount, and full mount. Then students should try to achieve these positions following a successful leg reap. Finishes from each position must then be learned following the same process. Learning seems painfully slow at times, but there is no other way to ingrain each step until your body begins to automatically sense where you are in the fight via one of many possible reference positions. Once established, you will know what your possible moves are and how to defeat your opponent quickly and efficiently.

This approach applies equally well to regulated activities, such as sparring, as it does to self-defense. An example is the sparring flowchart below. It is based on the strategy of attacking the opponent, then building logical combinations based on their reaction to your attack. The flow chart provides the specific tactics to achieve that goal.





Other flow charts can be used to describe stickfighting or combat with the staff (see below).



Good plans start with doctrine, then move on to specific strategy and tactics. At Satori Dojo, our doctrine states that, if you want to be a well-rounded fighter, you should study different arts. It will give you perspective on yourself as well as the relative strengths and weaknesses of a potential opponent. Knowledge and experience in different styles will help you learn how to read a situation and respond appropriately. Establishing common reference points will allow you to locate where you are in relation to the opponent. Logical progressions, like those depicted in the flow charts in this document, give you the specific tactics you will need to respond quickly and efficiently to the circumstances of the situation.

**“If you fail to plan, then you are planning to fail.”**

**-Benjamin Franklin**