



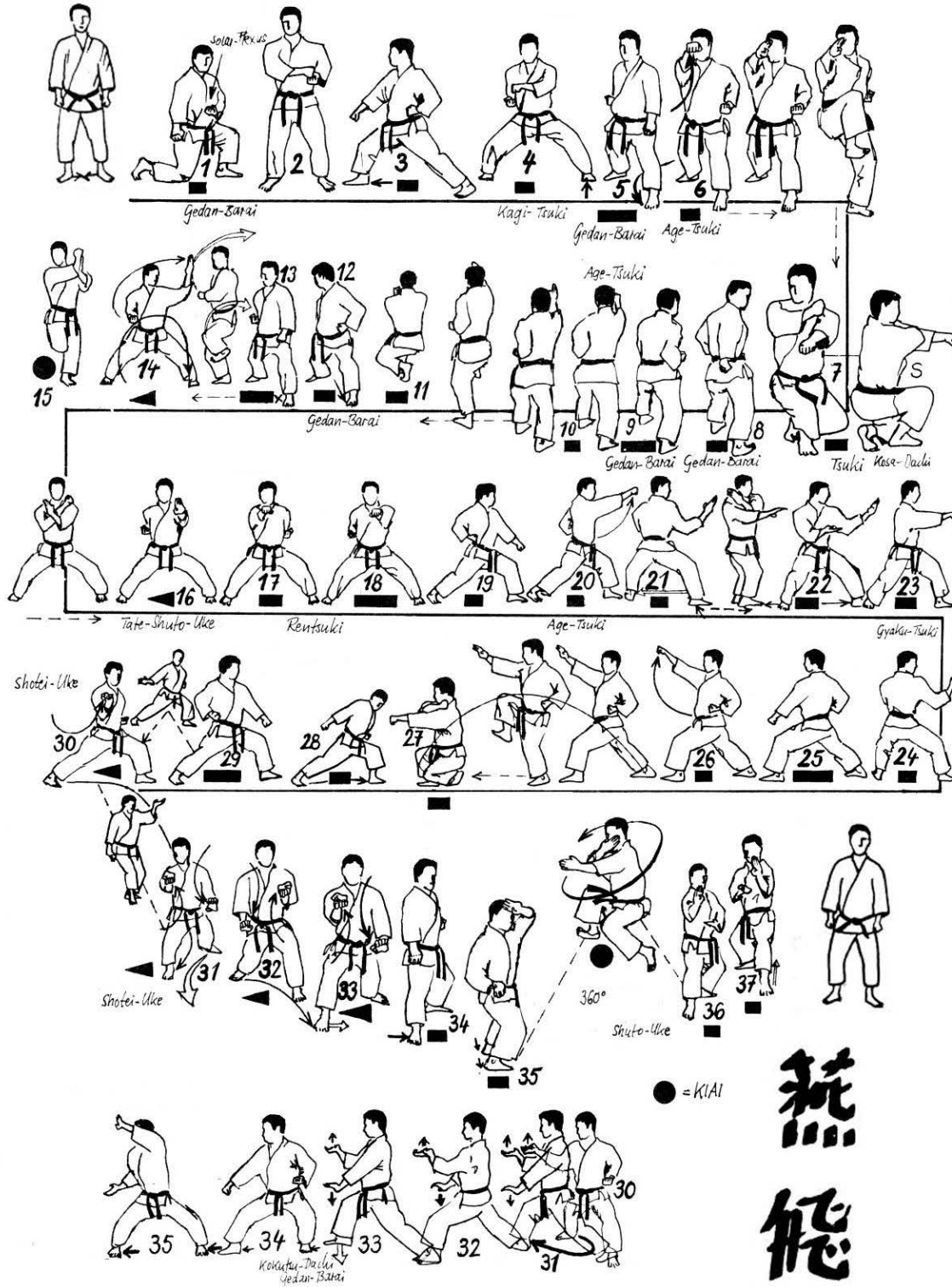
## History

*Empi* is a kata practiced by Shotokan and other karate styles, including Cuong Nhu. *Empi* (sometimes written as *Enpi*) translates to "Flying Swallow" and is one of the only forms left from the Okinawan style of Tomari-Te (most of Tomari-Te, including its kata and techniques, has been lost to history). The most commonly accepted theory about the creation and development of *Empi* is that a Chinese emissary, Sappushi Wanshu, transmitted the kata while serving in Tomari around 1669 during the reign of King Sho Tei. The name Wanshu may have originally been Wan Shifu, which means "Teacher to the King." Legend has that Wanshu was highly adept at the martial arts and had the habit of throwing and jumping on his adversaries. Little else is known about the man other than he only taught a few students at a time, and after a few years in Okinawa, Wanshu returned to China leaving behind a kata that became known as "Wanshu." The kata was exclusively practiced in Tomari up until 1865, when it spread to Naha and Shuri. Gichen Funakoshi changed the name of the form to *Empi* when he moved to the Japanese mainland in the 1920's (he changed the names of many of the kata in an effort to make the Okinawan art more palatable to the then nationalistic Japanese). He felt that the "feel" of the kata, especially the upward and downward movements and the quick shifting of stances, was similar to the movements of a flying swallow, thus its name.



## Shotokan's Enpi Kata

Below is the version of Empi practiced in Shotokan Karate, only they say “Enpi.” It differs only slightly from the way Empi is performed in Cuong Nhu. One glaring difference is the absence of the front snap kick in the “Flying Swallow” sequence where Shotokan delivers an upward knee kick (moves 6, 10, and 26). Other differences include the absence of a horse stance in move #2 (Shotokan uses a natural stance here), and the forearm strike seen in move #15 has been replaced with a more powerful and effective roundhouse elbow strike in Cuong Nhu.



# Cuong Nhu's Empi Kata

Stance	Action
0. Natural stance (north) Attention stance Natural stance	Bow
1. Turn 90 degrees left into left turtle stance (facing west, looking northeast)	Right circular lower block
2. Move right foot, slide LSS (west)	Right hook punch (west)
3. Turn 180 degrees right, LFS (east)	Right lower block
4. Move left foot, slide RSS (east)	Left hook punch (east)
5. Turn 90 degrees right low left, LFS (north)	Left lower block, right punch (high), rotate hand in a clockwise motion to a horizontal spearhand thrust
6. Right kicking stance	Right front snap kick
7. Jump forward, turn 45 degrees left, right low X stance (northwest)	Simultaneous right outer block, left hook punch (north)
8. Lean away in the opposite direction and move left foot into left lunge stance	Right lower block (north) (facing south, looking north)
9. Shift left foot to LFS (south)	Left lower block, right punch (high), rotate hand in a clockwise motion to a horizontal spearhand thrust
10. Right kicking stance	Right front snap kick
11. Jump forward, turn 45 degrees left, right low X stance (southeast)	Simultaneous right outer block, left hook punch (south)
12. Lean away in the opposite direction and move left foot into left lunge stance	Right lower block (south) (facing north, looking south)
13. Shift left foot to LFS (north)	Left lower block
14. Move left foot back to left kicking stance	Simultaneous left reverse crescent kick, left hand (palm open) moves with left foot
15. RS (north)	Left high backhand block 45 degrees from shoulder
16. Shift to right kicking stance	Simultaneous right shin block and roundhouse elbow strike to palm
17. Move right foot to RS (north)	Left circular chop block, consecutive punches (right, then left) <b>KIAI!</b>
18. Turn 90 degrees left, LFS (west)	Left lower block, right punch (high)
19. Advance RBS	Right knifehand block
20. Switch to LBS in same spot (west)	Left knifehand block
21. Shift LFS	Right reverse punch
22. Advance RBS	Right knifehand block
23. Turn 180 degrees left, LFS (east)	Left lower block, right punch (high), rotate hand in a clockwise motion to a horizontal spearhand thrust
24. Right kicking stance	Right front snap kick
25. Jump forward, turn 45 degrees left, right low X stance (northeast)	Simultaneous right outer block, left hook punch (east)
26. Lean away in the opposite direction and move left foot into left lunge stance	Right lower block (east) (facing west, looking east)
27. From left lunge stance, shift upper torso to face north	Simultaneous left low soft style block and right upward vertical palm heel (north, in tension)
28. Turn 90 degrees right, RFS (north)	Simultaneous right upward vertical palm heel block and left lower palm heel block (in tension)
29. Advance LFS	Simultaneous left upward vertical palm heel block and right lower palm heel block (in tension)
30. Advance RFS	Simultaneous right upward vertical palm heel block and left lower palm heel block (in tension)
31. Slide forward, RBS	Right lower block
32. Slide forward, RSS	Left high tiger mouth strike (palm up), right low spearhand (palm up)
33. Jump 360 degrees left, land RBS (north)	Right knifehand block <b>KIAI!</b>
34. Retreat LBS	Left knifehand block
35. Bring right foot to Natural stance (north) Attention stance Natural stance	Bow

## Understanding Kata Applications

Always keep in mind that the kata are a collection of moves much like a dictionary is a collection of words. A dictionary is a very handy thing to have when you need to learn a new word or reference an old one, but you can't have a conversation by merely reading the words out of the dictionary. You need to learn the words by heart, internalizing them to such a degree that you no longer have to think about the separate words anymore, but rather, they come to you as you need them to respond to a certain question or convey a particular thought. The applications of the kata act in the same way, as a primer course in self-defense. You could not fight trying to apply the moves exactly like they are presented in the kata. Rather, you need to mix and match different moves from different sequences in order to address the given situation.

To train this, learn the various sequences described above by training them with a partner, but as you get more comfortable with the concepts and techniques that they teach you, have your opponent attack more and more realistically. Don't worry about what techniques he is going to throw, instead concentrate on reacting to what you see coming at you. With hard work you will soon find yourself less concerned about the particular attacks you think your uke should be throwing in order for you to perform a specific application, instead developing a state of mushin, or "no mind", where you are free to react to the reality and spontaneity of the situation. Your partner can also begin to step up the speed, power, and variety of his attacks. This type of training is referred to as reality based application training.

Reality-based applications are worth far more to you in a self-defense situation than applications performed with a compliant uke. Your uke should only be compliant (i.e. not moving at top speed with good power, leaving a blocked punch out while you perform additional moves, etc.). Reality-based applications should start looking more and more like ippon kumite (one step prearranged sparring) and finally develop into kata based sparring, where the opponent comes at you with different techniques. Although sparring gear can be worn for such practice, kata based sparring is *not* to be confused with free sparring in the point sparring sense of the word. Attackers should attack with realistic, committed attacks closer resembling a street fight or assault than a sparring match between two trained martial artists concentrating on maintaining range, feinting, etc.

Good applications need to flow and feel natural. Flowing from one technique to the next allows you opportunities to keep the initiative once you've gotten it, controlling the opponent and the outcome of the situation. If applications are too choppy, or too complex, or too unnatural, they will not be useful to you in a real situation. This fact will bear itself out as your practice evolves into kata based sparring.

An opponent is most likely to attack you with his dominant hand, which is usually the right, and more often than not he will aim at your face and head. There is also a good chance that he may try to kick you in the body with his dominant (right) leg. To a lesser extent, he may also attack with a left punch or kick. Since you can't control what your opponent will throw at you in a real situation, in order to make your applications as effective and practical as possible, you will need to apply generalized blocking principle. This is the ability to apply a single technique against a wide range of incoming attacks,

and will quickly show its usefulness to you in both reality based kata applications and kata based sparring. Generalized blocking can cut down on your reaction time and make your defense more effective, which in turn can boost your confidence, giving you a psychological edge.

We can see this principle throughout the Empi kata, but it seems especially clear in the simple moves of the opening series: a lower block followed by a hook punch, which can be applied against most punches, kicks or grabs. In fact, close examination of the form shows that the majority of sequences, indeed all of the first 7, begin with a lower block! What does this tell us about the importance of the technique? The motion that we refer to so plainly as “lower block” was obviously very important to the creator of the form. Why? It may well be because the broad, sweeping arc created by your blocking arm as you perform the technique is capable of clearing a wide area in front of the body, allowing you (with practice) to be able to effectively counter a wide range of incoming attacks. In fact, the interception and deflection of an opponent’s attack can be performed with your elbow and/or forearm, leaving your “blocking hand” free to deliver a counterattack (usually a bottom hammer fist strike) to your opponent’s body all in the same move.



## Formatted Applications to Empi



### **Opening Series: Part 1 (moves 1-2)**

#### **Against a Kick:**

Against a front snap or side thrust kick, move off the line of attack by dropping into turtle stance as you execute a right lower-block to intercept and redirect the attack with the downward motion of your right elbow. Your right hand immediately scoops under opponent's kicking leg like a shovel block, securing his lower leg in the crook of your elbow.

- a. If you blocked to the dead side, reach over and hook the underside of the opponent's knee with your reaction hand as you use the hook punch motion to lift his lower leg and drive him down onto his butt. Finish with a low right hook punch to the face.
- b. If you blocked to the live side, use your free arm to momentarily check the opponent's arms and shoulders as you use the hook punch motion to turn his body away from you and throw him onto his face. If the opponent does not roll out, you can bring his foot down towards the back of his head to finish.

#### **Against a Punch:**

Against a punch, use the outer block motion at the beginning of the right lower block to block the opponent's punching arm. Your reaction hand immediately grasps and pulls the punching arm, as your right hand flows into an inner hammer-fist strike to the opponent's head. Your right hand then hooks around the opponent's head and you pull the opponent into a left hook punch to the face, head, or neck.

#### **Against a Grab:**

Against a grabbing attack such as a choke or lapel grab, use the outer block motion at the beginning of the right lower block to break the opponent's grip then drive downward with your elbow. Your right hand continues to flow around to the opponent's head (still trapping one or both arms) and you pull the opponent into a left hook punch to the face, head, or neck.

### **Opening Series: Part 2 (moves 3-4)**

Moves 1 and 2 are very similar to moves 3 and 4, therefore you can perform moves 3-4 against any of the attacks mentioned in Part 1 above. However, now you are moving *into* the attack instead of away from it. If you look at part 1 as a soft style approach, then Part 2 would be the hard style version. The follow-up techniques remain the same.

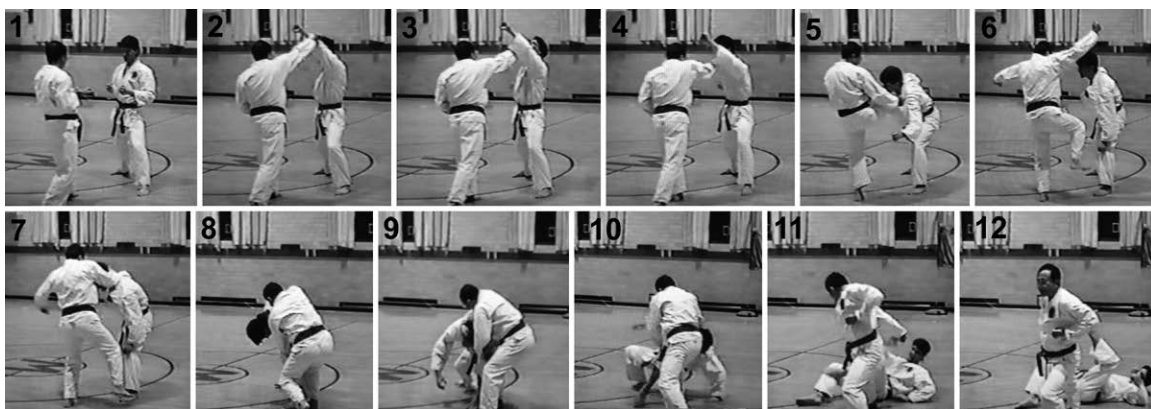




## Swallow Sequence: part 1 (moves 5-8 and 9-12)

### Against a Left Lead (opponent's left foot is forward):

Since we should refrain from throwing the first punch, this sequence could be prefaced by a left kick blocked with a left lower block. As the opponent faces you in a left forward stance (1), execute a right high punch to the opponent's face, which he blocks with a left rising block (2). Your right hand circles around the block, executing a right spear hand strike to the opponent's eyes (3). Grasp the opponent's shoulder with your right hand (4), and pull him into a right snap kick to the groin and/or knee kick to the face (5). Release your right grip (6) and quickly deliver a sharp right downward forearm strike to the back of the opponent's neck (7). As you put your right foot down, **step behind** the opponent's lead leg, your left foot following into a right X-stance, and pull the opponent into a left punch to the abdomen (8). Your right hand grasps the right side of the opponent's face (the shoulder works as well) as you hook your left hand behind the opponent's left knee (9). Pull the leg forward with your left hand as you crank their upper body backwards with your right (10) as you turn to your left and execute a left lower block (11), tripping him over your right leg and driving him to the ground (12).



(O'Sensei Ngo Dong, Richmond, VA, 1991)

### Against a Right Kick (blocking to the live side):

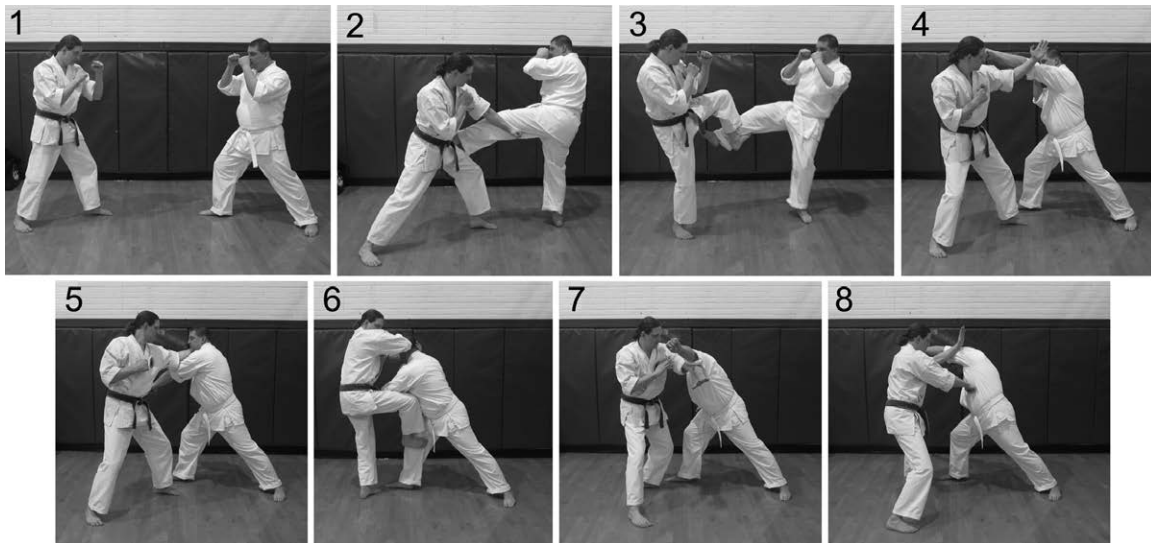
The opponent attacks with a right front snap-kick. Step into left forward stance and perform a left lower block, the downward motion of your left elbow blocking the kick, striking inside the opponent's knee, followed by a left hammer fist strike to the opponent's groin. Immediately execute a right high punching block to the opponent's face, blocking any counter from you opponent with his left hand as his right foot hits the ground. Your right hand then snaps open, executing a right spear hand strike to the opponent's eyes. Your right hand then grabs the shoulder or hooks around the opponent's head (from their left side) as you deliver a right upward knee kick to the opponent's midsection (if he steps out of range, use a front snap kick to the groin). As you put your right foot down, **step in between** the opponent's feet (left foot following into a right X-stance) and pull the opponent into a left punch to the abdomen. Hook your left hand behind their right knee and pull as you turn to your left and execute a left lower block, tripping their left leg over your right leg, driving them to the ground.



## Elbow Strike Sequence (moves 13-17)

### Against a Consecutive Kicks and Punch Combination (to the dead side):

Your opponent attacks with a left front snap-kick (1), which you block from the outside with a left lower block (2). He quickly attacks again with a right front snap-kick, which you block from the inside with the outward swinging motion of your left shin-block (3). The opponent throws a right punch as his right kicking leg lands; defend with a left backhand block (4). Your left hand immediately hooks around the opponent's neck (5) as you execute a right horizontal elbow strike to their face. At the same time, strike their right knee from the inside with the arch of your foot (6). Your left arm then extends under the opponent's left arm, parrying it upward with a circular chop block and moving you to the dead side (7). Your left arm continues its motion, hooking under the opponent's left arm, pulling him into a right punch (8). Immediately let go with your left hand and quickly punch again (not 1-2, but 1-1.2!)



### Against a Kick and Punch Combination (to the live side):

The opponent attacks with a right front snap-kick. Block the opponent's kick with a left lower block, striking the inside the opponent's knee with your elbow, followed by a left hammer fist strike to the opponent's groin. The opponent executes a left punch as their kicking leg lands; defend with a right parry into a left backhand block (double blocking principle). Your left hand then hooks around the right side of the opponent's head as you execute a right horizontal elbow strike, at the same time striking his left knee from the side with the arch of your foot, breaking his balance. Your right arm then extends outward (circular chop block, mirror image of the kata), across the opponent's face as your left arm hooks under the opponent's left arm, throwing him to the ground; follow-up with quick consecutive punches as he hits the ground.



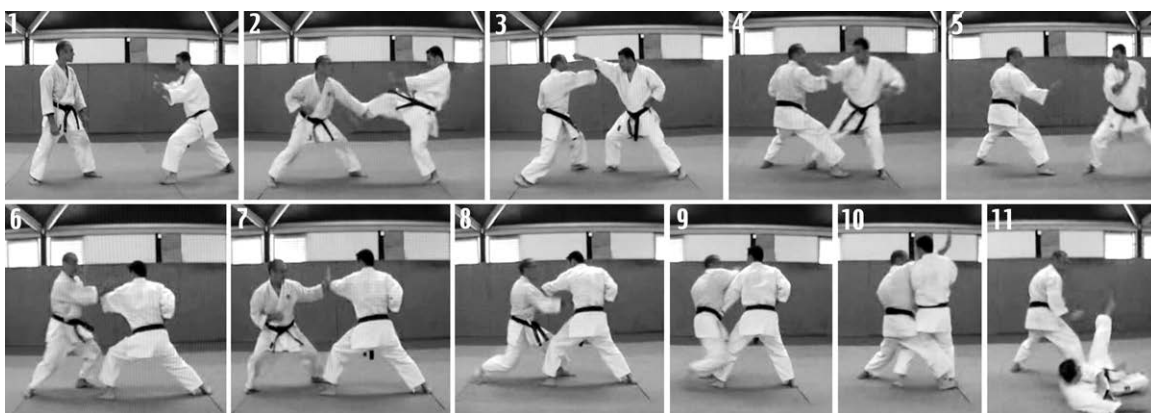


## Block, Punch, Knifehand Sequence (moves 18-22)

### Against a Right Kick and Punch Combination:

The opponent attacks with a right front snap kick (1), which you block from the inside with a left lower block (2). The opponent throws a right punch, which you block with a right rising punch (3). Step forward, pushing the opponent away with your right knifehand (4-5)... but he lunges in again with a left punch (6). Defend with a right parry into a left knifehand block (double blocking principle) as you step back into left stance (7), followed by a reverse punch to the opponent's ribs (8). Immediately step behind the opponent with your right leg and execute a right over the neck takedown (9-11).

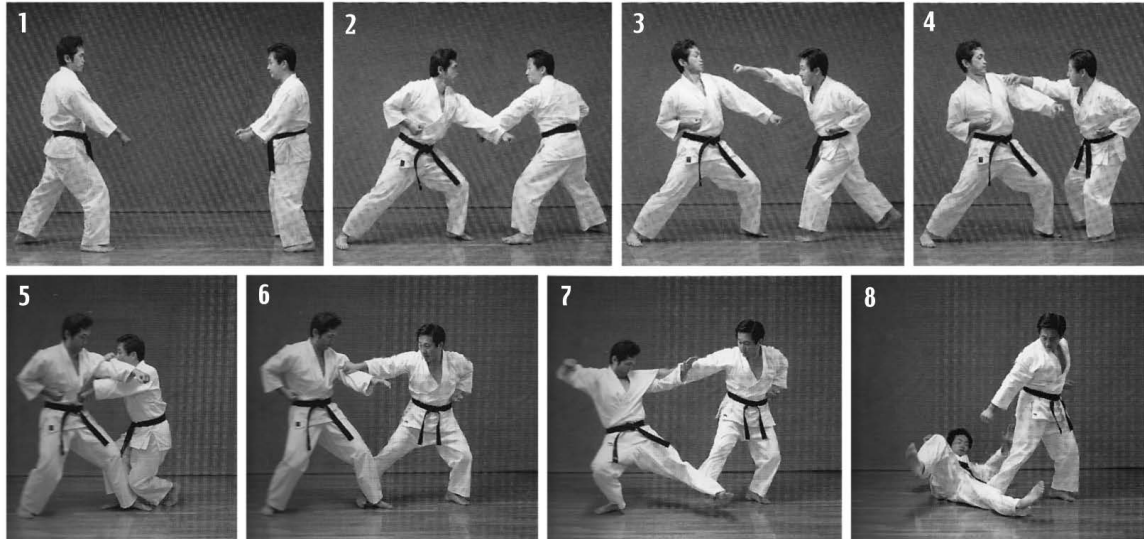
(Check out "ENPI le kata le bunkai la réalité" at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3RJ0TLfcwg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3RJ0TLfcwg))



## Swallow Sequence: part 2 (moves 23-26)

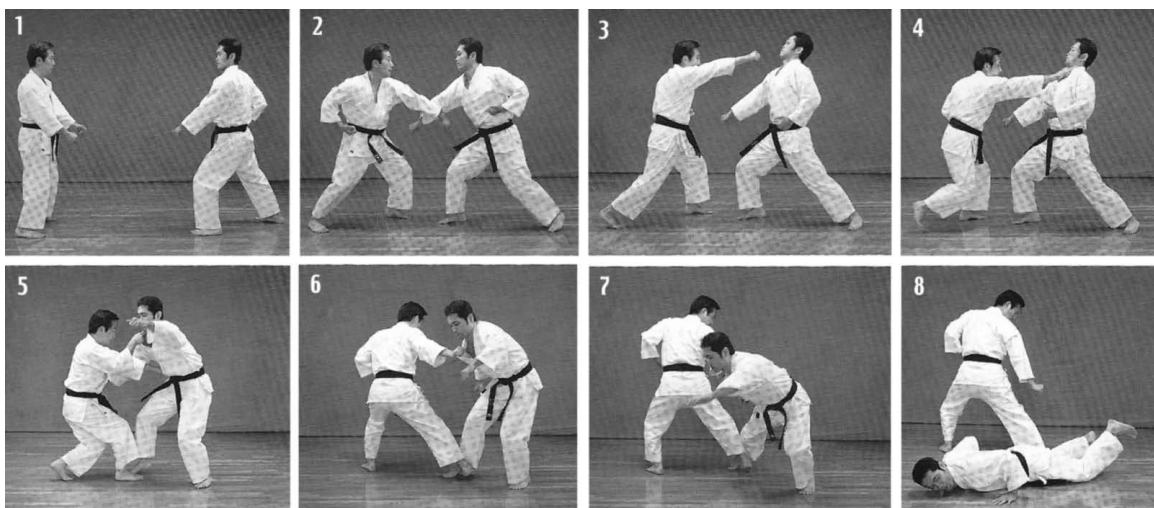
### Against a Left Punch or Grabbing Attack (to the dead side):

As the opponent steps in with a left lunge punch or grabbing attack, block his arm downward with your left arm (1-2) and punch at his face with your right arm (3). Regardless of whether your counter punch lands, immediately grab the attacker's left shoulder with your right hand as you step or jump in so that your right foot **lands just outside** the opponent's left foot (4). At the same time, execute a left lower punch to his abdomen while pulling him to you with his right hand (5). The opponent should now be thrown off balance to the rear, allowing you to step out with your left foot and sweep his left foot with your right foot (7-8). (From Hidden Karate II, Gennosuke Higaki, 2007, pgs 184-185)



### Against a Right Punch or Grabbing Attack (to the live side):

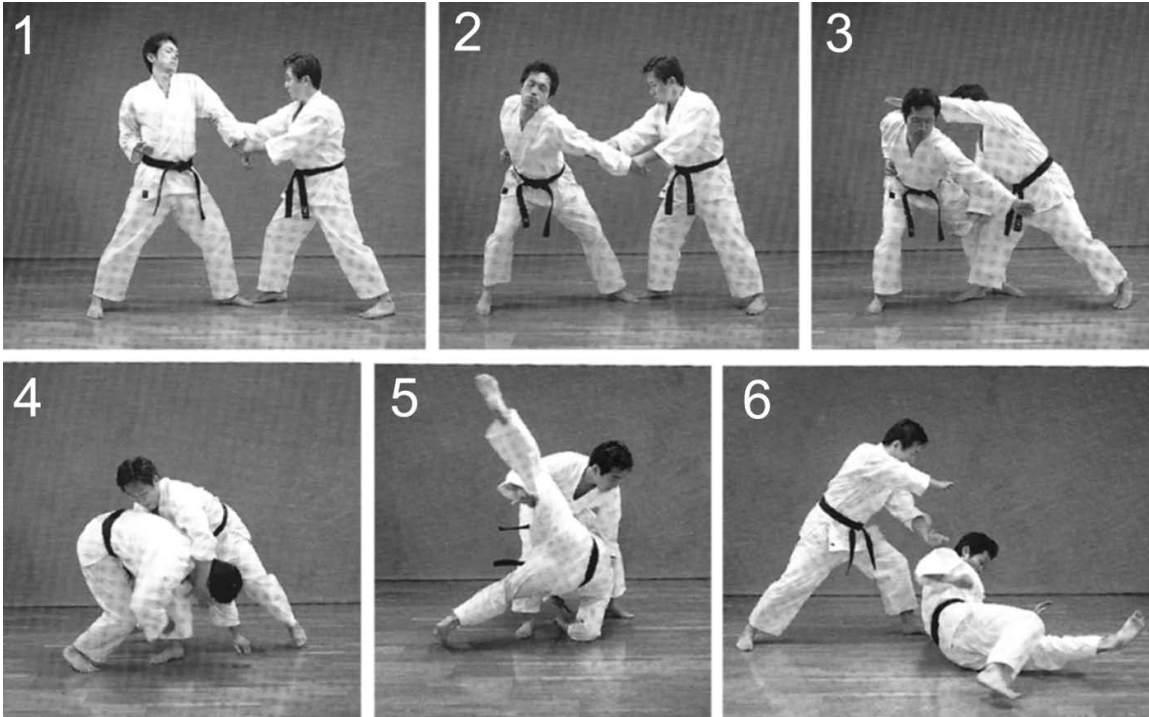
As the opponent steps in with a right lunge punch or grabbing attack, block his arm downward with your left arm (1-2) and punch at his face with your right arm (3). Regardless of whether your counter punch lands, immediately grab the attacker with your right hand as you step or jump in so that your right foot **lands just inside** the opponent's right foot (4). At the same time, execute a left lower punch to his abdomen while pulling him to you with his right hand (5). The opponent should now be thrown off balance to the rear, allowing you to step out with your left foot and sweep his right foot with your right foot (7-8). (From Hidden Karate II, Gennosuke Higaki, 2007, pgs 186-187)



## **Palm Heel Blocks, U-punch, Jump Sequence (moves 27-33)**

### **Against a left punch (to the dead side):**

The opponent attacks with a left mid-level lunge punch; move off-line to the right into a right diagonal stance, blocking with a left downward tiger-mouth to the opponent's wrist while simultaneously delivering a right upward palm heel strike to the opponent's elbow, hyper-extending or possibly even breaking his arm (1). As he moves forward to relieve the pressure on his elbow, reverse your hold, pressing down with your right hand as you pull up with your left (2). Slide into a right side-stance with a simultaneous right low spear-hand strike to opponent's groin and a left inverted tiger-mouth strike to his throat. Your right hand then hooks the opponent's leg from the inside and your left hand hooks behind his head (3) as you pull him down into a forward roll/side-drop (4-6). Turn 180 degrees and execute a right low flying side thrust kick (not pictured).



### **Against a right punch (to the live side):**

The opponent attacks with a right mid-level lunge punch; move off-line to the right into a right diagonal stance while executing simultaneous left downward tiger-mouth to the opponent's wrist and right upward palm heel strike to the underside of the opponent's jaw (this motion can be repeated against a right and again against a left punch to practice the arm lock and demonstrate applications for moves 29 and 30, but these moves are not pictured). Slide into a right side-stance with a simultaneous right low spear-hand strike to opponent's groin and a left inverted tiger-mouth strike to his throat. Your right hand then drives between the opponent's legs and strike him in the groin with your right shoulder as your left hand pulls him onto your back in a fireman's carry. Throw the opponent down into a forward roll/side-drop (kata garuma). Jump 180 degrees and execute a right stamping kick to the fallen attacker.

## Knifehand Block, Natural Stance (moves 34-35)

### Against a right punch (to the dead side):

The opponent lunges in with a right lunge punch (1). Defend by parrying the punch to your right with your left hand as you chamber it for the left knife hand “block” (2). Grab the opponent’s right wrist with your right hand as you deliver a left knife hand strike/inner chop to the right side of the opponent’s neck in a variation of the double blocking principle and/or three-step drill (3). Sweep the opponent’s right foot from behind with your left foot (4), maintaining your grip on his wrist as he falls (5). As the opponent hits the ground, deliver a right stamping kick to his face (6). You are now finished the kata (7).

