

What is one of the differences between karate as practiced in Japan and karate as practiced in America? Kata interpretation. Japanese and American karate each approach kata interpretation from different directions. To the Japanese, one way is correct. They dally with getting the smallest detail exact. The American way is to consider the kata as a whole and to investigate how and why the parts fit together. Japanese karate tells us that kata is a book, but also tells us how to read the book and what the book means. Americans do not read in that way. Americans like to read with an open mind looking for our own insight. In some ways, this is the cultural difference between a feudal culture and American "rugged individualism." The American mind looks for different levels in a book and for new insights (philosophical and technical meaning) every time the book is read. Japanese tend to look for new insights but within the same design (approach/philosophy.) Thus there is a clear distinction between the Japanese and the American mind and approach. This difference is seen not only in karate, but in other aspects of the two cultures. Americans create, Japanese refine. Americans discover new ways of thinking, not tied to what came before. Japan takes what has come before and improves on it. They are good at detailing specific applications and approaches whereas we create new concepts and ways of doing things. One way this is expressed in karate is that many American practitioners are familiar with many of the various styles and systems not only of karate, but of other martial arts. Japanese practitioners tend to be familiar with their own style of karate and maybe one or two other martial arts. Neither way is necessarily superior to the other and the aspiring karate-ka should take a lesson from both approaches.