

Hiroshi Kimura's troubles began on the day he came to Blirstown Iowa as a high-school exchange student from a remote mountain village in northwestern Japan.

Soon after he arrived, his host, Mel Brady, told Hiroshi to make himself at home. A few minutes later, Jamie Brady, Mel's 14-year old daughter screeched from the bathroom, "He's using my hairbrush." When Mel explained to Hiroshi that in America guests do not use their host's hairbrushes, Hiroshi defiantly replied that he was only making himself at home.

Hiroshi's troubles continued when he went into town and off to school. He had a habit—which apparently was common in his home town—of taking whatever he needed: a bicycle standing in a neighbor's drive, a notepad that a fellow student left on his desk. Hiroshi seemingly had no concept of private property. In his culture people used what they needed without regard for ownership.

Hiroshi's host family, his teachers and school administrators tried many times to teach him respect for the property of others. The young man, who was bright enough to speak English fluently and do well at school, demonstrated an intellectual understanding of the concept of private property, but seemed unable or unwilling to incorporate it into his daily activities.

The school psychologist labeled him as "oppositional" when Hiroshi challenged him: "You Americans think you are so free and open-minded, but when someone refuses to live by your rules, everyone comes down on him. Our way is better than your way. We share; you grab everything for yourselves. I'll live according to my rules."

Regretfully, Mel and his wife began to make arrangements for Hiroshi to return home, but before they could book a flight, a Benton County deputy sheriff called to tell them that Hiroshi had been arrested for stealing a fellow student's laptop. When Mel tried to explain that Hiroshi was only acting according to his own cultural values, the deputy told him to tell it to the judge. "Do you want to come down and bail him out?" he asked.

*Was it wrong for Hiroshi to use the property of others without their permission if he was acting according to the values he had learned as a child?*

*Is private property an absolute moral value? Is it a necessary foundation for any free society?*

*Should people who are living in foreign cultures adopt the values and practices of those cultures, even if they think those values are wrong?*

*Could Hiroshi's words and actions be explained by saying that he was acting on the basis of his own self-interest?*