

International Marriage

I moved to Japan in 2011, to study, after finishing my four-year college degree in my home country. Because the Japanese semester starts in April, I came in the middle of March. If you recall what happened in March 2011, you can probably imagine the situation in Japan when I arrived. The plane was completely empty. My section had only three passengers.

The *sakura* began blooming not long after I arrived, and I went to my first lesson in an eager mood. I might have been too excited – I forgot to take my pencil case. I sat next to a Frenchman and asked him if I might borrow a pencil. That's how it began. Five years later, I married that Frenchman. We've been together for eight years now. I'd like to share some funny cultural contrasts that we discovered after living together for a while.

The first thing is hot and cold. What do you consider to be hot, or cold? I'm from a tropical country, so it's generally hot and humid all year. Air conditioners in my country are usually set to 20 degrees. It's cold inside and extremely hot outside everywhere you go. So, I enjoy being in a freezing room. My husband comes from northern France, where people commonly don't even have an air conditioner at home. Every year, when summer arrives in Japan, we argue over what temperature to set our air conditioner to. My husband will try to avoid using it as much as possible. He will first close all the windows and dwell in the gloomy room, then explain to me that he doesn't want sunlight to enter the room. To me, however, it's just a sauna. When we can no longer stand the heat, we will agree to turn on the air conditioner, but he wants it set at 28, while I want it set as low as possible. We've agreed on a temperature of 25.

Second, the French take their food culture seriously. They have a tradition of eating each dish in order. They begin with an appetizer, then move onto the main course, then some cheese, and eventually dessert. On the contrary, in my food culture, we will have our own white rice in front of us and several dishes will be served all at once in the center of the table. Then we take the food we want, put it on our rice, eating each dish in no particular order. Basically, you eat anything you want, whenever you want. The issue is that I occasionally crave sweets in the late afternoon, but my husband firmly forbids me from doing so because he says I should not eat sweets just before dinner. Concerning this topic, I finally stopped this habit and now simply wait to begin my appetizer earlier.

Third, I'm not sure if other Asians are aware of this, but our room lighting is white and bright. My husband hates it. He grew up in a home with warmer, yellow lighting. When we first moved in together, he always switched the room lighting to a darker yellow, even when he was working or reading. He claims that the white, fluorescent light is too bright for him and irritates his eyes. Until I moved in with him, I hadn't realized that white light and very bright light were more cultural preferences in Asia. He also stated that his eyes' color is brighter than mine and they are therefore more sensitive to bright light. But for me, I can't see anything in the yellow light. I mean, I can see, but I'd prefer to see things more clearly. Now, we've reached a compromise. Every room in our house has yellowish lighting, with the exception of the dining area, because I lose my appetite when I can't see the food clearly.

People always say that foreign marriage is difficult. But, to me, I enjoy discovering new cultural preferences every day. I think it reminds you that the society you grew up in shapes your choices.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. About what year did the couple marry?

Answer: Around 2016.

Hints/Clues: The narrator mentioned that they married 5 years after they met. She arrived in 2011, so $2011 + 5 = 2016$. Alternatively, she mentions that they have been married for 8 years. $2024 - 8 = 2016$.

2. How many seasons do tropical countries have?

Answer: One.

Hints/Clues: The narrator mention that it's generally hot and humid all year in her home country – suggesting that there is not a big change in seasons.

3. How many courses the French people usually eat at least for every meal?

Answer: Three (or possibly four).

Hints/Clues: Consisting of an appetizer, a main course, and a dessert. (Potentially a fourth, if the students consider cheese being a course).

4. Is it acceptable to eats sweets at 5 pm in France?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: The narrator mentioned that her husband ask her not to eat sweets in the late afternoon, which she directly relates to food culture; “he says I should not eat sweets just right before dinner. Concerning this topic, I finally stopped this habit and now simply wait to begin my appetizer earlier.”

5. Has the narrator ever thought that the room light in her country residence is excessively bright?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: The narrator mentioned that “Until I moved in with him, I had not realized that white light and very bright light were more cultural preferences in Asia.”

6. Is the narrator's husband's eye color dark brown?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: The narrator said her husband has lighter eyes than she does and that she is Asian.