Paris syndrome

Paris syndrome ([French]: Syndrome de Paris, [Japanese]: パリ症候群, *Pari shōkōgun*) is a transient psychological disorder exhibited by some individuals visiting or vacationing in Paris or elsewhere in Western Europe. It is characterized by a number of psychiatric symptoms such as acute delusional states, hallucinations, feelings of persecution (perceptions of being a victim of prejudice, aggression, or hostility from others), derealization, depersonalization, anxiety, and also psychosomatic manifestations such as dizziness, tachycardia, sweating, and others.¹ Similar syndromes include Jerusalem syndrome and Stendhal syndrome. The condition is commonly viewed as a severe form of culture shock.

History

Professor Hiroaki Ota, a Japanese psychiatrist working in France, is credited as the first person to diagnose the condition in 1986.² However, later work by Youcef Mahmoudia, physician with the hospital Hôtel-Dieu de Paris, indicates that Paris syndrome is "a manifestation of psychopathology related to the voyage, rather than a syndrome of the traveller."³ He theorized that the excitement resulting from visiting Paris causes the heart to accelerate, causing giddiness and shortness of breath, which results in hallucinations in the manner similar to the Stendhal syndrome described by Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini in her book *La sindrome di Stendhal*.⁴

Causes

The authors of the article, in the 2012 French psychiatry journal Nervure, cite the following as contributory factors:

1. **Language barrier** – few Japanese speak French and vice versa. This is believed to be the principal cause and is thought to engender the remainder. Apart from the obvious differences between French and Japanese, many everyday phrases and idioms are short of meaning and substance when translated, adding to the confusion of some who have not previously encountered such.

2. **Cultural difference** – the large difference between not only the languages but the manner. The French can communicate on an informal level in comparison to the rigidly formal Japanese culture, which proves too great a difficulty for some Japanese visitors. It is thought that it is the rapid and frequent fluctuations in mood, tense and attitude, especially in the delivery of humour, which cause the most difficulty.
3. Idealized image of Paris – it is also speculated as manifesting from an individual's inability to reconcile a disparity between the Japanese popular image and the reality of Paris. The Japanese often picture Paris as a land of dreams, the land of beauty, culture and romance. However, they soon find out the contrary when they visit Paris for the first time. They find it to be a very regular place, the facilities are disorganized, many areas are unclean, and life characterized by noise, not like what was in their imagination.

4. Exhaustion – the over-booking of one's time and energy, whether on a business trip or on holiday, in attempting to cram too much into every moment of a stay in Paris, along with the effects of jet lag, all contribute to the psychological destabilization of some visitors.

**Susceptibility**

Japanese visitors are observed to be especially susceptible.[2][5] It was first noted in Nervure, the French journal of psychiatry in 2004.[6] From the estimated six million yearly visitors, the number of reported cases is not significant: according to an administrator at the Japanese embassy in France, around twenty Japanese tourists a year are affected by the syndrome.[7] The susceptibility of Japanese people may be linked to the popularity of Paris in Japanese culture, notably the idealized image of Paris prevalent in Japanese advertising.

Mario Renoux, the president of the Franco-Japanese Medical Association, states in Libération: "Des Japonais entre mal du pays et mal de Paris" ("The Japanese are caught between homesickness and Paris sickness", 13 December 2004) that [Japanese] magazines are primarily responsible for creating this syndrome. Renoux indicates that Japanese media, magazines in particular, often depict Paris as a place where most people on the street look like stick-thin models and most women dress in high fashion brands such as Louis Vuitton,[8] while in reality French high-fashion brands are mainly for foreign consumers, and the French population are far more overweight than the Japanese population.

As of 2004 the Japanese embassy ran a 24-hour help line to assist Japanese tourists suffering from this condition. The embassy also reported that at this time on average twelve people suffered from the disorder annually.[9]

**See also**

- Jerusalem syndrome
- Mean world syndrome
• Psychosis
• Multiculturalism

Bibliography

Notes

References


External links

• "Paris Syndrome," a 2010 short documentary