ISSN (Print) : 0974-6846
Indian Journal of Science and Technology, *Vol 9(35), DOI: 10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i35/101789, September 2016* ISSN (Online) : 0974-5645

The Influence of Psychological Distance to Cultural Assimilation on Tourism Destination

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Abstract

Objectives: While traveling, all tourists become aware of distance of various dimensions towards a destination. This study is to examine how tourist's psychological distance influences cultural assimilation in a tourism destination. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** To reveal its influence of psychological distance to cultural assimilation, this study conducted an empirical investigation. First, based on literatures, this study hypothesizes that psychological factors (i.e., geographic distance, linguistic distance, economic distance, politic distance) influence cultural assimilation factors (i.e., cultural similarities, acculturation intention, local cultural adaptation). Second, data were collected during November 2015 via on-line research site. Finally, SPSS 23 and AMOS 23were used for statistical analyses. **Findings:** This study attempted to verify the relationship of psychological distance and cultural assimilation through a SEM, and the several study results were found. First and most importantly, the study results found out the cause-and-effect in the relationship between the psychological distance that tourists feel and the level of their cultural assimilation. It was also found that the psychological distance that the tourists feel has been found to serve as the positive factor toward the cultural experience that the tourists feel at the destination. To be specific, both geographic and economic distances have a direct positive effect on cultural similarity awareness. The linguistic and political distances were found to be the influence factors of acculturation intention. Finally, cultural similarity has a strong positive effect on acculturation intention. **Improvements/Applications:** The study empirically proved the causal effect relationship between psychological distance and cultural assimilation. However, the sample population only includes Koreans travelling abroad. Therefore, future research is recommended.

Keywords: Acculturation Intention, Cultural Assimilation, Local Cultural Adaptation Psychological Distance, Tourism Destination

1. Introduction

Tourists intentionally look for cultural differences. When people travel abroad, these differences make them feel their experiences travelling abroad are exotic or novel. According to cognitive dissonance theory, tourists go through an emotional state of psychological discomfort when they experience cultural differences. At that time, tourists try to overcome the differences that contrast with their everyday life. Although the physical distance from a departure point to a destination is fixed, the psychological distance is different from person to person. Prior study[1] has confirmed that tourists' psychological distance distort the actual distance and influence tourist destination selection. Interestingly, when psychological distance is greater than actual distance, tourists do not tend to select a destination[1]. It seems to be counterintuitive because, as mentioned above, one motivation for tourism is experiencing cultural differences. However, there may be a threshold level at which tourists are willing to overcome the cultural differences, which can be explained as cultural assimilation. The main goal of this paper is to examine how tourists' psychological distance influences cultural assimilation in a destination. We also aim to understand the existence of culture similarities, acculturation intention, and local cultural adaptation dimensions in a model utilizing a tourist's psychological distance construct.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Distance

Psychological (psychic) distance refers to differences of what an individual perceives between his/her own country and a foreign country to be visited (destination)[2,3]. "Psychological" means something that is in the mind of a person; "distance" also exists in the mind of the person, based on what he/she believes about the world[3,4]. In[3] argued that psychological distance should not be measured with factual indicators because of its subjectivity. Within a tourism domain, psychological distance has been investigated in relation to tourist behavior. However, prior to this, the tourism discipline used the term cognitive distance. Cognitive distance defines as "people's beliefs about distance between places in large-scale spaces that are far apart and not visible from each other". According to this definition, there is a great difference between objective, measured distance (physical distance) and cognized, subjective distance (cognitive distance)[5]. A prior study[6] also argued that if tourists evaluate the cognitive distance of a destination as longer than the actual physical distance, then the destination is situated in a worse position. This is because a longer cognitive distance tends to diminish the probability of selecting a destination. In[7] stated that an individual's characteristics, generated by his/her social, cultural, and general life experiences, are the factors that form mental representations of actual distance (cognitive distance). Furthermore, In[8] argued that cognitive distance critically influences tourist destination selections related to tourist behavior. To be specific, they are 1. Whether to go or to stay, 2. Where to go, and 3. What route to take. In[9] argued that psychological distance can be related to diverse factors of objects and events. However, within an international tourism setting, this study focuses on the four dimensions that may influence the development of psychological distance: geographical distance, linguistic distance, economic distance, and political distance. According to previous studies[10], the four dimensions are recognized as objects that can differentiate between the actual distance to the destination and the psychological distance.

2.2 Cultural Assimilation

Assimilation refers to "the social, economic, and political integration of an ethnic minority group into mainstream society"[11]. In other words, individuals go through cultural learning and behavioral adaptation in order to overcome cultural differences when they encounter a new culture at a destination. The level of assimilation varies, depending on the individual and/or cultural distance. However, Gordon[12] distinguished the assimilation process into seven steps: 1. Behavioral assimilation; 2. Structural assimilation; 3. Martial assimilation (amalgamation); 4. Identificational assimilation; 5. Attitude receptional assimilation; 6. Behavior receptional assimilation; 7. Civic assimilation. The process of assimilation is an inevitable phenomenon in the tourist experience. Within a tourism destination, tourists require a certain motivation to participate in the cultural assimilation process in order to connect with a non-native culture (the destination culture). However, the level of cultural assimilation may differ from Gordon's steps[12], which were developed based on an immigrant context. With limited time and contact, tourists may or may not experience cultural assimilation. By analyzing the International Tourist Role scale (ITR), developed by in[13], it is assumed that cultural assimilation within a tourism context can be divided into three steps: cultural similarities, acculturation intention, and local cultural adaptation.

3. Methods

Based on previous literature on identifying the relationship between psychological distance and cultural assimilation, the current study hypothesizes that psychological distance (geographic, linguistic, economic, and political) are the independent factors influencing the dependent factor, cultural assimilation (cultural similarities, acculturation intention, local cultural adaptation). The final proposed conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

3.1 Measurement

To achieve the purpose of this study, and reveal the essence of tourism destination decision-making and its influence on cultural assimilation performance, this study empirically investigated by surveying proactive tourists (with an annual international tour experience of one time or more). A questionnaire was developed and consisted of four sections: 1. Psychological distance (to the destination), dimensions; 2. Cultural assimilation;

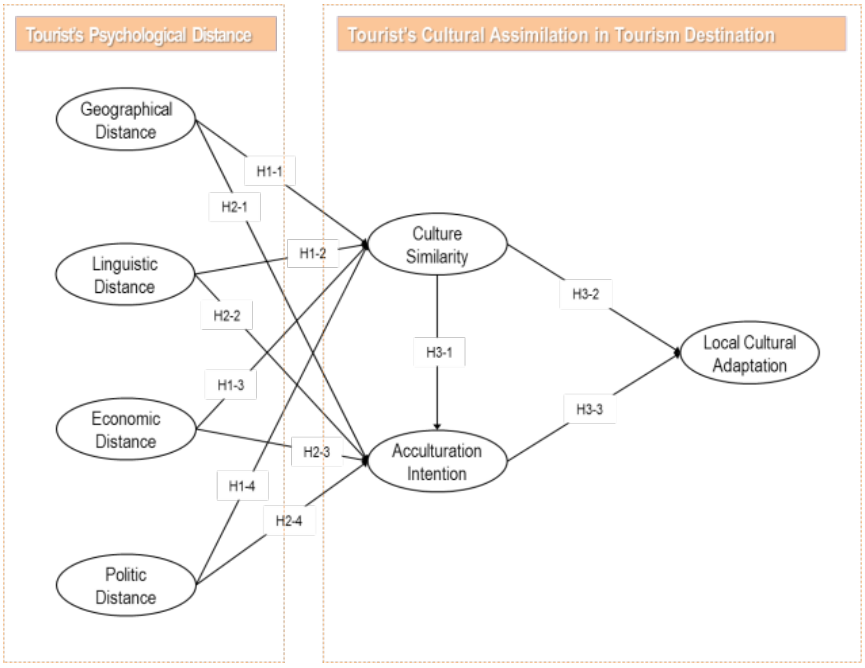

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study.

3. Tourism behavior characteristics; and 4. Respondent demographics. Specifically, respondents were asked about their opinion with 12 psychological distance items and 10 cultural assimilation items with a five point Liker scale, ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Data were collected from an on-line research site during November 2015. Respondents logged into the site, and were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Only panel members who were older than 19 years, and who had an annual international tour experiences of one time or more were invited to be asked in the survey in order to enhance the representativeness of the study sample. A total of 500 Korean Tourists participated in the study. All respondents were valid.

3.2 Data Analysis

The statistical packages SPSS ver.23.0 and AMOS ver.23.0 were used to analyze the data. In order to understand the demographic and tourism behavior characteristics of the sample, firstly frequency analysis was conducted. Then, we appraised there liability and validity of the measurement scales with an alpha coefficient test, and an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was also used to examine whether a hierarchical structure existed in the context of psychological distance and cultural assimilation. Lastly, Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used to test the suggested conceptual model of the effects of psychological distance on cultural assimilation. Additionally, various fit indices (χ^2/df, GFI, AGFI, RMR, NFI, CFI, IFI, RMSEA) were assessed to examine the measurement and the model. In general, non-significant values for χ^2, values of less than 3 for χ^2/df, values equal to or more than .90 for the GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI, TLI and IFI, values equal to or less than 0.4 for the RMR, and 0.08 for the RMSEA were considered as an acceptable fit[14].

4. Results

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

A descriptive summary of the respondents comprising the sample can be found in Table 1 and Table 2. As shown in Table 1, which describes demographic characteristics, males were slightly better represented (57.6%) in the sample, than females (42.4%). The dominant respondents were in the 40-49age group (118 respondents, 23.6%), followed by the 50-59 age group (117 respondents, 23.4%), and the 30-39age group (112 respondents, 22.4%). The majority of respondents were married (365, 73.0%) while 24.6% (123 respondents) were single. Many

of the respondents stated that their household income was KRW 50-74.9 million (168 respondents, 33.6%), KRW 25-49.9 million (148 respondents, 29.6%), and KRW 75-99.9 million (109 respondents, 21.8%). Approximately 57.2% of respondents had attended a 4-year University. Demographic characteristics consisted of gender, age, marital status, education level, annual household income, and residence. Exactly 57.6% of the respondents were male, and 42.4% of the respondents were female. The dominant age category of the respondents was 40-49 years (118 respondents, 23.6%), followed by 50-59 years (117 respondents, 23.4%). Approximately 22.4% of the respondents (112 respondents) were in the 30-39 age group, 19.6% (98 respondents) of the respondents were 20-29 years, and 11.0% (55 respondents) of the respondents were over 60 years old. The majority of respondents were married (365, 73.0%) while 24.6% (123 respondents) were single (others 12, 2.4%). Many of the respondents stated that their household income was KRW 50-74.9 million (33.6%), with 29.6% (148 respondents) of the respondents in the range of KRW 25-49.9million, and 21.8% (109 respondents) at KRW 75-99.9 million. Every respondent was Korean. To be specific, most of the respondents live in Seoul (161 respondents, 32.2%), with 25.6% (128 respondents) living in Gyenggido and 22.6% (113 respondents) in Kangwondo. Table 2 addresses tourism behavior characteristics. All respondents had travelled one time or more in a year, but most travelled only once in a year (314 respondents, 62.8%). The most frequent purpose for a tour was pleasure (255 respondents, 51.0%), followed by relaxing (148 respondents, 29.6%). The majority of respondents had traveled with their family (144 respondents, 28.8%), or his(her) husband/wife (130 respondents, 26.0%). Many respondents spent KRW 1-2.9 million per travel (332 respondents, 66.4%). Respondents primarily, used online information sources (272 respondents, 54.4%), followed by professional advice (130 respondents, 26.0%). Finally, respondents' destinations were East Asia (405 respondents, 59.4%), followed by Western Europe (67 respondents).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

	frequency	
	persons	**%**
Gender		
- male.	288	57.6
- female.	212	42.4
Age		
- 20-29 years	98	19.6
- 30-39 years	112	22.4
- 40-49 years	118	23.6
- 50-59 years	117	23.4
- over 60 years	55	11.0
Marital status		
- Single	123	24.6
- Married (include. remarriage.)	365	73.0
- Others (Divorced, Widow, Separated)	12	2.4
Education		
- Less than High School	62	12.4
- High School / GED	52	10.4
- 2~3-year College	35	7.0
- 4-year University	286	57.2
- Master's or above	43	8.6
-value unknown at present	22	4.2
Annual household income		
- Less than KRW25,000,000	38	7.6
-KRW25,000,000-KRW49,999,999	148	29.6
-KRW50,000,000-KRW74,999,999	168	33.6
-KRW75,000,000-KRW99,999,999	109	21.8
-KRW100,000,000 and more	37	7.4
Residence		
- seoul (city of KOREA)	161	32.2
- Gyeonggi-do (Incheon*)	128	25.6
- Kangwon-do	13	2.6
- Chungcheong-do (Daejun*)	37	7.4
- Gyeongsang-do (Daegu*, Busan*)	113	22.6
- Jeolla-do (Gwangju*)	42	8.4
- Jeju-do	4	0.8
- Other	2	0.4

Table 2. Tourism behavior characteristics

	frequency	
	persons	(%)
Touring frequency per year		
- Once in a year	314	62.8
- Two to three times in a year	147	29.4
- Four to five times in a year	26	3.2
- More than five times in a year	13	2.6
Tour Purpose		
- Pleasure	255	51.0
- Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)	25	5.0
- Relaxing	148	29.6
- Volunteer	7	1.4
- Business	64	12.8
- Other	1	0.2
Tour party		
- Alone	79	15.8
- Husband/wife	130	26.0
- Boyfriend/girlfriend	46	9.2
- Friends	73	14.6
- Family	144	28.8
- People whom are acquainted with each other	22	4.4
- People whom I never met before / Strangers	6	1.2
Tour costs		
- <KRW 1,000,000	78	15.6
- KRW 1,00,000-1,999,999	212	42.4
- KRW 2,000,000-2,999,999	120	24.0
- KRW 3,000,000-3,999,999	47	9.4
- KRW 4,000,000-4,999,999	25	5.0
- >KRW 5,000,000	18	3.6
Information sources		
- Professional advice	130	26.0
- Word-of-mouth	57	11.4
- Paid advertisement	5	1.0
- Books/movies/news	29	5.8
- Online sources	272	54.4
- Others	7	1.4
Destination		
- East Asia	405	59.4
- Middle Asia	22	3.2
- West Asia	10	1.5
- North America	77	11.3
- South America	12	1.8
- North Europe	15	2.2
- West Europe	67	9.8
- East Europe	30	4.4
- North Africa	4	0.6
- Middle/South Africa	3	0.4
- Oceania / Other	37	5.4

4.2 Reilability and Validity

In the first step, we analyzed Cronbach's alpha for there liability, and conducted an EFA for basic validity of measurement scales of total factors. Cronbach's alpha for the 7 factors ranged from 0.681 to 0.888. All factors had Eigen-values (varimax rotation) greater than 1.0, and a cut-off point of 0.5 on factor loading, accounting for 75.868% (psychological distance), and 66.899% (cultural assimilation) of total variance. The factor loadings and Eigen-value of each factor, as well as the mean and SD are shown in Table 3. The second step was to analyze the validity (convergent validity and discriminant validity) of the scales. Using the Maximum Likelihood (ML), the fit indices and individual path coefficients of the model was evaluated. Table 4 and Table 5 shows the results of the fit indices and the critical values recommended by precedence scholars[14]. The conceptual model of the psychological distance's effects on cultural assimilation can be statistically accepted based on the good fit of the model. As shown in Table 4, several inter-item correlations (in correlations between all 7 factors) were statistically significant ($p<0.05$). However, in order to evaluate discriminant validity and construct reliability, two more criteria (Composite Reliability (C.R), and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)) and a CFA were examined[15]. Who set the standard for C.R., a factor displays its discriminant validity and construct reliability if its C.R is greater than 0.7.The C.R of all factors in this model were found greater than 0.7. Higher variance extracted values mean that indicators are truly representative of final model. The AVE of all factors were higher than the standard critical value (>0.5), indicating that the average explanatory power of each item in the proposed model was good enough. Finally, as seen in Table 5, each factor's and the total CFAs were all statistically significant.

4.3 Structure Analysis

SEM with a maximum likelihood estimation procedure was tested, with results showing acceptable model fit indices (χ^2:367.747, df:137, χ^2/df:2.684, GFI:0.929, AGFI:0.901, RMR:0.051, RMSEA:0.058, CFI: 0.940, NFI:0.908) of the proposed model. The hypotheses were then tested. Table 6 presents the empirical findings from the SEM. The results of Hypotheses 1 and 2 indicate that perceived psychological distance significantly and positively affected cultural assimilation. Hypothesis 3 tested the relationship between 2nd order factors of

Table 3. Validityand reliability of variables

Factor	Variables	Mean	SD*	CA*	FL*	EV*	Variance (accumulated)
Geographical Distance (GD)	GD1.The perception of the distance from Korea to destination	3.484	0.878	0.789	0.867	2.134	19.396
	GD2.The perception of travel time from Korea to destination	3.550	0.879		0.896		(19.396)
	GD3.The perception of travel cost from Korea to destination	3.852	0.851		0.728		
Linguistic Distance (LD)	LD1.The difference between the main languages	2.940	1.037	0.829	0.892	2.257	20.520
	LD2.The incidence of the main language used in Korea	2.862	0.990		0.835		(39.916)
	LD3.The incidence of Korean used in the destination	2.602	0.993		0.762		
Economic Distance (ED)	ED1.The GDP of the destination compared to that of Korea	2.860	0.967	0.888	0.836	1.799	16.355
	ED2.Living standard of destination compared to that of Korea	2.896	0.931		0.844		(56.271)
	ED3.The consumer's price compared to that of Korea**						
Political Distance (PD)	PD1.The similarity of the political constraints in the destination	3.178	0.959	0.791	0.848	2.156	19.597
	PD2.The similarity between the democracy and autocracy	3.132	1.006		0.863		(75.868)
	PD3.The similarity between the degree of democratism	2.994	0.988		0.659		
Cultural Similarities (CS)	CS1.The Natives are of the same ethnic group as mine.	2.816	0.921	0.715	0.824	1.891	21.016
	CS2.Local culture is similar to mine.	2.994	0.914		0.855		(21.016)
	CS3.High priority on familiarity when thinking of tour destinations.	3.384	0.781		0.664		
Acculturation Intention (AI)	AI1.Speak, read, listen to local language in destination.	3.284	0.893	0.782	0.700	2.417	26.857
	AI2.Eat local foods	3.384	0.838		0.626		(47.873)
	AI3.Interact with the natives	3.414	0.839		0.772		
	AI4.Intention of making the native friends?	3.086	0.955		0.843		
Local Cultural Adaptation (LA)	LA1.Feeling of becoming a native of tour destination.**			0.681		1.712	19.026
	LA2.Have no cultural aversion to destination.	3.492	0.784		0.712		(66.899)
	LA3.Overall, happy with cultural experience in destination.	3.740	0.763		0.838		

Table 4. C.R and AVE of constructs for SEM

Construct			Correlation matrix						
Factor	C.R*	AVE*	GD	LD	ED	PD	CS	AI	LA
Geographical Distance (GD)	0.8072	0.5997							
Linguistic Distance (LD)	0.8333	0.6260	0.166						
Economic Distance (ED)	0.9012	0.8218	0.162	0.514					
Politic Distance (PD)	0.7912	0.5650	0.197	0.351	0.621				
Culture Similarity (CS)	0.7744	0.5393	0.231	0.172	0.236	0.193			
Acculturation Intention (AI)	0.7691	0.5309	0.093	-0.198	0.017	0.092	0.309		
Local Cultural Adaptation (LA)	0.7268	0.5834	0.003	-0.162	-0.171	-0.098	0.145	0.586	

*. C.R : composite reliabilities, AVE : average variance extracted.

Table 5. Summary of model fit index for CFA

Fit Index	Absolute index				Relative index				Parsimony index	
	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	RMR	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	PGFI	PNFI
Threshold value	**< 3.0**	**>0.90**	**>0.90**	**<0.04**	**<0.08**	**>0.90**	**>0.90**	**>0.90**	**>0.50**	**>0.50**
CFA (total factors)	2.601	0.932	0.904	0.049	0.057	0.914	0.944	0.945	0.653	0.711
Geographical Distance (GD)	2.968	0.995	0.968	0.016	0.077	0.993	0.995	0.995	0.166	0.331
Linguistic Distance (LD)	2.748	0.996	0.978	0.012	0.059	0.995	0.997	0.997	0.166	0.332
Economic Distance (ED)	0.275	0.999	0.998	0.006	0.001	0.999	0.999	0.999	0.333	0.999
Politic Distance (PD)	0.769	0.997	0.994	0.017	0.001	0.995	0.999	0.999	0.498	0.995
Culture Similarities (CS)	2.531	0.993	0.980	0.019	0.055	0.983	0.999	0.990	0.331	0.656
Acculturation Intention (AI) *	0.468	0.998	0.996	0.011	0.001	0.997	0.999	0.999	0.499	0.997
Local Cultural Adaptation (LA)	0.356	0.999	0.998	0.008	0.001	0.998	0.999	0.999	0.333	0.998

*. Acculturation intention's 1 variable(AI2) was excepted. *p<0.05,

Table 6. Evaluation of the suggested model

Hypothesis	Independent variable		Dependent variable	Standard path (estimate)	Standard error	Critical ratio (t-value)	p-value	support
H1-1	Geographical Distance	→	Cultural Similarity	0.235	0.065	3.625	0.000*	supported
H1-2	Linguistic Distance	→	Cultural Similarity	0.030	0.047	0.628	0.530	unsupported
H1-3	Economic Distance	→	Cultural Similarity	0.102	0.044	2.337	0.019*	supported
H1-4	Political Distance	→	Cultural Similarity	0.044	0.061	0.732	0.464	unsupported
H2-1	Geographical Distance	→	Acculturation Intention	0.060	0.081	0.736	0.462	unsupported
H2-2	Linguistic Distance	→	Acculturation Intention	-0.291	0.061	-4.749	0.000*	supported
H2-3	Economic Distance	→	Acculturation Intention	-0.007	0.055	-0.130	0.897	unsupported
H2-4	Political Distance	→	Acculturation Intention	0.119	0.078	1.528	0.126	unsupported
H3-1	Cultural Similarity	→	Acculturation Intention	0.415	0.070	5.917	0.000*	supported
H3-2	Cultural Similarity	→	Local Cultural Adaptation	-0.064	0.063	-1.012	0.312	unsupported
H3-3	Acculturation Intention	→	Local Cultural Adaptation	0.602	0.053	11.335	0.000*	supported

the cultural assimilation category (cultural similarity, acculturation intention, local culture adoption). The results indicate that cultural similarities only significantly and positively (+) affected acculturation intention. Furthermore, acculturation intention was significantly and positively (+) affected by the local cultural adaptation of cultural assimilation. Finally, a modified model was constructed from the results of testing the hypotheses. 3 variables—ED3, AI2, LA1 were excepted in the same manner as in the suggested model, as were 5 additional paths (on the relationship between psychological distance against culture similarities and acculturation intention, and between culture similarities against local cultural adaptation).The results of the model fit index show a good fitness of the modified model (χ^2:370.298, df:142, χ^2/df:2.608, GFI:0.928, PGFI:0.694, AGFI:0.904, RMR:0.053, CFI:0.940, NFI:0.907, PNFI:0.754, RMSEA:0.057). Figure 2 shows the results of the modified structural model.

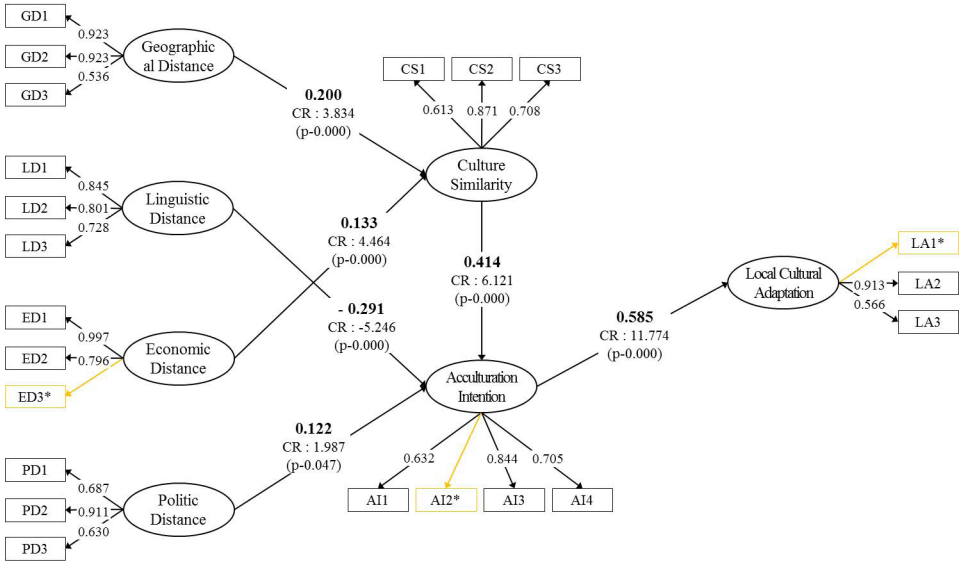

Figure 2. Modified structural model of SEMs.

5. Discussion

Under the assumption that the conceptual definition of tourism refers to the kind of travel in which one leaves one's place of residence, the tourists experience a cultural change and sense of difference in the process of travelling to the destination. In other words, all tourists become aware of the distance of different dimensions of the destination while travelling, and this research began from the assumption that such phenomena will play a part in the cultural assimilation experienced at the destination. In addition to physical distance, tourists' psychological distance can also be examined in terms of linguistic distance, economic distance, political distance, and more. The need for research on cultural assimilation has been brought up not only in relation to culture similarities, as proposed by many previous studies, or for the purpose of overcoming differences in the linguistic culture, but also for the acculturation intention of the tourist, or for the destination's local cultural adaptation on a comprehensive level. This study attempted to verify the relationship of psychological distance and cultural assimilation through a SEM, and the results have several implications. First, among the factors of psychological distance, both geographic and economic distances have a direct positive effect on cultural similarity awareness. In addition, the linguistic and political distances were found to be the influence factors of acculturation intention. More specifically, linguistic distance has negatively influenced on acculturation intention. Finally, among the relationship of the factors in the cultural assimilation category, cultural similarity has a strong positive effect on acculturation intention. Acculturation intention has been found to strongly affect local cultural adaptation, and culture similarity and local cultural adaptation were found to have no direct relationship with each other. The overall results of the study describe the structural cause-and-effect in the relationship between the psychological distance that the tourists feel and the level of their cultural assimilation. Assume that the psychological distance that the tourists feel is an ambivalent variable that gives the feeling of something new about the tourist spot visited for the first time and, at the same time, serves as the constraint of the tour when the place is revisited. From the following assumption, it was found that the psychological distance that the tourists feel has been found to serve as the positive factor toward the cultural experience that the tourists feel at the destination. However, the limitations of the study are that the existing literature about cultural assimilation is limited to only understanding the linguistic assimilation of immigrants or their cultural similarities. Therefore, understanding the essence of cultural assimilation such as acculturation intention or local cultural adaptation and so on is limited because the sample population only includes Koreans travelling abroad. For that reason, if the study about comprehensive cultural assimilation experienced by tourists travelling to other cultures is conducted in future studies, it is estimated that the academic and marketing

implications will offer a much broader understanding of the tourist populations. It may help us to understand cultural assimilation and address cultural demand, which originated from those cultural differences.

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