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AN ISM APPROACH TO ANALYZING THE CAUSES OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND GOVERNMENTS IN XIJIANG MIAO VILLAGE, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism development in ethnic regions plays a critical role in promoting economic growth and cultural preservation, yet it may also trigger social tensions due to inequitable resource allocation and diminished local rights. Taking Xijiang Miao Village as a case study, this research reveals that residents experience growing dissatisfaction with income inequality, the erosion of land and cultural rights, and limited employment opportunities, which have led to structural conflicts with the government and negatively affected tourism performance. Based on a comprehensive literature review and expert consultation, the study identifies 15 key conflict-inducing factors. Using Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM), a hierarchical structure of these factors is constructed. The results indicate that the lack of publicity, researchers, and a long-term plan are the fundamental drivers of conflict. The findings contribute theoretically to the understanding of conflict dynamics in ethnic tourism contexts and offer practical implications for local governments and tourism planners. By emphasizing the importance of policy support, governance reform, and community participation, the study provides a structured framework for achieving more sustainable and inclusive tourism development. The conclusions also offer transferable insights for managing tourism-related conflicts in other culturally sensitive regions.

Keywords: Causes of conflicts, ISM, ethnic tourism

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INTRODUCTION

The number of tourist destinations and tourism-related investments has grown substantially in recent years. The expansion of tourism has played a key role in driving socio-economic progress and cultural transformation worldwide (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2021). In some countries, ethnic culture is increasingly being used to attract tourists to ethnic areas (Yang & Wall, 2009). Minorities are a group of people who are small in number compared to the majority population in a given region, but who possess their own distinct cultural identity (Yang, 2007). Tourism has both positive and negative effects on the development of ethnic areas (Wang & Yotsumoto, 2018). The positive impact is reflected in the contribution to GDP, the improvement of infrastructure, and the preservation of culture. The negative effects include rising crime rate, rising prices and environmental pollution (Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019).

Xijiang Miao Village is located in southwestern China and is home to more than 1,300 families. The Miao population accounts for 99.5% of the total population of Xijiang Miao Village. The Miao have been in Xijiang Miao Village for over 1,700 years, and it is the largest Miao settlement

in the world (Xiao et al., 2020). As a typical ethnic village tourism destination, Xijiang Miao Village attracts many tourists to visit (You & He, 2023). In the development and operation of ethnic tourism in Xijiang Miao Village, there is a game of interests between governments, tour operators, and residents (Zou, 2024). In actual development, residents are disadvantaged (Hu et al., 2022). During the development process, there were more conflicts between the government and residents. Most tour operators and the government have similar goals because of the return on investment (You & He, 2023). The government, relying on its strong funding and enforcement power, fails to disclose information or take coercive measures fully, and does not value the interests of residents, resulting in ongoing conflicts between residents and the government (You & He, 2023). These conflicts can exacerbate the unrest in Xijiang Miao Village, thereby negatively impacting tourists. Therefore, this study aims to identify the leading causes of conflicts between residents and the government. At the same time, as there can be multiple causes of conflict, it is crucial to find the fundamental cause that drives the formation of other factors. This study uses the ISM model to achieve this goal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ethnic tourism

Ethnic tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on the customs and habits of indigenous and foreign peoples (Richter, 1978). It is often seen as an important link between tourism and the country, in which the country's culture, history, and customs are given commodity attributes and transformed into products that tourists can

consume. This commodification reflected not

only in the development and promotion of tourist attractions but also in the promotion of local specialties, traditional handicrafts, and cultural performances. In this way, the country showcases its unique cultural heritage and natural beauty to tourists while hoping to enhance its image and attract more international tourists (Yang & Wall, 2009). Therefore, the main attraction of ethnic tourism lies in its unique cultural exoticism, especially those cultures that are regarded as minorities by mainstream society. This cultural exoticism is reflected in the richness and diversity of traditional customs, festivals, unique artistic expressions, and the lifestyles of the local people, which attract many tourists to explore and experience. Tourists are often looking for a fresh and unique experience in travelling to a culture very different from the one they are familiar with (Wood, 1998).

There are 55 ethnic minorities in China, each with unique cultures, living in remote areas and possessing abundant resources to promote ethnic tourism (Yang & Wall, 2009). The Government of China also supports the development of ethnic minority tourism. It is used to increase farmers' income and reduce the development gap between urban and rural areas (Chio, 2014). Ethnic tourism research has been carried out in many provinces of China (Yu, 2015). These studies typically focus on local minorities, the sociocultural impact of ethnic tourism, and policies. They reveal the challenges in balancing the preservation of ethnic culture with economic development, the aspirations of minority residents for well-being, and limited control over tourism development (Su et al., 2016).

2.2 Causes of conflicts between residents and the government

The causes of conflicts between residents and the government have been widely discussed in the existing literature, with researchers analyzing the phenomenon in depth from a variety of economic, social, cultural, and political perspectives (Douglas, 2005; Min et al., 2018). In general, the root causes of these conflicts focus on uneven distribution of benefits, deprivation of rights, reduced employment opportunities, lack of cultural protection, and poor communication between the government and residents.

Firstly, unequal economic benefits distribution is considered one of the important root causes of conflicts (Yang et al., 2013). Numerous studies have shown that in the process of tourism development or the construction of large-scale projects, residents often find it difficult to obtain economic returns comparable to those of the government or external investors (Telfer, 2002). Particularly when the benefits from development projects are concentrated in the hands of a few interest groups, residents involved in the projects fail to share these economic benefits equitably, and this unbalanced distribution leads to their dissatisfaction with the government and triggers conflicts (Archabald & Naughton-Treves, 2001).

Second, denying rights is also an important cause of conflict between residents and the government. The literature shows that in many development projects, governments often

resort to coercive measures to expropriate land or redistribute resources, ignoring the legitimate rights of residents (Neef, 2019). Such coercive measures are perceived by residents as a violation of their land rights and way of life, leading to increased protests and boycotts, exacerbating conflict (Yu et al., 2020).

Reduced employment opportunities have also been one of the focal points of concern for scholars. Studies have found that the rise of tourism and modernization projects often leads to the impact of traditional agriculture or other local economic activities, resulting in the loss of livelihoods for some residents (Li YaJuan et al., 2016). At the same time, residents who are not fully integrated into the emerging tourism or modern economy, especially those who lack skills and resources, often find it difficult to find new employment opportunities (Cavaye, 2001). This reduction or instability of employment opportunities has led to residents' dissatisfaction with the Government's economic development policies, further fueling the conflict between the two sides (Henderson, 2007).

In addition, cultural conflict is an important aspect of conflict causation (Yang & Wall, 2009). Scholars generally agree that the rapid development of tourism often leads to the commodification and alienation of local cultures (Chen & Kong, 2021). With the influx of foreign cultures, residents feel that their traditional cultures, customs, and

social structures are threatened. At the same time, the government or developers are more inclined to economic benefits in their decision-making, neglecting the preservation and inheritance of culture (Yang & Wall, 2022). This cultural identity crisis further exacerbates the conflict between residents and the government (Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019).

Lack of participation in decision-making is also a recurring conflict trigger in the literature (Marzuki, 2008). Studies have pointed out that governments tend to adopt a top-down approach to decision-making in the formulation and implementation of development projects, without sufficiently listening to the views of residents (Kubickova & Campbell, 2020). This exclusionary mode of decision-making makes residents feel neglected, which triggers their resistance and escalates conflict (Kubickova & Campbell, 2020).

Finally, lack of information transparency and poor communication are important factors leading to conflict (Tian et al., 2023). Literature suggests that governments fail to adequately explain to residents the purpose, potential impacts, and long-term benefits of development projects as they move forward, resulting in a lack of understanding of the nature and outcomes of the projects (Li et al., 2021). This information asymmetry exacerbates misunderstanding and mistrust and contributes to conflict (Cole, 2006)

METHODOLOGY

Warfield first proposed Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) to analyse complex socio-economic systems (Awan et al., 2018). ISM is a tool that helps individuals or groups to translate their domain knowledge into models of interrelationships, intending to improve understanding of the complexity of these systems (Sushil, 2012). By presenting the relevant factors and their interactions in a structured way, ISM can paint a clear picture of the linkages and dynamics within the system (Bhosale & Kant, 2016).

The method's computational process can usually be divided into several steps (Sushil, 2012). Firstly, participants must identify and list the main factors or variables affecting a particular domain (Attri et al., 2013). Next, using expert opinion or participant knowledge, interrelationships between these factors are

established to determine their influence and dependencies. These relationships are then converted into a matrix for further analysis (Mathiyazhagan et al., 2013).

Next, by computing and processing this matrix, the researcher can generate a graphical structural model that clearly shows the hierarchical relationships and interactions between the factors (Raj et al., 2008). This structured view not only helps to understand the system's complexity but also provides a scientific basis for decision-making, facilitating effective policy formulation and implementation (Raj et al., 2008). Ultimately, the ISM approach provides a powerful tool for analysing and solving complex problems, especially in the socio-economic field, and can help researchers and policymakers better grasp the interactions between various factors (Kannan et al., 2009). The above steps are shown in Figure 1.

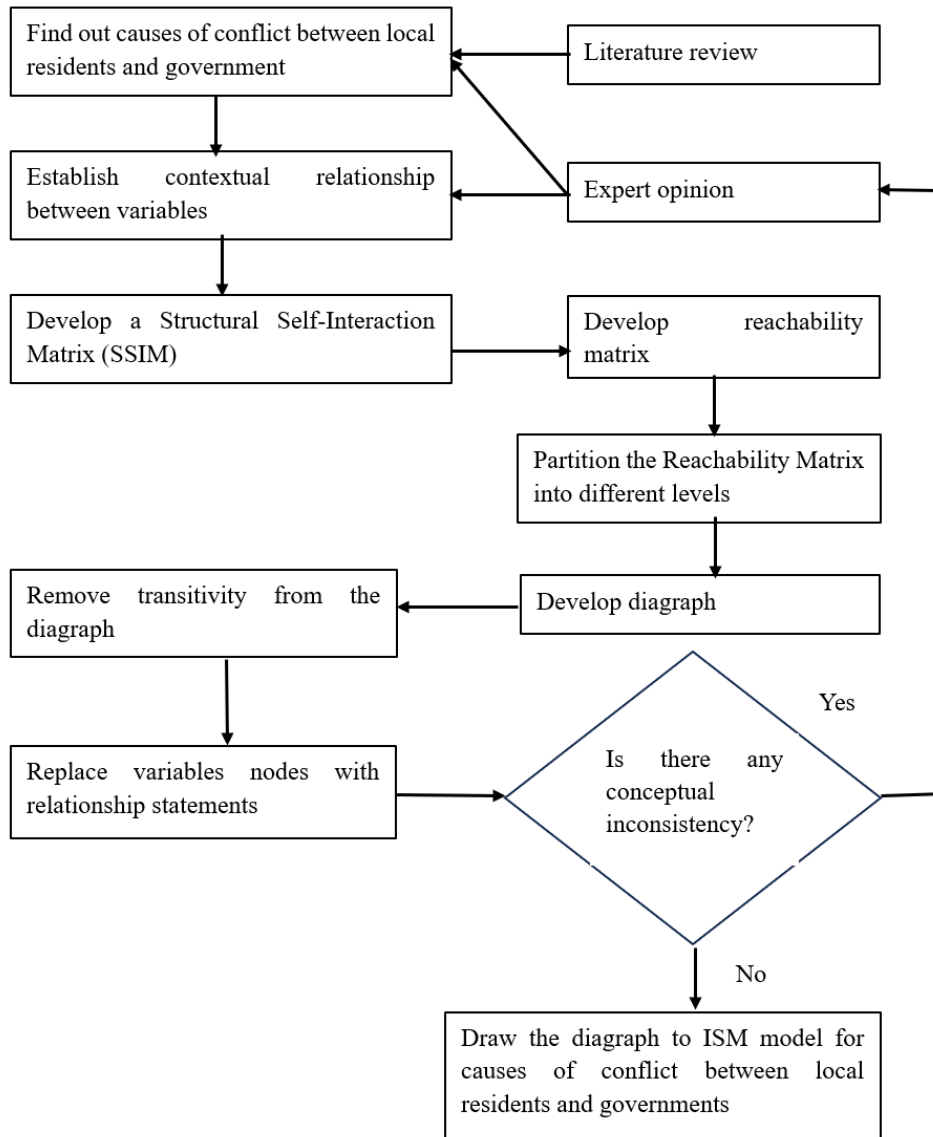


Figure 1: Flow diagram for implementing ISM

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Data collection

According to the literature review and expert interview, 15 causes of conflict between residents and the government have been identified. The study began on February 5, 2024, and ended on May 16,

2024. The experts are residents, government officials, tour operators, and ethnic village tourism research experts, who are stakeholders and are more familiar with the causes of conflict between residents and the government than other groups. Three representatives from each group are invited. Their social-demographics profile is shown in Table 1 below

Table 1: Social-demographics profile of stakeholders in Xijiang Miao Village

	Total	Percentage
Gender	12	100%
Male	5	42%
Female	7	58%
Age	12	100%
< 20	1	8%
20-30	3	25%
30-40	2	17%
40-50	4	33%
> 50	2	17%
Education level	12	100%
Primary	3	25%
Secondary	3	25%
Graduate	6	50%
Income level	12	100%
> 10000	2	17%
8000-10000	1	8%
6000-8000	3	25%
4000-6000	3	25%
< 4000	3	25%

Experts were asked to rate the causes of conflicts between residents and the government on a 5-point Likert scale: 5 is strongly agree, 4 is agree, 3 is neither agree nor disagree, 2 is disagree, and 1 is strongly disagree. The final criterion is the criterion for which the final average is greater than 3. The scoring results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Determine the causes of conflicts

Code	Causes	Mean	SD
C1	Few employment opportunities for residents	3.83	0.83
C2	The income level of residents is low	3.42	0.90
C3	Residents have no right to manage income distribution in ethnic villages	3.42	0.90
C4	Lack of investment	3.75	0.87
C5	The education level of residents is not high	3.67	0.89
C6	Lack of foreign cultural exchange	3.67	0.78
C7	Residents do not have tour guide certificates	3.25	0.87
C8	Lack of schools	3.33	0.89
C9	Residents are not competent to manage the ethnic village	3.67	0.78

C10	Lack of publicity	3.25	0.62
C11	Lack of a long-term plan	3.50	0.80
C12	Lack of researchers	3.25	0.75
C13	Lack of infrastructure	3.33	0.89
C14	Transportation is not convenient	3.25	0.75
C15	Residents cannot compete with foreign tour operators	3.42	0.90

4.2 Structural self-interaction matrix (SSIM)

The ISM methodology emphasizes the importance of expert opinion when identifying contextual relationships between variables. By gathering the views of experts in the field, the interactions and effects between variables can be identified and analyzed more accurately. Experts' expertise and experience help reveal relationships that may have been overlooked or underestimated, thus improving the accuracy and reliability of the model (Attri et al., 2013). In this study, the Delphi method was used to consult the 12 experts mentioned above to reduce personal biases and enhance consensus. In the first round, each expert independently evaluated the pairwise context relationships

among the 15 determined variables using the ISM method. Specifically, they use four SSIM symbols to determine whether one factor "causes" another factor: *V* represents the criterion *i* leads to *j*. *A* represents criterion *j* leads to *i*. *X* represents criterion *i* leads to *j*, and criterion *j* leads to *i*, *O* represents no relationship between *i* and *j*.

After the initial round, a summary matrix was compiled, and any items with disagreement across more than 50% of the experts were flagged for discussion. A second round of structured group dialogue was then conducted to reach agreement on the final relational judgments. Table 3 presents the finalized SSIM, which formed the foundation for generating the reachability matrix and subsequent hierarchical structuring.

Table 3: Structural self-interaction matrix

Causes	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	O	V	-
2	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	-	-
3	O	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	O	A	A	A	-	-	-
4	V	V	V	A	A	A	V	V	V	V	V	-	-	-	-
5	V	A	A	A	A	A	V	A	V	A	-	-	-	-	-
6	V	A	O	A	A	A	V	O	V	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	O	A	A	A	A	A	O	A	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	V	O	A	A	A	A	V	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	O	A	A	A	A	A	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	V	V	V	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	V	V	V	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	V	V	V	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

13	V	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14	V	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

4.3 Reachability matrix

The reachability matrix, derived from the Structured Relationship Influence Matrix (SSIM), can be developed at this stage. The process involves converting the data in each cell of the SSIM into binary values, which are then used to create the initial reachability matrix (Attri et al., 2013). Specifically, if the (i, j) entry in SSIM is V , then the (i, j) entry in the reachability matrix is 1 , while the (j, i) entry is 0 , indicating that variable i affects variable j , while j does not affect i . If the (i, j) entry is A , then the (i, j) entry in the reachability matrix is 0 , while

the (j, i) entry is 1 , indicating that variable j affects variable i . If the entry is X , the entries of (i, j) and (j, i) in the reachability matrix are both 1 , indicating that there is mutual influence between the two variables; if the entry is O , the entries of (i, j) and (j, i) in the reachability matrix are both 0 , implying that there is no influence relationship between the two variables. Following these rules, an initial reachability matrix can be constructed that demonstrates the relationship and degree of influence between the variables. The final standard initial reachability matrix generated is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Reachability matrix

Causes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
5	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
6	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
7	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
9	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
13	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
14	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

.4 Level partitions

In this process. Firstly, each criterion’s reachability set and antecedent set are extracted from the reachability matrix. The reachability set consists of the element itself and the other elements it can reach, which means that other elements can be influenced directly or indirectly by that element. On the other hand, the antecedent set consists of the element itself and all the other elements that can reach it, indicating which elements influence that element (Raut et al., 2017).

Next, by calculating the intersection of the reachability set and the antecedent set, it is possible to find elements in both. The element identical to the reachability set is considered the top-level element (Kumar et al., 2013). From a physical point of view, a

top-level element in a hierarchy is a situation where there is no other element above its level, i.e., it cannot influence any element in the higher-level hierarchy (Mathiyazhagan et al., 2013).

Once the top-level element is identified, it is separated from the other elements to be further explored in subsequent analyses. Once the top-level element has been identified, the same methodology will be used to find the next level of elements. This layer-by-layer analysis of elements and their interrelationships at all levels is to be progressively identified (Raj et al., 2008).

Finally, based on the elements’ hierarchical relationships, the accessibility matrix is rearranged, and the processed accessibility matrix is converted into the format shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Level partitions

Criterion	Reachability set	Antecedent set	Intersection set	Level
1	1,2	1,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15	1	II
2	2	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15	2	I
3	2,3	3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,13,14	3	II
4	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,13,14,15	4,10,11,12	4	VII
5	1,2,3,5,7,9,15	4,5,6,8,10,11,12,13,14	5	IV
6	1,2,3,5,6,7,9,15	4,6,10,11,12,14	6	V
7	1,2,7	4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,14	7	III
8	1,2,3,5,7,8,9,15	4,8,10,11,12,13,14	8	V
9	1,2,3,9	4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,13,14	9	III
10	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,13,14,15	10	10	VIII
11	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,13,14,15	11	11	VIII
12	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,12,13,14,15	12	12	VIII
13	1,2,3,5,7,8,9,13,15	4,10,11,12,13	13	VI
14	1,2,3,5,6,7,9,14,15	4,10,11,12,14	14	VI
15	1,2,15	4,5,6,8,10,11,12,13,14,15	15	III

4.5 Formation of ISM-based model

A structural model is generated based on the final reachability matrix, as shown in Figure 2. In this model, the relationships between criteria are represented by arrows that point from criterion i to criterion j , indicating the influence or effect of criterion i on criterion j . The model is then used to generate a structural model of the criteria. The generated graph is called a directed graph (digraph), which clearly shows the interrelationships and the direction of influence between the criteria.

After constructing the directed graph, its transmissibility needs to be removed as per the ISM methodology. Transmissibility means that if criterion i influences criterion j , and criterion j influences criterion k , it can be inferred that criterion i also influences criterion k . After removing the transmissibility, it can more accurately reflect the direct influencing relationship between the criteria without the interference of indirect influence. After this process, the directed graph is ultimately converted into an ISM model.

In the ISM model, it can be seen that lack of publicity (C10), lack of long-term planning (C11), and lack of researchers (C12) are the basis of all conflicts between residents and the government in Xijiang Miao Village. The lack of scholars means that the unique ethnic cultural values of Xijiang Miao Village have not attracted attention, which may lead to the demise of Miao culture. A lack of publicity means fewer tourists, leading to less income for residents. The lack of long-term planning is due to the change in the management of the Chinese government, which makes local officials seek profit returns for short-term political achievements, thus ignoring the long-term protection planning of Miao culture, which is inconsistent with the

interests of residents for long-term protection of Miao culture.

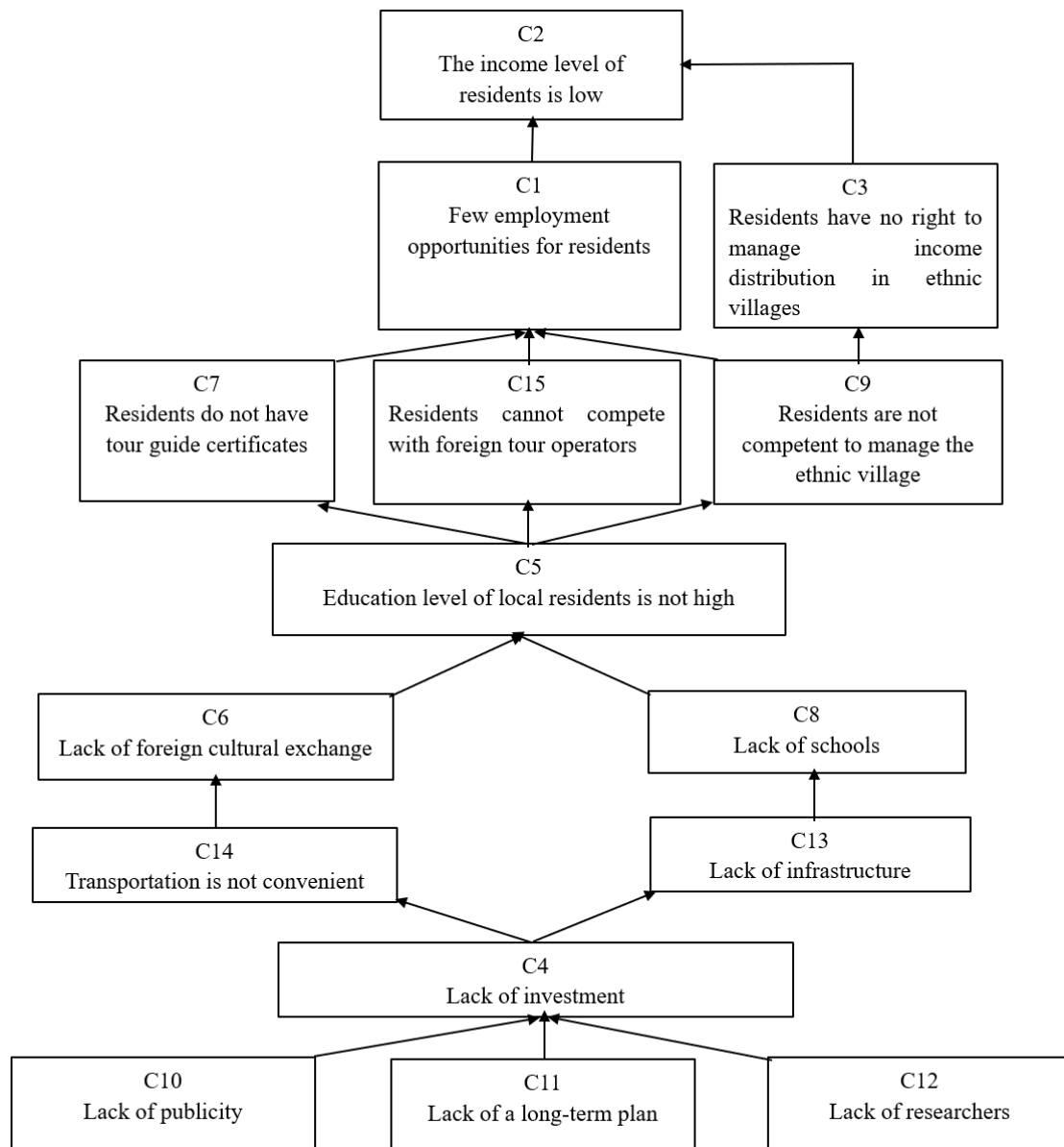


Figure 2. ISM-based model for the criterion

4.6 MICMAC analysis

To complement the ISM structural hierarchy and further explore the systemic influence of each variable, MICMAC analysis was conducted. This method categorizes variables based on their driving power (the number of variables they influence) and dependence power (the number of variables that influence them), using the finalized reachability matrix. During the analysis, the specific values and relationships of the driving and dependent capabilities of the variables are shown in detail in Table 6 and Figure 3.

Table 6: Dependence power and driving power

Causes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Driving power
1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	12
5	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
6	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
7	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
8	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
9	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	13
11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	13
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	13
13	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	9
14	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9
15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Dependence power	13	15	11	4	9	6	10	6	10	1	1	1	5	5	10	

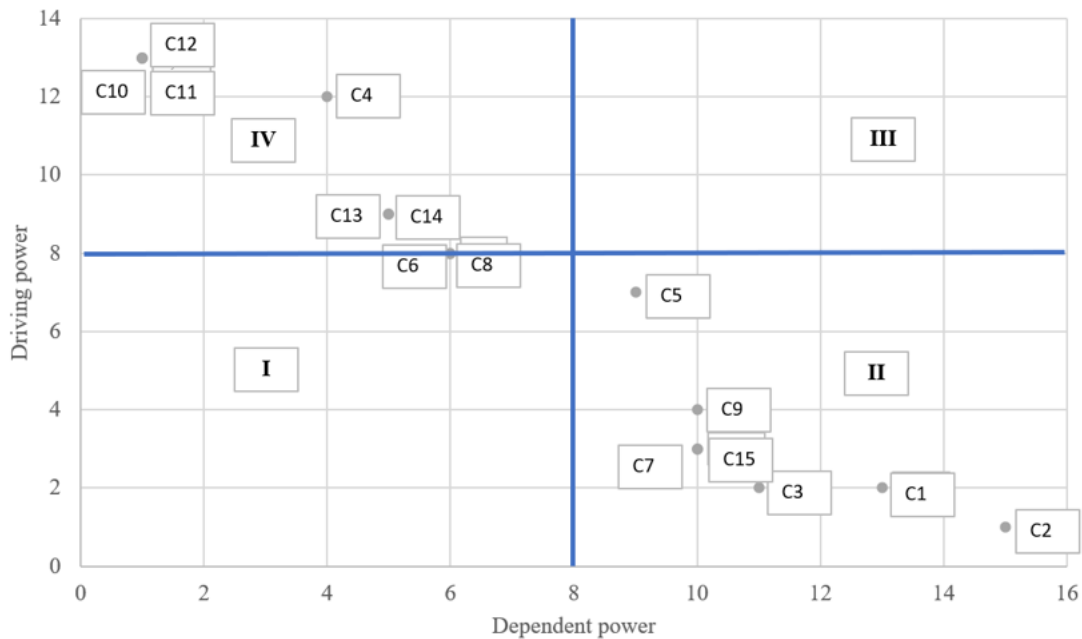


Figure 3: Driving power and dependence diagram

The results of the analysis categorized the variables into four different quadrants to better understand their roles in the system. The first category (Quadrant 1) consists of autonomous standards that have weak driving and dependency capabilities, indicating that they are relatively loosely connected to the system and have limited influence. As a result, these criteria are relatively independent in the system and do not respond significantly to changes in other variables (Janssen et al., 2019).

The second category (Quadrant 2) contains dependent criteria that are weakly driven but show strong dependence on other variables. This means that these criteria are significantly influenced by other factors in the system and may play a passive role in the movement of the system, making it difficult to actively drive change (Gorane & Kant, 2013).

The third category (Quadrant 3) is called correlation criteria, characterized by high driving power and dependence. These criteria are capable of exerting a significant influence on other variables and are themselves strongly influenced by other factors. This bidirectional relationship makes these criteria important in the system and often key factors in system changes (Chander et al., 2013).

Finally, the fourth category (Quadrant 4) contains independent criteria that have a strong driving capacity, yet their dependencies are relatively weak. This means that these criteria can effectively drive system change, but they are not significantly influenced by other

variables. This characteristic makes independent criteria an important reference in strategic decision making and policy formulation (Sindhvani & Malhotra, 2017).

From Figure 3, it can be seen that the first cluster (Quadrant I) has no autonomous criteria. The absence of such criteria in the present study indicates that all the causes of conflict considered play a significant role. Dependent criteria (Quadrant-II) are few employment opportunities for residents (C1), income level of residents is low (C2), residents have no right to manage income distribution in the ethnic village (C3), education level of residents is not high

(C5), residents do not have tour certificates (C7), residents are not competent to management the ethnic village (C9), residents cannot compete with foreign tour operators (C15). These causes of conflict between residents and governments have weak driving power, but strong dependence power. The third cluster (Quadrant-III) contains no criteria, indicating that none of the conflict causes exhibit strong driving power and dependence. The independence criteria (Quadrant-IV) include lack of investment (C4), lack of publicity (C10), lack of a long-term plan (C11), lack of researchers (C12), lack of infrastructure (C13), and transportation is not convenient (C14). These causes of conflicts between residents and governments have strong driving power, but weak dependent power.

CONCLUSION

Residents are the main body of tourism development in ethnic villages (Yang et al., 2020). However, due to the unbalanced social development of ethnic villages, residents seem vulnerable (Li et al., 2016). To strive for more interests, the residents of Xijiang Miao Village often have conflicts with the government (Peng ZhengBo & Wang FanFan, 2018). This study considers some of the leading causes of conflict and analyses their interactions using SIM. Based on the evaluation of 12 experts, including residents, government officials, tourism operators, and ethnic village researchers, a structural self-interaction matrix (SSIM) is formed, which is the basis for interpreting the structural model. Among these causes of conflict, the income level of residents is low (C2), which occupies the top position. This shows that C2 has the least impact compared to other

causes of conflict. This reason is the easiest to solve. Lack of publicity (C10), lack of researchers (C12), and lack of a long-term plan (C11) were the root causes of conflict. They drive the formation of other causes of conflict and are less dependent on others.

This research has significant practical implications. For local governments and tourism planners in Xijiang and similar ethnic tourism destinations, the results provide a diagnostic tool to prioritize interventions. Rather than focusing only on short-term outcomes like income distribution or employment quotas, emphasis should be placed on long-term planning, academic research support, and destination branding. These strategic actions can fundamentally alter the development trajectory of ethnic tourism and reduce the likelihood of recurring conflict.

Nonetheless, the study is subject to several limitations. The expert panel was limited to 12 individuals, which, although diverse,

may constrain the representativeness of the analysis. Additionally, the ISM methodology is qualitative and depends on expert judgment, which may introduce subjective bias despite efforts to structure and validate responses. The case-specific nature of the study also limits the direct applicability of findings to other ethnic regions without contextual adaptation. Future research could expand the participant base through mixed methods such as surveys or participatory workshops, and conduct comparative studies across multiple ethnic villages to enhance the generalizability of the ISM framework.

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