

# Research on the Development of Belief in Folk Tourism Resources in Western Guangdong - Taking the Example of “Nianli”

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## Abstract:

The tourism industry as one of the world's fastest growing, has become a new economic growth point in Guangdong, plays a more and more important role in the economic, cultural life in the province. Folk tourism is a high level of cultural tourism, has become one of the important content of tourist behavior and tourism development. The “Nianli” is a unique folk activity in the west of Guangdong province, especially in the two cities of Zhanjiang and Maoming. It is usually held independently in the village (or temple) from the first lunar month to February of each year. It integrates religious ceremonies and folk festivals. This paper is based on the development of “Nianli” folk tourism in western Guangdong, find out the deficiencies in the development of folk tourism, in-depth excavation of the cultural connotation of folklore activities in western Guangdong, and furthermore puts forward measures for the development of religious folklore tourism products.

## Keywords:

Belief, Folk Tourism, Nianli, Western Guangdong, Development of Resources

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## 1. Related Concepts of Belief in Folk Tourism

### 1.1. Folklore

The term folklore has been around since ancient times. “Guanzi. Zhengshi”: “Material business, check the folk customs”. “Book of Rites. Ziyi”: “The prince's appearance and heart are the same, his officials see his appearance will know his heart; The officials serve the king wholeheartedly, from his appearance you can see what he is. This auspicious come, the prince will not suspect its minister, and the minister will not understand its king”. “Shiji. Biography of Sun Shuao”: “Chu Folk Customs, Preferences carriage”. “Han Shu. Biography of Dong Zhongshu”: “Change the Folk Customs and Transform Folk Customs.” The above-mentioned “people” refers to ordinary people, and “vulgar” refers to Occurred many times, and gradually formed a repetitive or patterned behavior. Therefore, folklore can also be understood as a model

behavior formed among the folks or the common people, or can be understood as an abbreviation of folk custom.

### ***1.2. Belief in Folk Customs***

Belief in folklore can be said to be an in-depth folklore phenomenon, which belongs to a type of conscious folklore. It is a set of god worship concepts, behavior habits, and corresponding ritual systems that are produced and inherited among the people in the course of long-term historical development. Belief in folklore takes faith as the core and has certain objects of worship. It is passed down from generation to generation and has a broad social foundation. Its content mainly includes soul, nature god, totem, fertility god, ancestor god, career god and so on. Folk beliefs not only have unique ideological activities, but also are accompanied by behavioral methods, engaging in activities such as foreseeing, sacrificial offerings, and witchcraft. [1]

### ***1.3. Belief in Folklore Tourism***

Folklore tourism refers to the attraction of tourists to the unique folklore culture of foreign countries or ethnic groups. On the condition of certain tourism facilities, they leave their residences and go to tourist destinations (a specific area or a specific ethnic area) to produce a complex dynamic consumption for folk culture which is a cultural lifestyle formed by the progress of human civilization and belongs to the category of high-end cultural tourism [2]. Therefore, the folklore tourism mentioned here refers to various tourism activities that focus on folk belief. The research object of this article is the unique folk customs of the western Guangdong area--the "Nianli" as an example, which invites priests to worship, wandering, and praying for longevity of life; drumming, hanging lanterns, Lion Dance, firecrackers, puppetry shows, entertain for whole night. The main theme of these activities is to pray for good weather, prosperity and people's health and safety. Therefore, the author classifies the folk activities of the "Nianli" as a category of belief and folklore. This article presents the readers of the folklore activities in the Western Guangdong Province through their own experiences and related materials, and discusses how to develop this unique religious folklore tourism resource to fill the gap in the development of folklore tourism in the western Guangdong area.

## **2. An Overview of Belief in Folklore of "Nianli" in Western Guangdong**

### ***2.1. The Original of Folk Events - "Nianli" in the Western Guangdong***

"Nianli" is unique to the western Guangdong, especially in Zhanjiang City and Maoming City. It is an annual event. It begins on the second day of the first lunar month of each year and it is held in units of villages (temples). The traditional festivals include sacrifices, parades, hold banquets, etc., which are interspersed with various local folklore performances such as Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, Hopping Shed, "PiaoSe" activity, and act in an opera (Cantonese opera). During this period of the year, the main gods worshipped in different villages were different, including General Fubo, King Kangwang, and Tianhou Mazu, etc [3]. It is a folk event that integrates religious ceremonies and folk festivals.

GuangXu period "The record of Gaozhou Government" volume six places and six customs: Feasts to the land god in February, and divide the meat and take it home after the sacrifice, and then began to farm. From December to February of the

following year, folks built more peaceful Zhao, set sugar cane and wine on the door, and the witch embraced the gods, followed by prayers, throwing away the charms of Zhu, and the god Kang Wang. The villagers exorcise ghosts along the door and sing native songs, which is called the “Nianli”. Or the official gentry dress to greet the gods, choose the strong and the red flag, the face of the vermilion, the clothing is partial to the blouse, hold the giant shield, push the ghost and drive away, the Same as ancient etiquette [4]”.

This is the most detailed record in the ancient literature about the “Nianli”. It can be seen from the literature that “countrymen’s exorcism, chasing ghosts along the door, singing folk songs” is the “Nianli”. “Nuo” in ancient times refers to the sacrificial ritual to expel epidemic and ghosts, as well as exorcize disease and to pray for blessings.

In addition, there are also records about “Nianli”: Daoguang’s Dianbai County Records Volume Four. A custom in the world: “Congratulations on New Year’s Day, saying “Happy New Year”, the family set the cake and fruit sacrifice gods, saying “provide”, or the first image, set the cake and fruit worship. You can’t kill animals, but eat more vegetarian food, don’t trade in three days. The towns and villages perform the Spring Festival ceremony, call it “Zuo Nianli” [5].

Jiaqing’s “Maoming County Record” Volume 17 Customs: “From the beginning to the second and third of March, ancestral temple set up “Zhao”, and then worshipped by gods to chase ghosts along the door, which is called “Zuo Nianli”. Along the way, lights are lit, red flags are hung, drums and gongs are struck. Ancient customs can be as lively as opera [6].

From the above records, it can be concluded that “Nianli” has the meaning of “worship the gods” (to worship) and furnish and decorate “zhan” (that is, to worship and pray for blessings) in addition to expelling the epidemic. The “Nianli” of western Guangdong originated from the “Witch Nuo” culture, which was formed between Kangxi and Jiaqing in the Qing Dynasty. The religious part of it originates from the ancient ghost exorcism, god worship and disaster relief and pray for blessings, and part of the festival comes from the traditional Lantern Festival and folk entertainment.

## ***2.2. An Overview of the Folk Custom Activities in the Western***

Every year during the “Nianli” in Guangdong , there are endless crowds of people in the streets. The lively lights of every household, men and women, young and old all dress in glamorous costumes. With the smoky incense in the temple altar, the deafening noise of the gongs and drums, and the performance of dragons and phoenixes. Here you will see that the old men with gray hair are listening to Cantonese opera on the stage, and from time to time there are sounds of applause. The diligent and capable housewives are holding a table of delicious food, preparing to entertain their friends and relatives. The male host is busy greeting guests, and sometimes goes to the temple to incense, praying for the happiness of the whole family in the coming year. The colorful programs such as Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, singing, and dancing and so on, all are activities held during the “Nianli”. It is an annual traditional festival and the most unique folk event in western Guangdong. What is more, it is more important than the Lunar New Year for the local people in western Guangdong.

The Folk Custom “Nianli” can be Sumarized as: to see “Nianli”, to make “Nianli” and to eat “Nianli”. It is a comprehensive folk event that integrates eating, drinking and playing.

### 2.2.1. To See “Nianli”

“See” means to watch, and see “Nianli” is to look at the crowd. During the “Nianli”, there will be wanderings in the villages. There are many good-looking and funny things happen during the wanderings, such as lifting the Sedan Chair, Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, “Piaose”, “Chuansai” playing routines and playing silver drums etc. As the local languages says, this is called to see “Nianli”. Before the “Nianli”, every household will invite their friends and relatives to come to see “Nianli”. In addition to wandering, there are also some religious ceremonies in the “Nianli”. For example, some villages will perform Nuo Dances, and some villages will ask priests to “burn paper boats”. These ceremonies are the legacy of the ancient ghost expulsion ceremony.

#### a. Wandering God

“Wandering God” here refers to lifting the god sculpture out of the village and cruising around the village, which is similar to the temple fair in the north. Kangxi’s “Maoming County Chronicle” has a record of the wandering god: “There must be a shrine in the commune. When the god travels, the public cover is cut with bamboo paper, and the candles are used as lamps. You must ask God to informed consent before you go out. If the God agree, you can do it; Otherwise, you can’t do it [7]”.

In general, “Wandering God” will be divided into three parts: “Welcome God”, “Worship God” and “Wandering God”. Each link has a fixed time and a certain practice. For example, “Welcome God” is usually held during midnight. The iconic ritual is that the staff in the temple is fasting. At this time, everyone will worship the god. Generally, the road is closed at this time, and motor vehicles are prohibited. There will be a special person to perform the ritual of worshipping the gods during “sacrifice to the gods”, and the Sedan Chair will be ready to perform. After the success of inviting the gods, the gongs and drums help to open the way, and the staff places the god sculpture in the Sedan Chair one after another, and started to go on a village tour.

The following Table 1 is the wandering link of WenZhangwan Village in Zhanjiang City.

**Table 1.** The wandering link of Wenzhangwan Village in Zhanjiang.

Name of the session	Schedule	Iconic event	Main manifestation
“Welcome God”	12:00a.m.-4:00a.m.	Fast in the temple	Crowds worship god, purchase“Ping An Rice”, police close roads, gongs and drums begin work, and wandering actors put on makeup.
“Worship God”	5.00a.m.-6:00a.m.	performance	The teams of gongs and drums, Lion Dance and Dragon Dance team begin to perform. The “Welcome God” ceremony starts, the wandering actorsare in place, and the Sedan Chairis ready.
“Wandering God”	6:00a.m.-8:00a.m.	the gongs and drums help to open the way	“Welcome God”finish, the gongs and drums help to open the way, the god sculptureis placed in the sedan chair, "Chuan Lingjian" starts, the sedan chair is placed and the parade starts

### ***b. “Chuan Lingjian”***

“Chuan Lingjian” is also a kind of unique ritual of “Nianli” in Zhanjiang. “Chuan Lingjian” is also called “Chuansai”. The so-called “Chuansai” refers to the use of a silver needle ranging from 70 to 120 centimeters in length and weighing about 2 to 20 kilograms (locally called “Lingjian”, so “Chuan Lingjian” is also known as “Chuansai”, which means the arrow piercing through the dimples of the face. Some pierced from one side to the other, and some pierced from inside lateral wall of the mouth to the outside. After successful puncture, the people who stabbed must bite by their teeth, and at the same time support it with their hands, keeping this posture standing on the board behind the Sedan Chair, on which they will be carried around the village. According to the old man who once experienced, he said: “When you put the arrow pass through the face, there is no bleeding. Although there is a small hole after being pulled out, there is no bleeding at all. You can eat, drink, wash your face and brush your teeth as normal.” People must fast for three days before wandering, and bathe and change clothes at that day, waiting for the God sculpture to be placed in the Sedan Chair. They kneel in front of the god sculpture to pray for health, and then wait for the person who is in charge of the needles stabs in. Most of the people who participated in the “Chuansai” activity are young and at middle-aged, but people always actively participate in. Because it is said that they will be blessed by God after “Chuan Lingjian”, so the people in the village are very enthusiastic to join in this activity.

### ***c. Throw the “Cups”***

The “Cups” is actually an ancient divination tool. Throwing the “Cups” is actually a probabilistic activity and a key procedure for inviting God. The person performing this ritual must first worship the gods, ask the gods what to do, and then throw the “Cups” to the ground. The “Cups” is a pair of shell-shaped palm-sized wooden blocks, each of which has the obverse side and the reverse side. If the result of throwing the “cups” shows that with the obverse side and the reverse side, it proves that the gods allow it. Otherwise both obverse sides and reverse sides means not allow. After successfully inviting the gods, the gongs and drums help to open the way. Then people invite the great gods in the Sedan Chair. In the Tang Dynasty, Han Yu first recorded the custom of throw “cups” in his poem “Stopping at a Temple on Heng Mountain I Inscribe this Poem in the Gate-tower”. The poem reads: “Promoted to the top and recommended booze, wishing to be sincere. The temple order The old man is conscious of his mind and stares at Nengle Hao. He holds a cup and guides me to throw it, which is the most auspicious. The chasing of the barbaric luck is not fortunate, and food and clothing are only enough to end. ”

### ***d. Lion Dance Performances***

The Lion Dance is a must-have program in the “Nianli”. Basically, every village will invite the Lion Dance team to perform during the “Nianli”. In Guangdong, the traditional Lion Dance team is usually organized and trained by the local martial arts hall. The male members of the martial arts hall usually learn Lion Dance in addition to martial arts. Lions Dance and martial arts were separated in Guangdong in the past. With the development of society, traditional martial arts halls gradually disappeared, replaced by martial arts training classes and taekwondo training classes in various fitness centers. However, the Lion Dance has continued to develop because of the needs of traditional festivals, and has gradually formed an independent Lion Dance



team, specializing in the performances for some traditional festivals or shops opening. The Lion Dance team that really came out of the martial arts hall has been rare in some developed areas such as the Pearl River Delta. Fortunately, because of “Nianli” in Zhanjiang, many traditional martial arts museums have been preserved. In Zhanjiang, many villages have their own martial arts halls, recruiting students independently, inheriting martial arts, and maintaining the state that Lion Dance and martial arts are not separated. Therefore, the strength of Lion Dance in Zhanjiang has always been the most famous in the country, and Wenche Village in Zhanjiang has been regarded as the hometown of Lion Dance in China.

### ***2.2.2. To Eat “Nianli”***

To “have meals” in Cantonese generally does not say “have meals” but “eat”. And attending a banquet on the day of “Nianli” is called to eat “Nianli”. On the day of “Nianli”, the residents in the village generally will invite relatives and friends to dinner, and the food is very rich. especially for large households, where there are often hundreds of tables. The food in “Nianli” is very delicious, and all the visitors are guests, no matter whether they are familiar or not. The more guests in a household, meaning that this household will be more prosperous in the coming year. Therefore, on the day of “Nianli”, every household will invite friends and relatives to come over to eat “Nianli”. In ancient time, after the worship, everyone will gather around the temple to hold feast and celebrate the festival. Now the difference is that the feast is moved to the residents’ homes.

### ***2.2.3. To Make “Nianli”***

To make “Nianli” refers to going to the temple to worship God on the day of “Nianli”, and then prepare dinner in front of the house. On the day of “Nianli”, the tenants in the village will set up incense in front of the gate door, placing offerings (chicken, pork, wine, etc.) and incense to welcome the arrival of the wandering team. The old man said, "This is the meat of God, and God will bless you if you eat it." Before and after the Lantern Festival, you will find that the entire western Guangdong area is affected by “Nianli”: the price of fish and meat in the market has risen. Because there are too many villages to make “Nianli”, and the seafood are in short supply. There are more cars on the street, not to go to work, but to eat “Nianli”. On the day when the annual ceremony is held in each village, the entrance of the village will be blocked which caused people who drive to eat the “Nianli” worried about they cannot look for a parking space. Moreover, the topic of people's chat is also inseparable from “Nianli”, such as "There are so many people go to that village to celebrate ‘Nianli’", "My village will hold ‘Nianli’ tomorrow, come and have fun", "Why didn't this restaurant open? Oh it turned out that the boss went back to the village to celebrate “Nianli”. For now, it is not very hard as before for families to hold “Nianli”. Because there are professional chefs and workers on-site service. Of course, some families will make “Nianli” their own, due to the lack of financial ability or less relatives and friends come for visit.

## **3. A Study on the Development Strategies of Belief in Folk Custom Tourism in Western Guangdong**

### ***3.1. Highlight the Characteristics of Folk Custom Resources of the “Nianli” and Develop Special Tourism Products***

Folklore is a regional folklore. Different regions have different characteristics [2]. The regional characteristics of folk customs are the main driving force for attracting tourists. "Nianli" is a unique festival in western Guangdong (Maoming and its counties and cities, as well as Wuchuan and Lianjiang in Zhanjiang), with obvious regional characteristics. The main theme of "Nianli" is to pray for good weather, prosperity of all industries, and national security. During the "Nianli" in a village, the surrounding villagers all come for a visit. Every family entertains their relatives and friends with rich banquets. Every year during the "Nianli", the village and town streets are illuminated with lights. At that time, each family invites relatives and friends to visit. The more guests, the happier of the owner. Therefore, there is a saying that "Nianli" is more important than the lunar New Year." All activities like wandering, Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, "Piaose", Eight Sounds, martial arts performance, play drama (Cantonese opera), puppet show, fireworks display, etc. are showed during "Nianli" until the midnight. The annual folklore resources are rich and colorful, and it has the superior conditions for developing local characteristic tourism products. Such as the large-scale cultural parade held in Wuchuan Festival of Zhanjiang during the "Nianli" - the "Piaose" performance. This is also a large-scale parade custom in the local God's Welcome Festival held before and after the Lantern Festival. And it is also a national intangible cultural heritage. "Piaose" is a number of people pushing a swatch, which decorated with fixed posture figures. The character is supported by an invisible color stalk, flying and dancing in the air. Then came the name. By planning the entertainment and folklore tourism resources during "Nianli", a tempting feast of folklore tourism is formed, which not only enhances the city's popularity, but also contributes to the vigorous development of the local economy.

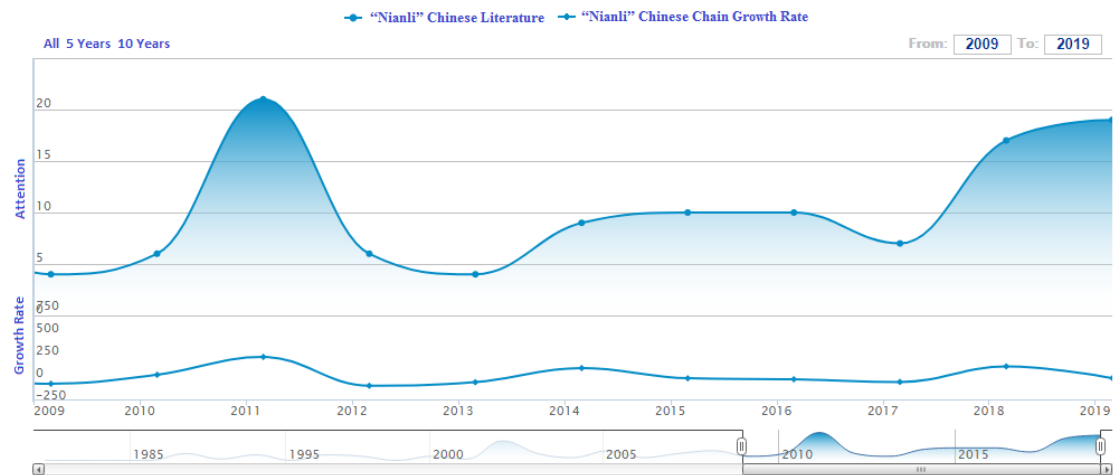
### ***3.2. Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Pave the Way for the Development of Local Folk Tourism***

Tourism infrastructure refers to the generic name of various physical facilities built to meet the needs of tourists in tourism. It is the indispensable material for the development of tourism [8]. It mainly includes motels, hotels, guesthouses, tourist catering facilities, transportation stops, tourist shops, tourist entertainment places and so on. Tourism infrastructure is an important supporting facility for the development of folk tourism. Without the necessary infrastructure, it is unrealistic to develop tourism products. Therefore, as a customary destination of folklore tourism, it is necessary to make plans for folklore tourism facilities. And from the aspects of the style, form and layout environment of the facilities, the convenience and comfort of tourists experiencing should be taken into consideration. "Nianli" are often held in suburbs, towns, and even villages. Therefore, factors such as the number of tourists, the accessibility of transportation, the accessibility of transportation lines, the distance from the central city, and the arrangement of tourist hotels are also should be considered.

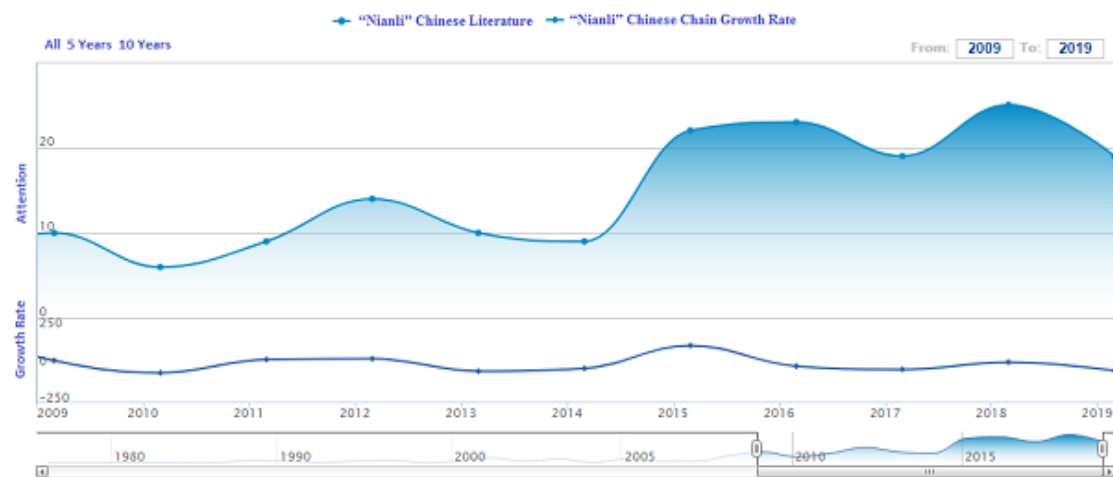
### ***3.3. Increase the Publicity of Tourism Resources of "Nianli" and Expand Its Popularity***

According to the data from China National Knowledge Internet, as shown in Figure 1 from 2009 to 2019 in the 10 years, the academic focus on "Nianli" is relatively low, in addition to a small peak in 2011. But from Figure 2 can be seen that the academic dissemination of "Nianli" peaked in 2015,2016,2018. This shows that in the academic,

this folk activities, “Nianli”, has received some scholars’ attention. But the attention is not so high.



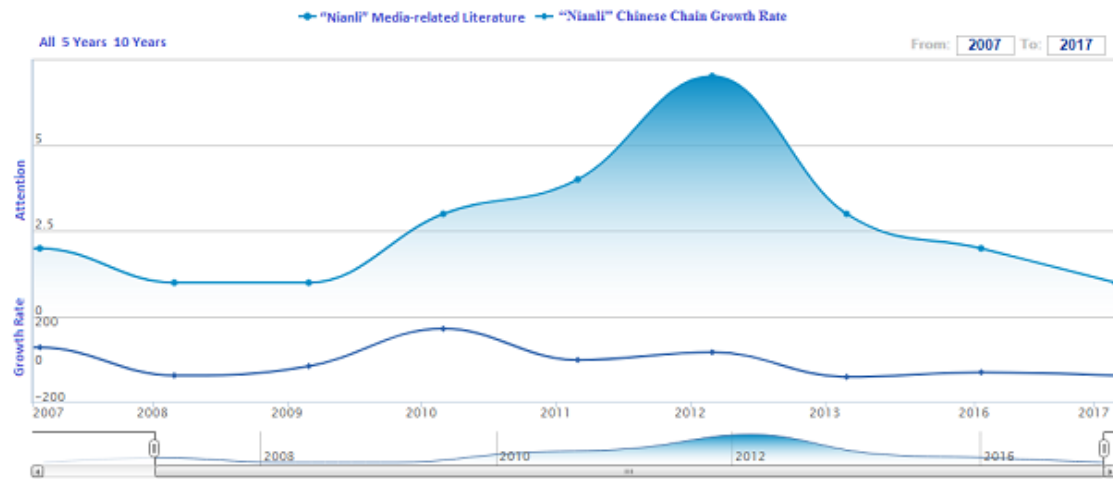
**Figure 1.** 2009-2019 academic focus on “Nianli”.



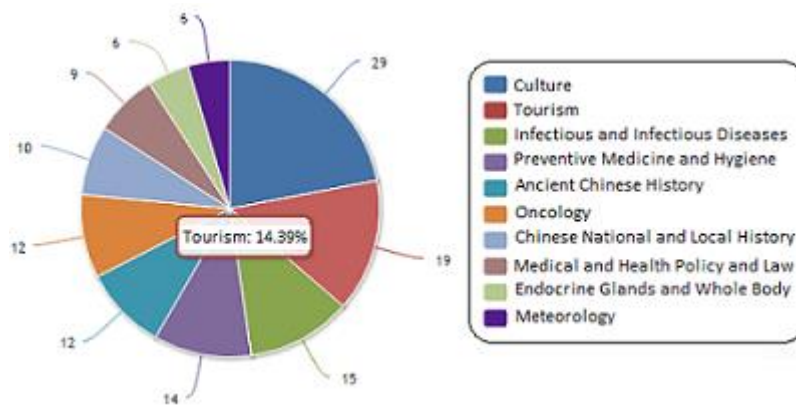
**Figure 2.** 2009-2019 Academic dissemination of “Nianli”.

As can be seen from Figure 3, the media attention on the “Nianli” is far less than the academic attention. Except for a small peak of attention in 2012, the media attention in other periods is basically less than 2.5. While from Figure 4, it is obvious that the attention of the “Nianli” in the media attention as the tourism discipline only accounts for 14.39%. It can be inferred from it that the folklore activity of “Nianli” has not been given enough attention as a tourism development project. Therefore, increasing media publicity and increasing media attention is an important means of developing folklore tourism products. To seize the opportunity of the development in this advanced age, such as the use of online marketing, folklore exhibitions of “Nianli”, the establishment of photography competitions of “Nianli”, the introduction of sponsors through all sectors of the society, or the connection with celebrities, tourist blogs, TV exposure, radio programs and the topics of “Nianli”. Some multi-channel marketing methods, such as product packaging, begin from the local, to face the whole country, and enter the international propaganda concept. Then the folk customs will become a beautiful scenery and city publicity business card in western Guangdong.





**Figure 3.** 2007-2017 Media Focus on “Nianli”.



**Figure 4.** 2007-2017 Distribution of Disciplines in Media.

### 3.4. To Build a Characteristic Tourism Village of “Nianli” and to Shape a Tourism Brand of “Nianli” in Western Guangdong

The unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants, and also give special characteristics to its folk culture. “Nianli” is a unique festival and celebration that is popular in the western region of Guangdong. It integrates folk beliefs in western Guangdong with many forms of folk art, and enhances the emotional exchange between people through customs such as “to eat ‘Nianli’”. It also provides a platform for many folk arts. It is both an encyclopedia of “Nianli” in western Guangdong and a three-dimensional folk custom painting.

**Table 2.** Brief Introduction of “Nianli” in Some Areas of Zhanjiang.

Activity Places	Folk Activists	Brief Introduction
Shijiao Town in Lianjiang City	Shijiao Nuo Opera	Originated in the Ming Chongzhen period and matured in the Tongzhi and Guangxu periods of Qing Dynasty, Shijiao Nuo Opera has a history of more than 400 years. Nuo opera is developed on the basis of Nuo festival, Nuo dance and Nuo song. It integrates traditional arts such as ritual, opera dance, witchcraft and sculpture, and is an important carrier of Nuo culture.

Wuchuan City in Zhanjiang	“Piaose”	A color plate is pushed by several people, and the plate is decorated with fixed posture. The character is supported by an invisible color dance, fluttering to fly..
Tiaoshun Island in Chikan District,Zhangjiang	Grass Dragon Dance	The grass dragon is made of materials such as straw, fish nets, and bamboo. The grass dragon dance twists, turns, wears, and lifts to show the spirit of the island's fishermen fighting the sea. Tuning the grass dragon dance was originally a sacrificial dance performed during the harvest season, evolved from the old net dragon.
Suixi Town,Zhangjiang	Lian Dance	Suixi is "the hometown of Lion Dance in China". Suixi's Lion Dance performance is majestic, strong and soft, flexible and vivid, fascinating and thrilling. In 2006, Suixi Lion Dance was selected as the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage.
Beipo Village in Suixi Town, Zhanjiang	Fish Lantern Performance and Fish Dragon Dance	Suixi "Swimming Fish" has become a new highlight of traditional folk culture. Split the bamboo into a scorn, tie it into a fish skeleton with white paper or silk cloth covered the skeleton. And use a color brush to draw the eye-end light on the paper. Then paste the fish scales, install candles or oil lamps in the belly of the fish. The "Swimming Fish"has been done. At present, in the local lantern culture, there are only a handful of performances with the theme of pure marine life.
Donghai Island, Zhanjiang	Dragon Dance	The Dragon dance has the reputation of "Oriental Value. , And also was selected the first batch of" national intangible cultural heritage." Dragon Dance performance, which dozens to hundreds of young adults and teenagers are wearing shorts, one by one to form a "long dragon " With the gongs and drums crying in the sky. The dragon head highly pushed, with the middle part of the dragon tumbling in the sky, and dragon tail strong swinging. Looks like the dragon swimming out of the sea.

The above is a list of some folklore activities of “Nianli” in Zhanjiang area. In fact, different places have their own characteristics. In the process of development local characteristics and folklore activities are taken as the key points for plan and designation, combined with the development of local dietary and tourism resources, which will be the biggest spotlight of the folklore tourism products. Through different folk activities to create local characteristics, shaping the tourism brand of the Western Guangdong.

#### 4. Conclusions and Outlook

The report of the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly stated: “Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. Culture rejuvenates the country and a well-developed culture lead to a powerful country.” As an important part of culture, local folk culture is an important tourist resource [2]. How to make use of folk culture to develop local tourism resources is a research direction of the author. Due to time constraints and lack of experience, the survey site is not comprehensive enough and individual views may not be mature enough, and further research is needed to make up for the deficiencies of the thesis so as to promote the sustainable development of annual folk tourism activities and local tourism development in western Guangdong.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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