

**WINE ON THE ISLAND OF TYPHOONS: CULTURE OF WINE AND WINE
DRINKING IN A SOUTHERN CHINESE FRONTIER**

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The article discusses the culture of wine brewing and wine drinking of the indigenous population that inhabit the most southern part of China – the Hainan Island.

The author suggests that the culture of wine and winemaking in China is the result of a cross-cultural dialogue in which various ethnic and social actors of China took part. Among most colourful of local wine cultures that enriched the world of Chinese wine are those of national minorities inhabiting the most southern territories of China – the Hainan Island

For the ethnical minorities that have been for centuries living on the island wine plays a very important role in their profane, everyday life, private and collective festivities and in their cults and religious ceremonies. Wine culture is closely intertwined with the spiritual life and ethnic self-awareness for the people of *Li*, *Miao*, *Yi*, *Tujia* and other islanders.

The article gives a brief introduction into the wine brewing technologies, traditional recipes and rituals of wine drinking of the Hainan people. Hainan ethnic minorities still sustain their own rich culture of brewing and drinking alcoholic beverages, the culture which relies heavily on the ecological conditions and natural resources of Hainan Island. The manner in which wine is used by these minority groups emphasises their core values, such as friendship, communal spirit and reverence of their elders and ancestors.

Key words: wine, wine brewing, Hainan Island, the *Li* people, the *Miao* people, rice wine, medicinal wines

The culture of wine and wine brewing in China is a complex multidimensional phenomenon that took its shape and form in the course of development of Chinese nation. The history of Chinese wine in many respects correlates with the history of China. Wine in China performs many functions, of which one of the most important is the communicative function –i.e. regulating social relations.

The culture of wine and winemaking in China is the result of a cross-cultural dialogue in which various ethnic and social actors of China took part. Although alcoholic products in China have their national specifics, yet alimentary cultural codes (of which wine brewing is a significant part) are comparable to cultural codes of other nations (Song, Yakushenkov 2015). In many respects Chinese wine culture developed within the main cultural patterns comparable to cultural traditions of other people. Chinese wine culture in the process of its formation absorbed winemaking technologies and various traditions of serving and drinking alcoholic beverages of many ethnical groups. Among most colourful of local wine cultures that enriched the world of Chinese wine are, as we believe, those of national minorities inhabiting the most southern territories of China – the Hainan Island, the land of wild tropical forests, rich flora and constant rains and typhoons.

Li (黎) minority are the autochthonic population of the Hainan island, the southern coast of China. The self-name of this ethnicity is *Hlai*, though the dominant Han people called them at different times “sai”, “say” and “liliao”. The common name *Li* refers to five ethnic groups Qi, Ha, Rui, Sai and Meifu. The DNA analysis shows that *Li* people belong to the *Yue* group (Peng et. 2011) that settled down in the South of China and is the major population of modern Vietnam. Some of these numerous tribes settled down in Guanxi province, some – in Zhejiang, where they formed a powerful Yue kingdom (Sarakaeva, Sarakaeva 2016). Other groups settled down at Hainan island thousands of years ago and became ancestors to modern *Li*, so the historical memory of *Li* people still connects them to Yue. For instance, according to local legends, the coconut palms appeared on the island as the fruit of self-sacrifice of the tribe chieftain, so a coconut palm is metaphorically called “The head of Yue king” (Li 2016, 45). The language they speak belongs to the *Hlai* branch of Kra-Dai language family of highly tonal languages found in southern China, northeast India and Southeast Asia.

Li are known for their rich and unique culture. Oppressed through centuries by Han conquerors they have been clinging and still cling tightly to their ancestral cultural heritage. Be it weaving techniques, cuisine, dancing and music, exquisite tattoos or complex taboos (Han 2012), embroidery or religion, the culture of *Li* has its bright recognizable idiosyncrasies shaped by the ancient system of beliefs and climatic conditions of the island of constant typhoons.

The influence of natural conditions and social factors gave birth to unique alimentary culture of *Li*, of which brewing and consuming wine is an indispensable part. The technology of wine brewing goes back to the primeval times and has been improved and perfected in centuries. The liquors produced by locals include rum, glutinous rice wine, rice beer, fruit wine, coconut wine, lychee wine, pineapple wine, sweet potato wine etc.

Wine plays a very important part in the daily life of *Li*, be they males or females, young or old. Wine is served during religious and seasonal holidays, during family reunions and celebrations, during funeral rites or at village banquets. The hospitality traditions are centred on wine - if a guest from afar comes to visit they are entertained with wine and are supposed to drink together with the hosts¹.

One of the most favourite types of wine is made of corn, of corn powder to be exact. Cooked rice is put into a pot together with corn powder, yeast is added and the pot is covered with a heavy cover. After half a month of fermentation, the wine is ready and can be used. This kind of wine contains a lot of corn starch; it has high percentage of alcohol. Therefore corn wine is considered not the best choice for the outsiders, those who are not used to traditional alcoholic beverages of *Li* people.

Wine made of glutinous rice symbolizes friendship, it has another name in the *Li* language meaning “bringing together, connecting” – the name which speaks for itself. This wine has yet another name - “the splendid wine of *Li* family”. It is distinguished for its special flavour and specific production characteristics – sometimes eggs are added in the process of brewing. Glutinous rice wine is considered to have healing effects; the locals even recommend it to pregnant women, incredible though it may seem for western people.

In mountainous parts of the island wine is made of mountain berries. With wide variety of wild berries growing in the mountain forests the locals carefully select edible species and use them as raw material for wine. The most famous of this kind of wine is that made of sweet lychee that grows only in Hainan and the neighbouring Guangdong province across the sea straight. Fruit wine also is believed to have medicinal value.

¹ Picture 4. All the photographs are made by the author of the article.

Sweet wine is produced out of pumpkin (marrow squash) and bananas. Pumpkin mass is processed into powder and mixed with steamed glutinous rice, then the mass is fermented and brewed into delicious wine. Bananas used for brewing are not ripe, they are cut into slices, and then cooked dry, yeast is added which is by the way called “wine cake” in local dialects. The mixture is fermented in a jar for a month, until it turns into fragrant wine with distinctive banana odour. These kinds of wine naturally have even more starch and are considered “heavy”¹.

The same method is used when producing sweet potato and cassava wine. The difference between the two lies in the percentage of alcohol: the concentration of alcohol in sweet potato wine is not high; it has a strong sweet taste. The locals recommend it for drinking in hot weather. There is much alcohol in cassava wine; it is for those who can drink strong alcohol beverages.

Very famous is wine named after a local sort of orchid, *Oreorchis patens* (Lindl.). It is compared to “maotai”, a brand widely known in China and abroad for the best wine of China. Orchid wine is made of glutinous rice also called “orchid rice” fermented with yeast into honey-sweet wine. Apart from rice and yeast, orchid wine is brewed with a complex mixture of raw materials including leaf thorns, black cane, sweet peach, leaves of oranges, leaves of mountain ginger, sugarcane leaves, the epidermis of sassafras trees, jackfruit leaves etc. These leaves and plants are chopped into pieces and soaked in water for a few hours. Then the plants are removed and the resulting juice is mixed with glutinous rice and left there for two days. After that the dough is wrapped in ginger leaves and fermented at a certain temperature. Some more plant essences are added at certain intervals of time to accelerate the process of fermenting, until the mixture turns into wine with strong aroma and taste. This wine is believed to be good for blood and body nourishment, as it supplements the loss of “qi” energy (Ya 2014, 231). When entertaining guests a host serving this expensive wine manifests the best of his hospitality.

But the most famous, in fact legendary wine of *Li* people is the mysterious “buried wine” (藏酒). This wine, a little similar to French brandy by its taste, got its name because when fermented it is buried deep in the ground. The colour of this wine depends on how long it has been

¹ Picture 1

kept in the soil, it varies from the initial golden yellow into red then brown, and after 5 years turns into its final dark brown, almost black colour. Unlike French brandy kept in oak barrels the *Li* “buried wine” is preserved in ceramic jugs. Unlike orchid wine it doesn’t taste sweet, for the brewing takes longer and the whole process takes from 2 to 5 years. The resulting beverage tastes sour and has a very high alcohol percentage. Unlike other sorts of rice wines “buried” wine is considered dangerous, harmful when drunk in big quantities, so even elderly people, skilled at brewing and drinking alcohol, are cautious with it, some even avoid drinking it altogether¹.

In traditional culture of *Li* people “buried wine” was a ceremonial drink served at the funerals. And not just any funerals – it was drunk to commemorate the mercy and benevolence of ancestors deceased no less than hundred years ago! Thus, if an elderly person wanted to be remembered, hoped their spirit would enjoy sacrifices long after their death, they would brew this kind of wine and bury it in the ground for their descendants to unearth hundred years later. So the metaphoric name of “buried wine” in the *Li* language is 绕塞 *rao sai*, which means “the thing of filial piety for the funerals” (Ya 2014, 240). To make it possible one needs meticulous preparation – the jug with the wine is wrapped in a few layers of banana leaves so that insects don't get inside, the cover of the jug is also sealed with a few layers of clay. When the time for hundred-year anniversary of an ancestor comes, “buried wine” is dug up in a grandiose ceremony. A special altar is erected; the jug is placed carefully on it and opened with reverence. The moment the seal is broken the strongest aroma of wine fills the air. The insides of the jar is not actually liquid, it is tarn-black wine sediment (bard) glued tightly to the jug, that is to be melted into a drink.

Though “buried wine” enjoys a country-wide acknowledgment as a treasure of *Li* culture, intangible cultural heritage of Hainan, one of the “four best wines” of China, still its production and usage decline. People don't dare to drink it and are not willing to make it, so nowadays it’s hard to find this wine even in the remotest villages of the island.

Miao (苗) minority is an ethnic group the majority of which belongs to Miao-Yao linguistic family (also known as Hmong-Mien family) of Mon-Khmer linguistic tree. It should be noted though that this

¹ Picture 2

grouping of many small ethnicities under one common name, *Miao*, is an artificial initiative of Chinese authorities “to identify and classify minority groups, to clarify their role in the national government, including establishing autonomous administrative divisions and allocating the seats for representatives in provincial and national government” (Schein 1986, 73). In fact, some of the ethnic groups called “*Miao*” are probably even not either linguistically or culturally related, so they sometimes don't understand each others' languages. Self-names of various *Miao* groups are Hmong, Hmub, Xong and A-Hmao.

They mostly inhabit South China mountain areas, in the provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Guangdong, Hubei and Hainan. Less than 1 % of all *Miao* people live in Hainan island, where they are the second most spread ethnic group.

Miao have a long history of political and social relations with the dominant Han nationality, mainly fierce battles for lands, resources, and later- for independence; battles that they would more often than not loose, but that gained them a reputation of a strong and bellicose ethnical group. During the famous Miao Rebellions of Ming dynasty thousands of *Miao* were killed and – no less horrible – mass castration of *Miao* boys took place. Yet some of the *miao* tribes chose to cooperate with the Chinese government, so it is mostly to them the Chinese applied their notorious classification of barbarians into “raw” (unfriendly) and “cooked” (loyal to the Chinese) (Yakushenkov, Yakuschenkova 2012). The “cooked” *Miao* tribes were sometimes used as warriors to pacify other ethnicities¹. Thus, when the Chinese government was worried about the *li* minority on the Hainan island they made the loyal *Miao* tribes move to the island with a distinct mission of subduing the rebellious *Li*. The conflicts between two ethnical minorities, *Li* and *Miao*, if there were any, are long forgotten by now and they coexist harmoniously sharing many similar traditions and habits².

Wine plays a very important part in *Miao* traditions which is reflected in numerous proverbs and saying like “eating meat is just feeling the taste of meat, drinking wine is feeling people's emotions” (Renqing 2008, 112). Wine is more important then dishes in a *Miao*

¹ S. Yakushenkov suggests that the very term “cooked” applied to an ethnical minority symbolically indicates that they are ready to be digested by mainstream Chinese civilization.

² Picture 3

banquet; if the host serves delicacies but the wine is poor, his hospitality is frowned upon, while the host who serves good and abundant wines, even if the dishes are simple and cheap, can be praised as a hospitable and lavish host who knows his duties.

The specific feature of *Miao* “wine ceremony” is passing wine in a circle, beginning from elderly people or guests of honour. The first one to start drinking is called “the one who holds wine” (Renqing 2008, 113), he would taste the liquor, express his admiration and pass it to the next guest who will drink it in his turn and pass the wine on. After everyone has drunk their wine, the second phase – “the reverse order” - will start. This time the wine goes backwards, each participant receiving the cup or bowl of wine is supposed to entertain the audience with a song or a joke. Drinking is obligatory at a *Miao* banquet, a guest who doesn't drink his full or – even worse- refuses to drink when his turn comes – he displays very bad manners and ultimately destroys the communion festivity. Drinking usually goes through night with toasts, songs sung in solo or chorus and jars of wine passed from hands to hands¹.

Traditional *Miao* wine is made of rice, its taste and technology of brewing is very close to that of the wine produced by the neighbouring *Li* and *Yi* people (Pan 1999). But the wine *Miao* people excel at that really strikes ones' imagination is medicinal wine made out of snakes.

Medicinal wine is not a novelty in China, nor is it known only to national minorities. Medicinal wines have always been considered an indispensable part of Chinese traditional medicine and were used “for treating and preventing diseases, promoting health and corporeity, and enriching people's restorative culture” (Xia 2011, 549). In different historical periods, Chinese medicinal wine differed in basic ingredients, medical applications, prescriptions, etc. There are many medical treaties and monographs dating from ancient times on Chinese medicinal wine, it's brewing and usage. There is a story originating from a treaty "Newly Revised Book on Medical Herbs" (本草新编) which is widely known in China: Once there were three people hurrying on a trip in the morning fog: one drinking wine, one eating meals, and one fasting. After they got to their destination, the one who was fasting died, the one who ate food was ill, but the wine drinker was well and sound (Chen 2008, 23). Wines were used as a solvent not only for extracting the pharmacologically

¹ Picture 5

active ingredients from drugs but also for keeping these ingredients active longer. Medicinal wines were applied not only orally, but also externally.

One of the most famous medicinal wines that *Miao* people produce is wine made of venomous snakes. *Miao* people breed snakes and use them to brew their unique “five snake wine” and “snake bladder wine”¹ which are drunk for medicinal purposes, chiefly for rheumatism and rheumatoid arthritis. Apart from snakes that are put into the bottle whole (usually without heads and guts), this sort of wine has a great number of plant ingredients. One of the recipes for the “five snake wine” includes, e.g., “Licorice, angelica, safflower, papaya, *Radix Polygoni Multiflori*, *Rhizoma imperatae*, etc., more than 20 kinds of rare medicinal herbs” (Chen 2014, 331) that are mixed in proportion 10 to 2 with snakes soaked in grain liquor. Snakes recommended for “five snake wine” are agkistrodon, *Bungarus multicinctus* (many-banded krait), cobra, zaocys and Indo-Chinese rat snake – all of them highly venomous species².

The authors of a collective monograph “Basic Prescriptions of Chinese Medicine of China” (1988, 61) give one more recipe: “Fresh black-tail snake (without head and viscera), fresh *Bungarus multicinctus* (without head and viscera), fresh cobra (without head and viscera), sargent gloryvine, *Clirnatiss finetiana Levi. et Vant*, root of Chinese climatis, ladybell root, hairy birthwort, *Parabarium micranthum Pier.*, vladimiria root, Chinese silkvine root bark, Chinese photinia, Sichuan aconiteroot, dried orange peel, rhizome of heracleum, achyranthes root, Chinese angelica root, sealwort, root of three-nerved spicebush, root of Dahurian angelica, *Celastrus orbiculatus*, rhizome of grass-leaved sweetflay, *Lycopodium clavatum*, mulberry mistletoe, wild aconite root, rhizome of *Ligusticum Chuanxiong*, cinnamon twig, Chinese cynomonium, licorice root, fruit of jujube, spirits”. This wine is prescribed when suffering from spasms, pain and numbness of muscles and bones and joint rigidity ; rheumatoid arthritis, rheumatic brachial plexus neuritis, etc .it is to be taken twice per day in 15ml doses, small children half the dose.

“Five snake wine” of *Miao* people is recommended for regular drinking “to balance the function of the human body, adjust the body's internal ecological environment, improve the body's immune function,

¹ Picture 7

² Picture 6

improve the vitality of the function, for skin nutrition and general disease prevention, treatment and health” (Renqing 2008, 113).

Thus, the Hainan ethnic minorities still sustain their own rich culture of brewing and drinking alcoholic beverages, the culture which relies heavily on the ecological conditions and natural resources of Hainan Island. The manner in which wine is used by these minority groups emphasises their core values, such as friendship, communal spirit and reverence of their elders and ancestors – both alive and dead.

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ВИНО НА ОСТРОВЕ ТАЙФУНОВ: КУЛЬТУРА ВИНА И ВИНОПИТИЯ ЮЖНОКИТАЙСКОГО ФРОНТИРА

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В статье рассматривается культура виноделия и винопития аборигенного населения Хайнаньских островов – самой южной провинции Китая. В своем анализе автор исходит из того что китайская культура вина сложилась в результате кросс-культурного взаимодействия представителей разных национальностей на протяжении многовековой китайской истории. Народность ли - автохтонное население южнокитайской провинции Хайнань, а также другие этнические группы острова, относимые к «национальным меньшинствам» внесли, как мы полагаем, определенный вклад в развитие китайской культуры вина.

Для этнических групп, которые в течение многих столетий населяли Хайнань, вино являлось важнейшей составляющей частью их культуры – как профанной, где вино было естественным элементом ежедневных трапез и частных и общественных праздников, так и сакральной культуры, где вино использовалось в ритуалах и религиозных церемониях. Духовная жизнь и этническое самосознание народов ли, мяо, и, туцзя и других этнических групп Хайнани были тесно связаны с культурой винопития и виноделия. В статье приводятся краткие сведения о технологии винокурения, рецептах изготовления вина и церемониях его распития на острове Хайнань.

Этнические меньшинства провинции Хайнань сохраняют до нынешних дней старинные технологии винокурения, основанные на природных условиях и ресурсах тропического острова и уникальные традиции распития алкогольных напитков. Эти традиции винопития позволяют судить о базовых ценностях островитян – таких как дружба, поддержание социальных связей и почитание стариков и предков.

Ключевые слова: вино, винокурение, Хайнаньские острова, народность ли, народность мяо, рисовое вино, медицинские вина.

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Приложение



Picture 1

Иллюстрация 1

Traditional equipment for wine brewing

Традиционные инструменты для изготовления вина



Picture 2

Иллюстрация 2

Traditional equipment for wine preserving
Традиционные сосуды для хранения вина



Picture 3

Иллюстрация 3

Miao girls in traditional clothes standing by wine jugs

Девушки мяо в национальных костюмах, рядом высокие сосуды для хранения вина



Picture 4

Иллюстрация 4

“Wine greeting” ceremony,

a guest of honour is treated to wine by two girls sitting on his lap

Церемония «приветствия вина»,

почетного гостя угощают вином девушки, сидя у него на коленях



Picture 5

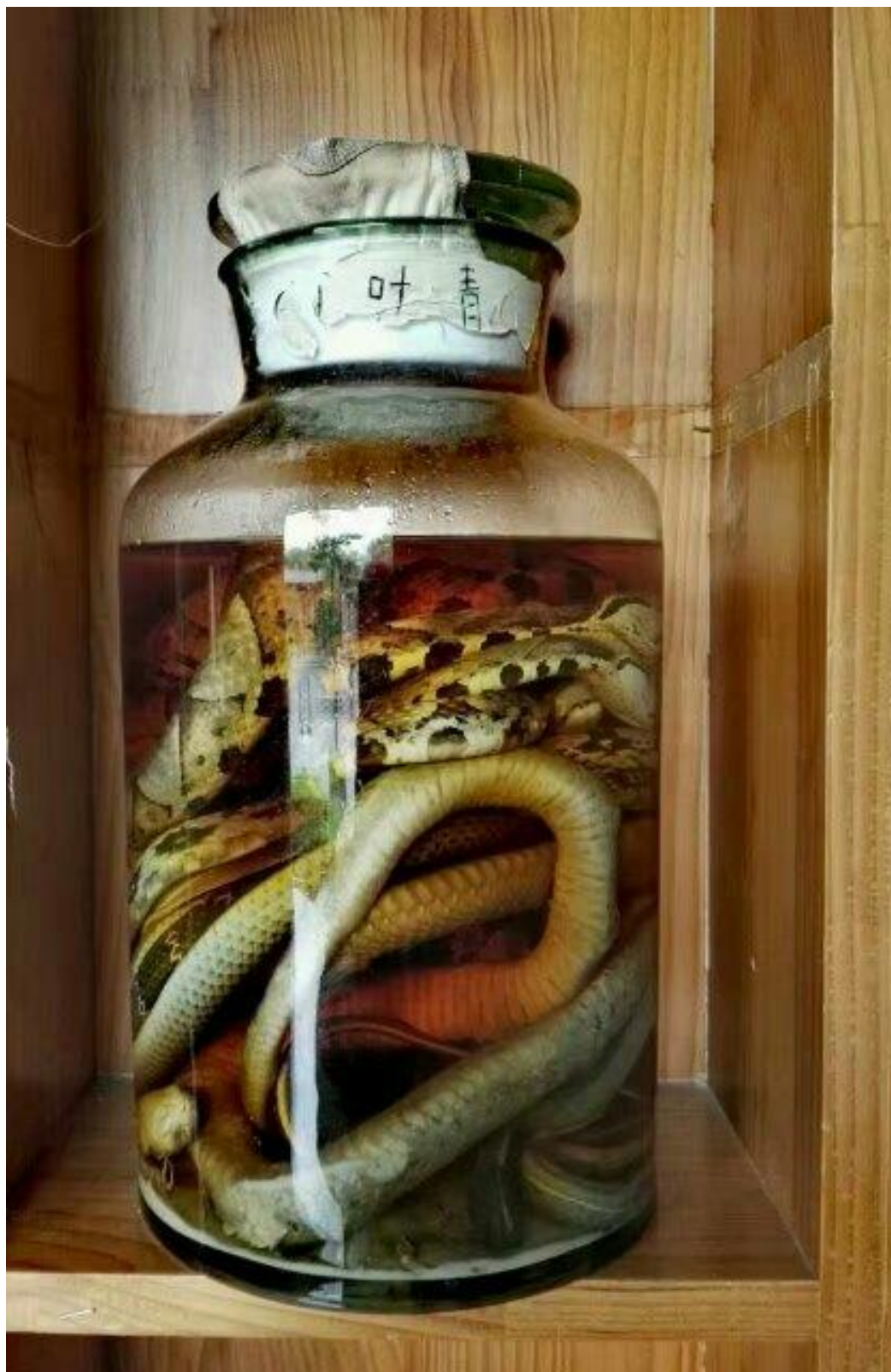
Иллюстрация 5

“Wine celebrating” dance,

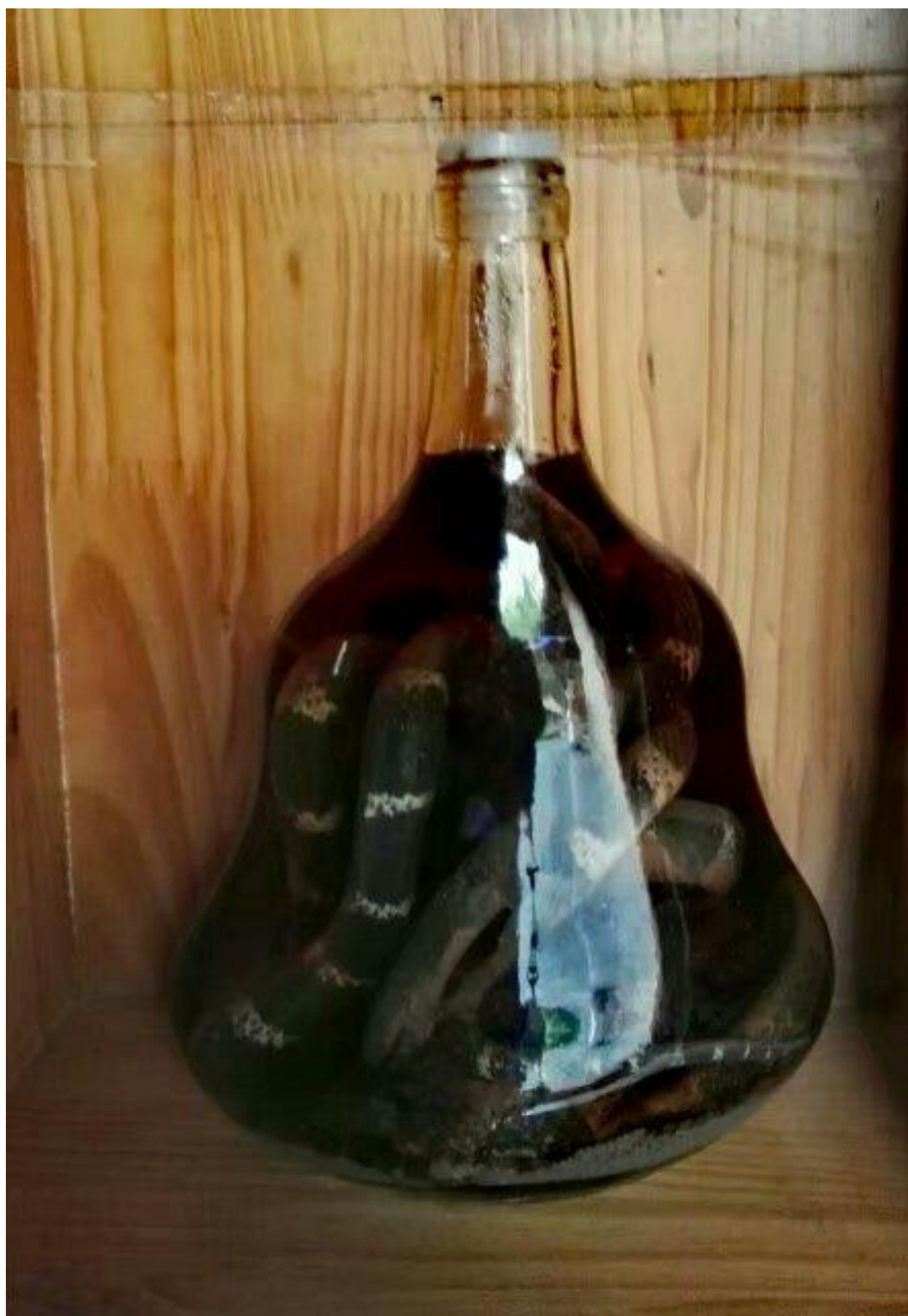
guests of honour are offered wine from a bamboo stem

Танец «поздравления вином»,

почетных гостей угощают вином из полого бамбукового стебля



Picture 6
Иллюстрация 6
Five snakes wine
Вино из пяти змей



Picture 7

Иллюстрация 7

Miao snake wine

Вино из змеи народности мяо