THE LEGEND OF

Plain rice cakes

& stuffed ricecakes  
By Nguyen Phuong Tuan  
To Morther and Brothers with loving thoughts

Dating back to the Bronze Age2 (2500BC), Van Lang “Kingdom” (an acient name of Viet Nam) was successively ruled by Hung Kings.

King Hung VI had twenty- tow sons who were called Quan Lang(Prince). They all were gifted in arts and expert in fighting, but they were uninterested in agricultual labor, except Lang Lieu, the 18 Quan Lang

Having a teste for rural life, Lang Lieu took wife and children to the country side where he devoted himselt to farming.

One day, at the of year, King Hung sent for his son and said he wouldleave the throne to the Lang(Prince) who cuold get the most delicous food, the most piculiar things served as sacrifices to God in the offering ritual on the coming New Year Day. Accordingly, the princes excitedlynset off in quest of valuable gifts.

As for Lang Lieu, he thought it wuold be from the prouduces of his land that he could make his specialties.

That year, at harvest time, Lang Lieu obtained a good crops of rice. Looking at the white grains of rice, he came to the ideathat he would use that rice to make two kinds of rice cakes: the one in square shape representing the earth, and the other, round in shape, suggesting the firmament. The moer he considered it, the more convinceed he became that it would work. So, the next morning he confided his plan to his wife and children. They all delighted and decided to make plain rice cakes first

Glutinous rice was thoroughly washed, boiled, pounded into a paste in a mortar, then molded in hemispheical form.

To make stuffed rice cakes, they used green arrowroot leaves to wrap up glutinous rice in square shape. The cakes, filled with fat, pork and green beans, were boiled overnight in a big pot.

On the Day of the New Year’s. ceremony, all the Quan Lang assembled in the imperial Palace. One after the other, they showed their gifts to King Hung. When came his turn, Lang Lieu brought a large tray loaded with rice cakes to the King. At first sight, those cakes appeared to be mediocre displays. But after understanding the signficance as implied in the rice cakes, King Hung was pleased and deeply moved. He even said his words of praise when eating the cakes. Plain rice cakes and Stuffed rice cakes were selected as the best foods for that great occasion. And it was Lang Lieu who first conceived the idea of making cakes from rice. He later accded to the throne

Thenceforth, by tradition, the Vietnamese make rice cakes as a kind od special food to eat on New Year’s Day.