

Bánh Chưng Bánh Dầy

The son of the first king of Van Lang, the Vietnam of long time ago, reigned under the name of Hùng Vương. He had three wives, each of them gave birth to a boy. The son of the first wife, Long married Kim who was arrogant and jealous. The son of the second, Ho married Ngoc who was naughty and sharp tongued toward her husband. The son of the deceased third wife, Vân, lived with his maternal grandmother and farmed for a living. He practiced the slash and burn agriculture, grew vegetables or went fishing in his spare time. His grandmother married Van to Xuân, a wise and hard working young woman in the village. The couple led a modest but happy life.

One day, summoned by the king, they had to sell their buffaloes to prepare for the trip to the court. There, they saw their elder brothers and their wives dress elegantly and adorned with jewels. Van and Xuan felt confused. Everyone mocked and scorned at them for going to see the king in such a simple appearance.

However, the king showed affection to Vân, an orphan of mother. Burdened by old age and a reign of 50 years, the king wanted to leave the throne to whoever could prepare the most savory foods. The spouse of the elder brothers, confident of their talent, rivaled for getting the throne to their husbands. Only Vân and Xuan were worried because they were very poor.

One night, in a dream, Van saw his mother who let him know he would be selected for the throne. It would be sufficient for him to make a sweet rice cake in the form of a square with meat and bacon in the middle of it to symbolize the heart. The square cake represented the earth because at that time people thought the earth was square. Vân woke up and recalled the dream to his wife. The couple decided to follow the advice of their mother to make the cake, and to boil it in a terra cotta pot

On the scheduled day, the two brothers Kim and Ngoc offered to the king expensive dishes. But the latter did not find anything exceptional. As for the cakes offered by Vân and Xuân, the king was excited by their delicateness

and meaning. (*One should govern the country with wisdom*). He showered Van with praises and designated him to be his successor. For his generosity, Van did not hesitate to give his brothers the title of viscount.



THE SWEET RICE CAKE

The sweet rice cake (or bánh chưng in Vietnamese) is one of the traditional delicacies of the Vietnamese people during the Tết festival. It is eaten with caramel marinated stewed pork.

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