

Mr. Bùi Ngọc Thái puts on his plastic gloves and carefully mixes the thin layers of lean pork meat, lard and skin with some salt, MSG and bột thính, the golden roast rice grounded into a brownish powder. The pleasant fragrance of thính started to fill the room.



Century of memories: Mr. Thái recalls the ups and downs of the nem and of his family and his country at large.

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His family's workshop in Đan Phượng district, 20km west of Hà Nội, is less than 100 square meters. But it produces a special delicacy—*nem Phùng*—that regularly travels by air, train and

bus to anywhere on earth where Vietnamese people are living.

In his high-ceilinged country home across the street from the workshop, Mr. Thái recalled how his grandfather used to make his *nem* at a cart stop eatery serving travelers and commuters who stopped by.

“My grandfather was born in 1890, the same year as President Hồ Chí Minh,” he said. “He sold *giò* (steamed pork jambon) and *chả* (fried pork cakes) and *nem* in his eatery and became very successful.”

Thanks to his grandfather’s martial arts skill, neither gangs nor robbers could steal from him. Known around the area by the name Phó Hòai, because he bought a small position in the local administration—something like a village sheriff – was very successful in his days. “Over time, he built his fortune by selling food and slowly purchased rice-cultivating land around the area. At one point he accumulated up to 50 acres of land, equal to 18 ha of land today.”

Vast political forces would soon alter the culinary family’s course. The Việt Minh League led by President Hồ Chí Minh declared to the world that Việt Nam was an independent country on September 2nd, 1945.



The photo is a family portrait taken outdoors in front of a traditional Chinese building. The family consists of two adults and five children. The background features a large tree and a building with a red door and Chinese characters. The photo is a family portrait taken outdoors in front of a traditional Chinese building. The family consists of two adults and five children. The background features a large tree and a building with a red door and Chinese characters.

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