

In this biggest city of the South, if you want something to eat, you will be served whenever you want, from dawn till dusk, and all night long. The rich can easily eat everything in their own way but the poor can also find ways to get their money's worth, that is, everybody can have his hunger satisfied. At present, most people have to try their best to make a living. Therefore many persons dare not allow themselves a night's rest. They should keep on working at night, but they feel happy and proud of their honest way of making money and of their art of selling their wares.

Vũ Bằng, a late writer, in his works such as *Món lạ miền Nam*, *Miếng ngon Hà Nội*, told many interesting stories about various delicious foods that he had tasted in the North and the South. Many of them are still sold by night pedlars now. These

cononut cream and sugar?). The voice sounded as sweet as, or even sweeter than, the pudding. It causes us to get up and want to taste a bowl of pudding. The night pedlar selling it is usually a middle-aged woman with two heavy baskets hanging from two ends of a pole carried on her shoulder. Eaters never lose appetite before a bowl of pudding flavored with vanilla and coconut cream. Her voice, for some time, has really become something to miss.

In Chine town, one can hear, at that time, a voice shouting "*Chí mà fú..*". This is also a kind of pudding prepared in the Chinese way with black sesame as the main ingredient. The Chinese like to have *Chí mà fú* at midnight, although it's only a very cheap food in comparison with other desserts prepared by the Chinese.

If you don't like something sweet,

night eaters. I have interviewed one of these pedlars:

- How many cakes can you sell every night?

- I often sell out 50 cakes of each kind.

- How long does it take?

- If my luck is in, I can sell out my wares by 1 o'clock. If it rains that night, it will take me one hour or two more.

- How much can you earn for a night?

- Around 20 thousand đồngs.

Sometimes, you can hear someone shouting "*Cháo huyết*". It is rice gruel boiled with a lot of water and pig blood. It's very delightful to have it at rainy nights. The pedlar is usually a Chinese old man who pushes a three-wheeled cart. Although his voice did not sound sweet, but his pot of rice gruel sends out a stream of smoke which stimulates our appetite. In a bowl of rice gruel of this kind, he puts some dried shrimp, squid, pig skin and a lot of red chili and ginger to make it hotter.

Another dish for the night is *phở*. It is made from sliced rice-paper boiled with beef or chicken. *Phở* is also peddled at night on three-wheeled carts. The pedlar, from time to time, shouts only one word "*Phở*" which sometimes startles sleepers or night travellers. I never hear any *phở* pedlar who shouts more than one word to advertise his wares. A bowl of *phở* eaten at night could make you feel pleasant because it is hot and you are hungry.

Other pedlars choose to produce sound in order to inform about their food. By midnight, you can hear the sound of a stick knocking on a piece of bamboo. They are pedlars selling *mì hoành thánh* (a kind of Chinese noodle). They play the stick on the piece of bamboo with a specific rhythm which has become familiar to people from the time immemorial. To help one pedlar selling *mì hoành thánh* on a three-wheeled cart parking by the sidewalk, three or two knocking boys will go to all small alleys to find customers.

Some Chinese families have sold *mì hoành thánh* for generations, the cart and the knocking instrument were handed down to sons by their fathers.

That was the life of night pedlars. All hardship will disappear when they sell out their wares and have a sleep for the rest of the night. In fact, without night pedlars, the pleasure of enjoying city night will be reduced remarkably. ■

SAIGON AND SHOUTS OF NIGHT PEDLARS

by VÂN HÀ

pedlars carry their wares from place to place and regularly give shouts to inform people about their wares and their presence. Their way of shouting has become familiar to local residents.

In this city, after 7 o'clock, rich people flood into expensive restaurants serving European, Vietnamese or Chinese food. When they was full up, they would go home and sleep like a log. After 10 o'clock, there comes another scene for the poor. When the clock says eleven o'clock, a shout comes from a deserted alley "*Ái ăn chè bột khoai, nước dừa, đường cát... hôn?*" (Do you like sweet pudding with flour,

you can wait for another shout: *Bánh chưng, bánh giò, bánh cức đây...!* They are cakes made by Northerners from rice or flour, green bean and pig meat in round or square shapes. In HCMC, they are produced (wrapped and boiled) in Gò Vấp or Hóc Môn. An army of pedlars carry them on bicycle to city center to sell at night. These cakes are wrapped in banana leaves and covered up with polythene sheet in baskets in order to keep them hot. It's very pleasant to have them at night when you have to work late. As for pedlars, they have to cover some tens kilometers through a lot of side streets and alleys to supply them to