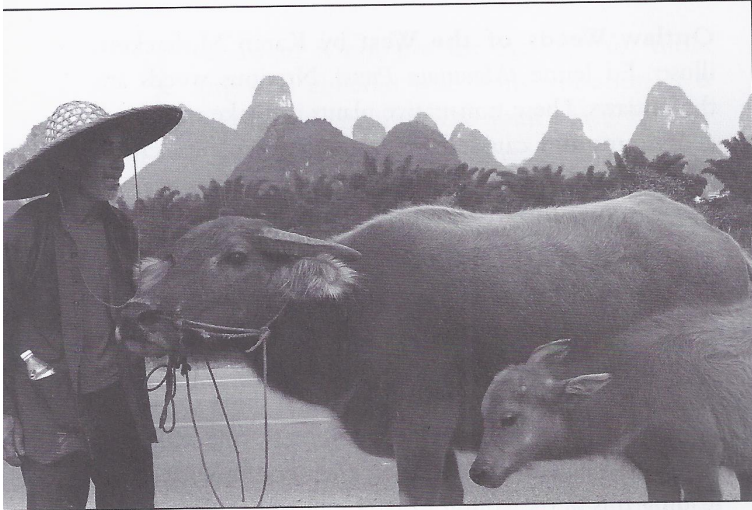


## The Buffalo and the Tiger: A Chinese Folktale



A farmer was very mean to his old buffalo that plowed his field. When the buffalo sank into the mud after plowing only a corner of the field, the farmer would whip and curse the buffalo because the animal could not work any faster.

"You stupid, slow creature! Haven't you seen how fast the tiger runs? Do you see how mighty he is? Why can't you be more like him?"

The buffalo, no longer able to bear the beatings, said, "You think so little of me. I'll go to the tiger and challenge him. You'll see with your own eyes who is mightier."

The next morning, the buffalo went to the tiger's lair. The tiger, smelling the buffalo, was ready to pounce upon him.

"Tiger, I'm not here to challenge you today," called the buffalo, shaking his two curved horns. "Your teeth are too dull for a fair fight. They're not able to pierce my hide. I'll give you three days to sharpen them. I'll do the same for my horns, then we'll have a duel."

The tiger agreed to delay his big meal. He went off to grind his teeth for three days until they were razor sharp. But the buffalo sharpened his horns for only one day. He spent the next two days rolling in mud and straw, over and over again, until he made an armor of shiny, black clay on his body.

On the fourth day, the two animals met for their duel.

"Buffalo, why do you cover yourself with clay?" asked the tiger.

"I roll on the riverbank to keep cool in this heat," replied the buffalo. "I do that all summer long."

The tiger looked at the buffalo with a careful eye. "He looks a little fatter," he thought. "All the better for a delicious meal."

"Tiger, you may be able to kill a pig or sheep, but not me," taunted the buffalo.

"My teeth are sharp now. Do you really think I can't bite you to death?" questioned the tiger.

"I'll let you bite first. If you fail three times, it will be my turn to butt you three times," answered the buffalo.

The tiger readily agreed. The buffalo lay down on his side. The tiger pounced on him and sank his teeth into the buffalo's body. He did not draw any blood, only cakes of mud filled with straw that fell apart in his mouth. After the tiger's third bite failed, the buffalo stood up. He lowered his head and thrust his sharp horns three times into the tiger's body. The first time, he pierced the tiger's stomach; the second time his back; the third time his heart. With a last roar, the tiger fell dead.

All this time, the farmer was watching from a safe distance. He realized how wrong he had been. His buffalo was not slow and stupid, but brave and wise. From that day on, he cherished his animal and he never whipped or cursed him again. To this day, the buffalo is not fast when he plows a field, but he is respected for his patience and strength.

—Fanny Wong, Chinese American author, New York.  
Chinese farmer, his water buffalo and calf by Jerry Brule.

Tiger by Daemion Lee, Oregon.

