



Traditional Chinese Festivals:

The Double Seventh Festival

两情若是长久时，又岂在朝朝暮暮

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The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl

In late summer, the stars Altair and Vega are high in the night sky, and the Chinese tell the following love story, of which there are many variations:



A young cowherd named Niulang (Chinese: 牛郎; pinyin: niú láng; literally "[the] cowherd"), came across seven fairy sisters bathing in a lake. Encouraged by his mischievous companion the ox, he stole their clothes and waited to see what would happen. The fairy sisters elected the youngest and most beautiful sister Zhinü (simplified Chinese: 织女; traditional Chinese: 織女; pinyin: zhī nǚ; literally "[the] weaver girl", the star Vega) to retrieve their clothing. She agreed to do so, but since Niulang had seen her naked, she agreed to his request for marriage. She proved to be a wonderful wife, and Niulang to be a good husband. They lived happily and had two children. But the Goddess of Heaven (or in some versions, Zhinü's mother) found out that Zhinü, a fairy girl, had married a mere mortal. The Goddess was furious and ordered Zhinü to return to heaven. (Alternatively, the Goddess forced the fairy back to her former duty of weaving colorful clouds, a task she neglected while living on earth with a mortal.) On Earth, Niulang was very upset that his wife had disappeared. Suddenly, his ox began to talk, telling him that if he killed it and put on its hide, he would be able to go up to Heaven to find his wife. Crying bitterly, he killed the ox, put on the skin, and carried his two beloved children off to Heaven to find Zhinü. The Goddess discovered this and was very angry. Taking out her hairpin, the Goddess scratched a wide river in the sky to separate the two lovers forever, thus forming the Milky Way between Altair and Vega.

Zhinü must sit forever on one side of the river, sadly weaving on her loom, while Niulang watches her from afar and takes care of their two children (his flanking stars β and γ Aquilae or by their Chinese names Hè Gu 1 and Hè Gu 3).

But once a year all the magpies in the world would take pity on them and fly up into heaven to form a bridge (鹊桥, "the bridge of magpies", Que Qiao) over the star Deneb in the Cygnus constellation so the lovers may be together for a single night, which is the seventh night of the seventh moon.

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