

Under the spot light of the June '89 Tiananmen Square unrest, my sixteen American tour members and I fled, away from the emotionally charged protesters. I decided to extract my frightened tourists, under restrictive travel circumstances, out of China, by any means possible. I was the group's 25-year-old fearless tour leader, and this is my story.

THE UNLIKELY YANK

by JOHN T. L. LU

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THE
UNLIKELY

Every immigrant has a dream,
and little Johnny wants to be
an American.

YANK

John T. L. Lu

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CHAPTER 15

Silk Road Princess

The need to improve upon its antiquated facilities to better accommodate flocks of Western tourists at key attractions was evident throughout China, and the Ba Da Lin Great Wall destination was no exception.

Initiated by the Zhou Dynasty in 250 BC, Wan'li'chang'cheng (ten thousand-li Great Wall) project expanded under Chin Xi Huang Di (First Emperor Chin) after he unified China in 221 BC. To keep China culturally and racially homogenous, dynasty after dynasty would contribute to the Great Wall against Xongnu invaders, or ancient nomads such as forefathers of Mongols, Turks, Uyghurs, among other Central Asian tribes. Thousands of years of Chinese defensive effort finally culminated in various Zi'zhi'qu, or autonomous regions, throughout Western China where descendants of the once-feared Xongnu nomads now cohabit with the Han Chinese.

“Anyone needs to use the restroom?” Jing Jing, our local guide, asked after we ascended the Great Wall. “There are two types of toilets available,” she explained, “for an American nickel, you could squat over a long trench, along with others, and do your business.”

“That sounds pretty disgusting.” Janice made a face.

“For an American dime, you could experience the *deluxe* public toilet.” Jing Jing continued to explain the different levels of facilities.

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“I’m almost afraid to ask what the differences are” Dr. Jimenez commented.

The local guide was proud of the deluxe toilet option. “For a dime, you get a private stall.”

Janice’s eyes lit up. “Okay, that sounds more like it, but does it have a lock on the door?”

“No, no door, just two pieces of plywood on each side of you, same trench.”

“Eww! Gross!”

The ladies all opted to wait until we returned to the hotel.

Jing Jing was perplexed by our tour members’ apprehension. “No worry, the deluxe toilet includes soft, white toilet paper.”

Our journey would grow more rural and more exotic as we traveled west toward the gateway to the Silk Road.

Xi’an, home of the internationally celebrated Terracotta Army, was the gateway to the Silk Road since the Qin Dynasty some two thousand years earlier. As a conflux of the Han and ethnic minorities from nearby Central Asia and the Middle East, Xi’an was also home to more than twenty thousand Muslims.

Due to the immense popularity of the Terracotta warrior exhibit, similar to limited-engagement museum exhibits back in the United States, tour groups often had to wait upon arrival even with reservations. However, domestic Chinese visitors, and there were not many, would be given priority entry at a substantially lower rate. My national guide, Lily, got

the local peasants to help us obtain the special *Ben Di Ren Piao* (Mandarin: local people ticket) for our group with priority entry through friendly social mingling. Thanks to Lily's effort, we were able to bypass all the other foreign groups in the queue and enjoy the air-conditioned exhibit away from the blistering midday sun. Lily's intention was not to skim on admission but to save time so we could stay on our schedule.

After the museum visit, the local guide and Lily accompanied our group to explore local shops while I trekked back to the motor coach parking lot where bus drivers and guides congregated to "talk shop." I learned early on from my Hawaii tour-escorting days that one must first gain the collective experiences from the pack in order to operate successfully as a lone wolf.

Xi'an was the midway point of the twenty-one-day journey, by which time I had perfected regional accents, learned local tourism slang, clothed myself in regional attire, and was eager to test the effort of my immersion.

A confident young woman, with a tall nose bridge, large almond-shaped eyes, long lashes, robust eyebrows, jet black hair, and a profoundly curvaceous figure, was encircled by a group of bus drivers and guides near my motor coach.

"*Ming'bai ma? Hui'min zai huan'ja de shi'bou, ni ke qian'wan bu'yao qu ta'rao ta.*" (Mandarin: Understood? Never bother a Muslim when he is haggling.) Presumably a guide from another tour group, the captivating young woman was sharing stories about how to avoid issues with *Hui'min* (Muslims) in the markets.

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Noticing a stranger in her audience, the young woman abruptly halted her tale. “*Ni’shi nar’ge dan’wei de?*” (Mandarin: which unit are you with?)

“*Wo?*” (Mandarin: Me?) I replied. “*Wo’shi mei’guo lai’de ling’dui.*” (Mandarin: I’m a tour leader from the United States.)

“*Suan le’ba, ni nar’xiang ge mei’guo lai’de ling’dui?*” (Mandarin: Forget it, you don’t look like a tour leader from the United States.) She burst out laughing.

“*Shi’ma? Na ni’suo wo’xiang nar lai’de?*” (Mandarin: Really? Then, where do you think I’m from?)

The playful local guide sized me up and down and gave me her verdict. “*Wo kan’ni ken’ding shi Beijing lai’de.*” (Mandarin: I am certain you are from Beijing.)

“*Shi’ma? Wo xiang’ma?*” (Mandarin: Really? Do I look it?)

Then I asked her, “*Nab ni’shi nar’ge dan’wei de?*” (Mandarin: Which unit are you with?)

“*Xi’an guo’lv.*” (Mandarin: Xi’an National Travel Service.) The attractive tour guide proudly announced.

“*Wo’jiao Xiao Zhang. Ni’lei?*” (Mandarin: I’m Xiao Zhang. You?)

“*Wo’jiao John, wo’xing lv.*” (Mandarin: I’m John, last name Lu.)

I never knew there were Chinese of Middle Eastern ancestry in China. All school children in Taiwan had to recite a folk song that glorified Chinese cultural diversity as having

five races: the Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui (Muslim), and the Tibetans, united under one kingdom in phrase such as “...*Wu’zu tong yi qia*...” (Five tribes in one family.) But childhood songs certainly did not prepare me for reality.

“*Ni’de tuan nar lai’de?*” (Mandarin: Where is your group from?)

“*De’guo.*” (Mandarin: Germany.)

“*Shi’ma? Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*” (Mandarin: Oh, yeah?
German: Speak German?)

“*Natürlich, wollen sie mich testen?*” (German: Of course, you want to test me?)

Suddenly images of Cynthia, my German-speaking “Goddess of Hilo Hattie,” flashed before my eyes.

“Hey, John, did you buy anything for your girlfriend back home?” Mrs. Peng and her husband, overladen with bags of souvenirs, cheerfully greeted me.

“Ha ha. I would if I had a girlfriend to buy for.” I always remained “maritally single” while on the job.

“No girlfriend back home?” Xiao Zhang picked up on the English phrases.

“*Ni zhen’de shi mei’guo lai’de ling’dui?*” (Mandarin: You really are a tour leader from the US?)

I nodded. “*Luo’shan’ji.*” (Mandarin: Los Angeles.)

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The exotic beauty slipped me her business card with a seductive glance.

“Hier haben Sie meine Nummer. Wir halten Kontakt mit einander.” (German: Here’s my number, stay in touch.) Xiao Zhang gave me a wink and walked back to her tour bus.

“He, Xiao Zhang, Schaut Mal was Wir gekauft haben!” (German: Hello, Xiao Zhang! Look what we bought!) Xiao Zhang’s German tour members were returning from their shopping frenzy.

“Hast du mir ein Geschenk gekauft?” (German: Did you buy me a gift?) Xiao Zhang playfully teased her elderly passengers who returned to the bus with bags of souvenirs.

Lily and the local guide double-checked our passenger count as our bus slowly maneuvered out of the festive motor coach parking lot at the Terracotta Army Museum.

The German-speaking Silk Road Princess made an impression on me.

To most of us in the West, a dumpling consists of meat wrapped in a dough skin, and served in portions the size of half a Twinkie. The Japanese acquired the taste for Gyoza, or Chinese dumplings, during their occupation of China. Georgians, influenced by China, had its own version called Khinkali, nearly identical to the Chinese Xiao Long Bao (steamed dumplings). Pelmeni, the Russian meat dumpling, closely resembled the Northeastern Chinese dumplings called Qiao Zhi. While I was no stranger to a wide variety of dumplings from different parts of the world, nothing

prepared me for what I was about to experience via the critically acclaimed “Xi’an Dumpling Feast.”

If dining could be compared to an opera production, then the *Xi’an Jiao Zhi Yen* (Xi’an Dumpling Banquet) would have been one of Mozart’s finest. In contrast to the Austrian Emperor Joseph II’s reaction to one of Mozart’s complex operas, as portrayed in the movie *Amadeus*, for simply having “too many notes,” the “Xi’an Jiao Zhi Yen” carried just the perfect number of notes, making it the most exotic and sumptuous opera for the taste bud.

Twenty-one different kinds of delicately created steamed dumplings, each piece the size of a Hershey’s Kiss, hand-crafted by a master chef who impregnated the silky-skinned dumplings with scrupulously composed ingredients, including pork, poultry, and vegetarian delights. The server chronicled the historical significance at the arrival of each new course, unveiling dumplings favored by the imperial court.

After the delicate and sumptuous dinner, we ventured to the *Hui’min Ye’Shi*, or Muslim Night Market, in the Muslim Quarter. One of the most popular Muslim cultural attractions in Xi’an, the Muslim Night Market was known for its food stalls with skinned goat-heads and full goat carcasses. Kebab vendors briskly carved meat off the rib cage of a lamb carcass, like a duster reaching through the opened window-blinds. These were signs of a prosperous business day.

The gamey odor of lamb stews, accompanied by the charcoal aroma of barbeque skewers, accentuated by the fragrance of the wood-oven baked pita bread, veiled under the sounds of Uyghur music, set an exotic tone for the market.

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My national guide and I decided to try the local favorite called Yang Rou Pao Muo, a bowl of soup made up of lamb, noodles, and crumbled pita bread. To completely immerse in this adventure, Lily and I both opted for the deluxe version of the dish, by adding an egg in the mix.

“Have you had this before?” my national guide asked

“No, this is my first time!” I barely knew what it was.

“You are brave. Most people don’t like lamb.”

“Well, I never had lamb, so it makes no difference to me.”

Muslim merchants offering shiny religious trinkets, brass ornaments, silver jewelry, and jade pieces atop their colorful woven blankets, reminiscent of Native American roadside vendors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, pervaded the bustling market. I noticed that our local guide hesitated to retrieve two ladies from a vendor when it was time for us to return to the bus.

“Why did you leave those two ladies at the market?” I asked Jing Jing.

“You cannot interrupt the transaction, or the *Hui'min* will beat you.”

I deemed my local guide’s response ridiculous; vendors at the market all seemed cheerful; after all, they were merchants. Without notifying Lily, I got off the bus to retrieve my two bargain shoppers.

“Excuse me, ladies. We have to go, everyone’s waiting.”

Both ladies seemed embarrassed for holding up the bus and decided not to go through with the purchase.

“Eh, ni bie’zou ah! Wo gei’ni ge hao’jia’qian! Bie’zou ah!” (Mandarin: Don’t you leave! I give you good price. Don’t leave.) The vendor, agitated, held up the jewelry to my two tour members’ faces.

“Lai, gei’ni ge hao’ja’qian!” (Mandarin: Come, give you good price!)

“Shall we?” I gently placed my hand over one of my tour member’s shoulders to turn her away from the pushy vendor.

As we began to walk away from the stall, the vendor suddenly became irate and started shouting in a dialect unfamiliar to me. Both my tour members were frightened by this unexpected turn of events as we hastened our steps toward the motor coach. Other vendors chimed in in support of the instigator and we were gradually being surrounded by an angry mob. I could see my petite local guide and my national guide rushing in our direction as the mob grew increasingly hostile.

“Eh, zhe tan’zi shei’de?” (Mandarin: Whose stall is this?) A woman shouted into the mob of spectating vendors.

“Za’man tuan’dui yao mai dong’shi, qian ge’shei ya?” (Mandarin: Our tour wants to buy something—who do we give money to?) More shouts into the crowd, from what appeared to be a tour guide, asking who to pay for souvenir from a stand.

Desperate to make a sale, nosy vendors dispersed back to their respective stalls. Meanwhile, a man pushed his way through the crowd toward us; it was Xiao Zhang’s bus driver.

Built like a Mongol wrestler, he used his large frame to shield my two female group members, as he escorted both women toward our waiting bus. Xiao Zhang's German group inadvertently rescued us from an escalating conundrum.

The confident and fearless Silk Road Princess went about assisting with transactions for her clients as the market settled back to normalcy. Two local police officers, unarmed, casually strolled toward the commotion. Evidently, quarrels and angry rants from vendors, triggered by tourists who were unaware of the regional business etiquette, were routine. Xiao Zhang escorted her group toward the bus parking lot after their transactions adjourned.

I thanked the driver profusely. "*Shi'fu, jen xie'xie ni.*" (Mandarin: Thank you so much!)

"*Mei'shier, ze hen pin'chang.*" (Mandarin: No sweat, this is very common.)

"You should thank Xiao Zhang," the driver said with a smile.

He and Xiao Zhang had been eating noodles near the aggressive vendor while their tour members shop around the market.

"When Muslim vendors started to shout, Xiao Zhang lifted her head to look at the commotion and recognized you right away," the husky driver explained.

The elderly German group and their guide were walking toward their tour coach parked two buses down from ours.

"Big sister, I retrieved your people!" Xiao Zhang playfully greeted my national guide.

“John, you cannot just run off without telling me!” Lily was a bit distraught, but more worried than upset.

“Are you okay?” Lily and our local guide attended to the two ladies who were shook up by the experience.

“Why is your group here?” I ask Xiao Zhang

“Don’t we all have the same itinerary?”

“*Auf Wiedersehen, Ich warte auf deinen Anruf!*” (German: Goodbye, I’ll wait for your call.)

Xiao Zhang motioned at me toward Lily as if to say: “You’re in trouble now!”

An elderly German tour member trod alongside Xiao Zhang and her bus driver as they started toward their motor coach.

“*Ich habe früher schon mal Lammfleisch in Afrika gegessen.*” The elderly man told Xiao Zhang that he had eaten lamb in Africa.

“*Auf einer Rundreise?*” Xiao Zhang inquired (German: Tour group?)

“*Nein Ich war beim Afrikakorps unter Feldmarschall Rommel.*” (German: No, I was in the German Afrika Korps with Fieldmarshal Rommel). The expression on the elderly gentleman’s face could not have been prouder.

My concerned national guide bid the Silk Road Princess and her driver farewell.

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Before I set foot in Guilin in Guangxi province, I presumed all Chinese paintings were rooted in calligraphy, resulting in the highly stylized Chinese landscapes, and reflecting the limitation of the medium. My erroneous presumption on Chinese art was corrected by the stunning visuals of limestone peaks. Protruding out of the Li River, the foreshortening illusion on the stoic limestone formations had been accurately depicted by Chinese poets and painters, such as Du Fu and Li Bai, for some 1,300 years. In addition to having the picturesque presence, Guilin would etch a lasting memory for me via a particular encounter.

Soon after we conferred with the local guide, Lily and I learned that “soft seats” were oversold on our train to Guangzhou, the final stop on our twenty-one-day journey.

“Bu’bao yi’si, ruan’pu dou mei’le, jiu’zhi’you ying’pu.”
(Mandarin: Sorry, soft seats are all gone, only hard seats are available.” The local guide apologetically confirmed the bad news.

Perturbed, I demanded that he call his office at once and adjust the seating situation; after all, the train ride to Guangzhou would take six hours.

For two days, the CITS Guilin office tried to rectify the situation without any success. Not having a seat cushion may seem trivial, but in our line of work, it was imperative that we deliver what our tour members paid for. While our guests enjoyed scheduled attractions, my national guide and I often met behind “open doors” in my room to reconfirm our itinerary and anticipate any foreseeable challenges ahead. In 1987, Chinese law decreed that the hotel room door remain open whenever a national guide or local guide, of the opposite sex, were in the tour manager’s room. For instance,

if I were visiting with Lily, or vice versa, the door must stay open to avoid any improper activities between unmarried people of the opposite sex.

During a brainstorming session in my room, I blurted out an angry rant about China and its incompetence.

“Things are not always as smooth as they are in Taiwan or America, John,” Lily said. “Although there are many challenges in China, this is our life, and we adapt.” The young woman stood, proudly defending her motherland. I stared into Lily’s eyes, a surge of passion overpowered my senses, and held my staunch national guide by her waist and kissed her passionately.

Lily was caught off guard by my sudden compulsion, but she soon gave in to her impulse as we lustfully caressed one another on my bed. When she felt my adrenalized manhood, confined in my tight blue jeans, stirring by the gate of her chastity, she softly whispered in my ear. “*Na’dei jie’le buen cai ke’yi.*” Nothing shuts down a full-throttle engine quicker than an ice-cold bucket of “That must wait until after we’re married.”

The China portion of the twenty-one-day journey concluded in Guangzhou without additional challenges. I realized that the Chinese brand of Communism was a compilation of Capitalism, Socialism, glazed with Chinese cultural decorum. Lily and my group parted ways at the Guangzhou Central Train Station after a two-night stay at the White Swan Hotel.

Like all major transportation hubs in China, the Guangzhou Central Train Station was crowded with travelers. The local guide and porter elbowed their way

through the dense human wave toward the cargo car to take an accurate count of the group's luggage before handing my national guide the baggage-claim tickets. Lily turned over the claim tickets to me.

"You most likely will not remember me after you return to America," Lily said, and looked at me with a coquettish smile.

"Why would you say that? How could I forget my first national guide on a twenty-one-day journey in China?"

My group members stopped by to bid their farewell to Lily as they boarded the deluxe train destined for Hong Kong. I discreetly handed Lily the gratuity I collected from the group.

"This is from everyone. Thank you for everything."

"You should not have. You did lots of work yourself." Lily blushed.

"You deserve it." I released Lily's hands and hopped onto the train.

My group would spend the next three days and two nights in Hong Kong, taking in sights and relishing the bargain shopping before returning to the United States.

Upon my return to Los Angeles from my first assignment as an overseas tour manager, Ritz Tours immediately put me on a grueling schedule of back-to-back three-day local tour assignments covering the Grand Canyon route and San

Francisco route. While there were sporadic Caribbean tours in the winter months, the peak tourism season was late spring until the middle of fall, and I learned to manage time and earning opportunities wisely over the short six-month season.

Sensing inspiration from my inaugural China trip, Martin asked me if I would be interested in designing a China tourism brochure targeting the general market. In two weeks, I produced a palette-knife painting, measuring approximately 11" x 17" that featured partial images of the terracotta figures I witnessed in Xi'an. The piece became the cover to Ritz Tours' first published China tour marketing booklet.

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Playing emperor on Li River cruise, China, 1987.



With Lily on Li River cruise.

CHAPTER 23

“Pas d’Entrée Sans Passeport.”

The first two nights in London were unremarkably routine, except that an elderly couple had their passports stolen during the evening walking tour. Confident that my backup copies of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson’s American passports would satisfy the Belgian Customs agent, I opted to obtain replacement passports for the elderly couple in Brussels. Theft was a common inconvenience during peak tourism season in Europe.

The calm waves of the English Channel gently rocked the P&O passenger ferry to the Port of Ostend. Anxious passengers on the upper deck elbowed one another for an optimal spot along the railing to take in the medieval architecture that lined the scenic port. Flocks of food-seeking seagulls circled above the ferry, looking for scraps discarded by passengers as the ship slowly drifted into port.

In the distance, colorful motor coaches turned the parking lot into a vibrant quilt. Each tour bus, with its engine running, waited patiently like a panting hound, eager to receive its new master.

I put down my stale coffee and set out to collect my group in preparation for Customs when I noticed a pair of my tour members, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, remaining in their seats in the corner of the main cabin.

“Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, why aren’t you out on the deck? The shoreline is beautiful!”

“John, will we be okay without our passports?”

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Although entry visas were not required of US passport holders to enter the remaining Western European countries on our tour program, every traveler still needed a valid passport.

“Don’t worry. I’ll chat with the Customs agent, and you’ll be fine.” I did my best to reassure the couple.

“Come, let’s go get some pictures of the Belgian coast!” I convinced the worrisome pair to leave the shadowy corner and ushered them to the upper deck to relish in the unseasonably brilliant sky. “We’re very lucky with this weather! The English Channel is often cloudy.” I marveled at our group’s good fortune.

There was a jolt that struck through the vessel when the ship’s apron rubbed against the side of the dock. A group of longshoremen, synchronizing their strength, secured multiple towlines to the mushroom-like iron bollards.

“I got you!” I extended my arms around Mr. and Mrs. Thompson’s waists before the couple could lose their footing on the upper deck.

“Thank you, John.” I let go of the elderly couple after making sure that they had a firm grip on the railing.

Commuters rushed from the upper deck down to the main cabin, while the ferry continued to sway.

“John, can you take a picture for us?” Mindy, one of my tour members, handed me her camera. Mindy and her husband, Jason, were both tenured employees at the Nellis Air Force Base just outside of Las Vegas, Nevada. While Jason had been to Europe during his previous deployments,

the middle-aged couple opted to enjoy their European vacation and leave all the logistics to the professionals.

“Move a little bit to the left, there, so I can get the church in the background... There!” I snapped a shot.

While my clients casually took in photo opportunities on the scenic deck, other passengers had descended to the lower level to form the Customs queue. I kept a watchful eye on a family of suspicious seafarers who lingered near my group.

“Can I help you?” I confronted a woman in a tattered wool coat with three unkempt preteens.

“*Ne parle pas anglais.*” (French: I don’t speak English) The weathered woman with a full head of matted hair moved closer to me while the children were about to scatter by my clients.

“*Sortez!*” (French: Move on!) I shouted at the woman and motioned for her and the kids to move on. A ferry crewman overheard the commotion and quickly made his way to our position. A heated conversation ensued, ending with the crewman escorting the Gypsy family off the ferry.

“What was that about?” My group members were surprised by the sudden upheaval.

“Nothing.” I smiled and diverted my clients’ focus back to the shoreline scenery.

“John, do you think they were thieves?” The Thompsons were particularly sensitive, still shell-shocked from their recent experience.

“Not sure, but I didn’t want to find out the hard way.” After reassuring Mrs. Thompson, I began to gather the rest of my group in preparation to clear Customs.

I gently placed my hand on the backs of the elderly holiday seekers and guided them toward the Customs line. “Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, you stay with me.”

European border officials were well aware of the theft epidemic during peak tourism months and would typically accommodate experienced tour managers who could provide backup copies of the lost passports. I hoped that the proof of citizenship—the copies of the Thompsons’ passports—which I had on me, should satisfy the Belgian Customs agents. As the crowd inched toward the counter I recognized the lead Customs agent. Officer Francois was a regular whom I encountered frequently in the past.

“*Bonjour, Francois.* My two clients here lost their passports last night in London. Would it be possible for us to have them replaced in Brussels?” Pre-9/11 European custom officials were generally lenient and helpful, especially with US citizens. Francois looked at the elderly couple and commented, “I’m sorry, those two must return to England with the same ferry right now.”

“Frank, here are copies of their US passports.” I handed over copies of my clients’ passports, prepared precisely for situations like this. “They’re both US citizens, and we can rectify this in Brussels tomorrow morning!” I couldn’t believe the Customs officer, an acquaintance, was giving me a hard time over a common courtesy. While Francois discussed my client’s case with his colleagues in the office, the motor coach parking lot that once seemed like a colorful quilt made of

tour buses, now resembled a gray rag with food stains as tour bus after tour bus departed with their passengers.

My long-distance driver must have been wondering about the lengthy delay. Thirty minutes elapsed, and the Belgian Customs agents had yet to pass down a verdict on Mr. and Mrs. Thompson's fate.

Meanwhile, a stocky middle-aged man in uniform entered the Port of Ostend Customs area; it was my favorite long-distance driver, Kasey. Known as "Big Kasey" in the industry, most young drivers and tour managers affectionately called him "Papa Kasey."

"Papa Kasey, please radio dispatch and have them call Kuoni in London to send a car to Dover to pick up Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, the elderly couple who had their passports stolen last night. Customs is sending them back!"

"Denied entry? But these are Americans! This is stupid!" Being a seasoned professional who often interacted with Customs officials throughout Europe, Big Kasey was on first-name basis with many port officials. "Francois, *quel est le problème?*" (Francois, what's the problem?) Kasey confronted Francois.

"Pas d'entrée sans passeport." (No passport, no entry.) Francois insisted. Papa Kasey argued to no avail. There would be no favors this time.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lu, rules are rules. Your two clients must return with the departing ferry to Dover." The agent closed his book and walked away. Nothing pleasant ever resulted from anyone addressing me as "Mr. Lu."

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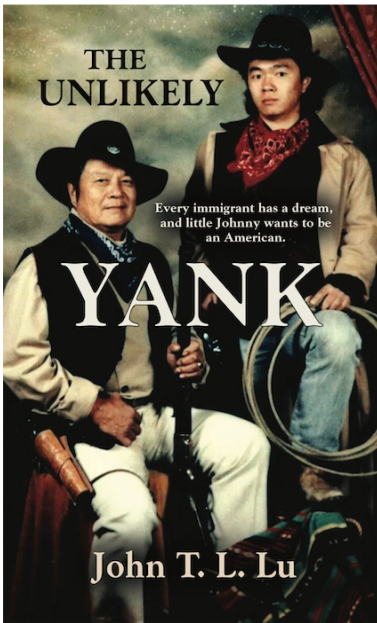
I never had anyone denied entry before; not in the Bahamas, not in Canada, not in China, and most definitely not in Europe. Perhaps I should have left the Thompsons in London with our local agent to get their replacement passports; at least they wouldn't have wasted a day at sea.

“Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, I'm very sorry for the inconvenience. Please rest assured that our London agent will pick you up this evening at Dover and make sure that you get your replacement passports tomorrow.” I attempted to comfort the elderly couple and watched helplessly as Belgian Customs officer promptly escorted Mr. and Mrs. Thompson back to the ferry.

Upon receiving my distress report on the Thompsons, the London local agent would immediately secure hotel accommodations, arrange transportation, and assign a local guide to pick up the couple from Dover that evening. Our London partner would also schedule a guide to escort the couple to the US Consulate the next morning. After the London office relayed this incident to the Ritz Tours headquarters in Los Angeles, the Thompsons could choose to return to the United States or they could choose to catch up with my group; either option would require coordination, financing, and logistics.

Feeling deflated like a football placekicker who just missed the winning field goal attempt, I watched the ferry sail out of the harbor, and vowed to never repeat the same mistake.

“Let's go, Johnny. We're losing light!” Papa Kasey patted me on the back as a silent reminder for me to suck it up for we had a tour to run.



Under the spot light of the June '89 Tiananmen Square unrest, my sixteen American tour members and I fled, away from the emotionally charged protesters. I decided to extract my frightened tourists, under restrictive travel circumstances, out of China, by any means possible. I was the group's 25-year-old fearless tour leader, and this is my story.

THE UNLIKELY YANK

by JOHN T. L. LU

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