

ADVENTURE STORIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

ULYSSES S. GRANT IN CHINA



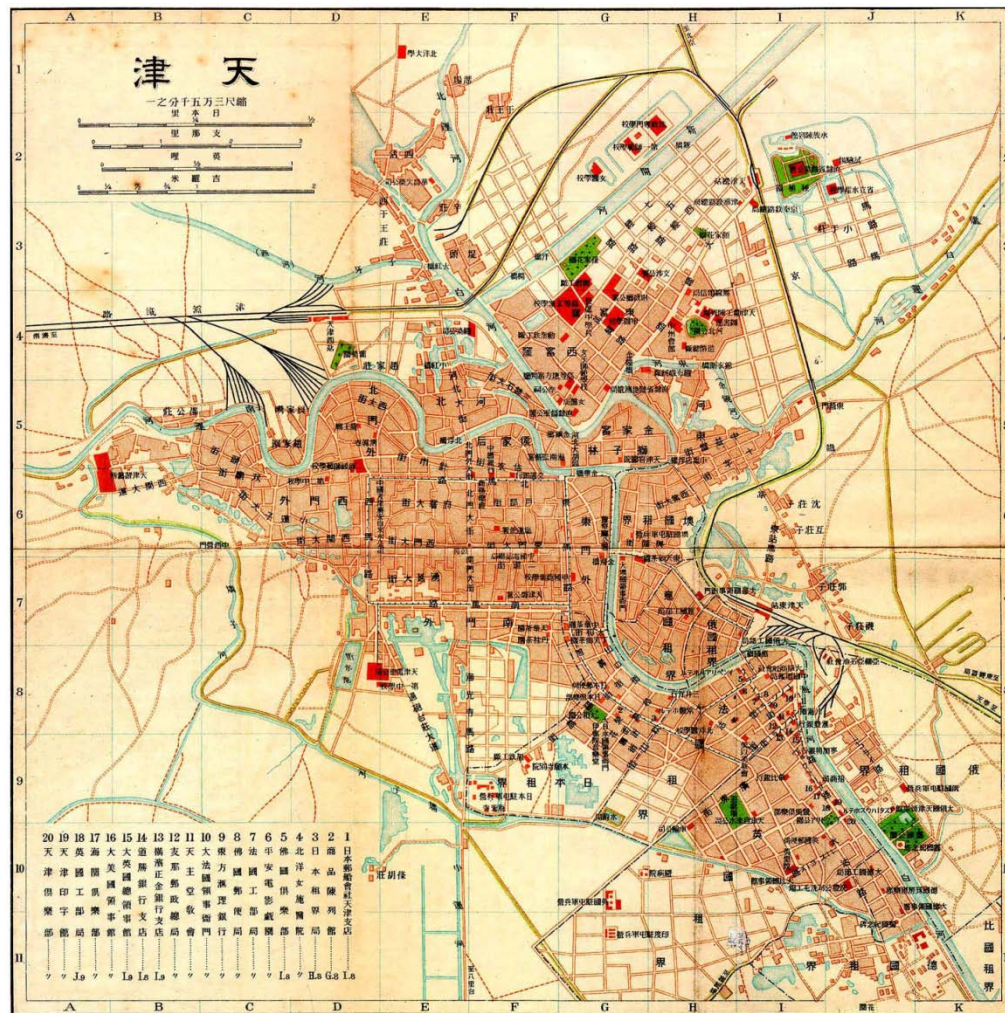
AND OTHER STORIES

BY T. DURWOOD

"Tom Durwood is the real thing."

-- Joe Weber, *Honorable Enemies, Rules of Engagement*

ULYSSES S. GRANT IN CHINA



1877

Tientsin, China

Two remarkable leaders meet during an era of swift modernization and drastic realignments

I came across the twin-throne photo of Ulysses S. Grant and Li Hung Chang in China in 1877 and could not get the clash of cultures out of my mind. This story is the result. My hope was to balance the big themes of the two nations' histories against the pragmatic (and sad -- always sad) personalities of Grant and Li Hong Zhang.

I have always imagined it as a play. My early speechy drafts had a gruff ex-president drinking too much, remembering Robert E. Lee and the Battle of Shiloh, and generally contemplating large matters. Terrible. This draft, I hope, is more lively. I have several more to go.

Two of the young characters here might connect this story to a new story I have in mind about the Boxer Rebellion, twenty years after Grant's visit.

Ulysses S. Grant in China

Music and Intrigue in the Court of Li Hong Zhang

A Play in Five Short Acts



by T. Durwood

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Prologue

In 1877, after leaving the White House, Ulysses S. Grant embarked on a two-year trip around the world. He and his small entourage were received with great ceremony in capitals across Europe.

In March of 1878, they arrived in Peking, where General Grant met the Chinese Viceroy and politician Li Hung Zhang. Zhang asked Grant to serve as arbiter over a dispute between China and Japan as to the conservatorship of the Ryukyu (“Loochoo”) Island Kingdom.

In this fictional account, a student musical group has been asked to play for Grant and the international dignitaries of Tientsin. When an American youth (Joseph) joins the concert group, jealousies and secrets among the teenaged players are revealed. The youths’ powerful emotions are expressed through seven brief musical pieces. The music takes on new aspects and changing dynamics as the two cultures – American and Chinese, monarchical and democratic – come together.

Matters more serious than teenage rivalries take over when an assassination plot comes to light. Opium, gun smuggling, and the colonial forces of class and rebellion all play a part in the surprising climax of the five short acts of *Ulysses S. Grant in China*.

Note: the Mandarin and Cantonese in this first draft are gibberish.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Pao-Shan = working class girl (servant's daughter, age 15)

Ning Po = rich girl (age 16)

Soo Ch'ing = little brother of Ning Po (age 14)

Madame Xi Ping = Ning Po's mother, beautiful, frail, haunted

Pi Chin = Madame Xi Ping's attendant and Pao Shan's mother

The Instructor = gifted in music but perhaps naïve in the ways of the world

Joseph Sewell = American boy (age 17)

Luk K'un = rebel boy (age 15)

Viceroy Li-Hong Zhang = himself

General U.S. Grant = himself

Holcombe = Grant's aide

Cho = Li Hong Zhang's aide

Julia Grant = herself

Miss Topham = Publisher's representative

Sato = Japanese representative in the Loochoo negotiations

Yoba = Ryukyu representative in the Loochoo negotiations

Ulysses S. Grant in China

General Grant reached Tientsin on the morning of the 12th of June at daybreak. He had not finished breakfast before he received a message that the Viceroy was on his way to meet him. The visit of the Viceroy is always a matter of ceremony. He comes with a guard and a small army of chair-bearers and attendants, and is received with cannon and music. A guard of honor was hurriedly marched up from the Ashuelot and formed under the trees in front of the Consulate, under the command of Lieutenant Belknap. General Grant, accompanied by Minister Seward and Consul Denny, was waiting on the veranda, and as the Viceroy stepped out of his chair the General advanced and welcomed him. Together they passed into an inner room and received tea ...

It was at this conversation that the Viceroy pressed upon General Grant the desire of the Chinese government that he should act as arbitrator between Japan and China on the Loochoo question.

-Around the World with General Grant by John Russell Young

Volume II, Page 415

Overture / Act I

A Trio Becomes a Quartet

The Prince saluted General Grant in Tartar fashion, looking at him for a moment with an earnest, curious gaze, like one who had formed an ideal of some kind and was anxious to see how far his ideal had been realized.

-- J.F. Packard, Grant's Tour Around the World



Music A: OVERTURE

MUSICIANS ARE PLAYING SEATED outside the closed curtains, as if they were the orchestra (they are not the orchestra, but players in the play).

SURPRISINGLY THE INSTRUCTOR CALLS OUT to one of the pupils and we realize this is not only a musical prelude to the play, but part of the play.

INSTRUCTOR

You must *flower* when you come in on that stanza, Ning Po.

NING PO

I cannot flower, Madame.

OVERTURE CONTINUES ...

INSTRUCTOR

The piece is entirely constructed around that moment.

OVERTURE CONTINUES ...

SOO CHING

I can flower.

INSTRUCTOR

I know you can, Soo Ching.

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Just try and keep the tempo, will you?
That last interval is faster than you seem to understand.

OVERTURE CONTINUES ...

PAO SHAN
We are terrible.

INSTRUCTOR
Hush Pao Shan.

SOO CHING
She's right.

PAO SHAN
Uriah S. Grant will not like our performance --

SOO CHING
Ulysses!

PAO SHAN (Cont.)
He will go back to America.

OVERTURE CONTUNUES ...

INSTRUCTOR
STOP!

THE TRIO COMES TO A RAGGED HALT.

INSTRUCTOR (cocks her ear)
Can you hear?

ALL STRAIN TO LISTEN. Through the window we hear music wafting through the window ... THE MUSIC IS A CHAUNQI, one of the five melodies of traditional Sichuan Opera. While the collective sound of many instruments is impressive, the melody is played slowly and without verve.

INSTRUCTOR
THAT is the Imperial Orchestra. They are practicing the Sichuan Opera piece they will play for the Great Warrior --

SOO CHING
Ugh! The American President will die of boredom.

INSTRUCTOR
We follow them. The audience will be happy to hear our simple folk song.
If only Soo Ching can keep the tempo ...

OVERTURE CONTINUES ...

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PAO SHAN

All the Internationals are playing.
We will win last place.

SOO CHING

The Scots will win. Everyone loves the bagpipes.

PAO SHAN

The Spanish drums are my favorite.

OVERTURE CONTINUES ...

PAO SHAN

We are Chinese! Why are we speaking English?

INSTRUCTOR

It is a global age, Pao Shan.

PAO SHAN

Da shui zhong ne long wang mian!

INSTRUCTOR

Very funny. Ning Po's parents, who are gracious enough to loan us their home for our practice sessions, have asked us to conduct them in English.

SOO CHING

English is impossible. Too many rules to remember.
Lao ji fu li, zhi zai qian li.

INSTRUCTOR

English is the language the rest of the world speaks.

OVERTURE CONTINUES ...

INSTRUCTOR

The Vizier has asked me to compose a brief refrain to celebrate the new China, a piece of music which all the legations might share. Here it is. See what you think.

SHE PLAYS A 12-BAR PASSAGE of her own composing on the flute.

INSTRUCTOR

Let's try it.

THE TRIO OF TEENS PICKS UP THEIR INSTRUMENTS and gives it a try.

INSTRUCTOR

One, two three ...

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INSTRUCTOR

Once again. One, two three ...

INSTRUCTOR

Awful! It must be the composer!
All right. You've done a good work morning's work.
God willing, we will be ready for Ulysses S. Grant.
Take a ten-minute break.

CURTAIN PULLS BACK TO REVEAL SET #1

AN INTERIOR / EXTERIOR



Stage Concept – Illustration Thomas Zentano

Set #1: A Music Room / Rock Garden

The stage is divided between a wooden-floored music room on the left and a rock garden with small flowering trees and boulders and a sandstone wall.

The back wall of the music room is dominated by a rectangular window with a spectacular view of Tientsin's main square.

THE THREE TEENS HEAD INTO THE STAGE AREA heading straight for the ROCK GARDEN.

THEY PICK UP BOWS AND ARROWS and begin shooting at the targets set up against the far wall (STAGE FAR RIGHT), happy to be free of practicing that song.

SUDDENLY WE HEAR RIFLE SHOTS.

PAO SHAN
What is THAT?

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SOO CHING

Is it the rebels?

There was an attack in Beijing ...

THEY RUSH TO WINDOW TO SEE what caused the noise.

INSTRUCTOR

The *jiangxi* are firing their rifles for General Grant.

SOO CHING

What idiots.

It is only the American advance party arriving ...

PAO SHAN

How do you know?

SOO CHING

Our father is helping plan the visit.

He has associates who are visiting soon.

He was talking about it at breakfast.

MORE RIFLE SHOOTING. NOW WE HEAR THE BOOM OF A CANNON.

MOTHER ENTERS WITH HER ATTENDANT to see what the commotion is. She is a petite woman wearing a formal gown with a high collar and wooden slippers that clatter slightly on the polished floor.

MOTHER goes to the window, shading her face with one hand. SOO CHING and NING PO look at her.

INSTRUCTOR

A hundred thousand people gathered on the banks of the Pei Ho just to get a glimpse of his boat.

They sang him songs.

All the way from Yongle to Wuking.

Can you imagine?

PAO SHAN

Where did they get all those rifles ...?

SOO CHING

I don't know what all the fuss is about anyway.

INSTRUCTOR

General Grant is a great man.

He led his people to freedom.

SUDDENLY THEY ARE INTERRUPTED BY A LOUD AND VIOLENT KNOCK ON THE DOOR. We hear a commotion among the staff.

A VOICE CALLS FOR MADAME XI PING (MOTHER). ATTENDANT RUSHES OFF STAGE (LEFT).

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We hear THE ATTENDANT answer the door.

MOTHER FOLLOWS OFFSTAGE. There is conversation. MADAME XI PING'S VOICE is so soft that everyone leans into the doorway to hear her. More conversation. Matter apparently conclude. THE FRONT DOOR SHUTS.

THE DOOR OPENS.

AN AMERICAN YOUTH ENTERS. He is dressed in a military uniform of Union blue with brass buttons, a neckerchief and white shirt.

He is carrying a case.

HE BOWS.

THE INSTRUCTOR BOWS.

HE HANDS THE INSTRUCTOR A LETTER.



Stage Concept - Sketch by Thomas Zentano

INSTRUCTOR (reading from the letter)

It says that this is American boy is a member of General Grant's entourage.

THERE IS A SLIGHT GASP at this news.

INSTRUCTOR (cont.)

Prince Li-Hung Zhang recommends that he join our group and participate in our musical tribute.

INSTRUCTOR

How fitting!

INSTRUCTOR

And what is your name, *laowai*?

AMERICAN YOUTH

Joseph. Joseph Seward.

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HE SHAKES HANDS VIGOROUSLY with the INSTRUCTOR, who tries to bow and shake hands at once.

INSTRUCTOR

Joseph Seward, you are most welcome.
Please join our group.

INSTRUCTOR

This is Pao Shan.
This is Soo Ching.
This is Ning Po.
What instrument do you play?

JOSEPH

I can play this. And this.
He removes a banjo and a harmonica from the carrying case.

INSTRUCTOR

How extraordinary! What is it?

Instead of answering, JOE PLAYS THE BANJO. The banjo explodes with sound and rhythm, which STARTLES THE GROUP, none of whom have heard such an instrument.

SOO CHING

What was THAT?

NING PO

How do you do that?

PAO SHAN

Can you teach me to do that?

Next he picks up the harmonica.

SOO CHING

What is that?

JOSEPH

A harmonica.

PAO SHAN

A what?

JOSEPH

A harmonica.

NING PO

Because it only plays harmony?

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JOSEPH

Hah!

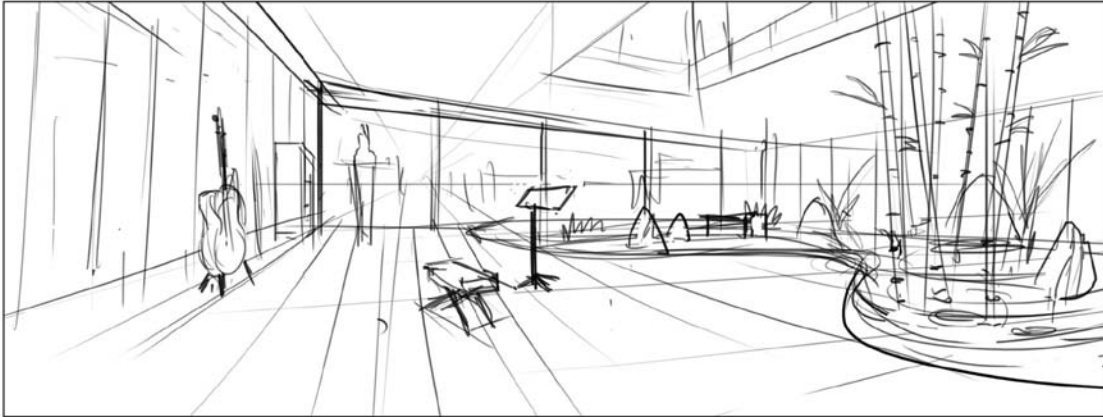
He plays a deliberately dissonant version of “Oh Susannah”

SOO CHING

How did you *do* that?

INSTRUCTOR

So now we are quartet! Excellent!



Stage Concept - Sketch by Thomas Zentano

THEY JOIN IN, playing a cacophonous Mandarin version of “Oh Susannah” with PAO SHAN trying to plunk the banjo as if it were a mandolin.

THE INSTRUCTOR, a most gifted musician, PLAYS A NEW COUNTER-MELODY

JOSEPH GRABS A CHAIR AND BEATS A RUGGED FAST RHYTHM ON IT.

SOO CHING grabs the HARMONICA and tries to isolate single notes that somehow fit the tune.

NING PO RISES FROM HER SEAT AS THEY SOMEHOW MANAGE TO PRODUCE A RAUCOUS MIX OF AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC AND CHINESE FOLK MUSIC.

THEY PLAY THEIR INSTRUMENTS AS THEY MARCH AROUND THE ROOM

THE INSTRUCTOR INTERRUPTS THE MELODY AND RETURNS TO THE PREVIOUS SONG. After a brief pause to find the right key, they now PLAY WITH ABANDON.

Joseph’s harmonica finds the chords beneath the melody. He and Ning Po trade off.

THE INSTRUCTOR is delighted. The infectious music overflows with all the feeling that was previously absent

CURTAIN CLOSES

You can purchase the rest of [Ulysses S. Grant in China on Amazon](#)
along with other Historical Fiction stories.

Author

Tom Durwood is a teacher, writer and editor with a deep background in history. As editor and publisher of a small press (Ariel Books), he has edited four series of young-adult histories with over a quarter-million copies in print. He collaborated with Henry Steele Commager on a young-adult series of biographies, *Americans* (Barrons). He edited a series of Native American biographies (Silver Burdett) with Alvin Josephy, as well as a *Great Authors* series for Creative Education which included biographies of Beatrix Potter, Jack London and J.R.R. Tolkien. His *Solutions* series (Barrons) of biographies in science for young adults won an Honorable Mention from the ALA. Tom's newspaper column "Shelter" appeared in the *North County Times* for seven years and can be viewed at www.nctimes.com (archives, keyword: "durwood").

Tom currently teaches Public Speaking and Basic Communications as guest lecturer for the Naval Special Warfare Development Group at the Dam's Neck Annex of the Naval War College. Tom also teaches English Composition and Literature at Valley Forge Military College, where he has won the Teacher of the Year Award twice.

Early readers of Tom's ebook on Teddy Roosevelt and the 25th Infantry, *Teddy's Tantrum*, have been favorable. "The debut of a promising new voice in history," writes journalist Tim Pritchard about the ebook, currently available on Amazon.com. It has also been called "a compelling human story" by John Milton Cooper, author of *The Warrior and the Priest* and *The Vanity of Power*; and "extremely promising ... a case study of investigative journalism and activist scholarship at their respective bests," by Dennis Showalter, former president of the Society for Military History.

Tom is editor of a new scholarly journal, *The Journal of Empire Studies* (www.empirestudies.org). Peter Suber, Berkman Fellow at Harvard University, an advocate of the open access movement, praises the journal as "a new opportunity for overcoming access barriers to knowledge and research." Dr. Julian Fisher of Scholarly Exchange has also applauded Tom's efforts. "Creating valuable academic content and then hiding it behind financial firewalls - the traditional scholarly publishing model - runs counter to the essence of scholarship, learning and sharing," according to Fisher. "To see a journal such as the *Journal of Empire Studies* breaking that mold is exciting."

Tom earned a Masters in English Literature in San Diego, where he also served as Executive Director of San Diego Habitat for Humanity. Tom is a member of MLA, the International Studies Association, and the Author's Guild. He presented a paper on the Brownsville Raid and Redemption on a Race and Trauma panel at the Modern Language Association convention in November, 2005. Tom earned his undergraduate degree from Harvard, where he edited an undergraduate arts journal and studied with David McClelland (*Roots of Consciousness*). He also holds an MBA from New York University.