

## Reflections from China

by Doug Bond

### PART I

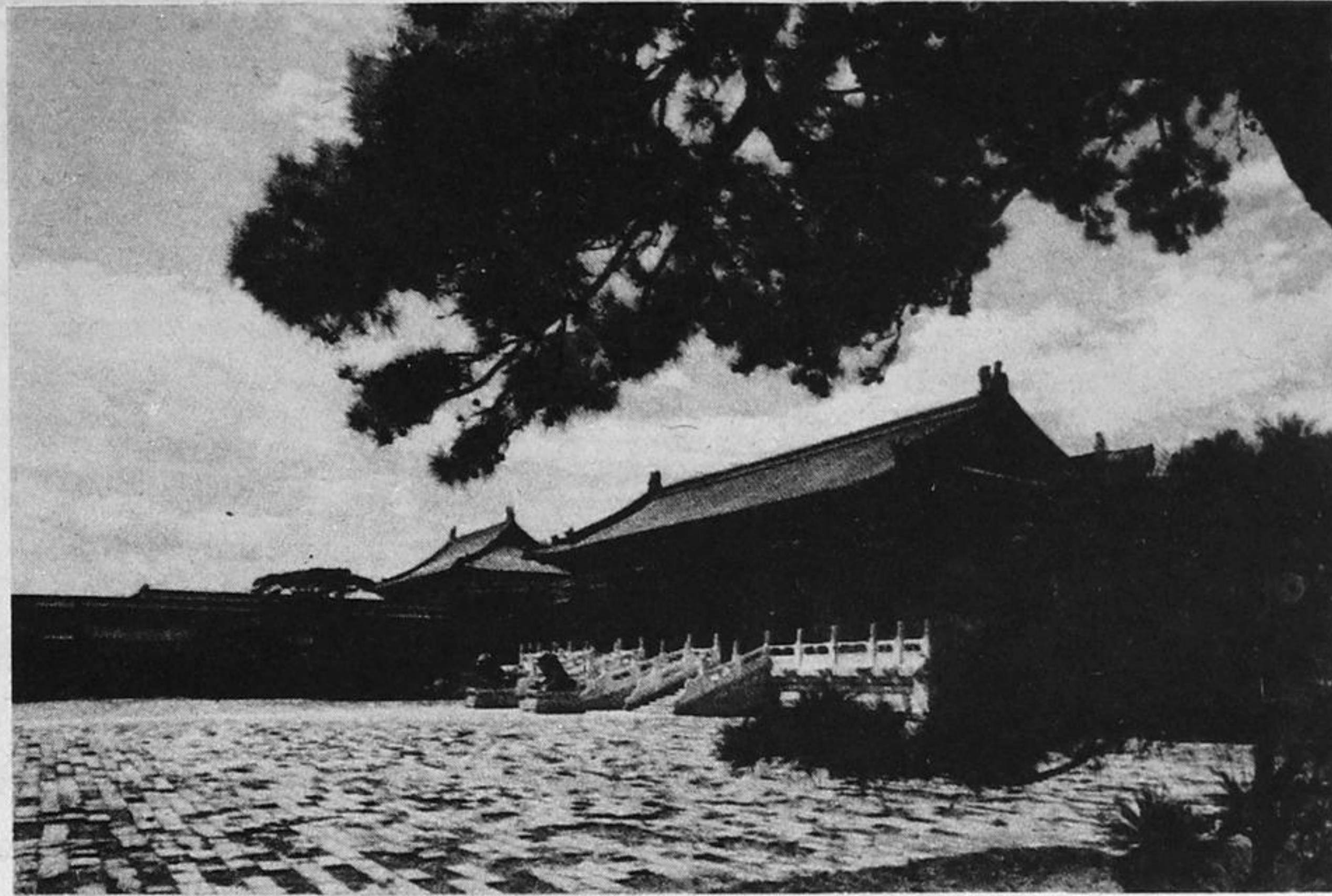
Through the drifting mist, the nearest tower of the Great Wall seemed to drift on the nearby ridge. Behind lay the fertile North China Plain with its toiling millions of people and millennia of culture. Before us rose mountain ranges en echelon, shrouded in fog and crested with 6000 kilometers of battlements. Constructed with stone, mortar, sweat and blood, this barrier was built to separate the productive and fearful farming folk of the south from the covetous and desparate nomadic horsemen of the north and west.

We were enjoying a few hours of history and tourism before our delegation of geographers and Chinese interpreters-guides were to catch the train back to Peking. So some of us accepted the challenge of the defiant tower above us. From the trainload of visitors to this ancient place, a group of soldiers dressed in the universal green and red of the Peoples' Liberation Army also accepted the summons of the parapet. They were not to be outdone by the hearty pace of these 'soft' Westerners and we had our own version of the Olympics on an ancient track that was more vertical than horizontal. The last few hundred metres to that great finish line in the sky left me struggling behind. But I am pleased to report that Canadian dignity was preserved by two pairs of Adidas and the event proved a draw. Pride was mutually maintained and Canadian and Chinese laughter punctuated with gasps for thin mountain air transcended half-a-globe of language and cultural differences.

Among the many memorable images of that day in July, the first in this facinating land, was the ride in their new and elite diesel train in an otherwise 'steam buff's paradise', the walk along the mountain road from the station to the Great Wall, the flashing eyes and waves of three girls, dressed in work clothes of the ubiquitous Chinese fashion, and riding on the back of one of the many coal trucks, and the modern parapet bristling with weapons of our time and defending this strategic pass to the north as did the 4000 years of Wall in the mist beyond.

To the occidental mind, these are some of the contrasts and seeming contradictions of a culture that reflects the incredibly old, the modern, the friendly, the forboding. And yet, in meeting with farmers and factory workers, apartment dwellers and acrobats, bureaucrats and bus drivers, it seems that people in China are 99% alike their fellow humans elsewhere. But our species seems to make great things of that 1% of differences. It is good news in the sense that it provides us with fascinating and colourful variations in culture. But the fires of misunderstanding and animosities are fuelled by our obsessions with these generalized differences. These are fires the human race can ill-afford anymore.

It is claimed that the Great Wall is the only man-made feature visible from outer space by the unaided eye. Yet from the plane flying high above the China Low-



The Imperial Palace Museum, once the home of the Emperor in Peking. It has 9000 rooms in total, encloses about 200 acres, once housed 20,000 to 30,000 servants and nobility and is surrounded by a 10 metre wall and a 50 metre moat.

lands, or from bus and train, more striking evidence of the handcraft of man are the endless lines of the modern irrigation systems. Millions of labourers constructed these linear rivers with the timeless shovels and baskets used by their Han ancestors to build the Wall. And these new lines on the Chinese landscape provide the people with a measure of defense against the timeless enemies of flood, drought and starvation rather than the ancient Mongols for which the Great Wall is testimony.

In spite of their recent obsessions with ideology, the Chinese are pragmatic people who seek efficiency in their environment. Multiple use is an object of their culture manifest in these irrigations systems. The most fundamental use of the dams, canals and reservoirs is to control the historic cycles of floods and calamity that have plagued them. But these artificial river systems also irrigate double and triple annual crops of corn and soyabean in the north and rice in the south. Barges with sail or motor ply the larger water roads and pre-cast concrete barges with pole power carry grain, bricks, and almost anything else of an almost modern technology through the local canals. Water plants grow in irrigation reservoirs to be fodder for millions of Peking, fodder for the floppy jowls of millions of pigs of Maishen or Peking black breeds. Top, middle, and bottom-dwelling species of

carp are kept in the reservoirs, are fed soyabean residue and, in turn, provide a staple Chinese food. But there are still the beds of the canals and reservoirs to be used. Enormous fresh water clams are raised and harvested on some southern communes. And even these can't loaf around eating bean residue for 2 to 3 years to reach efficient harvest size. So they are injected with natural irritants that become cultured pearls for the Hong Kong Jewelers. No such symbols of capitalist elitism and luxury must contaminate Maoist ideology. But should we recall what the Europeans did with opium and China?

There was the suggestion among our group that we could inform our Chinese hosts that earthworms could be raised in the soils under the canals and that they are rich in protein. But some of our more timid table members (a subgroup with which I must deny any association) vetoed this idea noting the arguments that we still had a couple weeks in China at that point; that the Chinese were very anxious to note and implement any technological ideas and suggestions we could give them; and that we already had some suspicions and qualms about the ingredients of some of the dishes we were sumptuously given to dine. So we left the silts of the Chinese canals only to be used occasionally by dredging and applying to the paddies as one of many fertilizers.

Part two continued next month

### Any Questions About Marketing Boards?

The Leeds Federation of Agriculture will hold its regional meeting on

October 24, 1978

at 8 p.m.

in the cafeteria of the  
Athens District High School  
in Athens

Guest speaker: James Boynton,  
Vice-chairman,  
National Farm Products Marketing Board

Open Question Period!

EVERYONE IS INVITED! BRING YOUR QUESTIONS ALONG!

Refreshments will be served.

