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# CHINA

BY WILLIAM YANG

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*Theatre program at end of playtext*

*William stands on stage before a microphone. Images are projected on two large screens behind him. To stage left is a musician who plays erhu (two-stringed Chinese violin) and pipa (Chinese lute).*

## BEIJING



The season was winter. I rode my bicycle through the streets of Beijing.



*Music: 'Thunder During Drought', erhu.*



Sometimes in China I saw things, and I had no idea what they were. What is he selling?



When I saw this red quilt amid the muted colour of the Beijing streets, it seemed to glow like a sacred object.

*Music ends.*

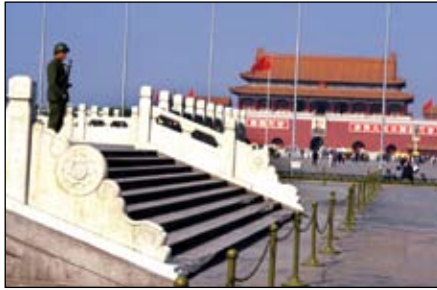
The year was 1989, a few months after the Tiananmen Square incident. There was a military presence in Beijing. All of the big international hotels were empty. Foreigners were *persona non grata* in China.



Chairman Mao still looks over Tiananmen Square. It was he who enlarged it in 1958 from 27 acres to 100 acres and it's now the biggest square in the world.

'Long live the People's Republic of China.'  
'Long Live the Great Union of the Peoples of the world.' Chairman Mao would stand on that balcony and address gatherings of over a million people.

Chairman Mao's embalmed body lies in a building adjacent to the monument. It's open to the public but it was closed this day so I didn't see it.



The aftermath of the June event, as they euphemistically call it, still hung heavily over the square. Here the steps had been damaged.

Many of the people I met in Beijing were traumatised by the event. Many wanted to leave China. The Australian Embassy was flooded with migration applications.



Next to the square is the Imperial Palace. It's one of the big tourist attractions to Beijing and it's not disappointing. I'm only going to show you this one photo, because it's in all the tourist brochures. It's easy to be seduced by the glory of China's Imperial past, but if you were an ordinary person I don't think they were very nice times in which to live. It's also known as the Forbidden City as ordinary people were forbidden to go near it.

Nor were they allowed to watch the spectacular procession of the Emperor and his entourage as they travelled south from the palace each year, through beautiful parkland till they reached the gate of the Temple of Heaven, where the Emperor had duties both civic and spiritual.



The circular structure in white marble is the Round Altar, the three tiers representing earth, man and heaven.

Everything is astrologically aligned, and based on the figure nine. Here the Emperor would perform rituals, symbolically conversing with the gods.

The main building, with its distinctive blue tiles, is the Hall for Prayer for Good Harvest. Here the Emperor would spend the night. The ceremonies would take several days.



The building is made out of timber. The Chinese name for the temple is Tian Tan, Sky Altar.

*Music: a single gong.*

## MR BAO



My main contact in China was Bao Naiyong, whom I had met in Australia. He stayed in Australia for about eighteen months and I got to know him quite well. In that time he never learned English so he understood that I couldn't speak Chinese. He was a photographer and a maverick. Once he photographed a demonstration, which all the government photographers were forbidden to touch. He got a scoop, and since this event he called himself China's First Freelance Photographer, a title that meant more in China than Australia.

We stayed in an unheated, slightly derelict apartment that didn't have a bathroom so we had to use the public toilet, which was a challenge.