

## **A Visit to the Museum in Beijing.**

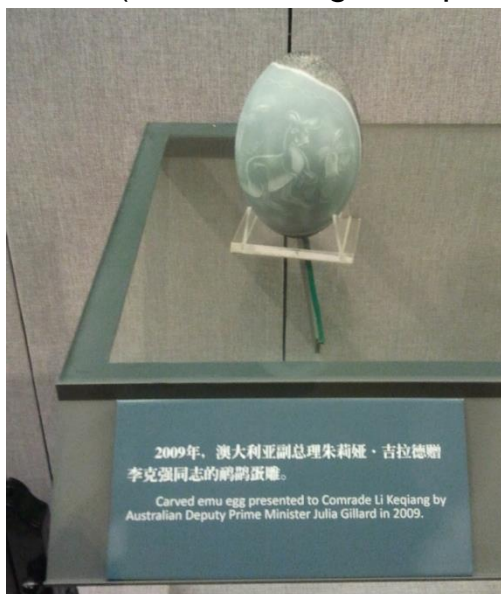
On a beautiful hot and sunny day in Beijing, a visit to the museum is something I wanted to do to continue my exploration of Beijing as I slowly grow a little more confident in understanding what is happening around me. I set off early to avoid the crowds and be at the National Museum of China before 9.00. I did not avoid the crowds either on the subway or lining up to enter the Museum. This is Beijing after all. The too the right exit from the subway and there were the crowds in Tian'anmin Square. The Museum itself overlooks the grand Tian'anmin Square which is at the heart of Beijing and the place where so many important events took place in Chinese and world history. The Square was a sea of multi-coloured umbrellas of people shading themselves to avoid the bright sun as they lined up to enter the Forbidden City and Mao's Mausoleum.

Very close to the exit of the subway were hundreds of people waiting to get into the Museum. Many of seem to have tickets. I did not have a ticket and there seemed to be no place to get one. I decided to wait and try to work out what was happening. I decided that the people who were in groups were able to go in first. Those without tickets would be able to follow. As the numbers lining up decreased, I joined the line. I got to the gate where I said in my poor Chinese that I had no ticket. The attendant then told me to go to the right and pointed me in that direction. (Thankfully I had been studying giving directions a couple of day before.) I went off and around the corner was another queue which I joined. Watching people in queues is fascinating as we stopped and started as we went through several barriers. People were selling ice creams and water. Other people joined the queue ahead of me and many others and on one said a word to them! I eventually I got my ticket at the one window that was giving them to those who like me had no Chinese identity card. Finally after passing through security I was in the Museum. Getting into it was an adventure in itself. I had taken me just over an hour.

The Museum itself is huge. At its centre is a large room celebrating the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. This room has a number of

large paintings showing the events including two showing Mao's proclamation of the Republic in the Square a short distance away.

There are many other rooms displaying the treasures of China: Jade carvings, ancient coins, bronze vessels and beautiful porcelain. One room which was quite crowded is a room displaying the gifts given to Government officials by government officials from other countries. The room is a sign of China's engagement with the rest of the world. Naturally, I looked to see if there were any things from Australia. And there were. There was a painting of Eucalyptus Trees given by Lionel Bowen when he was minister for trade and there is a carved Emu Egg given by Deputy Prime minister Julia Gillard to Comrade Li Keqiang in 2009. (Some have gone up in the world and some have fallen!)



I was also surprised to see a Tanoa given by Ratu Mara in 1990. (I can imagine some from Fiji seeing this saying, "Let's have a mix and a few bowls of Kava". And what a place Tian'anmen Square is to have it!)



One other gift that surprised me was a gift of the small republic of San Marcelino. They gave Mao a copper relief of the risen Christ with his disciples. I wonder why they decided to give that as a gift, what was Mao's reaction to it and also what the thoughts of those who decided to display it.

I had so much to ponder. And later I did so sitting in the Cafe of the Museum, sipping a cup of delicious Chinese tea and munching a ham sandwich.

Eventually, I exited from the Museum to gaze upon the great expanse of Tian'anmen Square and was tempted to actually cross the road and enter it. The sight of another queue and security check in the heat was enough to help me decide that was for another day as I engage with this amazing City and its people.