



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

**NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR**

**Speech by the President of the Republic of Slovenia  
Nataša Pirc Musar  
at the opening of the exhibition on Ferdinand Augustin Hallerstein  
on the occasion of the 320<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
the establishment of  
diplomatic relations between Slovenia and the People's Republic of China**

Ljubljana, 26 April 2023

Check against delivery.

*Dear Director of the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia,  
Honourable Ambassador of the People's Republic of China,  
ladies and gentlemen,*

*I am delighted that we are gathered here for an event that is special because of its intertwining of the present and the past, of art, human relations and science. All this is symbolised by the 320<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Ferdinand Augustin Hallerstein.*

*Ferdinand Augustin Hallerstein – Liu Songling – is, so to speak, my distant neighbour in time. Mengeš, where he was born, is less than 10 kilometres away from my hometown of Mekinje and only half an hour's walk from my current home in Radomlje.*

*His journey as a Jesuit, mathematician and astronomer, which took him through what is now Austria, Romania, Italy, Portugal and India to China, was extraordinary. Allow me to pause for just a moment in Europe in the description of his scientific journey. It*

*is worth noting that his work also resonated on our continent. He received international academic acclaim as a scientist through his correspondence with the Academy in Paris, the Royal Society of London, and the St Petersburg Academy.*

*Hallerstein's central story, however, is not about Europe, but about China. His work had a huge impact in the very place where he spent half his life, impressing the world with his innovations and scientific achievements. Who would not be proud of such a neighbour?*

*Sadly, this brilliant career then faded into obscurity and might have remained there had it not been for another journey, this time in the opposite direction. It was the journey of artist Huiqin Wang from China to Slovenia, which in the end turned out to be so much more than that. Huiqin stayed in Slovenia – it was love that kept her here. For three decades now, there has been a spiritual connection between her and Hallerstein, and I believe that her husband Mitja is not jealous of that connection.*

*During this time, her brushstrokes created Hallerstein's image based on written descriptions, an image which also found its place on Slovenian postage stamps. Her persistent study has restored Hallerstein to his rightful place. That of an important scientist who connected European and Chinese knowledge. Huiqin also brought him closer to children with her picture book, "Hallerstein – A Slovenian in the Forbidden City". Slovenian astronomers have named an asteroid after him, and this exhibition, with its numerous documents, will further strengthen our knowledge of him, not only in professional circles, but in society in general.*

*An important message of this exhibition lies in the cooperation between the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia and the State Archives Administration of China. It is only thanks to the good relations between the two archives that we have the opportunity to witness such an important event today. The cooperation between the two archives, and in general between Slovenian scientists and their Chinese counterparts, is a bridge-builder between the two countries. I would like to see these bridges grow even stronger and for mutual cooperation to extend across as many fields of science as possible, both in the humanities and in the social and natural sciences.*

*Science does not divide people, it enriches them. And it was the universal language of science that enabled Hallerstein to be accepted and appreciated in an environment that was alien to him and to Europeans at the time. The language of his science and that of Chinese science will be brought even closer to us by the copy of his astronomical instrument from the Beijing Ancient Observatory, which is expected shortly and which will be put on display nearby. Today, we can get to know documents from both countries, which will bring us closer to Hallerstein the scientist and the man.*

*Please allow me to remind you of another famous figure, Alma Karlin, the world traveller and writer, who set off more than a hundred years ago on a round-the-world journey at a time when women did not often travel alone, without a plan and without the financial means to do so. Her stay in China was an extremely important chapter in this journey. Alma symbolises a future that we are somehow forgetting: in order to understand each other, we need to visit each other and be curious. We must not isolate ourselves within our own borders. I would like to thank Huiqin also in this sense, but also all the other researchers in Slovenia who are helping us get closer to and understand China. I would of course also like for China to understand Slovenia. I therefore hope to see as many new Almas as possible, who will be ambassadors of Slovenia and Slovenian culture, not only in China, but in East Asia in general.*

*So, once again – a sincere thank you to all for all your efforts.*