



Speech
by the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at a gala dinner in honour of
the President of the People's Republic of China
Jiang Zemin and
Madame Wang Yeping
14 June 2002

Your Excellency the President of China Jiang Zemin
and Madame Wang Yeping

At the dawn of the new century your visit to Iceland bears witness to focuses in the cohabitation of nations, to the way that large and small nations, despite the distances that separate them and the different conditions they live under, share a purpose in their efforts to ensure peace and security, prosperity and welfare for everyone on Earth.

We Icelanders deeply appreciate the respect and friendship that you have shown our nation, and hope that this visit will give you some insights into the way that this small nation of farmers and fishermen, who for centuries were subject to foreign domination, managed to achieve freedom and independence, and in terms of material well-being, education, healthcare and level of technology has come to rank among the leading nations in the world.

Relations between Iceland and China have been steadily growing in recent decades and your visit now, the first state visit to Iceland by a President of China, is an impressive confirmation of the desire to consolidate and strengthen them in the future. Fascinating challenges await us in numerous fields.

Fisheries cooperation, processing and trading in seafood products, shipbuilding and production of technological equipment and software; geothermal research and harnessing of energy for space heating; soil reclamation and environmental conservation; progress in healthcare and

the medical sciences; and increased tourism are only a few examples of promising fields of cooperation.

Visits by artists, concerts, films, exhibitions by painters, performances by dancers and actors, and publication of poems and other literature, ancient and modern, also need to be strong features of our cooperation in the years to come, so that our nations can acquaint themselves better with each other's culture and creative powers, perceive the beauty that art brings us. This sense that we share was clearly shown in a recent translation by one of our foremost poets, Matthías Jóhannessen, of a poem which you, Your Excellency the President, composed just over a year ago after walking in the Huangshan mountains.

*Leaning towards the rejoicing pine
I watched the distant peak of the City of Heaven,
looked too at the lotus flower and the peaks of Rising Trust
which seems to have flown here from the stars.
Let me take up my dreamy pen,
so that I can sketch the majestic expanses
while the sun breaks through waves of cloud
and paints ten thousand miles of sky red.*

I hope that Icelandic nature, the plains of Thingvellir, the Gullfoss waterfall and Geysir geothermal fields, which you will visit tomorrow, will similarly impress you. Icelandic poets have praised these places in verses which are very dear to our hearts – and perhaps the Muse will also visit you at these magical Icelandic sites.

Thingvellir is the cradle of democracy in our country, the home of an assembly that met more than a thousand years ago, the heart of our political structure which gave pride of place to the rule of law.

There is an impressive symbolism in that the continents of America and Eurasia should meet at such a place and make Iceland into a bridge, both geographically and ideologically, preserving in its history the human values and democratic spirit which hopefully will serve as a guide for all nations.

We thank you, your Excellency the President, for the friendship and warmth that you have shown to the Icelandic people, both with your visit now and in so much that you have said and done in recent years. We shall not forget how you personally helped an Icelandic girl with a severe disability to benefit from the skills of a Chinese doctor, for such assistance often conveys a more powerful message than lofty speeches.

I hope that your visit will prove both pleasant and informative and lay the foundation for even closer cooperation between our nations in the new century. The Chinese people and the Icelanders, the most populous nation in the world and one of the smallest, can thereby demonstrate in practice how all the citizens of the world share a purpose, how mankind's successful future depends on all nations respecting each other. The results we achieve can serve as an encouragement to others and an indication of how to create a better world for all.

I ask the guests to rise and raise their glasses in honour of the President of the People's Republic of China, Jiang Zemin, and Madame Wang Yeping, and the friendship between Iceland and China.