



**Speech**  
**by**  
**the President of Iceland**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**at the Chinese-Icelandic Business Conference**  
**Beijing**  
**18 May 2005**

Distinguished business leaders  
Chinese officials  
Ladies and gentlemen

Cooperation between China and Iceland has in recent years become broader, deeper and more extensive than ever before, and my State Visit is an indication of our firm intention to journey together in the decades to come.

I was profoundly impressed by the good-will towards Iceland which President Hu Jintao demonstrated in our discussions yesterday. He clearly indicated the desire of the Chinese leadership to give priority to increasing ties with Iceland, not only in the fields of business and commerce but also in technology, science and culture.

In 2002 I welcomed President Jiang Zemin to Iceland on the first State Visit by a President of China to my country. President Hu Jintao's invitation to me now demonstrates the strength of our growing friendship and indicates clearly the positive spirit which will guide our cooperation in future.

I am sure that all of you who are assembled here today will contribute to the fulfilment of the hopes that have been raised by the dialogue between the leaders of China and Iceland.

We in Iceland have in recent years been privileged to receive many distinguished representatives of the Chinese people: members of the Chinese government, ministers in different fields, regional leaders, business executives and others. I hope that our Chinese friends who are here today will follow in their footsteps and become frequent visitors to our country.

As President Jiang Zemin said three years ago and President Hu Jintao confirmed in our discussion yesterday, Iceland has much to offer. Our experience can be of benefit to the Chinese people in many ways.

For centuries we were the poorest country in Europe, a society of farmers and fishermen, but we have now become a highly modern and diversified society, enjoying one of the highest living standards in the world, with a per capita income of \$30,000. We have free education and a national health service open to all on an equal basis. The level of information technology in our country is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that Iceland is among the world's leading nations in the use of mobile phones, personal computers and internet access.

How we made this transformation is a remarkable success story that we are now determined to share with the world. This is indicated clearly by the business delegation which has accompanied me to China. It is the largest Icelandic business delegation that an Icelandic president has ever taken on a State Visit.

Icelandic entrepreneurs, our business class, have made a fundamental contribution to our economic success and the well-being of our people, both in recent years and throughout previous times.

For much of the twentieth century, our development was based mainly on the performance of our fishing and fish-processing industries, which made Iceland a leading player in the global marketing of seafood. We now bring this experience to China, hoping to extend further in coming years Chinese-Icelandic cooperation in the world market for seafood products.

Harnessing and utilization of our extensive energy resources, both hydro and geothermal, has also been an important basis of Iceland's economic advance, producing electricity for industrial and domestic use and hot water to warm houses and buildings. We have already made our experience in this field available to China, and I hope that in the near future we will see joint Chinese-Icelandic energy projects, especially in the utilization of geothermal power.

Shortly after the Second World War, Iceland started to make advances in the airline business and now we can count a number of internationally successful airlines among our most promising companies. Already the Icelandic Avion Group has important partners in China, and Icelandair is working towards building up promising tourist traffic between China and Europe and between China and the United States.

In recent years Icelandic companies in many different fields have developed a global reach and become important players in both Nordic and European markets, in Russia and the United States and different parts of Asia.

They have utilized the experience they have gained in Iceland to become significant global players.

These companies are active in areas as diverse as prosthetics and pharmaceuticals, banking and finance, telecommunications and software, retail and fashion, food processing and food marketing, transport and shipping, trading in building materials and many other fields.

Together they form a formidable business force. Companies in these fields are represented here today. Their presence is a firm indication of their desire to develop and strengthen the cooperation with Chinese partners.

It is important to understand that these Icelandic companies can become important vehicles for Chinese commercial and business advance in the global market, and not just in Chinese-Icelandic trade.

In fact, I believe that the key potential of our cooperation lies in such globally relevant strategic Chinese-Icelandic partnerships, partnerships in which Icelandic companies, through their established positions in the European and American markets, could provide China with the benefit of growing trade with different parts of the world: with Britain and other countries in Europe, with the United States and Russia, and even with India and other countries in Asia.

The business conference which we are opening here today therefore contains promise in more areas than simply Icelandic-Chinese cooperation and trade. It can also strengthen our partnership in the global market and so contribute towards China's advancement world-wide.

Iceland is indeed a small country, but we have no enemies and many friends; we pose no threat to others and do not carry any baggage of military motives. We have discovered that these characteristics make others open all doors to us when we arrive. They know that we come with good intentions only – consequently, many nations have welcomed Iceland as a partner.

It is in this spirit that we arrive here in China on a visit which is of historic importance in the relations between our countries.

I encourage you all to make the most of this opportunity and I thank our Chinese friends for their interest and their good-will towards Iceland. It is indeed an honour to have you in our family.

I can also assure you that this visit and our discussions today are the important beginning of a new era in our cooperation. Both I and the President of China, Hu Jintao, and members of our governments, will keenly follow with great interest the success of your joint efforts and the progress of an ever-growing Chinese-Icelandic cooperation, in trade between our countries and especially in the wider global market.

I promise you that in the months and years to come I will regularly inquire about the success of the joint Chinese-Icelandic efforts and I hope you will all contribute towards the positive nature of those reports.

In such a way we will all be able to celebrate the profound contribution of this visit towards the future prosperity of the Chinese and the Icelandic people.