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To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to report that “Ibsen and Power: the XIVth International Ibsen Conference” (September 5-8-2018, Skien, Norway) was a huge success thanks to the talented leadership of the faculty and the tireless effort of the graduate students and staff from the Centre for Ibsen Studies at the University of Oslo. During the conference, hundreds of scholars travelled from all over the world to discuss the past, present and future of Ibsen Studies and its impact on the local, regional and the world cultures. From a century-long reception of Ibsen in China, to former socialist bloc countries’ appropriations of Ibsen from their imperial past to socialist and post-socialist productions, to African performances of Ibsen’s plays in high school drama camps, to multi-ethnic/lingual Indian productions of Ibsen’s plays in folkloric traditions and to Ibsen’s “role” in mediating the political and religious conflicts between the Iraqi and Kurdish groups, we have witnessed not only the power of Ibsen and the Norwegian cultural heritage, but also the achievements of the Centre for Ibsen Studies in the past decades.

Coming from the University of California at Davis, I have been to many national and international conferences on a variety of topics in the fields of Chinese literature, Comparative Literature, Cross-cultural Studies, Theater and Performance Studies, History, Political Science and Anthropology; I never experienced the same level of energy, depth, and wide range of research topics on a single author as I have here at this conference. As one of the keynote speakers, I have received many constructive responses to my talk that would enhance my research, not just on Ibsen and his complex influence in remaking China, past and present, but also on several other related research projects in global cultural performance. I am positive that I am not alone in feeling the benefits of attending a conference of this caliber.

During the conference, I incidentally heard about the disappointing news that there is a debate at your esteemed university on whether or not to remove the Centre’s discretionary budget. I am concerned that if this decision materializes, it will undermine the university’s mandate for the Centre and its worldly renowned reputation as the leader of Ibsen Studies, its tremendous national and international activities in promoting the studies of Ibsen, its development of the global networks of institutions, scholars, and artists, and the digital resources that had created a

virtual Ibsen Centre which has been acknowledged internationally as a significant Norwegian cultural presence.

As a side note of personal experience: during the cold-war era in the 1950s to 1960s when communist China was isolated from the rest of the Western world, it was the Norwegian Embassy in its early form which was virtually the only presence of the so-called “West;” a group of dedicated “cultural diplomats” helped launch a historic Chinese production of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* in 1956, which has been considered the model for subsequent Ibsen productions in socialist and post socialist China. I have learned during this conference that the same kind of cultural diplomacy has also happened in Romania and other former Soviet “satellite” countries and has continued in the post-socialist period. The Centre for Ibsen Studies has carried out this unique Norwegian tradition of “soft power” and it would be of vital importance that this tradition be further developed for world peace and cultural exchanges in this challenging twentieth-first century.

Please allow me to share another personal perspective: having served as the chair in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and on the university personnel committee at UC Davis, I have a first-hand knowledge and appreciation of the selfless and dedicated work the faculty undertake to lead an international center beyond their normal duties of research, teaching and service. Professor Frode Helland, Director for the Centre for Ibsen Studies, for example, has demonstrated to all of us how much more a faculty service of this scope will benefit the international communities of scholars.

Thank you so much for reading my letter and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions (xmchen@ucdavis.edu).

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'X Chen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Xiaomei Chen

Professor, Chinese and Comparative Literature
University of California at Davis