Ibsen’s Reappearance in China

Chinese and Norwegian interests in the fist
Chinese Peer Gynt in the 1980s

Dongling Jiang

Master’s Thesis in Ibsen Studies
60 credits

Centre for Ibsen Studies, Faculty of Humanities

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

December 2019
Ibsen’s Reappearance in China

*Chinese and Norwegian interests in the first Chinese Peer Gynt in the 1980s*

Dongling Jiang
© Dongling Jiang

2019

Ibsen’s Reappearance in China: Chinese and Norwegian interests in the first Chinese Peer Gynt in the 1980s

http://www.duo.uio.no/

Trykk: Reprocentralen, Universitetet i Oslo
Abstract

Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* was firstly translated and staged in China in the early 1980s, when China had just ended decades of political turbulence and started to reform itself and open up. The Chinese creation and reception as well as the Norwegian reception of this *Peer Gynt* production, in light of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory that the inexhaustible work of art “is made by all those who find a material in decoding it and commenting on it”, reveal that different interests were invested from many different parties. Situated in a transitional period in modern Chinese history marked by political uncertainty, how was the first Chinese performance of *Peer Gynt* created and received in China? In Norway, the Chinese translation and production of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* was positively received by the Norwegian authority and got reported by influential Norwegian media. But how did the Norwegian authority positively respond to this Ibsen event in China? How did the Norwegian news outlets report the first Chinese *Peer Gynt*? In order to address all these questions, I will separate my analysis into two parts, the Chinese interests and the Norwegian interests originated from this production. By focusing on this particular production and placing my analysis against the historical background of the relationship between Ibsen and the Cultural Revolution, and between Ibsen and the Sino-Norwegian interchange, I hope to shed light upon how Ibsen was used with different interests that originated from the creation and reception of the 1983 *Peer Gynt* production in China. As such, this thesis claims that the production, closely connected with the Chinese historical contexts, was used in the early 1980s to initiate the renovation of the Chinese theatre stage, while at the same time was used to improve the Sino-Norwegian relationship.
Acknowledgement

It has been a long journey, but an incredible one at the same time. Looking back to my study in the Centre for Ibsen Studies, I feel so lucky that I had the chance to freely explore in the theatre world, departing from Ibsen’s works with help from the teachers and administrative staff in the centre.

Here I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people that have helped me to make this thesis possible. I want to thank my supervisors, Xia Liyang and Ellen Rees. Thank you so much for all your quick replies to my emails, rich comments, precious suggestions and inspiring discussions for my thesis. Special thanks to Liyang, your help from beginning till the end is highly appreciated. My thesis would not be as good without your guidance! Also, I want to share my gratitude with my family and friends who make the process easier for me.

To my sister, thank you for helping me downloading several articles that I need for my thesis from zhiwang. And always being there whenever I feel stressed with the writing process. Thank you so much!

To Knut, thank you for always encouraging me along the journey and give me a lot of strength. I cannot imagine that I could finish this without your accompany. Takk for alt!

To my grandparents and parents, thank you for your unconditional love and support as always. You give me so much strength and motivation to embrace new challenges in my life and support my idea to leave home so far away to pursue my master’s degree. I would not be able to finish this study journey without you. Xiexie.
Contents

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 1
  1.1 Topic, research questions and claims 1
  1.2 Literature Review 3
  1.3 Methodology and main sources 8
  1.4 Design of the thesis 12

CHAPTER 2 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF CREATION AND RECEPTION OF THE FIRST CHINESE PEER GYNT 15
  2.1 Reappearance of Ibsen’s plays in China 17
  2.2 Xiao Qian’s ups and downs and the first Chinese translation of Peer Gynt 22
  2.3 Peer Gynt and the “lost generation” 28
  2.4 The historical context of the Norwegian reception 30

CHAPTER 3 HOW DOES THE FIRST CHINESE PEER GYNT INFLUENCE THE IBSEN TRADITION IN CHINA? 33
  3.1 Rediscovering the artistic values in Ibsen’s works 35
  3.2 Foreign play with its Chinese style 39
  3.3 Social educating purpose with Ibsen productions 45
  3.4 Student performance - a starting point of Ibsen on the Chinese stage 50

CHAPTER 4 NORWEGIAN RECEPTION OF THE FIRST PEER GYNT IN CHINA 53
  4.1 Reactions from Norwegian authority 55
  4.2 Norwegian news outlets about the first Chinese Peer Gynt 58
    4.2.1 “Ibsen’s thoughts shall encourage the Chinese” 59
    4.2.2 “In traditional production: Peer Gynt premiere in Beijing on 20th May” 60
    4.2.3 “Peer Gynt is winning a victory in China” 62
    4.2.4 “Peer Gynt is universal” 63
    4.2.5 “Chinese Ibsen expert in Norway: Peer Gynt – the right words at the right time” 65
    4.2.6 The two articles from Klassenkampen 66
    4.2.7 “Peer Gynt in Beijing” 68
  4.3 The Norwegian reception in conclusion 72

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION 74

REFERENCES 78
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Theoretical framework for the thesis. 9
Figure 3.1 Peer and the women in green are riding the “horse”. 41
Figure 4.1 Xiao Qian (to the right) and his wife (in the middle) visited Ibsen’s old apartment in Skien on September 5, 1984. 56
Figure 4.2 “Ibsen’s thinkings shall encourage the Chinese” in Aftenposten. 59
Figure 4.3 “Chinese Ibsen expert in Norway: Peer Gynt - the right words at the right time” in Aftenposten. 65
Figure 4.4 Peer and Åse in front of a Norwegian-style wooden house. 69
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Topic, research questions, and claims

In 1983, Peer Gynt was performed in China\(^1\) for the first time by a group of graduate students from The Directing Department in the Central Academy of Drama. This production of Peer Gynt is not only for the premiere of this play in China but also the first Ibsen play to be staged after the Cultural Revolution, a social and political turmoil between 1966 and 1976 in China which is often referred to as the “ten-year catastrophe” (shiniàn hàojié). As this Peer Gynt production achieved a big success\(^2\) in China, it also received much attention from the Norwegian authority and the news media. Invested in this production were, in light of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory that the inexhaustible work of art “is made by all those who find a material in decoding it and commenting on it” (1996, 171), interests from many different parties. It is these interests that I seek to analyze in this thesis.

Ibsen has been introduced into China since the beginning of the twentieth century. His works have been constantly presented by the Chinese dramatists to keep their relevance and actuality within Chinese society. Characterized by the post-revolutionary social-political context, does the Peer Gynt production maintain its consistency with the existing Ibsen tradition in China? Meanwhile, the production is claimed to “point to new directions within the Ibsen traditions in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) “with its “romantic and symbolic elements intact” (Helland 2015, 141). Situated in a transitional period in modern Chinese history marked by political uncertainty, how was the first Chinese performance of Peer Gynt created and received in China? The analysis of these questions demonstrates that the production, on the one hand, is used with a didactic purpose, which inherits the existing Chinese

\(^1\) The analysis in this thesis is limited to the situation in Mainland China.

\(^2\) As Larsen (1985) noted in Aftenposten, “Gong Xiaodong, the actor who played the young Peer in the production, recalled that ‘I have played Peer twenty-five times for full houses in Beijing. The first performance was in 1983. In 1984, the play was set up again’”. 
Ibsen tradition; on the other hand is used to explore the artistic values of Ibsen’s works, which generates new diversity of staging Ibsen in China.

In the early 1980s, China started to open up and reform itself after the Cultural Revolution and received the official visit from Odvar Nordli, the Norwegian prime minister, for the first time in 1980. Against this historical background, the Chinese translation and production of Ibsen’s Peer Gynt was positively received by the Norwegian authority and got reported by the influential Norwegian newspapers and Norwegian National Television (NRK). But how did the Norwegian authority positively respond to this Ibsen event in China? Meanwhile, how did the Norwegian news outlets report the first Chinese Peer Gynt?

For Norway, they shared an interest in this Chinese production of Peer Gynt. Ibsen’s works staged internationally has been a good chance for Norway to build up its soft power. The first Chinese Peer Gynt was debuted when it was high time Norway tried to build a better relationship with China. Through the analysis, it can be seen the authority used the Peer Gynt event as an opportunity to improve its relationship with China. Meanwhile, the Norwegian news media used the Chinese Peer Gynt to introduce Chinese history to the mass population in Norway. As such, the Norwegian reception of the Chinese Peer Gynt event will be analyzed to see how it factors into the Sino-Norwegian interchange in the early 1980s.

By focusing on this particular production and placing my analysis against the historical background of the relationship between Ibsen and the Cultural Revolution, and between Ibsen and the Sino-Norwegian interchange, I hope to shed light upon how Ibsen was used with different interests that originated from the creation and reception of the 1983 Peer Gynt production in China. As such, this thesis claims that the production, closely connected with the Chinese historical contexts, was used in the early 1980s to initiate the renovation of the Chinese theatre stage, while at the same

---

3 I will elaborate more on this concept in the section 1.3.
time was used to improve the Sino-Norwegian relationship.

1.2 Literature Review

Looking back to the early stage of Chinese Ibsen reception, Ibsen was introduced into China at the beginning of the twentieth century by Chinese intellectuals to “spread new ideas” (He 2004). In 1918, Hu Shi, one of the leading members of New Culture Movement, which sought to reform the old society with the new ideas, published an article “Ibsenism” (yibushengzhuyi) in the New Youth journal (xin qinnian), one of the most left-wing influential periodicals during the movement. In the article, Ibsen’s plays were referred to constantly by Hu to criticize the old social norms (Hu 1918). Lu Xun, another influential Chinese intellectual at that time, referred to Ibsen and his works quite a few times in his works and speeches to discuss the social problems. So, in the early Chinese reception of Ibsen, Ibsen’s works were mostly used by the Chinese intellectuals, represented by Hu and Lu, for iconoclasm purposes.

And it should be noted that the introduction of Ibsen and his works to China in the early twentieth century was purely out of Chinese initiative and did not attract much attention from Norway, which was to change with the development of Ibsen reception in China. In other words, not much Sino-Norwegian interchange happened on the official level in the beginning when Ibsen started to become renowned in China.

After several decades, the Chinese intellectuals no longer limited Ibsen within social criticism in China, even though the new reception of Ibsen was still closely influenced by the social context. The Chinese production of A Doll’s House in 1956, the first Ibsen production in PRC, saw cooperation between Norwegian and Chinese theatre workers as Frode Helland (2015, 132) noted that “In spite of the multi-layered and conflicting forms of misunderstanding at play here, the cultural exchange and cooperation was experienced as highly successful and rewarding by all the involved parties.”
In *Ibsen in Practice: Relational Readings of Performance, Cultural Encounters and Power*, Helland analyzed three productions of *A Doll's House* in China since 1949 and elaborated on how Ibsen’s works play its role in the Sino-Norwegian relationship throughout the development of PRC. He noted that the research of the Chinese Ibsen reception before PRC had been well completed whereas it has not been as well analyzed after PRC was established as before (Helland 2015, 120), so he chose to look into the three productions of Chinese *A Doll's House* respectively in 1956, 1998 and 2010, which he argued “represent different phases in the modern history of Chinese theatre, especially showing the shifts in its relationship with Western drama” (121).

Most studies on Ibsen in China have focused on *A Doll’s House* since this play is the most performed and most renowned among all of Ibsen’s works in China. Meanwhile, the *Peer Gynt* production in 1983 stands out for its transitional role in the Chinese Ibsen tradition from *A Doll’s House* as well as the other two Ibsen’s plays (*Ghosts* and *Enemy of the People*) that were staged for many times in the twentieth century. Staged in post-revolutionary China, how did the production of *Peer Gynt* influence the Chinese Ibsen tradition? Even though the first Chinese *Peer Gynt* is extensively claimed to play a transitional role in the Chinese Ibsen reception, the analysis of the Chinese creation and reception of *Peer Gynt* in 1983 and its influence in the later Ibsen productions is insufficient yet necessary for us to understand how the play influences the Ibsen tradition in China.

In “Peer Gynt in China, 1983 and an emerging new interpretation of Ibsen” (*Peer Gynt i Kina, 1983 og en gryende nyfortolkning av Ibsen*), Elisabeth Eide (1986b, 226) claims that *Peer Gynt* helped broaden the horizon of Chinese people regarding Ibsen’s conventional image in China, which was in most cases related to the reforms of social problems. It is not disputed that Ibsen’s works were at the beginning introduced to China for social criticism by the intellectuals and his conventional reception was mostly related to the social problems in China. Eide’s claim is consistent with Xu
Xiaozhong’s reflections after he directed the Peer Gynt production. Before Peer Gynt was translated and performed in China, Xu, the director of the 1983 Peer Gynt production, was only familiar with Ibsen’s social problem plays and he stressed: “how could we conceive the writing style of a writer in a certain period as his only creating style and criticize it dogmatically?” (Xu 1983, 49) after directing Peer Gynt. Moreover, Helland (2015, 141) noted that “the choice of ‘Peer Gynt’, and the staging of it with romantic and symbolic elements intact, point to new directions within the Ibsen tradition in the PRC”.

On the surface, Peer Gynt gave the Chinese theatre workers and the audience a new image of Ibsen; but the Chinese creation and reception of the new image were to a great extent still centered on the didactic purpose against the Chinese social context, which inherited the existing Ibsen tradition in China. As the translator addressed, Peer Gynt has a very healthy influence on the Chinese young generation that became confused about how to live their life after the Cultural Revolution (Xiao 1984). And the director meant that Peer’s disastrous life reminded the young generation that we should live our life with morality, principles, and responsibilities, otherwise everything whatsoever would be in vain (Xu 1983). After all, the 1983 production of Peer Gynt was not purely out of artistic creation; much of the creation and reception were still greatly influenced by the Chinese revolutionary social-political context.

Regarding the breakthrough of this Ibsen production through combining the style of the traditional Chinese drama, Tam Kwok-Kan (2012, 270) claimed that “Xu Xiaozhong’s Peer Gynt was the first Chinese attempt in localizing and sinicizing Ibsen by giving it a flavor of Chineseness. It was also the first attempt in presenting it in the style of traditional Chinese drama”. Tam’s claim is not accurate and contradicted by his own words two decades earlier. He noted in his doctoral dissertation Ibsen in China: Reception and Influence that “almost all of the Ibsen performances in the early phase of his reception (in China) were in one way or another domesticized” (Tam 1984, 164). In the same chapter, Tam introduced the
1939 adaptation of *A Doll’s House* which was contextualized to the Sino-Japanese war, for example the original tarantella was adapted to the dance with a sword while taking out an army uniform, “suggesting her desire to join the army in national defense” (179). In this case, Ibsen was sinicized with a flavor of Chineseness long before *Peer Gynt* was performed.

Considering the inclusion of the Chinese traditional drama in the Ibsen productions before the 1983 *Peer Gynt* was seldom mentioned in the Chinese Ibsen researches, it is hard to ascertain if the production is the first time that theatre workers tried to present Ibsen’s works with the style of the traditional Chinese drama. However, it can be said that *Peer Gynt* production is a starting point of integrating the Chinese operas into Ibsen’s plays since PRC was established in 1949.

Regarding how the following *Peer Gynt* productions have been influenced by the 1983 production, not much research has been done. Tam’s “Chinese-ness in Recreating Ibsen: Peer Gynt in China and Its adaptations” is the most prominent scholarly analysis on this topic so far, in which it is argued that “because of the success of Xu Xiaozhong’s experiment, several other later attempts since the 2000s have adopted a similar policy of incorporating elements of Peking opera and the story of the Monkey King in representing a sinicized *Peer Gynt*” (Tam 2012, 270). Tam’s interpretation of the Peer Gynt character in the 1983 production as Monkey King is a bit far-reaching since Peer is depicted as a negative figure most of the time in *Peer Gynt*, while Monkey King has repented at the beginning of the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West* (*xiyouji*). As Peer is looking for his self throughout the play, Monkey King finds his role of life from early on and keeps to his role in the whole novel. As such, it needs more research on how the 1983 production has influenced the following *Peer Gynt* productions.

In order to better know how the 1983 production played its transitional role in the

---

4 Monkey King is the “main disciple of Tripitaka (Xuanzang) who escorts him in his pilgrimage to India in Tang Dynasty (A. D. 618–907) of ancient China” (Xu 2012, 269) in *Journey to the West*. 
development of Ibsen reception in China, I would like to shed light on the Chinese creation and reception of the first Peer Gynt production. By comparing it with the earlier and later creation and reception of Ibsen in China, with the focus on the traditional didactic role Ibsen had and the artistic creation of Ibsen that was traditionally overlooked, the transitional role of the Peer Gynt production would be more clearly addressed.

As some scholars have researched the Chinese reception of Ibsen's Peer Gynt, the research on the Norwegian reception is whereas never done before. Thus my research into the Norwegian reception of the 1983 Peer Gynt production is original. That Peer Gynt got translated and performed in China attracted much attention from Norway. The interest shown by the Norwegian side in the Chinese Peer Gynt includes both from the authority and from the public communications. In the early 1980s, the Sino-Norwegian interchange was increasing with some high-profile mutual official visits, including Odvar Nordli’s visit to China in 1980 and Zhao Ziyang’s visit to Norway in 1984. In the meantime, the Peer Gynt production was well received by the Norwegian authority. It would be interesting to see how the Norwegian authority receives this cross-culture event because the official attitude towards the event has a direct connection with the Sino-Norwegian relationship.

Moreover, for the mass population in Norway, how would they receive the Chinese Peer Gynt? The news outlets played an important role in spreading information in public communication, especially in the 1980s, when the Internet was not popular yet, and people still depended much on the news agencies for getting news from all over the world. So the Norwegian news media had much influence on how Norwegian people viewed China and the Chinese Peer Gynt. In order to see how Ibsen factored into the Sino-Norwegian interchange in the post-revolutionary era, it is necessary to look into the Norwegian reception of the Peer Gynt production.
1.3 Methodology and main sources

I will, therefore, study not only the Chinese creation and reception of the play but also the Norwegian reception of the first Peer Gynt production in China. Such analysis will not be limited to the performance itself, but include the creators’ producing process and the reception resulting from the performance. But as we take theatre production as the recreation of the play, what is the value and meaning of the reception process when the creation and reception are juxtaposed? As Pierre Bourdieu (1996, 170) pointed out in The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field, the meaning and value of the art production constitute of “ensemble of institutions for recording, conserving and analyzing works…everything combines to favour the establishment of an unprecedented relationship between the interpreters and the work of art” besides the artistic production itself. For the art production in the theatre, the plays are interpreted first by the theatre workers when presented in a three-dimensioned performance and then further received by the audience e.t.c. The process of the creation and reception of the play constitutes an inseparable part of the value of the artistic production, behind which are different interests.

Bourdieu (1996, 171) further claimed that “the ideology of the inexhaustible work of art, or of ‘reading’ as re-creation, masks ... the fact that the work is in fact made not twice, but hundreds of times, thousands of times, by all those who have an interest in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, decoding it, commenting on it, reproducing it”. The inexhaustible work of art in my analysis is the Ibsen’s Peer Gynt. The Chinese creators and audience, together with the Norwegian authority and the news media, had an interest in decoding the production with artistic, social, political and cultural considerations. My analysis of the first Chinese production of Peer Gynt thus reaches out to the different interests that originated from the creation and reception of the play. As such, Bourdieu’s theory is overarching in the analysis of the whole thesis, as shown in the theoretical framework in Figure 1.1.
For the Chinese creators, it was a challenge to make the Norwegian elements in the play easy to understand and at the same time relatable for the audience. How can they reproduce Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* in the Chinese culture? Will the production homogenize the two different cultures or erase their differences? Erika Fischer-Lichte’s theory of the state of “being in-between” in performance meant that cultural diversity can be preserved in the cross-cultural theatre productions. By navigating through the cross-culture theatre performances in different parts of the world since the beginning of the twentieth century, Fischer-Lichte (2009, 400) argues that “since the 1970s…the interweaving of cultures in performance has neither led to the westernization of non-Western performances nor to the homogenization of performances globally. Instead, it has generated new forms of diversity”.

As the performances of Ibsen’s works had always been cross-culture theatre creations in China, the integration of *Peer Gynt* and the Chinese culture was made with the Chinese creators’ various considerations, such as how much Chinese-ness and Norwegian-ness the performance should be, and how to keep a good balance between the artistic and social value of the production. In the process of the new forms of diversity generated in the cross-culture performances, such considerations transformed into power struggles as Fischer-Lichte (2009, 400) further claimed, “the performance is to be regarded not only as an aesthetic, artistic process but also as a social, indeed political one” when the “power struggle” erupts between the two
cultures interwoven in the performance.

For the Chinese production of *Peer Gynt*, the power struggle is visible in the creators’ efforts of interweaving the Norwegian culture in the Chinese social-political context. In other words, it was a challenge for the Chinese creators to make the Norwegian play relevant in the Chinese context. In comparison with the early productions of Ibsen’s works in China, we will get a clearer picture of the evolvement of the power struggle in the Chinese Ibsen productions until the *Peer Gynt* production. Besides, the struggle also lies in the creation of the cross-culture theatre performance itself that two different aesthetic systems were interwoven in the Chinese *Peer Gynt*, namely between the traditional Chinese drama aesthetic system and the western drama. So, the other challenge for the Chinese creators was how to integrate the Norwegian play with the Chinese drama aesthetic system. Fischer-Lichte’s theory of the state of “being in-between” in performance thus provides a good method of interpreting the 1983 *Peer Gynt* production in China from these two angels.

With the big success of the performance, both Xiao Qian (1910-1999), the first Chinese translator of *Peer Gynt*, and Gong Xiaodong, the main actor of the production, were respectively invited by the Norwegian authority to pay a visit to Norway. Besides, Xiao was awarded by the Norwegian authorities for his Chinese translation of *Peer Gynt* and further spreading the knowledge of Ibsen outside of Norway. The Norwegian authorities’ reactions showed their positive attitude towards this Chinese initiative of introducing Ibsen’s works to the Chinese readers and audience, which was consistent with their intention of building a better relationship with China in the early 1980s. How is such a cultural event as Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* getting staged in China related to the Norwegian policy of a better Sino-Norwegian relationship?

Joseph S. Nye (1990, 181) introduced the concept of “soft power” in the 1990s as he pointed out that the indirect or co-optive power gets others to want what you want, which differed itself from the command power traditionally exercised by means of
economic and military force. He claimed that the soft power was “rest on the attractiveness of one’s culture and ideology or the ability to manipulate agenda of political choices in a manner that makes actors fail to express some preferences because they seem to be too unrealistic” (Nye 1990, 181-182). In his more recent article, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power”, Nye redefined the concept with greater clarity. As he noted, “Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country’s soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies” (Nye 2008, 94).

Nye’s theory provides a new perspective for the international relation studies community, while it has not been agreed on how effective soft power works compared to hard power. Nevertheless, for countries that intend to obtain the outcomes they want from others, soft power is considerable part of the power they could seek to exercise. In the case of Ibsen’s Peer Gynt getting introduced to China in the early 1980s, against the historical background that Norway tried to have more cooperations with China in Oil, Energy and other industries, it is natural to analyze the Norwegian official reactions based on the soft power theory to see how the cultural event was used by the Norwegian authorities to affect their relationship with China.

Moreover, the relevant Norwegian news outlets will be the main sources for the analysis of how the news agencies report the Chinese Peer Gynt to the Norwegian people. Same as the Chinese creation and reception of the play, the Norwegian reception was highly related to the historical context. Considering the performances were in China, and the video record of the performance has not been shown to the audience in Norway, it can be assumed that few Norwegian audiences ever had any chance to see it. Nevertheless, the news articles on the Norwegian newspapers, as well as the Norwegian program entitled “Peer Gynt in Beijing” (Peer Gynt i Peking) on NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) TV, which concerned the translation and stage production, are all good materials to look into.

Since the translation was published, the Norwegian newspaper started to release
several detailed articles covering how Ibsen had been received in China. And one year after Peer Gynt was staged, Xiao Qian got interviewed by Gunnar Høidahl, who was the NRK correspondent back then residing in Beijing. The interview was made into a 35-minute program “Peer Gynt in China” on NRK TV. Besides looking into how Ibsen has had his influence in China from the very beginning, the Norwegian correspondents showed their interests in Xiao’s personal experience during the Cultural Revolution. When the event of the first Chinese Peer Gynt was broadcasted to the Norwegian audience, much focus was put onto the Chinese social context through the coverage of Xiao’s life experience. Through the news outlets, Norwegian people got to know more about Ibsen’s reception in China and the little-known Chinese history before it opened up and reformed itself at the end of the 1970s.

The text analysis of the news articles will be conducted mainly through the timeline from the translation to the stage performance for getting a clearer overview of the development of the correspondents’ interest in the Chinese Peer Gynt creation. By comparing the news articles written by the same correspondent, together with the comparison of the articles from two news agencies that took different perspectives, the analysis of the Norwegian news articles will provide a more comprehensive angle for the study of the Norwegian reception of the Peer Gynt event in Beijing.

1.4 Design of the thesis

As my study focuses on the various interests that originated from the first Chinese Peer Gynt production, the thesis will include two parts, including the Chinese interest and the Norwegian interest. Before the main analysis, I will examine the process of translation and production of the Chinese Peer Gynt from a historical perspective to demonstrate the strong connection between the Peer Gynt culture event with the historical context and to provide a historical background of the analysis in the later chapters. Some detailed introductions about the historical context will be given in this part, including the translator and the director’s starting point of their creation, the
situation of the foreign literature in China when Peer Gynt was translated, the environment for the foreign plays to be staged on Chinese stage as well as the Sino-Norwegian relationship in the early 1980s.

The second chapter will focus on the transitional role this Peer Gynt creation, primarily the production has on the Chinese Ibsen reception. The artistic creation of the production will be analyzed, mainly based on the director’s creative thinking, with the focus on his efforts of integrating the Chinese style in this Norwegian play. In the past, researchers have had discussions on that the Chinese theatre workers should put more focus on the artistic values of Ibsen in China instead of keeping on taking him as a social reformer. The Peer Gynt production was an experiment by the director to renovate the Chinese theatre stage and explore the artistic values of this Ibsen play. Furthermore, the didactic purpose behind the Peer Gynt production and the form of student theatre will be addressed in this section to show how this production keeps in line with some of the Ibsen traditions in China. By elaborating the transitional role the 1983 Peer Gynt has in the Chinese Ibsen reception, which includes both the consistency with the existing Ibsen tradition in China and the new diversity generated in the power struggle of the cross-culture performance, I would like to point out the significance of this Peer Gynt production has had on the Chinese Ibsen tradition.

Along with the Chinese Ibsen reception history, it is also interesting to see the increasing influence Ibsen’s works have had regarding the Sino-Norwegian interchange, from the pure Chinese initiative and rare Norwegian attention at the beginning of 20th century till the early 1980s when Norway shows much more interest in the Chinese Peer Gynt event. The last section will thus focus on the Norwegian reception of the Chinese Peer Gynt, which includes the official reception and in the public communication field. The Norwegian news outlets concerning the Peer Gynt event in China, including the news articles from Aftenposten and Klassekampen as well as the NRK TV program, demonstrate how Norwegian news agencies made their efforts in introducing the modern history of China to the Norwegian people.
While the positive official reaction indicated that the Norwegian authorities exercised their soft power to increase their economic cooperation with China, which proved the positive influence the first *Peer Gynt* creation in China has had on the Sino-Norwegian interchange in the early 1980s. The Norwegian news outlets showed their interest in the little-known Chinese history, especially during the Cultural Revolution, as well as China’s future, last but not the least, their pride in Henrik Ibsen’s popularity and influence in China.
Chapter 2  The Historical Contexts of creation and reception of the first Chinese Peer Gynt

The last Chinese Ibsen production before Peer Gynt was a stage production of A Doll’s House in 1962 in Shanghai with more than two decades in between (Tam 2001, 271). During the decades, China went through long-time political turbulence, and the ten-year Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was reckoned as one of the most catastrophic political movements since PRC was established in 1949. But how can Peer Gynt, a Norwegian play that Ibsen himself thought people outside of Norway would find it hard to understand, be related to the Chinese revolutionary historical context? My analysis in this chapter demonstrates that the first Chinese Peer Gynt event has a close relationship to the Chinese historical context immediately after the Cultural Revolution, which not only provides an environment with more freedom for the creation but also has a significant influence on how the play was received by the Chinese creators, audience and the Norwegians.

Before analyzing how the Chinese stage production of Peer Gynt interacted with its historical background, I would like to clarify why Ibsen was absent from Chinese stage for a long time before Peer Gynt, to give a general idea about the cultural context of the introduction of this play into China. Then the connections between the production and the historical background will be divided into two aspects, including how the creation and reception were respectively related to the Chinese historical context.

A key person in the first Chinese creation of Peer Gynt is Xiao Qian, who translated the play into Chinese in 1981. The Chinese translation of the play has had great significance in the first performance of this play in 1983. Besides the fact that Xiao had been fascinated by the play since the first time he saw it in 1944 in the Old Vic in London, he talked more about his motivations for the translation work as well as his understanding of Peer Gynt in his interview with Gunnar Høidahl on NRK TV in
1984. In Xiao’s point of view, *Peer Gynt* has a very healthy influence on the Chinese young generation that became confused about how to live their life after the Cultural Revolution (Xiao 1984). Furthermore, the Norwegian reception of the first Chinese *Peer Gynt* production, both by the authority and the news media, focused greatly on this translator. Therefore part of my analysis of the connection between the production and the Chinese historical context is dedicated to discussing Xiao’s relationship to the play (see section 2.2).

Two years after the translation came out, the first performance of *Peer Gynt* was on stage in Beijing. Xu Xiaozhong confirmed Xiao’s views about the positive influence this play would have on the Chinese audience by addressing the topic of this play as “the troll philosophy twists people’s self-respect and destroys people’s values”, claiming that Peer’s disastrous life reminded the young generation that we should live our life with morality, principles, and responsibilities, otherwise everything whatsoever would be in vain (Zhongxi 2007). Both Xiao and Xu’s understanding of *Peer Gynt* reveals how the Chinese creation of *Peer Gynt* is closely connected with the Chinese social and historical context in the post-revolutionary period. By centering on the young people’s experience during the revolution, I will address how both the Chinese creation and reception are closely connected to the Chinese revolutionary historical context.

In addition, I will focus on the Sino-Norwegian relationship in the early 1980s in order to demonstrate how the Norwegian reception of the first Chinese *Peer Gynt* production was closely related to the Chinese historical context. As such, I will provide a broader overview of how the cross-culture production factored into the interchange between these two countries, as it is an inseparable part of the historical background of the Norwegian reception of this production.
2.1 Reappearance of Ibsen’s plays in China

As mentioned earlier, Ibsen’s works were absent from the Chinese theatre stage for more than two decades, and Peer Gynt’s debut in Beijing signals the reappearance of Ibsen’s works in China. How was the reappearance related to the historical context? It should be noted that during the Cultural Revolution, the regulations for western literature and arts were quite strict. Even though foreign literature was not completely forbidden from 1957 to 1977, “access to foreign literature during this period, was neither complete nor universal: availability of foreign authors was always selective, and often highly so. And access was often restricted, sometimes to highly circumscribed groups (though never as narrow as the official definitions stated)” (Volland 2017, 188). As a western writer, Ibsen was one of the foreign authors whose works were forbidden. Thus, the Chinese population had little to no access to Ibsen’s works in a long period of time.

On the other hand, it was hard for the literature workers and translators to work on the translation of foreign plays. When the whole society was fanatic in the revolution, many industries were paralyzed; that was also the case for literary and art workers. Many literary workers had to struggle to continue with their writing or translating, a large group of them sent to the countryside to be reeducated by the peasants as it was the intellectual group that was the main target of the political reeducation. Xiao Qian was sent down to the May Seventh Cadre School5 (wuqi ganxiao) in the countryside in Hubei province from 1969 to 1972, during which period he was assigned to physical work. The revolution severely hindered the translation work and the access to foreign plays became quite limited; theatre stagings of foreign plays were also banned. Chinese drama expert Xiaomei Chen describes the situation for Chinese theatre at the time as follows.

---

5 May Seventh Cadre Schools were Chinese labor camps established during the Cultural Revolution that combined hard agricultural work with the study of Mao Zedong’s writings in order to “re-educate” cadres and intellectuals in proper socialist thought. (Spence 1999, 582)
As is well known, from 1966 to 1976, when schools, libraries, and all other cultural institutions were closed in China, the purveyors of the Maoist official ideology started to promote what were known as the eight revolutionary model works, which consisted of five Peking opera, two modern ballets, and one symphonic work. The majority of the people were compelled to see these plays for the sake of their political education, sometimes performances preceded or came at the end of political meetings. Since the Cultural Revolution aimed to eliminate the ‘four olds’ (thought, culture, customs, and habit), the masses were encouraged to imitate the protagonists of the model theatre by watching and even performing model theatrical pieces themselves in order to become better revolutionaries. (Chen 2002, 33)

During the period when the model plays dominated the theatres in China, the Ibsen plays translated and performed earlier in China could no longer be staged. The political movements thus resulted in the absence of Ibsen’s (or any other Western dramatist’s) works from the Chinese stage for more than two decades. After the Cultural Revolution ended, the western plays returned to the Chinese stage, including Ibsen’s. Before it was put onto stage, the translation of Peer Gynt already marked a new revival of Ibsen in China in the literature area, which also indicated a more open cultural environment for Ibsen’s plays to have their reappearance on the Chinese stage. When the Chinese translation was published, Xu Xiaozhong decided to stage the play with the undergraduate students after reading Xiao’s translation (Eide 1987, 315). And he explained why Peer Gynt was included in the repertoire for teaching: “Ibsen’s thoughts and practice one hundred years ago still had great significance for the prosperity and development of the stage arts today” (Zhongxi 2007).

So, as China adopted an open up and reform policy to the western countries in the post-Maoist era, Chinese literature and theatre workers started to look to the western dramatists, breaking through the restrictions from the earlier Maoist doctrine of socialist-realism. The modern western drama was introduced into China from the early 20th century and Ibsen’s works, mostly his social problem plays, inspired many literary and political pioneers. Because of his earlier influence on the development of modern Chinese drama, his works were reprinted and distributed after the political turbulence. In 1981, The Collected Works of Ibsen (Yi Busheng wenji), the complete
Chinese translations of Ibsen’s works that consist of eight volumes, was published by People's Literature Publishing House (renmin wenxue chubanshe) and Peer Gynt was included in the third volume. The publishing house that was established in 1951 is one of the biggest professional literature publishing institutions in China ever since PRC was founded. Besides Ibsen’s works, the publishing house also published the Chinese translations of Shakespeare’s works after the Cultural Revolution.

Lü Yuan, back then the editor in the publishing house, told the Norwegian correspondent that “This is a big task, one of the publishing house’s biggest. That we've taken it on us is because we think Ibsen is still up to date, also in the Chinese context” (Filseth 1981). Following Lü’s words, Jiang Lu, back then the head of the foreign literature department in this publishing house, explained the role Ibsen had played in China as she commented on this publishing event:

Ibsen has a high position among Chinese intellectuals, especially the older generation. The poet is considered to be one of the inspirators of the May 4th social reform movement, which had a significant influence on Chinese youth in the 1920s and 1930s. But the young people under the age of forty do not know Ibsen so well, hopefully, we can correct this problem by publishing his entire works. (Filseth 1981)

Both of them demonstrated Ibsen’s significant role in Chinese society, which shows how the playwright was received in China when the social-political environment became less restricted in the post-revolutionary era. With the translation of Peer Gynt finished and published, it paved the way for the play to be put onto the Chinese stage. In the 1980s, theatre performances were no longer restricted to model plays, which gave the theatre workers more freedom to explore new possibilities for the Chinese theatre. Before Peer Gynt was staged in 1983, many other western plays already got staged in the professional theatres in China (Yang 1987, 166). Neither the foreign nor

---

6 The original Norwegian text is “Dette er en stor oppgave, en av forlagets største. Når vi har tatt den på oss, er det fordi vi mener at Ibsen stadig er aktuell, også i kinesisk sammenheng”.
7 The original Norwegian text is “Ibsen har en høy stjerne blant Kinas intellektuelle, særlig den eldste generasjon. Dikteren betraktes her som en av inspiratorene til den sosiale reformbevegelse 4. mai, som øvet en betydelig innflydelse på kinesisk ungdom i 1920- og 1930- årene. Men de unge under 40 kjenner ikke Ibsen så godt, og dette håper vi å rette på ved å utgi hans samlede verker”. 
the traditional Chinese opera was taboo on the stage, which led to the intercultural production of *Peer Gynt* in China in 1983. Some elements from the traditional Chinese opera were interwoven into the plot of *Peer Gynt*, making the Norwegian play characterized by its Chinese style.

Xu Xiaozhong, together with other theatre workers who were tired of the rigid social realism in the drama that prevailed on stage for a long time and longed for renovations for the Chinese theatre, paid attention to this philosophical verse play full of passion and colorful settings (Gao 2008, 42). Xu’s directing method of integrating the Chinese style and the Norwegian play makes the play not only easier to understand for the audience but also fits the Chinese audience’s traditional aesthetic taste towards the stage performance.

Xiaomei Chen (2002, 52) claims that the success of the *Peer Gynt* production lies in connection with the revolutionary reality that the contemporary Chinese audience could easily make when they saw the performance, rather than the play’s authentic Norwegian context. But how did the Chinese audience relate their experiences in the Cultural Revolution to the story of *Peer Gynt*? To clarify it clearer, Chen (2002, 52) paralleled Peer’s motto throughout his life – to avoid difficulties and conflicts, with Chinese people being afraid of showing their true selves or expressing their true feelings towards the people around them during the revolution. Chen’s analysis shows partly how *Peer Gynt* production became a success among the audience in the early 1980s.

Against the post-revolutionary social context, Xu Xiaozhong pointed out that the theme of the play was that “the troll’s philosophy twists people’s self-respect and destroys people’s values” (Zhongxi 2007). The Gang of Four⁸, that was officially seen as the instigators of the Cultural Revolution, was paralleled with the trolls. To depict

---

⁸ The Gang of Four (*sirenbang*) was a political faction composed of four Chinese Communist Party officials, including Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen. They came to prominence during the Cultural Revolution and were later charged with a series of treasonous crimes.
the negative image of the trolls, Xu transferred the troll’s image to the Pigsy, a figure normally related to gluttonousness and laziness in *Journey to the West*.

Hence, the increasingly open social-political environment in the post-Maoist period makes it possible for Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* to be translated into Chinese and be performed, marking the reappearance of Ibsen’s works on the Chinese stage. And meanwhile, the Chinese production was interwoven by the creators with the social-political context, which makes the production relevant to the Chinese post-revolutionary society.
2.2 Xiao Qian’s ups and downs and the first Chinese translation of Peer Gynt

During the Cultural Revolution, I always thought of this play when people anxiously put tails onto themselves to join the trolls at the time when right and wrong were mixed. I thought of the people and the things happened not long ago when I was doing the translation. When translating ‘the safest way is to howl with them when the wolfs are howling outside’, I suddenly saw all those ‘big criticism walls’ showing in front of me. It feels like Ibsen wrote this play more than one hundred years ago especially for China in the 1960s to 1970s. However bad my translation is, I did it with my heart full of resonance with the original play. (Xiao 1991, 320)

Regarding the important role that middleman has had on Ibsen’s works spreading worldwide, the Chinese reception of Ibsen follows the same tradition both for the early reception of Ibsen in China and the first Chinese Peer Gynt, both of which were initiated by influential Chinese intellectuals. As an early advocator of Ibsen’s works, Hu Shi was a Professor in Philosophy at Beijing University. Before he published ‘Ibsenism’, he had written some articles in New Youth, and his new ideas had already had some influence in the society. Meanwhile, Xiao Qian, the first Chinese translator of Peer Gynt, was an established journalist, writer, and translator.

When working as a young editor of Xiao Gong Yuan, a supplement of Ta Kung Pao, Xiao Qian was responsible for contacting writers to contribute articles to the supplement until he was sent to work in Britain in 1939. As a writer, he published many novels and was a close friend with some famous Chinese writers such as Ba Jin and Bin Xin. So, before he got to translate Peer Gynt, he already had some influence in the literary circle. Even though he lost his right to write freely during the Cultural Revolution as he was labeled as rightest when the revolution ended, he was approached by the editor of World Literature (shijiewenxue), which was the only journal that introduced foreign literature before the Cultural Revolution and restarting

---

9 The “big criticism walls” (dapipanlan) were common during the Cultural Revolution, where the criticism towards those accused of not being loyal to Mao Zedong’s revolution thoughts was displayed to the public.
to function after years’ suspending, and Xiao was asked to contribute some translation of foreign literature to the journal. It was upon that request that Xiao started the translation work of *Peer Gynt*.

Interestingly, Xiao Qian’s attitude towards Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* went through a 180-degree shift between 1949 and 1981. After comparing his understandings of the same play before and after, it can be seen that his reception of *Peer Gynt* has been greatly influenced by the development of the Chinese social context over the decades. When he was younger, Xiao wrote an article “*Peer Gynt* – A play condemning individualism” (*Pei’er Jinte – yibu qingsuan gerenzhuyi de shiju*), noting that “The subject that the satire *Peer Gynt* condemns is individualism from the beginning till the end of the play” (Xiao 1949, 5).

As Tam (2001, 129) noted in *Ibsen in China 1908–1997: A Critical-Annotated Bibliography of Criticism, Translation and Performance*, “Xiao believes that Ibsen is no longer needed in China, not only because Ibsen was a writer of the last century, but also because he belongs to the faraway Northern Europe, where the society is essentially different from that in China”. Moreover, Xiao concluded that “Ibsen’s weakness lies in the fact that he attacks only the surface corruption of society and does not analyze its economic causes. He, therefore, recognizes only the existence of the individual and not the masses” (Tam 2001, 129). His understanding of *Peer Gynt* in 1949 that was highly influenced by the social-political context was in the contradicts with his own opinion when he finished the translation in the early 1980s. As he completed the Chinese translation of the play, Xiao criticized his earlier understanding of the play as “superficial” and “incomprehensive” and explained in the preface of *Peer Gynt* (*Pei’er Jinte*) that “like most Chinese intellectuals at that time, I was also thinking about the ideological remolding issue10 (*sixiang gaizao*), then I

---

10 Ideological remolding (*sixianggaizao*) was a campaign of the Communist Party of China to request the Chinese intellectuals to reform their thoughts at the early stage when the People’s Republic of China was established.
referred to *Peer Gynt* to this issue…My understanding of the issue was to overcome individualism, which was why I take *Peer Gynt* as a condemnation towards individualism” (Ibsen 1983). Completely different from the earlier attitude towards *Peer Gynt*, Xiao claimed that “this play is going to have a very positive influence on the Chinese young people” when he was interviewed by the NRK correspondent (Xiao 1984). Interestingly his understanding of the play in 1984 was much influenced by the Chinese social-political context as well.

Growing up in the May 4th Movement era in the slum area of Beijing, Xiao Qian got to know Ibsen from an early age and had been fascinated by *Peer Gynt* since he watched a performance in London in 1944. After that, he started to collect the English versions of the play. The Second World War broke out when he was studying for his master's degree at Cambridge University, and during wartime, he worked in Europe as a war correspondent for *Ta Kung Pao*, a news agency based in Hong Kong. In 1949, instead of accepting the offer as a tenured literature professor at Cambridge University, he chose to go back to China to devote himself to the development of the new country. Based on his decision to go back to mainland China, it is reasonable to assume that Xiao Qian at that time agreed on the values promoted by the Chinese communist party, among which individualism was seen negatively for it represented private interest instead of the interests of the masses. So, against the social context in 1949, that *Peer Gynt* was referred to by Xiao Qian to condemn the individualism shown in the play was in tune with the social context, which shows his early political understanding of the play (Xiao 1949).

Even though he had a great passion for helping build up a new China, Xiao could not have control of his own life in the coming political movements. As a translator and writer, the personal experiences of Xiao Qian could be seen as the epitome of thousands of other intellectuals’ life through the Cultural Revolution. Even before the revolution started, Xiao Qian was branded as a rightist in 1957 for having written articles for an English newspaper called *People’s Daily* and asking for more
democracy from the government. As punishment, he was sent to the countryside to labor in rice fields and was permitted to return home to Beijing in 1961. He had not stayed at home for long before his second exile came when the Cultural Revolution started. Together with many other intellectuals, he was again sent to a small village in Hubei Province.

Xiao (1991, 288) demonstrated his desperation during the Cultural Revolution in his autobiography that “For many people at that time, death looks more beautiful and more attractive than living in the world. And I was one of them. When I saw my home ruined and all the European paintings that I spared no efforts collecting over the years were torn into pieces, when I saw (my wife) Wen Jieruo became criticized in public, I lost my interest in the world”. Based on his sufferings, Xiao had a new understanding of Ibsen’s Peer Gynt. He received the play from a moral perspective and used this play to condemn those people who took advantage of other people in the name of revolution, whom he paralleled with the trolls in Peer Gynt that is “selfish, self-centered and egocentric” (Xiao 1984).

Not only his understanding of Peer Gynt but also the process of the Chinese translation work of the play was closely connected to the historical context. The performance of Peer Gynt that Xiao saw in London left a great impression on him. He tried to persuade Pan Jiaxun, one of the most prolific translators of Ibsen’s works in China, to translate this play in 1956, to whom he also forwarded all the four English versions of Peer Gynt he had collected. But the translation was not completed as expected, and the English copies were sent back to Xiao in 1973 due to Pan’s poor health. As said earlier, the intellectuals did not have much freedom of translating foreign works into Chinese during the revolutionary period. When the Cultural Revolution ended, the social-political environment became better for literary workers. Then Xiao was asked in 1978 by Zou Difan, an editor of World Literature, to contribute some translations of foreign literature to the publishing house. So it was right after the end of the Cultural Revolution that Xiao started the translation work of
Peer Gynt, which could explain to some extent why his understanding of the play at that time was closely connected to the historical background.

With the English versions of Peer Gynt returned from Pan, Xiao started to do the translation by himself. Besides referring to Robert Farquharson Sharp’s English translation, William Archer’s English translation and the Blue Ribbon (New York) edition, Xiao finished the translation mainly based on the stage text by Norman Ginsbury in 1944 published in London in 1946. Considering that Peer Gynt is a verse play and Xiao was an amateur of verses, he decided to do the Chinese translation in a prose style, except some short poems in the play that he tried to keep its original verse format with the help from Sun Yong and Tu An, both of which also worked as translators (Ibsen 1983).

In 1978, the Chinese translation of the first and fifth acts of Peer Gynt was published internally in World Literature. In 1979, Xiao was given a certificate from the government which declared that he was wrongly labeled as a rightest during the revolution. Thus his reputation was officially restored and his writings and translations were able to be published in public. Two years later, Xiao completed the translation of the play and got it published in the fourth volume of Foreign Drama (waiguo xiju), which was officially released based on the original magazine Foreign Drama Materials (waiguo xiju ziliao) in 1980. The Chinese translation of Peer Gynt was later published as an offprint by Sichuan People’s Publishing House (Sichuan renmin chubanshe) in 1983, which indicates that the Chinese translation was well received by the Chinese readers since 1981.

With the translation and the following stage production, Xiao hoped the young Chinese generation could learn the lessons from the play and live a life with the principle in the post-Cultural Revolution era. Comparing Xiao Qian’s different understandings of Peer Gynt in the varying social-political context, we can see how decisive the context was for the Chinese reception of this play. For the Chinese people who just witnessed the loss of humanity in the political turbulences, the play touched
upon people’s hearts and made them reflect upon the revolutionary experiences they just went through. Since Ibsen was introduced into China, the mass population of Chinese people has never had such a need to think about the philosophy that was addressed in *Peer Gynt* as after the Cultural Revolution. In this respect, the Chinese translation of *Peer Gynt* came at the right time, which could count for its popularity in the early 1980s.

Moreover, Xiao’s life experience that almost covered the whole 20th century was the focus of the Norwegian news outlets. With his translation of *Peer Gynt*, the play got introduced into China and meanwhile, the Chinese revolutionary history got to be known by the Norwegians via the news outlets, which I will analyze more into details in chapter 4.
2.3 *Peer Gynt* and the “lost generation”

As the first Ibsen play staged after the Cultural Revolution, it was meant by the creators to have a positive influence on educating the Chinese young people who grew up in the revolution period. Xu Xiaozhong, the director, claimed that *Peer Gynt* would help the young people to reflect on their own behaviors and live a life of principle (Zhongxi 2007). Xiao Qian also said this play had a very good influence on the lost generation (Xiao 1984). Such comments about the positive influence *Peer Gynt* could have on the Chinese young people, especially the lost generation, are not few. But how could *Peer Gynt* positively affect the Chinese young people according to the Chinese intellectuals? What is the lost generation mentioned by Xiao Qian? For making it clearer about how the production had a positive influence on the lost generation, I will shed light on the historical context of this group and explore their connections with the play.

In “The ‘Lost Generation’: Its definition and its role in today’s Chinese elite politics”, Bonnin Michel (2006, 251) defines the lost generation as “all those people whose formative years were affected by the ‘revolutionary’ period of the Cultural Revolution or by the ensuing policy of ‘Revolution in education’”. By pointing out some special cases of the little influence Cultural Revolution could have on certain groups of young people, Bonnin (2006, 253) demonstrates that the lost generation “could be considered as including all urban people born approximately between 1947 and 1960”. Bonnin also gives a general idea of how the young generation lived their lives during the Cultural Revolution as follows.

During this period, the young Red Guards were able to leave the dull normality of their lives as well as the strict discipline of their socialist education to participate in an extraordinary event, a ‘revolution,’ in which their idol had decided to give them a major role. (Bonnin 2006, 250)

When the urban young people involved themselves in the revolution instead of having an education in the school, they were not well prepared for their future careers.
Bonnin further notes that “for all of them, the interruption of their studies caused by the outburst of the Cultural Revolution was made definitive when, in 1968 and 1969, they were declared ‘graduates’ and took a job in the countryside or a factory. Under the slogan of ‘revolution in education,’ academic learning depreciated, whereas participation in the study of Maoist thought, in political struggles, and manual work was praised” (Bonnin 2006, 251). For the young people who grew up with the Maoist thought and political struggles, naturally, they got confused after the Cultural Revolution ended when neither the Maoist thought nor the political struggles were so important and dominant in their life as before. A problem arose for the young people regarding how to live their life in the new era.

It is against this historical background that Xu (1983, 45) noted that “the wild plot of the play was united in the psychological conflict of the protagonist so as to reveal a common philosophical concept – how a man should live his life” and Xiao understood Peer Gynt as a play that was meant to teach the young people how to live their life as he said “Ibsen in this play tried to show two ways of life, one is the troll’s way, the selfish, self-centered and the egocentric way. As long as one could privately get the advantage of oneself, one could do anything at the expense of others. The other way is the way of an idealist, the way of a principled person” (Xiao 1984).

It can be said that the creators’ understanding of the play from the psychological perspective with morality standard reveals their concern for the young generation that grew up in the Maoist period. In a sense, the creation of the first Chinese Peer Gynt was attached to the post-revolutionary social reality, which made the production have a meaning beyond its artistic value and ensured the relevance and actuality of the play in the early 1980s in China.
2.4 The historical context of the Norwegian reception

In the early 1980s, China just adopted reform and open-up policy and the Chinese market was starting to open to the international community. Same as some other western countries, Norway had an interest in increasing its cooperation with China in the economic fields. When the Norwegian prime minister, Odvar Nordli, visited China in 1980, it was the first official visit by Norwegian Prime Minister to China since the two countries established a diplomatic relationship in 1954. During the visit, Nordli (1980, 6) expressed his wishes to have more cooperation with China in the fields of oil and energy industry besides the traditionally strong collaboration in the sea transportation industry. Moreover, he pointed out the importance of the increasing cultural exchange between Norway and China as follows.

Let me also mention the growing cultural exchange that helps to improve understanding between our two peoples, and which in turn reduces the distance between them.11 (Nordli 1980, 6)

In addition to stressing about the cultural exchanges between the two countries, Nordli underlined the active high-scale official visits mutually.

For us, however, it seems that the most important development in the reciprocal relationship in recent years perhaps has been the sharp increase in visitor exchange at a high political level. Important delegations from our National Assembly and some Norwegian ministers have recently visited the People's Republic of China. In Norway, for just over a year, we have had the honor and pleasure of having our guests, including Geng Biao and Kang Shien, both of them are Deputy Prime Minister, as well as a number of other members of the Government of the People's Republic of China, most recently Huang Hua, Foreign Minister. On the Norwegian side, we place the greatest emphasis on mutual personal contact and the friendship that such visits lead to.12 (Nordli

---

11 The original Norwegian text is “La meg også få nevne den økende kulturelle utveksling som bidrar til å bidrar til å bedre forståelsens mellom våre to folk, og som på sitt vis minske avstanden mellom dem”.

12 The original Norwegian text is “For oss synes det likevel som om kanskje den viktigste utvikling i det gjensidige forhold i de seneste år har vært den sterkt økende besøksutveksling på høyt politisk plan. Viktige delegasjoner fra vår nasjonalforsamling og en rekke norske statsråder har besøkt Folkerepublikken i den senere tid. I Norge har vi i løpet av litt over et år hatt den øre og glede å se som våre gjezer først visestatsminister Geng Biao og nylig visestatsminister Kang Shien, samt en rekke andre medlemmer av Folkerepublikkens regjering, senest utenrøksminister Huang Hua. Fra norsk side
Nordli’s speech shows that both China and Norway had the willingness to improve the relationship and build a friendship with more mutual visits in the post-revolutionary period. On 12th June 1984, Zhao Ziyang, then the Chinese prime minister, visited Norway and met King Olav V as well as other Norwegian ministers. Zhao’s visit has been the highest-level official visit that Norway has received from PRC. The high-level mutual visits from both parties show the Sino-Norwegian relationship reached its peak in the early 1980s.

Against this background, both the Chinese translation of Peer Gynt and the stage production were helped by Norway, including Elisabeth Eide’s support to the translation work when Xiao Qian needed to find some Norwegian materials for his better understanding of the play, as well as some Norwegian advisors from the Norwegian embassy, were requested for “assistance with national costumes, landscape, stage décor, etc.” for the theatre production (Eide 1987, 316). So from very early on, Norway was invested in this cultural event, which indicates that the Norwegian authority showed their interest in the first Chinese Peer Gynt event from the very beginning.

This trend of the increasing mutual visits also demonstrates that both Xiao Qian and Gong Xiaodong’s visits to Norway, respectively, in 1984 and 1985, invited by the Norwegian authorities, were within the Norwegian policy of building a friendship with personal contacts to develop a better reciprocal relationship with China. As such, both the government officials’ mutual visits and the visits connected to the Chinese Peer Gynt event display the Norwegian’s efforts of exercising its soft power through its resources of culture and foreign policy to increase its economical cooperation with China.

\[\text{legger vi den største vekt på den gjensidige personlige kontakt og den vennskap som slike besøk gir anledning til".}\]
To sum up this chapter, I have analyzed the connections between the Chinese historical contexts with the *Peer Gynt* creation as well as its reception in China and Norway. My analysis demonstrates that the historical context provides a creative environment with more freedom for the Chinese *Peer Gynt* creation and meanwhile, has a significant influence on how the play was received by the Chinese creators and audience. Moreover, the Norwegian reception was considerably influenced by the Chinese post-revolutionary historical context.
Chapter 3  How does the first Chinese Peer Gynt influence the Ibsen tradition in China?

Even though it was the first time Peer Gynt was performed in China, the production was well received by the audience with the full house of twenty-five performances. Throughout the whole twentieth century, Peer Gynt stands out as the second most performed Ibsen play in China in the 20th century. How does the first Chinese Peer Gynt production have its relationship to the Ibsen tradition in China? In this chapter, I will focus on the Chinese creation of Peer Gynt in 1983, centering on the transitional role this production has had on the Chinese Ibsen tradition. The analysis demonstrates that the director of the production inherits the didactic use of Ibsen while at the same time explores the artistic values of Ibsen’s works, which generated a new diversity of staging Ibsen in China.

Some scholars have already claimed the positive influence that the Peer Gynt production has on the Ibsen tradition in China. Eide (1986b, 226) demonstrates that Peer Gynt helps broaden the horizon of Chinese people regarding Ibsen’s conventional image in China, which was in most cases related to social reforms. Frode Helland claimed this production “could be seen as having a transitional character” in comparison to the way A Doll’s House was localized to the Chinese anti-bourgeois social context in 1956 and further concludes that “the choice of ‘Peer Gynt’, and the staging of it with romantic and symbolic elements intact, point to new directions within the Ibsen tradition in the PRC” through referring to Xiaomei Chen and Elisabeth Eide’s analysis of the production of this play (Helland 2015, 140-141).

That the production of Peer Gynt in 1983 is a transitional point for the reception of Ibsen in China is not much disputed, but researches on how this production, later on, has its influence on the Ibsen reception is inadequate. The artistic creation by the director needs to be further elaborated to show how it has had its impact on some of the later Ibsen production in China. So, part of my analysis will focus on the director’s
artistic creation, including his thoughts of rediscovering the artistic values in Ibsen’s works and the practice of integrating the Chinese style into the Norwegian play, both of which generated new diversity for the Ibsen tradition in China.

As the production is claimed to point to new directions of the Chinese Ibsen tradition, it should not be overlooked how it kept some Ibsen traditions in China from before. The didactic purpose of translating and staging Ibsen’s works in China has been an important part of the Chinese Ibsen tradition since the beginning of the 20th century. This intention of using Ibsen to educate the society was meant by the Chinese creators of Peer Gynt production as well. By focusing on this Ibsen tradition in China, I will analyze how it factored into that the creation of Peer Gynt kept its relevance and actuality in Chinese society and, moreover, that Ibsen remained relevant in different social contexts in China throughout the 20th century.

So, in this chapter, by elaborating the transitional role the 1983 Peer Gynt has in the Chinese Ibsen creation and reception, which includes both the consistency with the existing Ibsen tradition in China and the new diversity generated in the power struggle of the cross-culture performance, I would like to point out the significance that this Peer Gynt production has had on the Chinese Ibsen creation and reception.
3.1 Rediscovering the artistic values in Ibsen’s works

Before the 1983 *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen was conventionally linked to social criticism and women’s emancipation in China, mostly due to the popularity of *A Doll’s House* during the May 4th movement. Since it was the first time *Peer Gynt* was staged in China, the director was uncertain if the audience that was used to the social problem plays would accept this new “face” of Ibsen (Xu 1983, 49). But the success of the performance assured him of the dramatic appeal and the stage effect of the play. Moreover, after the creation and the teaching of this play, he realized that it was not correct to criticize a writer’s creating style by generalizing his/her style within a certain period; neither should a certain style be followed subjectively as the rules of theatre creation (Xu 1983, 49). Xu’s reflection was based on his discovery of the artistic values in Ibsen’s works that differed from the traditional Ibsen image in China. As such, the 1983 *Peer Gynt* production points to a new direction of Chinese Ibsen tradition as for staging Ibsen with more focus on the artistic values in his works.

In the case of Ibsen’s works, the social problem plays were often seen as Ibsen’s only creating style for a long time. So, for the director, *Peer Gynt* gave him some insights into Ibsen’s other dramatic skills. According to Xu, when he at first got to read this play, it was beyond his imagination that *Peer Gynt* was written by Ibsen and that Ibsen could have had such liveliness and broad horizon (Xu 1983, 44). It was not only the director but also some other theatre workers who were surprised to see the artistic aspects of Ibsen’s works. When *Peer Gynt* was chosen to be staged in Beijing, it was highly advocated to break the “fourth wall” in the 1980s, and the directors’ subject consciousness was highly stressed (Gao 2008, 42). Gao Yin, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, claims that “this play immediately touched upon a group of theatre workers who were attempting to adapt the traditional stage model

---

13 The fourth wall is a convention that an invisible, imagined wall separates actors from the audience in the theatre performance. According to the convention, the actors should act on stage as if the audience cannot see through this “wall”. (Bell 2008, 203)
and promote some new themes relevant to the new era” (Gao 2008, 42).

It is against this trend of renovating the Chinese theatre stage in the 1980s that Xu explored Peer Gynt from other artistic perspectives. Influenced by the Stanislavski system, Xu had a special interest in portraying the personal characteristics of the roles in the play, so he intended to present Peer’s inner conflicts throughout his life-long adventure. The NRK program “Peer Gynt in Beijing” shows part of the scene in the fourth act of the play, in which Peer’s inner conflict is presented as he tries to get away from the madhouse in Cairo. In the scene, Bergiffenfeldt is talking to Peer about “self” in the madhouse while they are surrounded by many “patients” murmuring “wo”(me). The term “ziwo”(self) is underlined when Bergiffenfeldt repeated it for several times in his conversation with Peer as follow:

Peer: (People here) lost their true self.
Bergiffenfeldt: You take it wrong. It is right at this place (the madhouse) where people can best keep their true self. Everyone locks themselves in the bucket of self. The bucket is blocked by the plug of self, and then immersed in the well of self. Look! No one sheds any drop of tear for others’ pain. No one cares about what others think about. No matter it’s about thoughts or body, we only have our selves and we are going to live our selves to the maximum. So, since we need an emperor now, you are certainly the best candidate.

The actor who played Bergiffenfeldt spoke his line in a fast speed and strengthened the word “ziwo”, which creates an appealing effect. Behind Bergiffenfeldt’s line lies an allegory of people’s indifference towards others’ sufferings during the Cultural Revolution. Besides, through the highlight of “self”, the madhouse becomes the symbol of the self, from which Peer attempts to escape, while he is on his journey to look for his self. The self symbolized by the madhouse thus contradicts with Peer’s perception in the beginning as he asserted that people there lost their true self.

Besides the scene in the madhouse shown in the video, Xu’s introduction about the fifth act when the old Peer returned home is also interesting (Xu 1983, 46). According to him, the original dialogue was changed into two kids dancing the same as what Peer and his friends did in the first scene when Peer was at Ingrid’s wedding, with the
same Norwegian folk dance music as the background music. The realistic scene here created a Chinese artistic conception that was in accordance with a famous Chinese poem “Coming Home” (hui xiang ou shu) written by the poet He Zhizhang in 744AD, indicating Peer’s loneliness and disillusion at that moment. Thus, the conception of a lonely old man traveling back home after many years’ wandering life was created by the dance and the music.

Furthermore, Xu intended to make a combination of creating a feeling of realness and realizing the alienation effect by making the audience have the consciousness of the theatre performance, basing on his understanding of this play that some plots felt real while others conveyed a feeling of illusion. So, in the performance, sometimes the audience was led to resonate with the characters in the play and sometimes thought of the play from a more rational and objective mind when they realized it was just a performance. Xu (1983, 47) clarified that the dancing group showing up from time to time in the performance to some extent was an effort of breaking the realness of the performance.

Xu’s directing methods indicated how he, amazed by Ibsen’s vivid imagination shown in Peer Gynt, put his efforts to convey the artistic values of the play to the audience. Regarding the artistic values of Ibsen’s plays, it is not the first time Chinese dramatists try to access Ibsen from more than the sociopolitical perspective. There were already Chinese dramatist paying attention to the artistic values of Ibsen’s works in the early reception of Ibsen, “from 1928 to 1948, Ibsen attracted the attention of more and more serious Chinese dramatists and critics, such as Xiong Foxi and Chen Zhice, both of whom were trained in Western Europe and North America and therefore put more emphasis on Ibsen’s dramatic innovations than on his social themes” (Tam 2001, 13). Thus the struggle of whether the social meaning or the artistic values of Ibsen’s works should be prioritized has long existed in the Chinese Ibsen tradition.

For the conventional image of Ibsen in China that was relevant to the social problem plays, Tam further claimed that “although in the late 1920s and early 1930s some
Chinese critics called for a reconsideration of Ibsen from the perspective of art, still the general tendency was to moralize him, which, however, was supported by the practical view that Ibsen’s drama was useful for social reform in China” (Tam 2001, 13). He pointed out the production of the 1956 *A Doll’s House*, the main Ibsen production in China before *Peer Gynt*, was mainly for criticizing the hypocrisy of the western capitalism instead of drawing much attention to its artistic values, in which case Ibsen was more used for political criticism instead of digging into its dramatic values (Tam 2001, 15). Tam’s claim could be applied to the *Peer Gynt* production as well considering how it reflected the Chinese revolutionary social reality. However, Xu’s adoption of some new directing methods, including symbolism, etc., shows the renaissance of the Chinese theatre workers exploring the artistic values in Ibsen’s works.

It should be noted that the social problem plays staged before *Peer Gynt*, including *A Doll’s House, An Enemy of People and Ghosts*, mostly presented the realistic themes. Instead of creating an illusion, those productions tended to convey the realness of the play to address the social problems in real society. In the premise that the dramatic values were toned down in comparison to their social values, the productions normally had a rigid realism without any artistic considerations.

So, for the reception of Ibsen in China, the *Peer Gynt* production in 1983 allowed the Chinese theatre workers to break away from rigid realism and experiment with other artistic approaches to stage Ibsen’s works. Even though it cannot be guaranteed that all the Chinese Ibsen productions afterward put their focus on the artistic values of Ibsen’s works, the first *Peer Gynt* in China did prove the efforts that the Chinese theatre workers made in rediscovering Ibsen from more artistic perspectives.
3.2 Foreign play with its Chinese style

As the director strived to achieve his artistic creation of the Chinse Peer Gynt production, he decided that it should be a Norwegian play with a Chinese style (Xu 1983, 48). So, in the production, on the one hand, the stage setting and the costumes were of Norwegian characteristics; on the other hand, some Chinese elements were included. But how much Chinese-ness the performance presented? How has the production influenced the later Ibsen productions in terms of the inclusion of the Chinese elements? In this section, I will focus on the Chinese-ness in the first Peer Gynt production, to see how the play was presented with its Chinese style and influenced the later Ibsen production. My analysis of the influence part will center on the 2012 production, as it is one of two main Peer Gynt productions staged by professional theatre companies in China after 1983 and at the same time is much influenced by the 1983 production.

As noted in the earlier section, the theatre workers intended to break away from the rigid realism and innovate the Chinese theatre stage in the early 1980s. Against this background, the integration of the Chinese operas with the foreign drama started to get experimented, for example, the Beijing opera version of Othello staged by the Experimental Beijing Opera Troupe of Beijing in 1983. In the following Ibsen productions after the 1983 Peer Gynt production, the increasing involvement of the Chinese-ness can be seen; for example, in the 1998 A Doll’s House production, the story was set in Beijing with Peking opera included in the performance. The Peking opera adaptation of Peer Gynt (2005) and the Yueju opera adaptation of Hedda Gabler (2006), both of which adapted Ibsen’s plays into two different kinds of traditional Chinese drama, marked the climax of this tendency of interweaving the Chinese-ness in Ibsen’s plays. These productions revealed the trend of integrating the Chinese elements and the foreign plays that started from the early 1980s.

However, it should be noted that the 1983 Peer Gynt production is not the first time Chinese dramatists attempted to Sinicize Ibsen. Tam’s claim that “Xu Xiaozhong’s
Peer Gynt was the first Chinese attempt in localizing and sinicizing Ibsen by giving it a flavor of Chineseness” (Tam 2012, 270) is not accurate and contradicted by his own words two decades earlier. Tam noted in his doctoral dissertation Ibsen in China: Reception and Influence that “almost all of the Ibsen performances in the early phase of his reception (in China) were in one way or another domesticized” (Tam 1984, 164). In the same chapter, Tam (1984, 179) introduced the 1939 adaptation of A Doll’s House which was contextualized to the Sino-Japanese war, for example, the original tarantella was adapted to the dance with a sword while taking out an army uniform, “suggesting her desire to join the army in national defense”. In this case, Ibsen was Sinicized with a flavor of Chineseness long before Peer Gynt was performed.

Considering the inclusion of the Chinese traditional drama in the Ibsen productions before the 1983 Peer Gynt was seldom mentioned in the Chinese Ibsen researches, it is hard to ascertain if the production is the first time that Chinese theatre workers tried to present Ibsen’s works with the style of the traditional Chinese drama. However, it can be said that Peer Gynt production is a starting point of integrating the Chinese operas into Ibsen’s plays since PRC was established. In comparison to Peer Gynt, the 1956 A Doll’s House production was more in an authentic Norwegian style, from the mise-en-scène to the character’s body movements, except the language (Helland 2015, 134-135).

Regarding the Chinese style in the 1983 Peer Gynt production, Xu introduced some concrete examples that replaced the Norwegian elements in the play (Xu 1983, 47-48). The pigsy, a figure that was familiar for the Chinese, was used to depict the trolls in the play since it would be difficult for the Chinese audience to associate with the Norwegian trolls. Even though pigsy is conventionally recognized as a negative figure in Chinese culture that is gluttonous and lazy, it is different from the negative characteristics that the trolls in Peer Gynt are depicted.

In the performance, the lion dance with the pig’s head and body replaced the wedding horse in the play (Figure 3.1). The combination of pig and lion dance created an
amusing effect for the performance as in the Chinese culture, the negative image of the pig contrasts significantly with the symbol of the lion dance that represents good luck and fortune\textsuperscript{14}. Moreover, the face-changing technics of Sichuan Opera was adopted to present the supernatural power of the character Button Molder, which represented the director’s method of using the Chinese opera in this production.

![Image of a performance scene](image)

Figure 3.1 Peer and the women in green riding the “horse” (Source: Xijubao).

Xu noted that the inclusion of the pigsy, the lion dance and the Sichuan Opera were not the main concern for his creation of the play with a Chinese style. Instead, he tried to achieve an aesthetic principle of the traditional drama throughout the performance to present the illusion of life (Xu 1983, 48). Different from the western drama, which is called spoken drama (\textit{huaju}) in China for it is normally performed with spoken dialogues, the Chinese traditional drama features singing and dancing style in the performance. In \textit{The Origin of Chinese Opera (xiqu kaoyuan)}, Wang Guowei, one of the earliest and the most authoritative Chinese drama researchers, noted that the traditional drama was the art of telling a story by means of singing and dancing (\textit{xiqu}.

\textsuperscript{14} Traditionally the dragon dance is for grand celebrations with jollification, which is also taken as a method to scare away the evil spirits.
Accordingly, Xu explained that Chinese theatre-goers usually have a high demand of the performing technics to the actors and actresses, for example singing, dancing or martial art, so he required the actors and actresses to build the characters with visible body movements and try to make the movements look more like a dance with more technics (Xu 1983, 48). Xu’s idea of having more visible body movements in Peer Gynt was positively received by some theatre critics, for example, Lin Kehuan.

With the help of the actors’ dancing and skillful body movements, Xu Xiaozhong gives the tableaux some concrete meanings, making the relationships between Peer Gynt and the women (mainly with Åse, Solveig and the women in green), his adventurous behavior when traveling around the world, as well as his experiences in the troll’s kingdom and in the madhouse in Cairo…into several pieces of modern allegories about the loss and salvation of humanity. Meanwhile, an integral symbol of looking for the self besides himself as a prodigal who is full of dreams is composed of a series of united activities. (Lin 1991, 75)

According to the review, Lin gives a relatively positive response to the inclusion of the dancing and body movements. Some high school students “were greatly touched by the philosophy of choosing one’s way of life besides the fact that they enjoyed the art in the performance” (Ge 1983, 36). As discussed in the earlier chapter, the young people were at a loss of how to live their life in the post-revolutionary period of time (see section 2.3). From such responses from the theatre critic and the audience, it can be seen that the efforts Xu made on the stagecraft were well received and at the same time, deeper understanding such as self-integrity was inspired by the performance.

From the methods Xu adopted to make the Peer Gynt production with its Chinese style, it can be seen that the director was into the integration of the traditional Chinese drama and foreign plays. And as a professor in the Central Academy of Drama, his students were more or less influenced by his directing methods. After this successful attempt at having more Chinese elements in a Chinese Ibsen production, we see the increasing popularity of staging Ibsen’s plays with the Chinese style in China. The two productions of An Enemy of the People in 1996 and A Doll’s House in 1998
directed by Wu Xiaojiang, as well as some other new Ibsen productions in China in the 21st century, all included the Chinese style into the performances. Wu even had an insignificant role in the Peer Gynt production as he was one of the graduate students of the Directing Department that year.

The performances of An Enemy of the People in 1996, as Wang Ning noted, is “a metamorphosed version reconstructed and reproduced by the Chinese artists” that “two kinds of Chinese games (huaquan15 and taijiquan16) were inserted” (Wang 2011, 206). The production of A Doll’s House in 1998 adapted the original Norwegian middle-class family story into a Chinese family with mixed marriage, so the topic of this production shifted to the cultural differences that China faces at the age of opening up and meeting new cultures. The Chinese style of this A Doll’s House performance lies not only in its completely Chinese style mise-en-scène but also in the Peking Opera that was played at the start of the performance and as a break between different acts of the play. The influence Xu’s Peer Gynt has had is not limited to Wu Xiaojiang.

There are three other main Chinese Peer Gynt productions after the production by the Central Academy of Drama, including the production by Shanghai Theatre Academy from 2005 to 2006, the production by the celebrated actors Sun Haiying and Lü Liping between 2010 and 2011 and the production by China Railway Art Ensemble from 2012 to 2013. Among these three productions, the one by the graduate students from Shanghai Theatre Academy adapted Peer Gynt completely into a Peking Opera performance.

Here I will focus on the 2012 Chinese Peer Gynt production to give some insight into the new direction of Ibsen tradition generated from the 1983 production because it is one of the two Peer Gynt productions set up by professional theatres in China. In

---

15 Huaquan is a Chinese finger-guessing game that is played during feasts while drinking wine.
16 Taijiquan is a form of traditional Chinese shadow boxing, which is famous for its slow body movement.
2012, *Peer Gynt* was staged by China Railway Art Esemble in the Opera House of People’s Liberation Army (*renmin jiefangjun gejuyuan*) in Beijing. After the success of the performances, the production team was invited to give another five performances in Beijing Normal University and Beijing Jiaotong University in 2013, and in the same year, was chosen to be staged in the National Theatre in Beijing. Liao Xianghong, the chief director of this *Peer Gynt* production, was enrolled in the Directing Department in the academy in 1979, the same as Wu Xiaojiang. Even though it is not clear if she joined the 1983 *Peer Gynt* production as Wu, Liao’s directing method in the 2012 production can be traced with Xu Xiaozhong’s characteristics.

Zha Mingzhe, a Chinese theatre director, released an article “*Peer Gynt* – an eternal classic” after the premiere performance, in which he noted that the success of Xu’s production thirty years ago had had a long influence until today that “many actors take the acting of Peer and Solveig as their artistic ideal” (Zha 2012, 6). Regarding the performance style of this 2012 *Peer Gynt* production, Zha addressed that

This production by CRAE integrated the “expression” method of the modern western drama and the “artistic conception” of the traditional Chinese drama based on the creating principle of realism. At the same time, the poetic conceptional atmosphere was created to present philosophical thinking in this classic. (Zha 2012, 6)

The creating method noted above is consistent with Xu’s focus on directing the 1983 *Peer Gynt*. Both productions tried to convey the artistic conception of the traditional Chinese drama in *Peer Gynt*. Moreover, by pointing out that the play could inspire the audience to think more about the self-integrity and human’s life, Zha (2012, 6) claimed that the play has a deeper realistic meaning for the Chinese audience that was in the shock of tide of the economy in a transitional period, compared to those in the 1980s. And the realistic meaning was meant by him to be the intention of this *Peer Gynt* production by CRAE. Thus the integration of the Chinese traditional drama and
Peer Gynt in 1983 inspired some younger directors who continued to stage Ibsen’s works with their Chinese style in the professional theatres.

3.3 Social educating purpose with Ibsen productions

Before foreign drama was introduced into China, Chen Duxiu, the chief editor of New Youth, noted that “the drama is the one and only way to reform the society” (xiqu cheng gailiang shehui zhi buerfamen) and “the theatre is a university for the human being” (xiyuan shi putianxia zhi daxuetang ye) in 1905 (Guo 2018, 7). Even though the drama he mentioned back then was the traditional Chinese drama, his belief in the didactic meaning of the theatre for the society was clear. Among all the western dramatists, Ibsen was chosen as the main dramatist to be introduced during the May 4th movement, which was based on the educating meaning that the Chinese intellectuals thought his works would have towards the Chinese society. And ever since Ibsen was introduced into China, his works have been attached with various social educating meaning in different historical contexts.

As the reappearance of Ibsen works on the Chinese stage after the Cultural Revolution, the 1983 Peer Gynt production was not excluded from this Chinese Ibsen tradition. For the audience, new lessons were to be learned from the production. However, compared to the early Ibsen reception in China when his works were used as an instrument to spread new ideas and reform the society, how has the Peer Gynt production played its role in educating the Chinese people in the 1980s? In terms of the instrumental role of Ibsen’s works, how has it developed over the decades? In order to see how the didactic meaning of Ibsen’s works contributed to their continued relevance in the developing Chinese society, I will first shed light on the educating meaning of the Peer Gynt production and the early Chinese Ibsen reception to see how the instrumentalism of Ibsen’s works develops in China.

Much research has been done regarding Ibsen’s early reception in China and it is unanimously maintained that Ibsen started to become famous in China after the May
4th movement (e.g., Eide 1986a; He 2004; Tam 1984). Hu Shi, one of the leading figures of the movement, published an article “Ibsenism” in New Youth, in which he criticized many social problems in China, for instance, the untruthful relationship within the family and individual people’s sufferings from the old society with a lot of reference to several of Ibsen’s works including A Doll’s House, Ghosts, etc (Hu 1918). Besides, he pointed out that “the advantage of Ibsen is that he is willing to tell the truth and reveal the corrupted and dirty truth in the society for everyone to have a look in detail” (ibid). Hu’s understanding of Ibsen’s works shows how Ibsen was interpreted to be relevant in the society as the Qing dynasty disintegrated in 1911, which marked the end of thousands of years of feudal imperial rule in China and iconoclasm became one of the main themes for the Chinese intellectuals. Labeled with social criticism, Ibsen was constantly referred to by some leading Chinese intellectuals such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun to teach the Chinese people at that time to abandon the old social norms.

Taken as a social reformer, Ibsen was held aloft; for example, Ibsen was referred to as early as 1907 by Lu Xun to whom “Ibsen was more important as a social critic than as a dramatist” (Tam 1984, 36-39). Tam’s clarification explained how Ibsen’s works were used to inspire the Chinese people to embrace the reform and not to be afraid of political chaos as follows.

In Lu Hsun’s (Xun’s) time, China was in the transition from a feudal society to a modern one. The people who grew up in an agrarian culture were at a loss on how to react to the changes in society. In order to protect themselves in the political chaos, they took a middle course and followed the majority… Considering Ibsen as an intellectual fighter, Lu Hsun concludes: “What Ibsen describes in his works are those strong characters who believe in the strength of reform and struggle, and are not afraid of being opposed to the majority”. (Tam 1984, 39)

So, at this early stage of Ibsen’s reception in China, Ibsen’s works were used as an instrument not only for criticizing the social problems in the old society and further indicating the necessity to break away from the old culture but also for encouraging
and inspiring the Chinese people to embrace the reform bravely.

During the war period after the 1930s, as China went through both the anti-Japanese war and civil war before the establishment of PRC in 1949, some adaptations of Ibsen’s works, mostly *A Doll’s House*, were performed and national liberation was promoted among the productions (Tam 1984, 177-183). At the new historical period after the wars ended, that *A Doll’s House* was staged in 1956 in Beijing, which was also the grandest performance since the play was introduced into China, had another meaning in the Chinese communist context that aimed at condemning the hypocrisy of capitalism and conveying a satire of the bourgeois social system (Helland 2015, 129). It can be said that between the first wave of Ibsen production and the 1983 Chinese *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen’s works were used as an instrument for ideological education.

Regarding educating Chinese people with Ibsen's works, the first production of *Peer Gynt* follows this tradition. In comparison with the turbulent historical backgrounds of the earlier reception of Ibsen in China, when China was on the edge of breaking away from the old society, the Chinese society was also at its transitional point when *Peer Gynt* was staged in 1983. The ten-year Cultural Revolution had just ended in 1976 and the whole Chinese society was facing a tremendous transformation from the revolutionary chaotic state to a more stable situation. With more freedom of literary creation, the Chinese intellectuals started to reflect upon the revolution and so-called “reflections literature” (*shangheng wenxue*), which was mainly based on the sufferings people went through during the revolution, started to become popular at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. In this period, the Gang of Four, which was officially seen as the instigators of the Cultural Revolution, was constantly criticized in the literary works.

This cultural phenomenon was not limited to the literature. On the theatre stage, the Gang of Four was criticized in the Chinese *Peer Gynt*. Elisabeth Eide (1987, 316) noted that the production came into being partly as a result of “...political
implications and lessons to be drawn from it. Parallels to the Gang of Four were constantly mentioned. The trolls and all that was negative in the play were taken as symbolic references to the Gang of Four”. This kind of symbolic reference from Ibsen’s works to the Chinese reality is not rare throughout the Chinese Ibsen reception as mentioned earlier, with which the social educating purposes were to be achieved. However, it was not only the Gang of Four that was criticized but also all those who chose a troll’s way of life during the revolution.

In his directing conception, Xu Xiaozhong claimed that the play warns people that “the troll philosophy twists people’s self-respect and destroys people’s values” (Zhongxi 2007) and noted that

Peer’s disastrous life told us that we should live our life with morality, principles, and responsibilities, which are the basis of the value of life; and our healthy nature would vanish without the basis… The script also told us that we should correctly understand what the true self is and take actions to keep our true selves… We should not concentrate on making profits, sell our soul for benefits, avoid the difficulty by turning around and compromise with oneself. The play also illustrated that trolls are inside the human heart! If we do not fight with or keep the distance from the trolls, we human beings will degenerate into trolls… (Zhongxi 2007)

Xu’s interpretation of Peer Gynt from the perspective of morality shows how Peer Gynt touched upon the Chinese creator in that historical point when the intellectuals tried to reflect upon the social reality that many people lost their morality, principles, and responsibilities during the past Cultural Revolution. The four points that Xu raised about what we should not do could be seen as the lessons he drew from the revolution. The educating meaning is clear and obvious with the play. Xiao Qian’s opinion about the educating meaning of the play is consistent with Xu Xiaozhong that Xiao claimed “Ibsen in this play tried to show two ways of life, one is the troll’s way, the selfish, self-centered and the egocentric way. As long as one could privately get the advantage of oneself, one could do anything at the expense of others. The other way is the way of the idealist, the way of a principled person” (Xiao 1984). In the post-revolutionary period, two of the most important creators of the Peer Gynt
production took it as a good opportunity to educate the Chinese people to live a life with morality and principle by condemning the troll’s way of life in Peer Gynt.

We can, therefore, see that Peer Gynt was meant by the Chinese creators to educate the Chinese people, especially the young generation, to live their life with morality and principles in the post-revolutionary period. Among the audience, there was a group of high school students from the Affiliated High School of Peking University (beida fuzhong) taken by their teacher to see the performance. Their reception of the performance is documented as below:

These young people at around 15 to 16 years old all understood the performance and was deeply touched by it. After the performance, they commented that we all had “Peer” in us, and we all need to fight with ourselves. The students also sent a picture frame to the Peer Gynt production team, and in the frame, there is a line from the play – “You have until the next roads” (rangwomen zai xiayige shizilukou zaijian). (Lu 1983, 33)

The line is originally from the dialogue between the Button Molder and Peer in the fifth act of the play, where Peer was granted some time to find proof to show that he had been himself during his whole life. And the students’ understanding of the play that related Peer with themselves and the humanity of fighting against the negative side represented by the character Peer indicates the success of the creators’ didactic intention with the production.

Even though the 1983 Peer Gynt production was meant by the creators to convey the didactic meaning to the audience, it was not the same as the early instrumentalism of using Ibsen’s works to reform the society at the beginning of Chinese Ibsen reception. Situated in the post-revolutionary social context, Peer Gynt was attached with the reflection of the Cultural Revolution and further pointed to the individual people’s way of life in the new period after the lessons drew from the chaotic revolutionary period. Nevertheless, from the early 20th century to the 1980s, the Chinese Ibsen tradition has been preserved as for using Ibsen’s works to educate the Chinese people based on different social contexts.
3.4 Student performance - a starting point of Ibsen on the Chinese stage

Having argued that the 1983 Peer Gynt production keeps the Chinese Ibsen tradition as for its didactic meaning, I will now examine how this production follows the tradition from another perspective. It is interesting to note that all the three plays that were performed earlier than Peer Gynt in China were debuted by students' amateur theatres, Peer Gynt is not excluded from this tradition. This students’ performance tradition indicates the significant role that the students’ theatres have had in contributing to introduce Ibsen onto Chinese stage, which has been a starting point for Ibsen’s works to be presented in more professional theatres and get to be known by the more Chinese audience.

As the translation came out, Peer Gynt was chosen to be the graduate performance for the students in the Directing Department in the Central Academy of Drama. Established in April 1950, the academy, initially inheriting the drama department of Lu Xun Art Academy in Yan'an, Art School of North China University, and National Drama College in Nanjing is regarded as one of the most prestigious drama schools in China. About the other three plays performed earlier than Peer Gynt in China, the first performance of A Doll’s House is in 1923 by a group of college students from Peking Normal College for Women (Xia 2018), the first Chinese performance of An Enemy of the People was staged by Nankai Zhongxue in Tianjin in 1927 and Ghosts by National Peking Academy of Arts in Beijing in 1929.

As Xia pointed out, many theatres faced commercial pressures when putting up productions that “did not fit the aesthetic preferences of theatergoers in the 1910s” (Xia 2018,153). Against this background came Amateur Theatre Movement (aimeiju yundong) in the 1920s and the non-profit and non-professional theatres were advocated in order to deal with the commercial pressures, which provided an opportunity for Ibsen to appear on the Chinese stage (Xia 2018,153). As such, several
Ibsen productions were staged by the amateur theatre groups from 1920s to 1930s (Tam 2001, 216).

The commercial pressure could also be the reason why *Peer Gynt* premiered by the students in China, instead of by professional theatres. In the early 1980s, China started its opening-up and reform policy in order to better develop the economy. The theatre industry was included in the reform list that the government began to “ask all theatre companies to bear responsibilities for its financial loss and gain” (Yang 1987, 176). With the commercial pressure, “most theatre companies in the nation are now taking the safe route of not putting on a show unless there is absolute assurance of making a profit or breaking even” (Yang 1987, 176).

Since it was the first time *Peer Gynt* was staged in China, the director was uncertain if the audience that was used to Ibsen’s social problem plays would accept this new “face” of Ibsen (Xu 1983, 49). In that circumstance, it would be too risky for the commercial theatres to stage *Peer Gynt* and test the market. After all, one of the advantages of student performance for the first Chinese *Peer Gynt* production was that the box-office did not need to be taken into consideration. And the big success of the 1983 student production paved the way for the play to be staged later on in the professional theatres, including National Theatre in Beijing in 2013.

Throughout the twentieth century, student performance has played a significant role in the Chinese Ibsen tradition as for introducing Ibsen onto a more professional theatre stage in China. And the 1983 *Peer Gynt* production is within this Chinese Ibsen tradition.

To sum up this chapter, I have analyzed the director’s artistic creation of *Peer Gynt* and the Chinese-ness in the production in the first two sections. The integration of Chinese style and Ibsen’s plays on the Chinese stage points to a new way of performing Ibsen in China and at the same time, renovated the Chinese theater stage. In the following two sections, the didactic meaning attached to the production and the
significance of the student performance has been elaborated. With the analysis, I argue that the Chinese interests invested in the 1983 Peer Gynt production have influenced the Chinese Ibsen tradition in two ways, one is that the director inherits the didactic use of Ibsen and the other is that the artistic values of Ibsen’s works got explored, which generated new diversity of staging Ibsen in China.
Chapter 4  Norwegian reception of the First Peer Gynt in China

As China invested different interests in the creation and reception of Peer Gynt, Norway shares an interest in this cultural event as well. The first Chinese translation and production of Peer Gynt have been enthusiastically received by the Norwegian authority and the news agencies in the early 1980s when it was high time Norway tried to build a better relationship with China. Although the Norwegian responses provide important information about a little-known period in Sino-Norwegian relations, research on them is almost entirely lacking. As such, the Norwegian reception of the Chinese Peer Gynt event will be analyzed to see how it factors into the Sino-Norwegian interchange in the post-revolutionary period. The analysis demonstrates that the Norwegian authority used the Peer Gynt event as an opportunity to improve its relationship with China from early on, while the Norwegian news media used the Chinese Peer Gynt to introduce the Chinese history to the mass population in Norway.

The analysis of this chapter will start with the reception of the Chinese Peer Gynt event by the Norwegian authority. Against the historical background of the Sino-Norwegian relationship in the early 1980s, I will shed light on the reactions from the Norwegian authority towards the Peer Gynt event in China, from the translation to the production, to see how the Norwegian authority used this cultural event to exercise its soft power and improve its relationship with China.

The second section analyzes several news outlets about the Peer Gynt event. The news articles gave the Norwegian people a chance to know more about Chinese history through the translator’s personal life experience. But different perspectives were taken by Aftenposten and Klassekampen. That the Chinese people, especially the intellectuals, suffered from the political turbulence is elaborated by Aftenposten, while Klassekampen did not highlight so much about people’s sufferings. Instead, the
translator’s confidence in the country’s future was underlined by Klassekampen.

Besides, both of these two newspapers noted that the translation and the production of *Peer Gynt* passed the theatre censorship in China. As Norway did not have the same censorship system as in China, the emphasis on *Peer Gynt* passing the censorship shows their intention of pointing out the difference between Norway and China in this aspect to the Norwegian readers. And the subsection of the NRK program further demonstrates that the Chinese historical context is the focal point for the Norwegian news media when they received the *Peer Gynt* event, while it paid more attention to the Chinese history after PRC was established.
4.1 Reactions from Norwegian authority

Before looking into the Norwegian reception of the first Peer Gynt in China, it should be noted that the Sino-Norwegian relationship in the early 1980s was in a harmony considering that the Norwegian Prime Minister Odvar Nordli, who was invited by the Chinese government, paid an official visit to China in 1980, which was the first official visit by Norwegian Prime Minister to China since both countries built the diplomatic relationship in 1954. Even though the purpose of the visit was mainly to enhance the cooperation in the oil and energy industry, Nordli (1980, 5) pointed out the cultural exchanges were increasing that contributed to a better understanding between the people in these two countries and decreasing the distance between them.

The 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978 marked the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the opening up and reform. At the historical point, the Norwegian authority showed their openness and willingness to have more cooperation and communication with China. Ibsen’s works, together with many other western works of literature that were banned for censorship during the revolution, were reprinted in 1981. It was against this historical background that the Chinese translation of Peer Gynt was completed and published.

The publication and stage production of the Chinese Peer Gynt were both the Chinese initiative with a little Norwegian support, including Elisabeth Eide’s support to the translation work when Xiao Qian needed to find some Norwegian materials for his better understanding of the play, as well as some Norwegian advisors from the Norwegian embassy, were requested for “assistance with national costumes, landscape, stage décor, etc.” for the theatre production (Eide 1987, 316). So from very early on, Norway was invested in this cultural event, both in the translation and the production, which indicates that the Norwegian authority showed their interest in the first Chinese Peer Gynt event from the very beginning.
In 1984, Xiao Qian was awarded Ibsen Medal (Ibsenmedaljen), which is one of the Ibsen-related awards given out by the Skien Commune, Ibsen’s hometown in Norway, to honor the recipients’ contribution to the Ibsen-related work. Xiao Qian’s translation of Peer Gynt was not only highly valued by the Skien Commune but also on the national level. In 1986, Xiao Qian received Norwegian National Medal from Arne Arnesen, the Norwegian Ambassador in Beijing at that time, for his brilliant Chinese translation of Peer Gynt.

In addition to the medals, Xiao was invited to visit Norway between August and September in 1984 with his wife and was, together with Helge Vindenes, who was the Norwegian ambassador in Chile, and several other Norwegian officials, received by the former Norwegian King Olav V in the Royal Palace in Oslo. Although the Norwegian King already lost the political power of appointing the ruling government since the end of the 19th century, they remain their significance in Norway as a

17 In the Skien official report, it is noted that “Ibsen medal has been given out in many years on different basis. Many of the recipients have received of the medal for their Ibsen-related work or contributions (Ibsenmedaljen har vært utdelt i mange år på ulikt grunnlag. Mange av mottakerne har fått medaljen for sitt Ibsenrelaterte arbeid eller innsats)” (Skien kommune 2006, 10).
national symbol. Every year, the Norwegian King receive those who come to thank for the honor they have been awarded or to clarify for a case or an organization.

During his visit, Xiao Qian gave a seminar on “Chinese Appreciation of Peer Gynt” at the University of Oslo on 4th September. And in Skien, he presented some photos from the performances of Peer Gynt in Beijing to the Ibsen Museum. Xiao Qian’s presentations showed the Norwegians how Ibsen had his significance in China.

Besides Xiao Qian, Gong Xiaodong, the main actor of Peer in the production, was invited by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pay a visit to Norway in 1985. The trip was arranged by the Norwegian-Chinese Friendship Association and was sponsored by the Norwegian Credit bank (Det Norske Creditbank), today’s DNB, the largest commercial bank in Norway. As an honored guest, Gong attended the Opening gala at National Theatre. In addition to visiting Ibsen’s hometown and several theatres in Norway, he traveled specially to Jotunheimen and Besseggen, so-called Peer Gynt’s kingdom, which are mountain areas in the middle of Norway written by Ibsen into Peer Gynt in the first act of the play. The year 1985 saw an active communication between Norway and China as King Harald (back then the prince) visited China with his wife for the first time this year.

The invitations from the Norwegian authorities to Xiao Qian and Gong Xiaodong, as well as the awards Xiao Qian has received, are all based on their contributions to the first Peer Gynt translation and production in China, which indicates the positive attitude that the Norwegian authority had towards this Peer Gynt event. At the age of reform and opening-up period in China, the Norwegian authority seized the chance of the Chinese Peer Gynt translation and production and increased its communication with the Chinese intellectuals based on this cultural event, which shows the Norwegian authority’s efforts of building a better relationship with China in the early 1980s.
4.2 Norwegian news outlets about the first Chinese Peer Gynt

When the Norwegian authority highly appreciated the Chinese translation and production of Peer Gynt, how did the Norwegian news workers report this cultural event to the Norwegian people? As mentioned earlier, the news outlets in the 1980s played an important role in public communication, as they were the main sources from which the mass population of Norwegian people got to know the international news. In this section, I will shed light on several Norwegian news outlets, including seven newspaper articles and a tv program made by NRK - “Peer Gynt in Beijing”, to see how they reported the first Peer Gynt in China and how they influenced the Sino-Norwegian interchange at that time.

Among the relevant newspaper articles, most of them were published by Aftenposten, the biggest newspaper agency in Norway, whose China correspondent Gunnar Filseth resided in Beijing between 1980 and 1985. The prominent position that Aftenposten has in the Norwegian newspaper industry indicates the great interest that Norway invested in this cultural event. Some other influential newspapers also covered the event of Peer Gynt performed in China, including Klassekampen, VG, Morgenbladet, etc, but to a relatively smaller scale compared to the reports from Aftenposten. Considering the quantity and quality of the reports, I will center my analysis on the news reports from Aftenposten and Klassekampen to see how the first Chinese Peer Gynt event was received by the Norwegian newspapers. The reason why I, later on, will not address much about the reports in other newspapers is that they are either the same content as in Aftenposten and Klassekampen, or merely an introduction of the NRK tv program of “Peer Gynt in Beijing”.

Before the analysis of the news articles, it needs to be noted that Aftenposten and Klassekampen represent two different views that are connected to their political stances. Aftenposten is claimed as having had retained a “conservative influence from the end of 1880” (Pettersen 2016a), while Klassekampen was a left-wing newspaper
in the 1980s\textsuperscript{18}. Considering the two different political stances that these two newspapers held in the early 1980s, it would be interesting to see how their reports of the event differ from each other.

4.2.1 “Ibsen’s thinkings shall encourage the Chinese”

When the Chinese translation of \textit{Peer Gynt} was finished in 1981, it was together with several other Ibsen’s plays published as an Ibsen works collection by the People’s Literature Publishing House, which caught Gunnar Filseth’s attention. He wrote a long extensive news report, “Ibsen’s thinkings shall encourage the Chinese” (Ibsens tanker skal anspore kineserne) for this publishing event, which covers almost a whole page in \textit{Aftenposten}. The article includes a caricature of Ibsen with him uttering three Chinese characters “sa”(卅), “guang”(广) and “wang”(往), which does not have any meaning in Chinese when they are put together, other than show that Ibsen is speaking Chinese (Figure 4.2). With the caricature, that Ibsen’s works are getting translated into Chinese is vividly depicted.

In this report, he claimed that the reason for this publishing event by referring to the statement of Lü Yuan, editor of the publishing house - “This is a big task, one of the biggest for the publishing house.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{“Ibsen’s thinkings shall encourage the Chinese” in \textit{Aftenposten} (Source: National Library of Norway).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Klassekampen} was originally published by Marxist-Leninist Groups (MLG), which is a precursor to the left-wing Norwegian political party - Workers’ Communist Party (Arbeidernes Kommunistparti) and has only been formally independent since 1991 (Pettersen 2016b).
That we've taken it on us is because we think Ibsen is still up to date, also in the Chinese context” (Filseth 1981). Also, Filseth noted that under Cultural Revolution, it was forbidden to loan out Ibsen’s works from the libraries, and what was worse was that the red guards even cleared out Ibsen’s works from the libraries and private book collections. It was until the end of the revolution when the Chinese publishing house endeavored to fill the literature hole caused by the revolution that Ibsen’s works, regarded as classics, were arranged right after Shakespeare to be published. When the publishing house tried to test the market and published a collection of Ibsen’s works two to three years earlier, all the 80,000 pieces of the collection were almost sold out. In his report, Gunnar Filseth stressed Ibsen’s significant role in the literature area in China from the beginning of the 20th century and his popularity by detailing such statistics, which indicates his pride in the Norwegian’s playwright’s influence in China.

In this report, instead of focusing on the first translation of Peer Gynt in China, it was more of Ibsen’s long-lasting actuality for the Chinese people based on which the Ibsen collection was settled to be published then. Through the news report, Filseth showed the Norwegian readers how Ibsen’s works were still valid and taken as significant western classics in China. The Cultural Revolution was mentioned when talking about how Ibsen’s works were devastated during the revolution and the status quo of the literary field in post-revolutionary China. But the historical context was not the main focus of the report, which was going to change in his following reports on the production of Peer Gynt in Beijing.

4.2.2 “In traditional production: Peer Gynt premiere in Beijing on 20th May”

On 9th May 1983, before Peer Gynt was going to premiere by the graduate students from Central Academy of Drama, Filseth wrote a news article in Aftenposten “In traditional production: Peer Gynt premiere in Beijing on 20th May” (I tradisjonell oppsetning: Peking-premiere på «Peer Gynt» 20. mai). Compared to the news report
on the publishing event, the report of the Peer Gynt premiere is shorter. In the start, Filseth pointed out that Ibsen had been absent from the Chinese stage for several decades that “This is the first time Ibsen becomes performed in China since 1956, when Gerda Ring set up A doll’s house in Beijing” (Dette er første gang Ibsen blir spilt i Kina siden 1956, da Gerda Ring satte opp «Et dukkehjem» i Peking. Filseth 1983). Interestingly, Filseth noted here that it was Gerda Ring who set up the 1956 A Doll’s House production in Beijing, while Helland pointed out that “the Norwegian director Gerda Ring was invited to Beijing to act as artistic advisor for Wu’s staging of A Doll’s House” (Helland 2015, 124). Filseth’s exaggeration about Ring’s role in that production to some extent indicates his pride in the Norwegian contribution to Ibsen’s works getting staged outside of Norway.

As reported, Peer Gynt was going to be performed in a wholly new theatre that has China’s most advanced stage equipment, which indicates how the Chinese theatre workers endeavored to make the Ibsen production with high-standard. The same indication can be seen from Filseth’s introduction of the Xu Xiaozhong as one of the most famous theatre workers in Beijing.

Regarding the challenges of the Peer Gynt production, Filseth noted that the “it was only after the clear signal was given by the official theatre censorship two months ago that the preparation of the test progressed a lot” (Virkelig fart over prøvene ble det først etter klarsignal ble gitt av den offisielle teatercensur for to måneder siden). He further mentioned that another Norwegian play People and Robbers in Kardemomme (Folk og røvere i Kardemomme by), which was planned to be staged in China several years earlier than Peer Gynt, failed the censorship so as not to be able to perform in public. Filseth’s report showed the Norwegian readers that the theatre censorship still existed in post-revolutionary China and still had much influence on the theatre productions.

As these two news articles were released on Aftenposten, barely any news about either the publishing event of Ibsen’s works in China or the premiere of Peer Gynt was seen
on *Klassekampen* yet, which can mainly be resulted from their absence of the news correspondents in China.

### 4.2.3 “Peer Gynt is winning a victory in China”

As *Peer Gynt* was successfully performed in Beijing, Gunnar Filseth wrote two more articles about this event in *Aftenposten*, including “Peer Gynt is winning a victory in China” («Peer Gynt» går sin seiersgang i Kina) on 20th June and “Peer Gynt is universal” (Peer Gynt er universell) on 30th June. Though both articles talked about the big success of the performance in China, different perspectives have been adopted.

In “Peer Gynt is winning a victory in China”, Filseth told the Norwegian people how well the Chinese audience received the performance. At the beginning of the news report, Filseth noted that “After a big success in one of Beijing’s theatres, billions of the country's people will now be a part of this drama” (Efter stor suksess på et av teatrene i Peking skal landets milliardbefolkning nå fo del i det ibsenske drama). His excitement can also be felt when he said that the Chinese production of *Peer Gynt* surely had the most audience since the play premiered in 1876. The statement about the covered Chinese audience of the production in Beijing is extravagant even though the performance was said to be broadcast both in Chinese television and on the radio. By using the extravagant method in the news report, Filseth indicated the huge population of the potential audience of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* in China.

He further indicated the popularity of the performance by noting that theatre-goers from several other Chinese provinces and big cities traveled to Beijing to see the performance, and a group of university students had seen the play three times. Other theatres were considering putting up this play, and the graduate students from the Central Academy of Drama were asked for guest performances. According to Filseth, it was a full house for all the performances even though the environment was harsh that the highest temperature in Beijing those days were between 30 and 36.8 degrees celsius, further demonstrating the enthusiasm of the audiences.
When the report came to an end, Filseth suggested that Norway was not as reciprocal in this cultural interchange as China. As he mentioned, the Chinese side offered a video recording of the production if NRK was interested in broadcasting it, in which case the Norwegian audience could also see the Chinese production of Peer Gynt on TV. In contrast, Filseth pointed out that the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing asked for permission to borrow a Norwegian recording of another Peer Gynt production but received a response that Peer Gynt recording was not found in Norway.

4.2.4 “Peer Gynt is universal”

As the report “Peer Gynt is winning a victory in China” focused mainly on the big success of the performances, the other report on 30th June was no longer restricted to the performances themselves. In “Peer Gynt is universal” (Peer Gynt er universell), Filseth showed the Chinese social-historical context of the first production of Peer Gynt through the elaboration of Xiao Qian’s life experience. And this is the longest and most detailed news report that is relevant to the Peer Gynt production compared to all the other relevant Norwegian news reports.

Firstly, he introduced that the translator Xiao Qian had been influenced by Ibsen from very early age and even took the words of Dr. Stockman in An Enemy of the people as his motto when he was sixteen years old – “The strongest man in the world is the one who stands the most alone”, which also inspired him when he was forbidden from writing since 1957 till the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977. As introduced earlier in the second chapter, Xiao Qian was labeled as the rightest and sent to the countryside twice during the two decades to do labor work. After mentioning Xiao’s 20-year writing ban, Filseth went further back to the 1920s when Xiao started to get to know Ibsen during the May 4th movement when Ibsen’s works inspired thousands of Chinese intellectuals. So, Xiao was one of those who got influenced by the first wave of the Chinese Ibsen reception. Later in the 1940s, Xiao saw Peer Gynt performed in the Old Vic in London while he worked as a war correspondent in Europe for the
After elaborating on the long-time influence Xiao Qian had had from Ibsen’s works, Filseth stressed the importance Xiao had in the revival of Ibsen in China for his translation of *Peer Gynt*. Ibsen was well known in China before for his social problem plays, and neither *Peer Gynt* nor *Brand* had been translated into Chinese before. The English copies of *Peer Gynt* brought back to China by Xiao made it possible for the Chinese people to get to see another possibility of Ibsen’s works. By looking through Xiao’s life experience in detail, especially the suffering he went through during the Cultural Revolution, Filseth introduced the historical context of the Chinese translation of the play. Besides, he pointed out that Xiao represented thousands of other Chinese intellectuals at that time who suffered from the political movements.

For the Norwegian people who lived far away from China and knew little about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the middle part of the report opened a door of the Chinese history to them, mainly about the history of how the intellectual people suffered during the revolution. And two examples of the Chinese intellectuals who lost their lives were given a detailed account of why they got suffered.

At the last part of the report, Filseth pointed out the didactic meaning *Peer Gynt* had on the Chinese young people that got confused after the revolution through referring to Xiao Qian’s comment on the play as follows:

*Peer Gynt* teaches us that we can live our lives in two different ways - like human beings or as trolls. To live like a troll was what the ‘gang of four’ were exactly like: To beat down others and take their advantage without regard to the misery of others. (Filseth 1983)

Xiao Qian’s understanding of this Ibsen play was significantly affected by his personal experience during the Chinese revolutionary context, which indicted how the reception of *Peer Gynt* was localized in the Chinese context and became relevant with the Chinese readers and the audience. Covering almost a whole page of the newspaper, this article dug into the translator’s life experience through which Filseth
showed the little-known Chinese history to the Norwegian readers.

4.2.5 “Chinese Ibsen expert in Norway: Peer Gynt – the right words at the right time”

Xiao’s comments of Peer Gynt were reasserted in the article “Chinese Ibsen expert in Norway: Peer Gynt - the right words at the right time” (Kinesisk Ibsenkjenner i Norge: «Peer Gynt» - ord i rett tid) published by Aftenposten on 4th September 1984 when Xiao was visiting Norway. To start with the article, Filseth cited Xiao’s comment of Peer Gynt that the play was the right play meant for the young generation in the 1980s in China.

According to the article, Xiao hoped that there would be a new wave of Ibsen influence in China and he further noted that the young people’s interest in Ibsen was rising again after the revolution. Xiao explained the reason why the young Chinese people at that time had little knowledge about Ibsen was partly due to the Cultural Revolution when Ibsen’s works were banned. Most of the contents in this news article had already been elaborated in the earlier articles, including the big success of the Chinese Peer Gynt production and the history of the Ibsen reception in China as his works inspired many intellectuals in the 1920s but got cleared out of the Chinese libraries during the Cultural Revolution, as well as Ibsen’s works were still relevant in China. Filseth also

Figure 4.3 “Chinese Ibsen expert in Norway: Peer Gynt - the right words at the right time” in Aftenposten (Source: National Library of Norway).
mentioned Xiao’s idea of having an Ibsen Festival on the Chinese stage.

Besides, it was pointed out that the translation of the play was censored the same as the production, but the translation passed the censorship after Deng Xiaoping took the political power in 1978, which indicated the decisive role that the political context had on the introduction of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* into China in the early 1980s. Xiao explained the reason why he chose to translate the play was that he thought the play would have a very important message, especially for young people.

In *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen answers many of the questions the young people are asking today. After the Cultural Revolution, the youth was so confused. In this situation, *Peer Gynt* is a very relevant moral lesson. (Filseth 1984)

The article ends with the demonstration of Xiao Qian’s optimism towards China’s future as he said “today we have the opening-up policy with associated reforms. I think we have learned that fanaticism does not go anywhere. In the long run, common sense will win over fanaticism”, which was never mentioned in the earlier articles. Thus, the Chinese political context became the highlight of the article. Xiao not only demonstrated the significant meaning of *Peer Gynt* and Ibsen in China but also the positive trend of Chinese political development. And in this case, the Chinese *Peer Gynt* is attached to much more political meaning.

4.2.6 The two articles from *Klassekampen*

In terms of the quantity of the news articles, *Klassekampen* could not compete with *Aftenposten* as there were only two articles about the Chinese *Peer Gynt* event in the early 1980s as far as I could find. On 20th May, “Ibsen-premiere in Beijing today – progressive *Peer Gynt*” (Ibsen-Premiere i Peking i dag: «Peer Gynt» progressiv) was released, written by Ole Walberg who was a correspondent based in Hongkong. In the article, Walberg briefly introduced Ibsen’s early reception in China as well as how the production came into being by referring to Xu Xiaozhong and Xiao Qian’s efforts for making the Chinese production of this play.
Furthermore, Walberg stressed at the end of the article that “All the theatre plays in China must be checked by the official theatre censorship in advance, but according to Xu Xiaozhong, the director of the production, the censors did not have any problem with the Norwegian progressive character Peer Gynt”\(^\text{19}\) (Walberg 1983).

In spite of mentioning the translation and the creation of the Peer Gynt performance as well as the emphasis of the theatre censorship in China, Walberg merely touched upon the historical context of the play, nor was the didactic meaning this play would have upon the Chinese people out of the creators’ intention was mentioned, which Aftenposten whereas drew much attention on.

Before the NRK TV released its program about the interview with Xiao Qian, Klassekampen released a news article “Peer Gynt i Beijing” (Peer Gynt i Beijing) on 3 November 1984 by an anonymous journalist. At the start, the fact that Xiao Qian chose to return to the PRC in 1949, even though he had a chance to live abroad, was stressed. The article continued with Xiao’s sufferings during the Culture Revolution and pointed out that Xiao after all, still had optimism towards China’s future. Such a loyal relationship between Xiao Qian and the PRC was never mentioned in those several articles about the Peer Gynt event in Aftenposten.

Comparing the reports of the Peer Gynt event by Aftenposten and Klassekampen, obviously, different perspectives were taken. In the five articles published in Aftenposten, the whole process of the Peer Gynt introduced into China was elaborated. In the news articles from the translation to the production, Filseth looked through the Ibsen reception history in China roughly and pointed out the first Chinese Peer Gynt helped Ibsen’s revival in post-revolutionary China. The most prominent message in his articles is the social-historical context of the Chinese Peer Gynt by focusing on the life experience of the translator Xiao Qian. In consistence with the

\(^{19}\) The original Norwegian text is “Alle teaterstykke i Kina må forhåndsklareres av den offisielle teatersensuren, men ifølge regissøren Xu Xiaozhong hadde ikke sensorene noen problemer med å godkjenne den norske Peer Gynt som en progressiv skikkelse”. 
newspaper’s conservative characterization, *Aftenposten* elaborated how the Chinese people, especially the intellectuals, suffered from the political turbulence. However, *Klassekampen* did not highlight so much about people’s sufferings. Instead, the translator’s confidence in the country’s future was underlined.

Besides, both of the two journalists in *Aftenposten* and *Klassekampen* noted the translation and the production of *Peer Gynt* passed the theatre censorship in China. As Norway did not have the same censorship system as in China, the emphasis on *Peer Gynt* passing the censorship shows the journalists’ intention of pointing out the difference between Norway and China in this aspect to the Norwegian people.

In conclusion, the seven news articles analyzed above indicate different Norwegian media’s interests in the first Chinese *Peer Gynt* translation and production and gave the Norwegian people a chance to know more about the Chinese history through the translator’s personal life experience. The articles certainly increased the Norwegian people’s knowledge about China, but the Chinese image shown by the articles, especially the first four articles by *Aftenposten*, can be hardly called positive. Meanwhile, the big success of the *Peer Gynt* production and the significant role Ibsen has had in China since the beginning of the 20th century should leave a strong impression on the Norwegian readers.

**4.2.7 “Peer Gynt in Beijing”**

The news outlets on the first Chinese *Peer Gynt* are not limited to the news articles. In 1984, Gunnar Høidahl, the correspondent for NRK who worked in China between 1982 and 1985, had an interview with Xiao Qian at his apartment in Beijing. Later the interview was made into a tv program entitled “*Peer Gynt* in Beijing” which was released by NRK TV on October 1, 1984, a program which was intended for the 35th anniversary of the establishment of PRC as well as the 30th anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between Norway and China.
The 35-minute-long program includes not only some video clips of the Chinese Peer Gynt performance but also the interview with Xiao Qian. The first scene in the program shows the first time Peer meets Solveig in the wedding, both of them are dressed in the Norwegian style costumes, which is consistent with the creator’s idea of making the performance with Norwegian characteristics (Xu 1983, 47). Then it shifts to the scene when Peer is describing his adventure to his mom Åse in the first act of the play, and the stage with the wooden house behind them strengthens the Norwegian-ness of the performance (Figure 4.4). The Norwegian narration accompanies the clips of the performance that it is stressed the big success this performance has had in Beijing.

Figure 4.4 Peer and Åse in front of a Norwegian-style wooden house (Source: NRK TV).

After the scene of Åse dying, Xiao Qian shows up in the video as he was sitting at the auditorium. His contribution to the translation of the play is stressed. Then the video shifts to the middle-age Peer in the madhouse in Cairo. After showing several video clips of the Peer Gynt performance, the program goes on with the history of the translation done by Xiao Qian and the interview with him. The interview part starts
with Xiao’s thoughts of the relationship between *Peer Gynt* and the Chinese revolutionary historical context as follows:

During the cultural revolution, I often thought of the play. Because during the cultural revolution, China became a paradise for the goal-getters and opportunists. There was no principle and the terrible thing could be then in the name of revolution. So, in the downfall of the Gang of Four, we had a sort of lost generation. The youth of that period were confused about what they should live for. I think the message I understood in *Peer Gynt* was very timely and appropriate. In my opinion, Ibsen in this play tried to show two ways of life, one is the troll’s way, the selfish, self-centered and the egocentric way. As long as one could privately get the advantage of oneself, one could do anything at the expense of others. (Xiao 1984)

In correspondence with Xiao’s critics of the troll’s way of life, the scene in the Dovre kingdom where the trolls are represented by the pig appears. In this scene, the Dovre king is trying to persuade Peer to put tail onto himself. Xiao keeps on his talking that the other way is the way of an idealist, the way of a principled person. In this play, I think Ibsen meant the man who cut his finger in the forest. But for me, the better type would be Dr. Stockman in the *Enemy of the People*... The play, I think, has a very healthy influence on our new generation. (Xiao 1984)

By contextualizing *Peer Gynt* with the Cultural Revolution context, Xiao Qian claimed the significant importance of the play for the Chinese younger generation. And based on his talk, Høidahl asked the first question about how well-known Ibsen was in China. But from the second question, the focus of the interview shifted from Ibsen in China to Xiao Qian’s personal experience after PRC was founded, including his two exiles to the countryside respectively in 1957 and 1969. The questions Høidahl proposed about the two exiles are detailed that include the specific reasons for the exiles and what Xiao did during the exiles.

Through the conversation, Høidahl dug deep into the individual’s life in the Chinese history before the translation and the production of the *Peer Gynt*, which provides the Norwegian audience a good opportunity to know more about the little-known Chinese history the same as the news articles did. Slightly different from the news articles, the
The 35-minute-long program “Peer Gynt in Beijing” centers on the interview with Xiao Qian by Gunnar Høidahl, during which the journalist showed great interest in Xiao’s life experience, especially after PRC was established in 1949. Even though there are several short video clips of the performance of Peer Gynt, the main part of the program is the process of Høidahl trying to dig deep into the Chinese revolutionary historical context through the interview. Thus, this program takes the chance of Peer Gynt premiered in Beijing and introduces the little-known Chinese history since the establishment of PRC to the Norwegian audience. Compared to the news articles, the tv program has not put so much effort into elaborating on the big success of the production in China, nor has Ibsen’s significant role in China been the main focus.
4.3 The Norwegian reception in conclusion

Xiao Qian is the key person in the Norwegian reception of the first Chinese Peer Gynt, both from the official reception and among the news outlets. His life experience that spanned over almost the whole 20th century, especially during the Cultural Revolution, drew much attention from the Norwegian news workers, which demonstrated the great interest that the news workers had on showing the Chinese history to the Norwegian people. The detailed description of Xiao Qian’s life experience during the political movements after PRC was established could also meet the Norwegian journalists’ curiosity towards the little-known Chinese history.

The other main point of the news outlets is about Ibsen’s reception in China, from the early introduction to the revival of Ibsen in China after Peer Gynt was translated into Chinese and got staged in Beijing. The news outlets regarding the significant role Ibsen had played for the modernization of China at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the success of the Peer Gynt production, must have created an eye-catching effect towards the Norwegian readers and TV audience. In general, the news outlets increased Norwegian people’s knowledge of China, while it is hard to say the impression that China left to the Norwegians, which was based on the Norwegian news outlets, is positive. The descriptions of the sufferings during the Cultural Revolution could to some extent, make the Norwegian people have a more critical view towards China.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian authorities received the Peer Gynt production positively as the cultural event was taken as a good opportunity to build more connections and enhance the friendship with China. In the early 1980s, such a way of receiving a culture event was in line with Norwegian interest when Norway strived to have more cooperation with China in some economic fields.

In conclusion, the Norwegian reception of the first Chinese Peer Gynt demonstrates that this Peer Gynt event was received by the Norwegian authorities and the news
workers with different interests. The Chinese initiative Ibsen production was used by the Norwegian authorities to enhance its relationship with China, while it was used by the Norwegian news workers to dig deep into the Chinese history and tell the people in Norway a fascinating story about an exotic China.
Chapter 5  Conclusion

Translated and performed in the early 1980s, the first Chinese Peer Gynt was closely connected to the post-revolutionary social context. The first Chinese translation would not be completed without the increasing freedom for the literature workers to work on the translation of foreign literary works after the end of the political movement. And same for the Peer Gynt production, the more open cultural environment paved the way for the play to be staged in public. In other words, the revival of Ibsen’s works was built on the more open political environment, which ensured the foreign literature was not a forbidden zone for the public anymore. Meanwhile, the influence of the social context was more than providing the precondition for the reappearance of Ibsen’s works in China; it also factored into how the Chinese creators and the audience understand this play and how they presented it to the Chinese audience.

Based on their personal experiences during the Cultural Revolution, both the translator and the director projected the image of trolls in Peer Gynt to those who selfishly gained private interests at the expense of other people and condemned the loss of morality during the revolution. Thus, with Ibsen’s Peer Gynt, the creators intended to educate the Chinese people, especially the young generation, to live a life with morality and principle. The post-revolutionary social reality made the production have a meaning beyond its artistic value and ensured the relevance and actuality of the play in the early 1980s’ China.

The production keeps the tradition of Chinese Ibsen reception regarding the didactic purpose of staging Ibsen’s works to educate the Chinese people, from the iconoclasm to the call for morality in the society. Even though Peer Gynt brought a new face of Ibsen to the Chinese dramatists that differed from the earlier social problem plays, it was still contextualized into the Chinese social context by the dramatists to realize the certain didactic purpose. In this sense, the first Peer Gynt production in China follows the Ibsen tradition in China for the educating value withdrawn from Ibsen’s plays.
Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the creators put many efforts into the artistic creation of *Peer Gynt*, combining the Chinese style with Ibsen’s play, further influence the later Ibsen productions in China. The artistic value of staging Ibsen’s works has been relatively overlooked compared to their social values before. However, Xu Xiaozhong made his efforts in exploring *Peer Gynt* through artistic perspectives besides his consideration to the social context as he took this play as an attempt to renovate the Chinese theatre stage in the 1980s. His experiment of including a Chinese style in the *Peer Gynt* performances centered on presenting the Chinese artistic conception, in which symbolism was adopted in the creation process. Besides, the Chinese-ness in the performances was integrated with the Norwegian story and the Norwegian mise-en-scène through the actors’ body movements with more technics, including the Chinese style dancing, which was out of his consideration of the audience’s artistic taste for the traditional drama performance.

So, for the reception of Ibsen in China, the 1983 *Peer Gynt* production allowed the Chinese theatre workers to break away from rigid realism and experiment with other artistic approaches to stage Ibsen’s works. Even though it cannot be guaranteed that all the Chinese Ibsen productions afterward put their focus on the artistic values of Ibsen’s works, the first *Peer Gynt* in China did prove the efforts that the Chinese theatre workers made in rediscovering Ibsen from an artistic perspective. It can also be seen that Xu Xiaozhong’s directing methods influenced some of his students that are active as theatre directors today, for example, Wu Xiaojiang and Liao Xianghong. The 2012 *Peer Gynt* production directed by Liao kept the method of integrating the Chinese style with the foreign drama and pointed to the realistic theme that people should think more about their self-integrity and human’s life in the new era when they were overwhelmed by the economic boom. Such interpretation of *Peer Gynt* about self-integrity that is closely related to the social context is in line with the 1983 production.
The purely Chinese initiative of *Peer Gynt* production not only played its transitional role in the Ibsen reception in China but also received much attention from the Norwegian authority and news outlets in Norway. In 1981, the Norwegian prime minister paid the visit to China, which was for the first time China received such high-profile visit from Norway. It was clearly shown that the prime minister had the intention of building a better relationship with China with his official visit. In 1984, the Chinese prime mister Zhao Ziyang’s visit marked a peak of the Sino-Norwegian relationship since PRC was established.

Against this historical context of the harmonious relationship between Norway and China, the Norwegian authority received this *Peer Gynt* production quite positively after the success of the performances. Both the translator and the actor were invited by the authority respectively to pay a visit to Norway and not least Skien for their contributions to the Chinese *Peer Gynt*. Besides, Xiao Qian also received the Norwegian National Medal and Ibsen Medal for his Chinese translation of *Peer Gynt*. The response from the Norwegian authority shows their intention of taking this culture event as an opportunity to increase communication with China at the beginning of the 1980s.

Xiao Qian was not only the main award-recipient from the Norwegian authority, but also was the focal point in the Norwegian news outlets that were related to the first Chinese *Peer Gynt*. Xiao’s life experience drew much attention from the Norwegian news workers and was covered extensively in the news outlets, which indicated the great interest the news workers had on showing the Chinese political history after the PRC was established to the Norwegian people. In general, that the Norwegian news outlets centered on the Chinese revolutionary social context of the translation and the theatre production of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* show the Norwegian media’s efforts to share the knowledge of the little-known history before *Peer Gynt* was performed. The other key point of the news outlets is about Ibsen’s significance in China, from the early introduction to the revival of Ibsen in China after *Peer Gynt* was translated into
Chinese and got staged in Beijing. Through emphasizing Ibsen’s popularity and influence in China, a sense of pride in the Norwegian dramatist can be felt.

The Norwegian reception of the first Chinese Peer Gynt demonstrates that this Peer Gynt event was received by the Norwegian authorities and the news workers with different interests. The Chinese initiative Ibsen production was used by the Norwegian authorities to enhance its relationship with China, while it was used by the Norwegian news workers to dig deep into the Chinese history and tell the people in Norway a fascinating story about an exotic China.

With the analysis of both the transitional role the 1983 Peer Gynt production has played in the Chinese Ibsen reception and its Norwegian reception, I argue that when this production was taken as an experiment to renovate the Chinese theatre stage from the artistic perspective with certain didactic meaning, it was used by the Norwegian side as an opportunity to increase its interchange with China. At the beginning of China’s reform and open up to the western world, the Peer Gynt production demonstrates that the cross-culture event exerted its influence beyond the boundary of the theatre.
REFERENCES


