

# **A Culinary and Educational Journey TO NTNU, Norway**

## **I. Introduction**

Prior to my arrival in Norway, a nation gently caressed by the aurora borealis and carved by profound fjords, my understanding of this country was constrained to its geographical appellation as "the Land of Ten Thousand Islands" and its culinary legacy as "the Hometown of Salmon." As a medical student from Nankai University in China, I embarked on an eight-day academic exchange journey in Norway with great enthusiasm for scientific research and intense curiosity about life in a foreign land. In Trondheim, we visited the solemn Nidaros Cathedral, participated in the lively Fadder Week, and tasted delicious salmon and flavorful tacos. In Ålesund, we engaged in the distinctive "bar to bar" activity, ascended the mountain in the city center to attain a panoramic vista of the entire city, and engaged in convivial discourse with Norwegian students regarding their daily lives. These experiences were of significant interest, and many of them were impossible to experience or even imagine back in China. A noteworthy observation was made during the course of this study. It was noted that students at NTNU were able to depart from school at 3 p.m. without any indication of anxiety or hesitation on their faces.

## **II. Research Enhancement**

During the initial week of the study, the group arrived in Trondheim, the

technological capital of Norway, to visit the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). In stark contrast to the bustling metropolis of Beijing, the landscape here was characterized by the absence of skyscrapers, with vibrant wooden houses nestled amidst verdant mountains and fjords, creating an ambience of serenity and aesthetic allure. The atmosphere was characterized by a sense of freshness and coolness, and individuals moved at a leisurely pace. This initial sensation of serenity was in stark contrast to the fast-paced and highly competitive domestic environment from which I hailed.

The city tour facilitated an opportunity to observe a different facet of Trondheim. A visit to Nidaros Cathedral was undertaken, and ascent was made to the tower, which was found to be narrow and steep. While the ascent was somewhat arduous, the culmination of the journey, with its breathtaking vista encompassing the city, served as a testament to the value of persevering through the exertion. Of particular significance was the profound respect and protection for history exhibited by the Norwegians. This commitment was evident in every facet of the process, underscoring a deep cultural heritage.

In addition, an excursion was undertaken to explore the woodlands, allowing for the full appreciation of the awe-inspiring natural landscapes that are characteristic of the Norwegian environment. The presence of towering ancient trees and clear streams has been shown to elicit feelings of

relaxation and happiness in observers. Concurrently, we had the privilege of visiting the medical laboratory of NTNU. The laboratory was characterized by its cleanliness and spaciousness, with various instruments and equipment meticulously arranged. The Norwegian teachers and students exhibited a warm and attentive demeanor. The guidance provided by the experts enabled the execution of experimental operations, including sectioning and staining. These operations facilitated the acquisition of a more intuitive understanding of medical experimentation.

The welcome ceremony, which was held in the center of the laboratory, provided a prime opportunity to observe the stark differences between Chinese and Norwegian educational concepts. The professor expounded on the circumstances of the Department of Biomedical Laboratory Science in meticulous detail, emphasizing the notion of "learning for a better life." This instigated a novel comprehension of the significance of learning.

During the second week of the study, the participants relocated to Ålesund, a picturesque coastal town. The learning focus in this case was meticulously targeted and pragmatic, emphasizing the mechanisms of coagulation and anticoagulation, in addition to associated clinical skills. An in-depth learning process was conducted on the complex pathways of the Coagulation Cascade, and the mechanism of action of anticoagulant drugs such as warfarin was discussed in detail.

Each knowledge point functioned as a component of a larger, overarching framework, contributing to the gradual development of a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Following the theoretical phase, the laboratory was entered, and semi-automatic and automatic tests of the International Normalized Ratio (INR) were personally performed. INR serves as a pivotal indicator for the supervision of anticoagulant therapy. Within the Chinese healthcare system, this responsibility is typically entrusted to professional personnel within the clinical laboratory department.

In contrast, the medical educators in Norway prioritized a hands-on approach, encouraging their students to master the principles and perform the surgical procedures independently. Upon completion of the sample processing, reagent addition, and instrument reading in a sequential manner, and subsequent attainment of an accurate INR report, the sense of accomplishment in "solidifying" theoretical knowledge through practical application was found to be unparalleled.

Subsequently, an even more challenging aspect of the training was initiated: venipuncture practice. Guided by the Norwegian instructors, who provided comprehensive safety instructions and close supervision, we engaged in repeated practice sessions with the assistance of simulated teaching aids. As indicated by the evidence presented, the students' progression from a state of initial nervousness and inexperience to one of

gradual proficiency was inextricably linked to the teachers' meticulous guidance.

This pedagogical approach, which was novel to me, particularly due to my prior experience in China, profoundly underscored the significance of experiential learning in the medical field. Concurrently, during the operation of molds, meticulous attention was devoted to the details and standardization of each operation, as it was recognized that these elements could potentially impact patient health and safety.

### **III. Life Enlightenment**

This culinary journey in Norway was characterized by the unique memories and stories associated with each dish. On the first day, in consideration of our predilection for hot food, the Norwegian teachers prepared bread and a soup similar to spicy bean soup for our lunch. Subsequent research revealed that this dish corresponds to a variety of Italian soups, comprising ingredients such as carrots, celery, green beans, and macaroni.

The warm soup was consumed rapidly, reducing the slight chill that had been experienced upon arrival in a foreign country. Following dinner, an intriguing occurrence took place: the leftover French fries were retrieved from the restaurant and subsequently provided as sustenance to the seagulls congregating in the central square. In China, an internet meme has gained

significant popularity, one that features a juxtaposition of seagulls and French fries. The subject was instructed to proceed to the pier with the objective of acquiring French fries. The source of this phenomenon can be traced back to a comic entitled "What Can I Have on My Mind," created by the Canadian artist Joshua Buckman.

The discourse between two seagulls in the comic about the meaning of survival subtly metaphorizes the life state of human beings rushing about for basic needs. At this particular juncture, the scene of feeding seagulls in a foreign country provided a more vivid interpretation of the internet meme. Indeed, these seagulls have been observed to actively approach individuals with unpeeled French fries and swiftly reclaim the food, doing so in a manner that is both discreet and unobtrusive.

The subjects' attire was both intelligent and appealing, contributing significantly to the enjoyment of the journey. During our sojourn in Norway, we had the opportunity to sample a variety of regional culinary specialties. Brunost is a dairy product derived from whey, a by-product of cheese production, that has undergone a prolonged boiling process to concentrate its constituents. Originating from Norwegian peasant culture, brunost was developed as a means of reusing the whey that is typically discarded during the process of traditional cheese making. This practice was driven by a desire to avoid the waste of vital nutrients. In contemporary Norwegian society, brunost has become an integral component of the breakfast ritual,

particularly in rural areas.

Notwithstanding its nomenclature, the substance in question bears a closer resemblance to a concentrated lactose caramel in terms of its production process and constituent ingredients. Norwegian waffles are a staple food in Norwegian daily life. These products can be consumed in a variety of ways, including as a breakfast accompaniment to coffee or tea, as a dessert to enhance the flavor profile of a meal, or as a shared tea time experience with friends or family, promoting a sense of relaxation.

In Trondheim, we had the opportunity to partake in waffles while being serenaded by the student choir, Candiss. Rømmegrøt (cream porridge) is a notable example. This traditional porridge is prepared by boiling sour cream, flour, and milk. The biscuit's texture is characterized by its thickness and smoothness. When accompanied by a drizzle of butter and cinnamon sugar, the biscuit's flavor profile is enhanced, offering a warm and satisfying sensory experience.

It was observed that in Trondheim, the consumption of this dish is particularly prevalent during the Christmas season. This bowl of porridge evoked a spontaneous recollection of our Laba porridge. Despite the dissimilarity in the ingredients, there is a striking parallelism in the warmth of home, the sense of ritual associated with festivals, and the emotions that are transmitted across generations.

Despite the potential variations in dietary habits, emotional responses often transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, underscoring the universal nature of human sentiment.

On the fourth day, the group engaged in an in-depth exploration of Norway's salmon culture. Salmon is a staple of the Norwegian diet, particularly in regions referred to as "the Country of Fjords." This culinary practice reflects a preference for unadorned and straightforward preparation methods. In addition to the traditional method of smoking salmon, local culinary preferences include frying or grilling the fish, followed by the application of lemon juice to enhance its flavor profile. This approach is said to preserve the fish's natural taste and aromatics to a significant degree.

This confidence and respect for high-quality ingredients, in conjunction with the Chinese culinary tradition of shaping and enhancing flavors through various techniques such as steaming, boiling, braising, and roasting, illuminates the distinct facets of these two culinary philosophies. One philosophy emphasizes the natural qualities of ingredients, while the other focuses on transforming nature, each with its own distinctive appeal.

In Ålesund, we engaged in the independent preparation of a substantial quantity of palatable sustenance. Numerous intriguing narratives emerged during the culinary endeavor. For instance, a tomato soup with thickeners was initially prepared, and subsequently, a spontaneous decision was made



to amalgamate the thickeners with instant noodles. This resulted in the creation of a novel culinary entity, characterized by an unanticipated and distinctive flavor profile.

In addition, we prepared potato slices and ham, heated pizza, fried meatballs, hamburgers with fried meat patties, and cooked cola chicken wings. The dishes were meticulously crafted by hand, instilling a profound sense of achievement.

#### **IV. Differences and Connections Between Norwegian and Chinese Food**

Firstly, there is the deep reliance on and ultimate utilization of local ingredients. The nation's extensive coastline has fostered a bountiful marine environment. The salmon we sampled possessed a fresh and tender meat quality, indicative of its "seafood diet." Local culinary practitioners excel at accentuating the intrinsic flavors of ingredients through unadorned cooking techniques, such as frying and grilling, eschewing elaborate seasonings.

Furthermore, dairy products constitute a substantial proportion of the diet. For instance, brunost, a Norwegian dairy product, is produced by the concentration of cow's or goat's milk, yielding a caramel-like sweet fragrance. It is a customary choice for Norwegians to consume it with breakfast or as bread, reflecting the comprehensive development of animal husbandry resources in Northern Europe.

Secondly, the dietary rhythm of "valuing snacks over staple foods" must

be considered. The notion of "staple food" possesses a comparatively negligible presence in the daily diet, with a variety of snacks assuming its place. Waffles serve as a paradigmatic example. In street stalls or cafés, waffles are often served with accompaniments such as cream, jam, or berries, constituting a popular snack or afternoon tea option.

Despite its capacity to induce satiety, risgrøt, a traditional Norwegian porridge, is predominantly consumed as a dessert or breakfast, rather than as a staple food for main meals. This dietary pattern, characterized by its emphasis on snacks, reflects the flexible and relaxed eating habits of Norwegians.

Thirdly, the simple and efficient dining scenario, which is especially prominent at lunch, is worthy of note. The decision to order Italian-style soup was influenced by the observation that the restaurant's prices were comparatively elevated. This choice aligned with the typical lunch patterns of Norwegians, who generally prioritize convenience and cost-effectiveness in their lunch selections, opting for quick and economical options such as soup and sandwiches. The majority of individuals opt to bring their own lunches or select dishes that are considered light in nature.

The practice of abstaining from lunch outside the home is indicative of a broader cultural emphasis on time efficiency and a nonchalant attitude towards life in general. Concurrently, international elements have been

incorporated into the diet. The advent of foreign culinary traditions, exemplified by sushi and tacos, stands as a testament to Norway's embrace of multiculturalism.

A comparison of the culinary traditions of Norway and China reveals notable distinctions. Chinese cuisine is predominantly characterized by the consumption of rice and noodles, which are staple foods. Rice, noodles, and steamed buns are considered fundamental components of every meal, and the comprehensive framework of "staple food + side dishes" is prioritized.

However, Norwegian cuisine does not prioritize the notion of staple food. Foods such as waffles and cream porridge are more functional in nature, serving to supplement energy and satisfy the appetite. There is no dietary logic in this regard analogous to that in China, where it is held that "a meal must have a staple food."

In the realm of culinary arts, Chinese cooking is predicated on the "harmony of five flavors" principle, which posits that the ideal gustatory experience is one that achieves a balance between the five basic tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami. A variety of techniques are employed to achieve this, including stir-frying, stewing, steaming, and deep-frying. A diverse array of seasonings, such as soy sauce, chili, and spices, is utilized to attain intricate and nuanced flavors.

Conversely, Norway adheres to the principle of "less is more," prioritizing

the preservation of ingredients' intrinsic flavors. The unadorned preparation of salmon and the delicate soup base of lamb meatball soup both exemplify a commitment to preserving "original flavor."

With respect to the social dimension of dining, Chinese lunches frequently serve a social function. In the context of shared meals among family members or colleagues, there is a tendency to prioritize the diversity of dishes and the concept of communal sharing.

However, Norwegian culinary practices exhibit a greater degree of personalization, prioritizing convenience and efficiency. It is noteworthy that the act of taking lunch does not typically constitute a social occasion in Norwegian culture, a stark contrast to the Chinese context, where the dining table is regarded as a central social venue.

## **V. My Own Thoughts**

So it is my first time to attend such an activity and also the first time to go abroad. It is pretty unforgettable. The first day when we arrived at Amsterdam, I was shocked by nothing, only the scene and different languages. I used to watch those scenes in the movies but it is quite a difference. The second day, when Kristin met us in the hotel, and she said "hi, I'm Kristin, what's your name?" and my thoughts go: uhh it finally begins—as I'm not good at English or Norwegian.

The next day, we toured together, accompanied by many students. They

were all very enthusiastic and took the initiative to strike up conversations with us, even though my spoken English was difficult to understand and took a long time to express. Gradually, I began to adapt to this feeling, growing accustomed to it and becoming adept at it. I discovered the true, wonderful sensation of English communication—something I could never have experienced back home.

Later and later still, everything felt like a dream. Each day brimmed with joy, and behind the simple words on that little schedule lay one indescribable surprise after another.

Here, the sun is never seen throughout the year, yet everything around is filled with warmth and passion.

I am deeply grateful to Ms. Cao for giving us this opportunity and for accompanying us throughout the journey.

If given another chance to choose, I would still stand firm in my decision—to come to the central square filled with seagulls, listen to the church bells ringing, sing “Love Story” with my friends, and work side by side in the lab. Everything was so beautiful, fleeting yet unforgettable.

## **VI. Summary**

Although this trip to Norway was short, its impact on me was extremely profound. I not only learned practical medical skills such as INR testing and venipuncture but also, more importantly, experienced a different medical

education model and cultural atmosphere.

This two-week journey was far more than just tasting food — it allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of how the economies and societies of Norway and China shape different daily lives. Norway's relatively high living standard and emphasis on work efficiency have made lunch a quick and casual affair, which is completely different from the lively lunch social gatherings in China.

The fresh salmon and local brown cheese are evidence that Norway's economy develops by making sustainable use of natural resources; while China's rich and diverse cuisines reflect its vast territory and prosperous food industry. From a social perspective, Norway's relaxed snack culture and casual dining atmosphere reflect the leisurely attitude towards life of local people. However, we also found that shared foods like waffles can also shorten the distance between community members.

In China, food-centered gatherings highlight that the dining table is an important place for maintaining social relationships. Although the two models are different, they both originate from the original intention of enriching life through food, which is particularly interesting.

The emphasis on the process, tolerance for failure, and respect for individual differences in Norwegian education have all made me rethink the essence of medicine. Medicine is not only about treating diseases and saving

lives but also about the overall care for people. In the laboratory, we pursue scientific precision; in the kitchen, we experience the warmth of humanity.

The combination of these two aspects constitutes the literacy that a complete medical student should possess. As a junior student, this experience has pointed out the direction for my future medical career. I will carry this cross-cultural experience and reflection with me, and in my subsequent studies, I will pay more attention to the cultivation of practical abilities and the improvement of humanistic literacy, striving to become an excellent medical worker who understands both science and humanistic care.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who made this journey unforgettable! Thanks to Teacher Cao for guiding us throughout the trip and enriching our experience with his unique insights. Thanks to all the teachers and students in Ålesund and Trondheim — your enthusiasm, patience, and sincerity in sharing cultural knowledge and good food spots made us feel extremely warm.

I also want to thank our partners from Nankai University — exploring new flavors and ideas together made every part of the journey full of fun. This journey is not just a simple learning experience, nor is it just about eating, drinking, and having fun; it is a journey that connects hearts and gains new knowledge, allowing us to see the unique way in which food and

life are intertwined in different parts of the world.

*August 26, 2025*