

## Reflections on a Norwegian Summer Exchange

This summer, I was fortunate to participate in an enriching academic and cultural exchange program co-hosted by Nankai University and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). This journey across the world to Norway was not merely a trip; it was a profound immersion into a different way of life, learning, and perceiving the world. It offered a unique lens through which I could appreciate both the majestic beauty of Norway and, by reflection, the profound depths of my own Chinese heritage. The experience, spanning the vibrant student city of Trondheim and the breathtakingly beautiful Ålesund, became a comparative study in culture, academia, and aesthetics.

Our adventure began in Trondheim, a city where history and youthful energy seamlessly intertwine. The architectural landscape presented the first stark contrast. In China, our architectural philosophy often emphasizes symmetry, grandeur, and a historical narrative that spans millennia, seen in the Forbidden City's imposing halls or the graceful curves of a Suzhou garden pavilion. Norway's architecture, however, tells a different story. The Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, a masterpiece of Gothic design, speaks of a deep-rooted Christian history and a rugged, stone-built perseverance against the elements. Moving to Ålesund, we were greeted by a uniform yet enchanting Art Nouveau style, a phoenix risen from the ashes of a great fire. This contrasted sharply with the diverse and often towering modern skylines of Chinese megacities like Shanghai or Shenzhen. Norway's architectural ethos seems to be about harmonizing with the natural environment, using local materials, and building a narrative of resilience.

This connection to nature is Norway's most defining feature. The breathtaking fjords, the pristine glaciers, and the serene forests are not just scenery; they are the nation's soul. We embarked on hikes where the only sounds were of waterfalls and our own breaths. This stands in poignant contrast to China's vast and varied landscapes, which are often imbued with layers of cultural and poetic significance. A mountain in China is not just a mountain; it is a subject of ancient paintings and a repository of Taoist or Buddhist philosophy. While both are majestic, the Norwegian wilderness feels raw and untamed, inviting personal exploration, whereas the Chinese landscape feels curated by millennia of human thought and artistic interpretation.

Culinary experiences further highlighted our differences. Norwegian cuisine is a testament to its maritime identity. We sampled fresh salmon, hearty elk meat, and the unique brown cheese with Norwegian students. The focus was on fresh, high-quality local ingredients and simplicity. Chinese cuisine, with its "eight great traditions," is an explosion of complex flavours, intricate techniques, and a communal, shared dining culture centered around the round table. Meals in China are a social event, a loud and joyful celebration of togetherness, while in Norway, there is a quieter, more individual appreciation of the food and the moment.

The core of our exchange, however, was academic. In Ålesund, we delved into the specialized field of coagulation and thrombosis. The learning approach was notably hands-on. We spent time in modern laboratories, conducting experiments that brought theoretical knowledge to life. This practical, student-centred pedagogy differed from the more lecture-intensive foundation common in China, which prioritizes a strong theoretical grounding.

In conclusion, this summer exchange was a meaningful experience. It was more than just visiting famous sites; it was about engaging in a dialogue of cultures. I learned that there is no superior or inferior, only different. Norway's embrace of nature, individuality, and pragmatic learning complements China's rich historical tapestry, communal spirit, and depth of theoretical knowledge. As a future medical professional, this experience has broadened my horizons immensely. It has given me a new perspective on healthcare ethics and the application of knowledge. I returned to China not only with souvenirs and photographs but with a renewed appreciation for my own culture and a global mindset that will undoubtedly shape my academic and professional journey forward.