Immediately after I exited the airport, I recognized the smell of air in China. No, this retail study tour was not my first trip to China. I visited China a few times before but much of my visits were limited to Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Unlike my previous trips, I will be traveling to five different cities with students who have never been to China, and visiting companies to understand the business-side of a diverse country.

Fully developed upper tier cities like Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Beijing are examples of China’s fast growth. And newly developing cities, like Shenzhen, are popping up right behind the major cities. It is amazing how quickly China is changing. Two years ago, I visited the Shangxiajiu Pedestrian Street in Guangzhou while the streets were still under construction. Now, the street is completely different from what I remember. The pavement and buildings are newer and there are bright lights and lanterns everywhere. Company visits in Tier 1 cities told me that their markets have become saturated so it would be interesting to how these cities will continue to grow in the future.

Yingkou, a tier 3 city in Northern China with a port, was vastly different from the upper tier cities. The streets were not as populated and there were still mom-and-pop stores that were on the verge of falling apart. Finished apartment complexes and spacious parks were plenty, but people had yet to occupy them. This was a city in development. Now that tier 1 markets are saturated, cities like Yingkou are the new markets that both foreign and domestic companies are now aiming for. Yingkou’s change is heading in a good direction but it seems that it will take more than just companies to get people to come to the city.
Visiting China again this time without the help of my relatives and family has been a wonderful learning experience. During this trip, I learned that certain aspects of this trip come naturally to me and not to others. But I also find myself surprised along with them on many occasions, thus showing that I still have much to learn about China.