It has been a few weeks since we all arrived in Tianjin for our UMAP programme. Funnily enough we all arrived at different times and barely knew each other. I arrived after a 24 hour train ride from Hong Kong to Beijing and another 3 hours and a lot of negotiating with the very little Chinese I knew and they could understand I arrived in Tianjin Normal University. I was shown to my room and after a much needed rest met the other girls in the next room. Whitney was to join us a week later.

The first week was pretty hard but also great fun. It was very cold (and seemed more cold since I had just come from tropical climate) and it was difficult to find basic things like restaurants and shopping places. Furthermore, since we were living in the hotel rather than the foreign student accommodation it was hard to meet new people. However after more than a week the TNU director through his assistant Li Tao organised a day tour of Tianjin for us and introduced us to two lovely Chinese girls who were majoring in English at the university. They were great help and showed us around to the market, the local restaurants and bakeries. Their English was great so it wasn’t so difficult to communicate with them and they encouraged us to practice our Chinese and speak to them in mandarin. The girls still help us out and sometimes just come to check up on us, so its great. That same weekend Li Tao’s organised tour guide, Jennifer, picked us up very early in the morning and took us for a tour of Tianjin. We went for a tour of the Shi Palace in Tianjin which belonged to the Shi family which was the largest and most wealthy family in Tianjin before the war began. The palace was beautiful and Jennifer knew all about the history of it as well as Tianjin’s. The next stop was the museum of Tianjin which was fascinating. Tianjin was one of the most affected regions of China in the war between China and Japan due to its proximity to Japan. This has been a major factor in shaping the city’s architecture and history. Most of Tianjin looks very European with fascinating buildings, monuments and street designs. Jennifer explained that this was due to the fact that different ally countries during the war period had quarters in the city. So the Italian quarter of the city is still quite preserved and has a very European feel to it. The day also included a very comprehensive tour of the city where we could see the history and things that Jennifer told us about. The tour was great as it gave us a better understanding of the city and helped us to get our bearings more clear.

Since then we have made many Chinese friends and have even offered to casually tutor some of the English language students. We have also been learning about Chinese culture through attending classes, taking part in Taichi lessons and been inquisitive about the different ways that people act and
interact. Now it seems that we our stay here is almost too short and there is still so much to learn!

Until next time.

Zaijian