

What would you do for a Tootsie-pop?  
How many licks does it take to get to the tootsie roll center of a Klondike Bar?

Today was the first day of the semester, with three hours of Chinese Marketing Systems. Class meets on the third floor of the central part of the business building, overlooking the central courtyard. It's a pretty building. The classroom is modern with a computer system and projector. There could be a few more power outlets, however. I'm sure there will be some competition going for the outlets at some point so students can use their laptops.

The atmosphere is fun. There are only 8 in the class of about 25 from America (seven from UH and one from the University of Florida). Most of the rest are from Europe, chiefly France and Italy. The seven CIMBAs are the majority of the graduate / MBA students in the class.

Our professor wanted to make the point that the fundamentals of marketing are similar around the world. Basically identify a need or want by consumers and provide the product of service to match. However, China, like all cultures, will have variances to the marketing game based on their unique culture. These differences may seem small, but understanding them and working with them will be key to making or a breaking a product.

To make this point, we played a card game called something like Bargna. The class was split into 6 groups and given a set of cards and rules. We had a few minutes to review them with our group and play a practice round. The entire class then had to play a round without talking. After the round, the winners moved up a group, and the loser moved down a group. Continuing in silence, the new groups played another round. To everyone's surprise, it turns out that the rules of the game for each group in the initial round were slightly different. For example, different suits of cards were the trump class, or there was no trump at all, and aces were high or low. These differences quickly came to light in the second round but we could not talk. Again, at the end of the round, the winner moved up and the loser down. However, this time we had figured out that the first step was to silently determine a set of rules for trumps and aces so everyone was on the same page.

During the lecture, some of uniquenesses of China were discussed. One of which is the incredible size of the population. The professor made the joke that if I am one in a million, there are 1300 people just like me in China! I volunteered to play the true or false game. My question was, "If a Chinese person asks if I am hungry, are they asking to go out for food?" The answer is false, it is just a way to ask how things are going. Confucianism was also mentioned as the chief cultural influence, a future lecture that I am very intrigued to hear.