



University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union
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**Disrespectful Actions and Cultural Appropriation at Grad House
2022 Lunar New Year Celebrations**

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CC:

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To Grad House Staff and Volunteers,

It has come to our attention that on February 1, 2022 during the Year of the Tiger Lunar New Year celebrations, Grad House staff placed red envelopes for students and residents to take into the common area, some of which contained 冥币/冥幣 (i.e., hell money/hell bank note/money for the deceased). According to traditions, paper money notes containing “hell money” and burnt for the dead are usually used during another Chinese festival 清明节/清明節 (Qingming Festival/Tomb-Sweeping Day).

The act of giving 冥币/冥幣(hell money) to living people draws disdainful sentiments and sends them the message of “*you are dead to me*” or even worse, “*I wish you were dead.*” It is not only insulting, but heavily unacceptable. We do not condone such actions at the UTGSU. Photo evidence of these notes is provided below.



Receiving a red envelope with 冥币/冥幣(hell money) is not only offensive and an act of appropriation, but also traumatic for our Asian community who are celebrating the Lunar New Year. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a drastic increase in anti-Asian racist violence and hate, despite decades of social movements advocating for social justice and anti-oppressive practice within colonial institutions. Whether or not this action was a mistake, it is unacceptable that the Grad House residence team alongside the university did not consult with members of the community who celebrate this significant time of the year before approving such actions. Furthermore, having failed to facilitate a safer space for marginalized students and racialized students as well as residents, both Grad House and, by extension, the university have perpetuated such impermissible sentiments during a time of happiness, celebration and reflection for a number of our student communities on campus.

While the university has issued a formal apology, we, the undersigned, demand the following actions from the residence team and any other related services:

1. Provide an explanation for this inappropriate practice.
2. Consult with students who celebrate the Lunar New Year before implementing Lunar New Year activities, and implement a similar process of student consultation before implementing activities for other cultural events.
3. Provide ongoing annual anti-oppression training for residence staff. If they already have such training, provide them with another one or improve the training content so issues like those outlined above do not happen again.
4. Provide culturally appropriate, anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory support in residence and on campus for students who have been negatively impacted by this action.
5. Make public the outline of steps that Grad House and/or the University intends to take in the future to prevent similar oppressive practices.
6. Proactively work to rebuild solidarity and mend ongoing relationships with those in the school community who celebrate the Lunar New Year.

These actions should be communicated publically to the Graduate membership at large, with opportunities for students to provide feedback.

We look forward to hearing how the University intends to implement these demands.

Sincerely,

University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU)
University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU)
University of Toronto Life Science Connection (UTLSC)
University of Toronto International Cantonese Union (UTICU)
University of Toronto Victoria College Urban dance club (THE CREW)
University of Toronto Mississauga Chinese Students and Scholars Association (UTMCSSA)
I Wish I Knew How to Quit Movies - U of T
iGEM Toronto
University of Toronto Mississauga Life-Science Student Connection (UTMLSC)
Scarborough Campus Students Union (SCSU)
Students For Barrier-Free Access (SBA)
Chinese Undergraduate Association at the University of Toronto on St. George Campus (CUAUT)
University of Toronto Minds, Miles & Motivation (3M) running club
UTChinese Network
Arts & Sciences Students' Union (ASSU)
International Association for Political Science Students
University of Toronto Chinese music club (UTCMC)

University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 3902 (CUPE 3902)
UTGSU Race and Ethnicity Caucus
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 3907 (CUPE 3907)
University of Toronto Chinese Politics Roundtable (UTCPR)
Trinity College Chinese Students Association (TCCSA)
UTGSU Grad Minds
United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) Canada
University of Toronto Scarborough Chinese Student and Scholar Association (UTSCCSSA)
OISE Asian Student Alliance (ASA)
OISE MACE
Applied Psychology and Human Development Student Association (APHD SA)
Applied Psychology and Human Development Racialized Students Team
OISE Student Collective
Comparative, International, and Development Education Student Association (CIDESA)
OISE CIDE East Asian Special Interest Group
The Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS)