

For Immediate Release

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CCNC-SJ Demands Official Apology from the University of Toronto Graduate House for giving Students “Hell Money” during the Lunar New Year

CCNC-SJ is appalled by the ignorant and insensitive actions of [the University of Toronto’s Graduate House](#) to give students traditional Chinese red packets that were filled paradoxically with joss paper, incense paper that is burned during funerals and prayers to honour our ancestors and pay our respects to the dead. As a traditional Chinese custom, the lucky red envelopes are exchanged as an expression of well wishes of prosperity, good fortune, and longevity. Receiving “Hell Money” that is given to the dead is a major curse and sends wishes of ill will and death to the receiver.

The brief apology on social media issued by the University of Toronto’s Graduate House is not sufficient. This incident must be understood in light of the significance of the Lunar New Year and its traditions, as well as the ever-present anti-Asian racism in Canadian society. The Lunar New Year is treated as the most important celebration of the year by many Chinese Canadians. Especially for our elders and community members who practise ancestral prayer and traditions, an act like this is a great insult. This lack of care reflects the all-too-common attitude that anti-Asian racism is to be treated lightly or is less deserving of attention.

“It is despicable that large institutions try to capitalize on their so-called diversity and can’t be bothered to make the minimal effort to check their facts,” said Susan Eng, Vice-President of CCNC-SJ. “How do you miss that? It says ‘HELL Bank Note’ on every note. It’s difficult to decide what is more offensive – the incident itself, or the gaslighting that follows,” said Ryan Chan, Project Lead on Online Hate and Social Media.

With official recognition and growing evidence of systemic and rampant anti-Asian sentiment in Canada, **CCNC-SJ demands that the University of Toronto administration:**

- Issue an official apology to all students and community members affected.
- Hold those behind the offensive act accountable and take steps to ensure similar events will not happen again.
- Commit with leadership and resources to engage Asian Canadian communities to combat anti-Asian racism within and beyond the University of Toronto.

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- 30 -