

Red Envelope 红包

Stories from the Yinghua Community

Lucky money wrapped in red is given by elders and adults to children on the occasion of the Lunar New Year and on special occasions throughout the calendar. And, these parcels full of crisp new bills may be known by other names in different areas of China and in other lands.

In the early 2021 Yinghua Academy newsletters, we invited families to share stories about giving and receiving hóng bāo, which, in English, we call red envelopes or red packets. Parents and students in our school community generously shared their heartwarming memories compiled here by Yinghua board member Joel Luedtke. Picture the scenes as you read the stories.



1B Rueben I was born in Xi'An. When I was very little, I lived in a group home apartment with a few other kids and the Ayis (aunties) who took care of us. One auntie was like a mama to me; her name was Chun Chun Ayi, and she loved me. When I was three years old I was adopted. [My new family] lived ... in Guangxi province, in the south of China, far away from Xi'An. I stayed in touch with Chun Chun Ayi. **She sent me a special hóng bāo for my first birthday with my family.** I was four years old. I felt so loved by Chun Chun Ayi.



Cynthia Seiner, K4 Elise and 2C Mira I grew up in a small village in South Vietnam. Life was difficult after the war ended. But on New Year—called Tết in Vietnamese—**everyone seemed to forget how hard life was when lì xì, the Vietnamese version of hóng bāo, were handed out.**



Esther Tan, 2B Oliver and 7C Zachary During Chinese New Year's Eve, dad will give hóng bāo to the children. Before receiving hóng bāo, **both children will say to dad the CNY blessings they learned in 1st grade at Yinghua.** We usually do this little ceremony after we have tuan yuan fan, or New Year's eve dinner. Children will put the hóng bāo New Year's money under their pillows. We wish our children to have a healthy and smooth year to come, growing one year wiser.



Khanh Nguyen, 4A Khoa and 6B My Linh Tết is what we call Vietnamese New Year. I remember as a kid always celebrating at the U of M Vietnamese Student Union's show full of skits and songs and dragon dance. But I barely had a clue as to what they were singing about! **We always gathered with extended family for a big meal.** I remember traditional New Year's food like Bánh chưng, a rice cake shaped like a rectangle or cylinder fill with sticky rice, pork, mung bean wrapped and steamed in banana leaves. (Which I now have made a tradition to make with my kids every New Year.) Then we would get lì xì money in a red envelope. But we always had to wish our elders a happy new year first in Vietnamese. But it was always the best part. Many times we would get a \$2 bill which we thought was pretty special, not knowing that it wasn't alot of money!



5B Michael When I lived in a mountain top village of Guangxi province, we kids always gave each other hóng bāo for a birthday present. **There weren't any stores for buying toys, so a red packet with a little cash was a very good gift.** Usually a kid's mom would call down to the town in the valley to order a bakery cake. One of the village drivers, who owned a van, would shuttle the cake up with other deliveries such as live ducks and boxes of oranges. Just before nightfall on the birthday, we kids ran around to find our friends, calling them to come the birthday kid's home for a party. Upon arrival, every guest handed the birthday kid a hóng bāo. Then we lit candles, put out the lightbulb, and sang happy birthday in Mandarin and English. After eating wedges of spongey cake, we always played a game of smearing leftovers in each other's faces, making a mess of white whipped cream. Then the mom or grandma would serve a nice supper around 8 p.m.





6D Titus Every year before Spring Festival my mom prepared hundreds of hóng bāos. During Spring Festival, we were invited to nearly every household of the village in rotation for breakfast, lunch, and supper. My mom would find the oldest persons in the house, and with two hands and a slight bow, present each elder with a generous hóng bāo. Then she handed each of the kids, including siblings and cousins, a smaller hóng bāo.

A few minutes later, the grandma of the house would discretely inspect the amount of one kid's hóng bāo, and multiply it by the number of kids, to figure the total amount of cash given. Then she would sneak off to the smoky kitchen and stuff four hóng bāos for the four kids in our family, reciprocating the amount of cash that we had just given to them.

When grandmas or aunties passed a hóng bāo to me, I never took it. Like all children, I was trained to politely refuse. **I found that a good rule of thumb is to decline three times. Then accept the hóng bāo reluctantly, but gratefully.** Sometimes the grandmas or aunties would just stuff the hóng bāo directly into my coat pocket.



Everyone at Yinghua Academy wishes we could all be together to celebrate the Year of the Ox. But we're keeping safe by maintaining social distance, and this has meant that a grand performance in Bethel University's Benson Great Hall would not take place in 2021.

*We invite you to support our students' education by making a donation to the school in our 15-year-old tradition called the **Red Envelope Campaign**. Coming soon to your mailbox is a Red Envelope letter from board chair Amanda Schneider, development chair Joel Luedtke, and executive director Sue Berg. The goal of this year's campaign is to raise \$50,000 to meet the needs of all students during this unprecedented year. Wait for your letter to arrive, or make an online contribution at bit.ly/redenv21.*

We can't be together, but we can still share our New Year spirit through our generosity and care for one another.

