

Sustaining Tradition: Singapore's Eco-Friendly Lunar New Year

As the Year of the Dragon unfolds, Singapore is at a crossroads of tradition and environmental consciousness. During CNY, many of us noticed the eco-friendly changes that this Lunar Year brought, and among them was Ethan Tan, a standard 11 student. After talking to him even he was able to recall multiple sustainable changes - from eco-friendly decorations made from recycled red packets to sustainable food practices.

“During the Lunar New Year, I witnessed a heartwarming and creative act that added a special touch to the festivities,” Ethan said enthusiastically, “the children in my community crafted beautiful lanterns and dragon ornaments from recycled materials like coloured paper and discarded Ang Paos to promote eco-friendly practices and reduce paper waste.”

But the question arises, why should I be worried about paper and food waste? Well, if you care about fish then you should be self-conscious. Excess food waste kills marine life by increasing the concentration of bacteria in the water which consumes the oxygen present which is also known as eutrophication.[1] Other than this, chemicals discharged from paper manufacturing can contaminate water supplies and our food chain by affecting the marine life involved. Furthermore, ocean waters, animals, and habitats all help the ocean absorb a significant portion of the carbon dioxide emissions from human activities. So by harming marine life, we are attenuating the effects of global warming and climate change.[2]

In Singapore's bustling urban landscape, a red packet recycling initiative emerges as a beacon of environmental responsibility. However, despite symbolising prosperity, these packets contribute to paper waste. In 2022, over 5,000kg of red packets were recycled – 5,000kg of red packets are enough to produce around 12,500 carton boxes.[3] This is why recycling these red packets is so crucial.

Greeners Action, a philanthropic environmental organization based in Hong Kong, reports that over 16,300 trees have been annually utilized since 2014 to craft 320 million red envelopes exclusively for Chinese New Year celebrations in Hong Kong. When additionally accounting for Singapore and mainland China, the environmental repercussions become even more pronounced.

By spearheading recycling campaigns, Singapore showcases grassroots efforts to combat waste, setting a precedent for global sustainability initiatives, and reducing global warming. DBS bank has launched digital Hong Baos which can be given through e-wallet apps. For the new generation which is comfortable without cash, this is a great initiative and also environmentally friendly. DBS has also increased its efforts to recycle physical red packets, given the growing momentum of digital gifting. The bank collected 4,300kg of packets through its annual festive packet recycling initiative in 2023, twice the volume collected in 2021 when the initiative was launched.[4]

Geneco, a Singaporean company, is conducting its fourth consecutive campaign, inviting people to contribute their used red packets until March 31. These packets will undergo repurposing by SGRecycle to create new paper products. Making participation convenient, the company has set up more than 90 collection bins across Singapore, strategically located in popular malls such as Plaza Singapura and Bugis Junction. With such widespread accessibility, whether you're out shopping or socializing with friends, there are ample opportunities to recycle. This initiative serves as a commendable instance of transforming waste into valuable resources.[5]



Singapore's Red Packet Recycling Campaign in Action. Photo: Wonderwall.sg

Moreover, during CNY many of us went on dinners, however, did we make sure not to waste food? According to the UN, food loss and waste generate around 8% of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions each year, which is almost the same as the tourism industry.[6]

The National Environment Agency (NEA) revealed that Singapore discarded approximately 813,000 tonnes in 2022, with food wastage surging by as much as 20 per cent during the Chinese New Year festivities.[7]

However, businesses and organizations, such as Treatsure and Treedots, are leading the charge. Treatsure's mobile app allows users to purchase

surplus food from partner hotels' buffet spreads, while Treedots connects suppliers with buyers to redistribute excess inventory. Additionally, "Food Rescue @ Events," spearheaded by Den Teo, facilitates the distribution of excess food to those in need through a Telegram group.[8] These initiatives reflect Singapore's commitment to sustainability and community welfare, setting an example for global efforts to combat food waste and global warming during the Lunar Year.

As Singapore enters the Year of the Dragon, it embarks on a journey of renewal and sustainability. The city sets a precedent for eco-friendly Lunar New Year celebrations by weaving together tradition and innovation. As we usher in a new year, let us embrace Singapore's green traditions and work towards a brighter, more sustainable future for all; by using E-Ang Baos, not wasting excess food, and recycling or donating the items we throw away during spring cleaning, we can help make a much better, and a much more sustainable Lunar New Year!

References:

[1]<https://www.scienceabc.com/nature/how-does-our-food-waste-affect-the-seas.html#:~:text=Food%20Waste%20Can%20Cause%20Eutrophication,-Besides%20the%20effects&text=This%20makes%20the%20waters%20uninhabitable,reducing%20diversity%20in%20those%20waters.>

[2]<https://blog.pdfFiller.com/world-oceans-day-lets-prevent-paper-pollution-in-the-ocean-together/#:~:text=Chemicals%20that%20are%20discharged%20from,affecting%20the%20marine%20life%20involved.>

[3]<https://dollarsandsense.sg/where-to-recycle-your-used-red-packets-into-cardboard-boxes-coasters/>

[4]<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/each-qr-gift-card-can-be-used-only-once-avoid-scanning-those-that-look-tampered-with-dbs>

[5]<https://www.asiaone.com/lifestyle/stop-dont-trash-your-used-red-packets-recycle-them-instead>

[6]<https://www.carbonbrief.org/in-depth-qa-what-food-waste-means-for-climate-change/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20UN%2C%20food,2022%2C%20according%20to%20the%20FAO.>

[7]<https://www.nea.gov.sg/our-services/waste-management/3r-programmes-and-resources/food-waste-management>

[8]<https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/helping-singaporeans-reduce-food-waste-chinese-new-year>

Dissemination:

<https://medium.com/@harshjais43/sustaining-tradition-singapores-eco-friendly-lunar-new-year-ee7b07bab896>