Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

RAVIV LITMAN

BA (University of Victoria, 2014)

“The Parent Tax: The governance of gratitude between transnationally educated Singaporean sons and their parents”

Department of Anthropology

Tuesday, August 30, 2016
10:00AM
David Turpin Building
Room A136

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Leslie Butt, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Daromir Rudnyckyj, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Jie Yang, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Simon Fraser University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Gregory Rowe, Department of Greek and Roman Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

In Asia many young men and women feel obligated to give allowances to their parents. Scholars have shown that Singapore has reinforced traditional family relationships as a source of economic national security among citizens by drawing these feelings of obligation. I argue that students’ experience with parent-child relationships of obligation within Singapore comes from a combination of state policy and parental expectations. These relationships are not created solely by the state, but co-created by the combination of parents and the state and result in reciprocal relationships expressed as gratitude. This thesis argues that there are state programs in Singapore that reinforce sons’ bonds to parents while they are studying overseas in order to inculcate the idea of self-motivated gratitude to give money to parents. This study draws on data gathered from ethnographic interviews and participant observation conducted in Singapore with male students returning from studying overseas in 2015. The conscription of men into the military, scholarships for overseas educations, and funding for overseas Singaporean communities were all arenas where the state invested in strengthening the ties between sons and their parents in order to keep overseas students close to family. Among the respondents in this study the pressure to give back to family was solidified as a result of being included in these government programs.