Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

GRACE WONG SNEEDON

MEd (University of Victoria, 1981)
BEd (University of Victoria, 1980)

“Who Are We – Suzie Wong? Chinese Women’s Search for Identity”

Interdisciplinary Studies
(Departments of Anthropology and Pacific and Asian Studies)

Tuesday, July 14, 2015
10:00am
Cornett Building
Room A319

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Margot Wilson, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Richard King, Department of Pacific & Asian Studies, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Lianne McLarty, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Tzu-I Chung, Curator of History, Royal British Columbia Museum

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Erica Woodin, Department of Psychology, UVic

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

The children born into the Canadian-Chinese community following the repeal of the Canadian Chinese Immigration Act (1923) were the first Chinese-Canadians to be born with full citizenship rights. After decades of isolation and segregation, the 1946 Canadian Citizenship Act transformed the limited citizenship of Chinese immigrants to full citizenship. Whether the parents of these children were Canadian or had just arrived, they could offer their children few benefits as Canadian citizens. The participants in the study are Canadian-born women, descendants from the four counties of Sun Wui, Hoi Ping, Toi San and Yin Ping of the Pearl Delta District of Guangdong, China. Their region, dialect, class, gender, age, and ethnicity unite them. There were few Canadian-born Chinese from the time of the repeal until 1967 when Canada changed its immigration policy to a more equitable point system not based on race.

This is an interdisciplinary study incorporating an anthropological interviewing methodology, an examination of Chinese-Canadian history and of Asian women in Hollywood films, and how these portrayals have impacted the contemporary societal perceptions of Chinese women. I have discussed Asian psychology, feminist, cultural, and film studies and how they relate to identity development. I examined the markers the participants used to fashion their identity, looking at the themes of beauty, behaviour, language, culture, values, and expectations. I used oral history and narrative methodology through in-depth interviews to examine how the historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts have influenced this generation of Canadian-born women of Chinese descent as they developed their identity in Canada.