



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

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

of

**Benjamin Lawrence**

MA (University of London, 2012)

BA (University of Leicester, 2008)

**“Cambodia’s Competing Constitutional Sites and Spirits”**

Faculty of Law

Thursday December 5, 2019

12:00 pm

Clearihue Building

Room B007

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Victor V. Ramraj, Faculty of Law, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Pooja Parmar, Faculty of Law, UVic (Member)

Dr. Simon Springer, School of Environmental and Life Sciences, University of Newcastle (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Melissa Crouch, Law Faculty, University of New South Wales

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Laura Parisi, Department of Gender Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

This thesis studies the Cambodian Constitution from a socio-legal and ethnographic perspective, highlighting some of the multiple ways in which diverse constitutional discourses and practices manifest themselves in the country outside of judicial, or even state, institutions. The thesis starts by recognising that existing literature typically associates constitutionalism exclusively with the work of courts, and with liberal-democracy, before providing a series of case studies that focus on constitutional practices that are typically obscured from view by such a focus. These case studies provide accounts of how, for example: international actors and local civil society groups engaged in Cambodia's 1993 constitution-making process; Cambodia's apparently liberal-democratic Constitution has been used publicly by the government to facilitate and justify authoritarianism; court cases are themselves used by local activists to conduct domestic and internationally-focused advocacy; constitutional provisions have helped to shape the way Buddhist monks understand their role in society and politics; and artists are helping to shape constitutional definitions of national identity and culture through their interactions with or avoidance of state censorship. The result is a nuanced, empirically grounded account of a constitutional order that has been largely overlooked by scholars in the country and abroad. However, it is also an exploration of the ways in which constitutionalism can be understood to operate outside of courts or state institutions, and how a liberal-democratic constitution can simultaneously act as a source of legitimacy for and challenge to authoritarianism.