

Special Seminar on Bhutan Society and Politics

NO
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Emerging Political Divide amidst Democratic Consolidation in Bhutan

※ Language: English



JANUARY 19 (THU) 14:30-16:30
Seminar Room (No.213)

2nd Floor, Inamori Foundation Memorial Building

ACCESS : <https://kyoto.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/access-2/>

 **Speaker**

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Abstract

The fourth parliamentary elections in Bhutan held between November 2023 and January 2024 saw a record number of five political parties contesting for the 47-seat National Assembly. For the first time, both the ruling and opposition parties were ousted along with a new political party in the primary round. The general round returned to power a party which formed the government between 2013 and 2018. A brand-new party has been elected as the Opposition.

Fifteen years after the political transition, democracy is consolidating in Bhutan. This stands out in the broader context of almost two decades of global democratic recession. Besides free and fair elections as well as changes in government, opposition and parliamentarians, there are other notable developments that attest to the democratic consolidation.

Nonetheless, there are emerging challenges as well. Compared to the last three general elections, voter turnout was lowest this time. Only two women were elected making women representation the poorest so far. Urban voters are heavily influencing electoral outcomes for rural constituents.

Far more worrying is the deepening political divide between eastern and western Bhutan. The east voted almost entirely for the brand-new party led by a former bureaucrat from the eastern district of Tashigang while the west voted for the party led by former Prime Minister, who is from the western district of Haa. In this east-west ethnic identity politics, Southern Bhutan with predominant population of Nepali ethnicity is becoming the king-maker.

Bio

Sonam Kinga is a member of the Teaching Faculty at the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies. He was the Chairman of Druk Gyalpo's Institute, Chairperson of De-suung Skilling Program, member of the National Service Core Working Group and member of the Task Force for National Resilience Fund. He was earlier a Visiting Scholar at the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies in Kyoto University, a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) in Tokyo and a founding member and researcher at the Centre for Bhutan Studies. He represented Tashigang Dzongkhag in the National Council, Parliament of Bhutan for ten years. In his first term, he served as the Deputy Chairperson and in second term, as the Chairperson. He has received the prestigious honour of Red Scarf and title of "Dasho" in 2012 and Gold Medal (National Order of Merit) in 2014 from His Majesty the King. His works include *Changes in Bhutanese Social Structure* (2002), *Polity Kingship and Democracy* (2009) and *Democratic Transition in Bhutan* (2019) published by IDE, Bhutan's Ministry of Education and Routledge respectively.

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