

Second conference of International Society for Bhutan Studies in Kyoto

A total of 52 scholars presented their works between February 4-6, 2025 at the second conference of the International Society for Bhutan Studies (ISBS), which was hosted by the Kyoto University.

Since its founding in 2015, ISBS has promoted the study of Bhutanese culture, life and nature in all aspects. It encouraged, inspired and motivated interest in lesser known aspects while strengthening the areas of existing concentration.

The President of ISBS, Professor Sabina Alkire of the University of Oxford, introduced the range of conference papers in the following terms; "from development programmes such as roadside tourist stalls and waste treatment stations to Bhutanese gaming habits, from in-depth studies of local deities, festival and Bon and Buddhist practices to historical royal letters, democratic structures and the current Je Khenpo's edicts. Other papers are linguistics, documenting certain language communities or indeed vocabulary pertaining to Yaks. A number of papers probed and explicated GNH – the sources of happiness, the GNH of monks and youth, and the need for mental training to realize GNH. Some were international, connecting GNH to Ubuntu, or to political theory, or AI."

Professor Alkire remarked that interdisciplinarity is a key principle of the ISBS. She said that the complex and interconnected problems that our world face today need multiple lines of analysis that only an interdisciplinary approach can provide.

Professor Seiji Kumagai, the conference organizer, emphasized that Kyoto was a fertile setting for an interdisciplinary conference. He said that "with its numerous Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, it is a city that combines tradition with modernity. It is a centre of ancient wisdom as well as modernism and inno-

vation with multiple universities and research institutions."

Dasho Karma Ura, who delivered one of the two keynote speeches, said that the first ISBS conference was held in 2019 at Oxford University, one of the Western world's most iconic educational institutions. Having the second conference at Kyoto University, one of the leading universities in the global East, encompasses the full breadth of the global educational experience.

Dasho Sonam Kinga delivered the conference's second keynote speech outlining Bhutan's unique constitutional structure that preserves the country's Buddhist heritage while incorporating inclusivity and religious freedom. He argued that fluidity of the constitutional and customary arrangements is poised to guide the country's dynamic future.

An international symposium titled "The Future of Well-being" was also organized on 7 February by the Kyoto University Institute for the Future of Human Society. Professor Kumagai introduced the Japanese government's Moonshot Research and Development Program, which promotes cutting edge R&D projects with the aim of resolving difficult societal issues while bringing together wisdom of researchers from around the world. Among the many projects that Moonshot supports, one was the harnessing of the rapidly developing AI technology to promote age-old Buddhist wisdom. He called such AI products 'Kokoro technology.' Drawing on the Japanese concept of Kokoro, which means 'heart' or 'spirit,' such technology aims to imbue AI with humanity and spirituality.

Similarly, in the seminar, Professor Alkire said that promoting wellbeing can be an effective tool for tackling poverty and other challenges in policy making. Dasho Karma Ura provided a historical and cultural perspective of hap-



piness and the attempt to measure it in Bhutan, attracting significant interest and goodwill.

With Bhutan receiving renewed global interest due to its futuristic developments in the Gelephu Mindfulness City, ISBS members agreed that the society can be an umbrella organization to bring together scholars and friends of Bhutan from around the world by communicating new research knowledge on the country. The ISBS renewed Bhutan's deep ties with the Japanese people. National organizations in Japan like the Japanese Society for Bhutan Studies and the Japan Bhutan Friendship Association were keen participants in the conference.

The conference organizers supported participations from key Bhutanese organisations like the Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies, Taktse College of Language and Cultural Studies, Zhung Dratshang as well as selected independent scholars. After the disruptions by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference will henceforth be held every three years.

Contributed by
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MONDAY, FEB 10

Good Day

- annual offerings

Bad Day

- build new monument
- consecrate
- appoint to new post
- handing and taking over of office
- entering new house

- marriage
- start new business
- hoist prayer flags
- hold discussion

Laza (For ritual): Snake and Horse
Sogza (General): Rat and pig
Shedza (Bad day): Monkey and rooster

TUESDAY, FEB 11

Good Day

- annual offerings

Bad Day

- build new monument
- consecrate
- appoint to new post
- appoint new military leader
- inaugurate military training
- start education

- handing and taking over of office
- entering new house
- moving house
- marriage

Laza (For ritual): Rat and pig
Sogza (General): Ox, dragon and dog
Shedza (Bad day): Snake and horse

WEATHER

Time of issue: 4:00 PM,
February 9, 2025

Gasa	Trongsa	Bumthang	Gelephu	Phuentsholing
8°C	13°C	13°C	25°C	25°C
-3	6	00	13	12

Source: National Center for Hydrology and Meteorology.
For any weather information: Call hotline 335578

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