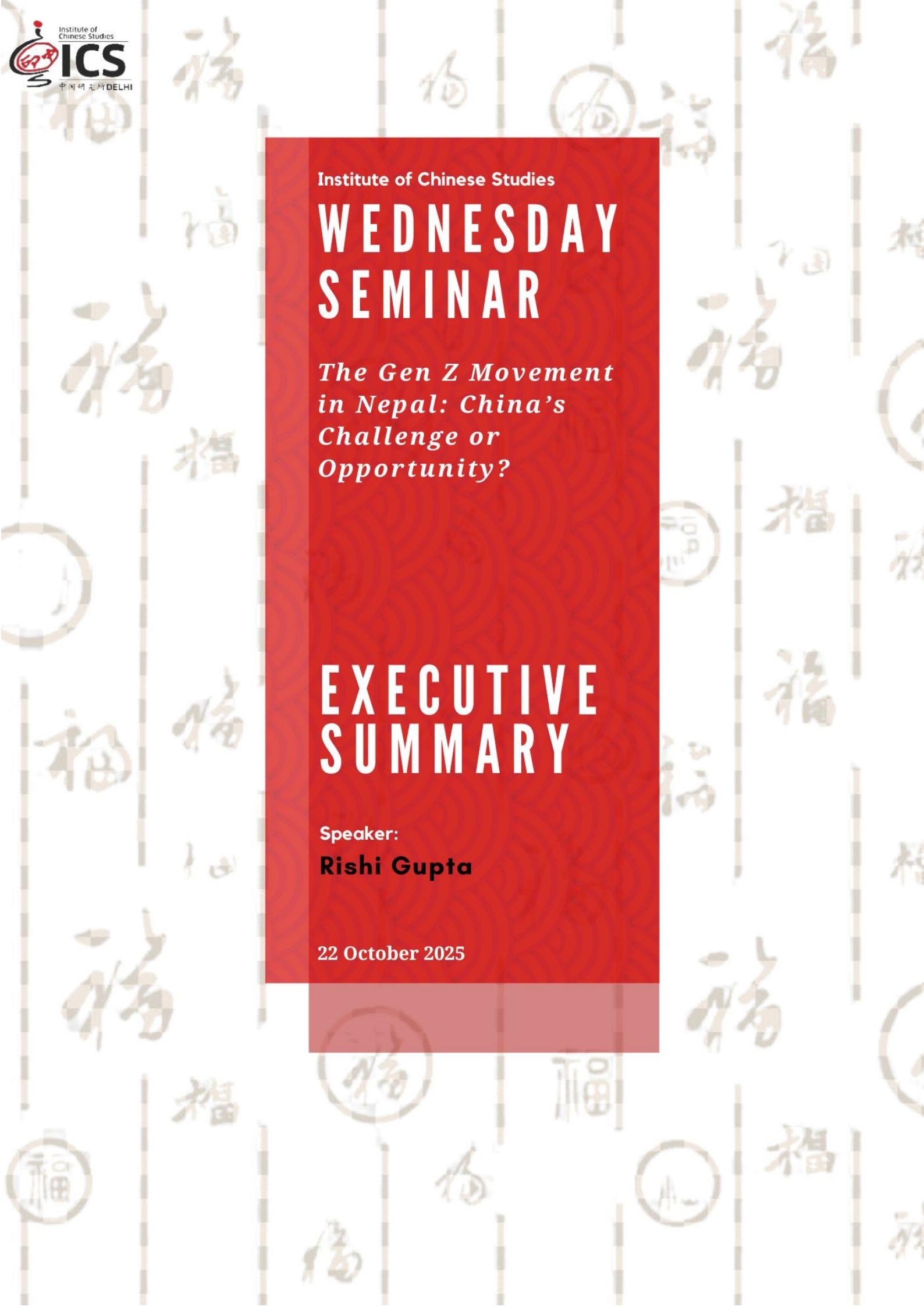




Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*The Gen Z Movement
in Nepal: China's
Challenge or
Opportunity?*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:

Rishi Gupta

22 October 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker: **Dr. Rishi Gupta**, Assistant Director, Asia Society Policy Institute, New Delhi; and, Visiting Fellow, Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Chair: **Prof. Mahendra P. Lama**, Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined Nepal's Gen Z movement, which began as a social media campaign under the hashtags "Nepo babies" and "Nepo kids". Dr. Rishi Gupta noted that initially aimed at exposing corruption among political elites, it rapidly transformed into a nationwide protest that questioned the legitimacy of Nepal's political establishment, as well as its ability to govern effectively.
- Dr. Gupta explained that the movement was triggered by the Nepalese government's decision to ban major social media platforms such as Meta and X after they failed to register under new regulations. This action was seen as a violation of free expression, and it provoked widespread anger among youth who depended on these platforms for communication, activism, and income.
- Protests erupted across Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu, as Gen Z activists used alternative tools such as Discord to bypass internet restrictions. The movement intensified quickly, resulting in violent clashes in early September, which led to over 70 deaths. The rapidly deteriorating situation forced Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to resign and led to an intervention by the Nepalese Army.
- According to the speaker, the crisis reflected deeper structural problems including corruption, nepotism, and persistent political instability. Since 2008, Nepal has seen 13 governments in just 17 years, reflecting erosion in institutional credibility. Economic stagnation and widespread migration have further undermined public faith in governance, fuelling youth frustration amid calls for reform.
- The speaker emphasised that, unlike earlier revolutionary movements, the Gen Z protests did not seek regime change but demanded accountability within Nepal's

democratic system. This marks the first recorded instance of a democratically elected government collapsing due to a social media ban, underscoring the generational shift in how digital rights influence political legitimacy.

- Turning to China's response, the speaker said that Beijing has adopted a cautious approach, reaffirming its commitment to stability and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence while avoiding direct references to the "Gen Z Movement". However, Chinese social media was rife with speculation about Western interference, revealing divergent narratives between official and public discourse.
- The speaker concluded that the movement presents both risks and opportunities for China. Political instability threatens Chinese investments and BRI projects, but a youth-led government may welcome deeper cooperation in education, technology, and development. If China maintains a non-interventionist stance, it could strengthen long-term influence amid shifting dynamics in South Asia.

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