

## BNAC Nepal Study Day, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford, 24-25 April 2014

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The Britain-Nepal Academic Council's twelfth annual Nepal Study Days saw twenty papers presented to an audience of some 50 participants, with robust and lively discussion throughout the two days. Panels covered more than eight topics, and the dynamic mix of discipline, region, approach, and topic meant that experts and students from all fields could exchange ideas that engaged with Nepal's history, culture, environment, and politics in a concentrated forum.

Two panels on **religion** explored the enormous diversity of religious practice in multiple areas of Nepal. These discussions ranged from classical religious studies, such as Yolmo concepts of sacred geography (Zsoka Gelle) or contemporary Bhaktapur Christians' view of divinity (Ian Gibson), to questions of political and religious identity, as with Gurung discussions about the relative merits of Bon and Buddhist identity (Florence Gurung) or Bahun and Chhetri debates over *kul puja* in the contemporary landscape (Krishna Adhikari). A final strand focused on new religious movements, in the case of Tenrikyō, a Japanese-inspired sect with an extended history of diplomatic relations with Nepal (Marilena Frisone), and the social context of conversion, particularly the ways in which Nepali Christians relate to other members of their communities (Ole Kirchheiner).

Under the rubric of **tourism**, two presentations investigated the powerful ways in which the material representation of Nepali cultures plays a significant role in drawing people into the country, and the ways in which actors from all over the world participate in these on-the-ground exchanges: politics around building on the site of Lumbini reflect global debates about who owns – and has the authority to represent – Buddhism (Kalyan Bhandari), and a previously unexplored long history of embroidery shops in Thamel (on Japanese sewing machines!) uncovered beautiful panels of finely crafted hippie icons – embroidered patches of yin yang eyes and yetis, among others – as the literal and material symbols of where, and how, the transnational encounter between Western travellers and their visions of the mystical East actually happens (Ken Ishikawa).

The final panel of the day focused on **health and diaspora**, exploring first the role of caste in health, using self-reported data that suggests that members of lower caste groups are disadvantaged in healthcare provision, and thus in health outcome; government policies do not show evidence of improving this social situation (Ram Prasad Mainali). The final paper of the day focused on Nepali rock bands in Camden, with a great deal of evidence for a thriving Nepali artistic culture among youth in London, with strong transnational links (Premila van Oomen): the Nepali diaspora is alive and well—inspired by Pink Floyd, perhaps, but sustaining its own creativity in vibrant ways.