The Emory Department of Anthropology presents:

**Songs for dead parents: materializing and dematerializing the dead in Southwest China**

Erik Mueggler
Professor of Anthropology, University of Michigan

This talk examines the ritualization of death in a “minority” community in mountainous Southwest China, where people are heir to an extraordinary range of resources for working on the dead, including abundant poetic language. The talk’s focus is the central artifact of poetic heritage in this region, an eight-hour-long speech for the dead, abandoned in the 1950s. The speech, divided into 72 “songs”, is a massive construction project, which builds a world for the dead. After bringing sky, earth, and markets into being, these songs for dead parents alternate between two fates for the dead soul, connected to a 19th-century transition from cremation to burial. On the one hand, the soul hangs forever in the sky, swaddled together with its spouse, head to the west and feet to the stars. On the other hand, it lives forever beneath the tomb, subject to the Chinese-speaking bureaucracy of Yan Luo Wang 閻羅王/Yama, king of the underworld. Ultimately the speech is a kind of anthropology: an attempt to sympathetically understand and describe a difficult and alien world of others, in this case dead others.

### Additional Event for Graduate Students: Lunchtime Seminar with Professor Mueggler

**Tuesday, April 7, 2015, 12-1 p.m., Anthropology 206**

RSVP by April 1 to Lora.McDonald@emory.edu

Recommended Reading for seminar:


Co-sponsored by the Confucius Institute at Emory, the Hightower Fund, Religion, Russian and East Asian Languages and Cultures, and East Asian Studies