



# Recite and Refuse: Contemporary Chinese Prose Poetry

*Nick Admussen*

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Chinese prose poetry today is engaged with a series of questions that are fundamental to the modern Chinese language: What is prose? What is it good for? How should it look and sound? Millions of Chinese readers encounter prose poetry every year, both in the most official of state-sponsored magazines and in the unorthodox, experimental work of the avant-garde. *Recite and Refuse* makes the answers to our questions about prose legible by translating, surveying, and interpreting prose poems, and by studying the people, politics, and contexts that surround the writing of prose poetry.

Author Nick Admussen argues that unlike most genres, Chinese prose poems lack a distinct size or shape. Their similarity to other prose is the result of a distinct process in which a prose form is recited with some kind of meaningful difference?an imitation that refuses to fully resemble its source. This makes prose poetry a protean, ever-changing group of works, channeling the language of science, journalism, Communist Party politics, advertisements, and much more. The poems look vastly different as products, but are made with a similar process. Focusing on the composition process allows Admussen to rewrite the standard history of prose poetry, finding its origins not in 1918 but in the obedient socialist prose poetry of the 1950s.

*Recite and Refuse* places the work of state-sponsored writers in mutual relationship to prose poems by unorthodox and avant-garde poets, from cadre writers like Ke Lan and Guo Feng to the border-crossing intellectual and poet Liu Zaifu to experimental artists such as Ouyang Jianghe and Xi Chuan. The volume features never-before seen English translations that range from the representative to the exceptional, culminating with Ouyang Jianghe's masterpiece "Hanging Coffin." Reading across the spectrum enables us to see the way that artists interact with each other, how they compete and cooperate, and how their interactions, as well as their creations, continuously reinvent both poetry and prose.

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