

## Academic Event Report

### A Memorial Service for J. H. Prynne Held at Sun Yat-sen University

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On June 19, 2026, the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, a memorial service for the renowned British poet Jeremy Halvard Prynne (1936–2026) was held in Lecture Hall 101 at the School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University, China. Prynne, a central figure of the Cambridge Poets and former Reader at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, passed away on April 22, 2026, at the age of 89. The service was organized by the English Poetry Studies Institute, School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University.

The gathering brought together Professor Ou Hong and Associate Professor Lei Yanni of Sun Yat-sen University, Professor Zhang Yuejun of Guangxi Minzu University, Professor Li Zhimin of Guangzhou University, Professor Zhang Guangkui of Shenzhen University, and scholars from multiple Chinese universities, along with faculty and student representatives.

The opening ceremony featured a keynote address by Dean Wang Yong, who traced Prynne's more than four decades of academic ties with the university. Prynne had been a close friend of the late Professor Dai Liuling and served as the postdoctoral supervisor for Professor Ou Hong at Cambridge University. In 2005, he was appointed Visiting Professor at the School

of Foreign Languages, and he visited Guangzhou for several times, especially in 2005 and 2008, to participate in the International Pearl River Poetry Festival. Dean Wang emphasized that the best tribute to the deceased is to continue his scholarly legacy.

The academic session was chaired by Associate Professor Lei Yanni, director of the Institute of English Poetry Studies, who systematically reviewed Prynne's life, academic trajectory, and long-standing association with the Institute. Rare photographic archives were also displayed.

Professor Ou Hong shared personal recollections of his decades-long friendship with Prynne, tracing their relationship from teacher and student in Cambridge to kindred spirits bridging Eastern and Western literary traditions. He spoke with particular warmth of Prynne's rigorous and elegant scholarly spirit and his unpretentious, amiable manner. Professor Li Zhimin of Guangzhou University, via video, gave a detailed account of his visits to Prynne in England in 2023 and 2025, moving many in attendance with his heartfelt narrative .

A notable highlight of the academic session was the presentation by Professor Zhang Guangkui of Shenzhen University, who recited his bilingual elegy, "Sand upon the Shunted Track: A Negative Terrain for J. H. Prynne." Composed in deliberate imitation of Prynne's poetics of difficulty, the poem weaves geological, physical, and economic lexicons into a dense semantic fabric—"strata," "proton exchange, " "the dried oil-slick of late capital" —that refuses easy interpretation, mirroring Prynne's own resistance to hermeneutic transparency. Its recurring refrain, "The pointer returns to zero..., " enacts a perpetual deferral of closure, a hallmark of Prynne's late style. In a performative gesture that fused scholarly ritual with Chinese funerary custom, Zhang tore the manuscript into fragments and cast them into the air, adding a dimension of material poetics that echoed Prynne's lifelong attention to language as a

physical and historical substrate. The elegy thus stands as both a critical engagement with and a tender farewell to Prynne's enduring poetic vision.

Other scholars, including Chen Shangzhen, Gao Wenping, Liu Yuyu, Shen Jie, Chen Xiaohong, Xiao Xiaojun, Shao Chaoyang, Luo Bin, and Zhou Fang, shared their memories and academic exchanges with Prynne.

The service concluded with a reading of Prynne's handwritten letter to all members of the Institute, presented by Institute assistant Zhuang Jianbin, as a final tribute to his scholarly spirit and literary character.

This memorial service was both a solemn remembrance and a cross-temporal academic dialogue. Though Prynne has departed, his poetry continues to be studied, the books he donated remain available to faculty and students, and his scholarly imprint on the "Kangleyuan" (Sun Yat-sen University campus) endures. The correspondences, poetry festival exchanges, and donated collections have become a lasting spiritual bond for the Institute of English Poetry Studies, inspiring future scholars to continue exploring the vast realms of literature and thought.