



MEI CH'ING  
(梅清), 1623-1697

By the Lion Cliff Rock  
A fine little cottage stands.  
For ten years I have lived  
here  
Having brought with me  
my lute.

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長 may represent the morpheme *cháng* meaning 'long' or *zhǎng* meaning 'grow'. In a line of poetry by Zhāng Jì 張籍, 死生長別離 *sǐ shēng cháng bié lí*, a common compound 生長 *shēngzhǎng* meaning 'grow' occurs. But after trying to fit *shēngzhǎng* as a compound in the line, we discover that the line has to be broken down into 死生 · 長 · 別離 *sǐshēng cháng bié lí* in order to derive its correct sense. In this case, 長 must serve as an adverb to modify 別離 meaning 'separate'. Only then can we identify the meaning of 長 as 'long time'. On this grammatical level, we must keep in mind the history of the Chinese language because most traditional poems are written in the T'ang style. We must also recognize that the linguistic elements which appear in different periods are not necessarily the same. In a line by Bái Jū-yī, 白居易: 食罷一睡覺 *shí bà yī shuì jué*, 睡覺 looks like *shuìjiào*, the contemporary meaning 'to sleep'. But in the T'ang period, 覺 *jué* meant 'to awake', and there was no such compound 睡覺 *shuìjiào* as there is today. Therefore the meaning of this line is: 'I woke up from a nap after eating'.

Unfortunately, grammar studies by modern linguists have not gone beyond structural analysis of sentences as yet. While we may be able to solve a lot of problems at the structural level, many will still remain for the next level [i.e., the role of cultural background]. Again, ambiguity arises when we quote a line from Bái Jū-yī's poem: 七十三人難再到 *qī shí sān rén nán zài dào*: here, 七十三人 is an ambiguous expression. It looks like 'seventy-three persons,' but only when we know that when Bái Jū-yī wrote this, he was seventy-three years old, do we get the right meaning. The meaning of this line is 'I, as an old man who is seventy-three years old, will find it difficult to come again'. In this line from Lǐ Bái's poem, 明朝有興抱琴來 *míng zhāo yǒu xìng bào qín lái*, 明朝 can only mean 'tomorrow morning' and not 'Ming dynasty'; this is obvious only because we know that the Ming dynasty is some hundred years later than Lǐ Bái's time, and Lǐ Bái