

The subterranean magic fungus (*Dixia rouzhi* 地下肉芝)

The recluse Xiao from Lanling - I have forgotten his personal name - once took part in the metropolitan (*jinshi*) examination and failed. Thereupon he burnt his books and lived in hiding [on the banks of] the River Tan. He studied [the arts of] immortality with a Daoist Master and for this reason stopped [eating] grain and practiced breathing [techniques]. Each morning he flexed and stretched his limbs hoping to extend his life span. After more than ten years his hair was completely white. His face was withered, and his back was bent. Some teeth had fallen out. One morning he looked at himself in a mirror, became suddenly furious and said: "I have given up fame and wealth; I have hidden in the wilderness (*tianye*), stopped [eating] grain and [practiced] breathing [techniques], hoping to achieve longevity (*changsheng*). Today I, too, am feeble and decrepit like this. Was that my heart's wish? He at once returned to live in Ye.¹ [There] he studied from a merchant how to pursue a profit of ten per cent. [After only] a few years in all, he had plenty of resources at his disposal and was a rich man.

Later, because he cultivated a garden with buildings, he dug out an object from the earth that resembled a human hand. It was fat/fleshy and moist, its colour being slightly red. The recluse took it and said surprised: "Could it be (豈) that this is not (非) an omen for coming disaster? In addition, I have heard that on the place, where the Planet Jupiter (Taisui) is, one cannot start to break up the earth (earth work). If (*tuo*) a person violates [this rule], a big piece (*xiu rou*?) of meat is supposed to come out from underneath, and this certainly is a bad omen. Today there is [such a piece of meat] as was to be expected. What shall I do [with it]? Thus, I have heard, when one finds a piece of meat one should eat it. Maybe one can still avoid the disaster. He then cooked the meat and ate it. It tasted delicious. He finished it completely. From this moment his hearing and sight became clear; his physical strength increased, his appearance became juvenile, and where his hair had become incomplete/bald it completely grew again like the hair of a young girl. Also, where his teeth had fallen out, new teeth grew in an even row. The recluse looked at himself in silent astonishment and did not dare to tell anybody. Later, the Daoist Master came to Ye where he met the recluse. He said surprised: "Sir, did you ever have the chance to eat Immortal's medicine? How did you become so vital, so bright and clear like this? The Daoist Master therefore diagnosed his pulse, nine times, and said again: "Sir, you have eaten a magic fungus (*lingzhi*). That (*fu*) magic fungus resembled a human hand. It was fat/fleshy and moist. It was one of those slightly red ones. The recluse realized what had happened and told him everything. The Daoist Master congratulated him saying: "Sir, your life can be as long as that of tortoises and cranes. This being so, you should not live in the world of dust you should retire to the mountains and forests and abandon all human affairs. [Then] you can reach [the state of a] divine transcendent. The recluse happily followed his advice and left. In the end, nobody knows his whereabouts. (Translation Thomas Jansen)

¹ Ye xian (Ye district). In 580 A.D. the Northern Zhou dynasty established Lingzhi xian (Magic Fungus district) on the territory of modern Anyang city in Hebei.