

found that she looked more beautiful than before, and her joints remained soft while we changed her clothes. After the cremation on January 11th, we found some holy relics (*she-li*) in the ashes of her body, which are what she left behind to increase others' faith and will to reborn into the Pure Land by reciting Buddha Amitabha's name.²⁹

DISCUSSION

After reading the 2 cases, one can only be impressed with the protagonists' attitude of facing their deaths. In the first story, Mrs. Lu accepted her death as a natural occurrence of life. She foretold its coming, although she had not contracted any life-threatening disease, and informed Mrs. Chang and her daughter of this news beforehand in such a manner that it was obvious she considered her impending death simply as a fact. She chose the Taichung Hospital as the environment within which she would like to pass away after careful consideration, asked her daughter to arrange her funeral, calmly said goodbye to her friends and family, and passed away in a position of sitting and reciting the name of Buddha Amitabha's name. She was so ready and confident in accepting the arrival of her last moment that she showed no fear, anxiety, or sadness but pure tranquility and acceptance throughout the entire dying process. Her last words to her husband were a perfect end to her life and highlight her clear consciousness at her last moment. In the second story, Mrs. Tsai-li also faced her death in a well-prepared manner. Unlike Mrs. Lu in the first story, she suffered from terminal lymph cancer. But she relied on her profound religious belief in the compassion and power of Buddha Amitabha and a concentration practice of reciting the name of this Buddha. This belief and practice, together with the support from her family and other Pure Land practitioners, helped her be prepared to welcome her last moment. The words she told her daughter-in-law, "I am determined to gain rebirth into the Pure Land", clearly indicate this well-prepared attitude. She predicted the day and moment of her death, asked to go to the bathroom to make herself clean, wanted her husband to do the assisting recitation for

her during her last few hours, and peacefully let nature take her away in its course.

Both Mrs. Lu and Mrs. Tsai-li gained their fearless attitude towards death through their great faith in the teaching of Pure Land Buddhism. This teaching promotes the perfection of the Pure Land and the compassionate vows of Buddha Amitabha while providing insights to the reality of the mundane world—impermanence and suffering. By observing the present life from this perspective, one will find the mundane world less desirable and the Pure Land more admirable. Gradually, the idea of departing from this present life will become less hard to bear, and one may not be so anxious about being unable to expect what will happen at or after death. For there is a wonderful Buddha Realm, the Pure Land, which can be looked forward to after death, and there is Buddha Amitabha's promise that he will come to greet the dying at the end of life, as long as the dying really want to go to the Pure Land. What Mrs. Lu and Mrs. Tsai-li showed in the 2 cases is their great confidence in the power of Buddha Amitabha. That is why they were so ready to receive the welcome of Buddha Amitabha. This confidence in Buddha Amitabha will increase through diligently reciting the Buddha Amitabha's name, which further helps one to overcome various afflictions aroused by all kinds of desires and suffering, and purifies one's mind to correspond to the purity of Buddha Amitabha's realm.

If we use the concept of a "good death" developed in Western societies to examine the 2 cases, they certainly possess the qualifications for being considered "good deaths". Both of the protagonists died in full awareness and acceptance. Further, they predicted the time of death and prepared their family and themselves for it in advance. They both enjoyed great respect from their family in choosing and applying Pure Land practices to manage their death, for both of their families were Buddhists and gave them total support. They both made their choices about where to die (one is in a hospital, and the other at home). In terms of social adjustment, both of their families believed that the deceased would be reborn into the Pure Land and felt comforted by this belief. No regrets were expressed by either the dead or the bereaved. Although the situa-