

tions were not perfect, as Mrs. Tsai-li in the second story suffered from cancer, while Mrs. Lu in the first story was not free from any physical suffering, yet she overcame it by her spiritual strength and passed away peacefully.

However, a good death in Pure Land School is beyond the concept of a good death in Western societies. While the Western world pays attention to the situation of the dying and others involved in the dying process, what Pure Land School looks for is transcendence of the dying from the chain of rebirths in the 6 realms. That is, the obtainment of a rebirth into the Pure Land is the good death in Pure Land Buddhism. Although the attributes of a good death ideal in Western societies can also be found in cases of a "good death" in Pure Land Buddhism, they can not be used to determine a good death according to the standard of Pure Land Buddhism. The 2 cases here deemed to be good deaths by Pure Land Buddhism are also in accordance with this norm. Usually, auspicious signs will help to decide whether a person goes to the Pure Land or not. If the dying claims to witness the appearance of the Buddha Amitabha and the Bodhisattvas Kuan-yin and Ta-shih-chih or predict his/her time of death, it is usually believed that this person is destined for the Pure Land. Other phenomena, like the discovery of holy relics amid the ashes of the cremated corpse, usually in the form of glassine or jadelike beads, and special fragrances smelled and unusual lights witnessed by those who attend a death event, are also considered auspicious signs of a good death.⁹

To achieve a good death of this kind requires the efforts of the dying to nourish a fixed faith in Buddha Amitabha by constantly applying the teachings and practice methods of the Pure Land School in their daily lives and to maintain this faith until his or her last moment.²⁶ The help from family and friends is also crucial, especially before and after the dying moment. Their aid can help arouse the faith of the dying in Buddha Amitabha and assist the dying to fix his/her mind on the name of this Buddha.^{10,26,30,31} It is believed that if the dying consciously fixes his/her mind on Buddha Amitabha's name at the last moment, he/she will be conveyed by Buddha Amitabha and the Bodhisattvas Kuan-yin and Ta-shih-chih to be reborn into the Pure

Land.²⁶ However, it is very hard for ordinary people to keep their mind composed and undisturbed with a strong faith in Buddha Amitabha under the threat of death.²⁶ Thus, the assistance of family and friends is necessary. It includes reminding the dying about the teachings of the Pure Land School and assisting the recitation of the name of Buddha Amitabha, which are 2 end-of-life practices frequently used by Pure Land practitioners and can be found in the 2 cases described herein. Apparently, the former practice is used to strengthen the faith of the dying. Assisting with the recitation of the name of Buddha Amitabha is to constantly recite the Buddha's name beside the dying, so that the dying can follow the recitation, either in mind or in a voiced way, to be absorbed in the name of the Buddha. In Taiwan, there are many voluntary Buddhist groups devoted to the service of assisting recitation to those who are dying and wish to use the Buddhist way to confront their death. It is noteworthy that during the practice of assisting recitation, there are some things which must and others which must not be done. The purpose of these suggestions is to bring the greatest benefits to the dying or the dead on the basis of Buddhist theories. However, non-Buddhists may think they are strange taboos, for a part of these suggestions even conflict with ordinary reactions and procedures of managing a death. For example, one of the things you must not do is that the family is not supposed to cry before or after the death. The prohibition of crying before death is because, there is a great possibility that the crying will distract the dying from mentally concentrating on the name of Buddha Amitabha. It will further disturb the feelings of the dying and make him/her lose their calm manner towards death.^{10,26,29} In this case, the dying will not be able to gain rebirth into the Pure Land but may go to a bad realm if his/her feelings turn bitter, for in Buddhism it is believed that the mind state of the dying at the last moment will determine the status of rebirth.²⁶ Crying is forbidden after a death, because in Buddhist belief the deceased's consciousness does not leave the body as soon as a death is announced according to the modern medical viewpoint.²⁶ For this reason, crying right after a death presents the same risks to the dead as crying before death in Buddhist comprehension. But how