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## **Master Shandao: A Brief Biography**

By Dharma Master Huijing

English translation by Householder Jingtū

Published by Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Association

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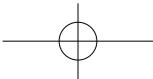
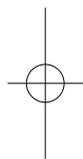
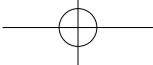
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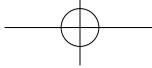
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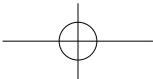
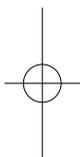
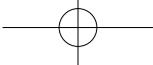


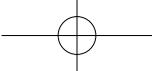
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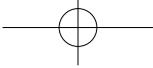


*After the Charter, it is necessary to be familiar with the school's founder, for the former is based on the teachings of the latter. The founder occupies a preeminent position in the school, unmatched by others.*

*The founder of the Pure Land school was Master Shandao of the Tang Dynasty, widely accepted as an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha. He synthesized and completed the Pure Land teachings and wrote the Five Works in Nine Fascicles, which definitively laid down the thought and practices of the Pure Land tradition.*

*The wisdom of the Buddhas is profound; it is unfathomable to ignorant ordinary beings. The meanings of the sutras are multi-layered and therefore subjected to many different interpretations. Literal explanations would do injustice to all the Buddhas. As they composed their explications, the ancient worthies adopted the perspectives of their own schools. And learners all took as benchmarks the interpretations of the sutras by their respective schools' patriarchs and lineage masters.*

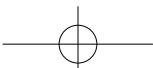
*Pure Land practitioners should follow only the explications of Master Shandao and the school's other lineage masters. If the interpretations of other*

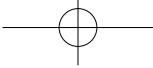


*knowledgeable figures should differ from those of our lineage masters, we should recognize that the others were using their own expedient means to attract and instruct learners. We should neither comment on nor seek convergence with these other teachings, but merely set them aside. It is sufficient to draw from the Shandao tradition alone.*

*This is the proper approach for practitioners of the Pure Land school to take towards such matters.*

***The Editors***

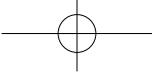




## ***1. Shandao Appears in the Golden Age of Sui-Tang***

Master Shandao, the *de facto* founder of China's Pure Land school and an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha, was born in the 9th year of the Daye period of the Sui Dynasty (613). He passed away in 2nd year of the Yonglong period of the Tang Dynasty (681), aged 69. His birth occurred during the rule of Emperor Yang of the Sui; he lived through the reigns of Emperors Gaozu and Taizong of the Tang, and died when Emperor Gaozong was on the throne.

Master Shandao adopted his approach of “believing in [Pure Land teachings] and persuading others to believe” just as the Tang Dynasty entered its golden age under Emperors Taizong and Gaozong. Shortly before his birth, Emperor Wen had reunified China under the Sui Dynasty, and the auspicious circumstances helped foster a Buddhist renaissance. Emperor Wen adopted policies to “rule the nation according to Buddhism” and to “reinvigorate Buddhism,” and issued an edict to “revive the country's Buddhist monasteries.” Nearly all aspects of life in China came under influence of the Dharma. It

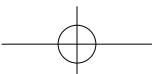


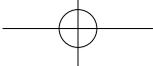
was during this time, when Buddhist faith flourished, that Master Shandao chose to come as an emanation from the Pure Land of Infinite Light. He raised high the banner of “reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name to achieve Buddhahood,” and taught sentient beings to seek rebirth in the Western Land of Bliss and become Buddhas.

## ***2. An Early Biography Hints at Greatness***

There are many texts relating to the life of Master Shandao, with about 20 to 30 in China and Japan. From this we can understand his lofty standing in the history of Buddhism and the deep influence he exerted.

Among the earliest texts was *Biographies of Prominent Monastics, Continued*, by Master Daoxuan of the Tang Dynasty. Also appearing during the Tang was *Edited Tales of Auspicious Happenings*, jointly composed by Masters Wennian and Shaokang. Apart from these, most of the literature was written from a laudatory viewpoint in later times. Though the latter texts have their significance, they are of relatively little historical value.

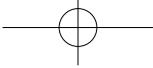




The basic references to the life of Master Shandao can be found in four biographies and six tablet inscriptions –

## I. Biographies

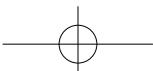
- *Biographies of Prominent Monastics, Continued*, Part 27, Biography No. 10 (Shandao's biography appended); by Master Daoxuan of the Tang Dynasty; 645
- *Edited Tales of Auspicious Happenings Relating to Rebirth in the Western Pure Land*, Chapter 12, "Biography of Master Shandao"; by Masters Wennian and Shaokang of the Tang Dynasty; 805
- *Tales of Rebirth in the Pure Land*, Part 2, No. 15, "Biography of Master Shandao"; by Jie Zhu of the Song Dynasty; 1064
- *Tales of Rebirth, Revised and Updated*, Part 2, No. 25 and 26, "Biography of Masters Shandao and Shandao [different second character]"; by Wang Gu of the Song Dynasty; 1084

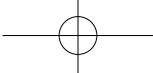


(Cited in *Collected Biographies of Five Pure Land Patriarchs*, in the Taisho Canon, Vol. 83, page 157)

## II. Tablet Inscriptions

- Tablet in Memorial Pagoda to Master Shandao, Ci'en Monastery (Tang Dynasty); in the capital (i.e., Changan, today's Xian), inscribed in metal and stone
- Eulogy in Memorial Pagoda to Master Shandao, Ci'en Monastery (Tang Dynasty); in the capital, inscribed in metal and stone
- Niche inscription at the Great Buddha statue, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang; "Collection in Metal and Stone," No. 73
- Memorial Inscription to Master Longchan; as above, No. 86
- Inscription at Pagoda to Master Jingye; as above, No. 75
- Inscription at Pagoda to Master Huiliao, Guangming Monastery (Changan); "Collection in Metal and Stone, Continued," No. 5



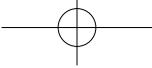


Master Daoxuan was born in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Kaihuang period of the Sui Dynasty (596), so he was only 17 years older than Master Shandao. They were contemporaries and Shandao was relatively youthful. Even then Master Daoxuan, founder of the Lu school (*vinaya*, or monastic discipline) at Mount Zhongnan outside Changan, was recording in his *Biographies of Prominent Monastics, Continued* what he had heard about Master Shandao. These characteristics of Shandao would later become widely celebrated. Though the text was only 123 characters in length, it provided a glimpse of the greatness to come.

### ***3. Surnamed Zhu, From Shandong***

Master Shandao was born into a family surnamed Zhu. A native of Linzi County, Shandong Province, he took monastic vows as a youth. His teacher was Master Mingsheng of Mizhou, who specialized in the study of such Mahayana scriptures as the *Lotus Sutra* and *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

Mizhou was in Zhucheng County in Shandong, not far from Linzi. Master Mingsheng was a student of the



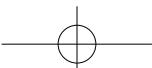
Sanlun (Three Treatises) school. Together with Master Jizang, the school's founder, he was a senior disciple of Master Falang.

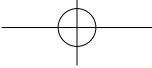
#### ***4. Buddhism Flourishes in the Late Sui and Early Tang***

Given the flourishing of Buddhism at the time, Master Jizang received an imperial summons to teach Sanlun at Riyan Monastery in the capital, Changan. He passed away in the 6th year of the Wude period (623). Master Shandao's birth coincided with the height of Jizang's activity in Changan.

Moreover, Tiantai school founder Master Zhiyi had died, aged 60, in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of the Kaihuang period (597). That was 16 years before Shandao was born. Afterwards Zhiyi's disciple, Master Guanding, vigorously promoted the Tiantai school.

As for Pure Land, Chan Master Daochuo had converted to its teachings in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the Daye period (609), at the age of 48. With Taiyuan in Shanxi Province as his base, he was sowing the seeds of





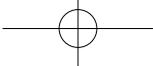
Amitabha-recitation. His fame spread, and even children knew the practice of reciting Amitabha Buddha's name.

There was also Tripitaka Master Xuanzang, who had journeyed to the West (India). After a 16-year sojourn, he brought back to China a huge number of sutras and translated them into Chinese, leaving a lasting legacy. Master Xuanzang was 11 years older than Master Shandao. They were active in Changan around the same time.

## ***5. A Painting Triggers Aspiration for Rebirth***

Master Shandao was once deeply moved after viewing a "Portrait of the Western Land of Bliss." Admiring and praising the powerful aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land, he said, "We should entrust our body to the Lotus Platform and our spirit to the Pure Land."

Such portraits depicted the splendors of Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure Land. They were meant to be viewed by the public and to evoke admiration. Master Shandao's first viewing of the painting had such a great



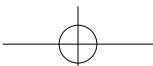
impact on him that he developed a deep longing for rebirth in the Pure Land, which never wavered. We can appreciate the strength of his positive merit from previous lives, and that there was a rationale behind his reaction.

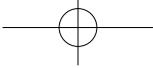
## ***6. Devotion to the Contemplation Sutra, Achieving Samadhi***

After receiving full monastic precepts at the age of 20, Master Shandao read the *Contemplation Sutra* together with Vinaya Master Miaokai. He exclaimed, with a mixture of sadness and joy, “The other practices are all circuitous, remote and hard to accomplish. Only through this one [in the *Contemplation Sutra*] can we transcend the cycle of rebirth.”

During late Sui and early Tang times, the *Contemplation of Infinite Life Sutra* was among the most popular scriptures. It was not only esteemed by Pure Land adherents, but received close attention throughout Buddhist circles. It became the subject of discourses and recitations everywhere.

That wasn't surprising, in terms of time and

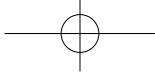




circumstances. During a period when many were troubled by the advent of the Final Age of the Dharma, it was natural that propagation of the *Contemplation Sutra* – which stresses the deliverance of wicked ordinary beings – would become widespread and much welcomed.

The *Tales of Rebirth, Revised and Updated* records that Master Shandao “then went to Wuzhen Monastery on Mt. Zhongnan. Within a few years, he forgot his fatigue during meditation and achieved a profound and marvelous state. In his *samadhi* (perfect concentration), he saw all the bejeweled pavilions and ponds, and the golden edifices [of the Western Pure Land], as though they were right before him.”

Mt. Zhongnan was situated south of Changan, while Wuzhen Monastery was in Lantian County in the vicinity. After its founding by Pure Land monastics in the Kaihuang period of the Sui Dynasty, the monastery hosted such masters as Baogong, Huichao and Facheng, all of whom practiced Pure Land. So Wuzhen could be said to be a place for the implementation of Pure Land practice. To have attained *samadhi* in his twenties, as Master Shandao did, was a feat rare in the annals of monasticism.

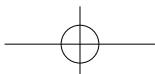


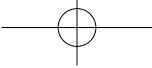
## 7. Seeking Guidance, Grasping Pure Land's Essence

It was during the Zhengguan period of the Tang, when Shandao was still in his twenties, that he first heard of Master Daochuo, who was teaching Pure Land in Jinyang. Despite the distance, Shandao decided to pay the older master a visit. Daochuo was delighted to receive him; he also realized that his young visitor would be his heir. Daochuo then thoroughly explained to Shandao the true meaning of Amitabha Buddha's Fundamental Vow and the *Contemplation Sutra*.

The essence of the *Contemplation Sutra* can only be properly explicated in light of the *Larger Sutra (Infinite Life Sutra)*. It is that the first 13 contemplative *samadhis* are to be set aside, and only the one arising from faith, aspiration and recitation of Amitabha's name is the supreme *samadhi*. Under the guidance of Master Daochuo, all of Shandao's doubts melted away and he grasped the profound meaning of the *Contemplation Sutra*.

Having been personally taught the hidden



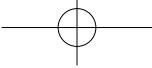


implications of the sutra, Master Shandao thoroughly understood the essence of Pure Land. He totally embraced the Fundamental Vow of Amitabha Buddha and became an outstanding disciple of Daochuo.

Master Daochuo had inherited the lineage of Master Tanluan, which focused exclusively on faith in Amitabha Buddha's deliverance and recitation of Amitabha's name. He expounded the *Contemplation Sutra* some 200 times. His influence was extensive, and he was known far and wide. Emperors respected him and ordinary people followed his teachings.

## ***8. Faith, and Two Rivers and a White Path***

According to the *Tales of Rebirth, Revised and Updated*, it was early winter when Shandao made his way to see Master Daochuo. The journey was arduous as frigid winds howled. Hollows in the ground were filled with wind-blown leaves. Shandao sat down in one of them and focused on reciting Amitabha's name. Days passed without his being aware of it. Suddenly he heard a voice

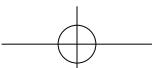


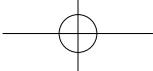
in the air. “It is all right to continue,” it said. “Proceed to your destination and do not worry about anything.” Shandao forgot his fatigue and pressed on to Master Daochuo’s Xuanzhong Monastery.

When Master Shandao later wrote his commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, he used the parable of “Two Rivers and a White Path” to reinforce faith in Amitabha-recitation. The parable invokes a lonely journey across an expansive and desolate wilderness, allowing readers to experience something of the dire straits he faced during his own pilgrimage.

## ***9. Practice Is the Path, Reciting Only Amitabha’s Name***

*Biographies of Prominent Monastics, Continued* contains this brief description of Shandao’s visit to Master Daochuo: “Nearby was a mountain monk named Shandao. He traveled extensively in search of the true Dharma. Arriving at Xihe (near today’s Taiyuan, Shanxi Province), he met Master Daochuo, who engaged only in name-recitation, the Pure Land practice of Amitabha Buddha.”

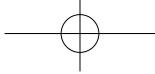




Like Vinaya Master Daoxuan's Fengde Monastery, Wuzhen Monastery, where Shandao resided, was located on Mt. Zhongnan – thus the designation “mountain monk.” Exclusive recitation of Amitabha's name invariably leads to rebirth in the Land of Bliss, as the process relies on the power of Amitabha Buddha's Great Vow. Therefore Master Shandao's well-known “Advocacy *Gatha*” says:

*As our skin turns wrinkled and our hair white,  
We see ourselves growing decrepit and senile;  
Even if we are rich and blessed with heirs,  
We cannot escape the ravages of aging.  
You may be happy in a thousand ways,  
But death always comes in the end.  
The sole path ahead is to practice,  
Reciting only the name of Amitabha Buddha.*

“Reciting only the name of Amitabha Buddha” is to “practice Amitabha-recitation exclusively.” It is also “the path,” and “the other practices are all circuitous, remote and hard to accomplish.” We can see that Shandao's style of Amitabha-recitation was taught him by Master Daochuo, who in turn followed the lineage of Master Tanluan.

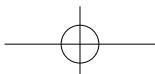


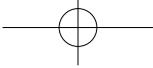
## ***10. Sincere Recitation, Earnest Discipline***

Shandao's meeting Daochuo was like a fish encountering water. The older master taught his disciple enthusiastically. When his teacher passed away in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Zhengguan period (645) aged 84, Shandao returned to Wuzhen Monastery. He was 33 at the time.

Admired as a saintly personage who had achieved *samadhi*, Master Shandao was extremely earnest and industrious in his daily activities. *Tales of Rebirth in the Pure Land* contains an account of some specifics:

On entering the hall, he would press palms together and kneel with his right knee on the ground. He single-mindedly recited the name of Amitabha Buddha, never stopping until he was exhausted. He would sweat even when it was cold; it was a mark of his extreme sincerity. He slept in the same place for three decades and never took naps. He would not remove his monk's garments, except when taking baths. He observed monastic discipline down to the finest detail. Never did he gaze upon women. He respected everyone, and would not accept reverences even from *sramenera* (novice monks).

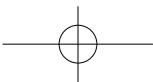


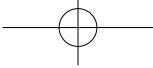


He scrupulously avoided fame and profit, as well as all variety of entertainments. Everywhere he went, people would compete to make offerings to him. He would not take for himself the abundant amounts of food, drink and clothing, but always gave them to others. The fine food he redistributed to his followers, the coarse food he ate himself. He never took cheese or fine cream. He made use of monetary offerings to copy more than 100,000 fascicles of the *Amitabha Sutra* and to create more than 300 portraits of the Pure Land.

When he saw dilapidated monasteries or pagodas, he would renovate or repair them. Every year he ensured their lamps were lit. He never asked anyone to wash his set of three monastic robes, his water bottle or his alms bowl. He always traveled alone, never with an assembly. He was reluctant to discuss worldly affairs, lest they interfered with his practice.

From this we can see that Master Shandao was strict with himself but generous towards others. His deep compassion meant that he brought benefits wherever he went. Praising Shandao's virtue, the "Memorial Inscription to Master Longchan" says:





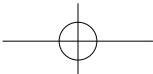
*His trees of mercy made the forest flourish,  
His flowers of compassion shone luminously.*

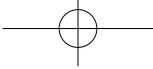
## ***11. A Ray of Light With Each Recitation***

Master Shandao was so accomplished at his recitation that light would emanate from his mouth whenever he invoked the name of Amitabha Buddha. The light continued to issue forth even if he made a hundred or a thousand recitations. In later times, Shandao was known as “Master Zhongnan” (he lived on Mt. Zhongnan) or “Master Light” (because of the emissions during his recitations).

## ***12. Debating Amitabha-Recitation, Emitting Light***

Once, Master Shandao was debating the virtues of Amitabha-recitation with Master Jingang in Xijing Monastery. Shandao swore an oath:



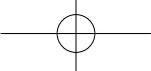


“If the teaching of the Buddha in various sutras that reciting Amitabha’s name once or ten times, for a day or a week, invariably leads to rebirth in the Pure Land is truthful, not deceitful, may the two Buddha images in this hall emit light. If the teaching is false, fails to bring rebirth in the Pure Land or deceives sentient beings, may I immediately fall from this high seat into hell and suffer there eternally.” He then pointed his staff at the images in the hall – which emitted light.

(from *Mirror of Amitabha-Recitation*, Tang Dynasty)

### ***13. 100,000 Sutra Copies, 300 Pure Land Portraits***

As befits an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha, Master Shandao accomplished some extraordinary feats of Dharma teaching and propagation. According to *Biographies of Outstanding Monastics, Continued and Edited Tales of Auspicious Happenings Relating to Rebirth in the Western Pure Land*, he “copied 100,000 fascicles of the *Amitabha Sutra*, and created 300 portraits of the Pure Land and presented them to countless people.”



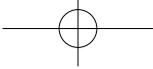
That is to say, Shandao copied the *Amitabha Sutra* by hand and gave the reproductions to monastics as well as lay practitioners. His renditions of the Pure Land were widely admired, so he “presented them to countless people.”

Today the library of Ryukoku University in Kyoto holds a copy of the *Amitabha Sutra* by Master Shandao. The volume was discovered in 1899 by the Otani expedition in the Turfan region of China. It is remarkable that Shandao’s writing should have been found as far away as central Asia; the discovery shows the extent of his influence.

According to *Tales of Rebirth in the Pure Land*, Master Shandao “went on to the capital and inspired monks and householders alike. Both the rich and the poor, and even butchers and traders, were jolted awake.”

In other words, Master Shandao arrived in the capital, Changan, and delivered multitudes by teaching Pure Land practice. He motivated both monastics and lay followers. Rich or poor, even those who slaughtered animals and traded goods for a living, were deeply affected. They repented their wrongdoings, recited Amitabha Buddha’s name and sought rebirth in the Land of Bliss.





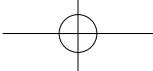
## ***14. A Butcher Lays Down His Knife and Becomes a Buddha***

The following episode is recorded in Part 28 of *Collected Records of the Buddha*:

In Changan during Tang times, there was a butcher surnamed Jing. Because Master Shandao urged people to undertake Amitabha-recitation, many had stopped eating meat. Butcher Jing resented him deeply. With a knife in his hand, he entered Shandao's monastery with the intention of killing the monk.

Master Shandao pointed to the west and manifested a vision of the Pure Land. Jing immediately repented and sought rebirth in the Land of Bliss. He climbed a tall tree, reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha; he then fell from the tree and died. Onlookers saw an emanation Buddha lead his spirit out of the top of his head.

The deliverance of Amitabha Buddha is always present, everywhere. It attaches no preconditions, and does not discriminate between black and white, or good and bad. Anyone who recites Amitabha's name and aspires to rebirth in the Pure Land will achieve it. Master

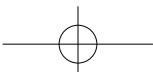


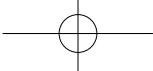
Shandao was able to touch others with his compassion. On seeing his face, people with virtue shed all their negative intentions.

## ***15. Forsaking a Defiled Life for Rebirth in the Pure Land***

Among the ordinary people of Changan, many were moved to adopt Pure Land practice. There were tales about how some believers, at the urging of Master Shandao to “abandon attachment to our defiled world and joyfully seek the Pure Land,” took their own lives in in order to do so. *Biographies of Outstanding Monastics, Continued* says:

When Master Shandao was teaching the Dharma at Guangming Monastery, someone asked him, “By reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha, am I certain to be reborn in the Pure Land?” Shandao replied, “Amitabha-recitation indeed assures rebirth.” The man finished paying his respects and left the monastery, continuously reciting *Namo Amitabha Buddha*. He climbed a willow and, pressing his palms together, faced west. Then he jumped,



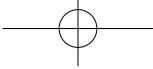


falling to his death. Word of the incident spread as far as the central government.

The above account was based on what Master Daixuan personally heard. Moreover, *Tales of Rebirth in the Pure Land* says:

In the capital's various regions, monks and nuns as well as male and female householders threw themselves off high hills, submerged themselves in deep streams or jumped from tall trees. Others immolated themselves. Such reports were heard far and wide, with more than a hundred principals involved. Those who left their families to undertake monastic practices and recite the *Amitabha Sutra* numbered between 100,000 and 300,000. Those who recited Amitabha's name 15,000 to 100,000 times daily, and who achieved recitation *samadhi* and rebirth in the Pure Land were too numerous to be counted.

Whether in the capital city or in the regions, monastics and lay practitioners, male and female, gave up their lives and even underwent immolation. They numbered more than 100.

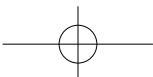


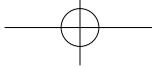
So powerful was Master Shandao's impact on people and so great his personal virtue that they were rarely seen in the history of Chinese Buddhism. A passage in the *Edited Tales of Auspicious Happenings Relating to Rebirth in the Western Pure Land* says, "Since Buddhism came east to China, never has there been such virtue as the Master's!"

This brings to mind the following excerpt from the "Meaning of the Meditative Practices," in Shandao's *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*:

*Passing hither and thither, we mustn't tarry  
in the lands of delusion;  
Over countless kalpas of rebirth,  
we have experienced all the Six Realms;  
We find no joy anywhere, hearing only  
sighs of sorrow.  
But after this lifetime, we will enter  
the Domain of Nirvana.*

It was Master Shandao's astute observation of the decadence of the times and the wickedness in society that prompted such a cry from the heart.

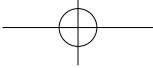




## ***16. Erroneous Accounts of Shandao's Passing***

Because there were numerous incidents of people taking their own lives in search of rebirth in the Pure Land, some biographies said that Master Shandao did so too. This was an error stemming from a misreading of the foregoing passage in *Biographies of Outstanding Monastics, Continued*. It was misinterpreted by Song Dynasty authors Jie Zhu and Wang Gu in their respective works, *Tales of Rebirth in the Pure Land* and *Tales of Rebirth, Revised and Updated*, to mean that Shandao had killed himself to gain rebirth. Even so, the blunder underscored how fervently people of the time sought rebirth in the Land of Bliss.

Moreover, *Tales of Rebirth, Revised and Updated* refers to two Shandaos, each with a different second character in his name. This was also a misunderstanding, and the account should be of just one person.

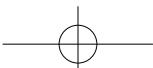


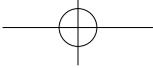
## ***17. Commemorative Tablets at Ci'en Monastery***

Master Shandao taught the Dharma extensively. In the urban areas of Changan, he resided for lengthy periods at the renowned Ci'en and Shiji monasteries, besides Guangming Monastery.

Ci'en Monastery was the base of the renowned Tripitaka Master, Xuanzang. It was at the translation institute there that Xuanzang completed the historic task of translating the scriptures he had brought from India. In the event, the monastery contained two tablet inscriptions in Shandao's memory:

1. Inscription in Memorial Pagoda to Master Shandao, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Yonglong period (681), Tang Dynasty; composed by Master Yicheng, written by Li Zhenfang
2. Eulogy in Memorial Pagoda to Master Shandao, 5<sup>th</sup> year of the Dazhong period (851), Tang Dynasty; composed and written by Master Zhiyu

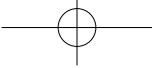




Unfortunately, these two inscriptions have been lost. Otherwise, we would have an even clearer picture and better understanding of Shandao's life.

There is a link between the construction of Ci'en Monastery and Master Daochuo. Empress Wende, the mother of Emperor Gaozong, greatly admired Daochuo's lofty and focused efforts to promote Pure Land practice. She passed away in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the Zhengguan period (636). In the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Zhengguan (648), Gaozong, then still crown prince, sought to gain merit for his mother by building Ci'en Monastery in the capital city. He invited 50 senior monastics nationwide to participate in the inaugural Dharma services. Among them was Master Shandao.

Shandao often stayed at Ci'en Monastery to teach the Pure Land tradition. The depth of his influence and the scale of his accomplishment were such that people later erected tablets to preserve their memories and appreciation of him.

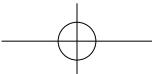


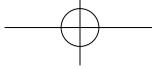
## 18. *Supervising the Longmen Buddha's Construction*

There are two sources of information about Master Shandao when he was based in Shiji Monastery:

1. Memorial Inscription to Master Longchan, or the “Memorial Inscription Bequeathed at Imperial Behest on Master Longchan by Huaiyun, Late Abbot of Shiji Monastery.” The tablet records how Shandao’s disciple, Master Huaiyun, came to take monastic vows. It says, “In the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Zongzhang period during Emperor Gaozong’s reign ... he took vows under the esteemed teacher Shandao, who had personally achieved *samadhi*.”

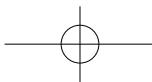
The inscription describes how Master Huaiyun (who came from an aristocratic family) had his head shaved and became a monk in a ceremony supervised by Master Shandao. The year was 668.

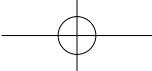




2. Niche inscription at the Great Buddha statue, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang. It was the wish of Emperor Gaozong that the world-renowned Great Buddha be built; its construction was funded and carried out by Empress We Zetian. The project was overseen by Master Shandao, under imperial appointment. He was then resident at Shiji Monastery. Recounts the inscription, “[The Buddha] was built on the instructions of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty ... Empress Wu contributed 20,000 strings of cash, while Master Shandao of Shiji Monastery, on imperial orders, supervised the construction ... The statue was completed on the 30th day of the 12th month, in the 2nd year of the Shangyuan period [675].”

The inscription refers to “Master Shandao of Shiji Monastery” in 675, when he was 63 years old. We know from this that Shandao was then resident at the institution. Its abbot at the time was Master Huaiyun, Shandao’s disciple. The passage tells us that Master Shandao’s erudition and talents, as well as his mastery of Buddhist arts, were such that even emperors depended on him.





## ***19. The Teachings Spread to Hubei***

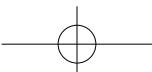
Shandao's teaching activities expanded. They covered not only the Shanxi and Heluo regions, but extended southward to Xiangyang in Hubei. The second part of *Biographies of Senior Tang Dynasty Monks Who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions* quotes Tripitaka Master Yijing as saying:

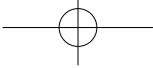
A Vinaya master named Salagupta went to Xiangzhou to meet Master Shandao, who taught him the surpassing practices of Amitabha Buddha.

It is noteworthy that the propagation of Pure Land recitation should have come to the attention of Master Yijing, who calls the practice "surpassing." It highlights the teachings' special merits, as well as Shandao's vigorous and dedicated efforts to spread them.

## ***20. Sacred Visions – and a Definitive Commentary***

During his time in Changan, Master Shandao wrote

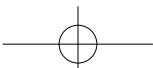


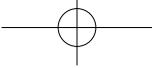


his four-fascicle *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* (also known as *The Four Fascicles*) to correct misconceptions about the sutra prevalent in contemporary Buddhist circles. Before he began writing, Shandao opened his heart and made resolutions before the Buddhas, asking for inspiration. That very night, he had a sacred vision in which Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appeared before him. Thenceforth a monk would appear in his dreams every night to instruct him about the profound and hidden meanings of the text. When his work was done, the saintly being disappeared.

Shandao put the final touches on his *Commentary*, then asked again for assistance. Three nights in succession, he had sacred visions. A full account can be found in Part 4 of *Commentary*.

In later times Shandao's work came to be known as "guided by Amitabha Buddha" and "a definitive commentary for the ages." It was put on a par with the sutras. And Shandao was called "the master who defined [the *Contemplation Sutra*] for all time."





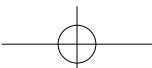
## ***21. Aware of the Timing, Shandao Passes Away Behind Closed Doors***

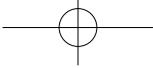
In Changan, Master Shandao taught Pure Land practice in a manner that suited the inclinations and capabilities of the public well. Monastics and lay practitioners, men and women – all fell under his influence and flocked to follow him.

Not long before he passed away, Shandao was in his monastery drawing a portrait of the Pure Land. Suddenly he hurried to finish it. When asked why, he replied, “I am about to be reborn in the Land of Bliss. I can only remain another two or three days.”

When the time came, Shandao developed a mild illness. He closed the door of his room and passed away in good spirits. His body was soft, his face in a normal condition. For a long while, music and an unusual fragrance permeated the room.

Master Shandao had lived 69 years, until the third month and 14<sup>th</sup> day of 681.





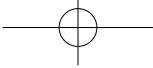
## ***22. Three Great Funerals of the Tang Period***

Because of Master Shandao's teachings, "countless people became believers and Changan was filled with the sounds of Amitabha-recitation." It follows that Shandao's funeral rites would be splendid indeed.

According to the biography of Chan Master Mazu Daoyi, "Huayan passed away at Songyang and Shandao was buried in the Qin hills. Rites befitting the most intimate of relations were observed and overwhelming numbers turned up to pay their respects. Only on three occasions has there been mourning on such a scale."

The "Huayan" who died at Songyang was Master Puji, a stalwart of the Huayan school. His biography records that "the weeping that saw him off was enough to topple a city, and the streets were emptied because of him." From this we can infer that Shandao's funeral drew a similar response.

Such outpourings were a natural response to great virtue, not the result of any human arrangements. We can see



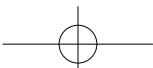
an affirmation in these laudatory words from the *Edited Tales of Auspicious Happenings Relating to Rebirth in the Western Pure Land*: “Since Buddhism came east to China, never has there been such virtue as the Master’s [Shandao’s]!”

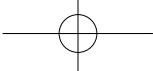
### ***23. An Outstanding Trio Among Countless Followers***

Master Shandao had many impressive followers; as a biography says, “countless men and women esteemed him.” Of the many disciples who carried on his lineage, three were especially renowned. They were Master Huaigan (circa. 670), who wrote *Dispelling Doubts About the Pure Land*; Master Huaihui (640-701); and Master Jingye (655-712). Huaigan passed away before he could complete *Dispelling Doubts*, and the task was left to the younger Huaihui.

### ***24. Memorial Pagoda on Changan’s Outskirts***

On the outskirts of Changan is a place called Shenheyuan. Located south of the city and north of Mt. Zhongnan, it is well-situated, overlooking water and

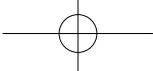




facing the hills. There stands an imposing, 13-story memorial edifice housing the relics of Master Shandao. Its name: Chongling Pagoda.

Master Huaihui, who followed and assisted Shandao for over a decade, chose this scenic spot to erect a pagoda and tablet to commemorate the abundant virtues of his teacher. Next to the pagoda he built a monastery named Xiangji. There he planted rare trees and grasses, and made frequent offerings. Huaihui served as the monastery's abbot, followed by Master Jingye, a younger fellow disciple of Shandao. These events were recorded on the "Memorial Inscription to Master Longchan" and the "Inscription at the Memorial Pagoda to Master Jingye."

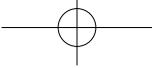
Impermanence, however, overtakes all worldly things. The monastery's magnificent appearance is no more. After 1,300 years of ravages by the elements, all that remains is the great pagoda, which stands tall amid the fields. It continues to radiate the imperishable virtues of Master Shandao, fuelling the aspirations of admirers and followers far and wide.



## 25. *Emperor Gaozong Offers a Thousand Relic Fragments*

The “Memorial Inscription to Master Longchan” contains the following description of the imposing scene at Xiangji Monastery:

*The divine trees and mystical grass  
flourished despite the wintry cold,  
The dark leaves and bright flowers  
overcame the bitter frost and withered not.  
Not only were the winds crisp and the air clear,  
a setting where Sravakas entered the Dharma path;  
The grounds also adjoined the water  
and faced the hills,  
a veritable place of enlightenment for Bodhisattvas.  
The fulsomeness of Dharma activities  
befitted a duplicate of Vulture’s Peak;  
The splendor of it all  
transcended the marvelous treasures of Mt. Kunlun.  
Such manifestations, and the sincerity and virtue  
of the deceased,  
moved the emperor to offer  
a thousand fragments of the Buddha’s relics,*



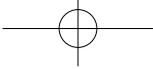
*enclosed in a seven-jeweled case and adorned with exquisite banners.*

Master Shandao's lofty virtues and the occurrences at Xiangji Monastery inspired the deep admiration of Emperor Gaozong. As a result, he made an offering of "a thousand fragments of the Buddha's relics" to the monastery, and adorned them with "a seven-jeweled case" and "exquisite banners."

We can conclude this about Master Shandao: In life, he displayed great compassion and delivered multitudes. After death his remnant virtue moved an emperor.

## ***26. Empress Wu Repeatedly Visits the Pure Land Sanctuary***

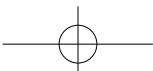
Because Master Shandao had many followers in Changan and Xiangji Monastery housed the relics and Dharma instruments offered by the emperor, visitors and worshippers came in never-ending streams. The monastery flourished.

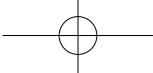


Notes the “Memorial Inscription to Master Longchan”:

*Having fulfilled the destiny of her bloodline  
and inherited the glorious tradition  
of Emperors Gaozu, Taizong and Gaozong,  
the great Empress Wu Zetian  
continued to recall the gardens of Xiangji Monastery  
and delight in its hills and streams.  
She frequently visited the Pure Land sanctuary,  
offering treasures from the oceans.  
She repeatedly mingled with the common people,  
donating valuables from the rivers.*

After becoming empress, Wu Zetian still remembered Xiangji Monastery fondly. So she “frequently visited the Pure Land monastery” and “repeatedly mingled with the common people.” Each time she would make lavish offerings of “treasures from the oceans and valuables from the rivers.”



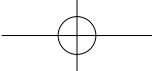


## 27. Wang Wei Writes a Poem, ‘Passing Through Xiangji Monastery’

*I knew not Xiangji Monastery ...  
 Just a few miles from the cloudy peaks  
 The ancient woods hold no path for humans;  
 Somewhere deep in the mountains, a bell sounds.  
 A stream’s gurgling muffles treacherous rocks;  
 The sun casts its cold light on the pines.  
 At dusk, amid the melody of an empty pond  
 I meditate calmly to tame the toxic dragons  
 of the mind.*

Wang Wei (700-761) was also named Mojie. A scholar of the highest rank during the zenith of the Tang Dynasty, he was a renowned poet, calligrapher and musician. His poetry was refined in form and spirited in style. Fresh, clean and transcendent, it was unique. Marveled the great Song Dynasty scholar and poet Su Shi, “There are paintings in his poems, and poems in his paintings.”

Wang was a lay Buddhist who dressed simply and observed a vegetarian diet. He delighted in Chan and was fond of Pure Land, and enjoyed a reputation as “the Buddha of poetry.”

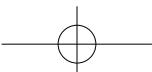


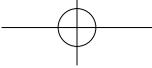
“Passing Through Xiangji Monastery” was probably written late in his life, as he toured various places. In the poem, “cloudy peaks,” “ancient woods,” “deep mountains,” “bell sounds,” “stream’s gurgling,” “treacherous rocks,” “sunlight,” “pines,” “dusk,” “empty pond,” “meditate calmly” and “toxic dragons” evoke the air of ethereal beauty prevailing at Xiangji Monastery at the time, with its tranquility, calm, profundity and extra-worldliness. The images are refined and lively, with no traces of artifice; they seem entirely natural.

Wang Wei’s “Passing Through Xiangji Monastery” only added to the fame of Master Shandao, the Chongling Pagoda and Xiangji Monastery, spreading it far and wide.

## ***28. Light From a Text Awakens Shaokang***

Another prominent Pure Land master appeared during the early Zhenyuan period (785-805) of the mid-Tang. He was Master Shaokang (736-805), from whose mouth Amitabha would appear when he recited the Buddha’s name, and who was later dubbed the “latter-day Shandao.”





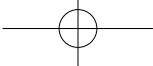
When Shaokang visited Baima (White Horse) Monastery in Luoyang, he was surprised to see light coming from some texts in the main hall. He went up for a closer look, and saw that the text in question was Master Shandao's *Guide to the Western Land of Bliss*.

Delighted, Master Shaokang made a wish: "If I have a karmic connection with the Pure Land, may this text give off light once again." Immediately afterward the light shone forth again, with countless emanations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Shaokang was deeply touched. He vowed on the spot: "The rocks of ages may move, but my resolve will never waver!"

## ***29. An Image Transforms into a Buddha and Gives Guidance***

Master Shaokang returned to Changan and went straight to Shandao's memorial hall there. After paying his respects and making abundant offerings, Shaokang asked earnestly to see Shandao one time. A portrait of Shandao

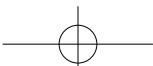


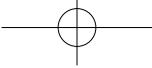
thereupon transformed into the form of a Buddha and said to Shaokang, “By following my teachings, you will bring benefits and joy to sentient beings and be reborn with them in the Pure Land.” That seemed to serve as a revelation to Master Shaokang.

### ***30. Buddha Emanations Recall Shandao***

Having twice witnessed documents emitting light, Shaokang was drawn deeply into Pure Land practice and swore that his “resolve would never waver,” even if “the rocks of ages” were to tumble. The episode, together with Shandao’s appearance as a Buddha emanation to instruct him, were extraordinarily rare occurrences. Indeed, they were of an unfathomable nature, inspiring us profoundly and invoking our deepest admiration.

After these experiences, Master Shaokang himself believed in Pure Land and encouraged others to do so. He practiced and transformed others. In all this, he followed Shandao’s path exclusively. Male and female, old and young – once people encountered Shaokang, they would





recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. Wherever he went, there would be the sound of Amitabha-recitation.

Shaokang later established a center for Pure Land practice in Muzhou, Zhejiang, where reciters gathered. Whenever he made a recitation, the assembly would see a Buddha emanate from his mouth. It was the same whether he did a hundred or a thousand recitations, echoing the phenomenon of light emission from Shandao's mouth whenever the earlier master recited. For that reason, Shaokang's contemporaries called him the "latter-day Shandao" and praised him as "today's Amitabha."

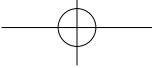
Yang Jie, the great Buddhist scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty, esteemed Shaokang and revered Shandao. He wrote *In Praise of Master Shandao's Place of Amitabha Teaching*, voicing his acclaim in this *gatha*:

*The stone steps to the altar on the Eastern Summit  
are lofty;*

*His recitations indeed produced  
ten Buddha emanations.*

*The later Shandao followed the tradition  
of the earlier one;*

*The Amitabha of today is the Amitabha of old.*

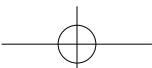


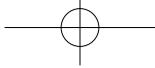
*Single-minded, perfect concentration  
transcends the Three Domains;  
Under the solitary moon, pure awareness  
is reflected in the myriad ripples.  
Having traversed the Pure Land  
in the boat of wisdom,  
they returned to our world to save sentient beings.*

### ***31. A Light Shines on the East, Where Honen Inherits the Mantle***

*Though he was gone, his brilliance remained;  
the stars shone on the East.  
Honen inherited the mantle and  
spread the school's attributes far and wide.  
I composed this gatha to praise  
both past and present;  
May the bright light of Mt. Zhongnan  
and the Eastern Ocean  
shine ever brightly!*

These laudatory verses were written by Zhao Puchu, vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political



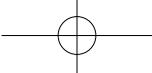


Consultative Conference and former president of the Buddhist Association of China. They commend Master Shandao and Master Honen (1133-1212).

In China Master Shaokang, the “latter-day Shandao,” carried on the teachings of the earlier master and worked actively to spread them. In Japan, the mantle fell in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to Master Honen, regarded as the wisest monk in the land and an incarnation of Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta. Relying solely on Shandao’s *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, he founded the Pure Land school of Japan. The text would become the school’s core scripture in that country. In the conclusion to his *Collection on Choosing Buddha-Recitation According to the Fundamental Vow*, Honen wrote:

Shandao’s *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* is a guide to the Western Land of Bliss; it is a practitioner’s eyes and feet. Aspirants to rebirth in the Pure Land must regard it as a rare treasure!

Moreover, Shandao was considered the founder of the Pure Land school, while Honen became one of its lineage masters. The various branches of Pure Land in Japan, today the country’s largest Buddhist tradition,



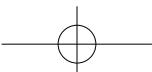
all trace their roots back to Master Honen, who relied exclusively on Shandao.

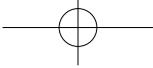
From the eternal and tranquil radiance of the Land of Bliss, Master Shandao continued to shine the light of wisdom on the East, so that Japan's "Honen inherited the mantle and propagated the school's ways far and wide." It also enabled "the bright light of Mt. Zhongnan and the Eastern Ocean [to] shine ever brightly" and guide people towards rebirth in the Pure Land.

Zhao's verse can truly be said to "acclaim both past and present"!

## ***32. Amitabha and Shandao***

That Master Shandao was an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha is mentioned in *Brief Tales of the Land of Bliss*. That's why such abundant merit and extraordinary events attached to him even before his birth and after his death. And quite rightly – for he had unique insights into the profound import of Amitabha's Fundamental Vow, enabling him to deliver huge numbers of name-reciters.





At the end of his *Collection on Choosing Buddha-Recitation According to the Fundamental Vow*, Master Honen set down these admiring words:

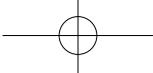
Above, in the original ground, stands the Dharma King of the 48 Vows, who has been calling out to us for 10 *kalpas* that Perfect Enlightenment depends on recitation of his name.

Below, following in his footsteps, is the teacher of single-minded Amitabha-recitation; his instruction, obtained in a state of *samadhi*, will certainly allow us to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

Though the former is different from the latter, their teachings are the same.

### ***33. Two Lineage Masters Meet, and Transmission Takes Place***

Honen revered and relied entirely on Shandao, giving his absolute allegiance to the Chinese master. Eventually, in a state of dream-like concentration, he felt Shandao approaching him to commend and verify his



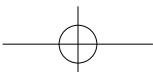
understandings. They also engaged in a question-and-answer session, which formed the basis of the classic “Dialogue of the Two Patriarchs” so widely relished among the Pure Land schools of Japan.

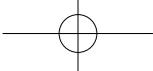
According to such texts as *Encountering the Sacred Visage in a Dream*, *Casual Accounts of the Pure Land* and *Biography of Master Genku (Honen)*, Master Honen said:

I had read the *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* eight times (and the entire Buddhist canon five times). I knew that “ordinary beings, with their confused thinking, would certainly be reborn in the Pure Land if they practiced the recitation of Amitabha Buddha’s name. This results from the power of Amitabha’s vows.”

Though I would definitely be reborn in the Pure Land, I also wanted to teach this practice to sentient beings. But whether the circumstances would be favorable was hard to tell, so I hesitated.

One night I dreamed of a great gathering of purple clouds, which covered the world. An infinite brilliance shone forth from the clouds and a flock of bejeweled birds flew out from the light.





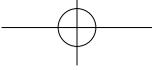
I was walking high up in the mountains when an eminent monk appeared in the clouds and stood before me. I immediately paid my respects and gazed upon his esteemed countenance. From the waist down his body was golden, resembling that of a Buddha. Waist up, he wore the robes of an ordinary monk.

The monk said, “I am Shandao of the Tang Dynasty. You are able thoroughly to understand the practice of single-minded Amitabha-recitation. As that is extremely rare, I have come to validate your achievement. Nothing will impede your propagation of the Dharma, which will spread far and wide.”

I prostrated myself and asked, “Please transmit the Pure Land teachings to me personally, so I can have faith in them and teach others to believe.”

The monk replied, “Very good! Bodhisattva and great sage, I will now pass the Pure Land teachings to you, as you wish.”

Across time and space, the two lineage masters met in a dream. The encounter was like a face-to-face, personal transmission, like water poured from one vessel

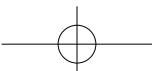


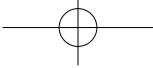
into another! As Master Shaokang was dubbed the “latter-day Shandao,” so can Master Honen be considered the latter-day Shandao of Japan. The lineage was continued, both domestically and abroad. I cannot suppress a few words of appreciation:

*An incarnation of Amitabha Buddha,  
Master Shandao of the Tang  
alone revealed the deep meaning  
of the Fundamental Vow.  
An emanation of Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta,  
Japan's Honen exclusively propagated  
the vital practice of name-recitation.  
In separate countries, the two sacred beings  
of the Western Land of Bliss  
taught the same method of Amitabha-recitation.  
In different time periods, the two lineage masters  
of the Eastern lands  
joined to create the Pure Land school.*

### ***34. A Buddhist Association President Pens His Praises***

*Rebirth of ordinary beings in  
the Pure Land's Realm of Rewards*

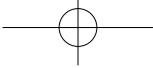




*and recitation of Amitabha's name  
and reliance on his Fundamental Vow –  
These accord with the Dharma,  
suit the circumstances and  
can save multitudes of people.  
Master Shandao's meritorious accomplishments  
honor the past and light up the present;  
In these latter days, our admiration and reliance  
grow all the more.*

In 1980 Zhao Puchu, former vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and president of the China Buddhist Association, respectfully penned acclamatory verses for a Dharma ceremony to mark the 1,300-year anniversary of Master Shandao's passing. For the occasion, Buddhists from China and Japan assembled at Xiangji Monastery, then undergoing renovation. The institution is the common ancestral temple of the Pure Land schools in both nations.

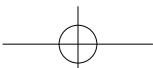
Zhao lauded Shandao as “a self-willed incarnation of Amitabha Buddha.” The Tang master, said Zhao, had taught Pure Land in accordance with contemporary conditions and motivated many to practice Amitabha-

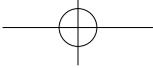


recitation correctly. Zhao praised “the great Buddha at Longmen” as a “masterwork for the ages,” inspiring eternal reverence from beings in both celestial and earthly realms.

He also commended Japan’s Honen for being deeply inspired by the light of Shandao’s wisdom and establishing the Pure Land school in his country. The Japanese master, Zhao noted, had inherited from Shandao the correct essence of Pure Land teaching – namely that “recitation of Amitabha’s name, relying on his Fundamental Vow,” leads to “the rebirth of ordinary beings in the Pure Land’s Realm of Rewards.” This shows that the two masters, who lived in separate countries during different times, belonged to the same lineage. Zhao’s verses:

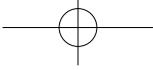
*Master Shandao alone willed his own reincarnation,  
Propagating Pure Land teachings  
according to circumstances.  
Skillfully expounding their profound essence,  
his Five Works in Nine Fascicles  
inspired correct faith in that which is hard to believe.  
The great Buddha at Longmen,  
a masterwork for the ages,*





*depended on his supervision;  
it will forever be admired by all beings.  
Having accomplished his work and his vows,  
he entered nirvana according to his karma.  
His stupa has stood at Xiangji Monastery  
for 1,300 years.  
Though he was gone, his brilliance remained;  
the stars shone on the East.  
Honen inherited the mantle and  
spread the school's attributes far and wide*

*Lotuses of four colors, trees of seven jewels –  
The sound of the Dharma reverberates  
and its sweet dew is everywhere.  
At the millennium-old ancestral temple,  
countless virtuous believers, with utmost sincerity,  
recite Amitabha's name around the clock.  
Thus do they gain good karma  
and make resplendent the occasion;  
They recall the Master's beneficence  
and forever avoid the Wretched Realms.  
The monastery is opened up and the stupa renovated;  
The ocean tides and celestial winds  
are favorable and accommodating.*



*Descendants from two nations are gathered together,  
forever kind and amiable,  
Together following in the ancestral footsteps.*

*I composed this gatha to praise  
both past and present;  
May the bright light of Mt. Zhongnan  
and the Eastern Ocean  
shine ever brightly!*

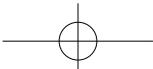
Respectfully composed and written by Puchu

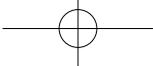
Master Honen once penned a *waka* (Japanese style of poetry) on this passage in the *Contemplation Sutra* – **“The light [of Amitabha] permeates all worlds, always embracing those who recite his name.”** The verse goes:

*Though it shines everywhere, the light of the moon  
registers only in the minds of those who look up.*

When he saw these lines, Zhao was full of admiration. He was inspired to write a few short verses echoing the sentiments:

*Moonlight covers all things,*





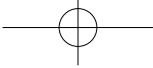
*but it exists only to those mindful of it.  
Suspended in the sky,  
the moon illuminates the entire earth;  
yet only seekers drink in its light.*

Thus we see that the Pure Land founders of both nations are esteemed by countless subsequent generations – and that Zhao Puchu was a seeker of the Pure Land.

### ***35. Lianchi and Yinguang Express Their Heartfelt Admiration***

In his *Collection on Rebirth in the Land of Bliss*, Master Lianchi showed himself deeply touched by Master Shandao's lofty virtues, which he much admired. His praises:

Master Shandao is said to be an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha. The meticulousness and discipline of his own practice and his extensive efforts to benefit others have been passed down through the generations. They powerfully instill faith in our hearts. If not Amitabha himself, he was surely a bosom friend of Avalokitesvara and Samantabhadra!



Master Yinguang, in his *Writings*, lavished praise on Shandao's wisdom and special powers:

Master Shandao was an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha. He possessed ample special powers and great wisdom.

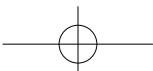
In expounding Pure Land, he did not stress the abstruse. He emphasized simplicity and clarity as he taught people how to practice.

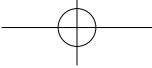
His teaching on exclusive and mixed practice has immense benefits.

Exclusive practice means that we venerate only Amitabha with our bodies, recite only his name in our speech and keep only him in our minds.

Every person who does this will be reborn in the Western Land of Bliss, without exception.

Mixed practice means engaging in the practices of various schools simultaneously, then dedicating the merit towards rebirth in the Pure Land. Because the practitioner lacks a pure and focused mind, benefits will be hard to come by.





As a result, only one or two in a hundred, three or four in a thousand, achieve rebirth.

This is the honest truth, which will never change.

### ***36. Take Shandao's Words as Amitabha Buddha's***

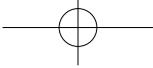
In his *Writings*, Master Yinguang offered these words of praise in the form of a chant:

During the early Tang, all the Dharma schools flourished.

It was then that the Master [Shandao] promoted Pure Land, meeting public expectations. Who could match a Buddha's power?

Those who give themselves over to it will certainly be reborn in the Land of Bliss.

He also advised people to “take the Master's [Shandao's] words as [Amitabha] Buddha's,” composing this *gatha*:



*The Master was said to be Amitabha's incarnation;  
Everywhere he promoted Amitabha-recitation  
and its principles.*

*Earnest learners must be humble, and develop  
weariness of the world and delight in the Pure Land.*

*In understanding, they should know all teachings;*

*In practice, they should grasp both*

*the aptitude of sentient beings*

*and the deliverance of Amitabha Buddha.*

*While reciting Amitabha's name,*

*he emitted light to inspire the assembly;*

*We should take his words as Amitabha's own.*

### ***37. Master Zhiyong Makes an Acclamatory Inscription***

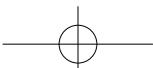
Deeply admiring Master Shandao's great virtue,  
Chan Master Zhiyong of the Song Dynasty made this  
commendatory inscription on a portrait of Shandao:

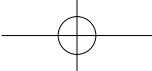
*Shandao was an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha.*

*To recite the six characters of Amitabha's name*

*is to praise the Buddha\*, repent\*\**

*and resolve to dedicate\*\*\**





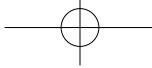
*all meritorious roots to the Pure Land\*\*\*\*.*

\* Reciting Amitabha’s name is to offer him the highest praise. Bodhisattva Vasubandhu said in his *Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land*: “Reciting Amitabha’s name is an acclamatory practice.”

\*\* The name contains merit. A single recitation is enough to eradicate eight billion eons of heavy karmic offenses. Since that is so, one who recites frequently is also one who repents regularly. In his *In Praise of Pratyutpanna*, Master Shandao says, “To recite [Amitabha’s name] regularly is to repent frequently.” This shows that repentance is a natural by-product of recitation.

\*\*\* Shandao says in the “Section on the Underlying Meaning” of his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*: “ ‘Namo’ means to entrust our lives, as well as to dedicate merit towards rebirth [in the Pure Land]. [Reciting] ‘Amitabha Buddha’ is the practice. That is why rebirth is certain.”

\*\*\*\* All of Amitabha’s practices before attaining Buddhahood and virtues after doing so are contained

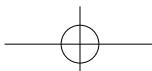


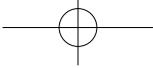
in his name. Thus the six-character name encompasses all meritorious practices and roots of virtue. By reciting the name, one takes on every fundamental merit and dedicates them to the Pure Land.

### ***38. Vinaya Master Tansheng Writes a Celebratory Gatha***

In 1161, during the Southern Song Dynasty, Vinaya Master Tansheng greatly admired Master Shandao's virtue and wrote an acclamatory *gatha* on a portrait of Shandao:

*When Master Shandao of the Tang Dynasty  
Recites Amitabha's name,  
the Buddha issues forth from his mouth.  
All believers who see this know  
it's not some fantastic trick.  
The Buddha dwells in our minds –  
It is entirely so with every person.  
If we wish to be like Shandao,  
the key is to be as well-versed and skillful as he was.  
The waters are still in the pool of our mind;  
the Buddha and the moon are reflected there.*





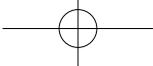
*But the winds of karma stir up ripples –  
sentient beings and the Buddha become distant.*

By Vinaya Master Tansheng,  
on this true likeness of  
Master Shandao of the Tang Dynasty,  
on the first day of  
the second lunar month, 1161

### ***39. Shandao Manifests – an Ancient Buddha Atop an Old Pagoda***

In 2002, a certain monastic and Gansu native was meditating while seated on a rock in the province's Maizhi mountains, in Tianshui district. Suddenly he saw an imposing Buddhist pagoda appear in the sky. Instead of a top, it was crowned by an ancient image of Amitabha Buddha.

The monk came down from the hills. Later he developed a desire to study and practice abroad. First, though, he went to Xian. After disembarking, he didn't know where to go. A householder approached him and took him to Xiangji Monastery.



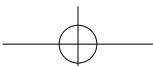
Once he arrived and saw Master Shandao's Chongling Pagoda, he recognized it as the Buddhist edifice he had seen in the sky. The pagoda originally had 13 stories. But the top two levels had succumbed to the ravages of time, leaving it without a top. As it happened, the monk watching over the pagoda wanted to leave on some business, so he asked the visitor to guard the structure on his behalf for ten days.

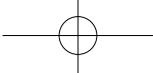
On June 27, a lay practitioner gave the monastic some books on the teachings of the Pure Land school's Shandao tradition, including *Master Shandao: The Essentials*. The monk accepted them happily and respectfully, saying, "I have a karmic connection with Master Shandao."

Master Shandao was indeed an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha. That he should manifest himself a millennium later is truly inconceivable!

## ***40. Master Shandao, an Amitabha Incarnation***

One morning in April 2008, householder Liu Tiansu



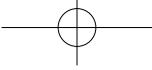


of the Chongqing Amitabha-Recitation Society kept an appointment to visit householder Li Peihong at home. His purpose was to give Li some books on the Pure Land Shandao lineage. He also wanted to introduce Master Shandao's Pure Land teachings to his host and persuade him to believe and accept them.

Just when Liu was saying that the Chongqing Society followed the Pure Land thought of Master Shandao, the TV in the living room suddenly switched on and displayed a color image. The imaged showed, in large, bold characters: "MASTER SHANDAO WAS AN INCARNATION OF AMITABHA BUDDHA." After several minutes, the characters faded away.

The two men looked at each other, astonished. How could the TV set switch itself on? Where did the image come from? What caused the bold characters to appear? The phenomenon could only have been a manifestation by Amitabha Buddha, whose aim was to affirm that Shandao was indeed his incarnation and that only his Pure Land thought was truly pristine. It was also intended to inspire the strongest faith in householder Li.

The experience touched Li deeply and prompted him

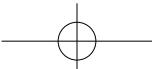


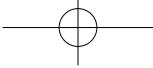
to exclaim, “This is incredible. We have both witnessed with our own eyes this miraculous episode!”

“Master Shandao was an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha” and “the Pure Land thought of Master Shandao” were both affirmed in an unfathomable manner. Stunning and profoundly moving, the incident has inspired the deepest faith and immeasurable joy in the Dharma. As Master Shaokang once declared, “The rocks of ages may move, but my resolve will never waver!”

## ***41. A Dream of Shandao Opens the Door to Amitabha-Recitation***

In 2002, householder Hu Qiuju of Changde in Hunan Province became a Buddhist at the age of 45. Yet she didn’t understand why she was learning the Dharma, and knew nothing about ending the cycle of rebirth or reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name to enter the Pure Land. Because she often did volunteer work at Dharma centers, she learned such standard Buddhist practices as reciting the Great Compassion Mantra, the *Universal Gateway Chapter*; the *Heart Sutra* and the *Dharani* of Inauguration. But she rarely performed Amitabha-recitation.



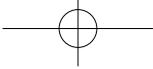


One day she dreamt that someone told her she had a connection with the Tang Dynasty. When she awoke, she had no idea what the dream meant. It stayed in her mind, however.

Sustained learning and practice of the Dharma made Hu aware of the cycle of rebirth and the importance of being reborn in the Pure Land. Even so, she didn't know whether what she was learning and practicing would allow her to do so. She often felt uneasy and implored Amitabha Buddha and Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara to enlighten her in her dreams.

In April 2004, Hu dreamt of a bodhi tree full of bodhi fruit. Beneath the tree were lots of people dressed in ancient Indian robes. They told her to “go to Changsha in 2006.” Upon awakening she thought: Changsha was more than a couple of hundred kilometers from Changde. Since the timing wasn't imminent and the destination was far, she put the matter aside.

In June 2006, Hu dreamt of a tall pagoda. At a pine tree beside the pagoda was a nun, who told her: “You must go Changsha. Your karma is there.” But because she did not know where in Changsha such a pagoda might be, she continued to ignore the issue.



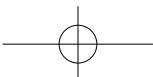
Come August 2006, and Hu saw in another dream a tall mountain. At its summit stood a magnificent, bejeweled pagoda that soared into the clouds. From the west floated a person dressed in old-style green robes; he settled on top of the pagoda. A cry came through the air, repeating itself: “Master Shandao! Master Shandao!”

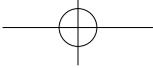
Liu awoke. She had no idea who Master Shandao was, or where the glittering mountaintop pagoda was located.

The series of remarkable dreams seemed to indicate something, yet Liu did not understand them.

In December 2006 Master Yinwu, a nun from Changsha’s Kaiyuan Monastery, returned to her former home in Changde to attend to some matters. She knew householder Hu and invited the latter to accompany her to Kaiyuan Monastery. Master Zhongxin, the head of the monastery, gave Liu a few books on the Pure Land school.

One of them, the visitor noticed at once, was *Dharma Sayings of Master Shandao*. Her eyes brightened, and a tremor came over her: She finally made her acquaintance





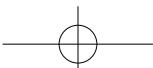
with Master Shandao in Changsha's Kaiyuan Monastery!

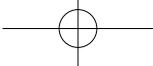
When Liu opened the book, she was struck by an image of Shandao's Chongling Pagoda – and startled to realize it was the jeweled structure she had seen in her dream.

At this point, the meaning of her unusual dreams of the past few years became clear. They contained revelations as well as guidance. The message was that she should focus on reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha according to the teachings of the renowned Tang Dynasty monk, Master Shandao, an incarnation of Amitabha. Then she would certainly achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

Master Shandao, the prominent Tang monastic and Amitabha incarnation, propagated Pure Land teachings exclusively.

More than a millennium later, he is still manifesting. We pay our deepest respects to him, as well as his boundless compassion and resolve.



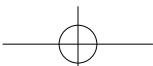


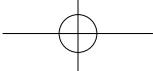
## ***42. Shandao Manifests as a Giant Buddha With Pressed Palms***

On the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth lunar month of 2010, a young man took refuge under the Three Gems. He was 25, and his Dharma name was Daocong. Shortly after, he began to read widely on Buddhism. But he lacked the guidance of a good teacher. Not surprisingly, he became confused. In the first lunar month of 2013, he had a dream and saw Master Shandao, who appeared as a giant Buddha with palms pressed together. Daocong's account of the episode:

In the middle of the first lunar month of 2013, I had a dream that seemed to last all night. In my dream I was taking a walk with my mother. Before I knew it, we arrived at an extremely quiet spot. I had never been to this place before. We heard birdcalls and smelled the fragrance of flowers, but saw neither birds nor flowers. The surrounding trees were unusually lush and verdant.

As we continued walking, the ground became somewhat elevated. We arrived at a corridor, one that resembled those at the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Suddenly,



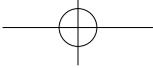


a giant Buddha image appeared in front of my mother and me. Its entire body was golden and it seemed to descend from the sky. This Buddha resembled a steep mountain, bringing to mind the saying, ‘The Buddha is a mountain, and the mountain is a Buddha.’

This Buddha sat in lotus position, on a purple-golden platform. His palms were pressed together, and his slightly open mouth wore a smile. White clouds repeatedly wafted across his head and chest. The thin clouds resembled white gauze, as well as spiraling white smoke from a cigarette. The purple-golden platform was shaped like a thousand-leafed lotus flower, with swirling golden petals ... I can only describe the scene as it was. Regrettably, my emotions upon seeing the Buddha, and the joy that the environment evoked, are quite beyond words.

Of course, it was a marvel that I dreamt of such a huge Buddha. After waking up, I kept asking myself: Which Buddha was it? I have seen images of Bodhisattvas pressing palms together, but never a Buddha.

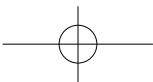
On the morning of September 1, I met a Pure Land practitioner in a monastery. He enthusiastically introduced me to the Pure Land thought of Master Shandao and

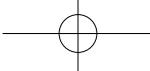


gave me a book titled *Biographies of the 13 Pure Land Patriarchs*. I leafed through it – and was startled to find the giant Buddha of my dream in one of the pages. It was a statue of Master Shandao, currently standing in Xiangji Monastery in Xian.

In the spring I saw Master Shandao in a dream, and now I have unexpectedly encountered his Pure Land thought. This is truly unfathomable. Clearly, I have a karmic connection with the Pure Land school, and especially with Master Shandao. I believe and accept this completely! All life long, I will practice Pure Land exclusively and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha alone. I will assuredly gain rebirth in the Land of Bliss.

(Recounted by Householder Daocong on October 26, 2013)



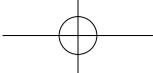


### ***43. Ancient Worthies Praise a Dozen Virtues***

Master Shandao took form in this world and dispensed universal benefits to marvelous effect. He possessed towering virtue. Our gratitude to our lineage ancestor is infinite, beyond comparison even with the hardest diamond or the highest admiration. We, who are ignorant and dull, cannot adequately commend even a tiny portion of his qualities!

At the risk of sullyng the saintly, I have respectfully assembled the praises of Shandao's virtues by ancient worthies to show the depth of my admiration. The effort is like a drop in the ocean, or a single hair on the backs of nine oxen. Its purpose is solely to express my humble sincerity –

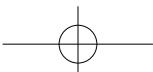
1. The virtue of local esteem
2. The virtue of utmost sincerity in Amitabha-recitation
3. The virtue of having achieved *samadhi* (perfect concentration)
4. The virtue of emitting light from his mouth

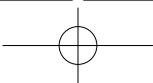


5. The virtue of being inspired (by Amitabha) in his dreams while writing his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*
6. The virtue of explicating the texts and overcoming obstructions
7. The virtue of composing a definitive commentary for the ages
8. The virtue of distinguishing between the ultimate and the expedient with absolute skillfulness
9. The virtue of teaching and transforming people widely
10. The virtue of gaining the respect and following of emperors
11. The virtue of his writings emitting light
12. The virtue of his image transforming into a Buddha

#### **44. Five Works in Nine Fascicles, *Main and Supplementary Commentaries***

Works by Master Shandao that have become sacred teachings of the Pure Land school include the *Five*





*Works in Nine Fascicles* (see below). There was also the *Meaning of the Amitabha Sutra*, now lost. Like the *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, the work's "Meaning of Meditative Practices" section had appeared twice. It was a text explicating the *Amitabha Sutra*.

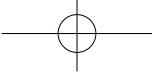
## FIVE WORKS IN NINE FASCICLES

**A. *Teachings*** (Main commentary, i.e., *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*):

1. Underlying meaning section: "Section on the Underlying Meaning" (1 fascicle)
2. Textual meaning section:
  - i. Introduction – "Meaning of the Introduction" (1 fascicle)
  - ii. Main part – "Meaning of Meditative Virtues" (1 fascicle), "Meaning of Non-Meditative Virtues" (1 fascicle)
  - iii. Circulation part – "Meaning of Non-Meditative Virtues"

**B. *Practices*** (Supplementary commentaries):

1. Practice of contemplation portion: Practices



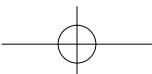
for special occasions – *Dharma School of Contemplation and Recitation* (1 fascicle)

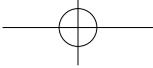
2. Practice of rites portion:
  - i. Temporary practices – *In Praise of Dharma Practices* (2 fascicles)
  - ii. Regular practices – *In Praise of the Rites of Rebirth* (1 fascicle)
  - iii. Practices for special occasions – *In Praise of Pratyutpanna* (1 fascicle)

Among the *Five Works*, the four fascicles of the *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* are the “main commentary,” also known as the “explication section.” The other four texts constitute the “supplementary commentary,” or the “practice of rites section.”

## ***45. Prominent Monastics of the Times and Their Dates***

Tanluan	476-542
Daochuo	562-645
Shandao	613-681





Zhendi	499-569
Xinxing	541-594
Huiyuan	523-592
Zhiyi	538-597
Jizang	549-623
Daoxuan	596-667
Xuanzang	600-664
Xianshou	643-712

Huiyuan's key works: *Commentary on the Meaning of the Larger Sutra* (2 fascicles), *Commentary on the Meaning of the Contemplation Sutra* (2 fascicles)

Zhiyi: *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* (2 fascicles), *Record of the Meaning of the Amitabha Sutra* (1 fascicle)

Jizang: *Commentary on the Meaning of the Larger Sutra* (1 fascicle), *Commentary on the Meaning of the Contemplation Sutra* (2 fascicles)

