



Genshin's Oj?y?sh? and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan (Pure Land Buddhist Studies)

Robert F. Rhodes

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The *Ojyōshū*, written by the monk Genshin (942–1017), is one of the most important texts in the history of Japanese religions. It is the first comprehensive guide to the doctrine and practice of Pure Land Buddhism written in Japan and so played a pivotal role in establishing this form of Buddhism in the country. In *Genshin's *Ojyōshū* and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan*, the first book in English on the *Ojyōshū* in more than forty years, Robert Rhodes draws on the latest scholarship to shed new light on the text, its author, and the tumultuous age in which it was written.

Rhodes begins by providing substantial discussion on the development of Pure Land Buddhism before the *Ojyōshū*'s appearance and a thorough account of Genshin's life, the full details of which have never before been available in English. Japan in the tenth century was marked by far-reaching political, social, and economic change, all of which had a significant affect on religion, including the emergence of numerous new religious movements in Kyoto. Pure Land was the most popular of these, and the faith embraced by the Tendai scholar Genshin when he became disaffected with the growing factionalism at Enrajuji, Tendai's central temple. A significant portion of Rhodes' study is a wide-ranging examination of the *Ojyōshū*'s Pure Land teachings in which he describes and analyzes Genshin's interpretations of Pure Land cosmology and *nenbutsu* practice. For Genshin the latter encompassed an extensive range of practices for focusing the mind on Amida Buddha—from the simple recitation of *Namu Amidabutsu* (“recitative *nenbutsu*”) to the advanced meditative practice of visualizing the buddha (“meditative *nenbutsu*”). According to the *Ojyōshū*, all of these are effective means for ensuring birth in Amida's Pure Land.

This impressively researched and updated treatment of the formative text in the Japanese Pure Land tradition will be welcomed by all scholars and students of Japanese religions. It also offers a fascinating window into Heian (794–1185) religious life, which will be of interest to anyone concerned with medieval Japan.

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