**HAA 18j: Japanese Architecture**

Lecture 7: Byōdō-in (The Phoenix Hall)

**Historical Era**

Heian period (794-1185)

**People and Terms**

Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028); Fujiwara no Yorimichi (992-1074)

Jōchō (d. 1057); most influential sculptor of the mid Heian period

Amida Buddha (S. Amitābha)

Western Pure Land (S. Sukhtāvatī)

Amida’s Welcoming Descent

*mappō* (“Latter Days of the Dharma”)

Genshin’s *Essentials of Salvation* (985)

*nenbutsu* (chanting)

**Byōdō-in (The Phoenix Hall), 1053**

Byōdō-in Temple is the the most important surviving example of an Amida Hall, a type of Buddhist structure new to the Heian period (794-1185). As its name implies, it was built as a site of worship for the **Amida Buddha** (S. Amitābha), who was believed to preside over the paradisal Western Pure Land (S. Sukhtāvatī). Pure Land Buddhism became popular from the tenth century onward among Kyoto aristocrats who wished to be reborn in Amida’s paradise upon death. Its popularity was owed in part to **Genshin’s *Essentials of Salvation* (985)**, which asserted that if the Amida Buddha’s name were recited, the deity would descend on a cloud accompanied by his entourage (Amida’s Welcoming Descent) to welcome and lead the believer to his Pure Land.

Amida halls during the Heian period were typically 11-bay-wide structures that aligned nine sculptures of Amida, reflecting the nine grades of rebirth that were thought possible in his Pure Land. One such hall was built by the powerful statesman Fujiwara Michinaga (966-1027) at his no-longer-extant temple **Hōjōji** (1022), and **Jōruriji Temple (1107)** on the outskirts of Kyoto is a surviving example of such a structure. The design of the Phoenix Hall, however, departs radically from these buildings. It was originally part of a larger monastic complex known as the Byōdō-in, of which the other structures no longer survive. Byōdō-in was built in 1053 by **Fujiwara Yorimichi** (992-1074), the nephew of Michinaga, on his estate in Uji, south of Kyoto.

**Further Reading**

Toshio Fukuyama, *Heian Temples: Byodo-in and Chuson-ji* (Weatherhill, 1976)

Mimi Yiengpruksawan, *Hiraizumi* (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999)

Robert Rhodes, *Genshin’s Ōjōyōshū and the Construction of Pure Land Buddhist Discourse in*

*Heian Japan* (U Hawaii Press, 2017)