

New Japanese Railway Scenery 1



JR Central's Series 373 EMU *Fujikawa* limited express running near Nishi Fujinomiya stations on Minobu Line. The southern end of the 88.4-km line was opened in 1913 as a private steam railway, followed by completion of the 43.5-km Fuji–Minobu section in 1920 as the private Fuji Minobu Railway. Further northwards extension reached Kofu in 1928 when the line was electrified. The line was nationalized in 1941 as part of the wartime mobilization. The 10.7-km Fuji–Fujinomiya section at the south end was double-tracked in 1974 due to increased traffic resulting from pilgrimages by Soka Gakkai members, a Buddhism-related sect, and commuting serving industrial cities in Shizuoka Prefecture on the Pacific coast. The 21.6-km Kofu–Kajikazawaguchi section is used mainly by commuters to and from Kofu City, the capital of Yamanashi Prefecture. JR Central runs seven *Fujikawa* limited-express services every day in each direction.

(Photo: M. Masbima Photo Office)



The photograph shows a costume parade imitating the ancient procession of Nichiren and his followers reaching Mt Minobu. Nichiren (1222–82) is a well-known Buddhist monk in Japan's medieval history. He founded the so-called Nichiren Shu (sect), and is regarded as one of the most radical reformers of Buddhism in Japan. He founded the sect's head temple called Kuon-ji (meaning Temple of Eternity) at the foot of Mt Minobu. The parade is part of *Kaihyakue* (commemoration of Nichiren's arrival at Mt Minobu in October 1274), and today's celebrations start on 15 October every year. During this period, the chief priest holds sermon at the temple's main hall.

Nichiren's radical doctrine was disliked by the other Buddhist sects and feudal government at that time, but he was supported enthusiastically by many followers, including some feudal lords, in the midst of prevailing disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, floods, epidemics, and famines. His prediction of the attempted Mongol invasions in 1274 helped revive his fame and he settled in Minobu in 1274. He founded Kuon-ji in 1281 helped by donations from his followers. He died of illness in 1282 at Ikegami (southern end of today's Tokyo) on his journey to his birthplace (today's Chiba Prefecture) and his ashes were entombed at Kuon-ji in accordance with his will. In later years, the famous Takeda and Tokugawa clans worshipped at Mt Minobu and Kuon-ji, which became a place of imperial prayers in 1706.

(Photo: Minobu Tourist Association)



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