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FEATURES:

**Impact of Railways
on Japanese Society
& Culture**

**10 Years of JNR
Privatization**



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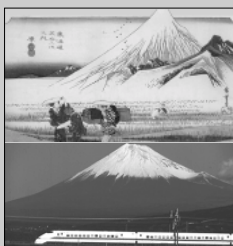
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*Mt. Fuji as represented in Hiroshige's
Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road
around 1830 (exhibited at Tokyo Station
Gallery, Jan-Mar 1996), and as seen
today from the Tokaido Shinkansen
(H. Morokawa)*

Editorial

Japanese Lessons

Japan surprised the world in 1987 by splitting up and privatizing its deficit-ridden national rail network. Ten years later, the newly-founded JRs are providing better services to their customers with much smaller workforces and improved safety records. Apart from the still-accumulating JNR old debts, which were taken over by the government, the reform has been a success at least in terms of improved service and efficiency. Many foreigners admire this achievement and try to learn some direct lessons from it. The Japanese are also so proud of the success that they tend to believe blindly that it is a panacea for all ailing national railways.

It was indeed a drastic change. However, it was the inevitable consequence of many failures in the previous decades by the government, politicians, JNR management, trade union leaders, and the media. In short, Japan failed to adapt JNR to the changing transport market, because nobody understood the real significance of the growth of motor and air transport, which deprived the railway of its monopoly. Inadequate and late rehabilitation plans failed successively, and the ill-fated JNR was finally driven to bankruptcy and dissolution. Because of such failures, the reform had to be radical. The true lessons can be learned from the long history of prior failures rather than from the success story of 1987.

T. SUGA

Contents

Features

Impact of Railways on Japanese Society & Culture

Tokyo Yamanote Line—Cityscape Mutations	Corinne Tiry	4
Networks of Modernity—		
Rail Transport and Modern Japanese Literature	James A. Fujii	12
The Tokaido—Scenes from Edo to Meiji Eras	Jilly Traganou	17
The Usui Toge Railway of the Shin-etsu Line, 1893–1997	Roderick A. Smith	28

10 Years of JNR Privatization

JNR Privatization—JR's First 10 Years and Future Perspectives	Shuheii Konno	34
10 Years of JR Operation—		
The Explicit and Implicit Aims of JNR Privatization	Ian Smith	39

Another Perspective

Japan's Museums—Their Architecture and Interior Design	Wang Zhi Hou	46
--	--------------------	----

People

Train Driver and Master Iaido Swordsman	48
---	----

Japanese Railway History 12

Changes in Japan's Transport Market and JNR Privatization	Mitsuhide Imashiro	50
---	--------------------------	----

Topics	54
---------------------	----

Photostories: Luxury Express Trains Run by Major Private Railways in Japan	2&59
Major Private Railways' Express Trains during the 1950s and 1960s ..	58