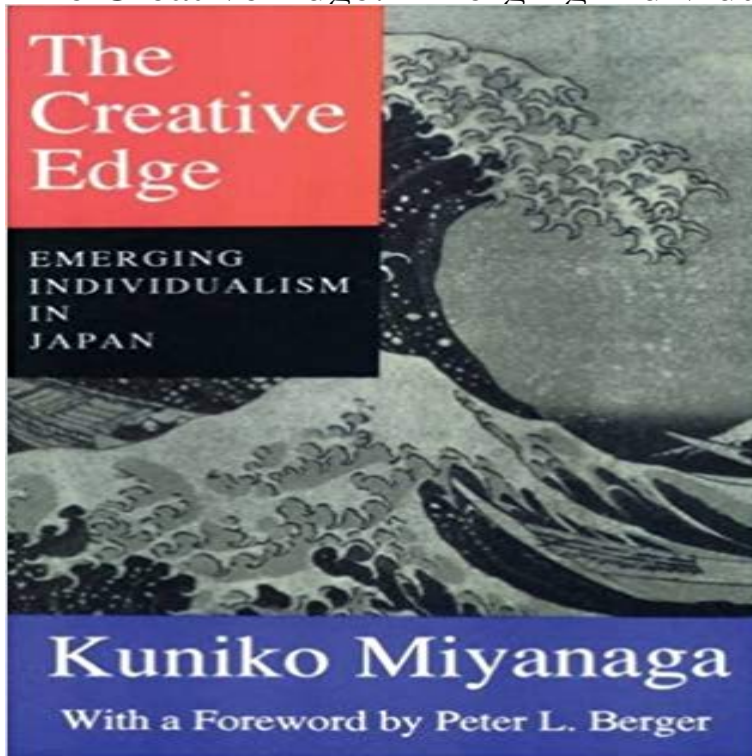


The Creative Edge: Emerging Individualism in Japan



Foreign interpretations of Japan hinge, in large measure, on the notion of a simple homogeneous culture in which individuality is subsumed in collective enterprise. Such interpretations posit a society organized with incredible efficiency for economic superperformance, a society to be, at once, feared and emulated. In this volume, Kumiko Miyanaga argues that the simplistic view of monolithic collectivity is misleading, and that Japan is undergoing a period of social transformation in which traditional attitudes toward collectivism and individualism are shifting in favor of the latter. Miyanaga finds that individualism is flourishing most significantly in the area of entrepreneurship, thus invigorating an already vital Japan. The author begins with a carefully nuanced analysis of the traditional and contemporary relationship between individual and collective attitudes. Historically, individualism has been a quiet, peripheral subculture, a refuge for society's dropouts, expressing itself chiefly in religion and art, and influencing little in the way of social change. With the acceleration of economic and technological growth since the 1960s, some individualists on the periphery of the Japanese economy have gained a position strong enough to enable them to interact with the mainstream without losing their independence. In such areas as the fashion industry, in high technology, and in venture-capital firms, individualists who would never make it with Hitachi or Toyota suddenly find themselves with very lucrative economic opportunities. Miyanaga contends that there is now a mutual influence between the peripheral and mainstream sectors. As enterprises on the outskirts of the economy grow larger and more successful, they feel the pull of the old ideology, and, conversely, mainstream organizations have discovered that they need the creative edge that comes

from the periphery. Just as the small Japanese entrepreneur dreams, at least occasionally, of being a Toyota, large corporations have come to realize the importance of individualism. This book offers an original and distinctive contribution to a very important debate over the future of the Japanese economy. It is a work of great fascination for social scientists, economists, and those seeking a social perspective on Japanese culture.

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