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Industrial Standardization and the Role of Governmental Research Institutes in 1950s Japan

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MESHITSUKA Yosuke

The primary objective of this paper is to clarify the role of governmental research institutes in the industrial policy execution process in 1950s Japan. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to examine the efficacy of industrial policies and laws in impacting Japanese economic development after World War II. In the 1

ast few decades, Calder and Hashimoto have highlighted diversity among government agencies as policymakers. However, what seems to be lacking is a study of diversity among internal subdivisions in those agencies. We are concerned with the role of specialists in the policy process in Japanese government, and especially, we focus on governmental research institutes and the scientists who worked for those institutes. Since governmental research institutes were a bigger part of national innovation system in this period than they are today, this lack of study of those institutes is troubling. The secondary objective of this paper is to demonstrate the hidden relationship between industrial standardization and technological development. First, we examine the restructuring of governmental research institutes after World War II. Some officers of the Allied Forces General Headquarters and the Ministry of Commerce succeeded in establishing the Agency of Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) as a centralized governance structure for governmental research institutes. The establishment of AIST and introduction of competitive research funding resulted in an increased number of research projects relating to industrial and technological policies. Second, we show that some technological developments were required through the process of establishing Japanese Industrial Standards (JISs). In the late 1950s, technological problems emerged in industrial standardization. JISs were required for features which had to date been evaluated through subjective testing. But without precise measurements it was impossible to establish objective and clear standards for those features. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) decided to mobilize governmental research institutes to solve this problem, and to make grants for research relating to industrial standardization. Finally, we analyze the process of standardization of noise and looseness of ball bearings in the late 1950s. When users of ball bearings in Japan required official standards for these characteristics, there were no sufficiently precise measurements, not only in Japan, but globally. The Government Mechanical Laboratory and Japanese bearing makers undertook collaborative research efforts and solved this problem. These results imply that governmental research institutes achieved an important role in the postwar policy process in Japan even if it was not as policy maker.





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