

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Study Group



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The Coordination State: Industrial Policy and Technology Transfer During Japan's Postwar Economic Boom, 1950-76

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Was the postwar economic miracle a result of the Japanese government's industrial policy, or did it occur despite it? This question has led to a substantial amount of literature, beginning with early work that claimed a positive impact of government policy on economic growth. This perspective is commonly linked to Chalmers Johnson's 1982 book, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*. Later research has focused on three main themes: policy instruments, the relationship between business and government, and the effects of policy. Many scholars found that the policy instruments supposedly used to promote growth industries actually diverted resources away from them and toward declining ones. Researchers who studied business-government relations discovered that government officials were neither as forward-thinking nor wielded as much influence over private industry as was previously thought. Numerous studies on the effects of government policy on industrial growth have produced contradictory or inconclusive findings. In this talk, I argue that one of the main instruments of industrial policy toward growth industries was the licensing system for technology imports. This system was a highly adaptable tool, used to implement a wide range of measures aimed at achieving various industrial policy goals. The government did not impose its policies on industry unilaterally. Instead, the licensing system created a platform for negotiating the details of policy measures, allowing stakeholders to align their interests. Regarding the impact, I focus on technology policy and find that the licensing system positively influenced the terms and conditions of technology imports. I contend that the government's role in postwar industrial development was more that of a coordinator rather than of a "leader" or "guide." This view is reflected in my description of the Japanese state as a coordination state, contrasting with Johnson's well-known concept of the developmental state.

Jonathan Krautter is a research associate at Hitotsubashi University's Institute for Advanced Study. His research focuses on the history of industrial policy, multinational enterprises, and Japanese foreign economic relations. Previously, he was a research fellow at the Chair of Social and Economic History at Humboldt University in Berlin and a doctoral fellow at the DIJ in 2017/18.

About:

The DIJ Study Group is a forum for scholars from all disciplines conducting research on contemporary or modern Japan. The event is open to all. This session is organized by Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus.

Hybrid Event:

On-site participation: please register via email to neuhaus@dijtokyo.org until December 16, 2025.

Online participation: please register via our webpage.

Venue:

Online and DIJ Tokyo: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/access/>