

120 Years of the Library of Economics, University of Tokyo

The origins of the Library of Economics at the University of Tokyo can be traced back to the purchase of the Engel's old Collection in 1900. The Engel's Library consists of more than 14'000 books formerly owned by Ernst Engel, a statistician known for his Engel's coefficient. It was purchased through the efforts of Iwasaburo Takano while he studied in Germany. This led to the establishment of the Economics Statistics Seminar at the College of Law of Tokyo Imperial University. Since the Meiji Restoration, an enormous amount of knowledge was imported from the U.S. and Europe to Japan, and became widely used resources for academic activities in the modern era. Among those was the collection of books in the Economic Statistics Seminar, which played an essential role in the development of information infrastructure.

Around the same time, domestic materials were collected to create the Commercial Materials Library, established in 1913. The Commercial Materials Library was created according to a proposal by a German professor named Siegfried Berliner, with the objective of collecting the statutes of corporations, Annual reports and other similar materials of domestic companies and thereby enable empirical research on the corporate economy.

In 1919, the two collections became independent from the College of Law, and the first Faculty of Economics was established in Japan. Two photographs remain from that era, the first is a photograph of then President Kenjiro Yamakawa delivering his congratulatory speech at the ceremony of the establishment of the Faculty of Economics, and the second is a photograph of the staffs in front of the Economic Statistics Seminar which burnt down in the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.

To commemorate the establishment of the Faculty of Economics, Inazo Nitobe donated 303 volumes of Adam Smith's old collection on December 21st 1920. The Faculty of Economics preserved this collection under the name Adam Smith's Library.

Now let us guide you through the events that shaped the Library you see today. In 1923, the Economic Statistics Seminar became the Economics Seminar. The library section of the seminar was called the reading room or the library room. Later it became the The Faculty of Economics Library Room and in 1982 it was changed to the Faculty of Economics Library.

In 1939, the Commercial Materials Library expanded its operations and became the Economic Documents Office, collecting not only corporate materials but also statistics, white papers, and other publications from government agencies and economic organizations. With the end of World War II and the beginning of a rapid economic growth, the Economic Documents Office was re-equipped and focused on collecting materials from government agencies and economic organizations.

The relationship between the Faculty of Economics Library and the Economic Documents Office changed drastically in 2009-10. In 2009, the Economic Documents Office, merged with the Historical Documents of Economics, which collected old documents, and the Economic documents Analysis Office, which handled primary sources of Japanese economic history. In this way, the Resources and Historical Collections Office was born.

In 2010, it was once again renamed, to adopt the name in use today: The Library of Economics, University of Tokyo.

Nowadays, the Library of Economics consists of two sections. The Main Library focuses on library services and is located in the Akamon General Research Building, while the Resources and Historical Collections Office is located in the International Academic Research Building and serves as an archive.

The activities of the Library of Economics have changed considerably since the days of the Economics Statistics Seminar and the Commercial Materials Library, and its collection has grown from the 14,000 volumes of the Engel's Library to approximately 840,000 volumes over the past 120 years.

Nevertheless, the library's structure in two sections, which serve as the two wheels of economics research, are based on the traditions established in that era.

The past 120 years of the Library of Economics have not been a smooth road. In the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the library lost most of its collection and while the Adam Smith's Library was saved, more than 90% of the Engel's Library was destroyed by fire. Although the library survived World War II, it was not without difficulties, particularly due to the censorship system, which affected how librarians collected books, or the evacuation of the library in an attempt to prevent air strikes. In the post-war era, the stacks and books were severely damaged during student movements. In 2011, 7000 books were damaged in the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Finally, nowadays society has been hit hard by the pandemic, a situation which forced a change in how university libraries operate. In this context, the Library of Economics and the Resources and Historical Collections Office are now exploring new ways to fulfill their role as a university library and academic research library in order to pass on to the next generation the traditions inherited from our predecessors and the academic knowledge accumulated over more than a century.