

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Study Group



July 29, 2026, 6:00pm (JST)

Independent Bookstores and Zine Communities as Third Spaces in Post-Corona Japan

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The fragmentation of the public into separated echo chambers, accelerated by social media, algorithms, and AI swarms, has furthered the polarization of democracies, with a wave of right-wing populist parties worldwide. In the midst of rising hate speech, a new trend towards the rediscovery of analogue places of social exchange has emerged: small bookshops, self-published zines, and festivals of independent literature have been on the rise in Japan, significantly soaring since the corona pandemic. What led to this re-shifting towards paper media-based gatherings, what is happening in these new spaces of community, and how can this alter the current state of fragmentation of democracies?

The project explores *dokuritsu-shoten*, a wave of newly founded independent bookstores since the late 2010s, deeply intertwined with self-published books and zines, under the concept of third places. Investigating the emergence (past), functionality (present), and potential (future) of independent bookshops, the thesis raises the question of how non-virtual communities arise through book-centered projects in post-corona times. The presentation introduces preliminary findings from fieldwork in independent bookstores and literature festivals in Japan, drawing on interviews with bookstore owners and self-publishers, as well as independent books and zines found in these spaces. Formations and potentials of the emerging independent bookworld will be highlighted, exploring the current state of independent bookstores and their impact on community building and the strengthening of democratic practices in the everyday.

Simone Decker is a 2nd-year PhD candidate at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU Munich), specializing in independent bookshops and the self-publishing world in relation to social movements. She completed her studies in pharmacy at LMU Munich and earned her Bachelor's degree in East Asian Studies as well as her Master's degree in Japanese Studies at the University of Heidelberg and Osaka. Her research interests focus primarily on communicative spaces, zine communities, and social movements in Japan. She has been a PhD researcher at the DIJ since April 2026.

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 Isaac Gagne.

This is a public event. Please be aware that audio-visual recordings may be made, stored, and published during and after the event.

On-site Only Event:

Please register via email to gagne@dijtokyo.org until July 27, 2026.

Venue:

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