Most of us think we have a pretty good idea of what Japan is probably like. It's so present in American culture today that even without having been there, many of us can list off any number of things Japanese: sushi, Hello Kitty, ninjas, and the world's first robot dog. But what we generally think about less often is how all of these are products of Japanese culture's rich and complicated development over time. This course is intended to take you back to the “beginning” around the turn of the last millennium—when rival chieftains appealed to the Chinese court for recognition before there was a Japan as such—and to move forward through the late 20th century—an age of giant cell phones and fears that Japan was going to buy up the US—to better understand the culture, people, and history behind the phenomena we all know. With a few “flash-forwards” into the 21st century, we will explore Japan’s culture and history through literature, documents, film, and experiential hands-on learning. By the end, you will be able to understand such things as the origins of the warrior, the meaning of “Zen,” Japan’s response to WWII, and why Hello Kitty has no mouth.