This course aims to call into question the popular misconception of Japan as a society possessing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity. We will begin by examining various assertions of the unique identity, racial purity, and cultural uniformity of “the Japanese people,” and then proceed to consider four currently recognized minority populations of modern Japan: 1) ethnic Korean noncitizen residents; 2) burakumin outcastes; 3) Ainu; and 4) Okinawans. In each case we will use a combination of literary, historical, and autobiographical materials to investigate what has caused these groups to exist, in very complex ways, on the margins of “mainstream Japanese culture.” How do individuals resist or embrace the pressure to assimilate? How do attitudes toward the possession of a unique minority identity, and membership in a minority community, transform across generations? What larger social contexts of 19th-, 20th- and 21st-century Japan generate frames of reference for positioning the “other”? These are among the many questions we will address. This course will be of benefit to those looking to deepen their knowledge of Japanese culture and society; think comparatively about the literary expression of authors who consciously write out of minority status; and explore the dynamics of social activism in a milieu vastly different from the US. In the final week of the term, we will explore how members of deaf communities in Japan situate themselves in relation to each other, the “able-bodied mainstream,” and the four minority groups identified above.