**Introduction**

This module introduces you to the Han empire (202 BCE-220 CE), the first long-lasting centrally administered empire in the area we now call China.

Over the course of its four hundred-year history, this empire would stretch from what is now North Korea, to the northern coast of Vietnam, and west into Central Asia. Even beyond the reach of its armies, Han economic dynamism reverberated across the Eurasian continent. Merchants and diplomats carried Han goods as far as Rome, following thousands of miles of interlinked trade routes now collectively called the Silk Road. Though only dimly aware of each other, these two great empires were economically intertwined and shared numerous similarities. Like the Romans, the Han gradually extended their power over much of the world they knew, building waterworks, military garrisons, and roads connecting their metropolitan areas to distant and diverse peoples.

In this module, you will try to figure out how this enormous expansion was possible.

**Problems**

This module poses three questions: two historical and one pedagogical. The historical problem is for you, the student:

* Historical problem 1: What motivated Han expansion?
* Historical Problem 2: What strategies did the Han use to expand?

The pedagogical problem is aimed at your instructor, but you should know about it:

* Pedagogical problem: How can students learn to synthesize interpretations of multiple sources to produce an overarching answer to a historical problem?

**What will you do in this module?**

In this module, you will work with your instructor and your fellow classmates to understand what forces drove imperial expansion during the Han, and how it was accomplished. First, you will cover some basic concepts that can help you begin thinking systematically about imperial motivations and strategies. Then you will begin applying these concepts as you learn about the background to the founding of the Han empire in 202 BCE. At the same time, you will review some of the key concepts that will help you understand some of the internal dynamics that shaped the Han’s external expansion. Next, you will follow the story of Han expansion in the first two centuries BCE. In this segment, there will be three key geographical focal points: the north, where the Han confronted the power of nomadic tribes on the Inner Asian steppe; Central Asia, where the Han extended its economic, diplomatic, and finally military influence as part of a strategy to weaken their nomadic enemies; and finally the South, where the Han dealt struggled to bring a variety of indigenous groups under its sphere of control. After this, you will split into groups to critically analyze sets of primary sources pertaining to each of these key areas, with one group responsible for one area. At the end, you will present your analyses to your classmates.