Much of the world’s history has been shaped by experiences of empires. China offers a particularly rich body of historical evidence for the experience of imperial power. This introductory course assesses that evidence and surveys the great drama of Chinese attempts to bring under single control and preserve the unity of its vast and varied territories. It takes in the full sweep of China’s imperial past: it starts in the third century BC, when the foundations of the imperial system were consolidated; it reaches into the early nineteenth century, when encounters with Western powers forced a radical reappraisal of the imperial system. Dividing this broad chronological scope into three periods - early China, medieval China, and late imperial China - it offers a sense of both change and continuity. Within each period, it brings into focus the social, cultural, and political arenas in which Chinese empire was developed and maintained.

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