

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ROBERT
STRAYER:**

In chapter 19, Japan rises, China falls. History is full of startling reversals of fortune, several of which are on display in chapter 19. Consider, for example, the case of China during the 19th century.

China had long been a powerful and innovative civilization with an influence that stretched across the eastern hemisphere. But by the end of the 19th century, the Chinese state had been reduced to the humiliating position of a semi-colony of various Western powers. It had been repeatedly defeated in wars with Europeans. And many of its people had become addicted to opium, imported by British and American merchants.

The irony, of course, is that by the late 20th century, Europeans and Americans were fighting their own drug war, while China enjoyed a booming economy that still holds much of America's debt. The Chinese might be forgiven, if they see some historical justice in this reversal of roles.

A very different reversal of fortune occurred in Japan, which had long lived in the shadow of its giant Chinese neighbor. Its remarkable industrialization-- the only such case outside of Europe and North America in the 19th century-- turned Japan into a world power in its own right, and allowed Japan to defeat China in a war in 1895, and Russia, 10 years later.

A third major reversal involved the Ottoman Empire, for centuries a powerful force within the Islamic world and in European international affairs. But by 1900, it was called "the sick man of Europe," its empire sharply diminished, and its economy substantially controlled by Europeans.

Explaining these dramatic reversals of fortune is the focus of chapter 19. But if there is a broader lesson here, perhaps it is simply this. Things change, sometimes rather quickly. And in this fleeting world of ours, nothing lasts forever.