PART THREE

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ECUMENICAL COMMUNITIES IN THE OTTOMAN PERIPHERY
Muslims celebrated the Japanese victory over Russia in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War as the victory of the oppressed against the invincible Western imperialists. The striking feat of Admiral Togo Heihachiro who sank the Baltic Fleet in the Battle of Tsushima and the subsequent conquest of Port Arthur in North Asia, made Japanese culture, women, children, games, the samurai and everything about Japan, popular overnight. Journals and papers in the Middle East were full of articles about Japan published in Arabic, Turkish, or Persian. The event inspired many Muslims to see Japan as a new form of modernity suitable to Islamic civilization. Reformists and revolutionaries such as the Young Turks who forced the abdication of the autocrat Abdulhamid II in 1908 with the declaration of the Second Constitution and a military rebellion, styled themselves as the prospective “Japan” of the Near East.¹ Much of this ardor for Japan remained little more than a romantic vision that was soon swept aside with the outbreak of the First World War, which shattered the political face of the Near East. But some Muslim actors followed this romance to its political finale as they pursued a career of Pan Islamism and nationalist defiance of Western colonial and imperial politics, both ideas frequently intertwined in transnational activities that brought them to the shores of imperial Japan.

Japan’s political and economic response to this worldwide enthusiasm was to incorporate the nationalist and revolutionary dynamism of twentieth century Muslims in Asia and Africa into a joint revolt against the West, to pave the way for the Japanese empire’s emancipation of the Asian peoples, namely the destruction of the colonial empires of Britain, Holland, and Russia. Meiji Japanese officials, military officers, politicians, and nationalist activists identified what they termed the need for an Islam Policy, that was developed jointly with Muslim collaborators such