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Introduction

The roots of today’s “clash of civilizations” between the Islamic world and the West are not anchored in the legacy of the Crusades or the early Islamic conquests. Instead, it is a more contemporary story rooted in the nineteenth-century history of resistance to Western global hegemony. In this resistance, the Ottoman Middle East believed it had found an ally and a role model in Meiji Japan. As news spread of Japanese domestic and international achievements, a century-long fascination with Japan was ignited in the region that still manages to flicker now and again in the twenty-first century: most recently, in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq. Japanese troops arrived in Iraq in 2004; shortly thereafter, the Iraqi chairman of the newly opened Iraq Stock Exchange, Ṭālib Ṭabarīʿī, was quoted as saying that “if I am permitted to dream, Iraq will develop into the Japan of the Middle East.”¹

When representatives of the Ottoman government approached British officials in 1908 to discuss forging an alliance between the two powers following the Habsburg annexation of Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina, they did not describe themselves with that all too familiar Western epithet for the Ottoman Empire, the “Sick Man of Europe.” Instead, the former Young Turk political exiles self-assuredly declared themselves to be the “Japan of the Near East” and expected the British to understand the potential merits of a partnership with them.² In identifying themselves this way, Ottoman statesmen invoked their newfound relationship to a particular trope—the modern Japanese nation—and all that it implied in the early twentieth century. In fact, this pan-Asian association with Japan was mainly a fiction generated by the imaginations of a vast number of Ottoman writers who searched for ways to ensure the empire’s survival in the modern era. Nonetheless, it calls for historical inquiry into the reasons behind and the purposes of Ottoman formulations of solidarity with an alien, remote, and non-Muslim Japan.

Japan loomed in Ottoman consciousness at the turn of the twentieth century. The contemporary Japanese nation was an example for Ottomans of how to attain “non-Western” modernity in a global order defined mainly by the West. That is, Japan demonstrated to the Ottoman Empire how to become modern by “Western” standards without losing one’s “Eastern” essence. Previous scholarship on Ottoman identity and modernizing efforts has overlooked the influence of Japan and assumed that the only pattern to aspire
toward was Europe, which is too simplistic an analysis given the complexities of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. The historical analogy of modern Japan proved to be an attractive alternative that drew an enormous amount of attention in the Empire from the elite and nonelite alike.

The Ottoman endeavor to become modern at the turn of the twentieth century was informed by this discourse on the Japanese nation that addressed issues of technical modernization, social reform, nation-building strategies, and other factors considered to be the determinants of enlightened civilization in this historical moment. Inevitably this discourse also spoke to an Ottoman concern for the Empire's future place in the world, somewhere between two entities that were simply differentiated as “East” and “West.” Yet this distinction was not so freely negotiated by the Ottomans. Once having had the upper hand in a rivalrous past shared with Christian Europe, they now sought to escape the current status to which they had been relegated—as inferiors to the West—even as they embraced many of Europe's contemporary intellectual foundations and material attributes. And it is this dilemma that resembles similar struggles to reach modernity in a variety of other “non-Western” societies: the quest of an often diverse cross-section of individuals within those communities to preserve what they considered to be certain essentialistic, indigenous qualities designated as “Eastern spirit,” while absorbing and integrating into their states and societies suitable elements of Western science and technological civilization, a feat Japan was believed to have accomplished.

Just choosing an appropriate description for the particular set of political and intellectual influences exerted upon Ottoman individuals as they grappled with issues of identity and statehood in a changed world proved a more daunting task than expected for what may seem a rather trifling narrative of one empire’s interest in another. Perhaps it is due to the complex forces at work under the surface of what initially appears to be nothing more than a mere passing fascination with an Asian country that accomplished in about fifty years of intense modernization what it took European nations much longer to achieve. Indeed the Arabic and Ottoman Turkish sources themselves frequently repeated the above comparison between the pace of European industrialization and the rapidity of Japanese modernization with a very obvious tone of satisfaction. What may not be apparent at the outset, however, is the level of imagining that was conceived of by a range of Ottoman writers, poets, political activists, journalists, and members of the ruling elite in the Empire, as well as non-elite Ottoman subjects, to express their sentient analyses of the emergence of Meiji Japan. Though the overused phrase “Rising Sun” seems perhaps a bit cliché in describing modern Japan’s ascent to global power at the end of the nineteenth century, again the contemporary newspapers, journals, and books circulating in Ottoman lands did not resist using this teleological trope to express their evaluation of what was bound to happen all over Asia if proper steps were taken by those in power, unhindered by European interference: the “rise of the East,” or an “awakening in Asia” that had been put in motion by “the Rising Sun.” It was poetic and descriptive all at once for the rebirth of the Orient to commence with Japan, located on that furthest edge of Asia where the sun made its first appearance each day.
The Japanese islands had not captivated the Muslim imagination in quite this way before. Arab and Persian Islamic geographers of the ninth and tenth centuries first charted exotic lands perched in the Far East beyond China, which they called Wāqwāq (rendered from the Chinese name for Japan, Wo-Kuo). In Ottoman times the belief that the apocalyptic peoples of biblical and Qur’anic eschatology called the Gog and Magog were to come out of that far clime beyond mainland Asia on the Day of Judgment was still lending a measure of superstition to perceptions of the few Japanese people seen in Ottoman cities.

But it was not until the late nineteenth century that the Islamic Middle East became enthusiastically aware of a nascent Asian power that had existed in isolation for centuries, now called al-Yābān in Arabic or Japonya in Ottoman Turkish. Up until this time, the Ottomans would have had little to glean from Japan other than the fine craftsmanship of Japanese lacquerware and ceramics, most samples of which made it into Topkapı Palace by way of foreign merchants or as gifts to the Sultans from visiting delegations who often were not themselves Japanese. Though the Portuguese and the Dutch had been involved with Japan through trade since premodern times, Europe effectively did not really become obsessed with things Japanese until the Victorian era, when their taste for Japanese cultural goods parodied the distaste they generally harbored toward the Japanese diplomatic and student missions resident in European capitals, whom they regarded as “peculiar Orientals.”

Commodore Perry’s forcible opening of Japan in the 1850s and, following this event, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 were the events that lured the world’s attention toward what would become the Japanese national modernization miracle of subsequent decades. For the Ottomans, 1868 fell in the latter years of the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876) and around the time the Islamic modernist Young Ottoman movement was resisting the centralized, top-down nature of these reforms implemented by a powerful Ottoman bureaucratic clique. Activist samurai overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate, assumed administrative control over Japan, and surrounded their newly empowered symbol of Japanese monarchical authority, the youthful Meiji Emperor; they became the famed Meiji oligarchs—the genrō of later decades that carried out dramatic reforms and guided modern Japan into its twentieth-century imperial stature. It was the next generation of Ottoman activists after the Young Ottomans, the Young Turks, who opposed Sultan Abdülmamid II (r. 1876–1909), and who would come to idealize the Meiji statesmen as their role models.

Japanese modernization did not hold any sustained Ottoman attention in the press nor elsewhere until after the first Japanese study missions had already come and gone from Ottoman ports in the 1870s and 1880s. The first visit, initiated by the new Meiji oligarchy as part of their policy to “seek out knowledge throughout the world” as delineated in the Charter Oath of 1868, must not have impressed the Ottomans tremendously. Fukuchi Gen-ichirō, the interpreter for the 1871–1873 Iwakura Mission to the United States and Europe, was dispatched on a side-trip to the Ottoman Empire. There, he was to investigate the Sublime Porte’s juridical system in cases involving foreigners, as a prelude to the hoped-for revision by the Japanese of their despised Unequal Treaties that had been signed with Western powers by the Tokugawa Shogun.
in 1858. Through some hobnobbing in Istanbul with a former diplomatic acquaintance, arrangements were made for the Japanese official to examine the Egyptian Consular court system in Cairo. Fukuchi submitted a detailed report to the Japanese Foreign Ministry upon his return in which he recorded his observations and conclusions regarding the Egyptian court system.  

In the 1870s, then, Japan was still pupil and not tutor for other non-European nations in international affairs; a change in roles was in the making however. The Yoshida Masaharu Mission of 1880–1881 was dispatched to Persia and the Ottoman Empire ostensibly to investigate the possibility of Japan opening trade relations with the two empires after the Qajar Persian Shah Nasir al-Dîn had made overtures toward the Japanese. Relations between the Japanese and Persian parties during the visit consisted of pleasantries and expressions of pan-Asian friendship as well as the Shah’s inquisitive queries regarding the details of Japanese modernization. But as Yoshida’s government report reflects, particularly in the last section entitled Seiryaku (Politics), Japan’s true motives for the visit consisted mainly of investigating British and Russian activities in the region, as Japan was beginning to play the game of Great Power politics. The Japanese mission spent considerable time in the physical environs of the Russo-Persian and Russo-Ottoman border areas as they were aware of Russia’s desire for southern expansion and the need to block it; they clearly anticipated war with Russia in the future. They also read British strategy in the Middle East very astutely:

The Russians seem to entice the Persians into undermining the Ottoman Empire from behind. As for Great Britain, to prevent this Russian intention and their cooperation with the Persians, they planned to create a bulwark state between the Ottoman and the Persian territories, which is expected to obstruct both the Ottoman and the Russian thrust into Persia. In brief, Great Britain has assigned the role of a bulwark to the revolting Kurdish people.

In time, Japan would use its status as an Eastern model of nationhood and modern statecraft as a way to package itself for other Asians as an alternative to Western imperial powers bent on colonizing all of the non-European continent. But in reality, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Japanese too had firmly entered the arena of imperial, colonial competition. Japan’s self-image had been transposed after the renegotiation of the Unequal Treaties with Western powers in 1894 and Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. The threat of Western occupation and colonization had plagued the Japanese for decades after Commodore Perry first forcibly opened the country in the 1850s. But by the late 1890s, Meiji officials were exuding an attitude of Great Power confidence and imperial entitlement commensurate with a nation that was now “leaving Asia” to “enter the West,” in the famous locution of Japanese intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi. Japan had remained independent, promulgated a constitution, and rapidly modernized the country. Its military, retrained and retooled, proved itself a worthy opponent against much larger foes, allowing Japan to acquire its own colonial possessions (Liaotung Peninsula and Formosa [Taiwan] from China, 1895). With
these achievements, the Meiji ruling oligarchy increasingly began to situate Japan at the apex of non-Western peoples, and to actively promote its stature in the world. Meiji Japan assumed the mantle of a superior whose “benevolent” civilizing mission in the East consisted of both delivering modernity to the “less advanced” races, and rescuing Asians from colonization by direct military challenges to the imperialistic West. Success against Russia in 1905 confirmed to Japan and others its abilities in the latter regard, and set the global stage for later confrontation with the West in the Pacific War of the mid-twentieth century. With Japan’s annexation of the Korean Peninsula in 1910, Koreans appeared quite alone in the world in their national resistance to what many Western and non-Western observers alike understood to be Japan’s active participation in the protection and modernization of a backward Asian country.

Modernity at Empire’s End: The Ottoman Struggle with “East” and “West”

Japan emerged as an objectification of Eastern modernity in Ottoman discourse only after the empire had suffered a convergence of political, economic, and social crises that included European imperialist pressures from the outside and separatist national movements threatening the stability of the polity from within. Earlier in the nineteenth century, new ideologies had begun to swirl in the minds of Ottoman thinkers concerned about the Empire’s survival: the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution had left an indelible imprint on the Ottoman intellectual educated either in Europe or domestically in one of the many modern schools established as part of the Westernizing reforms of the Tanzîmât and after. Rational science, secularism, a patriotic sense of a national homeland, and participation in government through the parliamentary process became the mantras of Ottoman opposition to autocratic rule. As the model liberal democracies of Britain and France persisted in their seizure of Ottoman provinces in North Africa in the 1880s, however, Ottoman disillusionment with Western imperialism pushed intellectuals in the Empire to look in a new direction for a national pattern to emulate, which could still allow them to remain true to these ideals. As the contemporary nineteenth-century sources often reiterated, it was an almost natural inclination for Ottoman reformers to “glance East,” toward Japan, though the current historiography on modernization in the Middle East still frequently omits this fact.

At this critical juncture, the demarcation we know today as East and West was being redefined once and for all on both sides of the divide. In large part the terms of the debate were determined by Europe, which then had the ability to dictate the power relations imbedded within this binary. More than merely an idea of division, this boundary was a historical trajectory whose point of origin scholars often debate—whether one takes as its defining moment the ancient Greco-Persian rift, the Latin-Orthodox Christian schism, the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad preaching the rectified Abrahamic faith of Islam and the subsequent Arab conquests, the medieval violence of the Crusades, the Ottoman ghazi state on Europe’s frontiers with its very real
ability to carry out threats of military invasion and political hegemony, or the arrival of Napoleon on the shores of Egypt armed with scholars as well as guns to take possession of the Orient.  

However it was conceived of in earlier times, as a demarcation between Occident and Orient, Christendom and Islamicate civilization, or in its latter stages between an emerging imperial Europe and an increasingly colonized Islamic world, this relationship was firmly theorized by Europe in the nineteenth century within the context of the global economy and Great Power politics, Social Darwinism, and racial assumptions: in short, in axiomatic forms also intellectually accessible to the very Easterners Europe had categorized. At this point, with the power balance having shifted in favor of Europe and rationalized into the consciousness of both Europeans and Asians subjected to the consequences of this hierarchy, the categories of East and West caused a historical anomaly to take place: the Ottoman Empire, an empire historically and geographically tied to Europe since its inception, was now looking to faraway, alien Japan in an innovative way, as fellow Asian brothers in the struggle for modernity and against European encroachment. It was partly the reflection of a new basis of identity at work in the modern world. The religio-dynastic realm and the religious affiliations that were the underpinnings of pre- and early modern identity were, in places and among some peoples, giving way to secular, biological, racialized, and ethnic categories of peoples, so that the Ottomans felt more affinity toward fellow Asian people such as the Japanese than they did to others. Similarly, the Japanese looked further west in Asia, to the Ottoman Empire, as a potential ally against Western (and especially Russian) advance on the Asian continent. These reorientations were driven by the global power structure that had evolved by the nineteenth century in which European empires had acquired colonies, wealth, and the military might to guarantee their expansion. The coalescence of physical, imperial colonization of much of the East by the West with scientific explanations for why human evolution yielded a hierarchy of peoples with various levels of civilization made possible this very anomaly.

Neither the Ottomans nor the Japanese, conversant in the scientific theories of the era defining Asians as inferior to Indo-European races, seriously attempted to reject the notion of a civilizational hierarchy that placed one people above another in the evolutionary ladder. They sought instead to reorder the power scheme within the established framework while leaving its foundational principles of Social Darwinism and cultural determinism intact. For the Japanese, the principles of a hierarchy of nations not only helped them to define who they were as a people, but also justified their later colonial mission in Asia. For the Ottomans, a hierarchy of civilizations indicated the potential for a reassertion of the Empire’s former glory in relation to Europe, mediated by the notion that Herbert Spencer’s Darwinian interpretation of the differentiation of species would steer the Ottomans on their own unique evolutionary path paralleling European progress. This Ottoman advance would in time lead them back—to that former and more comfortable position of superiority vis-à-vis the Great Powers. Modern Japan would be their guide: as the Young Turk journalist Dr. Abdullah Cevdet phrased it in 1905, Japan would be the “carrier of the torch.”
Pursuing a comparative study of Ottoman perceptions of Japan from the point of view of a specialist in the history of the Islamic Middle East allows for the opportunity to gain a fresh perspective on the complexity of meaning this East-West distinction meted out. In doing so, I am indebted to a Japan historian whose feedback alerted me to what could be called a “temporal paradox” in historiography. For those engaged in Islamic Studies, Edward Said’s opus on *Orientalism* is one of many theoretical approaches to the study of Islamic societies exposing the historiographical dilemmas of how the field emerged. Middle East and Islamic Studies specialists have been trained to understand the field as one plagued by Western definitions of the exoticized Other in combination with European imperialist politics inscribed into the region of the Middle East, so that the established polemic between the collectives called “East” and “West” has been virtually internalized without enough debate or disputation. Islamic civilization and more generally the entire East, or Orient, is understood to be in a rather constant, inherent state of resistance to a Western onslaught. For those of us whose perspective was limited by this presupposition, it would then seem rather natural for any group located within the entity defined as “the Orient” to identify with, or to commune with, another member of “the East.” Yet to presume this is ahistorical, as a mentor of mine was astute enough to point out. From the vantage point of Japan circa the early modern period and right up to the twentieth century, the Islamic world—and specifically for purposes of this study the Ottoman Empire—was undoubtedly in and an undeniable part of the West: physically, in its geographical positioning; spiritually, as the imperial guardian of Sunni Islam, an extension of the monotheistic, Abrahamic tradition beginning with Judaism and Christianity; and historically, in the shared experiences of the consequent relationships arising from these links. The early center of gravity for Judaism and Christianity was after all further East of Europe: “the Holy Land,” or Ottoman Palestine, as it was known from the sixteenth century onward. Christendom essentially had shifted West over the centuries. Yet Islam and Christendom possessed a single, intertwined history that wavered between competition and cooperation, stability and violence, wars and reconciliation.

Though retrospectively it may seem natural for the Ottomans to have linked themselves to the Japanese nation and its achievements as a comrade in the struggle against Western global hegemony, this is a postmodern illusion of our making. The actual reach toward Japan created a discursive dilemma for Muslims whose history was bound up in shared experience with Europe. To suddenly exit that history in favor of a mythological brotherhood with a foreign, non-Muslim (in effect pagan) nation tucked away in East Asia and about which little was known or had been considered in centuries or decades past required some creative explanation. The Japanese were part of a different cultural sphere comprising East Asians whose relations were forged through Chinese heritage and civilization; revolutionary connections had to be drawn up or constructed by Ottomans and Japanese that ranged from linguistic theories linking Turkish and Japanese languages in order to establish a rational association based on ancient history, to hopeful predictions on the part of Muslim reformers that the Japanese would soon complete their
metamorphosis into the most enlightened Eastern nation by mass conversion to Islam. Significantly, it was not until Japan’s first encounters with the West in the nineteenth century that a relationship between the Islamic Ottoman Empire and modern Japan could even be contemplated, and not until the late nineteenth century could the convergence of historical circumstances create the precise terms of this dialogue. Coincidently, Japan’s revision of its self-identity described earlier was related to its historical benefactors at that moment. First and foremost this process relied upon the reconceptualization of China, previously the civilizational and political center of Asia, which had profoundly contributed to the particular development of Japanese history and culture through the ages. As Stefan Tanaka has illustrated in his study of *Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, the imperial prestige of Chūgoku, the Chinese Middle Kingdom, had to be reconfigured by Japanese intellectuals into the inferior status of a backward country they renamed Shina before Meiji Japan could venture out of its environment of the Far East and assume its post as the progressive leader of Asia. This in turn facilitated Japan’s search for new political and economic realms in which to participate as well as its pursuit of unusual partners to further Japanese global aims. It is in this moment that the Ottoman Empire similarly came into focus for Japan for the first time in the late nineteenth century.

The first half of the present work on Ottoman imaginings of Japan investigates the process of envisioning “non-Western” modernity at empire’s end, in an Ottoman state and society at the turn of the twentieth century that both sought out modern in the world and struggled between locating itself in the East at one moment and in the West at another. I take into consideration the historical specificity of the Ottoman socio-cultural context and its particular set of challenges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Ottoman endeavor was affected on the one hand by a crucible of powerful ideas to explain the rise of nations and empires that mapped out their present and their potential futures politically, economically, even socially; on the other hand, the emergence of a new global economic and political order now involved the Japanese state as a major actor—a modernized Eastern nation understood as upholding these ideologies while at the same time altering and reversing the gloomy destinies of colonial subordination facing many Asian peoples.

The theoretical underpinnings of the binary of East and West solidified in this moment even as some players transgressed these boundaries—and Japan was one of the nations able to move between worlds, perhaps even more freely than were the Ottomans. The possibility of this transformation was expressed most succinctly as a physical relocation, the aforementioned “leaving Asia” to “enter the West” uttered by the Japanese intellectual Fukuzawa in describing the Meiji Japanese journey toward Bummei Kaika, or progress and enlightenment. Ironically this path frequently led non-Western nations hunting for modernity to “return” to their original cultural homes in an attempt to modernize while preserving the “eastern essence” that made them a “unique” nation to begin with. Or perhaps better stated, the nation ended up traversing back and forth over time in search of its identity, across the chasm of East and West. In Japan’s case, a vehement nativist reaction against the West in
the twentieth century followed the radical Meiji-era over-Westernization that occurred as Japan rapidly modernized to become a respected imperial power. The Ottomans who embraced modern Japan as an example to emulate hoped to make a similar kind of migration into the modernized Great Power status, but first they had to leave Europe to “revisit” Asia, to discover and reinvigorate their Eastern potential, before returning to their familiar cultural sphere that was ineluctably fastened to European historical currents.

The ramifications of Japan’s choices and its abilities in this transformation were interpreted differently by Europe and by Asians even when they had access to the exact same information. The Western world noted with much trepidation and anxiety the implications of Japanese modernization and military might—in other words the rebellion it might incite all over the world among the Asians and Africans resident in Europe’s imperial possessions who desired liberation from the colonial yoke. This fear was aptly demonstrated in the prolific amount of racially prejudiced headlines and imagery splashed across the Western-language newspapers to the effect of a “Yellow Peril,” a rival Japanese Empire emerging that threatened Western imperial powers’ own colonial and economic might in the Orient and perhaps would even overtake the world in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War (see figure 1.1).  

![Figure 1.1 The Knackfuss painting.](image)

*Note:* This image was reprinted in several Arabic journals to depict the European fears of the “Yellow Peril.” Designed and commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm in 1895, and titled “völker Europas, wahr eure heiligsten Güter” (“Peoples of Europe, Guard Your Dearest Goods”), it is also known as “Knackfuss painting” after artist Hermann Knackfuss. The image circulated among Western rulers, and the Japanese also published it in their papers.
In contrast, Asian anticolonialists in various parts of the world swelled with pride over Japanese successes. The Chinese Ch’ing-i (“National Renovation Movement”) in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that extended into the 1898 Chinese Reform Movement has been linked to Japanese influence there. The Vietnamese Đông-du (“go East”) movement typified the tendency among elites of non-Western societies seeking modernity to look selectively to Japan for guidance; Vietnamese intellectuals had Japan in mind as their cultural and national pattern to mimic. The Indian nationalist struggle against the British Raj idealized Meiji Japan, and to complement the intellectual discourse on Japan and modernization, Indian nationalists made direct contacts with the Japanese to assist in demanding economic self-sufficiency and political self-governance. Indian political exiles and engineering students found a haven in Tokyo after 1900. Indian nationalists instigated the 1905 Swadeshi Boycott of all foreign manufactured goods while allowing Japanese products to freely enter the country; indeed some of the first textile factories operating independently in India used Japanese machinery in them. The Russo-Japanese War and Japan’s defeat of Czarist Russia in 1905 had an immense impact on the entire world, whether among the colonized nations of Africa and Asia who now felt their liberation was at hand, such as those in the Dutch East Indies, or those anticipating a revolution in the East that might alter their autocratic political system to favor constitutional arrangements, such as Persia. Even the African American community wrangling with racist notions of white supremacy in the post–Civil War, postslavery environment of the United States took notice of Japan as a symbol to further their cause. After 1905, black internationalists believed the Japanese to be a “champion of the darker races” whom they anticipated would be powerful enough in 1918 to guarantee a provision for racial equality be inserted into the League of Nations Covenant; President Wilson intervened, however, to defeat the amendment for racial equality. Proximity to and direct experience of the Japanese ascent to power determined the rate and intensity with which a nation became disillusioned with the Japanese model, the Koreans and Chinese being the first to eventually resist Japan as a colonialist power. More distant peoples, however, could continue to imagine the ideal of modern Japan in any way they chose to portray it.

This solidarity of the so-called non-Western world found its deepest bonding experience in the mutual enthusiasm expressed toward Japan during the Russo-Japanese War and its astounding victory over the Czar’s forces in 1905, and the Ottoman Empire was no exception. Japan suddenly came to personify collective Asian strength and potential to succeed against the odds: to take the best from the West in order to surpass it, due to some kind of preservation of Eastern cultural-moral superiority that was channeled into patriotic defense of the homeland as well as into the dedication to modernize technically and socially (see figure 1.2). Passionate anti-Western, anti-imperialist sentiment flourished again in Asia during the Second World War, when many colonized and semicolonized peoples flirted with Imperial Japan as their potential liberator. Japan’s mid-twentieth-century “revolt against the West,” culminating in the Pacific War and the Second World War against the Allies, was viewed with ambivalence by many of the colonized peoples of the Islamic world who had
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suffered at the hands of Europe before the First World War and after, during the Mandate period. For this reason the fascination with the Japanese miracle of progress quickly resurfaced in Arabic literature and elsewhere (Indonesia) in the postwar period though the wartime behavior of the Japanese seems to have violated the very values of liberation they had come to represent. Despite Japan having committed atrocities in Asia, it was a relatively short-lived occupation (with the exception of Manchuria, Taiwan, and Korea) compared to the extended and degrading colonial experience most Asians had had with European powers: Japan as an Asian liberator was certainly preferable to the imperialist West whose hegemony had been part of life on the Asian continent for decades or more.

Figure 1.2 Arabic weekly Newspaper al-ʿ Ars al-Jadīd (The New Century) published in Cairo by Iskandar Chalhoub Bey.

Note: Front page of Egyptian newspaper al-ʿ Ars al-Jadīd (September 16, 1904) during the Russo-Japanese War, picturing Japanese prime minister Marquis Itō, Russian general Smirnov, and Chemulpo (Inchon, Korea) Bay where the Japanese carried out a strike against the Russian fleet.
This historical fact is perhaps not understood well enough even today, in light of a reinvigorated polemic that Samuel Huntington termed the “clash of civilizations,” which has arisen between certain sectors of the West and the Islamic world in the late twentieth century. The current tension has an antecedent in the late nineteenth century, when the feelings of anti-imperialist frustration with the West on the part of many Asian Muslims in the world was such that they preferred modernity to be packaged in an alien Japanese form rather than as a direct export from Western (European) civilization. The following pages explore how this attitude was rationalized, if it could be rationalized, or if it was simply a matter of an imagined icon functioning to serve local Ottoman interest without serious regard for any historical reality. The following chapters interrogate current thinking regarding the viability of binary categories like East and West in the humanities field and in our view of the world at large—by demonstrating how they are constructed to assert political affinity, antagonism, or resistance in a particular moment. In addition, by illuminating the Ottoman ability to culturally straddle Europe and Asia at the turn of the century, I disprove the exclusivity of these entities in late Ottoman times and thus their functionality for the present. I hope to encourage readers to think differently about their understanding of the modern world by illustrating that ultimately boundaries perceived to have been firmly demarcated between civilizations or regions were actually much more fluid and shifting than once believed.

Modern Japan in the Ottoman Gaze

Exposing the relationships between the Ottoman Empire and modern Japan in all their richness and depth requires contextualizing them within trends and patterns of the post-Tanzimât Ottoman era from domestic, international relations, and intellectual history perspectives. Reforming ideologies such as Islamic modernism (to reconcile religion and Western civilization) and the emergence of nationalist movements in the Empire indisputably affected the discourse on modernity, as did the predominance of other Western ideas to explain the behavior of societies and nations. Interestingly, embarking upon a study of Middle East nationalism yields a secondary literature on this phenomenon littered with references to the Japanese. Almost every monograph written between the 1960s and 1990s about the development of Arab nationalism will briefly pay homage to Meiji Japan, stressing the significance of the Russo-Japanese War in having inspired peoples of Asia to recognize their distinctive identities, to act collectively to resist the West, and to establish themselves as independent nations. Usually it is no more than a brief footnote that does not satisfactorily point out that the Japanese victory in 1905 was a three-fold triumph: for East over West in the first technological war between the two in the modern era; as a symbolic defeat of absolutist, autocratic Czarist rule by the forces of the Meiji constitutional monarchy; and as a profound demonstration of the power and spirit of a patriotic, independent nation-state over an antiquated, multiethnic, multireligious empire past its prime. Ironically, to become modern and civilized in this era was synonymous with the ability to
sustain a bloody war and inflict the highest number of casualties upon your enemy as well as to have the most contemporary medical treatments available for your own wounded at the front.

Who was it in the Ottoman Empire that took note of Japan? Was it solely Ottoman officials that observed the Japanese nation-state or that engaged in diplomatic negotiations with its representatives, or did Ottoman society at large envisage the “Rising Sun” and its implications for the Empire? How did people in the Ottoman Empire view Japan and the Japanese, and what characteristics did they emphasize? These questions were often left unanswered in the secondary literature, and I answer them here. Certainly it was not the Ottoman state and its governing personnel alone that paid attention to Japan as a model for administrative practice and the reform of institutional structures. Ottoman civil society also participated in the production of a Japanese trope through observations and commentary in variegated forms. This mutual interrogation of the Japanese example by state and society affected the polity in ways that had dramatic repercussions.

The Ottoman imagining of modern Japan is a kind of theatrical synthesis of concrete and abstract experiences on the part of many different actors. The historical backdrop of our play is the stage of the late nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, when the empire was suffering from multiple crises. The scene consists of a series of official diplomatic encounters and unofficial communications between the two states and their respective representatives, much of which was documented in the archival records of several Ottoman ministries and elsewhere. The dazzling script for this drama, perhaps the star of the production itself, is the interpretive literary discourse on modern Japan appearing concurrently in the pages of the local Arabic and Ottoman Turkish press, the Ottoman and French press published by exiles resident in European capitals and smuggled into the empire, and other miscellaneous literary forms such as books, pamphlets, and poetry collections. All of these forms of expression verbalized and/or otherwise influenced Ottoman public opinion about the distant East Asian nation by extolling the virtues of Japan’s modernization program and the strength of its people’s moral character. And this narrative of Ottoman-Japanese interactions allowed for no distinction to be made between the real and the fictive, as one inevitably had an effect upon the other: as Ottoman and Japanese statesmen met behind the scenes to discuss the establishment of an official treaty, the locally consumed newspapers and the Ottoman populace at reading salons, barber shops, and coffeehouses speculated publicly about the potential benefits such an alliance might have for all parties involved, subtly remolding unsubstantiated rumor and enthusiasm into a set of images of Japan that would soon be reiterated as historical fact and taken as a model toward which the Ottoman ruling class and the ruled should aspire.

A few comments must be made about the construction of an image for specific purposes, both generally and particularly as it relates to a predominantly Muslim empire idealizing the actions of a non-Muslim one. More will be said in subsequent chapters about how Ottoman intellectuals managed to either address or avoid the issue of Japan’s non-Muslim character for the sake of a larger, pan-Asian argument. For now, the following considerations
apply: first, Ottoman individuals constructed Japanese images to reverse the nineteenth-century hierarchy of peoples, and/or to demand sociopolitical change for weaker elements within Ottoman society. This imagery was often not based upon historical fact, but instead upon the argumentative needs of the agents in this process. In other words, those who drafted the images selected what they perceived to be the most valuable or useful characteristics of Japan to emphasize as an Eastern nation-state entity. They presented them as fact, either to contrast European development, or to illustrate Ottoman shortcomings. They frequently omitted what might not be illustrative or useful to their argument. As one scholar explains,

The literary image of another country and its inhabitants, especially on the level of popular literature, is often the image held in reality…The literary stereotype takes on a life of its own, to the point that the images formed by domestic mental and verbal constructs dominate any emanating from the reality.32

As such, and corroborating Said’s work on Orientalism, these images contribute more to an understanding of the society in which they are produced than to the society about which they relate. Representations of the Japanese nation constructed by members of the Ottoman polity that I analyze in successive chapters appear at times to be no less than mere hopeful fantasies of their creators, yet

…to say that the history of opinion is necessarily so insubstantial as to be scarcely worth writing is almost to set aside the possibility of writing history at all, especially the sort of political history which concerns itself with the relationships of nations, so generally does the picture of their relationships spring not from any set of objective facts but from what people have believed—or chosen to believe—to be the facts.33

Similarly, the social and political history of the people within the Ottoman Empire and their relationships with one another as they engaged in processes of nation building were informed by a discussion of Japanese images because “…we shall find that it is possible for two different and conflicting images to exist side by side in the same society, reflecting conflicts between those who hold them.”34

The “factual” data reaching the Middle East about Japan, it must be remembered, often emanated from Western sources so that it might contain certain distortions created by European perception or bias. Even more importantly, the Japanese historical analogy was very frequently derived directly from Japan itself. Japanese agency in constructing a particular self-image that would be consumed by the rest of the world should not be overlooked here. As a consequence of its obsession with recognition by the West, Japan had a vested interest in portraying itself to Europe and to other Asian “consumers” in a positive manner, as a beacon of enlightenment for the Eastern world and a Great Power worthy of treaty concessions and military alliances. Therefore Japanese political intentions in this study must be viewed as causative. Nonetheless,
the way in which these images of Japan were manipulated or interpreted once they reached the Middle East region is paramount to understanding internal historical development in the late Ottoman Empire.

Secondly, many of the constructed images of Japan produced to illustrate proper national or nation-state development, reform and modernization for the Orient, were either generated by or interpreted through Ottoman elite sectors of society. They had access to this information about Japan and as intermediaries for society they expanded upon it according to their own ideological predispositions. Comprehending this process requires mention of Benedict Anderson’s discussion of the influence of “print capitalism” on the development of national consciousness among societies whose overarching religio-dynastic realm was in collapse. He notes that “print-as-commodity”—that is, the consumable printed word as it appeared in books, newspapers, and other literature—was influential because it “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”  

Those active in the production of print capitalism in the late-nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire such as newspaper editors and publishers were eager to disseminate particular representations of the Japanese nation that would educate their readers in their views of what constituted an independent, Eastern nation. The press and other literature became the forum for propagating particular conceptions of a modern state and society. The press was the pedagogical vehicle whereby new elites could, as mediators of knowledge, suggest themselves as the members of society most qualified to oversee reform from above; they utilized Japanese societal and administrative models to demonstrate potential success in this endeavor for the Ottoman context, and in the process drew parallels between themselves and Japanese statesmen to emphasize their role as elites in contemporary society.

Ottoman elites wrote, but nonelites were still able to participate in the generation of this discourse through other channels. Local experiences on the ground in Ottoman lands related directly to what was happening in the larger world outside, and people made these connections. Ottoman officials certainly made their elitist views apparent in the correspondence they left behind in historical records, whether the memoirs of the Sultan himself, or else the writings and actions of his ministers and diplomats. The press, where perhaps the most striking and sustained public commentary about almost every aspect of Japanese state and society appeared, was the record of the literate middle- and upper-class intelligentsia of the Ottoman Empire who attempted to stake a claim in the ideological orientations of their government as well as in the minds of their reading audiences. They had access to education beyond a rudimentary level; they aspired to guide those less fortunate than themselves in issues ranging from reform of the Empire to national identity. Ottoman journalists engaged in print-capitalist enterprises to formulate “imagined communities” out of Ottoman Arab and Ottoman Turk communities of the Empire for example. They actively undertook “the invention of tradition” postulated by Eric Hobsbawm with their respective publications that resulted in a literary renaissance. The vast number of Arabic newspapers to come out of the Arab provinces of the Empire was a result of the initial nahda, or Arabic literary
awakening of the mid-nineteenth century, and the yeni Türkçe (new Turkish) movement flourished among contributors to the Ottoman Turkish journal Genç Kalemler. In other words, the Ottoman imagination that rendered the Rising Sun for public consumption was shaped in large part by the ruling elite and the emergent middle class in the Empire involved in publishing ventures for economic livelihood as well as for a means of political activism. Nonetheless, nonelite Ottoman witnesses of the rise of modern Japan were quite capable of recognizing the significance of this nation’s achievements for their everyday lives, and this recognition surfaced in the poetry they recited or the comments they made about Japan’s war with Russia to foreign travelers passing through even the most remote areas of the Empire.

Postmodern historical analysis has recently demanded that we reexamine history to include subaltern voices that either were not allowed to seize any platform in the historical moment in order to make themselves heard, or at least that were not immediately discernible to the retrospective historian’s ear. In other words, a critique of the overemphasis on intellectual elites as historical agents, and especially in the production of nationalist discourse, has appeared in many fields in recent years. In Donald Quataert’s essay on the state of Ottoman and Turkish studies in the United States, he put forth criteria for what a good study of Ottoman history should have as its basic pool of sources; he made precisely this demand to decenter elite perspectives on historians writing Ottoman history. But as Ronald Suny and Michael Kennedy have written in their introduction to Intellectuals and Articulation of the Nation, intellectuals often “appear to have the greatest agency in the shaping of national understanding, propagating the values of the nation, disciplining the people internally, and enforcing the rules and boundaries of the constituent people.” Intellectuals are disproportionately involved in the

…“quiet politics” of nationalism that establishes the possibilities for what states and societies might do….They do the imaginative ideological labor that brings together disparate cultural elements, selected historical memories, and interpretations of experiences…. [they] were enlighteners, liberators, the articulators of the national spirit that had to be revived, reborn, resurrected.

In the case of the Ottoman construction of a Japanese historical analogy, I tend to sympathize with their hypothesis that the role of intellectuals cannot be overstated when discussing the historical agency involved in producing nationalist ideological formulations that are palatable, attractive suggestions to nonelites on how to identify oneself and how to cope in the modern world.

Newspapers produced by Ottoman elites were read to the illiterate in coffee-houses and reading salons, and this shaped their views. Yet to allege that the lower classes, the peasantry, and people in remote rural areas of the Ottoman Empire had no convictions of their own, no independently reached attitudes about the changing world around them and how to deal with these new circumstances seems to ignore the influence of a large sector of society. Their search for a form of unity to survive in the modern world and to explain the
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reality as it transpired on the ground was no less interconnected to the example of Japan than were the orientations of the Ottoman elite who compared themselves to Japanese statesmen. The widespread nature of the fascination with Japan emanating from so many regions, classes, religious faiths, and ethnic communities within the Empire is demonstrated in the variety of images that permeated everyday life in Ottoman Anatolia, the Levant, and Khedival Egypt. Classrooms exposed children to particular images of Japan. People repeated anecdotes of Japanese victories in the course of their daily exchanges. Poetry memorized by schoolchildren and adults or orally transmitted stories conveyed a distinct message about the Japanese nation. Even the memoirs of the renowned Turkish writer and feminist Halide Edib Adıvar indicate the overwhelming sense of fascination and awe Japan inspired in Ottoman times: like many parents who witnessed Japan’s victory, she named her son after the Japanese admiral Togo during the Russo-Japanese War.

Sources show that Japan was on the minds of many peoples within the borders of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century and had a meaning both specific to each individual and common to others of various backgrounds within Ottoman society. The nineteenth-century experience of the Ottoman peasant in Anatolia with the Russian Empire may not have been more sophisticated than a sense of Russia as an historic enemy whose threatening position on Ottoman frontiers required the conscription of one’s sons into the military to fight and die defending the Ottoman homeland. But this experience often coincided with reading (or hearing a recitation of) an Ottoman journalist’s exposé on Japan in which he or she described in vibrant detail Japan’s ability to fend off Western threats and even defeat Russia in war because of Japanese patriotism, love of homeland, and the preservation of a distinctly Japanese warrior ethos. The press vocalized in print the overwhelming emotions everyday events evoked in common people. The coffeehouse and other public gathering areas where literate folk read newspaper articles out loud to illiterates provided a forum for this synthesis to take place.

In effect the shared perception of the Japanese nation-state by members of various classes including the Ottoman ruling elite, middle-class journalists or political activists, and the rest of the Empire’s subjects created a kind of dialogic bridge that vertically spanned state and society, a phenomenon in many ways rather new to an Empire formerly founded on a principle of rather marked separation (though not an impervious boundary) between the askeri (ruling) class and the reaya (the flock). Enthusiasm for the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 was almost universally celebrated in the Ottoman Empire, for example, with two noticeable exceptions: first, Sultan Abdulhamid II supposedly exhibited uneasy concern that his rule would be too closely equated with that of the defunct Czar after 1905, an issue with deeper implications for the Sultan during his struggle with the Young Turks. Second, the Balkan Christians of the Empire were overwhelmingly Slavic in ethnicity and Orthodox in faith. They identified most strongly with Russia, they sided with their Christian protector in the 1905 war, and they were reported to have frequently conducted church services to pray for a defeat of the Japanese, unlike Orthodox Christian Arabs in the Ottoman provinces whose journals were filled with exhortations of praise for the Japanese nation now awakened
in the East. The Ottoman state cared about public opinion toward Japan just as Ottoman subjects took an interest in diplomatic actions carried out by the Sublime Porte. Opinions held in common concerning the secrets of Japanese progress facilitated an inclusive sense of pan-Ottoman solidarity to an extent, across socioeconomic class differences.

Disparate viewpoints about Japan tended to reflect political contests between those commanding authority in the Ottoman Empire and those excluded from it. Some members of the Ottoman elite before the 1908 constitutional revolution and particularly after the 1909 counterrevolution saw Japan as their pattern for oligarchical government and centralized administrative control, whereas others emphasized the parliamentary nature of the Meiji constitutional monarchy as an endorsement for advancing democratic processes in the Ottoman system so as to allow greater civic participation. Egyptian demands for independence issuing from several nationalist camps tended to emphasize different aspects of the Japanese nation-state in their pleas to expel the British and acquire their own sovereignty, depending upon their proximity to nodes of power within the local Egyptian political system. The situation was complicated even further by the fact that a large number of Syrian Arab émigrés, many of whom were Christian, had a substantial role in both the British colonial administration in Egypt as well as in the publishing industry centered there. Their views at times corresponded with, and at other times contradicted, the indigenous Egyptian nationalist press in its reportage of Japanese modernity.

Views of Japan held in common by the ethno-religiously diverse population of the Ottoman Empire generated a horizontal bond of pan-Asian solidarity with one another—perhaps for the last time—in an empire being slowly pulled apart by the centrifugal forces of nationalist awakenings. Spurred on by the momentum of pan-Asian optimism generated by Japanese achievements, Ottoman ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional, and class differences were subsumed for the most part under the aspiration to somehow replicate Japan’s success in the Ottoman realm. The general editorial opinions expressed about Japan’s victory in 1905 by Muslim Young Turk exiles in Europe, such as the secular Positivist Ahmed Rıza, for example, were likely consistent with the views of an Egyptian Coptic Christian publisher in Alexandria, or with the pan-Islamist Egyptian nationalist Muḥṭafa Kāmil, or with those of the Islamic modernist and Ottoman Druze notable Shakīb Arslān, or indeed with most comments on the subject made by Syrian Christian journalists resident in Damascus, Cairo, or Beirut.

Simultaneously, however, the specific Japanese traits emphasized by one Ottoman societal group or another tended to be indicative of the emergent ideological differences that would eventually see the empire dissolve during and after the First World War. Although members of Ottoman society overwhelmingly shared their enthusiasm for Japan as a model of reform and national development, they also defined themselves more strongly in contrast to other communities in the Empire through the medium of discussions of Japan. At precisely the moment when it was believed by more traditional elements of Ottoman society that indigenous Eastern culture and Western forms of science and technology (Islam and modern civilization) could be successfully assimilated, a formula Japan represented for many Islamists, the Ottoman
regime itself was moving toward the secularization and Westernization of culture and institutions to modernize the polity, and statesmen used the Japanese example to argue for it—especially so in the second constitutional period.

Some Ottoman Turks viewed Japan’s “racial uniqueness” as the source of their tremendous capability in the international arena as well as their success in domestic modernization. This solidified their own Turkish identity as a racial group in the empire destined to remain its governing elite at the expense of the Arabs and other non-Turk elements. This belief served as an antecedent to the eventual willingness of the Turk-dominated Ottoman state to perpetrate policies designed to homogenize the homeland in the final years of the empire. They increasingly viewed themselves as an ethnic entity like the Japanese; some of those who perceived Japan in the most racialized terms, or who were the most influenced by this conception of race as it was framed in Western theoretical praxis and outlined in certain press and literature on the Turkish nation, applied it to Turkish identity. They acted on this understanding most profoundly in the twentieth century: as the architects of the Armenian genocide of 1915 as well as emptying Anatolia of unwanted minority populations that would contradict such an ethno-religious, racial understanding of a modern Turkey (though one ethnicity, the Kurds, was left in place that caused difficulties later). Japan embodied racial exclusivity and homogeneity for these Ottoman Turks.

In contrast, the Ottoman Arabs of the Empire saw a different metaphor of Japan. The Arab vision of the Japanese nation legitimated their demands for a special place for Arabs in the Ottoman Empire as the descendants of the pious ancestors—\textit{al-salaf al-\textsuperscript{s}ālīḥ}—the early Arabs, founders of Islam and the original genius behind Islamic civilization (its current incarnation being the Ottoman polity). The inclusiveness of Arabo-Islamic cultural heritage symbolized by Arabic language, the Islamic faith, and a shared history with other Muslims and non-Muslims, and not necessarily a distinct racial connotation of the term Arab, prevailed in their consciousness. Interestingly, despite the potential for a strongly ethnic understanding of the term “Arab” to unite Arab Christians and Muslims where their religiosity divided them, most Arab Christian writers tended instead to delineate a mutually shared Arab identity in terms corresponding to those of Arab Muslims: as coinheritors of an Arab, Islamic tradition. Japan’s reverence for its ancestors as a defining characteristic that buttressed its Eastern spirituality was taken to be the model for Ottoman Arabs of all Christian and Muslim denominations.

The Egyptian Arabs had their own ideas on what to learn from the Japanese example. Nationalists in British-occupied Egypt viewed modern Japan as inspiration for establishing an independent and constitutional country once they could dislodge British forces. Their comparative discourse on the Japanese nation-state possessed a heavily anticolonial tone that also emphasized the particularistic heritage of the Egyptians and thus disconnected them from the larger Ottoman Arab population in other provinces, who considered themselves part of a fledgling pan-Arab nation stretching across the Levant and North Africa.

As all these members of the Ottoman community shared in pan-Asian feelings of solidarity with Japan, an intimation of equality with one another could be said to have been etched into Ottoman consciousness despite
ethno-religious distinctions. However, at the very same moment, they inevi-
tably also began to irreversibly differentiate themselves from one another.
Discourse on modern Japan was a timely prism through which to discern
these evolving debates and distinctions. Ottoman individuals worked out for
themselves the achievements they attributed to a particular set of Japanese
values or policies while conjuring up their versions of a “Rising Sun.” In turn
they incorporated these ideas into their own communal self-views, setting
themselves apart from other sectors of Ottoman society.

A study such as this one will require some introduction to the Ottoman
predicament of the late nineteenth century before proceeding to unlock the
precise meanings of discourse on modern Japan produced in the empire, how
to study these perceptions, and how perception can affect historical out-
comes. It will not be a strictly chronological progression, but rather the chap-
ters are organized thematically. Part I, subtitled “Seeking out ‘Modern’ in the
International Arena,” is broken up into three chapters. Chapter 2 explores
the complexities of “non-Western” modernity by first clarifying the ways in
which power is framed—the theoretical underpinnings of the hierarchy of
nations as formulated in the nineteenth century and played out militarily
through the seizure of colonies by European powers. The search for modernity
caused people to look in various places for solutions. I explore the historiogra-
phy of East and West as binary categories, then move on to look at the rise of
Japan and the Chinese response to this in comparison to Islamic civilization’s
relationship to the West. Japan reversed the global political order according
to many Asian observers; I probe some of the relevant commentary made
by Ottoman writers claiming that Japan had done precisely this, juxtapos-
ing their views within the context of other Eastern or Asian attitudes toward
Japanese modernity.

Chapter 3 reviews several factors determining the Ottoman Empire’s orien-
tation as a polity, physically and intellectually situated between Europe and
Asia. Incorporation into the world economic system on the periphery of the
European core and a responsiveness among members of the Ottoman intel-
ligentsia to Western currents of thought are the key links to the European
continent affecting Ottoman life and reform efforts in the nineteenth cen-
tury. In the case of the latter, this responsiveness started with ideas of the
Enlightenment and influences from the French Revolution; in the nineteenth
and twentieth centuries, influential Western theorists, including the French
sociologist Gustave Le Bon and the British philosopher-sociologist Herbert
Spencer, explicated the racial-civilizational order in ways comprehensible to
Ottoman intellectuals.

Against this intellectual milieu, Chapter 4 explores the efforts to conduct
Ottoman-Japanese diplomacy as a very real response to challenges that both
powers faced at the time. Though ultimately these attempts are a failed
experiment between the “two citadels of Asia,” they are the backdrop for the
Ottoman transformation from a “Sick Man of Europe” into the “Japan of the
Near East”—in other words, the Ottoman migration out of Europe and into
East. Due to the significant contributions of the Tatar Muslim political activist
Abdüreşid İbrahim in attempting to forge this relationship, he will be dis-
cussed in a separate section.
Part II centers on how “modern” was defined in the Ottoman microcosm. In these chapters I elucidate the specific constructions of Japan imagery produced by Ottoman writers and intellectuals starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing through the First World War era, and how various groups wielded these images for domestic political effect. The Young Turks and Sultan Abdülhamid II were locked in a political struggle in which both sides found the Japan model to be an expedient tool for critique and defense, the focus of Chapter 5. This scenario is replicated again after the Committee of Union and Progress asserted its authority in the Empire more assiduously from around 1909. Constitutional, parliamentary government and universal education in one instance were the most important institutions behind Japanese success according to Young Turk exiles, provincial Arabs, and Egyptian nationalists; most of the Ottoman Turkish discourse from roughly 1912 onward distinctly shifts to interest in Japanese military strategy and modernization techniques as a response to wartime considerations, and the sources in general become scant after 1916.

Chapters 6-7 focus upon Ottoman definitions of terakki and medeniyet—modern progress and civilization—and how to achieve these through the appropriate synthesis of “Eastern essence” and “Western science,” à la Japan. Obviously there was variation in how these concepts were conceived by Ottoman authors. Around the turn of the century, Arabic writings on Japanese nationhood underscored certain elements necessary for defining Arabo-Islamic heritage; this resembled the exposition on Japan put forth by Islamic modernists from various ethnicities in the Empire who often wrote in Ottoman Turkish and who expanded upon how to become modern without sacrificing indigenous Muslim culture and morality. At the same time, their exegesis contrasted much of the secular, proto-nationalist Turkish discussions of Japan produced by Ottoman elites in positions of authority that stressed racial identity as the essential ingredient of “Easternness” and that understood the Empire’s survival in the modern world as predicated upon Turkish leadership to guide them through. The importance of specific traits Ottoman authors attributed to the Japanese themselves or to their state-led reform program allows us to better understand the internal dynamics being played out between Ottoman groups.

In the framework of the Japanese example mediating non-Western identity and nationhood, turn-of-the-century Egypt possessed a peculiar set of circumstances (situated between Europe and Asia, linked to both by geographic proximity and history, its ongoing British occupation) that requires a separate chapter in this study, although the centrality of Cairo as a hub of journalistic enterprise that reached far beyond Suez makes it impossible to consider Egypt in complete isolation from Ottoman Arab intellectual trends. In any case, for many Egyptian nationalists, Pharaonic Egyptian past became synonymous with Japanese ancestral worship as two similar foundations of particularistic national identity reinforcing the ability of the collective to achieve independence. The fulfillment of Egyptian statehood necessitated first and foremost a withdrawal of British forces before the natural course of Egypt’s development could commence; this process was represented by the attainment of a constitutional government and a universal, compulsory education system similar to
those of Meiji Japan. Both institutions were to elicit as well as to propagate a sense of Egyptian pride and patriotism in the territorial homeland (watan), the other key signifier of modernity for the national community (umma). Syrian Muslim and Christian émigrés residing in Egypt who published newspapers added yet another layer to the dialogue on modernity taking place there. They contributed to the discourse on Japan in ways that subtly shaped thinking about what should be the proper sociopolitical principles underlying the emergent Egyptian nation. Their influence should be understood empire-wide, their ideas, indicative of the broader debates occurring over the place of religion and ethnicity in one’s identity and in the formation of non-Western modernity.
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