

Oriental Enlightenment: The Problematic Military Experiences and Cultural Claims of Count Maurice Auguste comte de Benyowsky in Formosa* during 1771**

Ian Inkster***

ABSTRACT

Maurice Benyowsky's colourful version of his global adventures during the heady, expansive days of the late-Enlightenment remains still as an historical account, and is perhaps destined for reification at a time of romantic, post-modernist cultural affirmation. Yet this paper argues that within it there lies a virile and possibly dangerous Orientalism, one at least partially based upon a lurid, opportunistic and self-seeking fabrication of his visit to Taiwan (Formosa) in the year 1771. This paper examines the veracity, provenance and historiography of the Benyowsky account of late-eighteenth century Formosa, both as an exercise in one facet of Taiwanese history and as some exploration of the origin and maintenance of European views of the "other" and of the "orient" as they were transforming during the late-Enlightenment period. Furthermore a principal task is to provide an historiographical analysis that illustrates both the initial reasons for the acceptance of Benyowsky's lurid account as well as the wider contexts of its long life as a seemingly reliable and authentic tale. Questions remain as to the cultural contexts of any general acceptance of otherwise doubtful stories, experiments, claims and "adventures". Here there is little doubt that the original *Memoirs* were given greater credence by Benyowsky's talent in self-fashioning his character and status as those of a reliable gentleman.

Keywords: Benyowsky, Historiography, Aborigines, Enlightenment, Orientalism, Clash of Civilizations, Travel literature, Voyages

* We use the term Formosa commonly here because this is the term for Taiwan most usually found in the foreign literature itself, and throughout by Benyowsky and the related material.

** This is the first result of a larger project on *Strangers, Observers and Oriental Accounting: An Analysis of Western Observations of Taiwan/ Formosa circa 1604-1920s* based in the Research Centre for International Affairs, Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, Kaohsiung 80793, Taiwan. I would like to thank my Wenzao colleagues Profs. Jerry Liu and Yu-Hsuan Lee for comments on an earlier version, and Miss Meng Fang Tsai for research assistance.

*** Professor of Global History, Department of International Affairs, Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, Kaohsiung, and Research Professor of International History, The Nottingham Trent University, UK, and editor *History of Technology* (London, UK).

來稿日期：2010年3月23日；通過刊登：2010年5月10日。