

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

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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.

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1. The Count Benyowsky

Dubbed the “Candide and the Monte Christo of real life” in one of the many popular accounts of his fascinating career,¹ the notoriety of Benyowsky² has earned him a place in the reference books of history. In Langer’s 1940 *Encyclopaedia of World History*, he appears as a Polish adventurer with a commission to found a French settlement in Madagascar, who then set himself up as ruler of the whole north-eastern coast of that island, was repudiated upon his return to France in 1776, and was then supported and funded by the Americans to return to Madagascar, where he proclaimed himself ruler but was then killed during a campaign against a French expedition in 1786, all of which represents a fairly close, uncritical reading of Benyowsky’s memoirs.³ His

¹ Herbert Greenhough Smith, *The Romance of History* (London: George Newness, 1895), pp. 52-86.

² Following a full Hungarian orthography would yield Gróf Benyovszky Móricz, pronounced approximately with French accents. The spelling used here is Anglophone, is the most used in the literature and in the first editions, and in Taiwan this spelling is used by the best-known of foreign accounts of the Formosan “adventure”, those of James W. Davidson, *The Island of Formosa, Past and Present: History, People, Resources, and Commercial Prospects* (London; New York: Macmillan; Yokohama: Kelly & Walsh, 1903); Wm. Campbell, *Formosa under the Dutch: Described from Contemporary Records* (London: Kegan Paul, 1903) and Yosaburō Takekoshi, *Japanese Rule in Formosa* (London: Longman Green and Co., 1907). Each of these has been republished several times: see below extensively.

³ William L. Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History* (Cambridge: Houghton and Co., 1940), pp. 859-861.

seeming veracity on several counts, mainly those relating to Siberia and Madagascar had kept him alive in the accepted historical narratives of the 20th century. Thus he is mentioned by Braudel in *Perspective of the World*,⁴ regarding his 1770 observation concerning the tentative nature of Russia's hold over Siberia, which according to that great French historian he exaggerated. Similarly, an excellent recent biography of Catherine the Great, assesses Benyowsky as "one of the most romantically intrepid personalities of the eighteenth century", and judges him a real political danger in Siberia for the way in which he pulled together and led into escape such a disturbing group of dissidents, amongst whom could be counted Ioasaf Baturin (exiled for his plot to install the Grand Duke Peter in 1769), Peter Khrushchev (the guardsman conspirator banished in 1762), and Alexander Turchaninov (exiled from 1742 for conspiring against the Empress Elizabeth).⁵ More recently – and perhaps something of a measure of a new post-Enlightenment romanticism – Benyowsky's life has been proclaimed anew by his countrymen.⁶ At different times Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Russia have all proclaimed Benyowsky and the veracity of his memoirs and journals (see below), and recent political changes in Eastern Europe and Russia have generated a renewed swelling of interest. Thus, in 2004 a beautifully and expensively bound version of his manuscript on Madagascar 1772-1776, which reproduced the original French manuscript folios, as well as French and Hungarian printed texts,⁷ was published in Budapest.

⁴ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, vol. 3, *The Perspective of the World* (London: Phoenix Press, 1984), p. 458.

⁵ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 223-253. The Russian dissidents led by Benyowsky included also the officer of the Preobrazhenski Regiment, Ippolit Stepanov, who had been sent to Kamchatka in 1769 for advocating the overthrow of the Empress Catherine in favour of the Grand Duke Paul. According to Benyowsky, during the short period in Formosa, Stepanov emerged as his true enemy and rival, and was placed under forced confinement when the small fleet departed Formosa on 11 September 1771.

⁶ For instance the major exhibition, with lectures from various authorities including Benyowsky descendents, "Maurice Benyowsky: Citizen of the World," Library of Congress, Washington: American Philosophical Society, 1997; see also entry under Benyowsky of *Slovakopedia* (Internet Encyclopedia of Slovakia and Slovaks), <http://www.slovakopedia.com/>.

⁷ Móric Benyovszky, *Protocolle du régiment des Volontaire de Benyowszky crée en 1772* (Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Magyar-Madagaszkári Baráti Társaság Kossuth Kiadó, 2004). For the superb original manuscript French version see "Volontaires de Benyowsky 1772-1776. Memoire sur l'expédition de Lisle de Madagascar," British Library, Add. Mss., 18844. (Henceforth, Madagascar BL.)

Much fabricated mystery surrounds Benyowsky. By his own self-fashioning account he was born in 1741 at Verbowa, in Nittria, Hungary, the son of a Count and general of cavalry in the service of the emperor. He was educated and trained under the auspices of the court of Vienna in that manner afforded “to such of its vassals as are of illustrious families”. By his own highly problematic and inconsistent recounting, he was in active service as a teenager, his first major battle being at Lobositz in 1756 against Prussia. Subsequently, various intricate misunderstandings lead to his disgrace, so he determined to travel—in particular to Danzig studying navigation. Much Euro-voyaging ensued, until his involvement in 1767 in Warsaw with the planned Polish Confederacy against Russia, from when he was caught up in a continued life of adventure.⁸ One contemporary manuscript fragment claims that his early upbringing included a university education in Hungary in languages, mathematics and philosophy, and much subsequent practical study of navigation in Dantzic, which would certainly have placed him firmly within the Enlightenment tradition.⁹ The most certain elements of his early career were that he does seem to have fought as a lieutenant in four pitched battles against Prussia before he was 17 years of age. On the death of his father, his brothers seized his inheritance, and in his retaliation he was accused as a rebel, his property confiscated, whereupon he fled to Amsterdam and then possibly to Plymouth to study seamanship. Subsequently, he joined the Polish Confederation against Russia, fought as a colonel-general of cavalry, and secured a series of audacious successes. At one point he was captured and ransomed for £1,000, but repeatedly evaded permanent capture, until eventually seized by Cossacks and imprisoned. He escaped once more, to be captured and exiled to Kamchatka. The Siberian imprisonment and escape is the point at which the famous voyage begins, involving his claims concerning Formosa in September of 1771.

⁸ This is his story in all versions of the *Memoirs* from 1789 (see below extensively); see vol. 2 of Nicholson 1790 edition, pp. 1-35.

⁹ “18th Century fragments of the Career of Benyouski,” in Hardwicke Papers, vol. 491, Historical Collections 1700-1817, Additional Manuscripts, BL 35839, f. 365-367, three double-sided folios, unclearly written and partially preserved. [Henceforth Hardwicke fragment BL]. This account takes the life of Benyowsky only up to the rebellion in Kamchatka. The published accounts of Benyowsky’s early life, and the French manuscript volumes, do not mention such university studies, but have him enjoying a Viennese-style courtly education, joining the imperial army at 14 years of age, and fighting in his first battle at Lobositz in October 1756, the first action of the Seven Years’ War.

2. 18 Days in Formosa: The Narrative

According to his memoirs and journal,¹⁰ Benyowsky and his fleet of 3 ships and motley crew of 96 persons, arrived under the Polish flag somewhere on the eastern coast of Taiwan on 26th of August 1771. Giving his declared latitude as 23: 22N, this places him just south of the Tropic of Cancer, in a good harbour along the strip of coast to the north east of the Hsiu-ku-luan range of high cliffs. This was with certainty the territory of the Ami people, served well by west-east flowing rivers from the high-mountain ranges, far from the Han agricultural settlements and commerce along the western coast or the settlement sites of the earlier Dutch colonisation at that latitude to the west, well north of T'ai-tung, and with nothing much in the way of communications with the Ch'ing prefectural or county capitals and market towns of Taiwan at that date.

Upon anchoring a party set out in two boats towards a small group of islanders¹¹ around a camp fire, were subsequently led to their village, fed with roasted pork, boiled rice, limes and oranges, in turn presented the villagers with a first batch of the many European weapons – in this case knives – with which they were happy to supply indigenous groups, but were attacked with arrows upon their return.¹² The result of the first extended conflict on the first of 18 days, was over sixty indigenous Formosans killed at the cost of two Europeans slightly wounded. A larger landing party the next day were met by submissive, unarmed natives who again invited them into their village, plied them with alcohol and women and again attacked, driving them – some utterly naked –

¹⁰ As will become very clear, there are many versions of the *Memoirs* in particular. Here we derive our account principally from the original French manuscript as well as its published English translation by William Nicholson, London, G. G. J and J. Robinson, 1789. For the French original used here; Maurice Benyowsky “Memoirs with Charts and Maps,” Additional Manuscripts, British Library, ff. 5359-5362 (in the original French). These are 4 beautifully leather-bound and written manuscript books, confusedly paginated; f. 5360 Tom. II is some 360 pp beginning with the Kamchatka revolt and escape, and contains meticulous marginalia and addenda by Nicholson. There are some missing pages. The account of Formosa makes up 73 pp of the total. [Henceforth *Memoirs* BL].

¹¹ The French ms *Memoirs* BL variously refers to the indigenous Formosans as *insulaires*, *Formosiens*, *sauvages* or *les Indiens*, seemingly depending on whether friends or foe.

¹² This is reported as a repeated pattern of relations in *Memoirs* BL, as in “d’insulaires, femmes et homes, presentement avec de la volailles, du viz des Cannes, de Sucre, des Cochons, des Oranges, de autres fruits.”

from the settlement, Benyowsky's reply to which was to fire the village and kill some two hundred of its residents. This, only the second day.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Benyowsky fleet then sailed northward on a particularly benign current for a short distance, when two native boats guided them into a perfect harbour of three fathoms, which our hero immediately named Port Maurice after himself! The location is again doubtful, and it remains possible that Benyowsky had sailed north along the eastern coast just far enough to reach the inlets and bays of the coastal area populated by indigenous peoples, whose focal points were more inland in the high mountains and forests. Once more conflict seems to have been momentarily forgotten and a number of boats came to supply the westerners with poultry, hogs, rice and fruits. Altogether more unexpectedly, one of these was headed by a Spanish adventurer from Manila, one Don Hieronimo Pacheco¹³ who Benyowsky served with both presents and promises as an aid to obtaining his services as interpreter and ally. However, on the morning of the third day, a group of islanders hostile to Pacheco and his people, attacked them at a watering hole, and three Europeans were killed. Revenge was now the principal motive of both Benyowsky and Pacheco, the former slaughtering all native prisoners already held, attacking all approaching boats whatever their tribal allegiances, hanging all new captives. Some 250 of the mixed forces of Pacheco and Benyowsky drove the original tribe into high hills and used this exposure to bring the fleet's cannon to bear in broadside. A tally enumerated 1,156 dead indigenous people, amongst who were many armed women. In addition 640 captives were handed over into the charge of Pacheco.

Day the 4th began with Benyowsky moving his whole European crew and their womenfolk on-shore and the expected arrival there—from some 30 miles inland—of Huapo,¹⁴ enemy of the Chinese authorities, friend of Don Hieronimo and “chief” of the enemies of those natives already slaughtered by Benyowsky. This set the scene for a triangle of alliances on the eastern shore, potentially enormous as Huapo could supposedly muster under his own command some 20,000 to 25,000 armed men. A small advance group of indigenous warriors were hosted by Benyowsky and led by an officer wearing “a long close garment fitted to the body and reaching from head to foot, Chinese half-boots, a white

¹³ In the best-known account in Taiwan, that of Campbell, this is unfortunately miss-spelled Pacheco (eg. p. 521); the ms Memoirs BL clearly gives Pacheco (eg. 2nd pagination p.91).

¹⁴ In Memoirs BL (see first paginated pp. 10-14) this leader is consistently named Prince Huapo.

shirt, a black vest, and a red outer garment with buttons of coral set in gold. His bonnet of straw was exceedingly pointed and the upper extremity ornamented with horse-hair dyed red. His arms were a sabre, a lance, a bow and quiver, with twenty-five arrows. His troops were naked, with the exception of a piece of blue cloth around the middle; and their arms were bows and spears". By the time of the splendid arrival of the chief or Prince himself later in the day, the villagers were now sufficiently friends as to "leave their daughters in our camp". At the head of troops of infantry with pikes sat some fifty officers on "small but beautiful horses". The prince then thanked Benyowsky for the defeat of his enemies, identified him as a possible candidate for the mythical figure long predicted by his "diviners" as he who would break the hold of the Chinese over the island, and offered to join him in a wholesale liberation of Formosa.

At a later visit by the prince, Benyowsky was determined to ally with Huapo and to that purpose took him around the ships of his small fleet, put on an exhibition of fireworks, and presented him with two pieces of cannon, thirty muskets, six barrels of gunpowder, two hundred iron balls and fifty Japanese sabres. The chief — suddenly supplied with a western armoury that surely represented a veritable military revolution in Formosa — then prepared a series of proposals to Benyowsky, delivered by Don Hieronimo, including that he should leave some Europeans in Formosa after his planned departure, for reasons of both goodwill and instruction, that he should procure armed vessels and ships' officers for Formosa, that he should aid in the expelling of the Chinese in return for the proprietorship of the department of Hwangsin in the first instance, that he should complete the defeat of a neighbouring chieftain in return for a direct payment, and that they should enter into a permanent treatment of friendship and alliance. Benyowsky agreed with all of this except the first, and examined and minutely priced the rest with seemingly serious intent. After a complex ceremony of celebration and obeisance, Benyowsky seems to have committed forty-eight of his men and sixty horses to assisting in a war between Huapo and a pro-Chinese chief Huaposingo, whose capital was a day and a half's march away with a muster of "only" 6,000 armed men and perhaps 1,000 Chinese and a few dozen muskets.

So, on September 3rd, only the 9th day since first arrival, this combined but very mixed armed group set out against their new enemy. A few hours from the enemy's capital, Benyowsky's advance camp was attacked by ten or twelve thousand men, at which he lost many of his native allies, but on Huapo's joining

them, the next morning saw the “great slaughter” continue but in reverse, and the retreat of the inland enemy was rewarded with presents from the prince of fine pearls, 800 pounds of silver, and over twenty-five pounds of gold. Benyowsky responded with gifts of arms, and despite the protests of his European followers, increasingly showered with wealth, made the coast and determined to embark as soon as possible for Europe. On the 12th of September they set sail around the northern headland of Formosa, steering for Macao.

3. 18 Days in Formosa: A Reality Check

In terms of qualities, Benyowsky’s story is frequently questionable. Thus, despite his own accounts of the ferocious character of fighting on all sides, Benyowsky somehow concluded that “Les Formosiens sont d’un naturel efféminé, lache et sans aucune marque de courage”.¹⁵ But in terms of quantities, Benyowsky just gets far too much wrong. Any estimates of population for the eastern coast are guestimates at best, but under the Dutch it is unlikely that the whole indigenous village population of that coast had reached much above 6-10,000, living in maybe 40 or 50 settlements, representing some 10% at the very most of the total indigenous population of Formosa.¹⁶ It follows that all of the figures for armies and followers given by Benyowsky are on the scale from highly improbable to frankly ludicrous. The notion that any authority, including the Chinese themselves, could control 25,000 armed indigenous men along the eastern coast and high mountains appears fabulous only, and the figure of up to 12,000 enemy in the attack on the Benyowsky camp in the inland mountain area seems completely outlandish. On even a modest (!) estimate the deaths inflicted on the natives by Benyowsky, amounted to over 2,000, with mentions of hundreds of prisoners. None of this agrees with the demography of Taiwan as known by historians or with other near-contemporary accounts. And horses abound in Benyowsky. At their first meeting on August 31st, Prince Huapo arrived with 6 horsemen carrying a standard, a troop of pike infantry, 40 mounted cavalry officers, infantry with bows, a troop with clubs and hatchets,

¹⁵ Memoirs BL 2nd pagination, p. 46.

¹⁶ John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier 1600-1800* (Taipei: SMC, 1995); Ch’iu-k’un Ch’en, *Landlord and tenant: varieties of land tenure in frontier Taiwan 1680-1900* (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1987).

15 officers and the Prince on horses, then more troops. He was later attended by 50 mounted officers, and his army included another 250 horsemen. The prince lent Benyowsky 68 horses for his campaign. Yet all the evidence is that horses of any sort remained very rare indeed on the east coast and in the mountains and forest areas. It is true that combined with drums and muskets, horses had been deliberately used on the west coast by the Dutch many years earlier in order to terrorise aboriginal warriors and insurgents, and some time after Benyowski's visit (in 1788), the Chinese authorities were planning an increase in horses for their aboriginal military colonies in the west. But there is very little evidence that this use of horses during the Dutch years in the west of Formosa had ever translated into their wholesale use as vehicles of large-scale warfare in the east.¹⁷

Here we might note something of earlier authentic 18th century foreign accounts of Formosa in 1715, 1739, and 1782.¹⁸ In these the western emphasis was on the very insecure partiality of Chinese control over Formosa, the lawlessness of the indigenous peoples "without religion, and acknowledging no God" and the cruelty and duplicity of the Chinese in their search for treasure. In other words, such accounts were, as might be expected, fully determined in their criticism of Chinese culture and its impacts, in their emphasis on the "otherness" of both Chinese and aboriginal peoples, and in the confirmation of European cultural and material superiority that such journeys and observations provided the writers as well as their readers. Thus in 1715, de Mailla in a mere 16 pages of description is clear on the limits of Chinese control and offers a very anti-Chinese account, emphasising duplicity and rapaciousness; they were gold-seekers at best; he makes precise points concerning oxen rather than horses, "herds" of apes and deer, and sees the capital of Tai-wan fu as equal to the best found in China. The only indigenous peoples in such western Formosan places "are those who serve them as domestics or rather slaves". Again, Mailla is able to tally the 45 small towns of natives "subject to the Chinese", of which 36 were

¹⁷ The Dutch Council of Taiwan at times wrote during the 1640s to their Governor-general requesting supplies of Persian or other horses, but only for small-scale visits between villages; see "The Council of Tayouan to the Governor-General Antonio van Diemen, Castle Zeelandia, 15 February, 1645," in Wm. Campbell, *Formosa under the Dutch, Described from Contemporary Records*, pp. 208-209; L.D. Kessler, *K'ang-hsi and the Consolidation of Ch'ing Rule, 1661-1684* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), p. 106; John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier 1600-1800*, pp. 53, 354, 366.

¹⁸ J. B. du Halde, *General Description of the Empire of China*, vol. 1, trans. Richard Brookes, French Translation (London: John Watts, 1739), pp. 171-190; Abbe Grosier, *General Description of the Chinese*, vol. 1, French Translation (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1788), pp. 222-246, containing a description of the great Formosan flood of 1782.

in the north, 9 in the south, the northern populated and approaching the Chinese culture, the south more primitive, generally in smaller numbers and greater simplicity, living on rice, game, and small grain.¹⁹ In distinct contrast to Benyowsky, even at a point in 1715 when the eastern side of the island was in seeming full revolt against the western side, de Mailla mentions that indigenous people could at best put up ineffective fighting forces of perhaps “thirty or forty, armed with arrows and javelins”. Again, in contrast to Benyowsky, other 18th century accounts relate details of climate, flora and fauna, cuisine and cooking methods, the fatal dangers of the water supply; they note that amongst the Chinese oxen acted as substitutes for scarce horses, a much more likely aftermath of the Dutch occupation than the mustered and disciplined equestrianism claimed for the indigenous tribes by Benyowsky. In particular they highlight the vast contrasts between the cities and villages of the west and the wildness of the “barbarian” east. But they also describe in far greater detail the social life and cultural forms of the different varieties of indigenous peoples, providing evidence on such matters as hunting, clothing, tattooing, earrings and teeth-blackening, courtship, marriage and gender relations, governance by elders, commerce and tribute. Finally, in such earlier 18th century accounts, the search for “otherness” by no means precluded notions of nobility and superior morality amongst so-called savages, for they might well be “nearer to the true philosophy than a great number of the most celebrated Chinese sages”. Western accounts testified to the remnants of Dutch-driven Christianity amongst the indigenous peoples – though not at all amongst the Chinese – and an absence of idolatry. The expansive aggression of such accounts lay not in cannon and guns but in the late-Enlightenment conviction that indigenous survival and growth would depend upon a cultural conversion, led as a matter of course by religious conversion through the examples of “prayers and holy deeds”.

It is obvious that Benyowsky stands in stark contrast to all of this! Where Benyowsky does attempt something of a considered description of Formosa in his memoirs, the text quite abruptly ceases to be that of the adventurer, and reads more like a summary of the reports of others than his own observations. At such points he confuses Han Chinese, Hakka and indigenous regions and peoples, and is happy to assign to individual indigenous chiefs up to 2,000 slaves or 600 bodyguards each. There were simply not enough bodies on the whole island to

¹⁹ Father de Mailla, SJ, “The Early History of Formosa,” *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses*, French Translation (Shanghai: Loureiro and Co., 1715: reprinted in *The Celestial Empire*, 8 August 1874), quotes pp. 7-10.

provision such armies and services. One extensive quotation will need to serve the point, where he is supposedly *describing the Eastern territories that he has seen*, dominated by indigenous tribes and villages:

In each province there are five or six towns, which have establishments in instructing youths in reading and writing. Their characters for writing and for the expression of numbers are as difficult as those of the Chinese. Their pronunciation is sometimes quick and elevated, at other times slow and grave. They obtain their books from China. There are reported sorcerers or diviners here, who have a great influence over the people. Their religion consists in adoring one God, and in the performance of good offices to their neighbours. The provinces which are not conquered, are governed by Princes or Kings, who have an absolute power over their subjects. None of these subjects, without exception of even the great men, have any ownership in the land. They receive the advantages of their fields subject to the good pleasure of the prince, as well as the gains they derive from the multitude of their slaves. Some of the chief people have as many as one, or even two, thousand slaves. The princes always make up their councils of their principal military officers, and keep their troops on foot, divided into four, five, or six divisions, which remain constantly on the frontiers. The body guards of the sovereigns consist of no more than five or six hundred men, born of the principal families among their subjects. The ancient soldiers are employed in the command of towns or villages, for there is no village in Formosa which is not commanded by a soldier, and each commander is obliged to present annually to his superior a list of the people under his jurisdiction. Formosa being surrounded by sea, these Princes constantly maintain a certain number of vessels, each of which has two masts and twenty-four oars; they do not use cannon, but make use of artificial fireworks.

This mix of little-sense and non-sense comes at the end of a narrative of bloody, aggressive action and just prior to a plan for “the project of establishing a colony”. Nevertheless, it is from such narrative patches that we may extract the very few points of salience or veracity. Thus Benyowsky mentions that Formosa is called by the Chinese “Touaiouai” and by the natives “Pacchimba”; the former is close to terms used by aboriginal people for any foreigners and possibly misapprehended by early Dutch settlers as the term for their own land (Taiwan), the latter is not too far from the *Pakan* or *Pak-ande* historically used by some natives. Again, in areas where it was relatively easy for Benyowsky to repeat contemporary Euro-accounts or the talk of seafarers, such as crops, foods or wildlife, he did get it—more or less—right. In matters of which he could know little, such as the actual density of population on his eastern coast and into the mountains, he made incorrect assumptions that led to nonsensical claims concern-

ing numbers of troops and followers, prisoners and slaves that could not have been true. In these areas the accumulations of claims is more damning than any one problematic claim, from huge villages and commanding armies to horse-hair (rather than dog-hair, which would be more tenable) clothing, and so on.

4. Plans for Empire

Quite well-known are Benyowsky's plans for an imperial conquest of Madagascar. Despite being warned by the French governor of the island, M. Poivre, the French authorities in 1772 appointed Benyowsky in command of an expedition to Madagascar. He arrived with limited instructions in 1774, and immediately convened the local chiefs, obtaining grants of land. Malaria and lack of resources limited this venture, and restrictive orders from France further encouraged Benyowsky to resign his command of the French establishment at Louisbourg, arrange a treaty with native chiefs, and return to France. Receiving decreasing support there, Benyowsky sought resources from America, and in October 1784 sailed from Baltimore on a return to Madagascar, pursuing what was in effect an independent colonising adventure. After capturing the French depot at Ngontsy and building a fort, this in turn met with French retaliation in the form of a gun-boat in 1786, and in the subsequent engagement Benyowsky received a fatal wound on 23rd May of that year.²⁰

But his first serious proposal for any sort of colonisation had been conjured up in Formosa on 9th September 1771. In his plan to form a European colony in Formosa, Benyowsky laid out 23 points under the three headings of maxims, demands, and stipulations. Foremost amongst the first of these was included the necessity for early decisions concerning whether Formosa should be seen as primarily of commercial or military interest and "whether it be most proper to cultivate the commerce of exchange, of economy, or of industry".²¹ Benyowsky

²⁰ For detailed accounts see S. Pasfield Oliver, *Madagascar*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1886), pp. 18-21; Robert Drury, *Madagascar, or Robert Drury's Journal. And a further description by Abbe Alexis Rochon*, edited with an introduction by Captain Pasfield Oliver, *Madagascar* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890). For Benyowsky and Madagascar see the *Memoirs* and Alexis M. Rochon, *A Voyage to Madagascar and the East Indies* (London: E. Jeffery, 1793); the French version was published in Paris in 1791.

²¹ Because of its relatively common availability in Taiwan, I have taken all quotes in this section from Wm. Campbell, *Formosa under the Dutch*, pp. 535-538.

argued that for Formosa, gaining a “superiority over their minds” would be of greater efficiency than military rule, but also that the colony should be “animated by glory, for in that case it may conquer, but will never be conquered”. Benyowsky put forward exemplary Enlightenment views of governance and civil authority. So, although luxury should be generally avoided, “it will be proper to establish external marks of grandeur, according to the different ranks of citizens who form the colony; as by this means emulation will be encouraged”. Two further maxims declared Benyowsky as Enlightenment man. Although restraint of conscience should be abandoned, the resulting freedom would be Europeanised, for happy is he “who shall establish toleration and the belief of only one God”. As commonly held during the late-Enlightenment, the colony might be run on slave labour. Thus, a code of laws “should be made in favour of slavery”, but to encourage initiative and fit the moral codes for good governance “means should be appointed to enable this unfortunate order of men to arrive, by the force of labour and industry, to the rank of free citizens”. Formosa was by force to be turned into a late-Enlightenment version of the classical Greek state. Of course, the availability of slaves was to be augmented by a population policy that would grant especial “privileges and gratifications to fathers and mothers who shall have presented to the State a number of children, the issues of their marriages”.

Following this Enlightenment colonial agenda, Benyowsky issued demands pertaining to his own colonial authority and governance. Direct European power should work principally through his own authority and council, and should be boosted by the gift of three vessels with 18 months provisions and 1,200 men, with arms and tradable goods to the added value of one million two hundred livres. In order to set the conditions for efficiently sustained rule, Benyowsky demanded a three year period within which to be granted the right to “raise recruits to the number of four hundred men yearly, and the transport of two hundred foundling children of both sexes annually”.

Clearly stipulated on the basis of the defeat of the Chinese authorities in Formosa, Benyowsky’s 1771 plan represented – in brief – an Enlightenment proposal for colonial acculturation of indigenous people alongside a considerable repopulation of the island. In such a plan, casual, violent adventure had been replaced by an extension of the Enlightenment project, whereby Europe would emerge as the powerful cultural centre of a brave new world, in which peripheral areas would play their parts as suppliers of resources of all kinds. In such a

fashion, we might visualise this aspect of the larger Benyowsky project as fitting comfortably within late-eighteenth century European ideas of the expanding world as an infinitely available resource. This was a style of thought that did indeed bring Benyowsky into the same world as that of Joseph Banks (below), whose famous *Endeavour* voyages brought Enlightenment enquiry and colonial adventure together in a mission to “maintain the power, dominion and sovereignty of Britain”.²² From Australia to India, enlightened European ideology believed that indigenous people over the globe might be brought from what Governor Lachlan Macquarie of New South Wales thought of as “their rambling state” and transformed through colonial planning into commercial agents and farmers.²³ Even more generally, the Pacific was visualised as a vast natural laboratory within or upon which Europeans might experiment both politically and intellectually. Indeed, for these years Macleod and Rehbock once dubbed the Pacific “as a historical laboratory for scientific methods and mentalities, as well as an atelier for European art and anthropology”.²⁴ The essence of Europe in the late 18th century was an increasingly collective vision which located “The West” as a site of cultural change and creative diversity but located the entire rest of the world as a single site of stagnating otherness. The “enlightenment” component of this rested on notions that, with a more or less benign, controlled interaction, the “other” might – selectively – move across the civilization line towards the world of progress.²⁵

5. Historiography I: Benyowsky as Enlightened Euro-Orientalist

Historiography of the *Memoirs* must begin prior to their actual publication. In 1772 the very influential English review, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, published

²² Banks quoted in Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 36.

²³ Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, p. 109.

²⁴ Roy Macleod and Philip Rehbock, eds., *Nature in its Greatest Extent* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 1.

²⁵ Ian Inkster, “Global Ambitions: Science and Technology in International Historical Perspective 1450-1800,” *Annals of Science* 54 (1997), pp. 611-622.

an “extraordinary Account” in brief of “de Benyofsky’s” adventures in Siberia and Macau into late 1771 and early 1772, that did not explicitly mention Formosa at all.²⁶ Indeed, in a note written in French by Benyowsky and reproduced in this source, the Count himself writes that after taking in wines at Nagasaki he “sailed out again and passed by the Isles of Uljina, as far as Formosa and the Isle of Bassee; lastly took the straight course to Makaw, where I arrived in the month of September 1771... went out with 85 men, came back with 62”. Thus, in the earliest account of that period, given in French directly by Benyowsky to Barlow at Macao in November 1771, no mention is made of any very recent murderous or colonial 18-day adventure in Formosa itself, this in a short passage that did manage to find space to refer to wines from Nagasaki. Again, in a letter written on 24th September 1771 at Macao, less than two weeks after Benyowsky supposedly left Formosa, Monseigneur, the Bishop Le Bon, referred at some length first hand to the arrival there and the claims of Benyowsky, and wrote that for “two months past they suffered hunger and thirst. He had been twice shipwrecked and twice they have repaired their vessel ... He came from the north and has coasted the island of Japan etc”.²⁷ Again, here there is no mention of the Formosan adventure as reported in the later *Memoirs*. Even more damning, in material given Nicholson by the great *savant*, then President of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), an extended original account of his journey is given by Benyowsky himself, dated 21 March 1772, which seemingly came to Banks through the astronomer and priest the Abbé Alexis-Marie Rochon.²⁸ In what seems a reasonably precise narrative, Benyowsky here describes his Formosan period as follows:

²⁶ Nathaniel Barlow, “Extraordinary Relation of a Voyage to Macao,” *Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 13 (1772), pp. 272-274.

²⁷ The Le Bon letter is reproduced by Pasfield Oliver in the extended preface to his edition of the *Memoirs* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), pp. 17-18.

²⁸ The original of this was communicated directly to the governor of Mauritius de Roche and his assistant M. Pierre Poivre. Rochon was at Port Louis when Benyowsky arrived there. Much of the original is reproduced in S. Pasfield Oliver, ed., *Memoirs* (1893), pp. 34-39. For further background see Medeleine Ly-Tio-Fane, *Mauritius and the Spice Trade. The Odyssey of Pierre Poivre 1719-1786* (Port Louis: MAPF, 1958); Yves Laissus, “Note sur les manuscrits de Pierre Poivre 1719-1786 a la bibliotheque centrale du Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle,” unpublished Manuscript (Port Louis: Royal Society of Mauritius, 1973). It must be noted that Banks had accompanied Cook in his expedition around the world on the *Endeavour* during 1768-1771 and knew much of far northern waters, having visited Iceland in 1772. He was thus in a good position to remain both enlightened and skeptical in all things pertaining to Benyowsky.

Having entered a port in latitude 23:15 and longitude 223, I found myself attacked by the inhabitants, who killed three of my men. After avenging their death, the winds, always contrary, obliged me to make for the Continent of China, coasting along some small islands known under the name of Piscatoria: and want of water compelled me to enter by open force into Tanasoa, and to attack the Chinese, who endeavoured to prevent me from procuring a supply. I then sailed to Macao, a city belonging to her most faithful majesty, where I arrived on the 22nd of September 1771.²⁹

In this account, then, there is no description of extended warfare of the sort produced later in the *Memoirs*, nor anything of large-scale activity of any kind. Finally, the pre-publication accounts of Benyowsky's supposed adventures include that of the astronomer Captain James King (1750-1784) in his work on Cook's last voyage, published in 1784. Here, King provided a first hand account of meeting one E.G. Ismyloff (almost certainly Ismailoff) in the Aleutian islands, who claimed to have travelled on Benyowsky's expedition from the 12th of May 1771 to the Kuriles, to Japan, to Canton, and then to France.³⁰ King also wrote of Benyowsky's journey without mention of Formosa, talked with three of Benyowsky's crew who seem also to have failed to give him any account of Formosa, and gave a description of the Count's adventures up until 1774 when he was now "commander of a new settlement at Madagascar".³¹

Against this at best confused background, it is very clear from the outset that Hyacinth de Magellan (1723-1790), scientific investigator, copious correspondent of numerous European intellectuals, and descendent of the great navigator who had discovered the Magellan Straits in 1520, was essential to the original "Enlightenment" status of Benyowsky and his claims. Magellan was an Augustinian monk from Talavera, who then became involved in a

²⁹ By this his entry point might be identified as Black Rock Bay, the islands are the Pescadores, whilst if Tanasoa is Tamsui, the Chinese city in Formosa, then this does not fit at all well with the *Memoirs* account as above.

³⁰ If this is the Ismailoff referred to by Benyowsky in his *Memoirs* as active in Formosa (also spelt Ismailoff eg. p.252 *Memoirs*, Oliver edition of 1897), it is again strange that he should not mention these spectacular episodes to King or others at that time. Indeed, this account accords much better with Benyowsky's own, original versions of 1771 and 1772.

³¹ James King and James Cook, *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean for making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere*, 3 vols. (London: G.J. Robinson, 1784); see also James King, *Troisième voyage de Cook, ou Voyage à l'océan Pacifique, ordonné par le roi d'Angleterre* (Paris: Hôtel de Thou, 1785); King is a very reliable witness, providing a detailed account, he was FRS and author of *Astronomical Observations* (London: William Richardson, 1782).

series of scientific investigations, arriving in England in 1764. By 1774 he was a Fellow of the Royal Society in London, publishing work on optical equipment (1775), and was much engaged in the construction and public description of scientific instruments. So, he was well placed to advertise Benyowsky's literary wares.³² Correspondence between Magellan and Joseph Banks (1743-1820) between 1779 and 1783 shows Magellan as more than a mere acolyte and enthusiast, but rather as a member of a very extensive Enlightenment network that linked scientific experiment, navigation and exploration and global adventuring to a major Euro-project of placing European knowledge at the centre of world intellectual life and as a material and ideological beneficiary of an increasingly distant and exotic natural history.³³ Casual references in such correspondence, which stretched from Berlin to St. Petersburg, fitted nicely into Benyowsky's boasted university training in mathematics, philosophy and navigation.³⁴ Furthermore, during the 1780s Magellan was especially associated with a group of British *savants* who were members of the small but influential Birmingham Lunar Society, which amongst many such networks extended the notions of the late Enlightenment from metropolis to province, from theory to practice.³⁵ Associating and corresponding with such major British Enlightenment figures as botanist, medical therapist, and natural historian William Withering, (1741-1799), industrialist and engineer Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), and the geologist, instrument maker and engineer John Whitehurst (1713-1788), on such

³² The link between the two men was probably through navigation and instrumentation, though it must be emphasized that Benyowsky demonstrates very little mathematical or nautical knowledge anywhere in the memoirs or elsewhere, despite his claims of training and experience. See M. de Magellan, *Description des Octants et Sextants Anglais* (London: B. White, 1779); Joao Jacinto de Magalhaes, *Description et usages des instruments d'astronomie et de physique fait a Londres par ordres de la cour de Portugal en 1778 et 1779: J.H. de Magellan* (London: B. White, 1779).

³³ For the relations of such elements at this time see especially essays by Adrian Johns, Rob Iliffe, Larry Stewart and Ian Inkster in Roy Porter, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Science*, vol. 6, *The Cambridge History of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). It is surely safe to hypothesise that the Banks-Magellan friendship may well have influenced Banks in remaining merely distant and non-committal in terms of Benyowsky's claims when it came to use of his critical ms material in the Nicholson edited first edition of the *Memoirs*.

³⁴ Magellan to Joseph Banks, 1779-1783 in "Letters to Sir Joseph Banks 1774-1783," Additional Manuscripts 33,977, British Library, ff. 90, 112, 239.

³⁵ For the historical background see Ian Inkster and Jack Morrell, eds., *Metropolis and Province: Science in British Culture, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2007); Robert E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham: A Social History of Provincial Science and Industry in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

matters as universal measures, mathematics, atmospheric chemistry, mineralogy, it is clear that at the time of the handling of the Benyowsky manuscripts, Magellan was fully committed to generating financial benefit from locating these stories of oriental adventure within a broader enlightenment frame, just as he was hoping to generally benefit from the increasing twist of that frame towards matters commercial and technological.³⁶ In a sense, Magellan was constructing Benyowsky on a par with new works in mineralogy or chemistry.³⁷

Even more important for Benyowsky's initial British renown was the link with William Nicholson and the cosmopolitan, intellectually republican environs of London around 1789-1790. About 1783 or 1784 Magellan showed Nicholson a printed proposal to publish Benyowsky's memoirs in 3 volumes by subscription, a plan at that point given up. At that time the Count was back in Madagascar – having been funded by Magellan in hope of colonial returns. Again, this failed to reap any commercial benefits, so Magellan returned to publishing the memoirs, presumably in an attempt to recoup at least a proportion of his expenses. In order to do this he sold the rights over the French manuscript to Nicholson. When in 1788 Magellan became gravely ill, Nicholson decided to go ahead with publishing of the text despite the loss of the intended research by Magellan on the activities of Benyowsky that would have taken the story up to the point of Benyowsky's death.

William Nicholson (1753-1815) was a leading London figure of the late Enlightenment, the author of many works on chemistry, editor of the work of several *savants*, publisher and intellectual entrepreneur.³⁸ He himself had sailed under the East India Company in the years 1769-1776, but then settled in London as a very public scientist: he invented an ingenious aerometer for

³⁶ Letters Magellan to Withering 2 December 1783, 11 August 1785 (Manuscript Papers of William Withering, Royal Society of Medicine, London).

³⁷ Axel Frederic Cronstedt, *An Essay towards a System of Mineralogy*, enlarged and improved by John Hyacinth de Magellan (London: Charles Dilly, 1788).

³⁸ By "late enlightenment" we refer here mostly to France, England and Scotland, and the move from philosophical and literary renewal and critique towards new scientific certainties and a republican political environment amongst intellectuals and *savants*. For brilliant background see Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave, 2001), especially chapters 3, 7 and 9 and for an excellent summary see his comments in *The Guardian* newspaper (London) published on guardian.co.uk at 15.57 BST on Tuesday 12 June 2001; for an extensive treatment of London's scientific enlightenment in these years see Ian Inkster, "Science and Society in the Metropolis: A Preliminary Examination of the Social and Institutional Context of the Askesian Society of London," *Annals of Science* 34 (1977), pp.1-32.

laboratory usage, was a patentee and patent agent, became engineer to the Portsmouth and Gosport Water Supply Company, brought out his *Dictionary* in 1808, and most famously edited *Nicholson's Journal of Natural Philosophy* during 1797-1815, and translated many works in chemistry and natural philosophy.³⁹ As with Magellan, he was closely associated with the Lunar Society, becoming European agent for the great industrialist Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) from 1776, using his journal to publish the new researches of Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744-1817), Whitehurst, and Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), thereby linking provinces, metropolis and the continental Enlightenment.⁴⁰ Most significantly for the credence given to Benyowsky's leadership and navigational claims, Nicholson was publishing on practical navigation and instrumentation from the early 1780s, and in 1792 he produced his *Treatise on Practical Navigation*.⁴¹ In the 1780s he had been active in the Chapter Coffee House Philosophical Society, and around the great metropolis was one of those most active of men, best likely to further Benyowsky's posthumous reputation.

The Benyowsky project was also favoured by its timeliness, arising at the peak of an interest in French intellectualism and ideology, at the height of Nicholson's reputation as an English *savant*. Just a few years later many of that generation of Enlightenment *savants* were under attack by a post-revolutionary generation that required more expertise and less risk in their ideologues.⁴² Thus the stern critique by the Aikin brothers of the later editions of Nicholson's *Dictionary of Practical and Theoretical Chemistry*, as old-fashioned and too slight and lacking in any emphasis on "actual practice".⁴³ But at the time of the first editions of Benyowsky, William Nicholson neatly combined all attributes

³⁹ Nicholson was experienced at translation from the French, thus his well-known editions of J. A. C. Chaptal's *Élémen de Chimie* (London: G. G. J. Robinson, 1791) or G. B. Venturi's *Experimental Enquiries* (London: G. G. J. Robinson, 1799).

⁴⁰ S. Lilley, "Nicholson's Journal 1791-1813," *Annals of Science* 6 (1948), pp. 71-89; Robert E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham*, pp. 131, 259-261, 302.

⁴¹ Nicholson's *The Navigator's Assistant* (1784) and *A Treatise on Practical Navigation* (1792) focused on relations between theory and praxis, gave rules for plain, mid-latitude and Mercator's sailing, gave instructions for keeping a proper journal of voyages and seas, and advocated close scrutiny of standard sources such as John Robertson's (1712-1776) *Elements of Navigation* (1754).

⁴² Arnold Thackray, "Nicholson, William," *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* 10 (1974), pp. 107-109; T.H. Levere and G. L'E. Turner, *Discussing Chemistry and Steam: The Minutes of a Coffee House Philosophical Society 1780-1787* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴³ *Annual Review* 7 (1809), pp. 683-686, 805-806.

of the late-Enlightenment, advocating a science that addressed all intellectual adventurers “whose prospects may direct them to the civil or military service of their country, or to the manufactures, trade or other important departments of active employ ... A lecture upon the Principles of Natural Philosophy is delivered every Tuesday, and on Chemistry every Thursday, with experiments by an extensive collection of instruments and both sciences are illustrated by frequent exhibitions and explanations of the tools, processes and operations of the useful arts and common operations of society”.⁴⁴ Such a nice combination of attributes – navigational expertise, military adventuring, commerce, useful arts – would serve Benyowsky’s memoirs well when they were published under Nicholson’s careful editorship, first in 1789, the year of the French Revolution, of all things French. These were, clearly, the definitive European Enlightenment versions of Benyowsky’s claims, and they deserve some fuller consideration.⁴⁵

Nicholson immediately concludes from his work on the French manuscripts that “they contain nothing which is at all improbable or contradictory” and that “we must depend on his authority”.⁴⁶ He emphasises that there is much collateral proof, especially of material upon (surprisingly) Japan and Formosa. Nicholson certainly takes on a liberal, Enlightenment stance when he argues that, although some aspects of the Benyowsky account are not directly provable, “the veracity of the count may be relied on” and any “disagreements of collateral evidence are much more likely to arise from the imperfections of that evidence, than from his want of fidelity”.⁴⁷ Nicholson then tells the story of how the Magellan ownership of the French material fell to himself around 1788 when Magellan became

⁴⁴ *The Observer* 1 (July 1804), p. 1 advertisement.

⁴⁵ The Nicholson translation and editions (that is the 1789 Robinson, London and the 1790, P. Wogan, Dublin) were used extensively throughout Europe in the 1790s, but see especially the editions edited by Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-1798) of Berlin, Christian F. Voss und Sohn, 1790, and 1793; M.A. Benyowsky, *Begebenheten und Reisen Grafen Moritz August von Benjowsky* [with extra material from von C.D. Ebeling und Dr J.P. Ebeling] (Hamburg: B.G. Hoffman, 1791); Nicholson kept corrections or selection to a complete minimum and seems to have only really added chapter distinctions and headings. We should also note that even the original French edition of 1791 was published by the same London firm and included a full French version of the Nicholson preface. This original translation of 1789 has been used as the basis for most if not all subsequent published versions, including those of 1893 (London: Fisher Unwin) and 1904 (London: Kegan Paul) the best of the more recent standard English accounts being edited by Captain Pasfield Oliver (London: Fisher Unwin, 1893).

⁴⁶ Benyowsky, the 2 vols. of memoirs and travels, edited Dublin, P. Wogan, from the long preface by William Nicholson penned in London during December 1789, quote p.xiii.

⁴⁷ Nicholson in Benyowsky, *Memoirs* (1789), pp. xvi-xvii, xxi.

mentally incapacitated—in fact Nicholson then proceeded with publication very quickly. A strategic intent of Nicholson was to emphasise the adventurous seafaring aspect, so some account of Magellan’s researches into the later life of Benyowsky are included here, and repeated in most of the later editions that depend on the original work of Nicholson during 1788-1789. From the Madagascar and American adventuring of 1784-1786, Nicholson concluded that the Count possessed “an intimate and almost intuitive knowledge of the human mind ... he was formed to persuade, to command, and to coerce”.⁴⁸

Nicholson seems at his most accepting when evaluating the veracity of Benyowsky in Japan and Formosa, arguing as follows:

That he should stand across the Pacific Ocean and direct his course for China, are obviously the result of the dictates of common sense; that extreme distress should follow the want of proper subordination among a set of exiles, or men of desperate fortune and adventure, is not at all wonderful; and that such men, without any settled destination, and acting throughout from the impulse of either necessity or their own inclinations, should range from one island to another, where their wants could be best supplied, is what the slightest ideas of cause and effect would have foretold. The discoveries and adventures of the Count on this passage and elsewhere must speak for themselves⁴⁹

It should not, then, be a surprise that the early reviews of Benyowsky were supportive. Thus the highly influential *Monthly Review* treatment of the 1790 Nicholson edition, made much of the gender/sexual aspects relating to Benyowsky’s Russian mistress Aphanasia Nilow, and emphasised his frequent piracy on the coastal waters of Asia. The reviewer basically followed the Benyowsky story, being critical only partially and when linked to Benyowsky’s violent behaviour and attitudes, but even these were acknowledged as a function of the “motley complexion” and fractious nature of his crew. In such

⁴⁸ Nicholson, ed., *Memoirs* (1789), pp. xxiii-xxviii. He and family voyaged to Maryland in April 1784, bound ultimately for the Madagascar trade! This was because Benyowsky could not get directly there and also thought that, with the revolution, American merchants were more likely to take on a new trade. From Baltimore he sailed in October 1784, bound for the east coast of Madagascar, St Augustin, to “form a settlement or emporium”—he already had there some “influence with the natives”. He seems to have been a very dubious navigator. From Brazil he again headed out, and landed in Madagascar on 7 July 1785. He emerged from a confused armed encounter leading a force of armed natives against the French, and attacked the French factory at Foul Point and was killed on 23 May 1786.

⁴⁹ Nicholson, ed., *Memoirs* (1789), vol. 1, pp. xxi-xxii.

circumstances “we must not be too strict in scrutinizing their behaviour in the remote Eastern seas”.⁵⁰

6. Historiography II: The Elements of Acceptance

As we have noted, Benyowsky’s accounts, however fantastic, remained as historical resources throughout the 20th century and into the present time. A complicating issue is that on certain fronts they had some veracity, could be cross-checked with other accounts, and so were held in some regard by contemporaries, later reference sources, as well as professional, critical historians. For instance, distinguished and informed contemporaries seem to have relied on his accounts of his periods in Madagascar. Thus the French Minister Mons de Boynes, who invited Benyowsky to take charge of a limited adventure to Madagascar with the title of Governor-General and approved of his subsequent plans, claimed that the Count in the “course of his travels by sea, has learned the manner of treating of savage people; and to a great share of firmness, he has united that mildness of character which suits a design of this nature”. We may be fairly sure that the French minister had no idea of what Benyowsky had reputedly been up to in Formosa.⁵¹ When Samuel Copland wrote his history of Madagascar in 1822 he gave credence to the Benyowsky account of the 1770s and 1780s in a very substantial treatment.⁵² Again, the Reverend William Ellis, Foreign Secretary to the London Missionary Society, a long term resident of Madagascar and expert on its history, happily wrote of Benyowsky’s “firm and enterprising character”, his “accustomed decision and firmness”, and his “great prudence and decision of character, aided by an extensive knowledge of mankind”, as well as his attempt to “combine the opposite elements of military rule with philanthropic conciliation”, and even managed to summon up such Christian forgiveness as to explain away Benyowsky’s duplicity in pretending

⁵⁰ John Noorthouck, “Memoirs and Travels of M. A. de Beniovsky,” *Monthly Review or Literary Journal* 3 (September-December, 1790), pp. 169-175. Aphanasia was the daughter of the governor of Kamchatka, had been more or less promised to him by the governor—even though Benyowsky was already married; she escaped with other women dressed as men, after her father had in fact been deliberately killed during Benyowsky’s escape.

⁵¹ William Ellis, *History of Madagascar* (London: Fisher, 1838), quote p. 68.

⁵² Samuel Copland, *A History of the Island of Madagascar* (London: Burton and Smith, 1822), pp. 176-247.

to be himself the son of a local chief as well as his crazed cruelty during 1775 in ordering “firing without scruple upon all offenders” who opposed his, unwarranted, colonial ambitions.⁵³ Historians who have reported Benyowsky literally have often been simply following the credulities of his contemporaries, however often *en passant*. Thus the great historian of Japan, George Sansom, reported on Benyowsky’s brief visits to Japan and Madagascar and repeated, with scepticism, Benyowsky’s claims that “the Russian government had designs upon Japan”.⁵⁴

But from the later 19th century, Benyowsky was perhaps more a creature of Japanese colonial ideology, and fell subject to the need of the agents of Japanese expansionism to colour the Chinese people with the blackest of tars. The inexorable expansion of industrialising and – especially from the 1880s and 1890s – militarising Japan in the various coastline areas of Chinese culture coincided with a political project that was designed to denigrate and dismiss that culture, to spread myths and legends of Chinese arrogance, corruption, cruelty, backwardness and inefficiency. From an early point, a prime task of Japanese publicists and media was to reduce China to a place of corruption and ineptitude, just as Chinese commentators themselves were advocating such ideas as “A Scheme to Promote the Welfare of Asia” in early 1884 that assumed benign partnership between China and Japan.⁵⁵ Just months afterwards, the Japanese political elite was considering “The Fate of the Orient” and were clearly, openly distrustful of any comments from the West that they could not select or control, and proclaimed that the world must look to Japanese leadership of Asia, for “it is out of the question for Japan to desert the fellowship of Eastern nations in order to enter the coterie of European powers”, especially given western aggression over such vital issues as extraterritoriality and unequal trade treaties within Japan itself.⁵⁶ Any true coalition between China and Japan within the growing Chinese Empire could not now be on equal terms, for, as the *Hochi*

⁵³ William Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, pp. 68, 71, 73-74; it should be noted that his original order from De Boyes had been to establish a trading post, not a French colony. It might be also noted that when the Benyowsky manuscript account of Madagascar [above Madagascar BL] was sold in 1852 it was advertised widely as “indispensable” to any account of French colonialism [frontispiece Madagascar BL].

⁵⁴ George B. Sansom, *The Western World and Japan: A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures* (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 213.

⁵⁵ *Hu-Pao* (Shanghai, China), 20 February 1884.

⁵⁶ “The Fate of the Orient,” *Choya Shimbun* 3, May 1884.

Shimbun put it, how could equality be assumed between two such different peoples, where “inactivity and procrastination are the fundamental principles of Chinese administration”.⁵⁷ This is an often neglected aspect of the history of “Orientalism”—east of India, much of the 20th century “European” conception of the “Orient” was in fact filtered through the ideological machinations of Japanese imperialism in the years 1895-1945.

Benyowsky’s claims were captured by Japanese interests even prior to 1895.⁵⁸ In 1874 under a pretext of settling a conflict arising from the massacre in December of 1871 of some Ryukyu islands fishermen by a group of indigenous Taiwanese, an expedition was sent against the island led by Saigo Tsugumichi (1843-1902), of Satsuma, long a staunch loyalist of the Meiji government.⁵⁹ By the date of this Taiwanese venture, the Japanese had enlisted a number of Western observers as spies and advisers concerning the prospects of a successful invasion of the island, the likelihood of Chinese resistance, and the possibilities for commercial exploitation. In particular, General Charles Le Gendre, the US Consul at Amoy who had travelled fairly extensively in western Taiwan during 1872, was by 1874 in correspondence as an adviser to Okuma Shigenobu, (born 1838, a Councilor of State under the Meiji government), and writing to him concerning Japanese rights over indigenous Taiwan.⁶⁰ Although he had no direct knowledge of eastern Taiwan, Le Gendre drew upon a variety of second-hand sources in order to analyse Taiwan as an island of two distinct cultural halves, that of the Han Chinese in the west and that of the indigenous peoples in the

⁵⁷ *Hochi Shimbun*, 26 July 1884.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that foreigners in Taiwan were still taking Benyowsky quite seriously in their accounts though none could swallow all of his claims—see “Memoirs of Count Benyowsky,” *Chinese Repository* 3 (March 1835), p. 496-504; Jos Bechtinger, *Het eiland in de Chineesche zee* (Batavia: Bruning et Wyt, 1871); and see for instance Joseph B. Steere (1842-1940), in his *Formosa and its Inhabitants* (1876, republished and edited by Paul Jen-kuei Li, Taipei: Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, 2002), who lists cattle and horses, sheep, gold and silver as all “marvelous”, and so in need of proper examination! (p. 184). see also Joseph B. Steere, “Formosa,” *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 6 (1876), pp. 302-334.

⁵⁹ The Ryukyu islands had long paid tribute to both Japan and China; ironically in 1609 the daimyo of Kagoshima had sent an expedition against Okinawa on the grounds of the ill-treatment of some Satsuma fisherman wrecked on that coast.

⁶⁰ A manuscript now published in Robert Eskildsen, ed., *Foreign Adventurers and the Aborigines of Southern Taiwan, 1867-1874: Western Sources Related to Japan’s 1874 Expedition to Taiwan* (Taipei: Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, 2005).

east.⁶¹ In his unpublished manuscript of 1874, now in the Library of Congress, Washington, Le Gendre enlisted Benyowsky's account as a serious tactic that might well be followed by the Japanese on the east coast to take over Taiwan, adapting it only in order to land at several points rather than just one. As Le Gendre puts it, "Benyowsky, with only a small vessel and a few adventurers, established a settlement which would have become considerable and prosperous had his party been composed of men possessing such guarantees of morality that he could have trusted his fortunes to their hands. With her resources, Japan could easily accomplish that which one man came so nearly doing with such limited means at his disposal. She could establish military stations at the mouths of the streams, at which vessels can anchor, and send there persons condemned to confinement for political offences, to open up relations of trade and amity with the natives, who being nearly of the same race as the Japanese, would rapidly become civilized under the tutelage of these teachers, many of whom are men of great talent.... As for the Chinese portion of the island, it ought to be strictly respected. All that Japan could require would be that, in carrying out these plans for the pacification of Aboriginal Formosa, which could thus become an integral portion of the Empire, she would receive a full and cordial support from the Chinese government; and doubtless the latter would observe its treaty stipulations and prevent the aborigines, who would be at war with Japan, from taking refuge on the Chinese side of the island".⁶² The 1771 account had allowed a relative stranger to suggest aggressive colonizing tactics to senior Japanese statesmen at a time of extreme danger, tactics that followed directly from Benyowsky's earlier assertions regarding the nature of Taiwan's indigenous population and its relationship with Chinese authority.

Benyowsky was also enlisted in Japan's colonial project in one of the best known of Japanese early accounts of their Taiwanese colony. Although

⁶¹ It should be noted that Le Gendre as Consul had been important in securing a compact between American and Taiwanese indigenous interests, when American marines had invaded Taiwan in reaction to an 1867 attack by aboriginal Taiwanese on the American ship *Rover*. Over this issue the Chinese authorities had taken no action after showing little interest, this indisputably colouring Le Gendre's whole attitude to the island. By 1874 Le Gendre had resigned his Amoy consulship and joined other Americans as an advisor to the Japanese Expeditionary Forces under Saigo. Upon being sent to Amoy as chief negotiator between Japan and China, Le Gendre was arrested by the American Consul on a charge of high treason, sent to Shanghai, but later released.

⁶² Robert Eskildsen, ed., *Foreign Adventurers and the Aborigines of Southern Taiwan, 1867-1874*, quote p. 65.

Yosaburo Takekoshi's investigative trip to Formosa at the turn of the century was in fact very brief, the claim was immediately made that it accurately depicted Formosa under Japanese colonialism in contrast to the earlier, evil impacts of a neglectful Han rule. Takekoshi was a member of the Japanese Diet, and the status of his book as an official account was cemented in the preface of August 1905 written by the Chief of the Civil Administration in Formosa, Baron Shimpei Goto, in which he emphasised how Takekoshi "had full opportunities of observing the manners and customs of the people ... his statesmanlike ability has enabled him clearly to comprehend all sides of each question ... it would be a hard task to improve on his account".⁶³ The book in its English-language translation, is addressed to all those in the West who "still doubt our colonizing ability". With this persuasion at centre-point, it was imperative to strike the contrast between the benefits of Japanese rule and the long period of Chinese authority over the island.⁶⁴ Thus the historical sections emphasised the struggles between Chinese and aboriginals, arising principally because the "government was even more careless and irresponsible than on the mainland". Unable to prevent Chinese emigrants, the local Chinese authorities were powerless in the face of "these newcomers who plundered the native tribes, stealing their lands, wasting their farms, and cheating them out of their crops. They even went so far as to set fire to their houses and shoot them on sight, until at last the latter were forced to fly for refuge further and further into the mountains, and were terrified at the sight of a foreigner". For hundreds of years "hardly a day passed" without "race fights" between Chinese and aboriginals. At such a narrative point the Benyowsky story becomes of great utility, illustrating the "cruelty and wickedness" of the Chinese and how "deep seated this enmity was". In the Takekoshi version, Benyowsky, having "killed 1,056 of the natives who opposed his landing, he advanced into the interior of the island, where he met a Spaniard, named Don Hieronimo, who introduced him to Huapo, an independent Formosan chief ... The chief's idea was to use Benyowsky to drive out the Chinese, and thus revenge himself for all the cruel wrongs he had suffered at their hands. Count

⁶³ Takekoshi graduated from Keio and was appointed parliamentary undersecretary in the Department of Education of the Diet cabinet in 1898. He was member of the House of Representatives for 14 years then of the House of Peers. Most notably in terms of our argument, he was also Chief Historian of the Imperial House.

⁶⁴ Yosaburō Takekoshi, *Japanese Rule in Formosa*, quotes pp. 5-6. The book was written from Tokyo in early 1905.

Benyowsky's plan for colonizing the island, attracted attention all over Europe for a time, but was not well received in influential circles, with the result that, when a few years later he was killed in Madagascar, while fighting against the French, his schemes were soon forgotten".⁶⁵ In similar accounts stemming from Japan, Benyowsky's rebellion was considered literally authentic and one of a series, precursor to a "new revolt which lasted 30 years (1794-1833) and left the whole island a heap of ruins".⁶⁶ Takekoshi himself listed 22 "most important insurrections" in the 220 year period. Thereby, the personal aggrandisement of Benyowsky is elided into much more general claims concerning the character of Chinese personality and rule. By so leveraging the Benyowsky account into a general story, the Japanese engineered the notion of themselves as Asian liberators, as colonialists on at least an equal moral footing with anything that the West could then boast. Indeed, ironically enough, they represented a new enlightenment.

So, it seems possible to identify fairly readily the elements that determined the acceptance of Benyowsky's accounts, both at their inception in London around the late 1780s and their reassertion by the Japanese after 1895. A serious question of historiography remains: How had the Benyowsky story survived the years between the European republicanism of the 1790s and its colonial resuscitation by the Japanese in the late 19th century?

A first point must centre on the sheer amount of attention given the *Memoirs* across Europe. Russian and eastern European accounts often included additional material and tended to elide the Benyowsky texts with general, authentic analyses of exploration and navigation.⁶⁷ At the same time, several respectable writers often moved from such accounts to quite adulatory biographical statements.⁶⁸ Of great importance was the exposure afforded the Benyowsky texts in the pan-European literary world of the 19th century. The greatest early example of this was the play by the famous Weimar dramatist Augustus von

⁶⁵ Yosaburō Takekoshi, *Japanese Rule in Formosa*, quotes pp. 69, 71. It should be noted here that Takekoshi was drawing from the Nicholson/ Oliver version of the Benyowsky translated memoirs as published in London in 1893, and clearly opted for Nicholson's naivety rather than Oliver's healthy skepticism!

⁶⁶ Edmond Papinot, *Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan* (Yokohama: Kelly and Walsh, 1910), pp. 626-627, 767-768.

⁶⁷ See the Russian version edited by Ivan Ryumin (Katerinburg, 1822), which contained critical materials.

⁶⁸ See Constant von Wurzbach on Benyowsky in *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich* (Vienna: K. K. Hof, 1876).

Kotzebue (1761-1819). His comic dramatisation of Benyowsky's Siberian period was published as *Graf von Benjowsky* in 1791 to wide acclaim and many translations. Author of over 200 plays and commanding the entire European stage at that time, and at one time dramatist to the court theatre in Vienna, Kotzebue himself commented that the Benyowsky play was "received in a very flattering manner by the public, and, as was consequently to be expected, with scarcely less contumely by the critics".⁶⁹ Publicity was further raised when Kotzebue was arrested in 1800 when crossing into Russia on grounds that were dubious but which appeared to be related to the publication of the play. He was himself then sent to Kamchatka, and subsequently concluded that the cause of his retention there was related to possible offence caused to the Emperor Paul by his ridiculing of Russian authority in the far north.⁷⁰ He was released through another whim of that Emperor some months later. This did no harm at all to the performance of the Siberian play, which went through many popular editions in most European languages.

Towards the end of this period came a most significant edition, that of a giant of Hungarian literature, Maurus Jókai, (1825-1904). Jókai was the most acclaimed Hungarian literary figure of the time, whose first play *Zsidó fu* (the Jew Boy) was produced to much acclaim in the 1840s. He was editor of the leading journal *Életképek* and from the revolution of 1848 emerged as an aggressive proponent of the national cause, and from that time led the life of a political suspect. An enthusiast for the Magyar language, composing a great number of romances, tales, essays and critiques, he re-emerged on the official political platform with the re-establishment of the Hungarian constitution in 1867 as a parliamentary representative and, from 1863, as editor of the government organ *Hon* during which time his literary output escalated into hundreds of volumes. As a renowned exponent of the historical novel, Jókai has been seen primarily as an arch-romantic with a strong and emotional "Oriental"

⁶⁹ August von Kotzebue, *Count Benyowsky, or the Conspiracy of Kamtschatka, A tragic-comedy in Five Acts*, trans. Rev. Wilhelm Render, German Translation (Cork: printed by J. Connor and W. H. Creagh, 1799); the 1st edition of this was printed by the author, *ibid.* (Cambridge, 1798), another in London by W. J and J. Richardson in 1798. See also Benjamin Thompson, *The German Theatre*, vol. 2 (London: Vernon and Hood, 1801).

⁷⁰ Augustus von Kotzebue, *The Most Remarkable Year in the Life of Augustus von Kotzebue*, trans. Rev. Benjamin Beresford, German Translation, vol. 1 (London: R. Phillips, 1802), pp. 164-165.

imagination.⁷¹ But he was also a satirist and humorist of some subtlety, so it becomes problematic to signify the importance of his contribution to the Benyowsky historiography. Jokai's text – in five volumes – did not merely reproduce the standard memoir but appears to have involved some substantial research into Benyowsky's family and youthful years.

7. Windows of Deception: Orientalism as Fantasy

Precisely as Benyowsky was attempting to establish himself at Madagascar, and only months before his violent death, appeared the *Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, published in London for the very modest sum of one-shilling. Republished hastily and copiously throughout enlightenment Europe, this was shown to be the fictitious work of Rudolph Erich Raspe (1737-1794).⁷² Given its timing and its fantastic character, and that Raspe is known to have derived his stories from Hieronymus Karl Friedrich, Freiherr von Münchhausen (1720-1797), a German who had been long in the service of the Russian army, we can draw parallels within what might be over-generously termed a literary genre! This similar case having given rise to an entire psychological disorder – “Munchausen's syndrome”⁷³ – might we not merely dismiss Benyowsky's story as a good example of fantastic aggrandisement associated with this late enlightenment period, which mixed outrageous claims with the very real material and intellectual developments in Europe at that time, and spawned at the same time such fictitious accounts as those of James Bruce (1730-1794) in his 1790 *Travels to Discover the Nile*?

⁷¹ H. W. Temperley, “Maurus Jokai and the Historical Novel,” *Contemporary Review* 86 (July/ December 1904), pp. 107-114.

⁷² Rodolph Eric Raspe, *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvelous Travels and Campaigns in Russia* (Oxford: Smith, 1786). The original 49-page pamphlet expanded as it was randomly embellished by publishers and booksellers in subsequent years. Five English editions rapidly followed, and a free German translation was made by the poet Gottfried A. Burger and printed in Gottingen in 1786. The most commonly used text is the 7th English edition of 1793, continuously pirated in later editions. Note then the similarities with the Benyowsky publications in terms of background, association with Enlightenment intellectualism, and the possibilities of copying within this genre.

⁷³ First named in a paper by Richard Asher in 1951, this ailment is characterized by simulated illness, pathological lying, and constant movement from place to place: Richard Asher, “Munchausen's Syndrome,” *Lancet* 6650:1 (February 1951), pp. 339-341.

Do we dismiss Benyowsky — then — as *only* an opportunist? We argue here that this would be careless, not only because such fictitious adventuring was clearly part and parcel of a more general expansionist mentality of superiority and inevitability conjured up within Europe at this time, but because in the very specific case of Formosa, it had an important precedent that belonged more to the scientific world of Isaac Newton than the years of the later, republican enlightenment. In 1704, George Psalmanazar (1679-1763) published his *Description of Formosa* as a romantic but real account of his travels and experiences on the island, in which he utilised just that mixture of known fact and fantasy that we associate with Benyowsky.⁷⁴ Described by a modern writer as a “well-written melange”, replete with accounts of Formosan polygamy, cannibalism, idolatry and human sacrifices, with a god who demanded the hearts of 18,000 boys each year, much of the account was a partially-disguised attack on both pagan doctrine and Jesuit activity in the east and in Europe, and perhaps because of such controversial elements became an instant bestseller.⁷⁵ Although Psalmanazar identified himself variously as a Formosan or a Japanese, he was in all probability of Flemish or French background.⁷⁶ In a work of 1707, Psalmanazar posed as a Formosan, and in dialogic format argued that the Japanese were far more rational than supposed in Europe, that they were more “like a man of a free born understanding” This supposed focus in fact disguises an attack on the new rational religion of the early Enlightenment, where the “Formosan” actually wins the argument.⁷⁷

Urged on by booksellers he utilised existing accounts of Formosa by the Reverend George Candidius to construct his fictions.⁷⁸ Although the Royal

⁷⁴ For a psychological profile of Psalmanazar see Phyllis Greenacre, “The Impostor,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 27 (1950), pp. 370-379. For a good general account, F. J. Foley, *The Great Formosan Imposter* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute; St. Louis, Mo.: St. Louis University, 1968).

⁷⁵ F. J. Foley, *The Great Formosan Imposter*, p. 37.

⁷⁶ John Shufelt, “The trickster as an instrument of enlightenment: George Psalmanazar and the writings of Jonathon Swift,” *History of European Ideas* 31: 2 (2005), pp. 147-171.

⁷⁷ George Psalmanazar, *A Dialogue between a Japanese and a Formosan, about some Points of the Religion of the Time* (London: Bernard Lintott/ Nando’s Coffee House, 1707), quote p. 9.

⁷⁸ George Candidius, “Short account of the Island of Formosa,” printed in James Awtnsham and John Churchill, eds., *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 1 (London: Churchill, 1704), pp. 526-533; see also *Churchill’s Collection*, vol. 1 (London: Churchill, 1744), pp. 404-411. For an excellent recent account that places Candidius in a wider Formosan context see Hsin-hui Chiu, *The Colonial ‘Civilizing Process’ in Dutch Formosa 1624-1662* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), and in particular the commercial setting of “cangan-christians”, pp. 37-39, 66, 209.

Society of London, perhaps the foremost intellectual forum for Europe at that time, demanded his examination by the Jesuit mathematician and Chinese missionary, Jean de Fontenay (1643-1710), the fiction was truly foiled by the famous astronomer Edmund Halley (1656-1742) with basic astronomical questions concerning the duration of daylight in Formosa.⁷⁹ From 1705 the Royal Society publicly repudiated the Psalmanazar account. But – the account being periodically embellished and republished – credulity reigned amidst rationalism in 18th century Europe, and for many the Formosan fictions remained extant as Formosan truths throughout the European Enlightenment. Indeed, the influential *Monthly Review* – later to give credit to the *Memoirs* of Benyowsky – argued that Royal Society opposition aided the popularity of the Psalmanazar claim.⁸⁰ We might argue, then, that the Benyowsky memoirs were a timely reinforcement of an evolving “orientalism” associated with expanding European culture and power. In this milieu scientific truth was acknowledged as master, but in practice the most extravagant accounts could survive if they spoke to the European mind in other ways. In an interesting recent analysis of the Psalmanazar case as exemplary of fiction versus truth, Tzvetan Todorov argues that Halley and Fontenay demonstrated clear truth, just as Psalmanazar “spoke falsely”.⁸¹ This is so but can not explain the continued popularity of such claims, even when they were generally acknowledged to be deliberate falsehoods rather than fictions.

Perhaps Benyowsky may be best located within the conjuncture of the late Enlightenment and the renewed transmogrification of the “orientalist” discourse. In such a perspective, Benyowsky is exemplary of a complex, European search for identity, strengthened in the travellers’ accounts of “the other”, and especially in a reconstructed and invigorated western “orientalism”. It was not, perhaps, impolitic for Magellan or Nicholson to seek early publication in London rather than France, despite the French-language provenance of Benyowsky’s original script. From the popular writings of Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616) of Oxford in the late 16th century, the English had developed a fondness for maritime

⁷⁹ Halley had been fundamental to the writing and publication of Newton’s *Principia* which he introduced to the Royal Society and published at his own expense; editor of the *Philosophical Transactions*, he became Savilian professor of geometry at Oxford in 1703.

⁸⁰ R. Griffiths, “Memoirs of George Psalmanazar,” *Monthly Review* 31 (1764), pp. 364-385, 441-454; see also *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1st ser., 33 (1763), pp. 257, 447.

⁸¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Morals of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 87-119.

accounts that combined something of the exotic with even more of the commercial and the mercantile.⁸² Ackroyd has argued that England as a seafaring island had long taken in the most extravagant of accounts of travel, especially those that depicted vividly “all that England is not”, proposing that travel tales defined English “nationhood by describing other nations; it is an instinctive form of reassurance”.⁸³ But Britain was also the most aggressive and successful of all the enlightenment nations in its global reach and this brought with it a transforming orientalism.

For its great and critical proponent, Edward Said, *Orientalism* was primarily a creation of the European Enlightenment of the 18th century, applied in particular to Islam and what the west regarded as the Near East, and replenished, refined and culturally nuanced by a great industry of intellect and ideology throughout the 19th century.⁸⁴ More importantly for our argument, Said saw the early “orientalist” propositions as stemming overwhelmingly from England and France, effectively the twin origins of Benyowsky’s account. So his published version of 1789 came in the right place, at the right time, in the midst of a radical republicanism that also mooted a new, firm, and more aggressive perspective on the “Orient”. Edward Said argues that during the 18th century there arose “a number of new, interlocking elements that hinted at the coming evangelical phase” of culturally aggressive orientalism. Increased exploration, profusion of travel literature, voyages and scientific reporting, as well as developments in historical anthropology and historicism and in the classificatory sciences of Linnaeus and Buffon all combined to generate a tendency to classify and compartmentalise as a method or procedure of intellectual and emotional clarification.⁸⁵ It is clear that Benyowsky’s accounts touched directly on several of such elements. In particular, this form of a developing discourse allowed the

⁸² Richard Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London: Halpers, 1589).

⁸³ Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2002), quote p. 270.

⁸⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), see especially chapter 2, pp. 113-197. Said admits to the notion of Orientalism as being also based much further east, but restricts himself for reasons of coherence and greater focus. For considerations of a broader, inclusive notion of orientalism see Stefan Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); a review symposium which see Richard H. Minear, “Review: Orientalism and the Study of Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 39: 3 (May 1980), pp. 507-517; Simon Leys, “Orientalism and Sinology,” in Simon Leys, *The Burning Forest: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986).

⁸⁵ See Said, *Orientalism*, especially pp. 113-123.

bringing together of such otherwise disparate elements as the adventures and travels of a Benyowsky in Russia or China with the science of a Royal Society, Joseph Banks or William Nicholson in London. In such a particular setting the *Memoirs* could be seen as an addition to useful and reliable knowledge within a Euro-wide program of cultural change and colonialism.

It might well be that Benyowsky's claims concerning Formosa are of very little detailed empirical value to professional historians. The value that we might now place on this account, as well as several others like it, is that they serve to remind all historians, including those of Taiwan, that globalisation and Euro-modernity was never simply a story of large civilizations colliding. Thus much historiography tells the tale of "China and the West" as a great confrontation peopled by imperial courts, Jesuits, major battles and the victory of Euro-based useful and reliable knowledge over Confucian certainties.⁸⁶ Benyowsky's tales might force us to reflect rather on the interpretive salience of the many frictions between systems and fragments of systems that occurred over a period of very many years. Except in the most nominal sense of a highly stretched political suzerainty, the indigenous peoples of Taiwan were not mere appendages of the Chinese imperial system. Even if all of Benyowsky's claims concerning Formosa were true, they would not represent an episode in a clash of civilizations, but rather the perverse flack emitted by an uncontrollably expanding material world, the frontiers and confrontations of which were rarely within the governance of any central authorities whatsoever.

8. Conclusions: Enlightenment and the Warrants of Reliability

We have little reason to adhere to Nicholson's advice of 1789 that the Benyowsky accounts of Japan, Liqueio, but particularly, Formosa, "must be

⁸⁶ For arguments concerning the power of useful and reliable knowledge see Ian Inkster, "Potentially Global: A Story of Useful and Reliable Knowledge and Material Progress in Europe, circa 1474-1914," *International History Review* 28: 2 (2006), pp. 237-286; Ian Inkster, "Technology in World History: Cultures of Constraint and Innovation, Emulation, and Technology Transfers," *Comparative Technology Transfer and Society* 5: 2 (2007), pp. 108-127; Ian Inkster, "The National Imperative: The State, Science and Technology, and Policy Evolution, 1400-2000," in Rigas Arvanitis, ed., *Science and Technology Policy*, 2 vols. (Oxford: UNESCO, 2008), pp. 165-183.

admitted on the credit of the discoverer, until subsequent researches shall either confirm or disprove them". The fact that other aspects of his *Memoirs* (for instance on Siberia) could be demonstrated at the time and by subsequent research does not prove the veracity of statements concerning Formosa. The earliest accounts of the journey, prior to publication of the *Memoirs* in 1789, do not mention Formosa except as a coastal passing or brief stoppage en route to Macau, and these include authentic notes written by Benyowsky himself. Much of what he wrote about Formosa does not accord with our present historical knowledge from other sources.⁸⁷ Much of what he did depict with some accuracy could be got from existing sources, for as Oliver concluded after extensive reflection, "it is evident that Benyowsky not only had all the material in the form of charts, logs, and journals of previous voyages, but he actually had as his companions the master of the vessel and various other mariners in the ship whose acquaintance with the localities north of Japan was, so to say, intimate". Oliver also noted the stark contradictions of the Japanese and Formosan accounts, the mixture of reliance on published accounts and alterations of claims, especially the switch from his 1772 assertion about attacking the Chinese at Tanasoa, to his *Memoir* account that "he had carried on important operations against a city of the aborigines, a false story which cannot stand investigation. In this interpolation he has hopelessly confused his dates".⁸⁸ Yet his account of Formosa has stood as a text of Formosan history, republished and reworked in standard sources, Western and Japanese.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See however János Jánko, *Grof Benyowsky Moricz mint földrajzi kutató. Kritikai megjegyzések kamcsatkától Makóig tett útjára* (Budapest: Orientalia, 1890), and P. M. Kiss, *Janos Jánko, 1833-1896* (Gyula: Ferenc Múzeum Kiadványai, 1961). In his ethnography covering sources in several languages, Jánko investigated in great detail the journey from Kamchatka to Macau, deducing localities and bearings, but without any substantive additional material on the Formosa claims.

⁸⁸ S. Pasfield Oliver, ed., *Memoirs* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), pp. 50-51; see also footnote 64 above. It should be emphasized that S. Pasfield Oliver (1838-1907) was former Captain in the Royal Navy and a Fellow of the Royal geological Society, so knew his navigation and seamanship, the problems of difficult passages and terrains, as well as something of natural ecology and indigenous life. This explains his informed skepticism. Between Benyowsky's return to France in 1777 and his departure again from Europe in 1784, accounts that he may well have copied from include *Chart of Synd's Voyage towards Tschukotskoi Noss* (London: T. Cadell, 1780); J.N. Bellin, *Cartes de l'Empire du Japon. Par le Sr. Bellin, 1735* (Paris: P.F. Giffart, 1736); Stepan P. Krashennnikov, *The History of Kamtschatka* (London: T. Jefferys, 1764).

⁸⁹ We should also note that initially even in England doubts were cast from the first. Thus the generally supportive *Gentelman's Magazine* did suggest that by his own testimony, Benyowsky was "little influenced by a regard to truth, or indeed any principle of morality whatever" (lx, pt. ii, August 1790, quote p. 725).

We have suggested that the broadening acceptance of Benyowsky's fabulous tales during the 19th century was very much a fortuitous outcome of several elements operating at a pan-European level. Despite his eastern European origins, his memoirs sprang out of an Anglo-French late-enlightenment period of republicanism and political experiment. From the beginning they were bolstered by major enlightenment figures such as Magellan, Nicholson, and Banks whose *savant* enquiries coincided nicely with commercial interests following claims concerning the wealth of furs and other high-value trades obtainable in the extreme north, the richness of the China trade, at a time when reliable accounts of these areas and seas were sparse or non-existent.⁹⁰ It was only from the 1780s that more popular, yet acceptable accounts of discoveries and commercial possibilities in such regions as Kamchatka and the Bearing Straits appeared in Western Europe, this giving something of a boost to the earlier reception offered Benyowsky.⁹¹ Without doubt, Benyowsky's *Memoirs* were multiply timely. But we have shown that this early support was transformed into a much more popular, nationalist form in the subsequent years as Benyowsky was taken up by an enormous variety of agencies, who basically repeated the claims and arguments of the original editions. Ultimately, from the early 20th century, the use of the Formosan passages in particular for the purposes of a global defence of Japanese colonialism in East Asia, carried a more overt "Orientalist" message that continues into the present time.

Finally, we must surely admit that the manner in which Benyowsky's account of Formosa has survived so long also depends upon a process of self-fashioning and image-making. Steven Shapin brilliantly recounts how early-modern truth-tellers, scientists or savants, travellers or claimants on knowledge of all sorts, searched for and established their "warrants of reliability"⁹² Thus the natural philosopher Robert Boyle (1627-1691), a founder of the Royal Society, could accept the veracity of the Bristol navigator, Captain Thomas James's

⁹⁰ The force of this latter element was reduced somewhat with the publication of James Cook's (1728-1779) *Voyages* and William Coxe's (1747-1828) *Account* in 1780. See also below.

⁹¹ See especially William Coxe, *An Account of the Russian Discoveries between Asia and America* (London: Nichols, 2d ed., 1780; 3d ed., 1787); J. F. Le Horpe, *Abrégé de l'Histoire générale des voyages* (Paris: Chez Laporte, 1786). It should be realized that until then Dutch traders had retained their secrets concerning the Japanese trade, and that an intense rivalry existed between the various European-based companies operating east of the Cape.

⁹² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

(1593-1635) account of the northwest passage in 1633 because of James's record for reliability and skill that was certified by the evidence of reliable persons.⁹³ Support for such an extremely costly voyage came from merchants and even royalty, so that his accounts "may well be represented to us, as likely to deserve our consideration and credit". This seems very similar to the position of the early reviewers, his editor Nicholson and others concerning Benyowsky and his infamous *Memoirs*. Again, Shapin refers to "evident signs of knowledgeability", that is in James' case a university education and knowledge of mathematics, which led Boyle to believe his account of the cold extremities that he discovered. Also James was located within a network that included friends of Boyle. But James also showed great precision and the use of reliable instruments and accounts of latitude, nothing at all of which was shown by Benyowsky. But we can surely accept that the experimentalist Boyle would require stronger "warrants of reliability" than the general reading public of the late Enlightenment and industrialisation, where a romantic revival perhaps conjured increased degrees of scepticism concerning the ultimate outcomes of modernity, its industry and urbanism.

We must also acknowledge that claims by merchants and adventurers who could clearly gain tangible profit from travels and reports of voyages were held with greater scepticism than those of genteel status and style. From the 17th century many gentlemen intellectuals would presume that merchants were mundanely untruthful, one of Francis Bacon's categories of a lie was that told by the merchant "for advantage".⁹⁴ So, was Benyowsky principally seen in the guise of a savant, a traveller, a merchant or a gentleman? Perhaps a main function of the historiography post-1800 lay in constructing Benyowsky as a euro-wide gentleman-traveller, whose memoir was a report rather than a commercial adventure, dwelling little on the veracity of the Formosan passages, more on the greater certainties of the Russian and Madagascar passages and interludes. This was really quite a task, for Benyowsky was obviously "foreign" to most of his readers, indeed to all of his readers in such centres of euro-enlightenment as England and France. It would have helped that his original memoirs were written in French, translated into English by a public euro-savant and former

⁹³ It is of note here that Boyle was son of the first Earl of Cork, educated at Eton, a director of the East India Co, and possibly the greatest experimentalist of his age. Thomas James' narrative of his journey was pub in 1633 and has been problematically identified as the original of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

⁹⁴ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, p. 93 forward.

public servant, and that the original account and its “enlightened” commentaries were utilised for most if not quite all later editions well into the 19th century. Even Pasfield Oliver in his critical remarks remains dependent on both the Nicholson edition and the Nicholson commentary.

Of course, it was quite possible to be seen as an unreliable gentleman.⁹⁵ In the years of Benyowsky’s initial popularity, good birth certainly did not prevent deceit, and in all probability aided it. James Bruce (above) was educated at Harrow, a seat of the English gentry, was sequentially a wine trader, a consul at Algiers, and an archaeologist on the Barbary coast, all this prior to the publication of his fabulous accounts of the Nile, the Red Sea and Nubia. The more celebrated imposter, Alessandro Cagliostro (1743-1795), was exactly contemporary with Benyowsky, and he undoubtedly began his career in the criminal underworld of Sicily, but convincingly refashioned himself as “Count” in Malta, married the genteel Italian Loreanza Feliciani, and peddled both freemasonry and alchemical nostrums throughout Europe in the 1770s and 1780s. In the year of the French Revolution and of Benyowsky’s *Memoirs*, and after two brief imprisonments in Paris and London, he was finally arrested in Rome, and died six years later in the fortress prison of San Leo.⁹⁶ So, in establishing his pan-European status of gentility, Benyowsky was also fashioning what—following Shapin—we might identify as his initial “warrant of reliability”. And this did not prohibit a renewed fashioning in frontier locales—thus Benyowski’s readiness to identify with mythical, godly prophets and leaders within the indigenous legends of both Formosa and Madagascar, as a revolutionary in the deposition of the Governor of Madagascar, but donning the mask of the distinguished Euro-gentleman in his negotiations with French or American politicians and statesmen.

⁹⁵ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, pp. 95-101.

⁹⁶ For varying treatments see Charles Sotheran, “Alessandro di Cagliostro, 1743-1795: Imposter or Martyr?” read before the New York Liberal Club, reprinted in *The Truth Seeker* (New York: Truth Seeker Company, 1875); W. R. H. Trowbridge, *Cagliostro* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1926); Henry Ridgely Evans, *Cagliostro, a Sorcerer of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: The Masonic bibliophiles, 1931); Jean Villiers, *Cagliostro: le prophète de la Révolution* (Paris: Cruy Trédaniel, 1988).

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