

John Dodd

By Ian Keller

(Edited by Douglas Fix)

John Dodd, a Scottish merchant, first visited Formosa in 1860 and settled permanently in north Formosa in 1864.(1) Initially he worked for Dent and Company, but within a few years of arriving in Formosa he opened his own company, Dodd and Company.(2) Dodd's primary contribution was made in the tea-exporting market. While investigating camphor trees near Tamsui (Danshui), Dodd realized that tea was grown on the island. He proceeded to purchase some of the local tea, and it sold for a good price in Macao. Armed with this knowledge, Dodd made loans to Formosan farmers through his comprador Li Chunsheng to help the farmers increase their production of tea.(3) He also brought in tea plants from Amoy (Xiamen) and started a tea-firing business at Banka (Mengjia), which was relocated to larger quarters in Twa-tu-tia.(4) In 1868 Dodd brought in skilled workers from Amoy and Foochow (Fuzhou) to work in his new tea processing factory. Shipments were made to New York, where the Formosan oolong tea was well received.(5) However, by November, 1872, business had worsened and Dodd was pleading with his creditors, Jardine, Matheson and Company, for assistance.(6)

Although tea was Dodd's most well-known venture, it was not his only one. He became acquainted with north Formosa through his various travels, in which he investigated the export possibilities of camphor, tea, coal, oil, and cinnamon.(7) Dodd also found rock oil 20 miles southeast of Oulan.(8)

In December 1866 Dodd purchased a Dutch shipwreck. However, he had some trouble with acquisitive villagers and called upon the British gunboat *Havoc* for assistance in reclaiming his property.(9) He experienced another clash with local residents in 1868 when two agents of Dodd and Co. were assaulted in Banka. The conflict was resolved by Mr. Holt, the Acting British Vice Consul at Tamsui, the U.S. Consul Charles William Le Gendre, and local Qing officials. Again, the Europeans had the implicit support of two gunboats in the vicinity. Despite this effort Dodd ended up relocating to Twa-tu-tia.(10)

In addition to running his own company, Dodd continued to do work for various firms operating in the region and even became involved in consular work for Holland and the United States. In the case of the United States, Charles Le Gendre nominated Dodd as U.S. consular agent for Tamsui and Keelung. Dodd took the post in July 1868, but by January 1874 Dodd was no longer serving as the U.S. consular agent.

During Dodd's tenure as U.S. consular agent, the typhoon of August 9, 1871 destroyed two vessels in Keelung harbor, the British *Westward Ho* and the French *Adele*. The storm broke the *Adele* in half, and although the British gunboat *Elk* was in the harbor, it was unable to render assistance. Dodd swam to the wreck and made fast a rope between the ship and shore, which enabled the crew to be rescued. For this assistance, the French offered him the Legion of Honor, but the British government prevented Dodd's acceptance and instead awarded him the Albert Medal of the First Class.(11)

Dodd's most well-known publication is his book, *Journal of a blockaded resident in north Formosa during the Franco-Chinese war, 1884-5*. The French blockade of the island lasted about six months. Dodd spent the time in Tamsui with several other foreign residents. During the blockade, Dodd helped foreign doctors treat wounded Qing soldiers, and the Qing government decorated him for his efforts after the war.(12)

Dodd spent perhaps fifty years on Formosa; his date of departure from the island as well as the date of his death are both unknown. Westerners named the Dodd Range in northern central Formosa as a tribute to his exploring in that region.

Selected Publications:

"A few ideas on the probable origin of the hill tribes of Formosa." *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 9 (June 1882): 69-77; 10 (December 1882): 195-203.

"List of words of Tangão dialect, north Formosa." *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 9 (June 1882): 78-84; 10 (December 1882): 204-211.

"A glimpse of the manners and customs of the hill tribes of Formosa." *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15 (June 1885): 69-78. Note: This was a multiple-part manuscript, but only the first part was ever published.

Journal of a blockaded resident in north Formosa during the Franco-Chinese war, 1884-5.
Printed for private circulation. Hong Kong: "Daily Press" Office, 1888.
Originally serialized in the *Hongkong Daily Press*.

"Formosa." *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* 11 (1895): 553-570.

Notes:

1. Harold M. Otness, *One thousand Westerners in Taiwan, to 1945; a biographical and bibliographical dictionary* ([Nankang]: Institute of Taiwan History, Preparatory Office, Academia Sinica, 1999), pp. 42-43.

2. Huang Fu-san, "Bao Shun yanghang (John Dodd & Company)," *Taiwan lishi cidian* [Dictionary of Taiwan history] (Taipei: Wen Jian Hui, 2004), p. 1345.
3. John Dodd, "Formosa," *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 11 (1895): 569; Robert Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains: Fujian and the China tea trade, 1757-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 64-65.
4. Dodd, 1895, p. 569.
5. Huang, 2004, p. 1345.
6. George Williams Carrington, *Foreigners in Formosa: 1841-1874* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), pp. 190-191. Carrington cites Dodd's letters: "JM Tamsui P 9, 20 July 1872," and "abject, self-deprecatory letter of 22 November 1872."
7. James W. Davidson, *The island of Formosa past and present* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1903), p. 416, 494, 555; John Dodd, *Journal of a blockaded resident in north Formosa during the Franco-Chinese war, 1884-5* (Hong Kong: "Daily Press" office, 1888), pp. 178-229.
8. C. W. Le Gendre, *Reports on Amoy and the island of Formosa*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), p. 41.
9. Davidson, 1903, p. 189; Carrington, 1978, pp. 226-228.
10. Davidson 1903, pp. 199-201.
11. Davidson 1903, p. 207; Huang, 2004.
12. Huang, 2004.