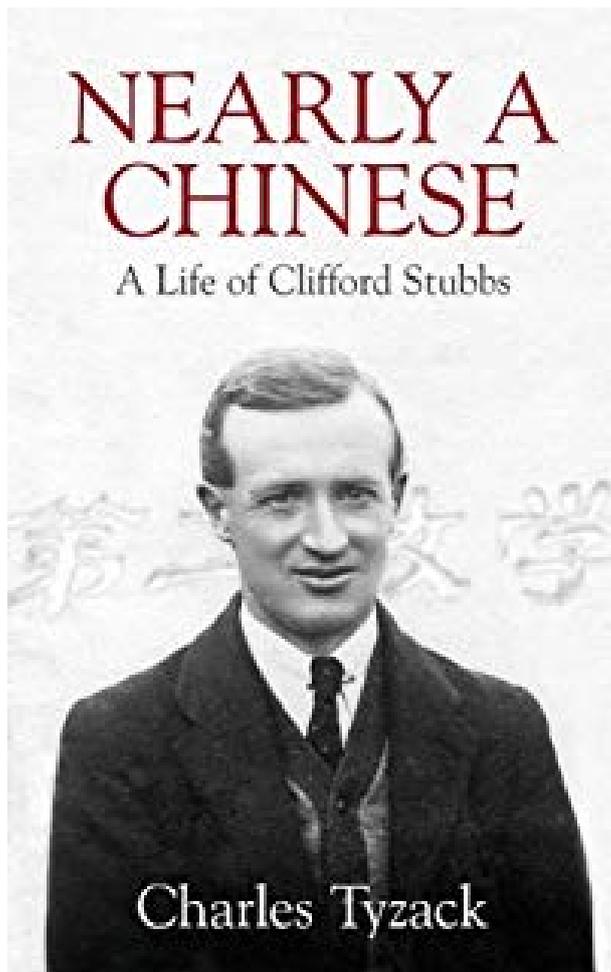


# Nearly a Chinese, A Life of Clifford Stubbs



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One night in 1930 Clifford Stubbs, a 42 year old English Quaker professor of Chemistry got on his bike to cross the campus of West China Union University in Chengdu, China to see some colleagues on business but he never arrived. He was attacked and stabbed to death by men unknown to him who stole his bicycle and then disappeared into the darkness. Though a time of international tension and resentment against missionaries, his death was deeply mourned by his Chinese students and colleagues.

Of all foreigners to be sensely murdered, he was the one who had sought reconciliation and promoted the Chinese viewpoint over that of the fading imperialists. Paid the ultimate compliment, his understanding of China was such that he himself was 'nearly a Chinese'. A tragic but obscure story, this hardly seems the stuff of a riveting read but I have just read Charles Tyzack's new book in little more than one sitting. And now I want to read it again. It works so well at many different levels.

The book is an inspiring story of how one man can stand alone in his views, can be years ahead of his times in understanding the disorder of China following a century of humiliation by foreign powers, of unequal treaties, war lords and civil disorder. His response was to offer friendship and reconciliation in a personal way that few

other foreigners ever could. At another level it is the story of his tragic romance with his soon to be bereaved wife, Margaret, and yet the book is also so much more than that. The author sets the personal story in its historical context so well that it also operates as a full history of the early struggles of West China Union University pioneering Western education in the far south west of China. More than that, it examines the inevitable conflicts created by the missionary movement in China as the Chinese revolution slowly gathered impetus. And it gave me an insight into the very history of China over the twenties and thirties as nationalism grew into an immovable force but was subverted by the failings of the Kuomintang government and its fateful conflict with the forces of communism. Rarely does a book give one so good a feel for what it was like to be there at that time in another world, a place where vast distances had to be travelled without roads, where cities were surrounded by walls whose gates were locked at night and which essentially had no contact with the rest of the world. I was thus transported and moved by a very poignant and inspiring story and by the wider history in which it was set. Relationships between China and the West are currently top of the agenda and there is a lot to be learned from the example of Clifford Stubbs, which was essentially to follow his instinct to trust the Chinese people. This is a book I can recommend very highly.