



**Reading Guide: *When America First Met China*
by Eric Jay Dolin (2012)**

1. Does this book have a central theme or argument? What is it?
2. Do you think the title accurately reflects the story being told in the book? Why or why not?
3. What parallels to modern relationships between the West and China do you see in the book? What differences do you detect?
4. What is the most important or memorable thing you will take away from having read this book? What surprised you most?
5. What does Eric Jay Dolin do well in this book? What do you wish he had done differently or better? How does his background as an environmental policy specialist shape the book?
6. Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read other works by this author?
7. Did this book change your perspective on the relationship between China and the West? How so?

Author Biography

Eric Jay Dolin's books focus on intersections between history, environment, geography, and economics. Holder of a Ph.D. in environmental policy and planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dolin's professional experience ranges from curatorial assistant at a natural history museum to positions at the EPA and the National Marine Fisheries Service. His other books include *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* (2010); *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* (2007); and *Brilliant Beacons: A History of the American Lighthouse*.

Related Texts

If you liked *When America First Met China*, you may enjoy these other books (descriptions courtesy of Amazon.com):

- *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* by Eric Jay Dolin (2010)
Eric Jay Dolin chronicles the rise and fall of the fur trade of old, when the rallying cry was "get the furs while they last," and how North America was explored, exploited, and settled, while its native Indians were alternately enriched and exploited by the trade. As Dolin demonstrates, fur, both an economic elixir and an agent of destruction, became inextricably linked to many key events in American history, including the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the War of 1812, as well as to the relentless pull of Manifest Destiny and the opening of the West.

- *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History* by Sarah Rose (2010)
In 1848, the British East India Company, having lost its monopoly on the tea trade, engaged Robert Fortune, a Scottish gardener, botanist, and plant hunter, to make a clandestine trip into the interior of China to steal the closely guarded secrets of tea horticulture and manufacturing. *For All the Tea in China* is the remarkable account of Fortune's journeys into China—a thrilling narrative that combines history, geography, botany, natural science, and old-fashioned adventure. One of the most daring acts of corporate espionage in history, Fortune's pursuit of China's ancient secret makes for a classic nineteenth-century adventure tale, one in which the fates of empires hinge on the feats of one extraordinary man.
- *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution* by Nathan Pert-Rosenthal (2015)
In the decades after the United States formally declared its independence in 1776, Americans struggled to gain recognition of their new republic and their rights as citizens. None had to fight harder than the nation's seamen, whose labor took them far from home and deep into the Atlantic world. *Citizen Sailors* tells the story of how their efforts to become American at sea in the midst of war and revolution created the first national, racially inclusive model of United States citizenship.
- *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* by Sidney Mintz (1986)
Sugar has been around for millennia, but only in the past two centuries has it become a significant foodstuff and major cash crop, and then only in the West. As a preservative, as a medicine, in decoration, as a spice or condiment, and as a sweetener, sugar has grown incredibly, even alarmingly, popular—and its use is still increasing. In this eye-opening study of how Europeans and Americans transformed sugar from a rare foreign luxury to a commonplace necessity of modern life, and how a slave crop, and the growing demand for it, transformed the history of capitalism and industry, Sidney Mintz asks us to consider the many ways in which sugar has become “meaningful” in modern Western life.

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