

FROM INSIDE CHINA

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# THE REJUVENATION OF NORTHEAST CHINA

## 浴火重生

一部中国工业发展与文明的真实记录

徐剑 著

Thomas Bray 译

中国出版集团

中译出版社

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传 真 / (010)68357870

邮 编 / 100044

电子邮箱 / book@ctph.com.cn

网 址 / <http://www.ctph.com.cn>

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**Xu Jian** is the author of several fictional works, among them *Oriental Hada*, as well as essays and TV drama. He has also penned a number of works of reportage, including *McMahon Line* and *The Oriental Express*. *Swords of a Rising Power* won the first Lu Xun Literature Prize in 1998.

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## *Preface*

### As the Northeast “Red Double” Fades out of Sight

**M**Y UNDERSTANDING OF the old industrial base of the Northeast began with that of the lives of the ordinary people.

At the end of the 1980's, my wife and daughter moved from our hometown of Kunming to Beijing, where I work in the army. As it was a long journey they carried with them only a blanket roll. Stuck in a military compound dorm on Chang'an Avenue, they began to acclimatize to the capital, realizing that they could no longer take refuge in our hometown as they did back before. At that time we hadn't even any pots and pans, and instead scraped by with the bowls gifted to us in Changsha from an auntie working at the Hunan Daily newspaper. Then came the pressure cooker, bought for us by an old military comrade working for the quartermaster sector. As I took it up in my hands, I could feel it was heavy. Looking upon it, I saw that it was a Red Double Happiness pressure cooker, manufactured in Shenyang.

One evening, I stood aside and watched my wife cooking in the corridor. Just as it was time to lift the pot she suddenly asked me to hand her the MSG. I stepped into the room and picked up a



bag. As I held it I noticed immediately on the label the picture of a red plum flower, signifying that the MSG was also produced in Shenyang. Later I found that my wife would most often buy the Red Plum brand MSG, and would sometimes buy a 500g bag of the stuff, enough to last a whole year.

“You can’t eat MSG as much as you eat rice,” said I, “Why did you buy so much all at once?”

My wife covered her mouth when she laughed. She answered, “Surely you can’t eat MSG as much, but I can’t cook without it. I bought a lot because I’m worried about the price; it may rise overnight. I bought enough for a whole year.

I laughed and shook my head.

My wife said to me, “There is nothing to laugh about. We are common people living our common life; we think about our cookware, dining ware and condiments all the time.”

Therefore, day after day and year after year, the Red Double Happiness pressure cooker and the Red Plum MSG had always been a part of our life.

Time passed like a dream. The same life had been replaced by a new lifestyle in the capital city of China. Without realizing it, the new millennium had arrived. My position equivalent to a Division Commander had resulted to two apartments offered to me by the army. Though they added up to a mere 100m<sup>2</sup>, we paid great attention to decorations and we had to buy new kitchenware. We gave the 13-year-old Red Double Happiness pressure cooker away to the decorating worker as it had become too old. He liked the small present. However, after we moved, we could not find the trace of another Red Double Happiness pressure cooker in the market. It had quietly been replaced by the brand Supor.