

# CHINA CROSSROADS

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## The Lettuce Diaries: How A Frenchman Found Gold Growing Vegetables In China

**Xavier Naville**

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A snobbish French executive arrives in Shanghai with his expensive shoes and ties, expecting a short career-boosting posting before returning to Paris. Instead, he ends up deep in China's manure-soaked fields, buying and selling vegetables, all because he has convinced himself that he can singlehandedly drag Chinese agriculture into the 21st Century. It didn't work out as he planned. The *Lettuce Diaries* is a revealing and humorous memoir of entrepreneurship, doubling as a primer for all seeking to do business in China, and explaining things the French executive, Xavier Naville, learned the hard way — like humility and listening to people, and how the Chinese economy is both totally different and a huge opportunity.

**Xavier Naville** is an author and quadrilingual experienced business leader with a professional track record serving in executive roles across many organizations around the world. Born in France, Xavier showed a competitive edge early in life as a member of the French national fencing team. He received highest honors graduating from business schools in Europe, and began a long and fruitful journey into international business, moving to China in the late 90's. There, Xavier started Creative Food Group, taking the food processing company from its startup phase to a scaled model with eight factories and four farms in mainland China, with over 1,500 employees across the country serving large restaurant chains like Starbucks, KFC or McDonald's. As CEO, he oversaw all aspects of daily operations for seven years before he sold the company to London listed Bakkavor Group from the UK, a strategic buyer, for a successful exit. Xavier served as CEO at Bakkavor China for several years, leading capital strategy through growth financing from capital markets, spearheading market expansion strategy, and most notably, managing the business during the Financial Crisis of 2008-2009, ensuring a healthy balance sheet meeting all bank covenants and enduring profitability.

**China Crossroads** hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a "crossroads" of the world and itself at a "crossroads" in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at [editor@shanghai-review.org](mailto:editor@shanghai-review.org).