



## The Story of Xiaolumian

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Xiaolumian noodle shop, where I spent part of my summer as a host for guests from all over the world, is less than half a kilometer north of the Brickyard Eco Retreat; across from the Beigou Village square. A statue of Confucius dominates a corner of the square; another corner, in front of the village hall, is dominated by a huge stone with the hammer and sickle of the Communist Party carved into it and painted red.

Xiaolumian's rough wooden gate opens to a paved walkway made of used bricks. Some were torn from the Great Wall by peasants, and originally used in the construction of their huts. The paving is also studded with local river stones, and weathered slate. Persimmon, pear, and chestnut trees fill the garden along with day lilies, honeysuckle, hollyhocks, and ivy. The path leads to a stone and brick farmhouse with a traditional grey tile roof.

The Great Wall provides a majestic backdrop for dining. While sitting under an umbrella on the private terrace and soaking in the scene on a sunny day, a visitor might wonder how The Schoolhouse acquired the property. The land and house that comprise Xiaolumian are actually still owned by a fourth generation Beigou native, Wang Yongjun. He leased out his home for an upfront cash payment, and concurrently became the night watchman at the Brickyard Eco Retreat where he has living quarters.

In the early 1970's, Wang Yongjun's father built the little three-room house that now provides Xiaolumian with its private dining rooms. He also started planting the fruit trees in what is now the courtyard. The father, Wang Yongjun, and his brother slept in one bedroom; his two sisters in the other, with a kitchen in the middle. Due to the death of their mother, the eldest

sister gave up her education to take care of the family. She did the cooking; sometimes making dumplings or baozi on the kitchen stove (which is still in the room today). The smoke blackened the kitchen roof timbers, but some of the smoke went into a flue that heated the built-in kang beds.

Wang Yongjun's father was a peasant. Back then the village peasants were paid by a communal "gongfen" work point system. At the end of each year, the village allotted available cash based on the number of work points earned. His annual paycheck was barely enough to support the family of five, much less to maintain or improve their home, although they did manage to build a root cellar in the 1980's. The farm shed, which is now Xiaolumian's kitchen, never even had windows.

The Wang family suffered the death of Wang Yongjun's brother and father. By 2006 both sisters had married and left the house; Wang Yongjun was living alone and working part-time in construction when that year Schoolhouse partner Jim Spear spotted this picture perfect house and garden. He mentioned to a local contractor, Yang Maohai, that it would be great to be able to restore the home and turn it into a Chinese restaurant. Yang Maohai said the owner was his primary school classmate, and that he would be glad to make an introduction. The rest is history.