

Revitalizing Tradition in Modern Postnatal Healing: A Case Study of BabyMom Confinement Centre

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Prologue

“This wasn’t how I imagined my motherhood would begin...” Mrs. Foo whispered to herself as she looked out the quiet window of her recovery room. She had always believed that having a baby would be filled with joy, but instead, she found herself overwhelmed, aching, anxious, and unsure of how to care for her newborn. Her mother offered help, but they didn’t always agree. The hospital had discharged her too soon. The sleepless nights, the physical pain, and the emotional weight, it all came crashing in.

Like many modern mothers, Mrs. Foo found herself caught between traditional practices and modern expectations. She longed for rest, guidance, and understanding, not just for her physical recovery but also for her emotional well-being. It was during this vulnerable period that she discovered BabyMom Confinement Centre, a place where traditional wisdom meets modern care.

Through this case study, we follow Mrs. Foo’s journey of healing, rediscovery, and balance, a reflection of how confinement care can play a crucial role in supporting mothers’ physical and emotional recovery after childbirth.

Then came the turning point: *BabyMom Confinement Home*.

From the moment she stepped into the warm, herb-scented bungalow, something shifted. With the soothing aroma of welcoming tea, the calm

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smile of the confinement lady, and the quiet hum of lullabies in the background, it felt like entering a sanctuary built just for her.

But behind this sanctuary stood a woman, Mrs. Foo, whose journey began not with a business plan, but with her own experiences of postpartum loneliness and struggle. Her hands had once cradled her newborns, and her mind had once echoed with the same doubts. Now, she turned those memories into a mission: to bring healing not only through herbs and meals but also through kindness, cultural wisdom, and science. Leveraging her 14 years of experience in home confinement and postnatal care, recognised by Zhongzhou University of Science and Technology in Taiwan, she established BabyMom to offer comprehensive support to new mothers.

At BabyMom, confinement was no longer a rigid tradition; instead, it was a ritual of restoration. Here, old practices met modern care. Belly binding coexisted with lactation support. Herbal baths followed mental wellness check-ins. The wisdom of the past, revived through the compassion of the present. For mothers like Mrs. Lim, it was not just recovery; it was rediscovery.

Significance of Traditional Confinement Practices

In many Asian societies, the postnatal or confinement period, typically lasting between 30 to 44 days, is observed through structured practices aimed at restoring a mother's physical and emotional balance. The Chinese "zuo yue zi", Malay "pantang", and Indian postnatal care rituals each share the same core philosophy: that childbirth depletes a woman's energy (qi or semangat), requiring warmth, rest, and nourishment to regain equilibrium (Chee et al., 2022; Tan, 2018).

These customs involve specific dietary regimens, herbal therapies, and physical restrictions designed to restore vitality, prevent "wind" or "cold" from entering the body, and ensure long-term health. Meals are often infused with medicinal herbs such as ginger, turmeric, and red dates, which have been shown to support circulation and recovery (Chia et al., 2020). While some may perceive these practices as archaic, research has demonstrated that traditional confinement care provides psychological reassurance, social support, and improved maternal outcomes when integrated with modern medical guidance (Kwok et al., 2021).

Emergence of Confinement Centres in Malaysia

With the urbanisation of Malaysian society and the decline of multigenerational households, many new mothers lack traditional family-based support. Consequently, the emergence of professional confinement centres bridges this gap, providing structured care that blends heritage-based wisdom with clinical safety (Abdullah et al., 2023).

These centres, concentrated in urban hubs such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Ipoh, now offer holistic confinement packages encompassing nutritious meals, 24-hour infant care, lactation support, and wellness therapy. This evolving industry reflects a shift in postnatal care preferences, where working mothers and multicultural families seek dependable, evidence-informed alternatives that preserve cultural identity.

Among these establishments, BabyMom Confinement Home stands out as a pioneer in Ipoh, founded in 2008 as the first center to adopt a hybrid care model combining Chinese confinement traditions with modern maternal healthcare standards. The center's commitment to safety, professionalism, and cultural inclusivity has positioned it as a benchmark in Malaysia's postpartum care sector.

The Founding Vision of Mrs.Foo

The story of BabyMom Confinement Home begins with the lived experience of its founder, Mrs. Foo. As a mother of three, she faced the emotional and physical hardships that often follow childbirth. Her postpartum journey was filled with both insight and struggle, and it was through these challenges that she recognized a pressing need for structured, nurturing support for new mothers.

Driven by empathy and a strong sense of purpose, she left her white-collar job and committed herself to providing postpartum care. Over 14 years, she developed hands-on expertise in home confinement and postnatal practices. To reinforce her knowledge, she pursued formal training and earned certification from Zhongzhou University of Science and Technology in Taiwan. This solidified her professional credibility and enabled her to blend traditional confinement practices with clinical standards.

In 2008, Mrs. Foo transformed her personal mission into a public service by founding BabyMom Confinement Home in Ipoh, Perak. It was the first centre of its kind in the city, designed to provide holistic, respectful, and culturally grounded care to postpartum mothers.

Evolution of the Centre: 2008 to Present

BabyMom began with a single, cozy bungalow in a peaceful residential area of Ipoh, strategically located near six major hospitals. The choice of location ensured that new mothers had easy access to medical support while enjoying a serene, home-like environment.

In 2015, the centre underwent a major rebranding to reflect its expanding vision and refined service model. This rebranding marked the beginning of a new growth phase. By 2017, BabyMom opened its first branch, followed by a second branch in 2020. Each expansion was rooted in consistent demand and a growing reputation for excellence in postnatal care.

The centre's infrastructure now includes three single-storey bungalows, each equipped with single occupancy rooms to ensure privacy, personalized care, and encouragement of mother-infant bonding. BabyMom was also the first centre in the region to introduce vegetarian confinement meals and modern breastfeeding support services.

Location and Infrastructure

BabyMom Confinement Home is situated in a quiet and accessible neighborhood in Ipoh, allowing clients to enjoy a calm recovery environment. The centre comprises three adjacent bungalows, each designed to support comfort, hygiene, and cultural practices.

The rooms are single-occupancy with attached bathrooms, designed to provide privacy and convenience. Baby care areas are equipped with surveillance cameras, and all facilities follow rigorous cleanliness protocols. Special rooms are designated for herbal baths and therapeutic sessions such as belly binding or lactation counseling.

The kitchen is managed by a trained chef, offering personalized, nutritious meals based on traditional recipes. Spaces are also allocated for education sessions, consultations, and family visitation (with controlled access to maintain a peaceful environment).

Staff and Organisational Structure

BabyMom employs a multidisciplinary team of approximately ten dedicated professionals. This includes trained confinement caretakers, a professional chef, housekeeping staff, a maintenance team, and administrative personnel.

Each confinement lady undergoes structured training in areas such as infant handling, hygiene, emotional support, and traditional postpartum therapies. Many staff members bring prior experience in maternal care, while others are continuously upskilled through internal workshops and external certifications.

The founder, Mrs. Foo, remains actively involved in daily operations and staff development. Her leadership is centered on empathy, professionalism, and a commitment to lifelong learning. BabyMom also works closely with medical advisors to ensure alignment with evolving healthcare standards.

Together, the infrastructure and personnel at BabyMom form a cohesive ecosystem designed to support mothers through their healing journey, making it a benchmark facility for modern confinement care in Malaysia.

Staff Coordinate and Communication

Running a confinement centre that delivers consistent, round-the-clock care requires more than just skilled personnel; structured coordination is vital. At BabyMom, internal communication is seen as vital to maintaining high standards of service, especially when it comes to ensuring smooth confinement lady rotations and crisis preparedness.

During one of the weekly team meetings, the manager emphasised, "We need to rotate shifts to ensure confinement lady are well-rested and alert." Another senior staff member added,

"Emergency leave or last-minute absences can be disruptive, so we always keep backup plans and cross-trained staff ready."

This proactive approach ensures that each mother and baby continues to receive uninterrupted care, even during unforeseen staff changes. Schedules are planned in advance, with flexibility built in to accommodate both staff well-being and operational needs. Communication tools like group messaging apps, daily handover sheets, and incident logs help staff stay informed and coordinated.

Overview of Chinese Zuo Yue Zi Practices

The traditional Chinese practice of *zuo yue zi*, or "sitting the month," has been passed down through generations as a cornerstone of postnatal care. This period typically spans 30 to 40 days and is centred around principles of warmth, rest, and nourishment. It is believed that the mother's body is in a weakened and vulnerable state after childbirth and therefore must be protected from external elements such as cold and wind to prevent future health complications.

Key practices include consuming warming foods such as ginger, sesame oil, black vinegar, and red dates, along with herbal tonics to replenish *qi* (energy) and blood. Mothers are encouraged to avoid cold food and drinks, limit exposure to water and wind, and refrain from engaging in strenuous activities. Belly binding, herbal baths, and strict rest protocols are often observed.

At BabyMom, these traditional principles are upheld while allowing for flexibility according to modern understanding and individual preferences. Clients who adhere to *zuo yue zi* can follow the classic regimen, while others may adapt the rules to suit their comfort levels, such as allowing hair washing after the first week or engaging in light mobility exercises under guidance.

The BabyMom case study demonstrates how cultural heritage can be effectively recontextualized in contemporary maternal healthcare. By merging traditional wisdom with structured professionalism, BabyMom not only preserves intangible cultural practices but also contributes to maternal well-being through an evidence-informed, emotionally supportive care ecosystem.

Its success aligns with a growing academic discourse on integrative postpartum care, one that respects traditional healing frameworks while embracing modern science (Ng et al., 2021; Chen & Zhang, 2022). This balance is what makes BabyMom a model for sustainable maternal health innovation in Malaysia.

Integration of Malay and Indian Confinement Approaches

Recognising Malaysia's multicultural society, BabyMom has also embraced elements from Malay and Indian confinement traditions, making the centre inclusive and adaptable for mothers of diverse backgrounds.

Malay confinement practices focus on body realignment and internal warmth. The 44-day recovery period typically involves daily hot stone massages (*bertungku*), abdominal binding (*bengkung*), and herbal baths (*mandi herba*). The diet includes warm, anti-inflammatory ingredients such as turmeric, ginger, and black pepper. These practices aim to restore body shape, improve blood circulation, and promote uterine contraction.

Indian confinement practices emphasis detoxification, bonding, and spiritual wellness. Mothers often undergo daily oil massages (*abhyanga*), consume spice-rich diets featuring cumin, fenugreek, and ghee, and practice sitz baths and light yoga. Emotional bonding through breastfeeding and prayer rituals is also common.

BabyMom integrates aspects of these approaches by offering massage therapy options, sitz bath sessions, and customised meals upon request. This flexible approach helps mothers honour their cultural heritage while receiving safe, professional care.

Cultural Sensitivity in Service Delivery

One of BabyMom's core values is cultural respect. The centre accommodates various religious and cultural preferences in its care delivery, ensuring that clients feel seen, heard, and valued. Staff members are trained to understand and respect the unique needs of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and modern urban clients, including dietary restrictions, spiritual practices, and family involvement preferences.

Younger mothers, including expatriates or modern clients, often request a hybrid model that blends tradition with science. They may choose traditional meals and herbal baths but also expect WHO-guided breastfeeding support, wound care, or mental health check-ins. BabyMom meets these needs through a customisable care package approach. This cultural responsiveness not only enhances the client experience but also reaffirms BabyMom's position as a leader in providing inclusive, heritage-based, yet future-ready postnatal care.

Centering on Chinese Confinement Philosophy

The core framework of BabyMom Confinement Home is built upon the traditional Chinese postnatal philosophy known as *zuo yue zi*, or “sitting the month.” This ancient practice emphasises a holistic recovery process for mothers in the first 30 to 40 days after childbirth. At BabyMom, this practice is interpreted through a modern lens, allowing mothers to benefit from centuries-old wisdom while receiving professional, medically-informed care.

The philosophy rests on four key pillars: warmth, rest, nourishment, and prevention. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), childbirth depletes a woman's *qi* (energy) and blood, making her susceptible to illness if not properly cared for. Thus, the focus at BabyMom is to restore balance through a tightly curated routine of diet, environment, and body therapy all delivered within the comfort of a structured in-stay service environment.

In-Stay Services: A Home-Like Sanctuary for Recovery

BabyMom's confinement model is built around the concept of a restful retreat. The in-stay services are housed in three fully equipped single-storey bungalows located in a quiet residential area of Ipoh. Each mother is provided with a private room, enabling full privacy and facilitating uninterrupted rest and breastfeeding.

Rooms are furnished with essential amenities and attached bathrooms, and maintained to strict cleanliness standards. The peaceful setting, limited visitor policy, and soft-toned interiors help create an environment of calm, conducive to recovery and bonding.

Mothers are placed on a structured daily schedule that includes:

- Three main confinement meals and two daily herbal teas prepared using TCM-approved ingredients
- Hydration therapy with red date and longan tea to replenish fluids and support lactation
- Supervised herbal baths and optional belly binding to stimulate circulation and support the uterus
- Minimal physical exertion, with confinement lady assisting in room services and baby care to allow maximum rest.

BabyMom incorporates a personalised touch by offering vegetarian confinement meals, a service first pioneered in Ipoh by the center, to cater to clients with specific health needs or personal beliefs, while preserving the essence of warming, nutrient-rich postpartum dishes.

Chinese Infant Care Principles in Practice

In line with *zuo yue zi*, newborns at BabyMom are given delicate, comprehensive care. Confinement ladies are trained in gentle handling, feeding routines, and hygiene practices that align with TCM beliefs, such as avoiding overexposure to cold and maintaining baby warmth.

Breastfeeding is supported with one-on-one guidance in traditional nursing positions and milk-boosting foods. Babies sleep in a dedicated nursery under 24/7 monitoring or may stay in-room with their mothers to promote bonding. Each baby's development is tracked daily, and confinement ladies update mothers regularly while encouraging maternal participation within their comfort level.

Epilogue

“Respecting Tradition, Embracing Flexibility”

While tradition forms the backbone of BabyMom's services, flexibility is built into every care plan. For example, while classic confinement discourages hair washing for several weeks, BabyMom offers warm, safe hair-washing options from the second week onwards, catering to

modern hygiene standards. Similarly, while traditional beliefs caution against cold air exposure, rooms are temperature-controlled for comfort and safety, avoiding extremes.

BabyMom's confinement ladies work closely with mothers to adjust confinement routines based on medical needs, emotional well-being, and cultural preferences, ensuring that no mother feels forced into a rigid structure but rather empowered by supported choices.

In sum, BabyMom's in-stay model exemplifies the synthesis of Chinese postnatal heritage and modern caregiving. It offers mothers a tranquil, nurturing environment where they can rest deeply, nourish themselves fully, and reconnect with their changing bodies and new roles with confidence.

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