

A Balance of Traditional Chinese
and Modern Postpartum Care

POSTPARTUM 30



THIRTY DAYS TO A
NURTURED FOURTH TRIMESTER

KRISTAL LAU, MBBS

PRAISE FOR
POSTPARTUM
30

“No matter how much planning you do, you can’t control what happens when you give birth. But what the amazing Dr. Kristal Lau so brilliantly teaches, is that you can control what comes next. Having a medically trained professional who bridges modern and traditional health practices by your side, you’ll be able to create a postpartum journey filled with bonding, serenity, and love. I only wish I’d had Kristal in my own early journey of motherhood.”

—DR. ABBY MEDCALF, PhD, psychologist, author, TEDx speaker

“This book [is] ideal for expectant parents and their respective families with different cultures on how to manage postpartum. What I enjoyed was the inclusion of the male spouses and partners during this time, which, during traditional times, they were excluded. The author gives excellent explanations and modern medicine during the postpartum period and the changes between them with suggestions on how to manage this time. It has personal stories; recipes and menus; and support suggestions for the partner, spouse, Dad and family. It is easy to read and easy to make references whenever you would need to.”

—DR. KAVIPRIYA SOMA, General practitioner obstetrician (GPO),
Athena Women’s Clinic, Australia

“*Postpartum 30* is a thought-provoking and educational read for . . . mums-to-be who wish to find that perfect blend between traditional Chinese confinement practice and modern Western postpartum care in the fourth trimester. Kristal enthusiastically engages the reader in a conversational manner not unlike that used by an older sister or auntie. There is a deliberate absence of medical jargon in the text, and Kristal speaks to you through the pages deeply from her own upbringing and experiences. The text carefully simplifies difficult concepts of TCM and postpartum physiology to make them digestible to the layman mum, and the subsequent chapters are purposefully layered to incorporate these concepts—making them easy to recall on a practical level. The book also explores cultural nuances and social constructs of gender roles specific to the Malaysian-Chinese population. If you are looking for a guide on how to do confinement at home, this book is a great resource for the modern mum!”

—DR. GRACE CHAM, MBBS (Hons.), DRANZCOG,
Obstetrics and Gynaecology Trainee

“As a very western Caucasian growing up in Australia, I had never heard of a confinement month until I was pregnant with my first child. I was at work (as a GP) one day, and a patient who was also a white woman married to a Chinese Indonesian man asked me, ‘So, has your mother-in-law planned your confinement yet?’ You can probably imagine my response—a combination of ‘what on earth are you talking about?’ and ‘I’m a grown woman, I plan my own things’ especially when they relate to my body, my health, and now my children. Thankfully, no one expected me to last a month without washing!

“I do wish I’d had access to this book when I was pregnant. It would have helped me understand better some of the suggestions from my in-laws, and given me help finding that middle ground of respecting elders and their traditions whilst still acknowledging my own autonomy. Kristal does an excellent job of explaining traditional confinement practices in terms of social and cultural norms, and traditional Chinese medicine understandings. Then she takes this one step further and measures these up against modern lifestyle and modern Western medicine. The result is an easy read which ultimately gives the reader enough information to be able to pick and choose confinement practices that would suit them. I love how Kristal makes it clear that it doesn’t have to be an all or nothing dichotomy—there really is scope to plan a confinement that truly suits your own circumstances. It would seem that the ultimate goal of even the most traditional confinement month is supporting the mother and ensuring her and her baby’s health. With her own cultural experience and her medical knowledge, Kristal is able to distill down this goal in each aspect of the confinement, which is where she really gives you the power to decide what would be best for you. I can see this being of benefit to new Asian mothers around the globe, and to women like myself, partnered into the culture.

“As a General Practitioner with a special interest in perinatal care, I look forward to recommending this book to new mothers who are considering options for their confinement month.”

—DR. SARAH TEDJASUKMANA, MBBS BSc (adv) (Hons I)
DCH FRACGP, GP and co-founder of Sydney Perinatal Doctors

“I found [this to be] an extremely well-balanced book, encouraging solutions and suggestions for the relationship between traditional and modern medical practices postpartum. It encourages personal preferences for families with different cultures and gives ideas for problem solving in the postpartum period.”

—SHAYNE WELLS, Retired Midwife

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KRISTAL LAU, MBBS

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For my mother, Josephine; my aunt Margaret;
and my late grandmother Yap Yoke Lan:
You represent the generation
of women before me.

For my girls, Kira and Kara:
The generation who will come after me.

And for my peers, today's generation of mothers:
I am you. You are me.
Sisters-in-arms, I look forward to taking
this journey of motherhood with you.

DISCLAIMER

This book contains recommendations and information relating to the postpartum period, matrescence, Malaysian Chinese postpartum cultural and traditional practices, basic Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) concepts, and trigger topics such as depression and suicidal thoughts.

The content in this book is not intended to substitute medical advice or to claim that one cultural practice is better than another. Please use this book as a supplement rather than replacement of regular advice and care of your health providers. This also applies to your racial, ethnic, and family cultures and traditions.

Every woman, female, and birthing person is different. Always seek professional medical advice from qualified health practitioners for any questions you may have about a medical or health condition, as well as treatments. Buying and reading this book does not establish a doctor-patient relationship between you, the reader, and the author, Kristal Lau.

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Foreword

by Anne Yu Ming Gim

Kristal and I started with a therapeutic patient-pharmacist relationship. She was seeking *zuò yuè zi* (confinement) herbs to supplement and boost her recovery after giving birth while living here in Germany. “Wow, that’s not a common request from my German patients!” I thought she was a German lady wanting to try the Chinese confinement practice. Receiving a request from a fellow Malaysian for confinement herbs was the last thing on my mind!

I head the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) department of an apotheke south of Munich (*apotheke* means “pharmacy” in German). My speciality lies in bridging Western and Eastern medicine and herbal preparations for my patients. I take things a step further in my apotheke by offering my patients the option of purchasing pre-brewed herbs that are conserved to last for 6 months. We also offer granules of the herbs and we mix them according to the prescriptions.

Incorporating these modern techniques of herbal preparation has improved my patients’ compliance in completing their herbal prescription course due to the convenience of consuming the herbs. This has made TCM more acceptable to the West

because the herbs are presented in familiar Western dosage forms, and my German patients are comfortable with that.

This is what I see in the future of health and wellness: the embracing of modernity and traditions. This book is a beautiful representation of this bridge between both worlds, especially in the realm of postpartum care and recovery. I think Kristal does a wonderful job of addressing this unique challenge of “modern versus tradition” in postpartum care. She gives the modern mom courage to put themselves first while maintaining a connection to their roots.

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Preface

A Love Note for You, Dear Reader

Dear new moms, being pregnant can be rough. Or easy. Either way, you really don't have much control over how your pregnancy goes. Anything can happen anytime. No matter how much you prepare or "do things right." Same goes for your birth. Our birth plans are really just wishful thinking. Even for the "easiest" ones. Our body and baby will do whatever they want and need to.

Naturally, that means we've been out of control for pretty much the entire process of growing and birthing our babies. That can be difficult to accept. Jarring. Frustrating.

So when you're able to design and carry out a postpartum plan that focuses on your unique recovery and growth needs during the vulnerable time immediately after birth, how refreshing is that? You'll have a strong foundation to start your motherhood journey. And you can build upon this as you traverse the rest of the journey.

There's also something special about reconnecting with an ancient motherhood rite of passage. In our still very patriarchal

society, there are still expectations that a modern mom should be able to do it all without a village or tribe to support them. The postpartum practice described in this book will give you space to be vulnerable and encourage others to help you without judgement. It's time to return to normalizing needing help and accepting help as mothers.

This book will show you that you deserve to have the support you need. And it is my wish that the information here will free you to ask for help without guilt and shame. We've got to nurture you so that you can grow into your new role and identity with all the love and respect you deserve.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book serves as a practical guide to plan and prepare for your postpartum recovery practice.

As a new mom, a postpartum plan is something you have some control over. Your pregnancy, birth, and new baby all have a mind of their own. Having this little bit of control is important if your birth plan didn't quite go according to plan (pun intended!). Or if your pregnancy was challenging, even if you were really fit and healthy to begin with. Your new baby? I wish you luck with anything going to plan. But at the very least, your chance of successfully following a postpartum recovery plan is a lot higher. This book can help you prepare for a postpartum recovery tailored to your liking.

If you're like me, an Asian woman who has migrated overseas, or you were born and grew up overseas, particularly in a Western country, this book is a wonderful resource on how to find and adjust what you need in order to design a postpartum recovery that resonates with you. I believe that you'll feel seen

throughout this book. You'll feel relieved to know that you can adapt tradition and customs to your modern lifestyle and identity. And most important, you'll learn how to connect with the older generation while adapting a postpartum practice rooted in tradition. I see you, I hear you, I am you.

If you married into an Asian family, particularly an East Asian family (e.g. the Chinese, Japanese, Thais, Koreans, Indonesians, Filipinos, Taiwanese, and more), you'll find explanations on why your in-laws would want you to follow a specific postpartum recovery practice after having your child. In this case, the Chinese postpartum recovery practice of *zuò yuè zi* or confinement. You'll also find ways to compromise with them on some strict traditional practices so that you can have a postpartum recovery month suited to you.

Finally, if you're someone who wants to learn how to be a new mom's ally and postpartum support person (whether you're a new mom's spouse, partner, family member, or friend), this book will guide you on how to help your loved one carry out and complete their postpartum recovery practice in comfort and confidence. I promise you that the effort, space, and patience that you put into completing this postpartum recovery month will be treasured forever. It'll strengthen your bond, respect, and trust between each other.

So, don't wait too long to plan your postpartum recovery, especially if you're choosing to practice the recovery parts that require Chinese herbs and ingredients that aren't readily available in your area. Since we're also living in a time when disease outbreaks easily travel around the globe, having a postpartum plan beforehand helps steady your worries and anxieties about how to manage when you get home with a newborn.

A good time to start preparing is at the start of your third trimester of your pregnancy (around week 30) so that you're still able to travel if need be. If you want to include Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in your postpartum recovery practice, this'll give you plenty of time to find and consult with a TCM doctor and get your herbs and food preparations ready. If you also need to plan things around your mother or mother-in-law, it's definitely a good time to do so before the baby is here. I'll guide you through this in chapter 3.

This book is split into two sections. Section one describes how to prepare for the physiological, emotional, and social changes you will go through during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Section two coaches you how to combine traditional and modern practices to create the perfect blend for your individual postpartum journey.

Introduction

Making the Case for a Modern Confinement

Were you brought up in Asia or in the West by Asian parents with conflicting messages about sticking to traditional values but to also embracing modernity to avoid being left behind in the modern rat race?

“I’m giving you all this education so that you can provide for yourself in the future. Also, when will you be getting married? You’re in your mid-twenties and still single! You need a husband to look after you.”

Or perhaps you’ve got Asian in-laws who are pretty conservative?

“Yes, lah, I understand she’s Westernised. Very independent. But she’s now your wife, she has to follow you, lah! Have to follow our family’s traditions, mah.”

The confusion and conflict can easily extend into your pregnancy and postpartum experience.

Why? Asian women, in general, practice a period of confinement or “sitting in” after giving birth. So, without saying

so, the female elders in your family will expect you to follow this tradition after giving birth. They'll happily show up to help you through this time along with their motherly advice: solicited and unsolicited ones!

Each Asian culture and family have their version of this postpartum practice. This book is dedicated to the Chinese confinement practice, a reflection of my Malaysian-Chinese heritage.

WHAT IS THE CONFINEMENT PRACTICE?

This Chinese postpartum practice is known as 坐月子 (*zuò yuè zi*), "sitting the month," "doing the month," or confinement, because the new mom, and their newborn, are confined to their home. This practice is a postpartum recovery program meant to help new moms regain energy and strength for the motherhood and parenthood journey ahead. It is also believed that adhering to the various confinement rules can prevent future ailments, such as rheumatism, when a mother reaches old age. These rules are formed from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) principles. We explore more of this in chapter 1.

While I knew I was going to follow the confinement practice after giving birth, I didn't like how constricting some of the rules and practices were. Viewing them through the lens of my medical training and experience, I felt that some of these rules and practices wouldn't help me get and stay comfortable while I recovered from birth. Some of them can be a health risk too!

“Don’t wash your hair or take a shower for 30 days after you give birth, ya!”

“And you have to stay warm and eat and drink warm food and beverages all the time. If you don’t, the wind will go into your body. That’ll make you get all sorts of aches and pain when you’re old!”

*“Most importantly, don’t **layan**¹ any strong feelings during these 30 days, ya? Not good for you and baby. Just focus on the good and happy things!”*

From a personal perspective, I felt these rules hadn’t changed much from my mom’s and grandmother’s time. They seemed out of touch with how I viewed myself as a mixed modern-traditional woman.

I was born and brought up in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. As a 1990s kid, my teenage years were filled with Western pop culture from MTV, Hollywood films, and TV series like *Xena the Warrior Princess*, *Angel*, and *Charmed*. The Western export of being a woman who could hold her own, fight her own battles, and thrive without a man was pretty inspiring. My mom didn’t mind me watching those shows either. She raised me to be independent after all.

I also had equal exposure to Chinese culture and shows since my parents and grandparents followed Hong Kong movies and TV series religiously through a Malaysian cable service called Astro. (Fellow Malaysians, remember the *Wah Lai Toi* channel with all the Hong Kong TV series? *Journey to the West* and *A Kindred Spirit*?) Many female characters were portrayed as docile, gentle, and almost fairy-like. Those who could fight were the “troublesome” characters (like Fong Sai

1. *layan*: Malay word for “entertain” or “give in.”

Yuk's mother in the Hong Kong TVB series). I saw myself in those rebellious female characters. I admired them.

I also grew up following Malaysian cultural traditions, specifically Chinese traditions and taboos, since my ancestors are from South China. I'm a third generation Malaysian, so many Chinese customs from mainland China have been adapted to Malaysia's multicultural melting pot.

Once such custom relates to the Hungry Ghost month. This time is usually observed in August, which corresponds to the seventh month in the lunar calendar. And what a time of trepidation! I was always told to watch my back for wandering souls from hell who were visiting the mortal realm. And to avoid stepping on any offerings that littered the sidewalk or were placed under many big trees.

Pregnant women were especially cautioned against going out alone at night during this month. Well, they weren't supposed go out at night at all! The spirits might've taken advantage of the vulnerable state of the pregnant person. And if they could help it, they SHOULD NOT give birth during this month. This belief is followed up till today for some folks.

I'm also a solid follower of *feng shui* because my mom still practices it diligently. So, to not adhere to the customs and taboos I grew up with made me feel very uncomfortable. Despite being a woman of science!

Naturally, I had a period of confusion and conflict about whether I had to be modern or conservative. But during my years as a medical doctor, I became comfortable with my modern and traditional identities. I embraced both sides of myself.

It started with patients and their families asking shyly,

“Kristal, erm, is it okay if we wanted to try acupuncture to try to improve Dad’s feeling in his arms? The stroke rehabilitation doesn’t seem to be working yet.”

“Doc, I don’t really want to take medications for this cold. Can I have some herbal teas I used to drink as a kid?”

“I’m a bit embarrassed to ask but I want to try Reiki healing for my back pain. What do you think?”

My response? Yes, yes, and yes! The catch? As long as the complementary therapies and herbal concoctions don’t interfere or worsen the main problem. I always found their expression of relief to my answer intriguing. Because in my mind, “Why wouldn’t you try both? It’s so normal in Malaysia to use both traditional medicine and modern medicine.”

This frequent exchange made me realise, “I CAN be a woman of science and follow traditional practices if I wish!” There was such a relief in releasing myself from the belief that I had to choose one side or the other.

After a while of having these interactions, I realised that embracing this side of me gave me an edge to my clinical practice. I could easily build a connection with my patients and their families or caregivers because of my mixed modern-traditional upbringing and approach. This has given me the open-mindedness and humility in letting my patients guide me in how best to serve them.

It is this part of me that is imbued in this book. The part of me that always seeks to compromise so that I can preserve tradition and be true to myself.

So while I planned for my confinement month while pregnant with each of my children, I wanted to have an experience that complemented my mixed modern-traditional self. A

confinement version that relates to our modern life yet rooted in my heritage.

I knew that if I was made to follow the traditional confinement rules strictly, there was a high chance I wouldn't complete the postpartum practice as desired. And I'd feel uncomfortable and stressed rather than pampered and rested!

Here lies the challenge with asking the modern generation to strictly follow traditional rules. Why?

CHALLENGES OF A TRADITIONAL CONFINEMENT

Outdated to the Modern Woman

Every generation always wants the next to do better. Many women in the past had to endure so much humiliation, degradation, and barriers to education and basic human rights. We definitely don't want this to continue for us and the future generation! Yet, there are still degrees of humiliation, degradation, and barriers to education and basic human rights for women in our twenty-first century. Just pop on the news and there's plenty to read about gender inequities globally across all aspects of human life.

The modern woman has unique challenges compared to the older generation of women. We bear the burden of breaking the cycle of oppression and sacrifice our maternal elders had to make through no complete fault of their own. We also bear the burden of setting examples for our children to show them that it is possible to break the cycle and do better.

Modern women everywhere these days also have to think about how much maternity leave they and their partner or spouse can get. Is it financially and logistically feasible to carry

out a very traditional confinement month? Can they get the physical support to do it? There were less of these challenges back in the days when families lived with each other in the same village or neighbourhood. We once knew our neighbours really well and trusted many of them. This connection isn't as common nowadays.

Excludes Partners from the Postpartum Period

Historically, males and fathers weren't allowed into the birthing room or during confinement. It was considered bad luck for fathers to come into contact with the birthing process. Meaning, bad luck would befall the family from then on if he did! (See the upcoming excerpt on "A Note on Chinese Cultural Views and Traditions Related to Postpartum and the Female Body" for more explanation.)

Some folks still believe in this taboo today! Others just stick to tradition and don't question it regardless of whether they agree with that belief. Many men, males, fathers, and dads end up being excluded from the confinement month. This means they're missing out on bonding time with their newborns. And they're unable to learn early on how to care for their loved one and baby for the rest of the Postpartum Year. This exclusion still happens in some confinement centers in East Asia.

The problem with this exclusion is just that. Benched. "Get out of the way!" is the message. Worst of all is the insinuation that "you don't know how to be a parent." But women are not born "knowing" how to parent just like that. We're not in the Matrix where the arrival of a baby can be programmed to automatically upload a "parenting manual." So, how are men and fathers expected to know how to parent if they don't learn hands on?

Note: I challenge this exclusion head on throughout the book with a focus in chapter 8 to ensure men and fathers are included in the confinement month. I'll say it now to plant the idea: *Spouses, partners, men, and fathers should be the PRIMARY postpartum recovery support person!*

Inconvenient in Our Modern World

Folks of Chinese ethnicity live all over the world nowadays. Many migrate to Western countries. Sure, Chinatowns are set up in most major Western cities, but not everything one needs for the confinement month is always available there. For those of us living in areas without access to Chinese herbs and special ingredients for cooking and making confinement meals and beverages, having to follow a strict tradition means we probably can't practice it much at all!

We've also got great health services and amenities in many Western and developing countries. Sanitation isn't like in the olden days anymore. We've got water treatment facilities and waste processing plants. We've got heating and cooling technologies that grow more advanced as time goes by. Most of all, we've got modern medicine and preventive programs to manage diseases that used to be fatal back in the days. So, strict traditions around hygiene are becoming more of an inconvenience in our modern world.

The biggest problem with being strict with old traditions is the loss of tradition itself. When we don't continue observing tradition in our generation, it's easy to see how it will be forgotten by the next generation. And just because something is outdated, doesn't mean we should discard it. When there's

room for adaptation, growth, and all parties can come together to preserve a tradition, we've got to seize the moment!

A NOTE ON CHINESE CULTURAL VIEWS AND TRADITIONS

Way back in ancient Chinese times, as described in *The Book of Rites*,² a new mom and her newborn were isolated after birth for 3 months. This is because it was believed that it was unlucky for the father and other family members to come into contact with the birthing process. This is undoubtedly the early version of the confinement practice.

It's also very common among many Asian cultures to view a woman's blood as "dirty." Back in Malaysia, I've been told that some places of worship don't allow entry to women who are having their menses. Because that blood is "dirty," it's "bad luck" and "offensive" to have her in a place of worship at that time. I've also heard of very traditional families who would "hide" the girl or woman away until her menses cycle ended. This relates to the view that childbirth is a "dirty" process.

"The reason for a woman to fulfil the month after childbirth is because during the birth her body passes through a state of pollution. Before her lochia is cleansed, she is not allowed to go outdoors, neither to approach the locations of wells and stoves, nor to worship the spirits and attend ancestral sacrifices."

—Xiao Pin Fang³

Keep in mind that TCM and Chinese culture are closely intertwined. So, there are traditions and practices that can be both medicinal and cultural.

2. "The Book of Rites, The Birth of a Child," World History Commons, <https://worldhistorycommons.org/book-rites-birth-child>.

3. Jen-Der Lee, "Childbirth in Early Imperial China," *NAN NÜ* volume 7, Issue 2 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852605775248658>.

Keeping to the very traditional and strict practices of confinement is a disservice to modern moms and their families. Being rigid with tradition, when our modern world isn't designed to support modern moms and their families, risks worsening the health of new moms. Then the tradition itself risks being forgotten.

If the postpartum confinement recovery practice continues to be outdated, it's going to be perceived as more inconvenient and uncomfortable for new moms and their families to follow. It's no wonder if the younger generation would rather dismiss the practice than try it out.

Yet, there is merit in preserving this practice. How so?

BENEFITS OF A TRADITIONAL CONFINEMENT

Remembering Our Roots

While traditions can be preserved in writing, audio, and visual form, there's something magical about experiencing it ourselves. The memories we form when we engage all or some of our five senses are unparalleled. I've noticed that many skills and practices are usually passed down by "see one, do one, teach one."⁴ Our ancestors who didn't have access to education

4. In medicine, I was taught many ward-based clinical procedural skills this way (i.e., not complex procedures requiring the operating theatre). I learned by watching tutorials or observing someone else perform the procedure. Or by attending a simulation session. Then, I'd do one under supervision. And when a junior or medical student wanted to learn the procedure, I'd be the one to teach them. My clinical educators emphasized that this was a practical way to keep our skills sharp and up-to-date. I follow this guide today in most things I do. This method of learning also happens at home. Especially with food and crafts. We're always learning from our elders about family recipes, tips, and tricks in the kitchen (and in their art and craft). Then, we practice it till we get better. And then we teach it to our children!

or were illiterate have been passing down their stories, culture, and traditions this way!

The best method of remembering the ways of confinement is to experience it ourselves. Knowing what worked and didn't work for us is a valuable resource for planning our next confinement after the next child. We're also able to help others who are looking for tips and tricks before and during their confinement month.

Passing Down Our Heritage

We know the power of stories. Storytelling has been around since the time of cavemen and ancient civilisations. Knowledge, religion, and traditions have been passed down this way. Nations have been moved, rallied, and crumbled through stories. Combined with our memories of our confinement month, being able to tell our story of experiencing this rite of motherhood and parenthood is an unforgettable way of passing down a part of our heritage. What a wonderful way of sharing your journey into and through motherhood and parenthood with your children too!

If you and your spouse or partner are the first to raise a mixed-race family, this holds even more value because you're both able to pass down your joint heritage once you've tailored a confinement practice to your family.

Honouring Our Elders

Coming together with our elders to nurture the new mom is becoming more difficult now than before. Sure, we have modern travel methods compared to our ancestors but we're also more dispersed around the world. Many of us adult

children are also modern immigrants to Western countries or to another place that our parents feel holds a better future for us and our kids. It also isn't always affordable for our parents to fly overseas or their health can't tolerate the ever-narrowing flight seats on long-haul journeys.

Continuing to practice confinement offers us a chance to reconnect with our elders when we're planning for the postpartum recovery month. It's a wonderful time to come together and rediscover family traditions and family histories. Especially as a way to take a walk in the shoes of the women who came before us. I can only imagine the new or stronger bonds a modern mom will form with their mothers, aunts, stepmoms, grandmothers—well, all the mom figures in their lives! I'd imagine not many elders openly share their stories of triumph and failures when they first became a mother. I cannot think of a better way to honour our matriarch elders than to hold space for them and remind them that they're not invisible.

This is also a perfect opportunity to have open conversations about what you, the modern mom, needs. It's such a tender conversation, so I'd like to think that our elders would be more empathetic to the new challenges the modern world brings to new moms and their families.



This book exists because I wanted to share my experience and remember the history of Chinese postpartum confinement in English. Something I can pass down to my children so that they and their partners can easily follow this tradition should they choose to.

I am not fluent or literate in Mandarin, Cantonese, or any other Chinese dialects. I can only speak enough to order

delicious food at the stalls and curse at someone. And I'm not sure if my children will pick up the language since they're unlikely to grow up and live around Mandarin- and Chinese-dialect-speaking family and communities.

I also don't like being shamed for not being able to speak my mother tongue or pressured into learning the language when it's not my priority. So, I wanted to share a resource with those of you who don't know Mandarin or are unlikely to pick up the language anytime soon. Just like me!

Making the conscious effort to respectfully adapt and adjust an old practice to our modern world means putting in effort to build a bridge (or many bridges!) between modernity and tradition. Between mothers and adult daughters. Between generations. Across cultures in mixed marriages.

And there is no right or wrong way to do it.

This book describes my method of adapting the traditional confinement practice to our modern needs and lifestyle. My recommendations come from bridging my medical background with my Malaysian upbringing, which was heavily influenced by TCM. My mom and aunt were also consulted, as well as a TCM practitioner, Dr. Eun Kim, who practices in Los Angeles, United States.

This book also serves as your guide and life jacket for the mental and emotional whirlpool that is the Postpartum Year. The postpartum recovery period is a very vulnerable time for new moms, no matter how many kids you've had. This is because it's always a new life event that's happening. There's so much physical, emotional, and mental recovery to go through plus the constant self-growth as your identity as a new mom and parent, and as a modern woman and person, is challenged every step of the way.

So, I invite you to embrace this month of being nurtured in the first 30 days of your postpartum recovery period. Allow me and your support network to help you get comfortable at the beginning of your postpartum journey.

About the Author



After becoming a physician and practicing medicine in Australia, Dr. Kristal Lau got her MS degree in Public Health. She believes that the future of health lies in combining our past and present knowledge about healing to meet the needs of our constantly evolving society as we move forward.

Kristal grew up in Malaysia, where it's common for people to use modern medicine alongside traditional medicine. She frequently applied this concept when managing her patients and their families—as long as the medical treatments and traditional or home remedies don't clash and cause harm.

After moving away from Australia in 2017, Kristal rebranded herself as a “doctor-turned-doula,” taking her medical training and practical experience and using that to explore

her interests in writing and podcasting. Now, Kristal runs a small business, called Mama's Wing Woman, offering postpartum support to new moms and their growing families.

Kristal and her husband have four children: two cheeky daughters and two incorrigible fur babies. Kristal practiced confinement after her first child with her mom as her confinement person. She's since completed her second confinement practice with her husband as her support person.