



With her first child, Renstroem said worried that she was doing everything wrong and was tired and disorganized trying to juggle meals for herself while attending to the baby's needs.

"I was in this cloud of sleep deprivation, which made it easy for me to become a bit lax about baby care," she said. "My second baby slept through the night much sooner than my first, and that was entirely down to the schedule set by our *yuesao*."

Ayi Matchmakers, a major Shanghai housekeeper agency that caters to expats living in the city, told Shanghai Daily that more customers in recent years have become interested in confinement services.

In fact, the agency is short of English-speaking *yuesao* to meet demand.

"As information becomes more readily available through the Internet, social media and word-of-mouth, Westerners living in China are increasingly aware of the *yuesao* concept," said Anne Stehlin, a Danish native and co-founder of the agency.

She added, "Westerners living in China may not have access to an extended support network

of family and friends who can assist with postpartum care, so employing a *yuesao* helps fill the gap by providing practical help, emotional support and guidance during the crucial postpartum period."

The agency said that its *yuesao* staff must go through maternal care training and have at least five years of experience.

"Postpartum care is a very intense job," said Stehlin. "It often requires knowledge and experience with traditional Chinese medicine to improve general well-being. *Yuesao* will also know about breastfeeding techniques, infant sleeping patterns and baby hygiene. A large part of their job is further to provide guidance about nutrition in order to enhance recovery and milk production."

Xu Duanqing, a *yuesao* from Anhui Province, is one example. She is good at planning meals for new mothers and help them produce milk.

"Clients from different cultural background have different demands, especially on diet," she said. "Westerners are usually quite casual about meals, but Asians pay more attention to a balanced diet.

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**Anne Stehlin**

Co-founder of a major Shanghai housekeeper agency



Naya with Renstroem's newborn — Ti Gong



Xu Duanqing has formed bond with many foreign families she worked with during her 10-plus years of experience as a *yuesao*. — Ti Gong

However, we don't just add traditional herbal remedies mechanically to their meal plans."

Chinese-style soup is widely favored. Chicken, pork ribs and fish are used in the base, and various vegetables are added according to a client's preferences.

After graduating from a training school where she studied maternal and child care, Xu started to work as a *yuesao* in 2011. She has worked with families from around the world, including the United States, France, Russia and Brazil.

"I learned English in school

and then perfected it while working," she said, "so I don't have problems communicating with my clients now."

Xu said that she appreciates the respect and friendships her role evokes.

"Every client asks if I am getting enough sleep and if I am eating well in their home," she said. "One French family, at the end of my month there, cooked dinner for me and took a lot of pictures of me and their baby. It was really a joy working for them."

The pampering care encompassed in *zuo yuezi* has a somewhat negative connotation with some people because

it harks back to the past, when new mothers, for a month, were forbidden from going outside, taking showers, brushing their teeth or using air conditioning on scorching hot days.

"Confinement is necessary because after delivery, women have relative weak organs due to pregnancy and labor," said Yu Rong, an obstetrician of more than 30 years. "But mothers have to approach the postpartum period scientifically and not stick strictly to rigid rules of tradition. Mental health care is equally important because hormone fluctuation may increase the risk of postpartum depression."