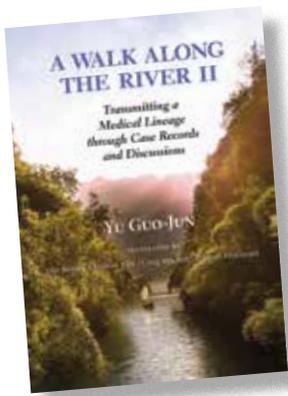


# Another River stroll reveals some breathtaking views

**A WALK ALONG THE RIVER II,**  
by Dr Yu Guo-Jun,  
Eastland Press 2019



**Review:** Sharon Weizenbaum

I WAS DELIGHTED THAT my offer to review Dr Yu Guo-Jun's second volume of *A Walk Along The River* was accepted because it gave me a chance to dive into Dr Yu's work sooner rather than later. Assuming that those who are reading this review have read volume 1, I want to assure you that you will not be disappointed! Dr Yu has done it again!

In addition to the chapters on various aspects of medicine, this text starts with a long introduction that expounds both on Dr Yu's background and on the roots of his basic philosophy of medicine. He shares with the reader each step of his path to maturing as a skilled doctor of Chinese medicine.

It is not simply a history of who he studied with and which texts he valued, but an account of his point of view, his intellectual vantage point and the clarity of his intention. It is this that allowed him to learn deeply. This text has value beyond words. How rare and precious to have a guide like this.

Dr Yu finishes this section with these words: "I was able to view the study of Chinese medicine through multiple lenses and appreciate the beauty within. Not only was I relatively objective and clear-eyed in my views, but I had a real appreciation for my studies, even to the point of sometimes feeling intoxicated." The text is then broken into five chapters as follows:

1. Disorders of Qi, Blood and Body Fluids: in which he discusses cases of bleeding and of phlegm patterns
2. Generalised Disorders in which he discusses fever from internal damage
3. Gynaecology and Obstetrics in which he discusses vaginal discharge, uterine bleeding, breast lumps and three different postpartum diseases, all treated with modified versions of *Si Ni San* (Frigid Extremities Decoction).
4. Paediatrics in which he discusses paediatric fevers, night sweats, food aversion,

diarrhoea, coughing and wheezing, and whooping cough.

5. Disorders of the Throat and Oral Cavity, which includes chronic pharyngitis, pharyngeal pain, canker sores, nasal congestion with diminished smell, visual distortion and diplopia.

He then offers an appendix on what he calls "Time and Space in Chinese Medical Therapeutics" with case studies and discussion of illnesses that arise at certain times. One case is of a woman who gets sick at the height of every summer, and another two cases are of people he treated in summer for diseases that came every winter.

The discussion and commentary around each case is what makes Dr Yu's books so rich. He goes into detail as to why he approaches cases as he does. At the same time, he teaches many important principles that he has thought about deeply and applied in his work. For example, in one case he uses *Hai Zao* (Sargassum) with *Gan Cao* (Glycyrrhizae Radix). A colleague asks him how he can use these together since they are listed in the standard list of incompatibilities. This question inspires Dr Yu to expound on his views about the 18 incompatibilities and 19 antagonisms, giving examples of classic formulas in which incompatible or antagonistic herbs are used together. He says, "We can see that ancient physicians were not handcuffed by the 18 incompatibilities, even though they were discussed in the materia medica of the time," and encourages us to follow his lead and use these herbs together, adding that "in recent years I have treated many patients with thyroid tumors and uterine fibroids in which the main diagnosis or an important component of the diagnosis was congealing of stubborn phlegm. To appropriate formulas used for these conditions, I have even added *Hai Zao* and *Gan Cao* and it has never let me down."

In Dr Yu's discussion of *Si Ni San* in the

gynaecology and obstetrics chapter, he is asked about why the formula is in the *shaoyin* chapter of the *Shang Han Lun* (Discussion of Cold Damage). This question launches Dr Yu to discuss an issue that has plagued scholars throughout time: why a formula that treats stasis of the Liver and Stomach would be listed in the *shaoyin* chapter with the line starting with the words “A *shaoyin* disease...” Dr Yu’s answers confirms what I’ve felt for years as a scholar and teacher of *Shang Han Lun* when reading various doctors commentaries, which is that “many of the commentators on *Shang Han Lun* that I most esteem seem to give quite strained interpretations of this issue that often seem disconnected from clinical reality.” Yes!

That is true and I love the word “strained” here because in reading some commentary, that is exactly how it feels.

It is as though theory is being strained to fit into an idea and the strain is in the tension between the theory and clinical reality.

I love that he grounds himself, not in lofty disconnected theory but in basic clinical reality—how things really work. He gives several examples of commentary that he feels miss the mark this way.

There is so much in this text that has value and it is a fun and easy read. At the same time, it deserves in-depth study and memorisation of some of the formulas and modifications Dr Yu has mastered over his many years.

Before I sign off of this review, I’d like to point out one more of the many aspects I enjoyed, which is his discussion of Fu Qingzhu. I am in the midst of translating and commenting on the work of Fu and so I appreciated the homage Dr Yu pays to this insightful

and innovative doctor. At one point, when discussing vaginal discharge, Dr Yu tells us that he noticed that the formula Fu Qingzhu recommended as being effective for *all* yellow discharge was often not effective for him. Given the opportunity to criticise Fu as overconfident, Dr Yu instead is adamant that Fu must be greatly honoured, and takes the chance to launch into a discussion of how surgical terminations, IUDs and other procedures have created very different scenarios than Fu would have seen. He differentiates the type of yellow leucorrhoea Fu’s formula treats but explains that many patients also have toxic heat and blood stasis due to their exposure to these modern procedures.

He goes on to offer several more formulas of Fu Qingzhu’s that have been important to him in his clinical work. This is a must-have text for every serious herbalist.

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