

The similarity of the theoretical positions of traditional Chinese medicine and some medical schools of ancient Greece

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The similarity of theoretical principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine and medical schools of Ancient Greece

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RESUME

The content of certain works of Ancient Greek philosophers and physicians shows no fundamental contradictions between the eastern and western medicine in ancient times. Empedocles (V century. BC) and Alcmaeon (IV century. BC) used principles similar to those of the basics of Traditional Chinese Medicine: dualism, the doctrine of continuous interconversion of primary elements, the circulation of vital energy through the channels other than blood vessels. This suggests that there is no reason for radical opposition of the eastern and western medicine, because of their considerable theoretical unity.

Keywords: theoretical foundations, Empedocles, Alcmaeon, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ancient Greece.

SUMMARY

The content of some works of ancient Greek philosophers and doctors testifies that there were no fundamental contradictions between Eastern and Western medicine in antiquity. Empedocles (V century BC) and Alcmeon (IV century BC) used principles similar to the foundations of traditional Chinese medicine: dualism, the doctrine of the continuous interconversion of primary elements (elements), the circulation of vital energy through channels that are different from the blood vessels. This gives reason to believe that there is no reason for a radical opposition of Eastern and Western medicine, due to their significant theoretical unity.

Key words: theoretical foundations, Empedocles, Alcmeon, traditional Chinese medicine, Ancient Greece.

Currently, the "common place" is the opinion about the uniqueness of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). But, if for many of her practical methods this is completely true, then regarding the theoretical foundations this statement can be challenged. Elucidation of the true state of affairs, in our opinion, has significant applied value, since it will greatly contribute to the implementation of the principles of integrative medicine. Moreover, the actual implementation and termination of disputes between specialists who understand the importance of widespread introduction of TCM in the practice of modern health care, and opponents of the "miracles" and "secrets" of TCM. Meanwhile, no

miracles and secrets in fact, no. There is only insufficient acquaintance with both TCM and the basics of ancient Western medicine. A study of the works of ancient Greek philosophers and doctors testifies that there were essentially no contradictions between Eastern and Western medicine in ancient times.

To understand this, it is necessary, first of all, to turn to the works of Empedocles, the famous philosopher who was born around 484–481 BC. in Akragante in Sicily and died about 424-421 BC. However, they have survived only in fragments that are practically unknown not only to the general medical community, but also to historiographers of medicine. Diogenes Laertius, the Athenian grammar of the first half of the 3rd century, left very valuable information about him, other reports are usually very scanty. Summarizing the mass of ancient data, Diogenes tells in detail about this person, the most difficult to understand, whose significance for the history of medicine is still far from being appreciated, in our opinion. However, these details almost do not relate to the actual medical activities of Empedocles, except for the instructions "Empedocles healed a certain Panfea from Akragant, which doctors recognized as hopeless." as well as "His poems" On Nature "and" Purification "reach five thousand verses, and" Medical Word "- six hundred verses" [2, p. 330-336]. It seems necessary to study in more detail not only the medical activities of Empedocles, but also to clarify some erroneous judgments about him. Ethnological classic D.D. Frazer spoke rather caustically about his personality, which manifested itself in assessing the activities of the great philosopher, in fact placing him in a very ambiguous list of ancient objects of worship [6, p. 98]: "The ancient Egyptians worshiped not only cats, dogs and other small animals, but also people <...> In classical Greece, Empedocles posed himself not just as a sorcerer, but as a god, claiming that he could teach his students how to summon or calm wind, cause rain and shine of the sun, drive out sickness and old age, raise the dead. "

Domestic medical historiography has only a brief summary of V.P. Karpova: "The philosopher and physician Empedocles is known, first of all, for his work" On Nature ", which sets out the doctrine of the four elements, the echoes of which have come down to modern times; in his activity as a doctor, apparently, quackery and mysticism played a large role as a response to the requirements of the era (magnificent clothes, rituals of purification, spells). This direction sharply differed from the strict rules of medical behavior and rationalism of the asclepiades of the Cnidus and Kosovo schools and could not count on their sympathy "[3, p. 46]. Vladimir Porfirevich Karpov (1870–1943), an outstanding Russian scientist - biologist, morphologist, philosopher, historian of science. One of the organizers and the first rector (1918-1925) of the Yekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk) University. A great connoisseur of the ancient Greek and Latin languages, a prominent specialist in the heritage of Aristotle (he was the first in Russia to translate his works on biology) and Hippocrates. Without the excellent editorship of V.P. Karpov, the first and so far the only complete edition in Russian of the Hippocratic Corpus in 1939–1943, only abbreviated in 1994, would hardly have been possible. Thus, he made a huge and invaluable contribution to Russian medical historiography. But, he made an enormous and invaluable contribution to Russian medical historiography. But, he made an enormous and invaluable contribution to Russian medical historiography. But,

apparently, V.P. Karpov was not closely acquainted with the texts of Empedocles himself. Otherwise, nothing can explain his rather impartial assessment. It seems that the true thoughts of Empedocles would be quite consonant with the ideas of V.P. Karpov, who developed the doctrine of vitalism and the body as a self-organizing system. Therefore, it is necessary to study in more detail not only the medical activities of Empedocles, but also to clarify some erroneous judgments about him.

Fortunately, we have the opportunity to use the works of Heinrich-Roman Ivanovich Yakubanis, who until 1917 served as an extraordinary professor at the Department of Philosophy at Kiev University, and after emigration, taught at the University of Lublin. In our opinion, to date, this is the best Russian-language work about Empedocles, especially since it is based on the surviving original excerpts of his poems. Below we present G. Yakubanis's translation of the surviving texts of Empedocles. Also important are his comments (in parentheses in the course of the quote), where italics belong to him. Responding to the incorrect comparison of Empedocles with the wandering "sophist-miracles" of the Renaissance and with modern southern Italian "eccentric" demagogues, G. Jakubanis emphasizes: "What is common between the majestic, profound ideas of Empedocles and the vulgar, senseless phrase-mongering of contemporary rhetoricians-demagogues? Or between a sincere, based on real facts, consciousness of his own genius and his great social merits of the first citizen of Akragant, highly respected by his contemporaries, to whom, according to legend, his compatriots even offered the royal crown as an expression of gratitude for the blessings shown to their native city, and between the pompous charlatanism of vagabonds -wonders who flooded Italy at the end of the Middle Ages? <...> Despite the wit and insight of the latest attempts to restore the integrity of his system, disturbed and darkened for us by time, the general picture of the world outlook continues to remain unclear, and the personality of the philosopher remains mysterious. There is a beautiful legendary story that the inhabitants of Akragant erected a monument-column to Empedocles, which depicted their great compatriot with a closed face. This artistic design turned out to be prophetic "[12, p. 17-19].

But the works of Empedocles speak best of all about the real thoughts and activities of Empedocles. He bluntly states in Fragment 112 of the Purification poem: "I walk among you as an immortal god, and no longer a mortal [man], held in high esteem by all, as it should be, crowned around with bandages and green garlands. When I, together with them, husbands and wives, arrive in the blooming cities, reverent worship surrounds me. And they follow me in an innumerable crowd, asking where is the path [leading] to benefit, some - having the need for divination, others are trying to hear a word that heals from various ailments, truly long tormented by heavy suffering "[7, p. 121]. About what all the same can receive knowledge and / or healings from Empedocles, realizing himself, on the basis of deep knowledge and incredible skills, truly godlike, Fragment 111 of the poem "On Nature" unambiguously says: "You will know all that there is, healing agents that protect against ailments and old age, since I will do all this for you alone. You will stop the rage of the tireless

the winds, which, rushing to the earth, destroy the fields with their gusts; and again, if you wish, you will excite [their] rewarding [previously hurt] breath. After a gloomy storm you will deliver people a timely bucket, and after a summer drought you will deliver streams of [rain] feeding the trees, which will pour out of the [heavenly] ether; and you will also return the soul from Hades (Μένοϋ - sob. : vitality, life, which coincides with the concept ψυχή - G.Ya.) of the deceased person "[7, p. 120-121]. Thus, students, but apparently only those close to them ("sincere"), are guaranteed mastery of not only magical techniques, incl. control of the weather and revitalization of the dead, but also the mastery of "all that there is, healing means that protect from ailments and old age." It becomes obvious that Empedocles became an object of universal worship not as a rogue sorcerer and, moreover, not as a "cult creature" such as a sacred cat or dog. He called on people with all his authority to study nature and master ways to preserve health.

As for the worldview of Empedocles, even in antiquity it was generally recognized that he was the leader in the creation of the doctrine of the constituents of all things - the "four roots", primary elements or elements (fire, air, water and earth). This is widely known even today, but it is perceived in an extremely simplistic way. The main surviving evidence here is Fragment 17 of Empedocles' poem "On Nature", which contains the main provisions of the great thinker's natural philosophy: "I will tell you two things. For that from the many, unity grows, then, on the contrary, from the one, a lot grows. The emergence of perishable creatures is also twofold, and the transition is also twofold: this last (i.e., the passage) by a universal union and is generated and destroyed, and the first (i.e., emergence), being called to life due to the [universal] germination [from the depths of indifferent Spheros], disappears again [under the gradually increasing influence of the decomposing Enmity]. And this continuous transition [of the elements from one state to another] never stops: either by the force of Love they all come together, then, on the contrary, by hatred of Enmity they are carried apart from each other. Thus, since the one is invariably born from the many, and from the germination of the one, much is again allocated, insofar as they (i.e. the elements) arise, and their age is unstable. But since the continuous transition from one state to another never stops, insofar as they always exist in an unchanging circle <...> All of them (i.e. the elements) are equal and simultaneous in origin, but one fulfills one purpose, the other fulfills another, and each possesses a special property, and they alternately dominate in the circulation of time. After all, nothing is born to them and nothing [of them] ceases to exist, since if they were continuously annihilated, they would no longer exist, and besides, what kind of force would have come from that would increase the [impoverished] universe? So, they remain the same, but, penetrating each other, in one place they become one thing, in another - another, remaining forever similar [to themselves, i.e. identical]" [7, p. 92-93]. Fragment 26 [11, p. 100-101] reads: "They (the elements) in turn dominate in the circulation of the [universal] cycle (that is, in the circular flow of successive periods of the great world drama, the universal process): then they become scarce (qualitatively, not quantitatively; they wither, weaken by forces, and do not "disappear", which, according to clear and repeated statements then they would no longer exist, and besides, what kind of force and from where would it have increased the [impoverished] universe? So, they remain the same, but, penetrating each other, in one place they become one thing, in another - another, remaining forever similar [to themselves, i.e. identical]" [7, p. 92-93]. Fragment 26 [11, p. 100-101] reads: "They (the elements) in turn dominate in the circulation of the [universal] cycle (that is, in the circular flow of successive periods of the great world drama, the universal process): then they become scarce (qualitatively, not quantitatively; they wither, weaken by forces, and do not "disappear", which, according to clear and repeated statements then they would no longer exist, and besides, what kind of force and from where would it have increased the [impoverished] universe? So, they remain the same, but, penetrating each other, in one place they become one thing, in another - another, remaining forever similar [to themselves, i.e. identical]" [7, p. 92-93]. Fragment 26 [11, p. 100-101] reads: "They (the elements) in turn dominate in the circulation of the [universal] cycle (that is, in the circular flow of successive periods of the great world drama, the universal process): then they become scarce (qualitatively, not quantitatively; they wither, weaken by forces, and do not "disappear", which, according to clear and repeated statements remaining forever similar [to themselves, i.e. identical]" [7, p. 92-93]. Fragment 26 [11, p. 100-101] reads: "They (the elements) in turn dominate in the circulation of the [universal] cycle (that is, in the circular flow of successive periods of the great world drama, the universal process): then they become scarce (qualitatively, not quantitatively; they wither, weaken by forces, and do not "disappear", which, according to clear and repeated statements remaining forever similar [to themselves, i.e. identical]" [7, p. 92-93]. Fragment 26 [11, p. 100-101] reads: "They (the elements) in turn dominate in the circulation of the [universal] cycle (that is, in the circular flow of successive periods of the great world drama, the universal process): then they become scarce (qualitatively, not quantitatively; they wither, weaken by forces, and do not "disappear", which, according to clear and repeated statements

philosopher, would contradict the very essence of the elements) they one after another, then they grow (again qualitatively, or, more precisely, from the point of view of the prevailing influence on other elements) in a fatal alternation <...> From the germination of a single, much again stands out, insofar as they (elements) arise, and their age is unstable. But, since the continuous transition from one state to another never stops, insofar as they always exist in an unchanging circle. "

In these fragments, which are most important for understanding the essence of Empedocles' doctrine of the four constituents of all things (primary elements or elements), there is a fundamental moment that, as it seems to us, escaped the attention of previous researchers. From the words, we emphasize - Empedocles himself, and not any commentators, it follows that the four "elements" are not just "first bricks" that make up everything that exists. It is a dynamic system of continuous transitions from one "element" to another, and - depending on the season, ie, in modern terms, a change in energy characteristics. And this is nothing more than an absolute similarity to the Chinese concept of Wu Xing ("five primary elements", or rather, "five transitions"), as we know - the cornerstone of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which ensured its success for millennia to the present. Thus, for example, the following opposition is completely groundless, in order to emphasize the "unique functionality" of Wu Xing: "The five elements (in TCM - V.L.) are not the Five primary elements, like the " four roots ", the " primary elements " of Empedocles" [3, p. 29].

For a deeper understanding of the essence of the teachings of Empedocles, in medical terms, let us turn to fragment 100 of the poem "On Nature" [7, p. 80], which, by the way, Aristotle himself literally (apparently, he had absolutely nothing to change or add to this brilliant insight of Empedocles!) Quotes in Chapter 13 of his work "On Breathing": "This is how the breathing of living creatures occurs: from the flesh of a tube, devoid of blood, they pass to the surface of the body, in the mouths of which the outer skin integuments are densely dotted with through small cracks, so that there is no access for blood, but ether easily penetrates through the holes. Every time the tender blood pours out from there, the ether rushes inward in a stormy wave with a bubbling <...> Air rushes inward, while moisture flows out. So, whenever the gentle blood poured over the limbs, turning backward, the stream of ether flows inward. Immediately, heaving in a stormy wave, it penetrates after her. But, with the return of her, he flies back again. " Here G. Yakubanis significantly distorts the meaning when translating, since, like all previous European authors, he translates the word "pneuma" as "air" and cannot understand what vessels a person may have, except for blood vessels. But we clearly see that here Empedocles expounds the doctrine of the channels of circulation of vital energy (ether), which until now was considered an exceptional achievement of the medicine of Ancient China.

The teachings of Empedocles formed the basis of the Italic and Sicilian schools of medicine in Ancient Greece. What was their practical activity, no information has been preserved about this: their doctors are better known as theorists of medicine, who transferred natural philosophical constructions to this area. Croton philosopher and physician Alcmeon influenced by the ideas of the Pythagorean school, also located on

Sicily, created the doctrine of health, which was based on the idea of a balance of opposing "forces" - warm and cold, dry and wet, sweet and bitter, etc. Disease of the body is caused by a violation of this balance. Diogenes Laertius makes a very important message about this: "He was a listener of Pythagoras, wrote mainly about healing, but sometimes about nature, saying:" For the most part, humans have only two. Apparently, he was the first to write a discourse on nature "[2, p. 329]. Thus, Alcmaeon developed the doctrine of krasis - the correct mixing of the properties of elements (elements), characteristic of a healthy organism, and dyscrasia, or akrasia - their immoderate, unbalanced mixing, causing illness. This doctrine, if you do not pay attention to the details, formed the basis of the pathology of all Greek medical schools [4, p. 46]. And here a significant affinity with the theory of pathogenesis in TCM is obvious. Alcmaeon is considered the first to introduce dualistic categories into Greek medicine, similar to the Chinese yin and yang, but we have seen that Empedocles was also based on dualism, as the basis for the formation of the four primary elements of all things. Most often, from the younger representatives of the Sicilian school, researchers single out Philistion from Locre, a contemporary and friend of Plato, known for the fact that, presumably, already in the 4th century. BC NS. he performed anatomical dissections, thereby violating the religious tradition of the Greeks [5, p. 7]. There is no doubt that Philistion, scalpel in hand, examined the human heart. The remarkable treatise "On the Heart" from the "Hippocratic Corps", according to authoritative experts, with a high degree of probability belongs to Philistion [1, p. 418]. But, in our opinion, Much more curious is fragment 105 of Empedocles' poem "On Nature", showing that the great thinker believed that the function of the heart was broader than "pumping blood" [11, p. 118]: "[The heart] lives in waves of rapidly circulating blood, and in it [is what] is usually called thought in people, because people have thought [nothing but] the blood that washes the heart." Almost all commentators, both ancient and later, saw here only the thesis that "The thought of man is blood." We consider it necessary to pay attention to the position that "in the heart there is what we call thinking", since there is a clear parallel with TCM. In it, the channel-organ Heart is assigned, as you know, the main role in the regulation of the processes of consciousness and thinking, and when the function of this channel is disturbed, mental disorders often develop,

V.P. Karpov emphasizes, in our opinion, the most important moment for all ancient medicine: "The doctrine of pneuma - air, respiration - as an important life agent (basically Egyptian), which we also meet in the Hippocratic Collection, was especially advanced by the Italic school. This school has passed into history as a school of theoretical speculative constructions, as an anticipation of the future, but in its historical significance it can in no way be placed alongside purely medical schools - Cnidus and Kos "[4, p. 46]. In our opinion, it is very rightly noted - it is the doctrine of vital energy-pneuma, if it were further developed with the same thoroughness as the ancient Chinese doctrine of qi energy, could ensure the viability of traditional Greek medicine for centuries. This, unfortunately,

did not happen - the anticipation of the future of the Italic school was not realized in practice.

CONCLUSION

A careful reading of ancient texts testifies to the almost complete similarity of the fundamental theoretical foundations of TCM and ancient Greek medicine in the person of Empedocles and Alcmeon. The question, therefore, is not which of the theories is more "unique", but in a completely different way - to what extent have these theoretical constructions been further developed in practice in Greece and China? Empedocles and Alcmeon certainly made a huge contribution to the development of medicine. True, the contribution was never fully understood by contemporaries, and, unfortunately, was not further developed in the practical plane either by their direct followers or anyone else in Europe. If it were otherwise, there would probably not be a contrast between Eastern and Western medicine today. Their roots, as we have seen, are largely the same.

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