

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF STRESS IN THE WORKS  
OF ANCIENT AND EASTERN THINKERS**Rajapova Iroda Ernazarovna**Independent researcher at Urgench State University  
named after Abu Rayhan Beruni<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21974227>

**Abstract:** This article provides a scientific and historical analysis of how the phenomenon of psychophysiological strain was understood and described in the works of ancient Greek, Chinese, Indian, and Eastern (Islamic) thinkers long before the term "stress" was formally introduced into science. The relevant ideas found in the works of Hippocrates, the Stoics, Laozi, Confucius, Patanjali, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, and al-Ghazali, and their correspondence with and divergence from modern stress theory, are substantiated from a scientific and practical perspective.

**Keywords:** stress, ancient philosophy, Eastern thinkers, mental strain, Hippocrates, Stoicism, yoga philosophy, Ibn Sina, theory of temperament, history of psychology.

**Introduction.** The term "stress" and its scientific concept were formally formulated only in the mid-20th century by the Canadian physiologist Hans Sele within the framework of the theory of "general adaptation syndrome." However, the phenomenon of the human body responding to external influences with tension, mental tension, and internal anxiety has always been observed throughout human history, not invented, but has been the focus of philosophers, healers, and sages since ancient times.

Ancient and Eastern thinkers, although they did not use the term "stress," put forward profound observations and ideas regarding mental tension, inner anxiety, and its impact on bodily health[2]. This historical and philosophical heritage is important for understanding the roots of modern stress theory, as well as for enriching modern psychological approaches.

In this regard, a systematic and detailed scientific-historical analysis of how ideas related to the phenomenon of stress are illuminated in the works of ancient and Eastern thinkers determines the relevance of this article [3].

The level of study of the problem. Although the founder of modern stress theory, G. Sele, scientifically substantiated the concept of stress in his work "The Stress of Life," he simultaneously emphasized that phenomena similar to stress were also recorded in ancient medicine and philosophy. In research on the history of psychology, it is argued that ancient Greek medicine and philosophy are among the roots of modern psychosomatics.

The history of Eastern philosophy and medicine is covered in the works of domestic and foreign researchers, in which Ibn Sina's views on the spiritual-physical connection in the "Canon of Medicine" are analyzed. The psychological aspects of Indian philosophy and the teaching of yoga have been studied in the comparative works of Western and Eastern researchers. The ideas of balance in Chinese philosophy and traditional medicine are covered in separate studies [5].

Nevertheless, an analysis of the conducted scientific research shows that there is still a lack of comprehensive research in domestic science that analyzes the ideas of the stress phenomenon in various ancient and Eastern philosophical-medical traditions in a single, comparative system, showing the corresponding and distinctive aspects of each of them with modern stress theory. Filling this gap determines the scientific and practical significance of this research.

**Discussion.** The theory of the four humors (blood, mucus, yellow bile, and black bile), put forward by the founder of ancient Greek medicine, Hippocrates, explained a person's psycho-physical state through the balance or imbalance between these fluids[1]. According to this theory, external factors (nutrition, climate, life events) could affect a person's mood and health by changing the ratio of juices. Although this theoretical system is incorrect from the perspective of modern physiology, its underlying idea—that a disruption of internal "balance" leads to illness and discomfort—represents the earliest, rudimentary form of modern homeostasis and stress theory.

The Stoic movement in ancient Greek philosophy (Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius) analyzed the nature of mental tension from a deeper, psychological perspective [2]. According to the central idea of the Stoics, it is not the events themselves that make a person restless, but rather a person's internal assessment and attitude toward them. In his famous teaching, Epictetus urged people to distinguish between what "depends on us" (thoughts, desires, actions) and what "does not depend on us" (external events, the opinions of others). This idea is strikingly consistent with modern cognitive evaluation theory (the dependence of stress on personal evaluation of an event rather than on the event itself).

In ancient Chinese philosophy, particularly in the teachings of Lao Tzu, the balance of yin and yang and the principle of "wu-wei" (non-violence, not fighting against the natural flow) occupy a central place. According to this philosophical system, when a person acts with excessive force against the natural rhythm and balance, it leads to inner anxiety and "illness." In Confucianism, the idea of achieving inner peace is put forward through harmony in social relations and knowledge of one's place. In ancient Chinese medicine, the free flow of qi energy



was considered essential for health, and its obstruction could cause emotional and physical discomfort.

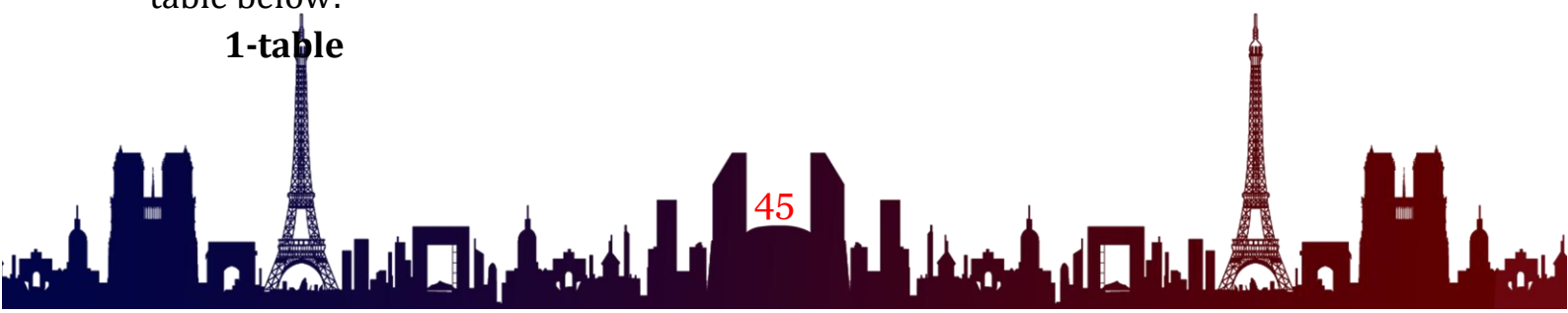
In ancient Indian philosophy, particularly in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, the concept of "chitta vritti" (vibrations of consciousness) occupies a central place. According to this work, the primary cause of human mental anguish ("klesha") is the ceaseless, unstable "swinging" of consciousness—a depiction that is remarkably close to describing a state of modern anxiety and mental tension. Yoga philosophy has proposed ways of calming the mind through breath control (pranayama), physical exercises (asanas), and meditation to overcome this condition, which is largely the historical root of modern stress-management practices.

Among Eastern, particularly Islamic, thinkers, Ibn Sina's work "The Canon of Medicine" ("Al-Qanun fit-tib") is of particular importance [5]. In his work, Ibn Sina developed the theory of temperament, describing in detail how intense emotional experiences—such as grief, fear, anger, and anxiety—have a direct impact on heart function, blood circulation, and overall bodily health. He even recommended methods of psychosomatic treatment, such as taking into account the psychological factor in the treatment of patients, making them listen to pleasant music, affecting them with a scent, which was considered a very advanced approach for its time.

Thinkers such as al-Farabi and al-Ghazali approached it from a more philosophical and moral point of view and put forward the idea of "peace of the soul" (tumā'ninat an-nafs). According to their teachings, if the balance between reason and emotion is disrupted, a person's inner world becomes restless, which negatively affects their overall life activities. These thinkers saw the path to achieving inner peace in mental reflection, self-education, and spiritual purification. In general, these ideas in various ancient and Eastern traditions derive independently of each other, but from a common truth—that a person's inner balance and attitude toward the external world determine their psychophysical state.

**Results.** In the process of analyzing the ideas of six main ancient and Eastern thinkers or philosophical schools regarding the phenomenon of stress, their core concepts, aspects corresponding to modern stress theory, and proposed coping approaches were systematized. The results of the analysis are summarized in the table below:

1-table



| No | Thinker / school                            | Key concept or term                                                                                    | An aspect that corresponds to the modern concept of stress                                                                                                                               | Proposed elimination approach                                                                                                        |
|----|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Hippocrates and Ancient Greek Medicine      | Theory of the balance of the four humors (blood, mucus, yellow and black bile)                         | Understanding the psychophysical state as a disorder of internal "balance," an early form of the modern idea of homeostasis                                                              | Restoring sap balance through regulation of diet, lifestyle, and environment                                                         |
| 2  | Stoics (Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius) | Distinguishing between what "depends on us" and what "doesn't depend on us," ataxia (inner peace)      | The fact that mental strain is caused not by the external situation itself, but by the internal assessment and attitude toward it (an idea close to modern cognitive assessment theory). | Achieve inner peace by changing your mindset and focusing only on what is within your control.                                       |
| 3  | Ibn Sina ("Laws of Medicine")               | The theory of "temperament," the direct influence of mental states on the functioning of bodily organs | The negative impact of strong emotional experiences (sadness, fear, anger) on heart function and overall health is described.                                                            | Equalizing the mental state through music, pleasant smells, and gentle treatment, taking the mental factor into account in treatment |
| 4  | Farabi and Ghazali                          | Peace of the soul ("tumānāt an-nafs"), balance of mind and feeling                                     | It is emphasized that if internal emotions are not controlled, a                                                                                                                         | Achieving inner peace through intellectual and philosophical                                                                         |

| No | Thinker / school | Key concept or term | An aspect that corresponds to the modern concept of stress | Proposed elimination approach                          |
|----|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                  |                     | person's mental and spiritual balance can be disrupted     | reflection, self-education, and spiritual purification |

As seen from the analysis presented in Table 1, the phenomenon of psychophysical tension was observed and understood independently, but similarly, in various civilizations that were geographically and historically distant from one another. A common idea in all traditions is that a disruption of internal balance leads to discomfort and "illness."

The results of the analysis also showed that the ideas of the Stoics and the philosophy of yoga are closest to modern cognitive-behavioral therapy and stress management practices, as they emphasize an internal attitude toward events rather than the events themselves. Ibn Sina's theory of temperament can be regarded as a direct historical predecessor of modern psychosomatic medicine. Overall, the analysis confirmed that the heritage of ancient and Eastern thinkers can serve as a rich, yet not yet fully explored source for enriching modern stress theory.

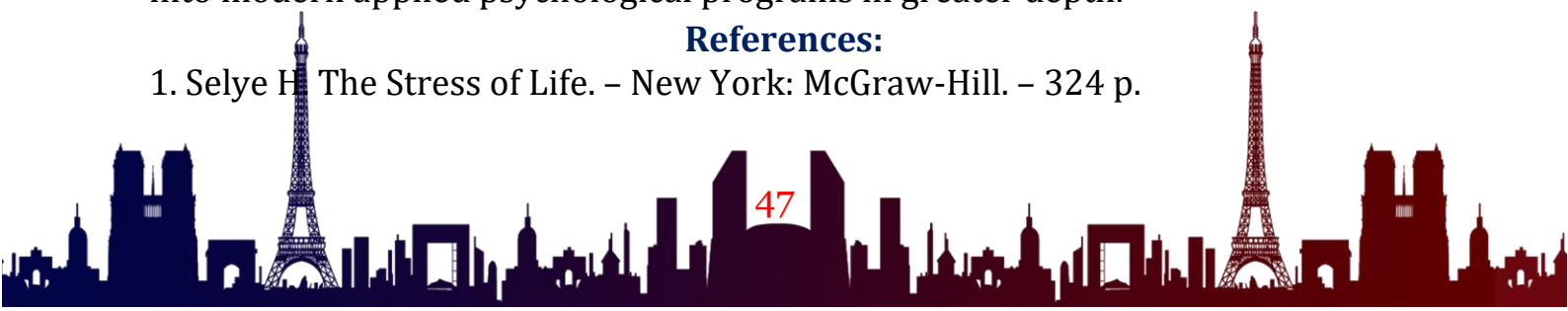
### **Conclusion**

Ancient and Eastern thinkers, although they did not know the term "stress," deeply observed the phenomenon of mental and physical tension and depicted it in various ways: as a disorder of balance, fluctuations in consciousness, changes in temperament, and restlessness of the soul. The research results showed that many of these ancient ideas are in harmony with the core principles of modern stress theory: the importance of internal evaluation, psycho-physical connection, and the need to restore balance.

An in-depth scientific study of this rich philosophical and medical heritage not only enriches the history of psychology and medicine but can also spiritually and philosophically strengthen modern stress management methods. In future research, it is advisable to study the possibilities of integrating these ancient ideas into modern applied psychological programs in greater depth.

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