

# The Idea Of A Leader's Stress Resilience In Classical Eastern Pedagogy (9th–16th Centuries): A Comparative Reading With Modern Resilience Science

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## Abstract

This article examines how the idea of a leader's stress resilience was articulated in classical Eastern pedagogy of the 9th–15th centuries - in the works of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Yusuf Khass Hajib, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ghazali, Sa'di and Navoiy - and reads it in dialogue with modern resilience science. Avoiding both "orientalism" and "Eastern exceptionalism," the study adopts a comparative-dialogical method in which the two traditions are used to illuminate, not replace, one another. It argues that these thinkers developed original insights - the psychophysiological link and cognitive appraisal (Ibn Sina's *wahm*), the "moral immunity" of the soul (Ibn Miskawayh), the three-level model of patience (al-Ghazali), and narrative resilience pedagogy (Sa'di, Yusuf Khass Hajib, Navoiy) - that strikingly converge with findings modern resilience science reached independently only much later. A "parallel translation" methodology is proposed for integrating this heritage into contemporary leadership education.

**Keywords:** leader's personality, stress resilience, classical Eastern pedagogy, cognitive appraisal, moral immunity, patience (*sabr*), narrative pedagogy, parallel translation, comparative philosophy.

## INTRODUCTION

Modern resilience science treats a leader's capacity to remain stable under pressure as a teachable competence rather than an innate trait. Yet long before the term "stress" entered scientific vocabulary,<sup>1</sup> classical Eastern thinkers of the 9th–15th centuries addressed the same underlying question: why do some people withstand adversity while others collapse? Studying this heritage faces two opposite risks. The first is "orientalism"<sup>2</sup> - measuring Eastern sources with Western categories and presenting them as a derivative "Eastern version" of Western thought. The second is "Eastern exceptionalism" - treating the heritage as a closed system that cannot be compared with modern science at all.

This study takes a third, comparative-dialogical path grounded in the methodology of comparative philosophy:<sup>3</sup> each classical doctrine is first read within its own logic and categories, and only then placed in a mutually enriching dialogue with modern findings. The aim is not to claim that Eastern thinkers "anticipated" Western science in a competitive sense, but to show that both traditions, arising from a universal human need, converge on shared insights and complement one another. The central question is therefore: what original contributions did classical Eastern pedagogy make to the idea of a leader's stress resilience, and how can they be integrated into contemporary leadership education?

<sup>1</sup> Selye H. *The Stress of Life*. – New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956. – 324 p.

<sup>2</sup> Said E.W. *Orientalism*. – New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. – 368 p.

<sup>3</sup> Garfield J.L., Van Norden B.W. If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is // *The New York Times*. – 2016. – May 11.

## CLASSICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

## EASTERN

**Al-Farabi (873–950)** built his “philosopher-ruler” concept on Plato but transformed it through Islamic ethics and Aristotelian philosophy. For al-Farabi the ruler’s knowledge flows from contact with the “active intellect” (*al-‘aql al-fa’al*), so inner equilibrium is not a purely personal trait but the fruit of that contact. Among the twelve qualities of the ruler in his “Virtuous City,” three relate directly to resilience: a strong memory and capacity to learn (cognitive flexibility), a love of truth and hatred of falsehood (moral integrity under pressure), and freedom from greed (low dependence on external rewards - intrinsic motivation).

*Among al-Farabi’s twelve qualities of the ruler, the love of truth and of knowledge underpins the ruler’s inner equilibrium: a ruler who has firm knowledge is less prone to the fear that uncertainty produces.*<sup>4</sup>

*(Al-Farabi, The Virtuous City, after Walzer - author’s reading)*

This claim - that knowledge dispels fear - parallels modern appraisal theory:<sup>5</sup> uncertainty and lack of control amplify the stress response, while knowledge and a sense of control reduce it. Importantly, al-Farabi also tied the ruler’s stability to the wholeness of the community: the virtuous city and the virtuous ruler shape each other, resonating with an ecological-systems view<sup>6</sup> in which resilience is a systemic, not merely individual, phenomenon. The limitation of his model is its elitism - it is designed only for the philosopher-ruler, whereas resilience education today must be available to all.

**Ibn Sina (980–1037)** extended Aristotle’s tripartite soul by adding the inner faculties of common sense, imagination, memory,

and - crucially - estimation (*wahm*). Ibn Sina’s *wahm*, the faculty of appraising a situation, functionally parallels the modern notion of cognitive appraisal, although the two are not identical: *wahm* is a broader estimative faculty for perceiving non-sensory meanings, of which situational appraisal is only one aspect. If appraisal governs the response to stress, then training it becomes a central path to resilience. In “The Canon of Medicine” he also documented, through clinical observation, how grief (*huzn*, *ghamm*) alters heartbeat, breathing, digestion and immunity - a link confirmed centuries later by psychoneuroimmunology.<sup>7</sup>

*Ibn Sina holds the soul and body to be closely bound, so that a change in one is reflected in the other: the soul’s joy strengthens the body, while grief weakens it and opens the way to illness.*<sup>8</sup>

*(Ibn Sina, The Canon of Medicine, Book I - paraphrase)*

The pedagogical conclusion is that physical and spiritual education are inseparable - a “whole-person” view<sup>9</sup> corroborated by evidence that exercise increases stress resilience.<sup>10</sup> Read this way, Ibn Sina’s *sabr* becomes a cognitive-emotional adjustment process - understanding the situation, re-appraising it, and continuing goal-directed action - congruent with modern emotion-focused coping.<sup>11</sup> His main limitation is a medico-centric focus that underweights social-systemic factors.

<sup>7</sup> Ader R., Cohen N. Behaviorally Conditioned Immunosuppression // Psychosomatic Medicine. – 1975. – Vol. 37. – P. 333–340.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Sina. The Canon of Medicine (al-Qanun fi al-tibb). Book I. – Repr.: New York: AMS Press, 1973.

<sup>9</sup> Miller J.P. The Holistic Curriculum. 2nd ed. – Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. – 240 p.

<sup>10</sup> Blumenthal J.A. et al. Effects of Exercise Training on Older Patients with Major Depression // Archives of Internal Medicine. – 1999. – Vol. 159. – P. 2349–2356.

<sup>11</sup> Folkman S. Revised Coping Theory and the Process of Bereavement // Handbook of Bereavement Research / eds M.S. Stroebe et al. – Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001. – P. 563–584.

<sup>4</sup> Walzer R. Al-Farabi on the Perfect State. – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. – 569 p.

<sup>5</sup> Lazarus R.S., Folkman S. Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. – New York: Springer, 1984. – 445 p.

<sup>6</sup> Bronfenbrenner U. The Ecology of Human Development. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979. – 330 p.

**Yusuf Khass Hajib (c. 1021–1075)** in “Qutadgu Bilig” presented resilience through four allegorical figures - justice, fortune, intellect and contentment - mapping onto the social, motivational, cognitive and emotional dimensions of the leader. His treatment of patience is strategic, not merely moral.

*In “Qutadgu Bilig” patience is praised as a key quality of the ruler: a self-restrained, sparing and patient bek prevails over the enemy, while an impatient bek leads his people to ruin.*<sup>12</sup>

*(Yusuf Khass Hajib, Qutadgu Bilig - paraphrase; after Dankoff)*

A patient leader denies the adversary the advantage of seeing his weakness; impulsive action, by contrast, reveals it. This resonates with a game-theoretic insight and is supported by neuroscience: under stress the prefrontal cortex weakens, producing impulsive action that undermines long-term strategy.<sup>13</sup> The allegorical, poetic form is itself pedagogically effective - narrative engages more of the brain and is retained longer than abstract precept.<sup>14</sup>

**Ibn Miskawayh (932–1030)** in “Tahdhib al-Akhlaq” modelled the soul on medicine: like the body, the soul has illnesses that can be treated, and certain virtues form a “moral immunity” that protects it from anger, fear and despair - a striking parallel to the modern notion of psychological immunity.<sup>15</sup> His three-stage analysis of anger (biological, cognitive, pedagogical)

resonates with modern anger-management theory.<sup>16</sup>

*For Ibn Miskawayh human nature is not fixed but malleable - it is shaped under the teacher’s guidance - yet this shaping demands long and sustained patience.*[<sup>^</sup>zurayk]

*(Ibn Miskawayh, Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, after Zurayk - paraphrase)*

**Al-Ghazali (1058–1111)** systematized patience into three levels - patience in adversity, patience against transgression, and patience in duty - paralleling modern coping strategies: emotion-focused, the active-moral form of avoidance, and problem-focused coping respectively.<sup>17</sup> He paired patience with gratitude, converging with the “broaden-and-build” theory:<sup>18</sup> positive emotion widens cognitive and social resources, raising future resilience.

Finally, Sa’di (1184–1291) and Navoiy (1441–1501) advanced a narrative resilience pedagogy - learning wisdom through failure (post-traumatic growth, growth mindset) conveyed through story rather than abstract precept.

*Sa’di’s tales convey the idea that the wise grow stronger by learning from their mistakes, whereas the fool, intoxicated by success, is unready for the next hardship.*<sup>19</sup>

*(Sa’di, Gulistan - paraphrase; after Thackston)*

Navoiy carried this narrative-ethical pedagogy into Turkic prose. In “Mahbub ul-qulub” (Beloved of Hearts) he addresses rulers, viziers and officials directly, holding that the just and self-restrained ruler who places service to the people above self-interest endures, whereas the self-serving

<sup>12</sup> Dankoff R. (trans.) Yusuf Khass Hajib. Wisdom of Royal Glory (Qutadgu Bilig). – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. – 281 p.

<sup>13</sup> Arnsten A.F.T. Stress Signalling Pathways That Impair Prefrontal Cortex Structure and Function // Nature Reviews Neuroscience. – 2009. – Vol. 10. – P. 410–422.

<sup>14</sup> Willingham D.T. Why Don’t Students Like School? – San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009. – 228 p.

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert D.T., Pinel E.C., Wilson T.D., Blumberg S.J., Wheatley T.P. Immune Neglect: A Source of Durability Bias in Affective Forecasting // Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. – 1998. – Vol. 75. – P. 617–638.

<sup>16</sup> Deffenbacher J.L. Cognitive-Behavioral Conceptualization and Treatment of Anger // Journal of Clinical Psychology. – 1999. – Vol. 55. – P. 295–309.

<sup>17</sup> Lazarus R.S., Folkman S. Stress, Appraisal, and Coping. – New York: Springer, 1984. – 445 p.

<sup>18</sup> Fredrickson B.L. The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology // American Psychologist. – 2001. – Vol. 56. – P. 218–226.

<sup>19</sup> Sa’di. The Gulistan (Rose Garden) / trans. W.M. Thackston. – Bethesda: Ibex Publishers, 2008.

tyrant is undone - an ethic of service that prefigures servant leadership.<sup>20</sup>

*For Navoiy the worth of a ruler lies not in rank but in justice and self-restraint: the ruler who guards the people with patience is remembered, while the one who rules for himself brings ruin upon himself and his realm.*<sup>21</sup>

(Navoiy, Mahbub ul-qulub - paraphrase)

## CONCLUSION

Classical Eastern pedagogy made original contributions to the idea of a leader's stress resilience that converge with insights modern psychology reached independently only later: the psychophysiological link and cognitive appraisal (Ibn Sina), the three-level systematics of soul-training (Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ghazali), the strategic-cognitive reading of patience, and the systematic use of narrative pedagogy (Sa'di, Yusuf Khass Hajib, Navoiy). A recurring limitation across these thinkers is an individual focus that underweights social-systemic factors - a gap best filled by a socio-ecological view of resilience.<sup>22</sup>

The most methodologically sound way to use this heritage in contemporary education is "parallel translation" - re-expressing the functional essence of a classical or religious concept in modern psychological language without denying its original meaning (for example: *sabr* → active coping + sustained attention; gratitude → positive reappraisal + broaden-and-build). For Uzbek leadership pedagogy in particular, this approach preserves cultural authenticity while aligning the heritage with modern empirical findings, offering a rich, time-tested resource for cultivating resilient leaders.

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<sup>21</sup> Navoiy A. Mahbub ul-qulub [Beloved of Hearts]. – Toshkent: Fan. [muallif foydalangan aniq nashr kiritilsin]

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