

# Study on the Writing of Official Translation Institutions from the Perspective of National Translation Practice

-- Take the "Wisdom Palace" of the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement as an Example

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**Abstract:** The translation activities during the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic translation movement have the typical characteristics of national translation practice. The country is the main body of translation practice, and translation activities have "institutionalization" and "mission color". By analyzing the translation practice in Arab countries during the Abbasid Caliphate, this paper reveals the relationship between "governance" and "institutionalization" of national translation in that period, and summarizes the characteristics and trends of Arab cultural translation activities in that period, with a view to providing useful reference for today's national translation practice.

**Keywords:** Characteristics, Institutionalization, National translation practice.

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## 1. Introduction

During the Abbasid Caliphate, Arabia was in a period of social change, and the translation practice of this period left a strong mark in the history of Arab translation and World history: the Arab Graeco-Arabic translation movement for a hundred years was a large-scale, organized academic activity in the medieval Arab Caliphate to translate and introduce ancient Greek and oriental scientific and cultural classics. The centennial Graeco-Arabic translation movement can be divided into three periods: the first period was from the middle and late 8th century to the early 9th century, which was supported by the famous Caliph Mansur and Harun al-Rashid. The translated books were mainly Persian works, focusing on astronomy and medicine, and the famous translators were Ibn Mugafa; The second period is from the early 9th century to the middle and late 9th century. The extraordinary support of Caliph Mammon achieved the golden age of the century long Graeco-Arabic translation movement. Translators represented by the famous translator Hounein Ben Ishagar translated and introduced a large number of books and books on Ancient Greek philosophy and natural science; The last period was from the middle and late 9th century to the early 10th century. During this period, the Caliph's support declined, the pace of translation slowed down, and a lot of work was retranslating and revising the previous translations. The famous translators were Sabit Ben Qurei, and this century long and mighty Graeco-Arabic translation movement came to an end.

Following the example of the Persian king, Mansur established a royal library, the "Palace of Wisdom", which was an official national policy in the early Abbasid Caliphate and was a collective and organized ambition to develop intelligence expressed by the royal family. Over time, a translation bureau, library, book storage room, and research institute were established within the "Wisdom Palace". The main position of translation activities during this period was located in the official translation agency with a "national mission" - the "Translation Bureau". From the 8th century to

the 10th century, the Arab Abbasid Caliphate emerged a stable political situation after the end of the large-scale foreign war, with greater development of productive forces, prosperity of economy and foreign trade, golden age of Islamic religious culture, advocating a cultural atmosphere of free and innovative thinking, which provided a specific cultural field and power field for translation practice. When examining translation research from a sociological perspective, we should combine translation practice with a larger field of power, which is not simply an institution directly engaged in translation practice, but rather a power manipulator behind the institution - the national political and cultural field. (Ren Dongsheng, Gao Yuxia, 2015a: 19) The centennial Graeco-Arabic translation movement led by the Caliph made the translation activities in the Abbasid Caliphate inevitably have the mission characteristics of "national translation". The rules and regulations formulated by the Caliph and the translation activities of the royal translation agencies under the specific social background at that time showed the characteristics of "institutionalization", which became the means of national governance at that time.

## 2. Characteristics of National Translation Practice during the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic translation movement

From the middle of the 8th century to the 10th century, Caliph Mammon of the Abbasid Caliphate incorporated translation activities into the national strategic plan, and carried out translation activities in an organized, selective and planned way. This official national policy was formulated mainly for the following three purposes: first, just after the end of large-scale foreign war, Caliph Mammon needed to appease the people and maintain the rule through Islamic religious culture; Secondly, in China, we should promote popular wisdom, advocate practical science and philosophy, and follow the tradition of original academic research; Third, the Arab Caliphate has a long tradition of building storerooms

to preserve written knowledge. National translation practice refers to "the autonomous translation practice spontaneously implemented by sovereign countries in the name of the country to achieve the strategic goal of self-interest." (Ren Dongsheng, Gao Yuxia, 2015b: 93) The Abbasid Caliphate ended the foreign war and had national sovereignty. At this time, the "wisdom palace" and its translation bureau became the main body of national translation practice during the Abbasid Caliphate, Its translation activities exhibit the following three basic attributes: (1) The state, as the initiator and subject of translation activities, has spontaneity. In order to implement his own policy, Maimeng founded the famous "Wisdom Museum" in Baghdad in 830. It is a joint institution of the library, the Academy of Sciences and the Bureau of Translation. From all aspects, it is the most important academic institution since the establishment of the Alexandria Museum in the first half of the third century BC; (Wang Xinzhong, Ji Kaiyun 2002:149) Official translators personally appointed by Caliph Mamun are also sponsors of translation practice, such as the Banu Musa brothers; Caliph Mamun himself (the highest ruler of the dynasty), the Persian noble officials of the dynasty, such as the minister Balmak (the mentor of the young Mamun) family and the Buktissus family, were all sponsors of the translation activities; (2) Translation practice centered around the "state" has autonomy. The translation practice in the "Translation Bureau" under the "Wisdom Palace" was carried out in the name of "official national policy". The supreme ruler of the dynasty, Caliph Mamun, formulated official Language policy and translation policy to guide and supervise academic and translation

practice. Persian language, Sanskrit, Syriac language and Greek are the original texts of the translation practice in the "Wisdom Palace", but the target language is Arabic; The discipline direction of translation activities is mainly purely practical disciplines such as medicine, astrology and agriculture, and later turned to astronomy, mathematics and Ancient Greek philosophy. (3) The translation activity in the "Wisdom Palace", as a national act, is self serving, which is mainly reflected in the following two aspects: internally, through the translation of Ancient Greek philosophy works, Islam is shaped and strengthened to achieve the goal of educating the people, thus promoting the identity and cultural integration, unity and cohesion of Arabs and Persians, and safeguarding the Abbasid regime; Through national translation practice, "opening people's wisdom" has improved the national quality of the Abbasid Caliphate to a certain extent. Talents have come forth in large numbers to promote the development of science, literature and foreign exchanges. The Abbasid Caliphate has ushered in a heyday, More importantly, it left a strong mark in Human history: "When Europe almost did not know Greek thought and science, the translation of these works has been completed. When Reid and Maimon were studying Greek and Persian philosophy, their contemporary Western scholars

### 3. Institutionalization of national translation institutions during the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic translation movement

The meaning of institutionalized translation		The Representation of Translation Institutionalization
Organizational System of Translation Production	Administrative organizational structure	Caliph Mamun, an academic institution set up under the "Wisdom Palace" under the general leadership of the Persian noble ministers, appointed the translator and scholar of the Jingist, Hounain Ibn Ishagar (809-873), as the director of the translation bureau Translators within and outside the official translator group
	Internal translator management mechanism	Manager Assistant Curator Assistant Binder Scholarship System - Promotion of Ranks and Ranks - Inheritance of Positions
	Practical behavior mode	Mode: The translation process of "Wisdom Palace" is very meticulous, and according to the research field and language of the book to be translated, the translation is handed over to a professional translator for initial translation, and then retranslated; After completing the translation, it is necessary to copy and bind the books; Translations are sent to individuals who are proficient in and proficient in handwriting; After the transcription is completed, the book pages are bound together with the cover and decorated, and they are included in the catalog and placed in a specific room of the library. For example, Greek works were first translated into Arama (Syriac language), and then into Arabic;
		Standards/specifications: literal translation is the main approach; Transliteration of foreign specialized terms; Create new terminology Translation publishing and circulation: Translating and introducing the text industry into an industry; Research on National Reading
The Self Institutionalization of Translation Practice	The Value System of Translation	Open up the wisdom of the people; Unification of religious ideas; Innovative philosophy and science; Maintain political power;

Figure 1. "Wisdom Palace"—Translation Bureau

Translation institutionalization has two meanings: one is the institutionalization of translation production organization; The other is the self institutionalization of translation practice.

Organizational institutionalization is reflected in two aspects: on the one hand, it is the organizational structure of the translation community, which involves the production of

translations, the publication and distribution of translated texts; On the other hand, the behavioral patterns of the translation community are reflected in the formation of translation concepts and the institutionalization of translation practices, which are specifically reflected in the establishment of the value system of translation. (Ren Dongsheng: 2015) During the Abbasid Caliphate, the century old Graeco-Arabic translation movement was incorporated into the official national policy, and its translation practice was supervised and guided. Therefore, translation activities in this period inevitably became standardized and institutionalized. The following table takes the translation bureau under the "Wisdom Palace" as an example to show the concrete connotation of the institutionalization of national translation during the Abbasid Caliphate.

The institutionalization of the translation production process is achieved through a unified administrative organization, internal management mechanisms, and practical behavior models to standardize and coordinate the translation process, laying the foundation for the institutionalization of translation practice itself; The institutionalization of translation practice reflects the value orientation and ideological purpose of translation activities, which can counteract organizational institutionalization and contribute to the continuous improvement and improvement of organizational systems.

#### 4. State institutionalized translation during the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic translation movement

After the institutionalization of translation, the output is institutionalized translation. (Ren Dongsheng: 2015) Institutionalized translation refers to "organized, planned, large-scale, and monitored translation activities guided by national ideology, serving the realization of political value goals such as the stability of the national political system and the implementation of national strategies, often initiated and promoted by national power institutions and ruler authorities. There are six representations presented: 'authoritativeness' of translation planning/policies,' nationalization 'of translation institutions,' intensification 'of intellectual resources,' hierarchy 'of translation text types,' institutionalization 'of translator identity, and non marketization of translation publication and distribution'. (Ren Dongsheng, Gao Yuxia, 2015a: 21) Institutionalized translation forms an institutionalized group of translators within the system through macro translation policy support and financial sponsorship support. The sponsors determine the selection of the original text and the output of the translated text based on

their own and national needs. Arabic translation began in the Umayyad Caliphate, but most of the books translated in the Umayyad Caliphate were Muslim and non Muslim personal undertakings, and there was no plan for sporadic translation. In the early stages of Abbas, translating books became a major undertaking of the country, carried out in a planned manner by leaders. The state has invested heavily in establishing institutions and organizing manpower: a large number of translators have been hired from various regions to conduct full-time work, providing excellent spiritual and material benefits. The scope of translation is also extremely broad. (Wang Xingang 2003:115) In view of this, translation practice in the Abbasid Caliphate will inevitably move towards the construction of classic texts.

##### (1) Authoritative Translation Policy

Translation policy refers to the legitimate written or oral guidelines or specific provisions made by national governments or government agencies, including non-governmental civil organizations or organizations, under the guidance or influence of the state, regarding translation activities. "(List, Yang Wenjin, 2015:92) The cause of translating and introducing foreign cultural books by the Arabe people began as early as the Umayyad dynasty (Dexin 2001:95), but was only limited to translators at that time Scholars themselves have scattered and unplanned activities. In the Abbasid Caliphate, book translation has become a major national undertaking since the early days, and it has been carried out under leadership and in a planned way. (Jonathan 2013: 153) The Caliph attached great importance to this activity. The state invested a lot of money to establish institutions. All parties hired talents to carry out full-time translation work, and gave generous rewards to translators and scholars both mentally and materially.

##### (2) Translation agency "nationalization"

In order to safeguard national interests, sovereign countries often set up national translation institutions to engage in translation and publishing activities directly in accordance with the national translation policy, serving the implementation of the national strategy (Ren Dongsheng, 2015). By the time of the seventh Caliph Mamun, the famous "Palace of Wisdom" was founded in Baghdad - a joint institution of libraries, academies of science and translation bureaus, where translation work is mainly concentrated. (Stavrianos 2005: 219-221) The translation practice in the "Translation Bureau" under the Wisdom Palace is basically the product of translation institutionalization: first, the initiator is the Caliph of the national government; Secondly, the translation practice in the "Translation Bureau" is subject to the guidance of national strategic policies and serves them; Thirdly, the official unified translation policy is that all translations are in Arabic.

Establishment time	830 AD
Location	Baghdad
Organization	Wisdom Palace
Founder	Caliph Mamun
Head	Hou Nain ibn Ishaag appointed by Mamon (Hunayin Ibn Ishāq)
Objective	Caliph Mamun sought evidence in the philosophy of ancient Greece to defend his view that "there is no real difference between reason and canon" (citing Arab general history) and defend his position
Translation	Officially designated literary works, practical science, and philosophical books

Figure 2. Translation Bureau

As a subsidiary of the "Wisdom Palace" of the Royal Library, "Translation Bureau" is located in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, and represents the official ideology. The translated books mainly include Islamic culture and art, Persian literature, art, practical science and Ancient Greek philosophy. Its fundamental purpose is to defend the Caliph's ideology for the sake of maintaining the rule of the dynasty. From this, it can be seen that the translation practices in national translation institutions inevitably have the characteristics of national translation practices, and their translation activities will inevitably move towards institutionalization.

### (3) Intensification of intellectual equipment

The moderators of the Wisdom Palace appointed by the Caliph Mamun of the dynasty and the heads of the subordinate sub organizations were chosen by the Caliph himself, and these translators have high scientific and cultural literacy and are highly professional.

### (4) Translation material selection "hierarchical"

Most of the translation choices from Persian language to Greek are concentrated in the field of literature and art. Even literary texts have a certain tendency: for example, the collection of animal fables "Kal" compiled by the writer Ibn Mugfa ī Lah wa Dimnah), this book aims to use the mouths of animals to teach rulers the principles of governing a country through humorous stories. Similar texts will be prioritized.

### (5) The institutionalization of translator identity

The official translator group in the translation bureau has the privilege of "compilation" and enjoys the privilege of "hereditary system".

### (6) Non market-oriented translation distribution

As a translation agency directly serving the country, the Translation Bureau within the Wisdom Palace has the support of national human, financial, and institutional resources for its translation distribution. Its printing, publishing, distribution, and sales all exhibit non market-oriented and non profitable characteristics.

## 5. Conclusion and Reflection

The above analysis shows that translation during the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic translation movement has typical national translation practice characteristics. Firstly, the main body of translation activities during this period was the sovereign state, which had the characteristics of self-interest and autonomy. Its purpose was to maintain rule, preserve traditional culture, and promote Islamic religious culture through translation; Secondly, the translation activities during the Arab Hundred Year Graeco-Arabic translation movement were based on the internal and external political demands of the Abbasid Caliphate, and the organizational model and practice itself needed to rely on the institutionalization of the political system; Once again, institutionalization of translation means that translation aligns with politics, translation aligns with power, and translation is no longer a purely social activity but a political act. Translation planning/policies, translation institutions, intellectual resources, translation material selection, translator identity, and translation publication and distribution all present institutionalized representations, collectively forming an institutionalized translation system.

Today's China and the world stand in a situation of great

change that has not happened in a century. The vigorous century Graeco-Arabic translation movement has provided many references and reflections for our future generations: first, we should formulate a long-term official translation activity plan; Secondly, the hereditary translator group will inevitably have the following drawbacks: narrow channels for promotion; The problem of translators being slack and lacking competitiveness in the later stage; Thirdly, ideological issues, translation activities were restricted by the religious beliefs of the Caliph. Later Islam abandoned natural science, leading to the end of the century long Graeco-Arabic translation movement, while the Renaissance in Western Europe led to the Industrial Revolution in Europe; Finally, the self positioning is particularly important under the localization trend of thought triggered by Postcolonialism. "Translation has become an act of state, whose fundamental purpose is to safeguard the interests of sovereign states, and essentially to strive for Cultural capital and the right to speak." (Ren Dongsheng, 2019b: 69) The special background of the Abbasid Caliphate makes translation activities focus on the "translation" of Islamic religious culture, philosophy, philosophy, and Persian culture. At the same time, The "Palace of Wisdom" also played an important role in supporting the literary works of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Smart Palace, as a carrier of national translation practice activities, has undergone historical changes and still exists in the world today. Smart Palace translation companies still shoulder the mission of carrying national cultural publicity and constantly innovate in form, gradually moving towards specialization, branding, and marketization.

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