

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reactivating Traumatic Memory through Paratexts: Translating Titles and Covers of *The Rape of Nanking*

Received: 16 May 2025; Revised: 23 June 2025; Published: 24 October 2025

Luomei Cui

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Ixelles, Belgium

Email: luomei.cui@vub.be

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6653-3170>

Abstract:

Translation creates a connection that allows present-day individuals to directly engage with and immerse themselves in the memory of the past, fostering a tangible link between the present and historical events. This study examines Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* (1997) and its four Chinese translations to explore how the translations recreate traumatic memories through the paratextual perspective. Iris Chang's work reveals Japan's invasion of China during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), which stored the memory of the decades of pain and suffering it brought to the people of Nanjing and even to all Chinese people. The study found that the four Chinese translations evoked contemporary people's memories of Nanjing through paratextual elements such as the cover and title. This research is embedded within the interdisciplinary frameworks of memory studies and translation studies. The research aims to achieve three interrelated goals: first, to evoke national collective memory among contemporary Chinese readers; second, to deepen public understanding of this traumatic historical period; and third, to inspire patriotic sentiment and foster a heightened awareness of peace. The study not only sheds light on the cultural and emotional impact of translation and retranslation, but also contributes to advancing theoretical and practical insights within both memory studies and translation studies.

Keywords: *The Rape of Nanking*, paratext, memory studies, trauma

1. Introduction

Translation functions as “a bridge between memories of texts written in time past and the desire for new texts in future time”, as Bassnett (2003, 295) eloquently posits, highlighting its profound capacity to transmit memory. Within this intricate process lies a profound mechanism for reactivating memory, breathing new life into historical events, and fostering cross-cultural understanding. In this sense, the existence of translation opens up the possibilities of analyzing memory in a specific text in a particular target culture. Accordingly, understanding how translation carries memories between different cultures can help us learn more about memory. At the same time, studying translation can improve our view by looking closely at different ways we can explore and understand how memories are transmitted.

Research has predominantly focused on the translation and reconstruction of trauma memory, war memory (see Kershaw 2019; Inghilleri and Harding 2010), and with particular emphasis on the memory of the Jewish Holocaust (Davies 2008; 2011; 2018; Deane-Cox 2017). Research also focuses on memories of the Spanish Civil War and Franco Dictatorship in translation (see Bush 2013; Pintado and Castillo 2019; Alicia and Lucía 2021; Marco 2021; Tower 2022; Jünke 2023). Previous studies have laid a solid foundation for exploring the intersection of translation studies and war or traumatic memory.



However, the specific case of the Nanking Massacre has remained relatively underexplored within both translation and memory studies. This gap underscores the need to reactivate and examine the memory of the Nanking Massacre through the lens of translation.

In the case of Nanking in particular, notably exemplified by *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, stands as a seminal endeavor in systematically portraying the egregious acts perpetrated during this harrowing period of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Traumatic memory embedded in Iris Chang's work regarding a significant 20th-century episode of rape, pillage, and slaughter prompts a critical examination of historical reconstruction among contemporary individuals, with particular emphasis on events of the Nanjing Massacre. "Interlingual translations of literary texts and testimonies related to difficult pasts and historical violence are an important medium of the transcultural transmission of memories as they ensure the accessibility and dissemination of these texts in linguistic and cultural environments different from their original ones" (Jünke and Schyns 2023, 2). Thus, translation enables historical traumatic memory to travel across cultural and linguistic boundaries. The memory of the Nanking Massacre, preserved through translation, allows present-day individuals to establish a more keenly felt and immediate link to the past, engaging the senses to foster a greater bodily awareness of the experiences of that time and place. Moreover, this emotional connection between the felt past and the lived present, facilitated by interlingual translation, serves to reactivate a more empathetic and ethical response by increasing awareness of the suffering endured by Chinese citizens during World War II.

This study explores how translation transmits traumatic memory, with a particular focus on the Nanking Massacre. The first part of the study provides a theoretical framework, examining the intersection of translation studies and memory studies, emphasizing how translation as a medium in preserving and transmitting cultural and historical knowledge, and reviewing recent research in these two fields. The concept of paratext is also introduced here, serving as a key analytical tool for exploring how memory is constructed and mediated through translation. Next, the study introduces the event of the Nanking Massacre and the text titled *The Rape of Nanking* by Iris Chang, which narrates the traumatic experiences of the Chinese people and deals with the author's recording of the traumatic memory of the Nanking Massacre. The study then investigates how memory is interpreted and transmitted from the English text to the Chinese text, considering the paratextual perspective as interpreted by different translators. A detailed discussion addresses how memory can be conveyed in the Chinese context through paratextual translation. Finally, the study concludes by emphasizing that the Nanking Massacre is not merely a historical event but a part of the living memory of those affected and their descendants. Understanding how translation contributes to memory reactivation provides insights into the role of language and cultural mediation in shaping historical consciousness. Furthermore, this research contributes to the interdisciplinary integration of memory study concepts in describing the interaction between translation and memory.



2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Translation and memory: From a possible confluence to interdisciplinary exploration

Memory, a crucial component of human cognition, represents not only the reconstruction of past events and facts for individuals, groups, and societies but also serves as the foundation for constructing personal identity and understanding the world. Since the “memory turn” in the 1980s, memory studies have gained prominence across disciplines such as history, literature, cultural studies, sociology, and psychology, facilitating its expansion into interdisciplinary fields.

Memory manifests in diverse forms, creating a complex network of individual and collective memories that often requires materialized records to overcome the risk of being forgotten and to ensure its continuation (Shao, Zhang, and Zhang 2023, 12). Literary narratives are among the most widespread and effective forms of materializing memory. Through storytelling or recording history, literary texts organize personal and collective memories in an orderly manner, preserving and transmitting past events, experiences, and emotions. These texts not only help individuals and groups interpret their experiences but also disseminate memory within broader cultural and societal contexts, fostering shared historical consciousness and identity. Beyond literature, memory is also preserved through monuments, museums, images, and films, which provide vivid and reliable bases for future recollection. Archives, artifacts, photos, and diaries similarly serve as materialized forms of memory, ensuring its transmission at various levels. Overall, memory is preserved and transmitted across individual, societal, and cultural dimensions through materialized records, contributing to collective understanding and identity.

Translation operates in both narrow and broad senses. In the narrow sense, as Jakobson’s (1959, 231-232) classification, translation includes “intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation”, focusing on converting linguistic signs from one system to another. This process involves achieving equivalence in vocabulary, grammar, and syntax while striving to retain the original meaning and expression. Broadly defined, translation encompasses cultural factors such as “context, history, and conventions” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, 11), focusing on how to convey information and reconstruct meaning across different cultural contexts. Regardless of scope, translation inherently involves both language and culture.

Given that “language and memory are intimately bound together, for not only is language a memorial phenomenon passed down through generations, but memory of past events, eras and traditions is embedded in language and in linguistic products” (Brownlie 2017, 1). In translation, this characteristic of language endows it with profound significance. Translation introduces memory into new linguistic and cultural systems, opening avenues for reinterpretation and facilitating the cross-cultural flow of memory, which links past texts to future audiences, reactivating memory, and giving historical events new life. Therefore, translation and memory share an intrinsic connection. Accordingly, translation thus plays a vital role in transmitting commemorative knowledge across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Research on the synergy between translation studies and memory studies becomes particularly apparent when considering the role of translation in mediating collective memories across linguistic



and cultural boundaries. This connection underscores the interdisciplinary nature of both fields and highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding the complexities of cultural communication and representation. Notably, American scholar Brodzki played a pioneering role in this exploration by introducing the theory of cultural memory to the fields of translation and comparative literature in 1999. Later, Bassnett's (2003) work on "Translation as Re-membering" made a significant contribution to the field of translation studies by conceptualizing translation not just as linguistic transfer, but also as the recreation and reconstruction of the cultural and social contexts of the source text. Brodzki's subsequent monograph, "Can These Bones Live? Translation, Survival, and Cultural Memory" (2007), offers a comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between memory function and the cultural-political implications of translation. Her work enriches scholarly discourse by providing a detailed understanding of how translation intersects with memory and its broader socio-cultural significance. In 2016, Brownlie published "Mapping Memory in Translation". This seminal work represents a significant scholarly endeavor aimed at elucidating the intricacies involved in establishing a comprehensive theoretical framework for the examination of translation and memory. Additionally, the 2019 conference titled "Translating Cultural Memory in Fiction and Testimony – Memory Studies and Translation Studies in Dialogue," held in Austria, further explored the potential in the dialogue between memory and translation. In the last two years, this interdisciplinary intersection has garnered increasing attention, marked by a notable rise in publications, including journal articles and edited volumes addressing translation studies and memory studies (e.g., Jünke 2023; Deane-Cox and Spiessens 2022; Towers 2022; Jünke and Schyns 2023; Hou 2023). Moreover, a central theme permeating numerous contributions is the intersection of translation and Holocaust memory (see Boase-Beier 2017), which has been significant in shaping and formalizing how traumatic memories are preserved, understood, and transmitted across languages and cultures.

In general, the intersection of translation studies and memory research represents a fertile ground for interdisciplinary exploration. Both fields, though distinct in their primary concerns, converge on the crucial role of language and narrative in shaping and transmitting human experience across temporal and spatial boundaries. Translation serves as a medium through which memories are preserved, transmitted, and shared across cultures. Simultaneously, memory studies benefit from the subtle perspectives and cross-cultural insights that translation brings to the forefront. Thus, the incorporation of memory studies has broadened the theoretical framework and heightened awareness of key issues within the field of translation studies. The concept of translation as a medium for cross-cultural memory transmission and even a practice of cross-cultural memory is essentially established. This confluence opens up new avenues for understanding how memories are preserved, transformed, and communicated through translation, and how translation itself is a dynamic act of memory. Therefore, translation and memory studies have a very broad scope for development.

2.2 Translation as a medium in transmitting memory

As Jünke (2023, 1284) argues translations are "the genuine media of transcultural memory ... and contribute to memories 'travels across the borders of book market, languages, and cultural spheres'". This suggests that translation plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication; it is not merely a process of linguistic conversion but also a medium for cross-cultural memory, bringing the cultural memory embedded in the original text into a new context. This mediating role of translation helps memories, which were once confined to specific cultures or languages, transcend regional and



linguistic boundaries, allowing them to be transmitted and preserved on a global scale. Next, this part will discuss how this mediating role operates and how it facilitates the transmission of memory.

First, translation is the process of transforming oral narratives into written form (i.e., intralingual translation). This process is essentially the reproduction and continuation of memory. Brodzki (2007) claims that “an act of intralingual translation, is a highly mediated movement or displacement from the language of the [primary witness’s] ‘unspeakable’ experience — her unbounded oral narrative — into writing”.

By converting oral accounts into written form, translation captures and preserves memories, allowing them to endure and reach wider audiences. In this respect, the author can be a “secondary witness” (Deane-Cox 2013, 312), thereby preserving the original speaker’s voice, emotional intensity, and historical context. In this transformation, the author acts as a translator, rephrasing the narrative for a different medium while maintaining its essence. Furthermore, as noted by Brodzki’s (2007, 6), “translation is the mode through which what is dead, disappeared, forgotten, buried, or suppressed overcomes its determined fate by being borne (and thus born anew) to other contexts across time and space.” For such forgotten, dark, and disappeared events, translation thus as recording can make those events more visible to audiences.

Second, interlingual translation plays a crucial role as a key medium for the transmission of memory across time when dealing with literary texts and testimonies that involve a difficult past and historical violence. According to Bassnett’s (2003) claim that translation conveys memory embedded in the text across different cultures and spaces, translation ensures the accessibility and dissemination of these texts in different linguistic and cultural contexts. In this context, transmitting memory in translation focuses on the memory of both the source text created by the author and the translations by translators. The source text thus serves as a storage or archive for containing and preserving historical events, experiences, or memories, documenting and holding them for reference, analysis, or interpretation by the translator. Subsequently, on an extratextual level, attention to factors such as intertextuality, multimodality, and macro-semiotics helps extend the memory of the original text into a broader cultural context. Ultimately, through various forms of translated texts, the memory of the original text is represented and transmitted, allowing it to be activated within a new cultural environment. Additionally, translation is inherently future-oriented; the translator is perpetually engaged in bringing something created in the past into a new present, effectively into the future (Bassnett 2003, 300). In this vein, translation continually updates and reproduces the original text so that it continues to exist and be remembered at different points in time and in different cultural contexts. In this way, translation continuously provides an “afterlife” (Benjamin 1972), acting as a bridge between past and future (Bassnett 2003), allowing memories embedded in the source text to be repeatedly reconstructed and reinterpreted. Therefore, this ongoing process of translation and reinterpretation ensures that memories remain alive and accessible, fostering a deeper understanding and empathy across generations and cultures.

In summary, translation serves as a powerful medium for the preservation and dissemination of cultural memory. It enables memory to traverse temporal and geographical boundaries, forming a network of cross-cultural memory. By transcending language and cultural barriers, translation extends the influence and lifespan of cultural memories, offering new perspectives for understanding how memory operates across contexts.



2.3 Paratext

The paratextual framing in the case of *The Rape of Nanking*, as will be explored later in this paper, holds significant relevance. In his seminal work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette (1997) [original French edition 1987] translated by Jane E. Lewin) argues that paratexts are any surrounding and subordinate material to the text that is crucial in guiding the reading process. In his definition, Genette emphasizes the “authorial intent” (12–14) of paratexts, and he points out that they are provided by either authors, editors, or publishers. Paratexts can be divided into two different categories, according to Genette, peritexts and epitexts. Peritexts are attached to the main text and exist within its internal space. Examples include the book cover, title, illustrations, preface, and postscript — all of which are paratexts accompanying the main body of the text. Epitexts, on the other hand, exist outside the main text’s space, such as book reviews, promotional materials, and reader feedback (Genette 1997, 4-5). With regard to paratexts in translation, Pellatt (2013, 3) states that their “non-verbal components [...] are powerful tools in the presentation and manipulation employed by the translator or the commissioners of a translation”. Pellatt (2013, 4) also points out that the book cover design does not merely ‘wield extraordinary power’, but, as Baker posited, it also ‘functions as a frame in that it anticipates and anchors our interpretation of the narrative elaborated in the book’ (2010, 353). Thus, since paralinguistic elements help frame a narrative from specific perspectives, this study will examine the strategies employed by translators, editors, and publishers to control or reshape *The Rape of Nanking* through the paratexts, and, in particular, peritexts such as cover designs and titles.

3. Nanking Massacre and Documentary Text: *The Rape of Nanking*

The Nanking Massacre, a horrifying chapter in human history, stands as a chilling reminder of the atrocities committed during the Second Sino-Japanese War, during which the Japanese troops committed widespread atrocities. In about seven weeks, from mid-December 1937 to February 1938, in Japan’s war with the Nationalist Chinese government, Japanese soldiers systematically raped, tortured and murdered more than 300,000 civilians, in China’s capital, Nanjing (then called Nanking). “As Auschwitz has become a symbol of the Jewish Holocaust and Nazi atrocities in World War II, the Nanking Massacre has become the symbol of the Japanese military’s monstrous brutality and savage cruelty in the Asia Pacific war from 1931 to 1945” (Li 2001, 227). It can be said that this event has left a deep scar in Chinese collective memory and remains a significant point of historical contention between China and Japan.

The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II, authored by Chinese American journalist Iris Chang, is a seminal work documenting historical atrocities. Originally written in English, the book was released in the United States in 1997, and it provides a meticulous portrayal of the brutalities and mass killings perpetrated by Japanese forces during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937—1945), which has garnered considerable international attention and widespread debate. Chang’s personal connection to the events adds a layer of poignant relevance. As a descendant of a Chinese family who fled Nanking during the conflict and resettled in the United States, she was intimately acquainted with her grandparents’ firsthand experiences of the massacre and their subsequent escape. This familial connection served as a catalyst for her profound interest in the subject matter, compelling her to undertake extensive research and documentation. Over two years, Chang devoted herself to intensive research, meticulously scrutinizing the diaries of American missionaries



and other foreign individuals present in Nanjing during the period. She also conducted fieldwork in Nanjing, engaging in discussions with Chinese survivors and exploring Chinese historical narratives. Furthermore, her investigation included examining confessions by Japanese army veterans and testimonies from international residents of Nanking, which provide invaluable insights into the events that transpired in the Nationalist capital in 1937.

The book involves three types of perspectives, offering a relatively objective viewpoint, capturing the process and outcomes of this historical event. First, the perspective of international residents like John Rabe, Robert Wilson, and Minnie Vautrin provides an outsider's perspective. Their accounts highlight the universal significance of the events, as they witnessed the horror unfolding in Nanking. Second, the perspective of the Japanese, for example, the diary of a Japanese soldier, Azuma Shiro (Chang 1997, 44), offers a stark perspective from one of the perpetrators, providing insight into the mindset and actions of the invading forces. Third, the perspective of Chinese survivors who lived through the massacre offers deeply personal accounts of suffering and resilience. These testimonies offer diverse perspectives, describing the violence against Chinese people from various vantage points.

In general, this book is more than a historical account; it stands as a poignant testament to the atrocities endured by the Chinese population during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937—1945). Iris Chang's meticulous research and powerful storytelling bring to light the horrors of the Nanking Massacre, urging readers to confront this painful history. The book enables members of modern society to understand and reflect upon events they have never experienced. This book also aims to remind the world not to forget this human catastrophe and bring awareness and reflection on these events to prevent future recurrences.

4. Reactivating Traumatic Memory Through Book Title and Cover

Translation serves as a means of preserving cultural memory, facilitating the transmission of ideas, narratives, and cultural heritage across generations and linguistic boundaries. Reactivating memory through translation involves more than simply recounting past events; it encompasses interpretation, representation, and emotional engagement that bring historical memory into contemporary consciousness. For the Nanking Massacre during World War II, translation reenacts tragic historical moments within the context of China. The translation of Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* into different languages, especially Chinese, has significant implications for the transmission and reception of traumatic memory. It reinforces the cultural memory of the atrocities and helps maintain the emotional and historical significance of the event around the world. There have been four translations of Chang's work in China, which introduce the text to new audiences in China across different periods of time. The first translation into Chinese was published in 1998, followed by translations in 2005, 2007, and 2013 respectively. "For the memory of particular past events to remain in circulation, such events must travel repeatedly over time" (Brownlie 2011, 3), thus the source text and the continuous translations in Chinese serve to maintain the emotional and historical significance of the massacre within society while continually introducing the traumatic event to new audiences over time.

Here, Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* serves as an example of how translated versions can reignite collective memory. As a member of the later generation that did not directly experience the war and trauma, Iris Chang is particularly relevant here. Chang embodies the concept of postmemory, as defined



by Hirsch (1997; 2012), which describes how later generations remember traumatic events they did not directly experience through mediated narratives. Chang felt a moral obligation to preserve the memory of Nanking, viewing it as her mission to inform the world about this Holocaust-like event in Asia and to ensure its remembrance for future generations. Furthermore, through her distinct descriptions and careful attention to detail, Chang engaged readers more deeply, fostering empathy and a better understanding of the traumatic experiences recounted in the text. Her commitment ensures that the memory of Nanking remains alive. Chang's hybrid technique includes paratextual elements such as the title, book cover image, historical documents, and photographs within the text. These elements are essential in representing memory, as they fill in historical moments. These paratextual elements have additional significance through translation, providing readers access to personal accounts and official documentation that form an integral part of China's collective memory. They extend the narrative's reach, thereby validating historical events on the global platform across the generations. The embedded paratextual elements are perfectly suitable for the text. The ironic title and the graphic cover in *The Rape of Nanking* are indeed used as mechanisms that preserve the essence of the possibilities of communication in this context.

Our case study in this part will explore translational memory from a paratextual perspective, with a particular focus on the title and cover. These covers and titles serve as paratextual elements that play a crucial role in shaping the reader's initial memory and engagement with the book. The evolution in design across these editions reflects different cultural considerations over time. Each cover employs visual elements and distinct Chinese titles to convey the gravity of the historical events, contributing to the reactivation of traumatic memory. The image below displays five different covers of Iris Chang's book *The Rape of Nanking*, including the original 1997 English edition and four subsequent Chinese translations (1998; 2005; 2007; and 2013). The analysis section below will discuss memory from the title and cover aspects and how they visually reinforce the narrative's historical and emotional weight, and explore how translators transmit traumatic memory through translation.

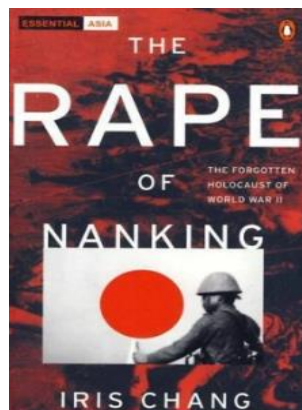


Figure 1. (ST)

Figure 1 shows the 1997 source text by Iris Chang, the title *The Rape of Nanking* is explicit and direct, utilizing the word “Rape” to convey the brutality and violence of the events. The subtitle, “The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II”, situates the Nanking Massacre within the broader context of global atrocities, drawing a comparison to the Holocaust. This comparison is intended to resonate with an English-speaking audience, highlighting the seriousness of the massacre and its historical



significance. In this vein, the cover of the book features a Japanese flag and a soldier, immediately situating the reader within the context of World War II and the Japanese occupation of Nanking. For English-speaking audiences, this cover serves as a powerful visual reminder of a significant historical atrocity that might be less well-known in the West. The imagery and title work together to evoke curiosity and a sense of historical duty to remember the events. This approach is consistent with how the author of the original text transmits the memories, ensuring that the Nanking memory is both accessible and impactful to a wider audience. The strategic use of paratextual elements—title, subtitle, and cover design—plays a crucial role in reactivating traumatic memory, fostering a deeper engagement with the historical and emotional weight of the Nanking Massacre.



Figure 2. (TT1998)

In the 1998 Chinese translation (see figure 2), this title *The Rape of Nanking* is rendered as “南京暴行” in Chinese, which means “Nanjing Atrocities”, with the term “暴行” (bào xíng) directly highlighting the nature of the events. The subtitle “被遗忘的大屠杀” (bèi yíwàng de dà tūshā) means “The Forgotten Massacre,” mirroring its English counterpart. By emphasizing “atrocities” and “Forgotten Massacre,” the title appeals to Chinese readers’ sense of national and historical identity, aiming to remind and educate them about a critical yet often overlooked part of their history. This serves to foster a collective memory and ensures the events remain part of the Chinese historical narrative. The cover prominently features a red handprint against a dark background, symbolizing violence and bloodshed. This graphic design is strategically crafted to evoke a profound emotional response among Chinese readers, enhancing a sense of tragedy and horror. It serves as a stark visual reminder of a painful period in Chinese history, aiming to provoke collective mourning and remembrance.



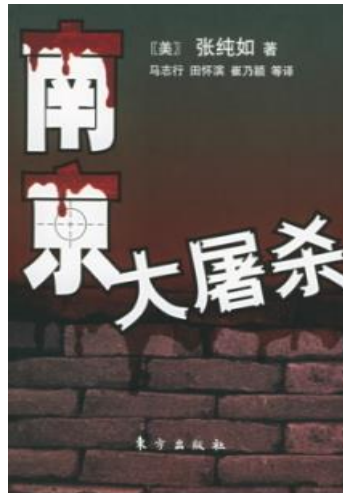


Figure 3. (TT2005)

For the 2005 Chinese retranslation (see figure 3), the title is translated simply to “南京大屠杀” (The Nanjing Massacre) in Chinese. The term “大屠杀” (dà tū shā) is straightforward and translates directly to “massacre.” This simplicity ensures clarity and immediate understanding among Chinese readers, highlighting the gravity of the historical tragedy without additional embellishments. It underscores the significance of remembering the Nanking Massacre as a pivotal and grievous episode in history. The cover design features Chinese characters prominently set against a backdrop resembling a brick wall, evoking a memorial or historical monument. This subdued visual approach creates an atmosphere of contemplation and solemnity, prompting readers to approach the text as both a historical document and a medium for preserving collective memory. The minimalist design suggests a deliberate focus on the content and the imperative of commemorating the past.

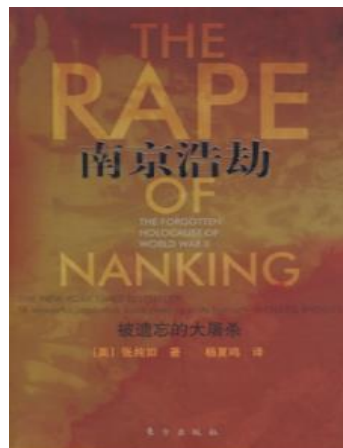


Figure 4. (TT2007)

With regard to the 2007 Chinese retranslation (see figure 4), this title is translated into “南京大屠杀”(nànjīng dà tūshā), with subtitle “被遗忘的浩劫”(bèi yíwàng de hàojié), together with the English title closely “The Nanjing Catastrophe: The Forgotten Massacre.” The term “浩劫”(hàojié) means “catastrophe”, which is a strategic choice that intensifies the depiction of the events. The use of such a powerful term not only conveys the extensive devastation and suffering but also serves to evoke a



strong emotional response. This heightened portrayal is crucial in reactivating the memory of the massacre, as it emphasizes the severe impact and widespread nature of the atrocities committed, ensuring that the historical memory is not diminished or forgotten. Additionally, by explicitly stating that the massacre is “被遗忘的” (bèi yíwàng de), the subtitle calls attention to the lapse in collective memory and highlights the necessity of remembering and acknowledging this historical event. This emphasis on the forgotten aspect of the tragedy serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving and transmitting this narrative to future generations, thereby reactivating and sustaining the memory of the massacre. The cover retains elements of the original English design, such as the title in English, but incorporates a more subdued color palette and traditional Chinese characters. The cover design, which retains elements of the original English version while incorporating traditional Chinese characters and a more subdued color palette, further aids in reactivating memory. The bilingual nature of the cover appeals to both Chinese and global audiences, thereby broadening the scope of remembrance. By blending English and Chinese elements, the cover not only reinforces the significance of this history within China but also highlights its relevance and importance to the global community. This dual appeal serves to reactivate memory on a wider scale, linking the traumatic events of the Nanjing Massacre to a broader audience.



Figure 5. (TT2013)

When it comes to the 2013 Chinese retranslation (see figure 5), the title is prominently displayed in bold red characters, directly referencing the historical event that occurred between December 1937 and January 1938—the Nanjing Massacre. In Chinese culture, red is often associated with blood, violence, and tragedy. This choice of color evokes strong emotions related to that period in history. Additionally, this title is also translated as “南京大屠杀” (The Nanjing Massacre) in Chinese. This straightforward approach also reinforces the importance of the massacre in Chinese history and ensures that the memory of the event is not lost in translation. This subtitle “第二次世界大战中被遗忘的大浩劫” (dì èr cì shì jiè dà zhàn zhōng bèi yíwàng de dà hàojié), emphasizes the often overlooked position of the Nanjing Massacre in global historical memory, urging readers to pay attention to this tragic and neglected part of history, thereby stimulating their recollection and reflection. The dark gray background resembles rough fabric or an old wall, suggesting the heaviness and weariness of history while symbolizing the scars left by war. This choice of cool tones fills the cover with a sense of oppression and sadness, indirectly invoking memories of historical trauma. Additionally, the central



part of the cover features a prominent bullet hole, directly referencing violence and death. The bullet hole is not only a symbol of war but also represents the loss of innocent lives and the bloody massacre. This visual element strongly stimulates associations with the violence inflicted upon innocent civilians during the Nanjing Massacre. The cover combines visual elements (colors, textures, patterns) and textual information (title, subtitle) to not only convey the theme of the Nanjing Massacre but also deeply touch the reader's emotions through its detailed design. This approach effectively guides readers to recall the history of the Nanjing Massacre and reflect on the cruelty and suffering caused by war.

As we have analyzed above, the various translations of *The Rape of Nanking* reflect different approaches to conveying the memory of the Nanjing Massacre. Translating this work into Chinese involves more than linguistic conversion; it requires cultural and historical contextualization to convey the traumatic memories with the same intensity and significance. The covers of the translated editions play a critical role in reactivating memory. Each cover adapts the narrative to the cultural expectations and historical consciousness of Chinese readers, ensuring the memory of the Nanjing Massacre is effectively preserved and transmitted across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Designed to evoke emotional responses, encourage reflection, and maintain the historical significance of the Nanjing Massacre, these visual elements serve as memory triggers. They remind readers of the atrocities and reinforce collective memory. Despite differences in design, all covers focus on the traumatic memory of the Nanjing Massacre, ensuring the book's central theme is consistently conveyed across different editions and translations. These covers are therefore crucial in shaping how the narrative is received and remembered by different generations and cultural groups. While the English title uses a direct and shocking approach, Chinese titles vary from straightforward descriptions like "The Nanjing Massacre" to more emotive terms like "Nanjing Atrocities" and "Nanjing Catastrophe." These titles are crafted to evoke strong emotional responses and foster a collective memory of the Nanjing Massacre. They ensure that the events are not forgotten, emphasizing their historical significance and the necessity of remembrance. By adapting the titles to suit cultural contexts and sensibilities, the translations in paratextual aspects help to reactivate and preserve the memory of the Nanjing Massacre for both local and global audiences, ensuring that the atrocities remain a part of the collective historical consciousness.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to examine the traumatic memory that the source text presents and how translation and retranslation transmit and convey collective historical memory in order to awaken a common historical consciousness in contemporary Chinese readers. In the case of *The Rape of Nanking*, the title and book cover are found to play significant role in shaping readers' perceptions. The analysis reveals that, despite variations in the presentation of TT1998, TT2005, TT2007, and TT2013, the reader's emotional memory is engaged to a certain extent. It reveals that the translations of *The Rape of Nanking* serve as a consistent reminder of the atrocities endured by the Chinese people during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Through the analysis of Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* and its different Chinese translations, the power of translation in either amplifying or diminishing the traumatic impact is illustrated and insights into how translations reactivate readers' emotional and intellectual responses to historical events are gained.

The role of the author, acting as a second witness, is crucial in conveying the memory of the Nanjing Massacre. Although Iris Chang did not experience the event firsthand, she draws on various sources to



recount and interpret the events, combining these with paratextual elements by carefully designing and selecting components that surround the main text for the readers. Translators, in turn, engage in the process of recounting the Nanking memory. For instance, by addressing extratextual elements like titles and covers, they evoke initial memories, enabling contemporary readers to connect with the past.

The analysis also highlights the importance of paratextual elements in the reproduction of traumatic memories. By incorporating rich visual elements and striking titles in both the source text and translations, readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the traumatic events in Nanking. These paratextual elements can clarify complex expressions, helping present-day readers in China to deeply grasp the trauma's depth and impact. Moreover, they present multiple perspectives and enhance emotional resonance, making the reproduction of traumatic memories more multidimensional and profound. Paratext translation thus plays a crucial role in safeguarding and preserving traumatic memories, ensuring their accuracy and integrity in cross-cultural communication.

By integrating perspectives from translation studies and memory studies, this research demonstrates that translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but a critical cultural practice that fosters empathy, understanding, and collective remembrance. Consequently, this study makes a significant contribution to both fields, highlighting their interconnectedness and the profound impact they have on reactivating history and collective memory.

Declarations and Acknowledgment:

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

References

- Alicia, CV. and Lucía, PG. (2021). Translation and transcultural memory in *La voz dormida*, *Perspectives* 29 (1), 156–170.
- Baker, M. (2010). Narratives of terrorism and security: 'Accurate' translations, suspicious frames. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 3(3), 347–364.
- Bassnett, S. and Lefevere, A. (1990). *Translation, history, and culture*. Routledge.
- Bassnett, S. (2003). Translation as re-membering. In: Caldicott CEJ and Fuchs A (eds) *Cultural memory: essays on European literature and history* (pp. 293–309). Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Benjamin, W. (1972). Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers. In: Tiedemann R and Schweppenhäuser H (eds), *Gesammelte Schriften IV* (pp. 9–21). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- Boase-Beier, J. et al. (2017). *Translating Holocaust Lives*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Brownlie, S. (2011). History, memory and translation: The case of Hachette Jeunesse's *Ivanhoé*. *Palimpsestes* 24, 23–40.
- Brownlie, S. (2016). *Mapping Memory in Translation*. Houndmills/Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brownlie, S. (2017). Institutional memory and translating at the DGT. *The Translator* 23 (1), 1-16.
- Brodzki, B. (2007). *Can these bones live? Translation, survival, and cultural memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.



- Bush, P. (2013). Memory, War and Translation: Mercè Rodoreda's In Diamond Square. In Nelson B and Maher B (eds), *Perspectives on Literature and Translation* (pp. 31–46). Routledge.
- Chang, I. (1997). *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. Basic Books.
- Chang, I. (1998). (Sun YC et al. translated). 南京暴行: 被遗忘的大屠杀[*The Nanking Atrocities: The Forgotten Massacre*]. Beijing: Oriental Press.
- Chang, I. (2005). (Ma ZX et al. Translated). 南京大屠杀[*The Nanking Massacre*]. Beijing: Oriental Press.
- Chang, I. (2007). (Yang XM translated). 南京浩劫: 被遗忘的大屠杀[*The Nanjing Haojie: The Forgotten Massacre*]. Shanghai: Shanghai Oriental Publishing House.
- Chang, I. (2013). (Tan CX et al. translated). 南京大屠杀: 第二次世界大战中被遗忘得浩劫 [*The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*]. Beijing: Citic Press.
- Davies, P. (2008). The Obligatory Horrors: Translating Tadeusz Borowski's Holocaust Narratives into German and English. *Holocaust Studies* 14 (2), 23–40.
- Davies, P. (2011). Translation and the Uses of a Holocaust Testimony: Elie Wiesel's *La Nuit* in German Translation. *German Life & Letters* 64 (4), 552–569.
- Davies, P. (2018). *Witness between languages: The translation of Holocaust testimonies in context*. Camden House.
- Deane-Cox, S. 2013. The translator as secondary witness: Mediating memory in Antelme's *L'espèce humaine*. *Translation Studies* 6 (3), 309–323.
- Deane-Cox, S. (2017). Remembering, witnessing and translation: Female experiences of the Nazi camps. *Translation: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 6, 91–130.
- Deane-Cox, S., and Spiessens, A. (2022). *The Routledge handbook of translation and memory*. London: Routledge.
- Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (Vol. 20). Cambridge University Press.
- Hirsch, M. (1997). *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hirsch, M. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hou, S. (2023). A critical review of research on translation and memory: Theories, themes, and prospects. *Forum* 21 (2), 213–235.
- Inghilleri, M., and Harding, SA. (2010). Translating violent conflict. *The Translator* 16 (2), 165–173.
- Jünke, C., and Schyns, D. (2023). *Translating Memories of Violent Pasts: Memory Studies and Translation Studies in Dialogue*. Taylor & Francis.
- Jünke, C. (2023). Transcultural memory and literary translation: Mapping the Field (with a case study on Lydie Salvayre's *Pas pleurer* and its Spanish translation). *Memory Studies* 16 (5), 1280–1297.
- Jakobson R. (1959). *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*. Reuben Brower, Cambridge, Mass,
- Kershaw, A. (2019). *Translating War*. Springer International Publishing.
- Li, P. 2001. *Japanese war crimes*. Routledge.
- Marco, J. (2021). Orwell's Homage to Catalonia in Catalan and Spanish translation. *Perspectives* 29 (1), 141–155.
- Pellatt, V. (2013). *Text, extratext, metatext and paratext in translation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Pintado, GL., and Castillo, VA. 2019. *New approaches to translation, conflict and memory: narratives of the Spanish civil war and the dictatorship*. Springer.
- Shao, P., Zhang, XD. and Zhang XY. (2023). 聚焦数字与遗忘: 海外媒介记忆研究的图景与路径[Focusing on the Digital and Forgetting: Perspectives and Approaches in Overseas Media Memory Studies]. 未来传播[*Future Communication*], 30 (2), 11–25, 138–139.



Towers, D. (2022). Translating Traumatic Memories: What is Forgotten in the English Translation of Mercè Rodoreda's *El carrer de les Camèlies*? *MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities* 17, 54–62.

About the Author:

Luomei Cui is a PhD candidate at the department of Linguistics and Literary studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. Her research focuses on retranslation studies and the intersections between translation and memory.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)