

# Theory of Intentionality in Literary Ontology: Reflection Based on Ingarden's Phenomenological Approach

Jianing Ruan

The College of Literature and Journalism of Sichuan University, Chengdu, China

## Abstract

In this paper, by analyzing Ingarden's phenomenological approach used in research on literary ontology, it suggests that Ingarden's phenomenology concept differs from Husserl's one in way of thinking, and the phenomenological approach he claims is only used to define the scope of literary research. The theory of intentionality is the theory that best reflects Ingarden's phenomenological approach, in Ingarden's discussion, the theory of intentionality expands its theoretical connotation; it is no longer regarded as a transcendental characteristic of the conscious subject, and the consciousness directionality and attributes of things, which are expanded into subjects, are extended beyond pure consciousness and goes deeply into the meaning composition of language. Ingarden's theory of intentionality not only illustrates the existence mode of literary works but also serves as the main thread running through the four layers of literary works, specifically explaining the intersubjectivity that makes communication between authors and readers, which is of great significance.

## Keywords

Ingarden, theory of intentionality, phenomenological approach.

## 1. Introduction

Roman Ingarden entered into phenomenology under Husserl, but due to his opposition to Husserl's transcendental idealism tendency and the resulting Epoche of the belief to "world existence", thus challenging Husserl, he used the existence mode of literary works as an example to illustrate the intentional existence mode of literary works, pointing out the "idea-reality" dualistic thinking and the ontological perspective of its limitations. Due to Ingarden's philosophical background and the phenomenological concepts he used in *The Literary Work of Art*, literary theory history also generally acknowledges his phenomenological approach. However, the approach Ingarden took in his research was not the phenomenological "Epoche" and "eidetic intuition", but mainly took an abstract and theoretical analytical approach. In the phenomenological theories he explicitly mentioned and seriously analyzed, the theory of intentionality is among his phenomenological approach, which also plays an important role in Ingarden's literary research.

## 2. "Impure" Phenomenological Approach

In *The Literary Work of Art*, Ingarden attempted to refute Husserl's transcendental idealism tendency by analyzing the existence mode of literary works, he didn't approve of Husserl's practice of all existence on "Epoche" and the view that there is an objective world outside of consciousness activities. Husserl's phenomenological approach is divided into three processes: "Epoche", "eidetic reduction", and "transcendental reduction" [1]. The first is "Epoche". Husserl used the approach of "Epoche", shelved the belief in the "world existence" that believes truths without examination. He believed that the belief in the existence of things is determined by subjective factors and natural attributes, in order to understand the things themselves, the

belief in the existence of facts must be temporarily "Epoched". This does not deny the existence of things, but only prevents them from working when studying the origin of consciousness, in case the natural attitude takes uncertain and individual things as premises[2]. The second step is "eidetic reduction", it is to reduce the individual things existing in reality to the general essence of intentionality. Eidetic reduction starts from the intuition of individual things and requires the "Epoche" of the belief in the existence of individual things, but does not require the "Epoche" of the belief in the existence of consciousness. Thus, the structure which is reduced to activity of consciousness is the structure of consciousness and object of consciousness. Husserl uses this to explain that activity of consciousness and object of consciousness are intentional. As Dan Zahavi said: "If A causally affects B, then both A and B must exist; if A intends B, then only A needs to exist." [3] Intentionality, as an inherent characteristic of activity of consciousness, has the independence of existence and does not require the existence of object of consciousness. The last is transcendental reduction; "Epoche" covers all existing facts, including sensory intuition, to make a pure consciousness field self-evident.

By comparing Ingarden's research method with Husserl's phenomenological approach, it could be seen that Ingarden's research method is not purely phenomenological. In Husserl's thinking, he used the method of "Epoche" to exclude the issue of whether individual things and all facts exist from the research scope and enter into the pure study of consciousness. However, Ingarden expanded the application scope of "Epoche", extended content of "Epoche" from the opposition of "reality-concept" to the range of "ontology and non-ontology", and thereby brackets the question of whether literary works is reflection of real or subjective psychology, focused on the analysis and intuition of the ontology of literary works, it could be seen that Ingarden adheres to a definite ontological position, believing that there are objective existents independent of consciousness. As for other phenomenological approaches, such as "eidetic reduction" and "eidetic intuition", Ingarden used them to eliminate psychologism to the author's life and psychology as well as the reader's experience, etc., thereby being able to dissect the essence of literary works, which is the focus of Ingarden's research.

It can be seen that Ingarden partly uses the phenomenological approach, but these methods are only used to define the research domain, in the ontological study of literary works, Ingarden partially adopts the abstract analysis method from traditional philosophy. In the analysis of various layers of literary works, Ingarden attempts to illustrate the constituent factors of different layers. At the phonetic layer, Ingarden distinguishes between phonemes and phonetic materials, and progresses from the pronunciation of words to that of sentences, in the meaning unit layer, Ingarden expands from the constituent elements of word meanings to the construction of sentence meanings and then to the formation of sentence groups. Although the "reproduced object" is not a definite object, Ingarden also points out that its essence and attributes are quite different from those of a real object, the key lies in that the qualitative connotation of a real object has no undetermined positions, and its appearance presented to the cognitive subject is complete; while the reproduced object is always full of undetermined positions, and its appearance also has blanks. However, even so, when Ingarden analyzes these two layers, he still uses analytical methods, explaining the characteristics of its existence by analyzing the time and space of the "reproduced object". None of these analytical methods are phenomenological intuitive methods, so where does the value of Ingarden's phenomenological approach lie?

This paper believes that the most important phenomenological theory lies in the theory of intentionality. However, Ingarden's theory of intentionality is not entirely explained from the thinking of phenomenological, many abstract analytical methods are also adopted in its core part. Therefore, it can be said that Ingarden's approach in the research on literary ontology is an impure phenomenological approach.

### 3. Connotation and Core Roles of Ingarden's Theory of Intentionality

Ingarden's theory of intentionality was developed based on his research on the existence mode and hierarchical structure of literary works. In literary research at that time, the debate over whether literary works were completely objective entities or conceptual existences was the background which Ingarden faced when entering into the field of literary research. However, Ingarden believed that neither of these viewpoints could explain the existence mode of literary works, literary works exist as "pure intentional objects."

When analyzing the existence modes of literary works, Ingarden distinguished between intentional objects and pure intentional objects. He held that intentional objects were the objects of cognitive acts, including material objects and conceptual objects in mathematics, which existed independently of the cognitive subject and were self-sufficient. This is not the pure intentional object, it was created directly or indirectly by conscious acts or by many such internal intentional drives, then it is purely intentional. It can be seen that the difference between intentional objects and pure intentional objects lies in whether they have independent existence conditions apart from the subject's activity of consciousness. However, regardless of whether they arise from the subject's consciousness, as long as they enter into the activity of consciousness and become the corresponding objects of activity of consciousness, Ingarden defined them as intentional objects. Therefore, the core meaning of Ingarden's "intentionality" lies in the directionality of activity of consciousness activity.

Furthermore, Ingarden divided pure intentional objects into native pure intentional objects and derivative pure intentional objects. The former originated from activity of consciousness of a single subject and could not exist independently of the subject, with the characteristics of self-evidence and richness. Derivative pure intentional objects not only originated from a single subject but were also determined by the subject's activity of consciousness through language and writing, which makes the pure intentional object to be relatively independent from the relationship with activity of consciousness activity. When temporarily separated from activity of consciousness activity, the intentionality of derivative pure intentional objects still existed. This was because, in addition to the activities of the consciousness subject, Ingarden also found factors related to "intentionality" in the components of language and semantics. During the analysis of the meaning layers of literary works, Ingarden analyzed the "intentional indication factors" in the meaning composition of words and the intentionality in sentences and sentence groups. The intentionality in language was not only a characteristic within the consciousness of subject but also became a directional element carried in the meaning of language. In Ingarden's view, the derivative pure intentional objects created by these meaning units of language were not independent existences either, these derivative pure intentional objects were directly related to the internal intentionality of the meaning units and indirectly related to the intentionality of the imaginative activity. Moreover, because it is not only the counterpart of the consciousness of "a single subject", but also directly related to the intentionality of the meaning unit, it is also intersubjective, it can be conceived and recognized as the same by different consciousness subjects.

And literary work is a kind of derived pure intentional object, Ingarden used this to refute the notion of regarding literary works as artificial printed matter or mental construction, took the phenomenological concept of "intentionality" as the core argument, and pointed out that the pure intentionality of the existence mode of literary works lies in the pure intentionality of the language construction. Ingarden believed that literary work was a kind of language construction, and this language construction was based on two heterogeneous things: the activity of consciousness of the subject and the objective written symbols: as the product of the subject's activity of consciousness, it is conceptual, but the final presentation of the literary works depends on the objectively existing written symbols. As a pure intentional object, literary

works, unlike other objects, cannot exist completely independently of consciousness, they must rely on the intentional activity of consciousness to be produced, exist and reveal themselves. Specifically, the creative process of literary works is an intentional act. In the creative activity, the subject's consciousness "points to" the external world, organizes, selects and processes the materials, endows them with form, order and meaning, makes them an internally unified system, fixes them with language, and finally prints them to obtain a material form of existence. However, literary works do not become material objects due to this, finally, they must be realized through the reader's reading, the reader's intentional reconstruction activity, demonstrate its characteristics as a conceptual entity.

It can be seen that Ingarden's "intentional" explains the relationship between the subject's consciousness and its consciousness object. Ingarden's theory of intentionality does not "Epoche" all existence. He discusses this issue on the basis of acknowledging the independent existence of objective things outside of consciousness. On the issue of intentionality, Husserl believes that the intentional relationship exists prior to the consciousness object. However, Ingarden's intentionality merely borrows one aspect of Husserl's theory, intentionality is merely the directivity of activity of consciousness. This is beyond doubt. Referring to Fang Fang's view, she believes that Ingarden's intentionality, due to its ontological stance, does not need to consider the process of meaning formation, and directly "discusses meaning as a ready-made thing. Therefore, intentionality becomes an attribute of things." [5]. The key to why Ingarden's theory of intentionality can coexist with the method of abstract analysis lies precisely in that "intentionality" is expanded by Ingarden to be "an attribute of things", rather than a structure within the concept.

In conclusion, Ingarden explains that the existence mode of literary works as language construction with "heterogeneous" existence bases is neither objectively real nor conceptual through the theory of intentionality, but intentional existence. However, the research on the existence mode of literary works only occupies a relatively small proportion in Ingarden's literary ontology. The most important conclusion of Ingarden's literary ontology is the layer structure of literary works.

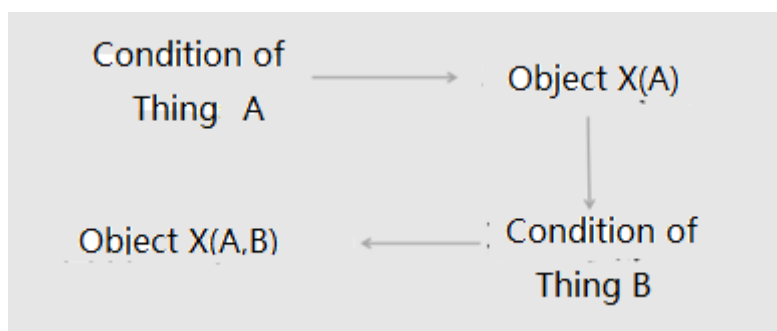
#### 4. Intentionality in the Various Layers of Literary Works

In *The Literary Work of Art*, Ingarden proposed that regardless of the layer of artistry, literary works have four structural layers, which are the Phenomenon of speech layer, the Meaning unit layer, the Representation object layer, and the Metaphysical layer. Ingarden used the concept of phenomenological theory to illustrate that as an "intentional" entity, the layer structure of a literary work differs from the self-existent reality in the real world, and it combines both certainty and uncertainty. The key that runs through these four layers and connects them lies in its theory of intentionality [6].

Ingarden believed that the first layer of a literary work is the "layer of phonemes and higher-layer phonetic structures based on phonemes". Ingarden acknowledged that a literary work is a linguistic structure, and pronunciation becomes an inevitable aspect within it. Ingarden distinguished between two different types of pronunciation: "phonemes" and "phonetic materials". "Phonemes" are super-subjective and can be received and consistently recognized by different subjects as "standard phonemes". "Phonetic materials" are closely related to the pronunciation activities of a single subject. Therefore, although Ingarden did not explicitly explain the intentionality of pronunciation at this layer, as the shell of semantics, "it limits its meaning and thereby guiding the listener's intention towards understanding its corresponding meaning, ultimately leading to the implementation of the understanding subject's intention. In this process, the 'intentionality' of the understanding subject plays a crucial role" [7]. Thus, the

"layer of phonemes and higher-layer phonetic structures based on phonemes" is inevitably associated with intentionality.

The second layer is the Meaning unit layer, which is the most core layer. At this layer, Ingarden focused on analyzing the intentionality of meaning units: words, as the smallest units of meaning, with the most important being nominal words, the function of the "intentional directional indicator" in its meaning elements is to make the word point to a specific object. While verbs also contain material content, the directional indexes of verbs only emerge after the subject confirms the subject of activity. After confirming the components of the meaning of words, the composition of sentences and their intentionality can also explain that sentences arise from the subject's sentence making activity the sentence making activity is based on the subject's grasp of the "state of things" of the object, namely a certain "side" of the object, therefore, therefore, the conscious activity of the subject attempting to adapt to a certain "situation of things" with sentences, which is intentional. And the product of this intentional activity, namely the intentionality of the meaning of the sentence making, points to the "state of affairs" presented by the object. The function of a sentence is also to create a purely intentional counterpart that belongs to the sentence, namely the "state of affairs". A sentence group is a combination of sentences, and different sentences create different "states of affairs", these sentences are associated with the same object, different "states of affairs" are mixed, becoming "a group of expanded states of affairs associated with the same object", the presentation process of the intentional object corresponding to the meaning of the sentence group is as shown in the following figure: object X as an intentional object, it is manifested through different specific states of affairs, and it can only exist within the existence scope of the object that the condition of thing implies.



**Figure 1.** The presentation process of the intentional object corresponding to the meaning of the sentence group

In the Representation object layer, reproducing the meaning of object in language, the derived pure intentional object is created, broadly speaking, it refers to the represented world implied by the linguistic meaning of literary works. The represented object has a quasi-realistic nature, in terms of the represented space, it depends on the cognitive center of the consciousness subject and changes accordingly, moreover, because it as the signified object of the language meaning, as a pure intentional object, it can only present itself in different conditions within a sentence group, as writing and reading continue, the "unfolded space" and "folded space" in the represented world will also change accordingly [8]. Moreover, in terms of the time in the represented world, it is neither the continuous real time that can distinguish the past, present and future, nor the "super-temporal" pure conceptual time that has no present, past and future, instead, it is the time that can only be represented through events within a certain period of time in a literary work, because different subjects can understand the time represented by this period of events referred to by the literary language, the time in the represented world is a visible, "intersubjective" time.

For the Metaphysical layer of the work, first, a brief explanation of its connotation is needed. "Representation " is a certain aspect of the form feature of an entity obtained by the cognitive subject in a certain perception, this perception method is sensible and non-conceptual. And the graphical representation is the skeleton of the specific representation. In essence, this layer is inseparable from the represented object, but since literary works are not literate books, they have aesthetic style characteristics, it makes sense to make a slight distinction from the Representation object layer. Whether it is an objective existing object or an intentional object, they present many presentations through the meaning units of sentences and sentence group, during the unfolding of the sentences in a literary work, these representations are perceived, thus producing the flow of past and current presentation, these presentation cannot all be clearly and visibly presented and retained in consciousness, so the conceptualized things left are the graph, the skeleton, namely the " graphical representation " [9].

By summarizing Ingarden's four layers of literary works, it can be found that the concept of intentionality serves as the core clue, which makes these four layers closely linked. In the phonetic layer, the phonetic form limits the meaning of words, thereby intentionality guiding the listener's understanding. In the Meaning unit layer, words intentionality points to a single object, sentences intentionality points to a certain physical state of the object, and sentence groups intentionally point to the domain of reproduced object by presenting different states of the same object. There is a layer of graphical representation from the meaning unit of pronunciation to sentences, sentence groups, and the layer of reproducing objects. It can be said that intentionality plays a key role as the core clue in Ingarden's ontology of literary works.

## 5. Conclusion

By comparing Husserl's phenomenological approach and analyzing Ingarden's application of methods such as "Epoche" and "eidetic intuition", it can be seen that Ingarden's theory of intentionality is the most typical phenomenological approach he applied in research on the literary ontology. This theory of intentionality also played a core role in specific research, not only explaining the existence mode of the intentionality of literary works but also closely connecting the four layers of literary works, under the core concept of the "intentional object" created by the meaning unit of literary works. Ingarden's theory of intentionality makes this pure intentional object of literary works intersubjective, which can make different subjects to be recognized the same. As illustrated when analysing the connotation of the "intentional direction index" of nominal words, this element is precisely what to confirm that this object is this and not that. With intentionality, different subjects can define the same object, and the same literary work can be accepted by both the author and numerous readers, therefore, it can be said that the intentional existence of literary works not only refutes the existing debate at that time on whether literary works are entities or conceptual existences, but also becomes the premise and guarantee for literary works to have "intersubjectivity" [10].

## References

- [1] Deng Xiaomang: A Guide to Hasserl Phenomenology, Academic Journal of Zhongzhou, No.6, 1996.
- [2] Wang Tangjia: Epoch and Reduction of Phenomenology, Academic Monthly, No.7, 1993.
- [3] Dan Zahavi: Russell Phenomenology, translated by Li Zhongwei, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2007.
- [4] Roman Ingarden: The Literary Work of Art, An Investigation of the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Language, Translated by Zhang Zhenghui, Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2008.
- [5] Fang Fang: On Ingarden's Theory of Meaning [D], East China Normal University, 2014.
- [6] Zhang Yongqing: Problems and Thinking: Ingarden's Thirty Years of Literary Theory Research, Literature & Art Studies, 2011, No.2.

- [7] Wu Keqin: On Ingarden's Literary Ontology Thoughts [D], Suzhou University, 2010.
- [8] Zhang Xushu: Initial Theoretical Studies of the Meaning of Ingarden's Aesthetics Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art, 2003, No.5.
- [9] Wang Yuechuan: Ingarden's Theory of Work Structure and Aesthetic Value, Journal of Peking University, Issue 5, 1991.
- [10] Charles Breathless: Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice, translated by Zhao Yong et al., Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2015.