The rise of native consciousness and the regional writing are two important phenomena in Taiwan’s culture in recent years. Speaking dialect, learning local customs and promoting native education are not only the official and civilian emphases, but also an index of identity attribute. Kissing the land and protecting Taiwan now are highly political proclamation showing the royalty and earnestness to this land. But what does soil (t’u) mean? Literally, it refers to belonging to the land origin. It is well known that it took much pain and hardship to articulate the word “nativeness” (pen-t’u) publicly in Taiwan. Obviously, the query of the nativeness is a structural activity as well as the process. The question is: how the image and implication of land evolve in Taiwan literature, and how the land comes into our view from negligence?

With these questions in mind, I reviewed the regional literature (hsiang-t’u wen-hsueh) in 1960s and 1970s, wishing to have a rough idea of how the land was represented. In the era when anti-communism and homesickness prevailed, the emphasis of Taiwanese modernist fictions was mainly placed upon the Mainland China. Though what they depicted were Taiwanese social phenomena, the space characters were not stressed. The native identity gained its strength in the post war era when the literature began writing about Taiwanese local customs and in Taiwanese dialect in large scale\(^1\). Despite the debate on the regional literature contained its development for a time, the concept of nativeness was clarified. Though the views

\(^1\) During the Japanese occupation and twenty years after the civil war, though many Taiwanese stories were about the events and people in Taiwan, they exert little influence upon the regional literature in 1970s due to different cultural and political conditions. See Yeh Shih-t’ao’s, “Taiwanese literature in 1970s concerns about the native land or the humanism”, The History of Taiwanese Literature (Kaolisuing: Wen-hsueh chieh, 1987), 137-140.
upon what is nativeness² varied, it is generally accepted that the native literature referred to such works set against the background of countryside and depicting the lives of rustic people with the language featuring local dialects³. However, as I started my query on the prototypes of the texts written by two representative writers, Hwang Chun-ming and Wang Chen-ho, to my great surprise that their description about the landscape is much less about their concern about the characters, which means, they paid much less attention to the geographic features of region than the people living in these places. The characters are the major objects of their work while the countryside only serves as the background. Strictly, the description and the implication of space are secondary to the characters and what the soil literature depicts is not the native land but the native people.

It is notable that in the works of Hung Hsing-fu and Sung Che-lai in the mid 1970s, the local history and the land consciousness tends to be strengthened. Instead of using the land as the rhetorical metaphor of people’s living conditions, Sung Che-lai questioned such policies as land planning, development and the distribution of resources; while Hung Hsing-fu set the land consciousness high above the human value and gave the land a sublime symbolic significance. In other words, the space rose form the background to the focus, becoming the object of the text and being linked with the symbolic system of a higher level. The role of the land in Taiwanese literature has experienced profound changes in a decade.

Why the native stories and problems were presented with the characters playing the leading role and the local history the background in Hwang Chun-ming’s works and vice versa in Hung Hsing-fu and Sung Che-lai’s? This paper attempts to explore the native land depicted in Hwang Chun-ming’s stories and his reasons in doing so by

² Please refer to the Collection of Discussion on the Regional Literature, edited by Yu T’ian-ts’ung for various opinions (Taipei: Yuan-ching, 1981).
³ Wang T’uo,” It is Realistic Literature, not Native Literature, an Historical Analysis on the Regional Literature”, collected in Collection of Discussion on the Regional Literature, p. 115.
stressing on the formation of place identity and the crises, and the initial strategy of
Taiwanese literature in reviving the soil literature in the post war era by analyzing the
molding process of the land in the fiction. In order to avoid the ongoing ideological
disputes in the analysis of Taiwanese literature history, this paper borrows concepts
from architecture and geography in analyzing the regional literature, trying to review
the evolving process of the land in narrative texts.

I. What is the Place

According to the research conducted by a phenomenological architect,
Christian Norberg-Schulz, the basic elements that constitute the human existing space
including place, path and domain. Place here refers to the place evolving from the
family and centered by the ego where people conduct social activities. It has marked
scope or borderline and has such features as being intimate, concentrating and closed.
Path is the path of human activities, linking two already known places or from a
known place to an unknown one. Walking along the path implies that the human
consciousness is a linear continuation. Path makes the existing space a more
complicated and special domain, integrating such geographical conditions as
mountains and rivers as well as political and economic factors. The domain possesses
adequate images that make the human imagination in accord with the existing space
and establish the order between human beings and the natural environment. The
human beings, occupation of space are realized by turning environments into domains
with the work of path and place, establishing the integrated space recognition and, in
turn, the stands of individuals. Christian Norberg-Schulz argues that:

The early agricultural culture was “place-oriented”, which means people
lived peaceful lives in a concentrated and “closed” domain. Their path was
moving in circle, never aiming at the outside targets......

The question of being inside or outside arises as the place interacts with its
environment. This phenomenological relationship becomes the basic standpoint of the existing space. The idea of being inside is clearly the initial meaning closely related with the concept of place, i.e. the outside means a place far away from the inside. A man becomes an inhabitant of some place as he defines the inside from the outside. With this relationship, his experience and memory is defined accordingly and the inside of the place becomes his individual inside. Therefore, the close relationship between the identity and the place is established, especially as his personality is being shaped.

Here the place is also translated into the local place by which its inhabitants can define the interaction between the inside and the outside as well as the boundary. As the recognition of individual identity is in accord with the local space by common experience and memory, the primary consciousness (imagination) is established accordingly to distinguish the local inhabitants from the outside visitors. The domain becomes the native land so long as it is large enough to support the inhabitants. The late Chinese geographer, Yi-fu Tuan, held that the human reliance on the native land is very strong. However, natural geographic or spatial coordinate is not the seminary for nostalgic feelings. It is the human orientation rather than the place orientation that decides spatial structure. In other words, it is the behavior of an individual, instead of the fixed geographical environment, that defines a person’s perception of the native place.

“Junior and the Police Officer” (A-wei yu ching-ch’a) (1968), a humorous story written by Hwang Chun-ming, is a vivid interpretation of the humanistic nostalgic feelings proposed by Yi-fu Tuan. The story is very simple, dwelling mainly on the dialogue between a police officer and an unlicensed vegetable vender. The police officer routinely demands the name of the female villager. But she only gives her

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nickname, junior. She does not carry the identity card, because she is “not visiting some place”. The upset police officer has no choice but to ask for her address. She replies, “Kui-liao-a.”

“Where is Kui-liao-a?” the police ask.

“Near Hsiao-p’i tsai.”

The confused police officer keeps asking about the names of township and village. But all he could get is Kui-liao-a, Kui-liao-a. It is not until he asks a courier that he finally gets the detailed address --- Yung-fu Village, Mei-chian Township. The police officer finally decides to spare the ignorant female villager and asks her to keep it a secret.6

The very attraction of this story lies in the differed recognition of the place between common people and the administrative system. Common people used to establishing the place and identity with the neighboring places and nickname while the administrative system carries out management by administrative codes and regulations. The official system, represented by the police officer, demands information in written form, such as the registered name, vending license and booth. While the woman, representing the plebeian culture, defines her status with her relationships with people and places. In the police officer’s perception, the name means the characters on the identity card. However, the woman recognizes her identity as junior, the youngest child of her mother. What the police officer holds legal is to apply to the government for sales license while the woman believes it is good enough to pay money to the managers of the food market and acquire the permission of the community. In terms of persons and places, the police authorities talk in abstract administrative signs while the common people rely on empirical perception under the principles of personal and community interactions.

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The perception of local people in Hwang Chun-ming’s fiction is in accord with the researches of geographers. Professor Tuan insists that, just like our attachment to our families comes from our experience of intimacy and fostering, the establishment of special human relations and intimacy are critical to develop the place identity. Rather than knowing each other’s every trivial thing, intimacy grows from “a sudden sincere exchange” and ‘each exchange requires an occasion on which the participants can share experiences.” The place where intimacy can grow “is deeply rooted in our memory and the very thought of it would give a strong sense of fulfillment.”

Professor Tuan argues that, apart from social experiences, “humble events may help people to establish a strong place identity.” In addition,” as food or commodities, chicken, egg, and tomato are all common in the countryside. Though inspiring no aesthetic feelings, they are beautiful in essence because they make people feel comfortable.

Seemingly irrelevant to the exploration on the evolvement of land in Taiwanese literature, Yi-fu Tuan’s argument is quite helpful in explaining the novelists’ excessive description of pigs, bulls, crops and even the geographical features. Take Hwang Chun-ming’s “The Story of Grandpa Ching-fan ” (1967) as an example. When Grandpa Ching-fan educates his grandsons, he tells little about the territorial or geological features, but rather elaborates on the ideas that jackstraw is the brother of farmers and “the reedbird is the flood forecaster”. He is convinced that the jackstraw and the reedbird are both important links in the local system. From his experience, the killing of reedbirds would bring about flood that devastates the village.

The description of the flood disaster is quite shocking. To our great surprise, when the grandfather of young Ching-fan senses the flood is coming, he immediately organize the flee of the whole family and orders Ching-fan to free all chickens, ducks,

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7 Tuan, p. 133.
8 Tuan, p. 136.
pigs and cows shut in the stable, rather than to help himself escape. The decision implies that the value of these poultry and livestock is more than their economic benefit. They are lives equal to other family members. After the disaster, the first thing that the young Ching-fan does to rebuild the family is to raise pigs again. “With litters of pigs, the cultivated field is expanding as well. All villagers are living in the same way.”9 As the family possession is recovering and new generations are born, Ching-fan has become Grandpa. Pigs bring comfortable memories of rebuilding the family. On learning the government’s policy of promoting sidelines, the old man decides to raise pigs at once. The prosperity of livestock brings about the prosperity of the family and the whole village at large.

Regarding the livestock and crops as the integrated links of the native system, Hwang Chun-ming establishes Grandpa Ching-fan imagination and perception of the Village. Similar ideas are shared with Hung Hsing-fu. Holding cattle in great esteem, he intertwines the destinies of the cattle and the protagonist to imply the destiny of the countryside in his story “Bad Foot T’ien-chu and His Cattle” (Po-chiao t’ien-chu han t’a-te-niu” (1972). Just like Grandpa Ching-fan’s reliance upon pigs, feeds his family by a cattle cart. After years of heavy work, the ox becomes old and T’ien-chu limps. Selling the cattle seems to be the best option for him. However, T’ien-chu is so attached to the cattle that he could not bear the criticism and low prices offered by the buyers. “This is not about the money.” It is the appraisal of the cattle. T’ien-chu’s faith on the cattle certainly would not convince the cattle businessmen of its value. Finally, the cattle dies of overwork. T’ien-chu , a tough man at the beginning of the story, now shows his gentleness to his old workmate. “He kneels upon the straw in the shed and leans his distorted face against the back of the

cattle. His bear is unshaved for a long time.” “He looks up and pats the back of the cattle, humming a unknown song.” T’ien-chu’s reaction to the death demonstrates that the cattle is no longer a production instrument. This personification reaches the climax at the death of the ox. Refusing to leave the corpse, T’ien-chu caresses it and says in gentle voice: “come on, old friend, let’s go playing and have a cup of wine.” All villagers come to the shed at the news of cattle’s death, “standing there silently and motionlessly, as if they have lost something important.” An animal bringing all villagers together implies their respect and recognition of T’ien-chu and his partner. They are also mourning for the vanishing of the village’s traditional virtues and beliefs.

II. The Place Called Home

The researches made by Christian Norberg-Schulz and Yi-fu Tuan both lead to the result that the place is where people stay in their moving process, and inspires intimacy and cohesion among people who stay there. The staying point could not only meet people’s biological needs, but also becomes the core of emotional values. The sense of security produced by our experience of intimacy and fostering is closely related to our attachment to the place, and the family in essence. So the collapse or crisis of families naturally alludes to the collapse or crisis of the place. The continuation of the family is closely related with the prosperity of the land. In the “Story of Grandpa Ching-fan”, the revival of the family symbolizes the recovery of the place; while in “Bad Foot T’ien-chu and His Cattle”, the deteriorating family financial situation indicates the collapse of the countryside. However, the most remarkable example is Hwang Chun-ming’s super-idealistic work, “The Days of Viewing the Sea” (Kan-hai te jih-tsi)(1967). This story wishfully apotheosizes the

image of mother, exalting concrete females to symbolize the land. Several scholars have pointed out the author’s male mode of thinking\textsuperscript{11}. However, what interests me the most is how the author employs the binary opposition of land/sea to establish the place identity in such a simple story, which even becomes a representative of “realistic” story.

The heroine of the story, Pai-mei, is a prostitute working in a fishing port. She is tired of the job and decides to have a baby without marriage and go back to settle in her hometown. Here the antithesis between the land and the sea alludes to the heroine’s predicament and way out\textsuperscript{12}. On the one hand, sea tides, fish shoals and visitors symbolize movement, which is unsteady and hard to establish an attachment and the sense of security. On the contrary, the land stands for stability, generation preservation and eternity. Though she was sold at her childhood, she immediately recalls her memory about the temples, fields and the farmers at the sight of her hometown mountains, and accordingly the sense of recognition is born. She settles down, sowing seeds of sweat potato and rebuilding her house after storm. Finally, on the train carrying her child and herself to revisit the fishing port, she suddenly feels that “the semi-insulator that used to isolate herself to the people does not exist anymore. Instead of looking at the world through suffocating grids, now she becomes a part of the world”. According to phenomenologist, “when our place coincides with the center of our lives, we are “at home.”\textsuperscript{13}. With the sense of belonging, Pai-mei can feel the interaction between her inside world and the outside world and enjoys the sense of security and comfort. The sense of dwelling based on the land makes her feel peaceful on sighting the sea. Those running and temporary sceneries belong to the

\textsuperscript{13} Christian Norberg-Schulz, p. 34.
“outside” world and exert no influence upon her inside peacefulness.

The continuation and maintenance of the family are indispensable to the establishment of the place identity. So a woman with tarnished reputation like P’ai-mei can overcome everything and solve any problems as long as she settles at her hometown. The tradition is endangered if such continuation is not possible. An example opposite to Grandpa Ching-fan and P’ai-mei is old Ken-keng in the “Dusk of Ken-keng-po”. Old Ken-keng is a kind and laborious old man living in a small village. He is easy to be pleased, “harvesting, sowing, budding, blossoming and fruit bearing never fail to make him smile.” 14 However, such a pure-hearted and laborious old farmer is facing the crisis of lacking continuation. His only child, A-shing was pressed into service by Japanese and went mad. He often walks around nakedly and Ken-keng has to lock him up in the field. Madness is a common disease in the native literature, alluding to distortedness and a threat to the order. Here it implies the damage wrecked by Japanese colonialism upon Taiwanese people. The jail of A-shing further echoes with the political allusion of this story. Contrary to the image of vast land, the cell is not a place at all and, instead of interaction between the inside and the outside world, there is only passive management conflicting with the local consciousness. Therefore the recognition of the land and the place identity are impossible. Nevertheless, the land symbolizes a generous shelter to all people in spite of the discontinuity of the family line.

Based upon above analyses, it could be observed that the intimate feelings towards the hometown are formed by the trivial interactions between livestock, poultry, family members and neighbors in Hwang Chun-ming’s fiction. Though the hometown does not have grand buildings or imagination-inspiring images, it has rich

resources in the daily lives to inspire our memories. Yi-fu Tuan’s research holds that, bounded by different cultural signs, the intimate feelings towards a place can be personal and special, and exert great influence upon the recognition of the people in the culture. The culture dominates the focus and scope of people’s vigilance; the language affects the domain integrating capability of the experience; painting and its rituals could be the complementary language of the experience domain. However, in the period when KMT Government dominated the policies on literature, Taiwan was not a desirable signifier. The space coordinates depicted in the realistic literature were mostly located in the mainland, such as the local customs and landscape south of the Yangtse River, (chiang-nan). Taiwan was only the platform for invading the mainland and the temporary home. It was not until 1973 that the “Ten grand construction” (shih-ta chian-she) projects were started in Taiwan, booming its economic growth and the modernization process. Under this political and cultural circumstance, Taiwan was only a blurring image in the literature; therefore, the local identity merely depends upon the individual experience and imagination of authors. With the daily experience, they constructed the island as an intimate community, distinguishing from the distant Mainland.

The sense of place of Hwang Chun-ming style is very popular and enlightening in the regional fiction of the same period. Take Hung Hsing-fu as an example. His early works in 1970s featured human-centered concerns, as I have discussed above. But later he discarded the humanism and upheld the meaning of the land. In his story, “My Land” (Wu-t’u) (1978), the seriously ill parents would rather commit suicides than allow their son to sell the land for medical expenses. Clearly here the sublimity of the land has exceeded that in the early soil literature or even Hwang Chun-ming’s works. To some extent, the native consciousness in “My Land” is vivid enough to be

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15 Tuan, p. 140-141.
regarded as the first sign of contemporary Taiwanese primacy. However, without the recognizable place identity formed by common things in Hwang Chun-ming’s works, the image of land in literature would not have undergone such a swift change.