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Archipelagic Literary Studies and Spatial Formation

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Abstract: This article develops Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) as a framework for rethinking Bildungsroman narratives in Southeast Asia. It shifts attention away from viewing space as backdrop and instead treats archipelagic spatial relations as constitutive of narrative form, development, and subject formation. Space is not secondary but the medium through which ethical and intellectual growth becomes possible. Against European models that emphasize coherence and social integration, Southeast Asian colonial texts disrupt linear development and institutional stability. In José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, formation begins in rupture: institutional failure produces ethical absence, articulated through *puwáng* as structural void. In Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*, development unfolds through navigation across distinct social domains (*ruang*), each governed by shifting norms and hierarchies. Rather than a single trajectory, these texts register a shared condition in which growth emerges through movement across uneven, unstable environments shaped by colonial power. Archipelagic relationality—grounded in maritime routes, dispersed settlements, and overlapping sovereignties—reconfigures narrative temporality alongside spatial form. Development thus arises across discontinuous sites of encounter rather than along a continuous line. ALS reframes Bildung as inseparable from relational geography, demonstrating how spatial logic structures development in Southeast Asian fiction.

Keywords: Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS); spatial analysis; postcolonial Bildungsroman; José Rizal; Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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标题：文学群岛研究与空间构形

摘要：本文以“文学群岛研究”为理论框架，重新审视东南亚成长小说。研究突破将空间视作背景的传统视角，转而将群岛空间关系界定为叙事形态、人物成长与主体建构的构成性要素。空间并非附属元素，而是实现个体伦理与心智成长的核心媒介。与强调连贯性与社会整合的欧洲成长小说不同，东南亚殖民语境中的文本打破了线性成长轨迹与制度稳定性。在何塞·黎剎的《社会痼疾》中，人物的成长始于断裂。作者借助“*puwáng*”一词，呈现体制失范所导致的伦理缺位。在普拉姆迪亚·阿南

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达·杜尔的《人世间》中，人物在不同社会场域（*ruang*）间穿行与成长，每个场域均受制于流变的社会规范与等级秩序。两部作品呈现出共通的叙事特征：人物并非沿着单一轨迹成长，而是在殖民权力所塑造的不均衡且不稳定的空间中辗转穿行。以海上航道、散居聚落与多重权力交叠为根基的群岛关系性，既重塑了叙事时间，也重构了空间形式。成长过程由此产生于不连续的相遇场所中，而非呈现为线性发展路径。文学群岛研究因此将“教化成长”重新锚定在关系性地理中，揭示空间逻辑如何构造东南亚小说中人物的成长过程。

关键词：文学群岛研究；空间分析；后殖民成长小说；何塞·黎刹；普拉姆迪亚·阿南达·杜尔

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Introduction

This article proposes Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) as both a theoretical orientation and a method for reading Southeast Asian postcolonial novels. The framework begins with a premise that is simple but often overlooked: space in literature is not merely background. It is not scenery, nor a neutral stage upon which characters act. In archipelagic contexts which are shaped historically by maritime circulation, colonial fragmentation, linguistic plurality, and institutional dispersion, space actively organizes narrative logic, ethical formation, and intellectual development.

ALS therefore treats spatial relations as constitutive rather than decorative. Environments do not simply contain events; they structure perception. Domestic interiors, schools, churches, courts, plantations, plazas, and administrative offices are not empty settings. They encode authority, regulate visibility, and distribute access. When characters move across them, they are not only relocating; they are negotiating power.

This insight draws conceptually from spatial theory, particularly the work of Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, who argues that space is socially produced because institutions, buildings, and landscapes emerge from political decisions and economic structures (1991, p. 31). Architecture carries ideology while urban design reflects governance. Because space is produced through social processes, it also becomes a medium through which authority operates, in which colonial institutions, in particular, materialize hierarchy in concrete form, shape movement, speech, and proximity (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 410-411).

Narrative theory further clarifies this relationship. Drawing on Fredric Jameson’s notion of cognitive mapping, ALS understands literary form as a way of organizing complex social realities into readable sequences. Although modern systems of power often exceed direct perception, narrative form can render them partially visible by tracing connections among institutions, locations, and social forces.

In archipelagic settings, this function becomes especially significant. Unlike continental imaginaries organized around a single center, archipelagic geographies are relational because meaning emerges through connections involving routes, crossings, exchanges, and transitions. Islands do not function in isolation; they exist through movement. This spatial condition shapes narrative form. Development unfolds across dispersed sites rather than within a unified field. Through movement across environments, readers begin to perceive how relations of domination circulate.

Within this framework, ALS reconsiders the Bildungsroman in Southeast Asian literature. Classical European models often assume linear maturation: the protagonist moves from youth toward integration into a coherent social order. In colonial Southeast Asia, however, social space is fragmented and unevenly structured because formation occurs through negotiation across differentiated environments. Growth is iterative rather than cumulative because it emerges through encounters with institutions that both enable and constrain action.

To analyze this process, ALS distinguishes three overlapping spatial scales, namely, intimate interiors, institutional structures, and broader civic arenas. Intimate spaces consist of households, private rooms, personal conversations, which often serve as early sites of ethical shaping. Intimate spaces, consisting of households, private rooms, and personal conversations, serve as early sites of ethical development. Institutional spaces like schools, churches, courts, and offices introduce codified authority and formal hierarchy. Finally, society-level arenas such as plazas, marketplaces, plantations, transportation networks, and colonial capitals, make larger systems of power visible.

These categories are analytical, not rigid because their significance lies in movement between them. Characters develop through transitions and insights gained in domestic spaces reshape interpretations of public authority. As such, encounters in institutional settings alter understandings formed in private interiors and development emerges from this continual repositioning.

Language intensifies this spatial process as terms describing environments frequently encode cultural understandings of distance, hierarchy, absence, enclosure, and relation. Everyday local words in Tagalog and Indonesian do more than denote physical locations because they signal social meaning. As they do, they reveal how communities interpret gaps, domains, boundaries, and interiors. Therefore, spatial awareness is linguistically mediated. Notably, narrative representation of space cannot be separated from the vocabulary through which that space is understood.

In such a context, spatial formation operates through both rupture and differentiation. In the novels analyzed here, these dynamics are articulated through the concepts of the Tagalog word, *puwáng* (rupture), evoking a sense of *pagitan* (between) and the Indonesian word *ruang* (a social domain marked by differentiation), evoking a particular space, like a room. Both words literally mean space and gap, marking structural absence and signaling socially organized domains, thereby providing culturally grounded vocabulary for understanding how colonial environments shape ethical awareness in the production of space, viewed not as a neutral "container".

Methodologically, as illustrated by the study, ALS combines close textual reading with structural spatial analysis. It pays particular attention to scenes of movement, threshold crossings, institutional encounters, and environmental transitions. These moments are not treated as incidental details; instead, they reveal how protagonists gradually assemble cognitive and ethical orientation within historically structured environments.

Applied to José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* (1980), ALS demonstrates how spatial experience organizes formation under colonial conditions. In both novels, development occurs through engagement with multiple relations in layered environments shaped by religious, civic, and administrative authority from which ethical awareness emerges not from isolated reflection but from navigating structured space.

By foregrounding spatial relationality, ALS reframes narrative development itself to argue that in archipelagic contexts, spatial organization does not merely influence the storyline; instead, it shapes the logic of genre, temporality, and maturation. In this sense, in the case of the Bildungsroman as deployed in the two Southeast Asian novels, space becomes constitutive of narrative structure in which formation becomes inseparable from movement across environments. Both novels are regarded as "postcolonial" to the extent that they both challenge the structures of colonial power and assert a distinct national identity.

This perspective does not replace existing theories of space or postcolonial critique. It synthesizes them within an archipelagic orientation, aligning spatial production theory, narrative mapping, and postcolonial analysis with the historical realities of maritime Southeast Asia. In doing so, it clarifies how dispersed geographies and layered sovereignties shape literary form.

In short, in Southeast Asian postcolonial Bildungsroman narratives, ethical and intellectual formation

unfolds through spatial engagement in which narrative structure reflects relational geography, and development emerges through movement across structured environments. To understand these texts fully, spatial logic must be read both as context and method.

Historical and Colonial Contexts in Southeast Asia

Understanding the distinctive trajectory of the Southeast Asian Bildungsroman needs to consider the historical conditions in which these narratives take shape because colonial societies across the region developed under overlapping systems of authority. Imperial administrations, religious institutions, indigenous elites, and racially stratified bureaucracies were the structures which did not operate in isolation. They intersected in the ordinary spaces of daily life, namely, schools, churches, courts, plantations, and municipal centers, and multiple environments, where social power was not only present but constantly negotiated, sometimes subtly, sometimes openly.

In the European tradition of the Bildungsroman, institutions often function as stabilizing frameworks. For example, schools educate, professions offer advancement, and civic participation provides a path toward belonging. Even when conflict arises, the narrative typically bends toward some form of accommodation with the social order. Beneath this narrative pattern lies an assumption that institutions, for all their imperfections, ultimately sustain a coherent structure within which individual development can unfold.

Colonial Southeast Asia presents a markedly different situation because institutions frequently embodied contradiction rather than stability. Schools introduced European intellectual traditions and modern forms of knowledge, yet they simultaneously reinforced racial hierarchies and cultural exclusion. Legal systems spoke the language of rational governance while privileging colonial authority over indigenous populations. Churches and religious missions shaped moral discourse even as they participated in the machinery of imperial administration. Consequently, the very institutions that appeared to enable development also imposed boundaries on autonomy and participation.

For young people coming of age in such circumstances, these contradictions were lived realities and not plain abstract political problems. As in the two novels, because of the stark and incessant contradictions between word and deed, the limitations are obvious but possibilities remain open in gaps, if only in a glimmer of hope. For example, education could awaken intellectual ambition while also exposing the barriers that prevented genuine mobility. Moreover, legal institutions might introduce concepts such as rights and justice even as their rulings reinforced unequal power relations. Finally, individuals seeking reform, dignity, or recognition thus found themselves confronting systems that offered opportunity on one level while closing doors on another.

The archipelagic geography of colonial Southeast Asia further complicated colonial and postcolonial dynamics. Social life across the region historically unfolded within dispersed islands, coastal towns, plantation economies, and administrative centers connected by maritime routes. Colonial governance operated through networks rather than through a single, continuous territorial structure and provincial towns were tied to imperial capitals through trade, bureaucracy, missionary activity, and communication routes that crossed water as often as land. As a result, everyday experience took place within a web of interconnected yet unevenly structured spaces.

Literature emerging from this environment often reflects that spatial complexity. Instead of portraying development solely as an inward psychological journey, many Southeast Asian narratives situate personal formation within movement between places such as between the household and the town plaza, between the classroom and the courthouse, between local communities and colonial administration. Each environment

introduces new expectations, relationships, and forms of authority.

In this setting, ethical and intellectual growth becomes inseparable from spatial experience. Individuals learn to interpret the meanings embedded in particular environments such as who possesses authority, who must remain silent, which behaviors are encouraged, and which invite punishment. Likewise, a child sees a town plaza functioning simultaneously as a center of civic life, with interactions that display religious or colonial hierarchy, the classroom stimulating intellectual curiosity while reinforcing cultural boundaries, and the courtroom promising justice while revealing the asymmetries embedded in colonial law.

Such environments demand a form of learning that is rarely linear because insight emerges gradually through repeated encounters with institutions, authority figures, and social hierarchies. Characters observe, reflect, misjudge, adjust their expectations, and return again to the same environments with a slightly altered understanding, and development unfolds not through a single decisive transformation but through an accumulation of spatial experiences.

This pattern becomes especially visible in two foundational works of Southeast Asian literature: *Noli Me Tangere* by José Rizal and *This Earth of Mankind* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Both novels follow young protagonists attempting to make sense of the societies they inhabit while confronting the contradictions embedded within colonial authority.

Set in the late 19th century, *Noli Me Tangere*'s Crisóstomo Ibarra returns to his hometown of San Diego after years of education in Europe. What greets him is a community where religious authority, municipal governance, and local social hierarchies intersect in complicated ways. Institutions that appear stable on the surface like churches, schools, municipal offices reveal themselves to be arenas of negotiation, rivalry, and unequal power. As Ibarra attempts to pursue reform through education, he gradually discovers how deeply entrenched interests limit the possibilities for change.

The colonial Java depicted in *This Earth of Mankind* presents an equally layered social landscape. Minke's world unfolds across Javanese aristocratic culture, Dutch colonial bureaucracy, an emerging sphere of print journalism, and domestic spaces shaped by gendered and racial hierarchies. Each environment offers opportunities for learning while simultaneously exposing the contradictions embedded in colonial modernity.

In both novels, the protagonists' journeys demonstrate that ethical awareness and social understanding do not develop in isolation. They arise through engagement with environments where authority, hierarchy, and expectation are constantly negotiated. Movement between intimate, institutional, and broader societal spaces repeatedly forces characters to reconsider what they believe about justice, responsibility, and belonging.

Recognizing this spatially grounded process of formation clarifies why a new analytical framework becomes necessary. Traditional models of the Bildungsroman struggle to capture the dispersed and layered environments that shape Southeast Asian narratives of development. To understand how these texts represent ethical and intellectual growth, the spatial networks through which characters move and the institutional structures they encounter need to be examined.

It is precisely this challenge that gives rise to Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS)—a framework designed to analyze how spatial environments, linguistic categories, and historical conditions interact to shape processes of formation in Southeast Asian literature.

Narrative Contexts: Spatial Formation in *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind*

Against the broader historical landscape of colonial Southeast Asia, *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind* present narratives of youth formation that unfold not only through personal experience but also through the environments in which that experience takes place. Each novel centers on a young protagonist

navigating a society structured by colonial authority, social hierarchy, and competing moral frameworks, whose development does not occur in isolation, taking shape through encounters with spaces where relationships, expectations, and power converge.

Both texts invite readers to observe how ethical awareness grows gradually as characters move from one environment to another, where homes, schools, plazas, courtrooms, and administrative offices operate as arenas where observation and judgment become possible, with each location bringing its own pressures and possibilities. What a character learns in one setting may be confirmed, complicated, or even overturned in another, with formation unfolding across a network of spaces rather than along a single, uninterrupted path.

In this sense, the novels depict development as layered and relational. Intimate environments such as households often provide the earliest contexts for reflection and moral orientation; institutional spaces like schools, churches, courts introduce formal systems of authority and knowledge; and at a broader level, public and civic arenas expose the protagonists to the larger forces shaping colonial society including political domination, racial hierarchy, economic inequality, and emerging reform movements. These spatial dimensions interact continually, producing a dynamic process through which insight accumulates.

Noli Me Tangere illustrates this pattern through the experiences of Crisóstomo Ibarra, the young Filipino reformer who returns to the town of San Diego after years of education in Europe. His homecoming initiates a series of encounters that gradually reveal the tensions embedded in colonial Philippine society. The town's central spaces including the plaza, the church, the municipal tribunal, and the cemetery, function not merely as narrative settings but as focal points where authority and communal life intersect. Through his interactions in these environments, Ibarra begins to recognize the realities of clerical dominance, social inequality, and political constraint under the Spanish colonial regime under the power of *frailocracia.*

What initially appears to be a hopeful vision of reform slowly becomes a more complicated negotiation with existing structures of authority. Ibarra's plan to establish a modern school places him at the crossroads of civic aspiration and institutional resistance. As he moves through the town, he discovers how religious authority, municipal administration, and social hierarchy intertwine, shaping both public life and private relationships. Ethical reflection emerges as he observes these interactions and weighs his responsibilities.

A comparable narrative of awakening unfolds in *This Earth of Mankind*, the opening novel of the *Buru Quartet* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The story follows Minke, a Javanese youth educated within the Dutch colonial system who gradually becomes aware of the contradictions embedded in that system. His intellectual and moral development occurs across a range of environments, each revealing different dimensions of colonial modernity.

One of the most influential spaces in Minke's life is the household of Nyai Ontosoroh. Within this domestic setting, conversations about education, dignity, and social standing encourage sustained reflection on the inequalities surrounding them. The household becomes more than a private refuge; it functions as an intellectual space where ideas can circulate more freely than in the formal institutions of colonial society. Yet the insights gained there cannot remain confined to the domestic sphere. As Minke moves outward into classrooms, public streets, administrative offices, and legal institutions, he confronts the structural realities that shape colonial life.

Public and institutional spaces expose the tension between ideals and practice with particular clarity. Colonial education introduces European intellectual traditions grounded in rationality, justice, and progress. At the same time, colonial law frequently denies those very principles to indigenous populations. Encounters with bureaucracies and courts therefore compel Minke to reconsider the assumptions he once accepted through schooling. Ethical awareness grows through this repeated confrontation with contradiction.

Although these two novels emerge from distinct historical and cultural contexts, they share a striking

narrative logic. Both depict development as the product of movement across environments where authority and hierarchy are constantly negotiated. The protagonists observe how power operates within specific locations across a Philippine town plaza and a Dutch colonial office in Java, among other locations, and gradually refine their understanding of society through those experiences.

Such patterns suggest that spatial experience plays a central role in shaping ethical and cognitive growth. The protagonists' journeys are defined not only by personal choices but by the environments through which they pass. Each space offers opportunities for learning while simultaneously revealing the constraints imposed by colonial institutions.

These narrative patterns indicate that formation in Southeast Asian literature cannot be adequately explained through models that assume spatial stability or linear social integration. The protagonists' development depends not on reconciliation with a unified order, but on navigation across differentiated environments structured by power. This spatial logic challenges conventional readings of the Bildungsroman and prepares the ground for an archipelagic framework.

Recognizing the significance of these environments, one asks: how do literary narratives represent the relationship between space and formation? Addressing that question requires a framework capable of examining spatial networks alongside historical and linguistic context. The following sections therefore introduce the framework of Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS), which explores how spatial environments, linguistic categories, and colonial histories together shape processes of development in Southeast Asian literature.

The Need for Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS)

Without attending to spatial production, analyses of Southeast Asian Bildungsroman narratives risk reducing formation to psychological growth or ideological conflict alone. Yet the texts examined here demonstrate that ethical awareness emerges through movement across socially produced environments. Archipelagic Literary Studies therefore functions not as an interpretive preference, but as a methodological necessity grounded in the historical geography of the region.

The spatial patterns shaping the experiences of Crisóstomo Ibarra and Minke suggest that the conventional frameworks used to study the Bildungsroman cannot fully account for the narrative dynamics found in Southeast Asian literature. Classical interpretations of the genre, most prominently those discussed by Franco Moretti (1987), tend to understand the Bildungsroman as a story of integration (pp. 3-23, 55-73). A young protagonist passes through stages of uncertainty, conflict, and discovery before eventually finding a stable position within society. Even when tensions appear along the way, the narrative arc generally assumes that social institutions will ultimately provide a structure within which individual growth can align with collective order.

These interpretations emerged largely from European literary traditions where institutions, schools, professions, civic organizations were imagined as relatively coherent systems guiding individuals toward maturity. Within such contexts, it made sense to narrate personal development as a gradual process of alignment between private aspiration and social structure. As such, the spatial environments in which these narratives unfold typically appear stable and continuous, often functioning as background conditions rather than as forces shaping the developmental process itself.

Postcolonial scholarship has complicated this picture in important ways. Studies of the postcolonial Bildungsroman frequently emphasize how colonial domination, racial hierarchy, and linguistic conflict reshape the process of youth formation. Although this body of scholarship has significantly deepened our

understanding of colonial formation, it has often concentrated primarily on ideological and institutional dynamics. The spatial environments in which these dynamics unfold, specifically in archipelagic regions such as Southeast Asia, have received comparatively less attention. Yet the novels examined in this study suggest that space itself plays a decisive role in shaping how characters interpret authority, negotiate relationships, and develop ethical awareness.

The historical geography of Southeast Asia differs in crucial respects from the territorial models that underlie many European literary traditions because instead of a single continuous landmass organized around centralized urban institutions, the region consists of thousands of islands connected through maritime routes, trading networks, and dispersed colonial administrations. Political and economic authority historically circulated through these networks rather than radiating outward from a single stable center with towns, plantations, mission stations, and administrative outposts functioning as nodes within a wider web of interaction.

Everyday life within such a landscape required constant movement between locations and institutions. Individuals encountered different languages, customs, and hierarchies as they traveled between ports, provincial towns, and rural communities. These shifting environments influenced how people interpreted authority and understood their place within larger social structures. The spatial experience of the archipelago therefore encouraged modes of perception and adaptation distinct from those associated with more centralized societies.

Literary narratives produced in these contexts frequently reflect this spatial complexity. Characters move between domestic interiors, public plazas, colonial offices, plantations, classrooms, and courtrooms. Each setting introduces new relationships and ethical dilemmas, and development unfolds through repeated engagement with these environments rather than through a single continuous path toward integration.

Recognizing this pattern calls for an analytical framework capable of examining how spatial environments shape narrative formation. ALS responds to this need by foregrounding the role of interconnected spaces in literary representation. Instead of treating environment as a passive backdrop, ALS examines how spatial structures influence ethical judgment, cognitive awareness, and social positioning.

The framework draws upon insights from spatial theory and literary geography. In Lefebvre's (1991) formulation, for instance, environments are not neutral containers for human activity because they emerge through institutions, practices, and power relations, and they simultaneously reinforce those same social structures. Similarly, the scholarship of Robert T. Tally Jr. (2013) argues that literary narratives often function as forms of mapping (pp. 48-54). Stories organize spatial experience, enabling readers to perceive relationships among places, institutions, and systems of authority. Through narrative movement, literature helps orient individuals within environments that might otherwise appear fragmented or opaque because storytelling is world-making (Tally, 2014, p. 3).

When applied to Southeast Asian literature, these perspectives reveal how spatial environments participate actively in the process of formation. Plazas, classrooms, homes, courtrooms, and plantations become more than settings for narrative action. They serve as sites where authority is encountered, interpreted, and sometimes contested. In these spaces, the protagonist learns not solely through inward reflection but through the experience of observing how power operates within particular environments.ALS extends these insights by emphasizing the distinctive spatial logic of island and maritime regions. The archipelago is not merely a geographic description because it represents a pattern of connectivity shaped by movement, distance, and uneven access to institutions. Communities may be separated by water yet remain linked through trade routes, cultural exchange, and colonial administration. In this sense, social life unfolds through networks rather than through a single centralized structure.

Within such networks, ethical and cognitive development becomes relational and iterative. Characters encounter authority in different forms depending on the environment they inhabit. Lessons learned in one setting may be reconsidered when applied in another. Movement across spaces becomes a key mechanism through which understanding gradually deepens.

ALS provides a framework for tracing this process. By examining how characters navigate intimate, institutional, and broader societal environments, the approach reveals how ethical awareness emerges through spatial experience. It highlights the ways in which colonial institutions, linguistic traditions, and historical geography together shape the narrative trajectories of the Southeast Asian Bildungsroman.

To clarify how this framework operates in practice, the following section outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations of Archipelagic Literary Studies, demonstrating how spatial analysis can illuminate the processes of formation depicted in *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind.*

Theory and Method: Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS)

Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) functions both as a theoretical perspective and as a practical method for interpreting narratives shaped by dispersed yet interconnected spatial environments. The framework begins with a straightforward premise: space does not simply provide a backdrop against which narrative events occur. Instead, it actively shapes how characters encounter authority, interpret relationships, and gradually develop ethical awareness. In archipelagic regions such as Southeast Asia, where societies historically formed across networks of islands, ports, colonial outposts, plantations, and villages, movement through space becomes a crucial dimension of intellectual and moral formation.

ALS therefore approaches literary space as historically produced and socially meaningful. Rather than imagining environments as neutral containers, they are understood to be structured by institutions, customs, and power relations that influence the possibilities available to individuals. Domestic settings, institutional buildings, and public arenas all contain embedded hierarchies that guide behavior and shape perception. When characters move between these environments, they encounter shifting expectations and forms of authority that require interpretation and response.

Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is created through social practice. Cities, institutions, and landscapes arise from political decisions, economic structures, and the routines of everyday life (p.31). Because space is produced through such processes, it also becomes a medium through which power operates. Schools, churches, plantations, and government buildings embody particular forms of authority, organizing social interaction in ways that sustain existing hierarchies. Lefebvre's insight proves particularly illuminating for the colonial settings depicted in *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind*. In both novels, institutions such as schools, courts, and churches are not neutral locations devoted solely to education or governance. They are spatial expressions of colonial systems that structure social relations. The ways in which characters move through these environments—where they are permitted to speak, where they must remain silent, and how they are positioned relative to authority—reveal the power dynamics embedded within the spaces themselves.

Another important influence on ALS comes from the concept of "cognitive mapping" developed by Fredric Jameson (1991), who uses this term to describe the process by which individuals attempt to orient themselves within complex social and economic systems (pp. 51-54, 415-418). In modern societies, structures of power often operate on scales too vast to be directly perceived. Narrative, however, can make those structures intelligible by representing the relationships between institutions, locations, and social forces. Literary narratives frequently perform this mapping function by following characters as they navigate unfamiliar or unequal environments. Through the protagonist's movement, readers begin to understand how

different spaces connect and how authority circulates among them. In archipelagic contexts, this mapping becomes especially significant because the spatial organization of society itself is dispersed. Meaning emerges not from a single central location but from the relationships among multiple sites.

ALS also draws on insights from archipelagic and relational theory. The writings of Édouard Glissant (1997) emphasize forms of connection that resist centralized control. He proposes an archipelagic model in which distinct places remain linked through networks of relations, instead of imagining the world as organized around a single dominant center (Glissant, 1997, pp. 28-29). Similarly, scholars such as Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens (2017) argue that island regions often generate intellectual perspectives attentive to movement, multiplicity, and connection. Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) is closely related to Tally's (2013, 2014, 2019) concept of literary cartography, from which it partly draws inspiration, while also diverging in focus as they differ in what they treat as primary, how space functions, and what kind of world literature they are ultimately trying to theorize. While Robert Tally's literary cartography focuses on how literature helps readers cognitively "map" the world and orient themselves, ALS treats space not as something to be mapped into coherence but as a relational, archipelagic field where meaning emerges through movement across uneven and discontinuous environments rather than through overall cognitive totalization.

These theoretical perspectives help illuminate the spatial logic underlying many Southeast Asian literary texts. The societies depicted in *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind* do not revolve around a single unified center of authority. Instead, power circulates through overlapping institutions from churches to aristocratic households. Each institution occupies its own spatial domain while interacting with others through networks of influence.

Within such an environment, ethical and cognitive development unfolds through a sequence of spatial encounters. Characters observe how authority operates in different locations and gradually assemble a broader understanding of the systems governing their lives. Insight arises not solely from abstract reflection but from lived experience within particular environments as characters listening to conversations within domestic interiors, witnessing ceremonies in public plazas, confronting bureaucratic procedures in official offices, or observing injustice within courtrooms.

Methodologically, ALS traces these encounters by examining how narratives depict movement between spatial scales as the analysis distinguishes among three broad categories of environment, mentioned earlier: namely, intimate spaces, institutional spaces, and society-level arenas.

Intimate spaces include households, private rooms, and other settings where close personal relationships shape daily interaction. These environments often function as early sites of ethical formation, where characters encounter family expectations, mentorship, and emotional bonds. Institutional spaces such as schools, churches, courts, and administrative offices introduce formal structures of authority that regulate knowledge and behavior. Society-level arenas encompass the wider environments where larger social forces become visible: town plazas, plantations, marketplaces, colonial capitals, and transportation networks.

The significance of these categories lies less in their separation than in their interaction. Characters move continually between them, carrying insights from one environment into another. Lessons learned within the household may shape behavior in the classroom. Observations made in public spaces may alter how institutional authority is interpreted. Therefore, development unfolds through an iterative process in which spatial experiences accumulate and interact.

ALS also pays close attention to the linguistic dimensions of spatial perception. As mentioned earlier, local terms describing space frequently encode cultural understandings of distance, proximity, hierarchy, and relational obligation. Spatial words refer not only to physical locations but also to the social meanings attached to those environments. Examining how such vocabulary appears within narrative contexts reveals how

language participates in shaping spatial awareness.

In practical terms, the methodological approach employed in this study combines close textual reading with spatial analysis. Descriptions of movement, observation, and interaction within specific environments receive particular attention. Rather than treating these passages as incidental details, the analysis considers how they contribute to the protagonists' evolving understanding of society.

Through this approach, ALS reveals how narratives of youth formation in Southeast Asia portray development as a process grounded in spatial experience. Ethical awareness, social perception, and intellectual maturity emerge through engagement with historically structured environments. The sections that follow apply this framework to close readings of *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind*, demonstrating how spatial encounters shape the protagonists' journeys toward moral and social awareness.

Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) does not function merely as a descriptive lens applied to Southeast Asian texts. It is a reorientation of method. Its central claim is not that space is important in literature—an assumption now widely accepted—but that in archipelagic contexts, spatial relations are constitutive of narrative logic, ethical development, and epistemological formation. Space is not context; it is structure. It is not background; it is mechanism.

This distinction matters. While much literary analysis treats environment as setting, and setting as stage, ALS rejects that hierarchy. In archipelagic societies—historically shaped by maritime circulation, colonial fragmentation, linguistic plurality, and institutional dispersion—space actively organizes perception. Movement across islands, institutions, and social domains does not simply relocate characters; it transforms their interpretive frameworks. Spatial transition produces cognitive transition.

The theoretical underpinnings of ALS

First, it is understood that space is socially produced, as explained earlier. Environments are constructed through institutional power, economic systems, cultural norms, and historical processes. They carry embedded hierarchies. Schools, courts, churches, households, marketplaces—these are not neutral containers but spatial articulations of authority. When literature depicts characters navigating such spaces, it is simultaneously depicting their negotiation with structured power.

Second, it is posited that narrative itself operates as spatial mediation in which literary form organizes experience into relational sequences. Scenes, transitions, thresholds, entrances, and exits are not decorative devices; they are cognitive operations. Through narrative movement, readers perceive how domains connect. Literature becomes a form of mapping—one that renders complex systems legible without reducing their complexity. This is not simplification; it is orientation.

Third, it is assumed that archipelagic geography intensifies relational thinking. Unlike continental imaginaries that privilege centralization, archipelagic formations are defined by linkage. Islands do not derive meaning from isolation, but from connection forged through routes, currents, exchanges, crossings—cultivating an awareness of interdependence rather than singularity. ALS therefore interprets Southeast Asian texts not as regional variations of European models, but as works emerging from spatial conditions that shape narrative differently from the outset.

Within this framework, formation is neither linear nor purely psychological. It is spatially iterative. Characters develop through repeated encounters with differentiated environments. Each setting introduces constraints and possibilities. Each transition demands recalibration. Growth occurs in movement, between intimate interiors, institutional structures, and broader social arenas. The protagonist's understanding expands not because the world becomes simpler, but because spatial relationships become clearer through experience.

This approach strengthens postcolonial analysis by shifting attention from identity alone to the spatial

systems that produce identity in which colonial authority does not operate solely through ideology or discourse. It materializes through spatial organization where access is controlled, movement is regulated, visibility is structured, and power is embedded in architecture, administrative layout, and geographic distribution. ALS makes these dynamics analytically visible.

Importantly, the framework does not replace existing theories of space or development; instead, it synthesizes them within an archipelagic orientation. Drawing from spatial production theory, it adopts the premise that environments are constructed through power; from narrative theory, it adopts the insight that storytelling organizes perception; from postcolonial critique, it adopts attention to asymmetrical authority. ALS integrates these perspectives while grounding them in the historical realities of maritime Southeast Asia.

What distinguishes ALS is its insistence that relational space is not an abstract metaphor. It is concrete because it is historically lived: it structures daily movement, linguistic practice, institutional engagement, and ethical perception. In archipelagic contexts, individuals constantly interpret connections between islands and languages, between public and private domains, between colonial systems and local communities. Literature emerging from these conditions reflects that interpretive labor.

From the integration, ALS reframes the Bildungsroman in Southeast Asian settings in which development is not the story of integration into a unified social order. It is the story of navigating fragmented yet interconnected spaces in which formation occurs through spatial awareness through recognizing how environments shape possibility. Ethical maturity grows as characters discern the structure of their world.

By foregrounding spatial relationality, ALS contributes to global literary theory while remaining attentive to regional specificity where it demonstrates that archipelagic literature offers not derivative forms, but distinct epistemologies—ways of organizing knowledge shaped by geography, history, and movement.

In this sense, ALS is not simply an interpretive tool but a methodological stance because literature is read as spatial practice; narrative is understood as orientation; and formation is analyzed as movement through structured environments. The framework's strength lies in its clarity of focus and its capacity to connect close reading with structural analysis without collapsing one into the other. ALS reveals that the Southeast Asian Bildungsroman operates according to a different structural logic than the classical European model. It is in this sense that ALS does not introduce space as an additional, supplementary thematic option among many.

Spatial production, narrative mapping, relational geography, and iterative formation converge into a coherent analytical model in ALS, standing not as an addition to existing criticism, but as a recalibration in the sense of aligning method with the spatial realities represented in Southeast Asian literary texts.

Linguistic Spaces: Language as Spatial Structure

In Southeast Asian colonial Bildungsroman narratives, space does not function as backdrop or metaphor, operating as a structuring principle of development in which characters do not merely inhabit environments; they learn to interpret them. Narrative formation unfolds through spatial differentiation, and spatial meaning is articulated through language. In this regard, Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) begins at the linguistic level, treating spatial vocabulary as evidence of how relational geography organizes subject formation. Rather than importing spatial theory as an external grid of interpretation, ALS grounds analysis in archipelagic linguistic practice and demonstrates how spatial logic already shapes narrative form. While many continental frameworks conceptualize space as bounded enclosure or geometric container, Indonesian and Tagalog usage frequently emphasizes relational capacity, transition, and social function. This does not imply cultural uniformity but identifies recurrent tendencies in which space is defined through interaction instead of isolation.

Terms such as *ruang*, *espasyo*, and *puwáng* illustrate this relational orientation. Indeed, these words do not merely denote empty volume because they encode structure. In Indonesian, *ruang* refers to a room or domain, yet it extends beyond architectural enclosure to signify a functional interval, a gap in an organized space that enables activity, encounter, or transition. A *ruang* is defined not only by walls but by its social capacity. For example, *ruang tamu* (guest room) is structured by the practice of hosting; spatial identity emerges from relational function. In Tagalog, *espasyo* overlaps with the native term *puwáng* which signifies a gap or opening, but not neutral absence. It may indicate structural discontinuity—an interval whose presence alters systemic coherence. Within institutional contexts, a *puwáng* can reveal rupture, ethical deficiency, or breakdown in authority. Its meaning lies in relational disruption rather than vacuity. These linguistic patterns are not presented as universal claims about Southeast Asian cognition; instead, they demonstrate how archipelagic conditions marked by maritime circulation, dispersed settlements, and layered sovereignties encourage relational spatial framing. ALS treats this evidence as foundational because spatial logic in these novels emerges through language, and language encodes relational geography.

In *Noli Me Tangere*, spatial formation begins in rupture. Institutional spaces appear stable, yet internal contradictions expose structural instability. Here, *puwáng* becomes an interpretive key as the novel repeatedly discloses gaps between authority and justice, presence and legitimacy. Development does not proceed through gradual integration into a unified social order because ethical awareness arises when characters recognize institutional incompleteness. The colonial town which is organized around ecclesiastical authority establishes a spatial hierarchy in which proximity implies inclusion and distance signals marginalization. As such, movement across its domains corresponds to shifts in epistemic position in which spatial transitions therefore carry developmental weight. When characters cross from center to periphery, or from public arenas into marginal landscapes, narrative logic shifts as formation is staged as the capacity to perceive structural *puwáng*—the gap between appearance and legitimacy. Temporality itself is reorganized as growth unfolds through interpretive rupture rather than linear progression.

In *This Earth of Mankind*, formation operates through differentiation rather than rupture alone. Development occurs across distinct *ruang* consisting of social domains governed by shifting norms and hierarchies. Each *ruang*, whether domestic interior, colonial institution, educational setting, or bureaucratic office, possesses its own behavioral code. Therefore, to mature within this narrative world is to acquire spatial literacy such as the ability to recognize which norms govern which domain and how transitions between domains reshape subject position. Interestingly, unlike Rizal's emphasis on structural gap, Pramoedya foregrounds navigation across differentiated environments in which formation does not arise from collapsing differences into unity but from moving across them with awareness, whose logic as may be gleaned from Nyai Ontosoroh's household. The estate forms a coherent social domain structured by competence and discipline, even as colonial law refuses recognition. Spatial organization here exposes the limits of institutional authority. Likewise, *kamar* (private room) introduces interior domains that cultivate reflection and intellectual development under constraint. Development becomes spatially distributed rather than institutionally centralized.

The comparison between Rizal and Pramoedya is therefore structurally decisive because while Rizal stages formation as recognition of spatial rupture—the ethical force of *puwáng*—Pramoedya stages formation as navigation across differentiated *ruang*. In one case, development begins when continuity breaks; in the other, it proceeds through movement among structured domains. These differences are not stylistic variations but distinct spatial logics embedded within archipelagic colonial conditions. Decisively, both novels revise

the classical European Bildungsroman model, often described as a linear trajectory culminating in stable social integration. Here, formation is not achieved through assimilation into a unified order but through spatial awareness: the capacity to read environments accurately and respond ethically within them. Space does not accompany development; it organizes it.

While ALS engages the broader field of spatial theory, it departs from influential models that conceptualize space primarily as social production or epistemological expansion. Unlike Henri Lefebvre's tripartite theory of perceived, conceived, and lived space, ALS does not begin with an abstract spatial ontology and apply it to literature. Instead, it begins with linguistic evidence within archipelagic contexts and demonstrates how spatial meaning structures genre form. In contrast to Edward Soja's spatial trialectics (1996), which extend spatial theory through epistemological reframing, ALS foregrounds narrative structure, arguing that spatial logic reorganizes the Bildungsroman itself rather than merely enriching spatial interpretation. Similarly, while approaches associated with literary mapping and spatial analysis, including the important work of Tally, offer valuable insights into representation, ALS shifts the emphasis from mapping space within texts to examining how spatial relations generate developmental architecture. In ALS, space in this framework is not only depicted; it functions as the structural condition of Bildung. Within postcolonial genre theory, this repositioning matters: ALS argues that colonial spatial formations reshape narrative development at the level of genre logic, not merely at the level of setting or theme.

At the macro-theoretical level, ALS situates these linguistic and narrative patterns within archipelagic geography consisting of maritime circulation, island dispersal, and overlapping sovereignties which produce spatial conditions distinct from continental enclosure. Space in such contexts is frequently experienced as connective interval rather than bounded territory. This is not to romanticize mobility but to identify structural consequences of archipelagic configuration such as relational boundaries, permeable thresholds, and distributed authority. These conditions shape narrative temporality as development unfolds across networks rather than within centralized institutional continuity. By grounding spatial theory in linguistic practice and narrative structure, ALS reframes Bildung as embedded within relational geography and demonstrates that spatial logic constitutes the primary architecture of ethical and intellectual formation in Southeast Asian colonial fiction.

Building on this foundation, the analysis proceeds to trace how spatial logic operates across micro-level of intimate interiors, meso-level of institutional structures, and macro-level of civic arenas of colonial formations in both novels, demonstrating that development is not merely influenced by space but structurally organized through it.

Noli Me Tangere*'s *puwáng

In *Noli Me Tangere*, the ethical and intellectual awakening of the main protagonist, Crisóstomo Ibarra, unfolds within space. In the Spanish original of the novel, "espacio" appears multiple times to refer to gaps, as in the Tagalog "puwáng," intervals of time, vast surroundings, or a conceptual space such as a social landscape shaped by overlapping if discrepant religious, civic, and familial authorities. His return to the town of San Diego after years of education in Europe initially carries the promise of renewal where he believes that reform to improve society is possible based on his knowledge. Yet the spaces he encounters upon his arrival—across plazas, churches, municipal buildings, and cemeteries—quickly reveal how deeply social hierarchies are embedded within colonial life. These spaces are not simply environments that provide the stage upon which events occur, because they actively shape how Ibarra comes to understand justice, responsibility, and

belonging.

Among the most powerful moments in the novel is the desecration of his father's grave (Rizal, 1912, All Saints section, pp. 83-87). What should have been a site of memory and respect instead becomes a place marked by humiliation and exclusion. Interpreted through the concept of *puwáng*, this moment signifies more than personal loss because the disturbed grave exposes a rupture within the social order itself, a void where dignity, justice, and communal obligation have failed to hold.

Faced with this discovery, Ibarra is forced to reconsider the assumptions he carried back from Europe. His education abroad had cultivated confidence in reform through education, civic improvement, and rational progress. Yet the revelation of his father's fate suggests that the institutions governing San Diego operate according to very different principles of clerical authority, local politics, and personal rivalry that intersect in ways that undermine the ideals he had imagined guiding society.

This realization does not arrive all at once, unfolding gradually instead as Ibarra moves through the town's interconnected spaces. While public ceremonies in the plaza confront him with the visible display of religious and civic authority, conversations within domestic interiors reveal the delicate expectations governing family loyalty and social reputation. Worse, encounters with clergy and municipal officials expose how authority circulates through both formal institutions and informal alliances.

Each environment offers a different perspective on the social order. The plaza becomes a stage upon which hierarchy is performed through ritual and spectacle. The church embodies spiritual authority while simultaneously reflecting the political influence of religious institutions within colonial governance. Municipal spaces represent the bureaucratic mechanisms through which local administration operates, often entangled with personal rivalries and competing interests.

As Ibarra encounters these environments repeatedly, his understanding of authority begins to shift, as his failed project to establish a modern school demonstrates. At first, the plan appears straightforward because education will benefit the town and provide future generations with opportunities unavailable in the past. Yet the initiative quickly becomes entangled in disputes involving clergy, local elites, and entrenched institutional interests. So what begins as a hopeful effort at reform gradually reveals itself to be a challenge to established power because by proposing a new educational institution, Ibarra inadvertently enters a web of relationships in which reform is interpreted as threat. The resistance he encounters forces him to confront the limits of idealism within a society structured by colonial authority and social hierarchy.

Spatial experience plays a decisive role in this process of realization. As Ibarra moves between private conversations, public gatherings, and institutional negotiations, he gradually perceives how these environments connect so that insights gained in one setting often return unexpectedly in another; a remark overheard during a domestic conversation may illuminate the meaning of a public ceremony; and an encounter with an official may expose the hidden implications of an apparently ordinary social ritual.

The concept of *espasyo* helps clarify how these settings function within the narrative. Each location in San Diego operates as a socially charged environment where relationships are enacted and observed. The plaza gathers the community beneath the visible authority of church and state. The household nurtures personal bonds while reinforcing expectations of loyalty and reputation. Institutional spaces regulate interaction through formal hierarchies and unwritten codes of conduct.

Therefore, Ibarra's development unfolds through a gradual process of orientation within these environments where he learns to read the signals embedded in everyday encounters in matters like who speaks with authority, who remains silent, which gestures signal allegiance, and which actions provoke suspicion.

Ethical awareness emerges not solely through reflection but through the lived experience of navigating these layered spaces.

Seen through the lens of Archipelagic Literary Studies, *Noli Me Tangere* portrays formation as an iterative process grounded in spatial engagement. The *puwáng* revealed by the desecrated grave reverberates throughout the narrative, reminding both protagonist and reader that the social order contains fractures that cannot easily be repaired. Ibarra's journey becomes a search for understanding within a landscape where authority is dispersed across institutions, relationships, and environments that continually reshape the possibilities for action.

Through this unfolding experience, José Rizal offers a vision of youth formation deeply embedded in colonial society where ethical insight arises from the effort to interpret a world where ideals of justice coexist uneasily with entrenched structures of power. The private, institutional, and public spaces of San Diego become the terrain upon which that struggle for understanding unfolds.

This Earth of Mankind*'s *ruang

In *This Earth of Mankind*,[1] the narrative of development unfolds within a colonial society organized through overlapping domains of authority where the protagonist, Minke, moves through environments that range from domestic interiors to colonial institutions and public spaces shaped by colonial governance. Each setting presents a distinct set of expectations, revealing the structures through which colonial power regulates knowledge, social mobility, and personal dignity.

The concept of *ruang,* which appears in the novel's Indonesian original dozens of times, provides a useful lens for understanding how these environments operate within the novel because in Indonesian usage, *ruang* refers not simply to physical space but to a domain within which particular forms of interaction become possible. A classroom, a household, a courtroom, or a colonial office may each constitute a *ruang*, yet the norms governing speech, authority, and behavior differ markedly from one to another. As such, movement between these environments therefore requires continual adjustment, demanding that individuals interpret the subtle signals embedded within each setting.

As a Javanese youth attending a Dutch colonial school, Minke's education places him in a particularly complex position within this network of spaces where he occupies an environment shaped by European intellectual traditions. The classroom introduces principles presented as universal foundations of modern civilization such as ideas about rational inquiry, progress, and justice, but at the same time, the colonial society beyond the classroom demonstrates that those ideals are applied unevenly, often withheld from the very populations whose labor sustains the colonial economy.

The tension between principle and practice becomes increasingly visible as Minke moves beyond the classroom into other domains of colonial life. From one *ruang* to another, he discovers administrative offices that enforce bureaucratic procedures privileging European authority, legal institutions reinforcing racial hierarchies embedded in colonial law, and public streets and marketplaces that reveal the economic inequalities structuring everyday interaction. Each *ruang* exposes a different dimension of the system within which he lives.

One of the most formative environments in the novel is the household of Nyai Ontosoroh. Within this domestic setting, conversations unfold that challenge many of the assumptions Minke initially carries from

1. The two most important settings in the novel, the H.B.S. school and Nyai Ontosoroh's household, mainly appear in Chapter 2. See Toer, Pramoedya Ananta (1990). *This Earth of Mankind* (Maxwell Ronald Lane, Trans.). Penguin Books, pp. 16-52.

his colonial education. Nyai Ontosoroh's intelligence, resilience, and moral clarity offer an alternative perspective on dignity and self-determination because her household becomes a site where ideas circulate with unusual openness, creating an atmosphere in which critical reflection can take root.

Although this domestic *ruang* offers a measure of intellectual freedom, it does not exist outside the structures of colonial authority because the household remains vulnerable to legal and administrative interventions that reflect the unequal status of indigenous and mixed-race families under Dutch rule. As events in the narrative make clear, the protection offered by private space can be fragile when confronted with the power of colonial institutions.

As suggested earlier, Minke's movement between the household and the broader public sphere therefore generates a process of ongoing reassessment as insights gained through conversations with Nyai Ontosoroh must be reconsidered when he encounters the rigid hierarchies of colonial administration. Likewise, experiences within bureaucratic or legal settings prompt new reflections when he returns to the comparative intimacy of domestic life.

Language plays a crucial role in mediating these transitions because Dutch, Javanese, and Malay each carry different cultural and political associations, shaping how individuals position themselves within particular environments. Speaking Dutch within the classroom signals participation in colonial modernity, while Javanese or Malay may carry connotations of community, heritage, or social intimacy. Navigating these linguistic registers becomes part of Minke's effort to understand his own place within a stratified society.

As his awareness deepens, Minke begins to recognize that colonial authority operates not only through formal institutions but also through the organization of everyday environments. Indeed, certain spaces encourage dialogue and reflection while others impose silence or submission. The boundaries separating these domains are rarely fixed because they shift depending on the relationships and hierarchies present within each setting.

From the perspective of Archipelagic Literary Studies, this continual movement between *ruang* illustrates how spatial experience contributes to ethical formation. Minke's development does not follow a simple progression from ignorance to enlightenment; instead, it unfolds through repeated encounters with environments that reveal different aspects of colonial reality. Each transition introduces new questions, prompting him to reconsider earlier assumptions.Through this process, Pramoedya Ananta Toer portrays youth formation as inseparable from the spatial structures of colonial society where ethical awareness grows through observation, dialogue, and confrontation within environments shaped by unequal distributions of power. The narrative demonstrates how individuals gradually assemble a broader understanding of their world by interpreting the signals embedded within the spaces they inhabit. Seen in this light, *This Earth of Mankind* offers a powerful example of how spatial experience and intellectual development intersect. The concept of *ruang* captures the shifting domains through which Minke moves as he learns to recognize the contradictions of colonial modernity. Each environment contributes to a growing awareness that dignity and justice cannot be understood apart from the spatial systems through which authority is exercised.

Building on this spatial framework, the comparative analysis that follows examines how *puwáng* (rupture), *ruang* (differentiation), and distance operate as structuring principles in *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind*, revealing how narrative form itself encodes colonial power through spatial organization.

Comparative analysis: *Puwáng and ruang*

The spatial logic of the two novels can be clarified through two complementary structures: rupture and differentiation. Reading *Noli Me Tangere* alongside *This Earth of Mankind* reveals how spatial logic structures narrative formation in colonial Southeast Asia. Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) treats space not as

backdrop but as constitutive principle. In both novels, ethical awareness emerges through engagement with environments organized by colonial authority.

In *Noli Me Tangere*, formation begins with rupture. The desecration of Crisóstomo Ibarra's father's grave exposes institutional failure at the level of space itself. Ordinarily a site of memory and continuity, the grave becomes evidence of moral breakdown. This event signals what may be conceptualized as *puwáng*, a structural absence within the ethical architecture of colonial society. The disturbance makes visible the gap between official authority and lived justice (Rizal, 1912, All Saints section, pp. 83-87). Rizal underscores this rupture through scenes that reveal institutional contradiction. The novel repeatedly stages encounters in the church, municipal hall, and public spaces where authority claims legitimacy but fails to uphold it, as exemplified by the sabotage surrounding the school project further demonstrating resistance embedded within colonial institutions (Rizal, 1912, The Derrick section, pp. 248-258). These episodes confirm that spatial disruption initiates consciousness as insight arises not from abstract reflection but from confrontation with environments that expose systemic injustice. The novel's closing movement across the lake reinforces this logic of displacement. Space does not reconcile tension; it reveals and intensifies it (Rizal, 1912, The Chase on the Lake section, pp. 473-480). Formation, therefore, emerges from rupture and remains shaped by it. *Puwáng* marks both absence and awakening.

By contrast, *This Earth of Mankind* organizes development through *ruang*, emphasizing differentiation among social domains. Colonial society is composed of distinct yet interconnected environment, each governed by specific institutional logic, including school, household, office, courtroom. At the H.B.S. school, Minke encounters European ideals of rational inquiry and modern education but these ideals operate within racial hierarchy. Education promises advancement while simultaneously enforcing limitation and the institutional setting itself reveals structural inequality, so "development" here requires learning how ideals function inside bounded spaces.

AS suggested earlier, Nyai Ontosoroh's household introduces another *ruang*. Within this domain, authority is grounded in discipline, literacy, and economic competence where Nyai asserts her agency, demonstrating intellectual autonomy within domestic space. The household becomes a site of formation unavailable in official colonial institutions, but this space remains structurally vulnerable to external power. The courtroom scene clarifies the spatial distribution of authority in which colonial law overrides local legitimacy, reaffirming imperial hierarchy within judicial space. Authority shifts according to environment, demonstrating that power operates through differentiated domains rather than a single unified center.

Unlike the rupture-driven logic of *Noli Me Tangere*, *This Earth of Mankind* emphasizes navigation across structured spaces where *ruang* does not signify absence; it signifies segmentation. Minke's development occurs as he learns to interpret the rules governing each domain and recognize the contradictions linking them. Despite these differences, both novels share a decisive insight: ethical and intellectual awareness emerge through spatial engagement. Neither Ibarra nor Minke achieves formation through introspection alone. Insight develops through repeated encounters with environments structured by colonial authority. Space becomes the medium of consciousness formation.

The two spatial concepts articulate complementary models of formation. In *Noli Me Tangere*, *puwáng* reveals ethical rupture and initiates awakening. In *This Earth of Mankind*, *ruang* structures experience across differentiated domains, requiring interpretive movement rather than assimilation. Together, they demonstrate that Southeast Asian postcolonial narratives construct identity through spatial negotiation rather than linear integration. This comparative analysis substantiates Archipelagic Literary Studies as a necessary framework.

In archipelagic contexts shaped by dispersed geographies and layered sovereignties, spatial organization actively shapes narrative form. The novels confirm that space is not decorative background but constitutive structure. Ethical formation unfolds through spatial transition, institutional encounter, and historically embedded environments.

Conclusion

This study has argued that Archipelagic Literary Studies (ALS) offers a structurally grounded way to understand how space shapes genre in Southeast Asian Bildungsroman narratives. While dominant approaches treat environment as metaphor, backdrop, or thematic layer, ALS proposes that archipelagic relationality actively reorganizes narrative development. In colonial Southeast Asia marked by dispersed geographies, maritime circulation, layered institutions, and uneven power formations, space does not simply host formation. It conditions it.

The readings of *Noli Me Tangere* and *This Earth of Mankind* demonstrate this claim concretely. In both novels, ethical and intellectual growth unfolds through engagement with structured environments. Plazas, classrooms, churches, households, courts, and administrative offices are not neutral settings; they encode authority because they regulate visibility and access, and shape how characters speak, move, and understand themselves. As a result, development emerges through repeated encounters with these spatial formations, not through seamless integration into a unified social order.

Crisóstomo Ibarra's awakening in *Noli Me Tangere* reveals how institutional rupture generates ethical awareness. The town's spatial arrangements expose contradictions within colonial authority and insight arises when the protagonist confronts the gap between reformist ideals and entrenched structures. Similarly, Minke in *This Earth of Mankind* negotiates differentiated colonial domains as his formation occurs across classrooms, domestic interiors, and public institutions that operate according to distinct logics of power. Growth is not cumulative in a linear sense; instead, it is iterative, relational, and historically embedded. Within this process, spatial experience operates through moments of rupture and through the navigation of differentiated domains—dynamics that correspond to the concepts of *puwáng* and *ruang* as structural conditions of awareness rather than simple descriptive terms.

To reiterate, ALS therefore clarifies a dimension that broader spatial theories may imply but do not fully foreground: in archipelagic contexts, spatial dispersion and maritime connectivity reshape genre structure itself. The classical Bildungsroman presumes progressive integration into a coherent social order. The Southeast Asian novels examined here instead reveal formation as movement across interconnected yet uneven environments where development unfolds through negotiation rather than assimilation.

This does not mean rejecting earlier spatial frameworks because concepts associated with spatial production and cognitive mapping remain valuable. ALS builds on them while specifying how archipelagic geography, characterized by island relations, maritime networks, and historically layered colonial infrastructures, reconfigures narrative temporality and coherence. In such settings, connection matters as much as separation as movement between spaces becomes central to meaning-making.

By foregrounding relational geography, ALS reframes development itself. It is a process shaped by spatial transitions, institutional encounters, and historical discontinuities. As such, formation is not a steady ascent toward stable synthesis. Ethical maturity emerges through engagement with environments structured by power. In the case of the two novels, narrative form reflects this condition, through the interplay of rupture (*puwáng*),

differentiation (*ruang*), and regulated mobility, confirming that consciousness and nation-formation in Southeast Asian colonial literature emerge through spatial negotiation rather than purely ideological assertion.

In this sense, space, in these texts, is not secondary. It is constitutive. ALS is genre-centered, archipelago-specific, and structurally interventionist, against the integrationist trajectory of the Western classical Bildungsroman. It does not merely describe Southeast Asian literature; it argues that spatial organization actively transforms the logic of the novel in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The comparative reading of Rizal and Pramoedya confirms that archipelagic spatiality reshapes narrative structure, developmental assumptions, and the epistemology of formation, from where its decolonializing impulse emerges.

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