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Tracing the global reception of *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere*: A comparative analysis of academic publications

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Abstract: *This study examines the global reception of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Bumi Manusia and José Rizal's Noli Me Tangere through a comparative analysis of academic publications. Rather than measuring reader responses directly, it traces how scholarship has documented the circulation, interpretation, and repositioning of the two novels beyond their respective national contexts. The study employs a qualitative comparative literature review and thematic coding of 32 academic publications, comprising 20 studies on Bumi Manusia and 12 on Noli Me Tangere. An evidence matrix was used to organize bibliographic information, analytical focus, and findings from each source. The publications were coded across 11 non-exclusive categories, including reception and afterlife, postcolonialism, translation, circulation, comparative literature, and World Literature. The findings reveal related but distinct reception trajectories. Scholarship on Bumi Manusia more frequently addresses postcolonial reception, nationalism, identity, and translation, whereas studies of Noli Me Tangere give greater attention to historical circulation, comparative and transcolonial connections, and institutionalization. These patterns suggest that the global reception of literary works cannot be explained by translation alone. It also develops through criticism, education, canonization, and successive acts of recontextualization that connect national literary histories with wider interpretive networks.*

Keywords: *global reception, comparative literature, postcolonial literature, Bumi Manusia, Noli Me Tangere*

INTRODUCTION

The movement of a literary work from a national setting into transnational literary space does not occur simply because the work is regarded as significant in its country of origin. It involves a range of processes through which a work is translated, circulated, reread, and granted recognition in broader literary contexts. World Literature functions less as a fixed canon of universal works and more as a dynamic mode through which texts travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries to acquire new reading contexts (Damrosch, 2003). This perspective is particularly relevant to Southeast Asian literature, where works emerging from colonial histories have often been read primarily through national frameworks. However, their subsequent journeys across languages, institutions, and interpretive communities raise broader comparative questions regarding how locally rooted works acquire transnational lives.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* and José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* offer a compelling comparative case. Although emerging from different colonial settings, both novels occupy central positions in the formation of national consciousness in Indonesia and the Philippines. Scholarship on Pramoedya has long emphasized the relationship between literature and nationalism. Teeuw (1997) identifies nationalism as a central concern in Pramoedya's fiction, while Guillermo (2017) situates *Bumi Manusia* within broader questions of modernity, nationhood, and the emergence of the modern world. These readings demonstrate that *Bumi*

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Manusia extends beyond representing colonial society in the Dutch East Indies by connecting national identity with global understandings of modernity. More recently, the novel has been re-examined through cosmopolitan subjectivity and *World Literature* (Utami & Kadafi, 2026).

A comparable yet historically distinct trajectory characterizes *Noli Me Tangere*, which has acquired an extensive afterlife through translation, education, publication, and canonization. Testa-de Ocampo (2012) traces this afterlife, showing how early English translations developed within the political context of American colonial rule in the Philippines. Translation thus actively shaped how the novel was interpreted within new political and cultural environments. Garinto (2024) further demonstrates how *Noli Me Tangere* evolved from a literary text into a cultural artifact through colonial publishing and educational institutionalization, sustaining its cultural significance well beyond its initial publication context.

The transnational dimensions of Rizal's work extend beyond the Philippine national framework. Rafael (2005) situates *Noli Me Tangere* within questions of translation, language, and nationalism. Hagimoto (2013) connects Rizal with José Martí, examining the intellectual ties between anticolonial struggles in the Philippines and Cuba, while Mojarro (2021) places Rizal in dialogue with foundational Latin American novels. Lifshey (2008) considers Rizal's literary position in relation to broader transnational literary formations, and Park (2019) introduces the concept of transpacific intercoloniality to re-evaluate the global dimensions of Philippine literature in Spanish. These studies collectively show that Rizal's work has consistently been interpreted through networks exceeding national boundaries.

Despite extensive scholarship on both novels, their transnational trajectories have largely been examined in isolation. Studies of *Bumi Manusia* focus on nationalism, postcolonialism, modernity, and translation, while those on *Noli Me Tangere* emphasize canonization, education, and transcolonial networks. A comparative analysis detailing how these two Southeast Asian novels transition into wider literary networks remains underdeveloped.

This study addresses that gap by analyzing reception, rather than intrinsic textual features, as its primary focus. It examines *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere* through translation, circulation, transnational recontextualization, and recognition in world literary discourse. Colonial experience and national consciousness are thus treated not as interpretive endpoints, but as historical foundations that are continually renegotiated as texts move into new linguistic and intellectual environments. Specifically, this inquiry investigates how the two novels are received in academic discourse beyond their national contexts, how translation and comparative reading expand their transnational positioning, and how colonial experience is renegotiated through postcolonial and World Literature frameworks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

World Literature and Literary Circulation

World Literature operates through the dynamic movement of texts beyond their original national boundaries into broader fields of reading and interpretation. Damrosch (2003) approaches this realm primarily through circulation, where translation acts as a vital mechanism for international transmission. As a work enters new linguistic and cultural environments, its original meanings transform through fresh interpretive relationships between source and target cultures. This transnational dynamic intersects with Casanova's (2004) conceptualization of the world literary space, wherein international recognition, literary power, and cultural capital are continuously negotiated within an uneven global literary field.

Postcolonial Literature and National Consciousness

A postcolonial perspective is necessary because both novels are rooted in societies shaped by colonial structures. Literature in such contexts can become a space for negotiating identity, history, and national consciousness rather than merely representing colonial

domination. Anderson (2006) links the formation of imagined communities to language, print production, and communication systems that allow individuals to perceive themselves as part of a wider collective. This relationship helps explain the convergence of literary production, publishing practices, and national consciousness in colonial settings. However, national identity remains inherently ambivalent rather than entirely stable. Bhabha (2013) views national narratives as continuous constructs negotiated through representation and language. Consequently, *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere* function not merely as national novels, but as texts capturing identity formation under colonial duress. In scholarship on *Bumi Manusia*, nationalism and postcolonial critique constitute central interpretive strands (Guillermo, 2017; Teeuw, 1997). National consciousness thus serves as a historical foundation that is subsequently reread and recontextualized as the works travel across national borders. A postcolonial reading consequently provides a bridge between the historical circumstances in which the novels emerged and the later contexts in which they have been interpreted.

Reception, Translation, and Canonization

Reception bridges the national life of a literary work and its transnational circulation, mapping documented traces within academic criticism, translation, publishing, education, and institutional canonization. The trajectory of *Noli Me Tangere* exemplifies this dynamic. Testa-de Ocampo (2012) demonstrates how early English translations during the American colonial period involved structural adjustments, such as omissions and additions that mediated the novel for new readerships under distinct political pressures. Garinto (2024) further highlights processes of institutionalization through education and publication, showing how the novel transformed into a canonical cultural artifact whose survival relies heavily on sustaining institutional frameworks.

A parallel dynamic characterizes the circulation of *Bumi Manusia*. Studies on *This Earth of Mankind* emphasize how paratexts and translator positioning mediate cultural differences for English-language audiences (Kim & Jo, 2025). Concurrently, recent scholarship links the novel directly to cosmopolitanism and World Literature (Utami & Kadafi, 2026). Translation and reception operate not as isolated phases, but as reciprocal sites of interpretation where critical discourse repositions translated texts within wider literary networks. Ultimately, these theoretical perspectives establish a comprehensive framework: World Literature accounts for transnational circulation, postcolonial theory illuminates coloniality and national identity, and reception studies trace the institutional mechanisms through which literary works acquire new meanings.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative literature review combined with corpus-based thematic analysis to examine the scholarly reception and transnational positioning of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* and José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. The study does not undertake a direct close reading of the two novels or measure reader responses empirically. Instead, it examines how academic publications document, interpret, and contextualize the novels' reception, translation, circulation, and institutional presence beyond their respective national settings. A literature review was treated as a research methodology involving explicit decisions about scope, source selection, evidence extraction, analysis, and synthesis (Snyder, 2019).

The analytical framework brings together three complementary perspectives: World Literature, postcolonial studies, and reception scholarship, including research on translation and canonization. World Literature provides a framework for examining how literary works move across linguistic and national boundaries. Postcolonial studies help identify discussions of coloniality, nationalism, identity, and historical consciousness. Reception scholarship directs

attention to the critical, translational, educational, and institutional practices through which literary works acquire new meanings and positions in different contexts.

The research corpus comprises 32 academic publications: 20 concerning *Bumi Manusia* and 12 concerning *Noli Me Tangere*. The publications were identified through purposive, structured literature tracing and selected according to four criteria: (1) relevance to either novel, its translation, circulation, reception, or institutional history; (2) verifiable bibliographic information in academic records; (3) substantive contribution to at least one analytical dimension established by the study's theoretical framework; and (4) relevance to explaining how the work or its literary significance has been interpreted, transmitted, or repositioned across national and transnational contexts. Studies of specific linguistic or stylistic features were retained when they contributed to understanding translation, cultural mediation, or the interpretation of the novel in another linguistic context. Publications addressing education, national reception, or the wider historical context were included when they helped explain the institutional conditions shaping a novel's continuing significance.

The publications do not all provide the same type of evidence. Some directly document reception, translation history, circulation, canonization, or transnational interpretation. Others provide contextual evidence through textual analysis, postcolonial criticism, linguistic examination, or studies of educational and historical institutions. This distinction was maintained during analysis: contextual studies were used to explain the interpretive and institutional conditions surrounding reception, rather than automatically being treated as direct evidence of international readership or circulation. The complete bibliographic profile of the 32 publications is provided in Appendix A.

Data extraction was conducted using an Evidence Matrix to organize and compare information across the selected publications (Miles et al., 2013). For each source, the matrix recorded bibliographic details, the literary work discussed, publication year, source type, analytical focus, reception context, circulation mechanism, and findings relevant to the research questions. The extracted evidence was then examined through thematic coding. Thematic analysis offers a flexible procedure for identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021) , while qualitative coding principles support the systematic organization of evidence into analytical categories (Saldana, 2011).

Eleven analytical categories were used: reception/afterlife; postcolonial/coloniality; circulation; translation; nationalism/identity; comparative literature; transnational/transcolonial; World Literature/globality; paratext; canonization/institutionalization; and education. The categories were informed by the theoretical framework and refined through engagement with the corpus. Each publication was coded binarily for each category, with 1 indicating that the category was substantively addressed and 0 indicating that it was not. The categories were non-exclusive, allowing a publication to be assigned to more than one category when its discussion addressed multiple dimensions. The resulting frequencies therefore represent overlapping analytical emphases, not mutually exclusive groups of publications or measures of the relative quality, influence, or international success of either novel.

The comparative analysis proceeded in three stages. First, evidence from the publications was organized in the Evidence Matrix. Second, each publication was coded according to the 11 analytical categories. Third, the category distributions and the substantive findings reported in the publications were compared across the two corpora. Numerical patterns were interpreted alongside the historical, linguistic, and institutional contexts documented in the sources. The purpose of the comparison was not to rank the novels or determine which had achieved greater global success, but to identify differences and similarities in how academic scholarship has represented their reception and transnational positioning.

To support data credibility, bibliographic details were cross-checked against available journal, publisher, and DOI records. The claims used in the analysis were also checked against the content of the relevant publications, with attention to the distinction between direct evidence of reception and contextual evidence. Interpretations were compared across sources where possible, and the category frequencies were treated as descriptive indicators rather than conclusive measures of global circulation or readership. These procedures were intended to maintain traceability between the selected publications, the coding decisions, and the comparative interpretations presented in the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the 32 academic publications demonstrates that the reception of *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere* unfolds across overlapping thematic dimensions. Reception and afterlife emerged as the most frequent category, appearing in 22 publications, closely followed by postcolonial/coloniality (19), circulation (14), translation (12), and nationalism/identity (11). Comparative literature appeared in 9 publications, transnational/transcolonial approaches in 8, World Literature and paratexts in 5 each, canonization/institutionalization in 3, and education in 2.

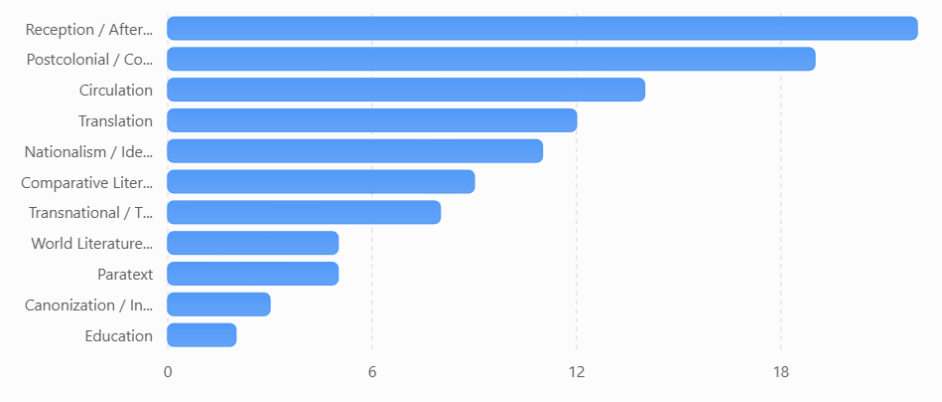


Figure 1.
Overall Distribution of Analytical Categories

Comparative breakdown by novel reveals distinct scholarly pathways. Among the 20 publications concerning *Bumi Manusia*, reception/afterlife appears in 12, postcolonial/coloniality in 11, and translation in 9. In contrast, among the 12 studies on *Noli Me Tangere*, reception/afterlife appears in 10, while postcolonial/coloniality and circulation each appear in 8, with comparative and transcolonial approaches occurring in 6 publications each.

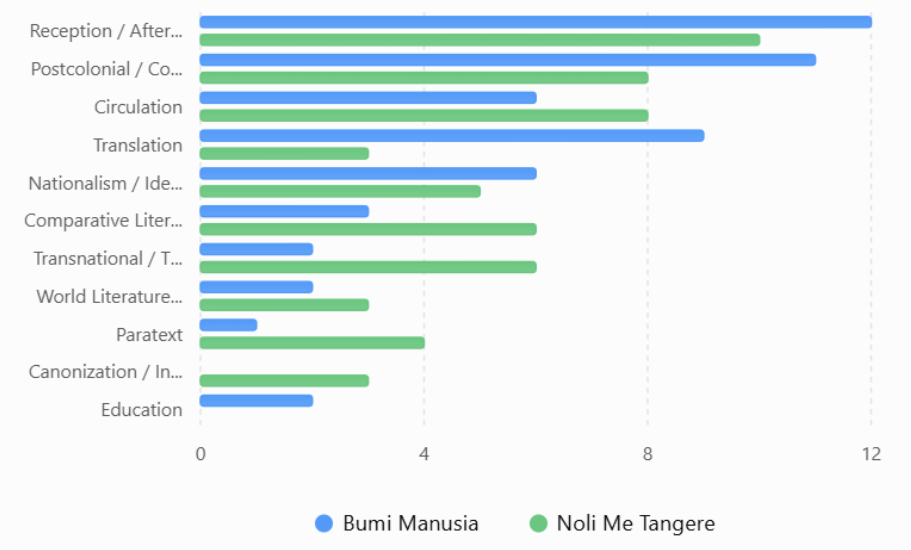


Figure 2.
Distribution of Analytical Categories by Novel

Table 1. Distribution of Analytical Categories in the Corpus

Analytical Variable	**Total (N=32)**	***Bumi Manusia* (n=20)**	***Noli Me Tangere* (n=12)**
Reception/afterlife	22	12	10
Postcolonial/coloniality	19	11	8
Circulation	14	6	8
Translation	12	9	3
Nationalism/identity	11	6	5
Comparative literature	9	3	6
Transnational/transcolonial	8	2	6
World Literature/globality	5	2	3
Paratext	5	1	4
Canonization/institutionalization	3	0	3
Education	2	2	0

Discussion

The findings suggest that the transnational positioning of *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere* is represented in scholarship through several overlapping processes rather than a single pathway. Reception and postcolonial interpretation connect the novels to their national histories, while translation, circulation, comparative scholarship, and institutional practices help explain how their meanings are reconsidered in wider contexts. The limited number of publications explicitly framed through World Literature also suggests that transnational positioning should be examined through the practices documented in scholarship, rather than inferred solely from the use of a world-literary label.

The postcolonial dimension remains essential for understanding how both novels are read across borders. Within the *Bumi Manusia* corpus, postcoloniality and nationalism appear prominently, aligning with Teeuw's (1997) emphasis on national identity in Pramoedya's fiction. Studies such as Farhana and Aflahah (2019), Nensilianti et al. (2025), Sofi and Basiri (2020), and Rahayu et al. (2019) position *Bumi Manusia* within broader discourses of resistance against colonial structures. When read internationally, the novel's specific Indonesian historical context transforms into a broader resource for examining colonial legacies. A comparable pattern appears in the *Noli Me Tangere* corpus, where postcolonial concerns and nationalism intersect

closely with historical circulation and transcolonial relations. Testa-de Ocampo (2012) and Garinto (2024) demonstrate that the novel's survival relies on institutional practices, education, and cultural artifact formation, ensuring its nationalist symbolism continuously adapts to new interpretive frameworks.

Anderson's (2006) conceptualization of print capitalism and imagined communities helps illuminate this continuity, showing how literary production fosters shared collective consciousness. Once texts cross national borders, however, their relationship with nationalism grows increasingly complex. Bhabha's (2013) notion of the ambivalence of national narratives demonstrates that national identity operates both as a marker of local belonging and as a dynamic site where cultural boundaries are negotiated under colonial duress. Consequently, both texts transcend the restrictive label of mere "national novels," functioning instead as vital sites where local historical experiences become legible within wider configurations.

Translation is a prominent strand in the selected scholarship on *Bumi Manusia*. Research on its English translation examines linguistic choices and paratextual features through which the novel is presented to readers in another language. Kim and Jo (2025) , for example, examine paratexts that make the translator's interpretive role visible. Read alongside Damrosch's (2003) account of literary circulation, this scholarship suggests that translation involves more than linguistic transfer: it also provides contextual frames through which readers may interpret cultural references and historical experiences. The evidence therefore identifies translation as an important focus of scholarship on the novel, although the corpus does not by itself establish the scale of its international readership.

The history of *Noli Me Tangere* illustrates another configuration of translation and circulation. Testa-de Ocampo (Testa-De Ocampo, 2012) shows that the novel's continuing readership in the Philippines has been shaped by translation, including English translation during the American colonial period. The colonial context influenced early English versions through particular acts of omission and addition. Circulation could therefore reshape the conditions under which the novel was read, making translation a site where power relations were negotiated across colonial contexts. Rafael (2005), Hagimoto (2013), and Park (2019) further situate Rizal's work within networks involving language, colonialism, nationalism, and relations among different colonial formations. The contrast between the two corpora thus points to two different configurations of transnational movement: *Bumi Manusia* is more strongly represented through translation-focused scholarship, while *Noli Me Tangere* is more frequently discussed through historical circulation and intercolonial connections.

These contrasts should be interpreted in relation to the composition and analytical focus of the selected corpora. The stronger emphasis on translation in the *Bumi Manusia* publications and on historical circulation in the *Noli Me Tangere* publications reflects differences in scholarly attention, not necessarily differences in the novels' actual geographical reach or readership. Because the corpus is purposively selected and the categories overlap, the comparison identifies patterns in academic representation rather than providing a direct measure of international recognition.

The next pattern concerns comparative recontextualization. Across the corpus, *comparative literature* appears in 9 publications, while *transnational/transcolonial* appears in 8. Both categories are more prominent in the *Noli Me Tangere* corpus, where each occurs in 6 publications, than in the *Bumi Manusia* corpus, where they occur in 3 and 2 publications respectively. Hagimoto (2013), for example, places Rizal in dialogue with José Martí through an examination of intercolonial connections, while Mojarro (2021) situates Rizal in relation to the foundational novels of Latin America. Park (2019) further develops a transpacific and intercolonial perspective on Philippine literature in Spanish.

In this study, comparative literature is not understood simply as a search for intrinsic similarities and differences between two novels. Comparative recontextualization instead

involves placing literary works within historical, geographical, and intellectual networks through which local experiences can be viewed from more than one cultural centre. The comparison between *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere* therefore does not collapse the colonial experiences of Indonesia and the Philippines into a single historical narrative. Rather, it identifies points of connection through which colonialism, nationalism, identity, and national consciousness can be considered across different historical settings. Their differences in history, language, and literary tradition are precisely what make comparison capable of generating new interpretive contexts.

The final pattern concerns the movement from national canon toward *World Literature*. Explicit references to *World Literature/globality* occur in only 5 of the 32 publications: 2 concerning *Bumi Manusia* and 3 concerning *Noli Me Tangere*. *Canonization/institutionalization* occurs in 3 publications, all within the *Noli Me Tangere* corpus. These findings suggest that the global dimension of the two novels is not always articulated through the explicit terminology of *World Literature*. Their transnational positions are more often traceable through concrete mechanisms such as translation, circulation, criticism, education, and comparative scholarship.

Because the analytical categories overlap, their frequencies represent intersecting dimensions of scholarly discussion rather than separate groups of publications. A single source may address translation alongside colonial power, national identity, or institutional reception. The distributions therefore provide a descriptive map of scholarly emphasis; interpreting the novels' reception trajectories also requires attention to the arguments and historical contexts presented in individual publications.

For *Bumi Manusia*, Guillermo (2017) and, more explicitly, Utami and Kadafi (2026) connect Pramoedya's novel with modernity, cosmopolitan subjectivity, and *World Literature*. The coding results nevertheless indicate that these explicit world-literary readings remain connected to broader processes of postcolonial reception, translation, and circulation. For *Noli Me Tangere*, the relationship between national canonization and broader literary space emerges through reception, education, translation, and institutionalization. Aguilar et al. (2021) demonstrate the continuing presence of *Noli Me Tangere* in Philippine education through the implementation of the Rizal Law, while Testa-de Ocampo (2012) shows how its afterlife has been sustained through translation and educational institutions. Canonization, therefore, is not only a matter of aesthetic recognition. It is also connected to the institutions through which a literary work remains present in cultural memory.

Damrosch's (2003) framework helps clarify why a work does not need to lose its national identity in order to participate in *World Literature*. Local identity, national history, and colonial experience can themselves become part of the processes through which a work is read in other contexts. Movement from a national canon into world literary space is therefore not a linear transition from the local to the global. It is an ongoing process of recontextualization involving translation, circulation, education, criticism, comparison, and literary institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies distinct but related patterns in the academic reception of *Bumi Manusia* and *Noli Me Tangere*. In the selected corpus, scholarship on *Bumi Manusia* places greater emphasis on translation alongside postcolonial interpretation and nationalism, whereas scholarship on *Noli Me Tangere* more frequently addresses historical circulation, comparative and transcolonial connections, and institutionalization. These differences describe the emphases of the publications examined; they do not establish a hierarchy of international influence or readership between the two novels.

The study contributes a comparative account of how academic scholarship represents the movement of nationally situated literary works into broader interpretive contexts. It also demonstrates the value of examining translation, criticism, education, and institutional

reception together rather than treating translation as the sole indicator of transnational positioning. Because the corpus is purposively selected and relies on academic publications, the findings should be understood as a map of scholarly approaches rather than a comprehensive measurement of the novels' global circulation or reader reception. Future research could extend this analysis through publishing archives, translation histories, popular adaptations, and curriculum studies to investigate dimensions of circulation and reception that academic publications alone cannot fully capture.

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Appendix A. Bibliographic Profile of the 32 Publications Included in the Research Corpus

This appendix lists the 32 academic publications included in the study's comparative literature corpus: 20 publications concerning *Bumi Manusia* and 12 concerning *Noli Me Tangere*. The publications were selected for their relevance to the novels' scholarly reception, interpretation, translation, circulation, and broader literary and historical positioning. The list records each publication's title, author(s), journal or publisher, and DOI where available. The corpus includes both studies that directly examine the reception and circulation of the novels and related scholarship that provides contextual evidence for interpreting their trajectories across national and transnational literary frameworks.

No.	Novel/ Corpus Focus	Judul artikel/buku/bab	Year	Penulis	Jurnal/Penerbit	DOI/Link
1	*Bumi Manusia*	*Bumi Manusia and Anak Semua Bangsa: Pramoedya Ananta Toer Enters the 1980s*	1981	Foulcher, K.	*Indonesia*	https://hdl.handle.net/1813/52532
2	*Bumi Manusia*	The Ideology of Nationalism in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Fiction	2007	Teeuw, A.	*Indonesia and the Malay World*	https://doi.org/10.1080/13639819708729903
3	*Bumi Manusia*	The Evolution of Java-Men and Revolutionaries: A Fresh Look at Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet	2018	Tsao, T.	*South East Asia Research*	https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2012.0088
4	*Bumi Manusia*	The Clash of Traditional and Modern Cultures in the Novels *Samdae* (Three Generations) by Yeom Sang Seop and *Tetralogi Buru* (Buru Quartet) by Pramoedya Ananta Toer	2019	Trihtarani, F. E.	*Humaniora*	https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.42797
5	*Bumi Manusia*	The Rise of the *Dunia Modern* (Modern World) in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind)	2017	Guillermo, R.	*UNITAS*	https://doi.org/10.31944/2017901.raguil01
6	*Bumi Manusia*	Revisiting Pram's *Bumi Manusia*: Between an Exile, Cosmopolitan Subject, and World Literature	2026	Utami, S. M. B., & Kadafi, M.	*MONOGATARI: Journal of Literature and Culture*	https://doi.org/10.69908/monogatari.v1i1.50466
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10	*Bumi Manusia*	Translating Paralinguistic and Onomatopoeia: An Analysis on the Novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Its Translation *This Earth of Mankind* by Max Lane	2021	Wiles, E.	*International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education*	https://doi.org/10.32585/ijelle.v3i1.1333
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15	*Bumi Manusia*	Kolonialisme dan Nasionalisme dalam Novel *Bumi Manusia* Karya Pramoedya Ananta Toer	2019	Farhana, F. & Aflahah, A.	*GHANCARAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*	https://doi.org/10.19105/ghancaran.v1i1.2946
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22	*Noli Me Tangere*	José Rizal's *Noli me tángere* and the Making of a Cultural Artifact	2024	Garinto, L. A. B.	*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*	https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.5031
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