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# COMMENT

## R.M. Briones' Comment on "The Future of Rice in Asia: Public and Private Roles"

■ David Dawe and C. Peter Timmer

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This is a thoughtful meditation by two renowned experts on the future of rice in Asia. All the themes covered are salient and skillfully tackled. However, such an ambitious title invites comments about this or that topic that the reviewer would like to be covered—colliding, perhaps, with the authors' view of what to emphasize and prioritize. Nonetheless, may I introduce my own biases on what themes are worthy of discussion, and how:

**Structural transformation.** The supply side of structural transformation (pp 3–4) discusses labor productivity and land consolidation. A broader aspect of transformation is diversifying into greater value adding, while still maintaining strong vertical linkages, i.e., from farming to agrifood systems. This phenomenon was briefly discussed under supermarkets and the like, in relation to modern price stabilization. However, the phenomenon may need further elaboration on its own terms, concerning quality shifts, diversification into processing and modern retail, and the implications of such changes.

**Price stabilization.** The argument for a market-based, publicly-driven stabilization is basically sound. While the rationale for public intervention was relegated to a citation, perhaps explicit discussion is warranted, especially on the political stability argument. This, I think, is more relevant to emerging economies of Asia, rather than welfare arguments that are more suitable for

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**The Future of Rice in Asia:  
Public and Private Roles**  
D. Dawe and C.P. Timmer

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lower income, subsistence-oriented economies. Moreover, the authors seem to overestimate the scope of market-based stabilization by modern supermarkets. I disagree that supermarkets stabilize because they control supplies. Rather, their behavior is characterized by price stickiness due to coordination failures (and similar arguments in the relevant New Keynesian literature). As such, there will be severe enough shocks that will prevent them from managing price instability, even if it may be socially worthwhile to do so from a political economy perspective.

**Resource scarcity and climate change.** Surely the biophysical challenge faced by rice production should be a prominent element in discussing the future of rice. There are allusions here and there in the discussion of rice research, and in the concluding section. But I think this theme deserves to be highlighted, including how the rice industry should adapt to climate change, water scarcity, and deteriorating soil health – and how rice industry can mitigate its own footprint on these current and future risks to sustainability.