A Festschrift is intended to review the origins, depth and breadth of the academic works by a noted scholar in the twilight of their career. From this perspective, writing a foreword to a Festschrift for Arsenio M. Balisacan is a strange task for me. Academically speaking, I think of Arsi as my grandson. His promise as a scholar was noted by Professor Cristina Crisostomo David when he enrolled in the master’s programme in agricultural economics at the University of the Philippines Los Baños in 1979. Tina was my PhD student in the early 1970s at the Food Research Institute at Stanford University, where she documented the striking role of fertilizer and rice prices in the political economy of Asian countries. Arsi continued this work at the University of the Philippines Los Baños under Tina’s direction, and then generalized the results into a conceptual approach to positive political economy in his PhD dissertation at the University of Hawaii, under the mentorship of Professor James A. Roumasset.

My first involvement with agricultural policy in the Philippines came in the early 1970s, when Arsi was still in high school. As part of the Stanford project on “the political economy of rice in Asia” that Tina David worked on, Wally Falcon and I commissioned eight country studies in East and Southeast Asia (including one on the United States by Leon Mears, a familiar name in the Philippines’ food policy circles). I worked closely with Mahar Mangahas on the Philippine study, so became acutely aware by 1975 just how complex the Philippines’ story was. I had drafted the Indonesian country study as a prototype for
other country authors and worked closely with all of them right through the publication stage.¹

This earlier work on the region’s political economy of rice set me up for understanding Arsi’s work. My engagement with his work started with rice policy, but extended more broadly to the fields of agricultural development and the nature of pro-poor economic growth. Both fields are well represented in this Festschrift, via contributions from major authors in the field and through the inclusion of Arsi’s own path-breaking research in both fields.

These two fields, and especially the economic and policy links between them, are very difficult territory for a scholar-practitioner in the Philippines. On two separate occasions, under two different presidents, I failed miserably to make any progress. The combination of an entrenched landed elite and the capture of most agricultural marketing enterprises by deeply vested interests stymied my efforts—after the People Power Revolution in early 1986 forced President Ferdinand Marcos from power—to help revamp the mandate of the National Food Authority to pursue stable rice prices without high protection.

A later effort to connect smallholder farmers to a more inclusive growth process also failed, despite high hopes in the development profession as President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had a PhD in economics from the University of the Philippines (she also studied at Georgetown University for two years, where she and Bill Clinton became friends). Over the years, I was able to work successfully with the International Rice Research Institute and the Asian Development Bank, and I enjoyed interacting with my Philippine colleagues and former students on each visit, but I could never make any progress with the government.

Thus, I am simply in awe of how successful Arsi has been as a scholar-practitioner at the very highest levels of the profession. His service at cabinet level in four different presidential administrations, while also serving with great distinction—as professor and dean of the faculty—in the best economics department in Southeast Asia, is without precedent.

My closest personal engagement with Arsi has been through his leadership of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study

¹ See volume XIV, nos. 3 and 4, Food Research Institute Studies, 1975.
and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), and through the journal Arsi founded while at SEARCA, the *Asian Journal of Agricultural Development (AJAD)*. I have served on the editorial board of *AJAD* since its founding because I believe deeply in its mission: to highlight the importance of agriculture to the development of Asian economies, and to publish manuscripts by regional scholars that document this role.

I also benefited from Arsi’s term as president of the Asian Society of Agricultural Economics (ASAE). In that role he invited me to Manila in August 2008 to give the keynote address at the sixth triennial meeting of the ASAE. I used the occasion to reflect on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Food Policy Analysis*. The cross-sectoral perspective developed in that volume remains essential to solving today’s problems of poverty and hunger.

This Festschrift is a fitting tribute to Arsi. His creativity, insights and just plain hard work illuminate every chapter. And he is just beginning...

C. Peter Timmer

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