

Rice Import Liberalization in the Philippines in Historical, Comparative Perspective

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Abstract: Why did Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte suddenly, in 2018, upend decades of protectionist policy by liberalizing his country's rice import trade? Conventional wisdom suggests that he enacted this major policy reform to curb inflation spurred by rising rice prices. Higher prices were especially harmful to the millions of poor who spend disproportionate levels of income on the foodstuff. This paper takes issue with the argument that overly assigns causality to inflationary pressures for Duterte's historic and controversial decision. Past Philippine presidents have encountered inflationary episodes without liberalizing the country's rice trade. Instead, this paper argues that placing the Philippine example in a broader historical, comparative framework provides a more compelling understanding for this instance of institutional change. Two rice importing countries of Southeast Asia that also grow rice in ample quantity, Malaysia and Indonesia, for decades have supported a similar rice policy model with monopoly control of imports by a parastatal. Yet they did not follow Duterte's lead and have maintained their protectionist status quo. This paper showcases a range of historical and contemporary factors that in comparative perspective more fully explain why the Philippines was the most likely case of the three to implement institutional reform.

Jamie S. Davidson is Associate Professor of Political Science at the National University of Singapore and concurrently head of the Asia Research Institute's Food Politics and Society research cluster of the same university. The author of three books on Indonesian politics (2008, 2015, 2018), he is revising his latest manuscript on rice politics in Southeast Asia, upon which this talk is based, for publication. A/P Davidson serves as editorial board member for prominent Asian studies journals and is co-editor of the Palgrave book series "Contestation in Contemporary Southeast Asia."



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**5/F, Lau Ming Wai Academic Building,
City University of Hong Kong**

How to attend this seminar:

Via Zoom

<https://shorturl.at/8k4Cw>

Passcode: 700421

or in-person (pre-registration and visitor QR code are needed):

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After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about the seminar.



All are welcome

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