



**Prof.dr. Gelia T. Castillo (1928-2017), Philippines.**

**Second woman honorary doctor Wageningen University 1983**



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## Contents

Contents.....	2
Life course .....	3
Her Profound Interest in Rice .....	4
IRRI-8: Miracle Rice?.....	4
Synthesis Reviews with Careful Contextualisation and Differentiation.....	5
Rural Sociology: to combine action, policy, research and theory.....	6
Women in Rice Farming Systems: integrated gender approach .....	6
Prof. dr. Gelia Castillo honoured in Wageningen 1983.....	7
Technologies to Provide beyond Productivity .....	8
Healthy Research Partnerships: North-South, International-National and Interdisciplinair .....	8
Ensuring Sustainability .....	9
Selected Highlights from her Publications: .....	9

### Photo Front page:

PROF.DR. GELIA T. CASTILLO AS NEW WU HONORARY DOCTOR ON WU DIES NATALIS, 9 MARCH 1983, TOGETHER WITH RECTOR PROF. DR. C.C. OOSTERLEE AND THE OTHER HONORARY DOCTORS H. DE BAKKER AND J. GREMMEN.  
SOURCE: WAGENINGS HOGESCHOOLBLAD 11 MARCH 1983, P. 4; PHOTOGRAPHER: REIN HEIJ

## Life course

Prof.dr. Gelia T. Castillo (1928-2017) was in 1983 the second woman who received an honorary doctorate from Wageningen University. Being born and based in the Philippines, she was actually the first woman from outside the western world. Gelia Castillo started her international career as rural sociologist with a MSc degree at PennState University and a PhD degree from Cornell. After her return to the College of Agriculture, University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) she stepped up to a full and university professorship (resp. 1972 and 1988). While continuing her work both in the Philippines as well as internationally, she was awarded many times. Though, her critical role in evidence-based support to women in rice farming systems starting in the 1980s, is not well acknowledged yet. UPBL's neighbour IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) greatly benefited from her advice as long-time consultant in social sciences up to the age of 85 in 2013.



PROF. EMERITA DR. GELIA T. CASTILLO, 2005

Prof.dr. Gelia Tagumpay. Castillo (1928-2017) started her international career with a MSc degree in Rural Sociology at PennState University in 1958 and a PhD degree from Cornell in 1960<sup>1</sup>. Much of her many publications<sup>2</sup> is worthwhile to revalue for its importance today. Her career came into reach by following a successful strategy from her father. To support his children to get out of poor conditions he pushed them to do more than their best to become outstanding.<sup>3</sup> She started with a BA degree in Psychology (*cum laude*) in 1953 at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, and was then 4 years an instructor in psychology and sociology in the Department of Agricultural Education, College of Agriculture, University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). After her return from the USA to UPLB she stepped up to a full and university professorship (resp. 1972 and 1988). Meanwhile, she saw IRRI being built nearby in 1960 – the oldest institute collaborating in CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research – 1971). Gelia became a much-appreciated ally to IRRI for her critical contributions as social scientist amidst life scientists. Her empirical social and gender approach led to evidence-based data and well reflected insights that were well contextualized and differentiated whether it was about youth, women or farming families in unfavourable conditions. She also contributed to overcome western bias and to interdisciplinary and multi-level participatory partnerships and tools.

<sup>1</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1960). [A Study of Occupational Evaluation in the Philippines](#), probably summarized in Castillo, G.T. (1962). [Occupation evaluation in the Philippines](#). *Philippine Sociological Review*, 10(3/4), 147-157.

<sup>2</sup> See below a list of selected publications.

<sup>3</sup> [Audio from interview](#) with Royal Colle, Los Baños, 29 June 2013.

Within the CGIAR she was in 1983 the first woman appointed Chair of a Board of Trustees, the one of CIP (International Potato Centre, Peru). Later she served in many other international boards and reviewing committees and was honoured many times. Certainly noticeable are her 11 years in the Board of Governors of the Canadian agency IDRC (1979-1990).<sup>4</sup> She maintained close cooperation both within the Philippines as well as outside with international players in the field. As Prof. emerita after 1993, she stayed connected and fully participating. CIP colleagues praised her as a constant source of advice and inspiration for their programmes. For IRRI she was long-time consultant up to the age of 85 in 2013. IRRI Director Matthew Morell recalled her intellectual vitality, lifelong curiosity, and passion for knowledge. Who met her, as I did, either as colleague or supervisor, they remember her wise, nuanced, sharp and inspiring presence. Characterized as the *grande dame* of the IRRI community, she is clearly very missed after she passed away in 2017.

## Her Profound Interest in Rice

As sociologist focussing on the rural areas, Gelia acknowledged the importance of rice. As it was central in farming and food, it was key to research and development: *"perhaps it's because it's something that we eat every day. We can't do without it and it's something that you find among both rich and poor and you can't ignore it. It's always there; no matter what happens, it's always there. If it's not there, you better find it, you know."*<sup>5</sup> Though, when IRRI became the neighbour of UPLB in the 1960s, there were worries and doubts. Gelia recalled how IRRI's new buildings were radiating modernity<sup>6</sup> while UPLB was poorly housed. She recalled very well: *"when the secretary of education visited IRRI, he looked and looked and finally said, "I cannot see the connection between the man who plants rice and eats rice and this fantastic building." (...) Of course, there were a lot of critics who said, "If they just give us the money, we can do it." That was the thinking."*<sup>7</sup>

## IRRI-8: Miracle Rice?

Her curiosity around rice and IRRI might have inspired her to the media analysis of IR8, IRRI's first high yielding variety (HIV), launched in 1966. Her paper was discussed at IRRI in January 1968<sup>8</sup>. She exposed how IR8 was mystified as *Miracle Rice* in the press. This made it also a milestone of the Green Revolution. It would bring abundant yields and profits. Media highlighted IRRI-8 also as *jackpot number, breakthrough waited for, wonder rice, miracle bounty, turning point, a life saver, a revolution, a ringer*, but also *hope, the solution, and the dawn of a new day*. It was given anthropomorphic characteristics and lastly seen as the solution to win the war in Vietnam. (Castillo 1968, pp. 11-17) In contrast Gelia Castillo quoted the rather modest descriptions by the researchers. They mentioned its shortcomings, called IR8 certainly an improvement and pointed out that it could never be the whole solution: *"No matter how good the variety, it will not realize its potential if it is eaten by rats, destroyed by insects or withered by disease. An improved variety is no substitute for careful culture and adequate protection."* (quoted in Castillo 1968, p. 5). The scientists openly acknowledged the drawbacks, denied the exaggerated prospects, and rejected being seen as

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<sup>4</sup> See more in her CVs in her books, and portraits: Yahes, C. (1995). GELIA CASTILLO (Philippines), in: [IN PERSON. Profiles of Researchers in Africa, Asia, and the Americas](#), IDRC, pp 36-45; Hettel, G. (2017). In memoriam Gelia T. Castillo (1928-2017). Helping science to serve a human purpose, [Rice Today, Oct-Dec 2017](#), p. 35; Bautista, M.C.R.B. (2017). [REQUIESCAT IN PACE: Gelia Tagumpay Castillo](#), *Philippine Sociological Review* 65, pp. 163-166; and last part website [profile Philippines](#).

<sup>5</sup> Hettel, G. (2010). [The IRRI Pioneers interviews](#), compiled booklet from *Rice Today* Jan-March 2008 until Oct-Dec 2010, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Cullather, N. (2004). [Miracles of modernization](#): The green revolution and the apotheosis of technology. *Diplomatic History* 28(2), pp. 227-254.

<sup>7</sup> [Pioneer interview with Gelia Castillo](#), video, by Gene Hettel, IRRI, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1968). *"Miracle Rice" as produced by the Press*, typed manuscript IRRI library, Paper prepared for the International Seminar on Communications, Media and National Development, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 13 November -2 December 1967.

magicians (Castillo 1968, pp. 18-20). She concluded that ideology led the media rice debates: “For although a grain of rice is a grain of rice, the men who eat rice, grow rice, buy rice, develop rice, and write about rice; all have some sort of “ideology”, even if it comes in the guise of “gossip in the agricultural circuit”.” (Castillo 1968, p. 20) She spotted patriotism and anti-Americanism, accusations around affordability or second rank rice, or denial of specific knowledge standards or environments to let it prosper. This referred mostly to how it was packaged. Here, she also agreed with comments that women would possibly better decisions-brokers than American advisors: “Come to think of it, what better “rice roles” are there for women than of “pitching”, “twisting” and “telling”? Who else could be better information extenders?” (Castillo 1968, p. 40) Ultimately, Gelia observed a growing concern of the media’s credibility after two years. As later called *Cadillac Rice*, the miracle seemed to have vanished.



PROF. EMERITA DR. GELIA T. CASTILLO IN TESTING FIELDS, CA 1998,  
SOURCE: IRRI

## Synthesis Reviews with Careful Contextualisation and Differentiation

The controversy over the high yielding or later called modern varieties (MV) led her to a new book. In 1975 she published *All in a Grain of Rice*<sup>9</sup>, a review of the social and economic impacts and implications of the packaged rice technologies. In this book she clearly stated and evidenced the necessity of careful contextualization and differentiation. She did the same whenever writing about youth, women, or farming families in unfavourable conditions. She argued that such synthesis reviews were very needed in the Philippine and Asian context. These would build evidence-based knowledge and identify knowledge gaps beyond the existing western concepts or studies, also to enable research-based teaching (Castillo 1975, p. xii). Likewise, her 1979 book *Beyond Manila*<sup>10</sup> and her 1983 book on participatory and rural integrated development practices in the Philippines<sup>11</sup> reflect such a critical reviewing style.

<sup>9</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1975). *All in a Grain of Rice*. Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture.

<sup>10</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1979). *Beyond Manila: Philippine rural problems in perspective*. Ottawa: IDRC.

<sup>11</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1983). *How Participatory is Participatory Development? A review of the Philippine experience*. Manila: PIDS.

## Rural Sociology: to combine action, policy, research and theory

Most of her publications show another keenness to stress and elaborate how to combine action, policy, research, and theory in an interdisciplinary and multi-level participatory way. In 1964 she presented her insights for the first time at the First World Congress of Rural Sociology, held in Dijon, France, under European Rural Sociology Society president E.W. Hofstee from Wageningen.<sup>12</sup> Her ideal rural sociologist should possess theoretical sophistication, research mastery, comprehension of bureaucratic behaviour, and intensive exposure to the world of policy and action. For development contexts she emphasized the need to re-examine old (western) concepts about traditional societies. This call corresponds with her later comments on the necessity to use clarity in concepts such as family: “Hence if one were to study the characteristic family structure in a particular society, conceptual clarification and operational specification of the varieties of existing family structure are indispensable.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, a connect from action-programs to research and theory should be secured. Planned change would also be improved by developing an analytical scheme to differentiate amongst targeted systems, innovations and change agents. Lastly, she called for learning more about practitioners and sharpening the research and analytical tools to strengthening the communication with action workers and policy makers. Therefore, expert preparation in rural sociology was required.<sup>14</sup> The latter was resonated by B.H. Nelson, USA, who pointed out the risks of manipulation of shared insights by policy-makers or opinion leaders.<sup>15</sup>

## Women in Rice Farming Systems: integrated gender approach

Combining these insights, Gelia Castillo’s support has been key to the inclusion of women in IRRI’s research and development efforts. Under director MS Swaminathan, IRRI organized as first CGIAR institute a *Women in rice farming systems* conference in 1983<sup>16</sup>, which led to the WIFRS (Women in Rice Farming Systems) programme. The WIFRS was integrated in the Asian Rice Farming Systems Network (ARFSN) to secure interdisciplinarity and it used participatory methods to include women’s perspectives.<sup>17</sup> Faithful to earlier work, Gelia presented herself as an empirical feminist: “*such (author: women in agriculture) studies must be designed with greater substantive specificity (agro-ecological circumstances; more detailed descriptions of the farming systems, including its different components, agricultural practices, etc., land ownership patterns; seasonality dimensions; technologies available and applied, etc.) so that the results will be operationally useful for technology development, training, extension and agricultural program formulation.*”<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, she argued to fully integrate former gender specific domains: “*there is no reason why nutrition, population education, hygiene and sanitation should not be introduced to the men of the household in the same way that we argue for the importance of women learning more about modern agricultural technology whether or not they are physically involved in farming. Farm and household decisions are not independent of each other and usually both males and females are involved in decision-making.*”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hofstee, E.W. (1964). [Foreword](#), *Sociologia Ruralis* 4(3), pp. 211-213.

<sup>13</sup> Castillo, G.T., A.M. Weisblat, and F.R. Villareal (1968). [The Concepts of Nuclear and Extended Family: An Exploration of Empirical Referents](#). *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 9(1), pp. 1-40.

<sup>14</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1964). [The role and function of rural sociology in Asia](#), *Sociologia Ruralis* 4(3), pp. 360-370.

<sup>15</sup> N.n. (1964). [Closing session](#), *Sociologia Ruralis*, 4(3), pp. 453-462.

<sup>16</sup> IRRI (1985), [Women in Rice Farming](#). *Proceedings of a conference on Women in Rice Farming Systems, IRRI, Manila, Philippines, 26–30 September 1983*, IRRI and Gower.

<sup>17</sup> See more: Burg, M. van der (2019). [Ch. 3 ‘Change in the Making’: 1970s and 1980s building stones to Gender Integration in CGIAR Agricultural Research](#). In: Sachs, C.E. (Ed.), *Gender, Agriculture and Agrarian Transformations, Changing relations in Africa, Latin America and Asia*, Routledge, pp. 35-57.

<sup>18</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1988). Some general impressions and observations from trips to India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, in: UPLB, IRRI and PIDS, [Filipino Women in Rice Farming Systems](#), pp. 31-39, p. 32; The book entails papers from the Consultative Workshop on Women in Rice Farming Systems in the Philippines, 26 March 1987, UPLB, Philippines.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

## Prof. dr. Gelia Castillo honoured in Wageningen 1983

On 9 March 1983 Gelia received an honorary doctorate from Wageningen University at its 65<sup>th</sup> *Dies Natalis* by promotor Prof.dr.ir. Dirk van Dusseldorp, Professor of Rural Sociology on the Tropics and Subtropics. We could not find his speech. Though, the WUR magazine of that time, the *Wagening's Hogeschoolblad (WHB)* announced a seminar on *Technology transfer in an imperfect world* with her at the Leeuwenborch and printed a full page interview with her.<sup>20</sup> Frank Heybroek articulated her engagement with the actual food situation, position of rural women and functioning of agricultural education and extension. When asked to evaluate the Green Revolution, Gelia did not hesitate to acknowledge that the new technologies gave less or hardly any support to small-scale farming families or ones farming under less favourable conditions. Though, she rejected to solely blame technology for worsening their situation of from landless rural peoples, women, or the urban poor. She took confidence in interdisciplinary and participatory approaches and gave examples of projects that used those to adjust new technology and management capacity building strategies to existing farm practices, not the other way around. Though, she also acknowledged the difficulties to fully integrate the contributions of economists, sociologists and anthropologists. She urged western researchers not to preach but merely support developing new methods and empirical evidence, also bringing in their experience with ecological approaches and nature conservation. She wished Wageningen would encourage this among its students as they appeared to her to like to work with farmers at the practical level.



PROF.DR. GELIA T. CASTILLO AS NEW WU HONORARY DOCTOR ON WU DIES NATALIS, 9 MARCH 1983, TOGETHER WITH RECTOR PROF. DR. C.C. OOSTERLEE AND THE OTHER HONORARY DOCTORS H. DE BAKKER AND J. GREMMEN. SOURCE: WAGENINGS HOGESCHOOLBLAD 11 MARCH 1983, P. 4; PHOTOGRAPHER: REIN HEIJ

<sup>20</sup> Resp. *WHB*, 4 maart; F. Heybroek, *Filippijnsse sociologe, mevrouw Gelia Castillo*, *WHB*, 30 maart 1983, p. 9.

## Technologies to Provide beyond Productivity

Accordingly, Gelia Castillo showed in the 1990s what scientists should add to their list of testing technologies beyond productivity—enhancing: “*also on sustainability, safety, biodiversity, social acceptability, ecological integrity, equitability and gender sensitivity.*”<sup>21</sup> She was certainly aware of the magnitude of that task and pointed again at new instruments of the researchers’ tool kit: farmer-participatory approaches and interdisciplinary village and farm-level diagnostic analyses. Up to the 2000s she repeated this message, also on prestigious conferences: “*Plant Genetic Resources issues are as much about people as about genetics. (...) indigenous knowledge and modern science, social and biophysical environments, breeders and farmers must meet for the common cause of plant genetic resources.*”<sup>22</sup> As she also repeated in 2010: “*Regardless of country, approach, or technology focus, the one common lesson we can draw from the case studies is that people make the difference.*”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, exposure to observation in the field was a requirement she kept calling for, especially among young researchers as in 2014. Welcomed as ‘*the general source of wisdom*’ at IRRI, the meeting report quoted her: “*Get into the field as much as possible, and do not work on your computers all the time.*”<sup>24</sup>

## Healthy Research Partnerships: North-South, International-National and Interdisciplinair

In a more extensive reflection about research partnerships<sup>25</sup>, Gelia noted that these traditionally tended to follow North-South patterns of colonial history and could easily work out as exploitative. She portrayed such ‘unhealthy’ partnerships in five types.<sup>26</sup> Mutual interest and trustfulness appeared most decisive for productive healthy partnerships. She assured that South-South partnerships would not score better per se as regions differ hugely. Anyway, locality was not crucial in the case of international institutes as these were as the CGIAR institutes, mostly based in the South but identified with the North. She also reflected on research partnership between international and national agricultural research systems (NARS). Since NARS were considered too weak for successful collaboration, Gelia lined out how to overcome their ‘partnership syndrome’. Gelia emphasized that priority setting by the North on producing research results for prestigious publications would set out for failure. These results should be translated into actual production, food security and economic benefits for farmers. Partnerships then needed to balance both the human and financial cost, and relate these to opportunities foregone and priorities unaddressed. As notable examples of healthy productive research partnerships she mentioned the Vietnam-IRRI and Bhutan-IRRI ones. Without international scientists in residence, their work relied on participatory methodologies. Nevertheless, building research capacity would not last without securing to utilise

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<sup>21</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1996). Rice, rice and beyond. Understanding fragile lives in fragile lands, in: Zeigler, R.S. (Ed.) *Rice Research and Development Policy: A First Encounter*. Proceedings of the research-policy dialog during the International Rice Research Conference 16-17 February 1995 Los Baños, Philippines, IRRI, pp. 31-57, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Swaminathan, M.S. and G.T. Castillo (2000). *Foreword*, in: Almekinders, C., and W. de Boef (Eds.), *Encouraging diversity: the conservation and development of plant genetic resources*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>23</sup> Castillo, G.T. (2000). The IRRC at an opportune time, in: Palis, F.G., G.R. Singleton, M.C. Casimero and B. Hardy (Eds.), *Research to impact: case studies for natural resource management for irrigated rice in Asia*, IRRI, pp. 363-365, p. 365.

<sup>24</sup> [IRRI blog](#) of Thursday, 23 January 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1997). *Research Partnerships: Issues, lessons, results and dreams for sustainable development*. AgRen (Agricultural Research & Extension Network) Network paper 71.

<sup>26</sup> These were also listed in: Castillo, G.T., P.U. Bartolini and F.L. Porcincula (2005). Research Partnerships: Who Pays and Who Benefits, in: Gonsalves, J., T. Becker, A. Braun, D. Campilan, H. De Chavez, E. Fajber, M. Kapiriri, J. Rivaca-Caminade and R. Vernooij (Eds.). *Participatory Research and Development for Agriculture and Natural Resource Management: A Sourcebook, Volume 2 Enabling Participatory Research and Development*, CIP-Users' Perspectives With Agricultural Research and Development (UPWARD), Philippines, and IDRC, Canada, pp. 69-74, pp. 71; 73.



and maintain it in order to keeping the people challenged and available. For instance, there was much more to learn from cross fertilization over sectors, for instance from health programmes. Interdisciplinarity was therefore a decisive skill to develop. She illustrated that it was often considered limited within the life sciences at the international level. The Wageningen DLO partner recommended to only work with social scientists to facilitate at the national level.<sup>27</sup> Later she used “hybridized” interdisciplinarity which professionals could acquire by training, personal inclination and interests, exposure to, and experience in more than one type of subject matter and one discipline. This would enable to function within a system or at least bringing a broader perspective than social science alone or agriculture alone.<sup>28</sup>

## Ensuring Sustainability

Gelia closed her 1997 contribution with sharing her experience that partnerships had to be given time to mature and required high leadership qualities and endurance. She emphasized that partnerships produced more than research results: human relationships and other added value as synergy; a healthy, diverse diet of perspectives in research; and the bonding between national and international scientists facing the tough tasks of mutual learning and developing mutual respect across all skill levels. Let us end with her final statement: “*When the best of science and scientists are devoted to the problems of those who have less in life, science brings equity and humanity in development. In our search for sustainability, science also forges an alliance with indigenous knowledge. Even the 'weak' can contribute to the 'strong'.*” (Castillo 1997, p.8)

## Selected Highlights from her Publications:

See WUR library search: [au:\(Castillo Gelia\) | Search | WUR Library \(worldcat.org\)](#)

See Google Scholar through WUR library: [Castillo, G.T. - Google Scholar](#)

See IRRI search (most online open access): <https://www.irri.org/search?search=Gelia+Castillo>

- Castillo, G.T. (1961). [Occupational Sex Roles as Perceived by Filipino Adolescents](#), *Philippine Sociological Review* 9, pp. 2-11.
- Castillo, G.T., and J.F. Pua (1963). Research Notes on the Contemporary Filipino Family, *Philippine Journal of Home Economics* 14(3), pp. 4-35.
- Castillo, G.T. (1965). Toward Understanding the Filipino Farmer, *The Philippine Agriculturist* 49(6-7), pp. 423-437.
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- Castillo, G.T., F.V. Cordero, and M.R. Tanco (1967). [A Scale to Measure Family Level of Living in Four Barrios of Los Baños, Laguna](#), *Philippine Sociological Review* 15(3/4), 67-87.
- Castillo, G.T. (1968). Technology and Social Change. The case of Miracle Rice, *Solidarity* 3(12), pp. 37-47.
- Castillo, G.T. (1968). A New Look at Old Concepts in Development, *Solidarity* 3(5), p. 14; written as 1967 paper at Cornell during visiting scholarship as associate professor, 1966/67.
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<sup>27</sup> Castillo, G.T. (1990). Interdisciplinary Work: Patterns and Practicalities, in: Proceedings of the Asian Training of Trainers on Farm Household Diagnostic Skills. Institute of Forest Conservation, UPLB, Philippines, 11-18 November, pp. 93-104; Reprinted: Castillo, G. (2006). [Idem](#), *Philippine sociological review*, pp. 34-46.

<sup>28</sup> Castillo, G.T. (2006). *ibidem*, p. 36.

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- Castillo, G.T. (1971). [Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: An analysis of changing social images in a developing society](#), *Asian Studies. Journal of critical perspectives on Asia* 9(1), pp. 24-36.
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- Castillo, G.T., A.M. de Guzman, S.L. Pahud, and L.P. Domingo (1973). The Green Revolution at the Village Level: A Philippine case study 1963-1970, in: Shand, R.T. (Ed.), [Technical Change in Asian Agriculture](#), Canberra, pp. 202-234.
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