The process of writing this book has been not only an intellectual but also a personal journey. Along this journey, my thoughts have been shaped by the numerous people whom I encountered. I thank every person who has shared an insight or left an imprint in some way. There are, however, a few people I would like to mention specifically.

First, I would like to thank Professor Saturnino “Jun” Borras at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, where I completed my doctorate in 2017. I had the serendipity of meeting Professor Borras at Myanmar’s first National Land Symposium in December 2012, for which he was the keynote speaker. At that time, I had just started working on the land issues in Myanmar, and so I reached out to him for some advice. After a few exchanges, he challenged me to become an expert on Myanmar land issues, a challenge that would eventually shape my life in wonderful and unexpected ways. Professor Borras was key to shaping the “puzzle,” as he liked to call it, that I went on to solve. I would also like to thank Professor Max Spoor, who was my first promoter at ISS, a steadfast supporter and mentor, and crucial to the completion of this study.

My heartfelt thanks go to Professor Ardeth Thawnghmung, Professor Mike McGovern, Professor Yoshihiro Nakanishi, Professor Miles Kenney-Lazar, Graham Teskey, and Anders Kirstein Møller for reviewing full drafts of my manuscript at different stages of revision and for providing invaluable advice and moral support over the long process. I am grateful to Dr. Ashley South and Dr. Jared Bissinger for further improving my manuscript with fact-checking. I would also like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who painstakingly read the manuscript and provided highly constructive feedback for improving it.

I am grateful to Masako Ikeda, executive editor at the University of Hawai`i Press, for offering me guidance during the publication process and working diligently to shepherd the book to print. I am extremely thankful for the services provided by the press, including meticulous copyediting, layout, and design, as well as facilitation of a smooth publication process.
It is impossible to express what Myanmar, my second home after the United States, and my community there mean to me. Arriving there in 2008 to respond to Cyclone Nargis, I was fortunate to have stayed for a decade, deeply involved with the country’s transition efforts. I am indebted to all the friends I made in Myanmar who shared their lives with me and taught me so much in the process. There are too many to name. The brave activists and rural people who told me their stories hold a special place in my heart.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest love and gratitude to my parents, Kai Leong and Han Kem Mark, to whom I dedicate this book. Carrying their passports with the label “peasant” stamped on them, they took the courageous step to leave China right after the Cultural Revolution. Arriving in New York City in 1981, they labored to make a better life for their four children. They inspire me to dedicate my life to help others who dream of the same.