Preface

The chapters of this book represent an extensively edited and rewritten version of four lectures originally given at the head office of Minerva Shobō in Kyoto between May and November 2014 (30 May, 4 July, 25 July, and 7 November). Although I was not so naive as to think that a simple transcript of my lectures could be turned into a book without a fair amount of rewriting, I must admit that the process of correcting and reworking the text ended up taking much longer than I had expected.

Part of the reason was the time it took to check for mistakes and omissions. But I also struggled with a dilemma that is inherent in any attempt to analyze current affairs. Sooner or later, the work of analysis and writing must come to an end, but the global situation continues to evolve on a daily basis. The manuscript inevitably starts to lose its freshness from the moment it is sent to the publisher.

I tried to think of a way to minimize the effects of this problem. My solution was to focus on long-term national strategy alongside the structures and systems of state. Of course, only the reader can decide whether this attempt was successful.

Anything written about current affairs must have an arbitrary cutoff line somewhere, or the book will never be finished. For this project, I defined my “status quo” as the end of August 2015. Of course, several important developments have already happened since, at least one of which has the potential to affect the analysis in this book considerably: the elections that took place in Myanmar on 8 November 2015. The elections brought a victory for Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) that was much more convincing than I had expected.
As I write this (12 November), the final results have not yet been announced, but it looks certain that the NLD will command a majority in the lower house. It is now likely that representatives from the NLD will be chosen as speaker and president when the Assembly of the Union convenes in 2016, and that “power-sharing” will become the dominant narrative within national politics in Myanmar. This will not be easy, given the gulf between the views on Myanmar’s political future held by Aung San Suu Kyi (as well as the NLD and the majority of the population that supports them) and those of the commander-in-chief and the armed forces.

This much is clear from statements made by both sides regarding the present constitution. Will the NLD be able to maintain political stability in partnership with the armed forces? Or, prompted by the overwhelming popular support that exists for democratization and liberalization, will it choose instead to regard the armed forces as an adversary and make changing the constitution the central plank of its policy? It is a delicate situation, one that will need to be watched carefully.

In writing this book, I received extremely valuable comments and feedback from many people. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Miya Kazuho at Kyoto Seika University, Assistant Professor Takagi Yūsuke at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), and Horikawa Kentarō, my editor at Minerva Shobō. As always, I benefited immensely from my discussions with Caroline Hau. I am extremely grateful to all these people and to everyone else who helped put the book together.

Much of the original research that went into the book was carried out under the auspices of a grant-in-aid from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for the project Southeast Asia in a Time of East Asian Transformation (principal investigator: Shiraishi Takashi; JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 23330052) and the Emerging State Project (principal investigator: Sonobe Tetsushi; JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 15K21728). I would like to take this opportunity to record my appreciation for this valuable support.

—12 November 2015