

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support, assistance, and encouragement of my advisors, family and friends during the years leading up to this dissertation.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my advisor, Professor Edward H. Chow, for providing me with guidance, wisdom, and patience. I have benefited greatly from his precious comments, expertise, and perspectives and have also learned the essentials of how to be a successful researcher and speaker. His high standards were always hard to meet, but they have often kept on a guiding light. It has been a privilege and honour to work with and learn from Edward. I hope I can follow his footsteps in my academic career.

I am also indebted to Professors Shean-Bii Chiu, Gang Shyy, Jie-Haun Lee, and Yu-Jane Liu for serving on my dissertation committee members and for their careful review of this dissertation, insightful comments and gracious assistance. Their criticisms have lead to innumerable extensions for my research, ensuring I have considered all alternatives.

Thanks to all my cronies for their help and constant encouragements, especially to my officemates for creating a happy environment for work. I would also like to thank and present my deepest sense of gratefulness to my lovely parents who have been dedicated their lives to support their children's education.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Wen-Chang Huang, who, with love, unwavering support, and encouragement, is always there sharing every moment of the process as well as many other important life endeavors.

Emma Y. Hsu