Foreword

For nearly twenty years Becky Chiu has been engaging with China. During that time she has been witness to an amazing transformation of the Chinese economic scene, as both observer from the outside and participant from the inside. Commercial reasons prevent us from giving full details of those business activities, and in any case it would not be appropriate to dwell on them here. Suffice it to say that she has established numerous joint ventures between large Western multinational firms and Chinese partners, sat on boards of some of them, rubbed shoulders and conducted business with the heads of many state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and represented both provincial governments and the national government of China in overseas operations. That experience has given her a unique perspective on the problems of the SOEs. At the same time, it has opened doors and provided access that has enabled case studies of the operations of SOEs to be undertaken and reported here.

The second-named author is no stranger to China. He spent an extended period in 1998 at the Economics Department of Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, one of the leading industrial centres in China, teaching and interacting with university staff and executives of Sinopec. Their experiences provided an invaluable learning curve. A further supported study tour of China was made in 2003. In between, he supervised Becky's PhD dissertation on state-owned enterprises in China from which a lot of the background material and three of the case studies were drawn. It was from this collaboration, and the very close friendship that developed with the Lewis family during Becky's trips to Adelaide, that this book developed.

A number of people have assisted with the volume. Ron McIver of the University of South Australia kindly allowed us to read drafts of his dissertation on bank reform in China, and use some of the data collated. Janet Matheson willingly typed all of the tables and drew a graph. Kelly Alexandra kindly prepared the figures. Edward Elgar Publishers provided strong support for the project. A special thanks is due to Kay Lewis who uncomplainingly typed the whole manuscript. Finally, gratitude is expressed also to those officials from state enterprises and government bodies in China who consented to be interviewed, and so willingly gave of their time. The study would not have been possible without their participation and help.

A final observation concerns the stylistic conventions used. There are two main ways of transliterating Chinese names into English, the older Wade-Giles system and the more recent Pinyin form (the official Mainland system). We have employed the Pinyin style, for example Beijing instead of Peking and Mao Zedung not Mao Tse-tung. However, to avoid confusion in less familiar cases, we have added the Wade-Giles form in brackets, for example Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek). Also, to assist readers, some of the abbreviations employed in the book are given in the List of Abbreviations.