

Foreword

When historians look back at our period, it is likely that few developments will appear quite so striking as the economic emergence of China. When those historians step back a bit further, though, they will see that this was not an emergence, but a re-emergence. China may well be on course to become the world's largest economy, but it has held that title before – little more than a hundred years ago.

Our knowledge of China's long-term economic development is based in large part on the work of the author of this book, Angus Maddison. In a series of remarkable studies over the years, Mr. Maddison has traced the course of China and the world's economy over the past 2000 years. This is a staggering intellectual achievement, and one with which the OECD is proud to be associated. His work has deepened immeasurably our understanding of the long-term growth of the global economy – the challenges that were met and the opportunities that were missed.

The world faces a new set of economic opportunities and challenges, and China lies at the heart of them. Years of phenomenal growth have made China one of the engines of the global economy, bringing great benefits: the lives of millions of Chinese have been transformed, providing them with new opportunities for work, travel and personal development. But there are challenges that need to be addressed if China is to continue on this growth path. They include increasing inequality in income distribution; regional disparities; population ageing; environmental degradation and impediments to innovation. Yet, by overcoming those, the Chinese economy will provide the foundation to future prosperity and wellbeing of its population.

In recent years, OECD has worked ever more closely with China to examine issues such as these, sharing insights we have gained from our member countries and learning from the extraordinary experience of this country. Our analysis has focused on issues such as governance, the economy, agriculture, innovation and environmental performance, as well as its growing economic relationships with countries in Africa and South America.

Now, as this book – the 2nd edition of *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run* – goes to press, OECD is beginning a new phase of our relationship, a process we call “enhanced engagement”. A deepening of our ties with China is indeed essential if OECD is to continue to play its role in developing responses to global policy challenges. To prepare for where we are going, of course, we must first understand from where we have come. Thanks to Angus Maddison, we have never been better equipped to do so.

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Secretary–General of the OECD

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