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978-1-108-41867-6 — Religion and Charity: The Social Life of Goodness in Chinese Societies

Robert P. Weller, C. Julia Huang, Keping Wu, Lizhu Fan

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Religion and Charity

Free markets alone do not work effectively to solve certain kinds of human problems, such as education, elderly care, or disaster relief. Nor have markets ever been the sole solution to the psychological challenges of death, suffering, or injustice. Instead, we find a major role for the nonmarket institutions of society – the family, the state, and social institutions. The first in-depth anthropological study of charities in contemporary Chinese societies, this book focuses on the unique ways that religious groups have helped solve the problems of social well-being. Using comparative case studies in China, Taiwan, and Malaysia from the 1980s on, it identifies new forms of religious philanthropy as well as new ideas of social “good,” including different forms of political merit-making, new forms of civic selfhood, and the rise of innovative social forms, including increased leadership by women. The book finally argues that the spread of these ideas is an incomplete process, with many alternative notions of goodness continuing to be influential.

ROBERT P. WELLER is Professor of Anthropology and Research Associate at the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University.

C. JULIA HUANG is Professor of Anthropology at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.

KEPING WU is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangdong.

LIZHU FAN is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Globalization and Religious Studies program at Fudan University, Shanghai.

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C. Julia Huang

National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan

Keping Wu

Sun Yat-sen University, Guangdong

with Lizhu Fan

Fudan University, Shanghai



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