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Preface

This volume has developed out of the discussions that took place in the panel “Buddhism and International Relief Work,” convened at the American Academy of Religion annual conference in Montreal, Canada, on November 8, 2009. It was attended by some of the contributors in this volume: Monica Lindberg Falk, Elizabeth J. Harris, Hiroko Kawanami, Jung-Chang Wang, and the discussant was Geoffrey Samuel. The aim of the panel was to explore Buddhist engagement with human suffering in the aftermath of the natural disasters—earthquakes, tsunami, cyclones, and so on—that struck many Asian countries in the preceding decade, and to highlight the work of local religious communities and international aid organizations engaged in relief work. This volume is an extension of the discussion to understand how local Buddhists, both monastic and lay, as well as members of international organizations become involved in community-based activities and work as part of civil society. Even monks in the most conservative Buddhist tradition in Southeast Asia have come out to engage actively with the survivors and families of the deceased to relieve their anguish and suffering. The contributors have conducted fieldwork in religious (mostly Buddhist) communities in Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Taiwan, China, Japan, and India, in order to explore their respective engagement with relief work. This volume recounts the nature of international relief work conducted in the aftermath of natural disasters and analyzes how the engagement of international aid organizations has impacted the local Buddhist communities.

We wish to thank the contributors of this volume for keeping their faith in us despite the many upheavals we experienced during the project. We would like to acknowledge Derek Maher for his earlier comments and editing the earlier draft of some of the chapters. Chiu Tzu-Lung has checked the Pinyin and Taiwanese terms. We also express our special gratitude to Robyn Curtis, the acquisition editor at Palgrave Macmillan

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