The recent shift in Chinese government policy towards HIV/AIDS has been extraordinary. In three short years Chinese policy has shifted from benign neglect to the promotion of most international best practices. The outbreak of SARS in the winter/spring of 2002–2003 alerted the Chinese government to the dangers of epidemic, life threatening infectious diseases that could undermine economic growth.

This volume, the first English language book on China’s AIDS epidemic, provides a picture of the current state of the epidemic, a social science and interdisciplinary perspective on gaps in the response, and a blueprint for needed actions. The book’s editors are leading experts on China’s AIDS epidemic, health and political systems. Contributors comprise some of the world’s leading Chinese and international researchers, policy-makers, and civil society representatives working on HIV/AIDS in China. The multi-disciplinary work provides a critically needed social science perspective and analysis of the epidemic, offers a framework for thinking about the spread of HIV in China, and includes suggestions for an effective policy response that also addresses social determinants.

The edited book is made up of papers originally presented at a Harvard University workshop on Social Policies and HIV/AIDS in China in May 2004. With a preface by Paul Farmer, the book examines for the first time many of the issues that have become routine in discussions of AIDS in Africa but have received little in the way of critical and sustained examination in the Chinese setting: the balance between prevention and treatment programs; the provision of medical care and social aid for greatly impoverished rural communities; how to deal with AIDS orphans; ethical, legal, and human rights issues from confidentiality in testing to patient rights; the resources (financial, human, bureaucratic) required to implement public health and multi sectoral policies and programs; how to handle the terrible stigma which surrounds AIDS patients and the risk behaviors that contribute to it. Chapters examine gaps in research and data currently used by the Chinese government to formulate AIDS policies, social impacts the epidemic in poor communities, issues surrounding the roll-out of AIDS treatment and access to effective medicines, local governance and national-local coordination of public policies, health system capacity to respond to AIDS, and China’s worsening AIDS orphan situation.

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AIDS and Social Policy in China

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