

Australia could learn from China's foster care system

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UNSW research shows Australia has much to learn from China's high quality, sustainable foster care system.

Caring for Orphaned Children in China, summarises more than a decade's research on China's [welfare system](#) undertaken by UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC).

The book, co-authored by Associate Professor Xiaoyuan Shang and Associate Professor Karen Fisher, provides concrete examples of how

the experiences of [orphans](#) are changing in China, and that a mixed welfare system, where state provision supplements family and community care, is an effective policy direction for orphans.

Associate Professor Fisher says international media coverage of orphans in China is "dated and ill-informed" and neglects new government policies toward [foster care](#) in various parts of the country.

"One of the international scandals that people think about when they think of China is the one-child policy, which has generated stories both true and false about orphans," says Associate Professor Fisher.

"There is definitely international ignorance surrounding the treatment of orphans in China that is used to justify international adoptions. Adoption and foster care within China, where [children](#) can maintain their identity, is a better option for children and is already well organised."

There are over one million children in China who are orphaned or abandoned without any form of parental care, often as a result of parental death, incarceration, illness or disability. About 110,000 of these children are in the care of the state, with 80 per cent of these living in institutions and orphanages.

Foster care is one of the best forms of alternative care in China and is recognised by UN Guidelines as a preferred method of care.

"Foster care families in China are subject to rigorous recruitment requirements, are supported financially and offered professional support – these are the sort of arrangements that Australia yearns for," says Associate Professor Shang.

The SPRC conducted the first national research project on alternative care for orphans in China in 2001. Commissioned by UNICEF and the

Ministry of Civil Affairs, the research demonstrated significant improvements for children living with foster families rather than in an institution. As a result 20,000 orphans nationwide were moved from institutions and placed in foster care families.

Associate Professor Fisher says good foster care programs allow children to go to school, get the therapy and medical attention they need and grow up in their own community.

"These are things any Australian parent would automatically expect for their child and yet our foster care system is failing at this dismally," says Fisher. "With the research advice of Dr Shang, China is now establishing a child welfare system to protect all vulnerable children – Australia needs to learn from China's experience of establishing sustainable, quality foster care programs," she says.

"The best way a child can grow up is surrounded by their own culture and identity with the support of a family and their own community."

Provided by University of New South Wales

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