**ESRC Bid Proposal – *Investigating ‘the best interests of the child’ in state care in China (BIC China): An international collaborative approach -* Monica Dowling**

The UK interdisciplinary team for the research bid are: myself (PI) and Co-Is Phil Bates (Law- Plymouth University) and Dr Jane McCarthy (Social Sciences -Open University), post-doctoral researchers Dr Katie Hoffman and Dr Guangyu Freear (OU –Business Development Unit), Dr Peter Selman from Newcastle University (expert consultant) and Professor Giles Mohan (expert consultant). Our Chinese collaborators are Professor Han and Dr LiYing from the School of Labour and Human Resources, Renmin University.

We are collaborating with a number of high profile organisations in China, the UK and the US:

* Renmin University, Beijing – one of the top University’s in China for Social Sciences (similar to LSE in the UK) – they are co-investigators on the Bid
* The Chinese Government - The Social Welfare and Social Progress Research Institute of China, Ministry of Civil Affairs
* Holt International –a US international non-government organisation (INGO) who have worked in China for the last 19 years both in providing child care and as an international adoption agency
* The Chinese Social Welfare Association – a national Chinese welfare organisation that can help with access to officials and institutions
* The Sino British Fellowship Trust, (contributes funding to the Royal Society and the British Academy) – they have contributed £10,000 for a pilot study visit to Renmin University in July 2014

Over the last two and a half years, they have all invested funding, resources and a written commitment to support this ground breaking research bid. The ESRC bid is for approximately £1.2million – (30% will be paid to Renmin University for their work on the Bid). The Bid will employ six post-doctoral researchers – three in China and three in the UK.

**Summary of research proposal -** The UN Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption includes a subsidiarity principle, under which intercountry adoption is seen as the best course of action only where permanent family care cannot be achieved within the child’s country of origin. With the tenfold decline in intercountry adoptions in China over the last five years, this research will investigate the situation for children left in state care and the extent to which national and international child care practices coincide in addressing their progress to permanent family care. Very little is known about the interpretation and implementation of the Hague Convention in relation to children in public care systems and information about Chinese child welfare practices is also very limited, despite global concern for the welfare of children in institutions. This research aims to contribute to knowledge on the reconciliation of international child care standards within local contexts including assessing the role of international NGOs in working with host countries. It utilizes a multi-disciplinary collaborative approach with Renmin University in China to examine the ‘best interests’ of the child in state care from legal, sociological, statistical, social policy and management perspectives.

**Benefits and impact of the research:**

* To Interrogate culturally variable understandings of the ‘best interests of the child’ in research, policy and practice
* To propose research recommendations to the Hague Convention regarding the subsidiarity principle and the role of government and international NGOs in providing state care for children
* To develop a significant presence in collaborative international research concerning children in state care in China and to develop meaningful dialogues and practice benefits for international, national and local actors involved in the welfare of children
* To contribute to knowledge on the development practices of international NGOs from the UK and US and provide research recommendations and training for those working with children in state care in China
* To create a pioneering Chinese/UK Interactive website and app that will enhance the impact of the research both in China and the UK
* To establish and evaluate an original methodological approach between Chinese and UK academics

Our findings will enable us to contribute to a greater understanding of how international legislation and policy is applied in practice[[1]](#footnote-1), and how in China – a major new global power –a sensitive and controversial topic area – children in state care - can be explored using innovative and novel methods

1. ESRC strategic priority 2011 – 2015: ‘Influencing behaviour and informing interventions’ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)