

Roots and Reach: The Evolution of the ISW Program in China

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The growth of the Instructional Skills Workshop program in Mainland China over the last ten years has been unprecedented and provides the Network with a stellar example of a national initiative to establish leadership and support for its phenomenal growth. As of May 2026, there are 1371 registered ISW Facilitators in Mainland China, more than the current number of registered Facilitators from Canada and all other countries combined!

National Taiwan University had hosted its first ISW in 2009 and its first FDW in 2013 with the assistance of Canadian Trainers. However, the introduction of ISW to Mainland China primarily started in 2013 with Canadian Facilitators visiting different parts of the country at the invitation of faculty members. Some of these faculty members had taken the ISW as graduate students or visiting scholars in Canada and were interested in introducing the program to colleagues. As a result, ISW began to be implemented in numerous institutions.

What follows is an approximate timeline of the **first** offerings of ISWs in Mainland China from 2013 up until the end of 2019.

Date	Institution hosting ISW
06.2013	Baotou Vocational and Technical College
09.2013	National University of Defence Technology
05.2015	Logistical Engineering University
01.2016	Beijing Normal University
03.2017	Shandong University
05.2017	Ningxia Medical University
07.2017	Shanghai Jiao Tong University
08.2017	Wuhan Polytechnic University
09. 2017	Chongqing University
11.2017	Northwestern Polytechnical University
12.2017	Southwestern University of Finance
01.2018	Beijing Jiao Tong University
05.2018	Zhejiang University of Technology
06.2018	Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University

06.2018	Inner Mongolia University of Technology
09. 2018	Yunnan Normal University
11.2018	Minzu University of China
01.2019	Zhejiang Chinese Medical University
01.2019	Qiannan Normal University for Nationalities
01.2019	Beijing University of Technology
04.2019	Beijing University of Chemical Technology
05.2019	Huaqiao University
05.2019	Huanghuai University
05.2019	Beijing Forestry University
05.2019	Xi'an Eurasia University
05.2019	Zhejiang International Maritime University
06.2019	Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine
06.2019	Jiangnan University
06.2019	University of Science and Technology Liaoning
07.2019	Shandong Medical and Pharmaceutical University
07.2019	Xi'an University of Technology
07.2019	Longyan University
07.2019	Teachers College of Beijing Union University
11.2019	Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine
11.2019	Naval University of Engineering
11.2019	China University of Political Science and Law
11.2019	Jilin University of Finance and Economics
12.2019	Jilin Agricultural University
12.2019	Jiaxing University
12.2019	Zhejiang College, Zhejiang University of Technology
12.2019	Shijiazhuang Tiedao University
Note: 2013 - 2018	National Taiwan University hosted faculty from Mainland China, conferring 30 ISW certificates and 33 FDW certificates.

If we have missed any institution that started ISW in Mainland China prior to 2020, please let us know!

The ISW program has been a huge hit, transcending cultural differences by celebrating diverse communities, peer support, self-reflection and a safe learning environment. With a growing number of Chinese post-secondary institutions participating in ISW, the program was expanding at considerable speed, giving rise to some concerns as to its ability to maintain quality standards. In October 2020, a WeChat (email) group was set up so that Facilitators and Trainers could communicate with each other. That group quickly reached its 500-member capacity, and a second WeChat group was required, then a third and a fourth. The ISW Network Executive Team soon become inundated with Registry applications from Mainland China and, because of the language difference and technical challenges accessing Canadian ISW website resources, the Network could no longer support the number of new Facilitators asking for ISW accounts. It was evident we needed to put a different plan in place.

In 2022, Jill Grose and Diane Morrison, on behalf of the ISW Executive Team, began meeting regularly with Saiqiang Li and Wenshya Lee to provide oversight and direction for a new ISW Network in Mainland China. Together, in 2023, we established the China ISW Core Group, comprised of thirteen ISW Trainers from across Mainland China, with Drs. Li and Lee serving in the role of co-chairs. The teaching centre at Wuhan Polytechnic University volunteered to create an ISW section on their website that could provide information about ISW with a mechanism for registering and posting the names of newly qualified Chinese Facilitators (isw.whpu.edu.cn/zcRegistration.htm). As mentioned earlier, there are currently 1371 Facilitators from over 200 institutions on the Mainland China ISW Registry.

Over the last few years, the China ISW Core Group has established various processes and policies to guide the growth of the ISW Network in Mainland China. There are now policies for the translation of documents, a mechanism for sharing new resources, a Trainer WeChat Group to support communications among Trainers, and a rigorous application and mentorship process for ISW Facilitators to become FDW Trainers, involving stringent and diversified criteria adjudicated by peers. This new emphasis on a process overseen by the China ISW Core Group provided a measure of quality control that ensured Facilitators had sufficient experience to move into the Trainer role and uphold the values of the ISW program. At the time of writing this article, there are 37 Trainers and six Trainer-Trainees in Mainland China. In addition, some of the processes introduced by the China Core Group have been modified and adopted by the ISW Network Executive Team for use across the ISW Network, as a result of our collaboration and shared interests.

In recent years, ISW training and the application of the BOPPPS model have increasingly become a research hotspot. A literature search using keywords such as “BOPPPS”, “ISW”, and “instructional skills workshops” identified 382 Chinese-language papers published in core Chinese academic journals, underscoring the growing scholarly attention to this field.

The China ISW Network has continued to offer numerous professional development opportunities for its Facilitators and Trainers. An annual conference is now offered that welcomes over 100 Facilitators face to face as well as virtual attendees to various sessions on ISW practices and principles. This year it will be held at Northwest Normal University (NWNNU) in Lanzhou under the leadership of Saiqiang Li and Yan He, the director of the NWNNU Center for Teaching and Learning.

That a 47-year-old grassroots Canadian program should be thriving in Mainland China and in so many different countries and cultures is testament to its design principles, flexibility and core values. It is also testament to the thousands of volunteers across the globe who have become Facilitators and Trainers over the last five decades, who are passionate about teaching and learning and who have dedicated countless hours to keeping this program alive and well.