

The Making of *The Wandering Earth*

A Film Production Handbook

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Chapter 1

Summoning the Heroes

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In 2014, with brilliant box office sales from his second film *My Old Classmate*, Frant Gwo received attention and expectations of various kinds, which in turn entitled him to join the “Rising Generation of Chinese Film Production.” At the end of that year, he paid a short-term but in-depth “academic visit” to Paramount Studios in the United States with a delegation organized by China Film Administration. On the day of graduation, Paramount held a farewell ceremony. Apart from expressing gratitude for Paramount’s enthusiasm and consideration in the past few days, the young Chinese directors also expressed their good wishes and longings for further communications and exchanges between the two countries. After all, this was a visit on behalf of the whole Chinese film industry. Frant Gwo raised a very ordinary question:

“Do you usually watch Chinese films?”

“No.” The U.S. filmmakers answered, frankly.

“Why not?”

The American friends’ answer was somewhat depressing, but fortunately it was not so difficult to understand: it was due to language barriers and subtitles. Many Americans are not very interested in films that require reading subtitles.

Perhaps it was because of the honest talk at the dinner party and the disappointment aroused by that “No” that Frant Gwo secretly made up his mind: “In ten years, you will have to learn to watch films with subtitles, because there will be plenty of Chinese films in your theatres.”

This might seem like an angry remark, a crazy prediction, or even a joke, but in Frant Gwo’s mind, it is a declaration as well as a summoning.

In 2015, Frant Gwo said to Li Jing, the agent who helped him manage contracts, “Please don’t push me to take shooting tasks any more. I’ve decided to make a science fiction film. I understand that I haven’t been making any films for two years, and during this period you are also between jobs – but can we wait a little longer together?”

At that moment, with two successful cinematic films (one of which had achieved excellent box office results), Frant Gwo would seem to be able to have everything in this field. He would easily get investment as well as recognition and support from his peers, making whatever he would like to make. However, the harsh reality was less satisfying.

Ever since the success of *My Old Classmate* in 2013, most of the screenplays offered to Frant Gwo were focused on the themes of youth and love. Even some big Hollywood companies came to him promising that funds were ready for him to start

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shooting as long as he agreed. All of the prudent investors hoped that Frant Gwo could replicate his success in a familiar field instead of taking on a new, challenging, and untested one. However, when Frant Gwo put aside the scripts brought by these investors and talked eagerly about his idea of making a science fiction film, most of them quickly quieted and warned him worriedly:

“Domestic science fiction? Is it possible to make it? Will an audience buy it?

Don’t you think it would be weird?”

“Hard science fiction or soft science fiction?”

“How much would it cost? Can the cost be recovered in the domestic market?”

“Are there any performers willing to play in a sci-fi film?”

“No one else has ever tried it before. Why are you so confident in making it?”

These are the questions Frant Gwo had been asking himself again and again, and his self-doubt was sometimes crueler than the doubts expressed by investors. Furthermore, he consulted with his close friends as well, who included Liu Yin [translator’s note: aka Michael Liu], the photographer who produced *LEE’s Adventure* with him; Gao Ang, the production designer, who was enrolled in making *The Three-Body Problem*; Ding Yanlai, who took part in the visual effects for *Mo Jin – The Lost Legend*, etc. And there was Gong Geer, a friend who had known Frant Gwo for more than ten years since they lived together in a low-rent house in Beijing in pursuit of their film dreams.

Over drinks, the friends did not talk a lot about their worries and concerns for the film; instead, they made a simple promise, saying “If you are going to try it, I will stand with you!”

At the time, Frant Gwo did not know that there was a company looking for a man who could answer these questions.

In 2013, the total box office of the film market in China exceeded 20 billion RMB. The rapid growth of the market in the previous years provided China Film Co. Ltd. (China Film Corporation) with much clearer judgment: domestic blockbusters showed the possibility of recovering costs from their own markets, and more attention could be paid to VFX-heavy films (especially films that need a lot of visual effects to support their production). Therefore, great opportunities ought to be created for the development of domestic sci-fi blockbusters from scratch. As the saying goes, “opportunity favors those who are prepared.” China Film Corporation set the stage for future success by obtaining the film rights for *The Wandering Earth*, *The Micro-Era*, and *The Supernova Era* by Liu Cixin, as well as investment to produce *Wolf Totem*, *The Great Wall*, and *The Secret of Immortal Code*.

However, during the implementation of these projects, notable problems emerged. Great gaps in cultural knowledge and aesthetic differences existed between domestic and foreign audiences. In addition, there were fundamental differences in crew positions and production procedures between camera teams from China and abroad, not to mention the communication barriers caused by language differences. Was it wise to stake the success of a film on the understanding and effectiveness of translators discussing art?

They say God helps those who help themselves. The Chinese filmmakers needed to find their own solutions to problems, either from technology borrowed from others or from the experiences they have learned.

It was at such a critical point that Frant Gwo and *The Wandering Earth* encountered each other.

It was in the middle of 2015 when the branch company of China Film Corporation came to me. After thorough consideration, I felt that *The Wandering Earth* was the only suitable film to produce that time.

I read *The Wandering Earth* quite a long time ago, and was deeply impressed. Da Liu [translator's note: nickname for Liu Cixin among sci-fi fans] wrote it in 1999 and published it in the magazine *Science Fiction World* in 2000. The plot of the novel is relatively simple, telling the story of how human beings try to survive when the Sun is doomed. In the story, the Sun's destruction will come through continuous expansion, during which time it will swell to such an extent that it engulfs the Earth. The only way for mankind to survive is to push the Earth away from its present orbit. Human beings install 10,000 planetary engines on the Earth to propel it away from our familiar sun, heading for a solar system near Alpha Centauri located 4.2 light-years away.

The novel was actually very short, just a little more than 20,000 words. But it outlined a dramatic backstory and setting, which was condensed in the life experience of the narrator as an embodiment of the whole planet's wandering.

Science fiction has been my dream since I was young. It was the dream of making a sci-fi film that drove me to be a director.

Like the heroes in his film, Frant Gwo embarked upon an unknown adventure.

There were neither flowers nor applause, but endless questions, difficulties, and obstacles coming to him. Frant Gwo stepped into an unknown landscape, leaving the familiar world behind. Almost everyone wondered how he would take the first step and what he would experience.

He had just one purpose – to answer a question with all his efforts:

“Can the Chinese make their own VFX-heavy science fiction films?”

Hard times: the Chinese sci-fi film story beyond imagination

With the gradual maturation of the Chinese film market, the standards and effects of commercial films improved markedly. Success factors such as all-star casts and high-volume media promotion are well documented; we also know that an emotional, romantic film can refresh our understanding of life and a comedy film with an excellent story might make us happier and more confident. But when it came to sci-fi films, the filmmakers knew little about norms and standards or the ways to create special visual effects.

1. What does a domestic sci-fi film look like?

As a film director, Frant Gwo pays great attention to the importance of film categories, and he has already earned experience with an accomplished genre film. However, as the director of *The Wandering Earth*, a domestic sci-fi film, Frant Gwo and his team were at first confused about its classification and positioning.

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There is no such genre (as science fiction) in China, so I don't know how to define it. It feels like going on a blind date. You don't even know who you are going to meet, a man or a woman. The only thing for sure is that it is not like any Hollywood science fiction films, definitely not.

(Frant Gwo, Director)

At present, the biggest problem in making science fiction films in China is that the audience has seen too many Hollywood sci-fi films and may have been greatly influenced by them. The moment they see some conceptual designs and some scenes, they would think: "Oh, this is quite like a science fiction. That's cool."

(Gao Ang, Production Designer)

The entire domestic audience has been looking forward to a Chinese science fiction movie in Hollywood style. Many Chinese directors or screenwriters dream of producing a sci-fi film as influential as such films from Europe or the United States. However, without any knowledge about the origin and the development of this genre they could only learn some superficial techniques. On the other hand, some domestic sci-fi films are based on far-fetched stories; for example, an uploader's live stream of contact with aliens on Kwai [translator's note: a short video app] are too shallow to be taken seriously. Therefore, I believe these factors must be balanced.

(Yan Dongxu, Screenwriter)

To be frank, domestic audiences have been influenced by Hollywood films, including me. But when we are going to produce a Chinese sci-fi film, we should take familiar elements such as traditional culture and the features of Chinese narratives into consideration. This is like the 'Westernization Movement' in late Qing Dynasty. But what can we take from Hollywood style as a reference in this case? Could we simply make a Chinese sci-fi film by borrowing some little gizmos or some mechanical armor? Our definition of a sci-fi movie should be developed in reference to Hollywood's.

(Zhou Yi, First Associate Director)

However, when it was time to make their own science fiction film, the creators realized that it was absolutely impossible to transplant the definition and experience from Hollywood to the Chinese context without adaptation. Even if they could actually build a "science fiction" world in Hollywood style with some cool "sci-fi" effects, would the Chinese audience really buy it?

2. *How can the context of domestic science fiction be trusted?*

To believe or not to believe, that's a question for Chinese science fiction films. Even though Chinese sci-fi literature has gained fame around the world, the conversion from words to images has not yet been widely recognized. Even in the Chinese film industry, Chinese audiences may still have difficulties believing what they see on the screen, especially from science fiction films. From the start, it is cultural differences that constitute the greatest barrier.

During the story-building phase of *The Wandering Earth*, the director's team and the screenwriting team spent several months discussing the Chinese context.



Figure 1.1 Liu Qi and the others meet Li Yiyi.

The Chinese are very serious about sci-fi films. Therefore, the creators dare not imagine a good story, while the audience dare not believe it.

(Yan Dongxu, Screenwriter)

Science fiction films are different from other genres. They can only be produced in a country that is strong enough to be based on both the confidence of the audience and the credibility of the story. Both aspects are derived from the sufficient national strength of a country. For example, we may find that in many American films, when the heroes set off to save the world they have nothing to worry about because their troops can be anywhere in the world to solve all problems. Now, the Chinese are also qualified enough to start trying.

However, even if we translate all the scripts of *Iron Man* into Chinese and invest the same amount of money in the same team, replacing all the foreign performers with Chinese ones, the story would be nothing but a failure. In fact, that is the biggest obstacle in producing a Chinese sci-fi film.

(Frant Gwo, Director)

In the film *Iron Man*, Robert Downey Jr. would be regarded as the REAL Iron Man when he got dressed up in that suit. But if the audience saw the face of a Chinese performer under the mask, they would find it weird and fake. That is the problem of context. The differences in cultural contexts are always the biggest obstacles.

(Ding Yanlai, Visual Effects Supervisor)

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The most difficult task is to build a story in a Chinese context, making the whole visual system credible to the Chinese audiences. Because trust from the audience is the premise of everything, only by creating authentic settings and situations can the story of the film be established and developed further. Then the audience will trust the characters and events they see on the screen. The first step is always the most difficult.

(Zhou Yi, First Associate Director)

Another difficulty in the cultural context is our values. Western science fiction films are always bearing their conquering dreams among the oceans of stars in the universe. But the traditional Chinese protagonist may not be used to gazing into the stars above or challenging the open oceans. We are more down-to-earth. With a passion for the land, the Chinese may be more contented with a peaceful life. The love for land is deeply rooted in our own agricultural civilization. We can take the film *Braveheart* as an example here. The American audience may be quite touched and angered when Mel Gibson's head was 'chopped off' in the film because they believe freedom and equality are the foundation of their country. But this may not be so in China. A similar kind of upset may be aroused if a Chinese person's house is to be demolished or he is robbed of his house property certificate. Therefore, we must find a bridge to connect different cultures even in the same film genre.

(Frant Gwo, Director)

3. *Expectations for Chinese science fiction films*

While the producers were still trapped in the dilemma of conflicting culture contexts, trying to figure out a suitable way to produce Chinese sci-fi films, even worse news came. There were now sky-rocketing expectations for domestic sci-fi films from the market, with an ambition to overtake western films overnight. The audience was looking forward to the visual feast offered by domestic sci-fi films which might be as good as Hollywood blockbusters. For the film's investors, unrealistic expectations from the market meant putting their money at risk. Therefore, it was impossible for the producers to get the same investment for a domestic sci-fi film as for a Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster. This meant that Chinese producers had to achieve the quality of a 100-million-dollar Hollywood film on a smaller budget of 100 million RMB.

From the perspectives of investment recovery and market awareness, a successful domestic sci-fi film has to acquire the support of Chinese audiences, with their self-confidence in both the local culture and domestic science and technology as the cornerstones. The combination of the two self-confidences is the precondition for domestic sci-fi films to gain opportunities. As we have witnessed, China's economy, industry, science and technology as well as aerospace projects have been developing rapidly in recent years. Meanwhile, the fruits of the previous preparations for film production are gradually emerging. These factors helped us to accept and participate in this project as early as the preliminary preparation, which was the most difficult phase during the whole production of the film. Therefore, we

offered help to Frant Gwo and his production team in investment, production publicity and marketing, etc.

(Zhang Miao, General Manager of the
Department of Development in Beijing Culture &
Film Corporation)

There were three big concerns. The first was to provide the audience with the best viewing experience. The second was to gain reasonable profits to recover financial investments. And the third point was to help the producers express themselves with the best conditions for creation. These three aspects were totally different from one another so it would be a great challenge to coordinate them.

(Gong Geer, Producer and Screenwriter)

As the saying goes, “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.” But as the first attempt to produce a blockbuster Chinese science fiction film, the whole crew decided to try to do both. The pressure went far beyond what they had imagined.

No man’s land: the uncultivated Chinese science fiction film industry

The conversion from words to images in film production relies heavily on a complete and mature film industry, including a cohesive industrial process and technical talents with various abilities. Compared with traditional films, the “heavy industrialized” nature of *The Wandering Earth* requires far greater amounts of the original production in every scene. That means everyone on the team needs to do a lot of creative work with enthusiasm, wisdom, experience, and even taste, rather than simply doing their job mechanically. However, this also means prolonged working hours, great working pressure, and strict standards. As a result, the production team often faced the difficult problem of “You can’t always find what you need at the right time or the right cost.”

1. Talent! talent!

Recall the classic line of Uncle Li, a thief played by Ge You [translator’s note: a Chinese actor] in the film *A World without Thieves*: “What is the most expensive thing in the 21st century? Talent!”

When preparations for *The Wandering Earth* were taking shape, Gong Geer, the producer who worked with Frant Gwo to summon the team, shared the same feeling quite literally and personally: “What is the most valuable resource in Chinese science fiction film production? Talent!”

It’s quite true that the Chinese specialized talents were far from sufficient, which meant we had no other choice but to cooperate with foreign teams. The cost and obstacles in language communication were really terrible. No one in our team could speak English so it was impossible to communicate with the foreign staff efficiently. A lot of time was wasted before we were able to work together. The only solution was to establish a domestic team. It would be the only correct choice either from the aspect of common aesthetic taste or working style.

(Gong Geer, Producer and Screenwriter)

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Foreign film producers are quite professionalized and industrialized. For example, anyone on their team could finish designing an engine independently as required. But none of us has any idea about this. We were badly in need of professional talents, but could find only a few qualified people in the trade. Indeed, we don't have enough accumulations of the specialists, which might be a societal problem. Anyway, the situation has gradually improved, so the number of specialized talents would grow slowly.

(Wang Ke, from CINEMORPH SFX)

2. *Flexible production process and task division*

Zhou Yi works as First Associate Director [translator's note: usually shortened to the first AD] in the production group of *The Wandering Earth*. There is a huge difference between the understandings of this task in Hollywood and in the Chinese film industry. There is a joke in the film industry that Hollywood films are actually produced by their first AD. Although this position seems to be part of the director's crew, it actually covers some part of the producers' jobs and is considered to be the central manager during the production. In Hollywood, some first ADs might spend their whole lives doing this job, accumulating decades of experience. But in China, some first associate directors shift their career to become directors after their first few films. Therefore, Chinese first associate directors don't have to undertake all the equivalent tasks to those in the Hollywood teams.

Among the team making *The Wandering Earth*, Zhou Yi was required to take on more intensive jobs and pressures than any other first ADs. "Unfamiliarity" is the word he used to describe his feelings. This feeling was also shared by Ke Ke, who worked first as an associate director but switched to become director of UI [translator's note: UI is the short form of User Interface, referring to interactive man-machine interfaces], and Ding Yanlai, the experienced visual effects supervisor.

To me, this unfamiliarity was triggered by three factors: an unfamiliar setting in the story narrative; the unfamiliar operation mode of the production team (because some new departments and new elements had to be created from scratch); and the unfamiliar ways of coordination and cooperation which would re-arrange the settled production process and shooting methods.

(Zhou Yi, First Associate Director)

I worked as an associate director when I joined the group and was assigned the task of physical special effects and UI by Zhou Yi. At that time, no one had ever tried UI designing because no sci-fi films had yet been produced in China, nor had anyone set up a specialized department in the whole team. Nobody knew what UI is or how to do it, including me, because it was also the first time I heard this term. So I began to study UI from scratch but only found an unimaginable workload in this field. I discussed this with Zhou Yi, suggesting establishing an independent department for physical special effects, concentrating on UI design.

As for the style of UI design, we were actually learning by doing, but there was nothing to learn from. With no artwork available, we just watched some American films for reference, such as *Star Trek*, *Transformers*, *Star Wars* and *Interstellar*. Each of these films has a distinctive style of UI design. Their UI designs are too



Figure 1.2 The lighter core squad watches as Wang Lei pulls down the handle.

recognizable to be copied directly. We made many of our own designs for the director and the production design team to choose from because what we designed had to be compatible with their jobs. Therefore, we spent a lot of time coordinating and getting used to each other's working styles. This was a long process of trying, as the production design team knew nothing about it, and neither did the directors. And I knew nothing more than what they did.

(Ke Ke, Associate Director)

Later, we found that having only one dedicated full-time associate director in charge of UI was still far from enough. One night, Ke Ke, our UI director, came to the producer and director and requested a discussion. At the end of that day, once all the crew members in the group had left the film set, we stood under the six-axis platform of the transporter and discussed it. With most of the lights turned off, everything seemed gloomy and dim. Ke Ke looked to be in despair. He explained every detail in the current UI workflow and the amount of work to be done. Frankly speaking, the complexity of this task was far beyond our imagination. Ke Ke required more staff or other ways to solve the problems, and said otherwise the UI design would have to stop. Everyone listened silently with approval. Then Mr. Gong, the producer, fixed his eyes on me. The next day, I was assigned the new task of working with Ke Ke in the UI Department, being in charge of UI implementation. In fact, this was a position created out of nothing at the desperate request of the production team, striving for perfection. Then the task of UI was taken on by the whole department instead of only one person. There were many examples like this during the production.

(Shen Jingjing, Director Assistant)

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The problem lies in the industrialization of the whole process. Everyone had taken part in filmmaking before, but in a stubbornly fixed routine because that was how previous Chinese filmmakers did their jobs. However, the old approaches to the work were no longer practical in making such a new genre of film. Most of them were inapplicable, at least. The new team would have a more rigorous working process. As the director, Frant Gwo spent three or four years researching Hollywood production methods after making *My Old Classmate*. He read a lot of reference books and went to study in the United States and at the Weta Workshop. He was a quick learner and knew what could be used in our project. The mature industrial process copied from the United States could not work well in China. That was why we needed to adjust universal measures to the local conditions. The director had to combine both aspects and use them flexibly in the project. Of course, there were also twists and turns in the implementation of the project, and now we have to gradually summarize and accumulate our experiences.

(Ding Yanlai, Visual Effects Supervisor)

We are the first team in the entire industry to experience the process of producing such a VFX-heavy film. Nothing was known for sure at the very beginning, so we encountered many unexpected problems. The preparation was never sufficient, so there were many problems to solve and a lot of lessons to learn. However, our flexibility and responsibility in the decision-making process were our advantages. We worked side by side with the creators, flexibly, in terms of investment and production. This film was a pioneer, a groundbreaker. Only by finishing the project could we accumulate our experiences. That was how Hollywood grew step by step, too.

(Zhang Miao, General Manager of Film Department, Beijing Culture)

As the producer of *The Wandering Earth*, Gong Geer thought hard about hidden problems in the nascent production process for Chinese sci-fi films. As various unexpected “mistakes” had occurred again and again in previous projects, this was not a groundless concern. For example, all of the finished film materials might get lost mysteriously; productions from different post-production companies were not compatible; copyright disputes erupted over classified documents and paperwork. None of these would happen in a mature industrial system like Hollywood.

They don't have these problems in Hollywood. Due to their equivalent competences, there would be few obstacles in the coordination and cooperation between different teams either from the aspect of the configuration of hardware and software or the talent's capabilities.

(Gong Geer, Producer and Screenwriter)

3. *Value of experiences*

Apart from shortages of talent and transformations in industrial processes, lack of experience was the third dilemma the whole crew faced during the production of *The Wandering Earth*. Even in *LEE's Adventure*, Frant Gwo's debut film, science fiction

elements only played a trivial role and therefore classified the film as “soft” sci-fi film for the majority of people. In contrast, *The Wandering Earth*, featuring advanced scientific concepts and a sublime cosmic setting based on Liu Cixin’s fiction, was truly “hard” science fiction.

Nothing could be foreseen at the very beginning. The concept of such a film was completely new and unfamiliar for every AD team in Chinese mainland. The directors had to work together with the screenwriters and producers to create an entire world out of their imagination. As an executor, I worked as an organizer and supervisor at the same time, but it’s impossible for me to concentrate on every detail ranging from the art photography to the specific completion time of various props. Take a nut as an example, I could only see it as a finished product, but had no idea how it was screwed. That’s really embarrassing.”

(Zhou Yi, First Associate Director)

The Art Department was under great pressure due to lack of professional talent and experience from relevant projects, as well as a tight schedule and inadequate technical products, etc. We accumulated a lot of experience through studying many mature productions of costume films, historical films, and contemporary films, but none of them could be used in the making of a sci-fi film, which was a totally different kettle of fish. The making of *The Wandering Earth* was a process of trial and error from A to Z.

(Gao Ang, Production Designer)

We are trailblazers in making *The Wandering Earth*. I have been working as a visual effects supervisor for 11 years. Numerous costume films, historical films, and war films enriched my experience, so I am quite confident in making these genres. However, faced with making the first sci-fi film in my life, I was completely at a loss because I had never tried it before. I dared not guarantee the quality of the final product at the beginning for I could never know what would happen during production, such as unexpected incidents or final effects produced through combinations of art and visual effects, etc. None of us went through this process before, and all that we could do was to try again and again, accumulating as much experience as possible.

(Ding Yanlai, Visual Effects Supervisor)

Brothers in arms: sailing into the unknown

The making of *The Wandering Earth* encountered “Hard Times” in a “No Man’s Land” at the beginning. Fortunately, all members of the film crew were united by the same dream, which brought them enough confidence to gradually gather an army of followers and then embark on an unknown journey.

Gong Geer: Producer and Screenwriter

Gong Geer used to be a singer, composer, sound engineer, film dubber, screenwriter, and actor, but he had NEVER worked as a producer.



Figure 1.3 Producer and screenwriter Gong Geer.

ing was historically extremely rare.

It must be destiny that brought us together, since both of us grew up as science fiction fans. When we were young, we enjoyed reading magazines such as *The Journal of UFO Research* and *Aomi Pictorial*. By the year 2015, we firmly believed that it was time for us to strive for our dream.

Both of them showed keen interest in this project. Besides, they were keenly aware that there was no way back at all.

In 2015, Frant Gwo invited me to join the project of making *The Wandering Earth*. I was really excited to hear that, because I am a fan of “Da Liu.” But I also realized the difficulties hidden in the project. On the one hand, it was extremely difficult to translate Liu Cixin’s sci-fi ideas into images on the big screen. On the other hand, there was a lack of industrialized production before, which presented a great challenge for us both in terms of creativity and technology.

As the director of the film, Frant Gwo built the whole team in person. And he chose me as the producer. As for this film, it was of little significance whether the team is mature or not because no one in the team had any experience of making such a film. There were also some experienced foreign teams, but they didn’t do well in local situations. It was not so bad to be inexperienced, for we could at least redefine something anew.

Ding Yanlai: Visual Effects Supervisor



Figure 1.4 Visual effects supervisor Ding Yanlai.

Frant Gwo has confidence in Gong Geer and Gong Geer also believes in Frant Gwo, too. This mutual trust might be derived from the brotherhood between them that grew when they lived in a small shared apartment, struggling together in Beijing. Besides that, their common interest in science fiction films also contributed to their dream of making a Chinese sci-fi film.

In 1999, both of them were required to write on the same topic, “What if memory can be transplanted,” for the National College Entrance Examination in China. This rather “sci-fi” topic for composition writing

Ding Yanlai also belongs to the post-1980s generation. Since his acquaintance with Frant Gwo in making the film *LEE’s Adventure*, Ding Yanlai has been working as a visual effects supervisor for over ten years.

Zhou Yi (First AD, *The Wandering Earth*), Liu Yin (Director of Photography, *The Wandering Earth*), Frant Gwo and I got acquainted when making *LEE’s Adventure*. We were all the same age, which brought us mutual trust and a shared outlook. When we strove together to get the task done, we would automatically ignore many interpersonal and non-creative problems, keeping only one goal in mind. That would make everything

simplified. The dream and the passion were the main driving forces in making *The Wandering Earth*. Otherwise, none of us would hold on right to the end.

Liu Yin: Director of Photography



Figure 1.5 Director of photography Liu Yin.

Like Ding Yanlai, Liu Yin met Frant Gwo during the making of *LEE's Adventure*. When Frant Gwo invited him to participate in *The Wandering Earth*, he agreed without hesitation and spared no effort to pursue their dream.

“He must be the only director of photography in the world who would spend his own money on filming.” Gong Geer talked about Liu Yin jokingly, but emotionally.

As the director of photography, he spent millions of RMB on equipment used in this film. He bought it himself and rented it to us. But in fact, no one else would use the equipment again in other films, so basically he would have to keep everything for himself.

Zhou Yi: the First Associate Director (First AD)



Figure 1.6 The First Assistant Director Zhou Yi.

As the first associate director, Zhou Yi faced more difficulties in management than in creation. The director would specify his creative intention in documents and distribute them to different departments. The task of the first AD was to coordinate different departments on behalf of the director and to ensure all the required tasks were completed before shooting every day. Zhou Yi was in charge of the whole team of associate directors. During the making of *The Wandering Earth*, he experienced almost every unexpected challenge.

Thanks to existing life experience and historical records, qualities can be forged in contemporary films or costume films. But in sci-fi films, all of the qualities could only be created out of the imagination. And all the qualities had to be useful for the directors. Just imagine the difficulties in that!

Gao Ang: Production Designer



Figure 1.7 Production designer Gao Ang.

To some extent, the importance of the production designer in the team is second only to the director and producer in making a science fiction film. A reliable aesthetic detail could easily make the whole science fiction setting authentic to an audience, while neglecting a seemingly insignificant detail might ruin everything, shutting the audience out of the film. As a consequence, a lot of time was spent on the selection

of the production designer before making *The Wandering Earth*. In the end, Gao Ang became the best choice for this position.

It is really an honor for me and the whole Art Department to participate in *The Wandering Earth*. We tried a similar sci-fi film before, and it must be our experience of trial and error that touched Frant Gwo and finally made him bring us in.

The similar science fiction film mentioned by Gao Ang was *The Three-Body Problem*. Their experience with this latter film triggered many strong objections and resistance from different quarters, causing twists and turns in their process of joining *The Wandering Earth*. However, the best solution was to continue to make a new film successfully. In fact, Frant Gwo also faced great pressures when choosing Gao Ang as the production designer, but he was impressed and touched by Gao Ang's words: "We have tried all the wrong ways to make a film before, so what's left must be the correct one."

What impressed me most during the process of production was the atmosphere of collective creation. There were so many young people in the crew striving to produce an excellent film together. In such a large group (more than 400 people), conflicts or disputes cannot be avoided, but it is really rare to see that there were no troublemakers.

(Wang Hong, Production Manager)

When I was young, I was also passionate and vigorous, fighting for my own dreams. Regretfully, none of the films I made in the past was perfect. However, to my delight, I happened to find the feeling of utopia in this film.

(Sun Min, Post-production Supervisor)

Though inexperienced, they created everything out of nothing.