

# Blockbuster movie energizes science fiction realm in China



**Xu Wei**

The Chinese science-fiction blockbuster “The Wandering Earth II” broke into the Top 10 movies in the North American weekend box office, but beyond ticket sales, the film is a landmark shot in the arm for the burgeoning sci-fi sector in China.

The film, which has raked in US\$4.12 million by early February in North America since its release there, has drawn missed foreign reviews. The New York Times called it “conspicuously nationalistic,” but other critics hailed it as one of the best sci-fi films so far this century. On IMDb, it received an eight out of 10 rating.

The movie, based on the

work of renowned sci-fi writer Liu Cixin, is a prequel to the 2019 sci-fi epic. It depicts how mankind puts aside earthly disputes as a rapidly burning sun threatens to annihilate the planet. The solution? Build 10,000 enormous engines to propel Earth out of its solar system into some more habitable corner of the cosmos.

Some foreign movie buffs say the film’s visuals top even the best of Hollywood, noting that the movie goes beyond typical Hollywood-style blockbusters that focus on individual heroism.

A netizen who goes by the online name “wbszds” said on IMDb that the film “is not full of extreme nationalism. In the story, governments of various countries cooperate, and world astronauts sacrifice themselves for all human beings. The choice of so many

characters in the face of disaster takes the emotional control of the film to a high level difficult to achieve in general-release commercial films.”

The film is shot from a global perspective, but criticism of “nationalist messaging” mostly focuses on a scene in the movie where Chinese diplomat Zhou Zhe-zhi says, “Our men are sure to accomplish the mission,” even though the Chinese Internet team has already reported failure in starting the gigantic engines.

In the eyes of many film bloggers, the movie’s hidden clues and plot about the growth of the super intelligent quantum computer MOSS might be overlooked, and that leads to a misunderstanding of Zhou’s words.

The film contains latent flashback shots to imply that Zhou is the only person



The film’s space elevator is among the talked-about special effects.

who knows that MOSS has already evolved into independent consciousness to challenge mankind, but there is still a vital variable to stop it.

The movie’s director, Frant Gwo, told Chinese media that people should always be cautious about possible influences posed by cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence and the metaverse.

Online in China, many scientists and scholars have joined discussions on the feasibility of some of the technologies in the movie, such as a space elevator and artificial-intelligence quantum computers.

Many of the film’s enthusiasts have watched it multiple times to try and figure out the hidden clues and metaphors, offering predictions for the plot of a possible sequel.

Local sci-fi fan Kevin Zhang, an administrative manager in his 40s, said he considers the film a milestone in Chinese science fiction.

“It doesn’t mean that it has no flaws,” Zhang said. “My friends and I love it because we have waited a long time for a really powerful homegrown sci-fi epic after Hollywood productions dominated the genre for decades. I think the movie is a textbook-level masterpiece.”

Perhaps the movie’s ultimately greatest impact will be its ripple effect on China’s emergence as a potent force in the realm of science fiction.

The film’s success follows on the heels of the worldwide popularity of the award-winning, best-selling sci-fi novel “The Three-Body Problem” by Liu Cixin. Netflix is adapting the novel into a film series.

Lao She’s modern sci-fi satire “City of Cats,” considered the first Chinese sci-fi work of note, was published in an English version in 1964. That led to a golden age for Chinese sci-fi between 1978 and 1983, when a number of

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An excellent blockbuster — a complex disaster flick for the digital age, probing global anxieties and grounding expressionist imagery in earnest humanism.

**Dimitri Kraus**  
Foreign viewer

Chinese actor Wu Jing plays the leading role of an astronaut.

