



GOOD GENES

Whilst working as a research scientist in America, Frank Zhang realised there was a golden opportunity to expand biotech into China. He formed GenScript in 2002 and today employs a workforce of over 2600.

FRANK FANGLIANG ZHANG, PH.D.
FOUNDER & CEO GenScript

Frank Zhang has been a high achiever for much of his life. Born in China, he received both a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in his home country, joining Huazhong University of Science and Technology as a lecturer, before heading to America to further his education.

Attending the prestigious Duke University in North Carolina, Frank secured his Ph.D. in Biochemistry and quickly went on to work as a lead researcher at U.S. based pharmaceutical giant Schering-Plough. It was during his tenure here that Frank filed a number of patents, including the first successful cloning of human geranyl transferase in the world, and Schering-Plough awarded him the President Award for his outstanding achievements at the company.

Opportunities

It was whilst working at Schering-Plough that Frank came up with the idea to form GenScript. As he explained, the whole idea came about from some simple observations made by him and his partners.

"We launched the company because we started to see all these opportunities available to us. Living in America, we obviously noticed how so many items on sale were made in China, everywhere you went you were surrounded by Chinese manufactured goods. However, Pharma seemed to be the exception to the rule, and

we could not understand why biotech was so underrepresented.

"Also, at this time, China's vast population was rapidly becoming wealthier and was able to spend more money on improved healthcare and medicine. With the Chinese government also announcing plans to invest large amounts of money into biotech, we believed it was the perfect time to launch a company based around gene synthesis."

In 2002, Frank founded GenScript in New Jersey, U.S., with two friends and \$5,000. Once the company had grabbed a firm foothold, he set about planning his homecoming, by expanding the company into China to make the most of the opportunities his motherland had to offer, especially with regards biotech R&D and manufacture.

Being scientists, rather than just driven businessmen, they made the ethos of their company more about making people's lives better, as opposed to just making money.

Contribute

"We are very focused on the long-term and are actually a rather low-profile company," admits Frank. "We want to make a difference and contribute to society in some way and founded the company with that belief."

However noble an attitude this may be, being a business means that profits remain →



imperative to the firm’s survival and GenScript has undoubtedly delivered on this front.

“We have always delivered beyond people’s expectations,” Frank remarks, “and have shown our investors a healthy return year on year. When we launched in 2002, we started out with just \$5000. In 2009, we received an investment of \$15 million from KPCB (Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers) and the Balloch Medical & Health Investment Group, two famous venture capital companies, and today we are listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange. So, as you can see, we are very capital efficient.”

During those early years, the field of gene synthesis was relatively new but, as Frank pointed out, it was obvious this was both an exciting and incredibly important area of research.

“Originally, genes were simply inherited from your parents. However, today you can create them from chemicals and we, as biochemists, thought this was a great business idea – the notion that a company could actually make genes from scratch.”

Learning curve

Under his leadership, GenScript has gradually developed into a world-renowned supplier of gene synthesis services, and one of the largest biotech CROs in China.

Although certain about the science of his research, Frank did not have a background in business, having had just one individual reporting to him at his previous position. Now, as CEO of GenScript, and with 2,600 employees in the company, Frank admits to having been on a steep learning curve with regards people management.

However, as he detailed plans for GenScript’s immediate future, it was obvious to see that Frank is more than comfortable in his role as CEO.

“Currently, there are three aspects we are focusing on. Firstly, because China is still investing in biotech, we are able to profit from this growth. As GenScript also conducts research for other companies, we are the go-to firm for many businesses and subsequently, we attract more customers.

“Secondly, because of this, we are able to hire and then build top teams of talent from the required fields, which in turn makes us even stronger.

“Finally, we are in the process of developing cell therapies which can help treat cancers so,



GenScript U.S. laboratory



GenScript China offices

as you can see, there is a vast amount of potential for us to continue to expand.”

Finding, and then securing, the right personnel seems to be a recurring issue in China at the moment. Competition is fierce, but Frank believes that the whole structure of the company is what makes GenScript such an attractive employer.

“Obviously we have always been very customer focused, as that is the true nature of our work. We truly care about the customer – and this also goes for our employees. We are lucky to have built such a great team, but we want them and, indeed, need them, to feel that they can both improve and grow with us. We offer a number of advancement programmes, so our teams can remain happy and fulfilled at work. The biotech market in China is just too competitive to let good people go.”

Frank believes that this kind of strategy is what leads to new innovations and scientific breakthroughs, something GenScript is constantly pursuing. “Over the past 17 years, we have overcome many challenges,” admits Frank. “I attribute this to our unique culture of ‘dare to win’, our customer first philosophy and our long history of encouraging innovation.”

Although currently focused mainly on China and the U.S., GenScript aims to expand to the Asia Pacific market and also Europe, having recently established regional divisions in both Singapore and the Netherlands.

Offering a number of delivery options for their products, ranging from days to weeks,

means the supply chain remains a critical factor at the company.

“Any delays are just not acceptable in our business,” insists Frank, “and that is why the relationship we have with our suppliers is incredibly close. We constantly interact with them in order to improve their technology and service. Most importantly, we always pay them promptly and fairly. This way, just like our employees, our suppliers can grow with us and continue to offer a first-class service that can deal with our rigorous delivery timelines.”

Frank believes that, even today, there remain many misconceptions about Chinese based businesses. He is frustrated that many companies still have a mindset that China is unable to make a quality product.

“Currently, one out of every four synthetic genes in the world comes from GenScript,” Frank points out. “We are the number one gene synthesis supplier for a reason, and our designs are used by a multitude of international com-

panies and leading pharmaceutical firms, who would never accept low-quality products.

“For example, Legend Biotech, a subsidiary of GenScript, is developing an innovative Car-T cell therapy that targets Multiple Myeloma. They entered into a collaboration and license agreement to jointly develop and commercialise the therapy with Janssen in 2017. This was a \$350 million deal so, when people speak about quality products and innovation capability in China, the figures speak for themselves.”

Mission

Gene synthesis remains the cornerstone of GenScript and the company’s proprietary technology. Frank is keen for the company to remain ahead of the game and spoke about his plans for future growth. “Over the next decade, our main-channel business will be focusing on four categories: service and product, based on life science research and application, bio-medicine CDMO, industrial synthetic product and cell therapy. This business model should guarantee GenScript will continue to achieve its mission – to make humans and nature healthier through biotechnology.”

GenScript’s success is down to Frank initially planting a healthy DNA at the heart of his company, where customer care and long-term success were put before immediate profits. As a scientist, he looks to have made all the right choices and, as the company’s continued gene success will no doubt prove, he has also made some very smart business decisions. 🌱

“ We offer a number of advancement programmes, so our teams can remain happy and fulfilled at work ”