

Read science fiction to predict Chinese policy, says LSE expert

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Analysts can gain useful insights on China's global strategy from studying Chinese science fiction, in light of tight restrictions around factual information, says a new strategic update from LSE IDEAS, the London School of Economics' foreign policy think tank.

Professor William A. Callahan, the report's author, puts particular emphasis on the work of Hugo Award-winning author Liu Cixin. Liu's novels are enjoyed by readers around the world, including top leaders in Beijing, he says.

Rather than cluing researchers in to specific policy decisions, Callahan believes Chinese science fiction showcases the underlying themes and worldview that shape these decisions.

At the heart of these novels, he sees a debate which explores whether perceived threats to China's future international goals should be viewed through the lens of science and technology, or politics.

"As the trade war becomes a tech war, China sees itself as the underdog in a scientific and civilizational struggle with the US. The main point is to appreciate how Liu frames this experience as the 'key problem', and then deterministically limits its 'solution' to particular strategies," he says.

According to Callahan's reading, the fictional worlds created by Liu and other authors reveal the values that would underlie a real-life Chinese world order.

Even during China's policy of economic reform and opening up to trade from the 1980s-2010s, he reads a strong lean towards a zero-sum game approach to international relations and away from cosmopolitan societies, favouring instead ones which are majority ethnic Chinese.

"With Xi Jinping, China's global strategy seems to be catching up with Liu's vision of the future, looking to science to solve political problems. Indeed, while the Chinese leadership of the 2010s was dominated by social scientists and lawyers, since the 20th Party Congress in 2022, the PRC is led by natural scientists," says Callahan.

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For more information, to see a copy of the strategic update, or to hear from Professor William A. Callahan, contact Jamie Hose at BlueSky Education on jamie@bluesky-pr.com, or call +44 (0)1582 790 706.