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Waiting for Superheroes

等待超级英雄

Articles in our Policy Forum series are commentaries on current political issues. They reflect the opinion of the authors and – although researched to our best knowledge – are not scientific papers. If there are CFDS papers on related issues, they will be referred to in the text.

Although Chinese and Americans have quite a different taste with regard to most aspects of their lifestyle, they – especially the younger generations - start to share a passion for Superhero movies. The main reason why superheroes attract crowds all over the world is beyond a shared taste for science fiction and explosive fireworks: with their superpowers the heroes protect good guys and punish bad ones. This archetype of a lone hero who serves justice is deeply embedded in American culture and apparently resonates with young people all over the world.

Art is born out of reality but, unfortunately, may be superior to reality. In real life, we lack the superpower to tackle our difficulties and problems although the obstacles and challenges we face might be as evil as in movies. When the last episode of the Dark Knight trilogy was playing in theaters, a mass shooting occurred

尽管中美在生活方式的很多方面存在差异，但是他们，尤其是年轻一代，已经开始分享同样的热情——对好莱坞超级英雄电影的喜爱。超级英雄电影在世界范围内的好评不仅来自它的科幻和烟火，更重要的是其背后传递的意义：超级英雄用他们的超能力保护好人打击坏人。这种孤胆英雄伸张正义的艺术形象是美国文化的自然流露并饱受世界各国年轻人的青睐。

艺术来源于现实，但遗憾的是，更高于现实。在现实世界里，我们没有解决各种困难的超能力，但挑战却和电影里差不多。当黑暗骑士三部曲的最后一集上映的时候，一起枪击案就发生在电影院里。这不仅是遇害



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right in the theater. It is a tragedy not only for the victims but also for society as a whole. When such a horrible killing happens right in front of Batman, it sends a message: there are no superheroes to save ourselves from misery, there is just us. And this creates this desperate wish for one from our midst to rise up to those challenges.

Of course, mass shootings are neither the only issue US could note solve in recent years, nor the one that drives most of their voters.

The deep divide in the American political system, essentially crippled political decision-making. During a large portion of Obama's presidency, he was de facto a lame duck, having to govern with a split or opposed house. Barely being able to get a budget passed and the debt ceiling raised, let alone get any of his major projects pushed through congress, disappointment went rampant both among Democrat and Republican voters.

Hollywood, the American spiritual center echoed this situation by launching another masterpiece about an iconic American leader, Lincoln, to reflect the embarrassment caused by a dysfunctional political system (and agenda) and to inspire the potential coming of a great politician to solve all kinds of problems. It is said, President Obama even watched the movie in the Whitehouse with his staffs and friends.

Just four years later, US people finally embraced the change they were longing for, but the savior came in a very very different version than what Hollywood envisioned. Rather than turning to a great statesman in the tradition of Lincoln but to Donald Trump.

Maybe partly inspired by the failure of Obama to get things done the conventional way, the Trump administration blatantly abuses its administrative authority to push its agenda.

And the remedy the current administration resorts to is quite simple, that is to blame others and use "superpower" to squeeze any penny for their "partners" at the negotiation table. It seems inevitable that globalization is going to be on hold for a while or even reversed. American voters – especially the workers who abandoned

者的悲剧，也是全社会的悲剧。当这样一场惨无人道的杀戮出现在蝙蝠侠的面前时，它仿佛在告诉我们：现实中的痛苦终究要由我们自己而不是超级英雄来解救。这不得不激励大家要从我们自己人中间去寻找一个迎难而上的人。

当然，枪支泛滥和枪击案只是当今美国政治不能解决问题的一个缩影，并且不是影响美国选情的最重要因素。美国深层次的政治分裂已经严重阻碍很多重要政策的制定。奥巴马大部分任期都是跛脚鸭总统的最好示范。那时，国会几乎不能让预算和债务上限通过，更不必说其他各种各样的提案，失望情绪弥漫在共和党 and 民主党的选民当中。基于当时恶劣的政治氛围，好莱坞又祭出了另一个大师级杰作《林肯》去反映政治运转失败的尴尬去表达对实际解决问题的伟大政治家的呼唤。据称，奥巴马总统甚至和阁员以及亲友一起在白宫观看了《林肯》。

仅仅四年之后，美国终于迎来了期待已久的变化，不过和好莱坞预见的版本非常不同：人们没有得到如林肯一样的伟大政治家，得到却是特朗普。或许是受到奥巴马政府按常规行事失败的教训，特朗普政府选择大肆使用行政权力推进政治议程。现在政府的解决方案非常的简单：都是别人的错误，并利用超强的实力在谈判桌上获取每一分利益。全球化进程因此受到了极大的阻滞甚至逆流。传统上左翼的工人联盟似乎非常满意这种变化，他们抛弃了传统的观点而转进到身份政治。从某种意义上讲，这丝毫不令人惊讶，因为美国已经在全球化的最前沿几十年。其实，经济学家很早就预见自由贸易

their traditional left-wing allegiance (just as they have been abandoned in their point of view for the sake of identity politics) – seem to cherish this development. In some respects, although the US were on the forefront of the globalization for decades, this is not too surprising. Economists have foreseen the concerns against free trade and globalization long ago and emphasized that each country should conduct redistribution by utilizing domestic taxation and transfer system to mitigate the impact on the losers of globalization within a country. Yet, given the traditional stance of the Republican Party on redistribution, and the “lone wolf” narrative that Trump is spinning, it seems unlikely that the US administration will chose that path.

Blaming others for your problems seems easier than tackling domestic problems, and can simultaneously placate the disenfranchised workers in the Rust belt and the traditional entrepreneurial base of the Republican Party. So more and more aspects get drawn in to the emerging conflict over the rules of the global game that started as a fairly traditional trade dispute. The recent development in the renegotiation of both the NAFTA and the US-EU trade relationship shows that labor laws and environmental standards become essential points of interest, and accordingly the negotiations enter uncharted waters including aspects that nobody considered seriously before. Foreign investment could also be the other battlefield in the discussion of international business barriers. In other words, the redesign of the international economic system has become a campaign in search for the frontier of sovereign authority, and it seems that in particular the Trump administration is willing to make demands that go deeply into what was traditionally considered a clearly domestic issue. It is questionable whether this approach is promising, because one thing is certain: the more aspects are involved in trade talks, the harder it is to strike a deal. The EU reform offers a vivid example. European leaders have already made a lot of effort on homogenizing their

和全球化可能带来的副作用，他们给出的建议是充分运用国内的税收和转移支付制度做好再分配，以便补偿全球化可能的受害者。但是，鉴于共和党在再分配上的一贯立场和特朗普的独狼论调，美国应该不太会考虑这个选项。

责备别人似乎比解决国内问题更容易，并且能够安抚锈带的工人和共和党的传统产业基地。因此，越来越多的因素被纳入到全球游戏规则冲突中，这些规则始于相当传统的贸易争端。最近在北美自由贸易协定和欧美贸易关系方面的发展表明，劳动法和环境标准成为关键的利益点，因此谈判进入了未知领域，包括以前没有人认真考虑的方面。外国投资也可能是讨论国际商业壁垒的另一个战场。换句话说，国际经济体系的重新设计已成为寻求国家主权权威边界的运动，特别是特朗普政府似乎愿意提出深入探讨传统上被视为国内问题的要求。这种方法是否有希望是值得怀疑的，因为有一件事是肯定的：贸易谈判涉及的方面越多，达成协议的难度就越大。欧盟改革提供了一个生动的例子。欧洲领导人已经做出了很多努力，将其体制设置同质化，超越了共同市场和货币联盟。他们已经看到了前路上充满了巨大的分歧，并且进行更多整合的尝试加剧了欧洲的分裂，并且基本上将英国赶出联盟。从这个意义上说，我们真正需要超级英雄的超能力来克服前方的障碍。

那么，如果特朗普真的如批评者所说只是破坏全球秩序和滥用权力，他怎么仍然享受着追随者坚定不移的支持？这是因为那些人把他当作他们一直期待的超级英雄。一个

institutional setup beyond the common market and the monetary union. They see huge problems ahead and the attempt for more integration as partly driven Europe apart and essentially driven Great Britain out of the Union. In that sense, we truly need the super power of superheroes to overcome the obstacles ahead.

So if Trump really just jeopardizes the global order without the chance of making progress, if he truly abuses his power as his critics claim, how come that he is still enjoying the unwavering support of his followers? It is because they perceive him as the superhero they have been waiting for. The vigilante who is defying the rules of the game, operating outside the traditional system to finally give to their perceived enemies "what they had coming" all along. But this also shows the danger of this narrative. One man's superhero is the other man's supervillain. Most interestingly all three of the major comic book movie franchise decided to tackle this issue before Trump was voted into office. The perceived danger of mutants has always been a pillar of the X-men stories, the danger of Superman is a critical plot point in Batman v. Superman and most obviously Captain America: Civil War tackles exactly this question. Is it good to have superheroes who are essentially judge, jury and executioner for anybody they deem worthy of their attention? It is the nature of this type of movie that the answer is heavily skewed towards the importance of superheroes. Ironically, the actual publishing history of Captain America, maybe the most iconic American hero, speaks another language. What Captain America did during the Red Scare in the 1950s was deemed so decidedly unheroic by future generations of readers, that his actions during this time were retconned to be the acts of a (crazy) doppelganger who took the mantle of Captain America but not the great Steve Rogers.

蔑视游戏规则的独行侠用传统系统之外操作打击他们所认为的敌人。但这也表明了这种表述的危险性。一个人的超级英雄可能是另一个人的超级恶魔。最有趣的是，在特朗普当选之前，所有三部主要漫画电影系列都决定触及这个问题。突变体的潜在威胁一直是X战警故事的支柱，超人的威胁是蝙蝠侠大战超人的关键情节点，最明显的是美国队长，内战那一集刚好切中的就是这个问题：对于任何他们认为值得关注的人，让超级英雄既当法官，又当陪审团和行刑人是否合适？这种类型的电影的答案严重偏向于超级英雄的重要性。但具有讽刺意味的是，美国队长的漫画出版历史可能表达的是另外一回事。美国队长在20世纪50年代的红色恐慌期间所做的事情被后代的读者视为如此绝对的非英雄，他在这段时间的行为被重新调整为一个（疯狂的）幽灵的行为，他只是穿了美国队长外衣而不是伟大的史蒂夫罗杰斯。

我们生活在一个分裂的世界里，正如林肯所说的，一个分裂的房子是站不住的。我们不能用电影给世人以善意和宏伟的蓝图但现实中做的又是另一套。向选民扮演超级英雄短期是很有吸引力的，但这不是一个稳定的长期均衡。美国的成功一度是建立在以榜样领先世界而不是以强权压榨世界的精神上的。当我看美国航天局、阿波罗和航天飞机相关的作品时仍然十分激动。令世人血脉喷张的是他们大无畏的探索精神。美国一度是这个世界的佼佼者，他们一骑绝尘从不回顾，并且尽他们最大的努力去探索人类的极限。美国应该拥抱历史，延续他们的传统。如果美国真的需要一个超级英雄的话，那他

We are living in a world divided. But – coming back to the great American leader Lincoln – “a house divided cannot stand”. We cannot feed the world with good will and ambitious dreams from Hollywood movies. Playing the superhero might appeal to the voters in short run, but this is not a stable equilibrium. The US had its greatest success when leading by example rather than oppression. I feel thrilled when I watch or read any materials about the NASA, Apollo and the Space shuttle etc. It is the adventure spirit that is quintessential to the American dream that inspired the world. The US should embrace this history, rather than trying to be a leading power that overwhelms the world. If any, this is the type of superhero that can have a role in the global world order. In the movie “Man of Steel”, when Clark Kent is struggling whether he should surrender himself to save the world because he is not sure whether the humans can be trusted, he goes to a human priest for advice. The message the superhero receive is as blow: “Sometimes you have to take the leap of faith first, the trust part comes later.”

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应该是什么样子的？在电影《钢铁之躯》里，氦星人克拉克肯特纠结自己要不要相信地球人把自己交给佐德将军拯救世界，苦于内心的挣扎，他求助于一个人类神父。这位超级英雄得到的启示是：有时候你要先信任别人，然后别人才会相信你。

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