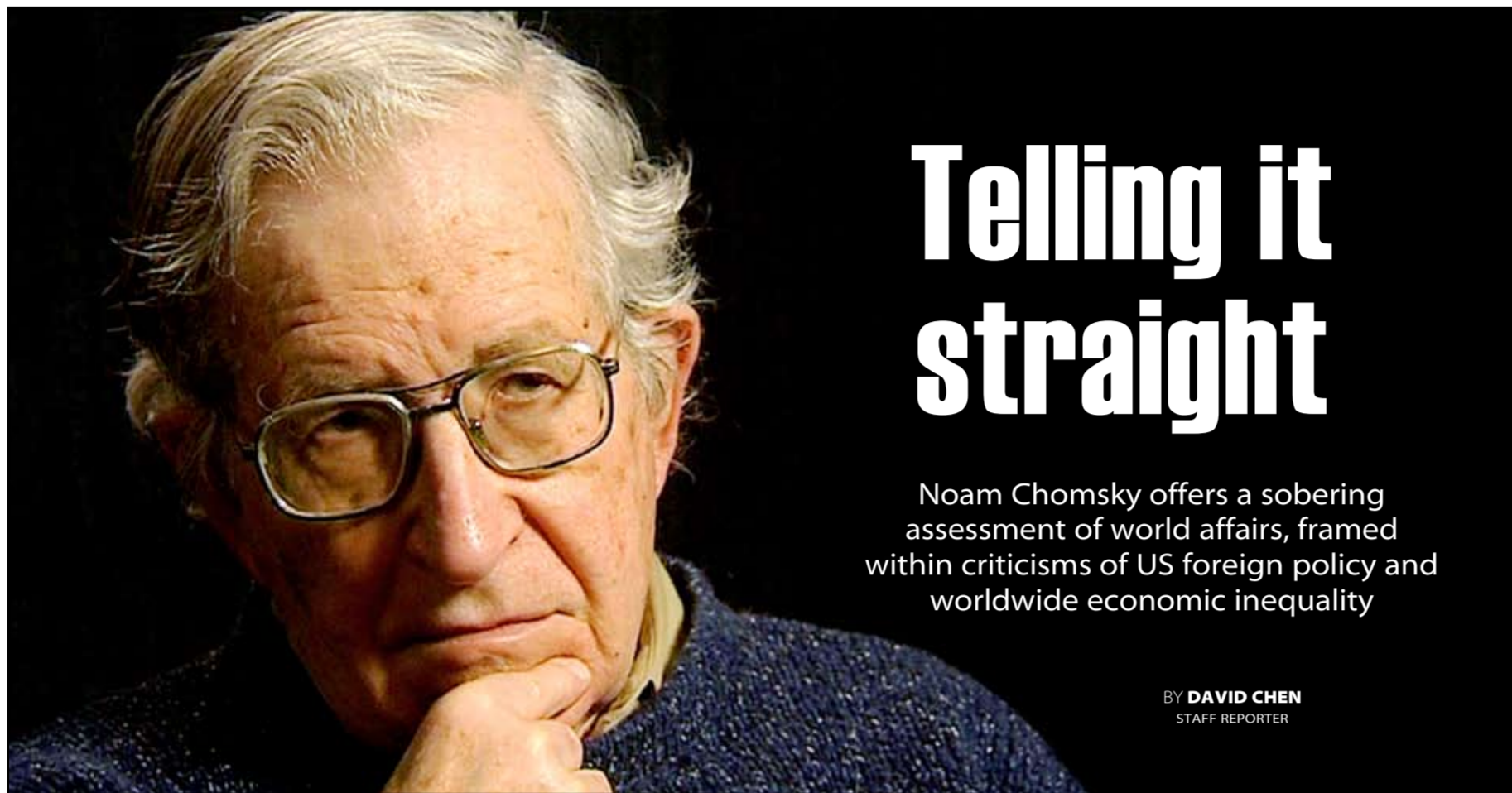


CULTURE

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[THE WEEKENDER]



Telling it straight

Noam Chomsky offers a sobering assessment of world affairs, framed within criticisms of US foreign policy and worldwide economic inequality

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER

Noam Chomsky, the renowned linguist and controversial social critic, visited Taiwan for the first time last week to present several lectures. The 81-year-old American scholar and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology — best known for his highly influential theories in modern linguistics but also regarded as an icon for the political left — gave a speech on international affairs last Monday at Academia Sinica.

Chomsky's hour-long talk, entitled *Contours of World Order: Continuities and Changes*, had been highly anticipated. All of the 800 seats available were already reserved a week before the lecture, which prompted organizers to set up a separate conference room with a video feed of the lecture for those who couldn't get into the auditorium.

In a dense and wide-ranging speech, Chomsky laid out a sobering assessment of world affairs, framed within criticisms of US foreign policy and overall economic inequality.

"At least two major threats to human survival, environmental catastrophe and nuclear war, are not only very real, but they're growing, and they're growing for reasons that are deeply rooted in institutional structures of great power and durability," he said.

Chomsky pointed to the US and UK as among the culprits, saying the countries' policies were "undermining the establishment of nuclear weapons-free zones."

His speech also touched upon global flashpoints such as Latin America and the Middle East. He commented on Israel's attack on Gaza in 2008, calling Israel's claim that it was acting in self-defense against Hamas rocket fire a "transparent falsehood."

He said a peaceful solution to that particular conflict was possible but ultimately had been obstructed by an "imperial ideology" forwarded by the US and its "client states."

Chomsky also remarked on economic sanctions imposed upon Iran, quoting a prominent dissident in the country as saying "sanctions will hurt people rather than its leaders."

He downplayed the threat of Iran as portrayed by the US. "The government of Iran is indeed a severe threat, mainly to its own population, but it's hardly unique in that respect," he said.

With regards to Iran's desire to increase its nuclear capabilities, Chomsky said that the US' demand that Israel be exempt from a proposed nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East was an equal cause for concern.

Chomsky acknowledged East Asia's growing role in the global economy, noting that China has become one

of the world's largest importers of oil from the Middle East and the largest exporter to the region.

But he also cast doubt on the conventional notion that the rise of China and India's economies represented a "great global shift in power" away from the West.

Despite their impressive economic growth in terms of GDP, Chomsky said the situation in China and India was more complicated, given both countries' high levels of economic inequality.

He noted these countries' poor rankings on the UN's human development index, which measures the impact of economic policies on quality of life (India ranked 134th, China ranked 92nd).

Chomsky also suggested that new measures were needed to measure economic growth. "It's not at all clear that prosperity in any sense meaningful to human life is measured by the number of commodities within reach, and the amount of fossil fuel that one can consume."

During a question-and-answer session after the speech, Chomsky was asked by an audience member to comment on why Taiwan's economy had been able to succeed despite the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) repressive rule until the late 1980s.

"Taiwan became a very successful development model ... by following the Japanese model, and violating the principles that are determined by the US, the World Bank, the IMF and so on," he said.

"And that's not accidental. That's true of every developed society, including Britain, the United States, Germany, Italy, Japan, right up to the East Asian tigers. Every developed state has violated, radically, neo-classical economic principles. And Taiwan did as well."

Chomsky said that for Taiwan, this meant using state intervention and protectionist measures in the economy. He offered several historical examples to make the point that many developed economies started under

heavy control by the state, which produced "successful development models."

"Whether they're good social models is another question," he said.

In the case of Taiwan, Chomsky said, the US was willing to tolerate KMT rule for "strategic purposes."

The press conference after the lecture was much livelier.

"You have a problem with the relativity of evil," said a man who identified himself as a reporter for the Associated Press, clearly irked by Chomsky's views. "How much of the evil that is created in the world today on a per capita basis? How much of it is American evil, how much of it is Chinese, how much of it is Iranian, how much of it is Burmese or Israeli? Because I didn't get a sense of balance in your presentation."

"You're saying that the United States is the leading terrorist country in the world," the man continued, his voice rising. "You are attributing most of the evil in the world to the United States."

Chomsky responded with relative calm. "When I write [about terrorism], I use the official US government definition. And that causes tremendous anger, like yours, because we're not supposed to use the official American definition. Because if we use that definition, it follows that at once that the US is a leading terrorist state."

"There's just no such thing as measuring the amount of evil," he said. "That's why I wouldn't pose the question. You can't count the amount of evil — you can talk about what states do, and we should, we should be concerned about our own state. But there is a moral issue, but it's not the one you raise. The moral issue, which is elementary, is that we are primarily responsible for our own actions and their consequences."

A reporter for Radio Taiwan International asked Chomsky's opinion as a linguist on Taiwan's current restrictions on pre-schoolers and kindergarteners learning English.

"It's illegal to learn two languages?" Chomsky asked incredulously. The reporter clarified his question by asking at which age was it acceptable for children to start learning a language.

"It's not a question of linguistics," he said. "For a young child, language learning is kind of like breathing."

Chomsky said the real consideration was one of social policy. "What kind of society do you want to live in? Do you want to live in a multicultural society or a culturally uniform society? And that's not a problem for linguists."

Chomsky also delivered a lecture on linguistics last Tuesday at National Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu.



Noam Chomsky speaks at a press conference after his speech on international affairs at Academia Sinica. PHOTOS: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES, AND BLOOMBERG

It's about picking the right door

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

It was almost a full house at the Metropolitan Hall on Saturday night for Chamber Ballet Taipei's (台北室內芭蕾舞) *The Door* (門), including First Lady Chow Mei-ching (周美青), who found herself the focus of autograph seekers during intermission.

The Door was very different from the last couple of shows artistic director Allen Yu (余能盛) has done, although like last year's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, he chose to divide the evening with two very different composers. Last year it was Mozart and Igor Stravinsky; this year it was Nino Rota and Sergei Rachmaninoff. This year's combination worked well.

The Door is the strongest production Yu has done here in recent years, although the divide between the two halves was huge and Part Two was choreographically stronger than its flashier predecessor.

Part One told a variety of stories about the choices we make in life or that are made for us — there were aspiring dancers having to deal with rejection, politicians on the campaign trail, young girls being forced into prostitution, a soccer game and a young couple divided by the husband's imprisonment.

The set was a variety of doorways — a revolving door, a cell door, a huge blue rectangular structure (the door to a career) and a large cut-out of a woman's leg, bent at the knee to form the doorway that led to a brothel.

Yu spent just a few minutes to flesh out each of the story lines, and if you hadn't read the program you would have had a hard time keeping up. When Daniel Cimpean shed his wig to show a shaved head, then disrobed and walked into a blindingly lit, smoke-filled opening in the back curtains, I'm not sure everyone realized he was meant to be turning his back on life to become a monk.

While the soccer game had a great slow-motion goal, some of the other segments were a bit heavy-handed. The "political *Rashomon*" had two almost cookie-cutter candidates, one with a green sash and one with a blue sash, who ended up being outmaneuvered by a rather evil-looking woman in red leading a small cadre of people with red armbands. Or perhaps I was reading too much into it.

Although some of the segments were clever and/or funny, there was too much overacting in this attempt at dance theater.

Part Two redeemed the program and would work well as a stand-alone piece.

The second half gave the imported dancers a chance to shine, and Nadja Saidakova and Richard Szabo made the most of it. Saidakova was flawlessly sleek; it was easy to see why she's a principal ballerina back in Berlin. While Szabo got off to a slightly rocky start with some sloppy landings, he recovered well and his technique was flawless for the rest of the night. He was also dancing with a pulled muscle — made clear by the taping on his left ribs during the first act when he was bare-chested.

His fellow Hungarian, Nistor Laura, had mostly a supporting role, but she was absolutely lovely, with very clean lines and good technique.

The sets by Huang Jih-chun (黃日俊) and costumes by Lin Ping-hao (林秉豪) were great, contributing to a much higher production quality than in previous years. Huang's different doors in Part One (I loved the leg) were well-matched by the cheekiness of Lin's designs, just as the deceptively simple gray walls of moveable doorways he created for Part Two were balanced with Lin's clean line of unitards and leotards with net skirts.

Among the local dancers, Chuang Yuan-ting (莊媛婷), Hung Chia-lin (洪嘉鈴), Kang Pin-ju (康那如), Kao Yung-yu (高永煜) and Chuang Shih-hsen (莊士賢) stood out.

However, I found myself wishing that more of the Taiwanese dancers had picked up pointers from Laura and Szabo. Laura smiled her way through — when appropriate — and looked out at the audience, while most of her fellow corps members rarely looked up, much less out into the theater. As for several of the men, their haircuts had more attitude and crispness than their footwork. Szabo, on the other hand, appeared totally committed whether acting or dancing, and that's what makes him worth watching.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHAMBER BALLET TAIPEI

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

AUG. 6 TO AUG. 12



1 Wang Lee-hom (王力宏) and *The 18 Martial Arts* (十八般武藝) with **17.15** percent of sales

2 Chen Wei-quan (陳威全) and *Yes, I Love You* (Goodbye, Single) with **11.88%**

3 Han Geng (韓庚) and *Geng Xin* (庚心) with **10.32%**

4 Terri Kwan (關穎) and *The Secret That Can't Be Kept* (關不住的秘密) with **6.8%**

5 Original sound track from *Love You 10,000 Years* (愛你一萬年) with **4.48%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

PLANET POP



Lindsay Lohan's been meeting some "mean girls" in jail.

PHOTO: REUTERS

"She will be coming back to New York," she said. "Los Angeles is a little ... It's a different game you play there, the court system is a little different."

She disagreed that she and her estranged

ex-husband Michael Lohan — who admitted to CBS' *The Early Show* on Friday he had "made my mistakes" — had not done enough to turn the young actress' life around.

"I had to let her go and let her live and fall and fail and survive. Without failure, there's no success," she said. "I was there in close proximity, but you can't make your child not go out and go to a club and not get behind the wheel of a car. I certainly don't condone any of that behavior."

The troubled actress rose to fame in Disney movies like *Freaky Friday* and enjoyed hits such as *Mean Girls* but began to see her career fall apart as Hollywood's nightlife caught up with her.

In 2007, she was arrested for drunken driving and cocaine possession and served 84 minutes in jail along with being put on probation.

Last month, Lohan was sentenced to 90 days in jail and another 90 days in rehab for missing alcohol education classes imposed as part of her probation on the 2007 charges. Her prison sentence was cut to 13 days because of overcrowding.

Another California inmate, Aretha Wilson, accused of attacking **Leonardo DiCaprio** with a broken bottle at a Hollywood party in 2005, pleaded not guilty on Wednesday to assault with a deadly weapon.

She is expected to return to court Aug. 23

for a preliminary hearing. Wilson, 40, who fled to Canada and was extradited to the US to face the charge, remains in a California jail.

DiCaprio, star of current hit movie *Inception*, suffered "great bodily injury" when Wilson attacked him with a broken beer bottle, according to an arrest warrant.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Hilleri G. Merritt previously issued a protective order requiring Wilson to stay at least 500 yards (457m) away from the actor and two witnesses to the alleged attack.

Also in California, **Zsa Zsa Gabor's** publicist says the actress returned to a Los Angeles hospital because she experienced complications while recuperating from a broken hip.

Publicist John Blanchette says an ambulance took Gabor from her home to an emergency room on Friday afternoon.

Blanchette says Gabor's husband told him that the 93-year-old actress is bleeding and in a lot of pain.

He says she was diagnosed with a blood clot and will be treated at the hospital for the next several days.

Gabor broke her hip July 17, had hip-replacement surgery and was sent home from the UCLA Ronald Reagan Medical Center on Wednesday.

—AGENCIES