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COLUMNISTS - OPINION

**Obama's win energizes people all over the world**

McAllister Jimbo / Guest Column

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BEIJING — "Obama jia you," exclaims my Chinese teacher, using a signature Chinese phrase that translates to "Keep going Obama!" Over the past few months, she has been closely following the election and frequently asks our opinions during class. Though trying to remain non-partisan, she cannot help but reveal her penchant for Obama. "He is very inexperienced," she admits, "but I think he will be good for America."

Watching the election from abroad has been a surreal experience. A large part of me wishes I were back home, in the midst of all the election fervor. But in some ways, there has been even more excitement here in Beijing, halfway across the world. From debate watching parties at the student hangout The Bridge to voter registration sessions at the Embassy, Americans in Beijing turned out in large numbers to these events, energized and enthused for the election. Heated debates even broke out between spectators and, in one instance, lasted for more than two hours.

While Americans living in Beijing have shown unprecedented interest in the election, local Chinese and international students have been

keeping close tabs as well. Li Guan, a sophomore at Peking University, explains, "Bush Jr. has not been good for America or China. The next President needs to have a greater understanding of the world." Pascal, a good friend of mine from Burundi, Africa, greatly admires American-style democracy. "You're so lucky to live in a country where you have a say in your government and people from all backgrounds can run for office," he says, adding, "In my country, whichever side has the most guns wins."

Although viewing parties took place all over Beijing, my friends and I decided to stay in and watch the election results together. We huddled around our computers, streaming newsfeeds and widgets, clicking reload every few seconds. Each time a state turned blue, we heaved a sigh of relief and anxiously awaited the next state. Pennsylvania and Ohio elicited loud cheers, as two of the most important swing states finally moved to the Democratic camp.

And then, after a commercial break, the station suddenly cut to a rather cheesy looking freeze frame of Obama, with computer generated fireworks going off in the background. My friends and I were confused for a moment, wondering why NBC was showing a less than stellar Fourth of July screen saver. Then we noticed an announcement, hidden near the bottom of the screen, written in small gold print that read: Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States.

We sat there stunned for a moment. No one could believe it really happened. We checked other networks to be sure, and one by one, CNN, AP and even Fox News declared the race an Obama victory. Everyone in the room, myself included, burst into screams of joy.

As we waited for Obama's acceptance speech, I received a phone call from Pascal, my friend from Burundi. He called to congratulate me on Obama's victory and proudly told me he stayed up all night by his computer, waiting for the results. "I feel honored to know you," he said. "America, and the world, is changing. Now one day your kids, and even mine, can dream of becoming President. And you were part of that change." I hung up the phone, and for the first time in a long time, felt truly proud of my country and the ideals and values



McAllister Jimbo



American citizens living abroad wear T-shirts with the name Obama written in Chinese characters as they watch President-elect Barack Obama's victory speech Nov. 5 at a U.S. Presidential result party organized by the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. (The Associated Press)

America stands for.

After what seemed like an eternity, Obama appeared onstage to give his victory speech. My friends and I fell silent, enraptured by every word. Obama accepted the Presidency with the poise and grace of someone well beyond his 47 years. As Obama heralded "the new dawn of American leadership" and responded to cries of "Yes we can," tears welled up in my eyes. Even though I was halfway around the world, I could still feel the intense outpouring of emotion, excitement and energy from the crowd.

That day, everywhere I went in Beijing, people congratulated me on the election. While the celebrations were nowhere near the scale of those back in the U.S., I still felt a deep sense of pride, joy and appreciation that I don't think I would have found back home. As Americans, we tend to take certain rights and privileges for granted and forget how spectacular our country really is. Yes, it has its flaws. But watching the election from abroad, in a country far less open and democratic, has reminded me what a true honor it is to be an American.

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