11-5-2008

Obama Elected, China Reacts

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive
Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/228

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
Chinese reactions to Obama’s election range broadly, as exemplified in this morning’s news coverage. Dominant themes include racial equality, financial security, a changing international profile for the U.S., and trade implications. [Please let us know if you find outstanding coverage elsewhere that you feel should be flagged—either by submitting a comment or by sending an email to thechinabeat@gmail.com.]

From Jim Yardley’s piece (it is the last piece before the comments section begins) on Chinese reaction to Obama’s election, at The New York Times:

...Mr. Tang, 23, admitted that the American election had been a serious distraction during his Wednesday morning classes. Given the different time zones, the outcome was still uncertain. Yet now that he could assess the historic Obama victory, Mr. Tang’s reaction seemed akin to a sports fan dissecting a box score and betrayed none of the hopeful idealism once conferred on Western-styled democracy by young Chinese intellectuals.

“We are different from the younger generation 20 years ago,” Mr. Tang said, alluding to the generation defined, and scarred, by the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square. “Now we can take a more rational, sober approach when we observe the election. The generation 20 years ago grew up in a different environment. America was like a completely different world. It would be shocking to watch this.”

Mr. Tang’s cool detachment is just a small reminder that if the idealism of young voters in the United States was considered critical to Mr. Obama’s victory, their peers in authoritarian China are often less convinced of the transformative potential of democracy. The bookcases outside Mr. Tang’s classrooms are filled with journals assessing the Sino-American relationship and several students said Mr. Obama’s candidacy had become a subject of much interest and discussion...

And from Evan Osnos at The New Yorker, “Breakfast in Beijing”:

...“Obama gives greater confidence to people of the Third World,” Yang said after the photo. “We, the black, yellow and other races, can be the same as the whites! We struggled for independence and, finally, won that. Now we have won in another field—political affairs—and in a superpower no less.”

In China, Obama’s success has attracted particular curiosity because his emergence is such a thoroughly un-Chinese phenomenon. Political prodigies are rare in a nation that grooms top leaders through decades of Communist Party road-testing and pageantry. And because Chairman Mao’s cult of personality led the country into extremism, the Party spent the next three decades engineering its politicians to be as indistinguishable as possible...

From the BBC’s interviews with Chinese people:

“American elections have shaken me to the core. I have always thought the Chinese political system is the best in the world, but it is not so. We are deprived of our sacred rights, rule of law and human rights are trampled upon. To have a democratic system like the one in the USA is more difficult than touching the sky... But we long to achieve freedom and democracy, which is a difficult task for us young people in China.” (Anonymous)

From Nathan Gardels at Huffington Post, a collection of international views on Obama, including a piece on “If America Accepts Obama, Then It Can Accept the Rise of China” by Wang Jisi (dean of Beida’s School of International Studies):

...Among Chinese intellectuals and elites, who are supposedly more knowledgeable about international affairs, including some senior specialists on America, stereotypes persisted.
Some of them have believed that "America could not accept a black president." Many in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong have predicted that something dramatic, similar to John F. Kennedy’s assassination or Chen Shui-bian’s mysterious "bullet event," would happen to disrupt the process. To them, America, after all, is a nation full of conspiracies, from the alleged “discovery” of Saddam Hussein’s nuclear devices to the machinations that precipitated the current financial storm.

These suspicions reflect a common image of the United States in China: a white-dominated, highly competitive society that believes only in power politics and the "rule of the jungle." Just as America would not elect a candidate from an ethnic minority, this thinking goes, neither would it ever accept the rise of a non-Western nation — China. Instead, America would do its utmost to contain and weaken China unless it changes into a country like Japan.

Now that the election campaign is behind us, it's time for both Chinese and Americans to view each other anew. Chinese should see the United States as a nation not necessarily discriminating against people or nations that are racially, culturally or politically different...

And for those of you interested in China-related election minutiae, Don King issued his endorsement of Obama yesterday from Chengdu.

For other coverage:
“Obama’s Race, Youth Welcomed in Worried China” (Reuters)
“We Wish US-President Elect Obama Well” (China Daily)
“How Will Obama Prove for China?” (Times of India)
“China Reacts Cautiously to Barack Obama’s Win” (Telegraph, with audio from Richard Spencer)
“Barack Obama: The View from China” (Guardian)
“China, Emerging Asia to Fight ‘Protectionist’ Obama” (Bloomberg)
“American Election and Chinese Rice Bowl” (Inside-Out China)
“Obama Victory Provokes Trade Worries in Asia” (Forbes)
“Obama to Retain Taiwan Policy” (Taipei Times)
“Obama’s Election Will Change Taiwan-U.S. Relations: DPP Lawmakers” (Taiwan News)
“Now it’s ‘Cool America’” (Asia Times)
“No Strong Reaction from China’s Leaders” (Washington Wire, Wall Street Journal) (See also: “The Election in the Chinese Media” by Sky Canaves)

Tags: Obama