Houston ties with China get diverse

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By May Zhou in Houston |   
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Houston's economic ties with China are diversifying, said local business leaders at a China trade mission recap meeting on Tuesday at City Hall. Both government officials and business leaders attended the event.  
Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner led a delegation of more than 70 to a trade mission to China in early December last year. The meeting was to review the results of their trip.  
Bobo Harvey, president and CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership, which organized the trip, said that the large delegation number reflected the importance of the relationship with China.  
"The last trip to China I went on was in 2013, the differences were dramatic. During that trip, the interest was almost entirely on energy. Almost every conversation started and ended with energy," Harvey said.  
This recent trip was completely different, Harvey said. "The diversity of Houston was on clear display. Healthcare and medicine was the topic time and time again."  
Texas Medical Center is billed as being one of the largest medical centers in the world and China has sought cooperation in this field in recent years.  
There was even discussion of building a medical city near Beijing airport leveraging the Texas Medical Center during the trip, Harvey said. "It was one of the more exciting conversations we had."  
In addition, while names can't be referenced yet, Harvey said that one of the largest medical device manufacturing companies in China also talked about how to grow its company from a handful employees in Houston to a company that will have multiple hundreds of employees in Houston.  
Energy still draws China's interest. "China is converting from coal-based energy system to an increasingly gas-based energy system; they desire to work with Houston in LNG to have that transformation," Harvey said.  
Mayor Sylvester Turner called the trade mission very successful. Six MOUs were signed in healthcare and education.  
"This trade mission was an opportunity to expand the already thriving relationship we have with our second-largest trade partner. It will ultimately be judged by what happens in 2018, let's see what will happen, let's measure the success with definitive and productive steps in 2018," Turner said.  
Definitive steps are certainly taking place. Li Qiangmin, Consul General of China in Houston, said that a new US-China biomedical innovation center will be launched in Houston in May.

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