Philadelphia eyes deeper China ties

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Aiming to strengthen the exchange and cooperation of cultural heritage, urban development and promote further business opportunities between China and the US, the first China-US Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Forum kicked off on Monday at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.  
"Our relationship with China is a special one, as it's continued to grow since 1979, when Philadelphia and Tianjin became formal sister cities — this was China's first sister city partnership," James Kenney, the mayor of Philadelphia, said in his speech at the forum's opening ceremony.  
"China now is our No. 2 market for international tourism, we also share world heritage cultural distinctions," Kenney said, adding that this January, representatives from the Philadelphia department of commerce visited China and discussed more opportunities for collaboration.  
"We value your friendship and partnership and we want to continue to grow that, it's important for us, important for the peace of the world and also important for our business communities," Kenney told the representatives from China.  
This year's forum is centered on the theme of Opportunities and Challenges for Digital Heritage Protection. The roster of attendees included experts on cultural heritage and relics protection.  
The city of Philadelphia is one of three co-organizers, along with the Consulate General of China in New York and the China Cultural Media Group, that hosted the event.  
The forum featured discussions and keynote speeches from both US and China experts on topics including cultural heritage protection and utilization experience sharing, digital heritage protection and the link between cultural heritage and urban development.  
"We are coinciding with a meaningful time in China-US relations — while we are convening here in Philadelphia to discuss cultural heritage and urban development today, 40 years ago, China launched its historical opening up and reform policy, and almost 40 years ago, China and the US established a diplomatic relationship," said Zhao Yumin, China's acting consul general in New York.  
"From city planning to heritage protection, China has improved its condition by learning and by self-innovation in the past 40 years," said Zhao. "And more importantly, the Chinese people and American people have built a cherished friendship and mutual trust — that's the foundation of broader collaboration between the two great nations.  
"Standing at this historic juncture, China and the US need to think about their future with common challenges such as economic recovery, climate change, environmental protection and counter terrorism," Zhao said, adding that the recent disputes between the two nations have harmed the friendship the two peoples built over past decades.  
"Shall we fight each other with a zero-sum mindset, or work together to find a win-win solution?" Zhao said. "Today we are here to discuss heritage, but what's the most important heritage we need to protect — that's the collaborative spirit China and the US have honored for nearly 40 years."  
Local politicians and business representatives also see the forum as an opportunity for greater economic and culture collaboration between China and the US at the local level.  
"Obviously there's a little complication as we speak right now, but we know things will change," said Philadelphia City Councilman Mark Squilla.

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