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International outreach key for San Antonio

San Antonio Business Journal - by [Patrick Shearer](#)

With its strategic location near the Mexican border, San Antonio has a long history of international trade.

And, for San Antonio to continue to grow and thrive in this next century, we must continue to develop relationships beyond our own borders.

While Mexico will always be a key relationship for San Antonio, Asia is quickly becoming a key target for San Antonio.

In the last week of May, I traveled to Shanghai as a part of the City of San Antonio trade delegation with the goal of establishing trade relationships with companies in China. Along with the mayor, several City council people, key city staff, and a number of other San Antonio business people, over the course of a week we met with hundreds of industry and government leaders, both in meetings with the full delegation as well as direct company-to-company meetings.

While many of our Chinese counterparts spoke excellent English, the presence of several Mandarin speakers from San Antonio, including Councilwoman Elisa Chan, Chin Foster from the San Antonio Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and Maria Ng from the San Antonio International Trade Center all helped to articulate our city's message directly in Mandarin.

I believe that San Antonio has a lot to offer Chinese firms. From our central location with major highways, rail lines and infrastructure like Port San Antonio, to our low cost of living and stable economy, we are better situated than many American cities to take advantage of global trade.

Of course, attracting foreign investment doesn't happen overnight, and building long-term relationships are the key factor to success. The groundwork laid by former Mayor Henry Cisneros creating relationships with Japan in the 1980s had a direct impact on Toyota's decision decades later to open a plant in San Antonio.

Our delegation's visit to China followed earlier trips by Councilwoman Elisa Chan and others, and this delegation led by Mayor Julian Castro is very significant to San Antonio's efforts to continue to build new relationships for decades to come.

On the visit, I was repeatedly awed by the size, scale and speed of China's development. As an example, the delegation had the opportunity to visit Suzhou, a city near Shanghai. Considered a smaller city by Chinese standards, Suzhou is a city of over 10 million people and hundreds of international firms have a presence there, including over one hundred Fortune 500 companies.

The delegation had the opportunity to tour the massive Suzhou Industrial Park, but calling it an industrial park belies the reality: this is virtually a new city, built from scratch, in just over 15 years.

To put it in perspective, total building area in the Suzhou Industrial Park is equivalent to the size of all of the office buildings in San Antonio combined, and it is all master planned around a beautiful lake with office towers, parks and meticulously manicured landscaping. A high-speed train connects Suzhou with Shanghai and other cities, turning a two-and-a-half hour drive into a 20 minute train ride. The investment that China has made in building their country's infrastructure is truly impressive, and visiting China in person opened my eyes to both the scale and opportunities being created there.

But global trade is not just a national issue. In a meeting with the San Antonio delegation in China, former Mayor Henry Cisneros pointed out that while we often think of international trade as being between two nations, the truth is that trade really takes place between two cities.

The friendship agreements that Mayor Castro signed with the cities of Suzhou and Wuxi will be an important step for San Antonio to continue to build relationships in China.

Following the trip I have no doubt that China will define the global economy in the coming decades, and San Antonio ought to make it a top priority to continue to build relationships there.

Patrick Shearer is a partner with Cambridge Realty Group, a full service commercial real-estate brokerage and investment firm based in San Antonio.

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