



XI'S VISION | HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

# 5 cities rise as intl centers for consumption

Policies including instant tax refunds, visa-free transit offer significant boost

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China is accelerating the building of five major cities — Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Tianjin and Chongqing — into international consumption centers on a par with global metropolises such as New York, Paris and Tokyo, as part of the country's broader efforts to boost domestic spending.

From the perspective of global standards, international consumption cities are often regarded as “shopping paradises” with advanced commercial facilities and strong purchasing power of consumers, industry insiders said.

Consumption's key role as a driver of economic development has long been a key focus of China's top leadership.

In November 2021, President Xi Jinping said in a speech delivered via video link at the opening ceremony of the fourth China International Import Expo in Shanghai that China will firmly share market opportunities with the world, including promoting the integration of domestic and foreign trade and accelerating the building of international consumption cities.

About four years ago, with the approval of the State Council, China's Cabinet, the decision was made that the five cities would take the lead in being developed as international consumption centers.

Zhang Xiaoying, a researcher at the Guangzhou Academy of Social Sciences, said, “Given the profound changes in the global economic landscape, building international consumption cities is of great significance for China in boosting the consumption market, promoting industrial upgrading, driving high-quality development and further expanding opening-up to the outside world.”

In the past few years, the five

selected cities have continued to innovate diversified consumption scenarios, and high-quality global resources are accelerating their presence in those cities.

Inbound travel has emerged as a bright spot in these cities. China unveiled a set of measures in April to further optimize its departure tax refund policy for eligible overseas visitors and instant tax refund services have been implemented nationwide.

Marco, a traveler from the Netherlands who didn't disclose his surname, visited Beijing for the first time in June with a friend. He shopped in the bustling Guomao area, the capital's central business district, and received an instant tax refund for the products he bought.

“Being able to buy tax-free goods is always good, just like in many other countries. We assumed there would be something like this here, and we learned the policy at the entry of the shopping mall,” Marco said.

In 2024, the number of inbound foreign visitors to the five cities doubled year-on-year, and the number of tax refund stores in those cities accounted for about 60 percent of the country's total. This year, China will increase the number of tax refund stores to about 10,000 nationwide, almost tripling the current number, the Commerce Ministry said.

“The number of such stores in China is far from enough,” said Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce.

Sheng noted that Japan has more than 60,000 stores available for tax refunds for overseas visitors. South Korea has some 20,000 such stores, while France, Germany and Italy have over 10,000 each.

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Iranians march with flags and signs in Teheran on Sunday during a rally against the United States' attack on Iran's nuclear sites.

ATTA KENARE / AFP

## Mideast tensions escalate as US attacks Iran's nuclear sites

By **LIU JIANQIAO** and **ZHAO JIA** in Beijing, **MINGMEI LI** in New York and **YIFAN XU** in Washington

China has strongly condemned the United States' attacks on Iran and the bombing of nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, according to a statement released on Sunday by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

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The US attacked three sites in Iran early on Sunday, inserting itself into Israel's conflict with Iran aimed at destroying the latter's nuclear program.

The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran confirmed that the attacks took place at its Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan sites. Iran and the IAEA, the United Nations nuclear watchdog, said there were no immediate signs of radioactive contamination at the three locations.

The actions of the US seriously violated the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law, and have exacerbated tensions in the Middle East, the Foreign Ministry said.

China calls on the parties to the conflict, and Israel in particular, to reach a ceasefire as soon as possible, ensure the safety of civilians and start dialogue and negotiation, the statement said, adding that China stands ready to work with the international community to pool efforts and uphold justice, and work for restoring peace and stability in the Middle East.

In a national address at the White House after the attacks, US President Donald Trump said: “Our objective was the destruction



A satellite image shows Iran's Fordow nuclear site on Sunday after it was struck by the United States. MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES VIA REUTERS

of Iran's nuclear enrichment capacity and a stop to the nuclear threat. ... There's no military in the world that could have done what we did tonight.”

He said that Iran's key nuclear sites have been “completely and fully obliterated.”

Iran reportedly responded to the US attack by firing 40 missiles targeting multiple sites in Israel, in the latest escalation of hostilities between the two Middle East nations. Since June 13, Israel has conducted large-scale strikes on Iranian military and nuclear facilities. In retaliation, Iran launched multiple missile and drone attacks on targets in Israel.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian condemned the US attacks, saying, “This aggression shows that the United States is the primary instigator of ... hostile actions against the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Iran's parliament has approved a move to close the Strait of Hormuz,

through which around 20 percent of global oil and gas supplies flow. Iranian media said closing the strait would require approval from the Supreme National Security Council.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was “gravely alarmed” by the US' use of force. “There is a growing risk that this conflict could rapidly get out of control — with catastrophic consequences for civilians, the region and the world,” he said in a statement.

Jack Midgley, an adjunct associate professor at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies in Washington, DC, said the US strikes will trigger more uncertainty in the region.

“Trump's speech after the US strikes on Iran set a triumphal and menacing tone that is both premature and unwise. The political and security-related consequences of these imprudent strikes will emerge over months and cannot easily be foreseen,” he said.

Countries in the Middle East will

now have to reevaluate their relationships with the US, he said. Far from creating regional stability, Trump's attacks on Iran are likely to foment global instability and risk, Midgley added.

Ding Jun, director of the Middle East Studies Institute at Shanghai International Studies University, said the US airstrikes alone are unlikely to compel Iran to back down.

“Iran is now targeting Israel, with the potential for direct attacks on US bases and other assets in this region. If that happens, the risk of the conflict escalating and spreading across the region would significantly rise,” he said.

Ding said that Trump's approach to Iran risks dragging the US into another protracted conflict, an outcome that should serve as a rational and sobering warning, as some US lawmakers have already condemned his action as “unconstitutional”.

Zhu Yongbiao, director of the Center for Afghanistan Studies at Lanzhou University in Gansu province, criticized the US for repeatedly resorting to military force to address regional issues.

“From Afghanistan and Iraq to Syria and Iran, the US has attempted to use military power to push for regime change and advance its own interests. But these interventions have brought suffering to local populations and undermined global peace,” Zhu said.

Ding, from the Shanghai university institute, said that as tensions in the Middle East threaten to spiral further, the UN Security Council and the broader international community must urgently act to foster negotiations, end the violence and avert a wider regional crisis.

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By **WEI WANGYU**

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Bao Guang stood before the snack aisle, his fingers tracing the edge of a potato chip bag.

His eyes were fixed on the first line of the nutrition facts panel: 2,228 kilojoules per 100 grams. Eating the contents of the bag would push his daily calorie intake over the limit he'd set for himself. In the end, he walked away.

His friends called him fat, and he agreed. Using the internationally recognized Body Mass Index,



he admitted he was “beyond the range generally considered healthy”.

Disliking exercise, Bao believed he could only restrict his eating. However, long-term dieting hadn't led to significant weight loss. Instead, it took a toll on his mental health.

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A dealership employee of Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD introduces an EV to a customer in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, in August 2024. HAN XU / XINHUA

## Chinese EVs help drive Africa's green transition

By **LIU JIANQIAO**  
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From Kenya to South Africa, Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers are ramping up investment in Africa, a move that experts said will accelerate the continent's shift toward clean mobility and sustainable development.

Chinese EV giant BYD recently announced plans to nearly triple its dealership network in South Africa by next year, as it seeks to expand its market share in the country, according to Steve Chang, general

manager of BYD South Africa.

Chang said the company plans to increase the number of its dealerships in South Africa to 20 by the end of this year and aims to further expand its dealerships to 30 to 35 by the end of next year. The company is currently implementing its hybrid and electric dual power train strategy, selling six models in the local market.

Beyond South Africa, BYD is also deepening its presence in the East Africa region.

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