

Apple sees China becoming biggest market

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Customers wait for an Apple store to open as = the new "iPad mini" goes on sale in Shanghai on December 7, 2012. Apple chief Tim Cook said he expects China to surpass the US as the company's largest market, state media reported.

Apple Chief Executive Tim Cook, on his second visit to China in a year, said he expects the country to surpass the United States as the technology giant's largest market, state media reported.

Cook said Apple would launch new products in China, but declined to comment on reports the company is planning a cheaper [iPhone](#) for

emerging markets like China, the official [Xinhua News agency](#) reported late Thursday.

"China is currently our second largest market. I believe it will become our first. I believe strongly that it will," Cook told Xinhua in an interview.

Apple said it sold over two million [iPhone 5](#) handsets in China within three days of its launch on December 14 last year.

Products of the California-based company, including the iPhone and iPad, are wildly popular in China where they are coveted by wealthy consumers.

Coming out with a more affordable iPhone in China and other markets could help Apple ward off competition from bargain-priced smartphones powered by [Google](#)-backed Android software.

A separate report carried by the news portal of [Internet giant](#) Sina quoted Cook as saying Apple planned to have more than 25 retail stores in China.

The company currently has 11 such stores in [mainland China](#) and Hong Kong. The Sina report gave no timeframe for the store openings.

Technology analysts say Apple has appeared slow to open more stores in China given the demand for its products.

Apple did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Cook's visit.

On Cook's previous visit to China last March, the man tipped to be China's next premier, Li Keqiang, told him that foreign firms should

protect workers as Apple faced criticism over factory conditions in China.

Speaking on the latest visit, where he met Chinese company executives in Beijing, Cook said Apple has strict codes of conduct for its suppliers manufacturing in China, which include Foxconn of Taiwan, Xinhua reported.

He said Apple would not do business with vendors who failed to follow the company's code of conduct, the report said.

Apple plans to bring some manufacturing of its computers from China to the United States this year, Cook said last month.

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