

The unlikely Chinese cities where house prices rival London

Some of the world's priciest housing markets aren't where you might think. A four-year property boom in China has elevated a collection of little-known cities and turned them into real estate gold.

While that's been great news for speculators, it's raising concern about whether China's educated middle-class is quickly being priced out of these so-called second-tier cities.

A 1,000-square-foot apartment in downtown Xiamen, a port city on China's southeast coast, is almost as expensive as the average home in London, even though local wages are a quarter of what's on offer in the U.K. capital.

How these cities found themselves here is a confluence of urbanization and the promise of quick capital gains.

Some 90 million people have relocated from rural areas since 2012, encouraged by better job prospects and policies aimed at giving migrant workers social welfare that's more akin to urban dwellers.

Owning property (or multiple properties), meanwhile, is something of a national obsession in China after **frenetic** price gains in the early years of this decade made hundreds of thousands of people rich, at least on paper. That mentality has meant literally millions of apartments across the country sit empty as their owners wait for prices to appreciate.

frenetic 狂热的; 狂乱的

"This housing surge can't be justified by economic growth or people's **paychecks**," said Shen Xin, a property analyst at China Real Estate Information. "Many have bought homes earlier than they planned, just to catch the price rally."

paycheck 薪水