

房价洼地

cheapest city

The Economist

听读系列



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中国生活成本最低的城市

现代生活的压力解释了为什么有些人要搬到一座冷清的前矿业镇

Chaguan

China's cheapest city

Pressures of modern life explain why some are moving to a sleepy ex-mining town

Rain

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1. CENTRAL PLANNERS have long shaped **Hegang**, a city in China's far north. Once, **coal** and other **minerals** made Hegang a **pillar** of **socialist** industry. When the richest **seams** were declared exhausted, just over a decade ago, the central government closed many mines and put its faith in green **infrastructure**.



Hegang *noun* 鹤岗, 黑龙江省辖地级市

coal /kəʊl/ *noun* [U] a hard black mineral that is found below the ground and burnt to produce heat 煤

mineral /'mɪn(ə)r(ə)l/ *noun* [C, U] 矿物; 矿物质

pillar /'pɪlə/ *noun* ~ of sth a strong supporter of sth; an important member of sth 台柱子; 主心骨; 中流砥柱

socialist /'səʊʃ(ə)lɪst/ *adjective* [usually before noun] 社会主义的

seam /si:m/ *noun* a thin layer of coal or other material, between layers of rock under the ground 矿层; 煤层

infrastructure /'ɪnfəstrʌktʃə/ *noun* [C, U] the basic systems and services that are necessary for a country or an organization to run smoothly, for example buildings, transport and water and power supplies (国家或机构的) 基础设施, 基础建设

Shanty-towns of soot-blackened miners' huts were demolished and replaced with brightly painted apartment blocks, marching to the horizon beside new city parks.



shanty /'ʃæntɪ/ **noun** a small house, built of pieces of wood, metal and cardboard, where very poor people live, especially on the edge of a big city 棚屋, 简陋小屋 (常搭建于城市边缘)

soot /sʊt/ **noun** [U] black powder that is produced when wood, coal, etc. is burnt 煤烟子; 油烟

hut /hʌt/ **noun** a small, simply built house or shelter 简陋的小房子 (或棚、舍)

demolish /di'mɒlɪʃ/ **verb** ~ sth to pull or knock down a building 拆毁, 拆除 (建筑物)

block **noun** [C] a square group of buildings or houses with roads on each side 街区里的大楼

march /mɑːtʃ/ **verb** [I] + adv./prep. to walk somewhere quickly in a determined way (坚定地 toward 某地) 前进, 进发

horizon /hə'reɪz(ə)n/ **noun** the horizon [sing.] the furthest that you can see, where the sky seems to meet the land or the sea 地平线

A **high-speed rail line** opened last December. There is proud talk of a **graphite** mine that will supply factories making batteries for new-energy vehicles.



high-speed /'hai'spi:d/ *adjective* [only before **noun**] that travels, works or happens very fast 高速的; 高效率的; 迅速的

rail line *noun* 铁路线

graphite /'græfaɪt/ *noun* [U] a soft black mineral that is a form of **CARBON**. Graphite is used to make pencils, to **LUBRICATE** machinery, and in nuclear **REACTORS**. 石墨

Alas for the **technocrats**, they could not prevent more than one in six locals leaving Hegang after 2010, **fleeing** low salaries, limited job prospects (especially for **graduates**) and long, dark, **brutal** winters.



alas /ə'læs/ **exclamation** (*old use or literary*) used to show you are sad or sorry (表示悲伤或遗憾) 哎呀, 唉

technocrat /'tekneukræt/ **noun** an expert in science, engineering, etc. who has a lot of power in politics and/or industry 技术专家官员; 技术官僚

flee /fli:/ **verb** [**I, T, no passive**] to leave a person or place very quickly, especially because you are afraid of possible danger 迅速离开; (尤指害怕有危险而) 逃避, 逃跑

graduate /'grædʒuət/ **noun**
(also *informal grad especially in NAmE*) **1. ~ (in sth)** a person who has a university degree 大学毕业生; 学士学位获得者

brutal /'bru:t(ə)/ **adjective** direct and clear about sth unpleasant; not thinking of people's feelings 直截了当的; 冷酷的

2. Recently, that combination of a home-building drive and a shrinking population has propelled Hegang to an unforeseen distinction. It is by some measures China's cheapest city at prefecture-level or above.



propel *noun* (-ll-) [often passive] ~ sb + adv./prep. to force sb to move in a particular direction or to get into a particular situation 驱使; 迫使; 推搡

unforeseen /ʌnfɔː'siːn/ *adjective* that you did not expect to happen 未想到的; 始料不及的

distinction /dɪ'stɪŋ(k)(ə)n/ *noun* [sing.] the quality of being sth that is special 特质; 特点; 不同凡响

prefecture /'priːfektʃə/ *noun* an area of local government in some countries, for example France, Italy and Japan (法、意、日等国的) 地方行政区域; 省; 县

In 2019 Hegang earned online **notoriety** after young outsiders made **viral** videos and **blog** posts **boasting** of buying **sizeable** apartments there for as little as 46,000 yuan (\$6,700).



notoriety /nəʊtə'reɪti/ **noun** [U, sing.] fame for being bad in some way 恶名; 坏名声

viral /'vaɪr(ə)l/ **adjective** used to describe a piece of information, a video, an image, etc. that is sent rapidly over the Internet from one person to another (信息、视频、图像等) 在网上快速传播的

blog /blog/ **noun** (also **web-log**) a website where a person writes regularly about recent events or topics that interest them, usually with photos and links to other websites that they find interesting 网志; 博客; 部落格

post **noun** (also **post-ing**) [C] (**computing** 计) a message sent to a discussion group on the Internet; a piece of writing that forms part of a **BLOG** (发送到互联网讨论组的) 帖子, 信息; 博文; 网志文章

boast /bəʊst/ **verb** [I, T] to talk with too much pride about sth that you have or can do 自夸; 自吹自擂

sizeable /'saɪzəbl/ **adjective** fairly large 相当大的

The claim is supported by more formal surveys. Hegang's **second-hand** housing **stock** sells for 2,152 yuan **per square metre** on average, making property 40 times cheaper than in Shenzhen, a **high-tech** southern **metropolis**.



second-hand /'sekənd'hænd/ **adjective** not new; owned by sb else before 旧的; 用过的; 二手的

stock /stɒk/ **noun** [U, C] a supply of goods that is available for sale in a shop/store (商店的) 现货, 存货, 库存

per square metre 每平方米

high-tech /'hai'tek/ **adjective** (informal) using the most modern methods and machines, especially electronic ones 高技术的, 高科技的 (尤指电子方面)

metropolis /mi'trɒp(ə)lɪs/ **noun** a large important city (often the capital city of a country or region) 大都会; 大城市; 首都; 首府

3. This **backwater** of 790,000 people near the Russian border has now become an online **byword** for a place where **strivers**—as well as **have-nots** and **misfits**—can turn **modest** savings into a home.



backwater /'bækwɔ:tə/ **noun** (often disapproving) a place that is away from the places where most things happen, and is therefore not affected by events, progress, new ideas, etc. 与世隔绝的地区；落后地区

byword /'baɪwɜ:d/ **noun** [usually sing.] a ~ for sth a person or thing that is a well-known or typical example of a particular quality (某种品质或特征的) 代表人, 代表事物, 典范

strive /straɪv/ **verb** [I] (formal) to try very hard to achieve sth 努力；奋斗；力争；力求

the have-nots **noun** [pl.] people who do not have money and possessions 一无所有的人；穷人

misfit /'mɪsɪt/ **noun** a person who is not accepted by a particular group of people, especially because their behaviour or their ideas are very different 与别人合不来的人；行为（或思想）怪异的人

modest /'mɒdɪst/ **adjective** not very large, expensive, important, etc. 些许的；不太大（或贵、重要等）的

True, many give up and leave within months, often as winter temperatures **plunge** to -20° C. Others visit only briefly to **decorate** apartments bought online, before returning to lives in a factory **dormitory** as **migrant workers** in a giant eastern city.



plunge /plʌn(d)ʒ/ **verb** [I] (of prices, temperatures, etc. 价格、温度等) to decrease suddenly and quickly 暴跌; 骤降; 突降

decorate /'dekəreɪt/ **verb** [T] ~ sth (with sth) to make sth look more attractive by putting things on it 装饰; 装潢

dormitory /'dɔːmɪt(ə)rɪ/ **noun** a room for several people to sleep in, especially in a school or other institution 宿舍; 学生宿舍

migrant worker **noun** 农民工; 外出打工人员; 流动工人; 打工者

But even that remote form of ownership is “a form of emotional comfort” for migrants, who may spend years in Shanghai or Guangzhou but have no hope of buying homes there, says Liang Yunpeng, a Hegang **estate agent**. He sells perhaps 80 cheap **flats** a year to outsiders, typically on the **upper** floors of old buildings without **lifts**. His customers often have less than 30,000 yuan to spend.

estate agent *noun* a person whose job is to sell houses and land for people 房地产经纪入

flat /flæt/ *noun* [C] (BrE) a set of rooms for living in, including a kitchen, usually on one floor of a building 一套房间; 公寓; 单元房

upper /ˈʌpə/ *adjective* [only before noun] located above sth else, especially sth of the same type or the other of a pair 上边的, 上面的, 上层的 (尤指同类或一对中的一个)

lift /lɪft/ *noun* (BrE) (NAmE **ele·va·tor**) [C] a machine that carries people or goods up and down to different levels in a building or a mine 电梯; 升降机



4. It would be **rash** to predict Hegang's **revival** by **incomers**. Several successful new residents **supplement** local jobs by creating short online videos and posts that play on the **novelty** of their move to China's far north, earning **millions** of views for films about the cold or the cheapness of **eating out**. Only a limited number can become famous online for living in Hegang.



rash /ræʃ/ **adjective** (of people or their actions 人或行为) doing sth that may not be sensible without first thinking about the possible results; done in this way 轻率的; 鲁莽的

revival /rɪ'vaɪv(ə)l/ **noun** [U, C] an improvement in the condition or strength of sth (状况或力量的) 进步, 振兴, 复苏

incomer /'ɪnkʌmə/ **noun** (BrE) a person who comes to live in a particular place 新来的人; 移民

supplement /'sʌplɪm(ə)nt/ **noun** a thing that is added to sth else to improve or complete it 增补 (物); 补充 (物); 添加物

novelty /'nɒv(ə)ltɪ/ **noun** [U] the quality of being new, different and interesting 新奇; 新颖; 新鲜

million /'mɪljən/ **noun** a million or millions (of ...) (informal) a very large amount 大量

eat out to have a meal in a restaurant, etc. rather than at home 上馆子吃饭; 在外用餐

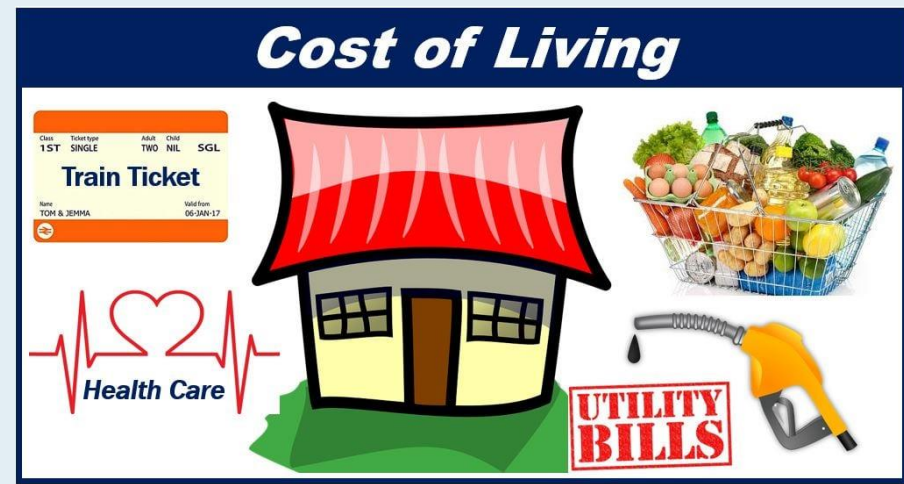
5. Still, this small city is a good place to observe a large trend. China faces a **cost-of-living** crisis. Between 1998 and 2021 urban Chinese homes became four times less affordable, as judged by the **ratio** of average housing prices to **median disposable** incomes. Today a flat in Beijing measuring 100 square metres costs, on average, 6.3m yuan, or about a million dollars. That is 34 times the average annual salary in China's capital.

cost of living *noun* [sing.] the amount of money that people need to pay for food, clothing and somewhere to live 生活费用

ratio /'reɪʃiəʊ/ *noun* pl. **ratios**~ (of A to B) the relationship between two groups of people or things that is represented by two numbers showing how much larger one group is than the other 比率; 比例

median /'miːdiən/ *adjective* [only before **noun**] (*technical* 术语) having a value in the middle of a series of values 中间值的; 中间的

disposable /dɪ'spəʊzəb(ə)l/ *adjective* (*finance* 财) available for use 可动用的; 可自由支配的



Unattainable housing is especially painful because property is seen as a safe, government-backed form of savings, and because a man without his own apartment will often struggle to find a wife. It also **exposes** deep **inequities** in modern society.

unattainable /ʌnə'teɪnəb(ə)l/ *adjective* impossible to achieve or reach 无法得到的; 难以达到的

expose /ɪk'spəʊz/ *verb* ~ sb/sth (as sth) to tell the true facts about a person or a situation, and show them/it to be immoral, illegal, etc. 揭露; 揭穿

inequity *noun* [C, U] *pl. in-equities* (formal) something that is unfair; the state of being unfair 不公正的事; 不公正; 不公平



Some involve yawning income inequality. But others reflect encrusted privilege from the socialist era, notably after urban housing was privatised in the 1990s and sold off to state-employed workers and officials at steep discounts.



yawn /jɔ:n/ **verb** [I] (of a large hole or an empty space 大的洞穴或空间) to be very wide and often frightening and difficult to get across 非常宽; 难以逾越 (*figurative*) There's a yawning gap between rich and poor. 贫富之间有一条鸿沟。

encrusted /ɪnˈkrʌstɪd/ **adjective** ~ (with/in sth) covered with a thin hard layer of sth; forming a thin hard layer on sth 硬壳覆盖的; 形成硬外层的

privilege /ˈprɪvɪlɪdʒ/ **noun** [U] (*disapproving*) the rights and advantages that rich and powerful people in a society have (有钱有势者的) 特权, 特殊待遇

privatise /ˈpraɪvəˌtaɪz/ **verb** ~ sth to sell a business or an industry so that it is no longer owned by the government 使私有化; 将 ... 私营化

sell off to sell all or part of an industry, a company or land 出售, 卖掉 (产业、公司或土地)

steep /sti:p/ **adjective** (*informal*) (of a price or demand 价格或要求) too much; unreasonable 过高的; 过分的; 不合理的

6. Visiting Hegang, Chaguan meets the owner of a small burger **bar**, **surnamed** Hou. He is locally born, and returned from Beijing in 2020 when the covid-19 pandemic **halted** his work as a guide taking Chinese tourists to Russia. Such holidays are not cheap: a family trip to **Moscow** might cost 30,000 yuan. Still, many of his clients were **seemingly ordinary pensioners**.



bar /bɑː/ **noun** [C] (especially in compounds 尤用于构成复合词) a place in which a particular kind of food or drink is the main thing that is served (专售某类饮食的) 小吃店, 馆, 处所

surname /'sɜːneɪm/ **noun** (especially BrE) a name shared by all the members of a family (written last in English names) 姓

halt /hɔːlt/ **verb** [I, T] to stop; to make sb/sth stop (使) 停止, 停下

Moscow /'masko/ **noun** 莫斯科

seemingly /'simɪnli/ **adverb** in a way that appears to be true but may in fact not be 看似; 貌似; 表面上

ordinary /'ɔːdɪn(ə)rɪ/ **adjective** [usually before noun] not unusual or different in any way 普通的; 平常的; 一般的; 平凡的

pensioner /'penʃ(ə)nəl/ **noun** (especially BrE) a person who is receiving a pension, especially from the government 领养老金 (或退休金、抚恤金) 者

The explanation is that **long-time** Beijingers might own two or three apartments, bought cheaply years ago. Now even a small flat can generate 60,000 yuan a year in **rental** income. In contrast, Mr Hou has noticed more Hegang friends **heading** home, after realising that—as migrant outsiders to a big city—they will never have enough **capital** to buy a home or start a business.

long-time /'lɒŋtaɪm/ **adjective** [only before **noun**] having been the particular thing mentioned for a long time 为时甚久的

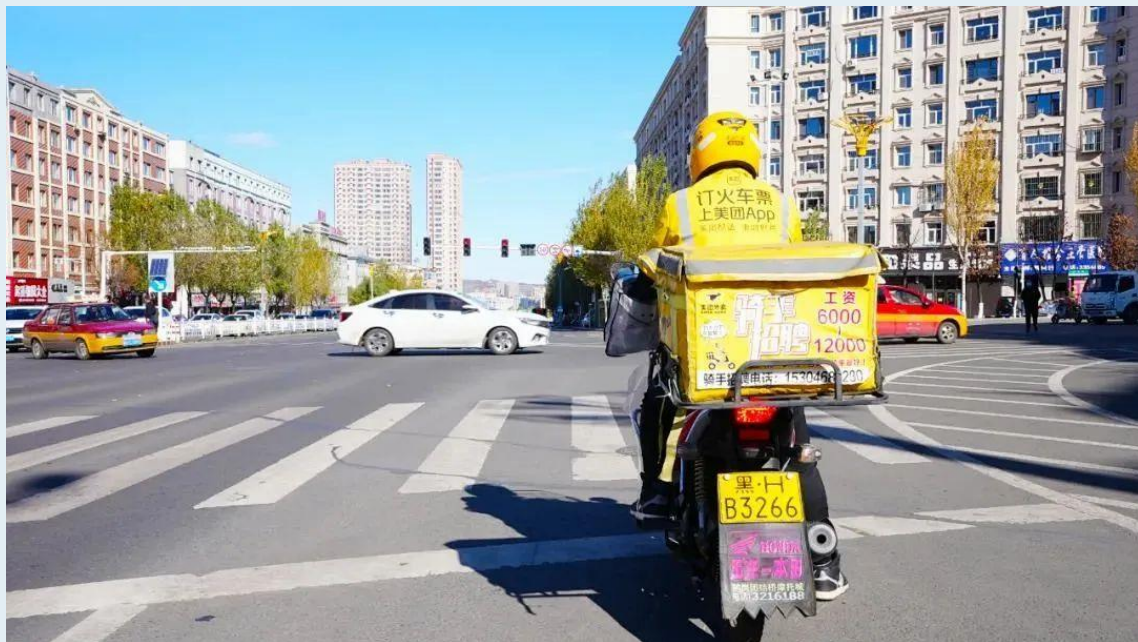
rental /'rent(ə)/ **noun** (also **rent** *especially in NAmE*) [**U, C, usually sing.**] the amount of money that you pay to use sth for a particular period of time 租金

head /hed/ **verb** [**I**] (also **be headed** *especially in NAmE*) + **adv./prep.** to move in a particular direction 朝(某方向) 行进

capital /'kæpɪt(ə)/ **noun** [**sing.**] a large amount of money that is invested or is used to start a business 资本; 资金; 启动资金



He is glad to hear more customers or delivery-**scooter** riders with non-local **accents**, too. **For one thing**, such newcomers **prop up** Hegang housing prices.



scooter /'sku:tə/ **noun** (BrE) (also 'motor scooter' NAmE, BrE) a light motorcycle, usually with small wheels and a curved metal cover at the front to protect the rider's legs 小型摩托车

accent /'æks(ə)nt/ **noun** a way of pronouncing the words of a language that shows which country, area or social class a person comes from 口音; 腔调; 土音

for one thing used to introduce one of two or more reasons for doing sth (用以引出两个以上的理由之一) 一来, 一方面

prop up to prevent sth from falling by putting sth under it to support it 撑起; 支起

7. Some locals resent Chinese bloggers who call the city a haven for those **yearning** to “**lie flat**”, or **drop out** and abandon material ambitions. Wang Dakai, who spent ten years in big cities before returning to open a **barber's** shop, worries that Hegang is being called lazy. “None of us is lying flat, everyone is **hustling**,” he says. Proving his point, as his price for answering questions he asks to film an online video pretending to cut his British visitor's hair to post on his **social-media channels**.

yearn /jɜ:n/ **verb** [I] (*literary*) to want sth very much, especially when it is very difficult to get 渴望; 渴求

lie flat 躺平

drop out to reject the ideas and ways of behaving that are accepted by the rest of society 拒绝传统社会

barber /'bɑ:bə/ **noun** a person whose job is to cut men's hair and sometimes to shave them (兼刮胡子的) 理发师

hustle /'hʌs(ə)l/ **verb** [T usually + adv/prep] to make someone move quickly by pushing or pulling them along 推搡, 推挤

social-media channel /'tʃæn(ə)l/ **noun** 网络社交媒体频道



Individual dreams in a **bastion** of old **collectivism**

8. Some fresh starts are life-changing. Buying and **renovating** a flat for 70,000 yuan last summer allowed a 25-year-old **vlogger** who uses the name “Hua Hua” to make a home for herself and her ten-year-old sister. Each month she sends money to pay for her mentally **impaired** mother’s care at home in Jiangxi province, 3,000km to the south.



bastion /'bæstɪən/ **noun** (*formal*) a group of people or a system that protects a way of life or a belief when it seems that it may disappear 堡垒; 捍卫者

collectivism /kə'lektɪvɪz(ə)m/ **noun** [**U**] the political system in which all farms, businesses and industries are owned by the government or by all the people 集体主义; (一切农场、工商企业都归政府或全民所有的) 公有制

renovate /'renəveɪt/ **verb** ~ **sth** to repair and paint an old building, a piece of furniture, etc. so that it is in good condition again 修复; 翻新; 重新粉刷

vlog /v'log/ **noun** a blog in which most of the content is in the form of videos 视频博客; 影音部落格

impair /ɪm'peə/ **verb** ~ **sth** (*formal*) to damage sth or make sth worse 损害; 削弱

She supports herself by selling **pancakes** and **bean jelly** from a street **cart**, **housesitting** cats, working as an online customer-service **assistant** and writing. Hegang is quiet and friendly, and has some good schools from its days as a mining centre, she says.



pancake /'pæŋkeɪk/ **noun** [C] a thin flat round cake made from a mixture of flour, eggs and milk that is fried on both sides, usually eaten hot for breakfast in the US, and in Britain either as a **DESSERT** with sugar, jam, etc. or as a main course with meat, cheese, etc. 烙饼; 薄饼

bean jelly **noun** 凉粉

cart /kɑ:t/ **noun** (NAmE) (BrE **trol·ley**) a small vehicle with wheels that can be pushed or pulled along and is used for carrying things 手推车; 手拉车

house-sitting **verb** (-tt-) [I] to live in sb's house while they are away in order to take care of it for them (屋主外出时) 代为照看房子

assistant /ə'sɪst(ə)nt/ **noun** a person who helps or supports sb, usually in their job 助理; 助手

Also, she likes snow. On a recent morning she was joined in her tiny, cat-filled home by a newly arrived friend, a **divorced** single mother. The friend has noticed that many arrivals have **strained** relations with families, as she does.

divorced /dɪ'vɔːst/ **adjective** no longer married 离婚的; 离异的

strained /streɪnd/ **adjective** (of a situation 状况) not relaxed or friendly 紧张的; 不友好的



9. No central planner **set out** to make Hegang a city where young women can enjoy rare **autonomy**, without a husband or relatives to control them. This cheap **ex-mining** town is best understood as an **accidental safety-valve**. Its **startling** fame reveals that Chinese society is a system under terrible pressure.



set out to begin a job, task, etc. with a particular aim or goal (怀着目标) 开始工作, 展开任务

autonomy /ɔ:'tɒnəmi/ **noun** [U] (*formal*) the ability to act and make decisions without being controlled by anyone else 自主; 自主权

ex- prefix (in nouns 构成名词) former 前任

accidental /æksɪ'dent(ə)/ **adjective** happening by chance; not planned 意外的; 偶然的

safety valve **noun** a harmless way of letting out feelings of anger, excitement, etc. 疏导 (情绪) 的方法

startling /'stɑ:tɪŋ/ **adjective** extremely unusual and surprising 惊人的; 让人震惊的