

《脱下戏服，小丑的人生五味陈杂》

导读:那些在我们的生活中扮演欢乐角色的小丑，脱下戏服并不总是笑逐颜开。对亚洲小丑而言，他们的收入相当可观，吸引了一批批后继者。但对欧美小丑来说，日子就没那么好过了。



Dressed in a patchwork of bright colours, Ken Ken the Clown fashions a flower out of yellow and pink balloons, and smiles widely.

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One of the first professional clowns in Hong Kong, the 35-year-old says that for the past 15 years he has been pursuing what he calls a "positive" career that "makes people happy".

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Often fully booked, Ken Ken can earn as much as HK\$550,000 (\$71,000; 57,000 pounds) per year. And such is the continuing popularity of hiring a clown in Hong Kong for kids' parties that he is far from alone.

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While he cut a lone figure back in 2001, Ken Ken says that today there are as many as 50 other professional clowns in the special administrative region, and that the number is rising fast.

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In fact, such is the current demand for clowns in Hong Kong that employment agencies are organising classes to train up people.

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One such agency is Grace Training and Development Centre. Enya Hui, one of its employment officers, says that clowning is now a "viable career path".

????????????????????????Enya Hui????????????"????????"?

The current popularity of clowns in Hong Kong is in marked contrast to the woes faced by the entertainers in the US and Europe, who this year have had to endure the so-called "creepy clown craze".

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This unlikely phenomenon on both sides of the Atlantic saw people dressing up as scary clowns to terrify children and adults alike. It led to some schools going as far as even banning children from talking about the craze.

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Against such a backdrop it is not surprising that clowns in the US and Europe have recently found bookings harder to come by - mums and dads are not likely to hire a clown for their child's birthday party if their little one is now scared of them.

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What is less well known is that the clowning industry has been in long-term decline in its established markets, with the World Clown Association saying that membership numbers have fallen by almost a third over the past 10 years, from about 3,500 to 2,500.

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So why are clowns struggling in the US and Europe, but booming in Hong Kong and other Asian countries, such as India?

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When not performing as a clown Ken Ken's real name is Kenneth Ng. Describing his clown persona as "a happy and hyperactive five-year-old", Mr Ng says that it took him 10 years to develop the character.

????????????????Kenneth Ng?Ng??

While he always plays the same role, he says that "every performance is different".

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With up to 100 performances a year, plus income from training other clowns at a weekly class, Mr Ng earns enough money from being a clown for it to be his only profession.

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This is in marked contrast to most clowns in the US and Europe, who usually need another job to supplement their income.

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Julie Varholdt, 52, a fourth-generation clown from Phoenix, Arizona, says that a typical clown in the US earns just \$14,000 a year. This is five times less than Mr Ng, so one reason for the growing popularity of clowning in Hong Kong but decline in the US is inevitably financial.

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Another difference between clowning in Asia and that in the US and Europe is a significant age gap.

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"You don't find a lot of young clowns in the West," says Mr D'Souza. The average age of clowns in Asia is between 25 and 30, whereas in the West, the average age is over 50.

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In the West they don't think of clowning as a lucrative career... but in Asia people are really looking at it as an alternative to an office or factory job."

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As discussed, the problem for most clowns in the West is that it doesn't pay a great deal.

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To attract more clowns in the US and Europe there will need to be an increase in popularity, which would raise demand and therefore earnings.

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