

China's 'Useless Edison' combines inventing and the internet, with hilarious results

Notes & Cues:

Article:

His fans call him "The Useless Edison." But inventor Geng Shuai doesn't mind. In fact, he kind of likes it.

"People say my inventions are useless, but I think there are two dimensions to usefulness: practicality and amusement, " said the 30-year-old former welder, who left his job last year to focus full time on making his questionable contraptions, such as a motorbike with its own toilet. "I like doing this. So it's useful."

Every country has its toolshed inventors. But China - which gave the world movable type printing, gunpowder and the compass - has spawned a population of tinkerers who display the kind of outsize ambition that has helped the country become a global economic giant.

Geng may now be the best-known among them - a new kind of social media star whose calling card is his quirkiness.

He makes a living through inadvertently hilarious videos - filmed with the Chinese beauty filters that make everyone look like an airbrushed star - in which he shows how he makes his inventions and then hams it up for the camera as he demonstrates how to use them.

He now has almost 2 million followers on the video site Kwai, and they give him mobile phone "tips" for his performances - the internet equivalent of a busker getting cash dropped in a hat. His biggest tippers get their names on plaques on the wall in his workshop, which is often the set for his videos. The bigger the tip, the bigger the plaque.

Now, his fans are encouraging him to push the boundaries. Some threaten to stop following him if he dares make anything that is actually practical.

Summary: