

JAPANESE ROBOTICS

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While robots often elicit ambivalent reactions in the west, because of the possibility that they may displace humans in the future or may cause fake emotions, Japanese society generally shows high enthusiasm for all kinds of robots. The popular Japanese manga and anime series Astro Boy featuring a robot boy as hero may have contributed to this sentiment.

To dwell on the history of Japanese robotics we should say that Among Japan's oldest robots are the karakuri ningyo, or mechanical dolls. Karakuri ningyo are believed to have originated in China. During the Edo period (1603-1867), Takeda-za developed a mechanical-puppet theater which flourished in Osaka's Dotonbori district.

In the middle of 20-th century, Ichiro Kato professor of Waseda University studied humanoid robot. He made "WABOT-1" the full scale humanoid robot in 1973. WABOT-1 has two arms, walks by two legs, watches with two camera eyes.

In 1996, Honda announced P2 humanoid robot. After that, a number of companies and institutes started to develop humanoid robots for many purposes.

Nowadays there are many different kinds of robots. Human entertainment robots have obtained great popularity lately, many people actually buy them instead of pets. There are even animal robots to remind people of different animals. Many other kinds of robots are available today, such as: guard, domestic, social and even rescue robots, not to mention androids (robots designed to strongly resemble humans).

Talking about androids, Japanese scientists developed an Actroid. It is a humanoid robot with strong graphic human-likeness developed by Osaka University and manufactured by Kokoro Company Ltd. (the animatronics division of Sanrio). It was first unveiled at the 2003 International Robot Exposition in Tokyo, Japan. Several different versions of the product have been produced since then. In most cases, the robot's appearance has been modeled after an average young woman of Japanese descent.

Eventually robots spread all over the globe. Some people consider it being dangerous, saying that robots may sooner or later start some sort of rebellion against people.

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