

Robot waiters in China never lose patience

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In this Dec. 14, 2010 file photo, a customer collects a drink from a robot waiter cycling around a restaurant in Jinan in eastern China's Shandong province. The restaurant, which opened earlier this month, is touted as China's first robot hotpot eatery. Service with a smile also comes with an electronic voice at the Dalu Robot restaurant, where the hotpot meals are not as famous yet as the staff who never lose their patience and never take tips. (AP Photo, File) CHINA OUT

(AP) -- Service with a smile also comes with an electronic voice at the Dalu Robot restaurant, where the hotpot meals are not as famous yet as the staff who never lose their patience and never take tips.

The [restaurant](#), which opened this month in Jinan in northern Shandong province, is touted as China's first [robot](#) hotpot eatery where robots resembling Star Wars droids circle the room carrying trays of food in a conveyor belt-like system.

More than a dozen robots operate in the restaurant as entertainers,

servers, greeters and receptionists. Each robot has a [motion sensor](#) that tells it to stop when someone is in its path so customers can reach for dishes they want.

The service industry in China has not always kept up with the country's rapid economic growth, and can be quite basic in some restaurants, leading customers in the Dalu restaurant to praise the robots.

"They have a better service attitude than humans," said Li Xiaomei, 35, who was visiting the restaurant for the first time.

"Humans can be temperamental or impatient, but they don't feel tired, they just keep working and moving round and round the restaurant all night," Li said.

Inspired by space exploration, robot technology and global innovation, the restaurant's owner, Zhang Yongpei, said he hopes his restaurant will show the world China is a serious competitor in developing technology.

"I hope this new concept shows that China is forward-thinking and innovative," Zhang said.

As customers enter the dimly lit restaurant lined with blinking neon lights to simulate a futuristic environment, a female robot decorated with batting eyelashes greets people with an electronic "welcome."

During the meal, crowds of up to 100 customers, are entertained by a dancing and talking robot that looks more like a mannequin with a dress, flapping its arms around in a stiff motion.

Zhang said he hopes to roll out 30 robots - which cost \$6,000 each - in the coming months and eventually develop robots with human-like qualities that serve customers at their table and can walk up and down

the stairs.

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