

Talking humanoid robot launches on Japan rocket

August 4 2013



In this photo taken from video Japan's H-2B rocket lifts off from a launch pad at the Tanegashima Space Center in Tanegashima, southern Japan, Sunday, Aug. 4, 2013. Japan successfully launched the un-manned cargo transporter Sunday carrying close to five and a half tons of supplies and equipment, along with a small robot which will serve as a companion to Japanese astronaut Koichi Wakata who is onboard the International Space Station. (AP Photo/JAXA via AP video)

The first talking humanoid robot "astronaut" has taken off in a rocket.

Kirobo—derived from the Japanese words for "hope" and "robot"—was

among five tons of supplies and machinery on a rocket launched Sunday for the International Space Station from Tanegashima, southwestern Japan, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, said.

The childlike robot was designed to be a companion for astronaut Koichi Wakata, and will communicate with another robot on Earth, according to developers. Wakata is expected to arrive at the space station in November.

Robot designer Tomotaka Takahashi, of the University of Tokyo, advertiser Dentsu and automaker Toyota Motor Corp. worked on the robot.

The challenge was making sure it could move and talk where there was no gravity.

Ahead of the launch, the 34-centimeter (13-inch) tall Kirobo told reporters, "one small step for me, a giant leap for robots."

Japan boasts the most sophisticated robotics in the world, but because of its "manga" culture, it tends to favor cute robots with human-like characteristics with [emotional appeal](#), a use of technology that has at times drawn criticism for being not productive.

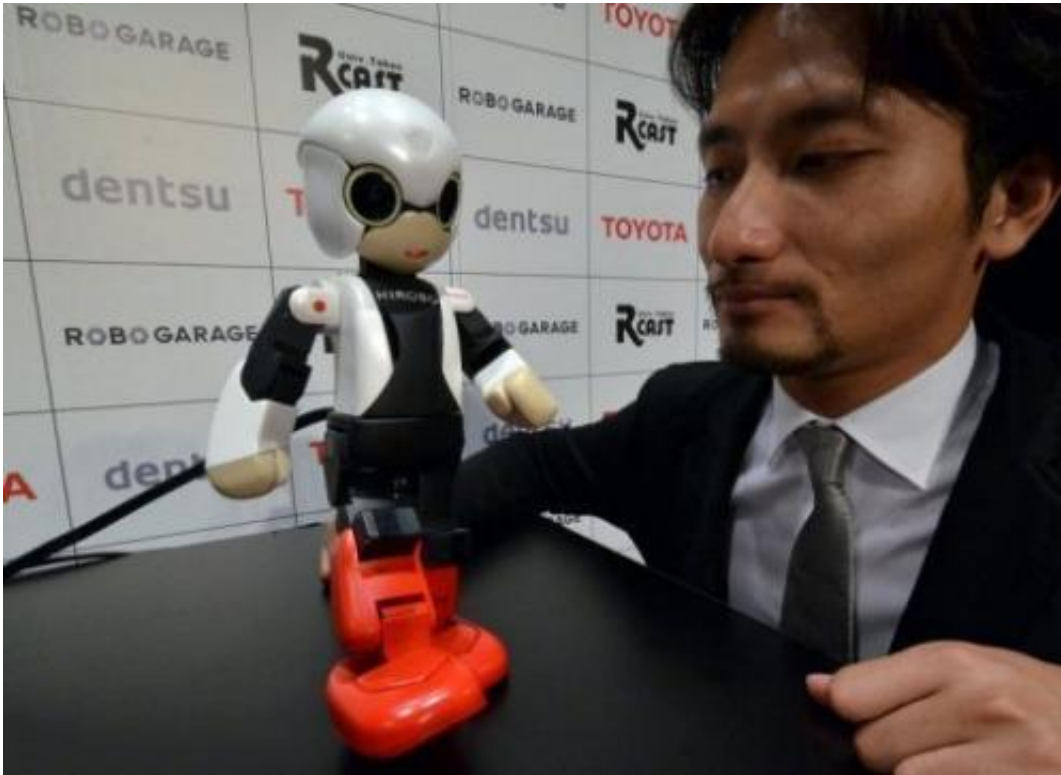


In this June 26, 2013, humanoid communication robot Kirobo is shown during a press unveiling in Tokyo. The first talking humanoid robot "astronaut" has taken off in a rocket. Kirobo - derived from the Japanese words for "hope" and "robot" - was among five tons of supplies and machinery on a rocket launched Sunday, Aug. 4, 2013, for the International Space Station from Tanegashima, southwestern Japan, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, said. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, File)

But Takahashi, the designer, said sending a robot into space could help write a new chapter in the history of communication.

"I wish for this robot to function as a mediator between person and machine, or person and Internet and sometimes even between people,"

he said.



Japan's Tokyo University robot creator Tomotaka Takahashi demonstrates robot Kirobo in Tokyo on June 26, 2013. The small talking robot accompanied the cargo-carrying rocket launched from Japan Sunday to the International Space Station.

JAXA, Japan's equivalent of NASA, said the [rocket launch](#) was successful, and the separation of a cargo vehicle, carrying the robot to the space station, was confirmed about 15 minutes after liftoff.

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