

# Chinese humanoid robot turns on the charm in Shanghai

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The humanoid robot 'Jia Jia' can hold a simple conversation and make specific facial expressions when asked

"Jia Jia" can hold a simple conversation and make specific facial expressions when asked, and her creator believes the eerily life-like robot heralds a future of cyborg labour in China.

Billed as China's first human-like robot, Jia Jia was first trotted out last

year by a team of engineers at the University of Science and Technology of China.

Team leader Chen Xiaoping sounded like a proud father as he and his prototype appeared Monday at an economic conference organised by banking giant UBS in Shanghai's futuristic financial centre.

Chen predicted that perhaps within a decade artificially intelligent (AI) robots like Jia Jia will begin performing a range of menial tasks in Chinese restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals and households.

"In 5-10 years there will be a lot of applications for robots in China," Chen said.

With flowing black hair and dressed in a traditional Chinese dress, Jia Jia looks strikingly real. Yet her charm has its limits and simple questions frequently stump her.

Still, Chen said his team has made great progress over the past two years in developing her AI.

She was able accurately to answer a query about the day's weather, hold basic conversations and recognise the gender of her questioners.



The humanoid robot 'Jia Jia' was created by a team of engineers from the University of Science and Technology of China

"You are a handsome man," she complimented one, but when asked later if she has a boyfriend, replied, "I prefer to stay single."

Rapid advancements are being made in artificial intelligence and such products stole the limelight at last week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

A range of products were unveiled that can respond to voice commands to play music at home and follow other remote-control orders—or even think on their feet by accessing and "learning" from the Internet cloud.

One company, Hanson Robotics, unveiled its life-like "Professor Einstein," which has realistic facial expressions and can engage in informative conversations such as lessons in math and science.

Jia Jia is not quite there yet, but Chen sees a bright future for her kind in China.

He said growing prosperity was causing many young Chinese to eschew jobs like waitressing, while an ageing population would require more hands on deck in hospitals and nursing homes—even if they aren't human hands.



The humanoid robot 'Jia Jia' is carried by workers following a presentation at a conference in Shanghai, on January 9, 2017

Chen showed a video of a less life-like, but more functional, robot making and serving tea to team members at his university lab in the eastern province of Anhui.

Chen, however, dismissed sci-fi fears of future robots getting too smart

for our own good.

"As long as this is done in a step-by-step and controlled manner, I don't think there will be a big impact on society. It won't harm human beings," he said.

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