

Fido funeral: In Japan, a send-off for robot dogs

April 26 2018, by Miwa Suzuki



A priest offers a prayer for Sony's pet robot AIBOs displayed on an altar prior to hold the robots' funeral at the Kofukuji temple in Isumi, Chiba

The robot dogs lined up in their dozens Thursday in Japan were no tech fair display. They were the dearly departed being honoured with their

own traditional "funeral."

In some respects, it was a funeral like any other in Japan, with incense smoke wafting as a priest chanted a sutra, praying for the peaceful transition of the souls of the departed.

But the departed were 114 of Sony's old generations of AIBO robot [dogs](#), each wearing a tag to show where they came from and to which family they belonged.

Electronics repair company A FUN, which specialises in fixing vintage products, has sent off some 800 AIBOs this way in recent years at a centuries-old Buddhist temple.

With the AIBO no longer in production, [owners](#) of old or "dead" robodogs often send them to the company, the only way it can obtain genuine parts to use in repairs.

The defunct dogs serve as the equivalent of [organ donors](#) for defective robots, but before they are put to use, the company honours them with a traditional send-off.

The dogs often arrive with letters that give their names, how they spent their lives, and other details.

"I feel relieved to know there will be a prayer for my AIBO," one owner said in a letter.



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Another owner wrote: "Please help other AIBOs. Tears rose in my eyes when I decided to say goodbye."

Bungen Oi, the priest at the 450-year-old Kofukuji temple in Isumi, east of Tokyo, dismisses the idea that holding memorials for machines is absurd.

"All things have a bit of soul," he told AFP after the service.

Nobuyuki Norimatsu, who heads A FUN, also says he feels the robodogs

have souls, even if they are destined to be "donors".

"We'd like to return the souls to the owners and make the robot a machine to utilise their parts," he said.

"We don't take parts before we hold a funeral for them," he says.



A girl wraps a pet robot AIBO after the robots' 'funeral'. The AIBO was the world's first home-use entertainment robot capable of developing its own 'personality'

Combined hearts

The AIBO was the world's first home-use entertainment robot capable of developing its own "personality".

Sony rolled out the first-generation AIBO in June 1999, with the initial batch of 3,000 selling out in just 20 minutes, despite the hefty 250,000 yen (more than \$2,000) price tag.

Over the following years, more than 150,000 units were sold, in numerous iterations, ranging from gleaming metallic-silver versions to round-faced cub-like models.

By 2006, however, Sony's business was in trouble and the AIBO, an expensive and somewhat frivolous luxury, had to go.

The company kept its "AIBO Clinic" open until March 2014, but then told dedicated and loving owners that they were on their own.



The departed at the 'funeral' were 114 of Sony's old generations of AIBO robot dogs, each wearing a tag to show where they came from and to which family they belonged

Desperate owners have turned to A FUN, which draws on the knowledge of former Sony engineers, to get repairs.

In January, Sony unveiled a new version of its [robot](#) dog, the "aibo", packed with artificial intelligence and internet connectivity, but it has not resumed repairs of old models.

The media fanfare did however prompt many owners of older models to look for ways to repair their faithful friends, or to donate those behind salvage.

A repaired AIBO is the product of generous owners, whose own dogs have become lifesaving donors, Narimatsu said.

"I feel it moves on the combined hearts of owners," he said.

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