

Hi, Robot: machines take over at China's Asian Games

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A robot greets visitors at a bank in the Asian Games media centre.

From autonomous bug zappers to android pianists and driverless ice-cream trucks, machines rule the world—at least at China's Asian Games.

The Games open Saturday after a one-year delay because of COVID with about 12,000 athletes and thousands of journalists, technical officials and spectators descending on Hangzhou.

The city is the unofficial home of China's [tech industry](#) and robots and other mind-boggling gadgets are set to serve, amuse and police visitors.

An automated mosquito trapper roams the vast Games Village, zapping the pests after luring them in by mimicking a human's body temperature and breathing.

Robot "dogs" that can run, jump and flip over patrol power-supply facilities. Smaller versions dance while a bright-yellow android plays the piano.

Driverless minibusses are set to shuttle visitors through the nearby city of Shaoxing, where baseball and softball venues are located.

Athletes can put their reflexes to the test against a table-tennis playing "Pongbot".

At the massive media center, a blushing plastic-and-metal receptionist with a number pad and card slots built into its torso greets customers at a makeshift bank.

Even venues were built with the help of construction robots which organizers say are "very cute, with unique skills".

Summing up how keen China is to push the theme at the Games, the mascots are three [humanoid robots](#)—Congcong, Lianlian and Chenchen, whose smiling faces adorn massive signs across Hangzhou and other nearby host cities.



A robot dog tramples over rubble in a demonstration.

Dog meets 'dog'

Hangzhou, a city of 12 million people in China's east, has built up a reputation as a home for tech startups.

That includes a thriving robotics sector eager to close the gap on industry-leading rivals in countries such as the United States and Japan.

At a business park, staff from DEEP Robotics put some of their most advanced models through their paces, commanding one four-legged bot

to walk through construction rubble and sending another up a nearby pedestrian bridge slick with rain.

At one point, a real dog turns up and sniffs its robotic equivalent curiously.

Elsewhere, office workers pick up lunch from vending machines that can steam the food and, according to maker Kuaie Fresh, check the temperature so the meal is just right.

The machine also collects data on customer preferences.

In some countries, that would give rise to concerns about where their personal information is going and how it will be used.

But at least one customer was impressed.



A robot dog walks down a pedestrian bridge in the Asian Games host city Hangzhou.

"Its cooking skills are better than most people who don't know how to cook," said Hu, 29.

A global race to push the limits of artificial intelligence brought AI-enabled humanoid robots to a UN summit in July, where they claimed they could eventually run society better than humans.

And industrial robots have raised fears around the world that machines could make millions of jobs obsolete.

"I wouldn't say that robots will replace humans, but rather they are a tool,

and they will help humans," Qian Xiaoyu, a DEEP Robotics executive, told AFP.

A temperature-taking [robot](#) had been lined up to take people's temperatures and report if they showed signs of a fever.

It can also remind visitors to wear a mask.

But the gadget will probably remain in its toolbox after China's ruling Communist Party abruptly lifted its draconian zero-COVID policy late last year.

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