

Quick Biz Reading

Pepper the robot can perform Buddhist funerals

In Japan robots can serve as companions, helpers for old people or entertainers. Now SoftBank's human-like robot Pepper has a new skill. It can act as a Buddhist priest for funerals.

Pepper can chant prayers in a computerized voice. It taps a drum while praying. It is cheaper than having a human priest to see your loved ones off when they pass away.



With the average cost of a funeral is ¥240,000. Pepper can do the ceremony for just ¥50,000. With Japan's population ageing and getting smaller, many Buddhist priests receive less financial support from their communities. Some have to find part-time work outside their temple duties. Pepper can step in when a human wasn't available.

Funeral arrangers have the option to deck Pepper out in the robe of a Buddhist monk and can even live-stream the ceremony to those who can't attend the funeral in person.

Buddhist priest Tetsugi Matsuo said he came to the "Life ending expo" to see if Pepper could "impart the 'heart'." He believes that the 'heart' is the foundation of religion."

Pepper hasn't been hired to conduct a funeral yet. But with robots slowly coming in to many roles of life it seems they will be involved in its end in one form or another.

- ❶ Work with a partner. In Japanese, talk about this story. How much do you remember?
- ❷ With your partner, try to tell the same story in English.
- ❸ If you go to a big supermarket, do you go to the cash register with a human or to automatic check-out? Why? What other robots do you use?
- ❹ **Take it deeper.** What jobs will change or disappear because of robots? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Why?