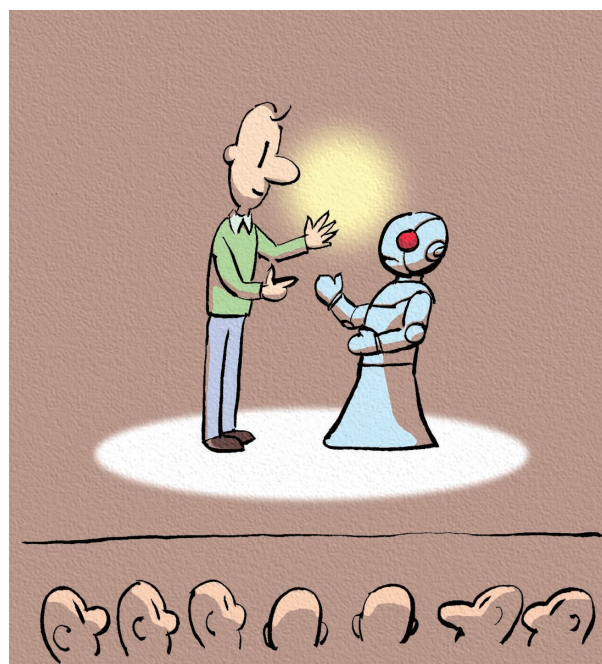


## How Robot-Human Theater Began

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It has already been six years since the Robot-Human Theater project with Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro of Osaka University began. Performances have been carried out in 33 cities in 15 countries (including 12 cities in Japan) to tremendous response. A Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research project that produces visible results in such a short time is probably unusual.

About a year after I moved to Osaka University, I ran into the university's then president, Kiyokazu Washida, in the waiting room for a university PR event, and we chitchatted. I had been gradually drawn into the university's Communication Design Center, which began under the direction of Professor Washida. And I had given several lectures on theater there.

Professor Washida asked me, "Is there anything else you want to do?"

I shared with him an idea that had been brewing in my mind for quite some time. "I want to use robots to create theater."

Professor Washida immediately contacted Professor Ishiguro and Professor Minoru Asada, then Professor Ishiguro's superior. I still remember distinctly the day I first visited Professor Asada's lab, a week later. I first asked him the following.

"If I join the project, I can present the robots as being more advanced than they really are right now. Is it okay to do this?"

I was asking for something taboo in the academic world. If you do something like this at a conference presentation, you will be absolutely criticized for fabricating results. However, the first words from Professor Asada's mouth were: "That's exactly what I want." I received Professor Asada's endorsement and began my project with Professor Ishiguro. The two of us are not only of the same generation, but the extent to which we share the same view of humanity and the same thinking about communication is astounding. Our research accelerated at full throttle from the start. Professor Ishiguro aspired to be a painter in his youth, and I have written many plays with science and technology as the theme, so our mutual histories were a reason why the project proceeded so smoothly.

Only Professor Ishiguro had the concepts for not just what kinds of robots to create, but for how to present them and how to stage the production. Thus I assumed a new position at Osaka University, and helped realize this project. Our achievements are evidence that Japanese universities still have some value as universities.

I have discussed the history of this robot-human theater project around the world. The upshot of my story is that the greatest contributor to this project was a philosopher, Professor Kiyokazu Washida, who brought Professor Ishiguro and me together.