**案例名称：**

**Encounter at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai**

1. **Case Description**

The 2035 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai serves as a vibrant backdrop for a significant cultural exchange and technological dialogue. This case revolves around an encounter between Johnson, an American investor, and a companion robot named BuddyBot, developed by ChinaBot, a Chinese AI company.

As the exhibition hall buzzes with excitement, Johnson stumbles upon BuddyBot, mistaking the robot for a human due to its lifelike appearance and demeanor. The initial interaction showcases a cultural clash: Johnson’s expectations of robotic functionality differ sharply from the design philosophy of BuddyBot, which prioritizes emotional support and lifestyle enhancement. Johnson approaches BuddyBot with curiosity, asking about its capabilities. His expectation is that the robot will function as a practical assistant, handling tasks such as email management and scheduling. However, BuddyBot, in its programmed manner, responds by offering to prepare tea and select a jacket for Johnson, emphasizing health and comfort. This interaction quickly becomes awkward, as Johnson expresses frustration over what he perceives as the robot's misinterpretation of its role.

The arrival of Manager Li, the Chinese manager of ChinaBot, introduces a crucial perspective. She explains that BuddyBot’s design is tailored for the Asian market, where the concept of companionship and family care holds significant value. This contrast in values highlights a key challenge in the global expansion of AI technologies--what resonates in one culture may not be accepted in another.

Manager Li invites Johnson to learn more about BuddyBot’s unique selling proposition, emphasizing its role in alleviating loneliness, particularly among the elderly. This resonates with traditional Chinese values of filial piety and family cohesion. BuddyBot, through its programmed responses, reinforces this by sharing statistics about its adoption rates among Chinese families. However, Johnson remains skeptical. He argues that the cultural context in the United States is markedly different; the desire for robot companions focused on family care is less pronounced. He asserts that Americans are less inclined to invest in such technologies, especially for elderly care, preferring more practical applications of robotics in personal efficiency. Despite Johnson’s resistance, Manager Li proposes an adaptation strategy—introducing the MYBUDDYBOT line, designed with more advanced features for personal quality of life improvement, such as exercise reminders and smart home control. This shift aims to align the product more closely with Western consumer expectations.

Johnson’s initial discomfort leads to further dialogues about emotional interaction with technology. He articulates his belief that effective companionship requires explicit communication and emotional resonance, traits he feels robots currently lack. The conversation reflects a deeper philosophical divide: while Johnson views robots as incapable of forming genuine emotional connections, Manager Li and BuddyBot propose a future where AI can adapt and learn to meet these emotional needs. Manager Li reassures Johnson that they are developing systems for emotional recognition and feedback, aiming to enhance the robot's ability to communicate effectively with Western users. The introduction of non-verbal cues and emotional expressions aims to bridge the gap between technological capabilities and user expectations.

As the discussion progresses, Johnson raises concerns regarding the societal acceptance of humanoid robots in the United States. He reflects on cultural anxieties surrounding AI, questioning the implications of robots with human-like appearances. Manager Li acknowledges these concerns and describes efforts to design less human-like robots to ease potential user discomfort. In a surprising turn, Johnson reveals an openness to Eastern philosophies, expressing a willingness to invest in ChinaBot’s expansion into Western markets. This moment signifies a pivotal shift in Johnson’s perspective, moving from skepticism to a proactive engagement with the company’s vision for the future of AI companionship.

The encounter between Johnson, BuddyBot, and Manager Li at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference illustrates the complexities of cross-cultural exchanges in technology. It emphasizes the importance of understanding diverse consumer needs and values when developing products for a global market. As AI continues to evolve, the ability to adapt to varying cultural expectations will be crucial for companies aiming to succeed internationally. Johnson’s eventual willingness to invest highlights a growing recognition of the potential for AI technologies to transcend cultural barriers, ultimately fostering a future where human-robot interactions can be both functional and emotionally resonant.

**II. Analysis**

**Section A Major Issues & Theoretical Explanation**

1. **The conflict about family responsibility**

* **The Chinese view:**

Chinese people have always had strong family values and have a culture of filial piety passed down for thousands of years, which is why the market for companion robots is chosen in China. Chinese people consider that they have the duty to take care of the elderly. So Chinese people will buy such robots for their family members, especially the elderly parents, to give them more care and companionship when family members are away.

**· The American view:**

For Americans, their family values may not be as strong as they are in China. Accompanying the elderly isn’t a must for Americans. In fact, it is a common phenomenon for Americans to separate from their children after they form their own core family. So that's why Johnson says these kinds of robots equipped with “special functions” won’t be different from the other common robots and thus won’t catch the American market.

**· Theoretical explanation:**

The cultural differences between China and the United States regarding the market for companion robots can be understood through Hofstede's dimensions of collectivism versus individualism and the Confucian value of filial piety, or "Xiao" .

In China, collectivism is a fundamental aspect of society. This cultural framework emphasizes family unity, community, and social harmony. Strong family values and the duty to care for elderly relatives are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, stemming from Confucian ideals. The concept of filial piety dictates that children should honor and care for their parents, reflecting a profound sense of responsibility. Consequently, the demand for companion robots in China is driven by a desire to fulfill these familial obligations, providing support and companionship to elderly family members, especially when their children are not available. These robots are perceived not merely as technological innovations, but as extensions of familial care, aligning with the collective values of the society.

In contrast, the United States leans toward individualism, where personal autonomy and independence are highly valued. The American perspective often encourages self-sufficiency, particularly among the elderly. In this context, many older Americans do not see the need for constant companionship or care from their children, as they have been socialized to prioritize their independence. As Johnson suggests, the idea of companion robots may not resonate with American consumers in the same way it does in China. To many Americans, such robots could be viewed as just another type of gadget, lacking the emotional and familial significance that defines the Chinese market.

This cultural dichotomy highlights a fundamental conflict: while Chinese consumers might view BuddyBot as innovative and useful tools for honoring family duties, Americans might perceive them as normal and view the new function as unnecessary. The Chinese market embraced these robots due to their alignment with traditional values, whereas the American market may not be surprised by them because the specially-designed function do not apply to the actual need for the Americans.

1. **The conflict about expressing emotions**

**· The Chinese view:**

In intimate relationships, Chinese people often express love and care in a more implicit way. They may take more actions to express emotions rather than speak too many words. Therefore, companion robots for the Chinese market will take action when serving people instead of verbal expressions, which lays a certain foundation for their development in the Chinese market because it can just meet the needs of Chinese customers.

**· The American view:**

For Americans, they value open communication, oral expressions and emotional interaction in intimate relationships. This comes from the environment they grew up in and the way they have been raised. Therefore, companion robots for the Chinese market cannot simply meet their needs. What they need are robots with stronger emotional interaction designs.

**· Theoretical explanation:**

The dialogue between Johnson, the American investor, and the companion robot, BuddyBot, highlights profound cultural differences regarding emotional expression, rooted in communication styles and attachment theories. Manager Li's assertion that "action speaks louder than words" reflects a culturally ingrained approach typical in many Asian societies, where emotions are often conveyed through subtle behaviors and actions rather than direct verbal communication. This aligns with high-context communication theories, which emphasize the importance of relational cues and the context surrounding interactions. In this framework, the actions of individuals—such as providing assistance or fulfilling duties—are seen as significant indicators of care and affection.

In contrast, Johnson embodies the principles of low-context communication, characteristic of Western cultures, particularly the United States. His expectation for explicit verbal expression of feelings, such as love and companionship, stems from a cultural norm that values transparency and direct emotional engagement. Drawing on John Bowlby’s attachment theory, which posits that early experiences with caregivers shape expectations for future relationships, Johnson's desire for clear communication reflects a secure attachment style often fostered in environments that encourage open emotional discourse. He expresses a belief that genuine companionship requires not just actions, but also verbal affirmations and deep emotional connections—elements he finds lacking in a robotic companion.

This case reflects the difference in the way Chinese and Americans express their feelings. As John Bowlby pointed out, the way in intimate relationship comes from the attachment pattern in childhood and the intimacy pattern in growing up, so the difference in this respect is not good or bad, but reflects a cultural phenomenon. In view of this difference, Chinese and Americans have different requirements for companion robots, so this is the source of Johnson's misunderstanding and the reason why Chinabot improved the design. Through the continuous optimization of emotional interaction design, American users may continue to change their perceptions.

**3.The conflicts about understanding of robot-human relationships**

**The Chinese(Eastern) view**

The Chinese see robots as potential family members, and appreciates acts of care demonstrated by the robots, such as attending to the health of humans or having conversations with humans, especially to the elderly and the children. The Chinese also embrace the idea of living with a high-tech robot to make life more convenient.

**The Western view**

The Westerners, on the other hand, expect robots to be personalized assistants that respond to needs of individuals. They are hesitant to establish emotional connections with robots and are more comfortable using robots as tools. They also have more concerns when imagining life with a robot.

**Theoretical explanation**

Firstly, the Chinese may believe that robots are not unlike humans, while Westerners might think otherwise. This difference is deeply rooted in the philosophical and religious heritage of the two cultures.

In the Eastern culture, different schools of thought all agree that human and non-human beings are fundamentally similar, and that the two should be harmoniously united. For example, Taoism holds the opinion that ‘Men follows earth and heaven, which follows Tao, which follows nature’, indicating that all beings are actually alike, which is further discussed by Zhuangzi in his famous article ‘On the Equality of Things’. And according to Confucious, the ultimate goal of cultivating virtue for one human being is to ‘come together as one with nature’. It is therefore natural and enjoyable for the Chinese to see robots acting like humans and to develop a robot-human relationship similar to that between two humans.

The Western culture, however, holds a different opinion. According to Christianity, men are unique because they’re created in God’s image, drawing a distinct line between human and others. And unlike eastern religions like Buddhism which believes the soul of humans can turn into souls of animals through incarnation, the concept ‘soul’ in Christianity belongs to humans alone. Besides, Christianity believes that creating ‘life’ is the power of God, and that trying to seize the power of God will lead to doom, as is told in the story of the Babel. Therefore, it may seem unacceptable and even frightening to Westerners to think that the robots are life-like. In fact, in the US, robots that imitate children or family members are considered inappropriate. (Scheutz, M. et al., 11th ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction, **2016**)

Secondly, Westerners are more careful about establishing emotional bonds than the Easterners in the first place, not only with robots, but also with another person. According to Hofstede’s theory, Western culture which scores high on individualism encourages people to prioritize personal goals and be more selective in their emotional commitments, leading to more cautious approaches in forming bonds. The Eastern culture which scores high on collectivism and stresses group harmony encourages people to actively reach out and form social connections. Thus, when Westerners face robots, they prefer taking a step backwards and viewing robots mainly as tools, while Easterners might be interested in building emotional connections, or at least giving it a try. (Castelo, N. et al., *Int. J. Soc. Robot.* **2022**)

Indeed, in this AI era, we need to consider the users’ cultural background while designing companion robots just like we consider the listeners’ cultural background while we communicate. In this way, we can promote cross-cultural interaction, not only between human and human, but also between human and the artificial intelligence community.

**Section B Resolution**

**Process Outline:**

1. **Premise**: Both sides should maintain a positive and rational attitude before the conflict. Because this is a worldwide artificial intelligence conference, each participant and each participant outcome has its own cultural background, so differences are inevitable. Then too much personal emotion and bias should not be inserted into the discussion, or even cooperation. We should maintain the attitude and concept of mutual respect and mutual understanding to reduce stereotypes of each other, so as to better find consensus and reach cooperation.
2. **Recognize the Conflict:** How to manage conflicts depends on the particular background and situation. Both parties should firstly understand the cultural background (social, economic, political or historical), identify the causes, and define them objectively by several different approaches, so as to figure out the best resolution.
3. **Understand Oneself:** In the process of cross-cultural communication, both sides should not blindly reject others' opinions or blindly rely on others' opinions. It's important to find their own cultural roots and maintain their position properly. Just as in the case, Johnson expressed that in his own culture, companion robots with emotional interaction rather than doing too much for himself are more needed, while Manager Li expressed the selection concept of companion robots based on family concepts and family responsibilities in her own culture.
4. **Understand the Others：**First of all, both sides should conduct comprehensive research on the etiquette, history, natural environment and other aspects of the other side in advance to have a more comprehensive understanding of the other side's culture and avoid prejudice and stereotypes in communication. Second, in the process of conflict resolution, it is important to be sensitive to different cultures and be prepared to suspend suspicion of other cultures. In addition, it is necessary to put yourself in the other person's shoes and understand and respect other cultures by listening carefully to each other's verbal and non-verbal cues. Finally, respond appropriately and politely.
5. **Maintain Contact:** Dialogue between the parties to a conflict is essential, the lack of which can lead to misunderstandings and exacerbate the conflict. If Manager Li hadn't come to explain the market and main uses of BuddyBot to Johnson, Johnson might have a lot of confusion and distrust about this product, and thus might not be optimistic about this product, not to mention future cooperation. Therefore, in view of the long-term cooperation between the two sides, only through communication can better and more peaceful mutual understanding be reached.
6. **Flexible Adaptation:** In this case, because Chinese people have different family values and understanding of intimate relationship from Americans and even people in more western countries, Manager Li said that ChinaBot will improve the robot design for foreign markets, such as strengthening the emotional interaction function, to meet the needs of these markets. This reflects adaptability and adaptation in the face of conflicts, and also reflects the necessity of an open and inclusive attitude in the process of cultural exchange. At the same time, such an approach will avoid further conflicts and create conditions and opportunities for cooperation.
7. **Come to terms and find a shared value:** After a heated conflict, both sides should seek a mutually acceptable solution. Sometimes compromise is inevitable. The key to compromise is to grasp the interests and values of both parties, which is based on an understanding of both cultures and what they have in common. For this case, Manager Li improved the functions and patterns originally designed for the Chinese market to meet the needs of users in the western market. As for Johnson, he accepts this improvement and accepts the robot's "partner" status, thus reaching a cooperation.

**Detailed Resolution:**

In the first conflict, Johnson firmly believes that Americans do not see caring for the elderly as an obligation, leading him to conclude that BuddyBot will struggle to find a market in the U.S. His skepticism stems from his perception that the robot's focus on companionship and emotional support is misplaced, as he prioritizes practical applications of technology instead. The conflict is addressed by Manager Li, who explains that the design philosophy of BuddyBot is deeply rooted in cultural values that emphasize family care and companionship, particularly within the Asian context. She argues that while American attitudes toward elderly care may differ, there is still potential for BuddyBot to adapt and address the individual needs of users in the U.S. by offering personalized features that enhance individual well-being. This perspective prompts Johnson to reconsider his assumptions. Ultimately, this resolution underscores that when developing and marketing AI technologies, it is crucial to actively adapt to local cultural contexts. It emphasizes that successful innovation and value propositions must be informed by a deep understanding of the cultural nuances involved in cross-cultural communication.

In the second conflict, different ways to express emotions were the main problem. This problem is solved by Manager Li. The conflict arises as BuddyBot, trained to prioritize actions over words, fails to meet Johnson’s expectations. Johnson’s frustration stems from his perception that the robot’s design overlooks the importance of emotional resonance that he associates with intimacy. The way to resolve the conflict is that Manager Li mentioned that ChinaBot is developing and improving the emotional interaction systems of the robot. This system aimed at facilitating better communication with American users illustrates an understanding of the necessity to bridge these cultural divides. Finally Johnson accepted this solution, showing a kind of understanding of this solution. This conflict underscores the importance of understanding and respecting diverse communication styles and emotional frameworks in the design and marketing of technology, especially as it pertains to companionship and interpersonal relationships.

In the third conflict, Johnson expresses concerns about the societal acceptance of humanoid robots in the United States, highlighting cultural anxieties surrounding AI and the discomfort that comes with robots that closely resemble humans. His apprehension stems from the belief that Americans may react with suspicion and fear toward overly human-like robots, contrasting sharply with the more open acceptance of such technologies in China. Manager Li addresses this conflict by acknowledging Johnson's concerns and explaining that ChinaBot is actively working on designing robots that are less human-like to mitigate potential discomfort among American users. She emphasizes the importance of creating a balance between functionality and user comfort, suggesting that a less human-like design can facilitate a more positive reception in Western markets. This approach not only aligns with Johnson’s insights but also reflects a strategic adaptation to cultural differences. As the conversation progresses, Johnson's openness to Eastern philosophies leads him to consider investing in ChinaBot’s expansion, signifying a significant shift in his perspective. This resolution highlights the importance of understanding cultural attitudes toward technology and emphasizes the need for thoughtful design choices that accommodate diverse societal norms. Ultimately, it illustrates how addressing cultural anxieties can foster acceptance and pave the way for successful innovation in AI companionship.