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When I was young and on a business trip to Nara, I heard someone say, "There was such-and-such there quite recently." • When I asked, "Around when was that?" • the answer was "about 400 years ago." • I still remember being shocked—400 years ago counts as "quite recent"?!

Apparently, to engage in everyday conversation, you need knowledge going back 400 years. You could probably manage without it, but true mutual understanding would be difficult.

A *high-context culture* is one in which communication relies heavily on context, relationships, nonverbal elements (facial expressions, attitudes, nuances of words), unspoken rules, and tacit knowledge.

Japan is often said to be the typical example. Just like my Nara experience, where history itself served as a necessary context, this is characteristic of a high-context culture.

To protect themselves from predators, small fish form schools to appear larger. They don't communicate with words, yet when it comes time to keep position or change direction, they all shift as if by agreement. Whether or not this is some kind of telepathy, it's a fascinating phenomenon.

Personally, I don't tend to go along with the flow of the atmosphere; I think my own will is relatively clear. Yet even so, I definitely sense the atmosphere. I can feel what those around me seem inclined to do, or what someone wants to say. The boundary between myself and the group feels vague.

By contrast, *low-context cultures* require explicit expression to understand.

In a low-context culture, verbalization is extremely important—putting one's thoughts into words, putting into words what one expects from others.

And speaking of verbalizationâ??this is where generative AI comes in. I think it may represent the ultimate form of verbalization.

For generative AI, the kind of silence that Japanese people often engage in is a real obstacle. Something like â??the eyes speak as much as the mouthâ?• might be replicable with a combination of image recognition and generative AI, but faced with a silent, expressionless person, itâ??s helpless.

As Iâ??ve written before, Japanese spirituality is entirely different from the faith of monotheistic religions. It involves observing nature, deriving teachings from it oneself, and passing them on to future generations. Rather than a passive faith of obeying the teachings of a god, it is an active formâ??seeking out the teachings for oneself. It is contemplative, giving great importance to nonverbal elements.

If generative AI is the archetype of low-context culture, then for those of us living in a high-context culture, it will inevitably feel as if something is missing.

Just as when we interact with people from cultures different from our own, perhaps we should also approach AI with an awareness of contextual culture. At the very least, at this stage AI has no true ability to understand you or meâ??and Iâ??m interested in seeing how it evolves from here.

Category

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