Editor's Preface

Three years have passed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. One of our colleagues, a specialist in medical history, informed us that pandemics in human history tend to continue for three years or so but usually do not exceed this average duration by much. This observation gave us a moment of relief.[1]

The COVID era has been, for us in academic and educational institutions, a period to increase the utilization of ITC technologies or a period to boost DX (digital transformation), in order to lessen the negative impacts of the pandemic and the accompanying restrictions that curbed our cross-border transportation and hence limited the opportunities for global collaboration. Since the increased practice of DX methods of communication, online utilities for exchanging informed opinions among specialists have become indispensable for our research life even after the end of the pandemic era.

On the other hand, since the fall of 2022, we have started to learn a new dimension of DX, the most recent development of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Generative AI. First, we learned about the artistic works created by such AI mechanisms, then its textual applications such as "ChatGPT," and other similar systems, where AI, having learned trillions of sentences written by humans in the past, is able to reproduce similar sentences and save time for its users. This immediately caused consternation among those of us in educational institutions, concerning what happens if a student asks the AI to write his homework while we have not acquired the means to discern it.

One of our specialist colleagues assures us that we are facing a technological revolution of a magnitude that is only comparable to the Industrial Revolution. Whether this be so or not, we have already been living in modern eras for long enough and have adjusted to technological innovations that have changed our lives and societies drastically. My personal assumption is that we will have to accommodate this innovation too, in one way or another.

Supposing that AI provides us with another utterly useful means for intellectual production, and we use it to upgrade our knowledge production capabilities, even though we need to decide a set of rules to use it justly, an immediate question that springs to this editor's mind is: If AI "generates" new texts, does its usage constitute plagiarism or not? If the texts do not exist in cyberspace, then all software used to detect similar texts may not find any similarities. Now, if the authors input their own findings into AI and ask it to generate valid expressions to say what they want to say, the authors can certainly claim the copyright and the right to be the first finder of the scientific findings in the texts.

We have yet to verify the degree of the originality of the author's own findings so that the work of AI remains just technical assistance. Today if we use, for example, AI translation software to produce an English article, we will not be charged with plagiarism as long as the original contents are the author's own. How about the case of AI generation of the texts by order of a researcher? If the issue is one of the degrees of technical support and the researcher's input, we will face problems that require delicate and sometimes complicated consideration.

An optimist may say that, even in traditional cases of plagiarism, we have from time to time faced cases that require careful consideration and sensitive handling. This editor is optimistic since scholars are always challenged by drastic changes in societies and environments. There has never been a significant time when scholars could survive with static modes of knowledge transmission, certainly not after the advent of modernity and the beginning of expansive knowledge production.

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1 Ritsumeikan University lifted all restrictions to prevent the spread of the disease on May 8, 2023, in conformity with the decisions of the Japanese government.

The impacts of the AI revolution must be examined in natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, where we express our findings and original thoughts in natural languages.

Let us remember one important fact here: the languages we use to express "originalities" are determined by the grammatical rules and vocabulary commonly shared by society. Even when a novelist creates unprecedented expressions, or a scientist names their finding with a brand-new term, they do so within the parameters of common rules and vocabulary. Our originality does not come out of total freedom or from nothingness.

In this sense, the emulation of our natural languages by AI should be a blessing, not a menace for the community of scientists, though the unprecedented nature of its manifestation may result in many challenges to us and demand our enduring answers to them.

In this AJI Bulletin we will continue our efforts to support the delivery of scientific findings and original thoughts by our contributors. Your continuous encouragement and support for our endeavors will be greatly appreciated.

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