Hot discussions and radical elaborations have ever been made in Optimality Theory (OT) since it was born in the early 1990s. Of course, ‘minor’ revisions have been made throughout its life, but if we name some of their landmarks which can never be said to be ‘minor,’ at least the following three will unanimously be included in the list of remarkable and influential theory-internal revisions: 1) Correspondence Theory, in which the conceptions of the ‘contained’ mappings and the faithfulness constraints were revised; 2) Partial-Order Model, which revised the premise of the totally-ordered constraint set as actually partially-ordered; and 3) models put forward by various researchers who attempted to account for opacity.

However, current elaborations are entirely different in quality from the ones above. This is because they have sought to overthrow the initial and basic premises that had for sure been thought of as major, established, and even unreformable since the birth of OT: Harmonic Serialism, abolishing the major premise of parallelism, and Noisy Harmonic Grammar, turning the major premise of constraint ranking into that of constraint weighting. These trends are so drastic and radical that the models concerned sound as if they could not be called OT any more.

There have also been other controversial trends currently: external enrichment in OT, incorporating some concepts and techniques from neighboring fields such as statistics, neuropsychology, phonetics, and other cognitive sciences. For example, the spirit of Stochastic Optimality Theory, which appeared in 1997, has been carried over into Noisy Harmonic Grammar in adopting statistic methods and taking learnability into consideration. In 2002, there appeared a model called Maximal Entropy Model, which also used the ideas and methods from statistics and cognitive science. Furthermore, Phonetically-Grounded Phonology has significantly impacted standard OT since its advent in 1995. It still continues to give substantial grounds to theoretical constructs of OT.

Needless to say, internal refinements and improvements have been important and significant at any point of the history of OT. Internal contributions by challenging established views and providing new insights always constitute the core or backbone of the theory, and thousands of new generalizations and fresh analyses have always been offered in tandem with the development of OT. As you know, they range from usual grammatical aspects to typology, acquisition, synchronic variation, diachronic change, etc. It is certain that OT could not be what it is at present without such contributions.

Now, what we have stated so far can be summarized as the following three trends, all of which concern the current developments and elaborations in OT.

(i) Rethinking major premises of the grammatical components in OT
(ii) Providing new insights by challenging or reviewing established views
(iii) Incorporating concepts and methods from neighboring fields

If we look at these current trends, it can safely be said that they reflect the attitude of ‘rethinking now by going back to the basics.’ OT was actually established as one form of cognitive science; in fact, the potentials of Harmonic Serialism and Harmonic Grammar were originally discussed in Prince and Smolensky (1993). Naturally, these current trends necessitate a return to

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cognitive science and a rethinking of questions such as “What are the original basics?”, “What premises should survive, revive, or be revised?”, “Where are we going in the future?”, etc.

This is the precise reason why we think it is now a very reasonable and even desirable opportunity to feature the theme of “Development and Elaboration of OT in Various Domains” in the present issue of the journal. Taking full advantage of new ideas in the current trends, the issue counts seven contributions as feature articles, which are categorized into one of the three types based on the above criteria.

(i) Rethinking: McCarthy, Tanaka
(ii) Providing: Son, Fukazawa, Kurisu
(iii) Incorporating: Kitahara, Kawahara

For specific themes and proposals, readers are advised to read the abstract or content of each article and so they are not repeated here. We really hope that through all of the feature articles, this issue will help you readers deepen your understanding of the past, present, and future of OT as a promising grammatical, linguistic, and cognitive theory.