

Females and the Legal World

By Kang Hyun-ju

In 1994, there was 'Park Bong-sook the Lawyer', a TV drama about a very competent female lawyer. In those days, viewers thought it was rather unrealistic because it was far from the actual, which was few female lawyers existed and were outstanding. I'm sure that, however, they will not feel strange any more for it to be rebroadcast now. Although the legal world was a limited field to females in past Korea, females are entering that field more and more these days as they are getting more opportunities to study law.

Females' entering the legal circle was actually limited in past Korea. There were few females in the legal world because it was too difficult for the females in Korea to enter the legal circle, which has been regarded as a males' field for a long time. According to a publication, which was issued in 1952 by the Korean Bar Association, the first female who passed the judicial examination couldn't become a judge or a public prosecutor just because she was a female. Only two females became judicial officers in 1973, and the first female public prosecutor was appointed after 1980. The fact that there were just two female public prosecutors in Korea in 1992 and the number of female lawyers was under 100 persons until 1988 shows how slight the improvement was. Moreover, the fact that we don't have any female justice of the Supreme Court yet is compared with the case of U.S., which has produced 9 female justices of the Supreme Court since 1981 till now. Considering the small number of females and their insignificant activities in the legal world, it is so clear that the legal world was a limited field to Korean females.

Although Korean females couldn't show their abilities without limit in the legal circle, the situation is changing now. They are extending their influence more and more these days as the number of females who enter the legal circle is increasing. The ratio of successful female candidates is increasing year by year – from 8% of total candidates in 1996 to 17% of that in 1999. Finally, in March 2003, the Judicial Training Institute produced 151 completed female trainees out of 798 persons and the ratio is the highest in Korean history. And the current number of females who are engaged in the legal worlds is not low. Lately it was totaled that 371 females are playing active parts in the legal circle as judges, public prosecutors and lawyers. The most remarkable change is found in the number of the female public prosecutors. The number of female public prosecutors, which was just 2 persons in 1992, increased year by year, and it became 29 persons after the last personnel changes. It is noteworthy that, for last two years, the number increased rapidly as 12 females became new public prosecutors. All of them are competent females who won hard and fierce contest against males.

How can we explain such increase of females' entry in the legal field? It is because they are getting more opportunities to study law as males are. These days, universities in Korea are trying to support female law students. E-hwa Women's University appointed the sphere of law as a special field and started to support it intensively, increasing the regular number from 110 to 200 persons. And in 1999, Sook-myung Women's University newly established the course of the intellectual property right, international trades and so on in order to cultivate female legal experts. Meanwhile, Seoul National University, Yon-sei University and Korea University expanded convenience facilities for females and reinforce the public information about their law departments in order to attract female law students. Supported by such higher educations, females are entering the legal world and showing their abilities. The number of female students in Seoul National University increased from 169 persons in 1995 to 277 persons in 2000, which amounted to 20% out of all students. And in the same year, the ratio of females who entered into the judicial training institute was 17, which is compared with the ratio of 8

in the mid- 90's. And for last three years, the very best of successful candidates of the judicial examination was a female. Now no one dare say that females can't succeed in the legal world. Even though strong influence of the males' dominated society was not entirely lost yet and females are suffering from it, more and more females will enter the legal world and expand their influence.

The legal world in Korea is not a field without females any more. Even though it was only opened to males in the past, females are active in the field nowadays because they have more chances of studying law. There is no doubt that female legal experts can be as capable as males in the same field. And sooner or later, we will feel there is nothing special about females' taking active parts in the legal world.