Winter 2009

Are Women-Only Trade Unions Necessary in South Korea: A Study of Women Workers' Struggles in Korea's Labor Market Comment

Gina Kong

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njilb
Part of the Labor and Employment Law Commons

Recommended Citation

This Comment is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Northwestern Journal of International Law & Business by an authorized administrator of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.
Are Women-Only Trade Unions Necessary in South Korea? A Study of Women Workers’ Struggles in Korea’s Labor Market

Gina Kong*

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifty years, South Korea has experienced dramatic economic and social changes. A once war-torn country has transformed into an affluent, urbanized, and democratic society. The rapid transition has led to considerable improvements in Korean women's education and labor force participation. But Korean women still struggle with job segregation and unfavorable treatment in the Korean labor market. The main reason for the prevailing gender discrimination in Korean labor law and the Korean labor market is cultural prejudice against women. Although Korea is a highly urbanized and modern country, Korean society continues to uphold Confucian patriarchal values which segregate jobs by sex and disapprove of women working outside the home. Many Korean employers further retain a discriminatory view that female workers are less cost-effective or efficient than male workers.

Recently, in response to discriminatory laws, a gendered labor market, and male-dominated unions, Korean women workers organized women-only trade unions. This comment argues that the strategy of Korean women workers to unionize apart from mainstream labor unions is a necessary and positive movement. First, the comment examines the circumstances in which the organization of Korean women's trade unions became necessary to respond to the discrimination and mistreatment of women by the Korean labor market and the inadequacy of mainstream trade unions to protect women workers. Second, the comment examines how the Korean women's trade unions have been improving the working conditions of Korean women and, at the same time, influencing society's views of women.

* J.D. Candidate, 2009, Northwestern University School of Law.
However, despite some of the positive changes in labor laws and various industries, the ongoing passage of laws unfavorable to working women and the gendered market system’s discriminatory response to these laws support the need for and continued growth of women’s trade unions in South Korea.

Finally, the comment concludes with research from other countries demonstrating that successful companies with high profit margins actively hire and advance a large number of female employees and executives. Thus, the comment proposes that in their efforts to overcome Korean companies’ cultural prejudices against working women and improve the working conditions of Korean women, the Korean women’s trade unions should focus on broader social issues pertaining to women’s status and emphasize the importance of gender equality in the workforce to strengthen Korea’s market.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN’S TRADE UNIONS IN SOUTH KOREA

In the 1970s, women workers laid the foundation for the modern labor movement by establishing autonomous grass-roots unions to respond to the military dictatorship of Park Chung Hee and the inhumane treatment of workers during export growth industrialization in South Korea. But when the South Korean heavy chemical industries replaced the light manufacturing industries, the labor movement shifted from female workers to male workers. Eventually, the autonomous grass-roots unions established by women workers were replaced by State-affiliated unions, which focused on large enterprises. When the Financial Crisis of 1997 swept South Korea, women suffered the most. However, the mainstream trade unions, dominated by male leadership, did not provide adequate protection for women workers and further marginalized women workers’ interests. In response to the inadequacy of the mainstream trade unions to meet their particular needs and alleviate their suffering, women’s trade unions formed in 1999. Although women’s trade unions are widely

---

1 Jeong-Lim Nam, Labor Control of the State and Women’s Resistance in the Export Sector of South Korea, 43 SOC. PROBLEMS 327, 332 (1996).
5 Koo, supra note 3, at 123–124.
6 Jinock Lee, A Study of the Emergence of Women’s Trade Unions in South Korea, at *10 (Oct. 20, 2003), http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/aliceCook100th/download/Emergence%20of%20Womens%20Trade%20Unions-Lee.pdf (paper presented at the Cornell ILR Conference
criticized for challenging mainstream unions and allegedly weakening the overall status of Korean workers, this section argues that women’s trade unions are necessary to respond to the labor market’s historic and current mistreatment of and discrimination against Korean women.

A. Women Workers’ Major Roles in South Korea’s ‘Democratic Union Movement’

A large number of women worked in South Korean factories during the export-led industrialization of the late 1960s to mid-1980s. In the 1970s, labor-intensive light manufacturing industries produced most of South Korea’s exports, and women comprised more than 50% of the workforce in these industries. For example, in the late 1970s, women comprised 55.2% of the workforce in electronics, 72.4% in textiles, and 52.4% in rubber footwear. Most of the women working in these industries were young, single women working from the time they finished school (usually elementary level) until they married. In a survey of 675 single working women, 90% of the women planned to leave their jobs upon marriage. The women in the survey planned to stay home after marriage because they believed that they could not earn the same income as men and that their work was limited to ruthless factories. One of the women from the surveys stated:

I spent more than seven years working in a shoe factory before I got married. I never want to see another sewing machine. My husband earns 400,000 won a month as a skilled technician. This is not a lot but we can live on it. My husband wants me to stay home too, so why should I go back to a miserable factory job at a sewing machine?

The reality was that light manufacturing companies hired young, single women cheaply and benefited by maintaining low labor costs. But among the factory workers, the married women were paid even less than the

---

7 See id. at *3.
9 Id.
10 Id.
11 Id.
12 Id. at 558.
13 Id.
14 Kim, supra note 8, at 558.
15 Id. at 557.
younger, single women. Nonetheless, the married working women rarely protested because Korean society disapproved of married women working outside of the home. Therefore, while married women resisted unions the young, single women challenged their low wages and inhumane working conditions.

As women’s entry into the labor market increased significantly through export-oriented light manufacturing industries, their participation in labor unions also increased. In fact, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, a greater proportion of women belonged to labor unions than men. Many labor clashes involved women workers that were well-organized and lasted longer than a month. In addition, women’s active resistance in the 1970s established autonomous grass-roots unions and improved the working conditions in many industries. Some of the more famous autonomous unions formed mainly by women workers included the unions at Wonpung Textile, Control Data, Dongil Textile, Namwha Electric, Suh Trading, and Y.H. Trading.

One of the highlights of this period that demonstrates women’s active participation in the ‘democratic union movement’ and their ability to effectively represent themselves is the formation of Soyo Enterprise’s union. Soyo Enterprise was a small, Japanese-owned factory that produced riding clothes for export to the U.S. market. Soyo Enterprise had 114 production workers, 100 of whom were women. Because of Soyo Enterprise’s abusive managers, low wages, and difficult working conditions, workers in Soyo Enterprise formed a union consisting of all women. The members chose Yu Un Sun, a young, single woman, as the leader, but also chose a married woman and a single woman to be vice-presidents. The union members hoped that by choosing a married woman as one of the vice-presidents, married women’s interests would also be represented and they would be less likely to interfere with the union. After going on extensive sit-down strikes and threatening continual strikes, Soyo Enterprise’s union (Soyo Union) was able to get management to

16 Id. at 560.
17 Id.
18 Id.
19 Nam, supra note 1, at 332.
20 Id.
21 Id. at 334.
22 Id. at 335.
23 Id.
24 Kim, supra note 8, at 564.
25 Id.
26 Id.
27 Id.
28 Id.
Are Women-Only Trade Unions Necessary in South Korea?  
29:217 (2009)

approach the Labor Office of Masan City to arbitrate a settlement between them. Eventually, both sides agreed to a settlement which included a daily wage increase of 500 won ($0.60) and an annual bonus increase from three months’ salary to four months’ salary.

The Soyo Union, although small in number, was significant for several reasons. First, the union was an example of Korean women contributing to the establishment of autonomous grass-roots unions in the 1970s and paved the way for future trade unions in South Korea. Second, contrary to the traditional view that women should be submissive and silent in Korean society, the Korean women workers actively fought against the mistreatment and discrimination they faced. By demanding higher wages and just treatment, they were changing societal views of women. In addition, the success of the Soyo Union demonstrated that women workers were able to organize effectively and negotiate successful agreements with industries’ managements.

However, the Soyo Union was active only until December 1989. Most of the autonomous grass-root unions were obliterated when the military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s severely restricted labor activities. In the 1970s, Park Chung Hee’s dictatorial rule sought to suppress the labor movement and maintain a cheap, disciplined labor force. Park’s regime passed labor laws restricting collective bargaining rights and collective actions. One of the laws passed specifically prohibited labor disputes and labor unions in foreign-owned firms and export-oriented industries. As a result, about 33% of labor struggles resulted in dismissals of union leaders and workers who participated in strikes. In more than 33% of the total labor struggles, union leaders were also arrested and imprisoned. For example, all the union officers of the Soyo Union were fired and the Soyo Union’s President was arrested and imprisoned for a year. Additionally, the use of violence by police to suppress labor struggles amounted to 55.6% of all disputes. In the 1980s, after the assassination of Park, General Chun Doo Hwan’s regime escalated its control over civil society, which included further suppression of the labor movement. Therefore, both

29 Id. at 565.  
30 Kim, supra note 8, at 565.  
31 Id. at 564.  
32 Nam, supra note 1, at 330.  
33 Id.  
34 Id.  
35 Id. at 335.  
36 Id. at 336.  
37 Kim, supra note 8, at 564.  
38 Nam, supra note 1, at 336.  
regimes’ excessive restriction of labor activities quashed the autonomous grass-root unions, formed primarily by the efforts of women workers. Meanwhile, in the 1980s, the focus on female workers shifted to male workers as South Korea’s light manufacturing industries were increasingly replaced by heavy chemical and manufacturing industries, such as steel, auto, and shipbuilding. As the democratic union movement expanded to include mostly male workers from these industries, the unionization rate between men and women began to widen. At the same time, trade unions in South Korea also changed from autonomous grass-root unions to large enterprise unions controlled by male leadership. One of the largest enterprise unions was the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU). In the 1970s and 1980s, the FKTU was re-structured and mainly administered by first Park’s and then Chun’s regimes. The role of the FKTU was to pass the dictatorial regimes’ policies down to the national-level unions. The other seventeen national-level trade unions, such as the National Automobile Workers Union and the National Textile Workers Union, consisted of all male leadership and were affiliated with the FKTU.

The dominance of the FKTU and the national unions eventually solidified the transition to male-dominated and large enterprise labor unions. Thus, the mainstream labor unions, focusing their attention on male-dominated large industries, began to neglect women mainly in the smaller industries.

B. The Status of Working Women During Modernization in South Korea

During modernization in South Korea in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the wide gap between female and male workers in wages, working hours, duration of employment, and job segregation by sex reveal that women faced a discriminatory and gendered labor market. In 1990, jobs were segregated by sex. Most women were concentrated in the traditional labor-intensive light manufacturing industries or unskilled jobs in the heavy manufacturing or chemical industries.

40 Kim & Voos, supra note 2, at 193.
41 Lee, supra note 6, at *2.
43 Id.
44 Id.
45 Id.
47 Id. at 752.
48 Id. at 753.
Also, women continued to dominate the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1991, the average female wage was 54\% of the male wage.\textsuperscript{50} In fact, according to one study, “the ratio of female to male wages in South Korea every year from 1980 to 1988 was the lowest among the [twenty-one] countries that made data available to the International Labor Organization.”\textsuperscript{51} The differences were mainly attributed to sex discrimination and different levels of productivity.\textsuperscript{52} Through the 1980’s, manufacturing, which absorbed over 70\% of the female industrial wage workers, had the lowest wage level in the production sector.\textsuperscript{53} In 1989, women increasingly worked in the clerical sector and were paid higher wages.\textsuperscript{54} However, the greatest wage difference between men and women was in the clerical sector, followed by production.\textsuperscript{55} The highest wage levels existed in the professional and managerial areas, but despite their rapid growth, these sectors together employed only 6\% of female wage workers in 1989.\textsuperscript{56} Wage differences between male and female workers also became greater as years of employment accumulated.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, the wage differences existed not only for female wage workers with low levels of education but also for those with higher education.\textsuperscript{58}

In regard to working hours, women worked longer hours than men, especially in manufacturing.\textsuperscript{59} Specifically, in agriculture and fisheries, women worked thirteen hours more per month than men.\textsuperscript{60}

Women also faced greater employment instability. More than 80\% of women had less than five years of employment in 1989.\textsuperscript{61} Only 3\% of women had worked for more than ten years.\textsuperscript{62} The “retirement at marriage” practice strongly prevailed in the manufacturing, production, and clerical sectors.\textsuperscript{63}

These facts show that although women increasingly became part of the labor market, the gendered labor market structure discriminated against
them. Several reasons exist for the discriminatory treatment of women during modernization. One apparent reason is that the traditional view of women from a patriarchal Confucian society persisted to separate the jobs by sex and mistreat women who were not at home. Another reason is the rise of South Korean chaebols (large, family-owned firms) during the modernization period. For example, by 1994, the top ten chaebols accounted for 12% of employment in manufacturing and 30% of manufacturing sales in South Korea. The chaebols received favorable treatment from the government in exchange for providing financial and political support. Thus, the monopolistic power of the chaebols gave the chaebols discretionary power in their hiring practices. The chaebols benefited from low labor costs by segregating the female workers from male workers and giving them lower wages. Furthermore, the wide disparity in wages between men and women, and the fact that women were segregated into unskilled jobs or labor intensive light manufacturing work, reveal that the mainstream trade unions neglected women workers and were preoccupied with higher wages and employment stability for men in the larger, male-dominated industries.

C. The Effect of the Financial Crisis of 1997 on Korean Women Workers

In 1997, South Korea faced a financial crisis—evidenced by export decline, credit crunches, failed businesses, collapsed chaebols, and a drastic increase in unemployment. Kim Young Sam’s government petitioned the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a rescue loan. The IMF’s fifty-seven billion dollar bailout loan was accompanied by strict financial and restructuring programs. The programs included extensive corporate restructuring through bankruptcies and mergers and acquisitions to induce foreign equity investments. The result was large-scale layoffs which devastated the lives and livelihoods of many Korean workers. President Kim Dae Jung’s Tripartite Accord, permitting redundancy layoffs in the case of an emergency affecting the company, legalized the layoffs and

---

65 Id. at 433.
66 Id. at 433–34.
67 Id. at 434.
68 Koo, supra note 3, at 122.
69 Id.
70 Id. at 122–23.
71 Id. at 123.
72 Id. at 123–24.
worsened the situation for Korean workers.\textsuperscript{73}

What was a stable unemployment rate of 2.6\% in 1997 rose to 6.8\% in 1998, and reached 8.6\% by 1999.\textsuperscript{74} The number of people unemployed increased from 426,000 in 1996 to about 1.5 million in 1998.\textsuperscript{75} By 1999, more than half of all employed workers were irregular or ‘non-standard’ workers (part-time, temporary, contract, contingent, or daily workers).\textsuperscript{76} Thus, both male and female workers were adversely affected by the crisis, but female workers suffered the most in the gendered labor market. During the restructuring of banks and financial institutions, women were the first to be laid off.\textsuperscript{77} Part-time and temporary work began to spread among women, but women typically found it more difficult to find full-time work.\textsuperscript{78}

Studies also show that 86.2\% of employers actually targeted women for “voluntary” resignation, especially if the women were from double-income families, married, or had children.\textsuperscript{79} For example, two major advertising companies eliminated female-dominated departments and targeted college-educated female employees for resignation.\textsuperscript{80} An insurance company and a construction company specifically transferred to remote locations their female employees who had not resigned voluntarily.\textsuperscript{81} Many banks forced female tellers to resign and then rehired them as temporary employees.\textsuperscript{82} For example, Nonghyup Bank, the largest bank in South Korea, laid off 688 female employees and rehired some of them as irregular workers.\textsuperscript{83} In fact, 86.7\% of irregular workers were workers who had been laid off and then re-hired as irregular workers by their respective employers.\textsuperscript{84} Women also disproportionately held irregular employment in the labor market, representing 62\% in 1997.\textsuperscript{85} By 1999, irregular female workers increased by 61\% compared to a 37\% increase for male workers.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{73} Id.
\textsuperscript{74} Lee et al., supra note 4.
\textsuperscript{75} Id.
\textsuperscript{76} Koo, supra note 3, at 126–27.
\textsuperscript{77} Kim & Voos, supra note 2, at 191.
\textsuperscript{78} Id.
\textsuperscript{79} Id. at 195.
\textsuperscript{80} Id.
\textsuperscript{81} Id.
\textsuperscript{82} Id.
\textsuperscript{83} Lee, supra note 6, at *10.
\textsuperscript{84} Kim & Voos, supra note 2, at 195.
\textsuperscript{85} Lee, supra note 6, at *10.
\textsuperscript{86} Kaye Broadbent, Sisters Organising Women-only Unions in Japan and South Korea, 4 (2003) (unpublished manuscript, Griffith Asia Pacific Research Institute) (on file with author).
One of the major reasons for the disproportionate dismissal of female employees during the crisis was the employers’ gender-stereotyped perceptions, which caused them to anticipate higher risks or costs for hiring or retaining female employees. In one survey, employers indicated their belief that female workers were less cost-effective or efficient than male workers. Most employers favored male workers because they believed that men had “more favorable attitudes toward overtime work, harmonious relations with co-workers, a lower rate of discontinuity in work, and had greater competence for the job.” On the other hand, a majority of employers who responded to the survey perceived female employees negatively, believing that women were “likely to quit due to marriage and childbirth, unwilling to work overtime, unsociable, and had lower competence.” The discriminatory attitudes of employers not only clarify why female employees were more easily discarded, but also explain the widespread practices of gender discrimination in the labor market.

D. Problems of the Mainstream Trade Unions

In early 1997, large-scale labor strikes broke out in response to new labor laws that gave employers more power to lay off workers and hire temporary workers. The strikes, focusing on job security, were highly-organized protests on a national level led by the newly formed Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the older FKTU. Although these trade unions gained immense support, they exhibited limitations in several ways.

First, the trade unions sought political power which compromised job security and social rights for members. During Kim Dae Jung’s Labor-Management-Government Council meeting, trade union leaders agreed to the Tripartite Accord, which permitted layoffs during emergencies in exchange for limited collective bargaining rights for school teachers and civil servants and allowed unions to participate in political activities. Although the KCTU voted its leadership out after the Tripartite Accord, it elected the hard line leader of the Hyundai Heavy Industry Union, Lee Kap Yong, as its new President. Lee Kap Yong focused on the issue of redundancy layoffs and restricted trade union activities to protect jobs and

87 Lee et al., supra note 4, at 24–25.  
88 Id. at 24.  
89 Id. at 25.  
90 Id.  
91 Koo, supra note 3, at 120.  
92 Id. at 121–22.  
93 Id. at 123–24.  
94 Id.
prevent wage cuts for workers in large companies.\textsuperscript{95} Thus, mainstream unions became formalized as economic unions and no longer concerned themselves with broader social issues.\textsuperscript{96}

As a result of mainstream unions focusing on large firms, workers at large firms, predominantly men, obtained a substantially higher wage increase than those working in small factories, who were mostly women.\textsuperscript{97} In 1997, the average wage for workers employed in small firms was 72.3\% of the average wage at large firms (hiring 500 or more).\textsuperscript{98} The economic disparities greatly increased as trade unions worked to gain a variety of other company benefits for their predominantly male membership, such as housing subsidies, commuter buses, and medical insurance.\textsuperscript{99}

Also, trade unions prioritized male workers over female workers during negotiations with large conglomerates. For example, the trade unions reached an agreement with Hyundai Motors to minimize the number of layoffs to 277.\textsuperscript{100} But half of the laid-off workers were women in the canteen.\textsuperscript{101} When Nonghyup Bank fired 688 female employees, the trade unions did not respond with the same organizational resistance that they had for other predominantly male industries.\textsuperscript{102}

Finally, continuing to position men as their leaders, the trade unions marginalized women's issues in the workplace. In 1999, women comprised 30\% of membership in the FKTU, the largest trade union at the time.\textsuperscript{103} But out of its 700 leaders, only 30 were women.\textsuperscript{104} Because mainstream trade unions were centered on male-dominated industries and neglected to represent women's concerns, the proportion of women in unions declined from 11.1\% in 1987 to 5.6\% in 1997.\textsuperscript{105}

E. Forming the Women’s Trade Unions in 1999

As the group of workers most negatively and disproportionately impacted by the process of economic restructuring in Korea, women workers became increasingly frustrated with the existing trade unions’

\textsuperscript{95} Id.
\textsuperscript{96} Id.
\textsuperscript{97} Koo, supra note 3, at 126.
\textsuperscript{98} Id.
\textsuperscript{99} Id.
\textsuperscript{100} Lee, supra note 6, at *10.
\textsuperscript{101} Id.
\textsuperscript{102} Id.
\textsuperscript{103} Kaye Broadbent, Sisters Organising in Japan and Korea: The Development of Women-Only Unions, 38 INDUS. REL. J. 229, 239 (2007).
\textsuperscript{104} Id.
\textsuperscript{105} Id. at 238. See also Korean Women’s Trade Unions, About KWTU, http://www.kwunion.or.kr/Eng/About.aspx (last visited Nov. 25, 2007).
failure to represent their interests. When the women unionists’ demands for a greater voice for women and more women’s representation in the leadership positions were slow to be met in the KCTU and the FKTU, women workers finally organized women’s trade unions in early 1999. The women’s trade unions became necessary to bring focus back to women’s issues in a gendered labor market and to protect many women workers in non-unionized sectors. Three women-only trade unions were formed.

The Seoul Women’s Trade Union (SWTU), located in Churngjong-ro, downtown Seoul, officially launched in January 1999. The SWTU is independent from other union federations or organizations. The SWTU also specifically organized to address sexual discrimination against women workers, represent irregular women workers, and organize unemployed women. However, after the SWTU openly stated that it intended to organize unemployed women, the Seoul city government refused to recognize the SWTU as a legal union. To date, the SWTU has 80 to 100 members and is growing slowly.

The Korean Women’s Trade Union (KWTU) was organized in July 1999. The KWTU is the largest women’s trade union with nine regional branches and approximately 4000 members. The KWTU is unaffiliated with the KCTU, but is affiliated with the Korean Women Workers’ Associations (KWWA), which had been in existence since 1987. Because of the KWWA’s extensive experience with women workers’ issues, the KWTU, unlike the SWTU, is able to cover all regions in South Korea and has accumulated resources. Also, by not disclosing that it organizes unemployed women during registration, the KWTU was able to obtain official registration. The KWTU is actively engaged in unionizing irregular women workers in small firms as well as representing unemployed women.

The third women’s trade union is the Korean Women’s Confederation

---

106 Lee, supra note 6, at *10.
108 Broadbent, supra note 103, at 240.
109 Id. at 241. See also Seoul Women’s Trade Union, supra note 107.
110 Broadbent, supra note 103, at 241.
111 Id. at 240.
112 Id.
113 Id.
114 Id.
115 Lee, supra note 6, at *11.
116 Id.
117 Id. See also Kim & Voos, supra note 2, at 241.
of Trade Unions (KWCTU). However, the KWCTU was formed by the KCTU and is viewed as a mere token women’s organization without any real powers.118 In fact, the KWCTU shows many problems typical of women’s divisions in unions.119 Although it has branches in eight regions of South Korea, the KWCTU remains relatively inactive.120

III. THE ACTIVITIES AND INFLUENCE OF WOMEN’S TRADE UNIONS IN SOUTH KOREA

Women’s trade unions have been actively working to represent women workers, especially the irregular workers in small firms, to obtain higher wages and better working conditions. Their successes have been mostly small-scale and incremental, but women’s trade union victories are significant in helping to change Korean society’s views and treatment of women workers. In fact, the successes of the SWTU and the KWTU have resulted in improvements of working conditions for working women in a variety of industries and ultimately show their positive influence over South Korea’s labor market.

A. Seoul Women’s Trade Union (SWTU)

The SWTU has been concerned with irregular workers who are employed in small-size firms. The SWTU has been particularly focused on organizing irregular workers because most of them are without union protection.121 The SWTU runs a union education program that emphasizes issues of sexual discrimination and harassment.122 It also offers legal support to victims of sexual discrimination.123 Not only did the SWTU create its own model collective agreement but it also actively engaged in collective bargaining on behalf of the women workers in small-size firms.124

The SWTU has been successful in a number of ways. For example, it succeeded in legalizing the unionization of the unemployed in 2001 after a year’s struggle.125 The SWTU has also been successful with the restoration of pay on behalf of bank call center workers.126 Recently, the SWTU

118 Lee, supra note 6, at *11.
119 Id.
120 Id.
122 Id.
123 Id.
124 Id.
125 Id.
126 Broadbent, supra note 103, at 244.
successfully represented Kim Na-Na and her husband Chung Moon-Soon, who lost their jobs at Korea Chemical. After they were married, Kim was fired, and when Chung complained about his wife’s dismissal, he too was fired. Korea Chemical insisted that Kim was fired for “incompetence” and that her husband was unfit for its “corporate culture.” However, Korea Chemical is widely known for refusing employment to married women and firing female employees once they get married. The SWTU supported Kim and twelve other women in similar circumstances and the group was able to recover unpaid wages and compensation.

These successes demonstrate that the SWTU has been actively working to change women’s working conditions in Korean society. Although its victories may be considered small, these successes show the ability of the SWTU to negotiate successfully with firms’ managements and to win complex legal battles. These victories also show that Korean industries are responding to the actions of the SWTU and are changing their treatment of women workers. Furthermore, the SWTU has been effectively altering the legal arena for women workers by empowering even the unemployed women to legally organize in Korea.

B. Korean Women’s Trade Union (KWTU)

The KWTU organizes members in a variety of industries where most women are irregular workers. For example, the KWTU organizes cafeteria workers, janitors, librarians, tutors in schools and universities, screenwriters in television, hotel maids, golf caddies, clerical workers, and other women employed in small businesses. In these sectors, the KWTU has successfully negotiated a number of contracts with employers for its members. Because the KWTU has been widely successful, it has recently expanded its membership to twelve regional branches and five occupational branches.

The KWTU has been successful in small-scale and large-scale cases. In the smaller case of the Kyeongsang University cooks in 2003, the University handed over the running of its cafeteria to a labor hire company which then fired many employees, then rehired them on a daily or

128 Id.
129 Id.
130 Id.
131 Id.
132 Broadbent, supra note 103, at 241.
133 Kim & Voos, supra note 2, at 202.
temporary basis. Eventually, when the University took back control over the cafeteria’s operations, the University fired the cooks, all women, employed at the time. The KWTU helped the cooks with strikes and negotiations. As a result, the University reinstated the cooks as full-time employees. Although the case was small-scale, such victories are crucial in assisting the irregular women workers in small firms, who otherwise are one of the most vulnerable groups of workers in society, regain their livelihood and improve their status.

The KWTU has also won an important victory for the Korean women workers on golf courses. There are approximately 20,000 golf caddies, most of whom are women, in South Korea. Because their legal status as workers in national legislation is ambiguous, the golf caddies have been particularly vulnerable to abuses from golf course owners. The caddies are not covered by workplace accident insurance, despite a high rate of accidents and injuries. The golf courses also prohibit caddies from wearing even eyeglasses which could protect them from serious injuries to the eyes. The caddies also face frequent unfair dismissals and sexual harassment.

When the caddies, all women, were laid off at the 88 Country Club, the KWTU represented them. But the Club management, claiming that the caddies were not workers as defined by the Labor Standard Act, refused to talk to the union. Management then temporarily closed and expelled all the union members despite the fact that a collective agreement the caddies won in July 2001 was still in force. Management also turned off the electricity for the union office and barred the union members from entering the premises of the golf course. In response, the KWTU held a series of demonstrations at the club. The 88 Country Club’s

---

134 Broadbent, supra note 103, at 244.
135 Id.
136 Id.
137 Id.
139 Id.
140 Id.
141 Id.
142 Id.
143 Id.
144 Id.
145 Id.
146 Id.
147 Id.
management, pressured by the media and the resolve of the demonstrations, ended up renewed the collective agreement and added new terms.\textsuperscript{148}

The agreement guarantees "the workers' right to union recognition and representation, contains provisions on sexual harassment by golfers, and guarantees sixty days maternity leave and one day of menstruation leave per month, which the Labor Standard Act guarantees all women workers but is frequently denied to golf caddies."\textsuperscript{149} The most significant achievement from this victory was that golf caddies, one of the more vulnerable irregular worker groups in South Korea, could now legally organize themselves and be recognized as official unions.

The KWTU has also been involved in large-scale issues. For example, in the Daewoo Motors case, the KWTU helped subcontracted women workers who were rejected by the existing union to form their own union within Daewoo.\textsuperscript{150} Additionally, since July 2001, the KWTU has campaigned with the KCTU, the FKTU, and other organizations to increase the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{151} As a result, the minimum wage has increased by a total of 20\% from 2001 to 2002.\textsuperscript{152} These successes demonstrate that the KWTU has broad influence over a variety of industries, has effectively improved the working conditions of women through collective bargaining and unionization, and has been shifting the focus back to women's issues in the labor market.

C. Positive Changes in South Korea's Labor Laws and Industries

Since the activist efforts of the KWTU and the SWTU, the Korean government has passed several laws in an effort to improve gender equality. Likewise, there has been a generally positive movement in recruiting and hiring more women in South Korean industries.

The creation of the Ministry of Gender Equality (Ministry) in 2000 is one of the most significant developments.\textsuperscript{153} The Ministry handles discrimination issues, develops policies to improve opportunities for women, and advances relationships with international organizations.\textsuperscript{154} Recently, the Ministry announced a plan titled "Dynamic Women Korea 2010" to create over 600,000 jobs for women within the next few years.\textsuperscript{155}

\begin{thebibliography}{15}
\bibitem{148}Id.
\bibitem{149}Id.
\bibitem{150}Lee, supra note 6, at *11.
\bibitem{151}Id.
\bibitem{152}Id.
\bibitem{153}Id.
\bibitem{154}Id.
\bibitem{155}Id.
\end{thebibliography}
The Labor Standards Law (Law) is the legislation governing working conditions: it prescribes minimum standards of working conditions, deals with employment contracts, wages, working hours, health, safety, and accident compensation, and forbids certain practices, such as arbitrary dismissals.\textsuperscript{156} The Law also permits certain rights for women: sixty days of time off for the mother after the birth of a child, and female employees are allowed one day per month for Pre-menstrual Syndrome (PMS) leave.\textsuperscript{157}

The Labor Dispute Mediation Committee (Committee) was created to examine whether an employee has been dismissed for just cause and has the power to order that an unjustly dismissed employee be reinstated.\textsuperscript{158} Additionally, the Committee enforces the labor laws—for example, if a worker that has been employed for one year or more is terminated for any reason, severance pay of at least one month or thirty days average pay must be paid to the worker.\textsuperscript{159}

The Equal Employment Act (EEA) was revised in February of 1999 to prohibit sexual discrimination in employment and to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.\textsuperscript{160} The EEA requires firms to conduct employee-training sessions on sexual harassment.\textsuperscript{161} In 2001, the EEA was amended again to include provisions concerning Maternity Leave and Childcare Leave.\textsuperscript{162} The EEA also has revised penal provisions, which makes it more practical to implement. For example, employers that fail to implement certain procedures, such as those against sexual harassment, are liable to a fine amounting to three million won.\textsuperscript{163}

The Sexual Equality Employment Act (SEEA) is one of the most important labor acts for Korean women because it has a broader scope in dealing with gender discrimination. The central provisions of the SEEA are that it prohibits sexual discrimination against any worker such that workers doing the same work of equal value are to be paid at the same wage scale regardless of gender.\textsuperscript{164} Under the SEEA, an employer violating these provisions is also subject to penalties that include imprisonment, heavy fines, or both.\textsuperscript{165}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{156}{TAESIK SUH & MARK FRIEDLICH, DOING BUSINESS AND INVESTING IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA 77 (Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP 2001).}
\footnote{157}{Id.}
\footnote{158}{Id.}
\footnote{159}{Id.}
\footnote{160}{Id.}
\footnote{161}{Id.}
\footnote{162}{Id.}
\footnote{163}{Id.}
\footnote{164}{Haesun Cho, Changing Gender-based Compensation Differentials: The Effect of SEEA in Korea, 7 ASIAN J. WOMEN'S STUD. 115, 118 (2001).}
\footnote{165}{Id.}
\end{footnotes}
Along with some of these laws striving to deal with gender inequality in the workforce, Korean industries have also increased the hiring of women. According to the Korea Employment Information Service, the percentage of women employed in Korea reached 42.1% in 2005, showing a steady increase from 40.8% and 40.9% in 2003 and 2004, respectively.\textsuperscript{166} In a survey, industries explained their reasons for recruiting and hiring more women. One reason is that some of the industries, mostly banks and insurance companies, have employed many women in the past and continue to employ women for work requiring simple, repetitive, and assistive tasks.\textsuperscript{167} Another reason is that women happen to be the central workers in terms of the nature of the business—department stores, cosmetics, fashion clothing, home appliances, and airlines.\textsuperscript{168} However, the remaining firms indicated that they were adhering to the EEA and gradually preparing for the shortage of labor.\textsuperscript{169} For example, manufacturing companies and new emerging businesses in auto sales and beverages are hiring large numbers of women in preparation for future economic predictions.\textsuperscript{170} Finally, most of the companies that hired large numbers of women cared about improving their public and social images.\textsuperscript{171}

In recent years, the electronics conglomerates have created an official quota for female employees in recruitment.\textsuperscript{172} LG Electronics introduced the new quota system for its business divisions in 2005 and gave 20% of job openings to female applicants during formal recruitment.\textsuperscript{173} The Samsung Group for the last few years has allocated 30% of entry-level college graduate openings to women.\textsuperscript{174} Although companies in other industries have not formally launched a female recruitment quota system, other companies have been actively recruiting and hiring more women.\textsuperscript{175}

Although it is difficult to pinpoint a direct correlation between these positive changes and the activism of the KWTU and the SWTU, the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{166}Women Account for 42% of Total Workforce in Korea, KOREAN WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE NEWS, Apr. 24, 2007, http://www2.kwdi.re.kr/kw_board/skin/news/view.jsp?bp_board=news&bp_search_key=&bp_search_txt=&bp_cateNo=&bp_curlPageNo=1&bp_bbsNo=151. \\
\textsuperscript{167}Taehong Kim, The Employment and Management of Women Workers Within Korean Companies, 1 WOMEN’S STUD. F. 5 (1998) (on file with author). \\
\textsuperscript{168}Id. \\
\textsuperscript{169}Id. \\
\textsuperscript{170}Id. \\
\textsuperscript{171}Id. \\
\textsuperscript{172}Bae Keun-min, Chaebol Hike Female Recruitment, KOREAN WOMEN’S DEV. INST. NEWS, Jan. 31, 2005, http://www2.kwdi.re.kr/kw_board/skin/news/view.jsp?bp_board=news &bp_search_key=&bp_search_txt=&bp_cateNo=&bp_curlPageNo=5&bp_bbsNo=107. \\
\textsuperscript{173}Id. \\
\textsuperscript{174}Id. \\
\textsuperscript{175}Id.
\end{flushleft}
changes are significant for several reasons. First, the positive movement reflects society’s awareness of efforts to improve women’s rights and gender equality. This could signify that the KWTU and the SWTU have been part of a larger social movement with other women organizations to bring about this change in Korea. In other words, Korean society is not completely stagnant; it has been responding to the pressures from women activists to change and meet women’s needs. Also, since these laws dictate that female workers should have the same rights as male workers, the KWTU and the SWTU can effectively rely on these laws and demand more favorable working conditions for women based on the principle of these laws. In addition, the KWTU and the SWTU can use the example set by the conglomerates, such as Samsung and LG, to recruit and hire more women as models for smaller firms during campaigns and negotiations. Lastly, the willingness of firms to employ more women to improve their public image suggests that companies experience realistic pressure from women activists.

IV. CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN WORKERS IN SOUTH KOREA

Despite some of the positive changes in South Korea’s industries and labor laws discussed above, the recent passage and implementation of unfavorable labor laws and the detrimental responses of industries to the laws present a crisis for modern working women and demonstrate the continuing need for the activism of the KWTU and the SWTU.

A. Discriminatory Laws and Their Effect on Korean Working Women

While the SEEA and other labor laws offer some protection, women are at a disadvantage from the outset because men and women are distributed differently across occupations. Women are usually found in occupations characterized by lower wages and/or less skill. Thus, despite women’s increasing participation in the labor market, over half of women still have irregular jobs.177 This figure, when compared with 27% for males, indicates that male workers are still prioritized over female workers.178 In fact, although women’s participation rate in the workforce has increased, the salary gap between male and female employees of Korea’s large companies widened over the past five years.179 Male workers
employed at the top fifty listed firms earned an average of 1.62 million won ($1,570) more per month in 2005 than their female counterparts.\textsuperscript{179}

One of the main reasons for the ongoing discrimination is that Korea continues to be a patriarchal society, emphasizing the importance of blood relations and the authority of the male as the head of the household. This is reflected in the Korean Family Law (Family Law), which has been only recently amended.\textsuperscript{180} The family-head system within the Family Law survived numerous reforms until 2008 because the Family Law deferred to traditional Confucian values.\textsuperscript{181} The family-head, or \textit{hoju}, is a legal term for a family member who represents and leads family members.\textsuperscript{182} The Family Law, which dictated that there is a \textit{hoju} or family-head in the family registry, had concrete ramifications—giving male household heads direct power over other family members and certain privileges denied to other family members.\textsuperscript{183} For example, the family-head had certain legal, inheritance, and property rights,\textsuperscript{184} and only men were eligible for a family-head position.\textsuperscript{185} If the family-head died, the succession order for the position was as follows: first son, other sons, daughter with single marital status, wife, and mother of the family.\textsuperscript{186} A female family-head, however, lost the family-head status upon marriage.\textsuperscript{187} When she married, the bride had to register into her husband’s family registry and her name was automatically removed from the original family registry.\textsuperscript{188} Under this law then, the surname and family origin of children followed the father.\textsuperscript{189} The Family Law, therefore, had maintained the patriarchal system in Korea for many years. In such a system, the Korean labor market predictably prioritized male workers over female workers.

In addition to the social and legal structural problems of Korean society that persist to discriminate against women, recently passed labor laws suppress the efforts of the women’s trade unions and present further problems for women workers. For example, the Korean government has

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{179}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{181}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{183}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{184}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{185}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{186}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{187}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{188}] Kim, supra note 182.
\item[\textsuperscript{189}] Id.
\end{itemize}
Are Women-Only Trade Unions Necessary in South Korea?
29:217 (2009)

renewed the ban on enterprise-level union pluralism and wage payments to full-time union officials until 2009.\textsuperscript{190} Therefore, many women workers cannot join the SWTU or the KWTU if their firms already have their own unions. Most of the women workers who are denied representation from women-only trade unions are in larger firms with established male-dominated unions. As a result, these women workers are denied proper representation. In addition, the KWTU and the SWTU still require substantial support, in numbers and resources, to survive. By prohibiting wage payments to full-time union officials, this labor law threatens the existence of the KWTU and the SWTU.

Finally, the most controversial labor law recently passed has had a detrimental effect on Korean workers, especially women. The Irregular Workers Protection Act (Act), enforced in July 1, 2007, requires employers to grant permanent status to irregular workers who have worked more than two years in the same job full-time.\textsuperscript{191} But instead of protecting irregular workers, the Act, lacking substantial and specific protective measures, has led to massive dismissals of irregular workers in Korea. For example, one day before the implementation of the new law, Hyundai Department Store shuffled about 500 cashiers with permanent status to other remote departments and forced the remaining 100 irregular cashiers under short-term contracts with the company to sign new contracts with temporary agencies.\textsuperscript{192} Lotte Department Store also terminated contracts with forty-three of their irregular employees and forced them to sign new contracts with outside staffing agencies.\textsuperscript{193} Hana Bank, one of the largest banks in Korea, has urged its irregular workers whose contracts would expire to seek employment with temporary staffing agencies.\textsuperscript{194}

The firms explained that the employment costs, following a sudden change in the status of irregular workers to regular workers, would bring considerable difficulties.\textsuperscript{195} A survey of 198 companies by the local leading newspaper Hankyoreh and the job portal JobKorea on July 19, 2007 found


\textsuperscript{193} Id.

\textsuperscript{194} Id.

that 40% of firms planned to cancel contracts with their existing irregular workers and only 27.2% were ready to upgrade their irregular workers. In addition, many firms also planned to outsource by relocating their factories to Vietnam or Cambodia to avoid the rising labor costs. Thus, the Act created more tension between employers and employees in Korea and the sudden outsourcing by companies threatens jobs for Korean workers. Since more than half of irregular workers in Korea are women, working women again have been affected the most.

B. The Story of E-Land

The most recent example which demonstrates the detrimental effect of the Act for women workers is the story of E-Land. In June 2007, one month before the implementation of the Act, the giant Korean textile and supermarket retailer E-Land dismissed more than 1000 irregular workers, mostly part-time female cashiers. Under the Act, the dismissed irregular workers who had worked almost two years would have signed permanent contracts with E-Land within a month. Also, when E-Land bought the French multinational Carrefour's Korean operations in 2006, it agreed to uphold the contract, signed by the previous owner, to legally protect the Homever (the previous company) workers from dismissal. But E-Land ignored this agreement by firing the Homever workers.

Since their dismissal, E-Land’s irregular workers have been picketing all over the country. The first two pickets were in two large shopping sites in Seoul until riot police forcibly carried them out. When pickets took over twelve more E-Land stores, the government and E-Land management responded by again sending riot police to arrest and forcibly remove the striking workers. In fact, several E-Land union leaders were arrested and riot police have used violence on the picketing irregular workers, who were mostly young women.

The E-Land conflict has led many unions to support the irregular workers. The KCTU has been leading the negotiations and strikes. Yet

---

196 Ahn, supra note 195.
197 Id.
199 E-Land Workers, supra note 198.
200 Id.
201 Id.
202 Id.
203 Id.
the weaknesses of the KCTU have been emerging—the KCTU once again has not been specifically focusing on the suffering of the E-Land irregular workers and has been using the E-Land conflict as a rallying cause for all workers. As a result, earlier talks broke down when the KCTU rejected E-Land’s proposals for an end to the outsourcing of cashiers and rehiring of those who had been reclassified as being employed by outsourcing companies.\textsuperscript{205} The KCTU has been adamantly demanding that all dismissed workers be reinstated in a month.\textsuperscript{206} The KCTU alternatively “vowed to take down E-Land” as an example to other companies of the union’s power.\textsuperscript{207} However, the KCTU’s dogmatic stance may break down further negotiations with E-Land and threatens the opportunity for rehiring and compensating many of the irregular workers. Furthermore, the downfall of E-Land would also mean more job losses, especially for the irregular women workers.

The E-Land story shows that women are still the primary victims of discriminatory laws, a gendered market system, and the mainstream unions. For many years the passage of the Act has been resisted by workers, and therefore the lawmakers fully understood the detrimental consequences the Act would have on irregular workers, mostly women. When the Act was passed, the gendered market system responded by discarding its working women. And finally, the mainstream unions, instead of protecting the rights of the women workers involved, chose to exploit the situation to display their power. Thus, women workers should empower themselves through women-only trade unions as a way to face the ongoing challenges specific to women.

V. LESSONS AND PROPOSALS

A. Relationship Between Profitability and Women Employees

Contrary to many Korean employers’ concerns regarding hiring and promoting women, experiences of overseas companies and recent studies show a correlation between high profit margins and companies recruiting and advancing a high percentage of female employees. In the United States, a study conducted over twenty-eight years and published in the \textit{Harvard Business Review} evaluated about half of the Fortune 500 companies.\textsuperscript{208} The study found that “companies with a higher number of women executives performed better with respect to profits as a percentage

\textsuperscript{205} Id.
\textsuperscript{206} Id.
\textsuperscript{207} Id.
of revenue, assets, and stockholders’ equity." After reviewing over 300 of the Fortune 500 companies, Catalyst, an independent research organization, found that companies with the highest representation of women in executive positions had higher returns on equity and to shareholders. The University of California Davis’s Graduate School of Management studied the 200 largest publicly-traded companies in California and found that having more women in management results in “stronger relationships with customers and shareholders and a more diverse and profitable business.” Companies such as IBM, DuPont, and Georgia-Pacific have been actively recruiting, training, and advancing female employees into executive positions while simultaneously reaping financial benefits. For example, in 1995, IBM began to promote women into its management positions when its stock price was in the low thirties. By 2006, when women comprised 19% of IBM’s executive population, IBM’s stock price was around eighty and IBM was the leading U.S. technology company.

In Britain, banking, an area traditionally discriminatory towards women, has also demonstrated a correlation between female leadership and profit margins. For example, in 2005, Lloyds TSB was the most profitable bank with a 33% profit on average capital. The bank, in comparison with the FTSE 100 index of Britain’s largest companies and other banks, has the most female executive directors on its board. 21% of its senior managers and 38% of its general managers are women. Furthermore, Helen Weir, its finance director, and Terri Dial, the head of its British retail banking department, have been responsible for about 40% of the bank’s pre-tax profit.

In Japan, the Study Group on Gender Equality at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has analyzed the relationship between profitability and percentage of female employees in approximately 26,000 Japanese companies. The Study Group found that “in comparison among

---

209 Id.
210 Id.
211 Id.
212 Id.
213 Id.
214 Cohen & Kornfeld, supra note 208.
216 Id.
217 Id.
218 Id.
companies, firms with a high percentage of female employees have a high profit ratio (or firms with a high profit ratio are firms with a high percentage of female employees)." According to the study, "these firms had eliminated [the] traditional concept of distinguishing between male and female employees and had a tendency to emphasize evaluation and compensation based on each individual's capabilities and performance." The study thus concluded that merit-based management enabled female employees to be more active, which translated into diverse work styles, excellent management performance, improved operating results, and increased earnings.

These international studies and the experiences of highly-profitable companies around the world show that many Korean employers' concerns regarding hiring and advancing women are unfounded. Korean companies can benefit financially by creating a business environment that actively recruits, hires, trains, and advances women.

B. Overcoming Cultural Prejudice by Focusing on Social Change

Despite the financial benefits Korean companies may reap from hiring and advancing more women, cultural prejudice in Korea continues to maintain a gendered labor market, concentrating women in certain occupations and treating female employees unfavourably. Laws, such as the SEEA, are also ineffective until men and women are more equally distributed across occupations. Thus, structural social changes are essential to incorporating more women into traditionally male-friendly, higher wage market sectors, and creating more favorable working conditions for women.

The SWTU and the KWTU should channel their efforts into overcoming Korea's prevalent cultural prejudice by focusing on promoting social change. One important strategy for the women trade unions is education. Education plays a vital role in changing Korean society's views of women. The SWTU and the KWTU should also challenge Korean laws that negatively affect women's social status. For example, certain family laws continue to promote gender stereotyping which negatively impacts women in the labor market. In addition, the SWTU and the KWTU should actively support social policies that benefit women. For example, the women's trade unions should support proposed legislation for developing special childcare and early education facilities that would allow household management to become less burdensome for Korean women.

\( /cGE0310Sume.pdf. \)

\( ^{220} \) Id.

\( ^{221} \) Id.

\( ^{222} \) Id.

\( ^{223} \) Jongsoog Kim, Female Irregular Workers and Policy Implications in Korea, 22 WOMEN'S STUD. F. 9 (2006) (on file with author).
C. Ensuring Companies’ Compliance with Legal Provisions

Although the SWTU and the KWTU should continue to support existing legislation which focuses on same wage for same work and other equality provisions, the women’s trade unions should also be demanding that the Ministry of Labor ensure compliance with these laws. For example, since 1992, the Ministry of Labor has not had routine or periodic inspections monitoring employers’ compliance with these legal provisions. The Ministry of Labor has instead resorted to responding to reports of violations. However, this is problematic since many female employees, especially irregular workers, will not report violations due to their job insecurities. Thus, women will benefit from the Ministry of Labor routinely monitoring employers’ compliance with laws, especially those pertaining to sexual harassment and maternity leave.

D. Taking Advantage of Globalization

Women activists from the SWTU and the KWTU should take advantage of “the era of globalization” to stimulate ideas and create powerful coalitions. For example, the International Center for Trade Union Rights works for the rights of unions and their workers at the international level. Women Working Worldwide is a coalition that supports women workers through public awareness campaigns and networking efforts. The SWTU and the KWTU should also work with and get ideas from established women’s trade unions in other countries, such as the Women’s Trade Union in Denmark and Tokyo’s Women’s Trade Union in Japan. By participating in and networking with international organizations and other women’s trade unions, the SWTU and the KWTU can contribute to raising women’s social status nationally and globally. Also, by having strong international support, the Korean women’s trade unions may increase their collective bargaining power during negotiations and promote awareness of women’s issues in the workplace more effectively.

VI. CONCLUSION

The SWTU and the KWTU should be mindful of past lessons: Korean women workers effectively and successfully began the democratic trade union movement in the 1970s and the 1980s by providing individualized attention to women in a variety of industries, including small firms, and concentrating on social issues pertaining to women’s rights. History and

224 Lee et al., supra note 4.
225 Id.
227 Id.
current events demonstrate that the growth of Korean women’s trade unions is vital to giving a voice and power to a sector of society that has been and continues to be marginalized. The success of the women’s trade unions will not only improve the working conditions of women workers but will also contribute to the growth and strength of Korea’s businesses and economy.