

“I would like to grow as an expert in the field of international sports dispute resolution, a niche market. Additionally, I would like to contribute to facilitating stronger connections between the Swiss and Korean legal communities.”

Said Ms. Jo. With an Asian background, Ms. Jo has an atypical profile as a Swiss-qualified attorney. She is notably the only Korean registered with the Swiss Bar Association.

Ms. Jo contemplated studying in Switzerland after visiting an acquaintance there at the age of eleven. Shortly after graduating from middle school in South Korea, she bravely relocated to Switzerland on her own, enrolling in a high school in the French-speaking region. When deciding on her university major, she was drawn to law, which she believed “underpins our societal structure.”

Becoming a Swiss attorney, especially as a foreigner, was a challenging journey. Ms. Jo explained, “The path to becoming a Swiss lawyer is comprehensive. While it varies by canton, in Geneva, it involves obtaining bachelor’s and master’s degrees in law, completing a 6-month program at the bar school followed by the first qualification exam, a subsequent 18-month traineeship, and then successfully passing the final bar exam.” Securing a traineeship at a law firm posed additional challenges since she did not possess Swiss/European citizenship at the time and needed a work permit. Given that French was not her first language, Ms. Jo invested additional time in mastering it, further integrating into both the local society and legal community.

After overcoming numerous obstacles, Ms. Jo graduated from the Geneva Law School (University of Geneva) and was admitted to the Geneva bar in 2019. She now serves at Bonnard Lawson International Law Firm, specializing in arbitration cases before the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the Swiss Arbitration Center (SAC), and the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). Her expertise extends to areas like sports, international contracts, distribution, and pharmaceuticals.

Leveraging her distinctive background, Ms. Jo remarked, “While trade between Switzerland and South Korea remains limited, I frequently receive inquiries regarding legal matters involving South Korea.” She further noted, “Having a shared cultural background is a distinct advantage when assisting Asian clients, which also reinforces that my firm embraces diversity.”

Ms. Jo is also keen on furthering her proficiency in sports arbitration.

Switzerland, being home to many international sports federations and the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne, witnesses a plethora of sports arbitration cases, including internal federation disputes.

Elaborating on her experiences, Ms. Jo mentioned, "Often, we represent clubs or sports federations, but players as well." She elaborated, "Many players, starting their careers young, might not fully grasp the intricacies of various contracts and sports regulations, which can occasionally be used against them." She added, "Given that the likelihood of the Swiss Federal Supreme Court overturning arbitration awards is minimal, challenging a decision by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) becomes daunting. Yet, achieving a favorable outcome is immensely rewarding."

Ms. Jo concluded, "I am committed to deepening my expertise in international commercial and sports arbitration with the aspiration of becoming an arbitrator. I am equally enthusiastic about fostering ties between Switzerland and South Korea, for example by updating the Korean legal community on Swiss-related legal developments."