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A Japanese Court Sides With Samsung Against Apple

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

Samsung Electronics has won the latest case in its continuing battle with the American owned computer company Apple over property rights. A court in Japan ruled in favor of the South Korean company last week in a case involving its Galaxy series of smartphones and tablets.

The three-judge panel in Tokyo said the products did not violate the property rights of an Apple patent for organizing music and video across devices. The court also ordered Apple to pay all costs relating to the court case.

The case is just one of many in the worldwide legal battle between Apple and Samsung.

Last month, a jury in the state of California found the South Korean company guilty of willfully violating property rights on several patents owned by Apple. The California jury awarded Apple more than one billion dollars in damages.

The patents include so-called utility patents for Apple's "pinch to zoom" and "tap to zoom" technology. They also include design patents on the look and shape of the iPhone, and one for the home screen design.

Madhavi Sunder is a professor of law at the University of California, Davis. She has also written a new book called "From Goods to a Good Life: Intellectual Property and Global Justice." She says issues involving design patents are more complex.

MADHAVI SUNDER: "These design patents are much more controversial. And a big question here is isn't that what market competition is all about."

Professor Sunder says patents are meant to increase competition and support design and development.

MADHAVI SUNDER: "For Apple to say its design -- which becomes a new industry standard, the standard of sleek, cool, modern gadgets -- is something that only one company can have an exclusive right over, this is a real problem. And it raises the real question of whether or not we should be protecting designs with patents in the first place."

She says Apple built its computer company using the same methods that it is now opposing.

MADHAVI SUNDER: "Steve Jobs, ironically, built Apple's reputation on the fact that Apple freely took all the best ideas that were out there and tweaked them and modified them to create a better product. He often quoted Picasso who said 'good artists copy but great artists steal.' The said thing now is that Apple is saying they can do it but no one else after them can. This goes to the heart of what innovation is about."

Samsung said the California court's verdict, in its words, "should not be viewed as a win for Apple, but as a loss for American consumers."

In a rare memo to its employees, the company said it would continue its fight until its arguments are accepted.

On the same day as the California ruling, a court in South Korea ruled in another case that both Apple and Samsung had violated each other's patents.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.