

**PATENT COURT
THE THIRD DEPARTMENT
DECISION**

Case No.: 2001Heo1006 Final Rejection (Patent)

Plaintiff: Institut National De La Recherche Agronomique
Counsel for the Plaintiff: Seungho KIM,
Jinhee KIM, Patent Attorney
Younghee KIM, Patent Attorney

Defendant: Commissioner of the Korean Intellectual Property
Office ("KIPO")
KIPO Litigator: Heesoo KIM

Closure of Hearing: April 11, 2002

Order

1. The Plaintiff's claim is dismissed.
2. The trial costs shall be borne by the Plaintiff.

Tenor of Claim

The decision by the Intellectual Property Tribunal ("IPT") in Case No. 99Won1918 issued on December 30, 2000 shall be cancelled.

Reasoning

1. Background facts

According to Exhibit Nos. K1, K26, and E1 to E3, the following

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facts are acknowledged.

A. The patent application of the present case ("Subject Application")

1) Title: DNA sequence imparting cytoplasmic male sterility, mitochondrial genome, nuclear genome, mitochondria and plant containing said sequence, and process for the preparation of hybrids

2) Application Date/Application No.: March 22, 1993 / 1993-700857
Priority Date: September 21, 1990 / French Patent Application No. 90-11670

3) Applicant: Plaintiff

4) Claims (as amended on June 30, 1999)

1. An Ogura sterility DNA sequence which comprises:
 - a) a DNA sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 in FIG. 1, or
 - b) a sequence having at least 90% homology with said sequence, wherein said sequence confers cytoplasmic male sterility on a plant when it is present in the mitochondrial genome of said plant.
2. The DNA sequence according to claim 1, which comprises a DNA sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 1569 in FIG. 1 or a sequence having at least 90% homology with said sequence, wherein said sequence is transcribed to RNA in the mitochondria of a male sterile plant.
3. A recombinant plant mitochondrial genome which contains an Ogura sterility DNA sequence which consists
 - a) of a sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and

- 1569 in FIG. 1, or
- b) of a sequence having at least 90% homology with said sequence mentioned in a), and confers cytoplasmic male sterility on a plant when it is present in the cytoplasm of said plant.
4. The recombinant plant mitochondrial genome according to claim 3, containing an Ogura sterility DNA sequence which comprises a sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 1569 in FIG. 1 or a sequence having at least 90% homology with said sequence.
5. The mitochondrial genome according to claim 3 or 4, wherein, in the recombinant genome, the *Raphanus* sequences of two formylmethionine transfer RNA genes used for translation initiation and a *Cox1* gene coding for subunit No. 1 of cytochrome oxidase have been substituted with the corresponding *Brassica* sequences.
6. ~ 7.7. (Deleted)
8. The mitochondrial genome according to claim 5, wherein said genome contains a sequence which gives a 2.5-kb fragment after *Nco*I digestion, gives a 6.8-kb fragment after *Nru*I digestion and a 4.4-kb fragment after *Sal*I digestion.
9. ~ 10. (Deleted)
11. A mitochondrion comprising the genome according to claim 3 or 4.
12. ~ 27. (Deleted)
28. A nucleic acid probe comprising a first sequence of at least 10 bases of a sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 1569 shown in FIG. 1, said second sequence conferring

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cytoplasmic male sterility character, labelled by a radioactive or non-radioactive means.

29. ~ 32. (Deleted)

33. A mitochondrion comprising the genome according to claim 5.

34. A mitochondrion comprising the genome according to claim 8.

35. ~ 38. (Deleted)

B. Procedural history

1) Final rejection

KIPO issued a final rejection in the Subject Application on February 27, 1999 on the grounds that the specification fails to meet the description requirements because a broad limitation “having at least ~ homology” is used to describe the claimed invention, rendering its constitution unclear.

2) Plaintiff's petition before the IPT (Case No. 99 Won 1918)

a) IPT decision: Dismissal of petition (December 30, 2000)

b) Gist of the grounds of the IPT decision

A claim directed to a gene should in principle be defined by a nucleotide sequence. In the Subject Application, while claims 1 to 4 (hereinafter, “Claims 1 to 4 Invention”) use limitations such as “a sequence having at least 90% homology with a DNA sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 or 928 and 1569 in FIG. 1” to define the subject gene, the basis for limiting the degree of homology as such cannot be found anywhere in the specification. Moreover, the detailed description of the invention, unlike the claims, recites “a DNA sequence having at least 50% homology.”

Thus, the claims of the Subject Application are not clearly described or supported by the detailed description of the invention. Accordingly, the Subject Application fails to meet the requirements prescribed by Article 42(4) of the Korean Patent Act, and therefore, the final rejection issued in the Subject Application is proper.

2. Appeal Grounds Submitted by the Plaintiff

- A.** Claims 1 to 4 are not unclear given that they are limited to DNA sequences having the function of “conferring male sterility” in addition to having at least 90% homology with a specific reference sequence.
- B.** In DNA-related inventions, due to the characteristics of “codon degeneracy” in DNA and “flexibility in amino acid substitution,” sequences that are homologous to a DNA specified with its sequence and retain the same function as the original DNA should also be included in the scope of the invention in order to effectively protect inventors. Therefore, it is inevitable that claims be drafted using the expression “having at least ~% homology with a nucleic acid sequence...” in such a case. Regarding Claim 1 of the Subject Application, for example, a person having ordinary skill in the art (“PHOSITA”) could easily understand that the phrase “a sequence having at least 90% homology to a sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 (1346 bp) in FIG. 1” denotes “a sequence which is identical to the specified sequence in at least 1211 out of 1346 nucleotides (i.e., 90%).” Further, since a change in sequence can occur by mutation, etc. at any position among the 1346 nucleotides, it would be impossible to describe in the detailed description of the invention the specific parts where a sequence change may occur by conducting experiments with respect to every possible sequence change.

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C. The U.S. and Japanese counterpart applications to the Subject Application were granted as patents with claims defined by the expression “a DNA sequence shown in FIG. 1 or a DNA sequence encoding a protein translation product identical to that encoded by the DNA sequence shown in FIG. 1,” which are broader than the claims of the Subject Application reciting “a sequence having at least 90% homology.” In view of the above, the Subject Application should also be granted a patent.

3. Determination regarding the propriety of the IPT decision

A. Whether Claims 1 to 4 of the Subject Application fail to meet the description requirements

1) Article 42(4) of the Korean Patent Act prescribes that claims shall be supported by the detailed description of the invention, describe the claimed invention clearly and concisely, and be described only with indispensable elements of the claimed invention. Thus, expressions rendering the constitution of the claimed invention unclear cannot be used in the claims (see Supreme Court Decision No. 97 Hu 1337 rendered on October 2, 1998). In gene-related inventions, which are characterized by having the potential to produce a protein with a different functional profile by a single point mutation in the DNA sequence, genes should be specified with their nucleotide sequence and, in principle, using vague expressions in a claim such as “a nucleotide sequence having ~% homology” with a certain reference sequence is not allowed. However, in a case where a DNA sequence having a new utility has been discovered, if the detailed description of invention provides the concrete bases for determining what degree of homology with the specific DNA sequence is required for the variant to have the same function as the original sequence, claims with a broader scope that use the expression “a nucleotide sequence having ~% homology” with a specific sequence cannot be said to be unclear.

2) Claims 1 to 4 are directed to Ogura sterility DNA sequences which comprise a DNA sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 (1346 bp) or 928 and 1569 (642 bp) in FIG. 1 and confer cytoplasmic male sterility on a plant, as well as “a sequence having at least 90% homology” with the above sequences, and recombinant plant mitochondrial genomes containing such sequences. Although it could be known that “a sequence having at least 90% homology” means that the sequence is identical to the above specified sequence in at least 90% of the nucleotides out of 1346 (or 642) bp, it is unclear as to which specific nucleotides should be identical or what are the grounds for limiting the degree of homology to 90%. Accordingly, the claims of the Subject Application can be deemed to be clearly described only when the grounds for limiting the degree of homology to 90% are presented, for example, by illustrating different variants having the same function as the original sequence while satisfying the homology degree. However, Exhibit No. E3 mentioned above merely establishes the fact that the detailed description of the invention of the Subject Application describes the following: “the present invention relates to a DNA sequence, which we shall refer to as Ogura sterility DNA sequence, characterized in that: a) it is carried by a DNA sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 in FIG. 1, or b) it possesses an at least 50% homology with the said sequence mentioned in a), and confers, when it is present in the mitochondrial genome of a plant, a cytoplasmic male sterility on the said plant. In particular, the subject of the present invention is an Ogura sterility DNA sequence, characterized in that: c) it is carried by the sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 1569 in FIG. 1, or d) it possesses an at least 50% homology with the said sequence mentioned in c), and in that it is transcribed to RNA in the mitochondria of male-sterile plants.”; “a cytoplasm containing a DNA sequence possessing an at least 50% homology with the sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 in FIG. 1, or a cytoplasm containing a DNA sequence possessing an at least 50%

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homology with the sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 1569 in FIG. 1, and transcribed to RNA, conferring the CMS character”; “the invention relates to a recombinant plant nuclear or mitochondrial genome, characterized in that it contains an Ogura sterility DNA sequence: a) which is carried by a DNA sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 of the sequence shown in FIG. 1, or b) which possesses an at least 50% homology with the said sequence mentioned in a), and confers, when it is present in the cytoplasm of a plant, a cytoplasmic male sterility on the said plant. In particular, one of the subjects of the present invention is a recombinant plant nuclear or mitochondrial genome, characterized in that it contains an Ogura sterility DNA sequence, c) which is carried by a sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 1569 in FIG. 1, or d) which possesses an at least 50% homology with the said sequence mentioned in c), and confers, when it is present in the cytoplasm of a plant and is transcribed to RNA, a cytoplasmic male sterility on the said plant.” The detailed description of the invention does not present any grounds for limiting the degree of homology to 90%, such as illustrative examples of variants having 90% or higher homology with the specified sequence while retaining the same function. Furthermore, nowhere in the detailed description of the invention can the description “at least 90% homology” can even be found. Therefore, Claims 1 to 4 of the Subject Application cannot be deemed to be clearly described, nor are they supported by the detailed description of the invention.

3) Determination regarding the Plaintiff's arguments

The Plaintiff argues that Claims 1 to 4 are not unclear because even when a DNA sequence has at least 90% homology with a DNA sequence bounded by the nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 (1346 bp) or 928 and 1569 (642 bp) in FIG. 1, it is excluded from the claimed scope if it does not have the function of conferring male sterility, and “a sequence having at least 90% homology” indicates that

at least 90% of the nucleotides, i.e., 1211 or 578 nucleotides out of 1346 or 642 nucleotides, respectively, are identical to those in the specified sequence, which could be clearly understood by PHOSITA. As discussed earlier, however, homologous nucleotide sequences encompass variants, fused genes, and the like, and there would be numerous sequence combinations exhibiting 90% homology with the above 1346 bp or 642 bp nucleotide sequences. Thus, it would be difficult for PHOSITA to clearly understand and reproduce the subject matter of Claims 1 to 4 in the absence of descriptions regarding the representative variants indicating which of the above combinations may result in male sterility. Therefore, the above Plaintiff's arguments have no merit.

Regarding, for example, "a sequence having at least 90% homology" to a sequence bounded by nucleotides numbered 928 and 2273 (1346 bp) in FIG. 1 in Claim 1, the Plaintiff argues that since a sequence change can occur by mutation, etc. at any position among the 1346 nucleotides, it would be unreasonable to require specific descriptions in the detailed description of the parts where a sequence change may occur by conducting experiments with respect to every possible sequence change. Although it is not required that the specification describe every working example of nucleotide sequences having at least 90% homology to the 1346 bp sequence while conferring male sterility, at least some representative examples of variants showing the critical significance of the claimed limitation of 90% homology should be described. Therefore, the Plaintiff's above arguments also have no merit.

The Plaintiff also argues that the Subject Application should be granted a patent as its U.S. and Japanese counterparts were granted as patents with claims broader than those of the Subject Application. However, whether or not a patent should be granted for a Korean patent application should not be influenced by the patent examination status in other countries. Moreover, even the U.S. and Japanese counterpart patents (Exhibit Nos. K7 and E4) show that they claim "a DNA sequence encoding a protein translation product identical to that encoded by the DNA sequence shown in FIG. 1" instead of "a

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sequence having at least 90% homology with said sequence.” Thus, these counterpart patents claim a DNA sequence encoding only the same protein with the identical amino acid sequence, the scope of which is clear, unlike Claims 1 to 4 of the Subject Application. Therefore, the Plaintiff’s above arguments also have no merit.

B. Sub-conclusion

Thus, Claims 1 to 4 of the Subject Application are not clearly described and are not supported by the detailed description of the invention. Accordingly, the Subject Application cannot be patented under Article 42(4) of the Korean Patent Act, and therefore, the IPT decision affirming the final rejection issued in the Subject Application is proper.

4. Conclusion

Therefore, since the Plaintiff’s claim seeking cancellation of the IPT decision is without merit, the Court dismisses the claim and issues a decision as stated in the Order.

May 30, 2002

Presiding Judge	Chijoong KIM
Judge	Jeongyul CHOI
Judge	Youngsun CHO

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Ogura Sterility DNA Sequence Case

[illegible]

Fig. 1

				M	T	I	C B	N	
F	M	H	b	s	n	v	z	a	
a	n	n	o	p	c	L	P	i	
u	l	l	I	E	:	J	H	:	
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	
CGGGGAAGAAGCGGGGTAGAGGAATTGGTCAACTCATCAGGCTCATGACCTGAAGATTAC									
342									390
3CCCCCTTCCTTCGCCCCATCTCCTTAACCAGTTGAGTAGTGCCGAGTACTGGACTTCTAATG									
		E							
M	S						S		
b	s	F	S	F			f	T	
o	S	i	P	a			a	a	
I	7	n	i	u			N	r	
I	I	I	I	I			I	I	
AGGTTCAAATCCTGTGCCCGCACCGTAGTTTCATTCTGCATCACTCTCCTGTCTTATC									
301									350
TCCAAGTTTAGGACAGGGCGTGGCATCAAAGTAAGACGTAGTGAGAGGGACAGCAATAG									
				H X		M TS			
			G	GCa m		aBsc	M		
			d	EdveMa		ecpo	b S		
			i	aiIIcI		Ie45	o p		
			I	eIJIrI		If57	I i		
			I	IIIII		IIII	I I		
			/ / /						
GACATCGCAAGGTTTTTGAAACGGCCGMAACGGGAAGTGACAATACCSCTTTTCTTCAGC									
361									1020
CTGTAGCGTTCCAAAACTTTGCCGGCTTTGCCCTTCACTGTTATGGCGAAAAGAAGTCG									
			B	T					
			sT	s					
			ca	p					
			Bq	E					
			II	I					
			/						
ATATAAATGCAATGATTACCTTTTTCGMAAAATTTGCCACTTTTTGTCATAATCTCACTC									
1021									1030
TATATTTACGTTACTAATGAAAAAGCTTTTAAACAGGTGAAAAACAGTATTAGAGTGAG									
							S H		
						C	aCa		
						Av	uvø		
						LI	9II		
						uJ	6JI		
						II	III		
						/	/		
CTACTGAATGTAAAGTTAGTGTAATAAGTTTCTTTTAGCTTTTTTACTAATGGCCC									
1081									1140
GATGACTTACATTTCAATCACATTATTCAAAGAAAGAAAATCGAAAAAATGATTACCGGG									

Ogura Sterility DNA Sequence Case

[illegible]

Fig. 1

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	T				
	a				
	q		T		
	I		Ms		
	I		Ep		
	-		gE		
	l		II		
			/		

AGAAAAATAATGCTTTGTGAACCCAAATTGCTTTGACAAAAATAAAGAAAGAAGCAAAATCT

1441 ----- 1540

TCTTTTATTACGAAACACTTGGGTTAACGAAACTGTTTTATTTCCTTCGTTTCTAGA

		S		N
T		SB a	M	L
s	z	gsDu	b	a X
p	a	l= p3	o	f c
E	r	lYnA	I	I m
I	I	IIII	I	I I
		/ /		

CATTCAATTTGAAATAGAAAGAGATCTCTATGCCCCCTGTTCTTGGTTTTCTCCCATGCTT

1501 ----- 1540

GTAAGTTAAACTTTATCTTCTCTAGAGATACGGGGGACAAGAACC AAAAGAGGGTACGAA

	H				
	I		M		C
	n		bs	M	M
	c		of	n	a
	I		le	l	e
	I		II	I	I

TTGTTGGTCAACAACCAACCACAAGTTTCTATAGTTCTTCACTACTCCTAGAGGCTTGAC

1561 ----- 1620

AACAACCAGTTGTTGGTTGGTGTGAAAGATCAAGAAGTGATGAGGATCTCCGAACCT

	C	H		T	N
	AvM	iT	G	3AM	a
	lin	nf	s	pss	I
	uJl	fl	u	Eee	I
	III	II	I	III	I
	/ /		/		

GGAGTGAAGCTGTCTGGAGGGAATCATTTTGTGAAATCAATTAATCTAATCATGCCTCA

1621 ----- 1680

CCTCACTTCGACAGACCTCCCTTAGTAAACAACCTTTAGTTAATTAGATTAGTACGGAGT

	T	M	T	M
BM	s	b	s	b
sn	p	o	p	o
el	E	I	E	I
II	I	I	I	I
	/			

ACTGGATAAATTCACCTTATTTTTCACAATCTTCTGGTTATGCCTTTTCTTCTTACTTT

1681 ----- 1740

TGACCTATTTAAGTGAATAAAAAAGTGTTAAGAAGACCAATACGGAAAAGAAGAAATGAAA

Fig. 1

Ogura Sterility DNA Sequence Case

[illegible]

Fig. 1

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T M B J D A S
 a n s j p l p
 q i e A n w E
 I i i i i I i
 TATATCGAAGTCCTCTCTCTTCAAATACTGGAAGGTGGATCACTTGTAGSAATTGTAGGAA
 ----- 2141 ----- 2150
 ATATAGCTTCAGGAGAGGAAGTTATGACCTTCACCTAGTGAACATCCTTAACATCCTT

 N N H
 L I BC a H
 a KR Ea8svHeSM iT S
 c cs alaaiaItw nf c
 I ma ellJJeliyo fi e
 I II IIIIIIII II I
 ////
 TGACATAATGCTAATCCATGTGTACATGCGCAAGGAAGCATAAAATGATTCTTTCAATTC
 ----- 2151 ----- 2160
 ACTGTATTACGATTAGGTACAACATGTACCGGTTCCCTTCGTATTTTACTAAGAAAGT AAG

 E
 c
 o
 R
 l
 2
 B
 E M 4E MT s
 c n /a nh p
 N l 3u la C
 I I II II I
 / /
 TATAGATACCTCTGGTAGGTAAAGCACTCTACTGTGCTTTATTGAAAGTTCCCATCGCGG
 ----- 2161 ----- 2220
 ATATCTATGGAGACCATCCATTTCGTGAGATGACACGAAATAACTTTCAAGGGTAGCGCC

 B C H E
 s T T P v l M cM
 p h a l l n l os
 C a q e J f y Dp
 I I I I I I I I I
 GGGCGAGGATACTTGCCTTCGGGGTTCGACTTTCTTTTCAGGCTTGACTCATTATTTC
 ----- 2221 ----- 2290
 CCCGCTCCTATGAACGGAAGCGCCAAGCTGAAAGAAAAGTCCGAACCTGAGTAATAAAAGG

 B
 s
 p
 S
 Aa S C91H H C
 vu M fAva2gs D iT v
 a9 n alin8is d nf i
 I6 l NuJI6At e fi J
 II I IIIIIII I II I
 / / / /
 GGTCCCTCTCACACCCCTTTAGAGCTCTTTATGATGCCCACTGAGTAAGATTGGGGGGCTT
 ----- 2281 ----- 2340
 CCAGGAGAGTGTGGGGAATCTCGAGAATACTACGGGTGACTCATTCTAAGCCCCCGAA

Fig. 1

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      N
      S      B      C      B as ENH      B      M
MNC h s Av F s0paST slb ST E a EM
scr h p li a asBcph pao ma a e an
piF a C uJ u JaIIla JII Aq r I rl
III I I II I IIIII IVI II I II
// / / // / /
CCCCGGCGCAGAAGCTCATTCGTGAACCGCGSGGAACCTTCGTCTCTTCGACACAAACG TTTT
-----
TGGCGCGCTCTTCGAGTAAGACTTGGCGGCTTGGGAAGCAGAGAAGCTGTGTITTCG AAAA
2401
      S
      C      M      BBB N a
v M b A sasDlHu
i n o L amcpap3
J l Y w aHYnIhA
I I I I IIIIVII
// //
ATGAAGAGGCTGATGGTGTATGAGGATCC
2401 ----- 2429
TACTTCTCGGACTACCACTACTCCTAGG

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Restriction enzymes:

AccI	AflIII	AluI	AlwI	AlwNI	AseI	AvaI	AvaII
BalI	BamHI	BanII	BbvI	BbvII	BceI	BglII	Bpu10I
BsaI	BsaAI	BsaBI	BsaJI	BsaI	BsmI	BsmAI	Bsp1286I
BspCI	BspHI	BspMI	BspI	BstBI	BstXI	BstYI	Cfr10I
CviJI	DdeI	DpnI	DrdII	DsaI	EaeI	EarI	Eco37I
EcoRI	EcoDI	EcoNI	EcoO109I	EcoPI	EcoP15I	EcoRI	EcoRII
EcoRI24/3I	EspI	EspII	FauI	FinI	Fnu4HI	FokI	GdiII
GsuI	HaeI	HaeII	HaeIII	HgiAI	HhaI	HincII	HinfI
HphI	MaeI	MaeII	MaeIII	MboII	McrI	MfeI	MlyI
XmaI	MnlI	MseI	MspI	MwoI	NciI	NcoI	NdeI
NheI	NlaIII	NlaIV	NcuI	NspBII	PleI	PmlI	PpsII
PstI	RsaI	SacII	SalI	Sau96I	Sau3AI	ScaI	SceFI
SfaNI	SfeI	SfrABI	SpeI	SpiI	SplI	SatI	StyI
StyLTI	StySJI	TaqI	TaqII-1	TaqII-2	TfiI	Thai	Tsp45I
TspEI	Tth111I	XbaI	XcmI	XmaIII	XmnI		

Restriction enzymes:

AatII	AclII	AgeI	AhaII	ApaI	ApaLI	AvrII	BanI
BcgI	BclI	BglI	BspGI	BspMI	BssHII	BstEII	Bsu36I
CfrAI	Clai	DraI	DraIII	DrdI	EciI	Eco47III	EcoAI
EcoOXXI	EcoEI	EcoKI	EcoRI24I	EcoRV	FseI	FspI	HgaI
HgiEII	HindIII	HinfIII	HpaI	KpnI	MluI	NaeI	NarI
NotI	NsiI	NspI	PclMI	PshAI	PvuI	PvuII	RleAI
RsrII	SfiI	SgrAI	SmaI	SnaI	SphI	SspI	StuI
StySBI	StySPI	StySQI	Tth111I	Uba1105I	Uba1108I	XhoI	

Fig. 1