

Japan's law to favor online shoppers

Shopping online is not only convenient, but it also allows consumers to buy products beyond borders easily. So it is easy enough for those living in one country to buy the product of another, assuming that they are willing to foot the bill for higher postage fees. The problem is, however, that the system can be fraught with danger should there be any dissatisfaction on either the part of the buyer or seller.

And the number of dissatisfied Internet shoppers continues to rise, with everything from trying to return a product and not being able to get credit for it, to being conned into buying something that is obviously very different from what was advertised online.

In order to reduce the perils of Internet shopping, the Japanese government Tuesday revised a century-old law that gives more power to the consumer when it comes to settling international disputes on an individual level. Specifically, legislators approved a bill that will allow disgruntled buyers to have the law of where the product was purchased, rather than dealing with the law of where the item originated from, thereby giving more power to the purchaser rather than the retailer.

That means that if a Japanese Internet shopper has problems with a product purchased from a U.S. Web site, Japanese laws can be applied and the consumer can seek government intervention to further its case. Moreover, Japanese law will be applicable even if the buyer clicked on a box stating that it would accept the retail laws of a specific state in the United States, thus giving more protection to consumers amid intensifying globalization.

The revision of the 1898 framework called the law concerning application of laws in general is not limited to Internet shopping, however. The law will be used for protecting Japanese workers who are employed by foreign companies too. Currently, Japanese workers based in Japan who work for non-Japanese companies can be terminated under the laws regulating the foreign companies. Japan has one of the strictest employment regulations among industrialized countries, making it difficult for Japanese companies to fire its employees, but those rules have not necessarily applied to those working at the Japanese branches of foreign companies.

Under the latest law, however, Japanese nationals will be able to resort to labor laws outlined by the Japanese government, regardless of the nationality of their employer.

As a result, some critics fear that the latest legislation may dissuade foreign companies based in the country from hiring Japanese staff, but local media have overwhelmingly applauded the change as it would give greater confidence to those who already are, or thinking about, working for a non-Japanese company.

Still, there are drawbacks for the consumer as well. For instance, should a consumer buy a product that is legal overseas but not accepted in Japan, they will need to answer to Japanese law and be unable to resort to protection from the foreign company for the transaction.

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