

AUTHENTICITY OF FLAVOR IN JAPANESE CUISINE AT ICHIRIN RAMEN PENUIN BATAM

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Abstract: *The increase of Japanese restaurants in Indonesia has raised questions about how to identify which restaurant that serve authentic taste of Japan, while many adapted to local preferences. This research purpose is to analyze the concept of authenticity in the context of operating a Japanese restaurants in Indonesia, along with the factors that made a Japanese restaurants being considered authentic in terms of taste. This research uses Ichirin Ramen Penuin Batam as a case study. This research is using qualitative method to analyze data, gathered through interviews with chefs and customers, direct observations of the food preparation process and the restaurants atmosphere. The results show how Ichirin Ramen Penuin Batam preserves authenticity through constructed balance between tradition and adaptation. Customers perceive authenticity not only through taste but also through presentation, service, and atmosphere, indicating that authenticity is a holistic experience rather than a fixed standard. The study highlights that Japanese restaurants abroad can sustain cultural credibility by balancing tradition at Batam.*

INTRODUCTION

The rising number of Japanese restaurants across Indonesia reflects the rapid transformation of the nation's culinary landscape, especially in metropolitan areas like Jakarta, Batam, and Surabaya ¹. This development has introduced Indonesian consumers to a wide range of Japanese dishes, creating a cross-cultural dining experience. Many restaurants adapt their menus—modifying ingredients, techniques, and presentations—to appeal to local tastes, yet the degree to which these adjustments influence perceptions of authenticity is still not well understood.

In Indonesia, cultural, religious, and environmental factors, as well as local taste preferences, have a substantial impact on how Japanese cuisine is received. As a Muslim-majority country, halal considerations are particularly important, often prompting

¹ Almyra Diah Pangestu and Siti Gomo Attas, "Fenomena Restoran Jepang Halal: Perspektif Agama Dan Ekonomi," *Community Development Journal: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat* 3, no. 3 (2022): 1892–99, <https://doi.org/10.31004/cdj.v3i3.9339>.

restaurants to adapt recipes, ingredients, and preparation methods to suit local norms ². These adaptations, while necessary, contribute to varied consumer perceptions of Japanese food, influenced by cultural backgrounds, individual preferences, and exposure to either traditional or modern culinary interpretations.

Food culture—which includes ingredients, cooking techniques, types of dishes, kitchen utensils, table settings, food presentation, and dining etiquette—plays a significant role in shaping a community's daily life and cultural identity ³. In this context, authenticity of taste refers to the degree to which a dish preserves its original characteristics, reflecting the culinary traditions and techniques of its region of origin ⁴. Factors such as the choice of ingredients, cooking methods, and presentation strongly influence this perception of authenticity. Replacing pork with chicken or beef, for instance, ensures acceptance but simultaneously underscores the tension between preserving traditional Japanese practices and meeting domestic expectations. This condition exemplifies glocalization, where global culinary heritage is reshaped within local contexts while striving to maintain its identity.

This situation highlights a tension between the desire to preserve authenticity—through the use of original ingredients, cooking techniques, and presentation—and the necessity to localize these elements to meet market expectations. One of the most pressing challenges for Japanese restaurants abroad is securing a reliable supply chain; without consistent access to authentic ingredients, maintaining the integrity of traditional flavors becomes difficult. Strong partnerships with local suppliers are therefore essential, serving both operational needs and the pursuit of culinary authenticity ⁵.

Although studies on Japanese food authenticity in Indonesia are limited, Batam provides a compelling setting due to its position as a cross-cultural hub attracting visitors from Singapore and Malaysia. Unlike Jakarta or Bali, which dominate prior research, Batam remains underexplored despite its diverse consumer base and strategic role in tourism and trade.

This study therefore examines how Ichirin Ramen in Batam maintains authenticity by blending tradition with adaptation. Through a qualitative case study involving chefs, staff, and customers, it highlights how authenticity is socially constructed within a cross-cultural setting. The findings aim to enrich academic discussions on culinary authenticity while also offering practical guidance for Japanese restaurant operators seeking to sustain cultural credibility and market relevance in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Authenticity in Culinary Studies

Authenticity is best understood not as an inherent or fixed attribute of a dish or dining experience, but as a socially constructed and context-dependent concept that emerges

² Siti Ayu Ningsih et al., “Adaptasi Masakan Jepang Di Indonesia Pada Restoran Franchise Marugame Udon Dan Hakata Ikkousha Di Bali,” *Jurnal Daruma: Linguistik, Sastra Dan Budaya Jepang* 1, no. 1 (2021): 105–18.

³ Olga S. Shibiko, “Visual Aspects of Traditional Japanese Cuisine,” *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems* 250, no. April (2023): 485–92, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78083-8_46.

⁴ Dina Hariani, “Halal Japanese Culinary as Attraction for Muslim Travellers to Visit Japan” 28, no. Ictgt 2016 (2017): 174–76, <https://doi.org/10.2991/ictgt-16.2017.32>.

⁵ James Farrer et al., “Japanese Culinary Mobilities Research: The Globalization of the Japanese Restaurant,” *Foods & Food Ingredients J. Jpn.* 222, no. 3 (2017).

through continuous interaction, negotiation, and interpretation within specific cultural and social frameworks ⁶. It is shaped by the meanings assigned by individuals and communities over time, influenced by perceptions, values, traditions, and evolving social norms. Therefore, authenticity is a fluid and dynamic construct that reflects collective judgments rather than a static or objectively measurable characteristic.

In culinary contexts, the authenticity of a dish is influenced by core ingredients, distinctive recipes or preparation methods, culinary techniques, and resulting flavor⁷. Maintaining authentic taste, texture, and appearance enables a restaurant to distinguish itself from other establishments ⁸. However, authenticity is not solely determined by objective criteria; it also depends on how consumers perceive it and how it is intentionally crafted and presented by food service providers.

Taste

Taste encompasses both sensory experiences and individual subjective interpretations during consumption, including basic taste elements (sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami), as well as aroma, texture, and visual factors ⁹. Taste is a fundamental feature of food that significantly affects consumer satisfaction ¹⁰. Positive taste experiences not only enhance immediate enjoyment but also create lasting sensory memories, contributing to perceptions of product quality and loyalty. Consequently, food and beverage entrepreneurs continually innovate to align flavors with evolving consumer preferences ¹¹.

The interplay between taste and authenticity is crucial. While adapting flavors can improve appeal, preserving authentic taste rooted in cultural and culinary origins adds value by maintaining the integrity and identity of the food¹²

Glocalization and Culinary Adaptation

Food is an intimate part of cultural and personal identity, and culinary practices vary across regions. Multinational food enterprises must adapt their products to align with local tastes and cultural expectations, ensuring acceptance and success in diverse markets ¹³. Japanese cuisine has gained international recognition due to its perceived health benefits,

⁶ Dominick Boyle, “‘ Authentic and Amazing ’: Authenticity as an Evaluative Category in Online Consumer Restaurant Reviews The Role of Authenticity in Food Discourse : Distinction” 7, no. 2 (2024): 1–25.

⁷ Heni Pridia and Rukmini Sari, “ANALISIS KEAUTENTIKAN DAN KEUNIKAN LAKSA CIHIDEUNG SEBAGAI KULINER UNGGULAN KOTA BOGOR,” *Transparansi Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Administrasi*, 2017, 1–15.

⁸ Sangkyun Kim, Eerang Park, and Min Xu, “Beyond the Authentic Taste: The Tourist Experience at a Food Museum Restaurant,” *Tourism Management Perspectives* 36, no. April (2020): 100749, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100749>.

⁹ Yulia Hartati and Ayu Meiliana, “Gambaran Spesifikasi Bahan Makanan Segar Dan Citarasa Makanan Lunak Yang Dihasilkan,” *Jurnal Pustaka Pada* 1, no. 1 (2022): 11–16.

¹⁰ Andrew Winscott Suherman and Charly Hongdiyanto, “Pengaruh Promosi, Cita Rasa, Dan Persepsi Harga Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Produk Milkmo,” *Performa* 5, no. 3 (2021): 233–41, <https://doi.org/10.37715/jp.v5i3.1774>.

¹¹ Gilang Permata et al., “Pengaruh Kualitas Pelayanan, Harga Dan Cita Rasa Terhadap Kepuasan Pelanggan Pada Rumah Makan Mekar Sari Di Kabupaten Trenggalek,” *Journal of Management and Creative Business (JMCBUS)* 2, no. 2 (2024): 83–102, <https://doi.org/10.30640/jmcbus.v2i2.2281>.

¹² Pridia and Sari, “ANALISIS KEAUTENTIKAN DAN KEUNIKAN LAKSA CIHIDEUNG SEBAGAI KULINER UNGGULAN KOTA BOGOR.”

¹³ Umar Farouq Ali and Vasco Santos, “Glocalization Strategies in the Food Industry: Adapting to Local Needs and Demands,” *Evolving Strategies for Organizational Management and Performance Evaluation*, 2025, 237–62, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-0149-5.ch012>.

cultural value, and heritage. The formal acknowledgment of Washoku by UNESCO in 2013 further

strengthened its global status ¹⁴. As demand increases, delivering authentic culinary experiences across borders becomes increasingly important. Globalization affects supply chains, separates production and consumption locations, and facilitates cultural exchange, giving rise to fusion cuisines and culinary innovation ¹⁵. Creative experimentation in the kitchen allows chefs to merge tradition and innovation, making gastronomy a living, adaptive expression of culture ¹⁶.

Consumer Perceptions and Expectations

Food functions as a cultural symbol, representing identity, tradition, and collective memory, and can serve as a medium of cultural exchange or soft power ¹⁷. Culinary experiences are expected to deliver an authentic taste of place, particularly for tourists or culturally curious consumers ¹⁸.

Although consumers are often assumed to value authenticity highly, empirical evidence linking perceived authenticity to higher satisfaction, loyalty, or ratings is limited ¹⁹. Modern diners increasingly prioritize holistic experiences that combine authentic taste with quality service, atmosphere, and environment ²⁰. In cross-cultural culinary settings, such as Ichirin Ramen, success lies in balancing traditional Japanese flavors with adaptations that satisfy local consumer preferences. Authenticity functions alongside other experience factors, complementing innovation, service excellence, and ambiance.

Summary

The literature demonstrates that authenticity in culinary experiences is a multifaceted concept, shaped by cultural, sensory, and consumer-driven factors. Taste, globalization, and consumer perceptions interact to define how authenticity is created, perceived, and valued.

¹⁴ MD. Saifullah Akon and Debasish Nandy, "Japanese Culinary Industry in South Asia: An Exploratory Comparison of Indian and Bangladeshi Consumers," *The Journal of Indian and Asian Studies* 05, no. 01 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1142/s2717541324500013>.

¹⁵ Eleanor Mitchell, "A Qualitative Approach on the Impact of Globalization on Traditional Italian Restaurant Supply Chains A Qualitative Approach on The Impact of Globalization on Traditional Italian Restaurant Supply Chains," 2025, 0–16, <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202501.0015.v1>. Vinod Kumar and Ruchika Kulshrestha, "Changing Tastes: How Globalization Is Shaping Regional Cuisines-Culinary Innovation and Fusion Cuisine, Variety, and Availability of Ingredients," *Global Sustainable Practices in Gastronomic Tourism*, 2024, 231–41, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-7096-4.ch013>.

¹⁶ Abhishek Rajan, "Gastronomic Evolution: A Review of Traditional and Contemporary Food Culture," *International Journal for Multidimensional Research Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (2023): 62–76, <https://www.chandigarhphilosophers.com/index.php/ijmrp/article/view/80>.

¹⁷ Umul Khasanah et al., "Japanese Diplomatic Strategy in Using Traditional Culinary as An Instrument of Cultural Diplomacy in Indonesia," *Jurnal Kewarganegaraan* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1161–67, <http://journal.upy.ac.id/index.php/pkn/article/view/5225>.

¹⁸ Alžbeta Királ'ová and Lukáš Malec, "Local Food as a Tool of Tourism Development in Regions," *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management in the Digital Age* 5, no. 1 (2021): 54–68, <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijthmda.20210101.oa1>.

¹⁹ David W. Lehman Balázs Kovács, Glenn R. Carroll, "Authenticity and Consumer Value Ratings: Empirical Tests from the Restaurant Domain," 2013, 1–41.

²⁰ Agus Yulistiyono, Eva Andriani, and Arief Yanto Rukmana, "Transformation of Modern Culinary Entrepreneurs: Strategies and Challenges in the Face of the Modern Era," *West Science Journal Economic and Entrepreneurship* 1, no. 03 (2023): 155–61, <https://doi.org/10.58812/wsjee.v1i03.157>.

For this study, these insights form the theoretical foundation to analyze how Ichirin Ramen navigates the balance between traditional Japanese culinary principles and local adaptations to deliver a cohesive and satisfying dining experience.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with an exploratory case study design to investigate how the authenticity of Japanese cuisine is maintained at Ichirin Ramen Batam. The restaurant was selected as the case study due to its strategic location in Batam—a center of international trade and tourism—as well as its reputation as a popular Japanese dining venue that attracts both local and expatriate customers. These characteristics make Ichirin Ramen a representative case for examining the interaction between Japanese culinary traditions and local adaptations. A case study is a qualitative approach used to explore a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, requiring active engagement with multiple forms of data, such as interviews and observations ²¹. The study examines several key dimensions of authenticity: ingredient sourcing and usage, cooking techniques, dining atmosphere, and the perspectives of both staff and customers. These dimensions are analyzed within the cultural and operational context of a fine-dining Japanese restaurant operating outside its country of origin.

Research Informants

The research population includes culinary professionals, service staff, local customers, and Japanese expatriate customers. A purposive sample of 9 informants was selected: one head chef, three service staff members, and five local customers. Sampling was guided by the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection was discontinued once no new significant information emerged. The inclusion of diverse informants enriches perspectives and enhances the credibility of findings. This approach reflects practices in similar studies, where data saturation was often achieved with a relatively small but focused sample, such as studies involving head chefs reaching saturation with approximately 15 participants ²². In this context, nine informants are considered adequate for a homogenous qualitative population and narrowly defined research objectives.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using three complementary methods: In-depth semi-structured interviews with chefs, staff, and customers to explore perceptions of authenticity, Non-participant observations of food preparation, staff–customer interactions, and the restaurant atmosphere, Document analysis, including menus, food preparation descriptions, online reviews, and internal records.

To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation (varied informants), method triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), and time triangulation

²¹ Kristine M. Alpi and John Jamal Evans, “Distinguishing Case Study as a Research Method from Case Reports as a Publication Type,” *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 107, no. 1 (2019): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.615>.

²² Mohamed Fawzi Afifi, J. J. Healy, and Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, “Chefs’ Perspectives of Failures in Foodservice Kitchens, Part 2: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Consequences and Handling of Food Production Failure,” *Journal of Foodservice Business Research* 26, no. 5 (2023): 669–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2022.2044736>.

(observations conducted at different operational hours: lunch, afternoon, and dinner). These strategies strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification. Thematic coding was applied with initial categories such as ingredient authenticity, culinary techniques, dining atmosphere, and consumer perceptions. Coding was conducted manually, focusing on recurring patterns and themes across informants. This approach aligns with ²³, who used a similar mix of interviews and surveys to assess authenticity in Japanese restaurants across Southeast Asia. The study's design thus reflects contemporary best practices in case-study-based culinary research.

Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument. In this study, the researcher positioned themselves as an external observer with limited access to the kitchen in order to minimize subjective bias while maintaining observational depth. Field notes and reflexive memos were included to enhance dependability and confirmability.

Transferability

To strengthen transferability, the study provides detailed contextual descriptions of the restaurant profile, location, customer characteristics, and operational practices. This enables readers to assess the extent to which the findings may be applicable to other Japanese restaurants in Indonesia or Southeast Asia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the authenticity of Japanese cuisine at Ichirin Ramen is constructed through a balance of culinary practices, ingredient management, service standards, and customer perceptions. These results reinforce the view that authenticity is not a fixed standard but rather a dynamic cultural negotiation between Japanese culinary traditions and the Indonesian local context.

Chef's Perspective

From the kitchen's standpoint, Chef Hideyoshi emphasized that authenticity begins with ingredient selection and preparation techniques. Approximately 50% of the ingredients are supplied from Japanese-owned factories in Jakarta, while the remainder is sourced locally from Batam. This hybrid supply strategy aligns with previous study ²⁴, who highlight the importance of ingredient consistency in maintaining flavor authenticity in Japanese restaurants abroad. Adaptation is evident in the substitution of chicken broth for pork bones, which are traditionally simmered in Japan for over 12 hours. Although the process differs, adjustments in seasoning and consistency preserve the essence of ramen. This reflects culinary adaptation consistent with the concept of glocalization ²⁵. Furthermore, the handmade preparation of ramen and udon noodles is preserved as a key element of

²³ Koji Domon, Alessandro Melcarne, and Giovanni B. Ramello, "Fake & Original: The Case of Japanese Food in Southeast Asian Countries," *European Journal of Law and Economics* 54, no. 2 (2022): 327–47, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10657-022-09742-9>.

²⁴ Farrer et al., "Japanese Culinary Mobilities Research: The Globalization of the Japanese Restaurant."

²⁵ Ali and Santos, "Glocalization Strategies in the Food Industry: Adapting to Local Needs and Demands."

authenticity, underscoring the role of craftsmanship and traditional techniques in Japanese cuisine.

²⁶ Previous study emphasized that authenticity is not an absolute standard but can be maintained when core culinary values are respected despite local adjustments. Similarly, Chef Hideyoshi underscores that handmade noodle-making for ramen and udon remains central to preserving authenticity. The artisanal approach, requiring skill and precision, reflects the craftsmanship behind Japanese cuisine, supporting ²⁷ argument that culinary authenticity is strongly tied to traditional techniques and preparation methods.



Picture 1. Ichirin Ramen Batam Noodle Room

At the same time, Chef Hideyoshi acknowledged that flavor profiles are deliberately adjusted for the Indonesian palate. Compared to the richer and more complex tastes in Japan, Indonesian customers prefer simpler and lighter flavors. Recipes are therefore modified slightly, without altering the visual presentation or the fundamental composition of dishes. This process reflects the concept of glocalization ²⁸, where global traditions are adapted to local contexts while preserving cultural identity. It also resonates with ²⁹ view that culinary innovation emerges from the negotiation between tradition and adaptation. In Ichirin Ramen's case, authenticity is preserved not only in what is served, but in how it is carefully adapted for cultural relevance.

Service Staff Perspective

The service staff highlighted that authenticity encompasses not only taste but also the overall dining experience. Ika emphasized consistent positive feedback, with many customers perceiving the dishes as more "rich" and "traditional" than other local Japanese restaurants. Mayang added that the presence of Japanese expatriates and VIP guests as regular patrons attests to Ichirin's credibility in maintaining expected standards. Rosa pointed to the importance of the open kitchen and sushi counter, which allow customers to observe the cooking process, alongside Japanese-inspired hospitality practices such as providing oshibori (warm towels) and warm greetings. These findings support the concept

²⁶ Hariani, "Halal Japanese Culinary as Attraction for Muslim Travellers to Visit Japan."

²⁷ Pridia and Sari, "ANALISIS KEAUTENTIKAN DAN KEUNIKAN LAKSA CIHIDEUNG SEBAGAI KULINER UNGGULAN KOTA BOGOR."

²⁸ Ali and Santos, "Glocalization Strategies in the Food Industry: Adapting to Local Needs and Demands."

²⁹ Rajan, "Gastronomic Evolution: A Review of Traditional and Contemporary Food Culture."

of authenticity as experience ³⁰ which suggests that atmosphere and hospitality are integral to the construction of culinary authenticity.

Customer Perspective

Customer perspectives further enrich the understanding of authenticity. Wahyu, who has never visited Japan, felt transported through the décor and hospitality of Ichirin. Ferry identified umami, shoyu, dashi, and mirin as hallmarks of Japanese cuisine, noting that although modifications exist, the essence of Japan remains intact. Kris stressed the importance of authenticity for global culinary branding, while Felix viewed visual presentation as central, associating Ichirin's dishes with representations of Japanese food in anime. Helen, who had visited Japan, critiqued the broth as less complex and the meat as less tender, yet still considered authenticity essential as a representation of cultural identity. These perspectives reveal that authenticity is perceived across multiple dimensions—taste, visuals, atmosphere, and cultural symbolism—depending on individual backgrounds and expectations.

Synthesis

Overall, the authenticity of Ichirin Ramen is shaped by three interrelated pillars: Culinary practices – the hybrid use of imported and local ingredients, handmade techniques, and adapted recipes, Service strategies – Japanese-inspired atmosphere and hospitality, Customer perceptions – diverse interpretations of authenticity based on sensory, visual, and cultural experiences.

These findings affirm that authenticity is multidimensional and dynamic, echoing ³¹, who describes culinary authenticity as a socially constructed and continuously negotiated concept between tradition and adaptation. For Ichirin Ramen, maintaining a balance between Japanese traditions and local market needs has proven to be a key strategy for sustaining authenticity and cultural credibility in a globalized culinary landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the authenticity of Japanese cuisine at Ichirin Ramen Batam is not a static concept but a dynamic process negotiated between culinary traditions and local adaptations. The findings demonstrate that authenticity is maintained through three interrelated dimensions: culinary practices (hybrid use of imported and local ingredients, handmade preparation, and recipe adjustment), service strategies (Japanese-inspired hospitality and dining atmosphere), and customer perceptions (interpretations shaped by sensory, visual, and cultural experiences).

The study underscores that authenticity in Japanese cuisine abroad cannot be reduced to the replication of original practices alone. Instead, it is constructed through a balance of preserving essential cultural values while adapting to local contexts. This supports the notion of authenticity as a socially constructed phenomenon, negotiated between chefs, staff, and customers within the realities of globalization and cultural exchange.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that Japanese restaurants operating

³⁰ Kim, Park, and Xu, "Beyond the Authentic Taste: The Tourist Experience at a Food Museum Restaurant."

³¹ Boyle, "'Authentic and Amazing': Authenticity as an Evaluative Category in Online Consumer Restaurant Reviews The Role of Authenticity in Food Discourse : Distinction."

outside Japan should focus on maintaining core cultural markers—such as craftsmanship, presentation, and hospitality—while remaining flexible in adapting to local preferences and constraints. By doing so, they can sustain both cultural credibility and market relevance.

Finally, while this research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of culinary authenticity in Batam, it is limited to a single case study. Future studies could extend this investigation by comparing multiple Japanese restaurants across different cities or incorporating cross-national perspectives to better understand how authenticity is negotiated in diverse cultural settings. For consumers, authenticity is perceived holistically—not only through taste but also through presentation, ambiance, and symbolic associations with Japan. This indicates that authenticity is not a fixed standard but a negotiated construct shaped by both restaurant practices and consumer perceptions.

The findings imply that maintaining essential Japanese culinary values while making careful local adaptations can strengthen cultural credibility and market relevance. Future research could expand this case by comparing different Japanese restaurants across Indonesia or Southeast Asia to explore how authenticity is negotiated in diverse cultural contexts.

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