The Meaning Behind the Signboard: Japanese Gastropology Representation in Restaurant Toponyms and Its Implications for the Cultural Sustainability of Bali's Tourism

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Abstract. This study examines how Japanese gastropology is represented in the toponyms of Japanese restaurants in Bali and how these representations relate to the principles of sustainable tourism. Drawing on 95 restaurant names collected through field observation in Kuta, Denpasar, Sanur, and Jimbaran, the study identifies five toponymic typologies: culinary-descriptive (42.1%), philosophical-symbolic (22.1%), anthroponymic (17.9%), hybrid-global (10.5%), and geographical-referential (7.4%). A gastropological analysis of these typologies reveals five corresponding dimensions of Japanese culinary culture embedded in naming practices: iconic culinary identity, aesthetic and philosophical values of food, personal ownership as a guarantee of quality, cross-cultural glocalization, and regional culinary diversification. Read through the lens of sustainable tourism, the findings show a dual dynamic: Japanese linguistic and cultural elements strengthen cultural sustainability by preserving and disseminating Japanese heritage within the public tourism landscape, yet they also raise challenges of cultural commodification that require careful governance. Unlike prior studies, which have examined linguistic landscapes, toponymy, or Japanese culinary trends in Indonesia separately, this study is the first to integrate these three strands into a single typological and gastropological framework. Its main contribution is a typology-based diagnostic matrix, together with concrete monitoring indicators, that destination managers can use to track cultural depth and commodification risk over time. The study closes with directions for future research integrating consumer perception.

Keywords: Bali, Cultural Sustainability, Gastropology, Japanese Restaurants, Linguistic Landscape, Sustainable Tourism

1 Introduction

As an international tourism destination, Bali has developed into a dynamic space of cultural encounter that is reflected in an increasingly diverse culinary industry. Among the various types of restaurants that have grown rapidly, Japanese restaurants are one of the most significant, particularly in major tourist areas such as Denpasar, Kuta, Sanur, and Jimbaran. This growth parallels the broader phenomenon in which Japanese cuisine has become one of the fastest-growing culinary trends in Indonesia over the past decade, accompanied by processes of cultural adaptation to the local context (Fatimah & Panjaitan, 2025). One intriguing linguistic dimension of this trend is the visible

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presence of Japanese vocabulary in the public space of tourism through restaurant signage and toponyms.

The name, or toponym, of a restaurant is not merely a label or a marker of place. It is a linguistic artifact laden with cultural, social, and economic meaning. In a tourism context, a restaurant name functions as one of the principal elements of the linguistic landscape (LL): the public space in which language is used to represent identity, attract consumers, and construct a particular image of culture (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Landry, R., & Bourhis (1997) define the LL as the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, place names, and commercial shop signs that together form the linguistic profile of a territory. Spolsky & Cooper (1991) show that such public-space language choices reflect language politics and identity strategies, while Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara & Trumper-Hecht (2006) argue that the LL is a symbolic construction of public space shaped by self-presentation and market orientation.

Analytically, restaurant names are examined through three complementary frameworks, including toponymic analysis, semiotic analysis, and language-contact/glocalization analysis. The toponymic perspective treats restaurant names as commercial micro-toponyms and focuses on naming patterns and referential strategies; recent tourism-toponymy research demonstrates that names can encode cultural values and local meanings (Ayuningtias & Ekawati, 2024). The semiotic perspective examines how names operate through denotation, connotation, iconicity, indexicality, and symbolic association. The language-contact perspective addresses hybrid naming and the adaptation of global cultural forms to local markets, a process also evident in contemporary restaurant naming (Tumuju & Lalira, 2025). Together, these frameworks allow the study to connect the linguistic form of a restaurant name with the cultural meaning and tourism function it performs.

Empirical studies have examined linguistic landscapes in Bali, including multilingual signs in Nusa Dua (Rastitiati & Suprastayasa, 2022), ideological meanings in outdoor public signs (Widiatmika & Sosiowati, 2024), tourist-place signboards (Dewi, Putra & Paramarta, 2024), and multilingual signage for sustainable tourism in Desa Kutuh (Utami, Ariyaningsih, Aritonang & Irwandika, 2024). Research has also addressed Japanese culinary language in Indonesia, showing that Japanese cuisine is actively adapted to Indonesian social and culinary contexts (Fatimah & Panjaitan, 2025), while studies of restaurant menus in Bali identify systematic mixing of local and international languages as a strategy for attracting customers (Setiari & Utami, 2024). These studies establish the relevance of language, food, and tourism, but they do not specifically explain how Japanese restaurant names themselves encode differentiated cultural meanings and how those meanings relate to cultural sustainability.

The research gap is therefore not the absence of studies on Bali's linguistic landscape or Japanese cuisine, but the lack of an integrated analysis that connects restaurant toponymic typology, gastropological meaning, and cultural sustainability within the same empirical framework. Existing studies generally emphasize language distribution, sign functions, menu language, or culinary adaptation separately. This study addresses that gap by asking: How is Japanese gastropology represented in the toponyms of Japanese restaurants in Bali, and what are the implications of these representations for cultural sustainability in tourism? The study pursues two interrelated objectives: (1) to identify and interpret the dimensions of Japanese gastropological representation encoded in restaurant toponyms; and (2) to assess their positive and

problematic implications for the cultural sustainability of Bali's tourism linguistic landscape.

2 Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing qualitative content This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using qualitative content analysis as its primary research design, a choice consistent with the aim of generating in-depth, systematic understanding of cultural phenomena rather than statistical generalization (Moleong, 2016). The analytical process follows a combined inductive–deductive coding procedure, in which initial categories were derived from existing theoretical frameworks (deductive) and subsequently refined in response to empirical data (inductive).

The population comprised Japanese restaurants operating in Bali's tourism areas, including Japanese-, foreign-, and locally owned establishments that explicitly identified themselves as Japanese restaurants or presented Japanese cuisine as their principal culinary orientation. Data were collected in four tourism precincts: Kuta, Denpasar, Sanur, and Jimbaran. These locations were selected because they represent different tourism and commercial contexts. The final dataset consisted of 95 restaurant names documented during April and May 2026.

The population comprises all Japanese restaurants operating in Bali's tourist areas, whether Japanese-, foreign-, or locally owned that explicitly identify themselves as Japanese restaurants or offer Japanese cuisine as their main menu. Data were collected across four major tourism precincts in Bali: Kuta (a high-density international mass-tourism zone), Denpasar (the urban commercial centre), Sanur (a mature tourism zone catering primarily to adult leisure visitors), and Jimbaran (a premium coastal resort precinct) with the total of 95 restaurants.

Field data collection was conducted during April and May 2026 through non-participant observation and systematic photographic documentation of restaurant signage. It was supplemented by unstructured interviews with restaurant owners and managers, together with digital research via Google Maps and Tripadvisor.

Sampling was conducted through purposive sampling, applying the following inclusion criteria: (1) permanently operating restaurants; (2) signage incorporating Japanese linguistic elements in any script (Latin romanization, Hiragana, Katakana, or Kanji); and (3) location within the designated research precincts. The final sample comprised 95 restaurant names. Frequency categorization followed a descriptive percentage scheme adapted from Sugiyono (2019) and Arikunto (2016), classifying typologies as dominant (>35%), high (20–34.9%), moderate (10–19.9%), or low (<10%). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and member checking with key informants experienced in Bali's culinary and tourism sectors.

Table 1. Indicators of typology frequency of occurrence (n = 95)

Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage Range	Frequency Range	Description

Dominant	> 35%	≥ 34	The most frequently used typology; reflects the principal naming tendency
High	20% – 34.9%	19 – 33	A fairly frequently used typology; indicates a significant pattern
Moderate	10% – 19.9%	10 – 18	A moderately used typology; present but not the primary choice
Low	< 10%	≤ 9	A rarely used typology; variable and non-dominant

Source: adapted from Sugiyono (2019) and Arikunto (2016)

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Data Distribution and Toponymic Typology

The analysis of 95 restaurant names produced five recurrent typologies. The distribution is important not simply as a frequency ranking but as an indication of which cultural meanings are most readily mobilized in the commercial linguistic landscape. Table 2 summarizes the five categories and provides the basis for the subsequent interpretation of their gastropological dimensions.

Table 2. The typology of Japanese restaurant toponyms in Bali (n=95)

Rank	Code	Typology	Frequency	Percentage	Category
1	CUL-DES	Culinary-Descriptive	40	42.1%	Dominant
2	PHI-SYM	Philosophical-Symbolic	21	22.1%	High
3	ANT-PER	Anthroponymic	17	17.9%	Moderate
4	HYB-GLO	Hybrid-Global	10	10.5%	Moderate
5	REF-GEO	Referential-Geographic	7	7.4%	Low
		Total	95	100%	

Source: Field Observation Data (2026)

3.2 Five Dimensions of Japanese Gastropological Representation

The five typologies are interpreted below as five dimensions of Japanese gastropological representation. The discussion moves from highly explicit culinary

references to more indirect cultural, personal, hybrid, and geographical references. This ordering makes it possible to distinguish the naming strategy from the cultural meaning it activates.

Iconic Culinary Identity: Culinary-Descriptive Typology. The culinary-descriptive typology is the dominant category, accounting for 40 of the 95 names (42.1%). Names referring directly to recognizable Japanese foods such as sushi, ramen, udon, or oden make Japanese culinary identity immediately legible to visitors. Their communicative strength lies in the direct association between the name and the product. The restaurant does not require extensive cultural interpretation before the customer understands its culinary orientation.

The finding is consistent with recent research showing that culinary language in restaurant spaces functions as a strategic resource for communicating products and attracting consumers. Setiari & Utami (2024), for example, found that restaurant menu names in Pererenan and Canggu combine linguistic forms in ways that help restaurants communicate culinary offerings and appeal to customers. Fatimah & Panjaitan (2025) likewise show that Japanese cuisine in Indonesia is adapted and reinterpreted within local cultural contexts. The present study extends these observations by demonstrating that the adaptation is visible not only in menus or food products but also in the restaurant's primary name.

From a gastropological perspective, the use of food names can therefore operate as an iconic cultural shortcut. The name 'sushi', for example, does more than identify a dish; it activates associations with Japanese culinary identity, freshness, preparation, presentation, and perceived authenticity. The oden-related examples are particularly significant because they transfer a food associated with warmth, seasonality, and social familiarity into Bali's tropical tourism environment. The result is a form of cultural translation in which a recognizable Japanese food term becomes a market-facing sign of culinary identity.

Aesthetics and Philosophy of Food: Philosophical-Symbolic Typology. The philosophical-symbolic typology comprises 21 names (22.1%) and represents a less explicit but culturally deeper naming strategy. Rather than naming a dish directly, these names invoke values, emotional states, or philosophical concepts associated with Japanese cultural imagery. The analysis focuses on three recurring layers: aesthetic-philosophical association, hospitality, and transformative symbolism. Names such as Okaeri (お帰り, 'welcome home') frame the dining experience through the cultural idea of omotenashi, while Hinotori (火の鳥, 'phoenix') and Yorimichi (寄り道, 'a detour or brief stop along a journey') activate broader symbolic narratives. The name therefore operates beyond product identification and constructs an expected experience. This interpretation is supported by recent food-tourism research that treats food as a medium of cultural engagement, destination branding, and narrative experience (Susanto, 2023). Long (2023) likewise demonstrates that culinary tourism can generate tensions between cultural tradition, tourism commercialization, and sustainability, meaning that the symbolic depth of a food-related representation matters to how culture is communicated.

The finding suggests that philosophical-symbolic names have greater interpretive density than culinary-descriptive names. They require consumers to connect a linguistic expression with a cultural concept before the restaurant's intended identity becomes fully meaningful. In semiotic terms, the sign moves from immediate recognition toward connotative and mythic interpretation. Such names can potentially contribute to cultural literacy when their meanings are explained rather than left as decorative foreign-language markers.

Personal Culinary Authorship: Anthroponymic Typology. The anthroponymic typology accounts for 17 names (17.9%). These names foreground personal or family identity and position the restaurant as an extension of an individual culinary identity. In this strategy, the name can function as a promise of authorship, continuity, responsibility, or personal quality control.

Recent research on restaurant naming supports the interpretation that names are closely connected to identity and commercial positioning. Tumuju & Lalira (2025), studying restaurant naming in Manado, found that linguistic creativity reflects local identity, global influence, and branding strategies. Brawijaya (2025) similarly shows that restaurant and shop names can encode owner identity, cultural affiliation, and symbolic positioning. The present finding adds a culinary-authorship dimension: a personal name can transform an anonymous commercial establishment into a place associated with a particular person or lineage.

Within the Japanese culinary frame, this strategy can also be interpreted through the cultural value attached to craftsmanship. However, the study does not assume that every personal name represents a historically authentic Japanese culinary lineage. Instead, the name is treated as a semiotic claim to personal identity and responsibility that may be interpreted by consumers as a quality signal.

Glocalization of Taste: Hybrid-Global Typology. The hybrid-global typology comprises 10 names (10.5%). These names combine Japanese linguistic or culinary elements with non-Japanese words, local expressions, English, or playful forms. Their defining characteristic is not linguistic mixture alone, but the negotiation of Japanese culinary identity with the expectations of a Bali-based tourism market.

This finding aligns with (Fatimah & Panjaitan (2025) conclusion that Japanese cuisine in Indonesia undergoes local adaptation rather than simple reproduction. It also corresponds with research on Bali restaurant language showing that mixed local and international forms can be used strategically to attract customers (Setiari & Utami, 2024). (Hazaea, Alfaifi, Alfaifi & Al-Sofi (2024) further demonstrate that restaurant outdoor signs in tourist cities should be understood in relation to the menus and the communicative functions of the business. The hybrid names in the present dataset therefore represent a broader glocal strategy in which cultural recognizability and market accessibility are negotiated simultaneously.

From a cultural perspective, hybridization should not automatically be interpreted as cultural loss. Adaptation can demonstrate the vitality of a cultural form when it remains connected to recognizable meanings. The critical issue is whether the adaptation preserves meaningful cultural associations or reduces them to superficial market symbols. This distinction becomes important when evaluating the relationship between naming practices and cultural sustainability.

Regional Culinary Diversification: Referential-Geographic Typology. The referential-geographic typology is the least frequent, with 7 names (7.4%), but it carries a distinctive form of cultural specificity. These names refer to Japanese regions or places associated with particular culinary identities. For example, Maizuru Sushi Renon references Maizuru, a port city in Kyoto Prefecture, thereby associating the restaurant with a specific regional food geography and marine-food reputation.

Recent toponymy research demonstrates that place names can encode cultural values and historical or local associations rather than functioning only as neutral geographical labels (Ayuningtias & Ekawati, 2024). In tourism contexts, such referential naming can also deepen destination narratives because it links a commercial establishment to a broader cultural geography. The present finding extends this principle to culinary toponymy: a geographical name can operate as a gastro-geographic signal that situates food within a particular region and implicitly communicates provenance, specificity, or culinary distinction.

Its low frequency may indicate that geographical references require more cultural knowledge from consumers than direct food names. Nevertheless, precisely because they are less immediately transparent, such names may have greater potential to stimulate curiosity and cultural learning when accompanied by contextual explanations.

3.3 A Spectrum of Naming Strategies

The five dimensions form a spectrum from explicit product identification to increasingly indirect cultural representation. Culinary-descriptive names provide the clearest and fastest signal of Japanese culinary identity, whereas philosophical-symbolic and referential-geographic names require greater interpretive knowledge. Anthroponymic names foreground personal identity, while hybrid-global names emphasize cultural adaptation and market accessibility. This spectrum is summarized in Table 3 and shows how naming practices simultaneously organize culinary information, cultural meaning, and commercial positioning.

Table 3. Gastropological Representation Matrix by Toponymic Typology

Typology	Gastropological Dimension	Barthesian Level	Peircean Function	Cultural Orientation
Culinary-Descriptive	Iconic culinary identity	Denotative	Indexical	Authentic–Global
Philosophical-Symbolic	Aesthetic & philosophical values	Mythical	Iconic	Authentic–Profound
Anthroponymic	Personal culinary authorship	Denotative–Connotative	Personal-Indexical	Authentic–Personal
Hybrid-Global	Glocalization adaptation	Connotative	Symbolic	Adaptive–Hybrid
Referential-Geographic	Regional diversification	Connotative–Mythical	Iconic–Indexical	Authentic–Specific

3.4 Implications for Cultural Sustainability in Tourism

The typological findings have implications beyond restaurant branding because restaurant names are visible components of the tourism linguistic landscape. The following discussion distinguishes between contributions to cultural sustainability and risks of cultural commodification. This distinction is necessary because the presence of cultural signs in tourism does not automatically guarantee culturally sustainable representation.

Contributions to Cultural Sustainability. The presence of Japanese linguistic and cultural elements in Bali's toponymic landscape makes several distinct contributions to cultural sustainability. First, the incorporation of Japanese vocabulary, script, and cultural concepts into public signage functions as linguistic preservation and dissemination, exposing international visitors to elements of Japanese language and culture, consistent with Nurse (2006) understanding of cultural sustainability as requiring the active transmission of cultural identity across generational and geographic boundaries.

Challenges of Cultural Commodification. The same visibility can produce commodification. The dominance of the culinary-descriptive category (42.1%) means that Japanese culinary identity is frequently represented through a limited set of highly recognizable food terms. This strategy is commercially efficient, but repeated reliance on the same symbols can narrow public understanding of Japanese food culture. The hybrid-global category also illustrates how cultural signs may be selectively modified to suit market expectations.

Recent scholarship on culinary tourism warns that sustainability involves tensions between cultural representation, tourism demand, commercialization, and the preservation of cultural meaning (Long, 2023). Similarly, research on cultural sustainability and tourism emphasizes that cultural resources require active management when tourism becomes a major force shaping their visibility and interpretation (Terkenli & Georgoula, 2022). The concern is therefore not the existence of commercial adaptation itself, but the possibility that complex cultural systems become simplified into market-friendly images without adequate contextualization.

For this reason, the study does not equate 'Japanese-looking' naming with authenticity. A Japanese lexical item may be culturally meaningful, commercially strategic, or both. Its sustainability value depends partly on whether the associated representation encourages informed cultural engagement or merely uses cultural difference as a decorative marketing device.

Toward a Culturally Balanced Linguistic Landscape Policy. The findings suggest three practical directions for sustainable tourism governance. First, restaurant operators can provide short explanations of culturally significant names through menus, signage, websites, or QR-linked digital content. Second, tourism organizations could develop voluntary recognition schemes for establishments that provide accurate cultural interpretation and demonstrate responsible representation. Third, linguistic-landscape and gastropological indicators can be incorporated into destination monitoring so that

cultural visibility is assessed together with the depth and contextual accuracy of representation.

The typological distribution can serve as a diagnostic starting point. A sustained increase in purely descriptive naming may indicate greater standardization of cultural imagery, whereas a balanced presence of philosophical, personal, hybrid, and geographical naming may indicate a wider range of cultural narratives. This should not be treated as a rigid authenticity index; rather, it is a qualitative monitoring instrument that can identify patterns requiring closer cultural evaluation. Such an approach is compatible with recent work that calls for cultural sustainability indicators and governance mechanisms capable of monitoring cultural impacts in tourism destinations (Jelinčić, 2021; Kartika, Ismayanti & Djamhur, 2024).

4 Conclusion

This study has identified five distinct dimensions of Japanese gastropological representation embedded within the toponymic practices of Japanese restaurants in Bali: iconic culinary identity (culinary-descriptive typology), aesthetic and philosophical values of food (philosophical-symbolic typology), personal culinary authorship as quality guarantee (anthroponymic typology), cross-cultural glocalization adaptation (hybrid-global typology), and regional culinary diversification (referential-geographic typology). Together, these dimensions constitute a rich and internally differentiated system of cultural representation operating within the public semiotic space of Bali's tourism landscape.

Read through the lens of sustainable tourism, the findings reveal a dialectical dynamic at the heart of Japanese restaurant naming practices in Bali. The use of Japanese linguistic and cultural elements makes measurable positive contributions to cultural sustainability: preserving and transmitting elements of Japanese cultural heritage, deepening visitor cultural literacy, and signalling the regional diversity of Japanese gastronomic tradition. At the same time, tendencies toward commodification and glocalization present ongoing challenges to the authenticity and depth of cultural representation.

The study's novelty lies in integrating toponymic typology, gastropological analysis, and sustainable-tourism theory within a single analytical framework, an integration not attempted in prior linguistic-landscape or Japanese-culinary-trend research, and in translating that framework into a typology-based diagnostic matrix with concrete monitoring indicators (Section 3.4.3) that destination managers can apply directly.

This study is nonetheless subject to limitations. The sample was confined to 95 restaurants across four precincts in Bali and collected within a two-month window, so the typological distribution reported here may not generalize to other seasons, precincts, or destinations. The analysis is also based on toponyms and observational data rather than on how tourists themselves interpret these names, which limits what can be said about actual visitor perception.

Future research could extend the present framework in at least three directions: first, by testing the proposed diagnostic matrix longitudinally, to see whether typology distributions shift as destinations mature; second, by incorporating consumer

perception through surveys or interviews, to assess whether tourists read these toponyms in the same gastropological terms proposed here; and third, by applying the framework comparatively to other culinary cultures represented in Bali's tourism landscape, to test its wider applicability beyond the Japanese case

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