

Kodawari and Hospitality: a multicase study of Japanese restaurants

Kodawari e Hospitalidade: um estudo multicase de restaurantes japoneses



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ABSTRACT

The Japanese credibility in the manufacture of products and in services provision was built from different philosophies. One of them is kodawari, understood as the constant search for perfection that can be applied in different businesses and processes. This article aims to identify the principles of kodawari that can be applied into restaurants, also investigating which principles of this philosophy are applied in Japanese restaurants in São Paulo (SP) and can contribute to increasing the competitiveness of these enterprises. This is a multiple case study (Yin, 2005) with the Murakami, JoJo Ramen and Nakka restaurants as cases. The data collection strategies were: bibliographic review, non-participatory direct observation, interview with the restaurants managers (general, service and kitchen management) and document analysis. The main results are: the identification of 21 kodawari principles applicable to restaurants; the identification of the importance of omotenashi no as a spirit of hospitality in the studied restaurants and in the context of kodawari; the application of kodawari principles mainly in the areas of production and service of the studied restaurants; the application of kodawari principles promoting the main strategies and the main competitive resources of the studied restaurants.

Keywords: *kodawari, hospitality, restaurants.*

INTRODUCTION

Japanese are worldly recognized as meticulous and perfectionists, mainly in the areas of manufacture and client attendance. Such credibility was built from different business philosophies such as the *kodawari*, which may be translated as “perfect”, “in search for perfection”, or still, as the act of delivering to the client what exists as best (White, 2012).

The concept of *kodawari* may be applied to different processes, such as design of products, choice of providers, management of quality in an industrial process and even in the coffee service (White, 2012). However, a bibliographic raise (that will be presented in a resumed form in the methodology) allowed to identify a gap in the application of such concept in restaurants, mainly in Brazilian researches.

Restaurants are commercial establishments which provide experiences and their management should focus mainly in the client's well-being (Carracedo, 2008). Due to this, innovation and demonstration of technical accuracy in the execution of food are essential (Oliveira *et al.*, 2022), but it is also needed that such establishments develop strategies focused not only on sensorial and sanitary quality, but also emphasize the excellence in attendance (Ferreira & Silva, 2018). In this process, in addition to commitment with the quality of what is being offered, it is necessary to be focused on the aspects associated to hospitality, aiming at establishing not only practices of good attendance, but also a relation of trust between the host and the guest (Blain; Lashley, 2014). Still, as highlights *et al.* (2022), the sector of restaurants is competitive mainly due to its diversity, both in terms of offer (establishments and available services for consumption) as well as demand (having at sight different needs that guide the choice of an establishment). On account of this, the efforts of the management need to handle the different variables and processes.



Having at sight the broadness of the principles of *kodawari*, it is believed that their application on the management of restaurants may help to develop environments with hospitality and to create competitive differentials to those enterprises.

This article has as purposes: (1) to identify the principles of *kodawari* that might be applied to the universe of restaurants and (2) to investigate which principles of the *kodawari* are applied in Japanese restaurants in São Paulo (SP) and that may contribute to the increase of the competitiveness of such establishments.

The city of São Paulo has the largest concentration of establishments in the food sector outside of homes in Brazil, registered, before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 60,000 bars and restaurants responsible for an annual income of more than R\$ 30 billions and for the generation of several direct and indirect jobs (Abrasel, 2019). São Paulo is also recognized as a multicultural, multi-ethnic capital by receiving a large number of people from the most several nationalities. Such multiculturalism may be observed in the gastronomy offered in neighborhood such as Liberdade, Bom Retiro and Bexiga (Pating; Da Silva, 2020). The sector was severely hit by the restrictions caused during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, but it has already been showing signs of recovery (Corsini, 2021). It is believed, including, that the investment in good practices of management will be essential to the recovery of the financial health of establishments which have survived such period.

The option to study Japanese restaurants was due to their representativeness in the São Paulo market (data from 2021 Tripadvisor, for example, indicated over 1.000 Japanese restaurants operating in São Paulo) and due to the intention of discovering whether the cultural perspective of such establishments would also be perceived as management – treating specifically of the *kodawari* principles. This research was developed from the method of Study of Multiple Cases, according to the premises of Yin (2005), having as selected cases JoJo Ramen, Nakka Restaurant and Murakami,



contemporary restaurants, committed to valuating the Japanese food culture and that are recognized by using quality supplies and techniques of preparation and style of attendance based on the traditional Japanese culture.

HOSPITALITY AND OMOTENASHI

The act of eating should be understood as something that goes beyond solely as an act of survival: it is necessary to recognize it as a symbolic and cultural behavior and that it may be transformed throughout the time (Boutaud, 2011). Such cultural behavior has been extended since the selection of ingredients, passing through the techniques of preparation and service, until the own attitudes which the eater takes by the table, whether in a private meal, or one held in a commercial space (Poulain, 2013).

Restaurants are considered a social space proper for the meeting of people and for the establishment or for the strengthening of bonds among them (Faltin; Minasse, 2017). Teixeira & Silva (2013) argue that restaurants are not only places do get fed, but also to live pleasant moments with other eaters. They are, therefore, spaces thought to eat, although they might also have clients to eat meals alone. Eating may be understood as the sharing of food or meal (Poulain, 2013) and it has an essential role in the practices of hospitality (Camargo, 2004; Lashley, 2004).

In big urban centers, as the city of São Paulo, restaurants are already integrated to the daily lives of thousands of inhabitants, who attend them by practicability (not knowing how to cook or not having enough time to cook) and by pleasure (to enjoy a differentiated environment, to taste a drink or specific food, to be among friends). However, such demand is served by a broad offer, creating a competitive market with different choices of products and services.

In this context, clients are each day more demanding and to offer a quality product or service is imperative for the survival of the enterprise (Fonseca,



2014). As observed by Castleman & Chin (2002) the clients of restaurants search for quality food, an extraordinary service and a pleasant environment, capable of making the experience “memorable”, reminding that, as observed by Carvalho & Paladini (2012), the quality of the service is also a result of the interaction between hosts and clients.

Franco & Rego (2005), De Boer & Rejowski (2014) and Stefanini, Alves & Marques (2018) highlight in their researches hospitality as a key element in restaurants, capable of customizing the offered services. Hospitality may be defined in different forms: for Lashley (2004) it is the relationship between the host and the guest; for Gotman (2009) it is an interpersonal relation that has as brand the sheltering. Camargo (2003, p.19) concepts hospitality as “the human act, exerted in a domestic, public or professional environment, of reception, hosting, feeding and entertaining people temporarily, outside their habitat”. On the other hand, for Montandon (2003, p.102), “hospitality is a way to live in group, guided by rules and rites and [...] an essential way of social interaction, but also a way of humanization or at least, one of the essential forms of socialization”.

The practices of hospitality are different among themselves, depending on the culture, the time and the location in which the meeting between the host and the guest will occur. It is expected that the host honor the guest, nurturing and offering the best and that the guest becomes worthy of receiving such nurturing that, according to Grinover (2006), means to consent, under certain conditions, the inclusion of the other in one's own space. In case some of these rules are not followed, embarrassment may be installed (Montandon, 2011).

According to Lashley (2004) the relations of hospitality happen in different domains, such as social, private and commercial. In each of such domains, the practices of hospitality have characteristics and specificity, even when they have in their basis the principles of the “domestic” hospitality. For Gotman (2009), hospitality in the commercial scope turns to the hospitality in the



domestic environment, recognized by the author as “authentic” to define their rules, practices and patterns. Telfer (2004) mentions, including, the importance of the commercial hosts to use principles of hospitality such as kindness and courtesy to establish a good relation with their clients.

In the commercial scope, the fact that the guest assumes the role of the client and the host of service provider creates a group of expectations and rules. For Lashley (2004) in such domain, hospitality appears as a planned act for the creation of a bond between the client and the service provider. In such relation the “guest” acquires, through payment, the right to enjoy a service or a product, and the “host” tries hard to offer the best service which attends the needs and expectations (Brotherton; Wood, 2004; Lashley, 2015).

In this context, the people gifted with “hospitality” as highlighted, term that describes the characteristics of hospitality people, those who have the wish and a genuine spirit to nurture, to please and to take care of the guests, regardless the refund (Camargo, 2021). In the perspective of hospitality, to become a good host, whether in the domestic or commercial context, it is important to understand and interact with kindness, courtesy and attention. As defended by Brotherton & Wood (2004), hospitality is directly linked to a motivation of behaviors.

When thinking about hospitality in the context of the Japanese culture, the concept of *omotenashi* is highlighted: it has its origin in the tea ceremony and it is related to the act of offering the best service possible and to anticipate a solution of any embarrassing situation. Based on the principle of nurturing searching for a demonstration of respect to the other, it may also be understood as “the simple fact of putting yourself in the position of the other to anticipate one’s desires” (Surak, 2012, p.51) or yet “to serve with the heart” (Wada, 2015, p.10). According to the principles of *omotenashi*, it is necessary to put your “heart” to deliver an excellent service and to create a unique experience (Aishima, 2015).



For the Japanese, *omotenashi* is immaterial and should be “felt” by the guest, characterizing also as a life philosophy taught since the early years of life that goes beyond the perspective of being kind with the other and surpasses all the levels of the daily lives (Morikoshi, 2014). In the commercial scope, it is such feeling of hospitality and nurturing that will make the client to come back, guaranteeing the maintenance of the relation between the host/service provider and the guest/client (Kuraesin, 2021).

KODAWARI AND COMPETITIVENESS IN RESTAURANTS

Kodawari may be understood as a discipline, a constant exercise of giving one’s best in everything to reach the closest to perfection, knowing that there will always be room to improve the already existing knowledge (Mogi, 2018). For White (2012, p. 66), *kodawari* is “the search for the desired quality and the search for perfection”, being defined by the same author as an extreme care with details of what is being produced or the service offered, anticipating problems or setbacks that may appear.

Williamson (2017) reinforces that the search for “perfection” of the *kodawari* is a never ending cycle. For Fukutomi (2014) and White (2012) *kodawari* follows the principles of aesthetic appreciation, of the rituals of production, of the conscientious consumption of supplies (privileging the seasonality of the food products) and the proper way to serve.

As indicated in the introduction, one of the purposes of this article was to defined which principles of the *kodawari* observed in the literature may be applied directly in restaurants.

Table 1

Principles of the *kodawari* applied in restaurants

Sectors	Attendance	Production process	Management
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Principles	Attention to details in receiving the clients (Mogi, (2018); Surajaya (2020); Kuraesin, (2021))	Appreciation of the rituals of production (Fukutomi (2014); Kumakura (2014); Surajaya (2020))	Appreciation of the client's satisfaction (Ikeda (2013); Morikoshi (2014); Wada (2015))
	Appreciation in the way of serving (Williamson (2017); Surajaya (2020))	Search for the best suppliers (Fukutomi (2014); Morikoshi (2014))	Relation of trust with suppliers (Morikoshi (2014))
	Appreciation of the environment's composition (White, 2012; Williamson, 2017)	Selection of the best ingredients and preparation techniques (White, 2012; Fukutomi, 2014)	Low waste in the production process (White, 2012; Fukutomi, 2014)
	Constant improvement of the attendance staff (White (2012); Williamson (2017))	Constant improvement of the operational production staff (White (2012); Williamson (2017))	Constant search for strategies of qualification for managers (White (2012); Mogi (2018))
	<i>Omotenashi</i> when receiving the clients (Alishima (2015); Morikoshi (2014); Kuraesin (2021))	Appreciation of the season consumption of ingredients (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014))	Appreciation of all the sectors to bring positive results to the company (White (2012); Mogi (2018))
	Focus and practice lead to perfection (Fukutomi (2014); Mogi (2018); Morikoshi (2014))	Focus and practice lead to perfection (Fukutomi (2014); Mogi (2018); Morikoshi (2014))	Appreciation of the collaborators (Kuraesin (2021))
	Transformation of the moment into a single one (Morikoshi (2014); Wada (2015); Surajaya (2020), Kuraesin (2021))	Appreciation of the aesthetics of the offered product (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014))	Narrowing the relations with the clients (fidelization) (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Aishima (2015); Surajaya (2020);



			Kuraesin (2021))
		Appreciation of the tools that are part of the meal's composition (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Mogi (2018))	

Source: the authors (2022) based on the review of the literature

In the context of restaurants, the quality of the food and the quality of the attendance are essential for the success of an enterprise. And, as the hospitality provides input to think and to execute the attendance in a differentiated way, *kodawari* may contribute to the optimization of the entire operation of a restaurant, making it more efficient and competitive.

Competitiveness may be understood as the position which a company reaches within the market from some specificity such as product, price, perceived quality and differential of the company (Porter, 2005). It may be measured through time that the organization is able to remain in the market, guaranteeing its investments and the intended return (Oliveira, 2014).

According to Porter (2005) the competitive advantage may be seen as a situation in which the company is differentiated in a favorable way from its opponent, being able to attract clients from aspects that other companies are not able to imitate or apply According to Beckhauser, Wojahn & Parisotto (2018) the competitive advantage is seen as the ability that an organization has to generate higher economy value than its opponents.

The theory of the five competitive strengths by Porter (1999) mentions the threats of new inbound, threat of substitution products, the power of negotiation of suppliers, the power of negotiation of buyers and the level of competitiveness among the opponents as essential strengths in the dynamic



of markets. Thinking about the general reality of Japanese restaurants in São Paulo, it is verified the pressure of all these elements, once it is about a market in constant expansion, where the Japanese restaurants also compete with restaurants of other specialties and of other categories; that such restaurants demand some very specific supplies that are offered in an amount by a reduced number of suppliers; in which there is constant variation of the demand by restaurants, mainly in moments of crisis as this such; that there is São Paulo a high concentration of Japanese restaurants, many of them offering high quality products and services.

Porter (2005) also establishes the application of three generic strategies of competitiveness: the cost leadership strategy (to reduce the costs without reducing the quality), the differentiation strategy (to offer unique products and services, without similar competition) and the focus strategy (to focus on the needs of specific clients). Thinking about the general reality of Japanese restaurants in São Paulo, the three strategies are relevant. There is the importance of the cost element (since many supplies are foreign and present high cost) and of the differentiation and of the focus, since there is the need to develop unique products and services in a segment of the market which is not small, which also demands finding and dedicating to a specific target-public, understanding their needs.

The competitiveness in restaurants may also be thought from the Vision Based on Resources, theory that defends that the companies may differentiate themselves through their own resources, aggregating value to their products or processes in a way to generate a competitive differential. Such theory starts from the analysis of the internal environment to formulate strategies from the resources and abilities that a company might have (GRANT, 1991), being such resources tangible or intangible (GRANT, 1991) or yet, belonging to four different classes: physical, organizational and financial resources (Barney e Hesterly, 2011).



According to Castro *et al.* (2015), tangible resources are materials, such as furniture, equipment, among others. The intangible resources are immaterial and may not be touched, such as management and organizational culture. For Barney & Hesterly (2011) the physical resources are access to the raw material, the geographic location, the equipment, among others. The human resources are the training, the experience, the relationships and the individual ability of the managers and the company's collaborators; the organizational resources are the structure of the company, its formal or informal planning and the information related to the group within the environment where it is found; and the financial resources are all the money capital of the company.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research was developed from a qualitative approach, having as method the Study of Multiple Cases, which allows the investigation of similar cases to obtain enough data to a profound analysis of a phenomenon (YIN, 2005). The strategies of each data gathering were: bibliographic review, direct non-participant observation; document analysis and semi-structured interviews, performed with managers from three areas: general management, production/kitchen management (*chef* or *executive chef*) and attendance management (*maitre* or responsible for the coordination of the activities in the lounge).

The selection of the cases was performed according to the following criteria: to be restaurant focused on Japanese food (not oriental food); to be a contemporary restaurant, but with elements that value the traditional Japanese food culture; to a *chef* familiar with the Japanese culture; to be functioning in the city of São Paulo. Having such criteria met, the selection of the three cases was held by convenience, considering the familiarity of one of the researchers (who works as a consulting professor in the area) and the availability of the establishments in participating in the research (the research was held during the COVID-19 pandemic).



Table 2

Selected Cases

Restaurant	Style	Target Public	Service	Beginning of the operations
JoJo Ramen	Traditional and contemporary Japanese restaurant	Varied	<i>A la carte</i>	2016
Murakami	Traditional and contemporary Japanese restaurant	Varied	Menu degustation	2017
Nakka	Traditional and contemporary Japanese restaurant	Varied	<i>A la carte</i> and degustation menu of sushis	2013

Source: the authors (2022)

The bibliographic review was elaborated from reference books and articles identified in the *Scielo*, *Scopus* and Google Scholar data basis, using the combinations between the terms *hospitality*; *kodawari*; *competitiveness*; *restaurant* (all in English and in Portuguese). Such raise allowed to identified a lack of studies that deal with the application of the term *kodawari* in restaurants, both in the national as well as in the international bibliography.

The purpose of a non-participant observation is to establish a direct contact with the researched reality, without interacting with the researched subjects, helping to identify information without influencing the observed subjects (Lakatos; Marconi, 2007). The non-participant direct observation was guided by a script built on the theoretical reference, considering elements of the lounge and of the kitchen (production). The observations were performed in the month of January 2022 during anonymous meals paid with one's own resources, being performed one observation in each establishment.

The documental research focused on publicity materials and on the restaurants' menu. On the other hand the performed interviews were semi-



structured, modality that, despite having predefined questions, the interviewer has the freedom to conduct the conversation (Lakatos; Marconi, 2007). The script was built from the literature, considering the analytical categories hospitality, competitiveness and *kodawari*, being composed by common questions to all interviewed and also specific questions to each sector. Representatives from three sectors of each restaurants were interviewed, totaling 9 depositions which were recorded, transcript and analyzed by the Analysis of Content according to Bardin (2011), considering the up-mentioned analytical categories.

The scripts of the interview followed a structure of base, but with adaptations related to the area of operation of each professional. Table 3 presents the script with ordinary questions to each management of each enterprise, to the manager of the kitchen and to the manager of attendance.

Table 3

Interview script- ordinary questions to the enterprise's, kitchen's and attendance manager.

Theoretical category	Questions	Interviewed	Referential
Characterization of the restaurant	What is the restaurant's proposal?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	Muller; Woods (1994); Porter (2005); Fonseca, (2014); Mendes, Pires & Krauser (2014)
	What is the user's profile?		
	How was your menu thought?		
Hospitality	What is hospitality to you?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	Lashley; Morrison (2004); Morrison (2004); Telfer (2004); Lashley (2008); Gotman (2009);



			Montadon (2011); Camargo (2013); Ayshima (2015)
Competitiveness	What is competitiveness to you?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	Muller; Woods (1994); Prahalad; Hamel (1995); Rebelato (1997); Bakar; Ahmad (2010); Hormiga (2011); Quadros (2011); Oliveira <i>et al.</i> (2012); White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Morikoshi (2014); Decourt (2015); Silva; Sobrinha (2015); Wada (2015)
	In face of the Covid-19 pandemic, what will be the big challenges to the restaurant sector in 2022? And to your restaurant in specific?		
	In your opinion, what would it take for a restaurant to succeed?		
	Is there a difference between managing a Japanese restaurant and a non-Japanese restaurant? If there is, what is it?		
	In your opinion, what are the competition of the restaurant? And for what reasons?		



	<p>Which elements of the menu and of the lounge (also considering the decoration and the attendance) that, in your opinion, allow the customer to have an effective contact with the Japanese culture?</p>		
	<p>What is the special dish of the house, the one that better represents the restaurant?</p>		
	<p>How do you work with the aesthetic issue (ceramics and presentation in general) of the dishes of the restaurant? How to always ensure a good result?</p>		
	<p>In your opinion what is good attendance?</p>		
<p><i>Kodawari</i> – Low was in the production process</p>	<p>Is there any specific action focused on the diminishing of the waste of the ingredients and other supplies (such as water and electric energy) in the restaurant? If so,</p>	<p>Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen;</p>	<p>White (2012); Fukutomi (2014)</p>



	what is done?		
<i>Kodawari</i> – appreciation in the client's satisfaction	Does the restaurant perform any satisfaction research with the client? If yes, how is it performed?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of attendance.	White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Kumakura (2014); Morikoshi (2014); Mogi (2018)
	How do you work such result?		
	Do you remind of any case of change due to a client's feedback?		
	Is there any strategy or action focused on fidelization of your clients?		
	And for the attraction of new clients? How does the restaurant discloses itself?		
<i>Kodawari</i> – appreciation of the sectors brings positive results to the company	Is there any strategy or action so that the sectors may feel appreciated?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Kumakura (2014); MOGI (2018)
	It is not uncommon to have any type of conflict between the staffs of the restaurant. Does this occur here? Why?		
	When the selection of a new professional is		



	performed for the staff, what do you search for?		
<i>Kodawari</i> – appreciation of the collaborators	Do you believe that your collaborators are satisfied with the company?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Kumakura (2014); Mogi (2018)
	Is there any strategy or action to value the collaborators in general? Or something specific focused on those who presented a good performance?		
<i>Kodawari</i> – constant search for qualification strategies	Is there any strategy or incentive for the collaborators to qualify themselves?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Kumamura (2014); Mogi (2018)
<i>Kodawari</i> – relation of trust with suppliers	Which are the main criteria for the selection of suppliers?	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen	White (2012); Fukutomi (2014)
	Is it common to have to replace a supplier? Why?		
	Is there any action of strategy to keep up a good relationship with the suppliers?		
<i>Kodawari</i>	Have you ever heard of the expression <i>kodawari</i> ? What	Manager of the enterprise; Manager of the kitchen; Manager of attendance.	White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Kumamura



	does it mean in your opinion?		(2014); Mogi (2018)
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Source: the authors (2022)

Table 4 presents the interview script, having the specific questions for the managers of each sector.

Table 4:

Interview script – specific questions to the managers of each sector

Theoretical category	Questions	Interviewed	Referencial
	Kitchen environments may be tense. Is there any strategy or action to keep up a good relationship among the members of the staff?	Kitchen manager	Lashley; Morrison (2004); Telfer (2004); Lashley (2008); Gotman (2009); Montandon (2011); Camargo (2013); Ayshima (2015)
	Is there any situation when a member of the kitchen goes into the lounge to interact with a client? If so what is or what are such situations.		
	What is emphasized in attendance?	Management of attendance	Lashley; Morrison (2004); Telfer (2004); Lashley (2008); Gotman (2009); Montandon (2011); Camargo (2013); Ayshima (2015)
	What experience have you lived and that you would like the client to live?		
	Do you give any specific training		



	to the attendance staff?		
Competitividade	Does the restaurant have any specific strategy to deal/to overcome in relation to the competition? What are the differentials in your restaurant?	Manager of the enterprise	Muller, Woods, (1994); Prahalad; Hamel (1995); Rebelato (1997); Bakar; Ahamd (2010); Hormiga (2011); Quadros (2011); Oliveira <i>et al.</i> , (2012); White (2012); Fukutomil (2014); Morikoshi (2014); Decourt (2015); Silva; Sobrinha (2015); Wada (2015)
	In your vision, what is the most difficult to maintain in a quality Japanese restaurant in the market?		
	How do you specifically evaluate the Japanese restaurant market in São Paulo?		

Source: the authors (2022)

Table 5 summarizes the characteristics of the interviewed of this research:

Table 5:

Group of interviewed

Restaurant	Interviewed	Position	Period in the position
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JoJo Ramen	Simone Akemi Xirata	Manager/Executive Partner	5 years
JoJo Ramen	Yasmin Yonashiro	Manager of attendance	4 year
JoJo Ramen	Janaina Suarez Correa da Costa	Kitchen Chef	1 year
Murakami	Suzana Murakami	Manager/Executive Partner	4 years
Murakami	Tsuyoshi Murakami	<i>Executive Chef/Partner</i>	4 years
Murakami	Jun Murakami	Manager of attendance/Partner	4 years
Restaurant <i>Nakka/ RNK Group</i>	Roberto Nakamori	Manager/Executive Partner	9 years
Restaurant <i>Nakka/ RNK Group</i>	Hermes Yoshiaki Takeda	<i>Executive Chef</i>	7 years
Restaurant <i>Nakka/ RNK Group</i>	Michel C. Santos	Manager of Attendance	1 year

Source: the author (2022)

The interviews with all mentioned interviewed were performed in person in January 2022, recorded and posteriorly transcript in full. All the interviewed signed a term of free and clear consent (TCLE).

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

JoJo Ramen was opened in 2016 and its focus are hot and cold *ramens* dishes and traditional side dishes. The owner-partner and general manager Simone Xirata performed an extensive research before conceiving the restaurant, having brought a Japanese chef to elaborate the menu, aiming at maintaining the quality and the Japanese standard with national ingredients. The place can be occupied by 45 people simultaneously and in two time schedules: lunch from 11:30 to 2:30 and dinner from 6:00 p.m. to 10 p.m. from



Monday to Saturday with lounge attendance, own online delivery system and *takeaway*.

The restaurant Murakami was opened in 2017, however, the manager Suzana Kinoshita Murakami and the Chef Tsuyoshi Murakami had other establishments, such as the award-winning Kinoshita, with one Michelin star. The restaurant works only with two types of degustation menu of six courses, the Sushi Menu and the Murakami Menu, both at the cost of three hundred reais without beverage. The house offers what the chef calls “the living menu” composed by elements of the traditional and of the modern Japanese food and prepared with fresh ingredients available on the day. The house opens from Tuesday to Saturday and works only with pre-reservation for both schedules at dinner: from 06:30 p.m. to 9 p.m., receiving up to 25 people in each period and offering, yet, *take away* at dinner.

Opened in 2016, the unit Jardins of the restaurant Nakka is one of the brands of the RNK Group (there is still one unit in the neighborhood Itaim Bibi, opened in 2013) The Executive Chef Hermes Takeda takes care of two Nakka units and together with his team develops a service *A la Carte* of fusion of the traditional with the contemporary Japanese food, uniting traditional Japanese ingredients with *foie gras*, scallops, special fish eggs and black truffles. The unit holds 110 people in the lounge, working from Monday to Friday, at lunch, from 12:00 to 3 p.m. and at dinner from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m.. In addition to the traditional lounge service, the restaurant also offers *delivery* and *take away*.

Table 6

Chart of characterization of the restaurants JoJo Ramen, Murakami and Nakka

Restaurant	JoJo Ramen	Murakami	Nakka
Characterization			
Proposal	Excellence in services in a modern and popular	Excellence in services in a modern and sophisticated	Excellence in services in a modern and sophisticated



	environment	environment	environment
Client's profile	Varied public	Varied public – classes A and B	Varied public – classes A and B
Menu	Adapted <i>Ramens</i> with Brazilian ingredients	Fusion of modern and traditional Japanese food with Brazilian ingredients	Fusion of traditional Japanese food and international food
Average ticket	R\$80,00	R\$400,00	R\$400,00

Source : the authors (2022)

The restaurants have a modern environment, having the Murakami and the Nakka a more sophisticated decoration, meanwhile the JoJo Ramen has a younger proposal. Considering the categories proposed by Muller & Woods (1994), both the Murakami and the Nakka belong to the upscale category, or luxury and the JoJo Ramen to the *moderate upscale* category. According to Fonseca (2014) the *JoJo Ramen* may also be considered a “specialized restaurant” since the focus of the menu is *ramen*.

In the general analysis of the observations and the performed interviews, it was established that the managers are unanimous by saying that the aim at offering excellence in the provided services and that attendance is considered and executed in a way to surpass the simple delivery of quality food. According to what can be noticed in the observation, this involves the preoccupation with the environment, with the quality of the ingredients, with the diligent employ of preparation techniques, with the aesthetics of the plating and with all the process of the attendance, in all cases, a careful attendance, without being invasive.

Although the three restaurants have as purpose to disclosure the culinary and the Japanese culture in Brazil, the proposal of the menus are different. Meanwhile the JoJo Ramen bets on the specialization in a plate with a fixed menu, not seasonal, the Murakami invests in an authorial kitchen based on a



completely open menu to the season. The Nakka can be placed among the two experiences: there is the possibility of tasting personalized *sushis* at the counter or to enjoy the menu *A la carte* at the tables at the lounge.

Regarding the category hospitality, it is verified that the managers associate it with “receiving the client well with your best”, “leaving the clients feeling at ease with your excellent service”, “to offer excellence in attendance linked to the food and to the environment”. It can be noticed the application in practice, of the principles of the *omotenashi*, term that was spontaneously mentioned by 8 of the 9 interviewed. *Omotenashi* was indicated as a key element for a restaurant that proposes to disclose and to appreciate the Japanese culture, being reinforced as something spontaneous and that comes from the heart, which allows to establish a direct relation with the perception of Wada (2015).

Being compatible with the *mid-scale* category and with the public which is frequent, the JoJo Ramen adopts the principles of the *omotenashi* in a less formal attendance. On the other hand, the Murakami, which has as proposal the exclusive attendance for few clients, offers a quite differentiated experience, built, mainly by the personalized attendance performed by the Chef himself. The Nakka offers a more standard experience of attendance (but also thoughtful and nurturing) to the clients of the *A la carte*, meanwhile the clients who sit at the counter receive a personalized attendance from the *sushiman*.

For the managers, to provide a good attendance means “to attend well from the beginning to the end of the meal”, “to focus on the client since the client’s arrival until the moment when the client leaves”, “to receive well and to make the client want to come back”. The interviewed agree that the attendance should be focused on the desires and on the need of each client, trying, if possible, to anticipate one’s needs – posture directly related to the principles of the *omotenashi* and of the *kodawari*. The managers also



understand that, in a unanimous form, that to offer a good attendance is an obligation.

The observations corroborate the interviews, once in all the restaurants, the attendance was careful, nurturing and cordial, with well-trained collaborators, focused on the details of the service, aiming at anticipating the needs and answering doubts. The *Chef Murakami (2022)*, mainly, deserves highlights: the way that he relates to the clients materializes the principles of the *omotenashi* and the essential characteristics of the hospitality, giving personality to his restaurant and differentiating it from the rest.

Among the managers interviewed only the manager of attendance from the *Nakka* was not aware of the concept of *kodawari*. The concept was defined, in essence, as the search for constant improvement, which is close to what is established by *Mogi (2018)*, which characterizes the *kodawari* as a discipline in search for perfection. However, no manager stated to use systematically the principles of such philosophy in the professional daily activities, being such application more “spontaneous” rather than “planned”.

On the application of the principles of *kodawari* in the studied restaurants, the approach was organized from the sectors of production/kitchen, attendance and general management.

Table 7

Comparative of the principles of the *kodawari* in the sector of production/kitchen of the studied restaurants

Principle	Jojo Ramen	Murakami	Nakka
Appreciation of the rituals of production (Fukutomi (2014); Kumakura (2014); Surajaya (2020))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Search for the best suppliers (Fukutomi (2014); Morikoshi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied



Selection of the best ingredients and preparation techniques (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Constant improvement of the production operational staff (White (2012); Williamson (2017))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Concentration and practice lead to perfection (Fukutomi (2014); Mogi (2018); Morikoshi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Appreciation of the seasonal consumption of ingredients (White (2012); Fukutomi, 2014))	Not applied	Applied	Little applied
Appreciation of the tools that are part of the meal's composition (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Mogi (2018))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Appreciation of the aesthetic of the offered product (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied

Source: the authors (2022)

The principles of the “appreciation of the rituals of production”, “selection of the best ingredients and preparation techniques” and “appreciation of the aesthetic of the offered product” are present in the depositions of the interviewed and their effects were perceived in the observations. The observant, who is a *chef*, teacher and consultant in restaurant, could perceive the accuracy of the employed techniques, as well as as the proper cutting, temperature and flavors in the tasted dishes, all served with evident aesthetic concern. The quality of the ingredients is directly connected to the principle “search for the best suppliers” and, in such aspect, all interviewed reinforced the need to hire partner suppliers regarding trust. The perceived quality is also related to the principles “constant improvement of the production operational staff” and “concentration and practice lead to perfection”. All interviewed indicated, with examples, the offer of internal and external training to all the staffs. The principle “appreciation of the tools that are part of the meal's



composition” was also confirmed in the observation, being related by the interviewed the care in the selection of the available materials to the clients, by understanding that these are also part of the meal's experience and end up prizing what is served.

Despite the principle “Appreciation of the seasonal consumption of the ingredients” not reaching unanimity, since only the Murakami puts it in practice in full (the JoJo Ramen has a fixed menu and the Nakka offers seasonal products only to clients who are not attended at the counter by the *sushiman*).

Table 8

Comparative of the principles of the *kodawari* in the sector of attendance of the studied restaurants

Principle	Jojo Ramen	Murakami	Nakka
Attention to details when receiving the clients (Mogi (2018); Surajaya (2020); Kuraesin (2021))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Appreciation of the way of serving (Williamson (2017); Surajaya (2020))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Appreciation of the composition of the environment (White (2012); Williamson (2017))	Little applied	Little applied	Little applied
Constant improvement of the attendance staff (White (2012); Williamson (2017))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Concentration and practice lead to perfection (Fukutomi (2014); Mogi (2018); Morikoshi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Transformation of the moment into a single one (Morikoshi (2014); Wada (2015); Surajaya (2020), Kuraesin (2021))	Applied	Applied	Applied

Source: the authors (2022)



During all the observations, it was possible to identify the principles “Attention to details when receiving the clients” being put into practice, since the initial greeting to the *mise-en-place* at the table, going through the conduction of all the service. It may be perceived the effort in providing a careful service, not invasive and compatible with the proposal of each environment (younger, in case of the JoJo, more formal, in case of the Nakka, and more personalized, in case of the Murakami). By putting into practice the principle “Appreciation in the way of serving”, the collaborators directly contribute to the “Transformation of the moment into a unique one”. The nurturing provided and the promptness in executing the service without apparent “effort” seem to be the result both of the application of the principle “Concentration and practice lead to perfection” as well as “Constant improvement of the attendance staff”.

The only principle that seems to be little applied is “Appreciation of the environment composition” once, although all the environments are pleasant and comfortable, the Japanese elements used in the composition of the decoration are recognized only by those who are already familiar with the Japanese culture.

Table 9

Comparative of the principles of the *kodawari* in the general management of the studied restaurants

Principle	Jojo Ramen	Murakami	Nakka
Appreciation of the client's satisfaction (Ikeda (2013); Morikoshi (2014); Wada (2015))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Relationship of trust with suppliers (Morikoshi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied
Low waste in the production process (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014))	Applied	Applied	Applied



Constant search of strategies for the qualifications of managers (White (2012); Mogi (2018))	Applied	It is not applied	It is not applied
Appreciation of all sectors brings positive results to the company (White (2012); Mogi (2018))	Applied	Partially applied	Applied
Appreciation of the collaborators (Kuraesin (2021))	Applied	Partially applied	Partially applied
Strengthening of the relations with clients (fidelity) (White (2012); Fukutomi (2014); Aishima (2015); Surajaya (2020); Kuraesin (2021))	It is not applied	It is not applied	It is not applied

Source: the authors (2022)

Regarding the application of the principles of the *kodawari* in the general management, it was verified that the “appreciation in the client's satisfaction” appears not only in the preoccupation of the managers, but also becomes highlighted during the attendance. However, the principle of “strengthening the relations with the clients” is not applied in any establishment, once it was not informed nor registered any measure of registry of the client's opinion or any other strategy of creation/strengthening the bond of the client with the enterprise. The *chef* Murakami stated that there are clients who have become friends, but this is an individual initiative and not an action extended to all clients.

All the interviewed stated to have a “Trustful relation with the suppliers”, which constitutes a fundamental criteria to the maintenance of such partnerships. The principle of “Low waste in the production process”, despite not being watched, revealed itself to be a constant concern of all the interviewed.



The principles “Constant search of strategies for the qualification of managers”, “Appreciation of all the sectors to bring positive results to the company” and “Appreciation of the collaborators” were able to be evaluated only through the interviews. It was stated that only the interviewed from the JoJo Ramen indicated the existence of action for the qualification of managers and also concrete actions for the “Appreciation of the collaborators”, meanwhile the other interviewed did not specify any other actions. The interviewed from the JoJo Ramen and from the Nakka indicated actions for the appreciation of all the sectors, mentioning meetings with all the teams. Despite mentioning the importance of such appreciation, the interviewed from the Murakami did not indicate specific actions.

Regarding the competitiveness, it is verified the main competitive strength (Porter, 2005), which occurs on the studied restaurants is the level of competitiveness among the competition. The three restaurants do not compete against each other directly, by having different average ticket (in the case of the JoJo Ramen) and also different proposals (the Jojo Ramen with a more casual proposal, the Nakka with a more formal proposal, the Murakami with a highly personalized proposal and based on a degustation menu). However, they compete directly with other establishments within the Ethnic-Japanese segment (for example, the Jojo Ramen with other *ramen* houses, the Murakami with the restaurant Jun, by Jun Sakamoto) and also indirectly (considered their proposals and the average ticket) restaurants dedicated to different gastronomy. It is highlighted that all managers consider competition as something positive that encourages the constant improvement – making the perception of the competition closer to the general principle of the *kodawari* of permanent search for perfection (White, 2012).

Table 10

Relation among the generic strategies, the main competition resources and the principles of the *kodawari* adopted

Restaurant	Three generic	Main	Principles of the <i>kodawari</i>
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	strategies (Porter, 2005)	competitive resources	applied
JoJo Ramen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership of cost; - Differential in providing different products and services from the competition; - Focus. 	<p><i>Tangible resources:</i></p> <p>composition of the menu; quality of the ingredients and preparations.</p> <p><i>Intangible resources</i></p> <p>Level of specialization of the kitchen staff; attendance based on the <i>omotenashi</i>; experience of the meal related to the Japanese culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for the best suppliers; - Appreciation of the rituals of production; - Selection of the best ingredients and preparation techniques; - Constant improvement of the production operational staff; - Concentration and practice lead to perfection; - Appreciation of the aesthetic of the offered product; - Attention to details when receiving the clients; - Appreciation in the way of serving; - Constant improvement of the attendance staff; - Concentration and practice lead to perfection; - Transformation of the moment into a single one; - Appreciation of the client's satisfaction; - Relation of trust with suppliers; - Low waste in the production process; - Constant search of strategies for the



			<p>qualification of managers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appreciation of all the sectors bring positive results to the company; - Appreciation of the collaborators.
Murakami	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differential to offer products and services different from the competition; - Focus. 	<p><i>Tangible resources:</i></p> <p>Furniture, supplies, composition of the menu, quality and variety of the ingredients and of the preparations.</p> <p><i>Intangible resources:</i></p> <p>attendance based on the <i>omotenashi</i>; technical knowledge and attendance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for the best suppliers; - Appreciation of the rituals of productions; - Selection of the best ingredients and preparation techniques; - Constant improvement of the production operational staff; - Concentration and practice lead to perfection; - Appreciation of the season consumption of the ingredients; - Appreciation of the supplies that are part of



		<p>provided by the <i>chef</i>; level of specialization of the kitchen staff and of the kitchen and of the lounge; experience of the meal related to the Japanese culture; Transformation of the moment into a single one.</p>	<p>the meal's composition;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appreciation of the aesthetic of the offered product; - Attention to details when receiving the clients; - Appreciation of the way of serving; - Constant improvement of the attendance staff; - Concentration and practice lead to perfection; - Transformation of the moment into a single one; - Appreciation of the client's satisfaction; - Relation of trust with the suppliers; - Low waste in the production process.
Nakka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership of cost; - Differential in offering products and services different from the competition; - Focus. 	<p><i>Tangible resources.</i></p> <p>Furniture; supplies, composition of the menu; quality and variety of the ingredients and preparations.</p> <p><i>Intangible resources:</i></p> <p>attendance based on the <i>omotenashi</i>; flexibility of the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for the best suppliers; - Appreciation of the production rituals; - Selection of the best ingredients and preparation techniques; - Constant improvement of the production operational staff; - Concentration and practice lead to perfection; - Appreciation of the season consumption of the ingredients;



		<p>client in choosing the experience of the meal (A la carte or at the counter); level of specialization of the kitchen staff and of the lounge staff; experience of the meal related to the Japanese culture; transformation of the moment into a single one.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appreciation of the supplies that are part of the meal's composition; - Appreciation of the aesthetic of the offered product; - Attention to details when receiving the clients; - Appreciation of the way of serving; - Constant improvement of the attendance staff; - Concentration and practice lead to perfection; - Transformation of the moment into a single one; - Appreciation of the client's satisfaction; - Relation of trust with suppliers; - Low waste in the production process.
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Source: the authors (2022)

It is verified that the application of several principles of the *kodawari*, currently in the sectors of production and attendance, foment the main strategies and the main competitive resources in the studied restaurants. It is believed that, if the principles of the *kodawari* were adopted in a systematized way, such strategies and resources would be broadened and strengthened.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research had as goals to identify the principles of the *kodawari* that could be applied to the universe of the restaurants and to investigate which



principles of the *kodawari* are applied in Japanese restaurants in São Paulo (SP) and that may contribute to the growth of competitiveness of such establishments.

The research showed that the majority of the identified *kodawari* principles are already put in practice by the studied establishments, even in a non-systematized way. From the 22 principles applied to restaurants identified from the review of the literature, only six seem to be not applied in a unanimous form. These are: “appreciation of the season consumption of the ingredients”, “appreciation of the environment’s composition”, “strengthening of the relations with clients”, “constant search of strategies for qualification of managers”, “appreciation of all sectors to bring positive results to the company”, and “appreciation of the collaborators” (despite the four last principles had been mentioned during the interviews, not all had specific actions indicated by the interviewed).

It is believed that the own characteristics of the operation of the Japanese restaurants that aim at appreciating the Japanese food culture demand a special attention to details of the production and of the service, as well as incorporating the principles of the *omotenashi* during the attendance of the clients. This research, therefore, allowed to observe that the *kodawari* also embraces the perspective of the hospitality – more notably of the *omotenashi* – by providing a careful and dedicated service, capable of anticipating the needs and the desires of the clients. The approximation between the *omotenashi* and the *kodawari* becomes highlighted in the application of the principles “attention to details when receiving the clients”, “appreciation of the way of serving”, “constant improvement of the attendance staff”, “concentration and practice lead to perfection”, “transformation of the moment into a single one”.

It can also be stated the presence of the principles of the *kodawari* in different aspects of excellence in the studied restaurants, including in basal



elements of their main strategies and competitive resources. The application of the principles associated to the “constant improvement” of the production, of the service and of the management, of the “appreciation” of the ingredients and final characteristics of the product’s presentation, in addition to the principles of “making the moment a unique one” are examples of such relation.

As limitation of this research, we may point out the performance of a single observation in the studied restaurants, on the account of the COVID-19 pandemic restriction, which also did not allow the approach of clients and collaborators of the respective restaurants. As a followup of this research, it is suggested the performance of similar initiatives in other types of restaurants, including clients and collaborators, in a way to search for a more holistic comprehension of the application of the *kodawari* in restaurants.

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