Highlighting Ramen:

How is Ramen Constructed Within Japanese Digital Journalism Platforms?

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Supervisor

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Abstract

Ramen is a multifaceted noodle soup dish that is often highlighted as a global dish, an unofficial national dish, and a marker of regional distinction within Japan. Although ramen is an iconic culinary symbol within Japan, it is also widely recognised that the dish originated from and is largely influenced by Chinese noodle dishes. This context reflects how food serves as a means for constructing a sense of identity on multiple levels. This research investigates ramen-related content released in English on Japanese digital journalism platforms between 2023 and 2026, to explore how ramen is constructed within media, focusing on the construction of identity and semiotic mythologies. This research was analysed within a bounded, real-world context, adopting a multiple embedded case study design, using the November 2024 issue of *Highlighting Japan* and NHK World-Japan's *Ramen Japan* as central cases. The data is then analysed with qualitative methods, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process. The data analysis identified five main themes within the cases: gastronomic structurisation, international audience connection, national food identity construction, regional ramen identity construction, and dynamic continuity of regional ramen identity.

This research observed that the content would construct ramen as a structured dish comprised of *dashi*/stock, *tare,* noodles, and toppings. These structural components varied amongst different styles of ramen and were used to distinguish ramen styles from each other. A regional ramen identity was then constructed around a distinct ramen style with a group following that identified with the dish within a regional perimeter. The content would then strengthen regional ramen identities through historical storytelling, positive identity reinforcement, and regional branding, and by highlighting the distinctiveness of the regional style. Additionally, the cases would mythologise each regional ramen identity as being classical or one that changes with trends. It was identified that the content would construct ramen as both an unofficial *kokuminshoku* national food, and as a global dish. This research provides a potential framework for analysing how content constructs umbrella dishes (a category of dish, for example pasta) at a structural, regional, and national level.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: 

Date: 30/07/2026

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Ramen is a noodle soup dish that can be found across the world in a variety of different styles (Tan et al., 2021; White, 2015). The dish is immensely popular within Japan, estimated to be served in over 15-25,000 restaurants across Japan (Okuda et al., 2025). Due to its national popularity, ramen is frequently labelled as an unofficial national food within Japan (Fukutomi, 2014; Kushner, 2013; Solt, 2014; SturtzSreetharan & Brewis, 2019). Furthermore, ramen is also recognised for its regional varieties (Fukutomi, 2014; Kushner, 2013; Solt, 2014), with over 36 different regional ramen styles that are recognised within the Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum, according to Reiffenstein (2017). While ramen has become a culinary icon within Japan, it is also widely acknowledged to have origins within China (Kushner, 2012; Matsuzono et al., 2019; Nakano, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2023; Solt, 2014; Sugino, 2024). Ramen in this respect serves not only as a source of nutrients, but also as a means for constructing a sense of identity. This central theme has long been discussed within gastronomic literature, with one of the founding fathers of gastronomy, Jean Anthelm Brillat-Savarin (1825/2012), stating in his fourth aphorism "Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are" (p. 18). Additionally, prominent semioticians such as Roland Barthes (Barthes & Lavers, 1957/1972) would often analyse food as a medium that naturalises cultural myths as fact. For example, he critiqued the perspective that it is inherently French to drink red wine, when the reality (at the time Bathes was writing) was that red winemaking involved the colonial exploitation of Algerians.

While there are seminal studies about ramen that have explored the significance of the dish from a historical perspective (Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014), there is yet to be a study that analyses, from a social constructionist perspective, how modern ramen-related content constructs the dish of ramen for international audiences within a real-world context. Therefore, this study explores this phenomenon, using a multiple embedded case study design based on the November 2024 issue of *Highlighting*

Japan and NHK World-Japan's *Ramen Japan* as central cases. The data has been analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process.

1.2 Research Questions

Considering the gap in research, this study explored the following research questions:

Primary question

- How is ramen constructed within ramen-related content on Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English between 2023 and 2026?

Underlying questions

- How is a sense of identity constructed around ramen within Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English?
- What semiotic myths about ramen emerge when analysing Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English?

1.3 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction – Introduces the research problem, and research gaps, and discusses what the study intends to research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Part 1; History and Background – Provides background information about ramen, covering how the dish is generally described within the literature, along with its historical background.

Chapter 3: Literature Review Part 2; Theory – Provides an overview of various theories within the literature that are relevant to the study. It covers a brief overview of semiotics, Barthes' Mythological Theory, Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, Cultural Identity Theory, and literature around food and identity.

Chapter 4: Research Framework and Methodology – Provides an overview of the researcher's positionality, social constructionist ontology and epistemology, value-laden axiological positioning, weak social constructionist paradigm, theoretical

framework, qualitative multiple embedded case study design, reflexive thematic analysis method, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion of Themes – Provides an overview of all the analysed cases and provides an analysis of the themes and subthemes that were identified within them. The chapter also serves to discuss how each theme and its inherent subthemes interact in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – Provides an overall summary of how the themes interact with each other in relation to the research questions. The chapter also discusses the broader implications of the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Part 1; History and Background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves to provide background information about ramen and its history. As this study is intended to analyse the construction of ramen within Japanese media, it is important to grasp the wider culinary and historical literature that surrounds the dish, before making any claims about constructed narratives. The chapter begins by looking at how culinary literature describes what ramen is. It then explores historical studies that relate to the history of ramen, starting from the introduction of noodles into Japan, continuing with a brief historical overview of Japan between the Edo and Meiji periods, and ending on the development of ramen within Japan.

2.2 What is Ramen?

Ramen, at its core, is a noodle soup dish. Similar to pasta, ramen can be extremely varied, with a wide range of flavours and styles which often reflect regional preferences (Kushner, 2012). While ramen is difficult to define, as it comes in many different styles that stay away from a traditional formula, it can be better understood by looking at the five components that are generally found in most bowls.

1) **Noodles**: Made with wheat flour, water, salt and *kansui* (Orkin, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2023; Solt, 2014) and other additional adjunct ingredients, depending on the recipe. *Kansui*, which is often referred to as lye water in noodle making, is a mixture of sodium carbonate and potassium carbonate (sometimes sodium hydroxide) alkaline salts. These salts are essential for ramen's unique springy texture and yellow colour (Ang et al., 1999; Ding et al., 2021; Fu, 2008; Kushner, 2012). Furthermore, the size, width and characteristics of ramen noodles often differ amongst ramen's various styles (Solt, 2014).

2) **Soup:** A typically unseasoned soup, often made by simmering various combinations of meat, seafood and vegetables, commonly including

ingredients such as pork, chicken, garlic and *kombu* (dried kelp). The choice of ingredients and methods used in the soup is also often tied to regional preferences. Secondary culinary sources also categorise the cloudiness of the soup as either a *chintan* or *paitan*. *Chintan* ramen refers to ramen with a clear soup (like French consommé) that is often simmered at a lower temperature. *Paitan* ramen (such as *tonkotsu* ramen) refers to ramen with an opaque soup that is often heavily boiled to emulsify the fat into the soup to make it cloudy (Imatome-Yun & Donovan, 2019; Michael & Scott, 2025; Spaeth, 2025).

3) ***Tare:*** A salty sauce that is mixed into the ramen soup to season and flavour the soup. *Tare* is generally categorised into three main *tare* flavours, including *miso*, soy sauce (*shoyu*) and salt (*shio*) (Okuda et al., 2025; Solt, 2014).

4) **Toppings**: Garnishes each bowl of ramen and is commonly customisable with a variety of different options. Some of the common ramen toppings include spring onion, *chāshū* (roasted/braised pork), *ajitama* (marinated boiled egg), *nori* (dried edible seaweed), *menma* (marinated bamboo shoot), *narutomaki* (cured fish cake), bean sprouts, and boiled spinach (Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014).

5) ***Koumi-abura*** **(aromatic oil):** Consists of animal fats or oils that are infused with aromatic ingredients such as spring onion, garlic, ginger or dried fish, and is argued to be the fifth component of ramen by secondary culinary sources. It enhances the aroma, flavour and mouthfeel of the ramen as the oil clings to the noodles when it is lifted out of the soup (Imatome-Yun & Donovan, 2019; Michael & Scott, 2025; Spaeth, 2025).

Reflexive Note 1

Reflexive Note: Although some academic literature tries to objectively define ramen, I opted to describe ramen by its commonly used components. As a chef and weak social constructionist researcher, I found that static definitions that aimed for objectivity would be vague and broad, to such a point that ramen could not be differentiated from other noodle soup dishes. Following the approaches seen in primary literature from George Solt (2014) and in secondary culinary literature from Mike and Scott Satinover (2025), I believe that describing ramen by its commonly found culinary elements allows readers to have a more nuanced understanding of the dish, by painting a bigger overall picture of the dish.

2.3 The Introduction of Noodles into Japan

Historians believe that noodles were first introduced to Japan around 1200 years ago during the Nara period of Japan (710–794 CE), by Japanese Buddhist monks who travelled around China for religious pilgrimages (Fu, 2008; Hou, 2020; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Kushner, 2012). The first types of noodles that were introduced to Japan were likely to be *botuo* noodles and *sakubei*. *Botuo* noodles are referenced in early Chinese cookbooks, such as *Essential Skills for the Common People* (Kushner, 2012), which dates back to around 533–544 (Bray, 2019). *Botuo* noodles came in a range of shapes depending on the location, with some variations that look like dumplings and others that are more like thick noodles. One theory suggests that the recipe for *botuo* noodles was brought over by a Japanese Buddhist Monk named Ennin, as he wrote that he ate the dish around China during one of the last official Japanese religious missions to China in 838. These noodles formed the basis of an early Japanese noodle dish called *hōtō,* which is still served in restaurants within Yamanashi prefecture. *Hōtō,* which is said to be a precursor to *udon* noodles, is typically comprised of flat-cut noodles that are served in a hot broth (Kushner, 2012).

Sakubei, on the other hand, referred to a category of wheat flour foods shaped like ropes. *Sakubei*'s second character, "*bei*", is the same character used for *bing* (Kushner, 2012), which served as a collective term for flour-based foods in China

(Kushner, 2012; Serventi et al., 2002; Shelke, 2016). Based on this etymology, it is believed that *sakubei* could have referred to a range of rope-shaped wheat-flour foods, from noodles to twisted dumplings (Kushner, 2012). However, as indicated by Kushner (2012), it is also the same character that is used in the modern Kanji for the chewy Japanese confectionery *mochi*. This correlation has led some historians to categorise *sakubei* as a confectionery; however, Naomichi Ishige (2001) would argue that it was more likely to be an early predecessor to *somen* noodles based upon the ingredients and production tools seen in early historical records.

These early varieties of noodles did not use *kansui*; however, as its usage in noodle production was largely unknown within Japan until its ports were opened after the Edo period (Fu, 2008; Hou, 2020; Solt, 2014). According to Kushner (2012), *kansui* was first utilised in noodle production within China around the Tang (608–907) and Song (960–1279) Dynasty periods. Initially, *kansui* was synthesised by boiling plant ash or lye stone in water to make an alkaline water solution (Fu, 2008; Kushner, 2012; Pongsa & Tangtreamjitmun, 2021). Scholars such as Bin Xiao Fu (2008) posit that *kansui* was used in noodle production in southern China around the Canton and Hokkien provinces, as a way of preserving noodles from mould growth within a hot and humid environment. While the origins of *kansui* in noodle production are debated, one popular theory that is discussed in several non-academic secondary sources suggests that it may have been derived from naturally alkaline lake water in Inner Mongolia (T. Anderson, 2022; Garzia, 2026; Nanachart Traders Consolidation Ltd., 2024; Nishiyama Seimen Co., Ltd, n.d.).

2.4 A Brief History of Japan Between the Edo and Meiji Periods

The National Isolation of Japan and the Bakuhan System

Over the coming centuries, many traditional noodle varieties would be developed in Japan, with noodle varieties such as *udon* and *soba* becoming popular in food stalls (*yatai*) during the Edo period (1603–1868) (Ishige, 2001; Kushner, 2012). Japan during the Edo period had limited foreign interaction due to a series of national seclusion policies known as the *Sakoku* Edict. This Edict, which was enacted by the Tokugawa

shogunate in 1635, aimed to maintain internal political control while also eliminating external foreign threats, following more than a century of civil war during the Sengoku period. This edict forbade Japanese citizens from international voyages, ban Christianity and limit foreign trade to the Netherlands, the Ryukyu Kingdoms (now Okinawa), Korea and China (Dąbrowska, 2022; Numao, 2024). The Edo period was also responsible for the *bakuhan* governance system. The *bakuhan* system was led by the *shogun*, under a military governance system, ruled by the Tokugawa *shogunate*. Although there was an emperor, they acted as a figurehead who would carry out ceremonial duties to preserve the imperial court instead of having real ruling power (Ogata, 2015). The system also split Japan into different domains known as *han*. Each *han* was autonomously ruled by feudal lords known as *daimyo*, on the basis that they were irrefutably loyal to the *shogunate*.

The Opening of Japan and the End of Sakoku

The Edo period brought two and a half centuries of civil peace under the Tokugawa *shogunate* (Ikegami, 1995; Ogata, 2015). However, this extended period of peace ended in 1853, when American Commodore Mathew Perry commanded a squadron of gunships (nicknamed the "Black Ships") into Uraga Bay and threatened the Tokugawa *shogunate* that he would attack unless they complied with American demands in a year (Dąbrowska, 2022; Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014). The Tokugawa *shogunate* knew they had vastly inferior armaments, so they complied with Perry's demands by signing the U.S.–Japan Treaty of Peace and Unity in 1854 (Dąbrowska, 2022; Solt, 2014). This treaty, which is referred to as the Treaty of Kanagawa, ended Japan's isolation period by opening ports within Shimoda (in the Izu Peninsula) and Hakodate to American ships (Dąbrowska, 2022; Heenan, 1996; Hoare et al., 2018; Ivings, 2017). This led to similar agreements with countries such as France and Russia in 1855, and the Netherlands in 1856. Additional ports opened in 1858, including ports in Yokohama, Nagasaki, Niigata and Hyogo, after the Japanese senior minister Ii Naosuke signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which is referred to as the Harris Treaty. This unequal treaty additionally granted Western powers the right to choose tariff rates on Japanese exports and imports, and allowed foreigners to settle, trade and purchase land within these port cities (Dąbrowska, 2022; Solt, 2014).

The Tokugawa *shogunate's* failure to defend Japan against Western encroachment resulted in widespread anti-*shogunate* and anti-foreign sentiment (Craig, 1959; Ikegami, 1995; Kodet, 2021; Ogata, 2015). This period saw a rise in the *sonno joi* political movement, which translates as "revere the emperor" (*sonno*) and "expel the barbarians" (*joi*) (Craig, 1959; Kodet, 2021; Ogata, 2015; Park, 2018), under the conviction that the *shogunate* betrayed the emperor by failing to uphold *sakoku* (Park, 2018). This movement, which originated within the Choshu domain (Craig, 1959; Kodet, 2021), gained support from the Imperial court in Kyoto, using sonno joi as a rallying slogan to overthrow the *shogunate* (Park, 2018). In 1866, the Satsuma-Choshu alliance was formed in secret, between multiple domains that opposed the Tokugawa *shogunate* (comprised mostly of Satsuma, Choshu, Hizen and Tosa clan members) (Baber, 2025; Ogata, 2015; Park, 2018). The alliance forced *Shogun* Yoshinobu to step down in November 1867, returning power to the Imperial court (Ogata, 2015). However, as no progress was being made in the formation of a new government, the alliance then overthrew the remaining power that the Tokugawa forces had through a coup d'état in Kyoto on 3 January, 1868 (Cohen, 2014; Ogata, 2015).

The Beginning of the Meiji Period and the Consumption of Meat in Japan

The newly formed Meiji government was responsible for significant reformations within Japan, starting with the abolition of the *bakuhan* government system, which was replaced with a new centralised government overseen by Emperor Meiji (Ogata, 2015; Ramesh, 2020). While the overthrow of the *shogunate* was encouraged by the *sonno joi* political movement, the Meiji government instead opened up the country, abandoning the principle of *joi* (Park, 2018). This shift came from the Meiji leaders' belief that Japan's sovereignty could not be achieved through self-isolation, as many of their neighbouring countries had been divided by Western powers. Therefore, the Meiji government set out to build Japan into a modern nation-state that could compete with international powers. They set to achieve this by adopting Western knowledge and technologies while adapting them to local customs (Koga, 2020;

Ogata, 2015). This would result in a cultural revolution in Japan with the introduction of many international customs and would play a pivotal role in the history of ramen.

As a part of the modernisation effort, the Meiji government promoted the consumption of meat by widely publicising that the emperor was a regular consumer of beef in 1872 (Krämer, 2008; Matsuishi, 2022; Nakamura, 2022). This was to break the taboo of meat consumption, as seafood had historically been the main source of animal protein in Japan following Emperor Tenmu's edict against meat in the late seventh century due to Buddhist influence (Krämer, 2008; Matsuishi, 2022; Nakamura, 2022; Sasaki et al., 2022). This dietary switch was largely influenced by the introduction of nutritional science from the West, which analysed food by its nutritional components from a positivist perspective. While meat consumption was promoted primarily to improve the health and strength of the people (Nakamura, 2022), influential scholars such as Fukuzawa Yukichi also advocated it as a civilised and enlightened practice of Western culture. While meat would not immediately become an everyday staple food within Japan (Krämer, 2008), the promotion of Western eating habits helped in the acceptance of meat-based foods, which facilitated the uptake of early forms of ramen by Japanese consumers (Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014).

2.5 The Development of Ramen Within Japan

The Introduction of Nankin Soba

During the early Meiji period in 1871, the Sino–Japanese Treaty of Amity was signed between China and Japan, so that the Meiji government could build international relations and the Qing government could prevent further external conflicts following the Opium War (Hoare, 2021; Okamoto, 2023). Unlike the unequal treaties Japan signed with Western powers, the Sino–Japanese Treaty of Amity established a mutual tariff system with consular jurisdictions between nations. The treaty protected and legally recognised the Chinese residents who resided in Japanese treaty ports (Hoare, 2021; Okamoto et al., 2024; Solt, 2014). Some of these Chinese migrants would bring over new noodle dishes and techniques from China. These dishes included the noodle soup dish *la-mien*, which comprises hand-stretched alkaline noodles served

within a clear chicken soup seasoned with salt. Japanese people who were exposed to the dish would eventually refer to the dish as *Nankin soba* (Nanjing noodles), named after the Chinese capital city of Nanjing. Early evidence of this name can be traced to an 1884 advertisement for a Western-style restaurant named Yowaken located in Hakodate (Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014). Over time, Chinese migrants would establish the Yokohama *Nankin-machi* (Chinatown), which contained many Chinese restaurants and *yatai* (pushcart food stalls). By 1887, the Yokohama *Nankin-machi* had approximately 20 Chinese restaurants that sold noodle soup dishes with sliced pork toppings such as *chashao tangmian* and *rousi tangmian*, according to former professor Ayao Okumura (2019) in a historical article in *The Japanese Table* section of Kikkoman's Food Forum. In 1894, the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation was signed, which renegotiated the unequal treaties between the Empire of Japan and Great Britain. The treaty abolished the British extraterritoriality rights and recognised Japan as a modern nation. Other similar treaties were then signed by other nations, which ended extraterritoriality in Japan after these treaties were implemented in 1899 (O'Kane, 2026). These treaties disbanded the treaty port system, which allowed foreign residents to settle and work outside of the ports (O'Kane, 2026; Solt, 2014), spreading *Nankin soba* to the interior of Japan (Solt, 2014).

The Introduction of Shina Soba and the Opening of the First Ramen Shop

In 1910, Ozaki Kenichi opened the Chinese restaurant Rairaiken within Tokyo's Asakusa district. Ozaki, who was a former customs agent in Yokohama, would frequently visit the Chinese restaurants in *Nankin-machi,* which exposed him to Chinese noodle soup dishes. Before the opening of Rairaiken, Ozaki hired Chinese chefs from *Nankin-machi*, who were familiar with the production of alkaline noodles. Rairaiken sold *Shina soba* (Chinese noodles), which localised *Nankin soba* to Japanese taste preferences, comprising a *shoyu*-seasoned soup with toppings such as slices of *chashu* (originally, roasted pork), *Naruto* fish cake, boiled spinach, *nori* (dried seaweed) and *menma* (marinated bamboo shoot) (Cwiertka, 2007; Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014). *Shina soba* started gaining popularity with industrial workers in the

1910s, as it was ideal for their dietary and lifestyle needs due to it being affordable, calorie-dense and quick to serve. By the 1920s, *Shina soba* could be found in many cities across the country, following a rapid rise in the number of industrial workers during the war effort, and the popularisation of mechanical noodle machines in the late 1910s (Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014).

The Post-war Popularisation of Chuka Soba

The term *Shina* was originally a neutral term for the country of China. However, this term was not agreed upon between countries, as it was commonly used to reject China as a central power in comparison to other, more formal terms such as *Chugoku* (meaning middle country) (Fogel, 1995). *Shina* developed into a derogatory term with negative racist connotations during Japan's aggressive imperialist campaign against China, from the First Sino–Japanese War (1894–1895) to the Second World War (1939–1945) (Cwiertka, 2007; Fogel, 1995; Solt, 2014; Sugino, 2024). This term was recognised as a slur following Japan's defeat in the Second World War and therefore common usage shifted to *Chugoku* upon the Chinese government's demand. Because of this, the name *Shina soba* changed to *Chuka soba* or *ramen* (the Japanese loan word for *la-mien*), which had been used within Sapporo since the 1920s (Cwiertka, 2007; Solt, 2014).

Just before the occupation, Japan had severe rice crop failures due to an accumulation of extreme weather events, labour shortages and a lack of fertiliser supply. Japan was also highly dependent on rice imports, as it needed to import 20% of its rice to meet local demand. Following Japan's surrender at the end of the Second World War, the U.S. occupied and administered Japan. However, Japan had used most of its resources to fund the war effort (Akihiko, 2017; Solt, 2014). This, coupled with food importation restrictions and the annexation of former Japanese colonies, accumulated into a critical food shortage. As a result, the occupation government enforced a strict rationing system. However, this rationing system was unreliable, corrupt, and only provided 65% of the bare minimum calories needed for an average adult during the first year of occupation. To survive, many Japanese people had to rely on black markets, which sold stockpiled food or diverted imported

goods illegally at an excessive rate. *Chuka soba* was an easy, cost-effective dish to produce at the black market and became a popular stall item as it provided people with a tasty and calorie-heavy dish (Solt, 2014).

In 1947, the U.S. government changed its strategies in its occupation policy in Japan, which is now referred to as "The Reverse Course" (Nester, 1996; Solt, 2014). Rather than providing a minimal amount of food aid, they instead prioritised food aid for Japan to try to stabilise rising tensions in the country and to revitalise its economy to minimise the support for communism in the wake of the Cold War. In 1948, the U.S. government started importing large amounts of surplus wheat into Japan, to prevent a third consecutive year of mass starvation. Wheat-based foods became a dietary staple within Japan, as their adoption primarily stemmed from mitigating food scarcity, rather than a rapid cultural shift. This can be seen in the consumption rate of bread, which went from 262,121 tons in 1948 to 611,784 tons in 1951 (Solt, 2014). Following the end of the occupation in 1952, Japan significantly eased food rationing. However, wheat continued to be a staple, as rice was still in short supply. Because of this, familiar wheat foods such as *Chukasoba/*ramen remained popular (Dyk, 2025; Solt, 2014).

The Invention of Instant Ramen

During the occupation, Momofuku Ando (a Taiwanese-born inventor and businessman) was encouraged to find an alternative usage for surplus American wheat as prominent public health figures such as Kunitaro Arimoto feared that bread would "westernise" the Japanese lifestyle (Kushner, 2012; Solt, 2014). After witnessing the lines for noodles at a black market, Ando realised that wheat noodles were more familiar to the Japanese public than baking bread. Many Japanese households were unable to make bread despite the occupational forces' wishes, as Japanese cuisine traditionally did not require the use of an oven (Dyk, 2025; Kushner, 2012). Knowing this, Ando set out to make a noodle dish that was nutritious, palatable and convenient to make. He eventually developed the method for making instant ramen through his experiments in his backyard shed after watching tempura deep-fry. This deep-frying method would dehydrate and cook the noodles, allowing

for a long shelf life and short cooking period when replenished in hot water (Dyk, 2025; Kushner, 2012). In 1958, Ando's food company, now known as the Nissin Foods Corporation, made a test release of Instant Chikin Ramen. After a positive test run, he then started personally pitching instant ramen to wholesale distributors in Osaka (Solt, 2014). Japan's economy flourished in the 1960s, and with an increased national income came a significant shift in dietary patterns (Fukutomi, 2013; Kushner, 2012), with a higher consumption rate of meat (Kushner, 2012). Along with this was a high demand for cheap convenience products, mostly amongst office workers and students (Fukutomi, 2013; Solt, 2014). Instant ramen became a staple food within Japan, with the average citizen eating around 45 servings per year in 1966.

The Rise of Regional Ramen Tourism

During the 1980s, Japan was considered a rich country, with major economic growth, which would accumulate into a bubble economy (Fukutomi, 2014; Solt, 2014). As Japan shifted away from its post-war deprivation, it would see a wave of Japanese people called *shinjinrui* (new breed). *Shinjinrui* was a label for Japanese people who emerged during the 1970s and 1980s and were considered trendy, affluent, city dwellers who did not know the struggles of post-war Japan (Herbig & Borstorff, 1995; Solt, 2014). During this period, many new ramen speciality stores would be established, with a more limited and higher-priced menu that catered towards the higher-end tastes of the *shinjinrui* (Solt, 2014). At the same time, another group of the *shinjinrui* generation would also popularise the 'B-grade gourmet' counter food movement, which stood against the expensive eating habits of the time, by finding connoisseurship in affordable, everyday foods. Correlating with these trends was a rise in food-related media, including magazines such as *Hanako* (which popularised the B-grade gourmet movement) (Fukutomi, 2014), movies such as *Tampopo* and television specials (Solt, 2014). Ramen-related media would start bringing local and regional styles of ramen to the nation's attention in the 1980s and 1990s. An early example of this was seen in the small city of Kitakata, located in Fukushima prefecture, where local city leaders used their local style of ramen to promote local tourism. This was done in 1982 by broadcasting their city's distinct ramen style on the National Broadcasting Network (NHK). As Kitakata's ramen-based tourism boomed,

other small cities would follow suit, with varying levels of success, highlighting the distinct local varieties of ramen across the country (Reiffenstein, 2017; Solt, 2014). After Japan's bubble economy burst in the late 1980s, local ramen tourism further proliferated in the 1990s and early 2000s (Solt, 2014). This peak can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, during this period, B-grade gourmet foods were further popularised in Japan, as Japanese citizens had significantly less disposable income to spend (Fukutomi, 2014). This period also saw the introduction of the internet, which helped develop the ramen industry and establish communities and blogs that focused on ramen. Finally, it also saw the opening of the Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum in 1994, which extensively documents the regional styles of ramen within Japan (Fukutomi, 2013; Reiffenstein, 2017; Solt, 2014).

2.6 Conclusion

Ramen has remained highly significant in the modern day, as it is the most popular category of restaurant within Japan (Reiffenstein, 2017), with ramen estimated to be served at 15-25,000 restaurants nationwide in 2025 (Okuda et al., 2025). Furthermore, instant ramen is widely consumed outside of Japan (Kushner, 2012; Tan et al., 2021; White, 2015), with over 95 billion packages of instant ramen consumed around the globe (Kushner, 2012). Today, ramen is widely recognised unofficially as *kokuminshoku* (Fukutomi, 2013; Kushner, 2013; Rath, 2016; Solt, 2014), which can be roughly translated as "national food" or "nationally popular food" (Yamamoto, 2024). At the same time, it is closely associated with various regional identities that emerged from the local ramen tourism boom in Japan. From a historical perspective, the adoption of ramen and its evolution from being a foreign dish to a nationally and regionally associated dish in Japan can be intrinsically linked to major political shifts. However, from a Barthes's semiotic perspective, cultural identity is not inherently contained within ramen itself, but is instead imbued by people, to naturalise a socially constructed narrative (Stano, 2023).

Chapter 3: Literature Review Part 2; Theory

3.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter explored ramen through a historical lens, to provide context about the historical narratives associated with the dish, this literature review is intended to explore how identity and meaning is constructed around food. To unpack this, the chapter explores semiotics to understand how semiotic myths are constructed around food in order to perpetuate a socially constructed narrative. Various theories about identity, including Social Identity Theory, Identity Theory, and Cultural Identity Theory, are then examined to understand the identity formation process. The chapter then finishes by exploring theories about identity in relation to food, to explore how a sense of identity is formed around food and to provide insight into how to explore ramen's complex relationship with identity.

3.2 Introducing Semiotics

Although this study does not adopt a structuralist framework, it utilises semiotic analysis to understand how a sense of identity is constructed around ramen. Semiotics is the study of signs, sign systems and the signification of meaning (Chandler, 2022; Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Niu, 2020). Semiotic concepts have been discussed as far back as ancient Greece by philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle (Niu, 2020). Early sign theory was significantly developed between the late 4th century and early 5th century by the Christian philosopher Augustine of Hippo, who first defined language as a system of signs (Cameron, 2017; Chandler, 2022; Niu, 2020; Tornau, 2024). The term "semiotics" was first used in 1690 by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (2008), expressing the need for a study that examines how meaning is portrayed through signs (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). However, the study of semiotics was not truly established until the 19th century by American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who are considered to be the founding fathers of semiotics (A. A. Berger, 2014; Chandler, 2022; Niu, 2020).

The Signifier and The Signified

In his 1916 book *Course on General Linguistics,* Saussure conceptualised that all signs are comprised of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the literal representation or 'sound-image' that a sign takes, such as the form of an image, object, written language or spoken language. The signified, on the other hand, is what we mentally conceptualise around the signifier, such as the concept that is attributed to a word or sound (A. A. Berger, 2014; Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Raaphorst et al., 2017). For example, the word 'rose' would be considered a signifier and the mental concept that is conveyed, such as a red flower, would be considered the signified. According to Saussure, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is socially constructed and maintained through collective agreement (A. A. Berger, 2014; Niu, 2020).

Connotation and Denotation

Barthes extended Saussure's dyadic sign theory by adopting Louis Hjelmslev's concepts of connotation and denotation (Perusset, 2022), creating a new semiotic system that incorporates two-order signification (Buchanan, 2010; Chandler, 2022). Barthes extended Saussure's dyadic model because he argued that it was overly focused on the denotative representation of signs rather than their connotative meanings (Chandler, 2022; Iskanderova, 2024). To support his claims, he reasoned that connotative meaning is situated within social contexts; consequently, their interpretations often expand beyond their intended 'literal' meanings (Chandler, 2022). Therefore, to Barthes, denotation is considered the first order of signification and represents the literal meaning of a sign (Barthes, 1961/1977; Chandler, 2022; Jadou & Ghabra, 2021) or, put simply, what the sign is (Buchanan, 2010). For example, when looking at a photograph of a rose, the denotative meaning of the photo would be simply a rose. Expanding upon that, Barthes considered connotation to be the second order of signification, representing the interpreted meanings of a sign which are influenced by social, cultural or ideological factors (Barthes, 1961/1977; Buchanan, 2010; Chandler, 2022; Chandler & Munday, 2020). For example, the connotative meanings of roses may include love or romance. Therefore,

connotation is considered the second order of signification, as the denotative sign acts as a new signifier that is then signified through interpretation into its more complex connotative meaning (Yan & Ming, 2015).

The Construction of Myth

From a semiotic perspective, 'myth' refers to socially constructed narratives that are produced from ideological messaging through the recurring usage of signs (Aqeel & Ali, 2024; Hasyim, 2015). First-order signification, which Barthes categorised as language, acts as the foundation for the construction of myths. Language is expressed through media such as words, images and gestures. The second order, which forms the myth, then redefines these pre-existing meanings through the incorporation of ideological messaging to create new meanings (Aqeel & Ali, 2024; Chandler, 2022; Hasyim, 2015). Myths help organise the shared ways that we conceptualise phenomena within culture. However, myths also naturalise culture, making social constructs appear as common sense, which develops into a sense of objective truth, even though it is socially negotiated (Aqeel & Ali, 2024; Chandler, 2022).

An example of a myth that Barthes covered in depth, which relates to food and identity, is the association between red wine and 'Frenchness'. From Barthes' semiotic perspective, red wine has been naturalised within French society, and is therefore imbued with the ideology that not drinking red wine is a rejection of French heritage and identity (George, 2023). The purpose of analysing myth, for Barthes, is to demystify the cultural codes and ideologies that have been naturalised within sign systems – not to outright reject social norms, but to challenge underlying structures (Iskanderova, 2024; Stano, 2023). This can be seen with the prior example about red wine and French identity, as Barthes pointed out in *Mythologies* (1957/1972) that wine was significant within the French economy. However, this red wine was directly linked with the colonial exploitation of Algerians during this period, as the French forced Algerians to grow vineyards instead of their staple of wheat (George, 2023).

3.3 What is Identity and What Does It Mean?

Although identity is generally understood within society, from a research perspective it is a difficult and slippery concept to define (Caprar & Walker, 2024). While there is no single agreed-upon definition of identity, in relation to this study it can be roughly understood as: "The ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 19).

The concept of identity has been extensively studied within the fields of psychology and anthropology; therefore, to better understand identity, this study analyses prominent theories from psychology, including Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory (Gerber & Folta, 2022).

Identity Theory

Identity Theory was first developed in the late 1960s by Sheldon Stryker along with parallel developments by George McCall and Jerry Laird Simmons. While Stryker first proposed the theory at an American Sociological Association meeting in 1966, McCall and Simmons also coincidentally developed similar conclusions to Stryker's theory, from which they would proclaim that Stryker "just presented their book" (Brenner et al., 2014; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

There are different nuances and approaches to Identity Theory within the literature (Stryker & Burke, 2000). However, across the various interpretations of Identity Theory, identity can be generally understood as the self-categorisation of roles within a social structure, and the self-internalisation of the shared meanings associated with these occupied roles (Stets, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2013; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Turner, 2013). According to this theory, individuals internalise their identity roles to better understand themselves, as these roles help develop a sense of self-meaning (Caprar & Walker, 2024). As this theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism, it implies that identity is dependent on both the individual and social level. This means that the roles that people identify with, along with the associated meanings surrounding them, are therefore constructed and negotiated by individuals through their social interactions within society (Andriot & Owens, 2012; Stets, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2013; Turner, 2013). For example, I would

personally identify myself as a chef, as that is a role that I identify with within society. With that role comes an expectation that I am knowledgeable about the culinary arts, as the role of "chef" holds a shared expectation of this quality. Therefore, because I identify myself as a "chef", I internalise within myself that I need to be knowledgeable in the culinary arts to sustain this identity. Ultimately, Identity Theory hypothesises that because identity is associated with expectations and imbued meanings, then identity itself guides behaviour, as people seek to fulfil these expectations and the meanings that have been internalised (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was developed in the 1970s, primarily by Henri Tajfel, with later additions from Tajfel's student John Turner. As Tajfel was Jewish, he faced severe discrimination within Poland during the Second World War. He wanted to understand why discrimination and intergroup conflict arise even when there is no rational cause for it (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Kish Bar-On & Lamm, 2023).

Social Identity Theory posits that the way in which people understand and perceive themselves is largely influenced by the emotional attachment they hold towards the social groups they are a part of (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2000). People distinguish the social groups they are a part of by categorising others into ingroups and outgroups. Ingroups are comprised of people who believe they are socially comparable to each other, based on a variety of factors or social norms; in other words, an ingroup has a collective sense of "we" or "us". Outgroups are comprised of people who differ from the ingroup, or are regarded with a collective sense of "them" (Caprar & Walker, 2024; Giles & Giles, 2013; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel et al., 2004). When individuals consider themselves to be a member of a social group and are emotionally attached to this membership, then that social group is internalised and becomes a part of their 'social identity', which influences their perception of themselves (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel et al., 2004). People make these categorisations to simplify the complex social world they live in, and to see how they are similar and different to other people (Andriot & Owens, 2012). For example, if I were a working chef within a restaurant, I would

consider the other chefs with whom I work as a part of my ingroup, whereas the front of house staff may be considered a part of the outgroup as they are not working as chefs. As I have an attachment to this social group of chefs, it would then be considered part of my social identity.

While Social Identity Theory has similarities to Identity Theory, the theories differ in focus, as Social Identity Theory emphasises broader group memberships, whereas Identity Theory focuses on "role identity" within social structures. However, both theories have overlapping concepts which include the following:

1) **Multiple Identities**: Everybody assumes multiple different role-based identities and group-based identities at once (Burke & Stets, 2012; Gerber & Folta, 2022; Manzi et al., 2024). For example, I would identify myself as a chef, but I would also consider myself to be a master of gastronomy student and a male.
2) **Identity Salience**: Individuals assume multiple identities at a time; some identities will hold prominence over others, depending on the broader characteristics of the situation (in the case of Social Identity Theory) and/or depending on the social structure arrangement between people (in the case of Identity Theory) (Caprar & Walker, 2024; Stets & Burke, 2000). For example, hypothetically, if a close family member dies and there is a funeral, I would place less importance on my identity as a chef and put a higher importance on my identity as a family member.
3) **Dynamic Nature**: Our identities can shift based on personal experiences and social contexts (Burke & Stets, 2012; Gerber & Folta, 2022; Stets & Burke, 2000). For example, while I am currently a gastronomy student, if I were to graduate, then that identity would shift to being a gastronomy graduate.

What is Culture and Cultural Identity?

Similar to the conceptualisation of identity, culture itself cannot be definitively defined due to the complexity of the concept, partially due to its various perspectives and usages within society (Raeff et al., 2020). However, this has not stopped scholars from trying to define it. For example, Alfred Louis Kroebar and Clyde Kluckhorn (1952)

analysed 164 different definitions of culture to establish an overall theory of culture (Jahoda, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2012; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). While they did define culture, they ultimately recognised that there is no overall grand theory of culture, but that it is instead made up of various linking concepts (Jahoda, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Recognising this, several scholars agree that researchers should not try to objectively define culture but instead should describe how culture is used within the study and the aspects of it that relate to the study (Jahoda, 2012; Minkov, 2013; Raeff et al., 2020). Recognising this, Spencer-Oatley and Kádár (2020) further elaborate upon 12 characteristics of culture. In reviewing and condensing the wider literature, this study discusses and elaborates upon five characteristics of culture, which are relevant in underpinning cultural identity. It should be noted that this overview merges different characteristics or ignores them entirely if they are not significant, as the intention in this study is not to describe culture in its entirety, as this dissertation is limited in length.

The five significant characteristics of culture go as follows:

1) **Culture is not a "thing" but instead describes complex systems that are made up of interrelating components:** Culture does not act independently from the human minds that construct it, which means that it is therefore not a "thing" (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). While not a "thing", culture itself can influence how people perceive the world (Kucharska & Bedford, 2023). This is because culture itself can be understood as a complex system (Spencer-Oatey, 2021) that is socially constructed (Stead, 2004), which establishes a shared, organised way of thinking through a variety of interrelating components (Kucharska & Bedford, 2023; Spencer-Oatey, 2021; Stead, 2004). Some of the common components within culture include assumptions, beliefs, values, behaviour and artifacts (physical manifestations of culture such as clothing or symbols) (Kucharska & Bedford, 2023). The components that establish culture are also interrelated and organised to a degree (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). For example, the introduction of the brigade system significantly impacted the organisational culture of professional kitchens by, for example, influencing

beliefs on kitchen management or artifacts such as uniforms (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2022; Gonzalez, 2019).

2) **Culture manifests at varying levels**: The values of a culture can guide people's behaviour. However, the way in which these cultural values manifest is often not visible, as culture has unspoken underlying assumptions (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). A common analogy for this, popularised by American anthropologist Edward T. Hall in *Beyond Culture* (1976), metaphorically compares cultural manifestations to an iceberg. Like an iceberg, manifestations of culture are visible (conscious) in aspects such as language, food, clothing or flags; however, like an iceberg submerged underwater, culture can manifest invisibly (unconsciously) through aspects such as beliefs, norms or traditions (Kucharska & Bedford, 2023; Silva, 2022; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018; Vice et al., 2021). This analogy, however, is limited as it is overly simplistic, static and potentially misleading, as the comparison can imply that culture is 'cold' like an iceberg (Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, 2017; Vice et al., 2021). Instead, cultural values can be categorised on three levels; the first level comprises the values that we are aware of and are visibly reflected (in art, clothes, etc.). For example, I would consider the *Edmonds Cookbook* to be a physical manifestation of 'Kiwi' Pākehā culture. The second level comprises the debatable values that we are semi-aware of and are still communicating. For example, I would consider a cultural value that I was taught growing up in a 'Kiwi' Pākehā culture is being modest or "down to earth", rather than flaunting wealth or achievements. The third level comprises the values that we are unaware of due to them being taken-for-granted, basic assumptions within the culture, which can be made visible again through deliberate, focused inquiry (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). For example, growing up in a Pākehā culture, I often unconsciously assume that I lack a distinct cultural identity, compared to more visible cultural identities.

3) **Culture is learned, not genetically inherited:** While people are born into cultural groups, they do not genetically inherit those cultures, as culture itself is communicated, imitated, taught, and learnt by people within a social

environment (Heyes, 2012; Kronfeldner, 2021; Peedicayil, 2001; Spencer-Oatey, 2021). The capacity and ability to learn about culture is genetically inherited; however, people do not innately know about culture through their genetics (Heyes, 2012; Peedicayil, 2001; Spencer-Oatey, 2021). Maria Kronfeldner (2021) reasons that when culture changes, it does not directly impact our genetics. Biological traits are genetically inherited, whereas culture is inherited socially, as people who are not parents can teach you about culture. What this means is that people can learn cultures which fall outside of their own. Therefore, people are capable of understanding cultural differences by learning about other cultures (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). For example, although I grew up in a Pākehā culture, I have learned about Japanese culture through travel, food, and researching this dissertation.

4) **Culture is shared amongst social groups; however, it is experienced and interpreted differently amongst its members:** Culture is a shared system; therefore, for it to be maintained, it needs to be shared by at least two people (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). Culture is shared on varying levels, such as the macro global or national level, a meso organisational or regional level, or a micro family or team level. As culture is a social construction that is taught to people, it is therefore interpreted differently amongst its members. Furthermore, while culture has shared values, beliefs, behaviours and norms, its relevancy differs amongst members (Erez & Gati, 2004; Kucharska & Bedford, 2023; Spencer-Oatey, 2021). For example, within the culture I grew up in, I learnt to value open communication; however, when I am working as a chef, I will shift my values to quick and direct communication based on the kitchen hierarchy for efficiency, as the organisational culture calls for it.

5) **Culture is dynamic:** Culture is not static, as it is subject to constant change. Because culture is actively learnt, it is required to go through a perpetual signification process. This implies that cultural information is required to be constantly communicated and reinforced to people in order to be sustained (Halloran & Kashima, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2021; Tri, 2024). This occurs in a cycle: first, the cultural information needs to exist. Once it exists, then it is communicated to others in some form through mediums such as language or symbols. After that, people then learn (or relearn) that cultural information. Once that cultural information is learned, it then alters the dynamics of that cultural group (Kashima, 2008). As this cultural information is perpetuated over time, it gradually changes culture with the introduction of new cultural innovations, which are discovered outside that culture or invented internally within that culture (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). For example, the kitchen brigade system was influenced externally by professional kitchen culture, though it was directly inspired by the organisational culture of the military (Le Cordon Bleu, n.d.).

Culture is not the same as identity; however, they are closely related. Culture can be understood as the complex system itself, whereas cultural identity is the identification or sense of belonging within its distinct groups, which develops a sense of self (Boston-Leary, 2024; Spencer-Oatey, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Much like social identity, cultural identity is relational but distinct. Cultural identity is relational, as it is built upon similarities, such as sharing a group identity, with shared cultural codes and a shared common history. At the same time, cultural identity is distinct, built upon unique circumstances, which differentiate cultural identities from each other. However, cultural identity is not a static concept but a dynamic, developmental process of 'being' and 'becoming'. It is rooted in shared history, but it is always in constant reconstruction, belonging both in the past and present (Chen, 2017; S. Hall, 2015; Yang et al., 2021). Because of these factors, scholars such as Stuart Hall emphasise that cultural identity should not be viewed as a static, homogenous collective, as people can challenge the established (often historical) narratives which have been placed upon them (S. Hall, 2015; Yang et al., 2021). For example, within

the literature, many journal articles challenge normalities within professional kitchen cultures, such as gender prejudices against female chefs (Acosta et al., 2022; Damla, 2025; Harris & Giuffre, 2010, 2015; Tunca & Pekerşen, 2023) or normalities of aggression and violence (Cooper et al., 2017; Meiser & Pantumsinchai, 2022; Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007).

3.4 Food, Identity, and Cuisine

Everybody needs to eat to survive; however, the foods we choose to eat are not primarily based upon pure logic or rationality. When people eat, buy or serve food, they make a deliberate choice, as we do not just happen to swallow food without any thought process. According to Barthes, these choices are highly structured, requiring habits, consumption patterns and other food practices. It is in this respect that food acts as a system of communication and is involved with processes of signification and interpretation (Barthes, 1961/1997; Stano, 2015). Food practices are a crucial signification process for Barthes, as he believed that it plays a crucial role in how people establish and maintain a sense of identity (Barthes, 1961/1997; Stano, 2023). This perspective was shared by one of the founding fathers of gastronomy, Jean Anthelm Brillat-Savarin (1825/2012), who stated in his fourth aphorism "Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are" (p. 18).

Recent studies theorise that we dynamically co-construct a sense of social identity through food, as individuals will adopt the food practices of the ingroups which they feel they belong to, distinguishing themselves from differing food practices used by outgroups. Through the continual adoption of these practices, the beliefs, norms and stereotypes associated with that group are reinforced, further developing a sense of social identity (Gerber & Folta, 2022; Reddy & van Dam, 2020).

Claude Fischler's seminal text "Food, Self and Identity" (1988) connects the relationship between food and identity to the concepts of the "incorporation principle" and the "omnivore's paradox". The incorporation principle, which is like Brillat-Savarin's fourth aphorism, posits that, when individuals eat food, they not only incorporate those foods' nutrients, but also the symbolic aspects of it. For Fischler, when individuals incorporate these meanings, they then become a part of a culinary

system which is practised by groups of people. This forms the basis of a group identity in a similar fashion to Social Identity Theory, as through shared food practices, individuals develop a sense of 'we' within the ingroup, and develop a sense of the 'other' with regard to the outgroup (Bessiere & Tibere, 2013; Fischler, 1988; Salvador, 2017; Stano, 2015). The omnivore's paradox was first conceptualised by Paul Rozin (1976) and describes the dilemma that omnivores face. On the one hand, omnivores are 'neophiliac' – they cannot live without eating a variety of different foods because they cannot consume all the nutrients they need from just one food alone, so they are inclined to explore and eat a diverse range of foods. However, on the other hand, omnivores are also 'neophobic', as they need to be cautious or outright averse to new, unknown foods, as they may pose a potential danger (Armelagos, 2010; Fischler, 1988; Lin-Hi et al., 2022; Stano, 2015). According to Fischler (1988), humans can resolve this paradox through culture and socially constructed practices. These practices (which are dynamically constructed) teach individuals what should be eaten and what should not be eaten, thus forming the structure of what is known as 'cuisine'. As different cuisines pertain to different social or cultural groups, humans therefore constantly differentiate themselves from each other through the foods they choose to consume or not consume.

Cuisine, however, encapsulates a knowledge base surrounding food that is wider than just a manner of cooking (Civitello, 2026). Cuisine expresses a condensed range of social beliefs (such as cultural, political or religious), which is reflected in the choices made around food (surrounding its preparation, serving and consumption) (Graff, 2020). These choices include (but are not limited to) the selection of ingredients and their quantities, food preparation choices, cooking techniques, cooking traditions, customs and habits (Kocevski & Risteski, 2020).

What are National Foods and How Are National Cuisines Formed?

Food is often classified into different national cuisines, but what makes food representative on the national level? A country's gastronomy identity is not just reflective of geographical boundaries, but also comprised of various factors such as history, religion, traditions, beliefs, diversity, flavour preferences and values

(Harrington, 2005; Yayla & Günay Aktaş, 2021). For a food to become 'national', it requires the existence of nations (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016). According to political scientist Benedict Anderson (2020, p. 283), nations are "an imagined political community". For Benedict Anderson (2020), nations are imagined due to the socially constructed nature of what is considered 'national', as the individuals within these communities will never know all their fellow "community" members. Anna Triandafyllidou (1998) posits that the organisation of the world into separate, distinct nations has been naturalised. As there are multiple nations across the world, there is a need for nations to be distinct so they can differentiate from one another. Each nation has its own history and culture; however, the construction of a distinct 'national community' implies a sense of difference, which requires grouping people into the 'national' ingroup and 'foreign' outgroup. The 'national' ingroup is constructed through a sense of national belonging, tied to a variety of shared factors such as territory, national mythology, history, culture, a common economy, and legal rights. The foreign outgroup, on the other hand, is categorised by difference, as they fall outside of the constructed boundaries that constitute the national ingroup (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta (2022) posit that one tool that constructs these national boundaries and distinctions is cuisine, as it allows people to differentiate the culinary ingroup and outgroup.

According to Rachel Laudan (2013), national cuisines are shaped and continuously reconstructed through a variety of factors, such as cookbooks, established ingredient usages, menus, national culinary philosophies and media. For example, Arjun Appadurai (1988) found that Indian cookbooks written in English around the 1970s and 1980s were influential in constructing a national Indian cuisine. Appadurai ultimately argues that national cuisines are a constructed culinary myth, which, in the case of Indian cuisine, could emerge from discussions about regional and ethnic cuisines around India within cookbooks. Appadurai posits that this construction happens in a variety of ways. Firstly, the myth is constructed by making historic traditions representative on the national level, with Appadurai giving the example of Shanta Ranga Rao's cookbook, which claimed to be 'Indian recipes' even though many of the recipes were not widespread and could only be locally found. Secondly,

the myth is constructed by categorising together regional variations of food, with pickles being an example given by Appadurai, as they could be found across India with a wide range of regional varieties. Lastly, the myth is constructed by subjectively grouping foods to make them seem unified, with Appadurai using spice mixes as an example, as they are subjectively grouped even though they can vary significantly across recipes.

Considering these factors, this study describes national cuisines using Laudan's (2013) definition of national cuisine:

> A national cuisine is usually thought to be one which is familiar to all citizens, eaten by all of them, at least on occasion, and found across the entire national territory, perhaps with regional variations. It is assumed to have a long continuous history and to reflect and contribute to the national character. (p. 380)

3.5 Conclusion

This literature review chapter identified various theories related to how a sense of identity and meaning is formed around food. The exploration of semiotics highlighted the theory of semiotic myth, which was shown to be an effective means for unpacking naturalised cultural narratives. Examining multiple theories of identity revealed how identity is founded, such as how the formation of ingroups and outgroups constructs social identity, while role-based identity was constructed by the internalising and enacting of roles. Culture was also seen to be a complex phenomenon but was shown to be based upon systems that were often invisible; culture is also dynamic in nature, constantly changing throughout time, but rooted in history. Considering these theories in the context of food revealed that the formation of a cuisine constructs a social identity, as it defines an ingroup–outgroup relationship based upon shared dietary practices. It also showed that national cuisines are mythological in nature, and utilise various mechanisms to project foods to a national level. Overall, these theories provide the academic grounding for exploring how the constructed relationship between ramen, identity and myth is presented on Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English.

Chapter 4: Research Framework and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Before presenting the methodology used in the research reported in this dissertation, this chapter begins with my declaration of my own positionality with regard to the research. Then this chapter discusses the research questions and the research philosophy, theoretical framework, and methodology used to answer them. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed.

4.2 Positionality Statement

Positionality is commonly defined as a tool to understand a researcher's worldview and standpoints in social and political contexts when conducting research (Goundar, 2025; Holmes, 2020; Yip, 2024). A researcher's positionality is unique to them and is susceptible to change over time (Holmes, 2020). The process of declaring positionality requires researchers to self-reflect upon the biases, assumptions and values they may hold when conducting research (Goundar, 2025; Pretorius, 2024). It is also important to be transparent about positionality, as it influences how the research will be conducted and its outcomes and results (Goundar, 2025; Holmes, 2020; Pretorius, 2024; Yip, 2024). Knowing this, a positionality statement is made here for transparency about my positionality. Furthermore, I use a reflexive approach by self-reflecting throughout the research process to acknowledge and reduce any potential conflicts of interest that might arise during the research process (Holmes, 2020).

As a 23-year-old white, Pākehā (New Zealand European), male who grew up in an upper-middle class household in Auckland, I acknowledge that I have lived a privileged life; this has directly impacted my worldview, which may result in unconscious biases and assumptions. Knowing this, I need to be reflexive throughout the research process to acknowledge and minimise my unconscious biases and assumptions. This is especially important in the context of this research, as I will largely be analysing Japanese media, which is from a culture outside of my own. While I have an interest in Japanese culture, I do not claim to understand what it is

like to be Japanese. It is in this regard that I would position myself as an outsider to Japanese culture, as I am not Japanese (Bukamal, 2022; Goundar, 2025). Because this research uses an outsider lens, I need to pay extra attention to being ethically and culturally sensitive in this research. I should also recognise a potential bias of mine in that, because of career aspirations, I might be hesitant to be critical in areas of this research, from a fear of being harmful or offensive. Therefore, I explicitly state any potential bias that might arise during the research process within reflexive notes and also consult my peers to ensure cultural sensitivity.

While I take an outsider position in relation to Japanese culture, that does not mean I use an outsider lens exclusively, as researchers can assume multiple insider or outsider positions depending on the context (Goundar, 2025; Holmes, 2020; Joseph et al., 2021; Yip, 2024). For example, I would consider myself to be an insider to chef culture and to the academic realm of gastronomy, as I have worked and studied in these areas.

My interest in this research stems from when I was working as a chef while I was completing my bachelor's degree. When I first started working as a chef at an Italian-New Zealand restaurant, I was taught by a Japanese chef. One of the first lessons he taught me was about knife sharpening and Japanese-style fish butchery, which he learnt from working in fish markets in Tokyo. From this, I eventually gained an interest in Japanese-style cooking. Shortly after, I was taught how to make pasta by the pasta chefs at the restaurant. With an interest in Japanese-style cooking and pasta production, I eventually became interested in the world of ramen, as from my perspective at the time it served as a bridge between the two cooking styles. My interest in ramen also derived from the E-Book, *The Book of Ramen,* by Mike Satinover, and Scott Satinover (2025) . While I would consider myself an amateur at making ramen, I want to be able to contribute to the knowledge of ramen, especially on the concept of regional ramen, using the knowledge I have learnt from studying gastronomy.

4.3 Research Questions

There is yet to be a study that analyses, from a social constructionist perspective, how modern ramen-related content constructs the dish of ramen for international audiences within a real-world context. Considering the gap in research, this study explores the following research questions:

Primary question

- How is ramen constructed within ramen-related content on Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English between 2023 and 2026?

Underlying questions

- How is a sense of identity constructed around ramen within Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English?
- What semiotic myths about ramen emerge when analysing Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English?

4.4 Research Philosophy and Paradigm

Cynthia Grant and Azadeh Osanloo (2014) posit that it is important for researchers to understand their own philosophical beliefs, as they significantly impact the researcher's choice of theoretical framework, and influence how the research is conducted. Therefore, before delving into this study's theoretical framework, I explain my own approach to research philosophy, by elaborating upon my choice of research paradigm in relation to this study. A research paradigm is a framework that reflects the researcher's philosophical approach to research; it consists of ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions (Pretorius, 2024; Pringle & Booysen, 2018; Spencer et al., 2020; Tracy, 2019).

Ontology

Ontology refers to the area of metaphysics that explores the nature of reality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Hathcoat et al., 2019; Pretorius, 2024; Pringle & Booysen, 2018). Ontology is concerned with what is real and how it exists. Different

ontological positions influence how research is conducted (Pernecky, 2016; Pringle & Booysen, 2018; Scotland, 2012).

This research assumes a social constructionist ontological position. The ontological position influences the research process, as it explores how social and cultural factors come together to construct shared perceptions of reality between people (Pretorius, 2024). This ontology assumes that reality is subjective and that our perspectives on reality are directly impacted by social and cultural factors (Phillips, 2023; Pretorius, 2024). Furthermore, a 'weak' social constructionist ontological position is assumed, positioned between realism and subjectivism on the ontological spectrum. This position does not deny an external reality, but instead assumes that our perceptions of reality are subjective and directly influenced by social and cultural factors (Elder-Vass, 2012; Taylor, 2018).

An important distinction of 'weak' social constructionist ontology is John Searle's concept of 'brute' and 'institutional' facts. Brute facts are facts that exist independently of human consciousness, such as how trees are made from wood. Institutional facts, on the other hand, are facts that are socially constructed, such as the value of money (Elder-Vass, 2012; Searle, 2010).

Epistemology

While ontology focuses on the nature of reality, epistemology, on the other hand, focuses on the nature of knowledge. Epistemology is mainly concerned with how we understand knowledge, our limitations in understanding knowledge and how we justify academic claims (Hathcoat et al., 2019; Levers, 2013; Pretorius, 2024; Scotland, 2012; VandenBos, 2016). Like ontology, many different epistemological positions can be generally categorised on an epistemological spectrum ranging between objectivism and subjectivism (Levers, 2013).

This research assumes a social constructionist epistemological position. A social constructionist epistemology is grounded in subjectivist principles, such as how knowledge is constructed and subjectively understood. However, where it differs from pure subjectivism is that knowledge is considered to be co-constructed by people instead of being purely individually constructed. The social constructionist

epistemological position is that this co-construction is established through mediums such as language or symbolism, and through cultural and historical normalities within society (Burr, 2024; Guraya et al., 2023; Phillips, 2023; Pretorius, 2024). From an epistemological perspective, social constructionism is concerned with the roles that culture, society and history play in the co-creation of knowledge (Andrews, 2012; Galbin, 2014; Phillips, 2023).

Axiology

Within research, axiology refers to a branch of philosophy that explores the nature of values. While axiology covers different values such as truth, goodness and well-being, within research, it also looks generally at values (Hiles et al., 2008; Smith & Thomas, 1998). Within a research context, axiology looks at the role of values and how they influence research (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016; Pretorius, 2024; Pringle & Booysen, 2018). This research adopts a value-laden axiological position. A value-laden positionality, which is typically aligned with qualitative methods, acknowledges that research contains biases and that values should be incorporated into the research process to gain deeper insights into the social world. This approach requires deep exploration into the researcher's values and how these influence the research (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Pretorius, 2024). By integrating values into the research process, I can ensure that the ethical implications of the research are constantly being evaluated while also providing transparency about the roles that values play within the research. This allows the research to deliver deeper insights while also increasing the ethical sensitivity of the study (Pretorius, 2024).

Weak Social Constructionist Paradigm

As established earlier, this research assumes a 'weak' social constructionist ontology, a social constructionist epistemology and a value-laden axiology, which are congruent with a social constructionist paradigm.

This paradigm highlights the societal influences on the construction of knowledge. Because of this, the social constructionist paradigm focuses on societal constructs, such as culture, language and societal norms, to explore how knowledge is co-constructed (Pretorius, 2024). While there are no methods that are strictly used

within the social constructionist paradigm, it does tend to use qualitative methods that analyse language, symbols and discourse to understand how knowledge is socially constructed (Burr, 2024).

One of the main strengths of this paradigm is that it allows the influence of social interpretation to be considered by deconstructing the production of knowledge within culture and society (Burr, 2024; Slater, 2017). Consequently, it challenges taken-for-granted assumptions, which promotes new insights and the reconstruction of theory (Burr, 2024; Galbin, 2014). However, social constructionism does have paradigmatic limitations. Dan Zahavi (2022) argues that social constructionism is neglectful of individual subjectivity, as an individual's sense of self exists on multiple levels. He says, for example, that while selfhood is influenced by social interactions, it would be overly simplistic to say the self is purely derived from social interaction, as there is still room for individual subjectivity. Therefore, while social constructionism involves an analysis of the social construction of knowledge, it does not ultimately account for individual subjectivity to the same level as an interpretative paradigm. This paradigm is also criticised for being apolitical, as it does not inherently address power relations during the social construction process (Phillips, 2023).

Reflexive Note 2

Reflexive Note: While this research adopts the principles of social constructionism, I also acknowledge that my personal worldview aligns with both constructivism and pragmatism. This is because I agree with the philosophical aspects of pragmatism, such as using research methods that best address the research, rather than adhering to a rigid philosophical framework, as research philosophy is constantly being changed and argued. However, a social constructionist paradigm was ultimately chosen due to its focus on the co-construction of meaning, which is a central topic within this research, rather than focusing purely on the research's real-world practical outcomes (Pretorius, 2024).

4.5 Theoretical Framework

It is debated whether a theoretical framework is required within qualitative research, as being too reliant on established theory can be overly deductive and dictate the research results (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Garvey & Jones, 2021; Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Herber et al., 2026). However, it is argued that it should not be abandoned overall, as a researcher requires a framework to understand the data (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Scholars propose instead that qualitative researchers should have a more flexible, less structured theoretical framework that remains exploratory and not overly deductive (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Furthermore, theory selections should be influenced by a researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs, as they are mutually dependent for philosophically grounded research (Herber et al., 2026). Considering these factors this study's theoretical framework will consist of a weak social constructionist positioning, underpinned by the social construction of reality thesis.

The Social Construction of Reality Thesis

The thesis of the *Social Construction of Reality* was conceptualised by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966). It argues that reality is socially relative and is constantly being constructed through our interactions with the social world (Boyland, 2019; Galbin, 2014; Spencer et al., 2020). This social construction of reality occurs through the processes of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation. Externalisation is an ongoing process of human projection, which occurs when people interact with the world and create products that only exist because of human activity. Objectivation occurs when these human products interact with the social world, which then socially constructs a collective sense of truth. Finally, internalisation occurs when objectivated ideas are imposed upon people's consciousness through socialisation, which then influences their perspective on reality (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Galbin, 2014; Little, 2023). A key aspect of this process is language, as it allows people to objectivate meaning and experience in the world, making it a crucial aspect of the social construction of reality. Furthermore, under this theoretical framework, identity would be considered a socially

constructed phenomenon that is shaped, maintained and modified between individuals and society (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

4.6 Methodology

Methodology Design

This study employed a qualitative case study research design, guided by Sharan Merriam's constructivist case study framework (1998), as synthesised by Yazan (2015). This study used Merriam's framework as a guideline, as it is an established, exclusively qualitative case study framework with characteristics that support the research objectives. A qualitative case study research design was chosen as it allows for an in-depth investigation of a complex, real-life phenomenon (Crowe et al., 2011; Rashid et al., 2019; Ridder, 2017; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The phenomenon in question is "the social construction of ramen". In relation to this study, a qualitative case study refers to "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Tisdell et al., 2025, p. 45). A bounded system in relation to a case study refers to a case or cases (which may be a group, event or phenomenon) that is set within a bounded, specific set of parameters, which needs to include time and place (Coombs, 2022; Stake & Visse, 1995; Tisdell et al., 2025). Under this framework, cases needed to have the following characteristics:

1) **Particularistic:** Cases could be used to focus on a specific phenomenon, rather than focusing on the relationship between multiple phenomena (Yazan, 2015).
2) **Heuristic:** Cases could be used to help readers understand the phenomenon, rather than presenting a deductive answer (Yazan, 2015).
3) **Descriptive:** Cases could be used to analyse the research phenomenon with detail and depth, to allow for a rich, thick description of the phenomena, as opposed to testing a hypothesis or cause and effect relationship (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019; Mills et al., 2010b; Yazan, 2015).

Furthermore, cases were instrumental in nature, as cases were used to study the phenomenon – the cases themselves were not the specific focus of the study (Crowe et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2010c).

Data Collection Methodology

Within Merriam's framework (1998), the literature review is essential in forming the theoretical framework and shaping the research questions. After the theoretical framework and research questions are established, the researcher then uses purposeful sampling to select specific samples that match the research questions and theoretical framework (Yazan, 2015). Following this framework, this study used a criterion-based purposeful sampling method. This method selects rich information sources based upon specific criteria to better understand the research phenomenon (Bouncken et al., 2025; Campbell et al., 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). This study also exclusively used secondary data by analysing existing documents, rather than conducting interviews. Secondary data was used as this study is focused on the social construction of knowledge in already established discourses found within Japanese digital journalism platforms. Considering these factors, data were chosen by these criteria:

1) The sample needed to be digitally accessible and available in English.
2) The sample needed to be from a Japanese digital journalism platform.
3) The sample needed to discuss ramen in relation to identity (e.g., regional ramen identity, national food identity, etc.), or about what ramen is.
4) The sample needed to have been uploaded between 2023 and 2026.

After researching samples that fit into these criteria, two highly relevant series of articles were found that fitted the sample criteria. The first series of articles comes from the ramen-themed, November 2024 issue of the digital magazine *Highlighting Japan*, which was published by the Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan (2024). This sample was chosen as the magazine itself is dedicated to "promot[ing] understanding of Japan for the people around the world, with a variety of themes" (Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan, 2024a, para.1). Additionally, it discusses what ramen is, and has multiple articles dedicated to regional ramen styles. The second series of articles is NHK World-Japan's *Ramen Japan* (2023), which is a web series that explores different regional variations of ramen across Japan. This sample was chosen for its relevance to regional ramen

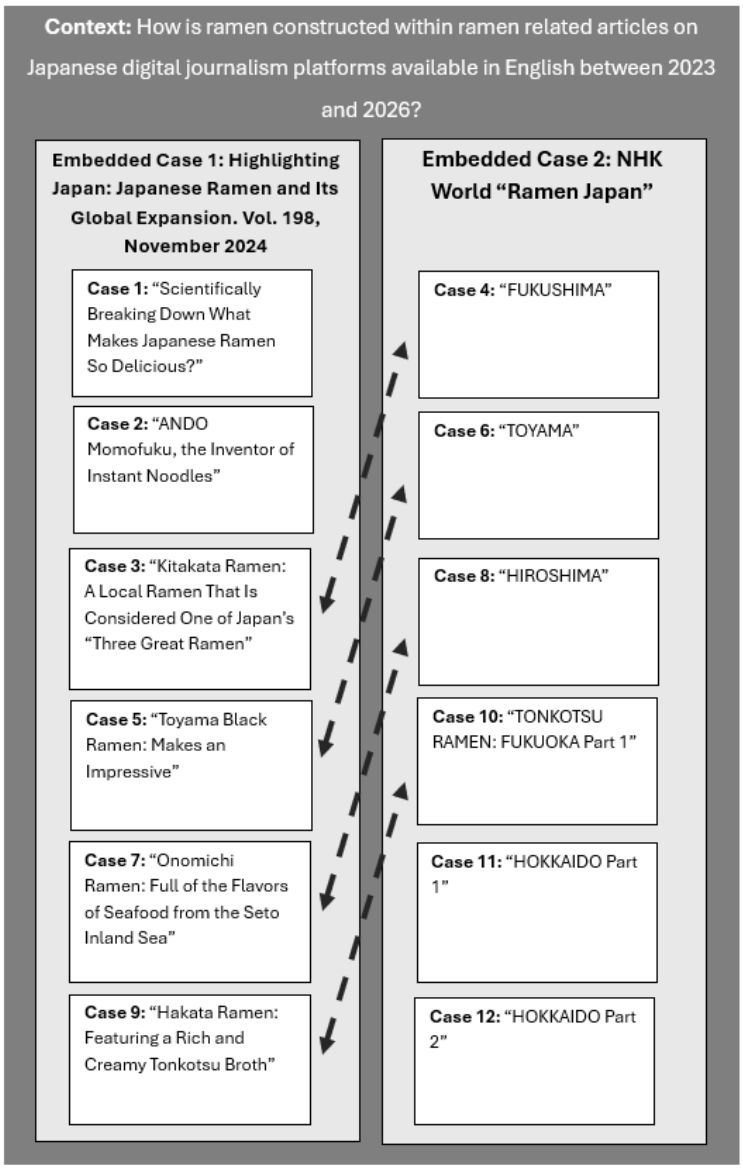
identity, as each episode explores a particular regional ramen style in depth. Additionally, as seen in the literature review, NHK has been highly relevant to the development of regional ramen identity in, for example, its involvement at the start of the regional ramen tourism boom in Kitakata.

This study was organised within a multiple embedded case study design, as outlined by Robert Yin (2009). A multiple embedded case study design focuses on multiple cases while analysing sub-units within each case. It is used to focus on the different salient aspects of a case, for more extensive insights into the case (Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Yin, 2009). While it is a multiple case design, this study has only focused on two different embedded cases, as Yin (2009) posits that even a two-case design is preferable over a single-case design, as the two cases provide stronger analytical conclusions and less vulnerable conclusions than would arise from a single source. Within this study, the two primary cases consist of the November 2024 issue of *Highlighting Japan* (Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan, 2024) and NHK World-Japan's *Ramen Japan* (2023). The embedded subcases consist of specific articles and episodes found within these samples that focus on a specific aspect of ramen. For example, the article and episode about Hakata ramen would be considered an embedded subcase. However, not every single episode and article is analysed within this study. This is because some of the articles in the magazine do not fit the sampling criteria. As for *Ramen Japan*, there are too many episodes to cover for the study to be thick and descriptive. Therefore, a limited number of episodes are covered in this study. These episodes were chosen and cross-analysed with correlating articles about regional ramen within the *Highlighting Japan* magazine. For example, the article about Hakata-style ramen in *Highlighting Japan* has been cross-analysed with the episode about Hakata-style ramen in *Ramen Japan*. Cross-analysis reinforces the validity of the study, promotes theoretical elaboration, and makes it possible to see if the information portrayed in the *Highlighting Japan* magazine is comparable with or in contrast to that presented by *Ramen Japan* (Mills et al., 2010a).

The two episodes about Hokkaido ramen were also chosen for analysis, featuring the content about Sapporo *miso* ramen and Hakodate *shio* ramen. These two episodes

were also covered as *Highlighting Japan* mentions how *miso* and *shio* ramen are major categories of ramen alongside *tonkotsu* and *shoyu*. Furthermore, both primary cases discuss how Sapporo ramen is one of the "three great ramen styles" alongside Kitakata ramen and Hakata ramen, which are already being covered. Additionally, some of the episodes of Ramen Japan may talk about multiple different regional ramen styles in a single episode. Therefore, to stay concise, only the most significant ramen styles will be analysed. This means just covering Hakodate ramen in Hokkaido Part 2, Kitakata ramen in Fukushima, Onomichi ramen in Hiroshima and Hakata ramen in Tonkotsu Ramen Fukuoka Part 1. A visual guide of this study's case study approach can be seen in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Multiple embedded case study design



Data Analysis Methodology

While this study uses Merriam's case study design as a framework, it differs slightly from Merriam's approach to data analysis, as this study has been undertaken with a social constructionist epistemological lens. Yazan (2015) posits that different elements of varying case study designs should be chosen to form an approach that best supports the research. Therefore, while this study shares Merriam's perspective that data analysis is a "process of making sense out of the data" (Tisdell et al., 2025, p. 238; Yazan, 2015, p. 149) it ultimately 'makes sense' of the data strictly through a wider social constructionist lens, rather than a constructivist lens. This affects the interpretation of the data, as this study focuses on language, using the social construction of reality thesis to understand how the data socially constructs knowledge.

This study uses a qualitative reflexive thematic analytical strategy, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process framework. While there are varying interpretations of what thematic analysis is, Braun and Clarke (2006) posit thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79).

Reflexive thematic analysis is relevant to this study for a variety of factors. The first factor is that it is a flexible approach that still generates a rich, descriptive account of the data. This allows the data analysis to be adaptable to the research, rather than being dictated by a rigid methodology or theoretical stance. This is important in relation to this research, as thematic analysis allows for the analysis and comparison of two different media, which in this study are text-based magazine articles and video-based television episodes. The second factor is that it is epistemologically compatible with a weak social constructionist paradigm, as thematic analysis is adaptable to a range of epistemological approaches. The last factor is that it allows the researcher to be an active part of the research process, which strengthens the value-laden nature of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). While their six-phase process is both flexible and adaptable, Braun and Clarke (2006) still emphasise that researchers need to make explicit decisions about how their

thematic approach is guided in relation to the research. These decisions were applied to this study's thematic analysis approach as follows:

1) **Theme constitution:** This study constituted themes based upon their significance to the research questions, and not by numerical frequency. For example, there may be a cluster of codes that have high frequency within the data; however, the codes may not have any theoretical significance to the research questions; therefore, they would not be constituted as a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen due to the strict qualitative nature of this study, as using quantitative measures would make a more frequent but less significant theme more valuable than a less frequent but more significant theme, which could potentially miss significant qualitative insights.
2) **Inductive approach:** The patterns within the data were identified with a bottom-up, inductive approach, by identifying codes from the data itself rather than identifying them from a coding map or framework. For Braun and Clarke, an inductive approach provides a richer, more descriptive overall analysis that focuses on thoroughness, researcher reflexivity and rigour, rather than focusing on the accuracy of the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).
3) **Semantic coding, developed into latent themes:** The data were initially coded into explicit, semantic codes to immerse myself in the data, and to understand the explicit meanings of the data. Once immersed in the data, I then focused on the underlying meanings, ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations of the data by clustering the explicit, semantic codes and organising them into underlying, latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). This approach was chosen due to the epistemological nature of this research, as the study objective was to identify the underlying semiotic myths and social construction processes which are hidden within the explicit meanings of the cases.

This study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process using a thematic approach accounting for the explicit decisions above, as seen in Table 2, below.

Table 2. Six-phase thematic analysis process

Phase	Description
1. Familiarity with the data	Read or watch each case multiple times (2+), then transcribe the script either physically by hand or digitally on Microsoft Word. Additionally, note down any initial ideas or significant audio or visual cues which are not a part of the script.
2. Initial coding	If a case transcript is not already written out by hand, print it out. With a highlighter and Post-it note, manually code the data into initial semantic codes using an inductive approach. After conducting the first round of semantic coding, collate the semantic codes to identify recurring latent subthemes.
3. Initial themes	Group together semantic codes by their latent, underlying messaging into initial latent subthemes, based upon their significance to the research questions. After identifying the initial latent subthemes, start grouping similar subthemes together to identify the overall latent themes within the data.
4. Review themes	After identifying the initial subthemes and overall themes, start reviewing, editing and potentially discarding them to make sure they: 1) accurately represent the data; 2) are distinct, with not too much overlap to other themes; 3) are relevant to the research questions; and 4) can be coherently understood.
5. Define and name themes	Once the subthemes and themes are reviewed, name and define them, making sure they are clear and reflective of the data.
6. Write a report	Once the subthemes and themes are named and defined, write a report about each theme, along with the subthemes featured within them. Support the report through the usage of numerous quotes featured in the transcript. Link evidence to the research questions.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical standards, guidelines and procedures set by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee. This study does not require a formal ethics approval as it does not involve animals, human participants, human data or human biological materials (Auckland University of Technology, n.d.).

However, ethical considerations have been addressed to ensure ethical research is conducted. A major ethical factor that is considered is my outsider positionality in relation to Japanese and Chinese cultures. Therefore, social and cultural sensitivity has been employed to respect the communities that I am positioned outside of. A positionality statement has also been made for transparency (see section 4.2), while I have also used reflexivity throughout the research process to identify potential biases that may have arisen while conducting the research (Holmes, 2020; Reid et al., 2018).

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion of Themes

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses content from *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan*. It breaks down the articles and episodes from these sources into multiple cases using a multiple embedded case study design, while utilising an adapted version of Sharan Merriam's (1998) constructivist case study framework and analysing the data using thematic analysis, which was outlined in the previous methodology chapter. The chapter first discusses a brief overview of each of the analysed cases, to provide context into the data itself. Following this is a section dedicated to defining the identified themes and subthemes, which were identified after conducting the thematic analysis (evidence of the transcripts along with the coding process is made available in the Appendix). The chapter provides an overview of how the cases approached each theme and subtheme and then discusses the findings of each individual theme. The conclusion section discusses how all the themes interact with each other to answer the research questions.

5.2 Outline of the Cases, and Identified Themes

Case 1: "Scientifically Breaking Down What Makes Japanese Ramen So Delicious" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024)

In an introductory article featured in Volume 198 of *Highlighting Japan*, Kumiko Morohashi interviews Muneaki Yonemitsu, a professor of life science at Kyushu Sangyo University, who researched *tonkotsu* (pork bone) ramen. The article primarily serves as an informative piece that sets out to explain the make-up of ramen and the reasoning behind its global popularity from a scientific lens. The article discusses the common characteristics of ramen, the classification system around ramen, the relationship between human taste mechanisms and appealing food, the popularity of ramen outside Japan, and the eating practice of slurping (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024).

Reflexive Note 3

Reflexive Note: In section two of this article, Professor Yonemitsu discusses different human taste mechanisms behind appealing foods. Towards the end of this section, Professor Yonemitsu states that human taste mechanisms "do not tend to vary depending on people's ethnicities or the regions where they live" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 7). While I would agree with Professor Yonemitsu's position on this matter, it is the statement following it that made me wary. Professor Yonemitsu's posits after that "the umami-rich flavor ramen has from its dashi broth and its salt concentration that feels just right, it is actually not so surprising that it has been accepted to such a degree worldwide" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 7). While I would also agree that the right amount of salt and umami can make food appealing, it is framed in a way that makes it sound that the worldwide popularity of ramen is derived from these taste aspects. While scientifically correct, I would argue that the way it was framed downplayed the subjective and sociocultural aspects behind food preferences. For example, other foods such as *soba* have not been accepted worldwide to the same degree as ramen, even though they have similar umami flavours and salt contents. Professor Yonemitsu does acknowledge another aspect behind the appeal of ramen, discussing how its novelty to foreign cuisines may also promote its appeal internationally (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024); however, the overall framing admittedly made me more sceptical about the narrative the article conveyed

Case 2: "Ando Momofuku, the Inventor of Instant Noodles" (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024)

In the sixth article featured in Volume 198 of *Highlighting Japan*, Akane Kurosawa interviews Tomohiro Arakawa, from the Corporate Communications Division of Nissin Foods Holdings. The article primarily serves as a historical piece about Momofuku Ando and his role in the invention and spread of instant ramen (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024).

Case 3: "Kitakata Ramen: A Local Ramen That Is Considered One of Japan's 'Three Great Ramen' " (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024)

In the second article featured in Volume 198 of *Highlighting Japan*, Kumiko Morohashi interviews Naoki Hayakawa, from the Kitakata Ramen Section of Kitakata City Hall. The article primarily serves as an informative piece about the regional style of ramen from Kitakata City. The article discusses the origins of Kitakata ramen, its characteristics, and Kitakata's morning ramen culture; it serves as a call to action for foreign tourists (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024).

Case 4: "Fukushima" (Nogushi, 2023)

This is an episode of *Ramen Japan* directed by Natsuki Nogushi (2023) which focuses on two regional ramen styles found within Fukushima prefecture. The first half of the episode discusses Kitakata's morning ramen culture, the characteristics of Kitakata ramen, the origins of the style, along with a brief historical piece about Tomiyama Shoji, who significantly impacted tourism within Kitakata through regional ramen tourism marketing (Nogushi, 2023).

Note. *The second half of the episode focused on Shirakawa ramen and was not analysed in this study for the purpose of staying concise*.

Case 5: "Toyama Black Ramen: Makes an Impressive [sic]" (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024)

In the third article featured in Volume 198 of *Highlighting Japan*, Kumiko Morohashi interviews Kiyoshi Kurihara, who is the chairman of the Toyama Black Ramen Traditions Association. The article primarily focuses on the branding of "Toyama Black", a regional ramen style found in Toyama prefecture. The article discusses the origins and characteristics of the dish, then discusses Toyama Black Ramen Traditions Association's promotional campaigns (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024).

Case 6: "Toyama 5min" (NHK, 2026)

This is an episode of *Ramen Japan* produced by NHK (2026) which focuses on "Toyama Black", which is a regional ramen style found within Toyama city, Toyama prefecture. The episode primarily serves as an informational piece about the Toyama

region and its regional Toyama black ramen style. The episode discusses Toyama's rice farming industry, the characteristics of Toyama black ramen, and the historical origins of the dish (NHK, 2026).

Note. *When this study was first conducted, there was a full-length version of this episode. By the time data analysis was conducted, it had been removed from all platforms. Therefore, the five-minute episode was used for analysis instead due to its availability. Furthermore, the director was not stated within the episode, so the episode is referenced to the production company, NHK.*

Case 7: " 'Onomichi Ramen': Full of the Flavors of Seafood from the Seto Inland Sea" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024)

In the fourth article featured in Volume 198 of *Highlighting Japan*, Kumiko Morohashi interviews Yuriko Takatsuki of the Onomichi Tourism Association. The article primarily serves as an informative piece focused on the regional ramen style from Onomichi city. The article discusses the origins of Onomichi ramen and how the dish was originally characterised. The article then looks at how Onomichi ramen is characterised in the modern day and how the local ocean environment has influenced the dish (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024).

Case 8: "Hiroshima" (Onoda, 2024)

This is an episode of *Ramen Japan* directed by Haruya Onoda (2024) which focuses on two different regional varieties of ramen found within Hiroshima prefecture. The second half of the episode discusses the characteristics of Onomichi ramen, the origins of the dish, the preservation of tradition at one local ramen shop, and the impact of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima.

Note. *The first half of the episode focused on Hiroshima ramen and was not analysed in this study for the purpose of staying concise.*

Case 9: "Hakata Ramen: Featuring a Rich and Creamy Tonkotsu Broth" (Tanaka, 2024)

In the fifth article featured in Volume 198 of *Highlighting Japan,* Nozomi Tanaka (2024) interviews an anonymous spokesperson for Fukuoka city tourism. The article serves

as an informative piece about Hakata *tonkotsu* ramen. The article discusses the characteristics of modern Hakata-style *tonkotsu* ramen, the origins of the dish, and the local practices when ordering ramen, and it highlights the local food stall culture (Tanaka, 2024).

Case 10: "Tonkotsu Ramen: Fukuoka Part 1" (Takamori, 2023)

This is an episode of *Ramen Japan* directed by Daisuke Takamori (2023) which focuses on two different regional varieties of ramen found within Fukuoka city. The second half of the episode discusses Hakata's food stall culture, the characteristics of the original style of Hakata ramen, the origins of the dish, and the pride of sticking with tradition over trends.

Note. *The first half of the episode focused on Nagahama ramen and was not analysed in this study for the purpose of staying concise.*

Case 11: "Hokkaido Part 1" (Takata, 2023a)

This is an episode of *Ramen Japan* directed by Ryujiro Takata (2023a) which focuses on Sapporo *miso* ramen, which is the regional style of ramen found within Sapporo city, Hokkaido prefecture. The episode discusses the characteristics of Sapporo *miso* ramen, the origins of the dish, the city's post-war environment, and the development of Sapporo-style ramen noodles, and reflects the cultural significance of the dish through an elementary school field trip to a local noodle manufacturer (Takata, 2023a).

Case 12: "Hokkaido Part 2" (Takata, 2023b)

This is an episode of *Ramen Japan* directed by Ryujiro Takata (Takata, 2023b) which focuses on two different regional varieties of ramen found within Hiroshima prefecture. The first half of the episode serves as an informative piece about Hakodate *shio* ramen. The episode discusses Hakodate's morning market culture, the characteristics of Hakodate ramen, and explicitly highlights one long standing ramen shop and how they retain the ramen's "classic" characteristics. The episode also briefly covers the history of Chinese migration in the city and their influence on the local ramen (Takata, 2023b).

Note. *The second half of the episode, which focused on Asahikawa ramen, was not analysed in this study for the purpose of staying concise.*

Outline of themes and subthemes

Table 3, below, outlines and defines the themes and subthemes that were identified during the thematic analysis.

Table 3. Definition of the overall themes

Overall theme	Description
1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen	- **Overall theme description** Cases actively construct a codification structure around the dish of ramen. The theme pertains to the structural elements of ramen which were conveyed in the cases, as well as how the different variations of ramen are classified.
2) International audience connection	- **Overall theme description:** Cases frequently deconstruct the potential cultural barriers surrounding ramen by actively connecting to international audiences. - **Subtheme 1: International tourist appeal** Actively connects to international tourists by promoting ramen-related tourist destinations. - **Subtheme 2: Emphasises the global popularity of ramen** Highlights the universal appeal of ramen, often highlighting its popularity with foreign tourists visiting Japan or by emphasising the prevalence of international ramen restaurants.
3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen	- **Overall theme description** Cases often discuss the significance of ramen at the national Japanese level. This theme actively constructs ramen as a national food within Japan but does not claim it originates from Japan. - **Subtheme 1: Branding ramen at the national Japanese level** Cases often brand ramen at the national Japanese level, primarily by using ramen as a symbol of Japanese identity, or by continually reiterating the national popularity of the dish within the country. - **Subtheme 2: Normalisation of slurping as a Japanese cultural practice** Actively discusses or plays sounds of slurping in conjunction with ramen, to portray slurping as a natural way to eat ramen within Japanese culture. - **Subtheme 3: Historically connecting the invention of instant ramen to post-war Japan** Case 2 uses historical storytelling to convey the national significance of instant ramen within Japan.

4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity	- **Overall theme description** A significant proportion of the cases were focused on regional ramen styles. Surrounding each regional ramen style is the sense that it has its own distinct identity. - **Subtheme 1: Group formations around regional ramen style** Some cases demonstrate how a group identity was formed around a particular regional ramen style, such as having an association dedicated towards the ramen style, or through the spread of a unique ramen recipe which would become associated with that region. - **Subtheme 2: Distinctiveness of regional ramen style** Each case discussing regional ramen considers the elements which make their regional ramen style distinct from others. Each case examines the regional ramen's toppings, noodle characteristics and soup characteristics, further reinforcing the codification of ramen. Cases also discuss the most popularly known, distinctive element of the ramen. Additionally, some cases address the unique eating practices associated with the regional ramen style. - **Subtheme 3: Positive Identity building** Some cases reflect a sense of pride surrounding a regional ramen style. Some of the ways this may be reflected is by enthusiastic local customers, emphasising the popularity of the ramen in the community, or through showing the craftmanship and dedication required to make the regional ramen style. - **Subtheme 4: Regional branding** Each case discussing regional ramen describes the region where the regional ramen style comes from. This includes describing where the region is and often includes branding the region by points of interest. Some cases associate the characteristics of the regional ramen with these points of interest, constructing a sense of terroir. - **Subtheme 5: Historical connection to regional ramen style** Each case discussing regional ramen covers the history surrounding the creation of the regional ramen style. This helps construct a sense of culinary heritage around the ramen style, which in turn helps reaffirm a sense of identity.
5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time	- **Overall theme description** Most cases discussing regional ramen examine the dynamics of regional ramen identity over time. Cases consider how the ramen style had changed over time or whether it had retained a sense of traditionality. This theme reflects the dynamic nature of regional ramen identity, and how that sense of identity is constantly being constructed or reconstructed over time. - **Subtheme 1: Preservation of regional ramen tradition** Some cases emphasise a classic and enduring nature surrounding a regional ramen style, often placing importance on keeping tradition rather than changing over time. - **Subtheme 2: Evolution of regional ramen style over time** Some cases discuss how the perception of a regional ramen style has changed over time, often being tied to changes in local lifestyles.

5.3 Theme 1: Gastronomic Structurisation of Ramen

Table 4. Cases that identify theme 1

Contains theme 1: Gastronomic structurisation of ramen											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Theme 1 Overview

The gastronomic structurisation of ramen is a theme that is identifiable in case 1, and cases 3–12. The theme pertains to how the cases constructed a codified structure around ramen. This codification structure is primarily elaborated upon in case 1, when Professor Yonemitsu discusses how ramen is classified into its main variations, "*shoyu*, *miso*, *shio* and *tonkotsu*" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 6). For Professor Yonemitsu, the ramen classification system is imprecise because it categorises the dish based upon inconsistent criteria, which can be seen by breaking down the structural elements of ramen soup. He explains that ramen broth is a combination of *dashi* and *tare*. *Dashi* in this example is a "type of broth or stock" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 7) that comprises the bulk of the ramen soup. Ramen *dashi* is commonly made with ingredients such as "pork bones, pork, chicken bones, whole chicken, seafood, vegetables, etc" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 8). *Tare,* on the other hand, is described as a "savoury sauce" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 7) which acts as the primary flavouring agent of the ramen soup. *Tare* is mainly comprised of potent seasonings such as *shoyu* (soy sauce), *miso* or *shio* (salt). Due to its potency, the *tare* is typically added in small amounts to the bottom of a ramen bowl and then mixed with the ramen *dashi* to create the overall ramen soup.

The main variations of ramen are often classified imprecisely, due to being categorised either by its type of tare, or by the characteristics of the dashi, rather than based on how they are combined. For example, *shoyu* ramen, *miso* ramen and *shio* ramen, are assumed to have a clear dashi, and is therefore categorised by the type of tare. *Tonkotsu* ramen, however, is usually not categorised based upon the type of tare

it uses, as it is differentiated by its cloudy, white, pork bone *dashi* (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024).

Table 5. Outline of case approach to regional ramen style structure

Structural elements of ramen featured in regional ramen cases					
Case number	Regional style	Dashi	Tare	Noodle type	Toppings
3 (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024)	Kitakata	Not specified	*Shoyu* base	High-hydration, thick, aged, firm, curly noodles	Fukushima Aizu beef slices (adapted version)
4 (Nogushi, 2023)	Kitakata	Pork and chicken bones, dried anchovy, and vegetables	Shoyu or shio base	Curly, thick noodles	Not specified
5 (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024)	Toyama black	Not specified	Shoyu base	Not specified	Not specified
6 (NHK, 2026)	Toyama black	Not specified	Shoyu base	Not specified	Green onion and thick cut pork *chashu*
7 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024)	Onomichi	Seafood base (modern style)	Shoyu base	Medium-thin, flat noodles	"Classic toppings", green onion, pork *chashu* and pickled bamboo shoots. + pork backfat
8 (Onoda, 2024)	Onomichi	Chicken and pork	Shoyu base	Straight noodles	Pork backfat
9 (Tanaka, 2024)	Hakata *tonkotsu* (modern)	Cloudy, pork bone stock	Not specified	Extremely thin, straight noodles	Not specified
10 (Takamori, 2023)	Hakata *tonkotsu* (original)	Not cloudy, pork bone, *kombu* seaweed and vegetables	Not specified	Flat, broad noodles	Not specified
11 (Takata, 2023a)	Sapporo *miso*	Pork bone, dried sardine, horse mackerel, *saba* mackerel, *kombu* seaweed (at interviewed shop)	Miso base	Thick, firm, curly, aged noodles	Pork mince, onion, garlic, and beansprouts stir-fried in lard (at interviewed shop)
12 (Takata, 2023b)	Hakodate *shio*	Clear, pork and chicken bones, and *kombu* seaweed	Shio base	Medium thick noodles	Pork *chashu*, pickled bamboo shoots, and green onions, "usual for old shops"

Case 1 also establishes that the noodles can have varying characteristics depending on the ramen style or regional variation. By describing the structural variations of ramen from its *dashi* to its *tare* and its noodles, case 1 constructs a formula behind the structure of ramen. Cases 3–12 reinforce this structure when describing regional ramen styles. They additionally expand on the formula, as some of the cases discuss the ramen toppings, with some cases featuring different toppings. The combination of these structural components constructs what the dish of ramen is overall. Additionally, because these structural components can be found in an assortment of different variations and characteristics, this allows for the construction of unique ramen styles. Each case relating to regional ramen styles discusses at least one of these structural components, which can be seen visually in Table 5, above.

Overall, across the regional ramen cases, there were four structural elements that were commonly highlighted, each with varying significance across cases. These structural components are:

1) ***Dashi*/stock:** Cases commonly discuss the stock base of various regional ramen styles, being seen in cases 4 and cases 7–12. Cases list the ingredient base of each dashi/stock base. Pork bones are the most common ingredient, seen in Hakodate, Sapporo, Hakata, Onomichi and Kitakata styles of ramen, featured in cases 4 and 8–12 (Nogushi, 2023; Onoda, 2024; Takamori, 2023; Takata, 2023a, 2023b; Tanaka, 2024). Kitakata, Onomichi and Hakodate styles also use chicken bones alongside pork, according to cases 4, 8, and 12 (Nogushi, 2023; Onoda, 2024; Takata, 2023b). Many regional styles also use seafood elements in the *dashi*, featured in cases 4, 7, 10, 11 and 12 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024; Nogushi, 2023; Takamori, 2023; Takata, 2023a, 2023b). The seafood ingredients used included dried anchovy in Kitakata ramen (Nogushi, 2023), dried sardines, *saba* mackerel and horse mackerel in Sapporo ramen (Takata, 2023a), and *kombu* seaweed in Sapporo, Hakodate and the original Hakata styles of ramen (Takamori, 2023; Takata, 2023a, 2023b). In case 7, Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) mention that many modern Onomichi-style ramen shops use a seafood base; however, they do not

mention seafood that is specifically used for the style. Instead, they allude to the fact that it is common for them to use small fish such as sea bream from the local Seto Inland Sea. The frequency of animal products (including fish) indicates that ramen dashi/stock is primarily animal-based across these regional styles. In fact, only cases 4 and 10 specifically mention the usage of vegetables in the dashi/stock, but they are also used in addition to animal products (Nogushi, 2023; Takamori, 2023).

The *dashi*/stock clarity is only highlighted in cases 9, 10 and 12 (Takamori, 2023; Takata, 2023b; Tanaka, 2024). Cases 9 and 10, which are both about Hakata-style ramen, discuss the clarity of Hakata-style ramen. Tanaka (2024) posits in case 9 that Hakata ramen is distinctively known for its cloudy, white dashi/stock. Takamori (2023), on the other hand, highlights how the original style of Hakata ramen has a distinctly different *dashi*/stock, which is less cloudy than today. Takata (2023b) emphasises the importance of having a clear *dashi*/stock when making Hakodate ramen, highlighting the dedication required to make the dashi/stock as clear as possible.

2) ***Tare*:** While the cases do not explicitly use the word "*tare*", they do allude to its usage in ramen by saying that the broth was soy-sauce-based or *miso*-based. Additionally, in case 12, Takata (2023b) highlights how one Hakodate ramen shop seasons their ramen with three teaspoons of salt. Whether or not this is constituted as a *tare* is debatable; however, while it is not a "savoury sauce" per se, it does describe how the ramen is seasoned, which is why the ramen is described as *shio* (salt) ramen. Cases 9 and 10, which both discuss Hakata *tonkotsu* ramen, do not discuss the type of *tare* that it uses (Takamori, 2023; Tanaka, 2024). Additionally, *miso* and *shio* styles of ramen are described as two of the four main styles of ramen in case 1 (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024).

3) **Noodles:** Cases 3, 4 and 7–12 discuss the noodle characteristics of various regional ramen styles. While noodles are featured in visual imagery across all the cases, cases 5 and 6, which are both about Toyama black ramen, did not explicitly mention the style's noodle characteristics. This indicates that these cases placed less significance on the characteristics of noodles compared to

the rest of this ramen styles' structural components. Across the cases that discuss noodle characteristics, there are several elements that varied the noodles' characteristics. The first element pertains to the varying thicknesses of the noodles. Modern Hakata ramen are described as having extremely thin noodles according to Tanaka (2024) in case 9. Both Kitakata- and Sapporo-style ramen are described to have thick noodles in cases 3, 4 and 11 (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024; Nogushi, 2023; Takata, 2023a). Onomichi- and Hakodate-style ramen are described to be in between, with medium-thick noodles, in cases 7 and 12 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024; Takata, 2023b). This noodle thickness scale is further elaborated upon in case 12 as Hakodate-style noodles are described to be "somewhere between Sapporo and Hakata" (Takata, 2023b, 4:06).

The next element pertains to the varying shapes of the ramen. Both Kitakata- and Sapporo-style ramen are described as curly in cases 3, 4 and 11 (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024; Nogushi, 2023; Takata, 2023a). Both Onomichi and the original Hakata styles of ramen are described as having flat noodles in cases 7 and 10 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024; Takamori, 2023). Additionally, both Onomichi and the modern Hakata ramen styles of ramen are described as having straight noodles in cases 8 and 9 (Onoda, 2024; Tanaka, 2024).

Both Kitakata and Sapporo ramen were the only styles of ramen that discussed the age of the noodles, as cases 3 and 11 both elaborated on how the noodle aging process made the noodles firmer (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024; Takata, 2023a).

Additionally, case 3 discussed Kitakata ramen noodles having a high hydration level (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024).

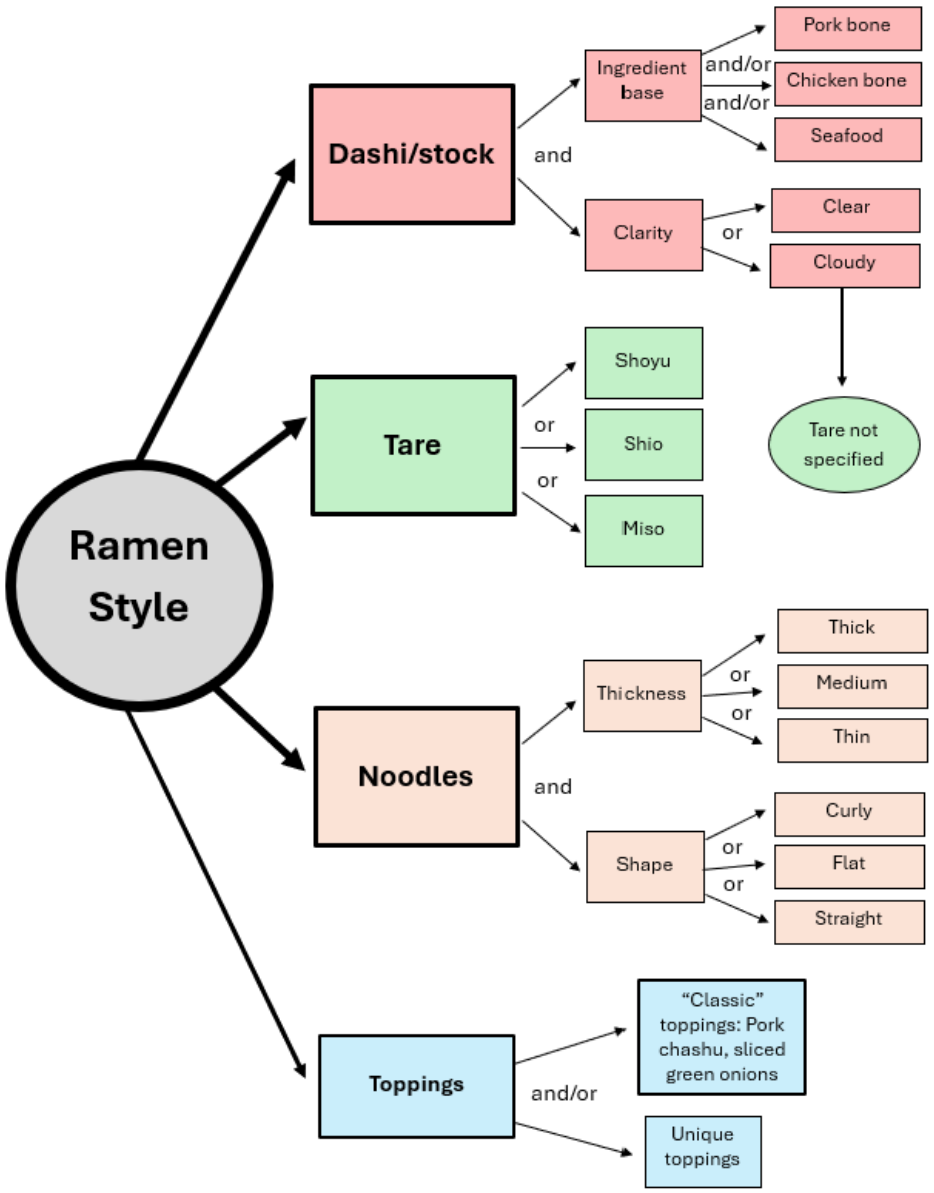
4) **Toppings:** Some of the cases discuss the toppings used in a regional ramen style. While the toppings are visibly identifiable within all the regional ramen cases, only half of the cases explicitly mention the type of toppings that the ramen style uses. The most common toppings that are explicitly mentioned are green onion and pork *chashu* (braised pork), being mentioned in cases 6,

7, and 12 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024; NHK, 2026; Takata, 2023b). The next most common toppings are pickled bamboo shoots, which are explicitly mentioned in cases 7 and 12 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024; Takata, 2023b). The combination of green onion, pork *chashu* and pickled bamboo shoots is alluded to as traditional ramen toppings in cases 7 and 12. Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024), in case 7, mention that these toppings are "classic Japanese ramen ingredients" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 15). While being interviewed by Takata (2023b), in case 12, Oura Yoshiaki mentions how "*chashu* pork, pickled bamboo shoots and sliced spring onions [are] the usual style at old shops" (2023b, 4:20). Both Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024), in case 7, and Onoda (2024), in case 8, agree that a distinctive feature of Onomichi ramen is its usage of pork back fat. Takata (2023a), in case 11, highlights how Sapporo ramen differs from other ramen styles, as the toppings are stir-fried with lard in a wok, opting to use pork mince, and vegetables such as onion, garlic, and bean sprouts. Morohashi and Hayakawa, in case 3, do mention that an adapted version of Kitakata ramen aimed at overseas visitors uses "roasted beef slices, which are made from rare Fukushima Aizu beef" (p. 11).

Theme 1 Discussion

Gastronomic structurisation was identified as a significant overarching theme within *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan*. The findings of the data analysis showed an underlying structure that constructs what ramen is conceptually comprised of. These structural components include *dashi*, *tare*, noodles, and toppings. Additionally, the cases demonstrate the varying nature of these components and how a ramen style is established based upon a unique combination of these components, which is visually represented in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. Ramen style structurisation framework



A unique ramen style forms the basis of regional ramen identity, as the unique characteristic of a regional style is often described so as to differentiate it from other regional styles. Applying Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory, this study posits that this source of differentiation constructs a sense of social identity around each regional ramen style, as the social groups that find membership in a regional ramen style establish an ingroup around it, which can then be differentiated from social outgroups that support other regional styles. Another gastronomic structure that was elaborated upon by Professor Yonemitsu in case 1 constructs the underlying

classification system behind the “main variations” (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 6) of ramen, categorising the dish either by the type of tare its uses if the dashi is clear, or by categorising tonkotsu ramen by its cloudy dashi. These two structural frameworks that socially construct ramen show the differences that lie behind a particular ramen style, and how ramen is generally classified. For example, Sapporo ramen as a ramen style is constructed around a distinct combination of thick and curly noodles, *miso tare*, and stir-fried toppings. However, because it uses a *miso tare* and clear *dashi*, it is classified as *miso* ramen. An additional feature around the classification structure of ramen is identified in case 12. In this case, Takata (2023b) highlights how a Hakodate ramen shop seasons their *shio* ramen with just salt. This reveals that ramen is classified not just by its *tare*, but instead by what it is primarily seasoned with, as salt by itself would not be considered a type of *tare* based upon its definition as a “savoury sauce” by Professor Yonemitsu (2024, p. 7).

The overall structural framework behind ramen, which has been constructed within the cases, projects a similar structure to that described in the literature review, albeit without the aroma oil component, which is emphasised in secondary sources and culinary literature. The cases may have been limited in discussing aroma oil, as the ramen styles that were analysed in this study are not usually distinguished by their aroma oil. For example, within the *Ramen Japan* episode focused on Kumamoto ramen, they explicitly mention how the style can be distinguished by its usage of *mayu* (“magic oil”), which is a distinctive black-coloured, burnt garlic oil (Teramura, 2024).

This indicates that the cases placed more emphasis on the differentiating characteristics of a ramen style, whereas the secondary culinary literature emphasised the overall structure of a ramen style.

5.4 Theme 2: International Audience Connection

Table 6. Cases that identify Theme 2

Contains theme 2: International audience connection											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Theme 2 Overview

International audience connection was a relevant overarching theme within *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan*. The theme pertains to how the cases position their content towards international audiences, which primarily reflects the episodes being produced in English and available to access outside of Japan. The theme is comprised of two subthemes, the first being how the cases appeal to tourists, and the second being how the cases emphasise the global popularity of ramen.

Subtheme 1: International Tourist Appeal

Table 7. Cases that identify Subtheme 1 (Theme 2)

Contains subtheme 1: International tourist appeal											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 1 Overview

International tourist appeal is a recurring subtheme identified within all the cases except for case 6, with the subtheme only being mildly featured within *Ramen Japan* cases. The subtheme pertains to situations in which the cases would target an international tourist audience. This was seen with the promotion of ramen-related tourist attractions or regional tourism incentives, or in tailoring a section towards international tourists. While the subtheme is featured only to a minor degree, it serves to highlight the intended audience of the media.

Kurosawa and Arakawa (2024), in case 2, promote the Cup Noodles Museums found within Ikeda City and Yokohama City, highlighting how the museums showcase the history of instant ramen and how the museum allows for visitors to "create their own unique Cup Noodles" (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024, p. 19).

In case 3, Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024) highlight how some Kitakata ramen shops are accommodating international tourists by displaying English menus on their web pages. The article additionally promotes the Finest Kitakata Ramen Sugoi campaign, which is aimed at international tourists. This campaign surrounds an adapted version of Kitakata-style ramen, which is offered in some ramen shops around Kitakata. The dish was designed to be "a dish that you can't prepare anywhere else but here [in Kitakata city]" (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 11). It features elements such as noodles made from Japanese wheat, and Fukushima Aizu beef slices, and is served in locally crafted lacquered tableware, with tourists provided with chopsticks as a souvenir (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024).

Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), in case 5, promote Toyama black ramen to international tourists. Within the article, Kurihara posits that Toyama was seeing an increase in inbound foreign tourists, who would also visit Toyama ramen shops. Because of this, the Toyama Black Ramen Traditions Association increased its promotion to foreign tourists using social media, while also making English and Chinese menus to share with them. Kurihara then tries to shift the salty perception that Toyama black ramen has received by promoting the point that many shops offer additional soup to dilute the broth, additionally adding that "many people say they find it lightly seasoned when they actually eat it" (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 13). The article also highlights how the flavour of Toyama black ramen can vary amongst the 60 ramen shops in the city, to entice people into visiting multiple ramen shops (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024).

Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024), in case 7, also promote Onomichi ramen by discussing how the broth and noodles vary among Onomichi ramen shops. To entice people to visit multiple shops, they add that "the portions are smaller than other regional ramen, [therefore] you can try to compare multiple bowls from different restaurants" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 15).

In case 9, Tanaka (2024) promotes the food stall culture found within Hakata to international tourists visiting the city. They first promote the foods among which Hakata ramen can be commonly found. The aspect they promote is the overall vibe of the stalls, saying "At night, the lights from the stalls brighten the area, and the cozy setting fosters conversations and interactions with locals, capturing the charm of Hakata" (Tanaka, 2024, p. 17). Additionally, similar to case 5, Tanaka (2024) posits that social media has captured the appeal of Hakata's food stall culture, which has attracted more international tourists to visit the city.

While they do not specifically mention anything about international tourists, in case 12 Takata (2023b) highlights two specific tourist spots within Hakodate. The first tourist spot that is briefly mentioned is the Hakodate morning market, saying that "in search of the freshest ingredients, visitors come here from all over the world" (Takata, 2023b, 0:59). The next focus is the Hakodate *Shio* Ramen Taxi (Takata, 2023b, 2:29), which is a taxi service, found only in Hakodate, that guides people around to different Hakodate ramen shops.

One recurring theme found within all the *Ramen Japan* episodes, except for case 6, is that all the episodes would end with a call to action, saying "Wouldn't you like some yourself? Come pay a visit for the best bowl of ramen you've ever had!" (Nogushi, 2023,14:50; Onoda, 2024,14:47; Takamori, 2023,14:49; Takata, 2023a,14:50, 2023b,14:49).

Subtheme 2: Emphasising the Global Popularity of Ramen

Table 8. Cases that identify Subtheme 2 (Theme 2)

Contains subtheme 2: Emphasising the global popularity of ramen											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 2 Overview

Emphasising the global popularity of ramen is a minor recurring subtheme identified within cases 1, 2 and 9–12. The subtheme pertains to the repeated assertions that ramen is globally popular, normalising the assertion as being taken for granted.

Morohashi and Yonemitsu (2024), in case 1, repeatedly assert the popularity of ramen within their article, stating that the dish is seeing "increasing popularity among visitors to Japan" (p. 6), with "more and more ramen restaurants opening up overseas" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 6). They add that "Japanese ramen has been enjoying widespread popularity even overseas" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 6), further positing later in the article that its popularity is not recent but had instead "gradually increased in worldwide popularity since shortly after 2000" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 9).

In case 2, Kurosawa and Arakawa (2024) focus on the invention of instant ramen, and discuss the rise of instant ramen outside of Japan towards the end of the article. They posit that Momofuku Ando "wanted to spread instant noodles worldwide" (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024, p. 19), so he travelled to Europe and the United States in 1966. The article then discusses how Ando invented Cup Noodles while visiting buyers in the United States, as they would cook the noodles in paper cups and eat them with a fork. These "differences in eating habits were the key to making instant noodles a global food," according to Kurosawa and Arakawa (2024, p. 19), and it has now "crossed cultural barriers to become a delicious and convenient meal worldwide, evolving into a global food staple" (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024, p. 19).

Tanaka (2024), in case 9, briefly touches upon this subtheme by positing that *tonkotsu* ramen has become "one of the most well-known representations of ramen abroad" (Tanaka, 2024, p. 16), as Hakata ramen restaurants have been expanding in different countries across the globe. Takamori (2023), in case 10, posits a similar opinion, saying that "tonkotsu ramen is loved not only in Japan, but all over the world" (Takamori, 2023, 14:40).

Cases 10, 11, and 12 additionally assert the global popularity of ramen at the start of the episode, stating that ramen is “now popular worldwide” (Takamori, 2023, 0:01; Takata, 2023a, 0:01, 2023b, 0:01).

Theme 2 Discussion

International audience connection was a relevant overarching theme within *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan*, primarily due to the content being produced in English and made available to English-speaking countries. This is made apparent in *Highlighting Japan* as, on the magazine’s homepage it is stated to be “an official monthly online magazine to promote understanding of Japan for the people around the world, with a variety of themes” (Public Relations Office Government of Japan, n.d., para. 1). The findings of the data analysis show, in the case of *Highlighting Japan*, that international audience connection was used to promote ramen-related tourism in Japan, often highlighting specific tourism locations and activities across Japan. The cases were clearly positioned towards tourism, as the articles would often interview people who were directly involved in local tourism or were involved with the promotion of a regional ramen style. For example, Naoki Hayakawa worked in “the Kitakata Ramen Section of Kitakata City Hall” (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 10), Kiyoshi Kurihara was “the chairman of the Toyama Black [Ramen] Traditions Association” (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12), Yuriko Takatsuki belonged to the “Onomichi Tourism Association” (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 14), and Nozomi Tanaka interviewed a tourism promoter for Fukuoka city (Tanaka, 2024, p. 16). While *Highlighting Japan* often discussed specific ramen shops or tourist attractions, *Ramen Japan* would not provide the specific names of the ramen shops which were interviewed, often instead opting to name the chefs that worked within those shops. This indicates that the episodes serve to promote visiting the region itself rather than a specific shop or attraction. Overall, this demonstrates that these articles are strategically oriented towards an international audience.

In conjunction with this international orientation, the data analysis also identifies a minor subtheme that constructs ramen as a global dish by repeatedly emphasising its global, widespread popularity. Barthes’ (1957/1972) theory of mythology indicates

that naturalising social constructs as common sense eventually establishes a sense of objective truth for claims. Therefore, by socially constructing ramen as a global food, the content serves to naturalise the appeal of ramen to those who have not tried the dish, lowering the barrier of entry for international audiences who are hesitant about trying the dish.

5.5 Theme 3: Constructing a National Food Identity Around Ramen

Table 9. Cases that identify Theme 3

Contains theme 3 Constructing a national food identity around ramen											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

Theme 3 Overview

The cases in *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan* establish an overarching theme that pertains to the construction of a national food identity around ramen. The theme reflects the construction of a national food identity around ramen which is achieved by branding the dish at the national Japanese level, naturalising slurping as a Japanese cultural practice, and by historically connecting the invention of instant ramen to post-war Japan.

Subtheme 1: Branding Ramen at the National Japanese Level

Table 10. Cases that identify Subtheme 1 (Theme 3)

Contains subtheme 1: Branding Ramen at The National Japanese Level											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 1 Overview

Branding ramen at the national Japanese level is a recurring subtheme identified within cases 1, 2, 4, 7, 8 and 10–12. The subtheme is featured more predominantly within *Ramen Japan* episodes. It pertains to how the cases brand ramen at the national Japanese level, primarily highlighting it through national culinary symbolism and repeated assertions of the national popularity of the dish.

Morohashi and Yonemitsu (2024), in case 1, allude multiple times in their article to ramen as a national food in Japan. This is apparent within the second-to-last section of the article, as Professor Yonemitsu projects ramen as Japanese, stating that "we can certainly expect the Japanese dish of ramen to continue becoming more widespread around the world" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 9). Another notable aspect of national identity branding can be seen in the previous section, as Professor Yonemitsu implies that ramen is more authentic if it is made by Japanese people, as they state that "There were already Japanese ramen restaurants around when I was in Europe in the early 2000s. These restaurants, however, tended to have local management, rather than Japanese" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 9). The article also highlights the prevalence of ramen in Japan, discussing how the dish is found in regions across the country, with "around 18,000 ramen restaurants" in Japan (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 6). Additionally, the statement "Japanese ramen" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 6, 7, 9) can be found in the article six times, reinforcing the Japanese national status of the dish.

In case 2, Kurosawa and Arakawa (2024) highlight the national significance of instant ramen as a Japanese cultural export with global popularity, saying that "Instant noodles, born in Japan, have crossed cultural barriers to become a delicious and convenient meal enjoyed worldwide, evolving into a global food staple" (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024, p. 19). The article also states that instant ramen has become an aspect of Japanese food culture in saying that Momofuku Ando, who is credited as the inventor of instant ramen, "dedicated his life to creating a new aspect of Japanese food culture" (Kurosawa & Arakawa, 2024, p. 18).

Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), in case 5, highlight the popularity of Toyama black ramen as a nationally popular regional style of ramen within Japan. This is indicated twice within the article, the first instance stating that “this local ramen [Toyama black ramen] is one of the more popular among ramen lovers across Japan” (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12), and “Toyama Black Ramen is one of the most popular among Japan’s many local ramen varieties” (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12).

In case 7, Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) explicitly mention how ramen is found across Japan by mentioning how Onomichi ramen could be found “in the 1930s, when ramen was just beginning to spread throughout Japan” (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 14). Additionally, the article mentions how Onomichi ramen became known nationwide after the release of a souvenir version of Onomichi ramen in the 1990s, stating that its release “led to the Onomichi Ramen name becoming well-known throughout the country” (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 15).

All the *Ramen Japan* cases, except for case 6, use national culinary symbolism to highlight the national significance of ramen in Japan, saying “Welcome to Japan, the land of ramen!” (Nogushi, 2023, 0:24; Onoda, 2024, 0:22; Takamori, 2023, 0:24; Takata, 2023a, 0:22, 2023b, 0:23). Additionally, in cases 10, 11 and 12, the presenters refer to ramen as a “Japanese staple” (Takamori, 2023, 0:01; Takata, 2023a,0:01, 2023b, 0:01), which is popular across the country, with each region having its own variations of the dish (Takamori, 2023; Takata, 2023a, 2023b).

Nogushi (2023), in case 4, additionally highlights the popularity of Kitakata-style ramen as a regional ramen style within Japan, stating that “customers from all over the country are eager for a taste [of Kitakata ramen]” (Nogushi, 2023, 1:10) or that “people come from all over Japan to sample Kitakata ramen” (Nogushi, 2023, 5:04).

Subtheme 2: Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice

Table 11. Cases that identify Subtheme 2 (Theme 3)

Contains subtheme 2: Normalisation of slurping as a Japanese eating practice											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 2 Overview

The normalisation of slurping as a Japanese eating practice is a minor recurring subtheme identified within cases 1, 4, 6, 8 and 10–12. The subtheme pertains to how the cases would normalise slurping as a common eating practice within Japan. This subtheme was primarily identified in *Ramen Japan* episodes, as the episodes would frequently feature loud slurping sounds in the background when people were eating ramen. The purpose of slurping is also elaborated upon in the final section of case 1, where Morohashi and Yonemitsu (2024) posit that there is a "slurping culture" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 9) within Japan, which is unlike many Western food cultures, where "slurping up noodles has been considered bad manners" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 9). Morohashi and Yonemitsu (2024) then recommend people to slurp their ramen as "the delicious flavour of the dish really spreads in your mouth" (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024, p. 9).

The other cases do not elaborate upon the act of slurping; however, slurping sounds are frequently heard within all the *Ramen Japan* episodes, especially when they cut to interviewing customers dining at ramen shops.

Nogushi (2023), in case 4, records slurping noises six times within the episode; they can be heard at 0:19, 1:19, 1:25, 4:44, 6:54, and 7:24 (Nogushi, 2023).

The NHK (2026), in case 6, records slurping noises four times within the episode; they can be heard at 1:56, 2:09, 2:30, and 4:36 (NHK, 2026).

Onoda (2024), in case 8, records slurping noises six times within the episode; they can be heard at 0:10, 9:00, 9:49, 14:35, 14:38, and 14:42 (Onoda, 2024).

Takamori (2023), in case 10, records slurping noises three times within the episode; they can be heard at 0:20, 12:12, and 12:30 (Takamori, 2023).

Takata (2023a), in case 11, records slurping noises nine times within the episode; they can be heard at 0:19, 1:35, 2:02, 2:33, 2:38, 4:12, 4:17, 13:11 and 14:22 (Takata, 2023a).

Takata (2023b), in case 12, records slurping noises 3 times within the episode; they can be heard at 0:19, 1:37, and 4:41 (Takata, 2023b).

By recording slurping sounds within all the various regional ramen episodes, *Ramen Japan* portrays a sense of normality around slurping, not just within a specific region but across Japan.

Subtheme 3: Historically Connecting the Invention of Instant Ramen to Post-war Japan

Table 12. Cases that identify Subtheme 3 (Theme 3)

Contains subtheme 3: Historically connects the invention of instant ramen to postwar Japan											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Subtheme 3 Overview

Historically connecting the invention of instant ramen to post-war Japan is a minor subtheme that is exclusively present in case 2. Case 2 is an outlying case, as it primarily focuses on the invention of instant ramen, rather than a regional style of ramen. While the case primarily focuses on Momofuku Ando, it also uses instant ramen as an instrument to explore the historic post-war environment of Japan.

Kurosawa and Arakawa (2024), in case 2, focus on the post-war environment of Japan and how it set the stage for Momofuku Ando to invent instant ramen. The article first outlines the widespread food scarcity within Japan after WWII, stating that “the streets were filled with hungry people, and countless numbers collapsed from

malnutrition" (p. 18). Kurosawa and Arakawa (2024) posit that the motivating factors behind Momofuku Ando's invention of instant ramen were witnessing mass hunger within Japan, and seeing a long line of people lining up for ramen at a black market near Osaka station. According to the article, Ando then set out to develop ramen that was "capable of long-term storage" (p. 18) and would be "quick and easy to produce" (p. 18). They then state that after instant ramen was released in August 1958, it became "an immense hit in Japan" (p. 19).

Theme 3 Discussion

The cases in *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan* socially construct ramen as a national food in Japan, primarily by branding the dish at a national level. The cases do this in a similar fashion to the way the international audience connection is constructed Theme 2, as the cases repeatedly emphasise the commonality and popularity of ramen within Japan, which naturalises a national representation of ramen.

Another aspect of the construction of ramen as a national food is identified when applying Appadurai's (1988) theory of national cuisine construction. Appadurai (1988) asserts that one method for constructing a national cuisine is by subjectively grouping foods together to unify them on a national level. Ramen in this respect can be viewed as categorisation of food, rather than one specific dish, as ramen can vary significantly across the country. By grouping ramen based upon a combination of *dashi*, *tare*, noodles, and toppings, the cases can group these varied styles under the title of 'ramen'.

An additional aspect of constructing a national cuisine that is asserted by Appadurai (1988) is the standardisation of different regional variations of a dish. This is significantly highlighted in the cases, as most of them cover different regional styles of ramen in depth, which effectively maps out ramen across the national territory of Japan.

Based upon the representation of ramen within the cases, it can be surmised that both *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan* socially construct ramen as a national food

within Japan, as it is representative of Laudan's (2013) definition of a national cuisine (also discussed in section 3.4), which states that:

> A national cuisine is usually thought to be one which is familiar to all citizens, eaten by all of them, at least on occasion, and found across the entire national territory, perhaps with regional variations. It is assumed to have a long continuous history and to reflect and contribute to the national character. (p. 380)

While ramen is constructed as a national food in these cases, it is important to distinguish that it is framed as a *kokuminshoku* dish. *Kokuminshoku,* which Eric C. Rath (2016) translates as "national people's cuisine" (p. 10), was originally conceptualised in 1940 by the Imperial Japanese Government to define a Japanese national cuisine. Rath (2016) posits that *kokuminshoku* served to create a standardised diet during wartime rationing, while also constructing a positive narrative around it. While this diet proved to be unsustainable, it ultimately gained a new meaning in the modern day, with it now referring to inexpensive, nationally loved foods that have foreign origins (Rath, 2016). The cases portray ramen with this modern redefinition, as cases 3, 4, 7, and 12 discuss the influence that Chinese migrants had on the origins and early history of ramen.

The cases additionally construct a national food identity around ramen through historical storytelling. This is strongly identifiable in case 2, as it narratively links the invention of instant ramen to the post-war historical conditions of Japan, resembling similar points made in the literature review.

Finally, the cases construct a national food identity around ramen through the act of slurping. Loud slurping noises are made apparent across all the analysed regional ramen episodes of *Ramen Japan*, often playing when local Japanese customers are eating a bowl of ramen. By demonstrating the commonality of slurping across various regions in Japan, the cases brand slurping as a national Japanese practice when eating ramen.

5.6 Theme 4: Constructing a Sense of Regional Ramen Identity

Table 13. Cases that identify Theme 4

Contains theme 4: Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Theme 4 Overview

Cases in *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan* establish an overarching theme that pertains to constructing a sense of regional ramen identity. The theme reflects the construction of various regional ramen identities by highlighting the distinctiveness of the region's respective ramen style, establishing groups around the regional ramen style, connecting the style to history, and regional branding, and through positive identity building.

Subtheme 1: Group Formation Around Regional Ramen Style

Table 14. Cases that identify Subtheme 1 (Theme 4)

Contains subtheme 1: Group formation around regional ramen style											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X

Subtheme 1 Overview

Group formation around regional ramen style is a minor recurring subtheme that was sometimes identified within regional ramen cases, featured in cases 3–5 and case 7. The subtheme pertains to how cases would explain how a regional ramen style became collectivised within a group. This subtheme, although minor, helps explain how a ramen style spread within a region, rather than staying as a style specific to a small number of shops.

Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024), in case 3, posit that the spread of Kitakata ramen was influenced by the style's original creator being open about his noodle and broth recipe. This growth started after WWII with two shops, expanding to around 90 shops in the modern day (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024).

Nogushi (2023), in case 4, notes that the 90 Kitakata style ramen shops found in the modern day are joined together as a part of the Kitakata Ramen Association (Nogushi, 2023, 2:14). This association was formed in 1987 by Tomiyama Shoji to unite rival shops during a ramen tourism boom within the city (Nogushi, 2023).

In case 5, Morohashi and Kurihara (2024) posit that Toyama black ramen shops rapidly increased in popularity, after (according to legend) "1,000 people lined up for it [Toyama black ramen] at a local festival" (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12). They add that Kurihara is a part of the "Toyama Black Ramen Traditions Association" (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 13) which came together to "promote Toyama Black Ramen as a local brand" (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 13).

In case 7, Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) suggest that Onomichi ramen spread following the end of WWII, as the city's shipbuilding industry declined. Many ramen stalls were established in Onomichi during this period, with a ramen style created by Zhu Ajun becoming popular within the city. Eventually, other Onomichi ramen shops adopted the style created by Ajun, establishing Onomichi-style ramen.

Subtheme 2: Distinctiveness of Regional Ramen Style

Table 15. Cases that identify Subtheme 2 (Theme 4)

Contains subtheme 2: Distinctiveness of regional ramen style											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 2 Overview

The distinctiveness of regional ramen styles is a recurring subtheme identified within the regional ramen cases featured in case 1 and cases 3–12. The subtheme pertains

to how the cases emphasise how a regional ramen style is distinctly different to other styles. Each regional ramen style is structured; however, one prevailing pattern that was identified is that cases centre on one or two structural components. By centring on one or two components, a regional ramen style is portrayed as being more distinct, as the characteristics of its other structural components would often overlap with other regional ramen styles. The structural elements that each regional ramen case centres on can be seen in Table 16, below.

Table 16. Outline of the distinctive elements of a regional ramen style

Distinctive regional ramen element emphasised in cases		
Case number	**Regional style**	**Distinctive element/s**
3 (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024)	**Kitakata**	**Noodles:** Aged, thick, curly noodles
4 (Nogushi, 2023)	**Kitakata**	**Noodles:** Thick, curly, noodles (hand-kneaded)
5 (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024)	**Toyama black**	**Tare:** Black shoyu tare
6 (NHK, 2026)	**Toyama black**	**Tare:** Black shoyu tare
7 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024)	**Onomichi (modern)**	**Topping:** Pork backfat **Dashi/stock:** Seafood broth
8 (Onoda, 2024)	**Onomichi**	**Topping:** Pork backfat
9 (Tanaka, 2024)	**Hakata *tonkotsu* (modern)**	**Dashi/stock:** While, cloudy, pork bone-based soup **Noodles:** Extremely thin noodles
10 (Takamori, 2023)	**Hakata *tonkotsu* (original)**	**Dashi/stock:** pork bone based, less cloudy than modern style **Noodles:** Flat noodles
11 (Takata, 2023a)	**Sapporo *miso***	**Tare:** Miso tare **Noodles:** Aged, thick, curly noodles
12 (Takata, 2023b)	**Hakodate *shio***	**Tare:** Shio base **Dashi/stock:** Extremely clear soup

Cases 3 and 4 posit that the most distinctive element of Kitakata ramen is its thick, curly noodles (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024; Nogushi, 2023). While both cases describe the distinctive characteristics of the noodles, Nogushi (2023) further highlights the curly characteristics of the noodles in an interview with Soga Takashi, who works at a Kitakata noodle manufacturer. Takashi highlights that Kitakata noodles are more than just curly, they are "the right kind of curly" (Nogushi, 2023, 3:13). This is achieved by gently kneading the noodles at the right pressure, after the noodles are formed and curled by the machine, to create an irregular texture (Nogushi, 2023).

Cases 5 and 6 posit that the most distinctive element of Toyama black ramen is its "black" *shoyu* base (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024; NHK, 2026). Both cases emphasise its vivid, black colouring; however, the two cases differ in how they emphasise it. Morohashi and Kurihara (2024) are more straightforward, stating that its black colouring is from simmering soy sauce over a long period of time, to provide manual workers with more salt following WWII. The NHK (2026) episode visually reflects the darkness of the soup instead, by first dipping a spoon into the soup, to show how opaque it is. They then show how the noodles change colour from white to black after being added to the soup.

Cases 7 and 8 suggest that Onomichi ramen is known in particular for using a generous amount of simmered pork back fat as a ramen topping (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024; Onoda, 2024). Onoda (2024) further highlights how one shop finds it important to use high-quality pork back fat, with the owner Sunamura Nozomu saying that it "has a more mellow flavor" (2024, 9:44). Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) additionally add that Onomichi ramen is also known in the modern day for its seafood broth that is made with small fish found in the local Seto Inland Sea.

Cases 9 and 10 analyse two different versions of Hakata ramen, with Tanaka (2024) analysing the modern style of Hakata ramen, whereas Takamori (2023) analyses the original style of Hakata ramen. Tanaka (2024) notes that Hakata ramen is known today for having a cloudy, white, *tonkotsu* soup combined with extremely thin noodles. Takamori (2023) contrasts this by highlighting that the dish was originally

known for having a less cloudy, *tonkotsu* soup, combined with thicker, broad, flat noodles.

Takata (2023a), in case 11, focuses on the *miso tare* in combination with thick curly noodles, as the "dashi ingredients vary from shop to shop" (Takata, 2023a, 3:35). The article highlights the importance of *miso* within Sapporo ramen, which is reflected in saying that "the city of Sapporo is synonymous with *miso* ramen"(9:39). The article also covers the importance of *miso* in Japanese cooking, and how Morito Omiya created *miso*-style ramen in Sapporo. Takata also emphasises the importance of the noodles, covering the origins of how Takayuki Nishiyama developed the thick, curly noodles the style is known for today, saying that they are "the perfect noodles for all that *miso* flavour" (Takata, 2023a, 3:56).

Takata (2023b), in case 12, highlights all the structural characteristics of Hakodate-style ramen. However, Takata (2023b) particularly focuses on the style's salt seasoning and extremely clear dashi, saying that Hakodate ramen "means salt, or '*shio*' style!" (1:15), which "has to be clear, never cloudy" (1:56).

The second element surrounding this subtheme that was identified in cases 3, 4, 6 and 9 was that the regional ramen style is associated with a unique eating practice. Both Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024), in case 3, and Nogushi (2023), in case 4, posit that Kitakata is known for its morning ramen culture.

NHK (2026), in case 6, emphasises the importance of rice in Toyama, and how it is common practice to order a bowl of rice alongside ramen, even going as far as to say that the ramen was just a side dish for rice.

For Tanaka (2024), in case 9, a distinctive feature of Hakata ramen is the way it is ordered, as locals often choose how firm they want their noodles to be cooked. Using the local regional dialect, people can choose their noodles to be "bari-kata (extra firm), kata (firm), and yawa (soft)" (Tanaka, 2024, p. 17).

Other miscellaneous elements are also used to make a regional style appear more distinctive. For example, NHK (2026), in case 6, states that Toyama ramen shops are known for their big portion sizes; on the other hand, Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024),

in case 7, say that many Onomichi ramen shops are known for smaller portion sizes. Takata (2023a), in case 11, says that Sapporo *miso* ramen is known for its unique cooking method, as chefs in the region often cook their ramen in a wok.

Subtheme 3: Positive Identity Building

Table 17. Cases that identify Subtheme 3 (Theme 4)

Contains subtheme 3: Positive Identity Building											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 3 Overview

Positive identity building is a recurring subtheme identified within regional ramen cases and featured in cases 3–8 and cases 10–12. The subtheme pertains to how the cases build a positive identity around a regional ramen style. Some of the common patterns identified within this subtheme include cases often emphasising how popular a regional style is with locals or tourists, highlighting the artisanal aspects behind making the ramen style, or highlighting the taste profile of the style.

Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024) approach this subtheme in case 3 by discussing Kitakata ramen's nationwide reputation as one of the " 'Three Great Ramen' along with the ramen of Sapporo and Hakata" (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 10).

Nogushi (2023), in case 4, also allude to Kitakata ramen being one of the three great ramen styles, saying that it is a town that is synonymous with ramen "alongside Hakata and its *tonkotsu*, and Sapporo, with its *miso* ramen" (Nogushi, 2023, 0:30). The episode also highlights the craftsmanship behind the production of Kitakata-style noodles at a local noodle manufacturer, with one worker saying "it's hard to do right" (Nogushi, 2023, 3:44) due to all the considerations that need to be made, and that every portion of noodle "has to be delicious" (Nogushi, 2023, 4:00). Another feature seen in all the *Ramen Japan* episodes is that they interview customers who are eating at regional ramen shops. In this episode, some of the customers comment that Kitakata ramen was "delicious" (Nogushi, 2023, 1:22), "simply delicious"

(Nogushi, 2023, 5:02), or that it was “actually better in the morning” (Nogushi, 2023, 1:26) in relation to Kitakata morning ramen culture.

Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), in case 5, emphasise the positive results that Toyama black ramen has had at local festivals and events. Towards the start of the article, they discuss a local legend which bolstered the style’s popularity, stating that a ramen stall selling Toyama black ramen supposedly had “1,000 people lined up for it at a local festival” (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12). They additionally describe its success at the Tokyo Ramen Show, with a local shop named Ramen Iroha winning first prize in 2009, then achieving the best sales at the show five times following on from this (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024).

In case 6, NHK (2026) highlights the pairing between Toyama black ramen and rice. The episode describes the characteristics of Toyama black ramen appealingly, stating that “the black salty soup, thick cut onions and voluminous chashu pork make this dish a perfect pairing with rice” (NHK, 2026, 2:23). This pairing is further supported within the episode with an interaction with a customer who said that “the combo of ramen and rice might be the best thing ever!” (NHK, 2026, 2:15).

In case 7, Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) promote Onomichi ramen as a “local specialty” (p. 14), which is “loved by the locals” (p. 15). One aspect of Onomichi ramen that is highlighted by Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) is its usage of local seafood, noting that “many restaurants have put special effort into the seafood used for the broth” (p. 15). They add that Onomichi ramen has a “nostalgic flavor” (p. 15) which “makes you want to keep sipping the broth” (p. 15).

Onoda (2024), in case 8, highlights the local pride that Onomichi residents have for Onomichi-style ramen. One interviewed customer had been coming to a local Onomichi ramen shop weekly for over 50 years. According to them, they would bring their “children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren” (Onoda, 2024, 11:58) to the ramen shop to get a “real taste of Onomichi ramen” (Onoda, 2024, 12:11). Another point of pride is the style’s usage of pork backfat, which one customer highlighted, saying that “it’s not too fatty, and the soup stays warm till the last bite” (Onoda, 2024, 10:05).

Comments by Takamori (2023), in case 10, relate to this subtheme to some extent, first in emphasising the quick uptake of Hakata-style ramen, stating that "its popularity spread in the blink of an eye" (Takamori, 2023, 11:02). The episode also conveys the appeal of the original style of Hakata ramen compared to the modern, heavier style of Hakata ramen that is known today. Takamori (2023) highlights this by interviewing a customer, who says that "it's not too greasy, light and tasty" (12:32).

In case 11, Takata (2023a) highlights multiple different aspects of Sapporo ramen that relate to this subtheme. The first aspect that is identified is the way the dish is conveyed as a comfort food for people in Sapporo. Towards the start of the episode, Takata (2023a) highlights the snowy, cold climate of Sapporo and how a hot bowl of *miso* ramen provides comfort in these temperatures. This perspective is then supported with an interview with a local customer, saying "I've eaten it since I was a kid. When it's hot, I sweat it out. When it's cold, it warms me up" (Takata, 2023a, 2:34). Takata (2023a) then conveys the appealing aspects of the dish, first highlighting the taste of the dish, which is described as an "umami explosion" (Takata, 2023a, 3:40), and as "rich and filling, perfect for lunch" (Takata, 2023a, 4:17) by an interviewed customer. During the episode, Takata (2023a) interviews Hideo Omiya, the son and second-generation successor of Morito Omiya, who created the dish. Hideo posits that the usage of *miso* in ramen was not just for its appeal as a seasoning but also for nutritional appeal, saying "*miso* is not just a great seasoning, it's also nutritious" (Takata, 2023a, 6:11). Additionally, Hideo posits that with the addition of vegetables such as bean sprouts, onions and garlic, along with ground meat, the dish provided "all the nutrition the body needs to keep on living" (Takata, 2023a, 6:45).

The final aspect of this subtheme that is conveyed is that the dish went through rigorous research and development before it was established. This is highlighted in the discussion about the development of Sapporo-style ramen noodles, as it emphasises the amount of trial and error that went into it. This is seen in quotes such as "they tried 100s, even 1,000s of versions [of noodle recipes]" (Takata, 2023a, 8:52), and that "the pair spent six years perfecting their creation" (Takata, 2023a, 9:14).

Takata (2023b), in case 12, highlights the craftmanship behind making Hakodate-style ramen, which is particularly focused on the effort and time required to make the soup as clear as possible. This is conveyed within the episode when interviewing ramen shop owner Yumiko Oura, who emphasises the importance of regularly skimming the dashi stock for its clarity. According to Yumiko, it is "the most time-consuming step" (Takata, 2023b, 3:19) and that she would be regularly skimming "from 7:00 am until closing time" (Takata, 2023b, 3:19).

Subtheme 4: Regional Branding

Table 18. Cases that identify Subtheme 4 (Theme 4)

Contains subtheme 4: Regional branding											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 4 Overview

Regional branding is a recurring subtheme identified within regional ramen cases, featured in cases 3–12. The subtheme pertains to how the cases describe the regions that each regional ramen style is a part of. Cases often first describe where the region is within Japan and then describe points of interest about the region, many of which would be tied to the overall character of the regional ramen style. The way in which each case approached this subtheme can be seen in Table 19, below.

Table 19. Outline of how the cases used regional branding

Case number	Regional style	Geographical description	Regional points of interest
3 (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024)	**Kitakata**	"Kitakata City in Fukushima Prefecture, in the Tohoku region of Japan" (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 10).	Identity: Ramen town Environment: Local supersoft water
4 (Nogushi, 2023)	**Kitakata**	Kitakata city is located in Fukushima prefecture, lying "50km southwest of the prefectural capital" (Nogushi, 2023, 0:44).	Identity: Ramen town Atmosphere: Quiet town
5 (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024)	**Toyama black**	"Toyama Prefecture is located in north-central Honshu Island, facing the Sea of Japan" (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12).	Attempting to get Toyama Black Ramen to be officially recognised by the prefectural government
6 (NHK, 2026)	**Toyama black**	"Toyama lies on the coast of central Japan"(NHK, 2026, 0:08).	Industry: Rice farming
7 (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024)	**Onomichi**	"Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture, is a warm climate port town facing the Seto Inland Sea" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 14). "Located about 80 kilometers east of Hiroshima City" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 14).	Industry: Shipbuilding Environment: Warm climate and The Seto Inland Sea
8 (Onoda, 2024)	**Onomichi**	"Hiroshima Prefecture in western Japan" (Onoda, 2024, 0:30). "About 90 kilometers from Hiroshima [city], [lies] the town of Onomichi" (Onoda, 2024, 8:24).	Industry: Shipbuilding Atmosphere: Old-time feel
9 (Tanaka, 2024)	**Hakata *tonkotsu***	"Kyushu, in the southwest of the Japanese archipelago, is home to Fukuoka Prefecture" (Tanaka, 2024, p. 16). Fukuoka city is the central city of Fukuoka prefecture. Hakata is a district of Fukuoka city, located to the right of the Nakagawa River.	Industry: Commerce and transportation hub (Fukuoka city) Culture: Food stall culture
10 (Takamori, 2023)	**Hakata *tonkotsu***	"For tonkotsu [ramen], Fukuoka is the place" (Takamori, 2023, 0:34). "Hakata, central Fukuoka City" (Takamori, 2023, 9:54).	Culture: Food stall culture
11 (Takata, 2023a)	**Sapporo *miso***	Sapporo city, is located on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido.	Climate: Cold snowy climate Identity: Miso ramen city
12 (Takata, 2023b)	**Hakodate *shio***	Hakodate is a port city located in southern Hokkaido	Culture: Morning market culture Culture: International character

Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024), in case 3, frame Kitakata as being "known as a ramen town" (p. 10). They further emphasise this branding in the article by highlighting how Kitakata is known for serving one of the "Three Great Ramen" (p. 10) alongside the Sapporo and Hakata styles of ramen. The article additionally emphasises how the very soft local water plays a significant role in the taste of the ramen, with explicit mention of how the water "was selected as one of the 100 'Famous Waters of the Heisei Period' " (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 11).

In case 4, Nogushi (2023) also highlights how Kitakata is characterised as a ramen town, saying that it is a "town synonymous with ramen" (0:39). They additionally link Kitakata's ramen town branding to Shoji Tomiyama, saying that he was one of "the first to link Kitakata with ramen in the public mind" (5:46). Nogushi (2023) additionally characterises Kitakata as having a small-town atmosphere, framing it as a "quiet town, home to around 40,000 residents" (0:49).

Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), in case 5, take a different approach, as the article does not characterise Toyama, but instead tries to characterise the prefecture by branding its local Toyama black ramen. Within the article, Kurihara posits that members of the Toyama Black Ramen Traditions Association were trying "to get Toyama Black Ramen officially recognised by the prefectural government" (p. 13) to "promote Toyama Black Ramen as a local brand" (p. 13).

In case 6, NHK (2026) characterises Toyama around its rice farming industry, which is a prevalent theme throughout the episode. Towards the beginning of the episode, it is stated that "Toyama is famous for producing Japan's staple grain of rice" (0:14), which is shown by highlighting that over 90% of its farmland is used for rice paddies. This regional branding is then highlighted within the episode to strengthen the local character of Toyama black ramen and to explain why people eat Toyama black ramen with rice.

In case 7, Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) primarily highlight the local environment of Onomichi. They first highlight the climate, saying that the city produces "many specialty products that thrive in the warm climate" (p. 14). They then highlight the surrounding Seto Inland Sea, and how it "fosters an abundance of phytoplankton,

which in turn supports zooplankton and small fish" (p. 15) due to the shallow depths and warm climate. They also highlight how Onomichi was known formerly for its shipbuilding industry before WWII.

Onoda (2024), in case 8, also refers to Onomichi having a reputation for shipbuilding, stating that it "has long had a thriving shipbuilding industry" (8:24). They additionally highlight the atmosphere of Onomichi, saying that it has an "old-time feel" (8:35).

Tanaka (2024), in case 9, primarily associates the Hakata district with its food stall culture, stating that "one of the highlights of staying in Hakata is experiencing its yatai (food stall) culture (p. 17). Tanaka (2024) additionally highlights how the wider city of Fukuoka is known for being a "key transportation hub but also as a centre of commerce" (p. 16).

Takamori (2023), in case 10, briefly covers this subtheme in highlighting the food stall culture within Hakata.

In case 11, Takata (2023a) highlights the cold climate of Sapporo, saying that the temperature of the city is "regularly below freezing" (0:59), and that winter is "bitter cold" (1:04). Additionally, Takata (2023a) highlights how *miso* ramen has become an ingrained part of Sapporo identity. This can be seen in statements such as "the city of Sapporo is synonymous with *miso* ramen" (9:39), or in an interview with a teacher who says that "Sapporo is known for ramen; it's something everybody eats, so we use it to teach about society" (11:29).

In case 12, Takata (2023b) highlights how Hakodate has developed an "international character" (5:14), as the city gained a diverse population over time, due to multiple nations opening consulates within the city when it first opened to trade in 1859. Takata (2023b) additionally highlights the city's morning market, which gets visitors from all over the world "in search of the freshest ingredients" (0:54).

Subtheme 5: Historical Connection to Regional Ramen

Table 20. Cases that identify Subtheme 5 (Theme 4)

Contains subtheme 5: Historical connection to regional ramen											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Subtheme 5 Overview

Historical connection to regional ramen is a recurring subtheme identified within regional ramen cases, featured in cases 3–12. The subtheme pertains to the overall historical storytelling that the cases utilised to ground a regional ramen style's identity. Cases would often highlight the origins of the regional style, and the broader historical context that enabled its rise in popularity.

Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024), in case 3, and Nogushi (2023), in case 4, both described a similar origin story behind Kitakata style ramen. Both cases attribute the creation of Kitakata ramen to Chinese immigrant Pan Qinxing (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 10) also Romanised as Ban Kinsei (Nogushi, 2023, 4:22). Nogushi (2023) posits that Ban Kinsei left China in 1925 looking for employment, and eventually started selling Chinese noodle dishes made with handmade curly noodles in order to survive. Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024) support this by saying that Ban Kinsei started selling *Shina soba* at a *yatai* (food stall) around 1927. The dish eventually spread, according to Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024), as his publicly available recipe was shared within Kitakata.

Additionally, Nogushi (2023) also discusses the history of Kitakata City Hall worker Tomiyama Shoji, who was "probably one of the first to give ramen a regional identity" (5:55). In 1983, Tomiyama was trying to boost tourism in Kitakata, so he wrote about the local ramen found in Kitakata and promoted it in a feature article in a travel magazine. This significantly boosted visitor numbers in Kitakata, as annual visitor numbers quadrupled, going from 50,000 to 200,000 following the release of the magazine article. Tomiyama also made maps outlining local Kitakata ramen shops.

These maps further promoted the dish, as indicated by the maps quickly running out of 60,000 copies. Tomiyama also helped form the Kitakata Ramen Association in 1987, which united ramen shops across Kitakata city, helping to formalise the Kitakata ramen style as a whole (Nogushi, 2023).

Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), in case 5, and the NHK (2026), in case 6, discuss a similar origin story for Toyama black ramen. Both cases posit that the style was created shortly after WWII, around 1947, with Morohashi and Kurihara (2024) attributing its creation to the restaurant Nishicho Taiki. Reportedly, the style originated due to a demand for more salt. According to Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), Nishicho Taiki would make their ramen saltier by simmering soy sauce until thick, creating a noticeably darker and saltier ramen soup. Both cases primarily attribute this demand for salt to construction workers, as the city of Toyama was being reconstructed due to being burnt down after the U.S. “dropped over 5000 incendiary bombs on the city centre” (NHK, 2026, 4:14) in August 1945 (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024; NHK, 2026).

Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024), in case 7, and Onoda (2024), in case 8, provide two different historical origin stories around Onomichi-style ramen. Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) trace the origins of Onomichi ramen back to 1930. At this time, Onomichi was drastically different from how it is today. The article elaborates that just before and during WWII, there were many people coming from China to work in the Onomichi shipbuilding industry. Following the war, the city saw many new Chinese food stalls open, as its shipbuilding industry declined. Zhu Arjun, who operated one of these stalls, is attributed as a forerunner to Onomichi-style ramen through their use of pork backfat as a topping along with the usage of a *shoyu tare* and flat noodles, with the dish being created around 1947. Onoda (2024), on the other hand, attributes its creation to Danjo Masayoshi; however, the episode does not state any exact date for this. The episode tends to link the dish to the historic post-war environment of Japan. For example, within the episode, Onoda (2024) interviews Syunko Masayoshi, daughter of Danjo Masayoshi. For Syunko, the addition of pork backfat was linked to extreme food scarcity of the time. Onoda (2024) also interviews Nii Hiroaki, who is a second-generation owner of a long-standing

Onomichi ramen shop founded in 1948. Hiroaki tells the miraculous story of how his father came to be a ramen shop owner, stating that his father only narrowly survived the bombing of Hiroshima, as he was away on business in Onomichi at the time. Hiroaki states that while his father was "lucky to survive" (13:48), his father ultimately started selling in order to feed his family (Onoda, 2024).

Tanaka (2024), in case 9, provides an extremely brief history of Hakata *tonkotsu* ramen, whereas Takamori (2023), in case 10, goes more in depth about the origins of Hakata *tonkotsu* ramen. Tanaka (2024) posits that *tonkotsu* ramen was created in Kurume city and then spread around Kyushu, developing into unique regional variations. Tanaka (2024) traces the creation of Hakata ramen to 1946, with it being originally known for having a less cloudy broth and using flat noodles compared to how it is known today. The shift to thin noodles was apparently influenced by Nagahama ramen.

Takamori (2023) dates the origin of Hakata ramen to around 1940, attributing its creation to Mori Kentaro. Similar to Tanaka (2024), Takamori (2023) also states that Hakata ramen was originally less cloudy and used flat noodles. Takamori (2023) posits that the dish originated as a re-creation of the chicken noodle soup dishes that Mori ate in Shanghai. However, chicken was difficult to source at the time, so Mori instead turned to pork bones, which were being thrown out in large quantities by processors. Teshima Takeomi would then become Mori's apprentice after eating at Mori's food stall, eventually opening his own shop. Teshima preserved Mori's original recipe, rather than changing with the times, and passed down the recipe to his son, also named Teshima Takeomi, who continues to serve the original recipe today (Takamori, 2023).

In case 11, Takata (2023a) historically links Sapporo ramen to the post-war environment of Sapporo city. This historical section is primarily told by Hideo, as his early memories of his father are "closely linked with postwar Sapporo" (4:52). Hideo posits that his father started selling ramen out of a food stall shortly after WWII. Although he had no experience with making the dish, he quickly learned to make it after seeing how popular the dish was. During this time, ramen sold within Sapporo was *shoyu* style; however, most of the soy sauce was substituted for salt due to post-

war scarcity. Hideo posits "that just the mention of ramen sounded like a feast, a real luxury" (5:55). The creation of *miso*-style ramen stemmed not just for taste appeal but also for nutritional purposes, according to Hideo, who says that "*miso* is not just a great seasoning; it's also nutritious, a fermented food" (6:11).

Takata (2023b), in case 12, primarily links Hakodate-style ramen to the early history of ramen within Japan. The episode starts its historical section by briefly touching upon the Sakoku edict, saying, "In the 19th century, the shogunate had closed off Japan to the outside world" (Takata, 2023b, 4:59). The episode then covers the opening of Hakodate, Nagasaki and Yokohama as trading ports. Takata (2023b) then posits that the dish of ramen "was brought to Hakodate by Chinese merchants" (4:59) who "helped spread ramen culture throughout the area" (6:00). The dish, which at this stage was still "Nanking noodles" (5:30), is "believed to have been a salt-flavoured noodle dish" (5:43) like Hakodate ramen today. Takata (2023b) additionally highlights the "oldest known advertisement for ramen in Japan" (5:34) from an 1884 Hakodate newspaper article.

Theme 4 Discussion

The construction of a regional ramen identity was identified as a predominant theme within *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan*. At the centre of a regional ramen identity is a distinctive ramen style, and a regional group following that is centred around it. Applying Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory to the data analysis, it can be seen that highlighting the uniqueness of a regional style compared to others forms a regional ingroup–outgroup relationship. Once regional groups start forming around a distinct ramen style found in their region, they establish an ingroup relationship around that ramen style, which is then used to easily distinguish themselves from regional outgroups that identify with other regional ramen styles. The formation of ingroups and outgroups establishes a sense of social identity, centred around the distinctiveness of a regional ramen style. The cases highlight the distinctiveness of a regional ramen style primarily by centring on one or two unique structural characteristics, distinct regional ramen eating practices, or distinctive features such as portion size or cooking methods. The group formations around particular ramen

styles are explicitly mentioned less frequently within the cases; however, many of the regional ramen styles are reported to have formal associations based around them or, within *Ramen Japan* episodes, it is conveyed that they have local followings. Furthermore, applying Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2012) reveals that a regional ramen identity is further strengthened through the enactment of role-based identities. For example, a Kitakata local may decide to partake in Kitakata's morning ramen culture to fulfil the role-based identity associated with that regional style of ramen.

Cases also use three different methods to further strengthen and validate a regional ramen identity.

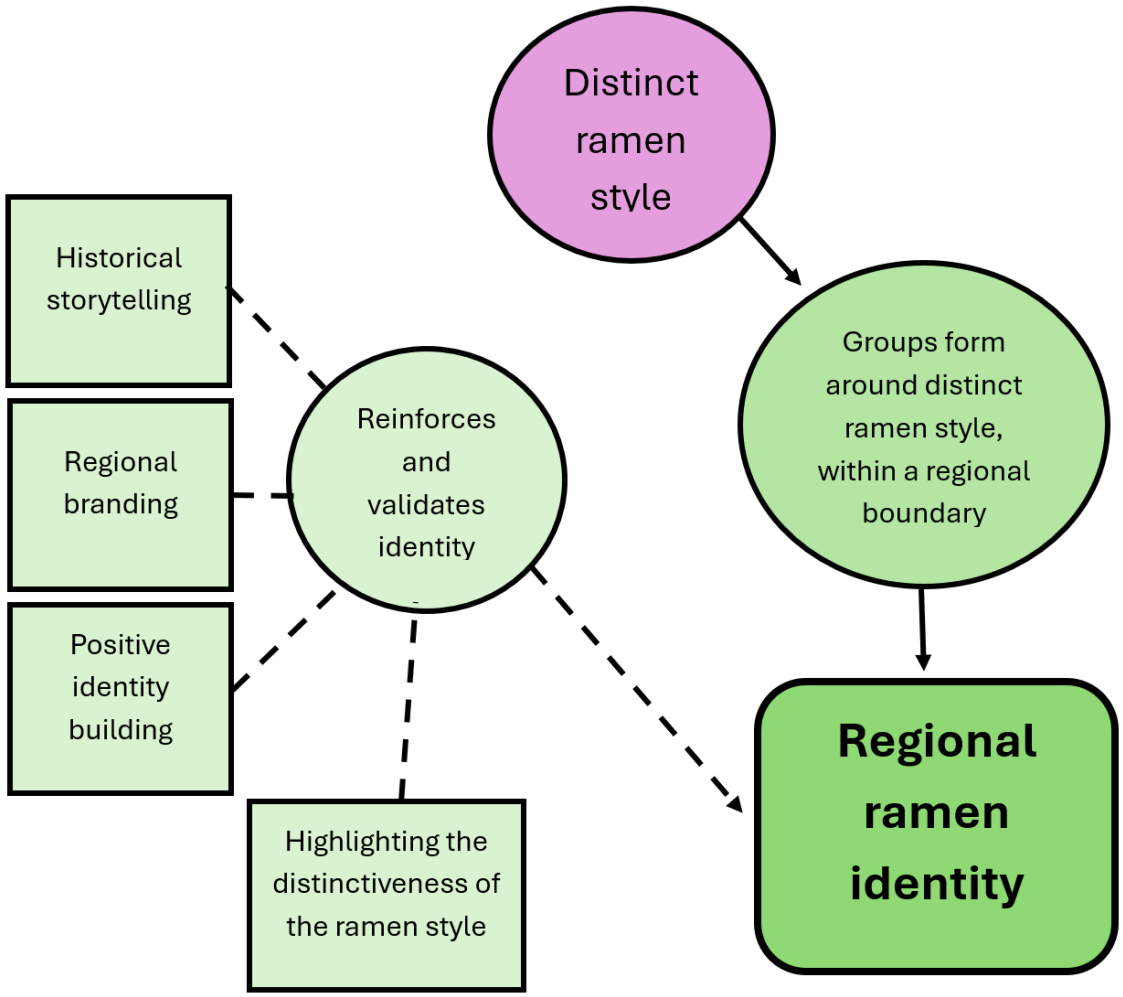
The first method shown in all the regional ramen cases is historical storytelling, which establishes a historical connection to a regional ramen style. The cases first discuss the origins of each regional ramen style, which have often been influenced by a broader historical context. These broader historical contexts highlight predominant themes seen in the background section of the study. For example, the data analysis identified within the cases indicates that Toyama black ramen, Onomichi ramen, Hakata *tonkotsu* ramen, and Sapporo ramen were all first created during the post-war period within Japan. Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024) also mention how Kitakata style ramen was originally sold as "Shina soba" (2024, p. 10). Additionally, Takata (2023b) refers to the early history of ramen in the late 19th century, when "Nanking noodles" (5:30) were first brought over to Japan by Chinese merchants.

The second method used for strengthening and validating a regional ramen identity, which is shown in all the regional ramen cases, is regional branding, which establishes a regional character around each style, constructing a more distinctive identity. The cases first describe the geographical location where the regional ramen style can be found, which establishes a regional boundary for each regional ramen identity. The cases brand each of these regional boundaries with different points of interest. A common regional point of interest is the environment, with the sources often discussing the climate of a region (case 7 and 11), or its local geographical features such as the water in Kitakata (case 3), or the Seto Inland Sea (case 7). Another common regional point of interest is related to predominant industries within

the region, such as shipbuilding in Onomichi, rice farming in Toyama, and commerce in Fukuoka city. It is also common to highlight distinct cultural aspects of a region, such as the food stall culture in Hakata, or the international and morning market culture in Hakodate. Lastly, both Sapporo and Kitakata are branded as being known for ramen. Cases 3, 6, and 7 also tie their regional points of interest into the regional ramen style itself, such as how the water in Kitakata contributes to the distinctive flavour of its style, why rice is served with Toyama black ramen, and why the local seafood is used in Onomichi ramen.

The third method used for strengthening and validating a regional ramen identity, which is shown in most regional ramen cases, is positive identity building, which establishes a positive distinction that is used to culturally assert a regional style. A common way that the cases build a positive identity is by highlighting the artisanal aspects that go into making the regional style. For example, cases 4 and 11 highlight

Figure 2. Regional ramen identity construction process



the craftsmanship that goes into noodle manufacturing within their respective region, while cases 7 and 12 highlight the effort that is spent in creating their regional style of broth. Another way that the cases build a positive identity is by highlighting the fan bases behind a regional ramen style, which can be seen in cases 4, 6– 8, and 10–12. Finally, the cases build a positive identity by highlighting the positive taste aspects of the regional ramen style. Overall, the way in which the cases construct a regional ramen identity is represented visually in Figure 2, below.

5.7 Theme 5: Dynamic Continuity of Regional Ramen Identity

Table 21. Cases that identify Theme 5

Contains theme 5: Dynamic continuity of regional ramen identity											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Theme 5 Overview

Cases in *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan* established an overarching theme that pertained to the dynamic continuity of regional ramen identity. Cases would reflect this theme either by emphasising how a regional ramen style has been preserved, opting to stay within tradition, or by emphasising how it has evolved. These two different approaches conceptualise the theme's two subthemes, the preservation of regional ramen tradition and the evolution of a regional ramen style over time.

Subtheme 1: Preservation of Regional Ramen Tradition

Table 22. Cases that identify Subtheme 1 (Theme 5)

Contains subtheme 1: Preservation of regional ramen tradition											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓

Subtheme 1 Overview

The preservation of a regional ramen tradition is a recurring subtheme identified within regional ramen cases, featured in cases 3, 8, 10, and 12. The subtheme pertains to how the cases highlight the traditional "classic" nature of a regional ramen style, rather than changing the style to suit the times.

Morohashi and Hayakawa (2024), in case 3, briefly touch upon this subtheme, positing that restaurants serving Kitakata-style ramen within the city "have preserved their taste for over 60 years" (Morohashi & Hayakawa, 2024, p. 10).

In case 8, Onoda (2024) interviews Syunko Danjo, the daughter of Masayoshi Danjo, whom the article credits as the creator of Onomichi-style ramen. Syunko emphasises the importance of preserving her father's original recipe, saying "you could call it nostalgia, but to me, it's a taste worth preserving" (Onoda, 2024, 11:16). Onoda (2024) then interviews Nii Hiroaki, who is a second-generation Onomichi ramen shop owner. For Nii, it is difficult but rewarding to preserve his father's recipe, saying "I stay true to the taste dad made. This is actually the hardest part. When a regular finally told me that I had got the flavour just right, it honestly made me so happy" (Onoda, 2024, 12:50).

In case 10, Takamori (2023) centres the episode around a subtheme by looking at the original style of Hakata ramen created by Mori Kentaro, rather than looking at what the style looks like today. Takamori (2023) interviews Teshima Masahiko, a third-generation ramen shop owner, who preserves Mori's original ramen recipe created over 80 years ago. For Masahiko, it is more important to keep a consistent recipe rather than adapting it to suit the times: "it's important to make our ramen the same way we've always made it instead of following current trends. I think consistency has meaning" (Takamori, 2023, 14:00).

Takata (2023b), in case 12, portrays Hakodate ramen as a classic style of ramen. Within the episode, Takata (2023b) interviews Yoshiaki and Yumiko Oura, who run "one of the few local shops to preserve the spirit of the original Hakodate ramen" (Takata, 2023b, 2:45). Takata (2023b) posits that just using salt to season the ramen is "the key to its classic flavour" (Takata, 2023b, 3:43). Additionally, the episode

reinforces this “classic” imagery by highlighting how the shop uses an old noodle machine, and toppings that are “the usual style at old shops” (Takata, 2023b, 4:24). This ramen style is portrayed with a classic character, likely to strengthen the historical section of the episode. This is because the episode highlights how Hakodate ramen is similar to how the dish was originally served, back when it was introduced to the city as Nanking noodles by Chinese merchants in the late nineteenth century (Takata, 2023b).

Subtheme 2: Evolution of Regional Ramen Style Over Time

Table 23. Cases that identify Subtheme 2 (Theme 5)

Contains subtheme 2: Evolution of regional ramen style over time											
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9	Case 10	Case 11	Case 12
X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X

Subtheme 2 Overview

The evolution of regional ramen style over time is a recurring subtheme identified within the styles featured in cases 5, 7, 9, and 11. The subtheme pertains to how the cases highlight the way in which a regional ramen style has changed over time, rather than retaining how it was originally.

In case 5, Morohashi and Kurihara (2024) highlight how Toyama black ramen has changed over time, positing that “the original black ramen and the Toyama Black Ramen of today leave quite different impressions” (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 12). For Kurihara, this change is primarily linked to the saltiness of the dish, in that Toyama black ramen was originally made salty to provide salt to manual workers; however, in the modern day it is becoming less salty so that it is easier for the average consumer to drink. The authors then encourage people to try the dish, saying that “many people say they find it [Toyama black ramen] lightly seasoned when they actually eat it” (Morohashi & Kurihara, 2024, p. 13). Additionally, they add that shops are starting to offer *soup-wari*, which is an additional serving of unseasoned *dashi* used to dilute the soup, allowing people to adjust the soup to their liking.

Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024), in case 7, discuss the characteristic changes of Onomichi ramen over time. Their article posits that Onomichi ramen was originally comprised of a beef-and-pork-based soup in the 1930s. The dish then characteristically changed in 1947, when Zhu Ajun combined a "soy sauce-flavored broth with stir-fried pork back fat and homemade flat noodles" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 15). Morohashi and Takatsuki (2024) posit that the style is now known for its usage of seafood within the soup, as "many restaurants use small sea bream and other small fish in their soup stock as a secret ingredient" (Morohashi & Takatsuki, 2024, p. 15).

Tanaka (2024), in case 9, posits that the noodles for Hakata ramen have changed from characteristically flat to extremely thin, likely influenced by the Nagahama-style ramen eaten around the port of Hakata. This shift from flat to thin likely occurred to accommodate busy workers, as thin noodles can be cooked considerably more quickly than flat noodles.

In case 11, Takata (2023a) interviews Hideo Omiya, who posits that the ramen that was originally served in Sapporo had a soy sauce base. Morito would eventually completely change Sapporo-style ramen through the invention of *miso* ramen. Morito's ramen would use a *miso tare*, new curly thick noodles developed by Nishiyama Takayuki, and the addition of "vegetables like bean sprouts, onions, and garlic" (Takata, 2023a, 6:25), and a different cooking method, namely cooking the ramen within a wok (Takata, 2023a).

Theme 5 Discussion

The dynamic continuity of regional ramen identity was identified as a theme within *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan*. The data analysis highlighted that most of the regional ramen cases detail the perception around a regional ramen identity over time, emphasising whether a ramen style has been preserved in tradition or if it has been adapted to meet changing demands. Kitakata ramen in case 3, Onomichi ramen in case 8, the classic Hakata ramen in case 10, and Hakodate style ramen in case 12 were all seen as preserved, traditional ramen identities. Cases discuss how the style has been preserved for decades, and how it has been inherited over multiple

generations. A common topic across these cases is a sense of pride about staying traditional and not changing with the times, such as how Teshima Masahiko finds meaning in consistently serving the original style of Hakata ramen (Takamori, 2023), or how Nii Hiroaki finds happiness in replicating their dad's recipe (Onoda, 2024). On the other hand, Toyama black ramen in case 5, Onomichi ramen in case 7, Hakata ramen in case 9, and Sapporo ramen in case 11 were all seen in terms of how the style has adapted over time, changing the perception of its regional ramen identity. A common topic across these cases is that people adapt a regional ramen style to better suit the times. For example, Morohashi and Kurihara (2024) highlight how Toyama black ramen has become less salty over time to meet changing consumer preferences, and Takata (2023a) highlights how Sapporo ramen changed to be more nutritious and to have more taste appeal for Sapporo residents during the post-war era.

This dual nature of tradition vs change is reflective of the two common positions surrounding cultural identity elaborated upon by Stuart Hall (2015) as, on the one hand, the cases highlight the historic, traditional aspects of a regional ramen style, whereas they may also highlight how the perception of a regional ramen style has changed to better suit the times. For example, Onomichi ramen was highlighted as a traditional style in *Ramen Japan*, whereas it was also highlighted as a dynamic style in *Highlighting Japan* in the discussion about how many local ramen shops now find importance in utilising the local seafood. If Stuart Hall's (2015) third position is applied, it could be identified that a regional ramen identity is historically situated but is also dynamic in nature. This can be highlighted by how Onomichi ramen is discussed, in its respective cases, by highlighting its historic, traditional features, yet at the same time it is a style of reinvention through the utilisation of local seafood for increased appeal in the modern day. *Ramen Japan* does allude to sharing this position as, in cases 10, 11, and 12, it is stated that each regional ramen is "shifting with the times while staying true to the original" (Takamori, 2023, 0:08; Takata, 2023a, 0:08, 2023b, 0:08). However, the data analysis identified that, in practice, the cases emphasise one position or the other.

5.8 Conclusion

The data analysis identified five overall themes that underpinned the construction of ramen within the cases. The way in which these themes interacted also constructed a sense of identity and establish semiotic myths around the dish. The theme of the gastronomic structurisation of ramen served as a central theme for how the cases constructed ramen. Within the cases, ramen was constructed not as a singular dish, but rather as a category of dish that was structurally comprised of *dashi*/stock, *tare*, noodles, and toppings. These structural elements varied, with the *dashi*/stock often being categorised by its ingredient base and clarity. The *tare* was categorised into *shoyu* (soy sauce), *shio* (salt), and *miso*. The noodles were often categorised by their thickness and shape. The toppings were often just listed; however, the combination of *chashu*, sliced green onion, and *menma* (pickled bamboo shoots) was considered a classic combination.

Distinctively combining these structural characteristics formed the basis of a ramen style, which is then used to easily categorise different types of ramen. The way in which each ramen style was described varied amongst the styles within the cases. This can be seen in case 1, with Professor Yonemitsu's discussion about the classification of the main ramen varieties, with *shoyu, miso,* and *shio* styles of ramen being classified by their *tare* and assumed them to have a clear *dashi*/stock (Morohashi & Yonemitsu, 2024). *Tonkotsu*-style ramen, on the other hand, was classified by its cloudy *dashi*/stock though what *tare* is used was not mentioned. This omission was also seen within the regional ramen cases, as many of them often skimmed over or completely neglect to mention any structural elements if the structural element was not distinctive enough.

This sense of distinctiveness played a crucial role in how the cases constructed a sense of identity around ramen, as it served as the basis for a regional ramen identity to distinguish itself from others. Applying Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory highlights the uniqueness of a regional style compared to other forms of a regional ingroup–outgroup relationship. The data analysis identified that there were regional group formations around the regional ramen styles, from a local fanbase to

formalised regional ramen associations. As these regional groups form around a distinct ramen style found in their region, they establish an ingroup relationship around that ramen style, which is then used to easily distinguish themselves from regional outgroups that identify with other regional ramen styles. This formation of ingroups and outgroups establishes a sense of social identity, forming the basis of a regional ramen identity. The cases then used three methods to strengthen each regional ramen identity.

The first method was to use historical storytelling, often by covering the origins of a regional ramen style or connecting to an overall historical environment. By utilising historical storytelling, the cases constructed a narrative to further distinguish the style from others. For example, Morohashi and Kurihara (2024), in case 5, and NHK (2026), in case 6, attributed the creation of Toyama black ramen to the post-war environment of Toyama, with the high salt content of the dish arising from a demand for salt by construction workers who were rebuilding the city, thereby mythologising the style as a dish for hard-working construction workers. The utilisation of historical storytelling also strengthened ramen's regional and national associations by linking it to an overall historical environment. On the regional level, for example, Hakodate-style ramen was linked to the history of Hakodate, as case 12 directly ties the creation of the style to the influx of Chinese merchants after the opening of Japan's ports. On the national level, for example, the creation of Toyama black-style ramen, Onomichi-style ramen, Hakata *tonkotsu*-style ramen, and Sapporo-style ramen was linked to Japan's post-war food shortages.

The second method used to strengthen each regional ramen identity was regional branding, which mythologised a sense of regional character around a regional ramen style. The cases approached regional branding by first outlining the location of each region, which places the regional ramen style within the boundaries of a geographical perimeter. The cases then branded the region by its points of interest, which were often related to the environment, predominant industries or culture, or by branding the region for ramen itself. The cases then associated these regional points of interest to the regional ramen identity itself. This mythologises a regional character around each regional ramen identity, such as how the usage of seafood in modern Onomichi

ramen could be linked to the climate of the Seto Inland Sea, or how the water in Kitakata made its regional style more delicious.

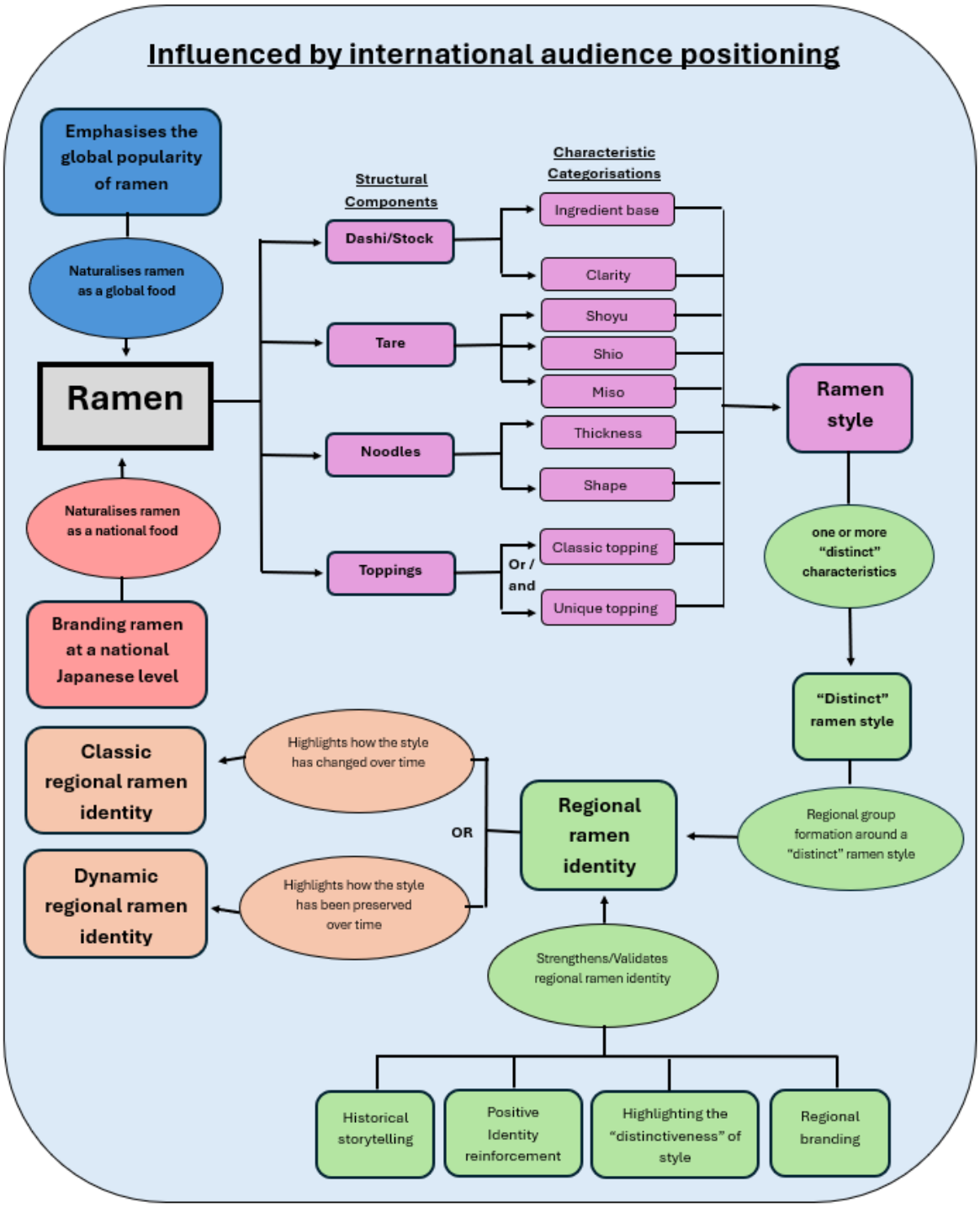
The third method was to use positive identity building to culturally assert a regional ramen style and build a positive narrative around it. The cases approached positive identity building by portraying a sense of craftsmanship, as seen for example with the manufacturing of Kitakata noodles in case 4 and Sapporo noodles in case 12. Cases also highlighted the local community support of a regional ramen style, which can be seen in cases 4, 6–8, and 10–12.

The regional ramen cases additionally constructed a narrative around each regional ramen identity by either portraying a preserved and enduring identity, or a dynamic and changing identity. These narratives mythologise each regional ramen style as being either a "classic", old-fashioned style that endures over time or an adaptable ramen style that changes with shifting demands.

The themes of international audience connection and constructing a national food identity around ramen were also significant themes in the construction of ramen. The theme of international audience connection highlighted two significant features in the data. The first was that the content produced for *Highlighting Japan* and *Ramen Japan* was positioned towards international audiences, rather than a domestic crowd, which was primarily identified through the promotion of regional tourism or specific ramen-related tourist attractions to an international audience. The other feature in the data was that the cases repeatedly emphasised the global popularity of ramen, which naturalised a global identity around ramen. Constructing a national food identity around ramen was the last significant overarching theme, from which it could be seen that the cases constructed ramen as a national *kokuminshoku* dish by portraying ramen as a nationally beloved dish that is inexpensive and foreign in origin. The cases additionally used national historical storytelling to link the invention of instant ramen to the post-war environment of Japan. Finally, the cases also portrayed slurping as a normalised eating practice across Japan by demonstrating its commonality within the regional ramen cases.

Overall, the way in which the themes interacted with each other within the cases to construct ramen can be seen in Figure 3, below.

Figure 3. Overall thematic framework



Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

Ramen is a multifaceted noodle soup dish, and although it is widely recognised to be influenced by Chinese noodle soup dishes, it is frequently highlighted as a national, and regionally varied dish within Japan. This research investigated ramen-related content released in English on Japanese digital journalism platforms between 2023 and 2026 to explore how ramen is constructed within media, focusing on the construction of identity and semiotic mythologies. This research utilised a multiple embedded case study design using a qualitative thematic analysis approach to analyse the data for the purpose of answering the research questions, as follows.

> **How is ramen constructed within ramen-related content on Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English between 2023 and 2026?**

It was identified that the cases were oriented towards an international audience, which influenced the process of ramen's construction. Broadly speaking, ramen was constructed within the cases as a varied but structuralised dish comprised of *dashi/*stock, *tare,* noodles, and toppings. Different styles of ramen varied by structural components and could be distinguished based upon the type of structural components used, such as how *miso* ramen is distinguished by the use of *miso tare,* or *tonkotsu* by its cloudy, white, pork *dashi*. The cases also constructed ramen as a regionally diverse dish, with unique ramen styles found throughout different regions of Japan. While the cases constructed each regional ramen style as being unique, the various regional styles often shared similar structural characteristics. However, the cases distinguished each style by highlighting one or two distinctive characteristics of each regional ramen style. For example, both Kitakata ramen and Onomichi ramen used a *shoyu tare*; however, Kitakata ramen could be distinguished by its noodles, and Onomichi ramen by its use of pork backfat as a topping.

How is a sense of identity constructed around ramen within Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English?

The cases constructed a regional, national, and global identity around ramen. A regional ramen style was formed around a distinct ramen style found within a regional perimeter. However, a regional ramen identity was constructed after regional groups started identifying themselves with a regional ramen style and its cultural practices, based upon an ingroup–outgroup relationship (e.g., the differences between regional styles) and the internalisation of roles (e.g., locals may partake in local ramen customs to confirm their identity). A regional ramen identity was then strengthened and validated within the cases through historical storytelling, positive identity reinforcement, and regional branding, and by highlighting the distinctiveness of the style. Additionally, the platforms projected ramen to a national and global level by repeatedly asserting its widespread popularity rather than using quantifiable measures. A further aspect of constructing a national identity around ramen was seen in associating the invention of instant ramen with the wider historical conditions of post-war Japan. Moreover, slurping was also identified as a common practice when eating ramen in Japan as the *Ramen Japan* cases highlighted the act across all the regions they showcased, suggesting the practice of slurping was an act that perpetuated Japanese identity.

What semiotic myths about ramen emerge when analysing Japanese digital journalism platforms available in English?

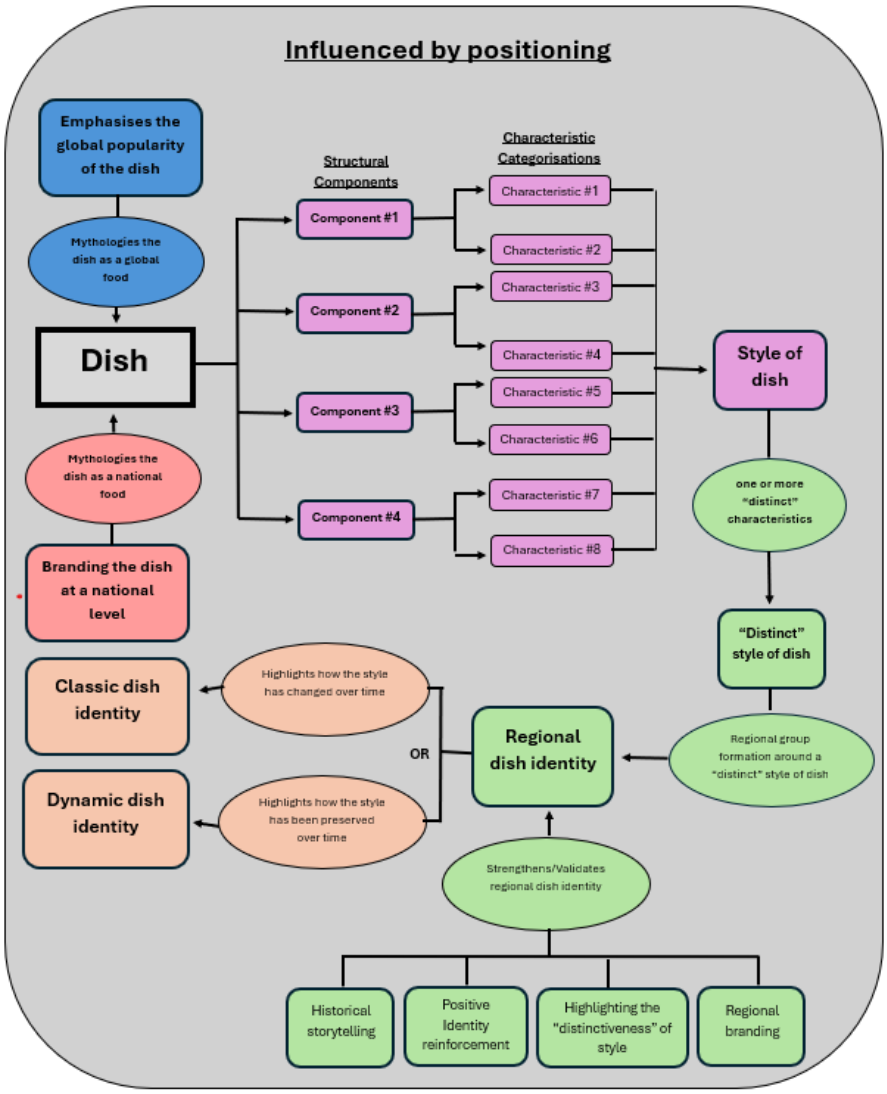
While there is historical and statistical grounding that supports ramen being considered a global dish and an unofficial *kokuminshoku* food, the cases themselves mythologised this identity through naturalisation, by repeatedly asserting its widespread popularity. Although one-third of the cases (3, 4, 7, and 12) discuss the influence that Chinese migrants had on the origins and early history of ramen, it was largely overlooked in the three-quarters of the cases (1-2, 4, 6-8, 10-12) that were identified as constructing a national food identity around ramen. To an international audience who may be unfamiliar with the history of ramen, and the categorisation of *kokuminshoku*, this content would potentially mythologise ramen as an inherently Japanese food. Another significant aspect of regional ramen that was mythologised

was its dynamic nature in being portrayed as either a classical style or style that changes with trends, showing that cultural identity is both rooted in the past and constantly changing over time. Lastly, regional branding was found to mythologise a regional character around a regional ramen style, even if the style was not inherently a consequence of the regional environment.

6.2 Broader Research Implications

Although this research is bounded within a limited scope, it proposes a potential generalisable framework which can be used to structurally analyse how the media constructs culturally significant category of food, at a regional, and national level. This can be seen with an adapted version of the thematic framework, seen in Figure 4, below.

Figure 4. Potential umbrella dish thematic framework



An example of this could be pasta which, hypothetically, if this framework was followed, would be broken into its structural components such as the pasta itself and the sauce that is used with it to construct a specific style of pasta. These structural components could also be broken down further by their characteristics, such as the shape or type of dough that the pasta uses, or the primary ingredients of the sauce. It would also be worth testing whether other media use similar techniques to also establish a sense of regional and national identity around other respective dishes, such as using historical storytelling, positive identity reinforcement, regional branding, or by highlighting the distinctiveness of the style. Overall, this framework can play a significant role in testing whether there is a consistent, underlying structure which is used to socially construct other culturally significant categories of food across different media outlets.

6.4 Limitations

It is acknowledged that this study has several limitations, including the bounded scope of the research, researcher's positionality, database accessibility, and limitations in the length of a dissertation. Firstly, this study recognises its limited scope and sample size, while this adhered to its descriptive nature, it has overall made the research less generalisable across the wider literature for future studies. Because of this, it is suggested that the potential umbrella dish thematic framework (Fig 4.) be tested within future studies to investigate if there is a consistent, underlying structure used across other various media outlets to socially construct other culturally significant categories of food. Secondly, this study is supported by literature that is exclusively in the English language, as the researcher does not speak Japanese fluently, and is therefore influenced by Western perspectives. Additionally, the study's social constructionist positioning meant that the data was largely analysed apolitically, focusing on the construction process itself rather than critiquing dominant power structures. Lastly, due to the limited length of the dissertation, only a select few subcases were chosen, rather than analysing all the content from both *Highlighting Japan*, and *Ramen Japan*, which neglects certain nuances within the wider dataset.

Future research could adopt a more critical approach, such as a Foucauldian approach (Phillips, 2023), or the critical research paradigm. It is also recommended that a wider range of data is explored, including literature that is primarily in Japanese language, and the analysis of a wider range of subcases.

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Appendix

Case 1 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 1		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1.Ramen styles can vary regionally within Japan 2. Ramen has a variety of soup styles 3. Ramen has a variety of noodle styles Ramen can come with a variety of different toppings 4. The main styles of ramen are shoyu, miso, shio and tonkotsu 2. Ramen is often classified into different categories 3. The classifications of ramen are imprecise 4. Ramen soup is comprised a dashi + tare 5. (Tare = Savory sauce) 6. (Dashi = stock/broth) 7. Ramen is generally classified by the type of tare 8. Tonkotsu ramen is classified by its cloudy, pork bone-based dashi 9. A type of tare can be categorised by its base seasoning (shoyu, miso, salt) 10. A type of dashi can be categorised by its main ingredients and its cloudiness 11. It would be more specific to categorise		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1.***Ramen is rising in popularity with tourists in Japan*** **2.Western audiences should try slurping their ramen for a new flavour experience**	**International tourist appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1.Ramen restaurants are popular outside of Japan ***2.“Japanese ramen has been enjoying widespread popularity even overseas”*** **3.Not surprising that ramen has been accepted globally**	**Emphasises the global popularity of ramen**	
1.“The Japanese dish of ramen” *2.Ramen restaurants are common in Japan*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Japan has a distinct slurping culture	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1.Ramen styles can vary regionally within Japan 2.“Kyushu tonkotsu ramen” 3.Ramen styles that use a clear dashi are generally associated with the Kanto region 4.Shoyu and Miso styles of ramen are common in the Kanto region	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**

Case 2 Thematic Key

Thematic Key: Case 2		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Recommends tourists to visit the Cup noodle museum in Yokohama	**International tourist appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. Ando continued development after instant ramens released to spread instant ramen globally 2. Ando would set out to Europe and United States in 1966 3. The Inspiration for cup ramen was derived from cultural differences from America 4. Instant ramen is a global staple	**Emphasises the global popularity of ramen**	
1. *Instant ramen was invented by Momofuku Ando in 1958* 2. *"Dedicated his life to creating a new aspect of Japanese food culture"* 3. *Ando dedicated his life to instant ramen* 4. *"instant ramen, born in Japan"* 5. *Black market lines signified Japan's love for noodles*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. *Post-war food shortage* 2. *Post-war malnutrition* 3. *Ando saw long lines at black markets for ramen* 4. *Seeing black market lines was responsible for instant ramens creation* 5. *Ten years later he would start the development of what would be instant ramen* 6. *Ando wanted to create ramen that was quick and easy to prepare* 7. *The ramen also needed to be capable of long storage* 8. *Ando had a breakthrough from watching his wife fry tempura* 9. *Deep frying the noodles allowed for long storage as well as quick and easy preparation* 10. *The deep-frying method was patented* 11. *The deep-frying method is still used to make instant ramen today*	***Historically connecting the invention of instant ramen to post-war Japan***	

Case 3 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 3		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Kitakata ramen uses High hydration, aged noodles. Characteristically thick, firm and curly. 2. Kitakata ramen uses a Soy sauce-based broth 3. Adapted Kitakata ramen is topped with rare Fukushima Aizu beef		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Some Kitakata ramen shops provide English menus for tourists 2. Kitakata City Hall launched initiatives for foreign visiting tourists 3. Culinary adaption to the local ramen for tourists 4. Adapted Kitakata ramen to be more luxurious and representative of local region 5. Local Souvenirs 6. Call to action (come try the ramen)	**International tourist appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. Pan Qinxing's recipe spread amongst local shops 2. Kitakata style ramen is now offered in 90 restaurants in the city	**Group formations around a regional ramen style**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Kitakata ramen is distinctly known for its unique noodles 2. Noodles are characteristically thick, flat, curly and firm, with a high-water content 3. Broth has a soy sauce base, which varies in colour and flavour amongst shops 4. Kitakata is known for having a morning ramen culture	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	
1. Kitakata ramen is considered one of the "Three Great Ramen" 2. Kitakata ramen has been familiar with locals for a long time	**Positive identity building**	
1. Describes where Kitakata is 2. Kitakata is known as a ramen town 3. Local water in Kitakata is key to its delicious broth 4. Emphasises the supersoft properties and taste of the local water	***Regional branding***	
1. Kitakata ramen has a history of 100 years 2. Historic origin tracing to 1930 3. Originated from Chinese immigrant "Pan Qinxing" 4. Kitakata morning ramen culture potentially arose to provide climatic comfort for seasonal workers 5. Kitakata morning ramen culture potentially arose to feed hungry factory workers who would finish in the morning	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	

Thematic Key (2): Case 3		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1.Local taste has been preserved over time	**Preservation of regional ramen tradition**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**

Case 4 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 4		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Kitakata ramen stock uses pork and chicken bones, pork backfat, dried anchovy and vegetables 2. Kitakata ramen is seasoned with either salt or soy sauce 3. Kitakata ramen uses curly, thick noodles		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Call to action (come try the ramen)	**International tourist appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. "Japan, the land of ramen!" *2. Kitakata is a nationally popular regional ramen destination*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Slurping noise #1 2. Slurping noise #2 3. Slurping noise #3 4. Slurping noise #4 5. Slurping noise #5	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1. Kitakata ramen shops joined together to form the Kitakata Ramen Association 2. Ban Kinsei's noodles spread amongst local Kitakata ramen shops 3. Tomiyama helped form the Kitakata Ramen Association 4. The Kitakata Ramen Association united rival shops	**Group formations around a regional ramen style**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Kitakata ramen soup: pork, chicken, pork backfat, dried anchovy and vegetables 2. Kitakata ramen can be either salt or sauce seasoned 3. Kitakata ramen is mildly seasoned and never salty 4. Kitakata ramen is distinctly known for its curly, thick noodles 5. Kitakata has a morning ramen culture 6. Eating ramen in the morning as natural local practice 7. Kitakata style ramen noodles are commonly ordered from local specialist manufacturers 8. One noodle maker supply over 50% of Kitakata ramen shops	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	

Thematic Key (2): Case 4		
Semantic codes:	**Latent Subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
17. Kitakata ramen soup: pork, chicken, pork backfat, dried anchovy and vegetables 18. Kitakata ramen can be either salt or sauce seasoned 19. Kitakata ramen is mildly seasoned and never salty 20. Kitakata ramen is distinctly known for its curly, thick noodles 21. Kitakata has a morning ramen culture 22. Eating ramen in the morning as natural local practice 23. Kitakata style ramen noodles are commonly ordered from local specialist manufacturers 24. One noodle maker supply over 50% of Kitakata ramen shops	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Kitakata is synonymous with ramen, along with Sapporo and Hakata 2. Local customers reaffirm morning ramen culture 3. A member shop describes the uniqueness of Kitakata ramen 4. Kitakata noodle manufacturers have an artisan approach 5. Kitakata style noodles are difficult to make, which requires expertise	**Positive identity building**	
1. Describes where Kitakata is 2. Kitakata has a small-town atmosphere 3. Tomiyama is considered one of the first to give ramen a regional identity	***Regional branding***	
1. Kitakata ramen is historically rooted 2. Originated from Chinese immigrant "Ban Kinsei" around 1925 3. Kitakata became a popular local ramen destination because of Tomiyama Shoji 4. Tomiyama used ramen to promote domestic tourism in Kitakata 5. Tomiyama linked Kitakata with ramen within a full-page article in a travel a magazine 6. The promotion of Kitakata ramen dramatically increased domestic tourism in Kitakata	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	

Case 5 Thematic Key

Thematic Key: Case 5		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Toyama Black Ramen has a black, soy sauce-based broth.		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Toyama Black Ramen is a popular regional style of ramen within Japan *2. Toyama Black Ramen is a popular local style with ramen lovers across Japan*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Increasing demand for Toyama Black from domestic and international tourism 2. Social media used for further outreach to international tourists 3. Some shops provide extra soup (*soup-wari*) to dilute the saltiness of the soup 4. Each "Toyama Black" restaurant offers a unique version of the dish 5. Call to action (come try the ramen)	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. Local Toyama ramen shops came together to form the Toyma Black Ramen Traditions Association 2. Due to its popularity at a local festival, many new Toyama Black ramen shops would open within Toyama	**Group formations around a regional ramen style**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Toyama black is distinctly known for its dark black soup 2. "Black" soup is from thickened soy sauce	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	
1. Toyama Black won in local ramen competitions 2. Highly regarded within Toyama 3. Apparently a Toyama Black stand had a line of 1000 people at a festival	**Positive identity building**	
1. Describes where Toyama is 2. Toyama Black has had an aggressive and successful promotion campaign 3. Press coverage encouraged local ramen recognition 4. Trying to become a recognised brand by the prefectural government 5. Local ramen brand extension through a popular food product	***Regional branding***	
1. Local ramen created shortly after WWII 2. Historic origins 1947 in Nishicho Taiki 3. Toyama black was created due to a demand for salt by Manual labourers	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	
1. Toyama Black has changed over time 2. Toyama Black became less salty over time 3. Trying to change "salty" perception	**Evolution of regional ramen style over time**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**

Case 6 Thematic Key

Thematic Key: Case 6		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Toyama black ramen toppings include green onion and chashu, 2. Toyama black has a black, soy sauce-based broth		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. *"Japan, the land of ramen!"*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Slurping noise #1 2. Slurping noise #2	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1. "Toyama Black" is distinctly known for its dark black soup 2. Toppings include thick cut green onions and plenty of chashu 3. Toyama black is known for being salty 4. It is a common eating practice to eat rice with Toyama black ramen	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Nishicho Taiki has been locally supported for nearly 80 years 2. Emphasises the "black" soup by showing the noodles dying black when going in the soup 3. The characteristics of Toyama black pairs perfectly with rice 4. Local customer said that it provided him with energy for construction	**Positive identity building**	
1. Describes where Toyama is 2. Toyama is famous for rice 3. Toyama has a high production of rice 4. Large serving sizes are a "local favourite" 5. Local customers reaffirm eating ramen with rice	***Regional branding***	
1. Historic origins 1947 in Nishicho Taiki 2. Toyama black originally was considered a side dish that went with rice 3. Created based on a demand for salt "after a hard day's work" or "after drinking" 4. Local preference for ramen served with rice is historically rooted 5. Toyama was devastated by fires after being bombed near the end of WWII 6. Ramen and rice provided energy to rebuild the city	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	

Case 7 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 7		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Onomichi ramen has a soy sauce-based broth 2. Onomichi ramen uses pork back fat as a topping 3. Onomichi ramen uses medium-thin, flat noodles 4. Modern Onomichi ramen contains a seafood-based broth, 5. Onomichi ramen uses "classic" Japanese ramen toppings of green onions, chashu pork and bamboo shoots.		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Onomichi ramen varies between individual shops 2. Smaller portions allow people to compare and contrast multiple local shops 3. Call to action (come try the ramen)	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. Became nationally recognised with Onomichi ramen souvenirs	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Many ramen stalls would open in Onomichi after the decline of its ship building industry after WWII 2. During this time, the style of ramen made by Shukaen became popular 3. Shukaen's style of ramen spread to other ramen shops in Onomichi	**Group formations around a regional ramen style**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Distinct for its soy sauce seasoned soup, pork backfat and flat noodles 2. Modern Onomichi ramen is characterised for its seafood broth and pork back fat 3. Noodles are characteristically medium-thin and flat 4. Uses "classic" toppings of green onion, chashu and bamboo shoots 5. Modern Onomichi ramen is distinctly known for its seafood broth with plenty of pork fat 6. Onomichi ramen is known for smaller portions	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	
1. Onomichi ramen is a "local speciality" 2. "Created a unique noodle dish" 3. Shukaen's ramen is popular in Onomichi 4. A popular local shop sold ramen in mail orders 5. Onomichi ramen is locally loved	**Positive identity building**	

Thematic Key (2): Case 7		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Describes where Onomichi city is 2. Onomichi is first characterised as having a warm climate 3. Onomichi ramen is representative of Onomichi city 4. Onomichi has a range of specialty foods due to the warm climate 5. Onomichi was known for its shipbuilding industry 6. Local sea supports small fish life Many Onomichi ramen shop's use small fish such as seabream	***Regional branding***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**

Case 8 Thematic Key

Thematic Key: Case 8		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Onomichi ramen uses a chicken and pork-based stock 2. Onomichi ramen uses straight noodles 3. Onomichi ramen is soy sauce based 4. Onomichi ramen is topped with pork backfat		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Onomichi ramen is popular with tourists	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. *"Japan, the land of ramen"*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Slurping noise	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1. Onomichi ramen uses a chicken and pork-based stock 2. Onomichi ramen uses straight noodles 3. Onomichi ramen is distinctively known for using pork back fat 4. Not overly fatty, but has enough to keep the soup hot	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Onomichi ramen requires high quality backfat 2. Customer says its not overly fatty, but has enough to keep the soup hot 3. "Pork back fat, Onomichi style!" 4. Pork backfat is irreplaceable for local consumers" 5. One customer has eaten at the shop weekly for 50 years 6. One customer brings each generation of there family (children, grandchildren and great grandchildren) to eat the ramen 7. The real taste of Onomichi ramen" 8. Locals praise when the taste is "just right" 9. Ramen owner gets satisfaction of getting the taste "just right" 10. Local customer emphasises the deliciousness of the combination of soy sauce and back fat	**Positive identity building**	
1. Describes where Onomichi city is, within Hiroshima prefecture 2. Onomichi is known for its shipbuilding industry 3. Onomichi has a "old-time feel"	***Regional branding***	

Thematic Key (2): Case 8		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. "Born from humble food stalls" 2. Onomichi was severely damaged due to WWII bombings 3. Interveiwed ramen shop was founded in 1973 4. Pork backfat was used within its soy sauce base 5. Pork fat was simmered in its soy sauce base originally 6. Onomichi ramen was created by Danjo Masayoshi 7. Onomichi ramen was originally sold from a food stall 8. The usage of back fat was due to post-war scarcity 9. Another Onomichi ramen shop also started as a food stall 10. The next shop originated in 1948	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Daughter Syunko Danjo preserves her father's ramen 2. Nostalgic taste is worth preserving 3. The soup recipe has been inherited between generations 4. Aims for the standard original taste	**Preservation of regional ramen tradition**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**

Case 9 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 9		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Hakata ramen has a creamy-white, pork bone-based broth 2. Hakata ramen uses thin, straight noodles 3. Hakata ramen used to use flat noodles, but changed to thin noodles		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Hakata food stalls are attracting international tourists to Fukuoka 2. Call to action (come try the ramen)	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
1. Hakata ramen is one of the most well known styles of ramen around the world	**Emphasises the global popularity of ramen**	
1. Hakata ramen is distinctively known for its cloudy, white, pork (tonkotsu) broth 2. Areas around Kyushu have different "unique" variations of tonkotsu ramen 3. Hakata ramen is also known for having very thin, straight noodles 4. People often order an extra portion of these noodles to later add to the broth 5. Hakata ramen has a distinct ordering system, which allows people to choose noodle firmness 6. Local dialect is used to communicate preferred firmness	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Describes where Kyushu and Fukuoka city is 2. Fukuoka is known as a transportation hub 3. Fukuoka is also known for being a commerce hub 4. Hakata is a district of Fukuoka, next to the Nakagawa River 5. Hakata is known for having a food stall culture 6. Many food stalls in Hakata sell ramen	***Regional branding***	
1. Tonkotsu style ramen is believed to originate in the neighbouring district of Kurume 2. Hakata ramen originally had flat noodles 3. Hakata was first served in a food stall in 1946	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	
1. The shift to thin noodles was influenced by Nagahama style tonkotsu ramen 2. Thin noodles have a shorter cooking time, which was perfect for busy port workers	**Evolution of regional ramen style over time**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**

Case 10 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 10		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Hakata tonkotsu ramen originally featured a stock made with pork bones, kombu seaweed and vegetables 2. Hakata tonkotsu ramen originally used broad, flat noodles		**1) Gastronomic structurisation**
1. Call to action (come try the ramen)	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
3. Ramen is now popular worldwide	**Emphasises the global popularity of ramen**	
1. "Japan, the land of ramen!" *2. Ramen is a Japanese staple* *3. Tonkotsu ramen is nationally loved*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Slurping noise #1 2. Slurping noise #2	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1. Ramen is regionally diverse 2. Hakata ramen is distinctively known for its cloudy, white, pork bone (tonkotsu) soup 3. It "naturally" contained pork bones (as tonkotsu translates to pork bone) 4. The original style of Hakata ramen differs from other styles 5. The original style of Hakata ramen is described as not too greasy, light and tasty	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Hakata ramen had a fast rise in local popularity upon its release	**Positive identity building**	
2. Fukuoka city is synonymous with Tonkotsu ramen 3. Fukuoka city has 3 distinct styles of tonkotsu ramen (Kurume, Hakata, and Nagahama) 4. Describes where Hakata is within Fukuoka city 5. Hakata is known for its night-time food stall culture 6. Hakata food stalls sell a variety of food and drinks, including ramen 7. Hakata has a high density of ramen shops 8. Tonkotsu ramen originated in Fukuoka city	***Regional branding***	

Thematic Key (2): Case 10		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Hakata ramen was originally not cloudy 2. Hakata ramen traces to 1940 3. The original Hakata ramen was created by Mori Kentaro 4. Hakata ramen originated as an attempt to reproduce a chicken noodle soup that Mori ate in Shanghai 5. Pork was used instead of chicken, as it was easier to source 6. Pork processors were throwing away pork bones at the time	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Each regional style of ramen has a sense of tradition 2. The original Hakata ramen recipe has been passed down between generations 3. The original Hakata ramen soup contained pork bones, kombu seaweed and aromatic vegetables 4. Recipe was passed down to Takeomi Teshima 5. Recipe was preserved and maintained by Teshima 6. The original recipe is preserved over chasing trends 7. "Consistency has meaning" 8. The original style of Hakata ramen represents Hakata's history	**Preservation of regional ramen tradition**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**

Case 11 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 11		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Sapporo ramen features a miso-based broth 2. At the interviewed shop they used a stock made with pork bones, dried sardines, "aji" (horse mackerel), Saba mackerel and kombu seaweed 3. At the interviewed shop they topped the ramen with pork mince, onions, bean sprouts and garlic, which had been stir fried in lard 4. Thick, curly, aged noodles		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
3.Call to action (come try the ramen)	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
5.Ramen is now popular worldwide	**Emphasises the global popularity of ramen**	
1. "Japan, the land of ramen" *2. "Miso is a traditional Japanese seasoning"* *3. "Miso is essential to Japanese cooking"* *4. Ramen is a Japanese staple*	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1.Slurping noise #1 2.Slurping noise #1 3. Slurping noise #1 4.Slurping noise #1	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1. Sapporo is known for Miso ramen 2. Contains beansprouts, pork mince, onion, garlic and lard 3. Sapporo miso ramen is stir-fried in a wok 4. Ingredients are stir-fried with miso 5. The soup base contains pork bones, dried sardine, "aji", saba mackerel and kombu seaweed 6. Soup ingredients vary in Sapporo ramen shops 7. Sapporo ramen is always fried in a wok 8. Sapporo ramen has a strong umami taste 9. Distinct thick, curly noodles 10. Sapporo style noodles were inspired by udon making methods 11. Rubber flaps give the noodles its distinctive curl	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**

Thematic Key (2): Case 11		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Ramen is a comfort food in Sapporo 2. Ramen warms people up from the cold climate 3. "Sapporo is one of the most competitive ramen markets in Japan" 4. Customer reiterates that ramen provides warmth and comfort 5. Sapporo style ramen noodles are "perfect" for miso ramen 6. Customer describes the taste as rich and filing 7. Instantaneous ramen stall popularity 8. "Has all the nutrition the body needs" 9. First of its kind in Japan 10. Aging the noodles like udon made the noodles firmer 11. Extensive trialling process 12. Curly noodles hold the soup better 13. Noodles took 6 years of development 14. Elementary school students in Sapporo "Naturally" eat ramen for lunch 15. Ramen is "special" to Sapporo children 16. Artisanal approach to noodle manufacturing 17. Quality control for consistency	**Positive identity building**	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Describes where Hokkaido is 2. Maps the different regional styles of ramen in Hokkaido 3. Shows where Sapporo city is within Hokkaido 4. Sapporo city has the largest population in Hokkaido 5. Sapporo has an extremely cold local climate 6. Sapporo is synonymous with miso ramen 7. "Sapporo is known for ramen" 8. "It's something everybody eats" 9. "We use ramen to teach about society" 10. High local demand for Nishiyama's noodles 11. "Sapporo, the home of miso ramen"	***Regional branding***	

Thematic Key (1): Case 11		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Changed from a shoyu based ramen, to a miso-based ramen 2. Miso was added to ramen for higher appeal 3. Miso was more appealing to local consumers as a seasoning and as nutritional ingredient 4. For additional nutritional appeal, Morito added bean sprouts, onion, garlic, pork mince	**Evolution of regional ramen style over time**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**

Case 12 Thematic Key

Thematic Key (1): Case 12		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. At the interviewed shop, their Hakodate style ramen used a clear stock, made with pork bones, chicken bones and kombu seaweed. 2. Hakodate style ramen is seasoned just with salt 3. Hakodate style noodles are medium thick, "between Sapporo and Hakata" 4. Hakodate style ramen uses "classic" toppings including chashu pork, pickled bamboo shoots and sliced green onions.		**1) Gastronomic structurisation of ramen**
1. Promotes the Ramen Taxi as a local ramen tourist attraction 2. Ramen taxi provides expert knowledge of local ramen to tourists	**Tourist Appeal**	**2) International audience connection**
7. Ramen is now popular worldwide	**Emphasises the global popularity of ramen**	
1. "Japan, the land of ramen" 2. Ramen is a Japanese Staple	***Branding ramen at the national Japanese level***	**3) Constructing a national food identity around ramen**
1. Slurping noise #1	Normalisation of Slurping as a Japanese Eating Practice	
1. Ramen is regionally diverse 2. Hakodate ramen is known for having a clear soup and simple toppings 3. Shop owner reiterates the importance of having a clear soup 4. "We make it as clear as possible" 5. Soup is made with pork and chicken 6. The classic flavour is derived from seasoning it with three teaspoons of salt 7. Noodles are described as being between "Sapporo" and "Hakata" 8. Toppings include chashu, pickled bamboo shoots and sliced green onion 9. Chashu, pickled bamboo shoots and sliced green onion are the "usual for old shops	***Distinctiveness of regional ramen style***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Soup needs constant attention for clarity 2. Constant skimming to keep soup clear 3. Constantly popular throughout the day 4. Customers describe Hakodate ramen as "light and delicious"	**Positive identity building**	

Thematic Key (2): Case 12		
Semantic codes:	**Latent subthemes:**	**Overall themes:**
1. Describes where Hakodate city is 2. Hakodate city has the third largest population in Hokkaido 3. Hakodate is associated with morning markets 4. Hakodate is synonymous with shio (salt) ramen 5. Shio ramen is just called "ramen" in Hakodate	***Regional branding***	**4) Constructing a sense of regional ramen identity**
1. Long standing patronage 2. Hakodate's trading port opened in 1859 3. Various nations opened consulates in Hakodate 4. Hakodate developed a diverse international character 5. An 1884 newspaper from Hakodate mentions "Nanking noodles" 6. Nanking noodles are believed to be salt seasoned 7. Nanking noodles were brought over by Chinese merchants 8. Chinese merchants came to Hakodate for the "abundant local marine products" 9. Chinese merchants spread ramen culture in Hakodate 10. "Places like Taiwan first made shio ramen"	**Historical connection to regional ramen style**	
1. Each regional style of ramen changes over time	**Evolution of regional ramen style over time**	**5) Dynamics of regional ramen identity over time**
1. Each regional style of ramen has a sense of tradition 2. Visits a ramen shop from the "old days" 3. Interviewed ramen shop preserves the historical character of the local ramen 4. The ramen shop has a second-generation owner, Oura Yoshiaki 5. Uses an old noodle machine 6. Original style of ramen preserved by shops such as the Oura's 7. Yoshiaki Oura's linage traces back to China 8. Hakodate ramen represents the beginning of ramen	**Preservation of regional ramen tradition**	