

**From the Stars to the Streets:
Culinary Capital and the *Michelin Guide***

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Abstract

Food is intrinsically linked to culture, identity, and social stratification, with institutions such as the *Michelin Guide* playing a key role in shaping culinary hierarchies and notions of prestige. The *Guide*, traditionally known for its focus on fine dining, has attempted to expand the reach of its gastronomic influence by including street food in its restaurant rankings. This shift raises questions about how the *Guide* negotiates culinary capital in non-Western contexts and whether it maintains or challenges existing food hierarchies. This research aims to explore how the *Michelin Guide* constructs culinary prestige within Southeast Asia, focusing on the evolving definitions of highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. The study uses thematic analysis to examine the descriptions of 87 Michelin-Starred restaurants and 169 Bib Gourmand establishments in the *Michelin Guide* across four cities in Southeast Asia: Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. The findings reveal that while the *Michelin Guide* aims for inclusivity, its criteria still prioritise French fine dining conventions, particularly in the Michelin-Star category. Starred restaurants emphasise sophistication and highbrow aesthetics, while the Bib Gourmand category highlights the authenticity of street food and its accessibility, but relegates it to lowbrow status. This distinction reflects the *Guide's* Western-centric values, maintaining traditional culinary hierarchies even as it seeks to represent diverse food cultures. The research suggests that while the *Michelin Guide* attempts to adapt to the culinary landscapes in Southeast Asia, it still grapples with internal contradictions in balancing inclusivity with traditional notions of prestige. This study contributes to the understanding of how global food institutions shape consumer perceptions and reinforce culinary hierarchies in non-Western contexts.

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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.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Food is more than sustenance, it is a reflection of culture, identity and social stratification. Throughout history, cuisine has functioned as a marker of status, with certain foods and dining experiences signifying distinction and prestige (Freedman, 2007). The global food environment is shaped by institutions that define and regulate these hierarchies, influencing consumer perceptions of culinary excellence. One of the most influential of these institutions is the *Michelin Guide*, a publication that has, over a century, dictated what is considered refined, prestigious and worthy of gastronomic recognition.

Originally a marketing strategy of the Michelin tyre company in France (Harp, 2001), the *Michelin Guide* was designed to encourage travel and dining as a means to sell tyres. Over time, it has evolved into the foremost authority on fine dining, bestowing coveted Stars upon restaurants that exemplify the ideals of haute cuisine – refinement, innovation and exclusivity (Lane, 2013). As a result, a formal recognition from the *Guide* is not just an accolade but also a symbol of culinary capital, influencing both industry standards and consumer perception. However, as the *Guide* expands its reach beyond Europe and Western societies into regions such as Southeast Asia, it encounters vastly different culinary landscapes. This expansion raises important questions about how the *Michelin Guide* negotiates culinary capital in a non-Western context and whether its evaluations reinforce existing food hierarchies or adapt to accommodate diverse culinary traditions.

Pierre Bourdieu's (2018) concept of cultural capital provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and tastes that grant individuals status within a particular social hierarchy. Within gastronomy, this capital is often dictated by institutions like Michelin, which determine what is considered "highbrow" or prestigious. The inclusion of street food¹ within the *Michelin Guide* suggests an evolution in culinary capital, yet it also raises questions

¹ While the definition of street food is debatable and subject to cultural and societal nuance, in the context of this research it refers to the local food of Southeast Asian countries which are typically affordable and readily available (Privitera & Nesci, 2015).

about how prestige is constructed and whether the *Guide's* approach maintains an underlying hierarchy between fine dining and more accessible forms of cuisine.

While the *Michelin Guide's* role in defining fine dining excellence is well-documented (Harp, 2001; Lane, 2011, 2013), its engagement with non-Western cuisines, including street foods, remains an underexplored area of research. Existing scholarship has largely focused on Michelin's impact on Western culinary traditions, with limited analysis of how the *Guide* navigates prestige and hierarchy in regions where gastronomic values differ significantly from its origins. This study aims to address a critical gap by examining how the *Michelin Guide* negotiates culinary capital in Southeast Asia. The inclusion of street food in its rankings suggests a shift in how prestige is defined, yet it also highlights the persistence of social and culinary hierarchies. By analysing Michelin's treatment of Southeast Asian cuisine, this research contributes to broader discussions on global gastronomy, cultural legitimacy, and the ways in which food institutions shape consumer perceptions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as Michelin's recognition can have profound economic, cultural, and social consequences. For street-food vendors, inclusion in the *Guide* can bring both opportunities and challenges – elevating their status while potentially altering the authenticity of their craft. For consumers, Michelin's evaluations shape dining behaviours and reinforce existing food hierarchies. By critically examining these factors, this study offers insights into the ongoing negotiation of culinary prestige in an increasingly globalised food landscape.

In this section, the introduction to the research topic and scope has been elaborated; next, the research questions are proposed and the researcher's positioning is explained. An outline of the dissertation completes the introductory chapter.

1.2 Research Questions

The objectives of this research are to analyse how the *Michelin Guide* constructs and communicates culinary prestige, and to investigate how the *Guide's* discourse shapes consumer perceptions and industry practices. It also seeks to examine whether the *Michelin Guide's* inclusion of street food reflects a shift in its culinary capital and existing hierarchies.

Specifically, this dissertation seeks to investigate the role of the *Michelin Guide* in shaping culinary hierarchies in Southeast Asia, using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to examine

the evolving relationship between fine dining and street food. The overarching research question guiding this study is:

- How does the *Michelin Guide* determine prestige and hierarchy in the culinary landscape?

To address this question, the research also explores the following secondary inquiries:

1. What is the culinary capital of the *Michelin Guide*?
2. How does the *Guide's* treatment of street food and non-Western cuisines shape perceptions of the culinary landscape in Southeast Asia?

1.3 Positioning the Researcher

The *Michelin Guide* has a close and complex relationship with me. Whilst, as a researcher, I strive to remain objective in the conduct of my work, it is likely my subjectivity and views will be unavoidably reflected in the research. Hence, I must elaborate on my positioning relative to this research.

As a Singaporean, I grew up in an environment where the discussion of food was omnipresent, from where to get the best of a particular dish to the discovery of a unique gem in an obscure neighbourhood. Often these discussions included foods that were within hawker centres, the quintessential third place of Singapore, where the cultural diversity and social fabric of the country is best represented in the food offerings from the various stalls. Some of the most memorable meals I have eaten are located within these stalls. I have great respect for hawkers. They are the backbone of the country as they work long and tireless hours to ensure the country is fed, often with slim margins and a harsh working environment.

For a Peranakan Nyonya², Peranakan food always represented a mother's love expressed in elaborate and sumptuous family feasts. Peranakan food, in my reality, was exclusively for consumption at home, and was only accessible if you were a member of this community. It stood out to me that Peranakan cuisine was marketed by the government and the *Michelin*

²In Singapore, Peranakan generally refers to a person of mixed Chinese and Malay/Indonesian heritage. Peranakan men are referred to as Baba, while the women are known as Nyonya (Koh, n.d).

Guide as a popular and distinctive cuisine in Singapore, rather than a unique cuisine of a sub-cultural minority group. Michelin's interest in Peranakan cuisine had a twofold effect on me: on one hand, I felt a sense of pride in my culture and community for the formal and international recognition. On the other hand, I felt a concern about the commercialisation of my heritage and the authenticity of the narratives of the government and the *Michelin Guide*.

However, my interest in Michelin really stemmed from my career in restaurants. I worked in both back-of-house and front-of-house roles, learning the business from the technical operations to the finesse of service. Particularly, during my time in a fine-dining restaurant, I was exposed to a very refined style of service and food, where I also had privileged access to some of the most premium ingredients and fine wines of the world. Discussion of Michelin within the industry was constant. I have had many discussions with colleagues about whether the Guide accurately reflects the restaurant industry (in comparison to our insider knowledge), and often the answer was no. Still, every year the industry anticipated the new list that Michelin released, and I thought it was fascinating that a French tyre company's marketing strategy had become such an important and respected entity in the restaurant industry. The annual update of hawkers in the Bib Gourmand list continues to be a topic of heated debate amongst Singaporeans. Secretly, I rejoice when a hawker I like is *not* on the list, and remains a 'locals-only' joint.

In a way, this dissertation reflects my life experience thus far. My cultural identity as a Peranakan, my national identity as a Singaporean, and my professional background is reflected in the Singapore's *Michelin Guide*. Sometimes, it feels like a mirror staring back at me. I will always observe the *Michelin Guide* with fascination, and question whether the power and influence it has over an industry is something that should be encouraged or criticised. Perhaps it is both.

1.4 Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is structured into five chapters, each summarised briefly below:

Introduction – An introduction to the dissertation topic, which includes the researcher's positioning and the research questions of this study.

Literature Review – This chapter comprises a critical examination of existing literature pertaining to the *Michelin Guide*, drawing on theory around the concept of ‘culinary capital’, which is based on Pierre Bourdieu’s work on capitals and his understanding of societal structures and hierarchies; the shift in contemporary definitions of how culinary capital is valued; and how the *Michelin Guide* has adapted with these changes through the case study of their activities in Southeast Asia.

Research Methodology and Method – This chapter details the research method, which adopted a relativist ontology, constructionist epistemology and interpretive paradigm; outlines data parameters and the thematic analysis employed in this research; and closes this chapter with a discussion of the ethical considerations underpinning this research.

Findings & Discussion – In this presentation of the results from the data analysis, the findings are assessed against to the concept of culinary capital and hierarchy, and how the *Michelin Guide* negotiates these for Southeast Asia.

Conclusion – In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, implications, limitations and further areas for consideration are outlined. The chapter concludes with final reflections on the research process.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review begins by providing background information on the *Michelin Guide*, from its origins as a tyre company handbook to its establishment as a globally recognised authority on gastronomy. The discussion then introduces Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinctions in society, which argues that society is structured along a spectrum of cultural groups defined by the capital they possess and their habitus. Building on this foundation, there is a discussion about the concept of 'culinary capital', as proposed by Naccarato and LeBesco (2012, as cited in Nowak 2013), as the cultural power of food as a means of self-expression and identity. Following this, the review explores how culinary capital functions within the traditional frameworks of prestige and status in food, with a synthesis of the theory and the *Michelin Guide's* role as an arbiter of taste.

The analysis then considers the shifting dynamics of power in contemporary times. Within the hierarchy of food, the challenging of the *Michelin Guide's* authority is critically examined against the democratisation of food discourse and the evolving determinants of prestige. The *Guide's* expansion in Southeast Asia serves as a case study to examine how culinary capital is negotiated in contemporary contexts, particularly in relation to the evolving boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. This section then discusses the *Michelin Guide's* influence within the region and assess its role in shaping the local gastronomic landscape. Finally, the chapter concludes by synthesising key insights from the literature, identifying the research gap to position this dissertation's contribution to knowledge and the research questions it seeks to address.

2.2 A Brief Overview of the *Michelin Guide*

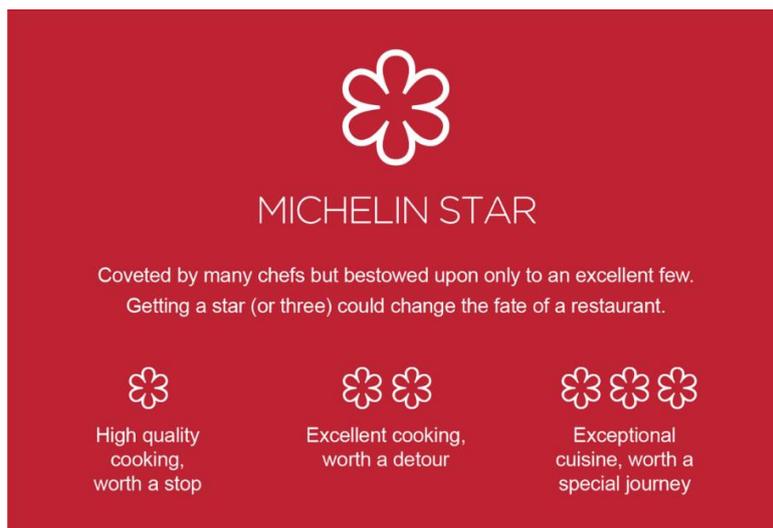
As the institution under review in this study is the *Michelin Guide*, I first provide a brief overview of its history as a company and its ranking system for restaurants. In its simplest and technical objectives, the *Guide* was initially a marketing tool for the parent company, Compagnie Générale des Établissements Michelin SCA, which manufactured and sold tyres in France (Michelin Guide, n.d.-n). In 1889, the two founders of the company wanted to encourage motorists to drive and travel the country, therefore creating opportunities to sell

more tyres. To assist their customers, they provided a red pocket reference book called the *Michelin Guide*, which contained travel information such as maps, petrol stations, hotels and restaurants to assist motorists on their travels (Michelin Guide, n.d.-n). In their restaurant recommendations, there was a focus on fine-dining restaurants, particularly because they were destination restaurants that motorists could visit, and the *Guide* sent anonymous inspectors to regularly review these establishments. The anonymity was a key emphasis of the *Guide*, so as to “ensure that they do not receive any special treatment” that could skew their evaluations and diminish their credibility (Michelin Guide, n.d.-u, para. 2). By 1926, they introduced a ranking Star system to organise the restaurants (Michelin Guide, 2019). This was crucial for the restaurants because it provided a credible and trusted system for potential customers to reference, which would translate to business revenue. The *Guide*’s criteria for inclusion were rigorous and strict, thus not many restaurants were included in its list. Their strict rankings and its implications for business revenue made recognition by the *Guide* highly desirable, eventually cementing its reputation and legitimacy as it became coveted by the professionals in the industry.

Their most famous Star system has three levels of rating: one, two, and three Stars (Michelin Guide, n.d.-aj). See Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Michelin Star System



Note. Image reproduced from Michelin Guide (n.d.-aj). Copyright 2025 by Michelin Guide.

As per the above, a Michelin Star is illustrated by its signature logo. One Star denotes a very good restaurant, two Stars indicate the cooking is excellent and is worth the detour, and three Stars signify exceptional cuisine that is worth a special trip (Henderson, 2017, p. 792). While fluid in requirements for culinary style and technique, the *Michelin Guide* has five criteria that must be met for a Michelin-Star consideration: the quality of ingredients used, mastery of flavour and cooking techniques, the personality of the chef in his cuisine, value for money, and consistency between visits (Michelin Guide, 2017). The *Guide* also stresses that Stars are awarded to the restaurant, not the chef (Michelin Guide, 2022a). It emphasises that only the food is taken into consideration in their evaluation, and stresses that other elements of the restaurant, such as ambience and service, do not provide any advantage. Whilst originally intended as a marketing strategy to increase tyre sales, the largely unchanged system has become one of the most famous ranking systems in the world in the present day (Lane, 2013; Pitte & Gladding, 2002).

Besides the Star system, the *Michelin Guide* concurrently maintains a separate award category called the Bib Gourmand, which consists of approachable food and value for money (Michelin Guide, 2022b). The Bib Gourmand category has no limitations in cuisine and style of eating, with the intention of including a larger variety of food styles and cuisines. It has largely remained a secondary function for the *Guide* in Europe. Yet the implementation of the Bib Gourmand is extensive in the Southeast Asia region, partly because of the region's diverse gastronomic landscape of affordable street food (Añes-De La Cruz, n.d.). The *Michelin Guide* also has a Select category, which is a category of restaurants with no award distinctions but is recommended by the Michelin Guide. At present, the *Michelin Guide* has an international presence in 45 countries (Michelin Guide, n.d.-v). The historical red book has also transitioned away from physical paperbacks to accessible digital platforms including its global online website and mobile phone application (Michelin Guide, 2023).

The *Michelin Guide's* role in defining and legitimising culinary excellence extends beyond mere restaurant rankings; it reflects broader societal structures that shape perceptions of taste and prestige. To better understand how these classifications function within a social hierarchy, Bourdieu's theory of capitals provides the theoretical foundations for analysing how culinary distinctions are formed and perpetuated.

2.3 Bourdieu's Classification of Taste

Although Pierre Bourdieu's work could be discussed at length, the emphasis for this literature review is placed upon two of his seminal works: *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Bourdieu, 1984) and *The Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu, 2018). In particular, this research draws on Bourdieu's concept of capital as a theoretical means to understand the *Michelin Guide* in the societal context. He defined capital as not only the economic wealth, but also the social and cultural resources that an individual possesses, essentially arguing that social inequality is not only based on financial disparity but also the level of accrual of the other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2018). These capitals are not simply tangible material possessions but also embodied knowledge, and the amount of each capital one possesses then determines one's status in society (Medvetz & Sallaz, 2018). In doing so, a social hierarchy forms as those with greater amounts of capital distinguish themselves from those who do not. Bourdieu (1984) called this 'taste', which is a social construct shaped by our position in society, determined by the level of capital one has. He argued that taste is not purely personal preference but also influenced by one's upbringing, education and social environment, and can be used as a means to distinguish social status and differentiate oneself from others. The elite or upper class (highbrows) are considered to have refined tastes, as they are highly educated and possess intellect in the form of knowledge and access to these capitals. On the other hand, the taste of the working class (lowbrows) prefers more functional and accessible forms of culture (Bourdieu, 1984). In the next two sections, I discuss two core contributions of Bourdieu's work, the concepts of capital and habitus, which are then synthesised in the production of a social hierarchy (section 2.3.3).

2.3.1 The Four Capitals

Bourdieu (1984) posits four distinct forms of capital that contribute to one's taste: economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Economic capital is the material wealth that can be converted into financial assets, acquired through a variety of means such as employment, inheritance, investments and real estate (Ding & Wu, 2023). It is the most quantifiable form of capital and a key determinant of one's social standing. Economic capital is important because it provides the resources to maintain and improve one's social status; without it, an individual will prioritise meeting their basic needs over social aesthetics.

Cultural capital comprises a person's social assets that can help one achieve success and social mobility. Bourdieu (2018) further identifies three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised capital. Embodied cultural capital refers to the internalised knowledge and skills that a person has, such as language skills, mannerisms and cultural awareness. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state is an unconscious effort through inculcation and assimilation over time, greatly influencing a person's dispositions and habits (Bourdieu, 2018). Examples of embodied cultural capital include a person's accent, social etiquette and intellect.

Objectified cultural capital refers to physical or material possessions that hold cultural significance, such as books, artworks or other artifacts that signal cultural wealth. Institutionalised cultural capital refers to the formal credentials of cultural competence, usually conferred through educational achievements such as a university degree. Each form of cultural capital contributes to a person's organic position in society and their social mobility. While Bourdieu posits that the obtaining of cultural capital may be pursued intentionally, it may not necessarily be acquired because "in matters of taste... all determination is negation" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56).

Social capital refers to the resources that are derived from a network of interpersonal connections, which are used for support and advancement (Lengyel, 2023). Symbolic capital refers to the non-material resources that signify prestige, recognition and influence in a social setting. It is a person's reputation in a particular society or cultural space. The interaction between these four forms of capital plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's social identity. They contribute to the formation of habitus – an embedded disposition that influences how individuals perceive and navigate the world.

2.3.2 Habitus

Habitus may be described as an individual's tangible condition of existence, which entrenches a set of habits, skills and character dispositions determined by the economic capital available to them (Gartman, 2002; Grenfell, 2014). The social environment inhabited likewise influences the individual's habitus; in conjunction, they produce the norms and general taste of their society. Beyond economic capital, the cultural capital one possesses also greatly shapes the person's understanding and position in the world. Huang (2019)

refers to this capital as knowledge which is gained through the specific culture the individual lives in. These understandings are reflected in the ways a person talks and their usage of language, as well as their attitudes and values, which are mainly derived from the level of education they have. Habitus may evolve as an individual gains new experiences and knowledge; however, like the idiom “a leopard cannot change its spots”, the fundamental disposition of an individual cannot be altered.

2.3.3 Social Hierarchy

Depending on the amount of capitals one has, and one’s habitus, Bourdieu (1984) proposes a systematic grouping of shared identities, which result in a social hierarchy. At either end of the spectrum are highbrow and lowbrow culture. Highbrow culture may be associated with the upper classes or the intelligentsia, often appearing as the more sophisticated, complex and refined society. It may require more nuanced knowledge to appreciate, which is normally obtained through formal higher education. On the other hand, lowbrow culture refers to the popular culture which is characteristic of the less-educated social classes, often having mass appeal and a trait of commonality. To attempt entry into high society, one must accrue more capital. Economic capital is a prerequisite for adding to one’s cultural capital; however they are not mutually exclusive (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980). The lower classes might have the economic means to access premium goods but the habitus they bring with them makes their bearing awkward, as they lack the propriety of knowledge and mannerisms that are found within highbrow culture.

Distinctions in taste, while perhaps easier to overcome for middlebrows, are still present in modern times (Thomas, 2022). Take fashion for example, as illustrated by a Prada purse. Its economic value is high, which already presents a barrier to access. Lowbrow and middlebrow individuals might consider purchasing alternative products that are cheaper, or they may seek replica bags. The upper-middle-class individual might have the financial means to purchase an authentic purse from the boutique. As the Prada bag gains more mass popularity, it retains its value of prestige as an expensive bag; however, it loses the value of sophistication and association with the upper classes as it becomes “loud” and “flashy” in the manner that the middle class uses the bag as a signal for their wealth. For the lower and middle classes, branding is the key decision-maker in distinguishing their status in society. High society might perhaps customise their Prada bags to avoid association with the “loud”

luxury group or seek other, more exclusive, nuanced products by Prada that might only be available through personal relationships between the customer and boutique. High society might consider Prada to be, firstly, a brand that offers very high-quality craftsmanship of leather goods, which inevitably contributes to its reputation and prestige in society.

In this example, the Prada purse becomes a status signal, but not in the desired manner for those in the lower classes. The aspiration to reach the level of prestige is futile as they lack the upbringing and finesse that is linked to the habitus of high society (Bourdieu, 1984). Two barriers of access must be overcome to acquire membership of highbrow society; the first is more tangible and the latter more inherent. First, one must have the financial capability to purchase said Prada purse. Secondly, the cultural barrier represented by knowing *why* one might purchase the Prada purse and the primary intention of the purchase is the differentiating factor that distinguishes who might be “in” and “out” of highbrow culture.

Just as high fashion signals social distinction, food also serves as a marker of status. In the next section, I discuss the concept of culinary capital, which is built upon Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, and how food choices signal distinctions in society.

2.4 Culinary Capital

As food is not only a physical good but also a means for cultural exchange, it can be used as a medium for individual expression of identity and social standing. Naccarato and LeBesco (2012, as cited in Nowak 2013) call this ‘culinary capital’. Based on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, culinary capital may likewise be acquired through knowledge acquired via education, cultural practices and personal upbringing. As it is determined by habitus and the capitals one has, it therefore establishes a hierarchy through the food one consumes (Nowak, 2013). I can elaborate this through the comparison between highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. Highbrow cuisine may include fine-dining restaurants, where food is only one component of the overall experience. A story is told through the food, which is often executed through the chef’s honing of culinary skills and creativity. Often, highbrow cuisine requires a specific level of knowledge and skill (Quinn, 2024). This includes being familiar with the conventions of dining etiquette, such as knowing how to rest utensils to signal to a waiter if you have finished eating, or holding a wine glass correctly. Other, more subtle rules may include dress codes and polite mannerisms such as eating and drinking quietly. In

contrast, lowbrow cuisine is generic and has mass appeal, and is created through a collective understanding and practice (Baumann et al., 2017). It emphasises practicality, often focusing on taste and affordability rather than artistry, and does not require specialist knowledge or skills to participate. Examples of lowbrow cuisine include quick-service restaurants such as McDonald's, and street food. Highbrow and lowbrow cuisines sit on a continuum, dependent on how much capital (both economic and cultural) is required to access the various forms of dining.

Besides the financial hierarchy of food, there is also a cultural hierarchy within cuisines. Fine dining is historically rooted in highbrow culture and French haute cuisine is still associated with finer forms of dining today (Schwark et al., 2020). In particular, nouvelle cuisine is the dominant style of cooking in top fine-dining establishments around the world (Trubek, 2000). Nouvelle cuisine is considered highbrow because it emphasises the artistic presentation, innovation and exclusivity of the food, appealing to those with high cultural and economic capital. The *Michelin Guide* also has five universal criteria for assessing restaurants, which align with Trubek (2000). They are "the quality of the ingredients, the harmony of flavours, the mastery of techniques, the personality of the chef as expressed through their cuisine and consistency" (Michelin Guide, 2022a, para. 1). It is important to note that the culinary techniques under discussion refer to French cuisine. Ferguson (2010) argues that the dominance of French cuisine's influence in gastronomy is a result of their food philosophy and system. The system allows for a degree of universality in application to other cuisines, unlike the notion of terroir and ingredients, which are tied to location.

Hence, in the traditional sensibility of cultural capital, culinary capital may also be defined and established through the hierarchies that are inherent within food. A highbrow individual may choose to dine in fine restaurants and possess insider gastronomic knowledge that may only be acquired through upbringing and education. Those of the middlebrow and lowbrow cultures may recognise foodstuffs that are commonly associated with highbrow cuisine but lack the etiquette and insider knowledge to truly appreciate them in the same way as highbrow individuals (embodied culinary capital). For example, caviar is commonly associated with highbrow cuisine because it is expensive and rare. In terms of economic capital, the caviar is already a signal of high taste because it is an expensive product. However, there is etiquette to eating caviar that is not common knowledge. Highbrow

individuals might be better educated to know that caviar is dolloped onto the back of your hand to warm the caviar slightly to enhance the taste or accompanied with blinis and crème fraîche; however, the lowbrow individual might just eat it off the spoon or even reject the idea of eating black fish eggs. Those in the middle are working towards acquiring the culinary capital and knowledge needed to have a better understanding and appreciation of caviar and the eating experience.

On the other hand, lowbrow cuisine presents a separate argument. Whilst more approachable in price and presentation, it does not necessarily imply a low value in society and culture. For particular regions of the world such as Southeast Asia, street-food culture is celebrated and remains a key element to the local gastronomic landscape (Henderson, 2019). It does not diminish in value simply because it is cheap by monetary standards. Instead, the strength of lowbrow cuisine's cultural capital lies in its universality and mass appeal. For example, a plate of chicken rice is eaten by almost everyone in Singapore regardless of their job or societal class. In this universal appeal, chicken rice blurs the social boundaries of class but also translates into a unifying symbol of national identity for Singaporeans. The culinary capital of lowbrow cuisine is valued through the collective participation in and appreciation of a gastronomic culture.

2.5 The *Michelin Guide* and Culinary Capital

The examples presented so far are representations of what is high and low cuisine based on varying philosophical approaches, but they beg the question of how do we reach these hierarchical distinctions of high and low cuisine? Who signals to consumers what foods are fashionable or fine dining? Who decides what foods are "in" or "out"? Lane (2013) posits that the *Michelin Guide* is the most influential tastemaker of gastronomy. According to her, they are tastemakers that "lay down the rules of what constitutes good or legitimate taste" (Lane, 2013, p. 343). As an arbiter of taste, the *Michelin Guide* has the ability to produce far-reaching and symbolic effects and material consequences for the entire cultural field. This supports the notion that the *Michelin Guide* has the power to confer and assign value and status through its food rankings. By establishing a culinary hierarchy, the *Michelin Guide* inadvertently turns itself from the work of food critics into the work of gatekeepers as they decide who and what cuisines should be included in the list of elite cuisines (Lane, 2013).

At this juncture, I must reiterate that the elitist notions of fine-dining cuisine are also conferred on French gastronomy. This is due to the history of Michelin as a company. Since its inception in the 1900s, Michelin has been and still is a French company. It historically emphasised and celebrated French gastronomy, in part due to gastronomy being an important element of constructing the French national identity (Harp, 2001, pp. 252-268). Even before the Star system was introduced, the *Michelin Guide* was a key resource that aided the pursuit of a French culinary identity and its establishment as a superior cuisine. Today, French culinary techniques continue to be the foundation of cookery in schools, and cooking competitions such as Bocuse D'or continue to perpetuate the impression that French cuisine is the benchmark of elite culinary practice (Ferguson, 2010). Therefore, I argue that due to the inherent "French-ness" of the *Michelin Guide*, its cultural and culinary status as a tastemaker of gastronomy also perpetuates these biases towards the impressions of French cuisine. This is why patronising a *Michelin Guide*-endorsed restaurant suggests a knowledgeable consumer of taste who aligns with French culinary traditions and highbrow gastronomy. Therefore, because of these connotations, Michelin-Starred restaurants become an important medium for expressing one's identity and position within society.

2.5.1 Chefs and the *Michelin Guide*

The relationship between the *Michelin Guide* and individual identity might be best observed through chefs, who play a key role in the legitimisation of the *Michelin Guide* as a tastemaker of the industry. Surlemont and Johnson (2005, p. 580) emphasised that chefs hold the *Michelin Guide* in high regard, and that the *Michelin Guide* serves as a "signalling device" for the industry. Chefs are highly motivated to earn the recognition of the *Guide* for several reasons: the potential business revenue that is generated through the publicity; the individual pride and satisfaction in the acknowledgement of their excellence in cookery; and the undisputed reputation of the *Guide*, which commands a level of respect among colleagues and industry peers (Bang et al., 2022; Institute of Culinary Education, 2022). In addition to these motivators, the scarcity of these Stars also contributes to their desirability and social value. Part of the reason why a Star award is an important achievement for chefs is because it is difficult to obtain and retain a Michelin Star, even more so for two and three, in part due to the extremely high standards of culinary expertise and skill that are associated with this system (Surlemont & Johnson, 2005). Stars are also rarely awarded, and it may take

many years before a chef achieves a Star (if at all); hence, the scarcity also contributes to the reputation of the *Guide* as a true judge of gastronomic taste. The *Guide* sends the message that it is serious and rigorous in its restaurant selection and not motivated by trends and popularity. For chefs, it also grants membership of an incredibly exclusive category of elites in the industry. It is an outward signal of excellence and esteem.

Although most chefs would likely gladly accept a Michelin award, there are a minority of chefs that do not want the attention from the *Michelin Guide* (Matta & Panchapakesan, 2021). A famous example is chef Marco Pierre White, who openly asked the *Guide* to not visit his restaurants, saying he does not need the recognition of the *Michelin Guide* and finds no value in the award (Witts, 2018). French chef Sébastien Bras also asked to return his three Michelin Stars in 2018, as he did not want the mental stress from the risk of jeopardising the restaurant reputation if the *Guide* ever decided to rescind the accolade ("French chef Bras gives up Michelin stars", 2018). It might be unfathomable that chefs would openly reject Michelin Stars but, in the true highbrow mentality, these chefs reject the notion of cooking to appease the *Michelin Guide* (or anyone) and would prefer to define their own artistry. Interestingly, it is also notable that these two chefs who rejected the *Michelin Guide* had at least one Star awarded prior. One can only meaningfully reject the award if one already possesses it, and the majority of chefs do not have the same privilege.

While chefs have differing responses and opinions, there is a close relationship between chefs and the *Guide*. Hence, I argue that chefs play a key role in legitimising the value of the *Michelin Guide*, whether they choose to accept it or not. With the traditional notions of culinary capital of highbrow cuisine and elitism, it is logical that most chefs in the world who have yet to gain any reputation or fame would desire the *Guide's* recognition. An award from the *Michelin Guide*, from the chef's perspective, represents all three forms of culinary capital: embodied through the identity of the chef, objectified through their food, and institutionalised through the validation conferred by the *Guide*.

2.5.2 Consumers and the *Michelin Guide*

From the diner's perspective, there are several motivations for patronising Michelin-endorsed restaurants. Kiatkawsin and Han (2019, p. 210) posit that materialism is the key driver for those who seek out Michelin-Starred restaurants as they desire unique and

exciting dining experiences. They found that it also created a snob effect as the restaurant patrons used the Michelin dining experience as a means to set themselves apart from ‘non-prestige groups’. This is a clear example of how the *Michelin Guide* holds its power as an outward symbol of individual capital accumulation. To say that “I have dined in many Michelin-Starred restaurants” sends these signals: I now have the financial means to afford highbrow cuisine, and I want others to know that I have the knowledge to navigate and appreciate the complexity and artistry of cuisine. Dining in these restaurants aligns oneself with the ultimate tastemaker of fine dining that is the *Guide*, and affiliates oneself to highbrow society as well.

In contrast to this view, however, another significant finding in the research was that there was no direct correlation between willingness to pay premium prices and the level of knowledge one possessed (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). This finding supports the previous discussion on social hierarchy transcending the limits of quantifiable assets and financial means. The idiom “money can’t buy class” summarises this notion succinctly. The intent of the individual pursuing Michelin restaurants is what sets apart highbrow individuals from the rest of society. This also supports Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, as certain highbrow qualities are inherited, not learned, and therefore those without them will never be accepted into highbrow society despite their efforts (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, simply having the means to dine at *Michelin Guide* restaurants does not automatically confirm membership of highbrow society.

2.6 Blurring Distinctions: Contemporary Culinary Capital

In the traditional sense of culinary capital and Bourdieu’s argument about social class distinctions, the *Michelin Guide* is clearly a signal of prestige and associated with highbrow cuisine, becoming a symbol for those looking to accumulate cultural capital. However, contemporary valuations of culinary capital are shifting and there is an increase in the blurring of the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow societies (Barrère et al., 2010; Lee & Ko, 2022; Vásquez & Chik, 2015). I argue there are three main reasons for this shift in power: the growth of the middle class; a perspective shift in how food is valued by society; and the democratisation of food critiquing via the rise of social media platforms.

2.6.1 The Rise of the Middle Class

The growth of the middle class has contributed to the erosion of exclusivity in elite gastronomy. Particularly with the increase in disposable income, global trade and the capitalist globalisation of the world, the middle class has been able to access foods that were once considered luxuries (Lane, 2014). Beyond financial capabilities, Barrère et al. (2010) cites four reasons why the traditional paradigms of elitism and luxury are evolving: the rise in costs of goods; the chef becoming an artist through the food; eating as a form of expression for the individual values and beliefs; and the growth of multiculturalism as a product of globalisation. Firstly, overall economic advancement has resulted in the extreme rise in cost of goods; and, secondly, a shift of the culinary mindset from nutrition to creativity has taken place, as chefs are assigned the role of artists and creators, rather than simply being people who provide food for the masses. Thirdly, values are re-assigned, such as the sophistication associated with ingredient provenance; for example, there are also other concerns when eating, such as environmental impact and food sustainability (Barrère et al., 2010). Morality influences the choices we make about food. Lastly, the globalisation of our food system allows for a greater rate of transmission and intersection between cultures and heritages. As a result, this intermingling creates multiculturalist societies and a fusion of cuisines. From this perspective, the old gastronomy model of French culinary superiority is diminished in its power over other cultures, especially those who are of non-European descent (Barrère et al., 2010). This results in a change in the global gastronomic landscape, as societies gain a larger plethora of food choices, and the palates of consumers inevitably adapt and change towards wanting variety.

Whilst the *Michelin Guide* is an outward signal of taste, the manner in which people affiliate themselves with the *Guide* is incredibly nuanced. As my earlier discussion in this literature review have indicated, one's habitus is an important factor in determining one's position in society. Acceptance in high society is not guaranteed simply because one patronises Michelin restaurants. If anything, it may achieve the opposite effect if one lacks the knowledge and skills of highbrow society when partaking in restaurants. Like fine art, the approach is more inward rather than an outward expression. It is important to remember that high society might prefer Michelin-Starred restaurants because it aligns with their habitus, rather than a means to flaunt their wealth and social position.

2.6.2 Perspective Shift in Society

There are many criticisms of the *Michelin Guide* for being “old-school”, elitist and biased. Gill (2012) emphasises that whilst Michelin is expanding and claiming to be universal, it retains its inherent bias towards the elitist French model of gastronomy. Hayward (2021) cautions readers that the *Guide* is ultimately a for-profit business, and that it should be used as a reference rather than a definitive bible. Groundwater (2023, para. 10) argues that the *Michelin Guide* is first and foremost, financially motivated, and that “there are clearly different criteria applied in [Bangkok] than there is in Paris”. These critiques are observations of the *Michelin Guide* which undermine its status as a fair and honest critic of food. This criticism could be justified through the evolving definition of culinary capital and prestige in contemporary times.

Vásquez and Chik (2015) posit that gastronomic pluralism is a new marker of having “taste”, as it signifies a person’s ability to travel and appreciate multiple cultures and their gastronomic prowess; however, the exchange of information and culture also perpetuates existing hierarchies within cuisine. Fine dining continues to be associated with class and prestige, but “the scope of what ‘eating well’ means has been widened to include a broader range of cuisines and an emphasis on authenticity in foods associated with diverse cultural traditions” (Vásquez & Chik, 2015, p. 234). For example, a person might express their culinary prowess through their learning and active consumption of different foods, like eating foie gras one night and then chicken nuggets the night after. Johnston and Baumann (2014) observed the same sentiments in foodies and American food discourse. What is interesting to note that is that while omnivorism expands our palate and diversifies our eating habits, the connotations of ‘elite’ and ‘peasant’ food still exist inherently. Like my example of foie gras and nuggets, it suggests that although one eats expansively, the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow foods does not change.

There is also a blurring of social boundaries due to the rise of the middle class, which has also resulted in the hybridisation of highbrow and lowbrow cuisine (Leer & Hoff-Jørgensen, 2024). In Leer and Hoff-Jørgensen’s research, a burger was perceived differently depending on the social context it was situated within. A simple burger within the context of fine dining

was positively received as a gourmet creation (Noma³ burger), whereas, in the collaboration between fast food (McDonalds) and Michelin chefs, diners required much more convincing that it was a premium gourmet burger. The situational context of both burgers – one being positioned within a highbrow environment and the latter in McDonalds – suggests our biases are informed by the social context. This presents a modified argument from Barrère et al. (2010); French cuisine’s superiority may perhaps be slightly diminished, but the notions of elite cuisine are very much present within fine dining. The research also noted that more effort was required to overcome the distinction barriers between highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. This is important because it signals that the Michelin identity in the McDonald's burger holds a more prestigious symbolic meaning, which conflicts with the symbolic values of commercialism and lowbrow cuisine that McDonald's represents (Leer & Hoff-Jørgensen, 2024).

As the conceptualisation of culinary capital evolves, the traditional authority of the *Michelin Guide* is increasingly challenged. The proliferation of social media and the internet has redistributed the power of authority between institutions and the general mass of people, enabling the public to actively participate in shaping gastronomic discourse and hierarchies.

2.6.3 Social Media and Online Reviewing

The power and ultimate authority conferred on food critics such as the *Michelin Guide* is now perhaps being undermined by the growth and popularity of online websites and user-generated restaurant reviews. Previously, only professional writers such as journalists or newspapers, or food lists such as the *Guide* could review restaurants with legitimacy (Charney, 2016). That has since changed with the rise of social media and user-generated online reviewing platforms. This democratisation of information exchange distributes the power of decision to the public masses; hence anyone can now claim to be an expert on food. Studies increasingly pay attention to online food reviewing platforms as they provide an “authentic” account of the restaurant, contributing to both the identity and reputation of restaurants whilst providing insight into the psyche of the individual reviewer (Chiang & Guo, 2021; Lee & Ko, 2022; Vásquez & Chik, 2015). The internet as a medium allows information

³ Noma was touted to be one of the best fine dining restaurants in the world between 2010 to 2021. It was the pioneer for the New Nordic Cuisine Movement with its innovative and sustainable use of local and foraged ingredients (The World’s 50 Best Restaurants, n.d.).

to be exchanged freely and willingly, and in doing so it constructs a new meaning for 'culinary capital' for the individual and the *Michelin Guide*.

Interestingly, while consumers' definitions of culinary capital are evolving, the *Michelin Guide* has retained its authority as a tastemaker of gastronomy. The internet is a shared space between the *Guide* and consumers (Lee & Ko, 2022), and they continue to use the *Guide* as an outward "signal" to differentiate themselves. Consumers desire to associate themselves with *Michelin Guide* restaurants because of the culinary capital it offers, and the internet is a highly visible platform for asserting their culinary capital and aligning themselves with the *Guide* (Chiang & Guo, 2021). Through the online discourse on fine dining, consumers inadvertently also perpetuate or reorganise the hierarchy in fine-dining cuisine (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). Since the *Guide* has moved its operating model from traditional paperback to its digital website and mobile app, it also signals that the *Guide* recognises the importance of digital communications as a means of appealing to the contemporary gastronomes. Alongside that, consumers are also given the freedom to express their own culinary identity through online exchanges, which may either align with or contradict the opinion of the *Michelin Guide*.

For example, a consumer may post a review on TripAdvisor about a one-Michelin-Star restaurant, stating that it was a magical experience. The food was absolutely deserving of the Star, as it was expertly executed. The wine list was extensive, and the sommelier lined up an impeccable wine pairing. They would recommend the restaurant and are keen to return soon. This presents a combined example of what has been discussed thus far. First, we can establish that the reviewer has considerable economic capital at their disposal, as they indicate they will make a return visit to the Michelin Star restaurant, which is expectedly an expensive meal. Secondly, the food and wine are discussed in a vague but seemingly sophisticated manner, and the mention of a wine pairing suggests this person is knowledgeable in wines too. Finally, to say that the Star was deserved suggests an alignment of opinion between the *Michelin Guide* and the reviewer, therefore contributing to both the reviewer and the *Michelin Guide's* culinary capital value. The reviewer establishes their place within the hierarchy of society, and the *Michelin Guide* maintains its position as an arbiter of taste through these affirmations from the public. It retains its symbolic, cultural and material power.

However, traditional notions of a particular cuisine being superior to others are waning, as society becomes globalised and the internet facilitates easier access to knowledge and information. What we eat is no longer limited to the geographic environment and cultural context we are born into, but also the experiences of and exposure to information as it becomes more readily available due to the internet. All these inevitably reflect and influence the way culinary capital is quantified and valued in society.

To summarise what has been discussed thus far, this literature review has examined how traditional culinary capital – as embodied by the *Michelin Guide* and informed by Bourdieu's theories of cultural distinction – is being reshaped in contemporary society. The rise of the middle class, evolving societal values and the democratisation of food critique through social media have collectively blurred the boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. While the *Michelin Guide* has long symbolised exclusivity and prestige, it has recognised the shift in contemporary culinary capital and incorporated a more pluralistic approach. In particular, the *Michelin Guide's* Southeast Asia operations provide a case study of this evolution as the *Guide* interacts with the diverse culinary traditions of the region and its street-food culture.

2.7 *Michelin Guide* in Southeast Asia

A defining characteristic of Southeast Asian gastronomy is its vibrant street-food culture, which plays an integral role in daily life of local society (Sawyer, 2025). While street food is often considered lowbrow due to its affordability and accessibility, this does not diminish its cultural and culinary significance. On the contrary, its strength lies in its universality, reinforcing the idea that culinary excellence is no longer confined to expensive or highly curated dining experiences. Many of the region's most iconic dishes, such as Vietnamese phở and Thailand's pad thai, are widely available from local street vendors and casual restaurants globally, making them a staple of both local and international food culture.

Concurrently, the region has experienced a growing appreciation for fine dining (Saini, 2023). This development is partly driven by economic growth, leading to the rise of a savvy middle class with higher levels of disposable income. The increasing affluence and appetite for new experiences are closely linked with a rising sense of nationalism and cultural pride, as the region increasingly recognises the value in its rich culinary heritage (Saini, 2023). Chefs often

incorporate traditional French and Western culinary approaches while infusing the menu with local flavours, providing a unique and innovative approach to the local cuisine.

The expansion of the *Michelin Guide* into Southeast Asia reflects these gastronomic trends. This is exemplified by the *Guide's* historic decision to award Michelin Stars to two hawker vendors in its inaugural Singapore edition (Goh, 2016) and, subsequently, to Raan Jay Fai in Bangkok (Holmes, 2017). Alongside the Stars, there has also been a continued and robust development of the Bib Gourmand lists for cities in the region, which heavily features street food. The inclusion of street food in the Bib Gourmand category – which recommends approachable cuisine at affordable prices (Michelin Guide, 2022b) – provides formal recognition of street food from a respected authority on food. Likewise, it also signals to readers that the *Michelin Guide* is adapting to contemporary culinary capital definitions and attempting a more inclusive approach in their guide's in response to shifting perspectives in society. Hence, the context of the *Michelin Guide's* activity in Southeast Asia can be used to examine the shifts in culinary capital definitions and the negotiation between distinctions of highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. This section begins by exploring an example of this negotiation, followed by a discussion of the implications for street-food culture and the countries of the region, and local sentiments about the *Michelin Guide's* presence in the region.

2.7.1 Re-negotiating the Boundaries Between Ethnic and Highbrow Cuisine

The fusion of culinary cultures is most evident through the innovation of local chefs, who integrate their French culinary training with their heritage and local inspirations to create distinctive and contemporary menus. Lane and Opazo (2023) posit that chefs who strive to elevate their cuisine and restaurant in the culinary and social hierarchy adopt several strategies, including: refining or reinventing ethnic culinary creations and their presentation; curating beverage offerings and services; enhancing service quality; and designing the restaurant space and menu to reinforce the intended gastronomic narrative (Lane & Opazo, 2023). In particular, local chefs typically incorporated French or Western techniques and ingredients into their ethnic cuisine as a means of culinary innovation. Chefs themselves are often from middle-class backgrounds with a high level of education or formal culinary

training (Lane & Opazo, 2023). Their study, though situated in Westernised cities, presents parallels to developments in Southeast Asia.

A salient example is Vietnam's *Ănăn Saigon*, a contemporary Vietnamese restaurant helmed by chef Peter Cuong Franklin. He is considered a pioneer in Vietnam's growing gastronomic scene through his contributions to the creative combination of Vietnamese street-food flavours with contemporary fine dining culinary techniques (Peter Cuong Franklin, n.d.). This is embodied through one of his signature dishes – the *petit bánh mì* (Figure 2.2):

Figure 2.2

Petit Bánh Mì



Note. Image reproduced from The New Zealand Herald (Johnston, n.d.). Copyright 2025 by NZME Publishing Limited.

In this image, the *bánh mì* transformed from a sandwich to a bite-sized snack. Wagyu beef is wrapped around the wafer, topped off with caviar and very meticulously placed garnishes. Its ingredients are a symbolic representation of those that would be found in a conventional *bánh mì*, which might look like the one shown in Figure 2.3.

A typical *bánh mì* generally consists of a Vietnamese baguette encasing ingredients such as pork pate, ham, and pickled vegetables. In contrast, Chef Peter Cuong Franklin's rendition of

the bánh mì is, as the name and size suggest, petite. However, it retains the sandwich's iconic elements while elevating them with premium ingredients like caviar and wagyu beef. This adaptation of an iconic street food in the refined context of fine dining exemplifies how chefs negotiate between culinary tradition and innovation, simultaneously preserving cultural heritage while engaging with the expectation of high-end gastronomy. In turn, Michelin's recognition of such restaurants expands the definition of highbrow cuisine beyond its traditionally Western-centric lens. However, while the *Guide* embraces the diverse range of culinary traditions, the Western-centric conventions of highbrow cuisine continue to exert a dominant influence.

Figure 2.3
Bánh Mì Huynh Hoa



Note. Image reproduced from HCMC Tourism Promotion Center (n.d.). Copyright by HCMC Tourism Promotion Center.

2.7.2 Culinary Recognition

Besides the development in the fine-dining scene of Southeast Asia, one of the most notable features of the *Michelin Guide's* expansion is its recognition of street-food establishments in awarding Michelin Stars to street-food establishments (Goh, 2016; Pajee, 2019). Street food

is traditionally considered lowbrow cuisine and therefore not within the traditional purview of the *Guide*. By acknowledging street food, Michelin not only elevates these establishments to the realm of global prestige but also disrupts its usual elite-controlled food narratives, signalling a broader redefinition of gastronomic legitimacy. The *Michelin Guide* also extends its platform of gastronomic arbitration as a means for local chefs and street vendors to elevate their craft and position local cuisine as a worthy contender within the realm of fine-dining restaurants.

Another significant shift Michelin's approach is the extensive inclusion of street food within their Bib Gourmand category, which features many street-food establishments in the Southeast Asia guides ("Thai street food eateries make a big splash in 2023 Michelin Guide list", 2022; Henderson, 2017; Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2024a). Historically viewed as a secondary category intended to complement the prestigious Michelin Stars, the Bib Gourmand has gained considerable relevance for the gastronomic landscape of the region (Sun, 2022), reflecting the middlebrow shift in consumer tastes (Saini, 2023). The recognition of both fine dining and street food ensured Michelin's continued relevance in gastronomy and in the region (Henderson, 2017), therefore also adapting to the contemporary definitions of culinary capital.

Beyond its role as a marketing strategy, the *Michelin Guide's* expansion also reinforces its authority in regions where international restaurant rankings were previously limited. Its coverage of the local culinary scene, combined with its reputation as an arbiter of gastronomy, positions the *Guide* as a credible and influential voice in shaping perceptions of Southeast Asian food. By integrating highbrow and lowbrow cuisines in its framework, it suggests that the *Michelin Guide* is adapting to the evolving definitions of culinary capital and continuing to confer power and influence as it legitimises street food as a respectable gastronomic culture.

2.7.3 Nation Branding and Tourism

Through the external recognition of local cuisine, the *Michelin Guide* also plays a critical role in enhancing Southeast Asia's culinary and national branding within the global gastronomic landscape. For instance, Singapore's campaigns centres on their "melting pot of cultures" (Singapore Tourism Board, n.d., para. 1) reflected through the local cuisine. An example of

this is fish-head curry, which has influences from several ethnic groups including Chinese, Malay, Peranakan and Indian (Roots Singapore, n.d.).

The *Michelin Guide* also presents an opportunity not only to showcase the local cuisine and its diversity, but also to elevate the local cuisine through the development of the fine-dining restaurant industry in the region. For example, Vietnam's fine-dining scene reflects the growth of the luxury sector and broader socio-economic shifts, with the increased appetite for high-end culinary experiences amongst middlebrows (Phua, 2024). Singapore is marketed as a gastronomic paradise with options from affordable hawker food to fine dining (Holden, 2023). While maintaining elements of locality and place, the trend towards highbrow adaptations to local cuisine presents an opportunity for these countries to position themselves as a competitor in the fine-dining industry and to make potential gains through the luxury dining sector.

One of the most significant outcomes of the Michelin expansion is its impact on tourism. A survey by McKinsey found that food is a crucial consideration for travellers, with fine dining ranking as the second most popular touristic activity after art and cultural experiences (Phua, 2024). Recognising these demands, countries across Southeast Asia have strategically leveraged the Michelin brand to promote their national culinary identities. Furthermore, the *Guide's* presence in the region can be understood within the broader context of Asia and its emerging consumer elite (Buchholz, 2020). Asia's expanding middle class exhibits a strong interest in accumulating Western highbrow cultural capital, in part due to the notion of a Western lifestyle as a symbol of wealth, education and knowledge (Xinran, 2004). Therefore, in the theory of cultural capital, Asian consumers view Western culture as highbrow capital, which is why the *Michelin Guide* – a French company promoting highbrow cuisine – serves as an outward signal of highbrow taste for these individuals.

Hence, by encompassing both highbrow and lowbrow cuisines within its Southeast Asian guides, the *Michelin Guide* positions itself as a crucial arbiter of contemporary culinary capital. The dual approach reflects the evolving markers of distinction, where both haute cuisine and cultural street food are recognised as integral components of culinary prestige. It suggests a comprehensive approach to appeal to consumers in Southeast Asia who seek to accumulate Western-centric cultural capital, whilst also attempting to be relevant to the local culinary landscape as the *Guide* is a foreign entity that lacks the established authority

of local cuisine. The inclusion of local cuisine within the Michelin-Starred category and street food in the Bib Gourmand serves to not only create relevance to the local Southeast Asian context, but also signals an adaptation of its operations to conform with contemporary definitions of culinary capital.

2.7.4 Criticisms of the *Guide's* Expansion

The inclusion of street food in the *Michelin Guide's* restaurant repository has generated much debate and garnered criticism from locals in these countries (Descalsota & Goh, 2023; Henderson, 2017), as some assert that Michelin inspectors are not in a position to judge local cuisines as they are unfamiliar with the local dining landscapes. In contrast, Michelin assures that the inclusion of modest eateries in the *Guide* serves as a “true reflection of the local restaurant scene” (Vinh Hoa & May, 2021, p. 62). Yet, in Vietnam it has been criticised for favouring restaurants in tourist-centric areas and a disproportionate focus on phở, despite the country’s diverse culinary offerings (Phạm, 2023). Additionally, concerns regarding the *Michelin Guide's* business partnerships with governments and hospitality sectors raises doubts about the transparency of its ratings (Elite+, 2017; Houck, 2018; Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2024b). The perception that financial incentives influence Michelin’s selections challenges the notion of the *Guide* as an impartial and authoritative voice in global gastronomy.

The controversy surrounding Michelin’s inclusion of street food and its alleged biases is not just a matter of local dissatisfaction – it speaks to the *Guide's* broader power in shaping global perceptions of cuisine and food. Despite criticisms of its methodology and potential financial motivations, the *Guide's* influence extends beyond restaurant rankings, impacting the way cuisine is valued, how chefs navigate their profession, and even how government-level strategies are designed to leverage food culture for tourism and nation branding. This supports previous discussion surrounding the *Michelin Guide's* culinary capital as a symbol of prestige and legitimacy in the field of gastronomy. The traditional symbolic power of the *Michelin Guide* remains, even as it adapts its approach towards contemporary culinary capital.

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review has explored culinary capital, drawing from Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, to examine how food hierarchy is constructed and understood. The *Michelin Guide*, recognised as a global authority of gastronomy, plays a key role in shaping culinary hierarchies and perceptions of highbrow cuisine. While traditionally focused on fine dining, the *Guide's* expansion – particularly in Southeast Asia and in its inclusion of street food in the Bib Gourmand category – reflects a strategic shift towards more inclusive rankings in terms of price and cuisine diversity.

Scholarly analysis has considered the *Michelin Guide's* influence on consumer perceptions and the fine-dining industry, but little attention has been given to its response to the changes in culinary capital and the extent to which it reinforces or changes prevailing food narratives and biases. Key questions remain: What themes are evident within the *Michelin Guide's* Starred restaurants? How has it changed to accommodate contemporary culinary capital definitions? How does it shape the perception of street food and lowbrow cuisines? And, more broadly, how do its rankings contribute to the culinary hierarchy outside of a Western context?

This study sought to analyse how the *Michelin Guide* constructs and communicates culinary prestige and investigate how the *Guide's* discourse shapes consumer perceptions and industry practices. It also sought to examine whether the *Michelin Guide's* inclusion of street food reflects a shift in its culinary capital and existing hierarchies. By analysing the *Michelin Guide's* activity in Southeast Asia, this research contextualises the theory of distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow cuisine to examine its broader implications for negotiating culinary hierarchy, prestige and legitimacy. In doing so, this study contributes to food sociology and food studies within Southeast Asia, offering new insights to the gastronomic landscape and its societal impacts.

3.0 Research Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding this research, detailing the philosophical foundations, research design, data collection and analysis methods. It begins by discussing the researcher's relativist ontology, constructionist epistemology and interpretive paradigm. Next, the research method is elaborated, including a purposive sampling of the data collected from the *Michelin Guide's* website, and the application of reflexive thematic analysis. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations relevant to this research.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

At the foundation of research is philosophy, the underlying belief system that influences how a researcher sees the world and engages with it. A researcher brings "a number of assumptions to [their] chosen methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 7), thus these assumptions need to be explicitly articulated as they inform the theoretical perspective of the researcher, which provides context for the study and justification for the chosen methodology.

Ontology is the "study of being" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10), and is concerned with the nature of reality and truth. The perennial ontological debate questions whether reality exists independently of our human consciousness and experience, resulting in a spectrum of views with two opposite end points: realism or relativism. The realist ontology assumes that reality exists independently of the researcher's consciousness (Poucher et al., 2020). By contrast, a relativist ontology asserts that the perception of reality depends on the individual interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this research, I adopted a relativist ontology. It assumes that there is no singular truth and "there are multiple realities and ways of accessing them" (Gray, 2022, p. 23). Reality is subjective and it is constructed through the individual experience.

Epistemology is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it; as Crotty (1998, p. 8) succinctly states, it is "how we know what we know". A constructionist epistemology has been adopted in this research. It rejects the notion of an objective truth waiting to be discovered. Meaning is not discovered but instead constructed through our interactions with

the world (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Knowledge and truth are created through the mind. As meaning is constructed and not discovered, meaning can also be constructed differently even in relation to the same phenomenon (Gray, 2022, p. 24). Multiple and sometimes contradictory accounts may exist, but all are equally valid and meaning is collectively created. Likewise, food is inherently subjective and personal, but these personal accounts are also informed by a collective of experiences as we interact with the social environment.

3.3 Paradigm

Research paradigms are framed by underlying ontological and epistemological beliefs about reality and knowledge acquisition (Scotland, 2012). In turn, each paradigm represents the most informed and sophisticated view that its proponents have been able to devise, as well as to demarcate what falls within the limits of legitimate research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this research, an interpretive paradigm has been applied, underpinned by the ontological position of relativism and a constructionist epistemology.

Crotty (1998, p. 67) explains that an interpretive paradigm “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the world”. This perspective asserts that reality is dependent on the individual’s mind and meaning is derived from the unique individual experience that is socially constructed. With this paradigm, multiple and concurrent realities exist, shaped by social and cultural contexts. In this research, this is exemplified through the *Michelin Guide’s* inclusion of street food in its Southeast Asia operations, reflecting a shift from its traditionally Western-centric haute cuisine purview, whilst it maintains its traditional ranking systems in other geographical regions.

The aim of interpretivism is to “bring into consciousness hidden social forces and structures” (Scotland, 2012, p. 12) and, in doing so, develop a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. In examining the *Michelin Guide* through this lens, the researcher aimed to develop a greater understanding of how our perception of value and the social environment shapes the way we eat and how we perceive food and culture.

3.4 Method

Research methods outline the processes, techniques and systems used in a research project (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For this research, reflexive thematic analysis was employed. A comprehensive discussion of its application is provided in Section 3.5.

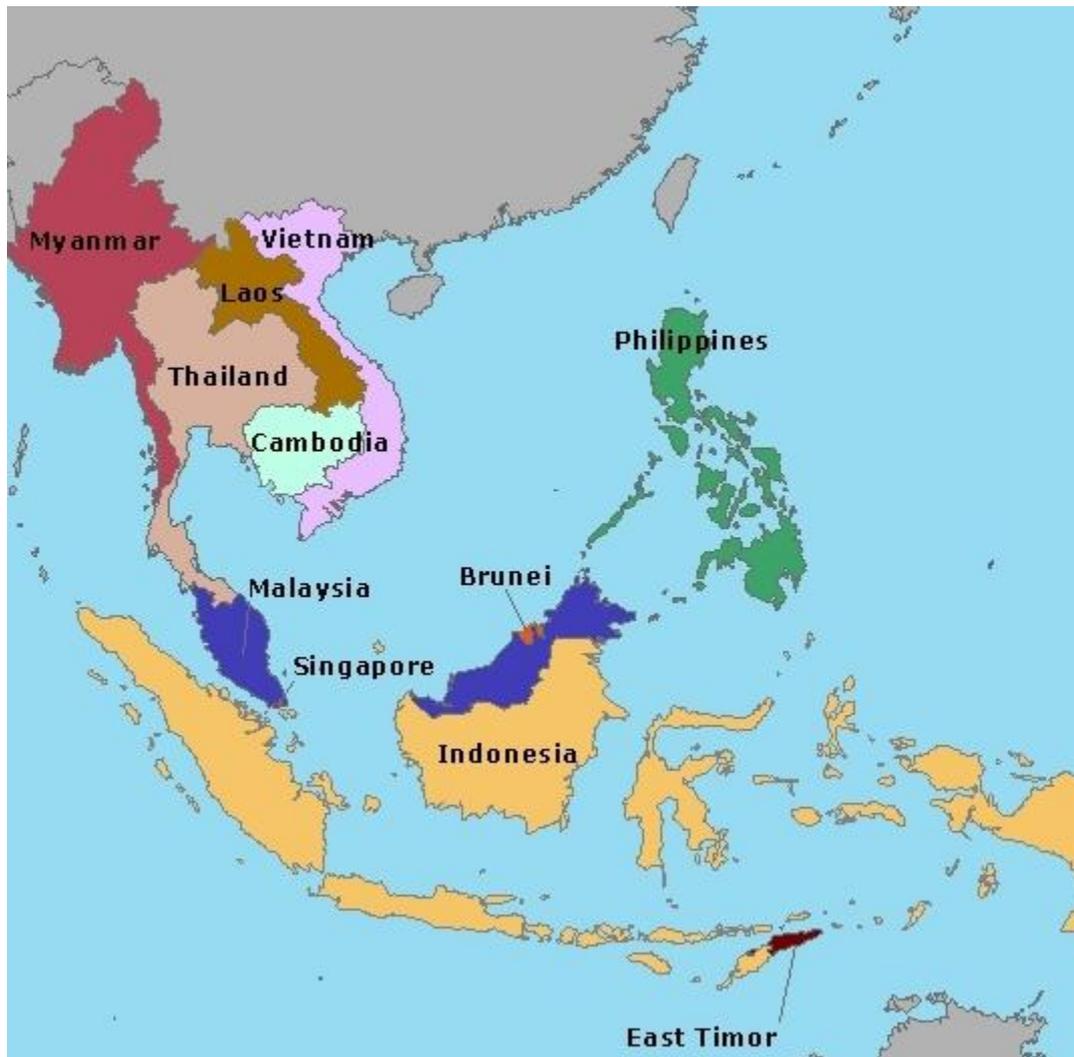
This research utilised a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the deliberate selection of cases is based on specific criteria, thus allowing the researcher to answer the research questions in a way that is as meaningful and informative as possible (Clark et al., 2021, p. 378).

The first step in sampling was to geographically situate Southeast Asia, and secondly to identify which countries have a *Michelin Guide* presence. To define which countries were included in this region, I referenced the established inter-governmental organisation called The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Whilst ASEAN as an entity primarily serves as the regional cooperative effort to promote political stability and economic prosperity (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, n.d.-b), in the context of this study it serves to officially demarcate the geographical boundaries of what constitutes Southeast Asia. The following countries were identified: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam⁴ (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, n.d.-a) (Figure 3.1).

⁴ In 2022, East Timor (Timor-Leste) was admitted “in principle” as the organisation's 11th member, with full membership pending (Reuters, 2022, November 11).

Figure 3.1

Map of Southeast Asia



Note. Image reproduced from Center for Southeast Asian Studies (n.d.). Copyright 2025 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

Once the geographic location was demarcated, the next step was to establish where the *Michelin Guide* operated within these countries. The collected data was sourced from the *Michelin Guide*'s international website. To determine which countries in Southeast Asia had a published guide, I typed each country name into the website's search bar. Only four countries produced results within this preliminary search: Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam. Within the four countries, these regions and cities identified a Michelin presence as listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1*Cities with an Established Michelin Guide*

Country	Regions
Singapore	Singapore (1)
Thailand	Bangkok, Phuket, Phang-Nga, Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya, Isan Region, Nakorn Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Koh Samui (11)
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur, Penang (2)
Vietnam	Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang (3)

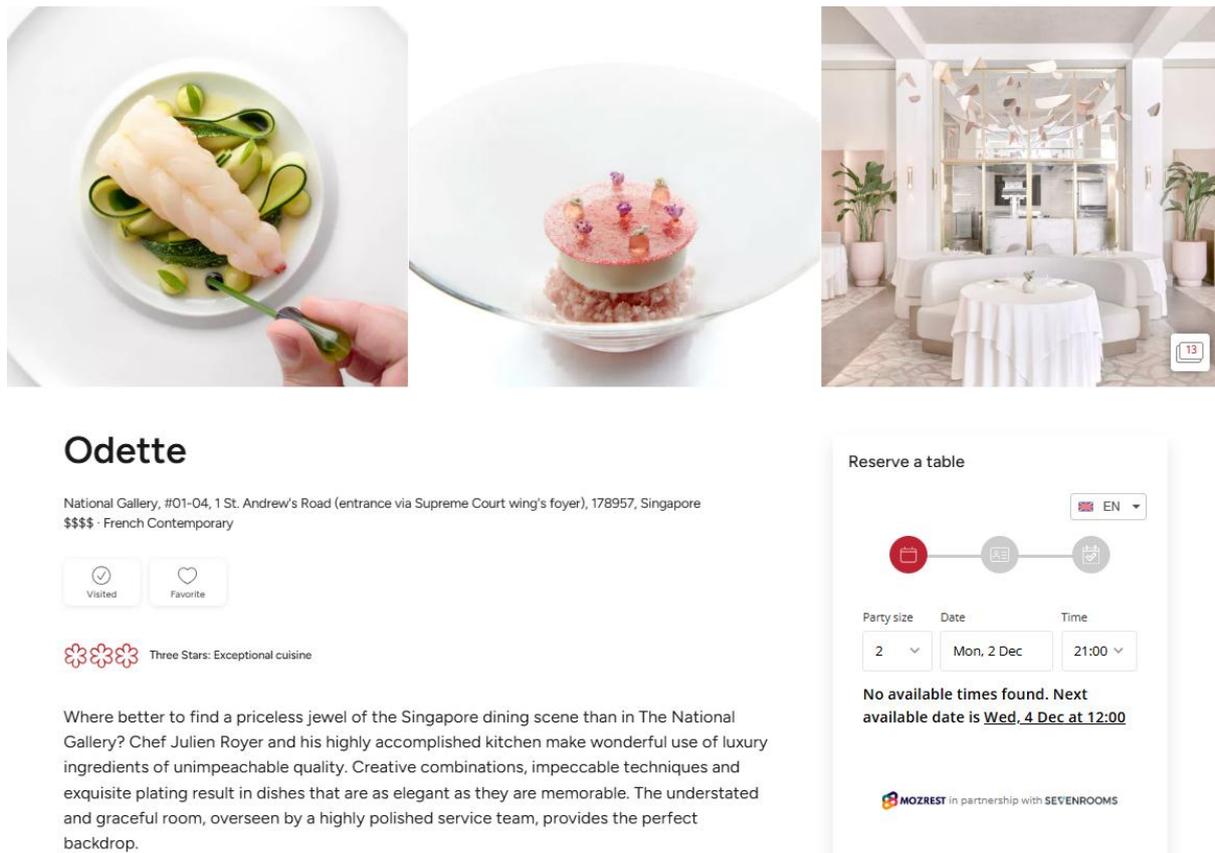
Working with data at the country level would include a total of 17 different cities, which is impractical in relation to the purpose and scale of this research. Hence, the purposive sample was narrowed to four major cities: Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Ho Chi Minh City. Apart from Singapore, which is a city-state, the cities were selected as they are the most populous cities (Statista, 2020; World Population Review, 2024a, 2024b) and they also have the largest guides.

Within these parameters, the *Michelin Guide* had three categorical rankings in each city: The Stars, Bib Gourmand and Select (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ac). The sample collected the descriptions of restaurants from two awarded categories: the 'Stars' list and the 'Bib Gourmand' list. These two categories were included because the Michelin Star system is the signature feature of the *Guide* and one of the most recognised food accolades in the world (Chiang & Guo, 2021; Vinh Hoa & May, 2021). As discussed previously, it is considered by many to be the world's leading evaluation system for restaurants (Lane, 2011), hence including this category is essential in interpreting the *Michelin Guide*. The Bib Gourmand category was also selected for this research specifically because it included street food. Since street food is an important feature of local gastronomic offerings (Henderson, 2019), the Bib Gourmand category is an important connection between the *Michelin Guide* and its attempt at localisation. The 'Select' category is solely a list of recommended restaurants. Due to its limited significance and lack of formal recognition as an awarded category, it was excluded from the scope of this research.

The *Michelin Guide* website allocates an individual profile webpage to each restaurant listed on their website. Each webpage contains information such as the restaurant name, location, the awarded category, the cuisine and an indicative price range, as well as a photo gallery and a short descriptive write-up about the restaurant. An example of this is illustrated below (Figure 3.2):

Figure 3.2

Odette's Profile Page on the Michelin Guide Website



Note. Odette's profile page retrieved from Michelin Guide (n.d.-x). Copyright 2025 by Michelin Guide.

This page profile follows the same presentation format used for all the *Michelin Guide's* listed restaurants. While each restaurant entry contained information such as photographs, location information, and price indicators, this dissertation analysed the written description of each restaurant (located in the bottom left quadrant of Figure 3.2). While the analysis could have utilised approaches such as geo-mapping or photo analysis, given the research scope and scale, the restaurant descriptions provided the most concise and practical medium for the investigation. The analysis resulted in 256 datapoints (87 Starred restaurants and 169 Bib Gourmand establishments). Data was collected from each restaurant page and

then transcribed and aggregated by city into three Excel spreadsheets for analysis. Other supporting information, such as the restaurant name and its awarded accolade, was also included for background reference. The data was subsequently categorised into two datasets: the Star-awarded restaurants and the Bib Gourmand establishments. With respect to the Stars list, this research did not distinguish between one-, two-, and three-Starred restaurants, as the distribution of the highest accolade varied across four cities in this study.

3.5 Thematic Analysis

There are multiple ways to approach the qualitative data analysis of text-based data. Two common approaches are qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). These two methods are often conflated as they share a common goal, which is to extract meaning from data (Braun & Clarke, 2021); however, there are distinctions. Content analysis explores the data by way of identifying patterns using a systematic coding with predetermined categories, based on a concern with the descriptive and surface-level interpretation of the data (Bloor & Wood, 2006). It may also quantify data and analyse the frequency of themes or specific words (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Thematic analysis, on the other hand, is a “method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involved systematic processes of data coding to develop themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 4). For this research, reflexive thematic analysis was employed. In this approach, codes are organically generated and inherently subjective, mediated by the subjectivity and reflexivity of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Later, themes are generated from the codes, and are identified by the shared meanings and a central organising concept.

3.5.1 Application

While, at face value, the text about the restaurants appears to be simple descriptions of what to expect when visiting the establishments, the research aimed to critically examine the latent meanings in how these restaurants are portrayed by the *Michelin Guide*. Adopting Braun and Clarke’s (2022, pp. 35-36) six-phase process for reflexive thematic analysis, the procedure for data analysis in this research is outlined in Table 3.2, below:

Table 3.2*Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

Phases		Application
One	Data Familiarisation	All data (text about the restaurants in the Michelin website) were transcribed from the official <i>Michelin Guide</i> website and aggregated into excel spreadsheets for easy reading.
Two	Coding	All data was imported into NVivo software for manual coding. The first round of coding was broadly grouped by three key features that were identified in the writing style and content: (1) mention of the venue ambience or environment; (2) the description of food and the mention of chef(s); and (3) any other phrases of interest that were relevant but did not fit any category.
Three	Generating Initial Themes	Two thematic mind maps were generated using the mind mapping website Miro to allow for better visual representation of the themes, sub-themes and inter-connections. Phases three to five were recursive as themes and code clusters were reviewed and refined based on the new connections established.
Four	Reviewing Themes	
Five	Refining and Naming Themes	
Six	Write-Up	Finalising analysis and writing-up of findings.

Phase one of the process was to familiarise myself with the data. Within the parameters previously established earlier in this chapter, the data was collected from the *Michelin Guide's* official website and consolidated into Excel spreadsheets. I proceeded to print and read the descriptions multiple times, highlighting and annotating any information of interest.

The second phase of the analysis was to code the information. NVivo software was used to assist with the coding and data management. There were several rounds of coding. The first round broadly grouped the data by three key features that were identified through the writing style and content of the restaurant descriptions: mentions of the venue ambience or environment; the description of food or mention of the chef(s); and, lastly, any other phrases of interest that were relevant but did not fit into the first two categories. These three categories were the first code clusters, which were further branched into new codes

and sub-codes, and continuously revised as initial themes were produced. These codes were checked against the research questions for relevance to addressing the purpose of the research, to ensure a logical coherence of the data. The codes were then reconsolidated and organised to form code groups and sub-code groups, which eventually informed the development of sub-themes and key themes in the data.

The next stage of the thematic analysis (phases three, four and five) was theme generation and refinement. The codes from the initial coding were transcribed onto Miro – an online mind mapping tool which assisted with the data visualisation of the themes, sub-themes and connections within the codes and code groups. This resulted in two mind maps – one for the Michelin-Starred restaurants (dataset one) and the Bib Gourmand establishments (dataset two). The mind maps can be found in Appendices A and B.

The final stage of the analysis process was to write up the findings, discussing the results from the data analysis in relation to the existing knowledge examined in the literature review. A cross-comparison between the results of the two datasets was also carried out to draw out broader and more comprehensive observations of the *Michelin Guide's* operation in Southeast Asia.

The results are further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

As a student of AUT, the researcher adhered to the university's academic integrity values of "honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, respect and responsibility" when conducting this research (Auckland University of Technology, 2025, p. 80). Ethics approval was not required as data collection involved secondary resources obtained from the public domain. There was no sensitive data involved, and the research was of low risk of causing anyone physical or emotional harm. There is no conflict of interest in this research, as neither the student nor supervisor have associations with the *Michelin Guide*.

It is important to note that while the narrow parameters of this research allow for a deeper exploration of the *Michelin Guide*, they do not capture the full cultural diversity of Southeast Asia – a region with rich, complex traditions shaped by history, geography and local customs. This study focuses on the *Michelin Guide's* role within the region rather than the dynamic

and multifaceted nature of its societies. The findings represent a “snapshot in time” of these food cultures rather than a definitive portrayal of the *Michelin Guide* within any specific cultural context.

The following chapter, Chapter 4, presents the findings and discussion of this research.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The flexibility of thematic analysis allows for an inductively conducted analysis while capturing both semantic and latent meanings, which offers both descriptive and interpretative accounts of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It was also appropriate for effective management of the relatively large datasets in this research (87 Star descriptions and 169 Bib Gourmand descriptions). In this chapter, the presentation of findings and the discussion of this research are integrated to support a flowing narrative structure in my analysis. I first present the findings and analysis of the Michelin-Starred restaurants (dataset one), and thereafter the Bib Gourmand establishments (dataset two). This is followed by a comparison between the two datasets to derive a more nuanced perspective on the *Michelin Guide* as an overall entity within its Southeast Asia operations. A summary of the findings concludes the chapter.

Before I begin the discussions of each of the datasets, summative diagrams (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.5) for datasets one and two are presented. These can be found in the relevant sections of this chapter (section 4.2 and section 4.3, respectively). These diagrams provide the reader with a visual guide of the connections between themes and sub-themes within each dataset. In addition to the diagrams, I also reference the two mind maps that were generated during the analysis to illustrate the connections within the data. These mind maps are included in Appendices A and B.

The reader is guided to refer to these diagrams and appended mind maps throughout this chapter.

4.2 Michelin-Starred Restaurants

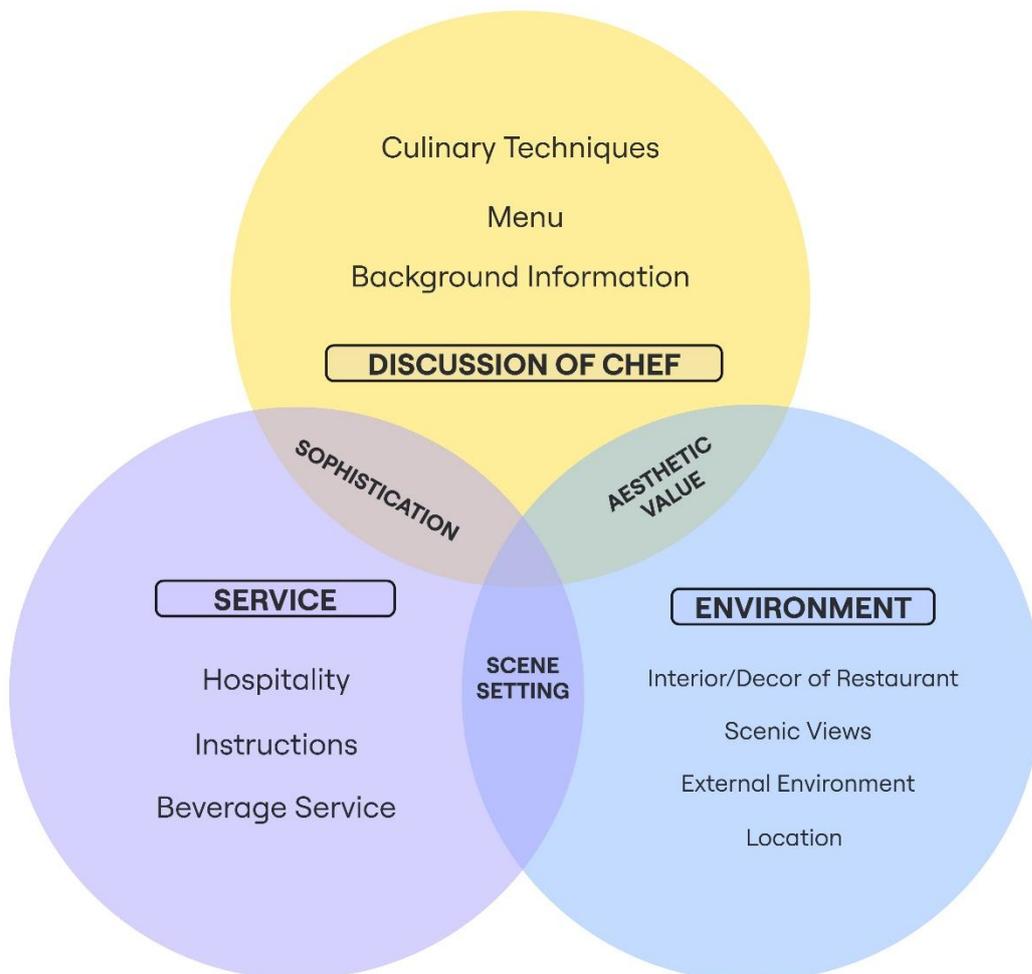
In this section, I discuss the results of the analysis of Michelin-Starred restaurants (dataset one), as this is the hallmark category of the *Michelin Guide*. The dataset comprises all restaurants that were awarded at least one Michelin Star in the four selected cities: Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Ho Chi Minh City. For this dataset, the mind map in Appendix A (“MM-A”) provides the thematic analysis framework that was applied. There

were 14 codes identified (the far-right column in MM-A) that were explicit in the written descriptions of the restaurants. These were further clustered into major code groups. The code groups later informed the development of three sub-themes: Discussion of the Chef, Service and the Environment (as illustrated in the three circled groups of Figure 4.1). These three sub-themes work interrelatedly to form the three key themes of dataset one: Sophistication, Scene Setting and Aesthetic Value.

These connections between the sub-themes and the key themes are illustrated through the Venn diagram in Figure 4.1, below:

Figure 4.1

Analysis Results for Stars Dataset

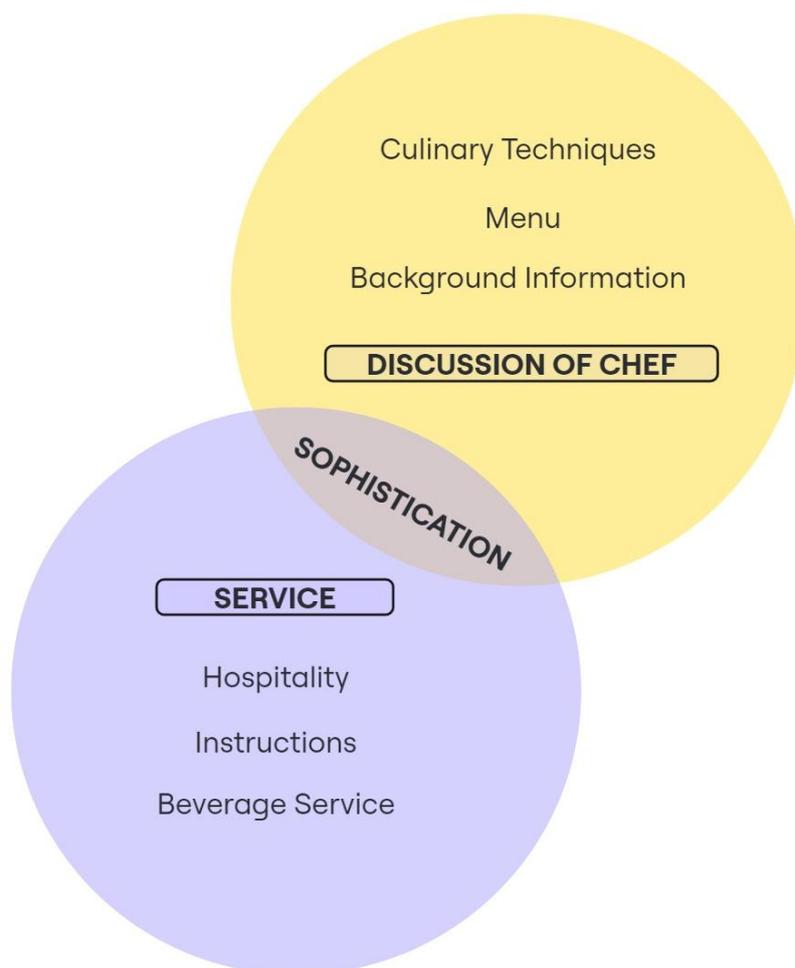


4.2.1 Sophistication

The first theme to be discussed is that of sophistication. Sophistication, in the context of fine dining, is a function of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Within the context of fine dining, it is a marker of capital as it requires both knowledge and the ability to navigate the complex gastronomic practices in these restaurants. The requirement of specific knowledge contributes to the level of sophistication required. Sophistication is derived from the intersection of the Discussion of the Chef and the Service of the restaurant, as illustrated in Figure 4.3 below:

Figure 4.2

Theme: Sophistication



The Discussion of the Chef Contributing to Sophistication

The way in which the chefs are introduced and described in the Starred restaurants' *Michelin Guide* entries signals that a level of sophisticated knowledge is required to understand the

food in fine dining. This is approached in three ways when describing the restaurants: through the chef's background, their culinary expertise and the menus. The chef's inspiration for the food was attributed to their cultural heritage and nostalgic food memories (see code groups *Culinary Techniques* and *Chef's Background* in MM-A).

For example, restaurant Meta focuses on the Korean heritage of the chef and how it inspires the menu, as "Chef Sun Kim hails from Korea's Busan, and his refined modern cooking combines Korean traditions and bold contemporary minimalist aesthetics" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-s, para. 1).

Nostalgia in Chef Malcolm Lee's menu, which is "influenced by his mother and his grandma" inspires "traditional Peranakan fare with creative twist and an Indonesian touch" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-f, para. 1) at Candlenut, one of only two contemporary Peranakan restaurants in Singapore.

Sometimes the culinary technique serves as inspiration for the menu, developed through the interconnection between code groups *Culinary Technique* and the *Menu Inspiration*. An example of this is evidenced in Sühring's entry, through the emphasis of fermentation in their cuisine as "each dish showcases expertly prepared seasonal ingredients using traditional German techniques such as fermenting, pickling, and curing" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ag, para. 1).

Through these approaches, the chef is likened to an artist who uses their culinary expertise in conjunction with their personal heritage and food memories and nostalgia as inspiration for creativity and innovation within their food. Food transcends the practical requirements of being satiating and tasty; instead, it becomes a form of expression of the individual chef's story and personality.

Regarding the discussion of the menu and food (see MM-A code group *Menu*), an emphasis is placed on the contemporary aspect of the cooking style. Food is referred to as well-balanced and elevated or emphasises reinterpretation of classic dishes or familiar foods. In Sommer's entry, "creativity abounds in dishes such as chef's version of the classic fish and chips, which takes the form of slow-cooked fish with pomme soufflé" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ad, para. 1). This emphasis is not limited to Western cuisine restaurants but is also found in descriptions of restaurants focusing on contemporary Southeast Asian cuisine. For example,

Ănăn Saigon's entry emphasises the blending of contemporary cooking with street food (Michelin Guide, n.d.-a): "After working abroad in Hong Kong, Chicago and Bangkok, chef-owner Peter Cuong Franklin has returned to Vietnam to open this restaurant in a lively market. He applies modern cooking techniques to authentic street food recipes to create enticing flavours" (para. 1).

Sometimes sophistication is expressed through the emphasis on the use of local ingredients to promote awareness of the local cuisine. This is evidenced in Baan Tapa's description, as "Chef Chudaree 'Tam' Debhakam brings the farm-to-table concept to life with her detailed, contemporary Thai tasting menu. Seasonal and sustainable ingredients, some sourced from her own backyard, highlight a culinary journey through Thailand" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-c, para. 1).

Another approach is through the local culture or personal heritage of the chef that serves as inspiration for expression through the culinary medium (see sub-code group *Inspiration – Personal Influences*). Indian restaurant Gaa is one example, where the chef "Garima personally services a tasting menu inspired by her Indian heritage, featuring inventive street food interpretations" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-k, para. 1). For many local chefs in Southeast Asia, the *Michelin Guide's* recognition of their creativity, through the integration of Western/French fine dining and local cuisines, flavours and ingredients, presents an opportunity for innovation and elevation of the local culinary culture and practice of the region.

The emphasis on storytelling, technique, and sophisticated appreciation reflects Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital. These examples from the data illustrate the concept of highbrow cuisine, where food is not merely a source of sustenance but a medium of artistic and intellectual expression. The artistic framing parallels fine dining with other creative disciplines such as painting or music, where the creator's intent is prioritised over the audience's preferences. Just as a gallery visitor would not alter an artwork, fine dining discourages diners from modifying the chef's menu. Simple requests, such as asking for salt or a substitution, can be perceived as undermining the chef's authority, reinforcing the idea that the dish is to be appreciated as presented rather than adjusted to individual taste.

As a result, the traditional power dynamic of the dinner table shifts. Rather than the customer dictating their experience, as in conventional dining where “the customer is king”, fine dining requires diners to submit to the chef’s artistic vision. This shift redefines the role of the diner from an active participant to a passive observer, experiencing the meal as the chef intends. While this elevates the prestige of the chef as a culinary artist, it also shapes the diner’s behaviour, subtly instructing them on how to engage with high-end cuisine.

Insider Knowledge as a Signal of Sophistication

Beyond the artistic value and conceptual appreciation of the food, the technicalities of fine dining also convey a level of sophistication. This is evidenced through the frequency of French terminology within the dataset which subsequently formed the sub-code group *Frequent use of French Culinary Terms/Words* (located within MM-A’s code group *Description of Food*). Key codes included “prix-fixe” and “degustation”, which translate together to mean a fixed multi-course menu that is to be carefully appreciated, and the Japanese term “omakase”, which means a chef-curated dinner wherein the diner leaves it to the chef to decide the menu (Aperitif, n.d.; Michelin Guide, 2021). Typically, for these styles of dining, the intention is to showcase the culinary skill and creativity of the chef with multiple small but highly curated dishes (Deer, n.d.). This suggests that each bite is intended as an appreciative showcase of the chef’s skill and culinary art. The structure of the menu implies that the food is meant to be appreciated artistically, which concurs with highbrow culture (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980).

Insider knowledge on identifying the quality of ingredients is another indication of sophistication. The quality of the ingredients used within these restaurants signals a high level of attention to detail and a commitment to the sourcing of quality ingredients (see code group *Quality of Ingredients* in MM-A). This emphasis can be illustrated through the entries for Shinji and Terra: “the ingredients are good quality, with fish flown in from Tokyo’s Toyosu Market” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ab, para. 1); and “best known for their focus on and respect for seasonal ingredients, the cooking is unmistakably Italian; while the ingredients are shipped from Japan daily” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ah, para. 1). In these two examples, the quality of the ingredients is emphasised through the freshness of products sourced from Japan, a country well-known for producing premium quality foods.

Another approach is evidenced through Jaan by Kirk Westaway's entry: "Chef Westaway makes good use of top-notch British produce and inspirations, such as scallops from Scotland and turbot from Cornwall, to turn out modern culinary creations that never fail to impress" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-o, para. 1). This example highlights that, although the ingredients may come from lesser-known origins, their premium quality remains uncompromised, demonstrating the chef's deep understanding of terroir – a French term referring to the geography and provenance of ingredients. By presenting a hyper-curated selection of British ingredients, the chef reinforces this expertise. Additionally, because these restaurants are located in Southeast Asia, emphasising the exported nature of the ingredients also contributes to its scarcity value. It would not only require great effort to source these ingredients internationally but they may also only be available in limited quantities.

Beyond the knowledge of food and cuisine, dining etiquette serves as another marker of cultural capital. The ability to correctly navigate a multi-course meal – knowing how to navigate the meal structure and etiquette or pairing beverages according to established conventions – signals one's gastronomic literacy and knowledge (Quinn, 2024). The *Instruction* code group within MM-A identifies directive instructions for the reader that support the navigation of the etiquette and practices of fine-dining restaurants. For example, there are several entries that advise the reader to make a reservation prior to their visit, which suggests that it requires premeditation and deliberate effort to secure a table for a Michelin-Starred restaurant. In the instance of Hamamoto, a reservation is not only essential but difficult to secure because "there is only one sitting at lunch and dinner at the handsome, curved counter, so you'll need patience and perseverance when trying to secure a booking" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-m, para. 1).

Besides making a reservation, the descriptions advise the reader to make specific requests that may enhance the dining experience. Resonance in Bangkok suggests the reader is able "to add another layer of subtlety to [the] meal [by requesting] for the tea pairing a day or two in advance" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-aa, para. 1). Likewise, Singapore's Les Amis invites readers to "consider booking the chef's table for an intimate experience" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-r, para. 1). The *Guide* sends subtle cues of how to navigate the dinner experience within these restaurants, not only to enhance the overall experience but to also emphasise that this

is the style of dining that is associated with the *Guide* and highbrow cuisine. By discussing these value-added components of the dining experience, the *Guide* also suggests to the reader that this is what should be done when visiting a fine-dining restaurant.

The emphasis on the beverages in fine-dining restaurants also contributes to the impression of sophistication. Often, the drinks were suggested as a complement to the meal, and this was done in one of two ways: the suggestion of pre/post meal-drink (aperitif/digestif) (see code group *Instruction* in MM-A) or the discussion of beverage pairings (see code group *Beverage*), which predominantly focused on wine and cocktails but also included non-alcoholic pairings such as tea. The concept of pairing drinks requires specific knowledge on how and why it is done, and what might be considered appropriate (Wine and Spirit Education Trust Global, 2023). It also requires a consideration of whether the pairing was conventionally appropriate, which would require background knowledge on pairing principles to make an assessment. For example, Beta's entry recommends the "fine cocktail-food pairings to complement the intelligent dishes" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-e, para. 1):

In addition, the presence of a sommelier and the discussion of wine lists were recurring discussions within the dataset, which became prevalent codes in MM-A that informed the sub-theme of *Service*. A sommelier – meaning "wine steward" in French – is a trained and knowledgeable professional who specialises in all aspects of wine service, including wine pairing, storage and presentation (Wagner, n.d., para. 5). I argue that the sommelier also represents an objectified means for the diner to accumulate cultural capital. To highbrow individuals, the presence of the sommelier signifies the restaurant's commitment to its beverage programme and offers an avenue for intellectual engagement and identity expression through wine knowledge. Conversely, to middlebrow consumers, the sommelier may function as an etiquette guide, helping diners navigate an unfamiliar and complicated topic. Thus, the sommelier's role is twofold: they not only serve wine but also facilitate the expression and accumulation of culinary capital for fine-dining patrons. The complexity of wine discourse makes for a potent signifier of sophistication, as an individual's ability to engage in such discussions reflects their level of culinary capital.

The *Michelin Guide* holds significant symbolic value for those who seek to accumulate culinary capital (Thomas, 2022). It cultivates an aura of sophistication through its restaurant

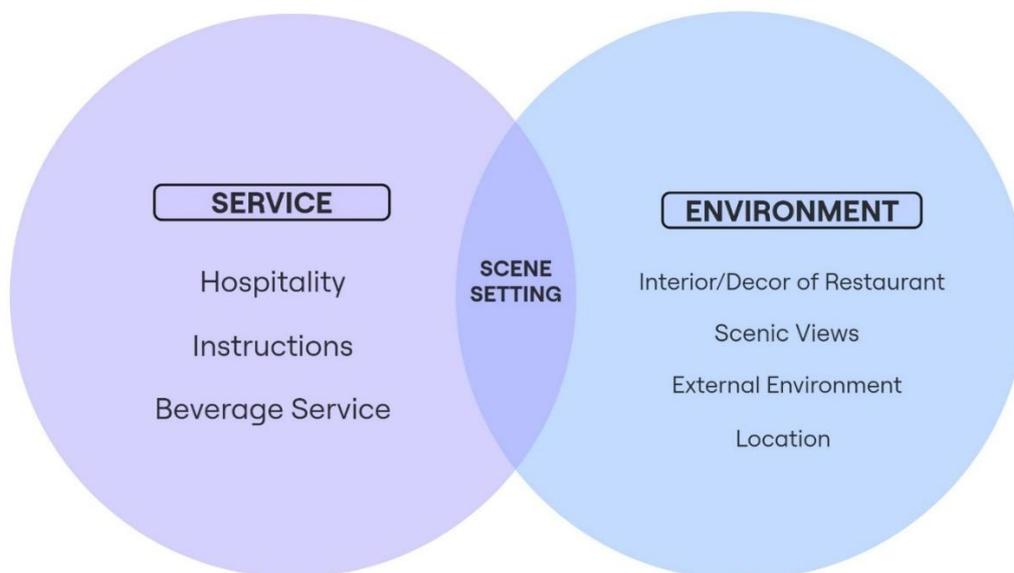
descriptions, offering subtle markers of cultural refinement. Embodied culinary capital is reflected in its detailed portrayals of chefs, restaurant atmosphere, and cuisine, reinforcing both the prestige of the *Michelin Guide* and the expertise of the chefs it features. It sends the message to the reader that, by patronising these Michelin-Starred restaurants, they too can accrue and embody highbrow culinary capital.

4.2.2 Scene Setting

A fine-dining experience is a sum of its parts. It is about engaging all senses – sight, smell, taste, touch and sound – to convey an experience of emotion. The environment is an important way to determine the mood of the meal (Spence, 2017, pp. 200-218). It sets the tone of the dining experience and complements the cuisine to present a theatrical experience. Beyond the environment, the hospitality of the staff is also an important factor in creating a personable and memorable dining experience (Boddy, 2018). This is where the second theme, Scene Setting, is derived (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3

Theme: Scene Setting



Scene Setting is derived from the intersection between Service and the Environment. Like a theatrical performance, the environment sets a backdrop for the service team to perform like actors within the restaurant, as they provide hospitality to create a memorable dining environment and experience (the combination of code group *Hospitality* and sub-theme

Environment). Entries in the *Michelin Guide* also convey a sense of the atmosphere and the level of professionalism through the descriptive words used.

For example, Odette's entry exudes a soft and refined aura through its "understated and graceful room, overseen by a highly polished service team" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-x, para. 1). Labyrinth's entry suggests a thrilling and adventurous experience, as "the restaurant's black canvas is punctured by razor sharp lighting, while the service team are clued up and very well organised" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-q, para. 1). Mezzaluna's approach differs again by extending the restaurant experience to the external environment by focusing on the premium views. Diners are "perched on the 65th floor of the Lebu Hotel, [where] Mezzaluna offers sky-high and breathtaking views" and the reader is encouraged to "toast to the high life at Sky Bar before settling in for a gastronomic journey" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-t, para. 1).

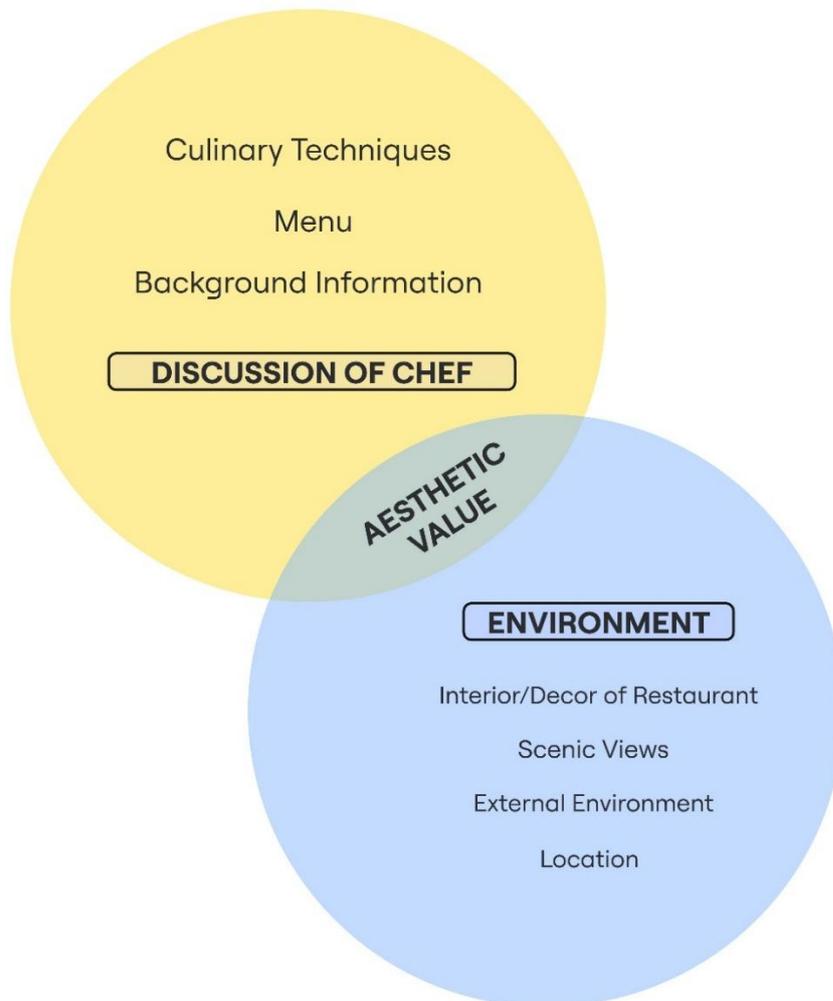
These examples demonstrate how scene setting in Michelin-Starred restaurants transforms dining into an aspirational experience. By highlighting the synergy between the environment, service and atmosphere, these descriptions position fine dining as a carefully curated gastronomic dining experience. This approach reinforces the *Michelin Guide's* authority in defining gastronomic excellence, shaping readers' perceptions and expectations of fine dining.

4.2.3 Aesthetic Value

Fine dining as an aesthetic is shaped by both the food itself and the environment in which it is consumed. These elements interact to create a multisensory experience that extends beyond taste, reinforcing cultural capital and notions of sophistication (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4

Theme: Aesthetic Value



The Fine-Dining Experience as an Aesthetic Object

Fine-dining cuisine is likened to an artistic craft, designed to be visually, texturally and conceptually stimulating (Kaplan, 2012). The chef, much like an artist, curates a dining experience that extends beyond sustenance to form a high culinary art. The data suggests that this is done in two ways: the innovation and creativity of the chef, and the style of plating (see code group *Likened to an Artist* in MM-A). For example, at Art di Daniele Sperindio (Michelin Guide, n.d.-b):

The tasting menus are inspired by chef-owner Daniele Sperindio's Italian heritage, childhood memories and love of his home country. From the sea to the mountains, his creative, intricate and exquisitely plated dishes take diners on a gastronomic journey around Italy. (para. 1)

Similarly, Dewakan in Kuala Lumpur “crafts a heavenly dining experience that is Malaysian down to its very core. Every ingredient is sustainably and locally sourced; even the dinnerware is handmade by local artists” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-h, para. 1).

In these examples the emphasis on the artistic value in the dining experience is captured through the nostalgia and expertise of the chef, along with the attention to the finer details such as the plating style and custom dinnerware. This emphasis on refinement as an aesthetic aligns with Bourdieu and Nice’s (1980) theory of highbrow culture. Culinary capital, in the Michelin-Starred restaurants, is defined through its association with refined and artistic appreciation for cuisine. By framing the Michelin Star restaurant experience as a sophisticated and curated experience, these descriptions reinforce the exclusivity and prestige associated with fine dining, and therefore with the restaurants the *Michelin Guide*.

Similarly, as readers engage with these descriptions of the Michelin-Starred restaurants, they internalise these aesthetic values associated with highbrow culture. However, like habitus (Huang, 2019), true embodiment of this aesthetic requires not only knowledge but also an innate understanding of how to navigate and appreciate highbrow cuisine. The *Michelin Guide*, in this context, subtly determines the definitions of what highbrow gastronomy is, which shapes the perception of culinary prestige. For those outside of this cultural sphere, the *Guide* also functions as a mediator of symbolic value, positioning Michelin-Starred restaurants as markers of refined taste. Consequently, patronising these restaurants signals to society a cultivated aesthetic sensibility, reinforcing an individual’s alignment with highbrow culture through the informed appreciation of highbrow cuisine and its associated etiquette.

4.2.4 The Starred Restaurant as a Symbolic Form of Culinary Capital

The *Michelin Guide* operates as a symbolic system of cultural capital, where the awarding of Stars confers the status of luxury and prestige on both its restaurants (and therefore chefs) and its patrons. For chefs and the industry in Southeast Asia, recognition by the *Michelin Guide* also presents an opportunity to elevate the status and prestige of the local cuisines of the region, placing them on a global platform that has historically been dominated by European fine-dining restaurants. This recognition, however, also comes with an inherent

tension – one that reflects the region’s negotiation between traditional culinary heritage and the expectations of fine dining as defined by the *Michelin Guide’s* Eurocentric framework.

The three themes – Sophistication, Scene Setting, and Aesthetic Value – are facets of the overall perception of the *Michelin Guide* and traditional notions of culinary capital and highbrow cuisine. This is expected, as the historical aspect of the *Michelin Guide’s* development of the Star system contributed to elite dining, and because of its French history perpetuates the French style of fine dining. Thus the *Guide* is an outward signal for the individual that provides a means for accumulating cultural capital and prestige through its impression of sophistication and aesthetics (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). The three themes synergise to form the overall disposition of Michelin-Starred restaurants: that they are an elite form of dining, and local cuisines of Southeast Asia must adapt or incorporate the Western-centric approach to have the same status conferred upon them. Beta’s entry provides an example of this synthesis (Michelin Guide, n.d.-e),

Beta offers discerning foodies an exciting way to taste Malaysia’s rich culinary heritage with a touch of finesse. The chef reimagines favourites from around the country, often jazzed up with modern techniques and soigné plating. Head to the lounge first for a round of cocktails and appetisers, before sampling the main courses in the theatrically appointed dining room with open kitchen. Fine cocktail-food pairings to complement the intelligent dishes. (para. 1)

In the description of Beta, cultural heritage remains central to the menu, but the cuisine is elevated through contemporary (French) techniques and refined presentation. This transformation aligns with Michelin’s fine-dining framework, reinforcing the idea that local cuisines can also gain prestige and culinary capital status through modernisation and artistic reinterpretation. Furthermore, the emphasis on experience through scene setting – through the highlighting of the service, ambience and drinks – positions the restaurant as a highbrow dining experience.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the analysis of Michelin-Starred restaurants resulted in the three key themes of Sophistication, Scene Setting and Aesthetic Value, derived through the interaction between the three key sub-themes of Service, Environment and Discussion of the Chef. The combination of the three themes suggests an identity of prestige and culinary

distinction that restaurants and diners can aspire towards. This justifies why the Michelin Star is sought after by chefs and patrons as they seek to accumulate culinary capital (Johnston & Baumann, 2014; Lengyel, 2023).

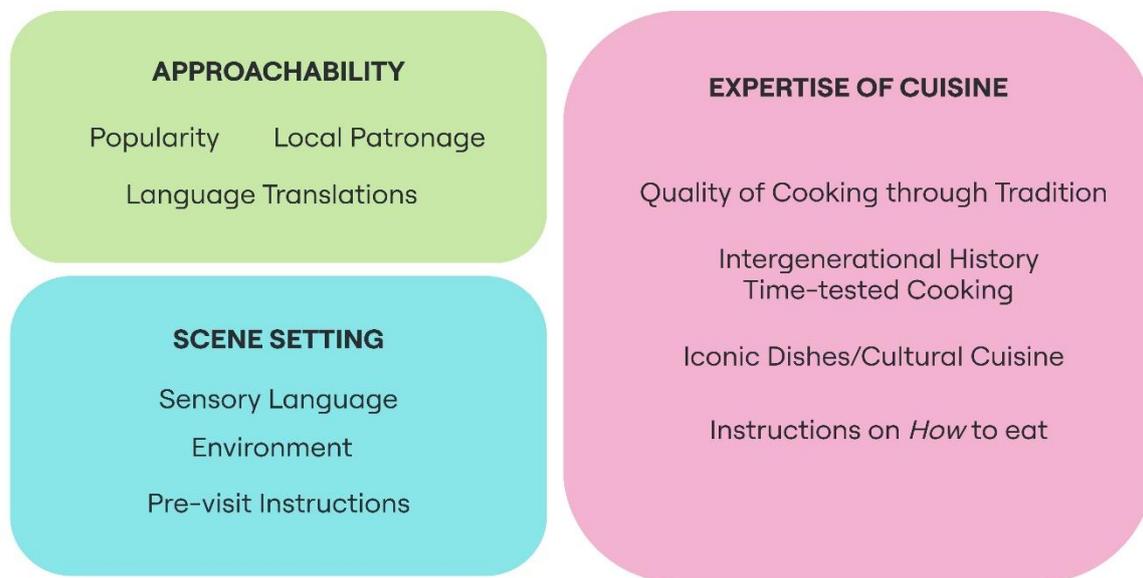
In Southeast Asia, the *Michelin Guide's* influence is not just about establishing a fine-dining industry – it actively shapes perception of what constitutes fine dining in a region where culinary traditions historically emphasise accessibility, communal eating and street food. The presence of Michelin Stars serves as an external validation of culinary excellence whilst reinforcing Western-centric standards of sophisticated cuisine and also introducing new aspirations within the region's evolving culinary landscape (Bang et al., 2022; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). Therefore, great symbolic power is conferred on the *Guide*, as it defines the rules of what fine dining encompasses and is associated with. This power presents a form of capital that can be embodied through active participation and the association of oneself with the *Michelin Guide*, expressed through the culinary practices of the chef or the patronage of Michelin-Starred restaurants.

4.3 Bib Gourmand

The *Michelin Guide* (2022b) defines the Bib Gourmand category as “best value for money restaurants” (para. 2), with “simpler styles of cooking and reasonable prices” (para. 4). Particularly in Southeast Asia, there is a heavier emphasis on the category due to its extensive inclusion of street food (Henderson, 2017), considering the total number of Bib Gourmand entries from the four major cities included in this study amounts to 169 establishments, versus the 87 restaurant entries for the Michelin-Star category. The establishments within the Bib Gourmand category comprise the second dataset for this research. The three overarching themes identified were Approachability, Scene Setting and Expertise of Cuisine, illustrated in Figure 4.5, below:

Figure 4.5

Analysis Results for Bib Gourmand Dataset



Each cluster is sized according to its prominence within the data, with Approachability being the least frequently observed theme and Expertise of Cuisine being the most common theme within the findings. These themes were derived through the code groups and sub-code groups, which were informed by 13 code topics. This analysis differs from dataset one as there are no sub-themes in this category, due to the nature of the written descriptions that were analysed being more straightforward and literal in their writing style and intent.

This section first discusses the least frequently observed theme, Approachability, followed by the second theme, Scene Setting, building the discussion towards the most common theme in the findings, Expertise of Cuisine. The mind map in Appendix B serves to illustrate this process of analysis for dataset two and is referred to as “MM-B” throughout this section.

4.3.1 Approachability

The first theme of dataset two is Approachability, which refers to accessibility of the food establishments within this category. As illustrated in MM-B, this theme was developed from three code groups: the mention of *Affordability* through price and portion size; Language

Translation for the description of dishes, and *External Validation* in terms of the popularity of an establishment achieved through popular endorsement and local patronage.

While price affordability is an important consideration for a Bib Gourmand establishment, it is not the only one. The popularity of the food establishment among locals contributes to the approachability of the establishment (see code group *External Validation* in MM-B). If a particular establishment is patronised by many locals, it is highly likely that the food will be of good quality. For those who seek to experience the lifestyle of locals, these “local spots” also serve as an authentic cultural experience. For example, frog porridge might be viewed as an exotic dish to the unknowing consumer, but Eminent Frog Porridge & Seafood in Singapore is “A favourite spot among locals for late-night supper, [the] place is always packed” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-i, para. 1). This reassurance through the popularity amongst locals might sway the reader from caution to adventurousness.

Another way the *Guide* emphasises the approachability of a Bib Gourmand establishment is through its language translations, which also formed the key code group *Translation* in the analysis. This is important contextual information as the Southeast Asian societies communicate in several languages and, apart from Singapore, English is not spoken by local people. As such, to outsiders the language barrier presents a challenge in communicating what the food is. Therefore, the detailed explanations of the dishes are necessary to enhance accessibility, helping the reader gain a better understanding of the cuisine. This is seen, for example, in *Cơm Tấm Ba Ghiền*’s entry (Michelin Guide, n.d.-g):

Since the 1990s, this unassuming stall has been serving what many locals consider to be the best *cơm tấm* (broken rice dish) in town. Their most popular version is steamed broken rice topped with pork chop marinated in a secret sauce and perfectly grilled over charcoal, along with pickled radish and sweet and sour fish sauce. There is a chicken version as well. (para. 1)

The *Guide* assumes the reader has no prior understanding of the dish *cơm tấm* and therefore it proceeds to describe in detail what the dish consists of. In addition, the emphasis of its popularity amongst locals reinforces the authenticity and credibility of the *Guide*’s street-food recommendations. Through the detailed explanation and breakdown of the dish, the *Guide* also asserts its credibility as an authority on street food.

I argue that this is a small but important factor in the *Michelin Guide's* credibility in the region. It is also opposite to its conventional norms of exclusivity, favouring inclusivity and accessibility/approachability, which is a response to the contemporary trends of gastronomic pluralism and the middle class wanting the best of both worlds: eating in fine-dining restaurants but also appreciating lowbrow cuisines such as street food (Johnston & Baumann, 2014; Vásquez & Chik, 2015). Particularly in Southeast Asia, where street food is the dominant food culture, the *Michelin Guide's* inclusion of these establishments can be perceived as a strategic negotiation of culinary capital to maintain legitimacy in the local gastronomic landscape. By including street food, the *Guide* adapts to appeal to the middle-class demographic, who values both highbrow dining and lowbrow cuisine (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). Excluding street food would risk alienating local consumers and the middle class, which weakens its authority in the region.

The data also aligns with the previous discussions in section 2.7.3. By making the *Guide* approachable, it serves two purposes: appealing to Southeast Asian consumers who desire Western cultural capital while embedding itself within the local culinary landscape. As an external and foreign entity without previously established authority on the local cuisine, the *Guide* seeks relevance by awarding stars to the local cuisine and recognition of street food through the Bib Gourmand. This approach not only aligns the *Guide* with the Southeast Asian food scene but also reflects its efforts to adapt to contemporary notions of culinary capital.

4.3.2 Scene Setting

As was the case with the Starred restaurants in dataset one, conveying an impression about an establishment requires a storytelling approach. The second theme – Scene Setting – refers to the way the *Michelin Guide* creates a story or impression of a Bib Gourmand establishment through its narrative style in the website descriptions. This was accomplished in three ways, which are reflected in the following three code groups: the use of sensory language to describe the food; supporting information about the food establishment; and the description of the environment. The use of sensory language is logical, as the *Guide* is attempting to convey a compelling story of the food and make it enticing to the reader. Descriptive words such as “crunchy,” “fresh,” “delicious,” “seduces,” “umami,” and “addictive” are used to establish a sensory description.

The *Guide* also utilised practical information including the simplicity or lack of service (sub-code *Service*) in these establishments and specific pre-visit instructions that manage the expectations of the reader, such as warnings of long queues and the importance of knowledge of the local language to communicate. For example, the *Guide* pre-empts the reader to “expect a long queue [at Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken Rice], but the velvety chicken with springy skin is worth the wait” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ai, para. 1). In Baan Yai Phad Thai’s case, readers would have to “come with a local since you have to write in Thai to make an order” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-d, para. 1).

The analysis of the descriptions of the environment resulted in two sub-code groups: the *Internal Environment* and the *External Environment*. The *Internal Environment* references the authenticity of the local food experience, with particular emphasis on the interior environment. Somtum Khun Kan highlights the “live music [which] adds to the atmosphere on Friday-Sunday evenings” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-ae, para. 1), meanwhile “despite [Phở Lê’s] age, the stall is always neat and clean, and always jam-packed with hungry locals getting their noodle fix” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-y, para. 1)

This presents a picture of a warm and welcoming environment offering an “authentic” experience. The definition of authenticity is open to interpretation (Saxena, 2019); however, in this research it refers to the cultural accuracy of the representation of the local lifestyle and cuisines of these countries.

The code group *External Environment* included descriptions of the external environment and surroundings of the food establishment that created a sense of adventure and discovery. For example, Gim Nguan Noodles is a “a hidden gem, tucked away in a Bangkok alley since 1999” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-l, para. 1). Likewise, Phở Minh “may be tucked away down a narrow alley, but [it] has been attracting hungry Saigonese with its traditional beef noodle soup since 1945” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-z, para. 1).

For these street-food establishments, the obscurity of the location implicitly challenges the reader to embark on a journey of discovery to experience the street food of these cities, creating a sense of adventure in the dining experience. This narrative strategy positions the act of finding these eateries as a form of gastronomic and cultural exploration, immersing the reader in the local lifestyle and environment. By framing these establishments as

“hidden gems”, the *Michelin Guide* enhances its credibility as an authentic and knowledgeable resource on street food, suggesting that its recommendations offer a genuine, insider’s perspective on the region’s culinary landscape.

4.3.3 Expertise of Cuisine

Based on the literature review presented earlier in this dissertation, it can be established that the *Michelin Guide* is an arbiter of culinary excellence (Lane, 2013). Within the Bib Gourmand category, this authority is reinforced through its emphasis on approachability and storytelling, as explored in the first two themes. However, the primary mechanism underpinning this authority is the Expertise of the Cuisine – the focus of this theme (the pink segment in Figure 4.5). The *Guide* repeatedly asserts to the reader that it is an expert on street food and that it is a trustworthy resource for navigating the gastronomic landscape of Southeast Asia.

There are three distinct ways this expertise is expressed in the Bib Gourmand list. First, within the code group *Cooking Methods*, the emphasis on quality cooking is through traditional cooking methods, like Foong Lian in Kuala Lumpur, who has “been feeding hungry diners claypot rice cooked over charcoal since 1986” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-j, para. 1).

The second is the emphasis on the inter-generational history of these businesses within the sub-code group *External Affirmation*, highlighting the long-standing tradition and time-tested cooking. For example, Kaeng Pa Loong Sa-Nga, a Thai curry restaurant in Bangkok, has been “run by the same family for over 20 years [and] this restaurant is something of a hidden gem for spice lovers” (Michelin Guide, n.d.-p, para. 1).

Thirdly, expertise is expressed through the iconic dishes of a cultural cuisine and specialty cooking, as seen in the entry for Muthu’s Curry in Singapore (Michelin Guide, n.d.-w):

Muthu means pearl in Tamil, which befits this gem serving traditional dishes from both the Southern and Northern regions of India. Originally called Muthu Makkan, the owner expanded and renamed the restaurant in 1982. The signature fish head, South-Indian style, uses a secret blend of spices. Swimmer crabs, masala prawns, lamb rack and tandoori chicken are also big hits among diners. (para. 1)

There are also very literal instructions on what the readers should order and/or how they should eat the food (see sub-code group *Internal Affirmation*), suggesting that the *Michelin Guide* is also an expert in the cultural nuances of approaching the local street food. For example, Singapore's Soon Huat elaborates on how to order a bowl of prawn noodles, where diners "choose between 'dry' and soup noodles topped with butterflied prawns, fish cake, bean sprouts, and fried garlic ... not a fan of prawns? Try the pork ribs noodles instead" (Michelin Guide, n.d.-af, para. 1).

Through the Bib Gourmand and the approach to street food within this category, the *Michelin Guide* exerts its expertise in the Southeast Asian culinary landscape by attempting to provide information on how to eat local dishes and aligning its identity with conventional knowledge of national and heritage cuisines in the region.

4.3.4 Bib Gourmand's Culinary Capital

The approach of the Bib Gourmand significantly differs from the Michelin Stars, adopting a more pragmatic and functional approach. While still incorporating storytelling, it aims to provide essential information to the reader. This difference can be understood in the context of the democratisation of the food hierarchy (Barrère et al., 2010), with the Bib Gourmand reflecting a more accessible and inclusive representation of food. It aligns with the concept of lowbrow cuisine (Baumann et al., 2017), emphasising its universal appeal and mass popularity.

This is evidenced through the resulting three themes from the analysis: Approachability, Scene Setting and Expertise of Cuisine. By asserting to readers that the Bib Gourmand is approachable, it also signals that the *Michelin Guide* is not only focused on fine dining but also lowbrow cuisine. It presents an opportunity for the accumulation of culinary capital in a modified sense of the traditional – prestige and "cultured-ness" is not only acquired through the expensive and exclusive fine-dining experience. A lowering of the barriers to opportunities for accumulating culinary capital is also facilitated through the *Guide*, as diners now have more affordable options to align themselves with the *Michelin Guide*, suggesting the democratisation of gastronomy has taken effect within the operation of the *Michelin Guide* as well.

Unlike the Michelin Stars, where the award inherently confers prestige and status, the Bib Gourmand endorsements does not carry the same assumed authority. This distinction can be traced to the *Guide's* historical focus on fine-dining establishments (Lane, 2013) However, in its Bib Gourmand selections, the *Michelin Guide* appears to assert its expertise in street food, suggesting an ongoing negotiation of its authority within the domain of street cuisine.

Hence, the *Michelin Guide* positions itself as approachable and knowledgeable so as to establish its credibility not only within highbrow fine dining, but also in lowbrow cuisine. In doing so, it claims to be an inclusive arbiter of gastronomic taste, even as it maintains an underlying cultural hierarchy. The Bib Gourmand category in Southeast Asia highlights the *Michelin Guide's* focus on accessible street food through the three themes discussed above: Approachability, Scene Setting, and Expertise of Cuisine. These themes emphasises affordability, local popularity, and authenticity, while positioning the *Guide* as an expert in street food. Despite its inclusive tone, the category maintains a cultural hierarchy by classifying street food as lowbrow, while asserting authority over both highbrow and lowbrow cuisines.

While the Bib Gourmand's inclusive approach offers a more accessible pathway to culinary capital, it also exposes contradictions and gaps in the *Michelin Guide's* representation of local food cultures. This is particularly evident in the contrasting results emerging from the analysis of the Michelin Stars and Bib Gourmand datasets. These discrepancies warrant further examination of how the *Guide* negotiates its culinary capital in the context of Southeast Asia.

4.4 The *Guide's* Negotiation of Culinary Capital in Southeast Asia

The *Michelin Guide's* inclusion of street food in Southeast Asia reflects a shift in how culinary capital is constructed, yet it also reveals tensions in its authority as an arbiter of taste. While its Star system has long reinforced highbrow culinary distinction (Lane, 2013), the Bib Gourmand category introduces a different engagement with gastronomic prestige, catering to middlebrow and lowbrow consumers seeking to accumulate cultural capital. However, this expansion does not eliminate the culinary hierarchy. Local cuisines are framed within a Eurocentric lens that positions Western culinary techniques as the aspirational benchmark for cuisine status elevation. Additionally, notable omissions in its street food selections raise

concerns about the *Guide's* credibility in representing Southeast Asian cuisines. This section explores these divergent approaches and gaps within the *Michelin Guide* to understand its negotiation of culinary capital and authority within Southeast Asia.

4.4.1 Divergent Approaches within the *Michelin Guide*

The inclusion of street food in the *Michelin Guide* represents an expansion of its culinary authority, signalling a shift in how culinary capital is constructed and disseminated. Unlike fine dining, where the *Guide's* authority as an arbiter of taste is well-established (Lane, 2013), the *Guide's* engagement with street food needed to be more convincing for the reader in order to validate its authority.

As a French institution with a Eurocentric perspective on gastronomy, it is culturally different to the culinary culture in Southeast Asia. Street food is deeply rooted within the culture and traditions of Southeast Asia (Sawyer, 2025), and this presents a challenge for the *Guide* in its desire to “authentically” recommend street food. As a way of overcoming this, the *Guide* employs a distinct narrative style in its descriptions of the Bib Gourmand establishments to emphasise their credibility through the expression of expertise and knowledge of the local cuisine. Unlike the Stars list, which often frames chefs as artists and fine dining as an extraordinary gastronomic experience, the Bib Gourmand list takes a more practical and explanatory approach. This difference in the rhetorical strategy suggests an effort to establish the *Guide's* authority in a domain where its expertise is not as readily assumed.

The distinction between these two lists also reflects broader differences in the ways culinary capital is accumulated. Fine dining, as represented by the Stars list, is often pursued as a form of self-expression and social distinction, reinforcing one's position within a hierarchy of taste (Chiang & Guo, 2021). In contrast, while the Bib Gourmand may still function as a tool for accumulating culinary capital, its mode of engagement is different – rooted in the appreciation of local and traditional cuisines rather than the exclusivity of sophistication of highbrow cuisine. This shift aligns with evolving definitions of culinary capital, in which gastronomic knowledge is no longer confined to fine dining but extends to a more diverse and accessible form of consumption (Lee & Ko, 2022).

Same-same But Different

Despite a more holistic approach towards the accumulation of culinary capital within the *Michelin Guide*, as seen through its provision of highbrow and lowbrow cuisine recommendations, a culinary hierarchy is still in place. Applying the theory of distinctions between social classes (Bourdieu, 1984), the structure of the Michelin rating system reveals a nuanced hierarchy within cuisine. By relegating street food to the Bib Gourmand, the *Guide* implicitly designates this category as lowbrow, reinforcing an inherent hierarchy within its rating system. This observation is not to be taken as a positive nor negative outcome, but it undeniably reflects a stratified culinary distinction within the Michelin framework. Furthermore, the *Guide* appears to have less authority in the Bib Gourmand list in comparison to its Stars list, raising the question of whether its credibility in evaluating street food is as trustworthy as it claims.

While there are hawkers with Michelin Stars, these are the exception and their inclusion is considered to be a marketing tactic and not an accurate representation of a typical Michelin-Starred restaurant. While there are local infusions and elements incorporated through other contemporary restaurants in Southeast Asia, the presentation and culinary philosophy of the restaurants in this category suggests an underlying Western bias. Local cuisine is infused with Western techniques as a means for elevating the cuisine, as discussed earlier in section 4.2.1 on the theme of Sophistication. This implies that local cuisine must be reinterpreted or elevated to the standards of Western culinary philosophy – and, therefore, highbrow cuisine (and therefore the *Michelin Guide*) remains tethered to a Eurocentric framework.

This might shed light on its emphasis of the Bib Gourmand category particularly in Southeast Asia. While there is a growth in the middle class within the region, that segment of the market also comprises “unsophisticated consumers who are highly cost-driven” (Hoppe & Baijal, n.d., para. 8). Hence, the Bib Gourmand caters to those who might be unable to afford Michelin-Starred restaurants but still seek to accumulate culinary capital. It functions as an entry point for lowbrow consumers aspiring to engage with the Michelin brand. In this way, the *Guide* serves as a marker of discernment between individuals in the same social bracket. The Bib Gourmand category becomes a “replica” category of the prestige and distinction of a Michelin Star. Just like the Prada bag example, the Bib Gourmand might be a means to assert culinary capital for the middle and lower classes, but the distinction of highbrows (embodied in Michelin-Starred restaurants) still remains.

Regarding the Bib Gourmand, one could ask why would the *Michelin Guide* bother with this category if they already have an established Star system? The middlebrow consumer who might be unable to access or afford the Michelin-Starred restaurants, may turn to the Bib Gourmand as a means of accumulating culinary capital. Alternatively, it can also be considered an entry point for the lower classes as well. In doing so, the Michelin brand itself serves as a signal of gastronomic discernment, even for those within the same social bracket. For middlebrow and lowbrow consumers, engaging with the *Michelin Guide* allows them to distinguish themselves from others within their class (Bourdieu, 1984). The strategic use of the *Guide* creates a sense of cultural superiority as they position themselves as more knowledgeable consumers. In this way, the Bib Gourmand provides a way to claim cultural capital within the class structures, even if one is unable to access the more exclusive Michelin-Starred restaurants.

What is interesting is that while the methods of engagement with culinary capital in the *Michelin Guide* differ between the Stars and the Bibs, the *Guide* remains a tool for signalling culinary capital. Individuals with high economic capital might utilise the Stars to accumulate cultural capital in pursuit of their highbrow cultural association, while those who cannot afford Starred restaurants leverage the Bib Gourmand list to distinguish themselves as knowledgeable consumers of gastronomic taste. This illustrates how culinary capital and hierarchy is deeply rooted in our patterns of consumption and strategically deployed within social interactions to reinforce distinctions in taste and class.

4.4.2 Notable Omissions from the Data

Whilst the *Michelin Guide* attempts to assert its authority upon street food in Southeast Asia, there is a notable narrative discrepancy within the Bib Gourmand's representation of the national cuisines and cultural foods of Southeast Asian countries, which raises concerns about the *Guide's* comprehensiveness and credibility. For instance, the Kuala Lumpur list does not feature any establishment that serves Nasi Lemak, despite its status as the country's national dish (Lee, 2022). Furthermore, the selection features several Chinese and Indian food establishments whilst there is limited representation of Malay cuisine. Given that Malaysia has a majority Malay ethnic population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), the lack of inclusion of the ethnic Malay cuisine reflects an imbalance in power and broader issues relating to the inter-ethnic relations within the country.

Similarly, phở is heavily featured in the Ho Chi Minh City list, yet there are no recommendations for bánh mì – an omission that overlooks one of Vietnam’s most globally recognised and iconic street foods (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, n.d.). If the *Michelin Guide* aims to present an “authentic” representation of national cuisines in Southeast Asia, these exclusions perhaps indicate either a selection bias and a misalignment with conventional knowledge of Malaysian and Vietnamese cuisine or deeper political power imbalances.

This inconsistency of the *Guide’s* claims about its evaluative practices and the descriptive style of writing within the *Guide* challenges and raises questions about its efforts to assert its authority as an arbiter of gastronomic taste within the region. The *Guide* is essentially competing against publicly accepted knowledge of Southeast Asian culture and cuisine. Not addressing these questions about cultural representations could potentially result in a judgement against an increasingly educated and discerning society of middlebrow consumers – the very demographic the *Guide* is trying to appeal to.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the *Michelin Guide’s* representation of Southeast Asian cuisine reflects broader culinary hierarchies and distinctions. The findings suggest that while the *Guide* seeks to embrace inclusivity in response to evolving definitions of culinary capital and gastronomic pluralism, its rating criteria, for Starred restaurants in particular, continue to prioritise French fine-dining conventions, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies that privilege Western-centric notions of prestige. Although the *Michelin Guide’s* culinary capital evolves alongside shifting perceptions of highbrow cuisine, its underlying framework remains rooted in traditional markers of gastronomic excellence.

The next and final chapter discusses the broader implications of these findings, addresses the limitations of the study, and proposes directions for future research.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

It has been more than a century since the *Michelin Guide's* inception in 1899 (Harp, 2001), and its influence on food continues today. With its French origins, the *Guide* has long upheld the ideals of haute cuisine, where refinement, innovation and exclusivity define gastronomic prestige. A Michelin Star has become more than an award – it is a marker of distinction for those who associate themselves with it. It is a symbol of culinary capital that has the power to influence restaurants, industry and societies. However, as the *Guide* expands into Southeast Asia, it enters a region where gastronomy thrives through vastly different approaches by dint of its geography and culture. This dissertation set out to examine the *Michelin Guide* within Southeast Asia, applying the philosophy of Bourdieu's (1984) distinctions in society and Naccarato and LeBesco's (2012, as cited in Nowak 2013) theory of culinary capital as a means to understand the *Guide* and how it perceives, determines and culinary prestige in Southeast Asia. The research set out to answer the following questions:

- How does the *Michelin Guide* determine prestige and hierarchy in the culinary landscape?
- What is the culinary capital of the *Michelin Guide*?
- How might the *Guide's* treatment of street food and non-Western cuisines shape our perception of the culinary landscape in Southeast Asia?

In this final chapter, the key findings of this dissertation are summarised. The implications and limitations of the research are considered before suggestions for future areas of research are put forward, and the chapter concludes with the author's final thoughts.

5.2 Key Findings

Thematic analysis of the *Michelin Guide's* Michelin-Starred restaurants (dataset one) and Bib Gourmand establishments (dataset two) from a sample of four cities in Southeast Asia – Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore – identified three key themes in each dataset.

For the first dataset, the three key themes were Sophistication, Scene Setting and Aesthetic Value. Sophistication of the restaurant was emphasised through the chef, and the portrayal of fine dining as an intellectual and artistic pursuit, reinforcing the traditional notions of prestige and hierarchy within the *Michelin Guide*.

Scene Setting focused on the description of and interaction between the restaurant's environment and service, creating an aspirational image of the dining experience. This synergy positions Michelin-starred restaurants as elite and highly curated spaces where one might be able to embody the culinary capital of fine dining and highbrow cuisine.

Aesthetic Value emphasised fine dining as an artistic craft, with chefs curating a sensory experience through their plating and culinary techniques. The *Guide* sends social and environmental cues that confer prestige and indicate refinement of taste, reinforcing highbrow culinary capital within dataset one. The restaurants as a symbolic form of culinary capital show how the *Guide* uses traditional notions of culinary capital (Lane, 2013) to confer prestige on restaurants and patrons. Through the intermingling of Southeast Asian cuisine with a Western culinary approach, as seen in restaurants such as Beta (Michelin Guide, n.d.-e), it is suggested that the *Guide* incorporates local heritage with modern Western techniques to confer prestige on fine-dining restaurants within the region.

The second dataset, Michelin's Bib Gourmand category, highlights the accessibility and authenticity of the *Michelin Guide's* recommendations for street food, positioning it as an approachable and credible authority in both highbrow and lowbrow cuisine. While emphasising affordable, locally popular dishes, it maintains a culinary hierarchy by relegating street food to the lowbrow category, distinguishing it from the fine-dining restaurants within the Star category. This reflects the evolving contemporary definition of culinary capital, where knowledge and culinary prestige may be accumulated through both highbrow and lowbrow cuisine (Johnston & Baumann, 2014).

The *Guide's* portrayal of street food seeks to assert its expertise, though it faces challenges in authentically representing the local food cultures which are deeply rooted in Southeast Asian identities, particularly through the omission of iconic dishes such as nasi lemak and bánh mì. Despite its efforts towards being more inclusive, the Bib Gourmand still reflects Western ideals of prestige as street food is relegated to the Bib Gourmand category. This

questions the *Guide's* comprehensiveness and credibility, which is critiqued against an increasingly discerning demographic of middle-class consumers.

In summary, the *Michelin Guide* has attempted to democratise its gastronomic purview in response to the evolving notions of culinary capital. Despite these actions, Western and French values are embedded in the *Guide's* habitus, indicating an internal struggle and contradiction in its identity and concurrently reinforcing distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow cuisines.

5.3 Implications of the Research

The study reinforces Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow societies (Bourdieu, 1984), demonstrating how food serves as a means for the accumulation of cultural capital at all levels of society. The *Michelin Guide*, despite the inclusion of street food, continues to reinforce culinary hierarchies, underscoring the persistent social stratification within gastronomy. Additionally, the research highlights the evolving nature of culinary capital, showing that fine dining is no longer the sole marker of gastronomic knowledge and status, signalling an evolution in the way society negotiates power within food.

The evolving approach of the *Michelin Guide* – in incorporating both fine dining and street food in its lists – reflects broader shifts in how society and consumers define and value culinary knowledge and status. While the inclusion of street food suggests the greater inclusivity and accessibility of the *Michelin Guide*, its continued reinforcement of culinary hierarchies highlights that social distinctions persist, even in evolving contexts. This reveals that culinary capital, like other forms of cultural capital, is a dynamic yet entrenched force that influences how we navigate social hierarchies, negotiate power, and express identity through our food choices. It challenges traditional notions of prestige in gastronomy whilst also exposing the complex nature of food and its ties to social structures.

At an individual level, the research encourages a critical examination of how our own status, capital and knowledge shape our dining choices. Recognising these influences enables diners to make more informed food decisions while fostering awareness of the broader socio-cultural structures that shape our culinary preferences. By critically engaging with food

discourse, and understanding the underlying dynamics of culinary capital, individuals can challenge their own assumptions that guide their food choices, whether it is the desire to use Michelin Stars as a badge of prestige, the allure of exclusivity, or the gastronomic prowess expressed through street food. By recognising the role of food in reinforcing or disrupting social stratifications, consumers can actively decide how to navigate these structures – whether to conform or to challenge them. In a more tangible sense, this critical engagement opens a door for individuals to support food cultures that align with values of inclusivity, authenticity, and local identity, rather than merely reinforcing traditional notions of prestige. Whether choosing to patronise a local street vendor or a fine-dining restaurant, consumers wield power in shaping the culinary conversation. In this way, the research highlights how the social power – but also the personal agency – of each individual contributes to the broader conversation of food, class and identity.

5.4 Limitations of the Research

As with any research, this study has several limitations which should be noted. The intersection of food, culture and identity is inherently complex and multifaceted. Given the constraints of a 60-point dissertation, it was not possible to explore these topics comprehensively. Consequently, this research adopted a focused approach, centred on a specific theoretical framework – culinary capital – and a particular geographical context – Southeast Asia – in relation to the *Michelin Guide* and its inclusion of street food.

The data for this study was collected in August 2024 from the *Michelin Guide's* official website. As the *Guide* does not timestamp its lists and only provides the most current lists, a historical year-on-year analysis was not feasible. Therefore, conclusions drawn were solely based on the data available at the time of collection. Without access to historical records, it was not possible to examine the evolution and trajectory of the *Guide's* development within the region and how it contributed to local society. Additionally, since the commencement of this research, there have been new developments within the *Michelin Guide*, including the awarding of the first three-Michelin-Star restaurant in Thailand (Michelin Guide, 2024) and the removal of Stars from several restaurants in Singapore (Quek et al., 2024). These changes occurred after data was collected and thus were not incorporated into the analysis.

Furthermore, apart from Singapore, the study sampled data from only one major city in Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. This limited scope may not fully capture the regional diversity of these countries, as variations may emerge in other cities such as Phuket and Hanoi. Finally, as this research was conducted in English, it did not incorporate relevant scholarship from the Southeast Asian region that is published in the local languages.

5.5 Further Areas for Consideration

This study could be replicated in other regions where the *Michelin Guide* operates to understand its influence on culinary capital within diverse cultural contexts. As Bourdieu (2018) posits, cultural capital is constantly negotiated and redefined across different social fields, and examining Michelin's impact in other regions may provide insights into how global gastronomic recognition influences local culinary practices, society's definitions of culinary prestige and the evolution of the global culinary hierarchy. Further research could build on this study by exploring how the *Michelin Guide's* representation of Southeast Asia's gastronomic landscape has evolved over time. A longitudinal analysis could track shifts in restaurant selections, movement between categories (e.g., the promotion/demotion of restaurants within the Michelin system), and the *Guide's* responsiveness to emerging culinary trends.

Additionally, consumer perceptions of the *Michelin Guide* warrant further exploration. While this study focused on the *Guide's* self-presentation, qualitative research such as interviews or surveys with diners, including Michelin-Star followers, could provide insights into whether the *Michelin Guide* genuinely influences dining behaviours. Moreover, it is important to assess whether alternative platforms, such as World's 50 Best Restaurants and La Liste, are gaining traction and challenging the *Michelin Guide's* hegemony as arbitrator of gastronomic taste. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok also play an increasingly significant role in shaping dining trends which may compete with Michelin's traditional authority on food. Investigating the dynamics of contemporary culinary discourse could offer a more nuanced understanding of culinary prestige in the digital age. Likewise, the analysis could be applied towards highly localised food rankings, such as Makansutra in Singapore, which specialises in hawker recommendations.

Previous studies have considered the “Michelin effect” and the *Guide’s* efficacy as a marketing tool (Bang et al., 2022; Henderson, 2017). Another area for future research is the socio-economic consequences of the “Michelin effect”, particularly for street-food vendors. Research could explore whether Michelin’s influence leads to gentrification, price inflation or shifts in accessibility, especially for smaller hawkers who may struggle to cope with the increased demand that results from Michelin recognition.

5.6 Final Thoughts

When I first started this research, I was simply intrigued by the strange relationship between the *Michelin Guide* and hawker stalls in Singapore, as these two culinary domains are polar opposites. I certainly did not anticipate the deeper sociological dimensions behind the *Michelin Guide* and its role in shaping food hierarchies. This research has facilitated a deep exploration of the evolving relationship between the *Michelin Guide*, culinary prestige, and street food in Southeast Asia. The recognition of street food by an institution historically associated with fine dining highlights a broader shift in how culinary value is constructed and legitimised. Rather than merely reflecting existing hierarchies in cuisine, the *Michelin Guide* also plays an active role in shaping perceptions of excellence, reinforcing certain narratives while redefining others. Its influence extends beyond recognition; it actively constructs and perpetuates a culinary hegemony, raising questions about who gets to define gastronomic value in an ever-evolving food landscape.

Seen through the lens of Bourdieu’s theory of social hierarchies and contemporary culinary capital, it becomes clear that food prestige is not fixed but constantly negotiated. The inclusion of street food in the *Guide* raises important questions about whose voices are recognised, whose traditions are validated, and how culinary authority is maintained or disrupted within an increasingly globalised food discourse. The perpetuation of French culinary hegemony remains evident in the *Michelin Guide’s* approach, as its standards and evaluation criteria continue to reflect Eurocentric ideals of fine dining. While the inclusion of street food signals a shift, it also raises the question of whether these recognitions genuinely challenge existing hierarchies or simply absorb other cuisines into an established framework of prestige.

At the heart of it, food is more than just something we eat – it is tied to culture and identity, and is a lens which can be used to explore human society and behaviour. The conversation around prestige and culinary capital will continue to evolve, shaped by those who have the power to define excellence. This research has shown me the importance of questioning these structures, challenging inherited notions of culinary hierarchy, and rethinking what it truly means to honour food traditions. Street food may now have a seat at the Michelin table, but the deeper issue remains: does inclusion signal real change, or does it merely reframe old hierarchies under a new guise? And more importantly – who truly gets to define the value of food, if not the people who cook and eat it every day?

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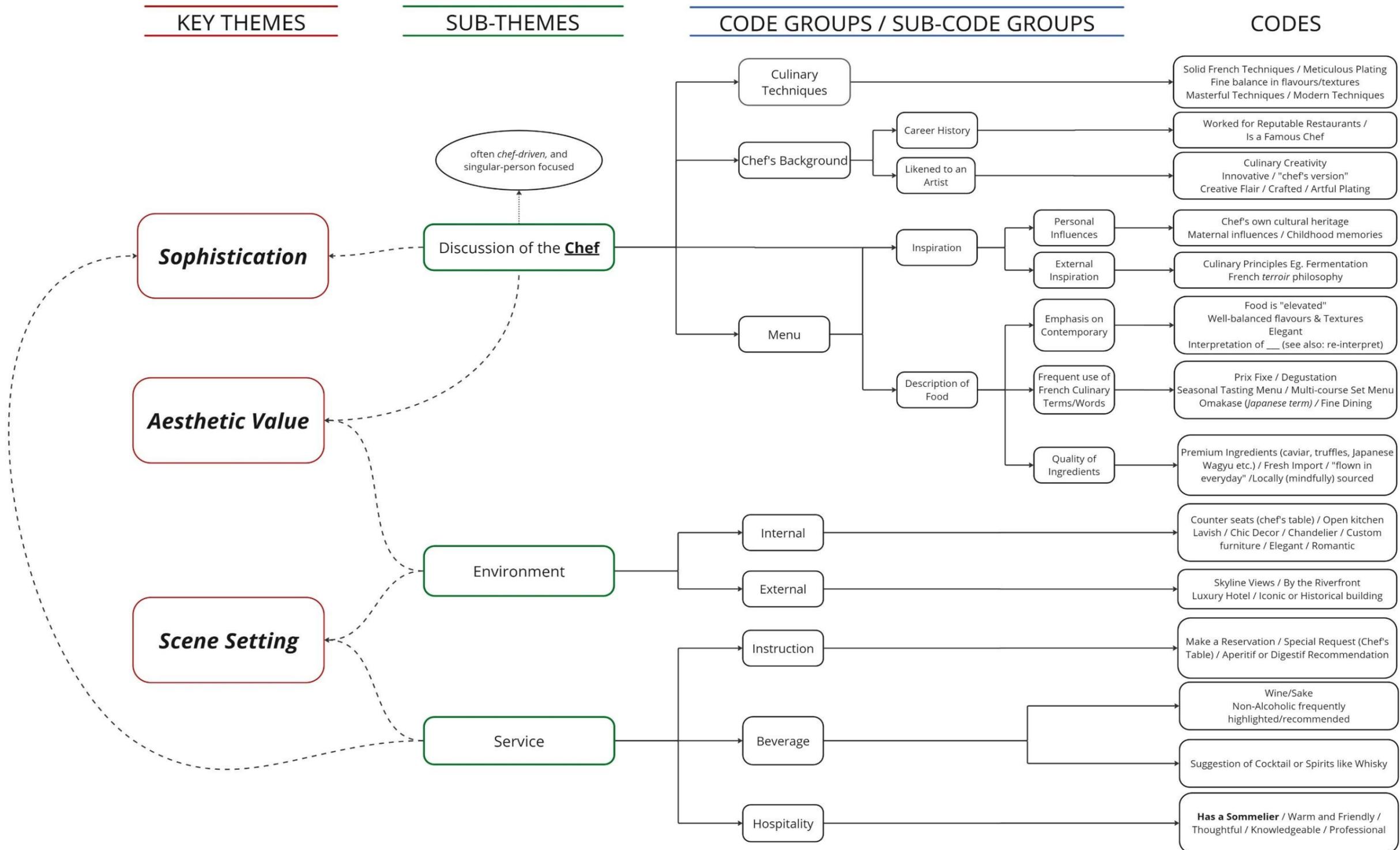
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Appendix A

Dataset One: Star-Awarded Restaurants



Appendix B

Dataset Two: Bib Gourmand

