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QUIET LUXURY IN LUXURY DINING: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANT FOOD REVIEWS IN THAILAND, MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

Seach Jin Beng^{1*}, Yahmini Marappan²

¹Department of English Studies, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Malaysia

 seachjb@taru.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9977-7123>

²Department of English Studies, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Malaysia

 yahminim@taru.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7626-1676>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

Amid increasing scholarly attention to changing forms of luxury consumption quiet luxury has emerged as a countertrend to conspicuous display of wealth. As a movement, quiet luxury has entered the realm of wealth display, particularly visible in the fashion industry. However, the presence of quiet luxury extends beyond the fashion industry. This study aims to highlight how quiet luxury has entered the domain of luxury dining. By analysing selected food reviews from restaurants in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore on Michelin's official websites through the lenses of Roland Barthes' myth and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, this paper demonstrates that quiet luxury does not need to only be appreciated visually. This study examines how Roland Barthes' myth theory shows that cultural ideas are simplified into linguistic symbols to shape and influence perception. Through linguistic approaches that focus on restaurant heritage, localised food ingredients, simplistic ambiance, and personalised narratives, the charm of quiet luxury is conveyed to potential customers who seek sophistication and refinement in culinary culture. This research offers new insights into how quiet luxury shapes perceptions of luxury dining by showcasing a reflection of cultural status through subtle details that are enhanced by myths

Keyword:

Cultural Capital, Luxury Dining, Michelin-Starred Restaurants Food Reviews, Roland Barthes' Myth, Quiet Luxury



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Introduction

Our world is blessed with various resources but not everyone has the prerogative to access equally to these resources. Nevertheless, in a society where capitalism inherently reigns supreme, many may feel compelled to behave and act similarly as those who are blessed with abundance in terms of wealth. In a highly materialistic world where having more is always deemed better than having less, those who fall under the latter will usually be placed in a more socially disadvantaged position. As such, this has resulted in the need for some people to put up appearances solely to keep up with the Joneses. In order to stay afloat in capitalistic competition, some may feel obliged to flaunt their lifestyles with flashy luxury logos and overt monograms in order to announce their status. At least, this has been regarded as the societal norm for the past few decades especially in the world of luxurious fashion.

However, with most people continuing to stay oblivious of the loudness affiliated with the concept of luxury, a contradictory trend begins to come into existence as a reaction to loud luxury. This contradictory trend sits well with those who are from the old money circles, the privileged few who opt for more subtle and conspicuous ways to express their wealth without deliberately announcing it to the world. The subtle tune that they are playing is graciously called quiet luxury. While money has inherently been deemed as a tool that announces its presence loudly, those who uphold the quiet luxury lifestyle believe that although money speaks, wealth should only be whispered. With this in mind, the quiet luxury concept is beginning to establish itself as a form of appeal, attracting more people who appreciate the more subtle way of indulging in the world of luxury to join the movement. As noted by Brahma (2024), individuals who gravitate towards the concept of quiet luxury are more conspicuous in terms of displaying logos of luxury brands as they take pride in their familiarity with the world luxury. The indirect indication and stealth display of luxury render them special even among the specials. Furthermore, the quiet luxury is also deemed a movement that serves as a direct reaction against the flaunting of logos of luxury products (“Elgar Encyclopedia of Consumer Behavior,” 2024, p.192)

It is widely acknowledged that individuals constitute a fundamental driving force behind the development, mobilisation, and success of social and political movements. This is certainly applicable to the realm of quiet luxury as well. Two distinct groups of passionate individuals whose relation to the world of quiet luxury is inseparable are the *Connoisseurs* and the *Aesthetes*. Brahma theorised that the former wallow in the quiet appreciation of finer things in life including art, watches, cigars and instrument by forming exclusive clubs that consist of only wealthy individuals who have access to the finest things in life. Meanwhile, the *Aesthetes* are those who are high-income individuals who are willing to fork out large sums of money to own things for their craftsmanship, aesthetic appeal and intricacies rather than label alone. In the world of the *Aesthetes*, the loud display of luxury is frowned upon. To say the least, the

Connoisseurs and the *Aesthetes* are those who choose to appreciate luxury in a subtle manner, thereby associating themselves firmly to the sphere of quiet luxury (Brahma 2023, p. 15)

Although quiet luxury is more visibly present in the world of fashion where the exterior charm is most heavily emphasised, it is slowing precluding other domains of luxury particularly in the realm of luxury dining. According to Lojacono (2024), the display of quiet luxury is discernible particularly in two realms; fashion and dining. In the world of fashion, quiet luxury is visible through the emphasis on neutral hues and the complete absence of logos. Although quiet luxury has been widely discussed in relation to fashion and branding, little attention has been given to how it is communicated within the luxury dining experiences.

Meanwhile, in the domain of dining and cuisine, emphasis is placed on locally and organically sourced ingredients alongside slow cooking and thoughtful presentation to promote a deeper appreciation for the cultural heritage of cuisines. All these are combined with environmental and social sustainability in mind. Specifically related to food, as explained by America (2009), luxury foods and fine dining often come hand in hand. In fact, in fine dining establishments, elegance is highly emphasised. To ensure that every small details of the guests' experience is carefully attended to, the menu is intricately crafted and the tableware, meticulously selected. In line with the foregoing, fine dining often showcases a high degree of complexity and sophistication, and this is often reflected through the exorbitant prices. Notable features of fine dining include a team of highly skilled culinary staffs and the use of outstanding ingredients and foodstuffs (Albala 2015, p.497)

It is widely acknowledged that the world of fine dining is more than meets the eye. From uber luxury hotels to exorbitant restaurants that are only known to select few, food enjoyment in luxury dining is tied to endless possibilities and surprises. However, this paper focuses specifically on Michelin-starred restaurants, as they are regarded as some of the most prominent places associated with luxury dining. In particular, the Michelin star system is also one of the most reliable and recognisable systems in the world for the rating of hotels and restaurants. Started before the First World War as a guide that provided information on how to change a tire, it eventually evolved into a proper Michelin guide system for dining by the 1930s (Harp, 2001). Today, the Michelin Guide serves as an independent agency to evaluate restaurants where the award of a star is highly regarded a great honour. As highlighted by Darling and Perzanowski (2017), chefs who played a role in helping their restaurants win a Michelin star are often able to make great profits from the increased sales and popularity. Although Michelin stars are awarded solely based on the quality of food and wine served rather than the atmosphere of the restaurant, the stars remain highly influential and reclassified in the world of fine dining. A single star denotes a very good restaurant in its category, two stars means excellent cooking, worth a detour while three stars means exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey (Pattajoshi, 2018, p. 32).

As a result of the shared geographical proximity between Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore, these three nations are linked closer in terms of economic, historical, and cultural ties. Naturally, these close ties led to the cross-cultural borrowing in the culinary domain where certain common food types are considered mainstream staples (Ling, 2012). Ma (2002) explained that the common mainstream staples shared by these three nations include rice and noodle due to widespread of Chinese immigration into the region. Furthermore, Singapore, Malaysian and Thailand are known as the more advanced ASEAN members followed by Indonesia and the Philippines (Tran & Harvie, 2008). By dint of being more economically

advanced in the ASEAN region, traveller flows between Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore are significantly high. This is instrumental in contributing to the enhanced dynamics of cultural and culinary exchange between these nations. Hence, examining how the concept of quiet luxury has permeated the domain of fine dining in these nations is deemed academically viable, as it contributes to gaining deeper insight into the food cultures shared by these nations, which ultimately helps enrich the region's gastronomic identity.

Understanding Cultural Capital and Quiet Luxury

Whenever the concept of capital is brought into a discussion, one may naturally associate it with physical capital such as cash, property or land. This certainly does not come as a surprise, as physical capital accumulation is essential for anyone to stay competitive and relevant in the capitalistic world. Having access to the right resources not only places people in an advantageous position but also grants them the opportunities to adapt to ever-changing conditions that lead to enhanced efficiency and productivity. However, as earlier elucidated, not everyone is privileged enough to be blessed with sufficient physical capital that can help them tip the scale in their favour. Hence, those who lack substantial physical capital may need to enhance on the other forms of capital that are considered equally important. One such example is cultural capital. In relation to this, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital will be further discussed. There are three forms of cultural capitals as posited by Bourdieu. The first is embodied cultural capital, which is the ability to appreciate and understand cultural materials through years of practice and exposure. The second type is known as objectified cultural capital which refers to cultural items like art, writing or instruments. Finally, there is also institutionalized cultural capital which consists of a person's academic qualifications and other credentials. In summary, all three types of cultural capital are closely related to one's education and family background (Gao, 2011).

To compensate for the lack of physical capital, enhancing one's cultural capital may also serve the same purpose in enabling individuals to maintain a competitive edge in society. Inherently, there are three types of cultural capitals that are deemed crucial in society, namely economic, social and cultural capital. Social capital can be understood as 'a social relationship with a cultural system of exchange, composed of symbolic goods, which can be understood as a corpus of knowledge, discourses, art objects, and cultural practices among others'. (Şerban, 2023 p.12). nevertheless, among the three forms of capital mentioned, the transmission mechanism through which cultural capital goes through is of the most subtle and invisible as cultural capital is acquired subconsciously through various extents, without deliberate inculcation (Bourdieu 1973, 1986). For ease of understanding, cultural capital can also be taken to mean as the ability to mingle effectively with higher levels of society because education and exposure to cultural settings have granted an individual the right credentials and proper access to cultural products (Stevenson & Hendry, 2024). Along the same lines, Harris (2024) argued that cultural capital is the most prominent form of capital as through it, one is able to access the superior system set by the upper class, an exclusive system that has long been perpetuated by the said group. To access to the system, one needs to be equipped with three crucial forms of cultural capital; embodied, objectified and institutionalised.

In fact, cultivating one's cultural capital can also be quite empowering. This is because through a heightened sense of cultural capital, society is compelled to function in a certain way as dictated by those who possess it. For instance, those who possess cultural capital even have the power to determine which stories get told and who gets to tell them in social circles within the

domains of media and cinema (Shekhar, 2024, p.55). Although cultural capital comes in three major forms, this paper focusses specifically on embodied cultural capital since it is linked more directly to the research parameter. This research examines the concept of quiet luxury found in the food reviews of Michelin-starred restaurants. That being the case, embodied cultural capital is deemed the most pertinent as it is a form of capital that is internalised by individuals through upbringing, education and personal experiences. Moreover, embodied cultural capital also includes linguistics abilities, demeanours and social behaviours one acquired through socialisation, Naicker (2024), thereby rendering it a prerequisite to cultivating a sense of appreciation for quiet luxury in the realm of haute cuisine. Examining the concept of quiet luxury in food review of haute cuisine alongside the notion of cultural capital is significant as it highlights how cultural knowledge and social cues are often intertwined in luxury consumption in a subtle manner.

The Intersection of Quiet Luxury and Cultural Capital

Quiet luxury, particularly in the realm of fine dining, is undoubtedly the secret codes to the initiated as quiet luxury is a form of acquired taste not meant to be overtly appreciated by the general masses. Hence, this explains why the quiet luxury circle remains exclusively small. With a rising number of people beginning to discover the appeal of quiet luxury, the market has expanded marginally, necessitating marketing and advertising campaigns to display content that gravitate towards the realm of quiet luxury. Although this is more discernible in the world of fashion, the presence of quiet luxury in fine dining is slowly gaining a new fan base, as evident by its increased visibility in promotional materials.

It is feasible to examine the concept of quiet luxury in Michelin-starred restaurant reviews as luxury foods are a palpable symbol of sophistication as they are well characterised by creativity in presentation and complexity in tastes and textures. When defining luxury foods, the experience often overrides the quality per se (Mosca et al., 2021, p. 78). In relation to the experience mentioned, not many are readily willing to splurge on luxury dining for the sake of experiencing it except for those who are rich in either physical capital or cultural capital. Taking this into account, there is a need for luxury restaurants to craft their food reviews incorporating elements that echo the concept of quiet luxury as this aligns with the vibes and taste of their target demographics.

Cultural capital, or more specifically embodied cultural capital, is closely linked with a person's upbringing, education, and personal experiences. Hence, it cannot be purchased by is only attainable through personal cultivation. This also means that individuals who are rich in embodied cultural capital are able to better appreciate the appeal associated with quiet luxury since they take pride in their profound knowledge in the epistemology of luxury. This being that norm, it is this safe to assume that reviews that echo the essence of quiet luxury are meant to intentionally attract the demographics that are rich in embodied cultural capital. The subtle and indirect mentioning of cultural icons/heritage, use of subtle language markets to suggest the presence of luxury and the emphasis on locally and ethically sourced ingredients serve of elements of understated sophistication linked to the experience of fine dining. These elements and codes of linguistics are not seen overtly by every reader, with the exception of those who possess a certain level of embodied cultural capital. This is because their values and taste intersect harmoniously with the appeals linked to the concept of quiet luxury. However, this research goes beyond demonstrating how Barthes' myth theory can be decoded as linguistic symbols that portray quiet luxury. The analysis also demonstrates how the combination of

Barthes' concept of myth and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can serve as an effective framework for showcasing how Michelin's restaurant narratives transform culinary elements into cultural symbols that communicate exclusivity and distinction.

Literature Review

Studies pertaining to food reviews, quiet luxury, cultural capital and language elements used in the domain of food have been conducted in the scholarly field. Huang (2019) explained that Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital and Habitus are universally applicable. Citing relevant examples discernible in China, it is regarded as a form of cultural capital to have friends who are doctors or have received a foreign education as these two are not easily accessible by most in China. Hence, parents play a role in shaping the future of their children by making the right decisions, and this reflects how Cultural Capital and Habitus are cultivated from home rather than external factors.

In the same veins, Makkar and Yap (2018) observed that the notion of luxury has changed over the years where inconspicuous luxury has become the more mindful alternative for certain consumers when indulging in luxury. Rather than focusing solely on materiality, there is a new generation of luxury consumers who aim to use luxury as a form of self-identification and communication to others. To them, luxury is a concept closely associated with truly understanding one's purpose and needs which eventually leads to an emotional bond with luxury. Furthermore, Jiang et al. (2021) explored how luxury consumption is deeply linked with narcissistic tendencies. In their research that examined two types of narcissists; the overt and the covert, it was revealed that overt narcissists are more likely to indulge in quiet luxury products due to the fact that quiet luxury items are rarer and less known by others. Comparatively, covert narcissists, who are more likely to suffer from social anxiety, may opt for loud luxury to express themselves as a form of defence mechanism against rejection.

Specifically in the culinary domain, as noted by Vásquez and Chik (2015), online public platforms such as Open Rice and Yelp certain allow diners to display their culinary capital through their reviews on Michelin-restaurants. These platforms make it possible for diners to establish their expertise which places them on the same level as food elites and experts. Although this can be seen to compromise the standards of the food hierarchy in haute cuisine, it serves as a way to widen the community and discourse related to culinary appreciation and cultural capital. Correspondingly, ŞahiN et al. (2021) proposed that consumers who patronised Michelin restaurants are primarily driven by a sense of curiosity. Based on the study that examined reviews on nine Michelin-starred restaurants on Tripadvisor, it was found that diners are eager to explore Michelin restaurants mostly for experiences that include being able to interact with servers and being carefully attended to. Also, the findings also revealed that food quality is ranked the most important factor in determining their level of satisfaction. On the flipped side, Michelin stars awarded to street food started way back in 2016 has also brought upon both positive and negative impacts to street food vendors. In Singapore, for instance, Henderson (2017) explained that street food vendors that were awarded Michelin stars did begin to get more local media attention, which served as an excellent boost to their businesses. However, their new Michelin status also means extra burden for the chefs and staff who have to work extra hours to cater to the burgeoning crowd. Simultaneously, many existing old patrons may be deterred from fears of longer wait time and increased food prices.

As far as language is concerned, Amatulli et al. (2016) clarified that specific linguistic styles and markers are used in luxury product advertisements. In examining thirty print advertisements found in lifestyle magazines in the USA and Spain, the authors discovered that a few recurring methods were used to describe and narrate the products. These methods include the inclusions of myths, cultural icons, timeless dimensions, the sense of lack and bespoke narratives. Similar techniques were also pointed out by Von Wachenfeldt (2018) when examining the concepts of luxury presented by a few European luxury fashion houses. The study indicated that concepts such as authenticity, craftsmanship, heritage and rarity are constantly utilised to mythologise luxury items to ensure their sustainability on the competitive market. Also, Seach and Noor (2026) also reported that the once-viral toy, Labubu, was indirectly popularised through language and media framing, particularly through discourses of obsession, domestication, and glorification. Such linguistic framing contributed to the mythification of Labubu, positioning it as a culturally desirable object and, for many consumers, a must-have item. In relating the use of language to food, language and food are in fact, closely intertwined. In a study by Cavanaugh et al. (2014), it was revealed that our use of language continues to expand and evolve as a result of our interaction with food and its culture. As a result of our continuous exposure and participation in discourses related to food, it has contributed significantly to the development in various linguistics aspects, particularly in ethnolinguistic analysis, food-orientated interviews, language socialisation, collaborative transcription, and semiotic analysis. Finally, Rahbek (2011) emphasised how food can be mythologised through Roland Barthes' concept of myth. While examining Marion Halligan's selected writings on food, Rahbek discovered how the author often demystifies and defamiliarizes readers with her choice of words in creating mythical settings rich in second-order significations. A good example presented deals with how Halligan conjured up a suburban republic where it is filled with imperfections in reality with layered with mythical charms constructed primarily through language.

The literature reveals a clear connection linking cultural capital, luxury food consumption, quiet luxury and the use of language. By cultivating an awareness of cultural capital, people will begin to pay more attention to appreciating food consumption as an understated form of art and this leads to a heightened awareness of language usage particularly in the domain of food culture and culinary elitism. As highlighted in the reviews of the literature, these highlighted entities were usually examined separately. Thus, this paper that investigates how cultural capital plays a role in influencing the language used to discreetly promote luxury food certainly expands the discourse pertaining to the selected domains. Not only does it emphasise a perspective that is scarcely examined, it also showcases how the use of language permeates every part of life, playing a pivotal role in mythologizing the concept of quiet luxury through food luxury food consumption.

Methodology

This research attempts to conduct textual analysis of food reviews on selected Michelin-starred restaurants in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Drawing from Roland Barthes' concept of myth alongside Pierre Bourdieu's framework of cultural capital, the textual analysis focusses on how the use of subtle language markers and symbolic language are able to conjure up notions related to quiet luxury. This study highlights that the language of quiet luxury is associated with the myth, as Roland Barthes pointed out, because it reflects and reinforces the tastes and values of those who possess cultural capital. Furthermore, those who are rich in cultural capital are equally drawn to and play a role in perpetuating the myth as it aligns with

it their values that associate luxury with a sense of subtlety, which is meant only to be appreciated and known by selected few. In order to examine the myth, three recurring themes dealing with cultural and iconic symbols, emphasis on locality and ethics as well as subtle luxury markers will be analysed alongside Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Eighteen food reviews taken from Michelin official website will be analysed in relation to Roland Barthes' concept of myth. This means that six reviews are taken from each selected country. The selected reviews cover a variety of restaurants in the selected countries, and they are all listed as the most expensive on the list. Selection is made based on only two categories which are [\$\$\$] or [\$\$\$] only to ensure consistency in determining the luxury scale of the restaurants. [\$\$\$\$] is categorized as the most expensive on the website while [\$\$\$] comes in second. On average, dining in these restaurants will cost a minimum of 100USD per person. Upon a thorough analysis, a comparison will be made to highlight insights on how the notion of quiet luxury is presented through Michelin food reviews in the three countries. Considering how these three countries are largely deemed as gastronomical destinations in their own right, examining how the concept of quiet luxury is presented linguistically through food reviews from these countries will reveal just how subtle markers of luxury are culturally coded. Hence, this provides a lens through which we can examine in order to better gauge the food cultures in these countries particularly in relation to the realm of fine dining. This study offers an alternative perspective to understand the food cultures of three different countries by becoming more aware of cultural variations in luxury signifiers. The findings are significant because Roland Barthes' myth concept and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital are scarcely examined together. Therefore, this is academically viable, as Barthes' myth is essential in analysing how denotative, connotative, and symbolic language contributes to the construction of luxury myths, while Bourdieu's cultural capital highlights these markers reflect social and cultural values.

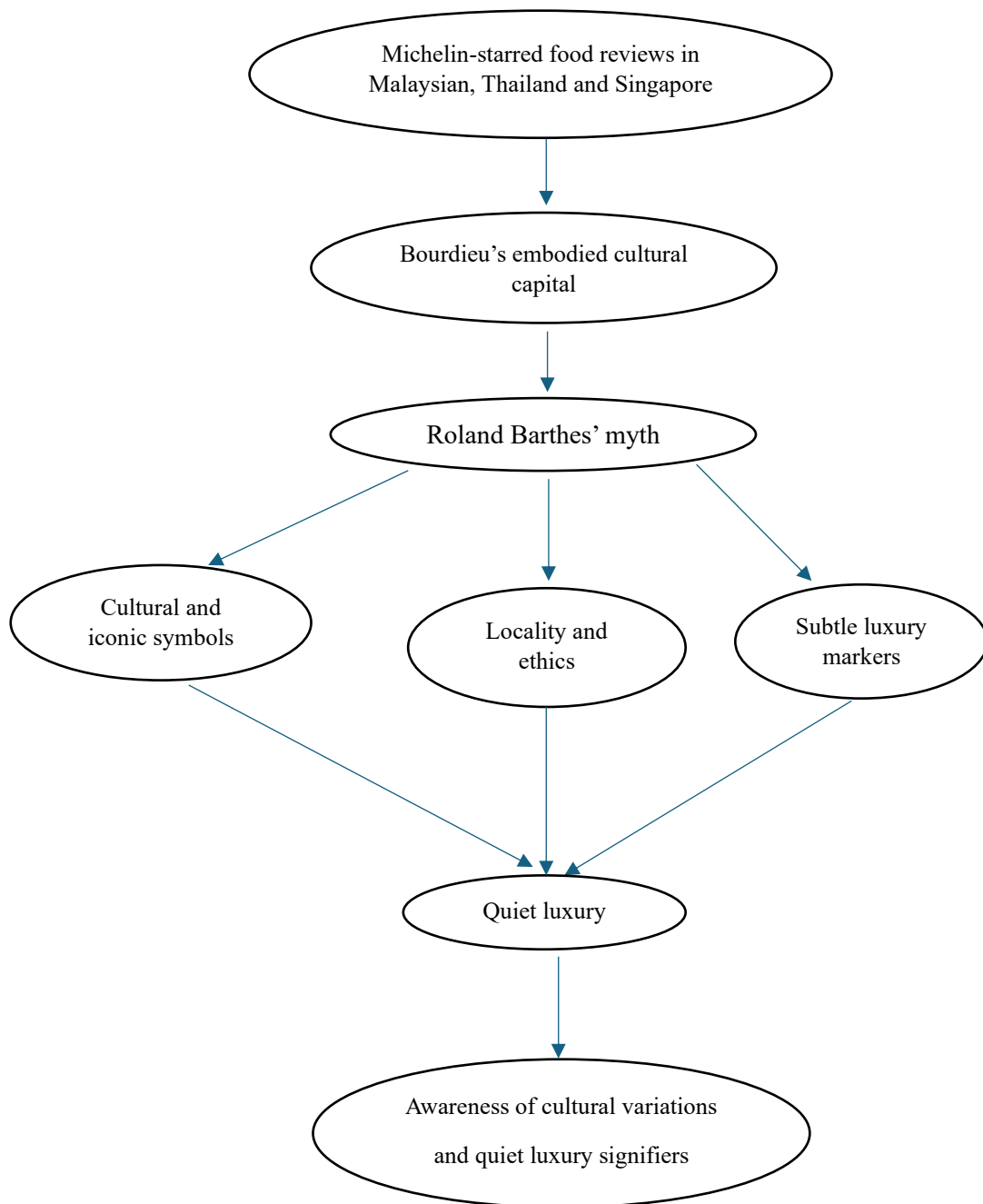


Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework

Discussion and Analysis

Michelin Thailand

Khaan ฿฿฿฿	The new restaurant of Chef Sujira 'Aom' Pongmorn, Khaan – meaning both "tiger" and "proclaim" in Thai, roars with impressive Thai flavours, while shining a spotlight on ingredients and the provinces from which they're sourced. The chef's use of modern techniques means her culinary creations, served in an elegant space decked out in deep red hues, retain all their characteristic depth. Opt for the tasting menu, paired with wine or tea, to elevate the experience.
Potong ฿฿฿฿	Traditional and novel converge at this Thai-Chinese fine dining restaurant from chef Pichaya "Pam" Soontornyanakij. Set in a historical Sino-Portuguese building that used to be Pam's family's Chinese pharmacy, Potong blends rustic and modern décor from ground floor bar to rooftop chill space. Her progressive tasting menu is infused with storytelling and hits its peak with aged duck breast. To make it even better, ask the sommelier for a wine pairing.
Samut [Phuket] ฿฿฿฿	Samut (or ocean) is set in a traditional Thai-Chinese building decorated in an Oriental style, with dark teak wood. Previously the lobby of the adjacent hotel, it's now a gastronomic destination. The set menu, with more than 10 dishes, tours the island's coastline, offering seafood caught by local fishermen. The chef respects the traditions of the island, selecting flavours and fruits inspired by local creativity, including a reinterpretation of Phuket dim sum.
Baan Tepa ฿฿฿฿	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. The dishes present bold flavours and delicate spices, crafted by a charming team within an elegant villa setting.
R-Haan ฿฿฿	R-Haan aims to reflect the way in which food has influenced Thai people and culture. Relax in the lounge with a cocktail before entering the main dining room for cuisine that encapsulates the beauty of Thailand and its provinces. The traditional Thai menu brings the essence of the country to your plate. A refined Thai welcome takes the form of an amuse-bouche, then come the mains, served the traditional way, family style, followed by iconic local desserts.
Khao ฿฿฿฿	Khao serves Northern Thai cuisine, along with some dishes from other regions. The chef, a prestigious culinary school graduate with 10 years of luxury hotel experience, brings an international perspective and a modern identity to traditional Thai dishes. The dining room is contemporary and inviting – crystal chandeliers coexist with carved teak panelling – and the terrace offers serene views of rice fields and hills.

The Opulence Of Siam

Individuals who possess a higher level of cultural capital have previously been elucidated to be able to manifest a higher level of appreciation of subtlety associated with luxury. As is evident in the six selected Michelin-starred restaurant reviews in Thailand, it can be seen that there are evidently a few recurring themes. In relation to the use of cultural or iconic symbols to insinuate the quiet presence of luxury, Khann exudes the notion through its name, which is a homonym for both "tiger" and "proclaim" in Thai. Whether it is meant to be understood as a noun or verb, both exude the notions of power and strength in the Thai community. The presence of cultural symbol is also evident in the review of Potong, where the use of phrases such as '*building that used to be the Chinese pharmacy of Pam's family and the menu infused with storytelling*' suggests that the present of the restaurant is anchored on a long tradition. After all, revelling in the act of breathing new life into an old building and transforming it into a form of storytelling is a brilliant way to create a sense of luxury without needing to try too

hard. Meanwhile, located on the beautiful island of Phuket, Samut pays homage to the cultural symbol by highlighting how ‘the chef respects the traditions of the island’. This is quite similar to R-Haan’s way of paying tribute to cultural symbols by including *‘traditional Thai menu served traditional, family style’*. Although the mentioning of cultural symbols may not necessarily mean luxury to the uninitiated, those who are equipped with cultural capital will read it differently as they can decode the subtle display of luxury that comes with honouring the past. Therefore, quiet luxury embodies a mythos of subtle yet profound elegance.

Next to be examined in relation to the portrayal of quiet luxury pertains to the emphasis on local charms. Concerning this, the significance of locally sourced ingredients is highlighted heavily in the selected reviews. Khaan, for example, takes pride in its food selection that shines *‘a spotlight on ingredients and the provinces from which they are sourced’* while Samut only selects *‘flavours and fruits inspired by local creativity’*. However, Baan Tepa’s way of honouring local ingredients is perhaps unmatched by others, since they source their ingredients directly from their own soils. The line *‘seasonal and sustainable ingredients, some sourced from their own backyard, highlight a culinary journey through Thailand’* signifies a highest form of honour to what it means to go local. Once again, the universal collective understanding of luxury is communicated to those who are equipped with cultural capital, and it is encapsulated within the simple phrases that sing praises to locally sourced ingredients. Evidently, the idea of quiet luxury is mythologised in the world of luxury dining. This certainly adds meaning and value to the food served in those establishments.

No discussion pertaining to the idea of luxury is adequately justified without the inclusion of the setting, decor or environment. With respect to this, it can be seen that in all the selected reviews in Thailand, the luxury ambiance of their establishments has been deliberately downplayed. Instead, the charm of the space and the emphasis of certain colours are highlighted as the subtle way of creating a sense of luxury. Khaan offers *‘an elegant space decorated in deep red hues’* while Potong *‘blended a rustic and modern décor from the bar on the ground floor to the chill space on the roof’*. Meanwhile, Samut transforms a *‘traditional Thai Chinese building decorated in an Oriental style, with dark teak wood’* while Baan Tepa serves their guests in an *‘elegant villa setting’*. Finally, Khao boasts of its rustic atmosphere perfected by the *‘carved teak panelling’* and the terrace offers serene views of rice fields and hills. Once again, luxury is presented in a rather indirect manner where it is not merely represented through the use of expensive silverware, opulent wallpapers, lavish décor or ostentatious architectures. Conversely, the emphasis of nature, such as the use of teak wood, natural landscapes, and tasteful use of available space that gravitates towards the rustic aspects of things, is given a preferential mention, thereby mythologising the notion of quiet luxury for culturally informed individuals.

Michelin Malaysia

Akar \$\$\$	Akar is Malay for "root" and Chef Low and his team pay homage to their culinary roots, creatively refashioning European dishes with interesting surprises. Local ingredients such as gula apong and engkabang are used in a menu that changes with the seasons and goes beyond the realms of typical Malaysian cooking. Their signature green salad with bagna cauda is packed with flavour. Further to refurbishments, the space feels intimate and cosy.
Gēn \$\$\$	Gēn is Chinese for root. The owner-chef revisits his culinary roots and childhood memories with nostalgic flavours and a tasting menu driven by local seasonal produce, especially fish, whose courses never fail to surprise. The plating is particularly pleasing, and sometimes playful, such as the silky chicken soup in a glass bottle. The wine list boasts over 30 organic and biodynamic tipples that complement the food perfectly.
Yun House \$\$\$	Set under high ceilings, this remarkable dining room with nice views is a great choice for both casual and formal gatherings. A specialist in Cantonese cuisine, the chef has lived in Southeast Asia for many years. His concise menu is pork free with a quality selection of seafood and dim sum. Don't miss the daily Inspirational Soup or fresh prawns simmered with glass noodles. Wrap up your meal with a crispy red bean pancake. The signature duck must be ordered in advance.
Beta \$\$\$	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.
Dewakan \$\$\$	Dewakan means "food from God", and the chef 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. The set tasting menu features many items that are fermented or dry-aged in-house, alongside seasonal fruits and herbs. Stunningly located on the 48th floor, diners enjoy jaw-dropping city views.
De. Wan 1958 (Taman U Thant) \$\$\$	Sunny and cheerful like the local celebrity Chef Wan, the room is inviting and bustling. Similarly, the food is guaranteed to lift your spirits with big tropical flavours. Whet your appetite with pomelo salad with crispy prawn cheeks in kerabu lime dressing and a hint of fish sauce. For mains, go for bakar bakar, BBQ meat or seafood that comes with your choice of the chef's mouth-watering sauces. Portion sizes are big enough for sharing.

Understated Nusantara Charm

The idea of how the concept of quiet luxury is well mythologized will be further examined here. Consequently, the three recurring themes examined in the previous section of the analysis are also evidently present in selected Michelin-starred restaurant food reviews in Malaysia. The honouring of cultural symbols is yet again visible in the names of two restaurants; 'Akar' and 'Gēn', which can be translated as root in English. Although 'Akar' has its origin in the Malay language and 'Gn', which is a mandarin word, both words place great importance in honouring the origins of both races that originate within the roots of the communities. Being two of the most dominant races in Malaysia, with approximately 71% and 23% for Malay and Chinese respectively, the names signify more than just the local flavours that the restaurants offer, whether it is for upholding childhood memories or a way of paying homage to culinary roots, both 'Akar' and 'Gēn' are powerful enough to represent a strong cultural representation of the establishments. Once again, when read through the perspectives of those equipped with cultural capital, these names are more than just a mere display of cultural pride, but a sense of quiet luxury that indirectly acknowledges the impeccable values of one's culinary roots.

Linked to this, Beta pays tribute to cultural symbol by giving new life to local favourites by upgrading them with '*modern techniques and soigné plating*'. Although the specificity of local favourites is not revealed, experienced diners will certainly go with a certain level of expectation, as they are the core of the Malaysian culinary cultural symbols. These selected reviews continue to wax lyrical about cultural symbols with the inclusion of celestial and earthly representations. The name 'Dewakan' is a noun that has the meaning of 'food from the dewa (gods)'. The name serves as a hyperbolic expression to the greatness of the food served in that establishment but, simultaneously, it may also symbolise a form of honour to the approximately two million Hindus in Malaysia as a cultural symbol. When examined from a secular perspective, heavenly food is meant specifically for those who truly appreciate the true value of rare culinary experiences, thus insinuating the luxurious attributes of the food served. Meanwhile, if ever there is a public figure deemed iconic enough to represent the Malaysian culinary scene, Chef Wan would unquestionably fit the bill. With more than 40 years of culinary experience under his belt, Chef Wan is certainly a Malaysian cultural symbol in his own rights. Hence, mentioning his name in the review of his own restaurant, De Wan, is not just a way to establish the credibility of his establishment, but a necessity that forms a crucial point of convergence between cultural symbols with quiet luxury.

The portrayal of quiet luxury through the lens of local charm is notably present in the mentioning of locally sourced ingredients once again. This recurring theme is well reflected in the reviews of both Akar and Gēn. It does not come as a big surprise to observe the inclusion of locally sourced ingredients in the reviews of these two establishments, as their names manifestly display a sense of honouring tradition. The seasonal menu of Akar is illuminated by local ingredients such as '*gula apong*' and '*engkabang*' while the nostalgic power of the menu of Gn is accentuated by its 'local seasonal produce'. Regarding the review of Yun House, although locally sourced ingredients are not mentioned in their review, the fact that the chef's 'concise menu' is pork free with a quality selection of seafood and dim sum showcases how the local charm is once acknowledged as an essential part of inclusivity. Although pork-free Chinese cuisine is not exactly difficult to find in Malaysia, Michelin-starred Chinese restaurants serving pork-free options are relatively rare. As for Dewakan, their insistence on emphasizing the local elements is readily observable. In fact, embracing local culture appears to be at the core of their identity where '*every ingredient is sustainably and locally sourced; even the dinnerware is handmade by local artists*'. Similarly, De. Wan demonstrates a comparable commitment to localism with dishes like '*kerabu lime dressing*' and '*bakar bakar*'. When the local language is used, it can only mean that it is meant to be enjoyed in the most authentic local way possible. Once again, although the idea of luxury is not presented in an ostentatious manner here, embracing localism is already an idea strong enough to insinuate the presence of quiet luxury. Of course, this is not meant to be understood by everyone, but it surely resonates with the select few who possess the cultural capital to truly appreciate and understand what luxury dining entails.

However, when it comes to describing the settings of the selected restaurant in Malaysia, the details pertaining to dining spaces are not as elaborate as those of the establishments located in Thailand. The choices of words are more straightforward and less suggestive. With Yun House offering a '*remarkable dining room with nice view*' and Beta a '*theatrically appointed dining room with open kitchen*', the notion of luxury is not reflected in its proximity to nature but rather in a smart use of space that extends beyond the dining area. Meanwhile, Dewakan revels in a sense of pride in its 'stunningly located on the 48th floor,' diners enjoy jaw-dropping city views, a well-fitted location for enjoying '*food from gods*'. Despite the lack of association with

elements of nature, the quiet luxury elements of these establishment are still evidently presented through the lack of direct mentioning of luxury aspects of things. Instead, the luxury vibes are inconspicuously presented through the vastness of space that offers unobstructive views which extends way beyond a confined space. This is where the true luxury lies and it requires a good mastery of cultural capital to be able to appreciate it. Furthermore, it also demonstrates how quiet luxury is consistently mythologised.

Michelin Singapore

Born \$\$\$	Housed in Jinrikisha Station, a former rickshaw depot circa 1903, Born boasts a modern dining room adorned by glowing double arches, high glass ceiling and an ethereal paper sculpture. A protégé of André Chiang, Chef Zor Tan cooks up a 9-course tasting menu inspired by the circle of life and his personal journey, melding French gastronomy with Chinese cooking. Dishes are creative and crafted with globally sourced ingredients, delivering contrasts in textures and flavours.
Labyrinth \$\$\$	Chef LG Han takes recognisable local flavours and tastes remembered from childhood as his starting point – and then reimagines and reinterprets them, using superlative ingredients from across Singapore. The result is an exciting, original and unforgettable set menu that surprises, amuses and satisfies. The restaurant's black canvas is punctured by razor sharp lighting, while the service team are clued up and very well organised.
Vue \$\$\$	Aptly named after the French word for 'view', this romantic restaurant boasts one of the most stunning vistas of Marina Bay. Even the ceiling is designed to emanate light without casting reflections on the glass panes. The menu shows the culinary vision of the young head chef, with the four-course chef's tasting menu being the most popular choice where diners may choose from a number of interesting options. Steaks and risotto are great for sharing. Executive set lunch is popular.
Pangium \$\$\$	The view of the lush green in the garden is one good reason to visit. But owner-chef Malcolm Lee's exquisite tasting menu that explores the untapped possibilities of Straits cuisine is what makes the experience of dining here unforgettable. Named after the plant that produces buah keluak seeds, a key ingredient in Peranakan cuisine, Pangium pays homage to family recipes passed down for generations with carefully crafted dishes that taste exceptional.
Mustard Seed \$\$\$	Before you can experience the head chef's unique take on Singaporean-Japanese fusion cooking, you have to book a table online months ahead. Punctuality is key as the food is only served after all the guests are seated at 7.30pm sharp. The 8-course omakase-style menu changes every two months, reinventing national dishes like rojak and laksa with clever Japanese twists. Counter seats overlooking the open kitchen let diners see the magic first hand.

The Lion City: Luxury In Restraint

The notion of quiet luxury has been intricately mythologised through cultural narratives presented through the selected food reviews. Hailed as one of the most expensive countries to live in, it is no surprise that luxury dining in Singapore is thriving alongside its robust economy. However, it is observed that, just like its neighbouring countries, quiet luxury has also crept into Singapore's luxury dining scene, where understated luxury begins to gain a massive group of devotees. The three recurring themes examined earlier are also traceable in the selected Michelin-starred restaurant reviews located in Singapore. When it comes to paying homage to cultural symbols as a way to hint at the presence of luxury, some of the selected reviews are seen to use iconic architecture to achieve the result. Born's iconic location within one of Singapore's historical landmarks, Jinrikisha Station, is a powerful testament that associates

them with the notion of luxury without ever having to over-kill it. Being the only restaurant operating within the historic Edwardian style building is another form of recognition of its exclusivity. The mention of a cultural icon is also included in the review of Vue, a French restaurant that prides itself on offering '*one of the most stunning vistas of Marina Bay*'. When an establishment is able to offer an unobstructive view to one of the most recognisable structures in Singapore, it is clear of the sign of luxury in presence, communicated in the quietest way possible. In addition to that, Mustard Seed uses cultural symbols in the form of food well with its menu that reinvents '*reinventing national dishes like rojak and laksa with clever Japanese twists*'. To the culturally adept, these are not merely signs of patriotism or national pride, they are indirect hints to the presence of luxury. Hence, quiet luxury is deeply mythologized as an epitome of refinement.

The mention of locally sourced ingredients is also noticeable in some of the reviews of Michelin-starred restaurants in Singapore. For example, Labyrinth offers a selection of iconic local flavours that are represented with '*superlative ingredients from across Singapore*' while Pangium holds localism high regard by preserving '*family recipes passed down for generations with carefully crafted dishes that taste exceptional*'. Compared to restaurant reviews in Thailand and Malaysia, this particular theme is less visible in Singapore. However, what is distinctively different in Singapore is that there is an emphasis on the restaurant menus that aim to establish unique perspectives. For example, Born's menu aims to deliver '*contrasts in textures and flavours*' while Labyrinth offers a menu that '*surprises, amuses and satisfies*'. Meanwhile, the Vue menu places importance on youth, where its menu represents '*the culinary vision of the young head chef*' and finally, Pangium takes a step forward by presenting a menu that delivers an unforgettable experience because it '*explores the untapped possibilities of Straits cuisine*'. Despite the absence of mentioning rare and premium ingredients, the idea of luxury is easily detectable for those well-versed in cultural nuance. Menus are not just printed documents listing the available food options in these establishments, hidden within them are secret codes of quiet luxury understood only to those enriched with cultural capital. Once again, it is proven that the concept of quiet luxury has been strategically mythologised in elite circles and transcends the superficiality of ostentation.

From emphasising the notion of locality to highlighting the simplicity of ingredients, and from giving precedence to simplicity in décor to preserving tradition, quiet luxury, as seen through reviews of Michelin restaurants in Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore, does share some similarities. These similarities are not surprisingly shocking, as these three countries are rich in cultural heritage that spans various ethnic backgrounds. When local charms blend with migrant wisdom, humility becomes a form of elegance that exudes quiet luxury. Through this analysis, it is safe to say that when quiet luxury is examined in the gastronomic domain, it goes beyond the visual aspect. Instead, quiet luxury becomes a form of myth that promotes effective storytelling, which is then presented to patrons who are willing to spend on luxury. Hence, cultural capital is not only embodied; it is now a code that needs to be understood through subtle forms of communication.

Conclusion

There are many ways in which the notion of luxury can manifest itself and be presented. While some may prefer an unapologetically bold display of luxury, others may gravitate toward a more understated and indirect approach. The notion of quiet luxury has been extensively examined in the world of haute fashion, but in the domain of luxury dining, it remains as an

area that is scarcely explored. These Michelin-starred restaurant reviews in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore serve as a good starting point to examine how the notion of quiet luxury has permeated the domain of luxury dining in these countries known for their gastronomical allures. Despite their status as high-end establishments, Michelin reviews do not present the notion of luxury that comes with these restaurants in a straightforward and overt manner. Instead, the notion of luxury is mythologised and presented in a way that is highly suggestive and allusive. The three recurring themes dealing with cultural and iconic symbols, emphasis on locality and ethics, as well as subtle luxury markers, are inherently present in most of the selected reviews. This indicates that quiet luxury does not need to be presented visually, but the same results can be achieved linguistically when it is examined from the perspectives of myth and cultural capital. Truth be told, quiet luxury is, in many ways, an abstract idea that may seem mythical to those lacking the cultural capital to decode and appreciate it. True appreciation of quiet luxury requires more than just expensive taste; it is cultivated through years of exposure and practice. When one finally master's the art of cultural capital, quiet luxury becomes a natural part of one's existence.

Finally, this research is significant as it extends Barthes' theory into the domain of gastronomy and directly expands the literature on quiet luxury beyond the current parameters of fashion and branding. Furthermore, the sphere of food studies is also widened, as quiet luxury, which has often been overlooked in this domain, can be examined more critically through linguistic codes alongside cultural concepts, including myth and cultural capital.

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