



What’s for Dinner?: Restaurants as a Proxy for Gentrification

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Abstract

Kyoto is home to some of Japan’s most significant cultural landmarks, attracting both domestic and international tourists. Our study explores the relationship between wealth concentration and restaurant diversity, particularly focusing on the areas surrounding important cultural sites. Using restaurant prices as a proxy for economic status, wealth distribution and its correlation with the presence of Japanese versus foreign cuisine can be analyzed.

Research Questions

1. Are high-end restaurants clustered in certain areas or are they evenly distributed across Kyoto?
2. Is there a significant difference in the density of Japanese restaurants near Kyoto’s cultural landmarks compared to the city-wide average?
3. Are Japanese / international restaurants described differently?

Dataset Description

We collected data from Tabelog, a restaurant review and rating website, based on their “Best restaurants in Kyoto” list, to perform data analysis on. We scraped each of the first 60 pages, detailing 20 restaurants each (for a total of 1200 restaurants) and extracted the following features for each restaurant:

● Restaurant Name	● Latitude
● Restaurant Rating	● Longitude
● Restaurant Link	● Description of restaurant
● Average Price	● Primary cuisine

We excluded incorrect pricing values, extraneous descriptor words, and dropped data with incomplete or ambiguous descriptions.

Data Exploration - Geographic

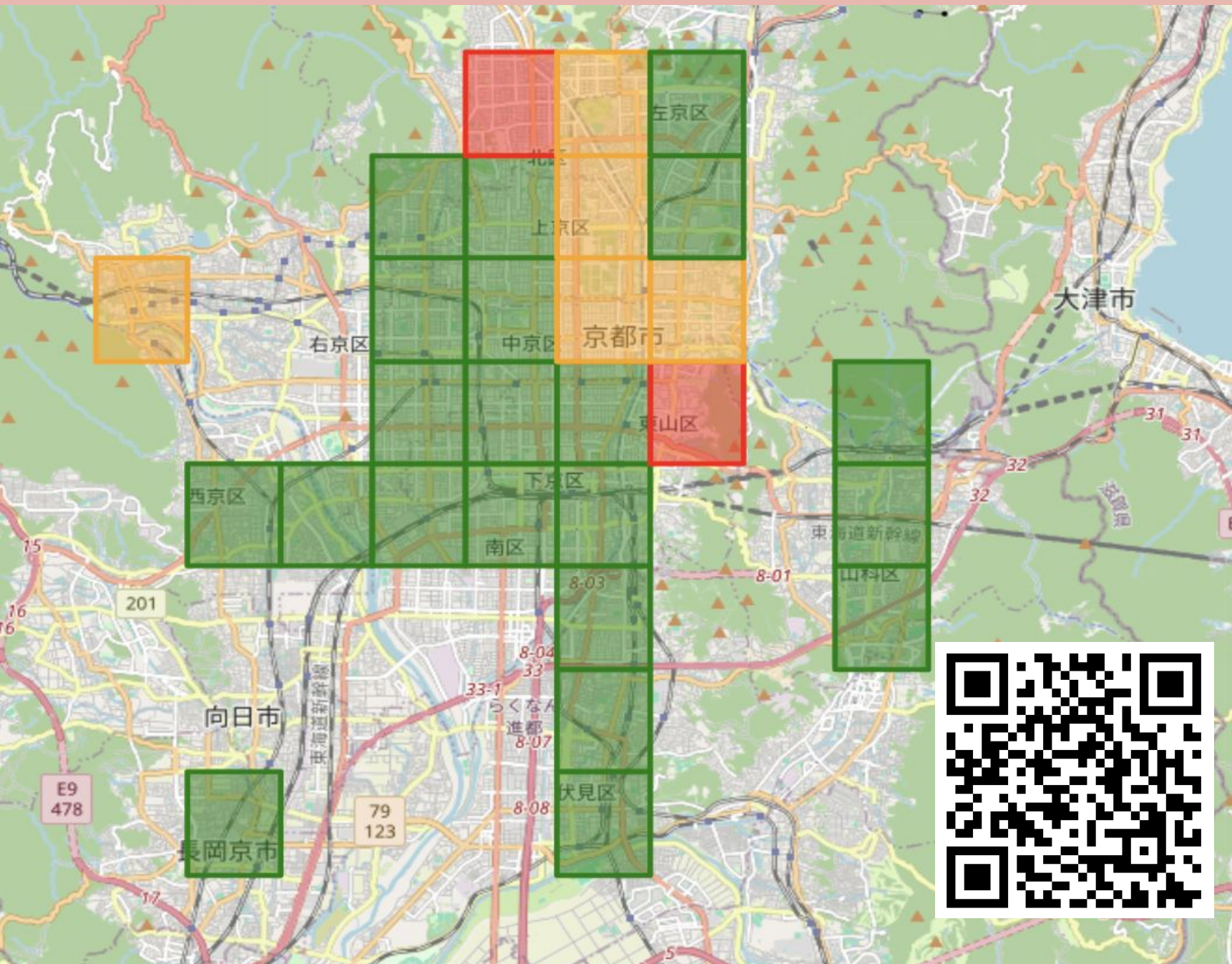


Figure 1: A visualization of median restaurant price in Kyoto in 1km² grids. Red corresponds to more expensive (<¥7500), and green is cheaper (>¥5000)

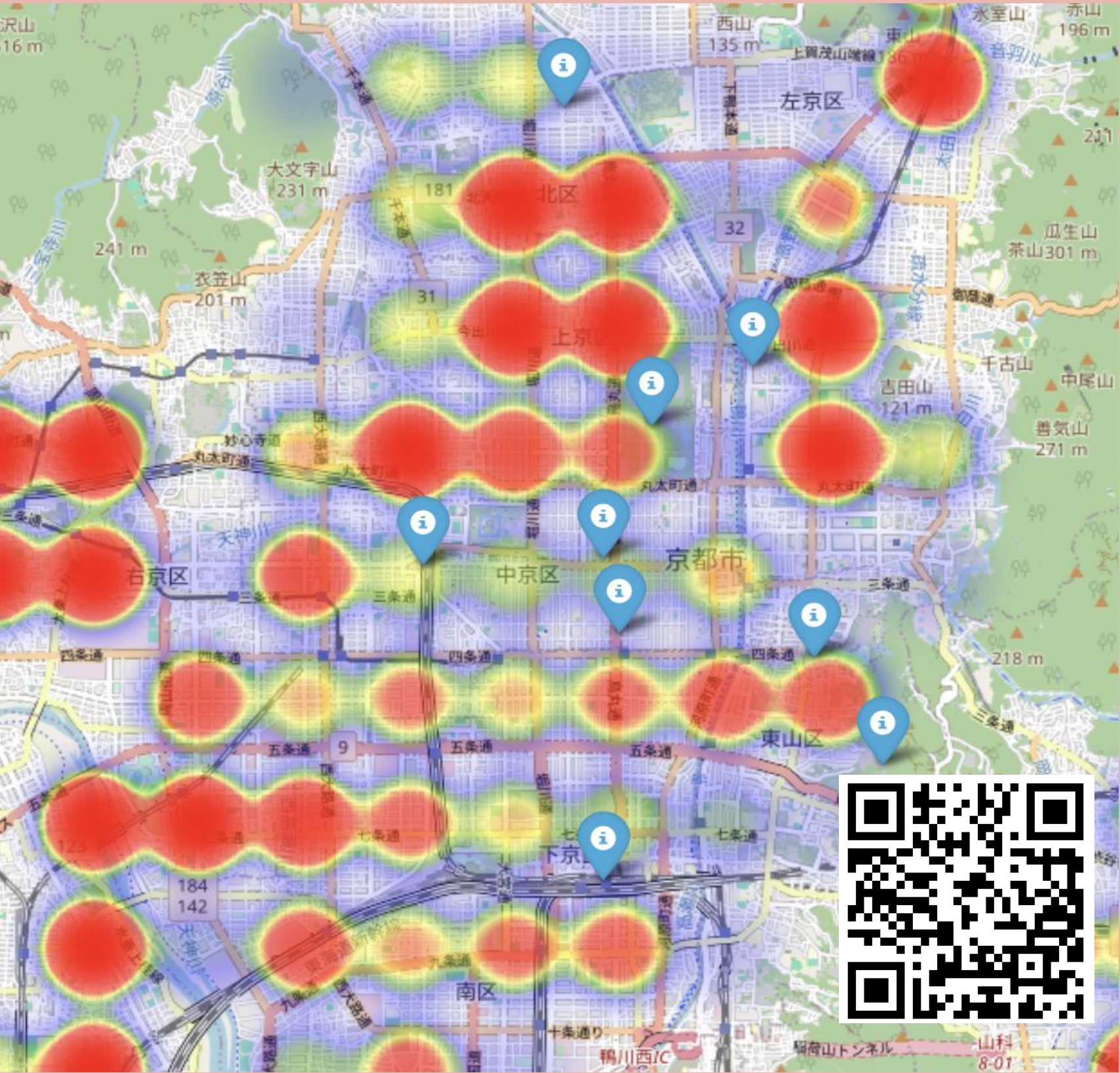
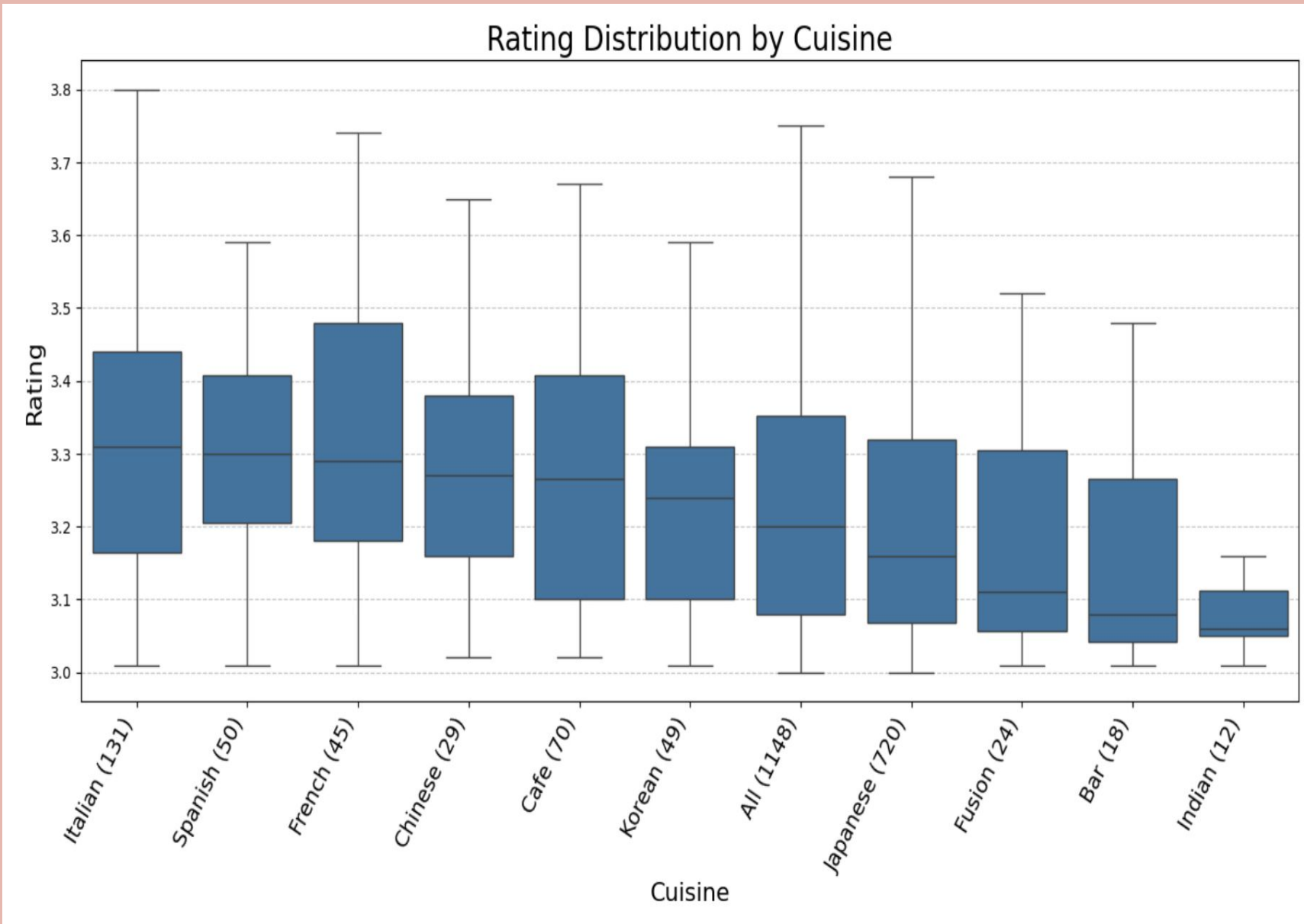


Figure 2: This heatmap plots the percent of Japanese restaurants in a 2 km² grid. The markers are tourist hubs. The markers’ nearest neighborhood averaged ~58% Japanese restaurants while the Kyoto-wide average was ~62% Japanese.

Data Exploration - Cuisine Based



Data Analysis

- 1. Kyoto’s Wealth Distribution**
 - Higher restaurant prices cluster near the Kamo River and major tourist hotspots.
 - Foreign visitors and wealthier residents influence economic activity in these regions.
- 2. Cuisine Distribution Trends**
 - Foreign restaurants generally have higher median ratings, while Japanese restaurants are rated lower, even compared to the median restaurant in Japan.
 - Areas with higher wealth and tourism presence have a more diverse culinary landscape.
- 3. Word Sentiment**
 - Kyoto’s culinary diversity
 - Fusion of local and international cuisines.
 - Japanese cuisine emphasizes izakaya and tavern-style dining
 - Italian, Spanish, and French cuisines incorporate bars and steak, reflecting a Westernized upscale dining experience.
 - International cuisines frequently mention Kyoto, suggesting localization and adaptation to the city's cultural and tourist landscape.

Conclusion

Our findings highlight the economic and cultural transformations occurring in Kyoto’s most visited areas, driven largely by tourism and wealth distribution. High-income neighborhoods and tourist hotspots tend to exhibit greater diversity in restaurant offerings, with a noticeable decline in the relative prevalence of Japanese cuisine near key cultural landmarks. This shift suggests that economic incentives and international visitor preferences influence the types of restaurants that operate in these areas, leading to a culinary landscape that is increasingly globalized.

The presence of high-end international cuisines such as Italian, French, and Spanish in wealthier districts aligns with broader economic trends, where affluent visitors and expatriates contribute to demand for non-Japanese dining experiences. Meanwhile, Japanese cuisine remains dominant in less tourist-saturated areas, reinforcing the idea that local dining culture is being preserved outside the economic pressures of heavy foot traffic and foreign consumer expectations