

REVIEW

Systematic Literature Review of Factors Influencing Food Away from Home (FAFH) Consumption in Asia: Drivers, Behaviours and Societal Implications

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ABSTRACT

Over the past twenty years, Asia has gone through major demographic, economic, and technological changes that have reshaped how people eat, with one of the clearest shifts being the growing dependence on Food Away from Home (FAFH) meals prepared or consumed outside the household. This systematic literature review (SLR) brings together empirical studies published between 2000 and 2025 that shape FAFH consumption and utilises the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method to examine the crit-

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ical drivers, behaviours, and social impacts influencing FAFH across Asian countries. The review systematically categorises the studies into five major themes: (1) economic and demographic factors, (2) health and nutritional effects, (3) environmental and technological influences, (4) sociological and cultural aspects, and (5) policy and governance responses. Overall, the findings show that eating practices across Asia are shifting toward more convenient and calorie-dense meals, although still shaped by cultural norms, food-safety perceptions, and the rapid growth of digital platforms. The trend became even more noticeable after 2019 with the rise of online food-delivery services linked to COVID-19. Research shows that in most Asian countries, people spend more on FAFH as their income rises, and studies suggest that eating FAFH might link to health issues. Although the expansion of FAFH has supported job creation and service-sector growth, it also brings challenges for food-security goals, and sustainable food-system development. Notably, this review demonstrates how Asian food consumption is changing and highlights the need for more integrated policy frameworks to achieve food security goals.

Keywords: Food Away from Home; Asia; Systematic Review; PRISMA; Food Consumption; Eating-Out; Socio-Economic Drivers

1. Introduction

In the last twenty-five years, food consumption patterns in Asia have changed faster and more noticeably than in almost anywhere else. The early 2000s marked a strong shift away from traditional home-cooked meals toward a more modern, service-based food system. This change is mainly pushed by economic growth, rising household income, urbanisation, migration, digitalisation, and also changing gender roles. In this situation, Food Away from Home (FAFH) which includes meals and snacks prepared outside the home and eaten in restaurants, canteens, takeaway shops, or delivered has become one of the key signs of Asia's nutrition transition.

Between 2000 and 2025, Asian countries saw steady GDP growth of more than 5% on average, along with major demographic changes and the rise of a busy, dual-income middle class. These changes affected how households manage their time and budget for food. For example, in China, FAFH spending increased from about 12% to more than 35% of total food spending between 2002 and 2020^[1]. Malaysia and Indonesia saw similar rises, with eating out becoming a normal habit among urban families^[2, 3]. Other Asian economies such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Taiwan also reported huge increases in FAFH spending as more people work in services, move to cities, and rely on digital delivery platforms^[4, 5].

FAFH is not only about convenience, but it also reflects deeper social and behavioural shifts. The early 2000s were a period when many Asian households moved from subsistence-style, home-based food systems to more market-oriented consumption. After 2010, this shift grew even faster because of digital innovation and the spread of online food delivery (OFD) platforms. Apps like Food Panda, GrabFood, GoFood, and Ele.me have changed how people think about eating by making meals more accessible, more affordable, and more varied^[6]. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) intensified this pattern, especially among groups that previously ordered food less often^[7].

However, the rise of FAFH also brings many challenges. Studies in nutrition show that dining out is linked with higher calorie intake, more sodium consumption, and a higher risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs)^[8, 9]. While FAFH supports job creation and urban economies, it may also affect local food self-sufficiency. For example, Taiwan's domestic food production dropped from 56% to 31% between 1988 and 2018, partly because of the growing reliance on FAFH^[5]. Socially, eating out reflects modern aspirations but also creates inequality: wealthier groups can access many food choices, while lower-income groups often face poorer dietary options^[10]. Environmentally, the sector contributes to increasing packaging waste and energy-intensive supply chains^[11].

Although many individual studies have examined

FAFH in specific countries, there is still a limited regional comparison. Most earlier reviews focus only on short timeframes (often after 2010) or only on certain determinants like income or health. Considering how much Asia has changed in the last two decades, there is a need for a more complete synthesis that looks at long-term trends, structural linkages, and differences between countries. It is also important to include emerging issues such as digitalisation, food safety regulation, and recent policy efforts, which have become central to the food system after 2015.

A systematic literature review (SLR) is therefore suitable for organising such diverse evidence. Inspired by Shaffril et al.^[12], this review follows PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency, consistency, and clarity^[13, 14]. Guided by the PICO framework which is Population (Asian consumers), Interest (determinants and impacts of FAFH), and Context (Asia's socio-economic and environmental change), the main research question is: "What are the key determinants, behavioural patterns, and societal implications of Food Away from Home (FAFH) consumption across Asian nations from 2000 to 2025?"

This review aims to: (i) analyse temporal and cross-country patterns in FAFH behaviour from 2000–2025; (ii) identify and synthesise major determinants including economic, demographic, environmental, technological, and cultural factors; (iii) evaluate nutritional, social, and policy impacts of growing FAFH consumption; and (iv) highlight research and policy gaps for shaping more sustainable food systems across the region.

Overall, this study expands existing literature by offering a two-decade overview of how FAFH has transformed in Asia. It provides deeper evidence and policy relevance for researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers working in food systems, public health, and sustainable development.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to consolidate empirical evidence about the determinants, practices, and effects of

Food Away from Home (FAFH) across Asia. This review followed the PRISMA approach (see **Supplementary Materials**) to ensure the process was transparent, organised, and comprehensible^[13]. The procedure comprised four primary stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion. The process was underpinned by a methodical search approach, organised data extraction, and appropriate quality evaluation. To guarantee that the review adhered to international standards, the PRISMA criteria were implemented, which facilitated clarity, uniformity, and reliability throughout the process^[14]. Although PRISMA originated in the medical domain, it is now extensively utilised in social science and food-system research, making it suitable for our evaluation^[15].

2.1. Identification of Sources

Three main online databases: Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar were first selected because they offer wide and relevant coverage for this topic. Scopus includes a broad range of peer-reviewed journals across many fields, ScienceDirect focuses more on strong publications in food, nutrition, and social sciences, and Google Scholar helps capture extra grey literature and local studies that may not appear in indexed databases. With this broader scope, the search covered studies from 2000 until 2025, so that the review could capture nearly two decades of research and show both the pre-digital and post-digital transitions in FAFH behaviour.

The search strategy followed the PICO framework:

- i. Population: consumers or households living in Asian countries.
- ii. Interest: determinants, behaviours, and impacts related to Food Away from Home (FAFH).
- iii. Context: the economic, social, technological, and regulatory environments shaping FAFH in Asia between 2000 and 2025.

Search strings were adjusted for each database and included combinations of main keywords, synonyms, Boolean terms, and country names to make sure national-level evidence was represented. Manual search-

ing and snowballing were also carried out by checking reference lists from included studies. This helped identify extra materials such as FAO, WHO, and OECD reports that were relevant to FAFH. Altogether, the initial search across all databases produced 1482 documents.

The search strategy combined keywords, synonyms, and Boolean operators (**Table 1**). Key terms included:

- “Food Away from Home” OR “FAFH” OR “eating out” OR “dining out” OR “meals outside home”.
- AND “Asia” OR specific country names (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia, China, India, Bangladesh, Taiwan).
- AND determinants such as “income,” “urbanization,” “online food delivery,” “taste preferences,” “health outcomes,” and “socioeconomic factors”.

Table 1. The search string.

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ((“Food Away from Home*” OR “food consumption*” OR “food*” OR “consumers*” OR “preferences” OR “environment*” OR “food culture*” OR “fast food*”) AND (“dining out*” OR “eating outside*” OR “meals*” OR “snack*” OR “eat*”) AND (“Household* income*” OR “age*” OR “nutritional*” OR “economic*” OR “health*” OR “societal*”) AND (“consumption* behaviours*”))
Science Direct	TITLE-ABSTR-KEY ((“Food away from home” OR “FAFH”) AND (“economic factors” OR “income” OR “price sensitivity”) AND (“food consumption” OR “dietary habits”) AND “Asia” AND (TITLE(“trends”) OR ABSTRACT(“patterns”) AND (“environmental factors” OR “sustainability” OR “ecological impact”) AND (“taste preferences” OR “consumer preferences” OR “food taste”)))
Google Scholar	All in title: (“Food Away from Home”) (food consumption OR food OR consumers OR preferences OR environment OR food culture OR fast food) (dining out OR eating outside OR meals) (Household income OR age OR nutritional OR economic factor OR consumption behaviours)

2.2. Screening and Eligibility

The initial search returned a total of 1,482 records (Scopus: 462; ScienceDirect: 318; Google Scholar: 460). After removing duplicates ($n = 326$) and papers that were irrelevant based on titles and abstracts ($n = 1,156$), a total of 326 articles were kept for deeper screening. The screening criteria followed the research question and were developed using guidelines for systematic literature reviews^[16, 17]. Since it is not practical to review every single published article, Okoli^[16] suggested limiting the review to a certain timeframe. Higgins and Green^[17] also mentioned that restricting publication years is acceptable when most relevant studies fall within a specific period. Although research on food away from home (FAFH) began to emerge in the early 2000s, the database search revealed a pronounced increase in FAFH-related studies from 2010 onwards, coinciding with the expansion of digital transformation in food systems, including online platforms, mobile applications, and food delivery services. This upward trend intensified further in the post-COVID-19 period, reflecting structural changes in consumption behaviour and food environments. Accordingly, the period from 2010 to 2025 was selected as the

inclusion timeline for this review.

To maintain quality, this review only considered journal articles with empirical data. Also, only English-language articles were included to avoid confusion or misinterpretation. For relevance, only studies conducted in Asian countries were selected.

The eligibility stage was the third process, where the authors manually checked all remaining papers to make sure they met the criteria. This required reading the titles and abstracts in detail. The eligibility criteria were applied as follows:

Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, or book chapters containing empirical or review data.
- Studies focusing on Asian regions or specific Asian countries.
- Articles examining determinants, behaviours, or social outcomes related to FAFH
- English-language publications.

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies based outside Asia.

- Descriptive reports with no analytical framework.
- Papers without a clear methodology.
- Non-peer-reviewed sources like commentaries or opinion articles.

After applying these inclusion and exclusion rules, 51 articles were removed for being non-Asian, methodologically weak, or outside the scope of FAFH. Another 83 were excluded because they were non-empirical or did not match the research focus. This resulted in 287 full-text articles that were assessed further for final eligibility and synthesis.

The screening happened in two levels: first, title and abstract screening to remove duplicates, irrelevant papers, or commentary pieces; and second, a detailed full-text screening to confirm that each article truly met all inclusion criteria (**Table 2**).

This stage was guided by criteria adapted from Higgins and Green^[17] and Okoli^[16]. After this screening, 287 articles remained for eligibility review.

2.3. Eligibility Assessment

The full-text assessment was conducted on 287 studies to verify relevance and methodological clarity.

Articles were included only if they:

- Explicitly analysed FAFH or eating-out behaviour;
- Reported empirical findings (e.g., household surveys, econometric analyses, experiments, qualitative interviews, or meta-analyses);
- Focused on Asian countries individually or in cross-country comparison.
- After detailed eligibility checks, 77 articles met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

Reasons for exclusion included:

- Non-Asian contexts (n = 122);
- Inadequate methodological information and determinants (n = 83).

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, and policy reports with empirical or review data	Non-peer-reviewed commentaries, dissertations, news articles, and blogs
Region	Studies conducted in Asia (including East, South, and Southeast Asia)	Studies from non-Asian regions
Language	English (allowance for national-language articles with English abstracts)	Non-English publications lacking English abstracts
Methodology	Empirical (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method) or systematic/scoping reviews	Studies with unclear or absent methodology
Focus	Studies investigating determinants, behaviours, health or societal implications of FAFH	Studies unrelated to FAFH or focused on unrelated food topics (e.g., agriculture production)

2.4. Quality Appraisal

To make sure the review was based on reliable evidence, every included article went through a quality appraisal using the Mixed-Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) which has also been applied in other systematic reviews^[17]. The appraisal focused on several aspects, including how clearly the research design was described, how transparent the sampling methods were, the strength of the statistical analysis, and whether the conclusions seemed credible based on the data provided.

Any article that showed weak or unclear methodological transparency had already been filtered out earlier during the eligibility stage. Impact factors and citation counts were also checked to help identify more influential studies, such as Kolady et al.^[18].

The MMAT was chosen because it works well with different types of research designs—whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods. Each study was evaluated based on five main criteria:

- Appropriateness of research design to the research

question;

- Clarity and validity of data collection methods;
- Adequacy of data and sample representation;
- Strength of analysis and interpretation;
- Consistency between results and conclusions.

A simple three-option scoring system was used (Yes/No/Cannot Tell). Studies that met at least three out of the five criteria were kept for synthesis. Out of the final 77 included studies, a total of 70 studies met four or more criteria, and 6 studies met three criteria.

2.5. Data Extraction

For each study that was included, the following key details were extracted:

- Bibliographic information (author, year, country, journal).
- Study type (survey, econometric analysis, qualitative, experimental).
- Determinants analyzed (demographic, economic, environmental, external, health, taste/societal).
- Outcomes (consumption frequency, expenditure shares, nutritional impact, socio-cultural implications).

After data extraction, the studies were grouped into six main themes and 14 sub-themes (for example, under “economic factors,” the sub-themes included income, spending patterns, and price sensitivity).

2.6. PRISMA Flow Summary

Following the PRISMA 2020 model, **Figure 1** shows the review process that can be summarised as:

1. Identification: A total of 1,482 studies were retrieved from the five selected databases.
2. Screening: After removing 326 duplicate records, another 1,156 papers were screened based on titles and abstracts.
3. Eligibility: A total of 287 full-text articles were then reviewed closely for relevance and methodological quality.
4. Inclusion: Finally, 77 studies were accepted and used in the synthesis after passing the quality appraisal.

This step-by-step process helped make sure that only studies with solid methodology and clear relevance to the topic were included, which strengthens the overall validity and generalisability of the review’s conclusions.

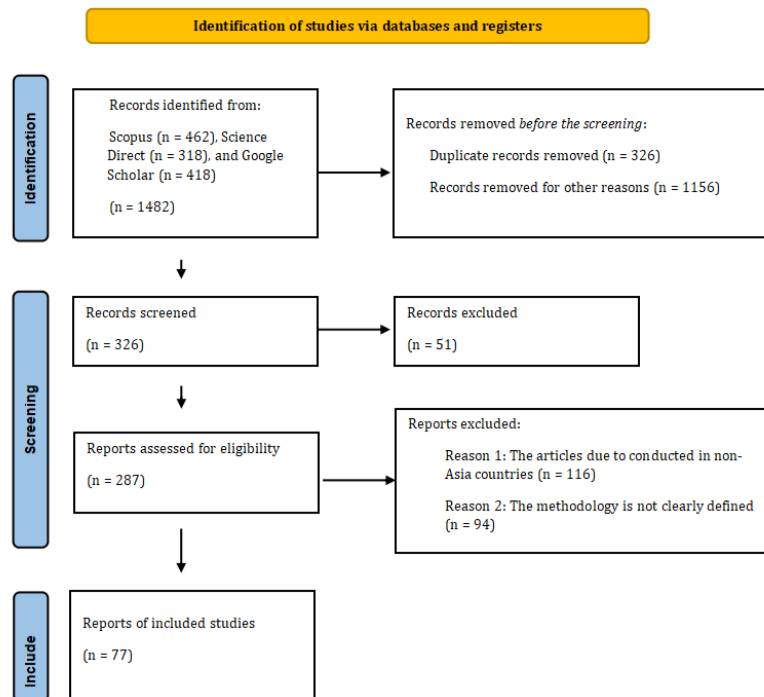


Figure 1. The flow diagram.

Source: adapted from Stovold et al. (2014).

3. Results and Discussions

Figure 2 shows that empirical evidence is heavily concentrated in East and Southeast Asia, particularly China (n = 14), Malaysia (n = 12), and Indonesia (n = 8). South and Southeast Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam are moderately represented, while several studies adopt a multi-country Asian or global perspective. This distribution reflects both research capacity and the rapid expansion of FAFH consumption in urbanising Asian economies.

In the last twenty-five years, food consumption pat-

terns across Asia have changed faster and more noticeably than in almost any other region. The transition from traditional home-cooked meals to modern/service-based food systems occurred in the early 2000s. This was driven by economic development, increasing household income, urbanisation, migration, digitalisation, and changing family structures and roles. In this context, Food Away from Home (FAFH), meaning meals and snacks prepared outside the home and eaten in restaurants, canteens, or purchased through takeaway and delivery, has become one of the strongest indicators of Asia's nutrition transition.

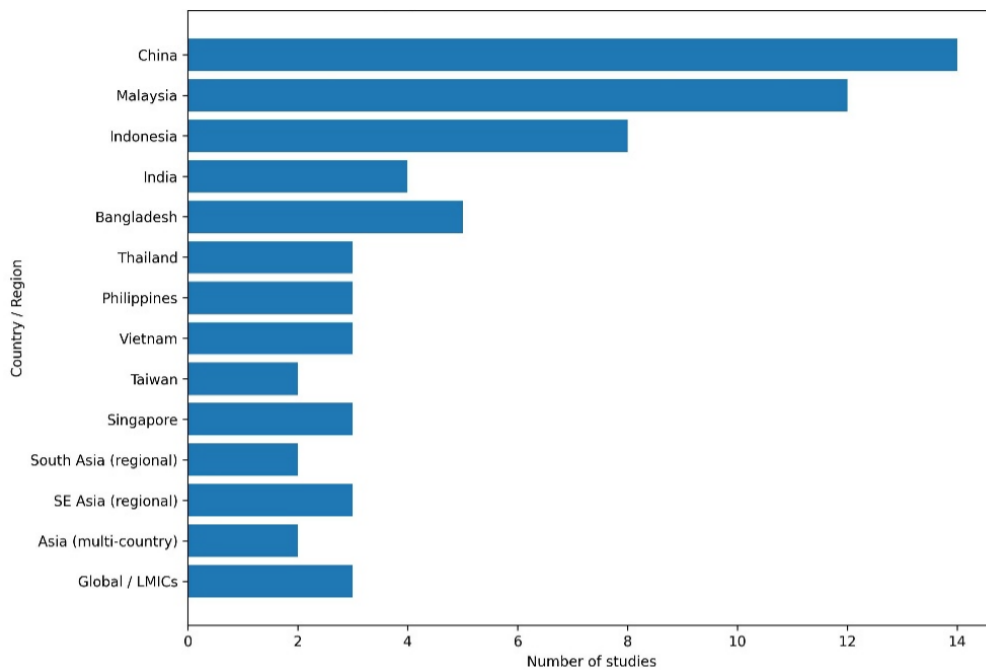


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of included studies on Food Away from Home (FAFH) in Asia.

Between 2000 and 2025, most Asian economies recorded average annual GDP growth above 5%, along with major demographic shifts and the rise of a busy, dual-income middle class. These structural changes altered how households manage their time and food budgets. In China, for example, FAFH spending increased from 9.8% to more than 27.8% of total food expenditure between 1995 and 2020^[1]. Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand show similar patterns, where eating out is now a normal part of life for many urban families^[2, 3, 18]. Other Asian economies like Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Taiwan reported significant increases in FAFH spending, driven by urban migration, growth of service-sector em-

ployment, and the rapid rise of digital food-delivery platforms^[4, 5, 19].

The rise of FAFH is not simply about convenience, rather, it reflects bigger socio-economic and behavioural changes across the region. The 77 studies included in this review show a wide range of factors influencing FAFH behaviour in Asia. The findings identified five broad areas or themes: (1) economic and demographic aspects, (2) health and nutritional implications, (3) environmental and technological factors, (4) social and cultural dimensions, and (5) policy, governance, and future outlooks. The geographical and thematic spans of the 77 studies are summarised in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Summary of FAFH thematic contributions based on country or region.

No.	Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Main Focus/Contribution
1	Liu et al. ^[20]	2015	China	Household composition, income, and food-away-from-home expenditure
2	Kolady et al. ^[18]	2020	India	FAFH and calorie reversal
3	Rufino ^[21]	2015	Philippines	Pattern of household FAFH consumption
4	Ahmed ^[22]	2023	Bangladesh	Household FAFH expenditure, income effects
5	Wongmonta ^[23]	2022	Thailand	Household food consumption patterns
6	Arya and Dubey ^[24]	2023	South and Southeast Asia	Fast-food consumption patterns, youth
7	Febriani et al. ^[25]	2023	Indonesia	Urban FAFH in Surabaya
8	Zou and Lin ^[6]	2024	China	Online-to-offline food consumption and obesity
9	Teoh ^[26]	2024	Malaysia	Household food spending trends
10	United Nations Human Settlements Programme ^[27]	2015	Asia	Sustainable urbanisation
11	Brend'Amour et al. ^[28]	2020	India	Urbanization, processed foods, and eating out
12	Zhong et al. ^[29]	2025	China	Migrants in urban food systems
13	Anindita et al. ^[30]	2022	Indonesia	Protein contribution of FAFH
14	Liao et al. ^[31]	2016	China	Income, urbanisation, and food service availability
15	Zeng and Zeng ^[32]	2018	China	Eating out and obesity
16	Vu ^[19]	2020	Vietnam	Food demand patterns
17	Amran and Abdul Fatah ^[33]	2020	Malaysia	Women's empowerment and decision-making
18	Khan et al. ^[34]	2021	India	Determinants of eating-out frequency
19	Lin and Liu ^[5]	2023	Taiwan	FAFH, planned behavior, food security
20	Gaupholm et al. ^[35]	2023	Southeast Asia	Food environment and FAFH
21	Landaïs et al. ^[10]	2023	LMICs	FAFH and diet quality
22	Nurhasan et al. ^[36]	2024	Indonesia	Dietary transition and FAFH
23	Lee and Tan ^[2]	2007	Malaysia	Ethnicity, gender, and FAFH demand
24	Ma et al. ^[37]	2021	China	FAFH frequency and youth overweight
25	Tan et al. ^[38]	2023	Malaysia	Healthy Plate awareness vs diet quality
26	Kelly ^[8]	2016	Asia	Nutrition transition, health outcomes
27	Godbharle et al. ^[9]	2022	Asia (multi-country)	FAFH and NCD risks (meta-analysis)
28	Du et al. ^[39]	2014	China	Restaurant density and BMI
29	Law et al. ^[40]	2019	India	Processed food purchase trends
30	Whitton et al. ^[41]	2014	Singapore	Fast-food consumers, diet quality and weight status
31	Piao and Kim ^[42]	2025	China	Urbanization, fast-food preferences, and BMI
32	Mottaleb et al. ^[43]	2017	Bangladesh	Food away from home in developing countries
33	Banwell et al. ^[44]	2013	Thailand	Nutrition transition and evolving food retail
34	Seow et al. ^[45]	2015	Singapore	Prehypertension and meals away from home
35	Ahmad et al. ^[46]	2021	Malaysia	High sodium food consumption

Table 3. Cont.

No.	Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Main Focus/Contribution
36	Ashari et al. ^[47]	2022	Malaysia	Norms of eating-out practice
37	Du et al. ^[48]	2022	China	Sodium reduction trial in restaurants
38	WHO Western Pacific Region ^[49]	2023	China	Reduced-salt submenu case study
39	Yeasmin et al. ^[50]	2023	Bangladesh	Food adulteration perceptions
40	Chang et al. ^[51]	2023	Taiwan	Healthy boxed meal attributes
41	Tamanna ^[52]	2024	Bangladesh	Hygiene and adulteration risks
42	Aceves-Martins et al. ^[11]	2023	Global/Environmental	Environmental implications of ready meals
43	Feng et al. ^[53]	2022	China	Anti-Food Waste Law
44	Jia et al. ^[54]	2024	Global/Asia	Nutrition-related policies for online food delivery
45	Safira and Chikaraishi ^[55]	2023	Indonesia	OFD vs eating-out substitution
46	Li et al. ^[56]	2024	China	Consumer requests for reduced-salt meals
47	Yoon et al. ^[57]	2008	South Korea	Nutrition and health perceptions towards fast foods
48	Ehlert ^[58]	2016	Vietnam	Emerging consumerism and eating out
49	Mognard et al. ^[59]	2013	China and Southeast Asia	Eating out, spatiality, temporality and sociality
50	Hu et al. ^[60]	2017	China	Eating out and socio-demographic factors of university students
51	Li et al. ^[61]	2020	LMICs	Fast-food consumption among adolescents
52	Park ^[62]	2004	South Korea	Consumer values of eating out and fast food
53	Naidoo et al. ^[63]	2017	Singapore	Determinants of eating at local and western fast-food venues
54	Latimaha et al. ^[64]	2018	Malaysia	Middle-income FAFH consumption
55	Islam et al. ^[65]	2010	Malaysia	Household expenditure on FAFH by meal type
56	Desnacido et al. ^[66]	2019	Philippines	Eating out-of-home situation and policy recommendations
67	Lachat et al. ^[67]	2009	Vietnam	Urban teens eat out more than rural peers
68	Wiastuti et al. ^[68]	2024	Indonesia	Family dining-out behaviours
69	Pettigrew et al. ^[69]	2022	Southeast Asia	Front-of-pack and menu labelling
70	Saha et al. ^[70]	2022	South Asia	Factors affecting fast-food consumption among college students
71	Littlewood et al. ^[71]	2016	Global	Menu labelling meta-analysis
72	Marina et al. ^[72]	2020	Malaysia	Knowledge, attitudes, and practice on nutrition menu labelling
73	Fernandes et al. ^[73]	2025	Asia and Africa	Sugar taxation policies
74	Rincón-Gallardo et al. ^[74]	2020	Global	Effects of menu labelling policies
75	Septiyana et al. ^[75]	2022	Indonesia	Dietary habits by income level during COVID-19
76	Muchlisin et al. ^[76]	2024	Indonesia	Food delivery system, eating-out
77	Dawe et al. ^[77]	2019	Asia	FAFH trends and policy implications

Altogether, the reviewed studies highlight six inter-linked categories of themes or drivers: economic and demographic factors, health, environmental, technology, societal and cultural factors, as well as policy—each operating differently depending on the country context. For example, Malaysia's FAFH landscape reflects its ethnic diversity, social norms, and the fast growth of online food delivery (OFD). The case of Indonesia shows substitution behaviour, inequality, and changes in household routines. In the case of India, we observe occupational stress and the evolution of social norms. China is experiencing rapid urbanisation and is highly dependent on OFD platforms, along with new regulations. Bangladesh exemplifies acute food-safety concerns, while the case of Taiwan exemplifies the tension between increasing FAFH consumption and the aim of food self-sufficiency. Overall, despite the trend of modernisation in the region, the local context and the behaviour of governments continue to dictate the nature of the shift.

3.1. Theme 1: Economic and Demographic Influencers

The most apparent manifestation of structural and dietary changes in the Asia region has been the rapid increase in Food Away from Home (FAFH), which can be linked to increased incomes, urbanisation, changes in the labour market and household structures.

Income elasticities for FAFH in China, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia ranging from 0.72 to 1.15 were reported by Liu et al.^[20] and Kolady et al.^[18]. This implies that eating out is almost entirely a luxury-normal good. The empirical verification by the study that FAFH is a necessity item in the food basket of modern Filipino households also confirms the validity of Engel's law to FAFH, with an income elasticity of -0.9587 ^[21]. Ahmed^[22] noted that as more households move into higher income brackets, FAFH spending increases more quickly, indicating that convenience, leisure, and the highly social nature of food consumption have new value. In Thailand and India, the consumption of FAFH is strongly linked to income and the rate of urbanisation of a household^[23, 24]. The World Bank states that Asia's middle class increased from about 450 million people in

2000 and is projected to reach approximately 2 billion people in 2020, a notable change in this region's demographics and how households spend their time and money on food.

According to Wei et al.^[1], China's share of home food spending on FAFH grew from 11.8% in 2002 to 35.4% in 2020, and the Department of Statistics Malaysia recorded an increase from 15% in 2005 to 29% in 2019. A similar trend can be seen in India and Indonesia. As food outsourcing becomes more common, Arya and Dubey^[24] and Febriani et al.^[25] associated rising service sector employment and urban youth consumerism with increased food outsourcing. Zou and Lin^[6] attribute the post-2010 acceleration to the digitalisation of food access, particularly online-to-offline food delivery ecosystems, which lowered search and transaction costs for consumers while enabling new forms of market expansion. The sighting indicates a change in food provisioning where the line between domestic and commercial food spaces has become increasingly indistinct.

Urbanisation has intensified this transformation. This growing preference for outside meals in both urban and rural areas may be driven by a different set of factors. In urban areas, food choices are generally more abundant and diverse, with a high availability of food service establishments that are mostly accessible via food deliveries. Another reason for high food away from home consumption among urban families is convenience. Greater time constraints due to long commuting times, employment and rising care burden as well as lifestyle changes associated with urbanisation also contribute to the demand for foods that are readily available^[27].

UN-Habitat^[27] recorded an increase in Asia's urban population from 37% in 2000 to approximately 54% in 2023, a structural shift accompanied by longer commutes, denser employment clusters, and higher opportunity costs for domestic time use. Brend'Amour et al.^[28] noted that urban households in India and Indonesia spend between 1.8 and 2.3 times more on FAFH compared to rural households, while Zhong et al.^[29] found that more than 70% of peri-urban migrants in China purchase at least one externally prepared meal per day. Similarly, in Indonesia, research shows that

households living in non-archipelagic Jakarta and urban areas have a greater opportunity to consume protein foods away from home and have more access to diverse food choices^[30]. Additionally, urban households were found to consume more FAFH than rural households in China^[31], indicating the urban-rural difference resulted from different levels of surplus energy, which was mainly due to the different labour intensity among rural and urban residents^[32]. While in Vietnam, the differences in food consumption patterns across different regions are remarkable. In the regions with higher urban populations, such as the South East and the South-Central Coast, rice expenditure was lower while FAFH expenditure was higher than in the other regions^[19]. These findings mirror Becker's household production theory, where FAFH becomes a rational economic response to constrained household labour time.

Gendered labour restructuring has also shaped FAFH patterns. Amran and Abdul Fatah^[33] and Khan et al.^[34] demonstrated that dual-income households in Malaysia and India spend between 25–40% more on FAFH than single-income households with equivalent earnings. Lin and Liu^[5] found similar behavioural adjustments in Taiwan, where rising female labour participation reconfigured household meal preparation norms. Ahmed^[22] observed that in Bangladesh, each additional working-age woman in a household increases FAFH spending by roughly 0.6%, reflecting the declining availability of unpaid domestic labour time.

Despite regional-wide growth, FAFH is characterised by significant inequality. Perceived availability of healthy food varied between populations^[35]. Landais et al.^[10] showed that the rural-urban FAFH spending gap in China widened from CNY 92 in 2000 to CNY 460 in 2020. According to Nurhasan et al.^[36], individuals from the highest income quintile in Indonesia eat out 5.3 times more than individuals from the lowest income quintile. This illustrates the differing economic and nutritional exposures. On the other hand, Lee et al.^[2] illustrate food and ethnicity in Malaysia's inequality. In the Malaysian context, Chinese and Indian households, in comparison to Malay households, consume FAFH more often and at higher price points.

The changes in the economy and demographics

mean FAFH shouldn't only be seen as a preference but as a fundamental shift in Asia's transformational process. Increased incomes, participation in the labour market, demographic migration, and shifts reconfigure the how, when, and who of access to better and more expensive food or FAFH meals.

3.2. Theme 2: Health and Nutritional Consequences

The rise of FAFH consumption in Asia has coincided with a notable nutritional transition characterised by increased caloric consumption, less varied diets, and greater reliance on ultra-processed food. Ma et al.^[37] and Wei et al.^[1] reported that individuals in China who consume FAFH at least once daily ingest between 16% and 25% more calories than those who rely mainly on home-prepared meals. Kolady et al.^[18] and Tan et al.^[38] traced similar patterns in India and Malaysia, where they found FAFH accounts for 28–35% of total daily energy intake. In this case, energy intake is largely unbalanced, coming mostly from refined carbohydrates and fats.

Kelly^[8] and Landais et al.^[10] suggested that while FAFH was initially concentrated among metropolitan upper-income groups, the behaviour diffused across broader population segments after 2015, normalising highly processed snacks, sugar-sweetened beverages, and portion oversizing. Godbharle et al.^[9] conducted a cross-sectional study of a 24-Asian cohort and found that individuals consuming FAFH four or more times per week face a 27% higher likelihood of obesity and a 35% greater risk of metabolic syndrome. Wei et al.^[1] further observed a long-run BMI increase of 1.4 kg/m² among habitual FAFH consumers in China between 2004 and 2018. While Du et al.^[39] asserted that an increase of one indoor restaurant in the neighbourhood is associated with a BMI increase of 0.01 kg/m² for men and 0.005 kg/m² for women. These establishments often provide full-service meals that may lead to higher calorie intake.

Urbanisation has intensified these effects. According to Nurhasan et al.^[36] and Law et al.^[40], fast food expansion and digital delivery logistics have doubled adult obesity rates since 2005 in Jakarta and Mumbai. These trends especially affect younger and working populations as convenience-related eating and sedentary

jobs compromise their diet even further. In Singapore, fast-food consumers often skew towards younger adults, higher income, and middle education levels, with frequent consumption linked to poorer diet quality^[40].

While in China, as communities become more urbanized, individuals' fast-food preferences and body mass index have also increased^[42]. Likewise, FAFH in Bangladesh is frequently associated with poor diet quality, often being higher in calories, fats, and oils, but lower in essential micronutrients like fibre, iron, and calcium. Hectic work schedules in large cities like Dhaka lead to a preference for dining out. Urban poor populations often spend 8–12 h away from home daily, making eating out a functional routine^[43]. The move towards more ready-to-eat meals and street food is creating a double burden phenomenon, where undernutrition is still present, yet the rates of overweight and obesity are on the rise. In Thailand, the transition is that undernutrition is receding while overweight and obesity are emerging. The rise of modern retail contributes to an “obesogenic” environment by making processed foods cheaper and more accessible than fresh produce^[44].

Duke-NUS Medical School research shows that young adults in Singapore who eat out more often are at a greater risk of suffering from prehypertension (slightly elevated blood pressure). In a survey of 501 university students aged 18–40, 27.4% had prehypertension and approximately 38% of the surveyed population ate more than 12 meals away from home per week. The findings revealed that those with prehypertension or hypertension tended to eat more meals away from home per week (per meal/week odds ratio (OR) = 1.05, 95% CI = 1.01–1.09), have higher BMI (per kg/m² OR = 1.15, 95% CI = 1.02–1.30), and low physical activity^[45].

Excess sodium and unhealthy fat intake represent critical determinants of regional health outcomes. Ahmad et al.^[46] found that typical mamak-style Malaysian breakfast meals contain an average of 2,200 mg of sodium per serving, exceeding 110% of the WHO daily recommendations. Additionally, Ashari et al.^[47] revealed that two-thirds of Malaysian respondents ate out and the habit was related to poor diet quality with excessive intake of sodium. According to Du et al.^[48], the mean salt content in Chinese restaurants is 5.8 g per 100

g, with a sharp rise post 2015 in the case of fast-food outlets. Due to this, the WHO Western Pacific^[49] and Ele.me, the largest food delivery service in China, implemented a reduced-salt menu initiative whereby 35% of the restaurants involved served lower-sodium meals within a year.

Micronutrient deficiencies continue amidst higher caloric consumption. According to Yeasmin et al.^[50] and Khan et al.^[34], noting that low-income street food consumers in Bangladesh and India, in particular, consume street foods low in iron, calcium and vitamin A. On the contrary, Chang et al.^[51] described a different trend in Taiwan and Singapore, where high-income consumers tend to buy more premium “healthy” FAFH (Food Away from Home) options, albeit with limited vegetable servings.

Food safety risks deepen the health implications of FAFH consumption. Tamanna^[52] recorded incidences of microbial contamination in 62% of street-vended food samples in Dhaka, which creates a disproportionate risk to already nutritionally vulnerable populations. This exemplifies a triple malnutrition challenge: overnutrition (with an excess of calories) among higher-income urbanised groups and a lack of essential micronutrients (undernutrition) among poorer groups.

3.3. Theme 3: Environmental and Technological Determinants

FAFH consumption has reshaped Asia's environmental footprint and accelerated the digital transformation of regional food systems. Aceves-Martins et al.^[11] and Landais et al.^[10] found that meals prepared in restaurants generally produce higher carbon emissions than home-cooked meals due to energy-intensive commercial kitchens, refrigeration, lighting, and disposable serving materials. Zou and Lin^[6] calculated that in Chinese cities, one-serving packaging used for online food delivery adds 0.41 kg CO₂-equivalent for each delivered meal, thus restating the ecological consequence of convenience consumption to a threefold impact.

Food waste is a major environmental consequence of FAFH. Feng et al.^[53] estimate that annual food waste from restaurants in China is 17–18 million metric tons, enough to feed 30 to 50 million people. According to the Department of Environment, Malaysian hotels and

restaurants contribute about 12% of the country's municipal waste, and more than 60% of the waste is food left on plates. China's Anti-Food Waste Law (2021) resulted in the first recorded reductions of plate waste from excess food ordering and fines in pilot cities. These cities recorded a nearly 30% average reduction in plate waste.

Digital platforms such as GrabFood, GoFood, ShopeeFood, Foodpanda, and Ele.me have been central to technological change in FAFH. According to Jia et al.^[54], approximately 70% of the world's online food delivery business is concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region. Digitalisation, according to Zou and Lin^[6] and Law et al.^[40], increased FAFH frequency by 18–27% after 2015, which has far-reaching consequences for patterns of consumption, supply-chain logistics, and fundamental aspects of the labour market. Safira and Chikaraishi^[55] observed that online delivery has expanded access to externally prepared food for semi-urban and rural populations, reshaping market geographies and altering the social organisation of food access.

Platform labour systems have also emerged as a critical component of the new food economy. Li et al.^[56] noted that while potential cloud and ghost kitchens save on rentals and energy by 15–20% compared to dine-in establishments, they pay the price with more packaging and an even greater separation between the consumer and the source of the food.

Environmental consciousness is growing, albeit unevenly. Chang et al.^[51] and Landais et al.^[10] state that customers in Taiwan and South Korea are ready to spend an additional 5–10% for sustainable or plant-based FAFH options. Initiatives like China's Green Dining and Malaysia's Eco-Restaurant certification strive to improve sustainable sourcing, waste reduction, and the adoption of biodegradable packaging. Digital services are starting to incorporate eco-labelling, while online platforms such as GrabFood and Foodpanda find tags for low-impact meals to promote behavioural change.

3.4. Theme 4: Societal and Cultural Dimensions

In Malaysia and Indonesia, family and social outings are perceived as expressions of family bonding and

family enjoyment, rather than simply a matter of time inadequacy, when it comes to eating out^[25,47]. Food courts, mamak stalls, open-air markets, and hawker centres are places where family outings and social gatherings take place, and from an anthropological perspective, they serve to maintain intergenerational and social community relations. These spaces often function as informal public arenas in which local norms, languages, and community relations are reproduced, even as the foods themselves become increasingly hybrid and globalised. Obviously, eating out constitutes a social practice that goes beyond socialising among peers^[47]. It also serves to delineate one's belonging to one group rather than another through the demonstration of a command of dining etiquette and social skills. In the case of Vietnam, eating out and spending time in gastronomic locations can function as an expression of social status aspiration; it is the demonstrated capacity to align oneself with and adapt to what is perceived as modern global consumer culture, as well as to locally embed it^[58].

Khan et al.^[34] and Mognard et al.^[59] noted that in China and India, communal eating in restaurants is of great symbolic value. Modern FAFH settings that have evolved from traditional banquets, wedding feasts, and festival meals still signal status, hospitality, and generosity. Confucian collectivist traditions in China and long-standing hospitality norms in India still shape expectations about shared dishes and group ordering, particularly in urban restaurants. In contrast to the more individualized dining experiences common in Western contexts, Asian Fast-Away-from-Home (FAFH) dining focuses on familial plate sharing, round-table seating, and collective decision-making, emphasising belonging and the hierarchical relational structures within families and member dyads of social networks.

Young people are now considered a major player in the growth of FAFH and dining out^[60]. Arya and Dubey^[24] and Safira and Chikaraishi^[55] indicate that consumers in the age range of approximately 18 to 35 have the greatest level of FAFH consumption in China, India, and Indonesia. For this group, coffee shops, fast-casual restaurants, and bubble tea shops are “third spaces” that are neither home, work, nor school, and where social identity is formed and expressed through

ambiance and aesthetics and the social media content that is created. Mognard et al.^[59] noted the décor, music, and menu engineering to attract the modernity, independence, and cosmopolitanism aspirations of the youth.

Li et al.^[56] mentioned that using social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), consumers transform the practice of eating into a 'performative practice by capturing, posting, reviewing, and consuming what and where others digitally influence them to eat'. Food is no longer just consumed; it is also 'displayed' and, as a result, "socially" and 'symbolically' serves a role in the construction of a person's digital identity. Using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Mognard et al.^[59] suggested that food choice patterns, including these social media practices, demonstrate that food and beverage consumption signify not just purchasing power, but also 'so-called' aesthetically acceptable knowledge of the food and beverage consumption trends and the "globalised" lifestyle. Thus, consuming artisanal (fancy) coffee or sushi in the Chinese cities signals to others of the 'worldly sophisticated', while dining at fast-casual branded (western) restaurants in India illustrates 'urban modern'.

At the same time, religion and ethnicity continue to exert strong influences on FAFH practices. In Malaysia, Ashari et al.^[47] explain that halal certification, from a food business perspective, means a lot to both Muslims and non-Muslims, as it represents a business that is clean and safe, and one that is ethical. This, to some extent, shapes the food service sector, as halal food chains are more likely to be trusted compared to non-halal competitors. In India, Khan et al.^[34] observed that the vegetarian and non-vegetarian markets are also divided along caste, class, and regional lines, thereby defining distinct FAFH markets. Anindita et al.^[30] refer to "syncretism" as a way to describe the incorporation of local tastes, dishes and religious requirements with Western fast-food brands, and the resultant hybrid menus that are a fusion of the global and the local.

The prevalence of fast-food consumption 4–7 days per week was lowest in the Americas (8.3%; 6.7–9.9%) and highest in Southeast Asia^[61]. Notably, at the regional level, the overall prevalence of fast-food consumption for 4–7 days per week in young adolescents was

found to be highest in Southeast Asia (17.7%). This is consistent with the fact that the socioeconomic status of Asian countries has improved greatly, which has increased their populations' accessibility to more energy-rich fast foods and the prevalence of a more mechanized, more sedentary, and less labor-intensive daily routine. Sedentary behavior in young adolescents also had a positive correlation with fast-food consumption, which is in agreement with the fact that with the technological advancement in Asian countries including South Korea, television programs have started occupying most of the leisure time of adolescents^[57].

Fast food is considered important to adolescents because it is one of the limited types of food that is affordable to that group. Furthermore, the types of food consumed by young people are an important symbol of social and cultural belonging. Fast food is tied to youth identity, lifestyle, and biological drives, exacerbated by marketing; a cultural shift normalizes obesity. A growing number of Korean and Singaporean teens are adopting Western influences and seeking more convenience in dining out. Consequently, fast food establishments have gained significant popularity among teens^[62, 63].

Latimaha^[64] and Islam et al.^[65] found that older Malaysians often perceive dining out as a special leisure activity or occasional treat, whereas younger adults increasingly regard it as part of their daily routine. Younger people (19–29) and those with lower education levels tend to consume more. Likewise in Thailand, consumption of takeaway was shown to increase from adolescence to young adulthood and a relatively high consumption of fast food occurred between the ages of 12–15 years, eating fast food 4–7 days a week, significantly higher than other regions, driven partly by easy access to street food and convenience items despite awareness of unhealthy impacts, indicating a shift from traditional diets and a need for targeted health promotion^[30]. While Filipino younger adults aged 19–29 years old (50%), females (47.1%), urban residents (52.1%) belonging to the richest quintile (60.2%) and students (71.1%) are consuming more meals out-of-home than their adult counterparts^[66]. Similarly, children from urban areas in Vietnam ate out more frequently compared with rural areas^[67].

Family dynamics and intergenerational relationships add another layer of complexity. In a study conducted in Indonesia, it was found that food taste, time pressure, and specific food cravings influenced families when choosing a restaurant. However, younger families are influenced more by food quality, while older families are influenced more by time constraints^[68]. In Taiwan, Lin and Liu^[5] described how intergenerational family dining, with grandparents, parents, and children together at the same table, supports family cohesion in the context of demanding professional roles. The shared meals serve as an important social resource by providing opportunities for the expression of cultural continuity, management of generational relational dynamics, and emotional regulation in the context of time scarcity in the city. In Malaysia, families spend their weekends at shopping complexes for various shopping purposes and they also take the opportunity to dine at the food court or nearby restaurants, while working parents necessitate them to spend some time together with their children and also entertain relatives and friends at food premises over meals^[54].

Gender norms remain influential, even as they evolve. Amran and Abdul Fatah^[33] and Latimaha^[64] observed that in Malaysia, women increasingly participate in deciding when and where to dine out, with FAFH sometimes experienced as a way to “reclaim time” from domestic labour. Nonetheless, Yeasmin et al.^[50] noted that in Bangladesh, even single women are socially frowned upon for dining alone in particular public places, indicating that patriarchal structures are still in control of women’s comfort in food environments. Other research conducted in South Asia found that, commonly, male students and people with higher body mass index consume fast food more often. Taste, price, and convenience, accessibility, availability, ambiance, and location also promote fast food consumption among college students^[70].

The social and cultural dimensions of FAFH indicate that Asian countries do not treat eating out as simply a function of so-called ‘economic rationality’ such as income, prices and time scarcity. Eating out expresses and reflects identities, aspirations, and social relationships. In this sense, FAFH also serves as social infrastruc-

ture, reflecting and shaping urbanisation, intergenerational shifts, changing structures of (gender) relations, and multicultural social formations.

3.5. Theme 5: Policy, Governance and Future Directions

The extension of FAFH has resulted in the policy agenda in Asia changing from eating out as a lifestyle choice to a more positive view of eating out as a relationship to an aspect of public health, environmental sustainability, and economic governance. Landais et al.^[10] observed that during the early 2000s, most governments responded to FAFH trends only indirectly, mainly by enforcing food safety standards or regulating trade in food products. By the mid-2010s, however, the accumulation of evidence on diet-related NCDs, food waste, and environmental impacts prompted more proactive policy engagement.

Regional frameworks have structured responses for the WHO Regional Action Plan on Diet and Health (2021–2030) and the ASEAN Food Safety Policy as the guideline pertaining to the reduction of trans-fats and sodium, improved menu or calorie labelling^[69, 71], and unhealthy food marketing^[71]. These frameworks encourage member states to go beyond self-regulation to more comprehensive food-environment regulations. China, Malaysia, Thailand, and India have begun to integrate multisectoral approaches to the governance of FAFH by incorporating nutrition, digital economy, and sustainability frameworks^[72].

Tools of a fiscal nature are to be noted as constituents of the complex of policies. A systematic study documented cases from Thailand and the Philippines where sugar-sweetened beverage taxes (implemented in 2017 and 2018 respectively) and Malaysia (in 2019) resulted in a 6 to 12% decrease in annual soft drink sales while the tariff positively influenced the reduction of consumption of taxed commodities, with decreases ranging from 2.5% to 19%^[73]. This shows that a tax-based policy could at least partially work to reduce consumption of soft drinks.

At the same time, policies of an informational nature attempted to modify the behaviour of both consumers and producers. Tan et al.^[38] noted that in South

Korea, where calorie counts have been mandatory on menus since 2011, and in Singapore, where such a policy was implemented in 2019, consumer awareness was increased and some firms were triggered to reformulate their products, though such policies had little impact on overall diet quality^[71]. While calorie-labelling practices are still a relatively new concept to be initiated worldwide, compared to Malaysia, the government does not have any implementation at the moment that provides education programs to restaurant operators and food service businesses on healthy eating even though eating out is prevalent^[72]. Although Marina et al.^[72] point out the public support for menu labelling, there are considerable inconsistencies in their knowledge and accessibility, especially for unprocessed foods. They seem to be showing that even though there is a positive attitude to labelling, there is a lack of action, and this seems to be related to knowledge of nutrition and the design of the labels.

The safety of food and the competence of the regulators are additional governance challenges. The Food Hygiene Regulations (2009) in Malaysia, the BPOM Guidelines (2018) in Indonesia and the Food Safety and Standards Act (2011) in India require restaurants and street vendors to have some form of hygiene certification. Nevertheless, in the case of Bangladesh, Yeasmin et al.^[50] and Tamanna^[52] documented food adulteration and the lack of enforcement of food safety laws as factors undermining consumer trust and endangering the health of the poor who, due to their limited income, depend on the cheap food sold on the streets. On the contrary, the QR-code-based Food Traceability System launched in Taiwan in 2016 is often regarded as a regional benchmark for digital transparency, as it enables consumers to identify the source of food and improves accountability in the food supply chain^[51].

The online food delivery's (OFD) rapid expansion is creating new governance frontiers^[55]. OFD services mediate an increasingly larger portion of the FAFH transactions, yet the regulatory frameworks continue to lag far behind the technological advances. WHO Western Pacific^[49] and Li et al.^[56] noted that China has been using frameworks with Ele.me to reduce salt and encourage choice-architecture to promote healthier menu items.

Singapore and South Korea recognised that digitally mediated food services are major "gateways" to food environments and have extended calorie counting, labelling, and hygiene regulations to food delivery apps. However, regulatory oversight is still fragmented in most countries, with the jurisdiction over platforms scattered across the health, trade, labour, and telecommunications ministries.

Environmental policies connected to FAFH have gained visibility under the broader Sustainable Development Goals agenda, particularly SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. As early as 2021, Feng et al.^[53] regarded the enactment of the Anti-Food Waste Law in China as a milestone in the legal regulation of over-ordering and promotion of portion size transparency, with some initial evidence indicating a considerable reduction in plate waste. Malaysia's Roadmap Toward Zero Single-Use Plastics (2018–2030) and Thailand's Plastic Waste Management Plan (2019) aim to encourage food-service providers to use biodegradable packaging and improve packaging waste. In China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, the green restaurant certification scheme is intended to incentivise the adoption of energy-efficient and sustainably sourced practices; however, this is often restricted to larger, formal-sector players.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns imposed to control its spread catalysed yet another reconsideration of the governance of FAFH services. The review by Law et al.^[40] and Septiyana et al.^[75]. Muchlisin et al.^[76] posited that in the lockdowns occurring in China, Indonesia, and India, restaurants were compelled to also quickly shift to delivery-only and hybrid models and, in the process of doing so, rapidly adopt digital payments, contactless services, and new (and perhaps more) hygienic practices. To assist micro and small food businesses in going online, governments provided stimulus payments, technology vouchers, and digitalisation grants. While these aid measures helped to secure and improve access to food during the crisis, they also created a more extensive and structural reliance on a limited number of dominant digital platforms, raising issues of monopolistic control, opaque algorithms, and the place of contingency employment protections in the future.

Looking ahead, scholars including Kolady et al.^[18], Landais et al.^[10] and Lin and Liu^[5] argue for a more integrated approach to FAFH governance that treats food environments as part of a broader food system, rather than as isolated retail or service sectors. Some key new opportunities consist of: Integrated food policies that bring together agriculture, trade, public health and city planning, nutrition alerts, eco-labels and recommended portions built into OFD systems, sustainable procurement with restaurants and local and traceable producers, and behavioural insights, social marketing, and gamification to change consumer preferences. Proposals for regulatory sandboxes suggest that governments should refine the scoring of nutrition AI and environmental labelling while working within such sandboxes, before scaling up^[60].

Throughout Asia, the management of FAFH has, on the whole, changed from fragmented and reactive interventions to more systematic and multisectoral strategies^[76, 77]. Nonetheless, gaps still exist in policy formulation and in the reality of the situations faced, especially with the small and informal food businesses that are common in numerous urban and peri-urban environments. The central challenge for the coming decade will be to harness the economic and social benefits of a vibrant FAFH sector while minimising its contribution to health inequities, environmental degradation, and digital exclusion. This will involve a set of technical rules and fiscal measures, as well as inclusive and collaborative forms of policy making involving researchers, the private sector, workers and consumers, in shaping the future food environments of Asia^[77].

4. Conclusions and Policy Implications

Asia's food system has undergone a major transformation over the past twenty years. Since the early 2000s, the interconnected factors of economic growth, changes in demographics, and the rapid adoption of technology have transformed the way in which people select, prepare and consume food. This transformation is best illustrated by the increases in Food Away from Home (FAFH) consumption. The once exclusive urban elite lux-

ury is now an ordinary practice of countless households across the region. Drawing on 77 review studies covering almost twenty-five years, this review shows that FAFH is not simply a temporary trend rather, it is a structural feature of Asia's modernization, tied to rising incomes, time constraints, changing gender roles, digital platforms, and evolving social identities.

Across the five major theme categories, the evidence shows how economic and demographic transitions have firmly integrated FAFH into middle-class life, mainly for reasons of convenience and efficiency. However, this shift has brought several unintended nutritional and social consequences. Eating out frequently increases the nutritional and health risks such as obesity as it is associated with higher calorie and sodium intake. Increasing food outlets and FAFH have contributed to overnutrition, poor food choices, and negative impacts on the environment. With the rapid growth of online food-delivery ecosystems, the environmental and technological implications of FAFH have become even more visible with higher energy usage, more packaging waste, and rising carbon emissions. While these digital platforms improve access and even provide economic resilience during crises such as COVID-19, they further increase digital dependency and normalise habitual consumption and unhealthy lifestyles.

However, the societal and cultural aspects highlight that FAFH in Asia is more than a nutritional or economic behaviour. Social interaction, cultural performance, and identity construction take on multiple forms. For example, from Malaysia and Indonesia, to India, China, and Taiwan, going out to eat together signals togetherness, hospitality, social harmony, ambition, and belonging to an urban setting. Who, how, and under what circumstances someone dines out continues to be influenced by gender and religious norms. The role of social media in this phenomenon is characterised by an enhancement of the performance of social class, lifestyle, and aspirations when dining out. Between the traditional and the modern, FAFH serves as an example of the cultural continuity and individual expression being negotiated in varying degrees across Asian societies.

Responses to the governance of FAFH are more numerous and more sophisticated, but still fragmented. Ini-

tial policies of the 2000s concerned only food hygiene. Now, most Asian governments balance food hygiene with concerns for nutrition, taxation, sustainability, and digital regulation. Public health and fiscal measures to curb excessive sugar in Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, and the campaigns Healthy Plate Malaysia and Taiwan's Boxed Lunch Initiative, represent important advances. However, the review shows that while awareness has increased, behavioural change is minimal, if not absent. The online delivery platforms that are poorly regulated, a combination of sporadic enforcement of food hygiene, and the absence of enforcement incentives for small vendors remain the major obstacles to the effectiveness of delivery and takeaway policies. The review further suggests that policy frameworks are best considered as synergistic, comprehensive solutions that encompass elements of public health, environmental protection, and digital governance.

The evolution of FAFH in Asia is a result of the region's urbanisation, social disparities, and multiculturalism. The present challenge is to manage these changes to achieve more positive social equity and sustainability outcomes. While this review focuses only on five major themes, developing a responsible ecosystem for FAFH will demand more integrated approaches, including positive and negative digital and nutrition regulations, food safety to sustain restaurant systems, and investment in sustainability and traceability. Social marketing and behavioural economics will be essential to effective consumer norm shifts to enduring positive behaviour change.

It is suggested that future research go beyond mere description towards more in-depth and longitudinal analysis. First, there is a strong need for panel and time-series studies to capture how FAFH behaviour evolves in response to income growth, urbanisation, digitalisation, and major shocks such as COVID-19. Second, prospects for additional research should be grounded in a more holistic analytical framework that combines and simultaneously examines economic components with nutrition, the economy, environment, and digital food environments, as these dimensions are often studied in isolation. Third, future studies should explore how AI, big data, and digital platforms could be used to

strengthen public-health surveillance and sustainability and food waste tracking in rapidly evolving online food systems. The intersection of the growth of Food Away from Home (FAFH) and food insecurity and nutrition equity demands more focus on the unequal distribution of risk and vulnerable populations, such as the poor, young adults, and those working informally.

Outside of the Asian context, future research should focus on cross-regional comparative research, including Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, high-income economies, and Asia, to identify the cultural, institutional, and policy drivers of FAFH, both in the regions and universally. Future research should also provide robust cross-country and cross-regional policy analyses to evaluate the nutrition policy, labelling, taxation, food safety, and sustainability frameworks to promote and enhance the cross-regional/global food system policy for a healthier and more inclusive food system.

Supplementary Materials

The supporting information can be downloaded at <https://journals.nasspublishing.com/files/RWAE-2866-Supplementary-Materials.zip>.

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Data Availability Statement

This study is a systematic literature review, and all data used in the analysis were obtained from publicly available research articles, databases, and other schol-

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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