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TOURISM AS EMOTIONAL MAINTENANCE: HOW THAI YOUTH NAVIGATE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERES AND SLOW-BURNING PRECARITY

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Abstract

This article challenges traditional economic frameworks by conceptualizing domestic tourism in Thailand as a vital affective socio-political practice. Addressing a critical gap in contemporary tourism geographies, the study explicitly explores how young adults navigate environments characterized by slow-burning precarity and persistent political tension. Using a triangulated qualitative methodology—in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, and focus group discussions with twenty-five participants aged twenty-one to thirty—the research examines the emotional dimensions of youth mobility. The empirical findings reveal that political atmospheres function as an inescapable emotional background rather than a strict constraint on travel, largely perpetuated by continuous digital connectivity. Consequently, domestic tourism is not framed as an apolitical escape, but rather as a highly necessary strategy for emotional maintenance. This adaptive practice provides the psychological restoration needed to sustain long-term civic resilience and ongoing political attentiveness. Ultimately, the study decenters Western-centric paradigms by demonstrating how young travelers seamlessly integrate normalized political volatility into their everyday mobility, offering profound insights into the intersection of spatial movement, affect, and sustainable democratic engagement.

Keywords: Affective Atmosphere, Emotional Maintenance, Youth Mobility, Slow-Burning Precarity, Domestic Tourism

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Introduction

Domestic tourism in Thailand has traditionally been examined through economic indicators, destination attributes, and motivational frameworks emphasizing leisure, escape, and identity formation (Kaosa-ard et al., 2001; Worrachananun, 2025). However, for many young adults in contemporary Thailand, travel decisions unfold within a more complex emotional landscape shaped by political tension, shifting public moods, and everyday atmospheres of uncertainty (Etminani-Ghasrodashti et al., 2018). Over the past decade, repeated political shifts and heightened public anxiety have coincided with increased political awareness among university students and early-career professionals (Chotewetsin, 2022). These socio-political conditions do not merely form a background to everyday life; they actively shape how young people navigate public space, experience belonging, and seek moments of respite. In this context, travel functions not only as recreation but as an affective practice intertwined with hope, fatigue, and the emotional weight of living in a politically charged society (Hewison, 1997). Despite the growing recognition of emotions in tourism scholarship, a critical research gap remains: empirical studies connecting affective political atmospheres to youth tourism experiences are remarkably scarce (Verlie, 2019). While existing literature often conceptualizes emotions as individual psychological responses to specific tourism encounters, it frequently overlooks "affective political atmospheres"—the diffuse, shared emotional conditions circulating during periods of political tension—and their pervasive influence on the tourism experience.

The "affective turn" in cultural geography and political sociology suggests that emotions are relational, spatial, and socially produced (Bille & Simonsen, 2021). However, these insights have rarely been applied to tourism research in Southeast Asia, where political tension subtly mediates how young people move and gather. Understanding domestic tourism is particularly revealing in this context, as domestic travel reflects everyday political emotionality more directly and intimately than international travel and acts as a barometer of national socio-political sustainability. Existing tourism research in Thailand has largely focused on economic resilience, recovery, and destination competitiveness (Jordan & Prayag, 2022). In parallel, studies of political communication and youth activism examine political stress and digital engagement but rarely consider how these emotional dynamics intersect with travel practices or experiences of place. Consequently, scholars have paid limited attention to how political atmosphere—beyond discrete political events—shapes young people's travel-related sensemaking, perceptions of safety, and use of tourism as a site for "emotional maintenance" or self-repair. This oversight matters because these coping mechanisms are not just personal; they are integral to the long-term social sustainability of a nation's youth, ensuring their continued civic engagement amid normalized precarity.

The rationale for this study is therefore twofold: first, domestic tourism among young adults represents a critical yet understudied site for examining how political emotions are negotiated in everyday practice; and second, as Thailand navigates ongoing uncertainty, understanding the emotional dimensions of youth travel is essential for interpreting social behavior beyond formal participation. By foregrounding emotional meaning-making, this study conceptualizes youth travel not simply as consumption, but as an embodied socio-political practice that sustains citizens' resilience. To address these fundamental gaps, this research adopts a triangulated qualitative methodology—comprising in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, and focus group discussions with twenty-five participants aged twenty-one to thirty—to explicitly explore how Thai youth navigate environments characterized by slow-burning precarity and persistent political tension.

The primary objectives of this study are to systematically explore how university students and early-career young adults emotionally experience Thailand's current political climate while navigating slow-burning precarity. The research also examines how these affective political

experiences shape motivations, decisions, and interpretations related to domestic travel. By understanding how travel functions as a vital strategy for emotional maintenance within a heavily politicized social atmosphere, the study aims to contribute a theoretically grounded perspective of tourism as an affective socio-political practice. Ultimately, this inquiry seeks to link individual psychological restoration to broader civic resilience and long-term political attentiveness, thereby decentering Western-centric paradigms in contemporary tourism geographies.

Literature Reviews

The Affective Turn and the Politics of Atmosphere

Over recent decades, social science scholarship has undergone what is commonly described as the affective turn, shifting attention from emotions as individual psychological states toward affect as relational, collective, and spatially situated (Bille & Simonsen, 2021). Within this perspective, affective atmospheres are understood as diffuse intensities that circulate between bodies, environments, and sociopolitical conditions, shaping how everyday life is sensed and experienced (Bille & Simonsen, 2021). These atmospheres are not owned by individuals; they emerge as shared conditions that shape feelings of safety, belonging, and possibility.

Political theorists further argue that political climates generate collective moods—such as anticipation, fatigue, anxiety, or cautious hope—that structure how people navigate public and private spaces (Anderson, 2009). These political affects often precede rational judgment and become embedded in routine practices of movement and decision-making. In contexts marked by cyclical and visible political tension, such as Thailand, affective dimensions of politics have become inseparable from young people's lived experience (Hoggett & Thompson, 2012). However, much of the existing scholarship on affective atmospheres remains heavily Western-centric, often assuming a baseline of political stability that is only occasionally interrupted by discrete "crises." This normative assumption fails to account for the "atmospheric permanence" of political tension in non-Western democratic contexts.

In contrast, the Southeast Asian context, and Thailand in particular, necessitates a more nuanced understanding of affect where political tension is not an exception but a constitutive, enduring element of the social fabric. This resonates with emerging studies in other Asian contexts, such as post-2019 Hong Kong and contemporary Myanmar, where youth mobility is increasingly framed by "atmospheric politics." In these settings, the political climate does not merely affect travel choices; it saturates the very sense of place and the emotional possibility of leisure. Despite this, existing tourism scholarship has rarely examined how political atmospheres shape tourism experiences outside moments of acute crisis. Most studies continue to focus on emotions generated within tourism encounters themselves, such as joy or awe, without considering the broader political conditions that frame these emotional states (Verlie, 2019). This omission is significant, as affective atmospheres provide the background conditions through which leisure, rest, and mobility are experienced (Verlie, 2019).

Youth, Precarity, and Political Emotionality in Thailand

Young adults in Thailand live in a highly politicized, digitally mediated environment shaped by fluctuating governance, economic uncertainty, and sustained exposure to political discourse. Research indicates that Thai university students and early-career workers experience heightened political sensitivity, emotional fatigue, and generational frustration, intensified by continuous engagement with online political content (Anamwathana & Thanapornsanguth, 2023).

This condition is best understood through the lens of "slow-burning precarity", a diffuse and persistent sense of instability that shapes everyday decision-making and emotional life (Chotewetsin, 2022; Anamwathana & Thanapornsanguth, 2023). Unlike acute precarity, often tied to sudden economic shocks, slow-burning precarity is a generational experience defined

by a lack of long-term predictability and constant negotiation with shifting political "rules." This form of precarity creates what can be described as an "emotional exhaustion" that is not tied to a single event but to the cumulative weight of living in a state of suspended uncertainty. Crucially, this precarity is not merely a socio-economic state but is fundamentally intertwined with the nation's affective atmosphere. Slow-burning precarity functions as the "fuel" for the atmospheric tension felt by youth; it creates a constant background of existential anxiety that mediates how they perceive their surroundings and their future. Digital platforms play a central role in amplifying these emotions, producing what scholars describe as affective saturation through constant exposure to political conflict, commentary, and symbolic violence (Thatsadonkunlaphat, 2025). However, few studies connect this affective terrain to travel behavior or tourism meaning-making, despite evidence that travel functions as a coping mechanism and source of psychological restoration during periods of social or political strain.

Tourism as Emotional Negotiation and Coping

Tourism research increasingly acknowledges the centrality of emotion in shaping travel experiences. However, dominant models such as motivation theory and push-pull frameworks tend to conceptualize emotions narrowly as antecedents of behavior rather than as ongoing affective practices (Chantakiri, 2024). In response, recent scholarship argues for understanding travel as an embodied and emotionally situated practice shaped by memory, sensation, and sociocultural context.

While a growing body of work examines travel as a strategy for emotional regulation and psychological resilience, these studies often detach emotional experience from the political worlds travelers inhabit. The concept of "therapeutic landscapes" has long been used to explain how certain environments promote healing; however, in a politically charged atmosphere, a destination's "therapeutic" value is not just its natural beauty, but its capacity to offer a temporary reconfiguration of political affect. For young adults reporting emotional exhaustion linked to political saturation and digital overload, travel may take on new meanings as refuge, reconnection, or self-preservation. However, empirical evidence on these dynamics remains limited, particularly in Asian contexts where the boundary between the "political" and the "personal" is increasingly blurred.

Political Climate and Tourism: A Narrow Intersection

Research at the intersection of politics and tourism has largely focused on macro-level impacts, including how protests, coups, or political violence affect tourist arrivals, destination image, or perceived risk (Sombatpoonsiri, 2023). While valuable, such approaches rely heavily on quantitative indicators and often overlook the micro-level emotional dimensions of lived tourism experience.

Emerging studies suggest that political climates influence perceptions of safety and vulnerability (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021), avoidance of politically sensitive locations (Possick, 2009), emotional openness to leisure experiences (Freire & Teixeira, 2018), and feelings of belonging or alienation while traveling (Frehill & Dunsmuir, 2015). However, these insights remain fragmented and rarely center youth populations. This gap is particularly striking in Thailand, where political atmospheres are emotionally charged and continuously mediated through digital platforms. However, qualitative understanding of how young adults feel through politics and translate these feelings into travel experience remains limited.

The Need for a Qualitative, Emotion-Centered Approach

Given the subtle, embodied, and relational nature of affective political atmospheres, qualitative inquiry is essential for capturing their complexity. Quantitative models are ill-equipped to articulate how political tension is sensed, narrated, and woven into the fabric of travel experience. Qualitative approaches enable examination of the metaphors, stories, and emotional negotiations through which young people interpret political atmospheres, assess safety and restoration, and use travel as a meaning-making or coping practice. This aligns with

broadener calls for interpretive and affect-oriented approaches in tourism research (Bille & Simonsen, 2021).

Summary of Gaps and Contribution

The reviewed literature reveals several critical gaps that this study systematically addresses to advance contemporary tourism geographies. Despite the growing prominence of the affective turn across the broader social sciences, empirical research connecting affective political atmospheres to tourism meaning-making—particularly among youth populations—remains remarkably scarce. Traditional tourism research continues to privilege individual psychological responses within isolated travel encounters, leaving the overarching political and atmospheric conditions that frame these experiences largely underexplored. Furthermore, current affective tourism scholarship suffers from a heavily Western-centric bias, assuming a baseline of political stability and treating political tension as an episodic disruption rather than a persistent, everyday condition. This normative assumption severely restricts the understanding of how political emotions are continuously negotiated in non-Western contexts, particularly in Southeast Asia, where volatility is fundamentally normalized and seamlessly integrated into daily life. At the same time, while young people are widely studied as active political actors or digital participants, their physical mobility and travel practices are rarely examined as emotionally and politically situated experiences.

By centering the Thai experience and using a rigorous, emotion-centered qualitative methodology, this study decenters these dominant paradigms to capture how political affect is lived, narrated, and integrated into everyday mobility. The research shows that young travelers navigate environments of slow-burning precarity through sophisticated processes of emotional adaptation, using travel to achieve the psychological restoration needed to sustain long-term civic resilience rather than succumbing to mere deterrence or withdrawal. Ultimately, this study offers a profoundly contextually grounded understanding of how Thai young adults negotiate political climates, extending affective theory into tourism studies by firmly positioning domestic travel as a vital socio-political practice that sustains political attentiveness and contributes to the broader discourse on social sustainability.

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to capture the nuanced and embodied experiences of young adults navigating Thailand's affective political atmosphere through domestic travel. By prioritizing lived experience and emotional meaning-making, the research aligns with the "affective turn" in tourism studies, which seeks to understand how spatial and social conditions are felt and narrated (Bille & Simonsen, 2021).

Research Design and Triangulation

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employs methodological triangulation by integrating three distinct qualitative methods: in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, and focus group discussions. This multi-layered approach was deliberately chosen to capture both the idiosyncratic, personal emotional journeys of individuals and the collective, shared moods of the youth population. In-depth interviews provided a dedicated space for participants to articulate personal reflections on their political sensibilities and travel motivations. Complementing this, narrative inquiry allowed for a deeper exploration of specific travel stories, revealing how political tension is woven into the temporal and spatial fabric of a trip. Furthermore, focus group discussions were instrumental in observing the relational nature of affect, as participants actively co-constructed and negotiated their shared sense of political fatigue and hope within a social setting. The synergy among these diverse data sources facilitated a comprehensive cross-examination of the findings. For instance, while individual interviews revealed deep-seated personal anxieties, the focus groups

showed how these anxieties were normalized through social interaction, ultimately providing a more robust, triangulated understanding of the affective atmosphere.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

Participants consisted of twenty-five university students and early-career professionals, aged twenty-one to thirty, residing in Thailand. This demographic was purposefully selected because of their heightened political awareness and active engagement with digital media, positioning them at the forefront of the nation's shifting political climate (Chotewetsin, 2022). Using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, the recruitment process captured a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds and political leanings, ensuring the data reflected a broad spectrum of youth experiences. Data collection took place between 2023 and 2024—a period marked by significant political transition and intense public discourse—and all interviews and focus groups were conducted in Thai to preserve culturally specific emotional nuances and metaphors. Given the highly sensitive nature of political discussions in Thailand, ethical rigor remained paramount; researchers obtained informed consent and adopted a listening-centered approach to mitigate potential distress, allowing participants to guide the narrative safely. All sessions were securely recorded, transcribed, and anonymized before undergoing interpretive thematic analysis. This analysis followed a recursive coding process where initial codes, such as emotional triggers, were progressively refined into overarching themes like digital connectivity and emotional maintenance. Ultimately, this systematic process was heavily informed by the study's theoretical framework, ensuring that all interpretations remained deeply grounded in the lived data and the overarching concepts of affective atmosphere and precarity.

Research Results

The thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, narrative accounts, and focus group discussions synthesized a complex portrait of how political atmospheres permeate Thai young adults' domestic travel experiences. While conventional tourism literature often posits political instability as a primary deterrent to travel, the findings of this study demonstrate a more nuanced "affective negotiation." The following sections detail the core themes that emerged, highlighting the intersection of political tension, digital mediation, and emotional resilience.

Normalization of Tension and Generational Adaptation

A dominant theme identified across the data was the normalization of political tension. For the cohort of university students and early-career professionals in this study, political instability is not perceived as an extraordinary "crisis" but as a constitutive element of everyday life. Having matured within a decade of recurring social movements and governance shifts, participants exhibited what can be termed as "generational adaptation."

In the focus group discussions, participants collectively articulated that waiting for a "perfectly calm" political climate before traveling would result in perpetual immobility. One participant (Female, 23, University Student) noted:

"If I waited for the politics to be stable before I went on a trip, I'd probably never leave my room. We have grown up with this. It is like the weather—sometimes it is stormier than others, but you still have to go out and live. We learn to pack our political anxiety in our suitcases; it does not stay at home just because we go to the beach." (Focus Group 1)

This sentiment was reinforced in individual interviews, where participants described political tension as a "background noise" (Interview, Participant 4). The triangulated data further suggests that while individual interviews revealed deep-seated personal anxieties about the nation's future, the focus group environment allowed these anxieties to be socialized and "normalized." This adaptive emotionality allows Thai youth to continue their domestic travels not by ignoring the political climate, but by integrating it into their spatial reality.

Consequently, political atmosphere functions as a contextual layer of the journey rather than a barrier to it.

Affective Continuity through Digital Connectivity

The findings significantly challenge the notion of travel as a "disconnection" from reality. In contemporary Thailand, the ubiquity of digital platforms ensures an affective continuity; the political atmosphere follows the traveler via real-time updates and social media discourse. This digital saturation means the emotional weight of the political climate carries across geographical boundaries.

Narrative inquiry revealed that participants remained "tethered" to the national mood through their smartphones. A participant (Male, 27, Early-career Professional) described his experience during a mountain retreat:

"I was sitting there looking at the fog, but my thumb was still scrolling through X (Twitter). A major court ruling happened that day. Even though I was physically in a 'peaceful' place, my heart was racing because of the hashtags. You cannot really escape the atmosphere when it is literally in your hand. The tension travels with you; it just changes location." (Interview, Participant 12)

This digitally mediated mobility creates a paradox: young adults seek physical respite through travel while remaining emotionally entangled in political discourse. This continuity ensures that travel does not represent a "switch-off" but instead shifts the spatial context in which political emotions are processed. Furthermore, the data showed that encounters with local communities during travel often sparked "affective triggers," where seeing local economic struggles reminded participants of macro-political failures, thereby deepening their political reflections while on vacation.

Travel as Emotional Maintenance and Socio-Political Resilience

Within the framework of "slow-burning precarity," domestic travel emerged as a vital strategy for emotional maintenance. Rather than a luxury or a mindless escape, participants framed travel as a necessary practice for self-repair—a way to manage the "affective saturation" of living in a politically charged society.

Participants largely agreed that travel provides the "emotional fuel" needed to sustain long-term political attentiveness. One participant (Female, 25, Graduate Student) shared: "People might think we are just ignoring the problems when we post travel photos, but it is actually the opposite. I go away because I am exhausted from caring too much. I need to reset so I can come back and keep being vocal. If I do not give myself this space, I will burn out and stop caring altogether. Travel is how I preserve my capacity to stay in the fight." (Interview, Participant 19)

The findings indicate that the "value" of a destination is increasingly judged by its capacity to facilitate this emotional reset. Natural environments and quiet spaces are preferred not just for their aesthetic appeal, but for their role as "affective refuges." Across the triangulated datasets, it became clear that travel functions as an embodied socio-political practice. It supports the social sustainability of the youth by offering a reprieve from the intensity of the national mood, thereby preventing total political withdrawal. In this sense, domestic tourism is repositioned as a tool for resilience, enabling young adults to navigate a volatile landscape without losing their sense of agency or hope.

The Paradox of 'Unplugging' while 'Staying Connected'

A key finding from the narrative inquiries was the paradox of the digital-physical divide. While participants sought physical isolation in rural or natural settings to escape the "heaviness" of the urban political atmosphere, their digital practices remained intensely political. This suggests that the affective atmosphere of the nation is no longer geographically localized but is lived through a hybrid spatiality.

For instance, several participants described a "guilt-ridden leisure" in which they felt a moral obligation to stay updated on political trials or protests even while on vacation. One participant shared a detailed narrative of her trip to a remote island: "I was on a boat, surrounded by the most beautiful turquoise water, but all I could think about was the signal. I needed to know if the activists were granted bail that afternoon. There is this constant tension between wanting to enjoy the 'now' and feeling like you are betraying the movement if you look away. So, you end up in this weird state where you are physically in paradise but emotionally in the courtroom." (Narrative Inquiry, Participant 22)

This narrative illustrates that for Thai youth, travel is not a "clean break" from political reality. Instead, it is a spatial relocation of political engagement. The affective atmosphere is so pervasive that it penetrates even the most secluded tourism spaces, mediated by the constant proximity of the digital screen. This finding further reinforces the concept of "affective continuity," suggesting that the tourism industry's traditional promise of "complete escape" is increasingly unattainable for politically conscious generations.

Affective Triggers: Encountering Inequality in Tourism Spaces

Beyond digital connectivity, participants also felt the political atmosphere through physical encounters with local socio-economic realities. Participants noted that traveling through provincial Thailand often acted as an "affective trigger," bringing macro-political issues into sharp, localized focus. The contrast between a destination's aesthetic beauty and the visible struggles of local communities often deepened their political fatigue or sharpened their critiques of governance.

In focus group discussions, participants reflected on how their political awareness changed their "tourist gaze": "Before, I just saw a beautiful village. Now, I see the lack of infrastructure, the struggling local shops, and I think about the budget distribution. The political atmosphere is there in the broken roads and the quiet markets. You can no longer see 'culture'; you see the consequences of politics. It makes the trip feel heavy in a different way." (Focus Group 2)

This suggests that the "affective political atmosphere" is not just a feeling in the air but is also embedded in the materiality of the destination. For young travelers, domestic tourism becomes a form of "informal political education," where movement across the country provides tangible evidence of the socio-political precarity they discuss online.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the intricate ways in which affective political atmospheres permeate the domestic travel experiences of young adults in Thailand. By moving beyond traditional push-pull motivation models, the findings offer a more sophisticated understanding of mobility as an affective socio-political practice. This inquiry yields two primary theoretical implications.

De-centering Western-centric Assumptions in Tourism Geographies

A pivotal contribution of this research is the critical decentering of Western-centric biases that have long dominated tourism-politics scholarship. Conventional frameworks—often developed in contexts of relative political stability—tend to conceptualize political risk or instability as episodic disruptions that deter travel (Sombatpoonsiri, 2023). However, the results of this study suggest that in Southeast Asian contexts like Thailand, political tension is not an anomaly but an atmospheric permanence. The participants' narratives of normalization and generational adaptation challenge the binary logic of stability versus crisis, revealing that Thai young adults have developed a profound adaptive emotionality to cope with ongoing volatility. In these environments, political uncertainty is seamlessly integrated into the fabric of everyday mobility. Consequently, travel behavior is not a reaction to a discrete event, but a continuous, embodied negotiation with a persistent climate of slow-burning precarity (Chotewetsin, 2022). Tourism scholarship must therefore evolve to recognize that in much of the global south, the political background continuously reconfigures the emotional possibility

and meaning of leisure itself, demanding a shift toward understanding travel as a tool for sustainable democratic engagement.

Domestic Tourism as Affective Infrastructure for Social Sustainability

Furthermore, the empirical findings offer a novel perspective on tourism's critical role in supporting broader social and political sustainability. Traditionally, using travel as a coping mechanism has been dismissed as political apathy or withdrawal—a mere escape from civic responsibility. In stark contrast, this study argues that for young adults, domestic travel functions as a vital affective infrastructure that necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of how resilience is conceptualized in tourism studies. While resilience is frequently discussed as an individual's isolated ability to bounce back from stress, in the context of Thailand's normalized political tension, it vividly emerges as a collective affective strategy. Domestic travel allows peer groups to pool and redistribute emotional energy, turning a simple leisure activity into the co-construction of a safe emotional container where deep-seated political anxieties can be voiced, validated, and temporarily neutralized.

This collective dimension of travel is absolutely crucial for maintaining social sustainability. It suggests that tourism provides a necessary "breath of air" that actively prevents the complete radicalization or total disillusionment of the youth demographic. By providing a dedicated space for emotional maintenance, domestic tourism indirectly supports the stability of the social fabric, allowing a frustrated generation to find the stamina needed to continue their civic lives. By engaging in domestic travel, participants do not switch off their political consciousness; instead, the affective continuity provided by digital connectivity keeps them firmly tethered to the national discourse. Travel serves as a strategic site of emotional maintenance, offering the necessary spatial and psychological distance to manage affective saturation and prevent severe burnout (Thatsadonkunlaphat, 2025). This reframing is crucial for understanding a citizenry's long-term resilience. If young adults are to remain politically attentive and sustainably engaged amid ongoing uncertainty, they require these affective refuges that allow for essential self-repair. In this sense, domestic tourism is profoundly repositioned as an embodied socio-political practice that directly sustains the youth's emotional capacity to continue navigating a highly precarious future.

In conclusion, this research challenges traditional economic frameworks by conceptualizing domestic tourism as a vital affective socio-political practice rather than a purely recreational activity. Through a rigorous, triangulated qualitative methodology, the study shows that Thailand's persistent political atmosphere—though perceived as tense and digitally saturating—functions as an inescapable emotional background rather than a strict constraint on youth mobility. Rather than suppressing the desire to travel, this constant exposure turns domestic tourism into a necessary strategy for emotional maintenance. By integrating normalized political volatility into their everyday mobility, young adults use travel to achieve the psychological restoration needed to sustain long-term civic resilience and ongoing political attentiveness.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

Theoretically, this study extends the "affective turn" into Southeast Asian tourism studies, offering a contextually grounded lens for how politics is "felt" through movement. Methodologically, integrating in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, and focus groups was instrumental in capturing the multifaceted nature of affect. While interviews revealed idiosyncratic emotional negotiations, focus groups highlighted the social normalization of precarity, thereby providing a robust, triangulated evidence base that quantitative indicators often fail to detect. Furthermore, this study offers a significant theoretical advancement by bridging the gap between affective geography and tourism sociology within a non-Western framework. By articulating the concept of "atmospheric permanence," the research provides a new vocabulary for scholars to discuss political influence in tourism without relying on the

language of "crisis management." This suggests that in volatile political landscapes, the traditional boundaries between the "tourist space" (as a site of leisure) and the "political space" (as a site of struggle) have become increasingly porous.

The integration of "slow-burning precarity" into the affective turn highlights that mobility is not merely a choice driven by individual desire but a social practice mediated by the generation's shared mood. Consequently, this research moves the academic conversation from viewing emotions as momentary reactions toward viewing them as sustained, atmospheric conditions that dictate the rhythm of contemporary youth mobility. This conceptual shift provides a robust foundation for future studies to examine how other forms of socio-political tension—such as economic inequality or environmental anxiety—function as invisible yet pervasive atmospheres that guide the way people move, rest, and make sense of their world.

Policy Implications and Future Directions

From a policy and industry perspective, the findings suggest that tourism stakeholders should move beyond the simplistic promotion of "political calm." Instead, there is a significant opportunity to recognize and support tourism's role in promoting the emotional well-being and social resilience of the youth population. Destination marketing could benefit from foregrounding themes of "restoration," "reconnection," and "affective refuge," acknowledging the emotional needs of a generation living under persistent strain.

For future research, this study recommends a broader comparative approach within the Asian region to examine how different governance structures and political histories shape youth travel emotionality. Furthermore, as political atmospheres are increasingly mediated through technology, future inquiries should use digital ethnography to track how political affects "travel" in real time alongside physical bodies.

Ultimately, for the young adults of Thailand, domestic travel is not a departure from the political world, but a way of sustaining themselves within it. Recognizing the profound intersection of mobility, emotion, and politics is essential for any future understanding of tourism in an age of global uncertainty.

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