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**Globalization and Democratization
in Thailand:**

**Structural and Agential Roles
in Political and Economic Change**

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degree of Master of Philosophy in Politics at Massey University

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Abstract

This thesis examines recent developments in Thailand's democratization process against the backdrop of economic and political globalization. It assesses the structural constraints and opportunities created by these forces, and the agential possibilities for managing them in a way that is consistent with democratization.

The structural environment of economic globalization has had highly contradictory effects on Thai democratization, in some instances helping and in others hindering. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's agential response to economic globalization does, however, have the potential to improve the climate for democratization. By offering alternative strategies for the management of this environment, and by prioritizing economic growth and redistribution, he has increased the options available to voters, and may be helping to avoid the economic problems that can undermine confidence in electoral democracy.

The structural environment of political globalization has likewise had mixed effects. Thailand has historically proved adept at adapting to changing global norms, and this openness has probably impacted positively on its democratization process. At the same time, however, it is an orientation that may have exacerbated Thailand's tendency to promote elite democracy, and stifled the search for indigenous democratic forms. Thaksin's agential responses to the political aspects of globalization do not appear to be favourable to deepening democratization. His impatience with what he perceives as the intrusion of the global community, his adherence to outmoded versions of sovereignty, and his failure to promote a global/local balance in the political realm combine to form policies that are unlikely to help Thailand take best advantage of international democratic networks.

This thesis argues the need to emphasize local solutions if Thailand's democratization process is to be protected in the context of a partially globalized world. Thaksin, albeit inadequately, has pointed the way toward these in the economic realm, but the pursuit of equivalent political solutions seems to be hampered by the power behind the projection of current global democratic norms, and by the difficulty of mediating between "top-down" and "bottom-up" democracy agendas in Thailand. Agential choice can make a difference here. But for this to happen, it is not only Thai agents who need a more inclusive and visionary democratic agenda. Changes in perspective are also needed by the most powerful agents in the global community – the world's most globalized, most wealthy, and most influential states.

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List of abbreviations

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
EAEM	East Asia Economic Model
EGAT	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
NHRC	Thailand's National Human Rights Committee
SET	Stock Exchange of Thailand
TNA	Thai News Agency
TRT	Thai Rak Thai party, led by Thaksin Shinawatra