TITLE
Reading the Thai nation and its social structure in cookbooks

SPEAKER
Mr Panu Wongcha-Um

Day, Date, Time, Venue
Wednesday, 31 October, 3 pm
HY/PS Lounge, AS1-0401

Abstract
Cookbooks, like other texts, do not exist in a vacuum, but in a cultural context that infuses them with meanings. In this sense, cookbooks can be considered “artifacts of culture in the making”. In this talk I will look at how Thai cookbooks, from the very first one ever written, have helped define the notion of “Thai” cuisine, and how that notion changed through time. Also to be discussed is the circulation of cookbooks and their role as social ornaments, especially in the case of those published as memorial volumes for distribution at cremation ceremony. These two aspects of the social life of cookbooks, meaning and circulation, reveal the cultural formulization of a Thai “national” cuisine out of a very fluid culinary landscape.

About the Speaker
Panu Wongcha-Um graduated with an Honours degree in History and International Relations from the University of Melbourne in 2005, with a thesis on maritime piracy in Southeast Asia. After working in Thailand for half a year, Panu is currently a M.A. candidate in the History Department at the National University of Singapore.