

I usually travel to Thailand in the cooler months of December and January, but one year I was homesick for the rain. I arrived at the height of monsoon season so that I could feel the wet, heavy “elephant drops” that I fondly remember from my childhood. My friend Gobgaew Najpinij, a professor of Thai culinary arts, and I decided to attend a fair on traditional Thai medicine at the Ministry of Public Health in Bangkok. Gobgaew, a petite woman in her sixties, epitomizes the traditional Thai woman of her age, refined and genteel, always impeccably attired in ethnic Thai dresses made of iridescent silk. Short, curly black hair frames her round face and oversized glasses magnify her twinkling eyes.

On that hot, humid August day, we joined the throngs pouring through the ministry’s gates and strolled past booths displaying myriad plants, herbs, and potions. Buckets and baskets were filled with shoots, bark, seeds, fresh and dried leaves, blossoms, and dried centipedes, snakes, and worms. Many vendors sold homemade remedies packaged in bottles, paper, or plastic envelopes. There were cures for just about everything, including herbs to help lose weight and tighten sagging skin.

We spotted a booth jammed with people under a large sign that read “Taht Chao Reien”—Home Element. Under the shady canopy, several elderly men and women sat behind a long wooden table, spinning a plastic wheel and consulting with passersby. Our curiosity piqued, we took a place in line and were soon ushered before a stocky gentleman who told us that he was a *moh thai*, or Thai folk doctor.

These doctors often come from generations of family healers and apprentice with Buddhist monks, who are skilled in the healing arts. In Thailand, medicine is closely related to Buddhism. Folk doctors are regarded as emotionally centered and spiritually wise. To become a healer, one must excel in both practical knowledge and religious theology.

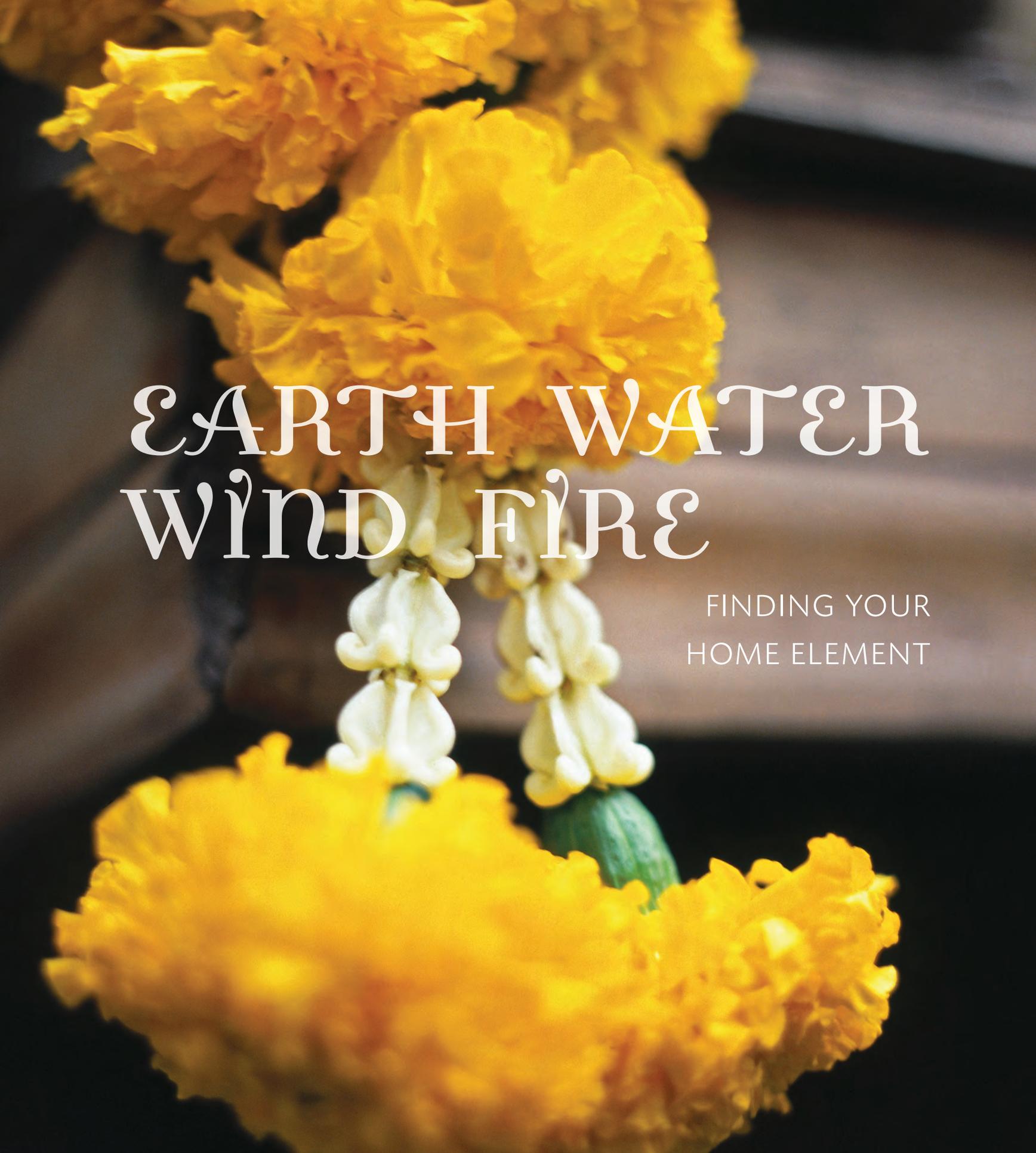
The *moh thai* looked at my face and asked for the date and year of my birth. He then began to move arrows on a plastic wheel covered with numbers, turning them back and forth, moving one circular wheel, and then another, right and left. In less than a minute, he told me that my home element is Water.

“Hot weather is good for you,” he said.

Gobgaew chimed in, “She lives in America.”

“How is the weather there?” the *moh thai* asked.

“Where I live, it’s good most of the time, not too cold or too hot,” I replied.



EARTH WATER  
WIND FIRE

FINDING YOUR  
HOME ELEMENT

“Good, good,” he said. “Your friend is lucky because cold weather is not good for her,” he continued, speaking to Gobgaew. “She should be careful when it rains. Cold and rain are not good for the nasal passages, throat, and lungs of Water people. Also, your lower intestine and bladder are sensitive. You would do well to eat fruits and vegetables with sour, bland, and bitter flavors.”

When it was Gobgaew’s turn, she was reluctant to give the old doctor her birth date. To the Thais of her generation, one’s birth date is sacred information, revealing the spirit of the person. In the wrong hands, one’s spirit could be tampered with. After assuring her that he was trustworthy, she finally gave him the date.

The moh thai spun the Wheel and quickly told her that her home element was half Wind and half Water. She was vulnerable to heart problems and high blood pressure.

“You must take care of your heart now that you are older,” he warned. “Meditate. Be quiet. Take care of yourself during the rain. Your body temperature goes up and down. Eat spicy foods with cool, refreshing flavors, and some bland and bitter tastes.”

Gobgaew and I looked at each other, astonished, feeling as if the doctor had looked right into our souls and bodies. Gobgaew cannot eat enough bitter greens. She detests the sweet flavors that contemporary Thai cooks add to her beloved curries, ruining the rightful balance that has been so carefully crafted by previous generations. Her body temperature often fluctuates. Lately, she sometimes slips away from her busy life to meditate with her son, a Buddhist monk.

As for myself, since I was a child I’ve known to look after myself when the weather turns cold and rainy. In recent years, I have cut down on spicy and creamy dishes. Chiles irritate my system and I can no longer digest rich dishes cooked with coconut cream. I crave bitter-tasting vegetables and I have always been drawn to sour fruits such as tamarind, green mango, and tart cherries.

“It’s all here on this Wheel,” the moh thai told us.

I asked him who invented the Wheel, and he replied that the doctor’s name was Khun Moh (doctor) Pennapa. He went on to explain how difficult it had been to determine a person’s home element before the Wheel’s invention. “I had to consult several books and calculate the exact astrological alignment at the patient’s time of conception,” he said. “Before the Wheel, I needed my books and abacus.”

“How did you come to use the Wheel?” Gobgaew asked.

“Dr. Pennapa came to the town where I live. She was interested in folk doctors. She came to learn and record our practices. It was tough going for her. You know how Thai people are: We don’t like to share our secrets. But we opened up to her little by little. She told us about the Wheel. At first, I didn’t think something so complicated could be made so simple, but when I calculated my patients’ home elements the old way and she used the Wheel, the results were the same!”

Gobgaew and I each bought a Wheel at the fair’s bookstore, along with a book published by Pennapa that explained how to use it. Gobgaew told me that Pennapa was the director of the Department of Traditional Thai Medicine at Thailand’s Ministry of Public Health and that a mutual friend of ours, Khun Mom (Lady) Sirin, knew her.



Su-Mei Yu with Dr. Pennapa Subcharoen



It would be a year, however, before I would meet Pennapa. In the interim, I started using the Wheel when cooking for friends, family, and myself. Herbs and spices that I regularly use in my cooking took on new meaning. No longer did I add them to food simply as flavorings, but also as preventive aids for my health and well-being. I soon found myself cooking like my mother and her generation of friends, and felt that I had become an alchemist as well as a cook.

When I finally met Pennapa in August of 2003, I was convinced of the Wheel's efficacy. Pennapa was in her fifties, a serious, well-educated woman. Her father was a folk doctor, and she was trained in both Western and Thai traditional medicine. She told me about her travels throughout Thailand, collecting medical texts and recording regional healing practices and herbal remedies from folk doctors.

"I've come to believe," said Pennapa, "that the path toward good health begins by knowing oneself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It's also important to have an awareness and respect for nature. Traditional Thai medicine has a holistic approach to treating illness. It takes into account the mental and spiritual condition of the patient. In the past, Thais believed that people got sick because their body elements had fallen out of balance with their environment. They paid attention to maintaining balance in their lives. They ate food that was grown locally and seasonally. Besides planting fruit trees, they also

planted trees that have auspicious meanings around their homes. They planted aromatic herbs and flowers that are used as medicine and aromatherapy to this day.”

I asked her about the Wheel. “I wanted a device that could be used by anyone to identify his or her home element,” she said. “The home element is the key to understanding who we are.”

Strolling through the herb garden Pennapa had cultivated at the Ministry, she said, “Your passion is food, and mine is the hidden treasures in edible plants. We make a good pair, don’t you think? The Thai people owe an enormous debt to the ancient Thai cooks, whom I consider geniuses. They consciously knew what they were doing when they invented heavenly-tasting dishes by blending common, ordinary plants that have specific healing properties. A typical curry paste is a combination of several herbs and spices, and usually includes lemongrass, which is an antiseptic, and bird chiles, which curb nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea and help blood circulate.”

At the end of our day together, I asked for her permission to translate one of her books about the Thai philosophy of health. She was delighted. The book would become an inspiration for me in my quest to understand the link between Thai food and folk healing practice.

Another year passed before I returned to Thailand with the partially translated manuscript. I asked Pennapa if I could use the Wheel and much of what I learned from her and her books for my own book. She graciously not only gave her permission, but also helped me revise the Wheel to make it more understandable to Westerners.

## YOUR HOME ELEMENT

“The spark of life is smaller than the tiniest droplet of sesame oil on the tip of a buffalo hair.” That is how a Thai saying describes the moment of conception, when our home element is assigned to each of us. Discovering your home element will allow you to use your diet to achieve harmony with nature. With the information you gain by knowing your home element, you can adjust your menus in response to the weather, the season, the time of day, or how you feel for optimum health and emotional well-being.

Your home element has a spiritual dimension as well. To discover its presence is to discover your true self. To know your home element is to know your inner voice. This light of wisdom illuminates your way as you journey through life. Its sustaining energy provides you with a sense of direction and fortifies you against life’s problems. When you follow the path of your home element and listen to your inner voice, you will be rewarded with a life of well-being and a state of physical and spiritual harmony that Thais call *suk sabai*: contentment, clarity, and happiness.





## TO FIND YOUR HOME ELEMENT:

1. Look on the back of the large disk and locate the year of your birth. Note the date and month next to your birth year. For example, my birthday is September 8, 1945, and the number next to it is 24 Mar. 1945.
2. Turn the Wheel over and, using the middle disk, point the small arrow to the date and month next to your birth year, as identified on the back of the large disk. I would point the small arrow on the middle disk to March 24.
3. While holding onto the middle disk, making sure it doesn't move, rotate the top of the smallest disk and point the left arrow to the actual date and month of your birth, minus one day if you were born in North America. (The Wheel was created for people born in Thailand, so for those born in North America, you need to subtract one day to make up for the time change.) I move the left arrow on the smallest disk to September 8, the day I was born. (I was born in Thailand.)

The home element arrow is now pointing to the approximate date of your conception. In my case, the home element arrow points to December 3. Dr. Pennapa says those born prematurely should add the appropriate number of days or weeks to your actual birth date before determining your date of conception. So, if you were born eight weeks premature on March 31, your birthday should be May 26, which would actually be May 25 if you were born in North America because you need to subtract one day. If you were born after your mother's estimated delivery date, subtract the number of days or weeks from your actual birthday, then subtract one more day if you were born in North America.

Underneath the right arrow of the smallest disk is an inverted triangular window. Either one or two colors will appear in this window. The colors identify your home element.

### YOUR HOME ELEMENT

**IF THE COLOR IS:**      **YOUR HOME ELEMENT IS:**

Red	Fire
Yellow	Wind
Blue	Water
Black	Earth

In my case, the color is blue, which means my home element is Water. If two colors appear in the window, this means you have two home elements. For example, if yellow and red appear in the window, your home elements are Fire and Wind. If both colors appear exactly the same size in the triangle, you have two evenly weighted home elements. If more of one color appears than the other, then that home element predominates, with influence felt from the lesser home element. Having more than one home element means you should follow the guidance of both elements in proportion to their dominance in the triangle.

Knowing your home element(s) is like having a compass. It guides you toward the right path on your journey through the unpredictable terrain created by nature's changing weather and time of day. With each change, you need to adjust your direction in order to remain in balance to maintain good health. One of the ways to achieve this balance is through a diet that combines the tastes, flavors, and aromas most beneficial to your home element(s) together with those appropriate to the elements dominating the time of day and that day's weather.

## A JOURNEY TO UNDERSTANDING

The bus pulled over to a clearing by the side of the road and stopped, jolting my husband, Bob, and me from our sleep. We had been on a bus since the night before, taking off from Bangkok for a small remote village in Prae, a province in the far northern corner of Thailand, with 30 other disciples of my friend and mentor, Dr. Pennapa.

Hidden in an isolated mountainous area surrounded by teak forest, the people of Chong Bhuk live untouched by most modern amenities except for electricity, mobile phones, and pickup trucks. Otherwise, their lifestyle remains basically the same as that of their ancestors. Each new generation is taught by its elders how to identify and use homegrown and foraged plants for foods and/or medicine. Chong Bhuk, according to Dr. Pennapa, would be a perfect laboratory where I could experience firsthand what I had been studying.

It was still dark when we got off the bus. The air was cold and wet, blanketing us in heavy, dense fog. Several men got out of their pickups and started to unload suitcases from our bus into the beds of their trucks. We were told to find ours and jump in. The ride in the open air over dirt roads winding through a wooded expanse, with a chilly morning wind whipping through our thin clothing, instantly banished any longing for more sleep from our weary bodies. By the time the truck came to a stop at a paved lot, we were shivering hard from the cold. Our minds had also snapped into full alertness.

Under a makeshift tent, several women wearing heavy sweaters with shawls draped over their heads and shoulders stood behind several tables. They called us to come and get our breakfast. There were steaming hot mugs of soy milk in all sizes and shapes, and enamel bowls filled with rice porridge, and cubes of taro, mushrooms, and sweet potatoes. Slivers of ginger mixed with some kind of spicy herb and chopped cilantro leaves garnished the porridge. Trays of sliced oranges were set nearby.

Warmed and nourished by breakfast and our brief welcome by the village chief, we were assigned host families with whom we would stay as guests in their homes. The early morning light had burnt off the fog, and we could see the green forest wrapping around the tiny village of Chong Bhuk. Aside from the concrete building that is the children's school, the village is laid out as a typical small Thai community. Along the single dirt road running through the middle of the village are modest wooden homes surrounded by bamboo fences covered with vines and early spring blossoms. A wide opening in the fence serves as the front gate to the homes. Across from the road is a wild wooded area with a waterfall and running stream.

After freshening up, we were divided into four groups. Each represented one of the four home elements: Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire. I was in the Wind group. Our assignment was to identify the taste, flavor, and aroma of both homegrown and foraged plants in the village and woods. We were also instructed to pick plants with the particular taste, flavor, and aroma most suitable for our assigned element. Each group was guided by a villager.

Our guide was a short, stocky, middle-aged man with an easygoing disposition. Mr. Somphun was born in Chong Bhuk, as were generations of his family before him. As a child and from the time he was able to walk, he would accompany his grandfather into the woods. He was taught how to identify and forage plants for food and medicine. As he walked with us through the village, he frequently paused, pointing at a tree, shrub, vine, or clumps of grass along the fences, in neighboring gardens, and at the edges of the woods. He would identify the plant's name, then pick a leaf, blossom, fruit, or shoot for us to taste, asking us to identify the plant's taste and aroma. Then he would ask us to name the home elements that would benefit from that particular taste, flavor, or aroma. After our answers, he would recite the plant's curative properties and how it is used either for cooking and/or as medicine. We recorded everything down in our writing pads.

At times, Mr. Somphun would use his machete to chop off or dig from the ground edible plants known to be valuable to the Wind home element and give them to one of us to carry. Several hours would pass before we came out on the other end of the wood into a vast grassy meadow.

There were four temporary lean-tos set up in four corners surrounding a central area with chairs and tables. The same women who made and served us breakfast now sat cooking and chatting merrily in each of the lean-tos. Mr. Somphun took our baskets and gave them to the women in the lean-to designated as the Wind kitchen. The air was heavily scented with spices and herbs.

When everyone had arrived, and while lunch was being cooked, Dr. Pennapa began her lecture about the interrelationship between taste, flavor, and aroma and the individual home elements, our body's elements, and nature's elements. She started by analyzing what we had for breakfast.

Although February is considered to be the beginning of hot season in Thailand, it is not so in Chong Bhuk. Located in the northern mountainous region of Thailand, the cool season lingers on a bit longer, and we had eaten our breakfast on a very cool, damp morning. The weather and time of day, stated Dr. Pennapa, are both under the dominance of one of nature's four elements. In Thailand, there are hot, rainy (monsoon), and cool seasons. The Thai cool season is generally dry and not extremely cold. Therefore, the dominant element for the Thai cool season is Water. On the other hand, in other parts of the world (including most of the United States) where winter can be very cold and damp, the dominant element for winter is Earth.

## NATURE'S DOMINATING ELEMENTS

### WEATHER:

- Cold, damp = EARTH element
- Cool, dry = WATER element
- Wet = WIND element
- Hot = FIRE element

### HOURS:

- 6 A.M. to 10 A.M. = WATER element
- 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. = FIRE element
- 2 P.M. to 6 P.M. = WIND element
- 6 P.M. to 10 P.M. = WATER element
- 10 P.M. to 2 A.M. = FIRE element
- 2 A.M. to 6 A.M. = WIND element

On that particular morning, the climate was under the influence of nature's Water element (Thailand's cool tropical climate), Wind element (wet and damp climate), and Water element (the early morning hours between 6 A.M. and 10 A.M.). The villagers served us a well-balanced breakfast made with ingredients exuding tastes, flavors, and aromas that helped our bodies' elements maintain equilibrium with nature's varied elements, beginning with the rice in the porridge. Its bland flavor (a flavor good for Water, Wind, and Fire elements) is especially nurturing to the circulatory, digestive, and respiratory systems when there are multiple dominating forces of nature (Water and Wind, in this case). The same is true of mushrooms, another bland flavor ingredient.

Taro tastes buttery, whereas pumpkin tastes buttery and sweet (a taste and flavor for Earth element). Both fortify our bones, muscles, tendons, and skin in a cool and damp climate. Spicy and warming ginger, plai (a variety of ginger), shallot, and cilantro in rice porridge shielded us from the wet Wind element.

Orange's sour and sweet tastes (tastes for Water element) generate the body's heat. It is a protective measure for our respiratory system, especially on wet, cool mornings.

Lastly, rich and buttery soy milk (a flavor for Earth element) sweetened with sugar (another taste for Earth element) warmed all of us against the cool and damp climate.

Among those of us with Water and/or Wind as our home element, breakfast was especially restorative. This is because nature's dominant elements on that cool, wet, early morning were the same as our home elements, and these double forces called for extra fortifications. All of us, especially people with Earth as their home element, glowed from an extra protective coating for our bodies against the surprising and unfamiliar cool and wet morning. And for people with Fire as their home element, although they fare better in a cool and wet climate, their body element still needs nurturing in order to keep its balance with nature's elements.

## TASTE, FLAVOR, AND AROMA AND THE HOME ELEMENTS

After centuries of observation and study, Thai traditional folk doctors have come to believe that all natural and edible ingredients contain one or more of nine essential tastes, flavors, and/or aromas.

The tastes, flavors, and aromas best suited for the individual home elements are:

- **EARTH ELEMENT:** astringent, buttery, salty, and sweet
- **WATER ELEMENT:** bitter, bland, and sour
- **WIND ELEMENT:** spicy and cool/refreshing
- **FIRE ELEMENT:** bitter, bland, and cool/refreshing

Dr. Pennapa then asked us to identify the nine natural tastes, flavors, and aromas, with their healing qualities. By then, we had learned and repeated the recitation taught to us by our guides:

- **ASTRINGENT** equalizes the elements
- **BITTER** purifies the blood
- **BLAND** aids the respiratory system
- **BUTTERY** lubricates the joints and tendons
- **SALTY** restores the skin
- **SOUR** rids the body of phlegm and cleanses the blood
- **SWEET** increases the Wind (affects breathing, emotions, and digestion)
- **SPICY** drives away the Wind (eases digestion, bloating, and flatulence)
- **COOL/REFRESHING** nurtures the heart

Dr. Pennapa went on to elaborate that some vegetables, herbs, and fruits may have multiple tastes, flavors, and aromas. For example, orange has both sour and sweet tastes, and some nuts such as almond are buttery and sweet, while other seeds like sesame are buttery and bitter. Green beans are astringent and bland, and mint is spicy and cool/refreshing. These ingredients are suitable for various home elements in which these tastes, flavors, and aromas are needed.

The distinct tastes, flavors, and aromas in edible plants, explained Dr. Pennapa, are the keys that unlock the secret passage into the depths of the healthful benefits of the plants. For example, ginger tastes spicy and warm, the flavor that regulates and drives away the Wind. This spice is known to be beneficial to the digestive, respiratory, circulatory, and nervous systems. It curbs nausea and bloated feelings and warms the chest, easing a cold. For a Wind element person with these delicate systems, ginger is a perfect spice.

Besides edible plants, traditional Thai folk doctors include traditional Thai seasonings such as salt, sugar, honey, vinegar, fish sauce, soy sauce, salty bean paste, fermented shrimp paste, and fermented fish paste in this classification of tastes, flavors, and aromas.

Several young children crept up to Dr. Pennapa and whispered that lunch was ready. Before taking us through the four lean-to kitchens, Dr. Pennapa asked us to call out together which element ruled the climate on that cool and sunny day and what tastes, flavors, and aromas were best suited for it. We all chimed together "Water," followed by calling out "bland," "bitter," and "sour." Then she asked which element dominates the lunch hours and which tastes, flavors, and aroma nurture it, to which we answered, "Fire," followed by "bitter," "bland," and "cool/refreshing."

Her lecture fresh in our minds, we followed her from one makeshift kitchen to the next.

The women in the Earth element kitchen had prepared a dipping sauce made with astringent banana blossoms, aromatic and bitter/sour kaffir lime juice, peppery green onion, buttery salted dried fish, roasted dried chiles, spicy garlic and shallot, buttery peanuts, and sweet palm sugar. An array of steamed vegetables and buttery, sweet pumpkin would be served as accompaniments.

The women in the Water element kitchen created a salad made with sour green mango and unripe star fruits, shallots, and a wild cool/refreshing herb. The dressing was made with sugar, fish sauce, garlic, chiles, aromatic herbs, and lime juice.

Cooks in the Wind element kitchen, using a variety of bitter greens, bland-flavor mushrooms, astringent/bland green beans, and cups of spicy basil, made a northern Thai-style curry called *gaeng khae* that is seasoned with a paste with salt and spicy chiles, garlic, shallot, lemongrass, and galangal and served with buttery grilled fish.

Cooks in the Fire element kitchen prepared several stir-fry dishes. One was made with tender and slightly astringent banana shoots, garlic, and basil, the other with a variety of bland-tasting greens seasoned with a paste made from salt, garlic, peppercorns, and coriander root. Away from the kitchens, several men were roasting large bamboo tubes over a fire. When we gathered to watch, they laid one with a charred and blackened surface on the grass and hacked it open with a machete, spilling out steaming hot newly harvested red and brown rice.

Dr. Pennapa explained that she had deliberately asked the villagers to cook dishes best suited for each of the four elements. Yet each kitchen, while using ingredients with tastes, flavors, and aromas most suitable for that particular element, all flavored their dishes with a “balancing” seasoning paste. These pastes, central to most if not all Thai recipes, represent the connection between Thai food and traditional Thai folk medical theory because they are made with herbs and spices from either opposite elements or all four elements combined, creating a balance that is necessary and suitable for all home elements and climates. For example, the curry paste for the *gaeng khae* made by the cooks of the Wind element kitchen, like most Thai curry pastes, was prepared with herbs and spices from two opposite elements, Earth and Wind, providing important nurturing and healing remedies for all. The green mango and unripe star fruit salad made by the cooks of the Water element kitchen was served with a dressing containing ingredients with tastes, flavors, and aromas from all four elements.

As we lined up to pick our selections, Dr. Pennapa reminded us that we should feel free to enjoy all the dishes from each of the home element kitchens, but she advised us to take a bit more of the dish most suitable for our particular home element. For those with Water and Fire as home elements, she reminded us of the double forces at play from nature’s Water (the weather) and Fire (the time of day) elements. Because of this, Water and Fire people should eat fewer dishes from Earth and Wind elements kitchens and more from their own home element kitchens.

We partook of a typical traditional Thai meal, consisting of several dishes served together and prepared from seasonal fruits, vegetables, and herbs, a balanced and healthful meal, Dr. Pennapa concluded, suitable for all.

## CREATING BALANCE IN YOUR OWN KITCHEN

No matter where you live, what climate you happen to be in, or which meal of the day you plan to cook for yourself and/or others whose home elements are known to you, your menu should include ingredients that balance tastes, flavors, and aromas based on:

1. Your or their home element(s) together with . . .
2. The element that dominates the climate together with . . .
3. The element that dominates the time of day.

Here are combinations of the different elements based on the above formula. To select the appropriate ingredients, you can refer to the chart of ingredients with their tastes, flavors, and aromas at the beginning of each element chapter.

**NOTE:** On a hot or cool day, if it rains, add Wind to the combination. On a rainy day, if it is hot, add Fire to the combination. If it is cold and damp, add Earth to the combination. During the winter, if it is cool (not cold) and dry, add Water.

If you plan to cook for friends whose home elements are not known to you, then your menu should include ingredients that balance the tastes, flavors, and aromas of the element that dominates the weather together with the element that dominates the time of day.

## EARTH HOME ELEMENT

### HOT CLIMATE (FIRE):

BREAKFAST: Earth + Fire + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Earth + Fire + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Earth + Fire + Water (time of day)

### RAINY CLIMATE (WIND):

BREAKFAST: Earth + Wind + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Earth + Wind + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Earth + Wind + Water (time of day)

### COOLD CLIMATE (EARTH):

BREAKFAST: Earth + Earth + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Earth + Earth + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Earth + Earth + Water (time of day)

## WATER HOME ELEMENT

### HOT CLIMATE (FIRE):

BREAKFAST: Water + Fire + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Water + Fire + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Water + Fire + Water (time of day)

### RAINY CLIMATE (WIND):

BREAKFAST: Water + Wind + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Water + Wind + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Water + Wind + Water (time of day)

### COOLD CLIMATE (EARTH):

BREAKFAST: Water + Earth + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Water + Earth + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Water + Earth + Water (time of day)

## WIND HOME ELEMENT

### HOT CLIMATE (FIRE):

BREAKFAST: Wind + Fire + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Wind + Fire + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Wind + Fire + Water (time of day)

### RAINY CLIMATE (WIND):

BREAKFAST: Wind + Wind + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Wind + Wind + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Wind + Wind + Water (time of day)

### COOLD CLIMATE (EARTH):

BREAKFAST: Wind + Earth + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Wind + Earth + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Wind + Earth + Water (time of day)

## FIRE HOME ELEMENT

### HOT CLIMATE (FIRE):

BREAKFAST: Fire + Fire + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Fire + Fire + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Fire + Fire + Water (time of day)

### RAINY CLIMATE (WIND):

BREAKFAST: Fire + Wind + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Fire + Wind + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Fire + Wind + Water (time of day)

### COOLD CLIMATE (EARTH):

BREAKFAST: Fire + Earth + Water (time of day)

LUNCH: Fire + Earth + Fire (time of day)

DINNER: Fire + Earth + Water (time of day)

	HOT CLIMATE	RAINY CLIMATE	COLD CLIMATE
<b>BREAKFAST</b>	Fire + Water	Wind + Water	Earth + Water
<b>LUNCH</b>	Fire + Fire	Wind + Fire	Earth + Fire
<b>DINNER</b>	Fire + Water	Wind + Water	Earth + Water

Once again, remember to add Wind to the combination on a hot or cool day if it rains. Add Earth to a rainy day if it is cold and Fire if it is hot. In the winter, if it is cool (not cold) and dry, add Water.

When planning your dish or dishes, begin by balancing ingredients with the tastes, flavors, and aromas from opposite elements or a combination of all four elements:

	EARTH	
FIRE		WATER
	WIND	

It can be as simple as combining salt (Earth) and pepper (Wind) or sugar (Earth) and cinnamon (Wind) or making a salad dressing of salt, oil (Earth), lemon juice (Water), mustard (Wind), garlic (Wind), and mint (Wind and Fire).

Then select seasonal ingredients to create a balance of tastes, flavors, and aromas of all elements. You can use this same guideline for putting together a single dish or for preparing a combination of dishes, as was the case with the meal served at Chong Bhuk. Here is how it works:

Let's say it is a cold winter morning and you decide to make pancakes for your family. Cold weather is under the dominance of nature's Earth element, and the morning hours between 6 A.M. and 10 A.M. are under the dominance of nature's Water element. If you happen to have two members of your family whose home elements are Earth and Water, they will be under the double influence of the Earth and Water elements.

This particular pancake recipe (Applesauce Pancakes, page 32) is made with ingredients with tastes and flavors of Earth element (buttery, sweet, and slightly salty), as well as a bit of orange juice and zest for a touch of Water element. Serving it with a sweet syrup is a good idea, as sweet is a taste best suited for Earth element. This combination makes it an especially good breakfast on a cool morning dominated by Earth element.

As a double measure of protection for the Earth element person, use buckwheat instead of oat flour and offer some buttery walnuts, almond slivers, and/or sliced sweet banana for additional toppings. To take care of a person with Water home element, sour dried cranberries, dried apricots, or slices of oranges would be a wonderful choice. For a Wind element person, shake some warm and spicy cinnamon on top of the uncooked pancakes while they are still on the griddle and offer slivers of spicy candied ginger as a topping. For a Fire element person, garnish the pancakes with shavings of bitter chocolate.

Now, let's consider what to make for lunch when the weather is still on the cool side. Look at the basic Fried Rice recipe on page 69. It contains seasonings and ingredients with the tastes, flavors, and aromas of all four elements, making it balanced not just for all home elements, but also for nature's demands. Rice is a balancer ingredient, good for all elements. Spicy garlic, ginger, and white pepper are restoratives for Wind element, cool/refreshing cilantro and cucumber for Fire element, and sour lime for Water element.

As suggested in the recipe, make one serving at a time, so that you can mix in additional cool weather ingredients to further meet specific home element needs. Remember that in the case of family members with Earth or Fire as their home element, they will need extra protection because of the double forces from their home element and nature's element (weather = Earth, time of day = Fire). You can add raisins, apple, and carrot (sweet) as well as celery (salty) for the Earth element person. For the Fire element person, add mushrooms (bland) and fennel (bland/slightly sweet). For a Water element person, add broccoli or arugula (bitter) and mushrooms (bland). For a Wind element person, add extra garlic, onion, and dried chiles (spicy).

Use the same guidelines when you plan a dinner menu with multiple dishes. A dinner on a cool evening is still under the dominance of nature's Earth element. However, the hours are under the influence of nature's Water element (6 P.M. to 10 P.M.). Consider a menu that includes ingredients with the tastes, flavors, and aromas of mostly Earth element (astringent, buttery, salty, sweet) and Water element (bitter, bland, sour), which will also take care of those with Earth or Water as their home element. Then add a couple of other dishes with tastes, flavors, and aromas suited for Wind and Fire, if you will be feeding people who have either of them as their home element.

For example, you can build a menu around hearty and warming Mussaman Curry with Chicken and Dried Apricots (page 138). It is a perfect dish for a cool, wintry night. To start, the curry paste is made with ingredients perfectly balanced and suitable for all home elements. Additional warming spices in the paste, including cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cumin, are especially nurturing to Wind element people. The curry sauce is made with rich and buttery coconut cream, a flavor that is strengthening to the muscles, joints, and tendons of all elements. The recipe includes apricots, whose sweet flavor turns fruity and sour when cooked, a taste suited for Water element people, as well as meets the need to balance the evening's dominant Water element. Sour taste is believed to warm the upper respiratory system during the cool evening hours.

Accompanying dishes might include Pear and Smoked Fish Salad (page 243), an elegant dish and excellent choice for the refined taste and desires of the Wind element person. For another dish, make Stir-Fried Chicken, Cabbage, and Bean Threads (page 297). Cabbage, with its bland, slightly sweet taste, is cooling and considered to be good for Earth, Water, and Fire element people. Finally, serve rice as a balancer for all the elements. For dessert, do as most Thais do—instead of a sweet, rich dessert, serve fresh, seasonal fruits such as sliced apple and pear. Or, for a little indulgence, make Sponge Cake with Cinnamon and Kumquats (page 180).

## HARMONY

Before the morning sun rises, nature's Wind element rules, blanketing the earth with dew. While we sleep, our body's Wind element, following nature's cues, effortlessly spreads its energy through the streams of our consciousness. Some of us sleep blissfully, our bodies floating gently in the arms of a balanced Wind. Others wrestle with demons in their dreams, as the ungrounded Wind element whirls and spins off course.

When the sun rises, brightening and warming the earth, as we begin to awake, nature's Wind element lingers in our somnolent consciousness, slowly easing the way for the Water element to assume nature's watch. During this precious and transitory moment, for those of us fortunate to have enjoyed a tranquil

rest, our minds are calm and peaceful, prepared to meet the day's chores and responsibilities. For those of us who experienced a fitful or sleepless night, we wake up exhausted, with our minds and spirits battered by the stormy Wind element.

Regardless of your state of being, before getting out of bed, take a moment to close your eyes and focus your mind on the rhythm of your breath. As you draw in each breath, deep and slow, imagine streams of white light entering your body, spreading its loving kindness through you. As you slowly breathe out, focus your mind on the light leaving your body, enveloping you with its compassionate rays. In this pool of deep quiet and light, you are in the presence of your home element's guiding spirit. If your mind wanders, gently refocus on your breathing and the streams of light, guiding it back toward thoughts of loving kindness. While in this state of mindfulness, gently tap into your emotions. Make a survey of how you feel. Are you content, or are you worried, anxious, or upset? Inhale and exhale deeply, breathing away the anxiety. Recite your home element's mantra. Take in the vision of your mantra and, with your mind's eye, see yourself moving through the day ahead with grace and wisdom.

Stretch slightly and quietly, mentally checking on the condition of your body. Are you well, or are your muscles and joints achy? Are you uncomfortable from last night's dinner? Make a note of what you find. In the light of your physical, emotional, and spiritual state of being, let your guiding spirit lead your consciousness. Alert and prepared, get up and look upon the beauty of nature that surrounds you. Embrace it as your companion in the hours to come.

The early morning hours, ruled by nature's Water element, remind us that the right balance of fluid intake is like a constant and refreshing stream that keeps us well hydrated and rejuvenated. By midday, nature's dynamic Fire element heats up our world and bodies. Stimulated by the day's activities, we hunger for nourishment, a reminder to refuel our body's energy. Mid-afternoon welcomes back nature's Wind element, as our minds and emotions move into high speed. Though it may seem counterintuitive, slow down. Remember to breathe; calm your body's Wind element and keep it on course, balanced by your wise and steady home element.

By evening, nature's Water element returns. Unwind, relax, and let its pure and pristine streams cleanse away the grime and worries of the day. As you get ready for sleep, close your eyes and release your body's weighty Earth element that you have shouldered throughout the day. Get back in touch with your home element's guiding spirit and breathe evenly and deeply to slowly calm the force of the body's Fire element. Let it refuel your tired body as you drift off to sleep. Feel your guiding spirit as it wraps you in blissful sleep.

While the sun, moon, and stars revolve in their constant, quiet, and serene cyclical paths, your home element synchronizes your mind and body with the planetary cycles, illuminating its guiding light within and through you. Trust your home element to keep you on a harmonious life path, balanced within the ever-changing influences of your body's elements and nature. In this state of perfect harmony, we are truly one with nature.