

MODERN THAI BUDDHIST POETRY BY WOMEN POETS: A TRANSFORMATION OF WISDOM¹

Suchitra Chongstitvatana²

Abstract

*The study is an attempt to explore and explain the transformation of Thai didactic poetry, especially Buddhist poetry by women poets. The texts selected are **Dawn in the Night** by Chomchand, **Under the Rain and Thunder** by Khunyng Chamnongsri Rutnin. In Thai Theravadin tradition women poets rarely hold a high position nor have authority in teaching Dharma. In the realm of didactic poetry, monk-poets or male poets are the norm. These two women poets convey the teaching of Dharma through expressing artistically their personal experience of practicing Dharma. This aspect transforms the tradition of Thai didactic poetry by emphasizing the 'practice' of Dharma in daily life and not only "the faith" in Dharma. These women poets are showing their readers a direct path to wisdom. The message conveyed in their works is quite universal though they are writing as practicing Buddhists. Thus, these women poets are no longer addressing the limited audience of Buddhists. They are speaking to a wider audience and propagating*

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² Associate Professor, Department of Thai, faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

Buddhism not as a religion but as a message of wisdom for all mankind.

The Influence of Buddhism in Modern Thai Poetry

In the research work **Buddha Dharma in Modern Thai Poetry** (Chongstitvatana: 2001) the finding reveals a significant influence of Buddha Dharma or the Buddhist philosophy in a large number of works by contemporary Thai poets. These poets are much influenced by the teaching of Buddhadasa³ who emphasized the practice of Buddhism in daily life and advocated the importance of contemplating nature as a means of spiritual development.

The two women poets, Chomchand and Chamnongsri Rutnin, could also be included in this category. They both had the experience of practicing Buddhism at Suan Mok, a famous retreat centre and monastery of Buddhadasa in southern Thailand.

Chomchand and Chamnongsri Rutnin are, however, quite different from other

³ Buddhadasa (1906-1993), a highly venerated monk and scholar of Thailand who wrote numerous works of Buddhism for present day Buddhists emphasizing the virtue of practicing Dharma in daily life ever for lay people.

contemporary poets. They are not poets who normally write didactic poetry nor are they 'professional' poets with a large number of works.

Chomchand is a famous literary critic and a very prolific novelist. **Dawn in the Night** is her first book of poetry. Chamnongsri Rutnin is a well known literary translator and a playwright. She mostly composes prose poetry and tales rather than conventional poetry. **Under the Rain and Thunder** is a record of her retreat in the forest monastery of Suan Mok.

Both of them are modern poets who write to 'convey' their ideas, feelings and experiences. Even though their 'message' is a message of Buddha Dharma, they do not try particularly to follow the convention of Buddhist poetry of the past. Most Thai Buddhist poets would compose poetry to relate Jataka tales in order to express both their faith in the Buddha and their ultimate purpose of accumulating merit through spreading the Dharma for the benefits of all sentient beings.

These two women poets are apparently trying to share their experience of studying and practicing Dharma. They mostly relate their feelings and contemplation regarding the nature of the mind and how to develop mindfulness leading finally to wisdom.

In order to understand how the two poets transform the wisdom they convey in their works, we have to first look at the nature and the significance of their poetry as Buddhist poetry.

Dawn in the Night: A Birth of Wisdom

Six poems have been selected from **Dawn in the Night** by Chomchand. They appear

good representations of Chomchand's Buddhist poetry because their contents are primarily about how to gain wisdom through spiritual practice of contemplation on life and meditation.

The name of Chomchand's book **Dawn in the Night** is obviously an exquisite metaphor for the birth of wisdom.

'Dawn' signifies light or wisdom, whereas 'Night' signifies darkness or in a very Buddhistic meaning, ignorance. 'Dawn in the Night' could therefore mean 'the birth of wisdom out of ignorance'.

As a whole, the book contains poems relating a fine contemplation of life on the poet's part.

The first poem selected here shows how the poet sees 'worldly' life as a cruel burden, impossible to get rid of just because of our own ignorance.

Carrying a Yoke

How heavy is this yoke!
The shoulder can no longer bear it
How long has this been?
Far too long for a happy man!

Why grumble and complain?
Why get angry with this Ugly World?
Why complain of bad karma?
Why suffer so much for so long?

I pay respect to the Buddha
Please relieve all my pains
I've suffered tremendous pains
They are burning my heart to death!

The Buddha Image smiles and stares
How many heaps of sufferings are there?
How many worlds you own?
Why complain, just let go!

Put them down monkey-human
With your own hand, put down the yoke
They are under your control
The yoke is your own choice!

Chomchand
Dawn in the Night⁴

The concept of 'life' or the five aggregates as a 'heavy' thing is apparent in many Buddhist texts. So it is not surprising here that the poet expresses this idea through a metaphor of a yoke or carrying a heavy thing.

The poet also links this concept to the popular belief of 'bad karma' of the past as the cause of suffering in the present life.

However, the real message the poet would like to convey is that according to the genuine teaching of the Buddha our suffering in life is mostly a result of our own attachment and craving. Thus, the mention of the Buddha and the advice of 'letting go.' Also, the poet emphasizes the power of one's wisdom to control one's life.

The poet explicitly says that the sufferings are 'under your control' and the carrying of a yoke is in fact 'your own choice'.

Through this explicit message, the poet is rendering a 'higher' teaching to her audience rather than a conventional teaching of asking a blessing from the Buddha and accepting the bad karma of the past because there is no remedy for it.

By stating the ultimate truth of 'letting go' as a genuine solution for a happier life in this world the poet is pointing to a direct path of wisdom.

This direct path of wisdom will be beneficial to present life because it awakes us to the reality of life and cultivates an understanding that could further develop to a higher level of enlightenment.

The value of self-contemplation, as well as contemplation of nature, is much emphasized in Buddhist tradition. The following poem 'A Revelation' is a good example of self-contemplation by the poet who represents ordinary human beings who struggle with their own ego and conscience to be virtuous amidst the complexity of life.

A Revelation

I used to believe in human potential
In the right to choose their path
In the power of their intellect
In the undefeatable abilities!

They are perfectly able
To achieve everything
When protected by awareness
And wisdom of a perfect being!

Yet life is not at all easy
Forwarding too far can become detouring
Yet cautiously, modestly backwarding
You become a defeated coward!

When persisting with courage
Then appearing crazily aggressive
When trying to be moderate
You appear staying still!

Things come to you from nowhere
Things get involved without reason
Something very wicked and malicious
Influencing sudden mistakes!

It is beyond acceptance of defeat
It is beyond any control of changes
It is beyond any fighting back

⁴ All the poetry in this paper is translated by Suchitra Chongstitvatana

Just looking in amazement!
This is a revelation!
We are just tiny, so absolutely dust!
Worldly sins conquer the world
Worldly sins devour our whole life!

Chomchand
Dawn in the Night

The poem starts with the confident tone of a young poet who expresses a belief in the power of human potential in achieving the ultimate goal of life.

The latter part of the whole poem conveys the feeling of amazement to the point of despair when one grows older and is, more or less, forced to accept the limitation of one's life and circumstances. One has to come to terms with life as it is and to accept that one does not have an 'absolute' control of one's life.

The last two stanzas are quite significant as they secretly express the 'weakness' of the poet with whom the readers can readily identify themselves. They sympathize the poet and share the same despair and amazement. The poet is not superior to her readers, for they share the same fate. Thus when the poet comes to the conclusion as a 'revelation' that we are all absolutely as insignificant as dust, the readers could not but agree.

At this point the poet can convey a 'real message', that 'worldly sins conquer the world and devour our whole life'.

Nevertheless, this message is not meant to be a declaration of truth that one should accept without reacting to it. If the readers realize this, they must or should do something about it. This is the impact intended by the poet, as we can easily see from the title of the poem 'a revelation'.

The revelation of the complexity of life and the 'weakness' of human nature should serve as a good introduction to a serious spiritual life.

The practice of a spiritual life can start with a simple practice of observing nature and observing one's own mind. The next poem of Chomchand 'Voices of the Night' relates such an experience of 'listening' to nature and one's inner voices.

Voices of the Night

...
Softly smoothly the voice echoes
The leaves are falling to sleep
Hush! Listen to the earth
Fading, aching petals are dying
Crying heart-rendering tears!
Young pure petals are blossoming
Listen to their joyous melodies!

What magic of divine Nature
The radiant world is descending!
The voices of the World are magical
Close your eyes, savouring the Divine!

Whose sobbing is that
Echoing in the quiet night?
Coming and going... so far away
Whispering of the Night!

Listen whose heart is crying?
Listen what screaming noise
Listen what joyous laughing
Where are they all from?

Now come, listen again
Listen to myriads of new voices
The night and the World is passing us
My heart is making noises

Mostly I listen to surrounding people
Mostly I try to give answers
Mostly I enjoy hearing others
Yet never listen to my inner voices!

Chomchand
Dawn in the Night

The first two stanzas are description of a charming night when life and death in nature are in harmony. This creates 'magic' and serene 'divinity' of the quiet night. Then come the next two stanzas where the serenity is destroyed by suffering and joy – the 'sobbing', 'crying', 'screaming' and laughing. The serenity of the night is equally destroyed by the inner voices of the poet.

The poet ends her poem with an elegant paradox that reveals the truth of many other people. Mostly we listen and try our best to communicate with others. We hardly try or make any special effort to listen to our own 'inner' voices or the expression of our true self inside!

Here, the poet seems to be mocking everyone including herself for being so ignorant! Listening to one's self is a primary requirement for practicing self observation or meditation.

Therefore, we are able to infer that poet is trying to persuade us to start observing our selves and our mind by starting to listen to our own inner voices.

Of course, the practice to Dharma does not stop at listening to the inner voices. The poet expresses an explicit manner of meditation by observing the whole body in the following poem 'To Fill a Life'.

To Fill a Life

Contemplate each part of life
Now so stained and dirty
Hand prints, foot prints all over
And a big bucket of tears!

Contemplate the hidden heart
Why so empty now
With cuts and untidy lines,
Holes and holes all over!

Contemplate the brain
The membrane sadly decays
Memories and intelligence fading
Flowing away despite perfect knowing
Contemplate the whole mutilated body
The speaking mouth is full of worms
The seeing eyes are in fact blind
The hearing ears are in fact deaf!

The nose is not functioning
The hand is not writing
The legs are not properly walking
How all the body is deteriorating!

Now I'll fill you to perfection
With smiling heart and willing body
Following the flow of wisdom
Ins and outs of the serene breath!

Chomchand
Dawn in the Night

In Buddhist tradition, an analytical contemplation of each part of the body as unpleasant and undesirable is a common technique of meditation. This method is employed as a means to get rid of one's clinging to one's body and also the ignorant attachment to the body as 'self'. Therefore, the poet adapts this attitude in her contemplation of the body. So we can perceive the 'deteriorating' process in every part of the body apart from the fact that it is badly damaged by life itself! The important message is the last stanza, where the poet declares that the practice of meditation on the in - and out - breath is the perfect cure for a damaged life or body.

What the poet is saying in fact reflects both worldly and otherworldly aspects of

meditation. On the worldly level, breathing meditation is an efficient means to gain serenity of mind and thus renders an ideal life of happiness according to Buddhist belief.

On the otherworldly level, meditation is the most efficient way to gain wisdom. Through this spiritual wisdom one can hope to attain Nirvana. To attain Nirvana means that one puts an end to Samsara or the cycle of repeated birth and death. So when one gets out of Samsara one does not have to suffer the 'deteriorating' process of the body or life any longer.

In the poem 'Candle Light', the beauty and serenity of meditation are artistically conveyed.

Candle Light

Softly softly shining
Softly softly moving
Swiftly close your eyes
Swiftly Swiftly disappearing
Now open your eyes
The light is still softly shining
Smilingly close your eyes
The light is swiftly disappearing!
Whose candle is this?
Linking the thread of dreams
Softly Softly moving!
Now appearing, then disappearing
Now the heart, then the candle
Appearing and disappearing
Coming and going
Then a blaze of Light!
Softly shining, softly shining
Oh heart of illusions!
Swiftly disappearing
Swiftly blazing!
Whose candle is this
Linking the heart thread
Softly and softly moving
A blaze of light

So eye-opening!

Chomchand
Dawn in the Night

The poem expresses the joyous experience of meditation through the metaphor of the candle light. It is not clear whether the candle light here refers to a real thing or the light in the mind of the meditation or both. Still the serenity of the experience is alluring enough for the readers to be attracted and not to be put off by it. (Because there exist some myth about the danger of meditation without an experienced teacher!)

The poet's wish to encourage people to practice meditation is further elaborated in the poem 'Golden Boat II'.

Golden Boat II

Come on board a crescent moon boat
Come bravely into this boat for a journey
Come enjoy the radiantly golden boat
Come savour the joy of Night!

This is not serene and calm peace
This is not a release of all pain
This is not a vibrant joy
This is not an easy escape!

Every suffering is still here
Every suffering is still strong and great
Yet it is calmly acknowledged inside
How it happens and goes on

The dawn is approaching the sky
The golden boat seems to be leaving
Yet in the heart of joyful night
The golden boat is shining bright!

Come on board a crescent moon boat
Come down bravely... for a new start
Come to greet the brilliant morn
Come on a boat journey for a golden path!

Chomchand
Dawn in the Night

The 'golden boat' here is a rather conventional metaphor in Buddhist context. The practice of Dharma or the merits accumulated are usually compared to a boat or a vehicle that could take one across the ocean of 'samsara'. So, here the poet is alluding to this well known metaphor to encourage her readers to board on the 'golden boat' so that they can start a journey on the 'golden Path' or the path to enlightenment.

We have seen how Chomchand advocates the practice of Dharma in daily life especially through self contemplation and meditation.

We would now turn to the poems of Chamnongsri Rutnin to see whether she shares the same opinion as Chomchand. Since they are both, more or less, students of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, it will not be surprising if there are a few similarities in the 'message' in their poetry.

The most striking similarity is in the importance of observing nature in daily life as a teacher of Dharma. This aspect is a prominent 'signature' of all the followers of Suan Mok monastery of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

Under the Rain and Thunder: An Attempt to Go Beyond

Under the Rain and Thunder is in fact a diary in poetry form of the poet when she was in a long retreat at Suan Mok Monastery. This explains why the content of the work has a prominent harmony of Dharma reflection throughout.

The title of the book is a parallel to a Buddhist riddle explaining the the state of mind of an enlightened person who will not be disturbed by any perception nor any joy or suffering. In Thai the riddle is '*Fon Tok Mai Tong Fa Rong Mai Thung*', meaning 'untouched by the rain and the thunder'. But Chamnongsri Rutnin is saying that '*Fon Tok Yang Tong Fa Rong Yang Thung*' means 'still moved by the rain and the thunder'.

This title shows that the poet is not claiming that she has achieved anything special in her practice or training of Dharma in her retreat. Yet this poetic record is an evidence of an attempt to go beyond, to reach the state of serenity that is not under the rain and the thunder of life any longer.

The first poem selected here illustrates the importance of contemplation of nature in the practice of Dharma.

A Pond

Morning Light
The Pond looks radiant
Calm
Clear

No it is not so
This is deceiving
If it is really clear and calm
We must see the bottom!
Now we only see the surface
The shadows of images and colours
From everything reflected
So clear so very real
No it isn't
It is not real!

Look carefully,
The colours in those high trees
Their shadows are different with moss
Look carefully,

The colour of the sky
Water illusions, the blue is more intense
The water clouds spreading like silk
If you look really carefully
You'll see the difference
They are dancing on the ripples!

The pond looks radiant
After the heavy rain last night
So does the heart!

The mind is like the clear water
That shows all reflections
Deceiving reflections
Repeatedly luring the heart!

Today the ripples are still alluring
The charm of movements
Never staying still
Just like everything in life
Dragging the heart around
Forgetting to see deep down!

Be tranquil
Look deep down to the bottom
At least you'll realize
The deeper the water
The more still
Much clearer
And much more serene!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

The poem 'A Pond' illustrates how one could meditate on the beauty of nature and reach a deeper understanding of life.

The poet warns her readers against the 'alluring' power of beauty that can obstruct the power of wisdom. However, through the merit of mindfulness, one can reach serenity and attain true wisdom. Thus, the advice of the poet 'Be tranquil, look deep down to the bottom.'

When one contemplates nature, one also looks at other lives in nature. The next poem 'Black Ants' illustrates the lesson of wisdom through observing the lives of black ants.

Black Ants

Yesterday millions of black ants
Migrate like bursting of a black stream
At dawn the stream looks so fierce
Afternoon it is still strong
At dusk on the meditation path
The stream becomes so tiny
Winding like a dry water way
From where, to where who knows
Among the millions,
How many know their destination
Just following others
Where does that end, they don't know
Tired, exhausted, so serious
Never ask questions

Just pushing forward
With all their might
May be just a very few
Know their destination!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

The behaviour of black ants inspires a question in the poet's mind, a question of the real purpose of life. The black ants are obviously compared to us – ordinary human beings who are ignorantly following 'the ways of the World' without questioning.

The poet equally uses her contemplation on nature in observing the beautiful butterflies in nature as a symbol of illusion in a poem 'Butterfly Illusion'.

Butterfly Illusions

Catch your thought when moved

Like catching a butterfly
Hold it tight in your fist
Once you open your fist to see the colour
Nothing is there
One minute, and the butterfly
Dancing again in the air!

Watch the emotion in your heart moving
Love, anger, sorrow, joy
Stare at it hard, it vanishes
Stable, still as long as watched
One minute off guard
The mind moves with the thought
You know that thoughts are illusions
Coming, going, changing ceaselessly!
Various colours, rhythms and melodies
The wings can never be fixed!

Who would tell us
How to teach our children
Not to be lured by butterflies
Hundreds and thousands flying from their
heart
How to catch the butterfly
Dancing amidst their heart
Catch it again and again
To clear ignorance
To purify the mind
Not to be precariously moved
By the wings of hundreds
And thousands of butterflies!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

The metaphor of 'butterfly' as a thought or illusion created in our own minds is a very appropriate one. Butterflies are mostly quite fragile, alluring and short-lived. Our thoughts and emotions also show these qualities.

The message of the poet at the last stanza is a real encouragement for all of us, children and adults to practice mindfulness – to catch the butterflies dancing in our minds –

in order to clear ignorance and to purify the mind.

Still, in order to 'purify' the mind and get rid of 'ignorance', we also have to understand all our emotions, positive and negative emotions.

The poet explores the nature of various emotions such as loneliness and fear.

The next poem, 'Loneliness', is an analysis of the nature of loneliness and how to conquer it in a Buddhist way.

Loneliness

Feeling lonely... similar to feeling bored
Growing from a craving heart
Wishing to run away from oneself
Wishing to have someone near
Wishing to have someone who understands
The heart reaching out
Searching, lamenting!

The remedy is similar to the remedy of boredom
Look deep inside yourself
Concentrate on the heart, watch your mind
Look deep down, very deep down

We perfectly realize
That loneliness is much harder
To conquer than boredom
For it has self-pity as its ally
Self-pity looms large in the hole inside
The hidden hole so secretly kept

Look deep down,
Sharply stare at it
Once clearly seen, it dies!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

The poet clearly states that to meditate on loneliness – to look deep down and observe

it – is the best way to understand it and get rid of it.

When it comes to fear, the poet analyzes it in more detail and finds the same solution in conquering another negative emotion.

Fear

Fear has various forms
People cheat out of fear
Fear of pain, death, dishonour
Fear of lacking, loneliness, losing
Fear ceaselessly governs their heart

Money is a chain binding men
Money is a magic forcing people
To accept being ruled
Keeping people busy gathering money
Such is a vicious circle
Enlarging the cause of fear
How pitiful!

This pity causes forgiveness
Still, even pity is hindered by fear
Fear of losing, lacking
So the heart can't afford forgiveness!

Hidden fear must be seriously controlled
Must be hunted down!
The inner book must be read
Minutely read even between the lines

Fear then creates greed
Fear again aggravates anger
Fear makes the heart drunk
The ego is so insecure
Fear of being destroyed
First we must manage this Fear
Your mindfulness will do!
Mindfulness and concentration!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

The poem begins with an analysis of fear in

a most understanding tone. To understand that fear creates a lot of suffering such as greed and anger would certainly make us merciful to those we consider wicked. Thus, understanding fear will enable us to forgive more easily.

Yet, the poet explores in another poem the complication of forgiveness and the danger of 'false' forgiveness.

Forgiveness

To Forgive
Is such a tough giving!
Especially important things
Complicate things
Silly things are easily forgiven!

So easy we believe all is the same
But we must forgive
To purify our dark heart!

Yes, we know that forgiveness
Gives new life
For what could be more terrible
Than an angrily burning heart
We just realize
Reason and thought can't make us
Truly forgive at all!

We begin to realize
Only when serenity reigns in the heart
That true forgiveness begins

The previous acquiescence
The acceptance of defeat
Is not forgiveness
It isn't a pure giving
For deep deep down
There is still expectation of joy
Watch out
This might over accumulated
And burst out
Into broken pieces!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

The poet stresses the fact that ‘serenity’ is the most important factor in creating ‘real’ forgiveness. This serenity is of course gained through the practice of mindfulness. Therefore, the poet is indirectly persuading us to practice mindfulness through meditation.

The most significant benefit gained through meditation is the realization of the ‘primary cause’ of our own suffering, as the poet explores in the following poem.

Primary Cause

Little by little, it is clear
Joy and suffering
Have their cause to be
To change and to vanish

By observing we know
It is not from outside causes
Not the making of others
Not by chance
Not by the weather
No, not the outside cause
The true cause is inside!

The new and old got mixed
Like the fallen leaves over there
Got rotten, became soil
A cause for joy, suffering, love and hatred

Even though we realize this
It’s only in the brain
We still blame the outside cause

We must pursue wisdom
From the heart’s realization
Of the Truth!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

Nevertheless, in the pursuit of wisdom one must be careful not to go to extremes, as the poet explains in the poem ‘Extremes’. The joy of attaining serenity in the mind can also be as dangerous as adhering to suffering. One cannot and should not get attached to either positive or negative emotions.

Extremes

Feeling oneself
Broken, Divided into three persons
So separate from one another
The first one is the ego’s slave
Delighting in showing off
The second one is serene hiding inside

So free, so joyous unattached
Going a separate way!
The third one is observing outside
Peacefully watching “the play”!

Don’t go to extremes
Be cautious of being positive
Be cautious of being negative
Maintain the Middle Path!

Chamnongsri Rutnin
Under the Rain and Thunder

‘The Middle Path’ has a very prestigious meaning in the Buddhist context. It is the path recommended by the Buddha as the most beneficial path to attain enlightenment. The awareness of the danger of going to extremes is therefore very significant.

**A Transformation of Wisdom:
Dharma Practice for Everyone**

From the analysis of the poems by Chomchand and Chamnongsri Rutnin we can confidently conclude that they are

writing a 'modern' version of didactic poetry, emphasizing the practice of mindfulness through meditation.

It is obvious that the Dharma they are conveying is far from 'new' or 'modern'. Yet their approach to the 'teaching' itself is interesting and quite different from the approach of poets of the past.

In the past, poets normally chose stories from the Jatakas and narrated them as didactic tales in poetry form. Mostly the stories would be quite entertaining yet be prominently didactic.

'Poetic justice' was conventionally employed and the 'moral' of each story was clearly stated. The reader or the audience (when the poetry was recited) would normally learn some moral 'lesson'. Their faith in Dharma and in the virtuous merits of the Bodhisattva would be graciously re-invigorated.

The poetry of Chomchand and Chamnongsri Rutnin create a different impact on the mind of the reader. Firstly, their poetry does not intend to 'entertain' nor to 'preach' to their readers. Their poetry is mostly quite short and not too prominently stylized their poetic expression. They employ simple diction and tend to communicate their thoughts and feelings very clearly. The simplicity and clarity enhance the importance of their 'message', emphasizing the ultimate purpose of practicing Dharma as a means to eliminate suffering in daily life.

The two poets point out 'primary' problems, such as loneliness, fear, attachment, anger, hatred and craving. They analyse the nature and the cause of these problems and inform the readers that the problems could be solved by the wisdom cultivated through the serenity of the mind.

The 'didactic' tone in their works is mellowed by the fact that the poets relate and share their feelings in a friendly manner. So, readers can identify with the poets.

This 'rapport' allows readers to accept the message from the poets more readily. Moreover, since the poets never try to employ a specific Buddhistic diction of Buddhism in their text, they can create a 'neutral' sense of their message.

Even though readers may not be Buddhists, they can easily understand the text very well. This quality renders a universal aspect to the message of Dharma in these works.

The strong advocacy of the value of practicing mindfulness reflects a 'modern' attitude towards religion.

For the modern mind, religion has an important 'functional' role in life. People believe more in the value of religion for this present life (for they are not too certain about their future life or next life.)

Therefore, the emphasis of the value of Dharma in helping to lessen all the suffering everyone faces here and now is much valued. The poets are not attempting to persuade anyone to change their faith. They are just giving advice on how to gain wisdom to get rid of suffering in this present life.

Seen in their light, the poetry of Chomchand and Chamnongsri Rutnin is interesting evidence of the transformation of Thai didactic poetry. They are showing their readers a direct path to wisdom through a serious practice of mindfulness. The fact that the poets themselves are practicing Buddhism helps to recommend their advice to the readers in a very efficient way.

Though the poets are only laywomen, not nuns or Bhikkhunī, they are graciously giving Dharma for the benefit of all beings.

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