Pillān’s varied treatment of specific images in Nammālvār’s poems. Vasudha Narayanan’s numerous translations from the Tiruvāyoli are graceful and direct, and they convey the passion of the originals. Narayanan is also highly successful in translating Pillān’s difficult commentarial style into lucid English prose.

This rich, thought-provoking book raises more important issues regarding the history of Śrīvaiṣṇavism than I have been able to indicate in this brief review. Specific questions will continue to be debated. For instance, are Nammālvār’s poems dominated by the mood of separation, as claimed by Hardy, and by R.D. Kaylor and K.K.A. Venkatachari (God Far, God Near, Bombay, 1981), or is separation in the Tiruvāyoli firmly offset by the frequent images of “mingling” and the initial and final verses which celebrate Nammālvār’s “triumphant union” with the Lord, as Carman and Narayanan suggest (p. 159)? Whatever one’s response to specific ideas advanced in The Tamil Veda, one comes away from the book with a satisfying sense of having participated in the ongoing conversation between practising Śrīvaiṣṇavas and their texts and teachers. Through their nuanced study of the relationship between Nammālvār, Pillān, and Rāmānuja, Carman and Narayanan have successfully shown that, through centuries of change in doctrine and practice, Śrīvaiṣṇavas have cherished, and will continue to cherish, the hymns of the Alvārs, not merely because of formal constraints, but because of the many deeply intuited resonances between their own vision of God and that of the poet-saints of their tradition.

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This excellent volume conveniently combines two rich, scholarly essays by the West’s leading researcher of the thought of Mao, offering in one important work a uniquely informed panorama of Mao’s ideological changes from 1917 to his death. Schram’s analysis is not only based on his usual close study of texts and his brilliant use of findings by Japanese researchers, but it adds important data culled from a decade of post-Mao Chinese openness which permitted Schram to meet and learn from Chinese analysts who had fantastic access to secret material. Schram begins this comprehensive survey with Mao and his generation’s military understanding of patriotism, of how only a people infused with martial spirit could keep a weak and backward nation from enslavement by big, strong imperialist nations. To me, this preoccupation is a clue to many of Mao’s fixations such as his early decision to give top priority to nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, to rely politically on the military which opened the way to attempted military coups, and to turn the entire country into an armed camp in the extraordinarily wasteful third front policy of 1964 to 1983.

Since the CCP’s Central Committee criticized Mao’s strategy of armed struggle and yet that strategy led on to nationwide victory and an earth-shaking strategy for wars of national liberation, it is not surprising that Mao was not budged by critics of his military obsession. He explicitly took the revolutionary army as the model of the communism he sought.

But in this book Professor Schram does not elucidate many large unifying themes. Rather he tends to explicate change from one moment or phase to the next. No one
else does it as well. Stuart Schram is the authority on Mao, covering almost every issue, treating each with uniquely informed concern.

But the chronological approach leads Schram to focus on ruptures where notions of thematic continuity might also further understanding. Whereas Schram rightly sees 1957-8 as a decisive break, with Mao suddenly acting on utopian notions of building communism in the Great Leap, it is also true that Mao was long committed to restoring a unique greatness to China, in this case making China the greatest socialist nation in the world, something he concentrated on ever more after Stalin’s death in 1953. Mao found China’s revolutionary experience richer than the Bolshevik revolution, China’s poor superior to English and American workers.

One of the themes that Professor Schram does explore better than any other scholar is Mao’s debate and differences with Stalin and other Soviet leaders. But when Schram shrewdly notes that Mao saw in the Stalin system ‘‘a pattern of stratification reminiscent of the tsarist era’’ (p. 163), I wanted him to explain why Mao did not see the same feudal deformation in China, instead of misleadingly characterizing China’s problem as capitalism.

Professor Schram is brilliant and persuasive in showing that Mao’s goal was never to make the socialist state a vehicle for the interests of China’s overwhelming majority, the peasantry. Rather, Mao’s top goals included consolidating power in the hands of his state apparatus (mainly army, police and court system) and having the correct Party leadership reeducate the peasantry. One of the few peasant virtues that Mao praised, as he directed budget priorities to the military and heavy industry, was peasant ability to live simply and not put consumer demands on Mao’s government. Mao called for the merciless extermination of the peasant household and its economy.

Schram shows that Mao, far from being a democrat or decentralist, only would devolve insignificant powers. Mao, as a Stalinist-Leninist, insisted on centralizing and commanding the major levers of state power. Although Mao often invoked the term democracy, he meant, as Wang Ruoshui has pointed out, little more than what feudal officials meant, knowing what the lower orders were thinking so rulers could mobilize and use them for the rulers’ purposes.

One of Schram’s many important contributions to intellectual history is to correct the misreading of Mao as someone who was obsessed with a Party in power growing privileged and alienated from the people. Instead, Schram establishes, Mao fixated on promoting the poor and pure because he was obsessed that the revolution had not been consolidated, that the defeated classes could stage a counter-revolutionary comeback. For Leninists such as Mao, this supposedly had happened in the French Revolution’s thermidor, the defeat of the Paris Commune and, in the twentieth century, in the Spanish and Greek Civil Wars, and then in Tito’s Yugoslavia. What Mao therefore feared was that his Party opponents would succumb to the wiles of defeated exploited classes to reestablish an exploitative system. He saw the Party as easily corruptible. As a Leninist centralist who mocked liberal democracies, Mao would not try to check corruption and privilege with competitive elections, a federal system, a professional civil service, a free press and independent judiciary.

Mao’s preoccupations did great injury to the Chinese people. While he called for technical revolution, he did not understand the dynamics of modern technical innovation. He called for seeking truth from facts but created a police system of opportunism, zealouslyness and denunciation which left little space for truth-telling, innovation, progress or creativity. Instead, Mao kept China mired in stagnation while the rest of Pacific Asia raced ahead. That failure may some day be a source of a democratic