ABSTRACT

Cen Shen (A.D. 715 - 770) was a poet of the Tang dynasty, a leading figure in the "Frontier School" of Tang poetry. One of his most important literary achievements was a set of poems called "Songs on frontier".

Cen Shen lived in a period of many frontier battles; he was also influenced by older scholars who had been to the frontier and had written interesting poems about the place. All these aroused his curiosity which eventually caused him to pay two visits to the frontier and all in all, he had stayed there for a period of five to six years. With his profound understanding of life at the frontier, he wrote numerous outstanding frontier poems, of which, the twenty-five songs were considered to be the best.

Cen Shen's songs on frontier can be divided into several groups: early songs written before his visit to the frontier; songs written during his first and second visits; and songs written after returning from the frontier. The themes and styles of these songs varied. But the songs he wrote during his second visit superceded others in terms of literary quality.

With regard to the content, Cen Shen had made a vivid and comprehensive description of all aspects of life at the frontier. There are depictions of battles and defence, descriptions of landscape and customs, expressions of sentiments concerning farewells and nostalgia as well as satires of officers stationed there.
With regard to the artistic display, Cen Shen's songs on frontier had shown several distinct characteristics. Besides being magnificent in style, unique in rhythm, they were also refined and simple in diction, clear and distinct in structure. Not only were the images astoundingly beautiful, the feelings were also touchingly real. As a whole, they were a composition of realism and romanticism.

Since Cen Shen's songs on frontier excelled both in content and art, he was almost unparalleled in the history of poetry writing especially in frontier poetry. And so he has always been held in high regard by literary critics and historians of all generations.