The 1919 May 4th Movement brought China a dynamic atmosphere in which new ideas flourished. It was against this particular historical background that a group of writers, with Lu Xun as the leader, began to experiment on rural and regional themes. These writers were later to be known as home village writers who showed profound interest in everyday country life and the "noble savage". Shen Cong-wen was undoubtedly part of this literary tradition, but because the infused in his writing an original approach to the depiction of country life and unique aesthetic values, he held a preeminent position among the home village fiction writers.

Shen Cong-wen was born in an isolated region of western Hunan Province. As a child, he would rather play in values and hills than read in the classroom. While still in his teens, he spent five years as an enlisted man, which took him to almost inaccessible places and enabled him to see with his own eyes objectional practices in poverty-stricken areas and blood-thirsty warlords killing people at their own free will. In the meantime, he also participated in the rural festivities and lived among the minority Miao nationality. These experiences and others provided him with rich source materials for his home village fictions.

Shen Cong-wen's published literary works have reached 70 volumes, which embrace about 500 of his novels. Of all his works, his home village fictions (Bian Cheng, Changhe, Zhangful Baizi and Xiao Xiao, just to mention a few) are of supreme quality and are widely acclaimed both in China and overseas. They recount the life in the army, the life in the woods and the life of a multitude of peasants, especially those poor yet innocent prototypical country people who form the image for the writer of the ideal, the unspoilt and the primitive.

So far, there has been a notable absence of any type of synthesis or analysis of Shen's home village fictions as an individual subject for criticism. This paper has grown out of a sincere desire to provide such a synthesis and analysis. It is also the intention of this paper to examine Shen's artistic features and philosophical thinking behind his regional novels, to shed some light on the vicissitude of social and historical situations in the inner regions of China in the 1920s and 1930s, and, finally, to give a fair and, hopefully, accurate assessment on Shen Cong-wen's achievements in the genre.