Bi Feiyu (1964–) is one of China’s most prominent present-day writers. Born in Xinghua, Jiangsu Province, he grew up in the countryside and lived a carefree life in his childhood. His mother is a respected teacher, beautiful, outgoing, and having multiple talents. She played a positive role in his upbringing and future development. Influenced by his mother, Bi Feiyu is enthusiastic about sports and keeps this interest till now. His favorite writer is Lu Xun. Bi Feiyu once said, “Undoubtedly, among all Chinese modern writers, it is Lu Xun who influences me most.” Lu Xun and his writings are so powerful that Bi was fascinated by them and read a lot in his childhood and teenage years. He began writing at an early age, around fourteen or fifteen. In 1987, he graduated from Yangzhou Normal College with a major in Chinese and got a teaching position in Nanjing in the same year. He worked as a journalist for Nanjing Daily in 1992 and for Rainflower (Yuhua) Magazine in 1998. Now he is the resident professor of a studio named after him at Nanjing University.

Bi Feiyu’s fictional works are known for his subtle portrayal of the “female psyche” as he is widely accepted as the best contemporary male narrator of women’s stories. This fame mainly comes from his two novels, The Moon Opera (Qingyi) and Three Sisters (Yumi, Yuxiu, Yuyang). The former was published in 2000 and translated into English in 2007. The latter was published in 2001 and the English version came out in 2010. The two novels portray a gallery of women’s lives and struggles in present-day Chinese society. In the two novels, women both in the city and the countryside cherish their ambitions and work hard to realize their dreams despite their disadvantaged positions. Because of this, some scholars have labeled his novels as feminist works, but Bi Feiyu vigorously denies his feminist affiliation, saying that he is just a writer who writes in his own way, whether his themes are concerned with men or women. What is true, however, is his strong interest in the daily lives of marginalized people, including the poor, weak, disabled, and above all, women in male-dominated society. In this sense, he may be viewed as a chronicler of the disadvantaged.

Bi Feiyu is a verbal artist who paints human portraits with words. Since he started his writing career in the 1980s, he has published four novels, eighteen novellas and forty-one short stories.
Compared with some prominent contemporary writers, he may not be considered very productive, but his works are unique in perspective, subject matter and writing techniques, especially in depicting the lives of disadvantaged groups and their inner world. He admits that most of his novels are realistic, but with a different notion of realism. In his opinion, realism in literature must be concerned with showing human care and sympathy. He puts into practice what he believes by creating literary works that care for and arouse sympathy for the disadvantaged people.

In 1991, he published his first short story “The Solitary Island” (Gudao) which was favorably reviewed. In 1996, he published another short story “The Lactating Woman” (Buruqi de nvrn) which won the First Lu Xun Literature Prize in 1997. It is a story about a little boy who does not know the taste of breast milk and has no idea of maternal love, because soon after he is born, his parents leave him behind with his old grandparents so as to work in a faraway place and only spend a few days with him each year. The novella of The Moon Opera (Qingyi, 2000) won a prize from the Chinese Novel Association in 2001 and was placed on the longlist for the 2008 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. It is a woman’s story, a moving portrait of an ill-fated Peking opera singer’s struggle to pursue her beloved career in extremely unfavorable circumstances. The novella Yumi (2001) won the Chinese Novel Association Prize in 2002 and later garnered the Third Lu Xun Literature Prize, the top accolade for writers in China. In 2007, the same novel won the People’s Literature Prize and in 2011 won the Fourth Man Asian Literary Prize. His novel The Plain (Pingyuan, 2005) won the French World Newspaper Literary Prize in 2009. It is a story about a group of young men and women who suffer both physical and psychological traumas in the tumultuous years of the 1970s. The novel Massage (Tuina, 2008) won the People’s Literature Prize in 2008 and the Eighth Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2011, the highest literary award in China. It is a group portrait of blind massagers’ life and work. On August 21, 2017, the French government conferred on Bi Feiyu the French Knights of Literature and Art.

Bi Feiyu’s works have been translated into over 20 languages. Half of them are in French translations. In 2004, he was named the Most Popular Chinese Writer among French Readers at Paris Book Fair. So far, six short stories, one prose and three novels have been translated into English. Among them, the notable ones include The Moon Opera (Qingyi), Three Sisters (Yumi, Yuxiu, Yuyang) and Massage (Tuina), all translated by the well-known Chinese-English translator Howard Goldblatt and his wife. While many Chinese writers seek competent translators to translate their works, the English translation of Bi Feiyu’s literary works was initiated by American publishers (Ibid.). At the invitation of a publishing company, Howard Goldblatt accepted the commission of translation. As a verbal artist, Bi Feiyu’s use of language is elegant, subtle, and profound. There is something universal in his novels, which arouses sympathy and empathy from readers regardless of their cultural backgrounds. The insights into life uncovered by his novels make him a thinker as well as a writer. Showing no interest in fame, wealth or social status, he has abandoned opportunities in those areas and is wholly preoccupied with one thing, his writing.

Two of his literary works, Three Sisters and Massage, stand out to represent the achievement of his literary creations. The former portrays the lives of three women in the historical framework of recent changes in China, while the latter delves into the lives of blind massagers in a massage center. Whereas the former reflects on how historical events affect the lives of women in a transitional period within a historical framework, the latter goes beyond the historical framework to contemplate on the fate of a minority group of people to be found in all cultures. As a special group of people, the blind usually do not get adequate attention in society. The popularity of the novel has made a significant contribution to the change of that situation. Since the novel was published, it has been adapted into film and modern drama. More and more people begin to care for the blind, the disabled, and the disadvantaged.
Three Sisters: individual portraits for three women

*Three Sisters* paints the portraits of three women in a society undergoing a transition from patriarchy to modernity. The story happens between 1971 and 1982, during and shortly after the Cultural Revolution, a special and important historical period in China. As a responsible contemporary writer, Bi Feiyu presents the historical reality in a different way by narrating the interlocking stories of three sisters: the eldest sister Yumi, the third sister Yuxiu and the seventh and youngest sister Yuyang. The three sisters have different personalities and fates, but they are also closely related, just like three common and different corns (the literal meaning of the Chinese word for “Yumi”) on the same stem, growing up in different historical periods with different personalities and encountering different fates. Yumi and Yuxiu’s stories take place in 1971, a crucial year during the Cultural Revolution. Yuyang’s story takes place in a college in 1982, six years after the ending of the Cultural Revolution. The new time and space constitute the background for Yuyang’s life and fate.

Yumi: portrait of a mature woman

Yumi’s story was published as a novella in April 2001. It won immediate acclaim from readers, critics, and writers. It became so popular that when people met, some of them might greet each other with this remark: “Have you read *Yumi* lately?” Shortly after its publication, it won The Third Lu Xun Literature Prize for novellas. Yumi or corn is a common crop in China, but Bi Feiyu gives a special meaning to it. Under his pen, “yumi” is not just a name for corn, but refers to a fictional woman living in the period of the Cultural Revolution. She is a representative of her age.

Yumi grows up in a big and powerful family in Wang Family Village in the north part of Jiangsu Province. Her father Wang Lianfang is a Party secretary, the most powerful person in the village. He abuses his power by seducing women in the village and coerces his wife into silence about his affairs. When the wife gives birth to the eighth child, the only son, she becomes totally lazy and slack. Yumi takes her mother’s place to care for the baby and do all the housework. At home, Yumi controls the life of her siblings with a firm hand, and has her way with all of them except Yuxiu, who always gets more love and attention from their father. But it is Yumi who wins the village’s praise and respect for her capabilities and diligence. She enjoys a sense of superiority when getting together with other girls. Family background, social environment, and her inborn temperament have turned her into a strong-minded, independent and determined young woman who will try every means to realize her dream.

In her teenage years, Yumi’s personality is already distinct. At the age of fourteen, she gets to know her father’s sex scandals. But she never talks about it openly. Instead, she purposefully goes to those women’s home and plays with their children in an act of silent protest. When her mother finally gives birth to a son, the only son, she becomes totally lazy and slack. Yumi takes her mother’s place to care for the baby and do all the housework. At home, Yumi controls the life of her siblings with a firm hand, and has her way with all of them except Yuxiu, who always gets more love and attention from their father. But it is Yumi who wins the village’s praise and respect for her capabilities and diligence. She enjoys a sense of superiority when getting together with other girls. Family background, social environment, and her inborn temperament have turned her into a strong-minded, independent and determined young woman who will try every means to realize her dream.

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In the following days, a series of misfortunes occur to the family. But Yumi handles all of them with tact and wisdom. She matures quickly and plays the role of a parent for her siblings. Soon after her father’s sex scandal, her two younger sisters, Yuxiu and Yuye are criminally assaulted by several men who seek revenge on their father. She takes them back home from the
spot and helps them recover from the trauma. Days later, her boyfriend Peng Guoliang breaks up with her, but she does not allow herself to cry for long. Instead, she calmly assesses the family situation and quickly decides to sacrifice her happiness to protect her family by marrying a man with power, who is older than her father. Yumi does not indulge in feeling sorry for herself, for she knows that is the only way to save her family. She moves with the man to town and soon gets a post in a state-owned unit. Through marriage and its accompanying power, she successfully protects her family and even regains prestige and respect for her family in Wang Family Village.

Some scholars argue that Yumi is a victim to power. Her marriage ruins her happiness and her life is a tragedy. But the cruel reality is that her family’s problems can be resolved only by power. With the protection by a man of power, her family can avoid being bullied and continue their normal life. Besides, the fact that she has a notorious father and her two sisters are raped makes it almost impossible for her to marry a decent young man, not to mention a young man with power. Therefore, Yumi’s decision to marry a man with power is not simply a self-sacrifice; it is a rational move endowed with a sense of nobility. She is a big sister and the backbone of the family. Her personality and responsibility determine that she has to sacrifice her love and happiness to regain a respectable life for her family.

Yumi’s story seems to impart a message for women: Marriage is a sort of gambling and women can never depend on men to gain happiness. They must rely on themselves to live a happy life. Yumi plans her marriage and lives in the way she desires. As a big sister, she helps Yuxiu get a job in town, brings good material stuff to her family, holds a celebration for Yuyuang’s success in college entrance examination and gives her enough money to cover her college expenses. She is thus a responsible and successful sister. She feels proud and happy for what she has done. Yumi’s story is realistically presented and has a sense of universality. The same story happens in all societies in various forms. What makes Bi Feiyu’s novella different is that by narrating Yumi’s struggle and success in life, it reveals a different dimension of women’s strength and independence, which has often been interpreted correctly or wrongly as containing insights into women’s emancipation and even feminism.

Yuxiu: portrait of a half-mature woman

Yuxiu’s story paints the portrait of a beautiful but tragically sad woman. As her father’s favorite child and the most beautiful daughter in the family, she learns to make use of her beauty and acts coquettishly to gain favor and benefits. However, fate plays a joke on her. Soon after her father loses job and power, she is criminally assaulted by several men at the age of seventeen. After the rape, Yuxiu loses her pride and courage to face the villagers. She comes to Yumi’s new home for help. To stay in Yumi’s home for long, she succeeds in leaving a good impression on Yumi’s husband and stepdaughter. But due to her strong personality, she continues the rivalry with Yumi and makes use of her beauty for personal gains. Because of her beauty, an accountant wants her to become her son’s girlfriend, but her past history ruins the opportunity. Then, Guo Zuo, Yumi’s adult stepson, a handsome and educated young man comes back home. Yuxiu falls in love with him, though she knows it is foolish and dangerous. But as a spoiled child with strong personality, she has sex with Guo Zuo and gets pregnant, only to find that the man whom she loves leaves her and never returns. We may contribute Yuxiu’s poor fate to the fact that she does not come across good and reliable men. But the novella seems to imply that she should be responsible for her miserable fate. The author imparts this idea through a contrast with her eldest sister. Yumi never encounters good men in her life. Her first boyfriend Peng Guoliang deserts her when she needs him most. The second old man, Guo Jiaxing does not treat her kindly at first, but Yumi finds ways to please him in bed and then gives birth to a child. Later on, she successfully gains
status in the new family. When Yuxiu finds her pregnant, she attempts to commit suicide twice, but gives up in the end, while Yumi immediately sends Yuxiu's newborn baby away without any hesitation. Through the contrast, we may conclude that unlike Yumi, Yuxiu is irresolute, irresponsible, and immature. She does not have a clear aim in her life. Her irresponsibility lands her into a sad fate.

**Yuyang: portrait of an immature woman**

Yuyang’s story presents the portrait of a naïve woman. She is the youngest and plain daughter in the family. But she becomes the first and the only child in the village to go to college. Naïve and innocent, she is docile and obedient. But she also desires to be noticed and appreciated. At school, she is instructed by the head teacher to take part in the long-distance race at which she is not at all good, but she perseveres to the finishing line in the hope of winning recognition. When Wei Xiangdong, a scoundrel notorious for his hard fist during the Cultural Revolution and now working in the security section of the college, selects her to be a member of the School Guard because of her honesty, she proudly and excitedly accepts the task. This post gives her the privilege to monitor any one in her class, including her head teacher and another School Guard member Pang Fenghua. She does her job dutifully and reports everything to Wei Xiangdong who is in charge of the School Guard. She reports the defects of her roommate Zhao Shanshan and student poet Chu Tian, directly leading to Chu's madness. She also reports the love affair between the head teacher and Pang Fenghua, ruining the head teacher’s career. In writing these secret reports, Yuyang’s only motive is to do her job well and gain trust and recognition from the school authority. She is so innocent that she does not even realize that she is hurting others. She is so naïve that she even tolerates Wei Xiangdong’s molestation and swallows her humiliating experience in the scoundrel’s hands.

The reader may wonder why she believes in others so easily and even obeys them. Bi Feiyu suggests that both family and social background contribute to Yuyang’s character and her bitter fate. She is brought up by her grandparents and does not receive any instruction about growing up from her parents and siblings. She is quiet, living in her own world. But at heart, she needs friendship, appreciation, and consolation from others. Unfortunately, her emotional needs make her vulnerable to manipulation and deception by immoral and indecent people, and her inexperience only leads to the opposite of what she desires. The story ends with her being totally alienated from her classmates. Just as her name suggests, Yuyang is only a baby corn, green and immature. Her bitter experience is the cost she has to pay for achieving maturity.

**Three sisters: three ways of growing up**

In my view, the stories of the three sisters represent three different ways of growing up. The eldest sister Yumi is mature like a ripened corn, ready for any storm or inclement weather. She can control her life very well and indeed, her life ends pretty well. The third sister Yuxiu is in a half-mature state. Her beauty both helps her and ruins her. Her half-mature mental state makes her vulnerable to assaults by ruffians and deception by a perfidious man. The youngest sister Yuyang is immature and in need of others’ protection. Like a flower growing in a greenhouse, she has no experience or ability to weather the social storm and has to adjust to life’s challenges the hard way.

The three sisters also represent three different types of women. Yumi represents the type who is wise, self-reliant, decisive, and independent. She is able to meet the challenges of life and pursue her ideal in life as she dreams. Yuxiu is clever and beautiful, but is indecisive without
definite aims. She likes to please others and depend on others for making a good living. If she does not meet a very kind man, her life will be in shambles. Yuyang is naïve but honest. She does not have a clear idea about the world and herself. People can deceive and make use of her easily. She thinks she will fare well in life so long as she remains good and kind, but she is constantly frustrated by realities. She is disappointed with the world as well as herself.

**Massage: a group portrait of the blind**

The novel *Massage* is Bi Feiyu’s best writing up to date. It vividly presents a series of individual portraits of a group of blind persons in a massage center. This story comes from the author’s close relationship with the blind. For a period of time, in order to relieve the neck pain, he went to the massage center every day and made friends with blind massagers. They all know Bi Feiyu as he once taught in Nanjing Normal University of Special Education. Many of his students are the blind massagers’ teachers. So, they call him teachers’ teacher. Owing to this relationship, it is easy for them to like him and regard him as their best friend. Besides, Bi Feiyu is a friendly, kind-hearted, helpful and considerate person. Whenever they encounter some problems or troubles, they would like to air their grievance with him. Bi Feiyu finds out that the blind is not as weak and miserable as common people think. They have their own way of enjoyment. Some of them are also optimistic and outgoing. Bi Feiyu once said he could even play joke with them about their blindness. At the same time, he knows and understands their pain and hard life, as he himself is a person sensitive to pains. At the request of the blind friends who want to read stories about their own life, he made up his mind to write on their behalf. As a very considerate and sensitive writer, Bi Feiyu did not put the real stories he heard from the blind massagers into his story but respected their desire for privacy. Nevertheless, he made good use of his friendship with them and his knowledge of their lives in his imaginative creation. A combination of his experience, imagination and talents resulted in the creation of the novel, *Massage*. According to one critic, only twenty percent is taken from real life, while eighty percent of the story is imagined.

*Massage* is narrated from a point of view which shifts between the first-person and the third-person. Thus, the narrator is always present in the story. As a good and true friend of a group of blind massagers, Bi Feiyu enters their heart and mind, thinking and imagining in their positions. He observes their life with loving care and portrays each character with deep sympathy and understanding. Of all the massagers, some are born to be blind, some become blind because of the accidents either in childhood or adulthood, and others are becoming blind gradually because of diseases. Therefore, their pains and understanding of life are different. There are two obvious themes in the story: respect and love.

**Respect comes first**

A major theme of *Massage* addresses the topic of respect for people, including the disabled. If you regard the disabled as another kind of people, different from ordinary people, it is the biggest insult and harm to them. Among all the blind massagers in the novel, the topic of respect is repeated again and again. A distinct case is Wang Daifu, who was born to be blind, a man of total blindness. His brother does not want him to be present at the latter’s wedding for his brother thinks it is a disgrace for others to know that he has a blind brother. But this does not prevent him from asking his blind brother for a red packet with congratulatory money. As a dignified man, Wang Daifu is hurt at heart. He initially wants to send five thousand yuan as cash gift, but to show his dignity and protest, he mails two hundred thousand yuan instead, which makes up the bulk of his savings squeezed out of his frugal daily life. For him, money is much less important than dignity.
Du Hong is another blind massager the narrator sympathetically portrayed. Beautiful and talented, she is an accomplished pianist, but fate does not treat her kindly, for she is also born blind. At one public performance, her teacher insists that she play a difficult and unfamiliar music. She is so nervous that the whole performance is a failure. But the audience gives her a loud applause. The hostess enthuses over her performance, praising it as perfect. But when the hostess describes her as a poor blind person whose piano playing is to repay society, she feels badly hurt. What is the relationship between her performance and society? She never owes anything to the society. She hates others for describing her as “poor and blind”. She doesn’t owe anyone. She does not need normal people’s sympathy, nor does she want her blindness to be a topic for normal people in public. In order to protect her dignity, she quits her favorite piano. Her story shows that what sustains people in their hard life is not money or even sympathy; it is dignity and respect that help those disabled people endure hardships and sufferings. Then she becomes a massager, but an accident makes her right thumb injured. Other massagers voluntarily donate money to help her because they think she is so unfortunate that she can no longer do massage work. This time she is not hurt because she knows her colleagues’ help is sincere. She feels warm and moved but she refuses the donation. As a person with dignity, she is unwilling to be regarded as a poor girl and live on other’s sympathy. She does not know where she should go, but she is proud and wants to keep her dignity. Her story attests to a truism: “Dignity is something that makes people feel noble and proud.”

Xiao Ma is a third example who protects his dignity in his own way. Different from those born blind persons, he became blind in a car accident in his childhood. His mother died in the accident but he survived with the loss of eyesight, which may explain why he looks like a normal man. Besides, he is very handsome and has bright and clear eyes, but with no eyesight. It is free of charge for the blind to take the public transportation in China. But one day a bus driver wrongly thinks that Xiao Ma pretends to be blind so as to save the fare. Ever since this incident, he never takes bus again. No one is willing to tell others in public that he is blind. Dignity is far more important than inconvenience. The disabled cherish their dignity and appreciate others’ respect. But how do normal people, even family members treat them?

When Xu Tailai leaves home to look for a job, his parents tell him that they do not wish to see him return home for his wedding. The reason is simple. They do not want to lose face. Since he is blind, his wife is probably another blind person. Two blind peoples’ wedding ceremony is not an event to be celebrated because it may bring shame to the family in the village. When Wang Daifu and his blind wife Xiao Kong stay in his parents’ home for their so-called honey-moon days, his sister-in-law intentionally uses the word “blind” in her daily language. The cook of the massage center, Jin Dajie takes advantage of the massagers’ blindness by giving more meat to people she likes and much less meat to those to whom she is not close. The receptionists at the massage center are normal persons with eyesight. They also take advantage of the massagers’ blindness to make money. If some massagers give them red packets with money, they will make a point of directing good customers to them. Otherwise, it will be the opposite situation. With a sharp observation, the narrator exposes the callousness of those people with normal sight who go so low as to profit themselves by taking advantages of the blind and hurting their dignity and respect.

Love is a necessity for the blind

Another important theme in Massage is the love between blind massagers. Life without love is miserable. Love is a major emotional sustenance for the disabled. Wang Daifu and Xiao Kong
is a couple that finds in love their emotional and spiritual support. Even though Xiao Kong's parents are against her relationship with Wang Daifu, she makes her own decision to come back together with her lover to Nanjing, Wang Daifu's hometown. They love each other and stay with each other, through thick and thin. When they come back to work, they have to live in different dormitories and can't sleep in the same bed. Desires, especially sexual desires, torture the young couple. As a consequence, they begin to quarrel, and then start a cold war without speaking to each other, but when conflicts are solved, they become even closer, just like common couples. Sex is an important part in the blind person's life, as important as food. With deep insight into the intimate life of the blind, the author manages to convince the reader that the blind is just like normal people.

The second story focuses on Xiao Ma's crush on Xiao Kong. His love arises from good smelling of shampoo from Xiao Kong's hair. He is passionate about her but she is already Wang Daifu's girlfriend. He has to find a way out to vent his emotion. Another massager, Zhang Yiguang leads him to a prostitute named Xiao Man. At the beginning, Xia Ma regards her as Xiao Kong and makes love with her in a crazy way. Every time he goes there, he just selects Xiao Man. Their relationship is also complex and moving. Xiao Ma is blind in his childhood and is physically defected. Xiao Man becomes a prostitute after she is hurt by her former boyfriend and is psychologically defected. After intimate physical contacts, they gradually fall in love with each other. Their love is natural and pure, without ulterior motives.

The third story is about the relationship between Du Hong and Xiao Ma. Du Hong falls in love with Xiao Ma and subtly expresses her emotion towards him. But at that time Xiao Kong occupies his heart and Xiao Man satisfies his body. There is no room for another woman, even though he knows Du Hong is very beautiful.

The fourth love story is between Du Hong and Sha Fuming, one of the owners of Sha Zongqi Massage Center. Through many customers' mouth, Sha Fuming gets to know that Du Hong is amazingly beautiful, as beautiful as a fairy. What is beauty? He asks himself this question again and again. Gradually he is attracted and tortured by the question. He wants to touch the beauty and feel the beauty. He has already fallen in love with her. Sha Fuming is an ambitious man. Ever since childhood, his dream is to find a wife with eyesight. But with the appearance of Du Hong, he gives up his childhood dream. For his beloved girl, he even thinks about opening a massage center independently and imagines Du Hong playing the piano in the center. Though Du Hong needs love, she is proud and has her dignity. She does not want others to make use of her beauty. In her mind, this kind of love is superficial. She declines it even though he is one of the owners of the center.

The fifth love story is between Tai Lai and Jin Yan. Jin Yan first overheard Tai Lai's early love story from a distant source. She is moved by Tai Lai's passion for his former girlfriend. She wants to comfort him and love him. So, she travels all the way from Dalian to Shanghai and then to Nanjing. Other massagers can't accept Tai Lai's accent and think it strange. But Jin Yan loves his accent and thinks highly of it. How important it is for him to be praised! He is respected and gains more self-confidence. Sometimes love is to appreciate each other.

**Responsibility as a virtue**

Like normal people, most blind massagers are responsible persons. Wang Daifu is a typical case. When he and Xiao Kong confirm the love relationship, he determines to work hard and set up a massage center for his girlfriend so that she needn't massage for customers. He loves her and wants to take good care of her. Though not successful, he keeps the aim in his heart and works hard for it. This is a man's responsibility towards his beloved woman. As a son, he also behaves
Bi Feiyu’s fiction

responsibly even though his parents do not give much love and care to him. When a landlord hires some thugs to go to Wang Daifu’s parents’ home to collect a debt owed by his brother, Wang is summoned home to deal with the situation. He does not have much money himself and it is no easy for him to earn money. Moreover, he is reluctant to pay his brother’s debt, because the latter is a wastrel and paying the debt is like throwing money into water. To help his parents out, he cuts himself on the chest in front of the hired thugs, using his blood as a token to pay the debt. His action frightens them away. Without money, he uses his blood and life to protect his parents who are old and weak. While one able-bodied son gets his parents into trouble, another disabled son protects them at the risk of his own life. What a great irony!

Du Hong and Ji Tingting’s story presents a case of responsibility between friends. Ji Tingting introduces Du Hong to the Massage Center and they become close friends. Later on, Du Hong gets closer to Gao Wei, a receptionist, a normal person with eyesight. Gao Wei’s additional job is to take Du Hong from the dormitory to the Massage Center in the tricycle. Transportation is important to the blind. Tingting does not feel angry at all. She knows an eye-sighted friend is more helpful. One day, Tingting decides to leave the Massage Center to get married. Feeling sorry for her upcoming departure, Du Hong wants to accompany her for the last few days. Besides, she has a secret love story to share with Tingting. Unfortunately, while Du Hong is waiting for Tingting, her thumb is injured badly by the door’s sudden close. Tingting feels so sad and sorry as she thinks she should take the responsibility for Du Hong’s injury, for if she does not decide to leave, Du Hong would not have had to wait for her and the accident could have been avoided. She insists on staying at Du Hong’s hospital bedside day and night to look after her. Du Hong certainly knows her heart. But Du Hong does not want to obstruct her marriage and tries to drive Tingting away. Realizing the subtle relationship between them, their colleague Jin Yan works out a good idea and successfully sends Tingting on the way home. Their responsibility towards friends and colleagues is extremely moving.

Xiao Ma’s story is also a good case of responsibility. He loves Xiao Kong, but as a responsible man, he knows he can’t, for she is already Wang Daifu’s girlfriend. When he has no way to release his passion, he goes to the prostitute Xiao Man for relaxation. Later on, when Du Hong falls in love with him, he declines to accept her love though he knows Du Hong is as beautiful as a fairy. The story shows that though Xiao Ma may have his faults, he is a man of sincerity who is loyal to his heart and responsible for his love.

The complex world of the blind

Like other communities, Sha Zongqi Massage Center is a small world with complicated relationships in several ways. The first complexity involves the relationship among normal people: receptionists Gao Wei and Du Li, and the cook of the center, Jin Dajie. The conflict arises because Gao Wei feels unfairly treated compared with Du Li, who has a lower education but receives less criticism from the boss. One day she accidently finds out there is much more meat in Du Li’s lunch box than in hers. Obviously, Jin Dajie deliberately makes a difference. People in the center fall into two camps, each standing behind one of the owners. Jin Dajie and Du Li belong to Zhang Zongqi’s camp because Jin Dajie is Zhang’s relative. Gao Wei belongs to the other camp, which supports the other boss Sha Fuming because she is Du Hong’s close friend and knows Sha loves Du Hong. Affiliations with different camps give rise to discord, which sometimes leads to crisis.

The second complexity concerns the relationship between the blind and the normal people. The cook Jin Dajie takes advantage of the massagers’ blindness to give more meat to her favorite Du Li. Knowing Du Hong is Sha Fuming’s love, Gao Wei makes friends with Du Hong and
voluntarily transports her between the dormitory and the Massage Center. Moreover, she assigns good customers to Du Hong.

The third complexity covers the relationship between the born blind and post-natal blind. Zhang Yiguang becomes blind at the age of thirty-five in an explosion. He has a wife and two kids. His world and value are different from those born blind. He still thinks and behaves as a normal man. As a consequence, he can neither get along well with the blind people, nor can he maintain good relations with normal people around him. He belongs to neither of the two groups. He is an outsider feeling lonely and isolated.

With a sharp eye, the author not only presents the various conflicts among the people in the massage center but also delves into their causes. The conflict between Gao Wei and Du Li is easy for us to understand. They are normal people, so it is natural for them to behave as they usually do. These normal people come to work among the disabled and take advantage of the massagers’ disability. When the blind work together with common people, the latter exert an influence on them. Furthermore, the blind massagers are also common people, who are endowed with ordinary people’s weaknesses and shortcomings. They vary in personality, education, family background, and life experience. So various conflicts arise. Whether a conflict involves normal persons or disabled persons, the author always does a good job of vividly presenting it and revealing its cause.

The author also cautions the reader to guard against the notion of depicting the blind as spotless persons. On the contrary, he convincingly shows the blind to be just like normal human beings who have their advantages and disadvantages, likes and dislikes. They like beautiful things, tend to be easily influenced by others’ opinions, and have natural desire for intimate relations. When Wang’s mother comments that Xiao Kong is becoming more and more beautiful and her face looks rosy, she eagerly hopes that her lover, Wang Daifu can have the eyesight to notice her change and appreciate her good looking. At home, the couple enjoys lovemaking twice every day. But when they come to the massage center, they are required to live in single sex dormitories and cannot have intimate relations. Xiao Kong is tortured by the natural desire and becomes angry easily. Xiao Ma loves Xiao Kong because others say Xiao Kong has an attractive and sexy body. Later he is attracted by the prostitute Xiao Man because he enjoys making love with her. Intimate physical touch leads to emotional change. The author depicts Sha Fuming’s case to show the blind person’s idea and pursuit of beauty. Fuming falls in love with Du Hong simply because customers all say she is a great beauty. He wants to know what beauty is and hopes to touch and possess it and satisfy his curiosity and vanity. Even though he is refused, he still keeps his love for her in his heart. Du Hong likes Xiao Ma because through customers’ mouth she gets to know he is very handsome. She contemplates on the good prospect of her life with him, even though she clearly knows that the life with Xia Ma will be very dull since he is too quiet and dislikes talking. Just like normal people, she cherishes the fond dream that a beauty should marry a handsome young man.

The author presents a different story in Zhang Yiguang’s case. He is a normal man for 35 years and feels immensely sorry for himself after an explosion blinded him. As a result, he needs more psychological assistance and emotional consolation than the born blind. He frequently goes to different prostitutes and imagines him to be an ancient emperor by calling those prostitutes concubines. His relation with them is defined by pure sex and no personal emotion is involved. Sex is a good way for him to release, relax and find comfort. In daily life, he indulges in dirty talk. The author shows the character to be no different from those vulgar people among healthy people.

The two owners of the Massage Center, Sha Fuming and Zhang Zongqi are smart businessmen. Before they become bosses, they vow to be good ones by signing contracts with massagers
Bi Feiyu’s fiction

and treating them well. But when they open their own Massage Center, in order to get more profits they do not mention contract at all. The food for massagers is simple and often of low quality for the purposes of saving more money for themselves. When conflicts arise, they only care about their own profits and resort to various tricks for their own gains. From another perspective, the author shows how the blind is not any different from the normal people.

The world of the blind is always viewed by normal people as a mysterious space, incomprehensible and impenetrable. Bi Feiyu’s Massage furnishes the reader of normal human faculty with a profound glimpse into this mysterious world from both external and internal perspectives. By showing the blind as similar to normal people with common desires, aspirations, physical and emotional problems, the author nevertheless makes us aware that the blind certainly need sympathy, consolation and financial support, but what they need most is fair treatment, equal respect and genuine acceptance of them as people by the mainstream society. The novel confirms from the perspective of a special group of people Abraham Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of human needs: when the basic needs of self-preservations are met, a human being will seek a higher level of needs including respect, love, and sense of achievements. Respect makes one’s life valuable and meaningful; love makes life livable and beautiful; sense of achievements makes people responsible and virtuous. In the history of world literature, not many writers are interested in or willing to inquire into the world of the blind. Bi Feiyu’s novel offers a unique way to explore this much-neglected subject matter. His artistic achievement has successfully aroused the interest of people across cultures in the life of the blind, thereby carving a niche for him in the pantheon of world literature.

Notes
1 Bi Feiyu and Zhang Li, Teeth Is the Second Criterion for Testing Truth (Yachi shi jianyan zhenli de dier biaozhun) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2015), 203.
3 “A Catalogue of Bi Feiyu’s Works,” (Bi Feiyu zuopin mulu), Journal of School of Chinese Language and Culture Nanjing Normal University (Nanjing shifan daxue wenxueyuan xuebao) (2009), no. 4, 49–51.
5 Bi Feiyu and Zhang Li, Teeth Is the Second Criterion for Testing Truth, 355.
8 Oliver Chou, “Author Bi Feiyu Leaves It All Down to Chance,” South China Morning Post (May 17, 2014).
9 Bi Feiyu and Zhang Li, Teeth Is the Second Criterion for Testing Truth, 358.
11 Ibid., 1.
16 Bi Feiyu, “Providing a Free World without Fear to the Blind” (Gei mangren mianyu kongju de ziyou shijie), interview by Yang Fan, *The First* (Jingbao), October 13, 2008.

Further readings