

# JOURNEY TO THE WEST

An Indian man cycles from his country to Europe in the pursuit of love, **Jocelyn Eikenburg** reports.

**P**K Mahanandia, the subject of the book *The Amazing Story of the Man Who Cycled from India to Europe for Love*, has been called a “Silk Road hero” for his feat, which spanned 3,600 kilometers over more than four months in 1977. But few know that his epic journey to the West was, in part, inspired by the legendary Chinese monks Faxian (337–422) and Xuan Zang (602–664).

“I said, ‘If Faxian and Xuan Zang can walk from China to India, why couldn’t I go by bicycle?’” recalls Mahanandia. “There was no doubt. I will do it or I will die.”

But unlike the monks, who sought Buddhist texts, Mahanandia sought love — specifically from Charlotte Von Schedvin, the Swedish woman who was destined to be his wife, according to a prophecy.

“My mother said, ‘We are not going to arrange a marriage for you. Your wife will find you — her sign (zodiac) is Taurus, she plays the flute and she owns jungles.’”

He and Von Schedvin met in New Delhi in 1975, at a time when Mahanandia was an impoverished art student from the “untouchable” caste who drew portraits in the popular shopping district of Connaught Place.

“When I started doing her portrait, I felt a strange feeling in my body. I was breathless.”

She returned, and after asking her questions, he learned she was a flute player born in May, whose family owned forests.

“Then I knew that we are destined to meet. I said, ‘You will be my wife, it is decided in the heavens.’”

While very surprised, Von Schedvin ultimately opened her heart to Mahanandia and followed him to his village in Orissa state.

“We were together for three weeks. We got married in a tribal way, so we had no papers.”

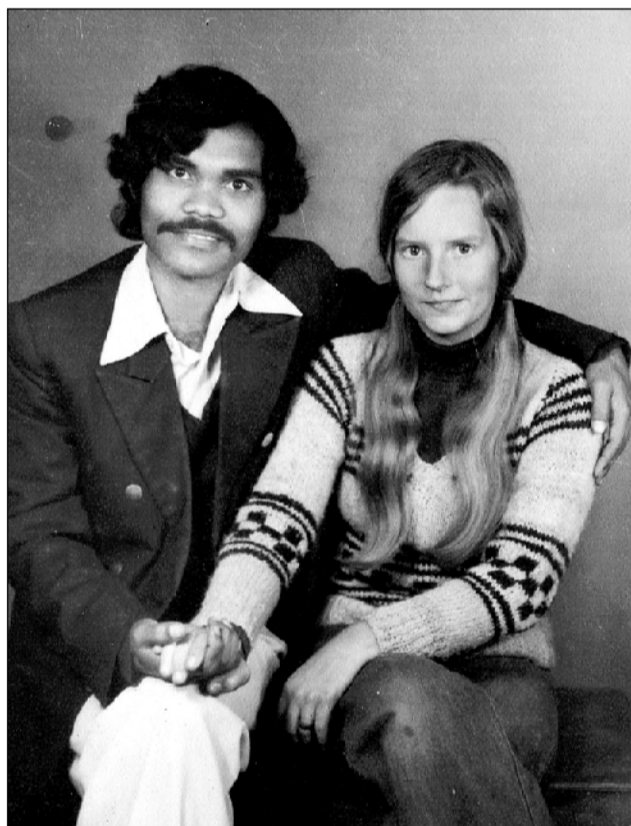
But Von Schedvin had to return to Sweden, and over the following year, the distance and longing weighed upon Mahanandia.

“We wrote each other letters, and then I started thinking — where the sun is setting in the west, I could bicycle that way.”

So he purchased a Raleigh bicycle, pulled together some travel necessities and sewed \$80 into his belt. And in 1977, he began cycling to Sweden, following an ancient route known at the time as the Hippie Trail,



**PK Mahanandia**, pictured with his wife Charlotte Von Schedvin at a UN event, appeared on Aug 17 at a Shanghai bookstore to promote the book, *The Amazing Story of the Man Who Cycled from India to Europe for Love*, which just has its Chinese version published. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



**Mahanandia** met his wife of destiny Von Schedvin in New Delhi in 1975 when he drew portraits of people in the popular shopping district of Connaught Place.

He painted portraits along the way, which helped him survive. “People gave me food very often in Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey — I had one piece of bread I could eat for three whole days. People in Europe often gave me money.”

While often exhausted from the difficult journey, he gained encouragement through letters from Von Schedvin, sent to him poste restante at post offices along the route. Mahanandia finally reunited with her in Sweden in 1977, where the two would ultimately raise two children together and enjoy fulfilling careers in teaching.

But marriage between an “untouchable” Indian man and a woman of Swedish nobility defied tradition, so “people started writing articles since I landed in Sweden.”

That eventually drew the interest of Per J. Andersson, the Swedish journalist and co-founder of the travel magazine Vagabond, who wrote about him for the publication.

After the success of *My Grandfather Was a Tribal Chief*, the 2004 documentary about Mahanandia, the journalist told him the film was so popular that many people would think there was a book already. This conversation paved the way for *The Amazing Story of the Man Who Cycled from India to Europe for Love*.

First published in Sweden in 2014, the book, like its subject, would end up voyaging to untold countries.

It came out in many languages, including Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, English, German, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Thai, Korean and, most recently, Chinese.

Mahanandia appeared with his wife on Aug 17 at a Shanghai bookstore to promote the book, published by the People’s Literature Publishing House under the Chinese title *Cong Xindeli Dao Buluosi*.

“China is rising and taking the leadership, and I am very glad for that. Things are very prosperous here. People seem very happy and proud of their citizenship.”

He also sees parallels between his own journey of love and togetherness across the ancient Silk Road and today’s Belt and Road Initiative.

“We cannot do anything alone. But together, we can accomplish many things.”

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## Wuhan in spotlight at US exhibition

SAN FRANCISCO — The success story of Wuhan city, better known in the West as China’s Chicago, in Central China’s Hubei province, will become more familiar to Americans thanks to a photo exhibition being held in San Francisco over the next four months.

The exhibition brought into spotlight the achievements made by Wuhan city over the past 40 years. This is the end result of China introducing a reform and opening-up that transformed the outlook of the country.

Nine photographers from Silicon Valley visited Wuhan in May and captured the daily life of locals and the city’s new landscape.

The American photographers told their countrymen their own “China story” through their camera lenses and presented to the world the new look of Wuhan city.

China’s consul general in San Francisco Wang Donghua says that the exhibition features more than 100 photos and pictures shot by the nine Silicon Valley engineers-turned-photographers, and captured touching moments of the diverse and dynamic city.

The photos are the heart-felt expression of the American photographers about what is taking place in Wuhan, says Wang.

Tom Fortin, the chief librarian at the Main Library of the San Francisco Public Library, says he is happy to see the photo exhibition being held in the Civic Center facility in downtown San Francisco.

The exhibit is part of the fifth Across the Pacific: China Arts Festival, which began earlier this month, and Fortin says he feels honored to attend the arts event for the third year.

Morance Fong, a prominent leader of the Chinese community in northern California, says that the cooperation between China and the United States will not only promote their development, but also benefit the world.

“Photos can tell a lot of stories and this exhibition will further deepen the understanding between the two countries,” she says.

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# BREAST DISEASE AWARENESS

## EARLY DETECTION AND INTERVENTION CAN SAVE LIVES

# VITAL FOR WOMEN

Surveys show that a high percentage of Chinese women suffer from breast disease, and the life-threatening condition is now being found in younger women.

Many breast cancer patients did not recognize the early symptoms of the disease, and thus often receive diagnosis and treatment late. Medical experts suggest women aged above 30 should conduct breast self-examinations monthly and contact their doctor if they notice anything unusual.