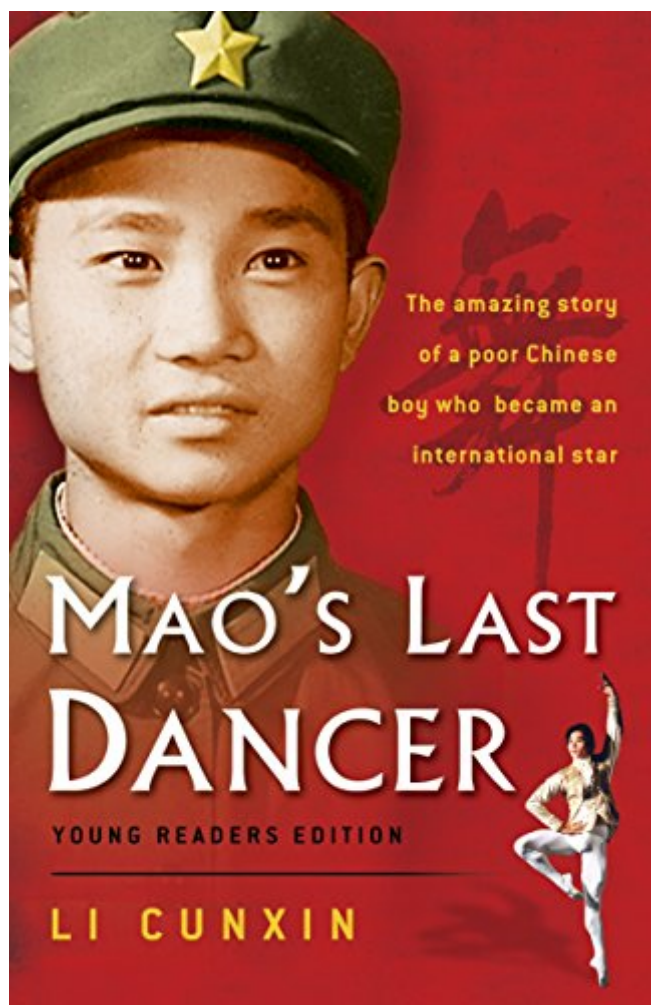


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# Mao's Last Dancer, Young Readers' Edition



## Synopsis

At the age of eleven, Li Cunxin was one of the privileged few selected to serve in Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution by studying at the Beijing Dance Academy. Having known bitter poverty in his rural China home, ballet would be his family's best chance for a better future. From one hardship to another, Cunxin demonstrated perseverance and an appetite for success that led him to be chosen as one of the first two people to leave Mao's China and go to America to dance on a special cultural exchange. But life in the U.S. was nothing like his communist indoctrination had led him to believe. Ultimately, he defected to the west in a dramatic media storm, and went on to dance with the Houston Ballet for sixteen years. This inspiring story of passion, resilience, and a family's love captures the harsh reality of life in Mao's communist China and the exciting world of professional dance. This compelling memoir includes photos documenting Li's extraordinary life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the inspirational tale of a boy/man who trains as a dancer in China under

Mao's communist regime. Told in a straight-forward, unembellished style, it

presents countless fascinating details of daily life and relationships that present a vivid picture of what the author experiences. The account is especially moving because it offers insight into the lovable character of people once considered enemies by the United States. Li Cunxin's peasant family endures brutal hardship, working long hours every day, suffering extremes of weather and lack of food, and yet they are quite resigned and able to enjoy each other and the good they have. Even the broader community seems to rejoice with Li Cunxin's successes rather than wallow in self-pity or envy. The story evokes sympathy for people who suffer under communism, but are also vulnerable to official propaganda, as we all are.

This book truly makes you realize how difficult it is for many people to manage to get enough food to feed their families in China. It makes you realize how good it is in America and how many freedoms we have. Well told story.

This book is one of those that you cannot put away till the end. Li Cunxin writes in a simple way, but with that rare skill of keeping you baffled through all its chapters. It traces Cunxin's early life in a peasants' commune in rural China, suffering abject poverty, to his eventful obligatory trip to Beijing, to study ballet at the Beijing Ballet Academy, under China's strict communist discipline and rules, where he completes 7 years of training. Initially Cunxin hated ballet, but after several years, he learned to appreciate its beauty and artistic value. That turning point made him work harder, and the rest is history: he became one of the best dancers of the world of his time. It is a very touching book. Also very interesting because besides Cunxin's personal life as it relates to the ballet world, one learns about Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution in China through the eyes of a poor peasant child who turned into an international star, not without before having caused a diplomatic conflict between China and USA. I recommend this book for all ballet lovers and to those who have an interest on China's history under Chairman Mao's communist rule and its impact on China's education and social life of that time.

I just finished this book, and picked it because I have visited China and had so many horrible and questionable things about when Mao was Chairman of China. This is a true story written by the main character, Li, a poor peasant of a close family of 7 boys. It's amazing how poor the peasants were during Mao's rule and what they did to survive. Very fortunately for Li, because of his body type, he was picked to go to the main Chinese ballet dance academy in Beijing at 11 years old. He was so young and homesick for two years, then really got into his dance with classes each

day for 7 years. Li gets an opportunity to visit the Houston Ballet and sees how Americans are free and not the evil propaganda of the west that Chairman Mao brainwashed everyone in China to believe. Li falls in love in Houston, defects, divorces, remarries and has raised a family in Australia. He remains close to his big family and travels to China often and sees how China changes after Chairman Mao leaves office. The history involved in this book along with the juxtaposition of Li's personal life by this very good writer makes this for an amazing book! One I will always remember.

This is a wonderful book, Li Cunxin's struggle against impossible odds to go from a life of abject poverty to become a great ballet dancer. As a writer, Li has a great ability to portray and convey how a given experience feels, whether his life as a small boy, dance school in Beijing, his defection in Houston, his unsuccessful first marriage, his growth and success as a world class ballet dancer. My only criticism is that towards the end of his book Li's successes seem unending. He is not only a great dancer, but a perfect father, husband, stockbroker etc. But, given Li's drive and resilience, perhaps that was inevitable. In the end, it is a worthy book to read.

I am a former ballet dancer, and I think that "Mao's Last Dancer" is a wonderful rags to riches story, fraught with emotional heartache and determination. During Chairman Mao's rule, anything but the strictest loyalty and the following of rules could cause one to be executed. Li Cunxin was granted a three week "work/study" permit to dance with a well-known American ballet company. Living in the United States contradicted all that he had been taught since he was a little child in rural China. He learned to not be afraid to express his views and ideas and to let himself soar as a dancer. While here, he fell in love with one of the ballerinas, who subsequently became his wife. They are now living in Australia - his wife's home country - with their three children. I loved the feel-good story of success against adversity. The DVD is well worth watching.

I loved and adored this book.....I am an avid fan of the ballet, so this book was perfect for me.....This book was well-written, full of drama and life! I loved the way he progressed in his goals.....I loved his expression of love for his family.....what a marvelous book! I have ordered the CD as well now, as I want to see this beyond my imagination.....thank you for this book.....it has given me great pleasure.....I actually hated to finish reading it.....Gayle

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