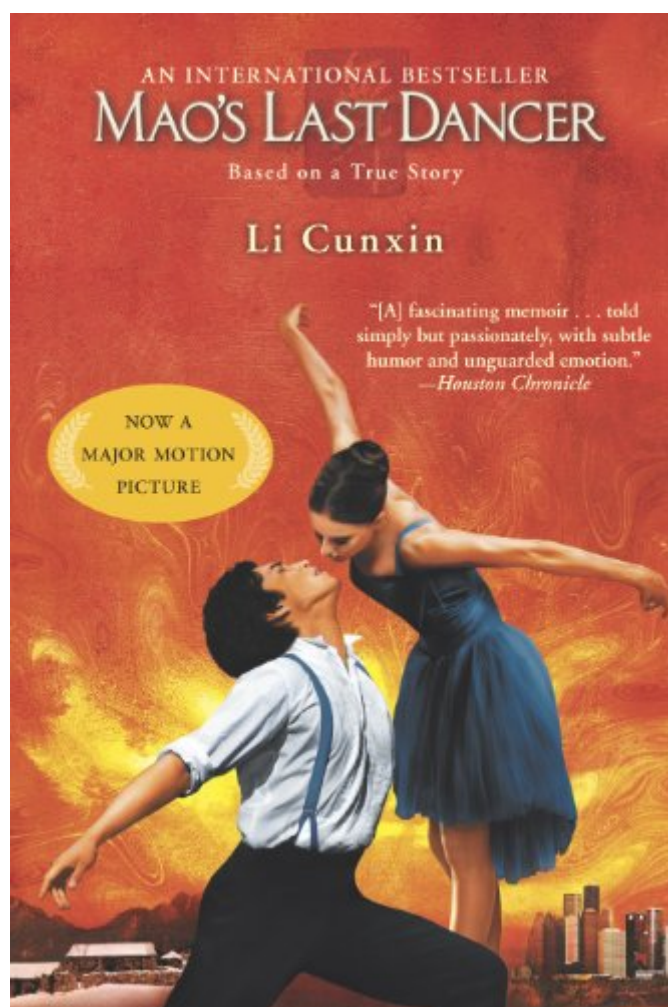


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## Mao's Last Dancer (Movie Tie-In)



## Synopsis

**THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER**The extraordinary memoir of a peasant boy raised in rural Maoist China who was plucked from his village to study ballet and went on to become one of the greatest dancers of his generation. From a desperately poor village in northeast China, at age eleven, Li Cunxin was chosen by Madame Mao's cultural delegates to be taken from his rural home and brought to Beijing, where he would study ballet. In 1979, the young dancer arrived in Texas as part of a cultural exchange, only to fall in love with America-and with an American woman. Two years later, through a series of events worthy of the most exciting cloak-and-dagger fiction, he defected to the United States, where he quickly became known as one of the greatest ballet dancers in the world. This is his story, told in his own inimitable voice.**THE BASIS FOR A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE**From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When my wife and I moved to Texas in the early 1980's, the Houston Ballet's performances were a refreshing antidote to the Southwest's unrelenting commercialism and fixation with football and barbecue. Under Ben Stevenson's lively direction, this troupe of superb athletes pushed the bounds of gravity with grace and verve. Among the foremost in their number was a supple young oriental

dancer who was obviously feeling his way toward familiarity with American culture, but always showed uncommon spirit, sensitivity, and vitality in his approach to movement. This was Li Cunxin (pronounced Shwin-Sin). He became our favorite male dancer, and his photos are on our walls today. This marvelous autobiography by Mr. Li opened our eyes to the unimaginable gulf he had to leap in order to appear before us. When he was plucked from among millions of other peasant children to attend Beijing Dance Academy, the train ride to Beijing was his first. His meals at the Academy were the first time he'd ever had enough to eat. His untrained tendons and muscles were ruptured repeatedly by the contortions he was forced into. Beijing's approval for him to leave China on scholarship to Houston Ballet Academy was China's first such concession to an artist in almost forty years. The first time he ever felt air-conditioning was on the plane to America. His first automobile ride was from the Houston airport to Ben Stevenson's house. And so on - the simple dance outfit purchased for him upon his arrival cost the equivalent of two years of his father's salary in China. The book contains hundreds of poignant reminders of the risks Mr. Li took in breaking the bounds of his peasant heritage and infuriating both the Chinese government and his American friends when he defected.

There seems to be no end of stories by and about people who came of age during the darkest days of the Cultural Revolution. This book is different from most of them in a couple important respects. First of all, Li Cuxin's family were peasants. Perhaps it would be a bit strong to say that they "missed" the revolution, because Li Cuxin does describe one particularly graphic scene where he witnessed an execution. But they were not personally struggled against. The peasants were the idealized heroes of the Cultural Revolution. Li Cuxin's suffering was poverty, pure and simple. But there are lots of poor people in the world. Secondly, the benefits Li Cuxin was given were unique in that they were not given him by the country he went to (America). They were given to him by the People's Republic of China. And the life he went to was really unreal. Most Americans do not live like the people Li met when he came to America. So this book is not a classic story about a persecuted person who somehow managed to find freedom in the West. As such, I must admit that I often had mixed feelings while reading this book. I don't want to spend too much time on that, but I want to address it, because it is central both to what is right and what is wrong in this book. For me, the centerpoint of this book is Li Cunxin's decision to defect to the West. He married one of his fellow dancers secretly, and told his benefactor from the Houston Ballet that he was not going to return to China. It is this decision that really defines this story, because everything that happens before it can in some way be considered an influencing factor. And everything that happens after it

is a result of it.

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