

Li Cunxin

Mao's Last Dancer, Queensland's Australian of the Year

Li Cunxin's personal journey took him from the bitter poverty of his childhood as a Chinese peasant boy, to defection in the United States and into some of the greatest ballet companies of the world. His story been recorded in his extraordinary autobiography *Mao's Last Dancer* and brought to life as a blockbuster film by Bruce Beresford.

An inspirational and motivational speaker, Li Cunxin speaks with honesty, dignity and pride. He uses his story to deliver memorable messages about the importance of family values, leadership, goal setting and realizing your dreams.

In 2014, Li was name Queensland's Australian of the Year, the latest step in an inspirational and remarkable life.

About Li Cunxin:

Li was born in 1961 in Qingdao, China. At age 11, he was chosen by Madame Mao's Cultural advisers to study at the Beijing Dance Academy. He endured 7 years of hard classical ballet training and graduated at the top of his class. Li was awarded the scholarship to study in the US in 1979 upon his graduation, one of the two first cultural exchange students ever sent to the US under the communist rule. In 1981, Li defected in Houston, Texas and was locked up against his will by the Chinese Consulate for 21 hours. Li Cunxin's defection became a huge political incident and caused international headlines. He was finally released after a dramatic standoff between the US and the Chinese Governments.

Li went onto became one of the best dancers in the world. He won numerous dance awards including two silver and a bronze medal at International Ballet competitions. He performed all over the world with many top ballet companies.

Li Cunxin and his family moved to Australia in 1995. He went on to dance as a Principal Dancer with the Australian Ballet for another 4 years.

Li then made a successful career transition from ballet into finance. He was a senior manager at



Bell Potter, one of the largest stockbroking firms in Australia. Li served on the boards of the Bionics Institute, The Australian Ballet and as Councillor of the Australian Council for the Arts. He was awarded a Doctorate by the Australian Catholic University for his contribution in Dance and Literature, and in 2009 he was named Australian Father of the Year (Li and his wife Mary have three children).

In March 2012 he left the world of finance to return to the world of ballet as Artistic Director of the Queensland Ballet.

Li's extraordinary autobiography *Mao's Last Dancer* was published in 2003 and a Young Reader's edition was published in 2005. A tale of talent, faith and determination, the book is a moving account of the moral complexities, personal costs and rich rewards of following one's dreams. As at 2014, the book has been reprinted 52 times and is sold in over 30 countries. It was awarded the Book of the Year by the Australian Booksellers Association, the Nielsen BookScan (2004) and was named in Amazon.com's Break-Out Books list just weeks after its US release. It has become an international bestseller.

In 2009, Bruce Beresford brought Li's story to life in a blockbuster feature film, *Mao's Last Dancer*. *Mao's Last Dancer* was the Runner Up for the highly coveted People's Choice Award at the prestigious 2009 Toronto International Film Festival. It was ranked the 4th biggest box office success for the opening week in Australian film history.

Li Cunxin talks about:

The importance of family values; passion; courage; the process of realising one's dreams; rise up to challenges; embracing changes; leadership; goal setting and achieving against impossible obstacles and odds; successful career transition; entrepreneurship.

The harsh training regime Li Cunxin endured as a young boy taught him discipline, hard work, determination and perseverance. Those things, combined with his incredible drive and undeniable talent, made him one of the best dancers in the world.

Now, as well as being Artistic Director of the Queensland Ballet, Li Cunxin is a motivational speaker and mentor, not only to other ballet dancers but to all Australians.

Client testimonials

“ Our participants were very moved by your story, with many commenting that it was one of the most inspiring presentations that they had ever heard...thank you again for making a huge impact on our conference and our staff.

- Goldman Sachs GBWere

“ You are in a class of your own. As your story was about courage, loss and challenge, it transported the listeners into your experiences and aspirations. Your delivery was powerful and effective and you certainly had the audience with you all the way, conquered, inspired and enriched. Your presentation was beautifully structured and tailored to our theme, and you skillfully intertwined a mixture of content, humour and inspiration. You are without doubt one of the better speakers we have heard and the standing ovation you received was testimony to this fact. Your contribution to the success of the PwC Conference was significant.

- PricewaterhouseCoopers

“ The World Presidents and their spouses are of course, an exceptionally critical audience. The reaction of this group to Li's enthralling and riveting presentations was...simply astounding! Li reduced much of his audience to tears and as the participants left the auditorium, many said it was the most moving and absorbing presentation they had ever heard! This reaction was borne out when the final ratings appeared - Li scored 10.0 out of 10 in one presentation (unheard of) and 9.9 out of 10 in the other, making him easily the highest rating speaker (out of a field of some 40 presenters) at the University. China University became the highest rating event ever produced by WPO and Li's graphic presentations were certainly a major contributor to this rating.

- World President's Organization (WPO)

“ Comments included: Inspirational Outstanding, excellent. Mr Li was absolutely inspirational. Excellent story. Very inspiring, great choice as a keynote speaker. It has been a long time since I have heard such a wonderful delivery presentation. FABULOUS. Very emotional and inspiring. Brilliant session. Really inspirational. The best presentation I have ever attended.

- CPA Australia

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