

# Mao's Last Dancer

Curs 2011-12

Cinema per a estudiants



## **Pel·lícula recomanada per a:**

ESO. Batxillerats. Cicles Formatius. Centres de Formació d'Adults

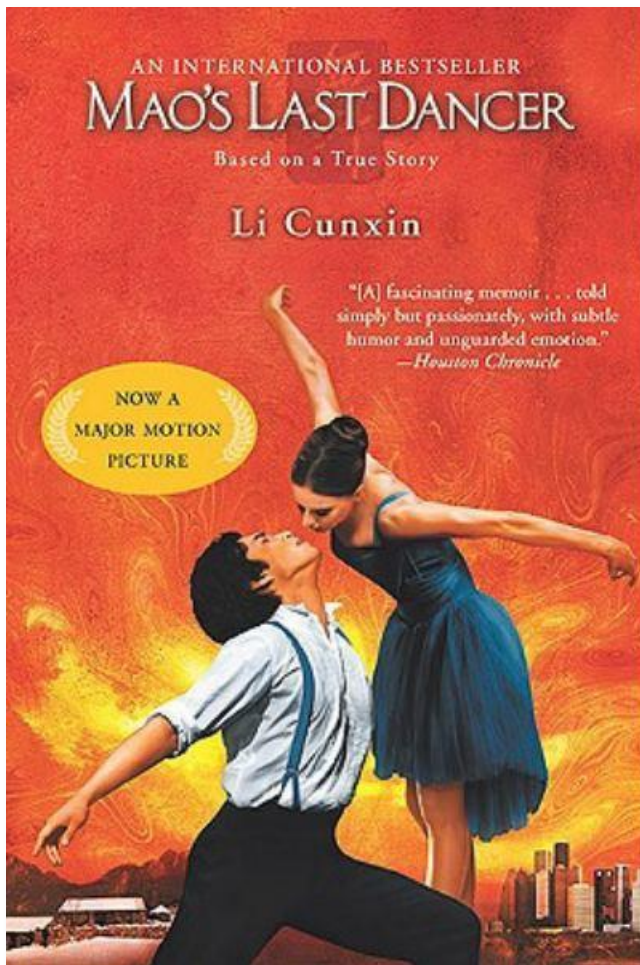
## **Àrees del currículum:**

Llengua anglesa; Arts escèniques, música i dansa; Ciències socials; Món contemporani; Educació per a la ciutadania i els drets humans.

## **Temes:**

Diversitat cultural, immigració; Sistemes polítics; Adaptació cinematogràfica d'obra literària.

[www.cinemaperaestudiants.cat](http://www.cinemaperaestudiants.cat)



**Direcció:** Bruce Beresford.  
**Interpretació:** Chi Cao (Li Cunxin), Chengwu Guo (Li Cunxin adolescent), Huang Wen Bin (Li Cunxin nen), Joan Chen (Niang), Bruce Greenwood (Ben Stevenson), Wang Shuang Bao (Dia), Amanda Schull (Elizabeth), Kyle MacLachlan (Charles Foster), Jack Thompson (Woodrow Seals). **Guió:** Jan Sardi. **Producció:** Jane Scott. **Música:** Christopher Gordon. **Fotografia:** Peter James. **Muntatge:** Mark Warner. **Disseny de producció:** Herbert Pinter. **Vestuari:** Anna Borghesi. **Gènere:** Biòpic, drama. **País:** Austràlia. **Any:** 2009. **Durada:** 117 min.

(per a més informació sobre la pel·lícula i veure el tràiler del film, cliqueu sobre la foto)

## SINOPSI

El film tracta la història real de Li Cunxin, adaptada de la seva autobiografia *Mao's last dancer*, que explica com en ple caos de la Revolució Cultural Xinesa, Cunxin va haver de deixar els seus, una família de pagesos, per embarcar-se en un sorprenent viatge que el va acabar encaminant cap a la llibertat i el triomf personal.

La pel·lícula ens relata com Li va superar l'adversitat i com va descobrir i explorar les seves habilitats naturals i el seu gran talent com a ballarí clàssic. Per això, no només va haver d'enfrontar-se amb les seves pròpies limitacions físiques, sinó també amb el càstig que li va imposar el desconfiat govern xinès després de la seva deserció als Estats Units.

## ACTIVITY 1.

These are some of the characters in the film. Complete the information next to each picture with the following words: succeed – humble – director – force – peasants – fell – conflict – freedom – scholarship – locked – special – ballet.



Li Cunxin is a Chinese boy from a poor village who is chosen to learn \_\_\_\_\_. After some years, he travels to Houston and \_\_\_\_\_ as a dancer.



Li's parents raised seven sons and were \_\_\_\_\_. They never had the privilege to go to school so they couldn't read or write, and had a very \_\_\_\_\_ life.



Teacher Xiao was a very \_\_\_\_\_ teacher for Li. He was an inspirational \_\_\_\_\_ for him.



Elizabeth was an American dancer who \_\_\_\_\_ in love with Li and secretly got married, provoking an international political \_\_\_\_\_.



Ben Stevenson was the artistic \_\_\_\_\_ of Houston Ballet and he chose Li for a \_\_\_\_\_ in USA while travelling in China.



Charles Foster was the lawyer who helped Li Cunxin to win his \_\_\_\_\_ when he was \_\_\_\_\_ in the Chinese consulate.



## ACTIVITY 2.

Ballet is a word that comes from French and Italian. Most of the words related to this precise dance are in these both languages too, but do you know any of them? Learn some of the vocabulary related to this art. Can you match the definition with its picture?



1. SPLIT JUMP



2. ARABESQUE



3. GRAND JETÉ



5. PASSÉ

- A. A bending of the knee or knees.
- B. From the French (literally, to glide). One foot slides out and the other foot joins it, closing in fifth.
- C. The dancer seems to do a split in the air moving forwards.
- D. It is a position of the body, in profile, supported on one leg, with the other leg extended behind and at right angles to it.
- E. A jump executed with legs extended horizontally and separated by 180 degrees.
- F. One foot passes the knee of the other leg, the standing leg.



4. PLIÉ



6. GLISSADE

### ACTIVITY 3.

There are some fables explained in the film. This one is explained by Teacher Xiao to Li Cunxin. What is the moral of the story? How this fable applies to Li's life?



One of the guards in an emperor's palace went to visit his teacher because he wanted to be the best **bow-shooter** in the land. The teacher told him to go away.

The guard returned every day and **begged** his teacher to teach him. Day after day, week after week, month after month the guard came. He came in the rain and in the snow. After one whole year the teacher, moved by the guard's perseverance and determination, finally accepted him as a student.

The teacher asked him **to pick up** a heavy bow and **hold it up**. But after a few minutes the guard's arms **started shaking with tiredness**. Then the teacher made him carry very heavy loads in each hand every day. The next time the guard picked up the heavy bow again it looked like a **feather** in his hands.

Later the guard asked his teacher when he could shoot an arrow. The teacher told him that he wasn't ready yet but asked the guard to look at something far into the sky. The guard **looked it up** as far as he could. But he couldn't see anything.

Then his teacher told him to look at a very little spider in a far-away tree. For a long time **he kept focusing** on it with **one eye at a time**. Gradually he began to see the spider clearly. And when he used both of his eyes the little spider seemed as large as his **shield**. Then his teacher said that he was ready to teach him how to shoot an arrow. Soon the guard became the best bow-shooter in the land.

(Adapted from Li Cunxin's book, *Mao's Last Dancer*, pages 191-192)

#### Vocabulary:

**bow-shooter:** arquer; **begged:** suplicar; **to pick up:** aixecar; **hold up:** mantenir dret; **started shaking with tiredness:** van començar a tremolar de cansament; **feather:** ploma; **looked it up:** es va esforçar en veure-ho; **he kept focusing:** es va mantenir concentrat; **one eye at a time:** canviant d'ull; **shield:** escut

## ACTIVITY 4.

**Read Li Cunxin's biography and answer the questions below.**

Li Cunxin was born into an extremely poor peasant family in Qingdao, a remote commune village in Northern China in 1961. The sixth son in a family of seven sons, he lived in a small house with twenty of his relatives. The family struggled to stay alive, subsisting at near starvation levels on a daily basis.

At the age of 11, he was selected to train in Madame Mao's Beijing Dance Academy. Then, he spent seven years of harsh training regime at the Beijing Dance Academy. He learnt discipline, adaptability, determination and perseverance. Li's astounding energy and hard work made him one of the best dancers China has produced.

When he was 18, Li was awarded one of the first cultural scholarships to go to America, and subsequently been offered a soloist contract with the Houston Ballet. Two years later, Li decided to stay in the West, but he was locked in the Chinese Consulate in Houston, which involved the then Vice President, Mr. George Bush senior. Li was banned from going to China for several years. He then went on to become one of the best dancers in the world, won two silver and a bronze medal at three International Ballet Competitions.

In 1987, he married Mary McKendry, an Australian ballerina. In 1995, Li and his family moved to Australia where Li danced his last three and half years as a principal dancer with the Australian Ballet.

For the final two years of his dancing, Li studied finance at the Australian Securities Institute because he wanted to become a stockbroker. This meant waking up at five in the morning to start his daily ballet practise, then going to the stock exchange by eight.



By the time he joined the rest of the Company's dancers for afternoon rehearsals, he had already worked a full day. Li made a successful career transition from ballet to finance in 1999. He is a senior manager at one of the largest stockbroking firms in Australia.

The story of Li's inspirational life is explained in his memoir *Mao's Last Dancer*, which was published by Penguin-Australia in September 2003. Li's book has been translated into several foreign languages and is sold in over 30 countries worldwide.

(Adapted from Li Cunxin's website)

**Now, answer the following questions:**

2. What are the adjectives that best describe Li's character?
3. What do you think are the main features of Li's character in China? And in the West?
4. George Bush senior. (Then USA Vice President) was involved with Li Cunxin. What did he do?
5. Li changed from ballet to stock exchange. What do you think about this change in career? Why do you think he chose such a different job?
6. In 2003, he decided to publish his memoir with great success. In the title, he used Mao's name. Who was this historical person?

(click on the picture for Li Cunxin web site)





## ACTIVITY 5.

The story of Li Cunxin's first years is also the story of the Chinese Revolution and its conflicts with the Western world. Could you match these texts with the following pictures?

A.

October 1st, 1949. The *People's Republic of China* (PRC) emerges victorious from the Chinese Civil War. *Kuomintang* party members and the intellectual and business elites are evacuated from mainland China and flee to Taiwan.

B.

1979. Ben Stevenson, Artistic Director of the *Houston Ballet*, arrives in China as part of a Cultural Delegation from the USA, and meets Li Cunxin for the first time.

C.

**1958-1960. Mao Zedong attempts to rapidly modernize Chinese Industry. The resulting economic disaster and subsequent famine lead to the deaths of over 20 million people.**

D.

2003. Li Cunxin publishes his remarkable life story, *Mao's Last Dancer*, a great success.

E.

**Li Cunxin marries the Australian dancer Mary McKendry in 1987 and they have three children. They live now in Melbourne.**

F.

September 9th, 1976. Mao Zedong dies, bringing the *Cultural Revolution* to an end. His wife, Jiang Qing and three other government officials, known as the "*Gang of Four*", attempt to achieve power, but are unsuccessful.

G.

**1972, Jiang Qing, also known as 'Madame Mao', revives the *Beijing Dance Academy* during the height of the *Cultural Revolution*. 11 years old Li Cunxin is one of the few children chosen from across the country to attend.**

H.

May 16, 1966. Mao starts the *Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, apparently an attempt to reform the country and eliminate any remaining "liberal bourgeois" elements. In reality an attempt to cement his power base, the *Cultural Revolution* resulted in nationwide political and social chaos.

I.

**1981. As part of an artistic exchange program between the USA and the *People's Republic of China*, Li Cunxin arrives in Houston, Texas, with a 3 month contract to dance with the *Houston Ballet*.**

J.

**Li Cunxin is locked up by the Chinese consulate in America for 21 hours in 1981. He had married an American girl. He achieves his freedom with the help of lawyer Charles Foster.**

K.

February 21-28, 1972. USA President Richard Nixon visits China. It is the first time a sitting USA President visits the country. The diplomatic trip was the first step in normalizing relations between the two countries

L.

Li Cunxin grew up in a distant village in China, with his parents and his six brothers. In 1971, at the age of 10, he was chosen to train as a ballet dancer. He only kept a picture of his family.





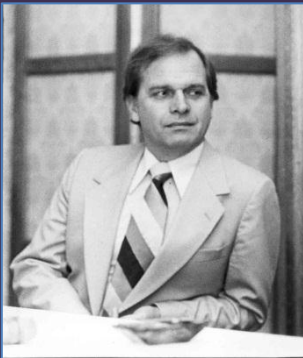
1. Mao Zedong, leader of the Chinese Revolution.



2. Li Cunxin in 1981.



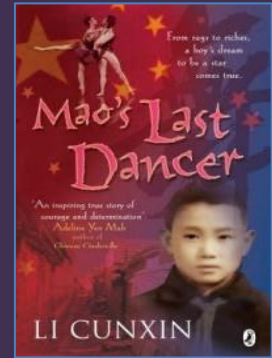
3. Some Chinese leaders were brought to a trial.



4. Ben Stevenson, Artistic Director of the Houston Ballet.



5. China's population almost doubled during Mao leadership.



7. Book about Li Cunxin's story.



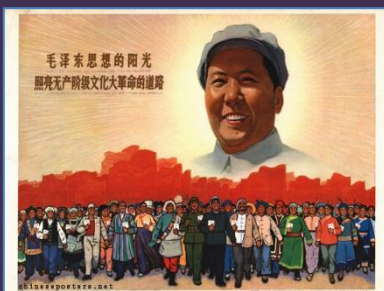
8. Li Cunxin's Chinese family.



9. Li Cunxin, Mary McKendry and Charles Foster.



10. Jiang Qing, Mao's wife.



11. Propaganda of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.



12. Richard Nixon, former president of the USA.



13. Li Cunxin, his wife and sons live in Australia.

## ACTIVITY 6.

**After watching the film, you can discuss the following questions:**

- Li doesn't like ballet at first. What changes his attitude? Is there any person involved in the situation?
- What do you think about the hardness and cruelty used at the Academy? Are they justified by the results?
- At the academy in China, they must dance political ballet (the revolutionary ballet performed for Madame Mao). At a point, he says to Liz he dances better in the U.S. A. because he feels freer. Can you explain that?
- What Communist rules Li follows in North America after the advice of the Chinese official?
- Why does Ben want Li to return to China? Why does he feel betrayed?
- Why do Li and Liz fail in their marriage? Do you think it was because Li couldn't stay in America?



## ACTIVITY 7.

Several topics are dealt throughout the film. They can be described with different adjectives and nouns. Choose from the words at the bottom the ones you think can match with the following topics. Add any necessary adjectives. More than one answer is correct.

the importance of family values; love; passion; courage; determination  
striving to realise one's dreams; human achievement; excellence  
meeting challenges; goal setting and achieving goals against odds  
continuous improvement; embracing changes; commitment and focus



Feeling	hopeful	sensible	powerful	desire
loyal	romantic	emotional	heroic	eager
patient	strong	tradition	fearless	purity
kind	empathy	honour	audacious	trial
unselfish	tenderness	inheritance	struggle	successful
truthful	sense	respect	attempt	effort
revolution	adjustment	brave	transformation	



## LA DANSA CLÀSSICA I EL BALLET



(per a més informació, cliqueu sobre la foto)

... El ballet és una dansa escènica molt evolucionada i estructurada, que s'harmonitza amb els ritmes d'obres orquestrals, escrites o no d'una manera expressa amb aquesta finalitat, i amb l'espectacle plàstic de la decoració pictòrica ...

Aquesta dansa exigeix a aquells qui la practiquen notables condicions físiques, un elevat grau d'especialització i una disciplina constant. El ballet és un espectacle difós internacionalment que disposa en diversos països d'acadèmies especialitzades, generalment annexes als grans teatres d'òpera, els quals ofereixen periòdicament cicles complets de ballet ...

La terminologia del ballet emprada internacionalment és la francesa. Els diversos elements —música, coreografia, decoració— han obtingut un paper més o

menys preponderant al llarg de la història del ballet: a vegades el compositor s'ha subordinat a un pla coreogràfic, a vegades el coreògraf s'ha adaptat a una composició ja feta, o també hom ha creat, en igualtat de condicions per al compositor, el coreògraf i el pintor, la síntesi que constitueix un ballet. Els orígens del ballet remunten al Renaixement ...

Una etapa important de la història del ballet fou la reforma de Jean-Georges Noverre (1777-1810), coreògraf considerat el més gran renovador de la dansa del s XVIII. Noverre fou el promotor d'una nova fórmula de ballet, exposada en les *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* (1760): el ballet d'acció, el qual, prescindint del text i constituït únicament per dansa i música, obrí el camí al ballet modern ...



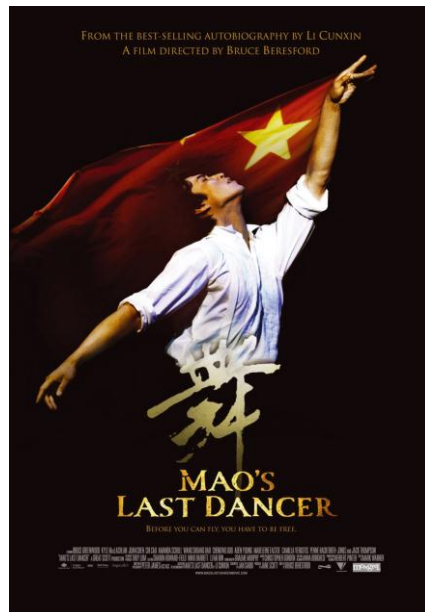
## Mao Zedong i la Revolució Xinesa.

... L'1 d'octubre de 1949 Mao Zedong, màxim dirigent dels comunistes, proclamà a Pequín la República Popular Xinesa i el 14 de febrer signà un tractat d'amistat i cooperació amb l'URSS. La victòria militar inicià una primera fase revolucionària destinada a combatre la burgesia reaccionària, el subdesenvolupament, la manca d'educació, les diferències regionals, el burocratisme, la corrupció, les drogues, les inundacions, les rates i els mosquits, etc. Quatre fets marcaren aquesta etapa: la primera reforma agrària (1947 i 1950), que eliminà els latifundis no conreats, la reforma de l'idioma, la llei de casament (1950), que emancipà la dona i ajudà a destruir la rígida estructura familiar tradicional, i la guerra de Corea (1950-53), la qual absorbí una gran part dels esforços revolucionaris, però en canvi li donà una imatge de credibilitat revolucionària a tot el Tercer Món. Aquesta fase de destrucció de la societat feudal donà pas a la concepció d'un model revolucionari agrari i diferent del soviètic i a l'establiment de les bases d'aquesta societat socialista ...

*L'Enciclopèdia.cat*

(per a més informació, cliqueu sobre la foto)





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