Creative Project Explanation

Li Cunxin (Lee Shwin Sing) was born 26 January 1961 in the Li Commune in rural Qingdao, China. He was selected as a child to train at the Beijing Dance Academy. In 1979, he was sent as one of the first cultural exchange students under Mao’s regime to the United States to perform at the Houston Ballet in Texas. Two years later in 1981, Li married an American days before his scheduled return to China and refused to leave, resulting in a dramatic defection at the Houston Chinese Consulate. Negotiations between the US and Chinese diplomats lasted for 21 hours, and the story made headlines across America. Ultimately, Li was allowed to stay in America, but his Chinese citizenship was revoked.

Li’s defection marks a major blow to Chinese soft power. Li was one of the rising stars of ballet, and was seen as a symbol of the greatness of Chinese culture. The news of China’s “loss” of Li Cunxin to the capitalist Americans must have been curtailed by the censorship of the Publicity Department of the CCP. To reflect how the propaganda department likely responded, I portrayed the event as if it were part of a modern set of censorship instructions.

The *China Digital Times* describes these instructions as leaked media instructions “distributed online. Chinese journalists and bloggers refer to these as “Directives from the Ministry of Truth”. The site refers to the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China as Minitrue. Censorship instructions are regularly issued weekly to media heads, and can emphasize any number of points. They can inform media networks to delete articles, avoid reporting on certain topics, or emphasize only particular points surrounding a topic. For example, on the topic of Obama’s meetings with the Dalai Lama, Minitrue has directed the following:

**“State Council Information Office:** Only Xinhua and national media copy may be used regarding U.S. President Obama meeting the [Dalai Lama](http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/dalai-lama/). Do not hype the issue. ([February 21, 2014](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2014/02/%E5%9B%BD%E4%BF%A1%E5%8A%9E%EF%BC%9A%E7%BE%8E%E5%9B%BD%E6%80%BB%E7%BB%9F%E5%A5%A5%E5%B7%B4%E9%A9%AC%E4%BC%9A%E8%A7%81%E8%BE%BE%E8%B5%96%E5%96%87%E5%98%9B/))

国信办：“美国总统奥巴马会见达赖喇嘛”一事只可使用新华社和国家级媒体专稿，不炒作。”

The censorship issue is much more complicated in modern times than it was in 1981, due to the proliferation of information on the internet. Since his defection, Li Cunxin has led a successful ballet career, and is now works as a stockbroker as an Australian national. He published his autobiography, *Mao’s Last Dancer*, in 2003, and a film adaptation was subsequently produced in 2009. The film is currently banned within China.

Wang Renzhong was Minitrue’s Department Head from 1980 to 1982.