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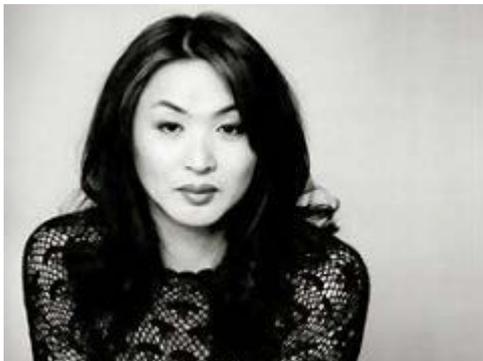
# A Dancer's Quest for True Self

## Jin Xing, China's Leading Dancer, Pushing the Limits

by Mia Turner, Time Magazine

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Editor: Please note, the inappropriate references to Jin in the male gender throughout this article is of the writers choice and does not reflect the Gender Centre's view.



Jin Xing - When [her] first Beijing performances, profound, complex and imbued with homosexual themes, received a warm reception, Jin finally felt ready to tell [her] family about [her] decision

In a country where individual choice is still a privilege, China's leading dancer, Jin Xing, continually tests the limits. At age nine, Jin begged [her] parents, an army officer and an interpreter, for permission to join the Shenyang Military Song and Dance troupe in north-eastern Liaoning province. When they refused, [s]he went on a hunger strike; after two days they relented. Years of gruelling training took Jin to the top of China's ballet world and earned [her] a government scholarship to study in the U.S. the only Chinese dancer ever to do so.

*As the only male heir on [her] father's side of the family, [s]he was shocked to find [her parents] so supportive and so unsurprised.*

Despite [her] success, Jin always kept secret something [s]he feared, made [her] too different. "Even as a child I dreamed of becoming a girl", [s]he says. Now twenty-eight, China's Nureyev has decided to undergo a sex change operation that will make [her] wish come true.

Jin's latest choice challenges the sexual and cultural mores of conservative Chinese society. As an adolescent, [s]he was attracted to men, but because homosexuality is taboo, [s]he instead put all [her] energy into [her] art. [Her] 1988 - ninety-three day stay abroad was a turning point. While honing [her] dance craft, [s]he also explored [her] sexuality. "After a year, I realised I didn't fit into the gay community", [s]he says. "I discovered I (was attracted to) men who like women."

Jin first met transsexuals while teaching modern dance in Europe and recognised what [s]he now says is the truth of [her] own sexual identity. By the time [s]he returned to China in 1993, [s]he had made up [her] mind to become a woman. When [her] first Beijing performances, profound, complex and imbued with homosexual themes, received a warm reception, Jin finally felt ready to tell [her] family about [her] decision. As the only male heir on [her] father's side of the family, [s]he was shocked to find them so supportive and so unsurprised.

Likewise, the government has displayed unprecedented tolerance for [her] high profile transformation. Ministry of Culture officials recently visited [her] in the hospital to discuss future performances. "They think I'm a crazy artist, but they respect my work," [s]he says. "By the time they left, they were calling me Miss Jin." A state television crew is even making a documentary. Jin hopes this publicity will help others grappling with uncertain sexual identities. Chinese hospitals have reportedly turned down most of the three thousand requests for sex change operations they received in the past six years. "As one person, I cannot change society," [s]he muses. "But I want people to know that nothing in life needs to be immutable. There is always a 'maybe'."

Jin has undergone the first two stages of the procedure, breast implants and facial hair removal, and this week will have the final eight-hour operation. [She] admits to being nervous but says, "The more I am forced to convince others, the more I convince myself that I am doing the right thing".

### Jin Xing

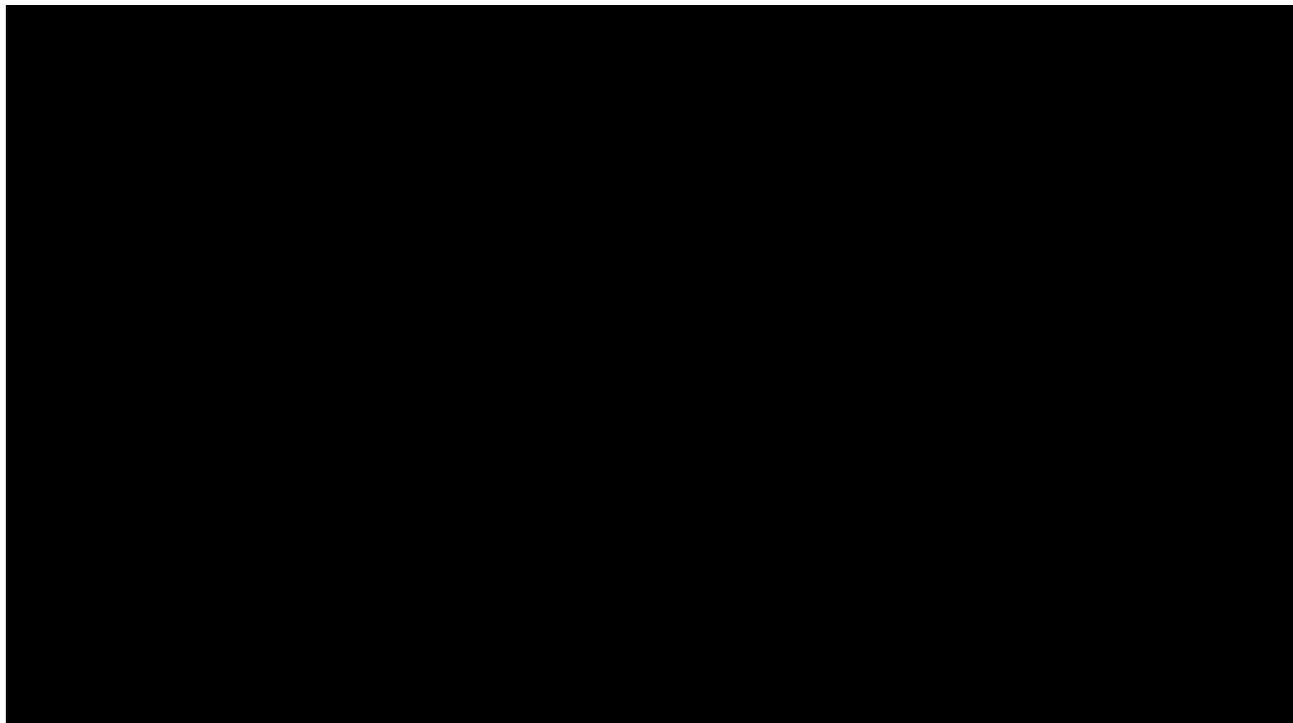
From Jin Xing's website:  Jin Xing (directly translated: golden star) started her remarkable life journey 1967 in Shenyang in Liaoning province. She was born to parents from the country's Korean minority at a time when China was caught in the throes of the Cultural Revolution. At the age of nine, she managed to get herself enrolled in the famous military dance ensemble in Shenyang, whose teacher belonged to the top of classic ballet in China. Since then Jin Xing's history reads like row after row of superlatives.

At the age of seventeen she received the Best Dancer of China Award. With nineteen she became the first

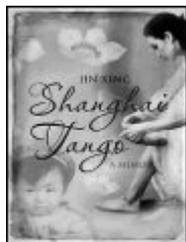


Chinese dancer to win a grant in New York from the Asian Cultural Council of America and the American Dance Festival. Amongst others she studied with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Jose Limon. In 1991 she won the "Best Choreographer Award" of the American Dance Festival for her creation *Half Dream*. Jin Xing then decided to move to Europe. There followed educational visits and appearances with various ensembles in Rome and Brussels. In 1993 after a total of six years in the western world Jin Xing returned to China where she became teacher for the National Choreography and Modern Dance Training workshops commissioned by the Chinese Ministry of Culture. In 1994 she resigned as Colonel from the Chinese military dance company.

[Read more about Jin Xing at her website](#) 



This video is courtesy [H.D. Net World Report](#) and You Tube



**Shanghai Tango: A Memoir**  
Author: Jin Xing  
Publisher: Atlantic Books (2007)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1843546329

[From Amazon Books](#)  This unusual memoir describes how China's foremost male ballet dancer (and colonel in the People's Army) underwent China's first sex-change operation and became the Shanghai Ballet's prima ballerina. This book is suitable for fans of ballet and modern dance, anyone interested in gender issues, and in Chinese culture and customs. Jin Xing is a former prima ballerina, one of the brightest stars of the Shanghai Ballet. But her journey to international fame has

been fraught with difficulty because Jin Xing was in fact born a man. From an early age she was intensely uncomfortable with her gender. Unable to understand or put words to her feelings, she immersed herself in ballet dancing, her first love. Aged nine, she joined the People's Liberation Army, where she received both dance and military training and attained the rank of colonel. The curtains opened on a new act in her life when, at the age of nineteen, she received a scholarship to study dance in New York. It was there that she discovered for the first time that it was possible to change sex. In an instant, what had been the province of dreams became a real opportunity. She took the courageous decision to return to China to face the authorities, quit the army, and confront the world with her decision to become a woman. As dramatic, graceful and deeply felt as a pas de deux, *Shanghai Tango* is a deeply personal and inspiring account of growing up in a body that feels alien and of braving pioneering surgery in communist China.

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service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.