

Reading the tea leaf of the closing of Inside Kung-Fu Magazine

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The cover of the March Issue of Inside Kung-Fu Magazine

Inside Kung-Fu Magazine

The March Issue of *Inside Kung-Fu Magazine* (*IKF*) has a good compilation of articles with a cover story on Shane Lacey's body-conditioning program. Regrettably, it is one of the last issues of this reputable magazine.

A couple of months ago, *IKF* sent out a notification to its sponsors and advertisers and announced that *IKF* will cease printing after the April. It advised them to place ad in its sister publication *Ultimate MMA*.

IKF was one of the oldest English martial arts magazines if not the oldest one. It began publishing about 38 years ago. Throughout its long history, it has served as one of the most important media for the martial arts community globally. It helped to promote the martial arts. It provided great advice to practitioners. It celebrated the accomplishments of experts and masters especially through its annual

Hall of Fame Awards. It also served as a platform for open discussion on many martial arts related issues. It was individually owned and then sold to **Beckett Media**, which is a privately held subsidiary of **Eli Research**. Aside from the notification to its sponsors, *IKF* is not replying to any interview request nor has it made any public announcement for its future plans. People in the martial arts industry have some reflections and hopes on the closing of *IKF*.

Most people suspect that the depressed economy is the culprit of *IKF*'s demise. It was reported that the other reputable *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* was forced to go online due to its distributor's bankruptcy.

The print media have been suffering a general decline for years before the recession. With the Internet, YouTube, social media and mobile devices becoming increasingly prevalent, traditional print media have been folding, and even the award-winning **Newsweek** is becoming very skinny. Specialty magazines have not been able to escape this tidal wave either. People can watch a Wushu master performing on YouTube for free at their fingertips and many question the value of reading articles and looking at pictures on paper.

Some are quick to point out that *IKF* is a victim of a large corporation whose decision-making is concentrated at the upper management. *IKF*'s competitors *T'ai Chi* and *Kung Fu Tai Chi* magazines are owned privately. Both publishers Marvin Smalheiser and Gigi Oh are **Tai Chi** and martial arts enthusiasts. They devote themselves totally to the magazines to raise the awareness of the arts and promote them. Their magazine is their core business. On the other hand, Beckett Media owns 13 sports magazines, 5 automotives magazines, 7 gaming and entertainment magazines, 5 outdoors magazines, 5 homes magazines besides *IKF* and *Ultimate MMA* along with the related memorabilia, collectibles, books, DVDs, and apparel sales. Beckett Media's parent company Eli Research is a media powerhouse that owns over 200 print and online publications, teleconferencing, and audio learning products. Even though *IKF*'s Editor Dave Cater has won accolades for his journalist work and devotion to the arts, but he is the Editor not an owner.

True martial artists think the downfall of *IKF* is another sign that traditional martial arts are losing focus attention to mixed martial arts (MMA). MMA is a full contact combat sport that allows a wide range of fighting styles and techniques in the same fighting ring. Striking and grappling are permitted while standing or on the ground. There are few rules in comparison with the traditional martial art sparring, *San Shou* or *Lei Tai*. The MMA matches can get ugly and bloody. It attracts large audience as well as big money. In a way, MMA tournaments resemble Roman Gladiatorial fights. Advanced martial artist Stephan Berwick, the founder of **True Taichi** (Washington DC) and Tai Chi Sifu Justin Meehan, founder of St. Louis Hunyuan Taiji (St. Louis, MO) have a deep concern that the philosophy, theory, techniques, and beauty of the traditional martial arts distilled from thousand years of culture and history will be lost. There are other symptoms which signals that traditional martial arts are declining according to Berwick, i.e. the Tai Chi workshop attendance has been down from years ago so are the Martial Arts

tournaments.

As we lament the death of IKF, many remain hopeful. *Kung Fu Tai Chi Magazine* went full-color in September 2010. The 34-year old *T'ai Chi* magazine has developed gradually from a four-page newsletter to its current glossy four-color 68-page format. Even though internet has its sights and sounds, but true journalistic writing and crisp clear photos on paper will always hold a special place in readers' hearts. When TV was first launched, many doomsayers declared the inevitable crashing of radio. History proves that radio is now thriving in the ever-crowded media world. Two years ago, **Lama Tantrapa** boldly started a talk radio show *the Secrets of Qigong Masters* on the internet. Last year, Dr. Tai Chi tried out the idea of an interactive net show *Chi Chat*. Recently, Lama Tantrapa launched an online e-zine *Mastery Journal*. The respected *Qi Dao* e-Newsletter started an online network and e-zine call *Yang Sheng. Journal of Asian Martial Arts* is a paid online subscription now

In the time of change, the global media landscaping is morphing constantly. The martial arts community hopes that IKF can find a new platform to continue its journalistic tradition.

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SUGGESTED LINKS

- 2011 Inside Kung-Fu Hall of Fame Inductees
- IKF's Instructor of the Year: Tai Chi Master Ren Guangyi
- IKF's Woman of the Year: Master Tiffany Chen
- Kung Fu Tai Chi Magazine is now splashed with colors!
- The Secrets of Qigong Masters & its first anniversary



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