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June 30, 2010 in [Interview](#) by [mcunningham](#) | [3 comments](#)

Maura Elizabeth Cunningham: How did [Danwei](#) get started, and what is its primary mission? Has this changed over time?

Jeremy Goldkorn: The reason I started Danwei was that there seemed to be a huge gap between the China I was living in and the way it was reported in the English language media. More specifically, I had worked in the media industry since 1997, and I wanted to describe the excitement and dynamism of the Chinese media scene. In 2003, there was very little written in English and published on the Internet that reflected the real situation and an outsider could have been forgiven for thinking all Chinese journalists and editors were brain-washed apparatchiks.

I started Danwei in 2003 as a one man blog, translating and commenting on interesting articles and trends I was seeing in Chinese media and advertising. At the time, there were very few English-language online sources of information about the Chinese media, and far less coverage of China in the international press than there is today. The information gap between presentations of China in English and the reality of life in China seemed almost criminal.

In its early years, we posted short translations from the Chinese media and Internet postings, comments on funny advertisements and egregious intellectual property infringements, and articles about off the wall subjects like transsexuals entering beauty pageants.

We still do more or less the same thing, but we publish much longer translations now. Every weekday, we summarize the front page of a Chinese newspaper, so we now have an archive of daily snapshots of Chinese life as seen through the mainstream media going back four years. We produce a lot of video, mostly interviews in English and Mandarin. Another relatively new feature is the extensive links blog at the top of Danwei.org where Danwei writers recommend news and good writing in English about China elsewhere on the Internet.

Danwei is now a four person company. We make money mostly from jobs ads on DanweiJobs.com, and from custom research projects for media companies, and for other companies that want to know what Chinese people are saying about them in the media and online.

MEC: On blogs and websites, stories quickly live and die — one week a post will get picked up and linked to by dozens of different people, but by the next week it's already been left behind. Is there a story you've run that had a particularly long life? What do you think were the reasons for its endurance?

JG: The stories that people continue linking to long after they have been published are usually long pieces with original research and reporting, particularly some of the contributions from writers who don't work for Danwei, such as the essays we've published by David Moser about Chinese media, self-censorship, and Chinese comedy (e.g. "[Stifled Laughter: How the Communist Party Killed Chinese Humor](#)"). We also come quite high on Google-related searches, so depending on what's happening in the news, old stuff sometimes gets a new life if it is about a popular or newly trending search term.

Our videos also continue to get watched on Youtube, Vimeo.com and Tudou.com.

MEC: What's one China story that you would like to see told in a different way?

JG: I don't think it's one particular story. It continues to amaze me how little the average Westerner knows about China. It's not that the information isn't available, especially online. But mainstream news media in the U.S. and other countries remains parochial, and generally does not cover China except when there is bad news or a visually appealing event like the Olympics (television is of course the worst culprit).

MEC: In addition to blogs and websites, where do you turn for China updates, news, and insights? Are there authors, books, or newsmen that you turn to for their reliable China coverage? Are there any new websites that you've recently begun tracking that you'd recommend to other readers?

JG: We recommend a lot of blogs and China websites in our [Model Worker's](#) section.

Aside from the China websites, China reporting by newspaper journalists and blogs, one must at some point escape the Twitterized Internet and read books. I recently did a segment on an episode of Kaiser Kuo's [Sinica podcast](#) that recommends a huge range of good books about China:

MEC: What is the future of Danwei? Where is it headed? Any changes on the horizon?

JG: More of the same, but better. We want to commission more original work, cover broader cultural and social issues than we have in the past and our team is also now working closely with the newly established Australian Centre on China in the World at the Australia National University at Canberra. Details of our collaboration will be announced as the Centre begins its formal activities from July.