The film *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, despite its trenchant critique of capitalist alienation, does not ultimately call for an overthrow of transnational capitalism. The factory worker makes it clear in her anonymous letter at the end of the film that she does not want Americans to stop buying Chinese-made beads, as she earns her livelihood in their manufacture. She does, however, call on consumers to pressure Chinese factory owners to scale back their harsh discipline – to “stop punishing us.” For Roger, the owner of the bead factory, punishment is the holy grail of proper management. He bemoans the failure of the predominately female workers to conform to the discipline of the industrial process. He couches his admonitions in the language of morality – it is important to make workers feel “guilty” for their transgressions. This all-encompassing regime extends even to the relatively private universe of the dormitories. A patriarchal benefactor par excellence, he acts as though he has his workers’ best interests in mind when he forbids romantic liaisons on factory grounds – “they will only end up hurting themselves,” or somesuch. He is doing them a *favor* by fining and firing them for such behavior.

Pun Ngai traces the authoritarian regime of the factor in chapter three of her book *Made in China*. (A popular phrase!) The harsh restrictions that Roger places on his workers make sense in the light of what Pun describes as the deep divide between rural and urban Chinese people, or in reform China, between urban capitalists and rural socialists. Media often depict migrant dagongmei and dagongzai as a destructive, boundary-pushing mangliu (blind flow) of undisciplined bodies. Managers like Roger, raised in capitalist Hong Kong, see it as necessary to submit this heterogeneous mass of bodies, speaking diverse dialects and originating in distant regions, to a disciplinary regimen of punishment in order to produce *one* standardized body – the ideal capitalist worker. As Pun notes, this vision of an ideal worker is a self-Orientalizing one: “slim body, sharp eyes, nimble fingers, shy, and hardworking” (77). Although both male and female workers are present in the factory, the vast majority are dagongmei, and this circumstance, combined with an Orientalizing management approach, constructs dagongmei as passive bodies in need of disciplinary inscription at the hands of male bosses and suffocating self-inscription under the catalytic influence of the electronic eye. This appraisal negates the agency of women who come to the city to realize themselves as individuals apart from the strictures of rural familial bonds, fully aware, as Pun insists, of the abuses they are likely to encounter.

Pun describes class relations in a Chinese factory as a shadowy, unspoken realm – one that everyone nevertheless possesses a keen awareness of. She interviews several workers whose piercing insights lay bare the inequality separating them from management. This knowledge, while brought home by the experience of labor, is no secret in rural areas, and is present in the minds of most workers as them embark for the city. Once in the factory, workers are aware of the degree to which timetables artificially and violently dissect their lives. “No one,” states Pun, “was a dupe” (100).

Concurrently, Pun documents a number of myths that perpetuate a desire for urbane experience among rural women. Workers returning to the provinces for the New Year do not bring back stories of devastation and sleep deprivation on the tip of their tongues. Instead, they “bring back 1,500 yuan…and many exciting stories of their experiences in Shenzhen” (Pun 58). In the film, on of the female workers brings a watch home for her little brother as a token of affection. This watch is more than a watch; it embodies all the romance of wage labor, without any of the mind-numbing repetition. This watch, this talisman of experience, has no connection to its own creation; it is not even very useful in itself. It is like a drug, like alcohol – like mardi gras beads – meaningless in itself but a wonderful excuse for transcendence. The younger brother who wears the watch piggybacks on the arc of Capitalism and taps a rich seam of su zhi that point him toward the future – without his having to understand its material consequences.

Roger uses similar romantic language in reference to factory discipline, language that elides the material threat of punishment and replaces it with artificial consensus. As he lauds the dedication of workers who resist the urge to speak to each other on the line, on-screen text alerts us that the punishment for talking is a full day’s wages deducted. Roger knows this rule but presents the documentarians with an infinitely rosier reduction. Perhaps he even believes it himself. It is necessary to see su zhi as something essential, not as a strategic choice by autonomous workers who may equally choose to disrupt the production line tomorrow. The message of both Pun and the filmmakers is an anti-Orientalizing one: while romantic narratives may tantalize dagongmei into the factory, never do they surrender agency to indoctrination. The very real instruments of punishment lie just beneath the surface, and industrial workers strategically resist and conform to their stringencies. In mind, if not in body, they do not become golems of capital’s myth.