

FURNITURE SHIPMENT FROM FORMOSA

The heavy rough sawn crate—

Three hundred twenty-one pounds

on the bill of lading from the Mikagesan Maru out of Keelung.

An unoriental collage of crowbars, hammers, splintered
flying wood, the groan of nails forced from their pits. The East
came nearer. Pads of plastic foam, corrugated cardboard
like peasant roofs, excelsior (or maybe the phoenix's nest)
swathes of pulp paper and red cord. A sudden avalanche
of dried cedar beans bared a fat in-curved leg
of teak, a new scent. A dragon's eye shone
darkly amid shadow-shapes slashed with gold.

Peering from depths of the Han Dynasty, it pierced
the final layer by its own dint; its body coiled
and clung to drawers and doors, enormous impatience
slipping the ties of dozens of oblique-eyed Liliputians.
Then through a paper fissure on the side,
a trick of light on hand-rubbed lacquer—the phoenix wing
was a battle axe: General Kuan Kung, pursuing his vow
to liberate the mainland, adjusted his armor and headdress,
turned and vanished behind seven hundred years. Only
beast and bird burst free, flaming orbs
clutched in claws, scales glittering blackly,
and shook off the last dust of island China.