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Gulf Streams

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Chinese Wood Cut

A bamboo pole
creasing her shoulders,
she swings her double load of soybeans
like pendulums in the sun,
deftly tightropeing an invisible line
earth hard beneath her feet.

Helen Petter Westra



Gulf Streams

Hung Tu has the lean legs
of a long distance runner.
In English class, he names himself Louis,
swift and fearless in conquest.

He dreams new states of mind
Maine, Ohio, Mississippi, Montana.
Fingering the braille of contour maps,
he treks great plains, canyons, peaks,
thrust faults, gulf streams
far from Sichuan.

Flushed from vaulting the Pacific,
sprinting the Atlantic,
Hung Tu's face gleams like ruddy cinnabar
from his Tah-hsueh birthplace.
The veins on his temples throb.

Like a Confucius, he speaks in proverbs:
books are pocket gardens;
history travels through misty mountains;
the landscape of the imagination
is not for the timid.

And I say:
a running stream cannot
be cut with a sword.
Run, Hung Tu, run.

Helen Petter Westra

