

e the city and  
inflict a crushing defeat on his adversary."]

9. Neither is it the acme of excellence if you fight and  
conquer and the whole Empire says, "Well done!"

[True excellence being, as Tu Mu says: "To plan secretly,  
to move surreptitiously, to foil the enemy's intentions and balk  
his schemes, so that at last the day may be won without shedding  
a drop of blood." Sun Tzu reserves his approbation for things  
that

"the world's coarse thumb  
And finger fail to plumb."]

10. To lift an autumn hair is no sign of great strength;

["Autumn" hair" is explained as the fur of a hare, which is  
finest in autumn, when it begins to grow afresh. The phrase is a  
very common one in Chinese writers.]

to see the sun and moon is no sign of sharp sight; to hear the  
noise of thunder is no sign of a quick ear.

[Ho Shih gives as real instances of strength, sharp sight  
and quick hearing: Wu Huo, who could lift a tripod weighing 250  
stone; Li Chu, who at a distance of a hundred paces could see  
objects no bigger than a mustard seed; and Shih K'uang, a blind  
musician who could hear the footsteps of a mosquito.]

11. What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who  
not only wins, but excels in winning with ease.

[The last half is literally "one who, conquering, excels in  
easy conquering." Mei Yao-ch'en says: "He who only sees the  
obvious, wins his battles with difficulty; he who looks below the  
surface of things, wins with ease."]

12. Hence his victories bring him neither reputation for  
wisdom nor credit for courage.

[Tu Mu explains this very well: "Inasmuch as his victories  
are gained over circumstances that have not come to light, the  
world as large knows nothing of them, and he wins no reputation  
for wisdom; inasmuch as the hostile state submits before there  
has been any bloodshed, he receives no credit for courage."]

13. He wins his battles by making no mistakes.

[Ch'en Hao says: "He plans no superfluous marches, he  
devises no futile attacks." The connection of ideas is thus  
explained by Chang Yu: "One who seeks to conquer by sheer  
strength, clever though he may be at winning pitched battles, is  
also liable on occasion to be vanquished; whereas he who can look  
into the future and discern conditions that are not yet manifest,  
will never make a blunder and therefore invariably win."]

Making no mistakes is what establishes the certainty of victory,  
for it means conquering an enemy that is already defeated.

14. Hence the skillful fighter puts himself into a position  
which makes defeat impo