Cantonese schoolmaster Hong Xiuquan, self-proclaimed Younger Brother of Jesus Christ, led the rebel Taiping movement to success in the 1850s and 1860s, bringing large areas of China under the rebels' control. But even by the time this official document was printed in 1854, the unity of the movement was beginning to unravel. The Taiping authority issued this proclamation to boost morale by demonstrating that behind all their successes was the divine plan of the Heavenly Father. The so-called demons referred to here are the armies of the Qing emperor who tried to stop the rebels' advance as they took city after city, capturing territory from Guilin in the south to Nanjing (here called Jinling), a thousand li away (one li equals three miles) by the rebels' estimates.

The Principles of the Heavenly Nature

With regard to human life, reverence for Heaven and support of the Sovereign begin with loyalty and uprightness; to cast off the devil's garb and become true men—this must come about through an awakening. Now, the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother have displayed the heavenly favor and specially commanded our Heavenly King to descend into the world and be the true Taiping sovereign of the ten thousand states of the world; they have also sent the Eastern King to assist in court policy, to save the starving, to redeem the sick, and, together with the Western and Northern Kings, [Wei] Changhui, and the Assistant King, to take part in the prosperous rule and assist in the grand design. As a result, the mortal world witnesses the blessings of resurrection, and our bright future is the symbol of renewal.

We marquises and chancellors hold that our brothers and sisters have been blessed by the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother, who saved the ensnared and drowning and awakened the deluded; they have cast off worldly sentiments and now follow the true Way. They cross mountains and wade rivers, not even ten thousand li being too far for them to come, to uphold together the true Sovereign. Armed and bearing shield and spear, they carry righteous banners that rise colorfully. Husband and wife, men and women, express common indignation and lead the advance. It can be said that they are determined to uphold Heaven and to requite the nation with loyalty ...
number, rank upon rank, encircled the city from all directions. There was no avenue of escape. By this time the devilish demons knew of our situation and became unusually fierce, all believing their plan would succeed. In the third month, the Heavenly Father greatly displayed his powers and ordered us younger brothers and sisters, one and all, to uphold the true Sovereign and attack Guilin. We then moved the camps and broke through the encirclement; and, because the Heavenly Father had changed our hearts, we one and all with utmost energy and disregard for our persons struck through the iron passes and copper barriers, killing innumerable devilish demons, and directly arrived at the Guangxi provincial capital. Thereupon Guilin was encircled. Later, because the people of the city came out and spoke to the Eastern King, reporting that the city granaries were empty and that provisions were deficient, the Eastern King, seeing that their strength was exhausted, showed great mercy and immediately ordered a temporary lifting of the siege until another good plan of attack could be contrived.

You all should know of the Heavenly Father's power, his omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Why was it that the one city of Guilin alone could not be attacked and secured? This was because our Heavenly Father secretly made it so—something not easily understood by man.

Thereafter, from Guilin we moved on to capture Xing'an, Quanzhou, Daozhou, Chenzhou, and other moated cities. Wherever the Heavenly Army went, battles were won and objectives taken; wherever it went, the enemy scattered, our strength being as [irresistible as] a knife splitting bamboo. We moved from Chenzhou to Changsha; the latter city was attacked several times, and again we rushed by the city; this also was the result of the Heavenly Father's having secretly willed it so. If the army had entered Changsha and had been stationed there long, then the boatmen at Yiyang and other places along the river, being unable to avoid the trickery and intimidation of the demons, would have had to flee to distant localities. How then could we have obtained boats for a million brave soldiers, that we might float downstream to capture Wuchang? From this we can see that our Heavenly Father's power secretly made it so.
From Wuchang to Jinling [Nanjing] the land extends as far as a thousand li; how strategic and important are the passes and river crossings, and how strong and firm are the cities and moats! To attack and capture the cities seemed difficult; even if victory could have been secured, it appeared that it would take a very long time. Yet in not more than one month's time, we had followed the stream eastward from Wuchang, passing Jiangxi, crossing Anhui, and pushing directly up to Jinling, without the least resistance. After reaching this provincial capital, we found the height and thickness of the city walls and the vastness of the land to be indeed twice that of other provincial cities; to attack it seemed far more difficult. Who would have known that within ten days one single effort would bring success? Jinling was captured with our hands hanging at our sides. Had it not been for our Heavenly Father's power, how could things have been so quick and easy? From this we can again see the Heavenly Father's power to predetermine things.
