Art Conservation and historical newspapers

The slight, 9" x 3.7" booklet bears little resemblance to newspapers more familiar to western eyes. Less than .02 inches thick, this edition of the Peking Gazette is printed on seven lightweight sheets of bamboo paper between front and back bamboo paper covers, all bound together on the right-hand side with two paper twists, or “nails,” and four pinholes. But the Gazette, which was usually printed weekly, contains news as important during the final years of China’s Qing dynasty (1636-1912) as any news today. This edition of the Gazette is inscribed “Nov 1892,” and it would have been read by anyone interested in the activities of the emperor and his court, including both the Chinese and the many foreigners in the country at that time. Now a treatment project for WUDPAC Fellow and paper major Tammy Hong, the booklet belongs to the Penn Museum (acc. no. A1830) and is inscribed with the name of its donor, Charles D. Hart. A third inscription reads “Peking gazette” and is, like the others, written in brown ink and in opposite orientation to the Chinese text.

The fragile booklet is in poor condition overall, and Tammy’s goal is to stabilize it so that it can be handled safely by researchers. She found that the bamboo papers and covers are brittle, with losses, creases, wrinkles, and folds throughout. One of the paper nails is lost, and the other is loose, while a brown, sticky substance has created a dark stain that binds together the second and third pages – the table of contents and the court’s official note – so they cannot be opened at all.

After cleaning the Gazette’s surfaces with soft brushes, Tammy will first work to stabilize the fragile paper by mending losses and tears with adhesive-coated paper activated with ethanol. To further reinforce the booklet’s structure, she will replace the missing paper nail and tighten and reuse the loose paper nail that remains. She will also work with a small spatula and ethanol in local areas of the adhered pages. She hopes this will reduce the stain and allow the pages to release themselves. When Tammy’s treatment is complete and the Peking Gazette is returned to the Penn Museum, its news will once again be available to anyone interested in the happenings of November 1892 during China’s Qing Dynasty.