Good morning! It is a tremendous pleasure to be here in Hangzhou with all of you today for this conference: “The History and Cultural Heritage of Chinese Calligraphy, Printing and Library Work.” I want to welcome you all here this morning, and I want to say, “Thank you,” from the bottom of my heart to all of our friends here in Hangzhou who have made us so welcome and have done all the planning of this conference. I want to thank the Hangzhou Preconference Organizing Committee, especially its chairman, Yan Jianxin, the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture here in China, and also the vice-chairman, my colleague Jan Bos, the Secretary of the IFLA RBMS Standing Committee. I would also like to thank Qi Youwei and Jin Gengchu, both of the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture. We could not have had this preconference without all the hard work of our Chinese colleagues here in this beautiful city of Hangzhou. I know we have been told repeatedly about the sweltering heat, but we have also heard a delightful expression a few times and that is: “The heat is just a symbol of the warm heartedness of the people here who are welcoming us.” And this is certainly the case. We have been welcomed in a very wonderful way.

Now I want to tell you all a bit about IFLA and the RBMS Standing Committee (the Rare Books & Manuscripts Standing Committee). The mission of the Rare Books & Manuscripts Section (RBMS) is to provide a forum for discussion and exchange of information on matters of particular concern to rare books and manuscript librarians, including the subjects of collection development, preservation, bibliographic control, and the role of special collections materials in all types of libraries.

Recently we have had two goals to support the mission of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section. The first goal has been to promote the understanding of the significance of rare books and manuscripts for scholarly research as a part of the heritage of civilization in an international context. So it is very proper for us to be here in your city in China to look at rare books and manuscripts in the context of Chinese culture. A second goal of RBMS has been developing international standards in the field of rare book and manuscript librarianship, publishing directories and bibliographies, and building up sources of information that will assist rare book and manuscript librarians in their work. We have taken a number of actions in recent years, and we hope to do more in the future. Some of our continuing projects include the discussion of the security of rare materials, the collection of samples of policies and standards for the digitization of special collections material,
and participation in setting the criteria for the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. We also seek members and corresponding members by sponsoring the 2006 satellite meeting here in China. We are hoping more of you from China will join in the work of RBMS. We continue to augment the Sections web pages. We have a working group on ISBD (a). We are also planning to sponsor midterm meetings from time to time. Other actions we take as a section to promote rare books and manuscripts include providing a newsletter for professionals in the field. We also have a Section brochure, which, thanks to our friends here, has been translated into Chinese.

Finally, as a means of professional development RBMS has provided preconferences prior to IFLA World Library and Information Congresses. A satellite meeting was convened last year in Copenhagen, Denmark, and this year here in Hangzhou, China. Next year RBMS will participate in a preconference in Durban, South Africa, where we will collaborate with the IFLA Preservation and Conservation Section on a program on conservation of library materials. For those of us going on from China to Seoul, Korea, for the World Library and Information Congress at the end of this preconference, we will have a program there entitled: “West by East, East by West: Culture and Technological Exchange, Old Technology, New Technology, Collecting, & Describing Rare Materials.” I hope you will join us for that meeting in Korea. But in the mean time, let me return to the program of this preconference. I am so very grateful to committee members and sponsors here in Hangzhou. I look forward to today, tomorrow, and Wednesday not only to hearing the important papers and presentations that will be given, but also to seeing the wonderful rare books and manuscripts preserved here in this region of China. Thank you all very much for being here this morning.