Welcome, welcome to this IFLA conference.

On behalf of IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, we welcome all professionals and policymakers from all over China and the wider world, meeting here in Hangzhou. It is an honor to address so many specialists and scholars who are concerned with rare books and manuscripts, with the written and printed cultural heritage and with library work and services. Important issues of our heritage worldwide need to be discussed.

That is why IFLA as the global organization for libraries and information services offers a forum for professionals to discuss issues of worldwide concern, exchange expertise and work on international standards. But IFLA is doing much more. For those of you less familiar with these international aspects of librarianship a few more words.

IFLA works at the international level and represents the interests of library and information services and their users. (In figures: more than 500 thousand library service points as well as the 2.5 billion registered library users around the world.) IFLA was founded in 1927 at an international conference and has its headquarters in the Netherlands, on the premises of the Royal and National Library in The Hague.

What does IFLA work for as an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit organization? IFLA promotes high standards of provision and delivery of library and information services; for access to sources, for the exchange of information, for the best preservation of library materials, for catalogues, and digital representation, it is important to have international standards, developed by professionals; our work, librarianship is truly international.

IFLA also encourages widespread understanding of the value of good library and information services; this means promotion of library services for all; partnerships with education, cultural sectors and others; and convincing decision makers to provide adequate budgets for library work.

Finally, through participation in the international community, for example at UNESCO, United Nations and international organizations on e.g. copyright, trade, communication, IFLA represents the interests of the members throughout the world. It has now 1,700 Members (library associations and institutions) in 150 countries, including China, and many other countries in the Asian region, where now satellite conferences take place around the IFLA World Library and Information Congress, starting in a few days in Seoul, Korea.
What makes IFLA special? Let us explain this with help of some keywords, all starting with P (at least in English).

IFLA is professional. In the sections and divisions dedicated professionals share their knowledge, improve competencies and qualities, also in the less known or popular areas of librarianship. A profession is for a lifetime, and requires the respect for the knowledge from the past. A professional attitude works for the future beyond one human generation. Respect for tradition, good skills for accountable description (standards) and modern representation through new technology, are what makes librarianship, especially in the field of Rare Books and Manuscripts a true profession.

IFLA is political, in the sense that it protects universal basic values which also apply to library and information services: human development, access to information for all, freedom of expression, cultural diversity, unbiased service, and independent acquisition and treatment of sources. As professionals we stand for these values, and library associations worldwide will advocate for the interests of libraries and their users. We all know how vulnerable rare books are in conflict driven and changing times.

IFLA is promising. Our societies are increasingly knowledge societies. More and more people are learning, studying, in need of good sources. As professionals we wish to promise that materials of e.g. cultural heritage are well kept, adding sometime surprising knowledge to the issues of today and tomorrow. We all also work in a promising field of new technologies which can help where human capacity is limited. That is why we need cultural and technical exchanges on technology and strategies for collecting and describing rare materials. Every rare book or manuscript taken care of and put into the public is a promise for human development.

IFLA is partnership. Through the work in the sections, through e-mail and conferences contacts are established for sustainable partnerships. You will experience yourself how many opportunities for networking, for professional development are offered. IFLA works with international partners, such as the Blue Shield to preserve heritage, to protect valuable materials and to apply new methods of treating e.g. rare books and manuscripts. Without international orientation, many professionals, many materials would be at a loss.

Therefore, it is very fortunate that IFLA’s Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, has found such good partners here in China, in Hangzhou, so it can hold a special conference totally dedicated to its prime interests.

All the professional papers are also referring to the keywords with P: it is about paper and printing, production and preservation, people and politics that influenced the written and printed cultural heritage in China.

So we are all going to enjoy this conference, the meetings and wonderful visits on the spot. On behalf of IFLA we would like to thank in advance the organizers and co-organizers: the section has done a wonderful job bringing us here, in Hangzhou: the paradise on earth, and also the paradise for the book.
For a good book all is present, but the most important is the spirit in which it is written. In the same way: all elements for a good conference are present. Let us collect all the good spirits that come from these rare books and manuscripts, and write together a rare conference.