Ladies and Gentlemen:

The 2006 IFLA RBMS Preconference, "The History and Cultural Heritage of Chinese Calligraphy, Printing, and Library Work," now commences in the city of Hangzhou, paradise on earth on the banks of beautiful West Lake. Please allow me on behalf of the China National Library and the China Society for Library Science to extend my warm welcome and sincerer wishes on this great occasion.

China is a country of ancient civilization with a long history. It created a world famous splendid culture of long standing in the process of its development. This civilization is solidified in ancient architecture and various kinds of relics, and condensed in the writing of different media. And of course, it is still alive in our non-material cultural heritage. There is no doubt that antiquarian and rare books and the various media of cultural heritage have experienced endless disasters of war-ridden years, natural calamities, and man-made calamities. Only approximately one per cent has survived in good condition. According to incomplete statistics, in China there are about 30 million volumes of old books made before 1911 of which 2.5 million were made before 1795. These books are collected in our China National Library, public libraries, university libraries, museums, and monasteries. There are 2.7 million volumes of old books collected in the China National Library. These valuable, antiquarian books trace the footprint of the Chinese nation’s development, record the course of the Chinese nation’s civilization and its connotation, embody the Chinese nation’s spiritual value and mode of thinking, and reflect the Chinese nation’s abundant imagination, great vitality, and creativity. These collections are a great achievement of the wisdom of the Chinese people, and they are an important part of the world’s cultural heritage.

The Chinese government, libraries, museums have paid special attention to the preservation and conservation of these antiquarian books. On the basis of the general survey, we compiled and published the “Bibliography of Chinese Ancient and Rare Books” in the 1990s. In recent years, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance have been manufacturing reprints of the rare books. We have carefully chosen more than seven hundred titles of rare books to reproduce. Last year, we started to make a preservation plan for Chinese special collections of rare books in order to put into effect the classification and protection of rare books. The preservation conditions for rare books have improved as the Chinese economy has developed. To sort out and reprint the antiquarian and rare books has been a remarkable achievement. We have sorted and punctuated 2.5 billion characters in
Chinese antiquarian and rare books and digitized 1.5 billion characters from these books. There is no need for reticence. The preservation and conservation of these antiquarian and rare books is still a very deep worry. Disasters from insects like silverfish, the calamities of water, i.e. leaks and floods, and fire happen occasionally. We feel extremely anxious due to the fact that there are certain numbers of rare books that are at risk from storage in simple and crude conditions. With each passing day they are damaged seriously from acidification.

The purpose of holding an international conference to study the history of Chinese calligraphy and printing culture is to draw the outline of the development of book history clearly and to try to understand ancient Chinese printing techniques. Anyway, through this seminar we must bring to the attention of the entire society this important human cultural heritage and the great importance of preserving rare books and manuscripts. We hope by putting forward advanced preservation techniques to protect rare books that this abundant and valuable cultural heritage will be preserved and carried forward from generation to generation bringing benefits for future generations. We have great expectations for the great achievements of this conference.

With best wishes for the great success of this preconference.