The 2006 IFLA RBMS Pre-Conference in Hangzhou, which took place on Aug. 14–16, 2006, came to a successful and satisfactory close. This Pre-Conference was lauded by all the participants. Our chair, Dr. Susan M. Allen said that it was one of the largest pre-conferences in the history of IFLA RBMS. There were 158 participants from twelve countries and regions of Asia, America, Europe and Oceania. Altogether sixty-three papers concentrated on the subject of “Chinese Written and Printed Cultural Heritage and Library Work.” Fifteen people made welcoming speeches, keynote addresses and paper presentations, including our chair, Dr Allen Mr.Yang Jianxin, Director of the Cultural Department of Zhejiang Provincial Government, Dr. Marian Koren, on behalf of IFLA, Dr. Zhan Furui, Director of the China Society for Library Science and Director of China National Library, and Dr. Jan Bos, secretary of IFLA RBMS, who made closing remarks. There was also an exhibition on China’s Ancient Libraries, a cultural evening at the China Yue Opera where “The Family of the Book Collector” was performed, and two days of visits to see ancient Chinese papermaking, book printing, book thread binding, damaged rare book and manuscript repair and recovery, the Chinese Writing Brush Museum, and the collection of 150,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing, etc.

All these speakers and activities made the attendees excited and enthusiastic. Dr. Alice Prochaska, IFLA RBM Section’s former chair said: “Everything went so well, and the papers were all fascinating. The rest of the program all fitted so well, too, with the theme of the papers. I learned a great deal about Chinese rare books and print culture, and it was a great pleasure to make contact with you and so many other Chinese colleagues.” Dr. Hartmut Walravens, chair of the IFLA Newspaper Section, expressed his feeling in his E-mail: “I can only summarize that you and your colleagues deserve the highest praise for arranging such a wonderful conference; the hospitality was truly magnificent. I also find the several publications that we were given most enlightening.” Dr. Bjorn Dal, IFLA RBM Section’s Standing Committee Member, said: “After all, it was one of the most interesting conferences I have ever attended. It was all very well arranged and all the talking between the participants afterwards was full of enthusiasm. You can be very satisfied with the job done! I’m absolutely honest when I say that I really hope to be able to visit China again. If there will be another conference further on I will do all I can to be able to come!” Prof. Li Guoqing from the China Tianjin Library said: “Being an attendee, I have participated in many seminars at home and abroad, I compared with the different conferences, no matter on the contents of the announcement or the final program; the welcoming speeches or the keynote speeches, or paper presentation; the pre-print papers or the special cultural eve-
ning; the exhibition of the Chinese ancient library or the excursion on the conference theme, it was really worth as an international level conference because of the hosts and sponsor’s hard working, the detail planning and good arrangement.” Dr. Jan Bos said: “I returned home, still full of sweet memories of our wonderful Pre-Conference in Hangzhou! It was a magnificent experience. The hospitality, the organization, the welcome speeches, the papers, the visits, the unforgettable cultural evening, the many gifts, everything was perfect.” Dr. Susan M Allen said: “The three days of papers and tours were extraordinary, and your many gifts and kindnesses to me and the other attendees at the meeting were very much appreciated. I will long remember my first visit to China with warmth and happiness. Thank you very much for all that you did to make this important conference a successful event in every way. I hope you will also tell your staff how meaningful it was to us all, and thank them for taking such good care of those of us visiting from other countries.” Therefore, this Pre-Conference made a lasting impression on all the attendees. The title of the Pre-Conference attracted many participants. The attendees from China believed that this conference theme will have a good result for strong support of the preservation of China’s material and non-material cultural heritage and will strongly promote the preservation of rare books and manuscripts in China. Thekeynotes and paper presentations were all wonderful and fascinating. During the Pre-conference, threekeynotes speeches and nine papers were warmly welcomed by all the attendees. “The papers selected for presentation were high in quality and they reflect the latest development and trends of the study on Chinese printing, Chinese papermaking, Chinese ancient libraries, preservation work on Chinese wood blocks for printing, as well as Chinese ancient and rare books preserved by libraries in China and Europe” said Dr. Sim Chuin Peng, of the Singapore National University Library.

In a word, almost all the attendees suggested having an official publication of these high quality papers in order to share them with more and more colleagues across the world.

The sites chosen for cultural visits matched the pre-conference. On Aug. 15–16, 2006, we arranged for all the participants to visit the Ancient and Rare Books Department of Zhejiang Library to see the repair and recovery of damaged rare books, to visit Chinese Traditional Printing Cultural Village and see the traditional papermaking, book printing, and book binding, to visit the 440 years old Tianyi Ge Library, the museum of the Chinese writing brush and 150,000 pieces of wood blocks for printing collected in Jiaye Tang of the Zhejiang Library. The arrangements were a great success. Dr. Björn Dal said: “The excursions were extremely important for me as I was able to see this with my own eyes, notice the details in fabrication and enjoy the whole impression. You know, there are in many aspects no similarities between East and West culture of books.”

Special Features of the Chinese Ancient Library Exhibition made people know that the history of book collecting in China can be traced back 3,000 years. Literature, in the form of books and precious materials, was handed down from genera-
tion to generation, from dynasty to dynasty. Unfortunately, China has suffered from foreign invasion and internal disturbance in recent centuries and the traditional Chinese ancient libraries have barely survived. According to an uncompleted estimate, there were more than one thousand ancient libraries in the Zhejiang Province since the Song Dynasty (960 A.D.-). Only fourteen of them have survived to this era. Around twenty of them still remain in the whole of China. To support this pre-conference, the Zhejiang Library prepared an exhibition, which introduced the surviving fourteen ancient libraries in Zhejiang. The contents of the exhibit showed pictures and a written explanation of each one. The superb exhibit of the beautiful ancient libraries was attractive and a feast for all to see. It added to the enjoyment of the conference. Dr. Jan Bos, IFLA RBMS secretary said: “Sorting out my pictures after I returned home, reminded me of the very nice exhibition in the hall of your library. I hope it will be possible to make a small e-publication of it.”

The Special Cultural Evening, local Yue Opera performance, touched everyone’s heart. In China, book collecting, which is a good quality of the noble character, has been carried forward from generation to generation. Therefore, there were many stories, which had circulated among the people. “The Story of the Fan Family Library (Tianyi Ge Library)” was one of them. The Preparatory Committee of the 2006 IFLA RBMS Pre-Conference arranged for the performance of the Yue Opera with its soft melody of the Zhejiang local style. This was a great success. Dr. Hartmut Walravens said: “I was at first a little doubtful about the Yue Opera but after the performance I can only congratulate you on including it in the programme. It seems unique that a library story was made the theme of an opera, and when I mentioned this at the Seoul World Library and Information Congress colleagues were extremely interested. I must also say that the cast was excellent and the performers were first rate.”

In a word, the 2006 IFLA RBMS Pre-Conference in Hangzhou obtained such a great success, because of its hosts who attached the utmost importance to it, and were supported by the committee members of our Section and the hard-working sponsor and co-organizers. We would like to express our sincere gratitude and many thanks to our chair, Dr. Susan M. Allen, to our secretary, Dr. Jan Bos, our Newsletter editor, Dr. Jutta Weber, and all members of the IFLA Rare Books and Manuscripts Section. We also want to express our special thanks to our IFLA President Dr. Alex Byrne for his strong support of this Pre-Conference and for writing the special preface for this book.