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Welcome on Behalf of IFLA to the
Rare Books and Manuscripts
Section Pre-conference
Hangzhou, 14–16 August 2006

MARIAN KOREN

Welcome to distinguished guests, especially, Mr. Yang Jianxin, director of the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture; Dr. Zhan Furui, director of the National Library of China; and Dr. Susan Allen, chair of the IFLA Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, and a cordial welcome to all members of the IFLA section and to all colleagues and friends of libraries. On behalf of IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, we welcome library professionals and policymakers from all over China and the wider world to this 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 on our heritage worldwide need to be discussed. That is why IFLA, as the global organization for libraries and information services, offers a forum where professionals discuss issues of worldwide concern, exchange expertise, and work on international standards. But IFLA is doing much

★ This pre-conference was hosted by the IFLA Rare Books and Manuscripts Section and the Cultural Department of Zhejiang Provincial Government, China and sponsored by Zhejiang Library.

more. For those of you less familiar with these international aspects of librarianship, I offer a few additional words.

The International Federation of Library Associations works at the international level and represents the interests of library and information services and their users—in figures: more than five hundred thousand library service points as well as the two and one half 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, and 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; establishing partnerships with education, cultural sectors, and others; and convincing decisions makers to provide adequate budgets for library work.

Finally, through participation in the international community, for example at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations itself, and other international organizations, IFLA represents the interests of its members throughout the world on copyright, trade, communication, and other issues. It has now seventeen hundred members (library associations and institutions) in one hundred fifty countries, including China and many other countries in the Asian region, where satellite conferences take place around the annual IFLA World Library and Information Congress, held this year from August 20–24 in Seoul, Korea.

What makes IFLA special? Let us explain this with the help of some keywords, all starting with the letter “p” (at least in English).

IFLA is “professional.” In the sections and divisions of IFLA, dedicated professionals share their knowledge to 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. And, a professional attitude works for the future beyond

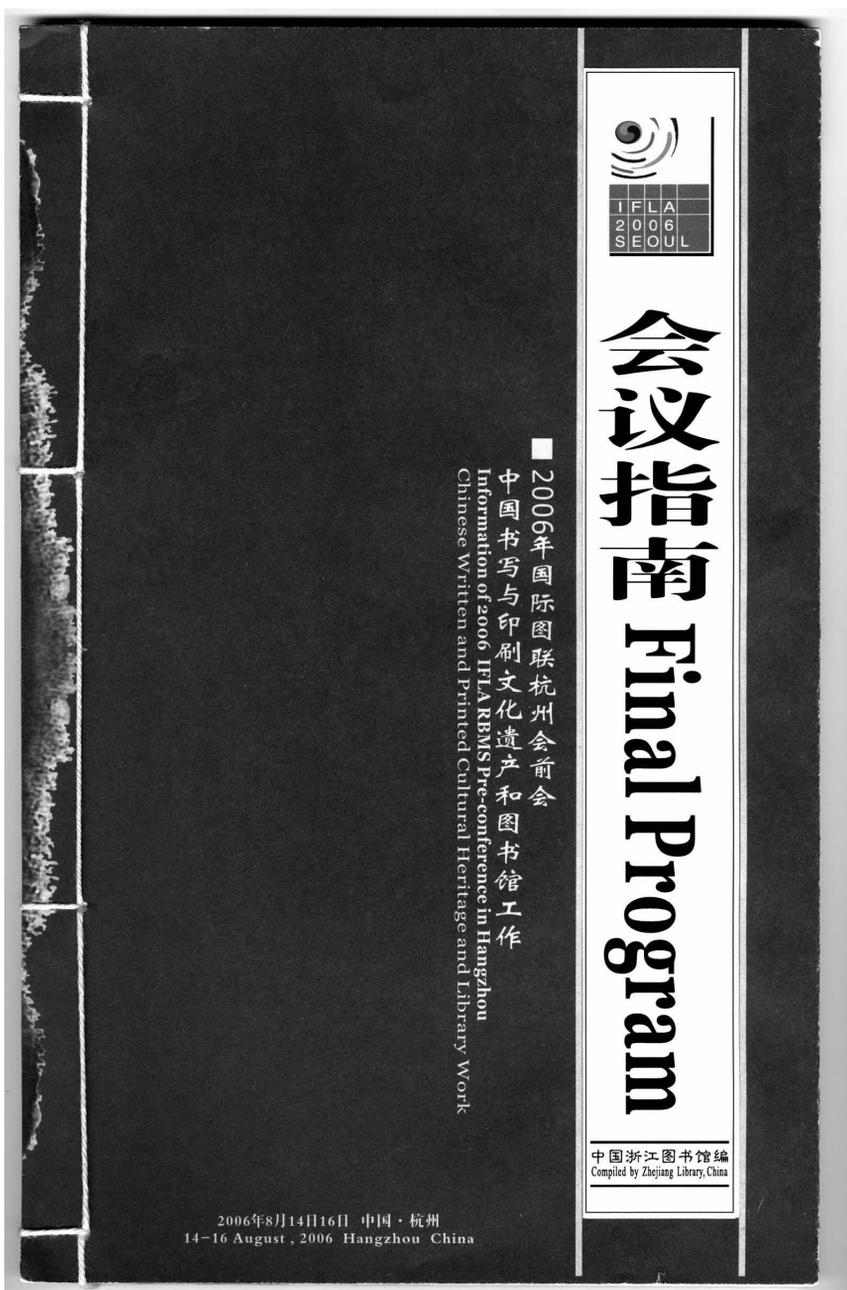
one human generation. Respect for tradition, good skills for accountable description (standards), and modern representation through new technology are the elements that make librarianship, especially in the field of rare books and manuscripts, a true profession.

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 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, and in need of good resources. As professionals, we wish to promise that materials of, for example, cultural heritage are well kept, adding sometimes surprising knowledge to the issues of today and tomorrow. We all also work in a field of promising new technologies that 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 made 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 the way in which 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.¹ Without international orientation and many professionals, many materials would be lost.

Therefore, it is very fortunate that IFLA’s Rare Books and Manuscripts Section has found such good partners here in China, in Hangzhou, so that it can hold a special conference totally dedicated to its prime interests. Our specially bound copy of the program embodies what we will be talking about. (See figure 1.) Further, all of the professional



1. Cover of the program—bound in the style of a traditional Chinese book—for the pre-conference of International Federation of Library Associations “Chinese Written and Printed Cultural Heritage and Library Work” held in August 2006 in Hangzhou at the Zhejiang Library.

papers prepared by the participants refer to the keywords that begin with the letter “p;” they are about paper and printing, production and preservation, and people and politics, all of which have influenced and continue to influence the written and printed cultural heritage in China.

We are about to enjoy this conference with its meetings and wonderful visits in the Zhejiang region to sites of strong relevance to China’s written and printed cultural heritage. On behalf of IFLA, I would like to thank in advance the organizers and co-organizers; the section has done a wonderful job in bringing us together here in Hangzhou—paradise on earth and also paradise for the book. As ever, everything necessary for the making of a fine book is readily available here in Hangzhou, but the most important thing is the spirit in which that book was and is written. Similarly, all elements for a good conference are present here in Hangzhou. Let us now collect all the good spirits that emanate from China’s rare books and manuscripts and together write a truly rare conference.

14 August 2006

NOTES

1. More information on “Blue Shield” is available on the IFLA’s website. See <http://www.ifla.org/blueshield.htm>. The Blue Shield program is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. The “Blue Shield” symbol was specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for marking cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict. It is also the name of an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world’s cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters. The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) covers museums and archives, historic sites, and libraries. This committee brings together the knowledge, experience, and international networks of five expert, non-governmental organizations that deal with cultural heritage—Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA), International Council on Archives / Conseil international des archives (ICA), International Council of Museums / Conseil international des musées (ICOM), International Council on Monuments and Sites / Conseil international des monuments et des sites (ICOMOS), and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions / Fédération internationale des associations de bibliothécaires et des bibliothèques (IFLA).