The “Preface” to the Chinese edition of this book has already recounted how the book was conceived and the many debts that I incurred in the process of writing that book. The story of this English translation can be shorter. In the summer of 2016, I agreed to join with CHEN Wei 陳偉 and LI Tianhong 李天虹 of the Centre for the Study of Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts (Jianbo yanjiu zhongxin 簡帛研究中心) of Wuhan University 武漢大學 to launch a new journal entitled Bamboo and Silk, which would be based primarily on the journal Jianbo 簡帛 (Bamboo and silk studies), of which they are the editors. Despite my objections, both Professors Chen and Li insisted that a translation of my article “An Outline of Western Studies of Chinese Paleography,” originally published in Jianbo 簡帛, should be included in the first issue of that new journal. Since I could not dissuade them from this decision, I determined that it would be best simply to translate the article myself. Later, in March, 2017, during a visit to Hong Kong, after I had recounted this story to Professors CHEN Zhi 陳致 and Adam SCHWARTZ of the Jao Tsung-i Academy of Sinology 饒宗頤國學院 of Hong Kong Baptist University 香港浸會大學, they both encouraged me to translate the other three chapters as well, offering to publish the book in the Academy’s monograph series. Later my wife, Elena Valussi, convinced me that there may be western scholars outside of the field of Early China studies who might also be interested in the history of this field, but who would not invest the time to read a 650-page Chinese book. So I determined to do it. Fortunately, I was able to do most of the work while I was correcting the proofs of the Chinese edition late in 2017 and early 2018, the work of translating ensuring that I pay close attentions to the galleys.

The book was originally intended for a Chinese readership, an intention which manifests itself in numerous places throughout this English translation. It is no doubt backwards that I, a western scholar, should have written the book first in Chinese and then only after that book was finished did I translate it into English. Strange but true, such has been the process. One of the scholars that de Gruyters invited to evaluate the present book has justly criticized this orientation, and has suggested that I should not have simply translated the book, but should also revise it with a western readership in mind. In an ideal world, I should like to do this. But deadlines loom, and other projects beckon. Aside from removing a few gratuitous references to “Chinese readers,” I simply do not have the heart to undertake a wholesale revision of the book. One of these references to Chinese readers in the original Chinese edition comes at the end of the “Preface,” where I expressed the wish that Chinese readers might learn of discoveries and scholarly developments in the West about which they may not have known. I have revised
that sentence to extend that wish to western readers as well. In addition, I should also like to express the fervent wish that scholars of all nationalities and backgrounds will feel free to correct mistakes that I have made and to provide information about any scholarship that I may have neglected.