GE1501 Chinese Civilisation
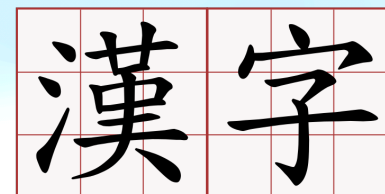
Week 2: Chinese Language

漢字
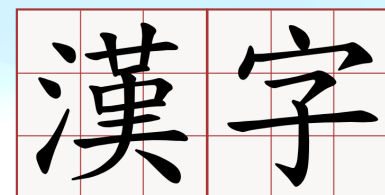
Dr Wilson Chan

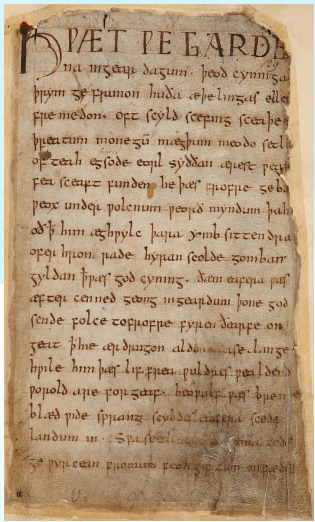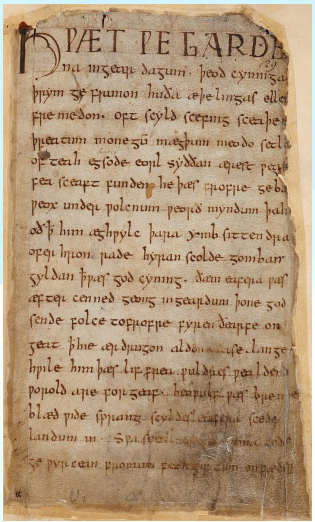*Beowulf*, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, (c. 975–1010 AD) British Museum, London

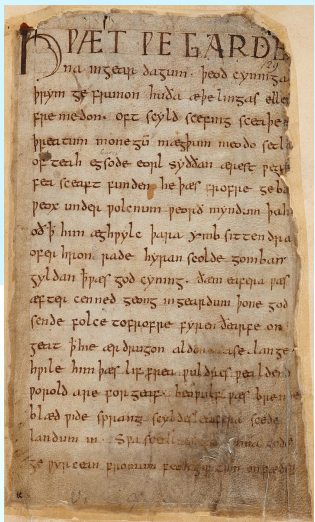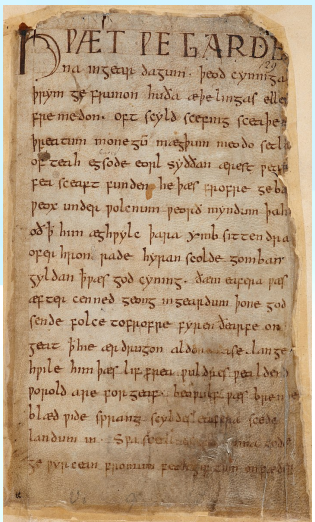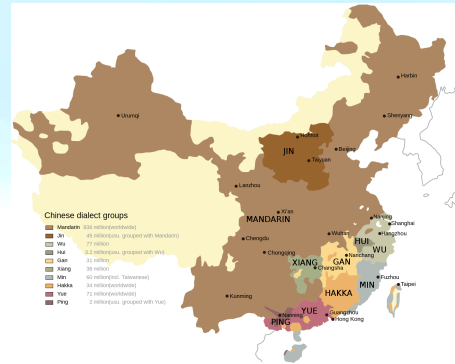*Spiritual Flight Sutra* (*Lingfei jing* 靈飛經), eighth century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
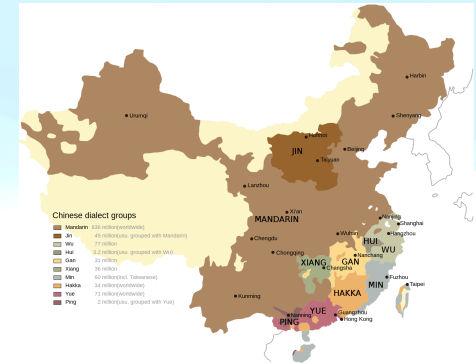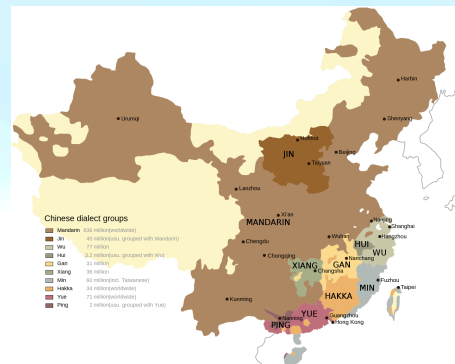
Chinese Language

- Sino-Tibetan language family
- Modern regional groups
  - Mandarin (836 million)
  - Min (60 million; e.g. Taiwanese)
  - Wu (77 million; e.g. Shanghainese)
  - Yue (71 million; e.g. Cantonese)
  - etc.
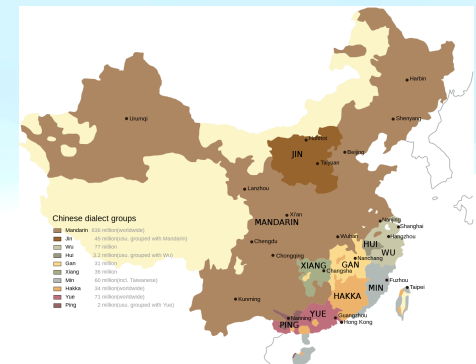
Standard Chinese

- Mandarin
  - National language created since Republican period (early twentieth century)
  - Based on a dialect of Beijing, capital of China
- Historically, the national language was
  - Guanhua 官話 of Ming (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasties (1644–1912)
  - Based on the dialect of Nanjing, capital of early Ming

Standard Chinese

- Defining components
  - Phonology: sound system
  - Vocabulary
  - Grammar: vernacular (versus Classical Chinese)

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Standard Chinese

- Monosyllabic: sound<->character

- Tones: 4 for Mandarin, 6 for Cantonese

- Writing systems (modern)

  - Traditional

  - Simplified

Examples of Standard Mandarin tones

Characters	Pinyin	Pitch contour	Meaning
妈/媽	mā	high level	'mother'
麻	má	high rising	'hemp'
马/馬	mǎ	low falling-rising	'horse'
骂/罵	mà	high falling	'scold'
吗/嗎	ma	neutral	question particle

Examples of Standard Cantonese tones

Characters	Jyutping	Yale	Pitch contour	Meaning
诗/詩	si1	sī	high level, high falling	'poem'
史	si2	sí	high rising	'history'
弑	si3	si	mid level	'to assassinate'
时/時	si4	sìh	low falling	'time'
市	si5	síh	low rising	'market'
是	si6	sih	low level	'yes'

Standard Chinese

- Lost in translation (?)
  - Between traditional and 'modern' ways of reading Chinese (when horizontally written)
  - Traditional: right to left
  - Modern (as well as Simplified): left to right

Standard Chinese

- Vocabulary
  - Loanwords
    - Pusa 菩薩: bodhisattva
    - Bashi 巴士: bus
      - Compare and contrast: dim sum/點心 and ketchup/茄汁
    - Dianhua (Mandarin)/denwa (Jap.) 電話: telephone (wasei-kango 和製漢語 from Japan)
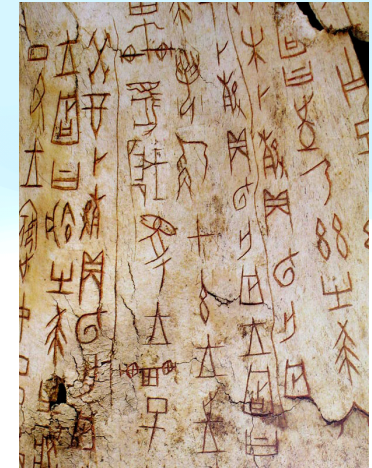
Writing Systems

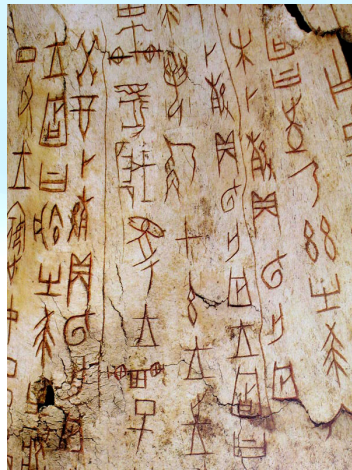- Oracle bone script
  - Late second millennium BCE

Writing Systems
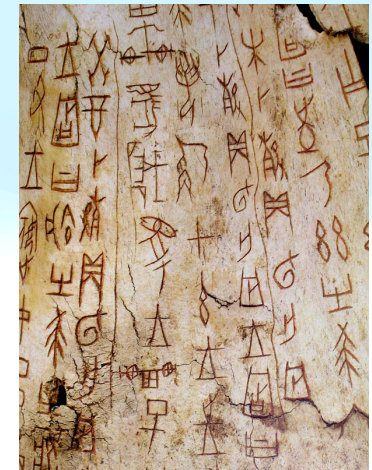
- Oracle bone script
  - Late second millennium BCE

Writing Systems

- Oracle bone script
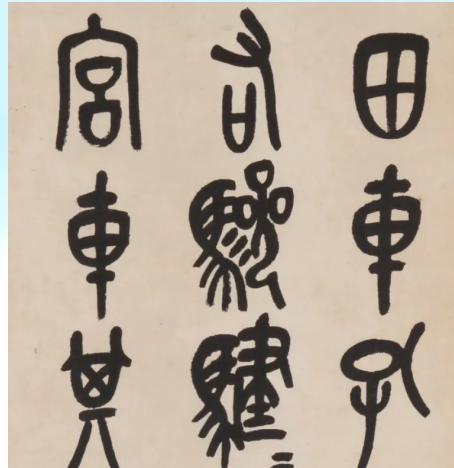 - Late second millennium BCE

Writing Systems

- Oracle bone script
  - Late second millennium BCE

Writing Systems

- Seal script
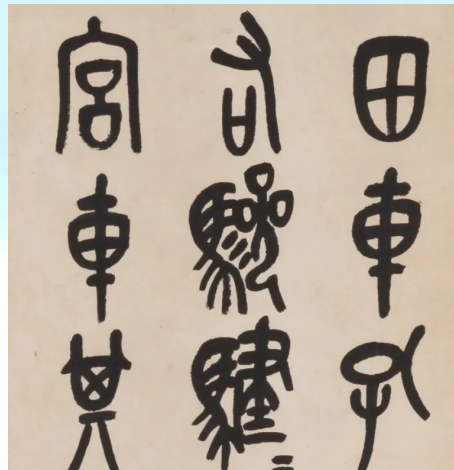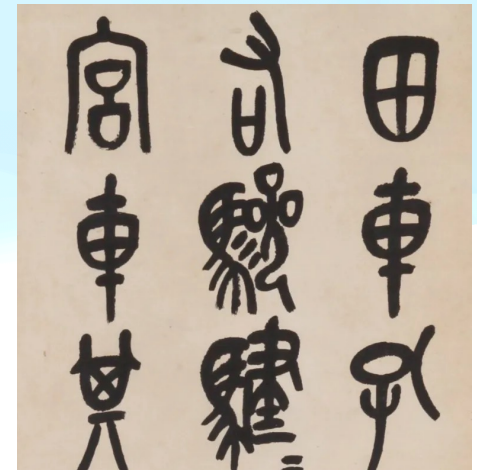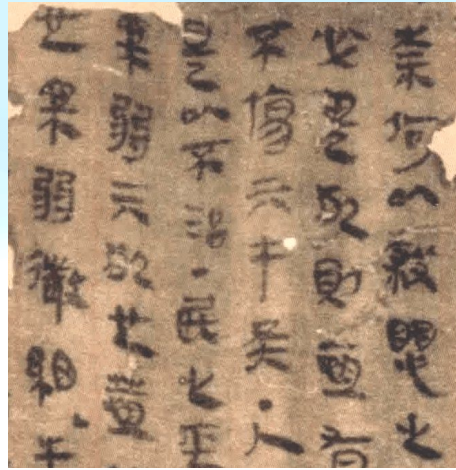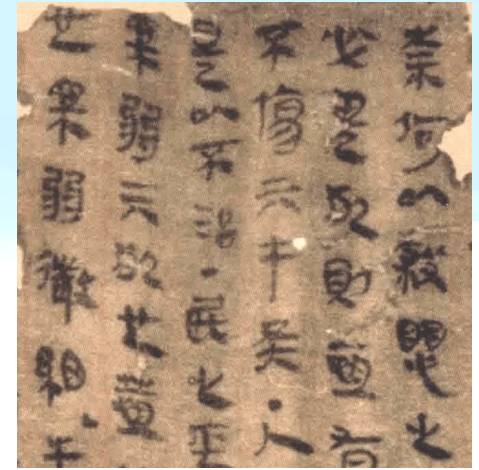 - Standardised under Shihuangdi (r. 221–209 BCE) of Qin Empire

Writing Systems

- Clerical script

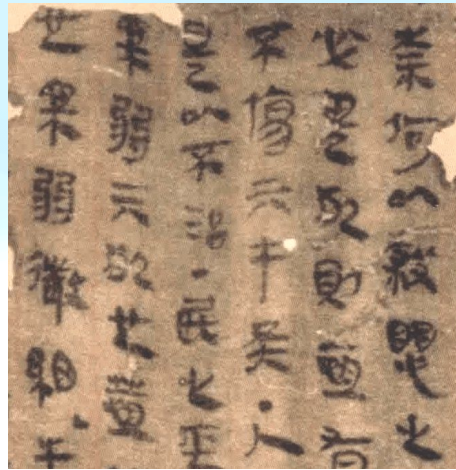 - *Laozi* from Mawangdui tomb, 203–157 BCE

Writing Systems

- Clerical script

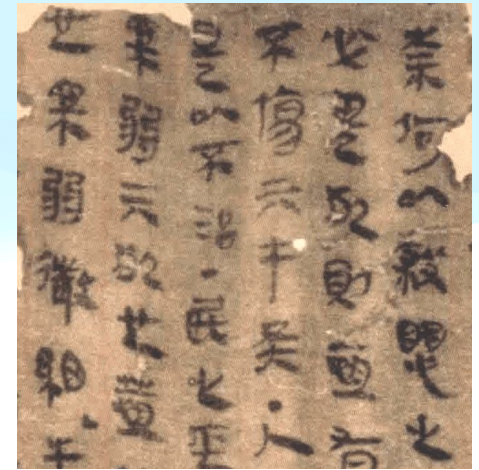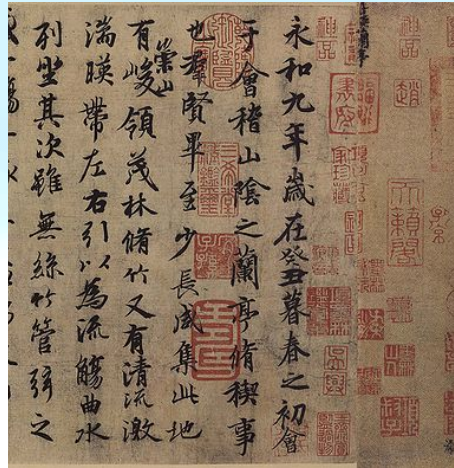 - *Laozi* from Mawangdui tomb, 203–157 BCE

Writing Systems

- Clerical script

  - *Laozi* from Mawangdui tomb, 203–157 BCE

Writing Systems

- Clerical script
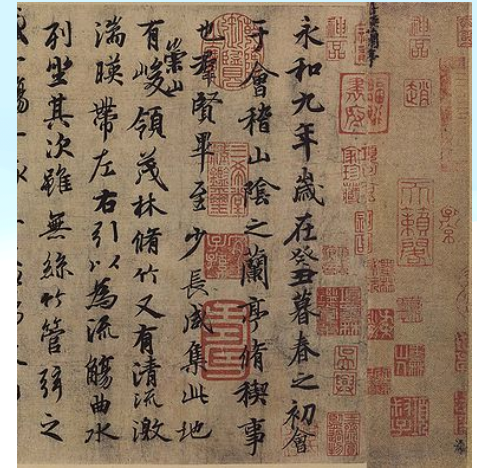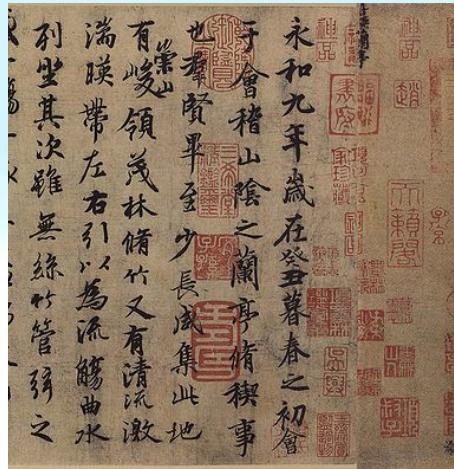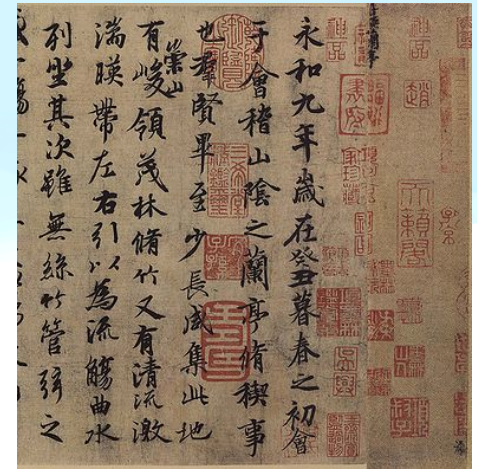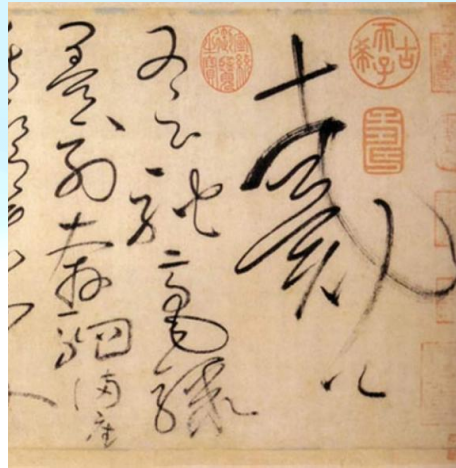
  - *Laozi* from Mawangdui tomb, 203–157 BCE

Writing Systems

- Running script

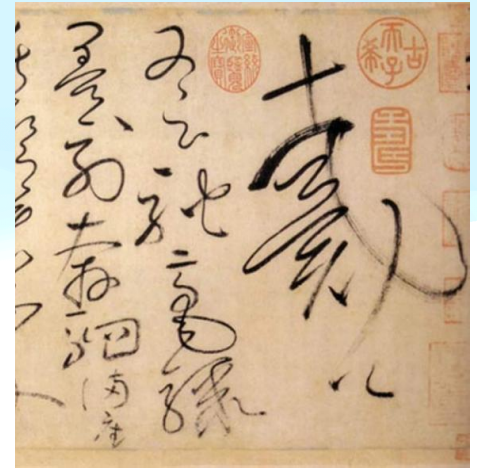 - *Preface to the Orchid Pavillion*, reproduction based on autography by calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361)

Writing Systems

- Cursive script (1)
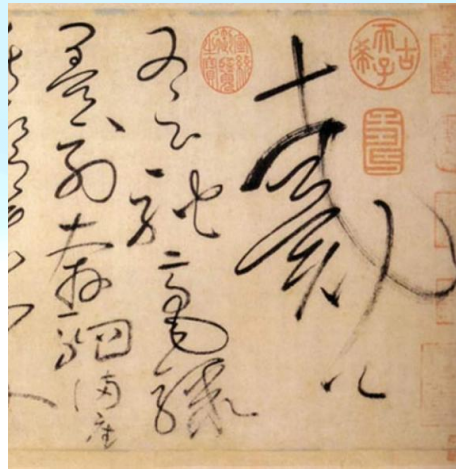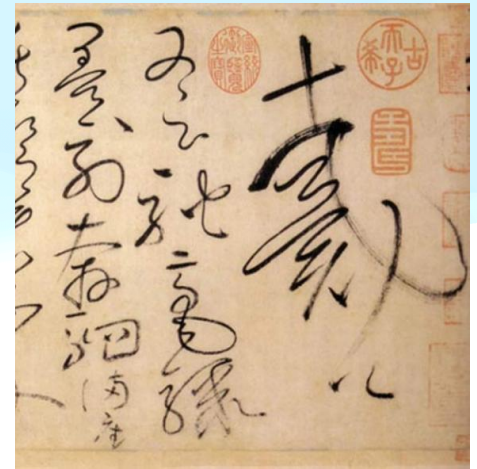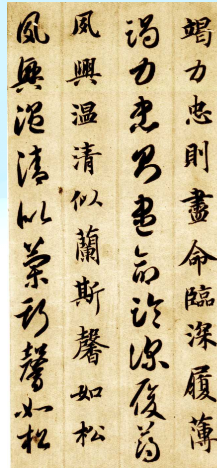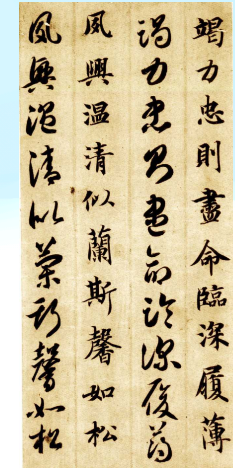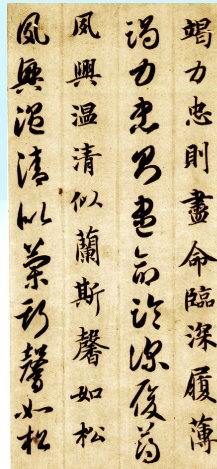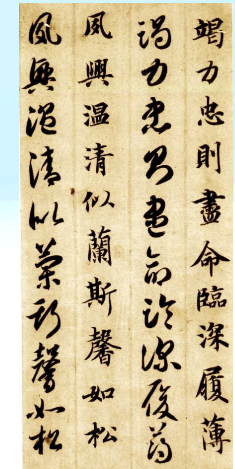 - Monk Huaisu 懷素, *Autobiography*, 777 AD

Writing Systems

- Cursive script (2)

- Standard script

- *Thousand Character Classic in Cursive and Standard Scripts*, copied by monk Zhiyong 智永,

  late sixth century

Romanisation

- Wade-Giles system
- Pinyin system

Mandarin Romanization Comparison

Characters	Wade–Giles	Pinyin	Meaning/Notes
中国/中國	Chung¹-kuo²	Zhōngguó	China
台湾/台灣	T'ai²-wan¹	Táiwān	Taiwan
北京	Pei³-ching¹	Běijīng	Beijing
台北/臺北	T'ai²-pei³	Táiběi	Taipei
孙文	Sun¹-wên²	Sūn Wén	Sun Yat-sen
毛泽东/毛澤東	Mao² Tse²-tung¹	Máo Zédōng	Mao Zedong, Former Communist Chinese leader
蒋介石/蔣介石	Chiang³ Chieh⁴-shih²	Jiǎng Jièshí	Chiang Kai-shek, Former Nationalist Chinese leader
孔子	K'ung³ Tsu³	Kǒngzǐ	Confucius