

vitality to a white wall, pleasing to guests and friends.

Spring Festival couplets are calligraphic works produced specially for the celebration of the Spring Festival, the most important traditional festival of the Chinese people. Written on red paper, such couplets are posted on gateposts, door panels, walls or columns of houses. The characters on the couplets always express good wishes for the year.

Characters in special styles appear as masthead inscriptions for newspapers or magazines, or as the titles of books. The six characters meaning the People's Bank of China on Chinese banknotes were written by a famous calligrapher. The calligraphic characters or paintings on folded fans demonstrate the elegance of the user. It is no exaggeration to say that the Chinese people have an indissoluble bond with calligraphy. The first photo album of a newborn baby has congratulations written by his elders with brush and ink; when he gets married, the pillow cases are embroidered with



A running-style calligraphic work by Pan Boying on a fan covering.



A pair of Spring Festival couplets and New Year pictures on the main gate of a house.

Oracle Bone Inscriptions and Inscriptions on Ancient Bronze Objects

It is difficult to ascertain exactly how old Chinese characters are. The geometric designs on the 5,000-7,000-year-old pottery of the Yangshao culture discovered at

Yangshao Village in the 1920s may be the embryo of Chinese characters.

The following 2,000-3,000 years is a blank period for the development of Chinese characters and no cultural relics from this period have been discovered with traces of writing on them.

The oracle bone inscriptions and inscriptions on ancient bronze objects developed more than 3,000 years ago during the Shang Dynasty are the earliest systematized Chinese characters.



Designs on ancient pottery.

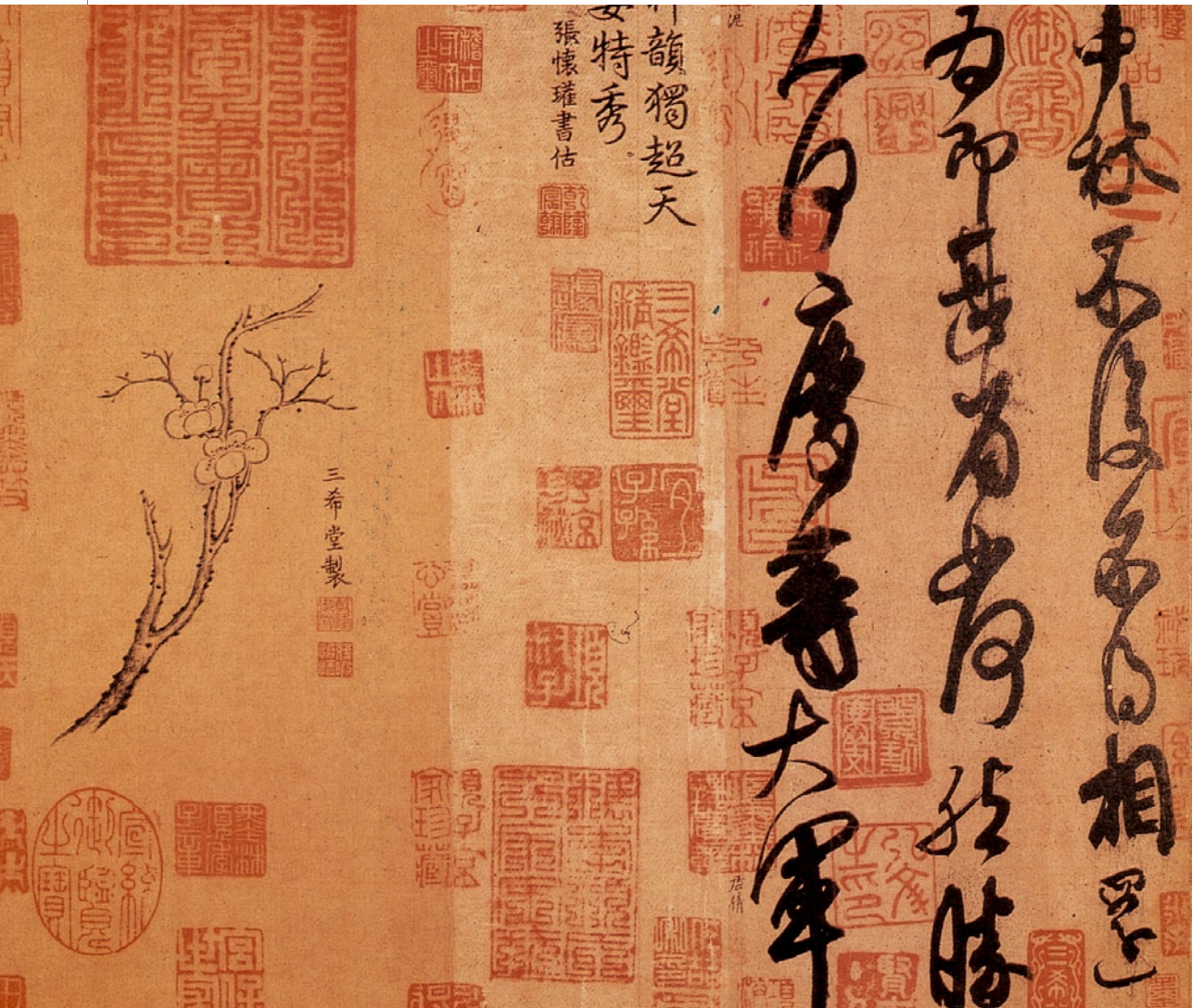
Official Script and Later Scripts

In the Qin Dynasty, there were busy exchanges of documents between the central and local governments and cultural and information exchanges between various parts of the country were speeded up. These exchanges demanded the swift writing of documents and notices, with little attention to the nice forms of the characters or the length and thickness of strokes. Also, people believed changeable, vigorous and not well-proportioned characters were nicer than those in even and symmetrical forms, and with unified strokes. As a result, the cursive and cursive-seal hands appeared.

The cursive-seal hand is quite different from the

Ancient official-script characters written on silk.





Mid-Autumn Scroll, written in running-cursive hand by Wang Xianzhi.