

Understanding Joseon Korea through the *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*

Gina Choi

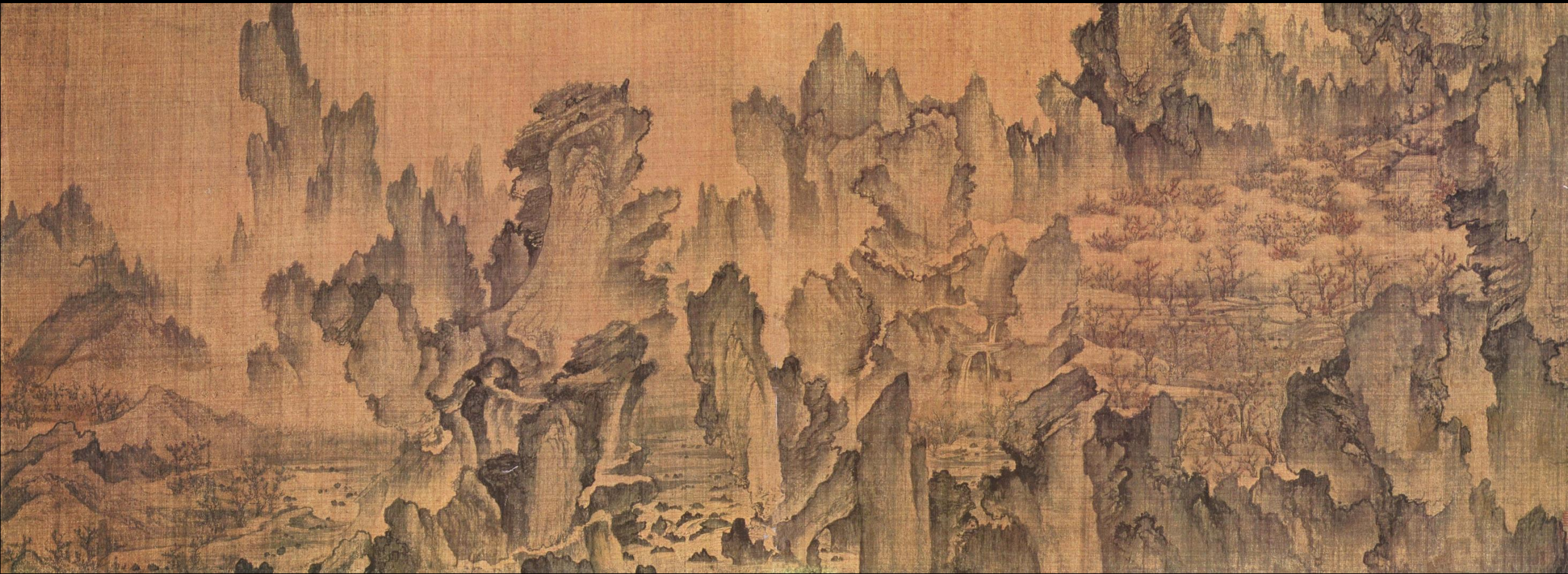
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East Asian Picture Scrolls as Teaching Sources

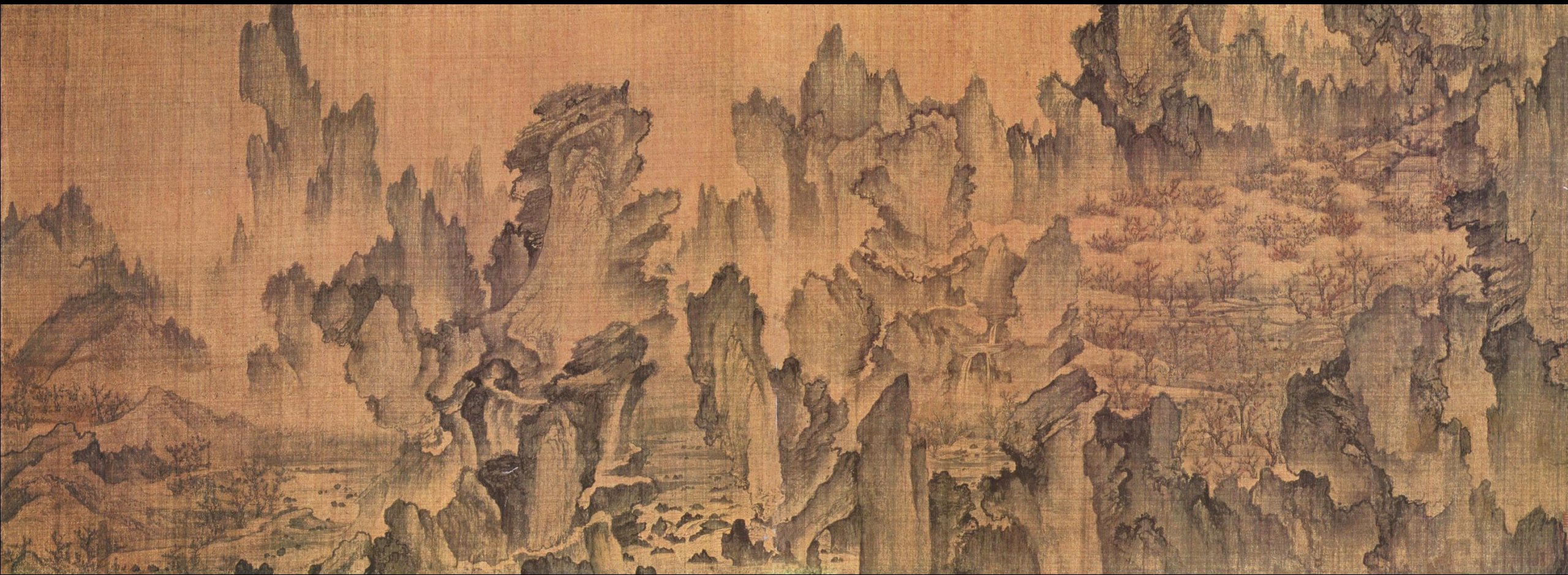
NCTA Princeton

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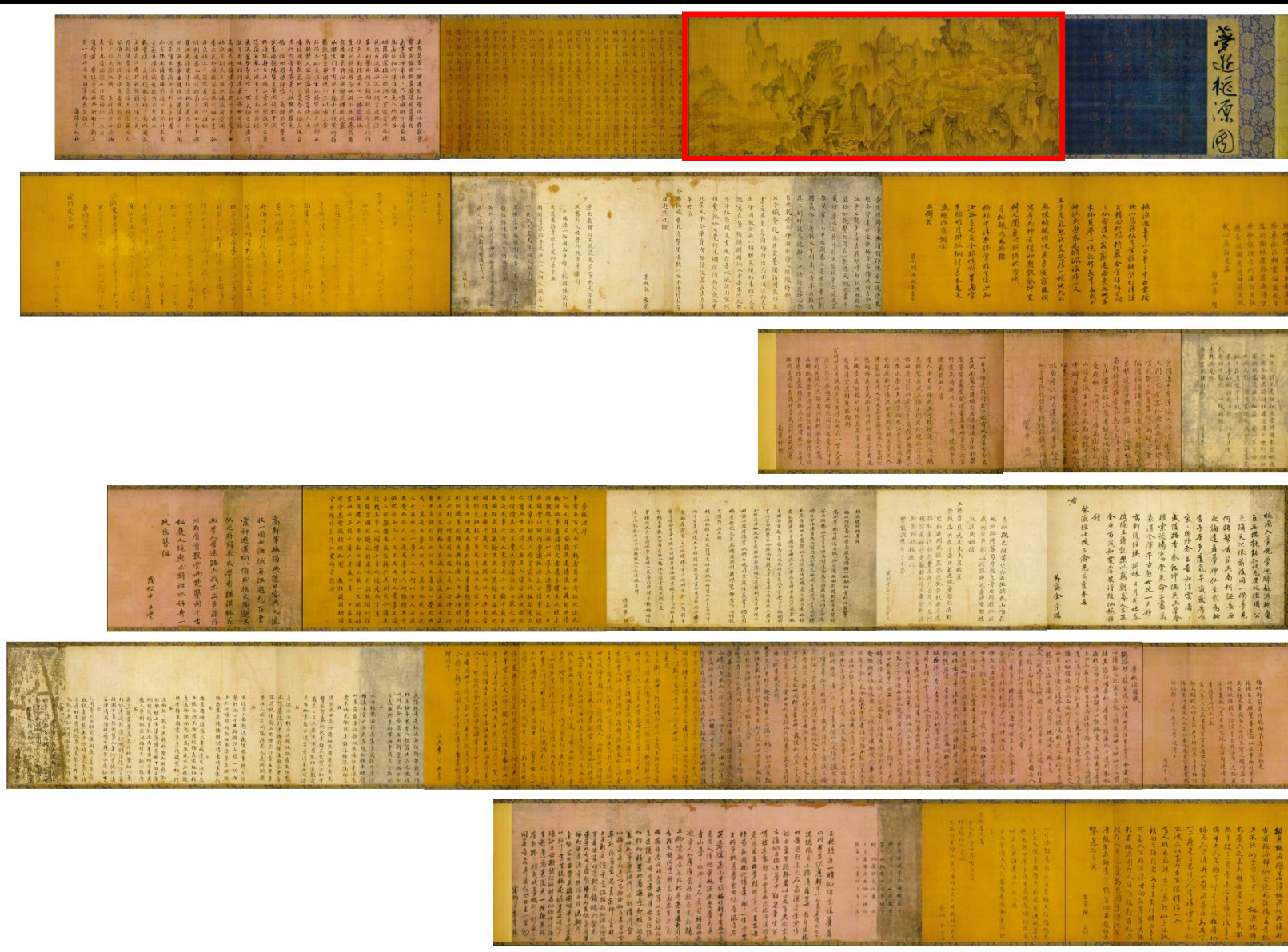
An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land (Mongyu dowondo)*, 1447.

Available on Wikimedia Commons ([Link](#))

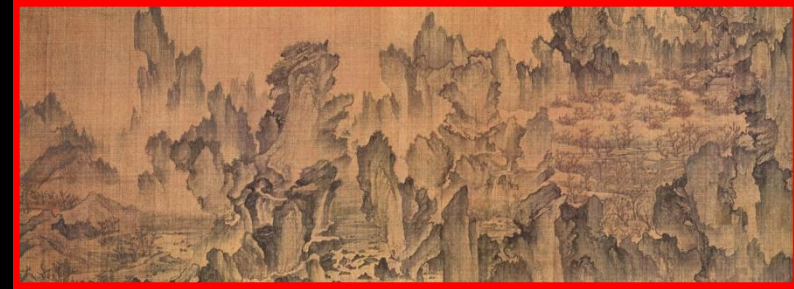


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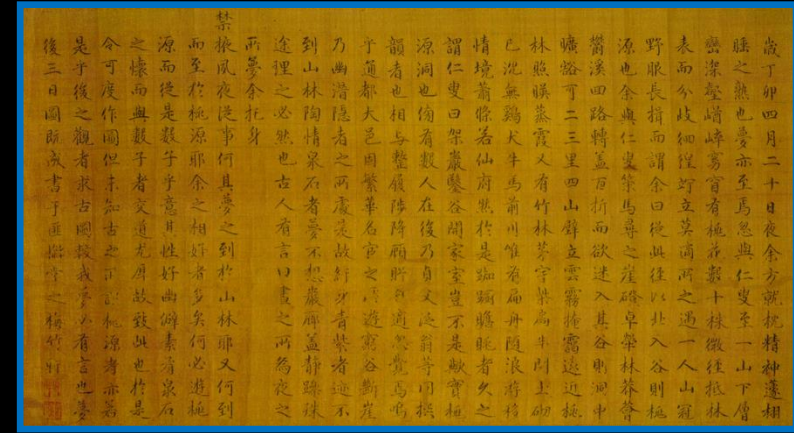
Prince Anpyeong (Yi Yong, 1418–1453)



Prince Anpyeong's *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land* scroll, including the painting by An Gyeon and 21 poetic writings by scholar-officials and a monk, 1447–1450. 38.7 x 1839.5 cm.



Painting



Prince Anpyeong's colophon



Peach Blossom Spring by Tao Yuanming

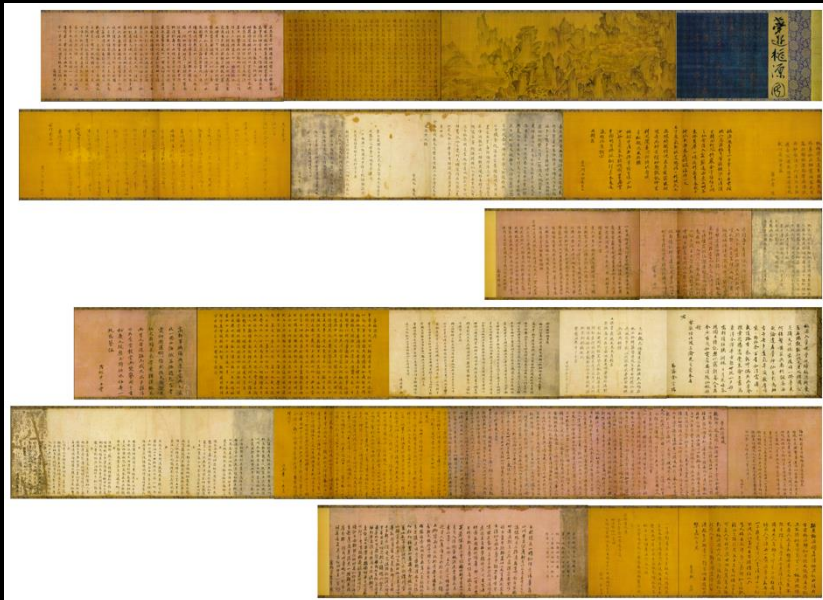
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Poetry and Painting: The Literary and Artistic Culture of Joseon Korea

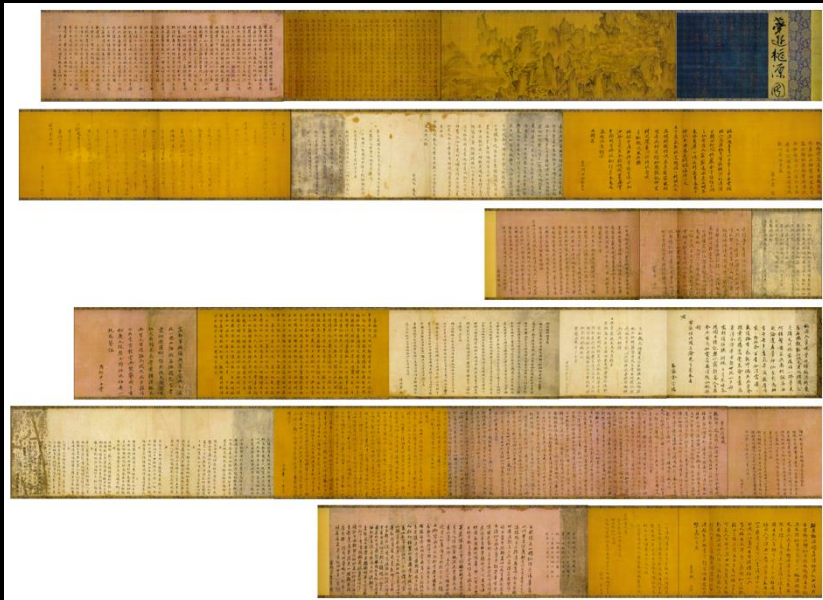
Prince Anpyeong (Yi Yong, 1418–1453)

- Style name: Bihaedang
- Known for his calligraphic prowess, literary knowledge, and love of painting
- Third son of King Sejong
- Participated in state affairs and headed several literary and translation projects
- During leisure time, worked on personal projects that combined poetry and painting



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Joseon dynasty (1392–1910)

- Capital: Hanseong (today's Seoul)
- Established by General Yi Seonggye (King Taejo, r. 1392–1398)
- Adopted Neo-Confucianism as the state ideology
- King Sejong (r. 1418–1450): Anpyeong's father
 - Civil service examination
 - Hall of Worthies (Jiphyeonjeon)



Portrait of King Sejong

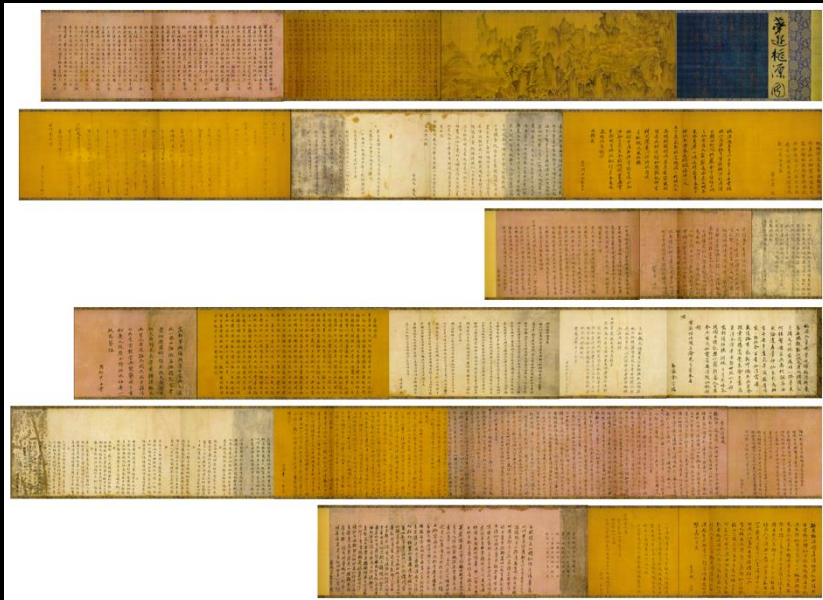


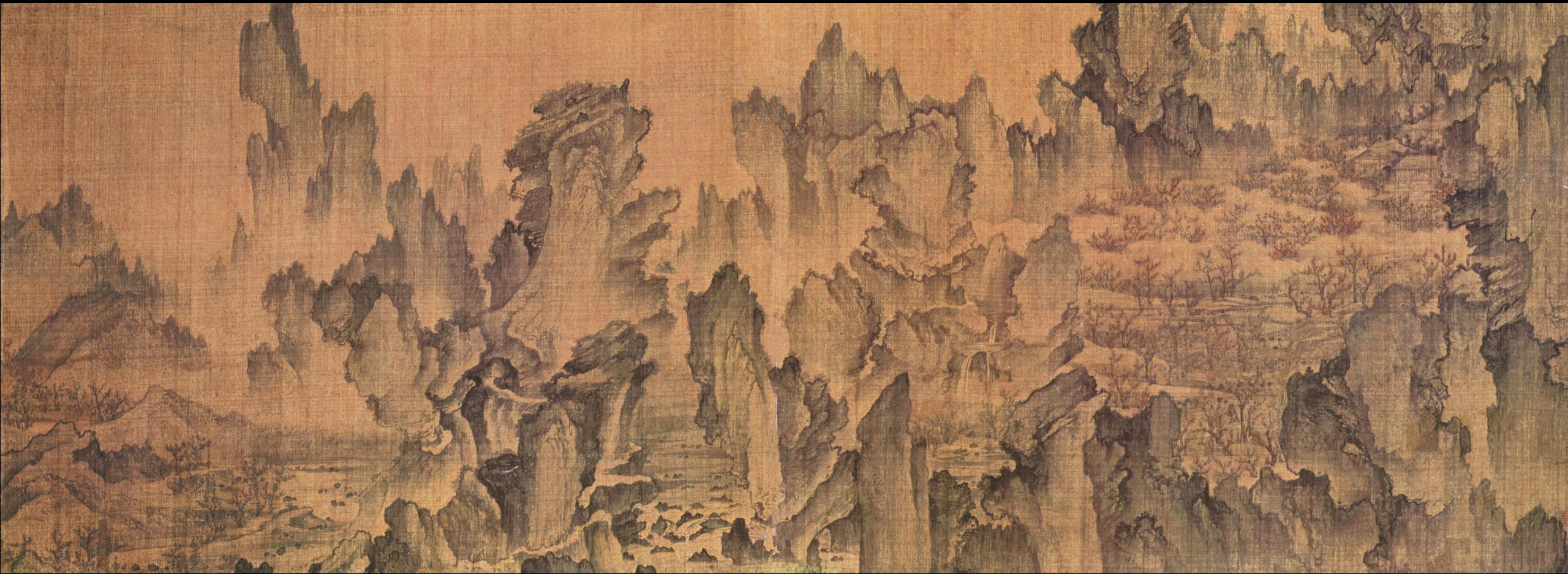
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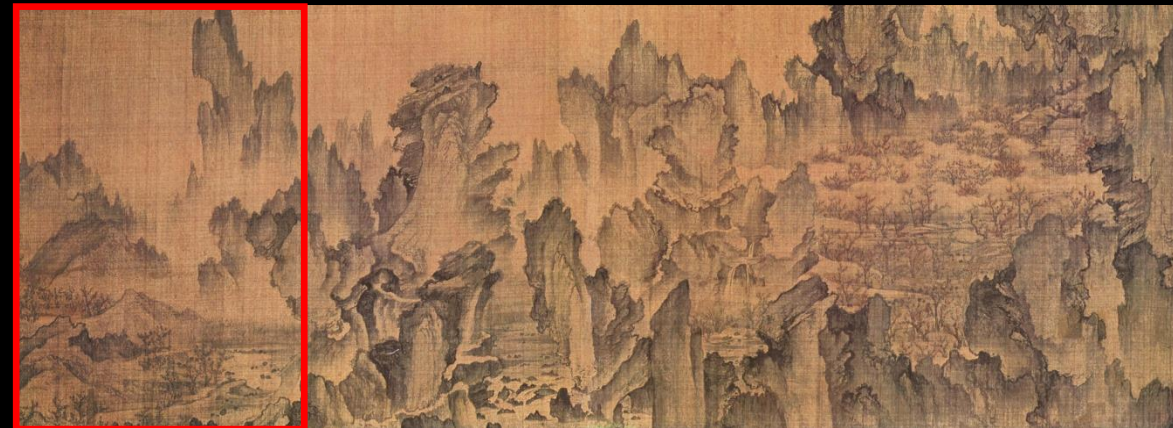
An Gyeon (fl. 1440s)

- Court painter
- The painter of *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*
- Maintained an unusually close relationship with the prince

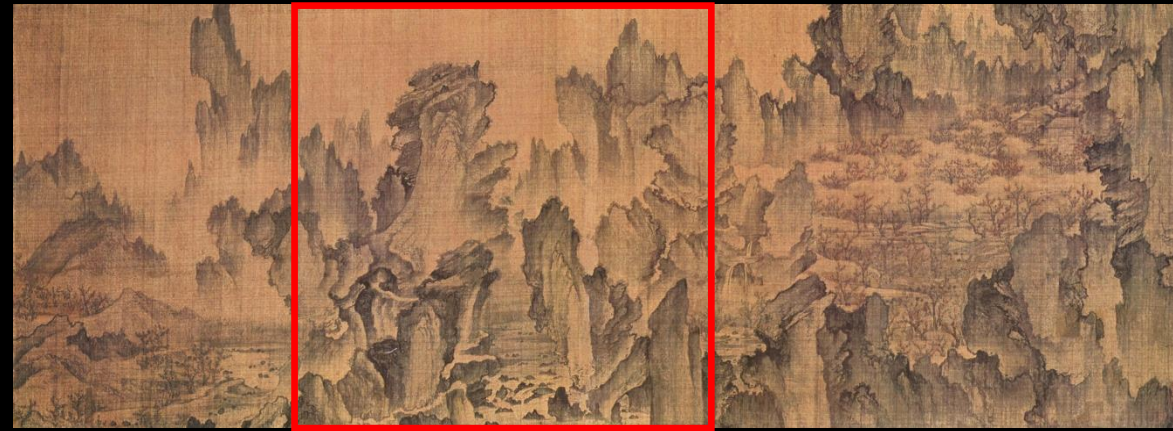
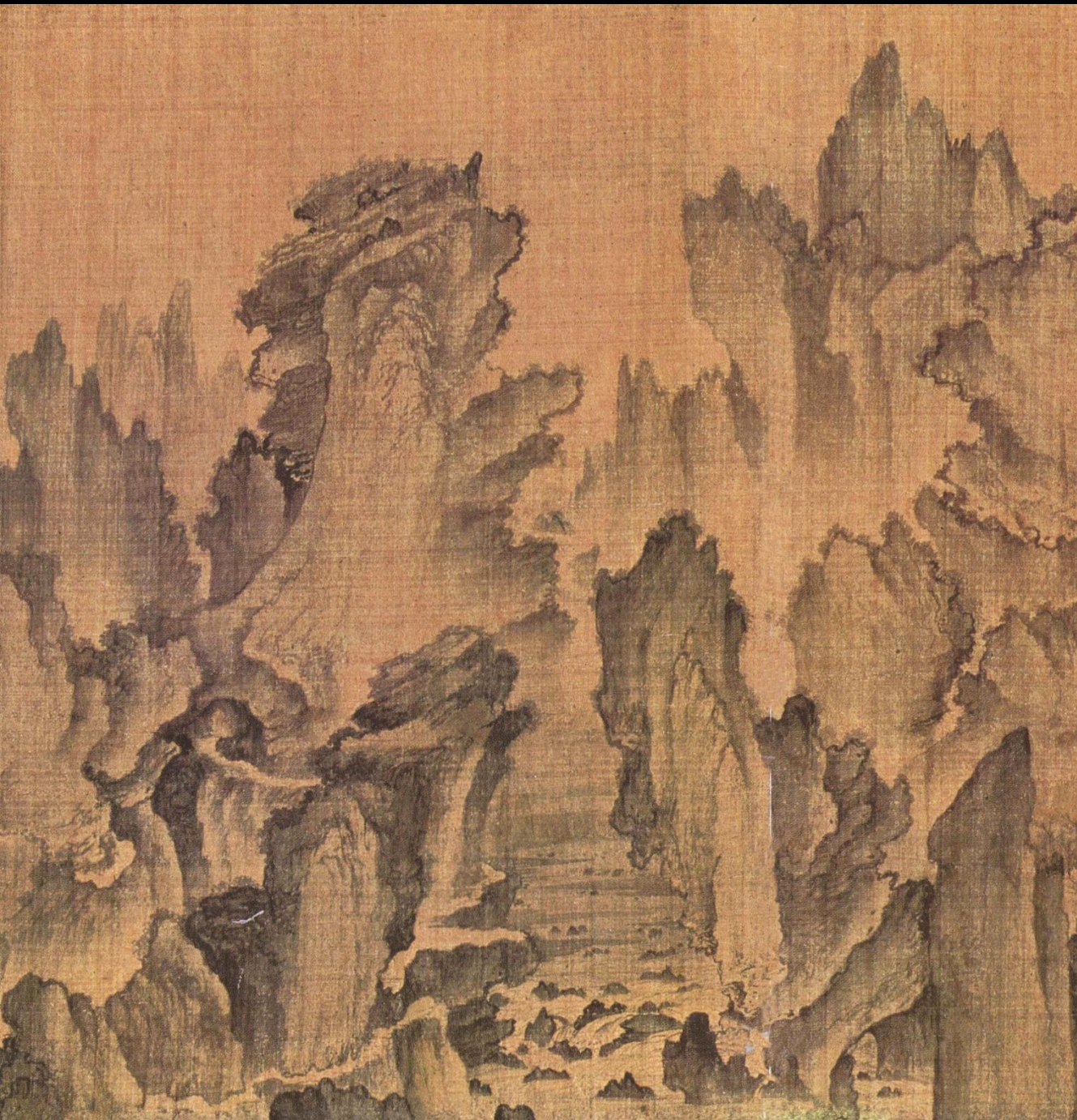




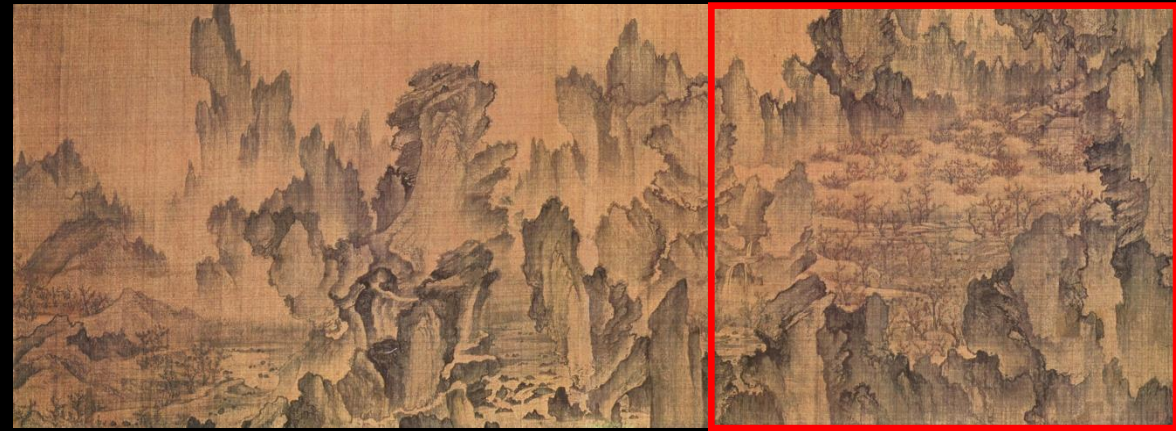
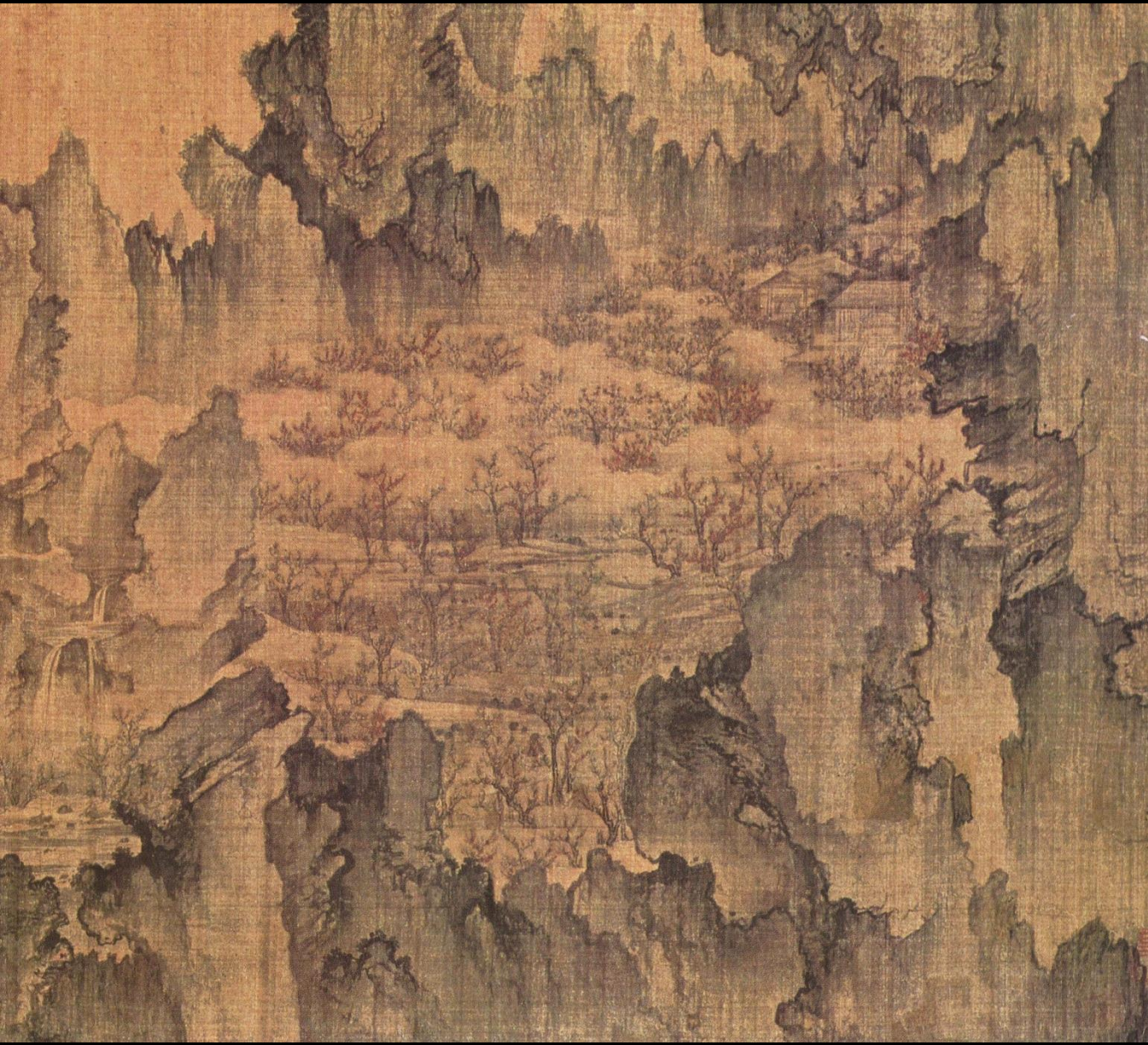
An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, 1447.
Handscroll; ink and light color on silk. 38.6 x 106.2 cm.



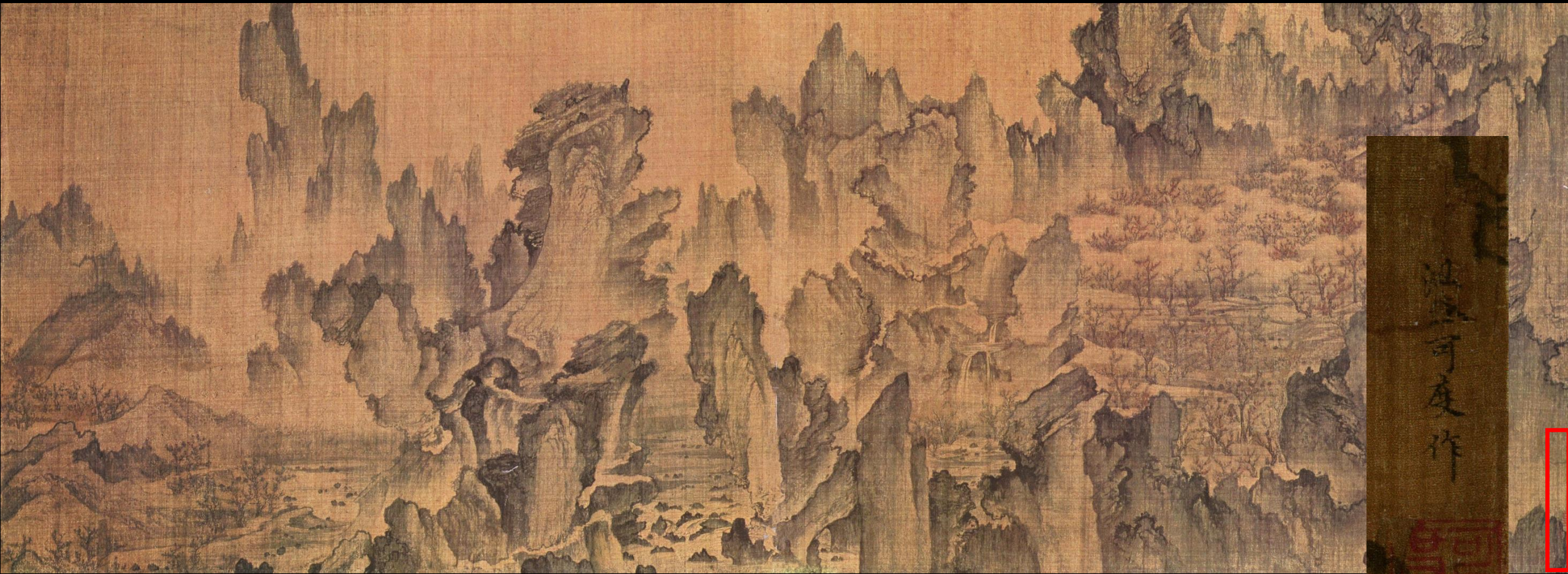
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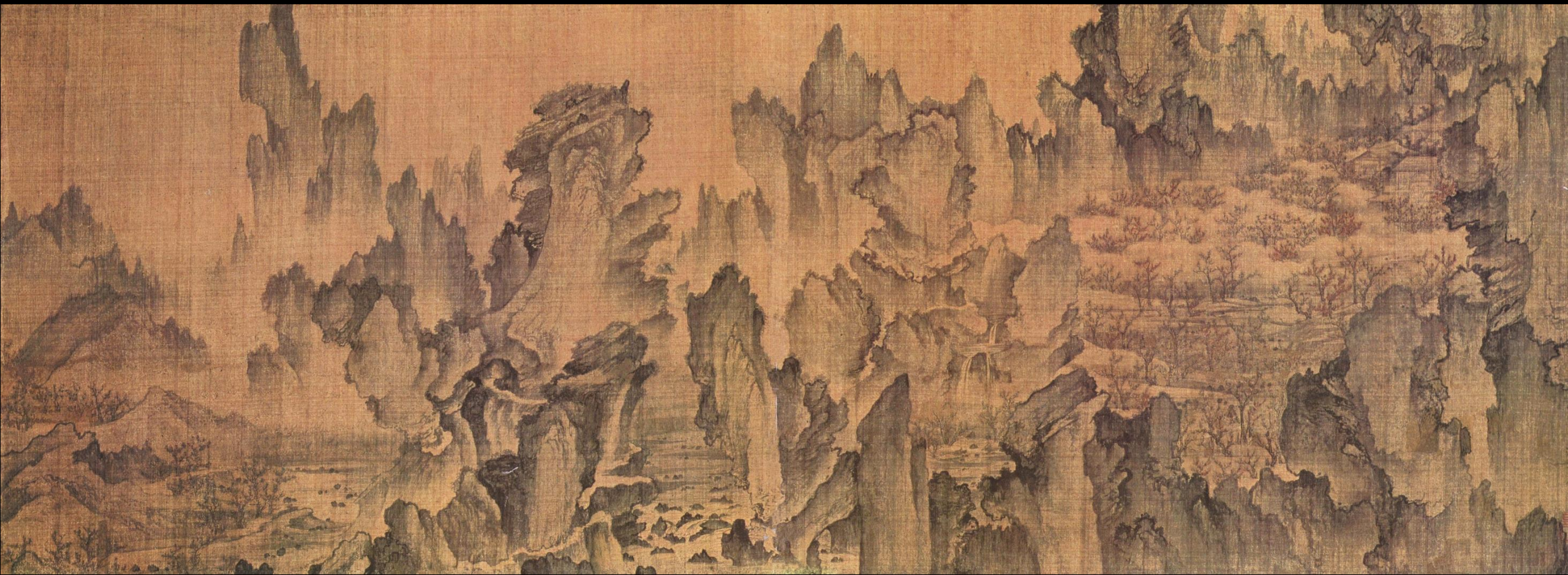


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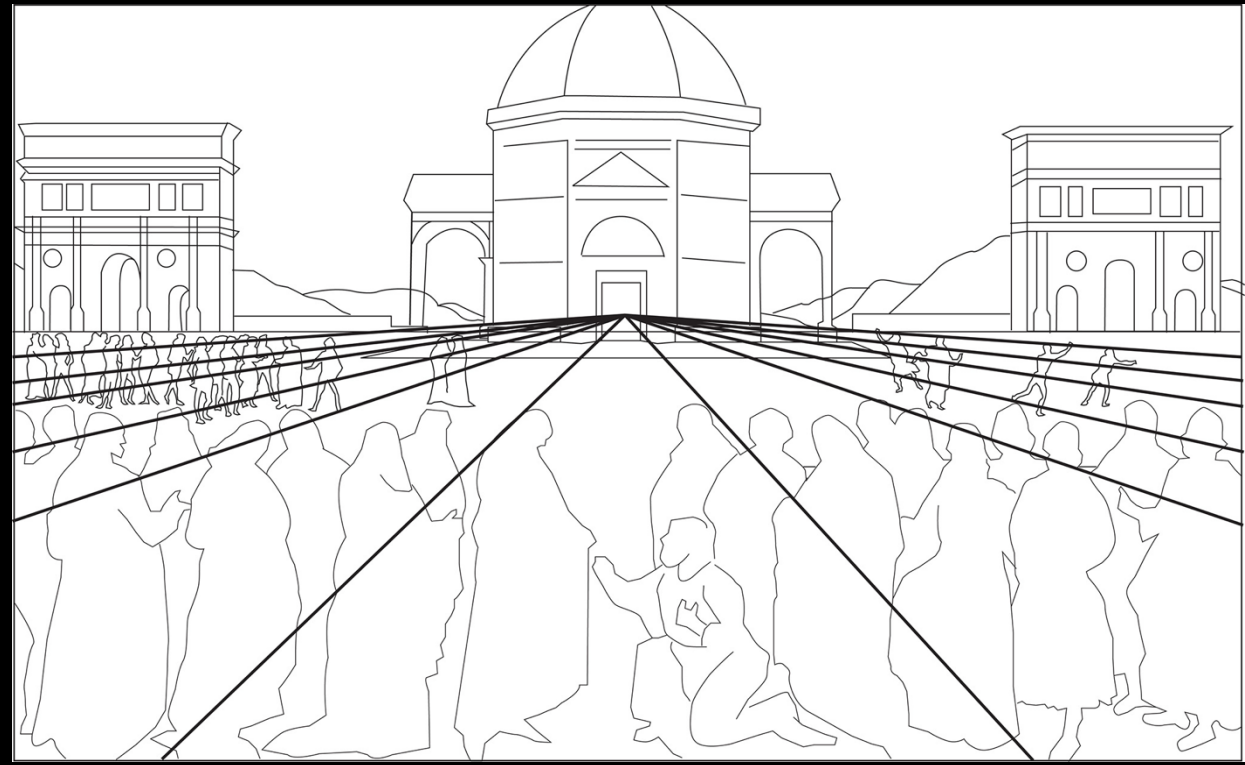
The painter's seal and signature:
"created by Gado [An Gyeon] of Jigok"



An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, 1447.
Handscroll; ink and light color on silk. 38.6 x 106.2 cm.

perspective: a system for representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface

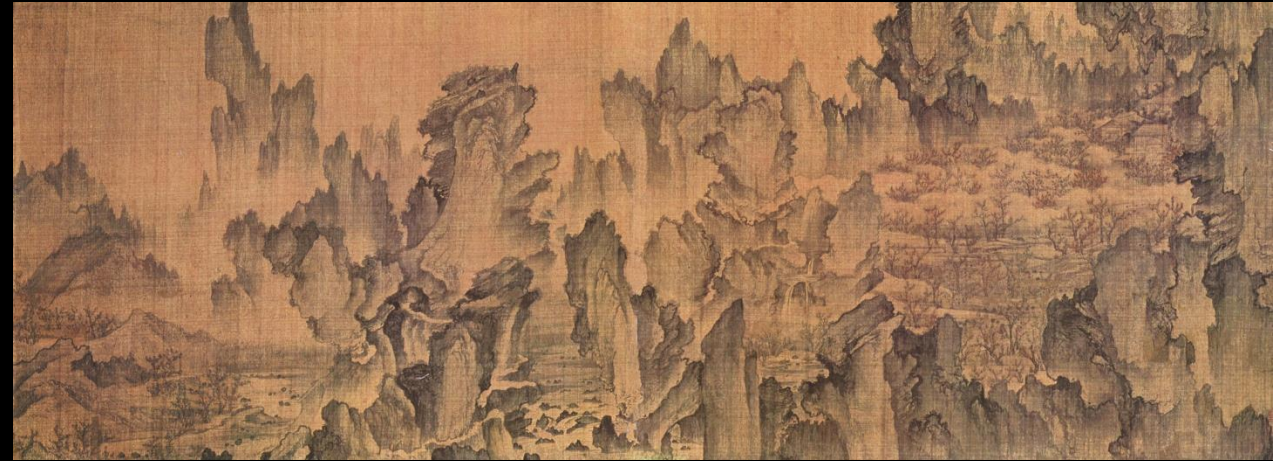
linear perspective & vanishing point

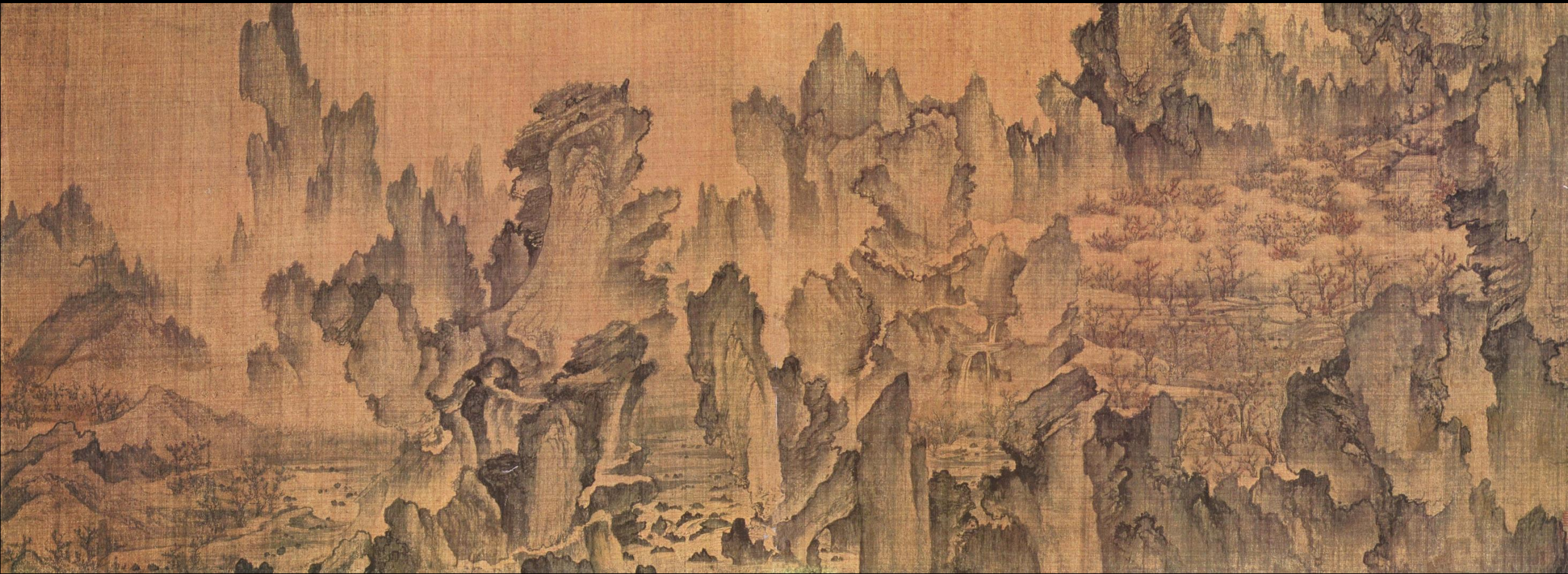


Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, c. 1480–1482.
Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.



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The night of the twentieth day, the fourth month, the year of Jeongmyo [1447]. When I was about to fall asleep, my mind grew dim, and I fell into a deep sleep. Soon I was in a dream state.

Suddenly Insu [Bak Paengnyeon] and I arrived at the foot of a mountain....

Near us were a few people, including Jeongbo [Choe Hang] and Beomong [Sin Sukju], with whom we compiled rhymes [in real life]. We cleaned our shoes and walked down together. As we enjoyed looking around, suddenly I awoke from the dream.....

Therefore, I ordered Gado [An Gyeon] to create a painting.... The painting was completed three days after the dream, so I, Bihaedang [Prince Anpyeong], write this at Maejukeon [Building of Plum and Bamboo].

歲丁卯四月二十日夜余方就枕精神遽相
睡之熱也夢亦至焉忽與仁叟至一山下層
巒深壑峭崿窈窕有桃花數十株微徑抵林
表而分歧細徑跨立莫適所之遇一人山冠
野服長揖而謂余曰從此徑以北入谷則樵
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後三日圖既成書于匪懈堂之梅竹軒

Prince Anpyeong, Colophon, 1447 [4/23].

A big city indeed prospers and is where the government officials stroll around, while a deep valley with a sheer cliff is where the recluse resides. This is why those who wear colorful, splendid garments cannot reach the forest [of Peach Blossom Spring] in the mountains, and those who cultivate their minds as they gaze at the streaming water over rocks do not even dream about large gates and grand mansions....

The ancient people said, 'At night, you dream about what you did during the day.' I have entrusted myself at the court and been absorbed in work. So how is it that I dreamed about reaching the mountain forest? And how could I even reach the Peach Blossom Spring? ...I think it is because by nature I like quiet and remote places, and I have been fond of natural landscapes since before.

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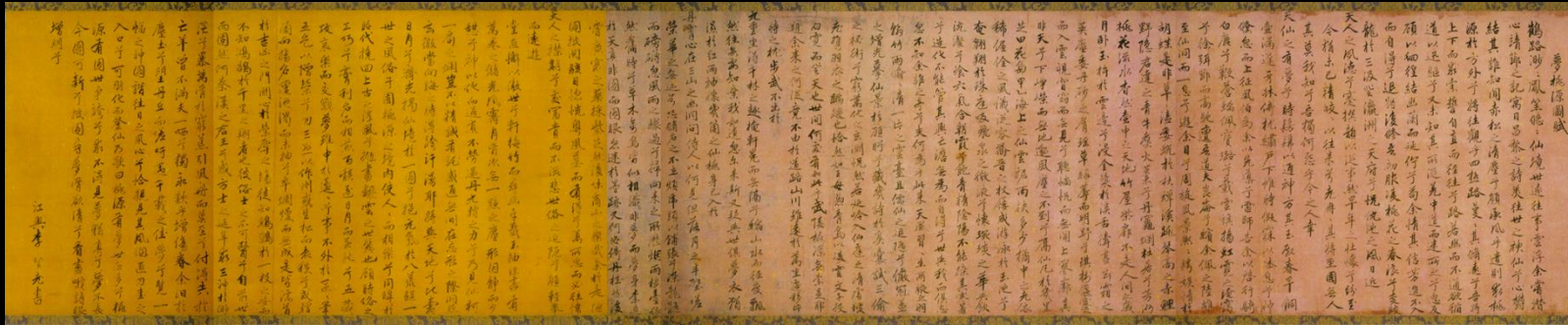
Peach Blossom Spring
a 5th-century tale by Tao Yuanming (365–427)



Attributed to Shi Rui, Detail,
The Haven of the Peach Blossom Spring,
15th century, China.

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Yi Hyeonro (d. 1453),
Prose-poem.

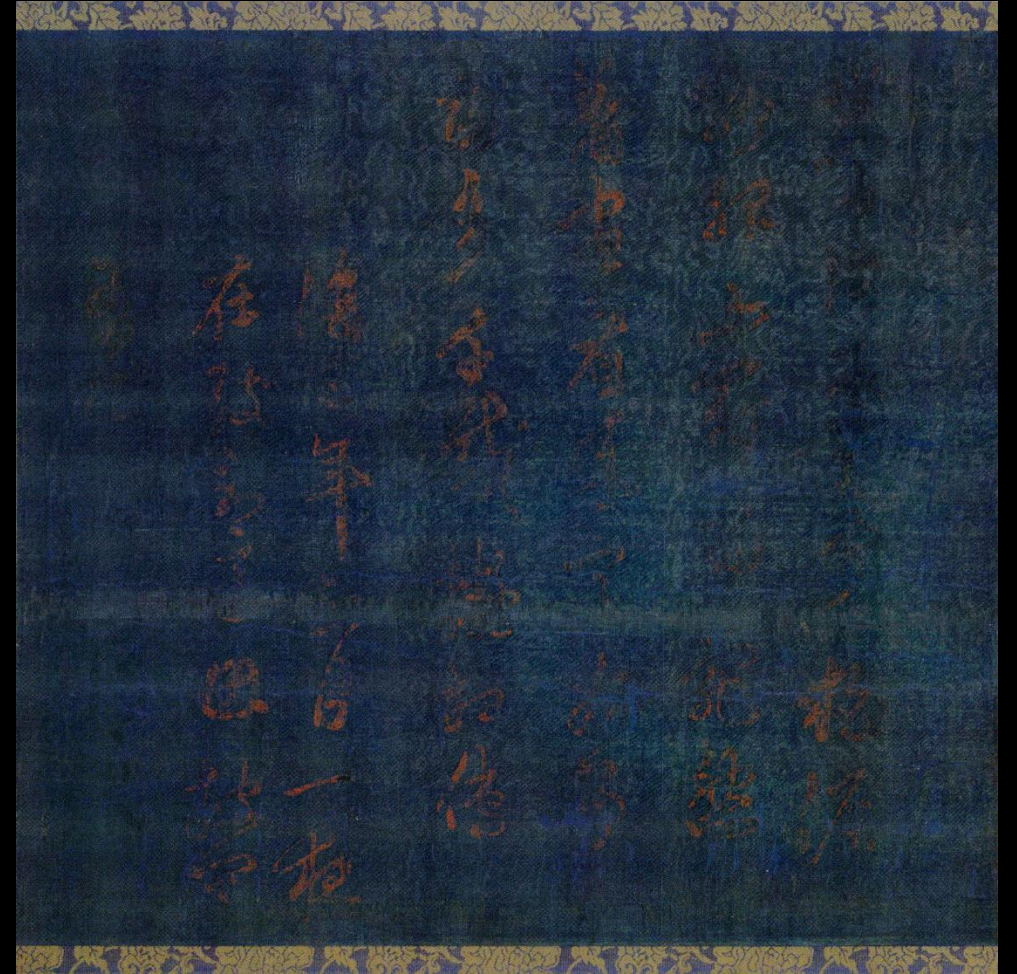
How great is the heart of the heavenly being! Despite the noble status, he did not fall into its depravity...
Lively and unreserved, his mind has no single speck of dust.

...
An immortal scenery is hung in a painting; its energy can be breathed in from all directions.
Customs of the world are kept away, and the boundaries of the Peach Blossom Land are controlled.
[Anpyeong] let each person enjoy and let all relish the splendor of a peaceful reign.

...
He encountered a dream difficult to occur in a thousand years and [as a result,] I have seen a miraculous painting.
The place that I have long yearned for; it is just like I have seen its scenery in person.
Even without a spoon of elixir in my mouth, I could sprout my wings and reach the immortal world.

...
This world has seen quarrels and boasts over a painting of Peach Blossom Spring,
But its scenery still unseeable even though the paintings were procured; [Anpyeong] saw it in a dream as if in reality.
The dream has now disappeared, but the painting can be new again.
Opening the painting and seeking the dream, the insides of my bones become clean;
Gazing the painting and reciting the poems, my eyes brighten.

Where of the world did I dream as the Peach Blossom Land?
The hermit's attire is still vivid [in my mind].
It [the Peach Blossom Land] has been painted, and I like gazing at it.
I assume this to be transmitted for a thousand years.
Three years later, on the first night of the first month.
I spread this out at Chijijeong and compose [this poem].
Cheongji [Anpyeong].



Prince Anpyeong, Poem, 1450/1/1.

King Sejong's "Eight Horses" (1446)

Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven (Yongbi eocheonga; 1445): a compilation of 125 commemorative poems for the founding of the Joseon dynasty by King Taejo

Heaven sent a talent [like Emperor Taizong of Tang (r. 626–49)] to make the lives of people comfortable, and six noble horses were born at this right time.

Heaven sent one with courage and wisdom [like Taejo (Yi Seonggye; r. 1392–98)] for the comfort of this country, and eight noble horses were born at this right time.

右第六十九章
 天挺英奇生不特也宮安民昌為宮曰六駿曰應期宮曰야나니
 天錫勇智宮曰靖國曰為宮曰八駿曰應時宮曰야나니
 天錫勇智為靖國曰騎驕驕八駿曰生應時曰方
唐太宗上駿曰特勒驪曰銀或雲曰青驪曰蒼毛驪
 曰什伐赤曰白驪曰
 曰登管攝曰龍騰曰白凝雲曰白獅子曰玄豹



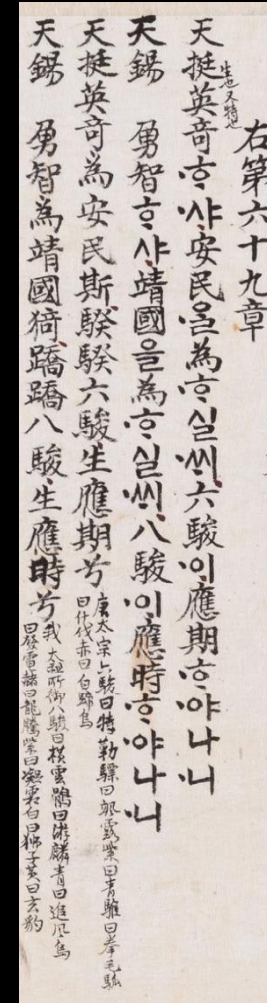
"Hyeonpyo" of *Eight Horses*, Joseon dynasty.

King Sejong's "Eight Horses"


The King [Sejong] said, "...I worry that posterity would not know the difficult steps our holy ancestor took in the founding if we do not depict the figures [of the horses] and transmit [these images] to subsequent generations."

...
Now our king is bright and wise that he considers how difficult it was for the above to establish [the dynasty] and is concerned with how difficult it might be for the below to maintain descendants. Thus, he even [ordered] a praise of the mere animals and their visual form to be made, so excellent writers of the time described them through songs. These [songs and painting] will truly be our Chosŏn's boundless beauty to be transmitted into eternity.

—Bak Paengnyeon, *Preface to the Song of Eight Horses (Paljundo song byeongseo)*, 1447.



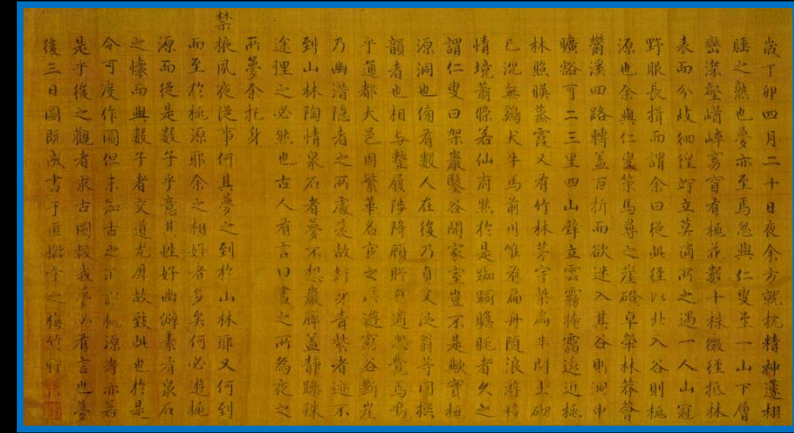
"Hyeonpyo" of *Eight Horses*, Joseon dynasty.



The Interplay of Text and Image in *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*



Painting



Prince Anpyeong's colophon



Peach Blossom Spring by Tao Yuanming

Prince Anpyeong's *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land* scroll, including the painting by An Gyeon and 21 poetic writings by scholar-officials and a monk, 1447–1450. 38.7 x 1839.5 cm.

Tao Yuanming, *Peach Blossom Spring*

During the Tai-yuan period of the Jin dynasty [266–420], a fisherman of Wuling once rowed upstream, unmindful of the distance he had gone, when he suddenly came to a grove of peach trees in bloom. The wild flowers growing under them were fresh and lovely, and fallen petals covered the ground — it made a great impression on the fisherman. He went on for a way with the idea of finding out how far the grove extended. It came to an end at the foot of a mountain whence issued the spring that supplied the stream. There was a small opening in the mountain, and it seemed as though light was coming through it.

Prince Anpyeong, Colophon

The night of the twentieth day, the fourth month, the year of Jeongmyo [1447]. When I was about to fall asleep, my mind grew dim, and I fell into a deep sleep. Soon I was in a dream state.

Suddenly Insu [Bak Paengnyeon] and I arrived at the foot of a mountain. Its peak stood high, and the valley was deep. The mountain terrain was rugged and secluded. Among dozens of peach blossom trees was a narrow path, which parted ways in the forest. We hesitated, not knowing which way to take, and encountered a person in hermit's attire.

He respectfully bowed and said to me, "If you follow this path and enter the northern valley, you will reach the Peach Blossom Land."

Tao Yuanming, *Peach Blossom Spring*

The fisherman left his boat and entered the cave, which at first was extremely narrow, barely admitting his body; after a few dozen steps it [the cave] suddenly opened out onto a broad and level plain where well-built houses were surrounded by rich fields and pretty ponds. Mulberry, bamboos, and other trees and plants grew there, and criss-cross paths skirted the fields. The sounds of cocks crowing and dogs barking could be heard from one courtyard to the next. Men and women were coming and going about their work in the fields. The clothes they wore were like those of ordinary people. Old men and boys were carefree and happy.



Attributed to Shi Rui, Detail,
The Haven of the Peach Blossom Spring,
15th century, China.

Tao Yuanming, *Peach Blossom Spring*

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A depiction of Tao Yuanming in a 14th–15th century Chinese handscroll.



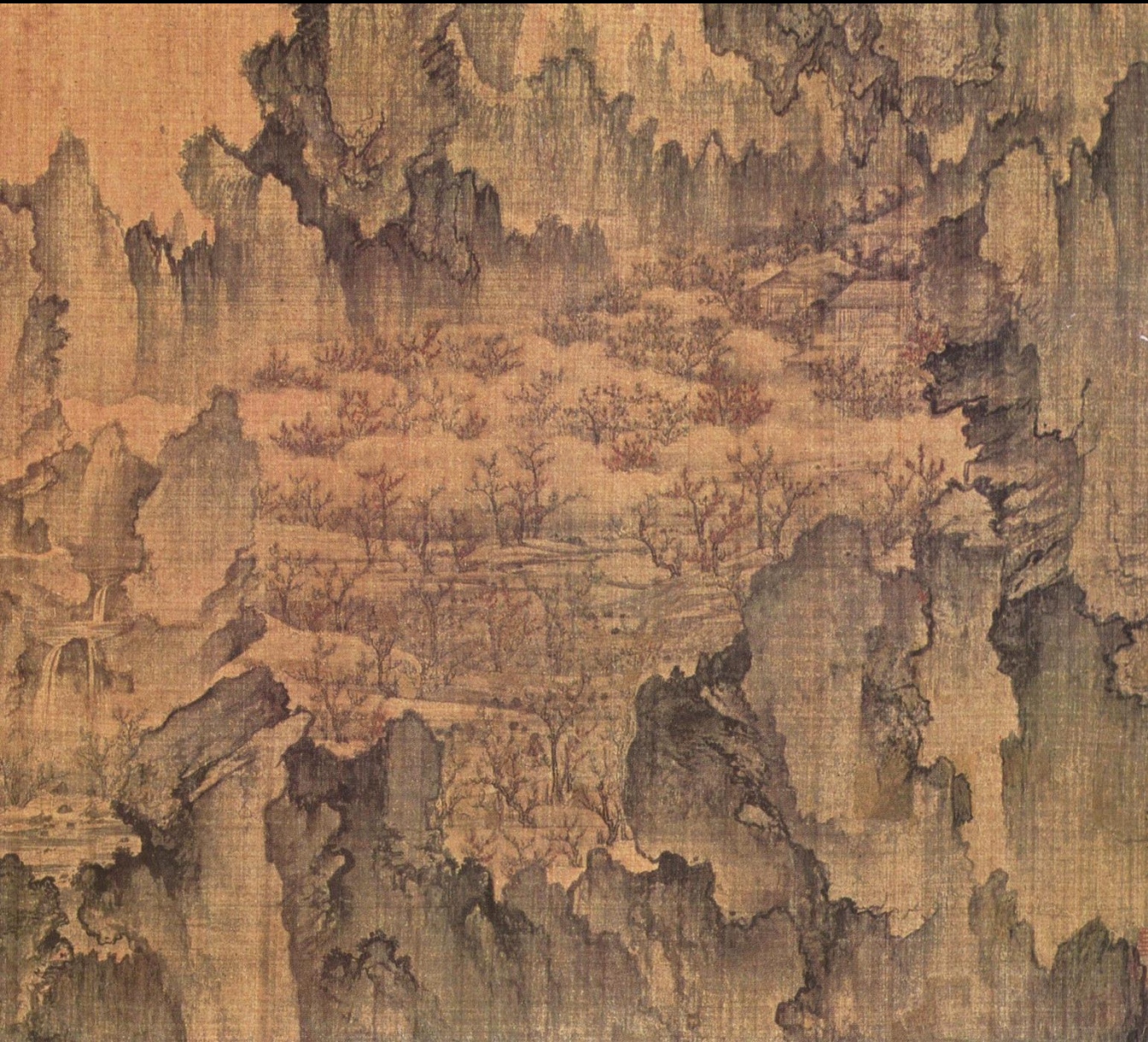
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Prince Anpyeong, Colophon

Mountains were all around, with thick clouds and fog surrounding them. Near and far was a forest of peach trees, with rosy-tinted haze illuminating [them]. Also, in the middle of a bamboo forest were thatched houses. Their twig gates were halfway open and the stone steps made of soil were crumbling. There were no chickens, dogs, cows, or horses in sight. Only a small boat swayed in the waves on the stream running in front of the village. The sight [of the place] was lonely and desolate. I thought this place must be where immortals live.



Prince Anpyeong, Colophon

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Choe Su (act. 1440s): a “world in a gourd-shaped bottle”

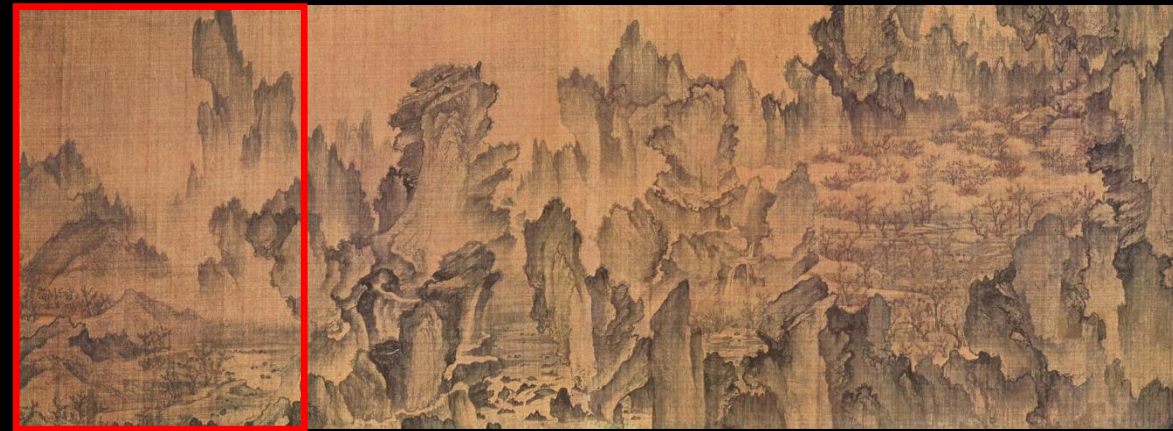
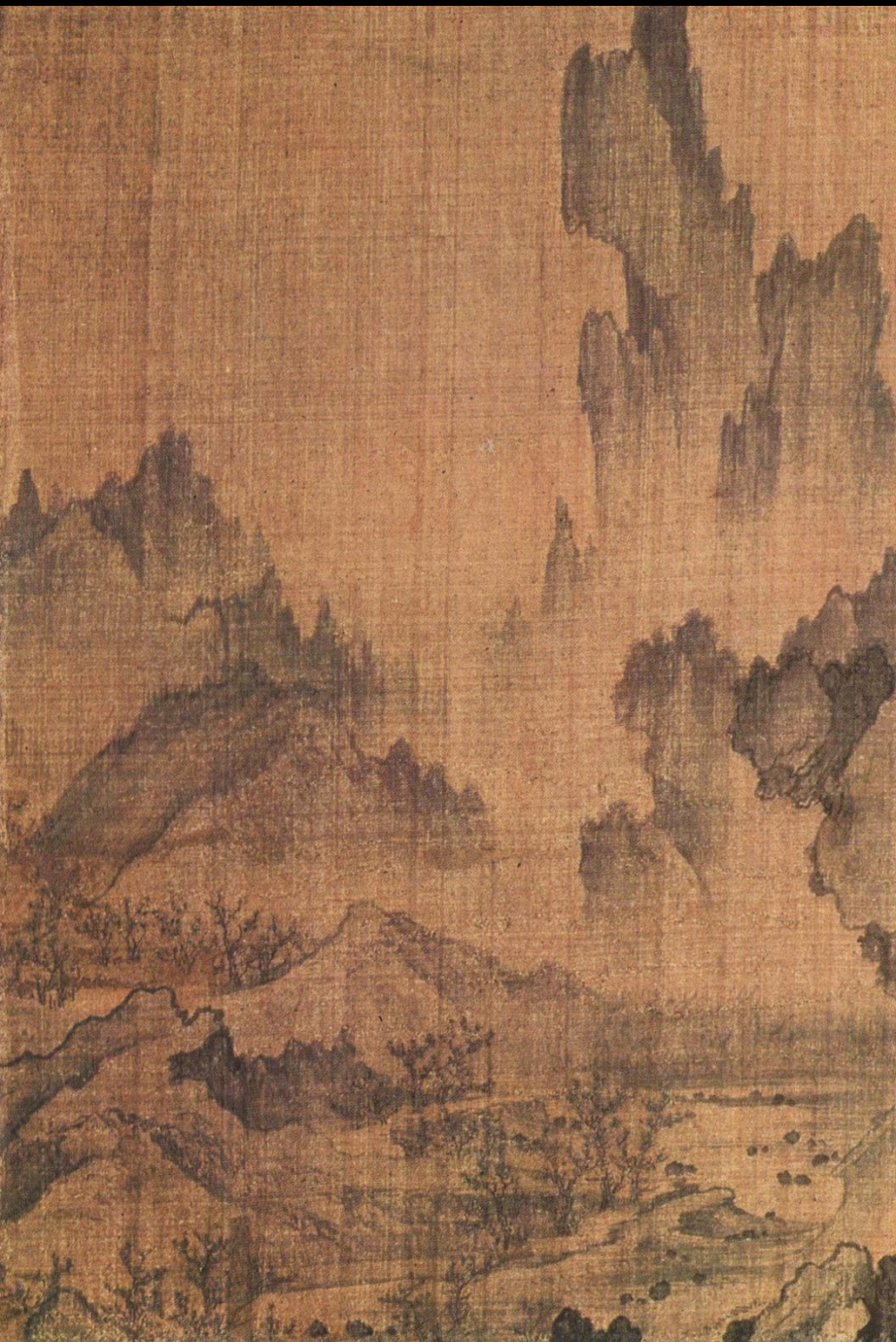
Yi Gae (1417–1456): a “gourd”

Tao Yuanming, *Peach Blossom Spring*

The pure and the shallow belong to separate worlds.
In a little while they were hidden again.
Let me ask you who are convention-bound,
Can you fathom those outside the dirt and noise?
I want to tread upon the thin thin air
And rise up high to find my own kind.

Prince Anpyeong, Colophon

A big city indeed prospers and is where the government officials stroll around, while a deep valley with a sheer cliff is where the recluse resides. This is why those who wear colorful, splendid garments cannot reach the forest [of the Peach Blossom Land] in the mountains, and those who cultivate their minds as they gaze at the stream water over rocks do not even dream about large gates and grand mansions. This is because quietude and noisiness differ, which is also an inevitable logic.... I have many [people] that I like, yet how come only those few followed me to the Peach Blossom Spring and strolled together? I think it is because, by nature, I like quiet and remote places, and I have been fond of natural landscapes since before. It is also because my friendship with those few was especially strong.

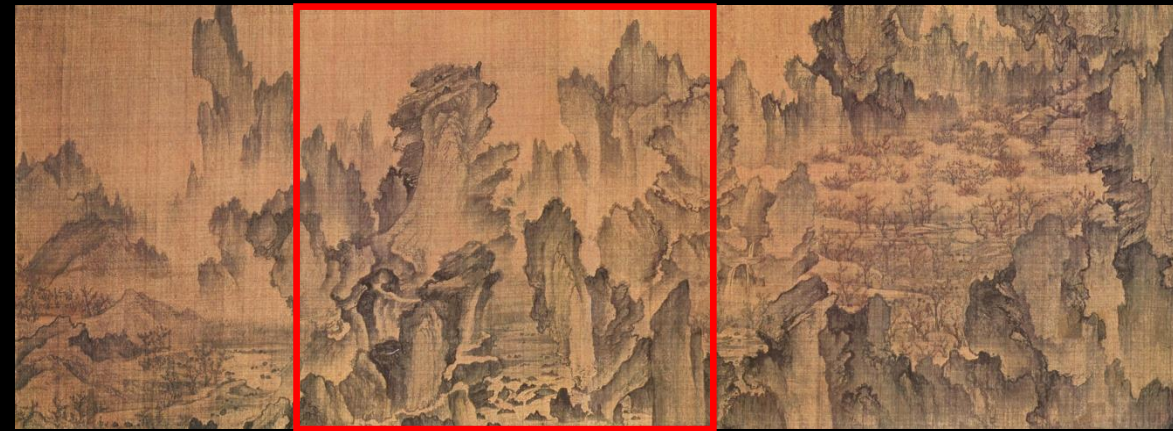
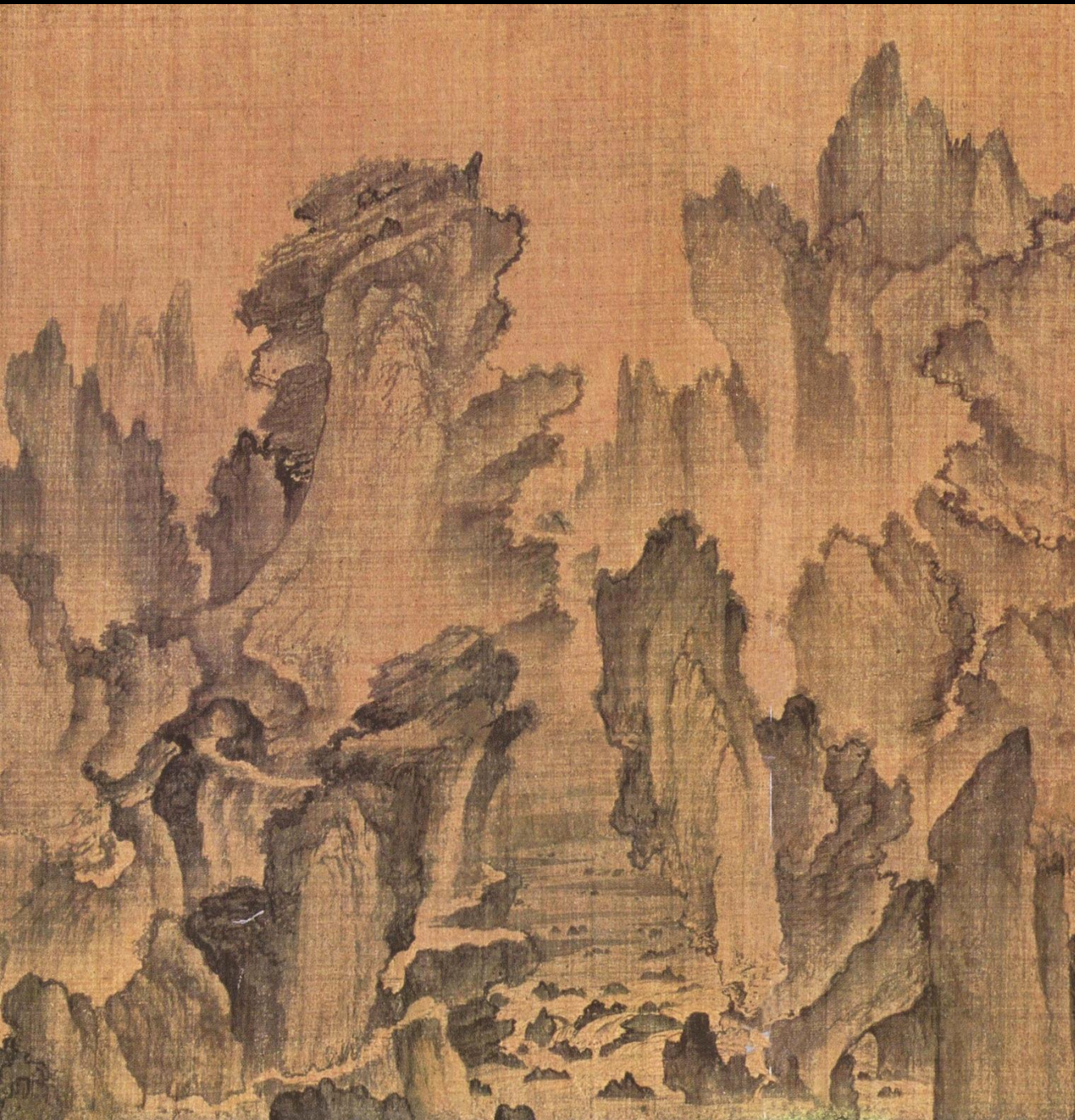


An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, 1447.

Prince Anpyeong: The night of the twentieth day, the fourth month, the year of Jeongmyo [1447]. When I was about to fall asleep, my mind grew dim, and I fell into a deep sleep. Soon I was in a dream state.

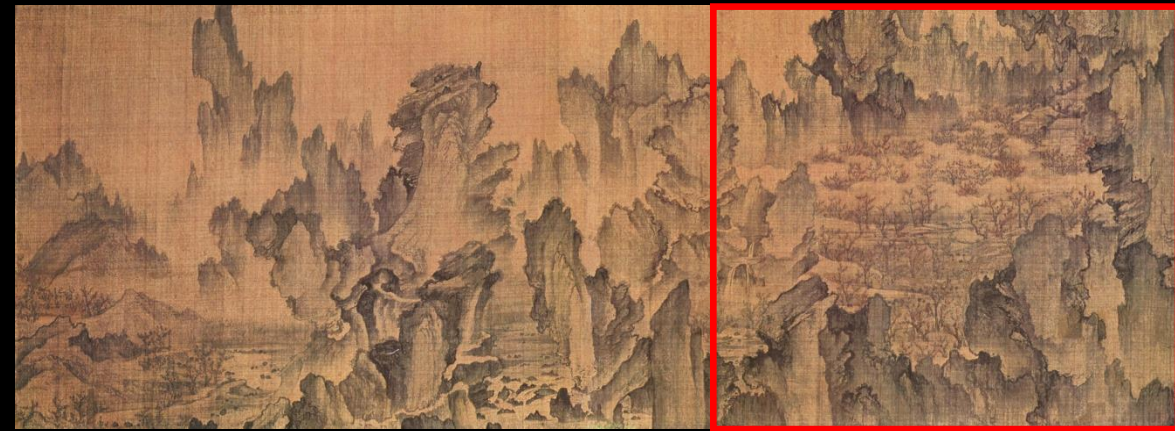
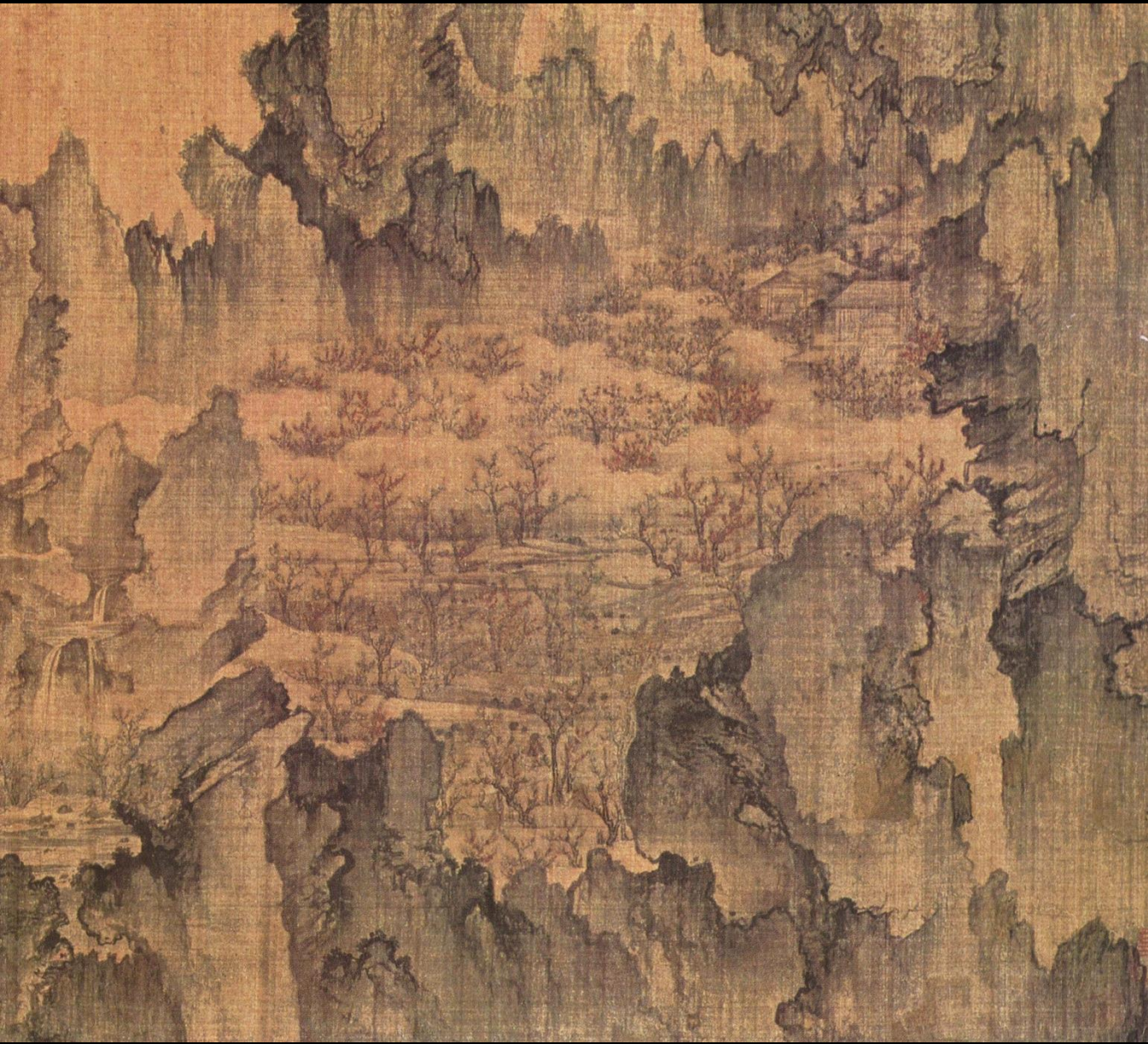
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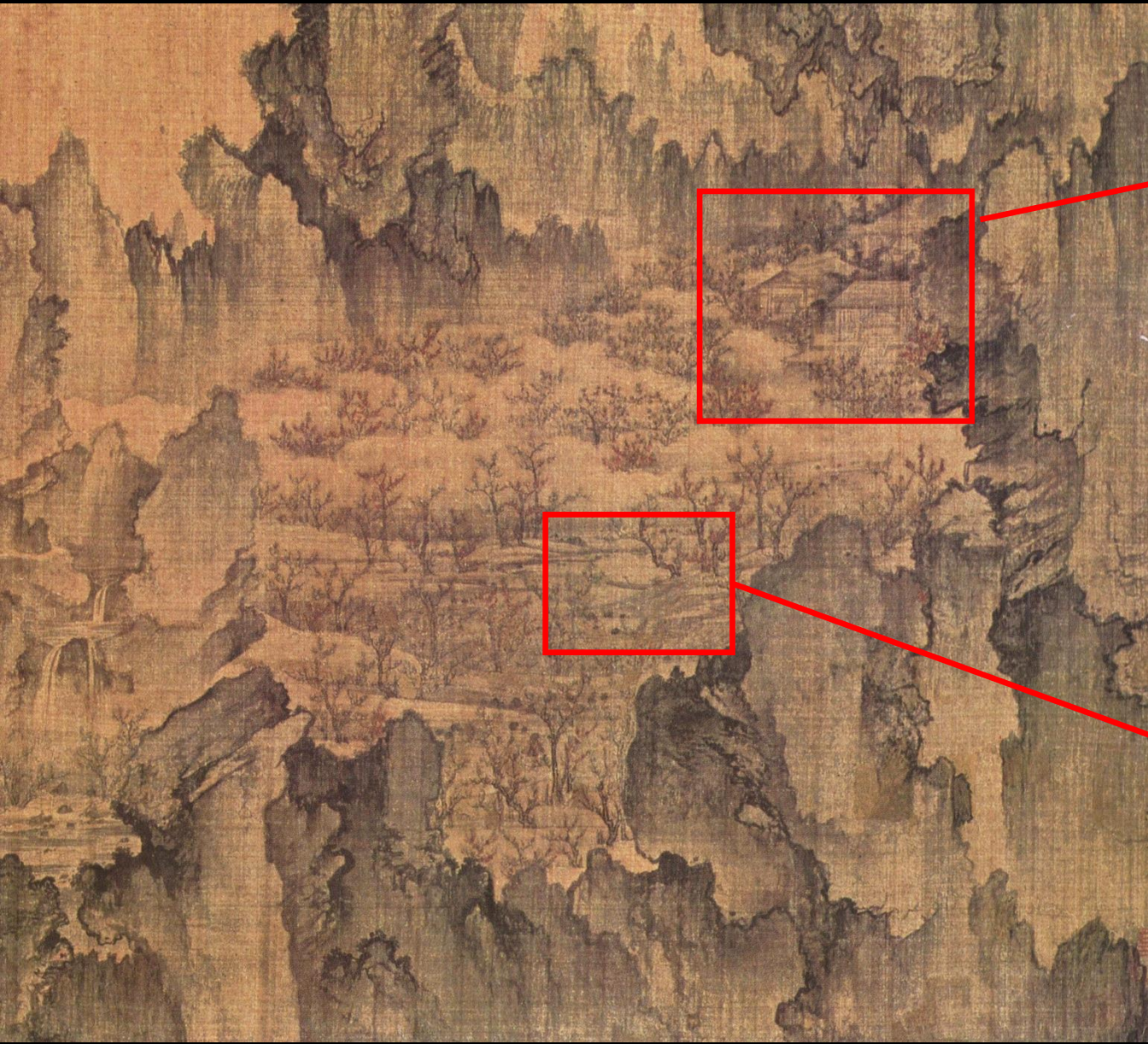
An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, 1447.

Prince Anpyeong: Insu and I whipped our horses and searched for it. The cliff stood high, as if [sharply] cut, the forest was dense and thick, the stream meandered, and the path twisted a hundred times and we did not know where we were going.



An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, 1447.

Prince Anpyeong: Mountains were all around, with thick clouds and fog surrounding them. Near and far was a forest of peach trees, with rosy-tinted haze illuminating [them]. Also, in the middle of a bamboo forest were thatched houses. Their twig gates were halfway open and the stone steps made of soil were crumbling. There were no chickens, dogs, cows, or horses in sight. Only a small boat swayed in the waves on the stream running in front of the village. The sight [of the place] was lonely and desolate. I thought this place must be where immortals live.

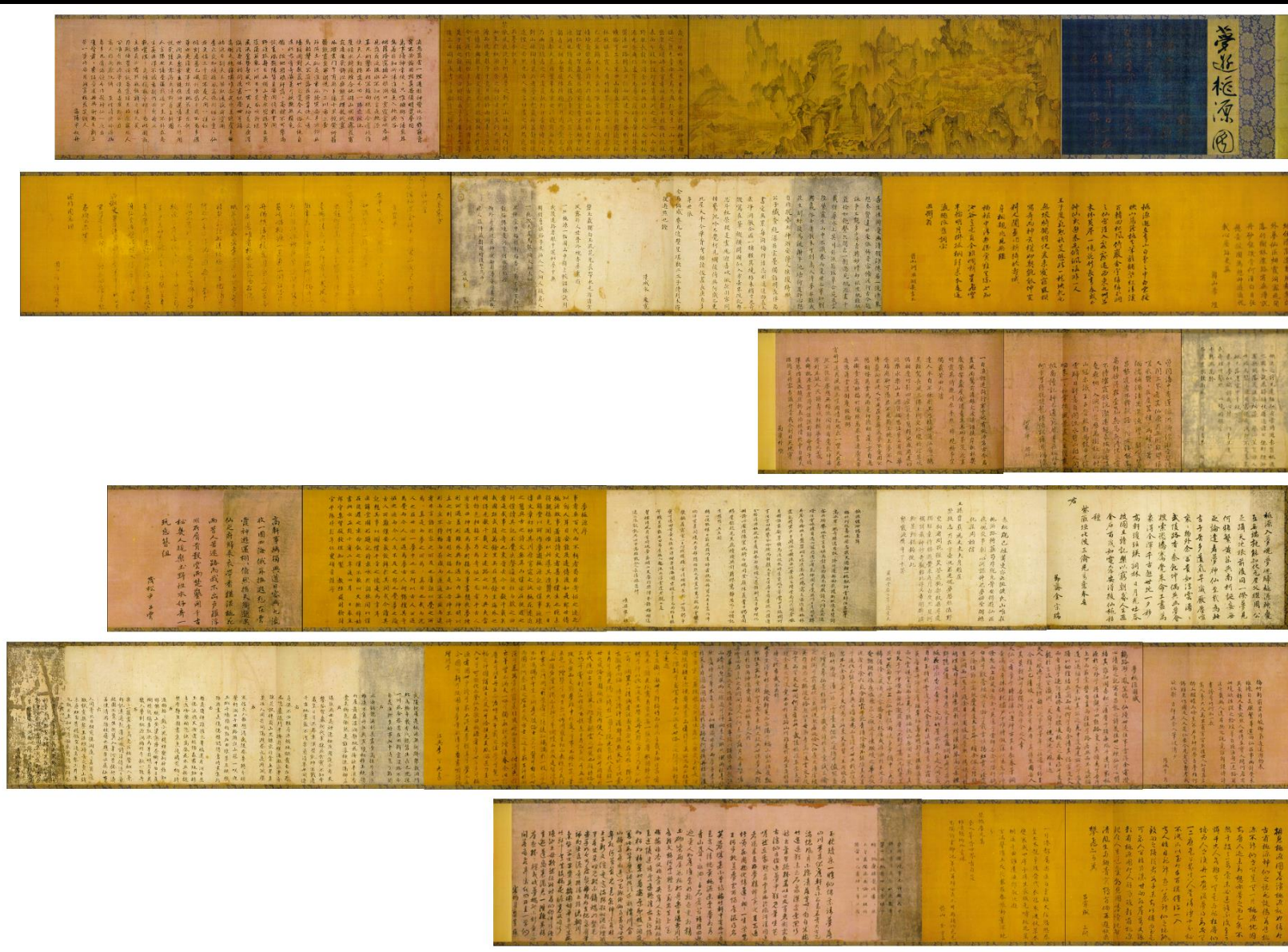


Digital re-creation of *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land* on YouTube ([Link](#))

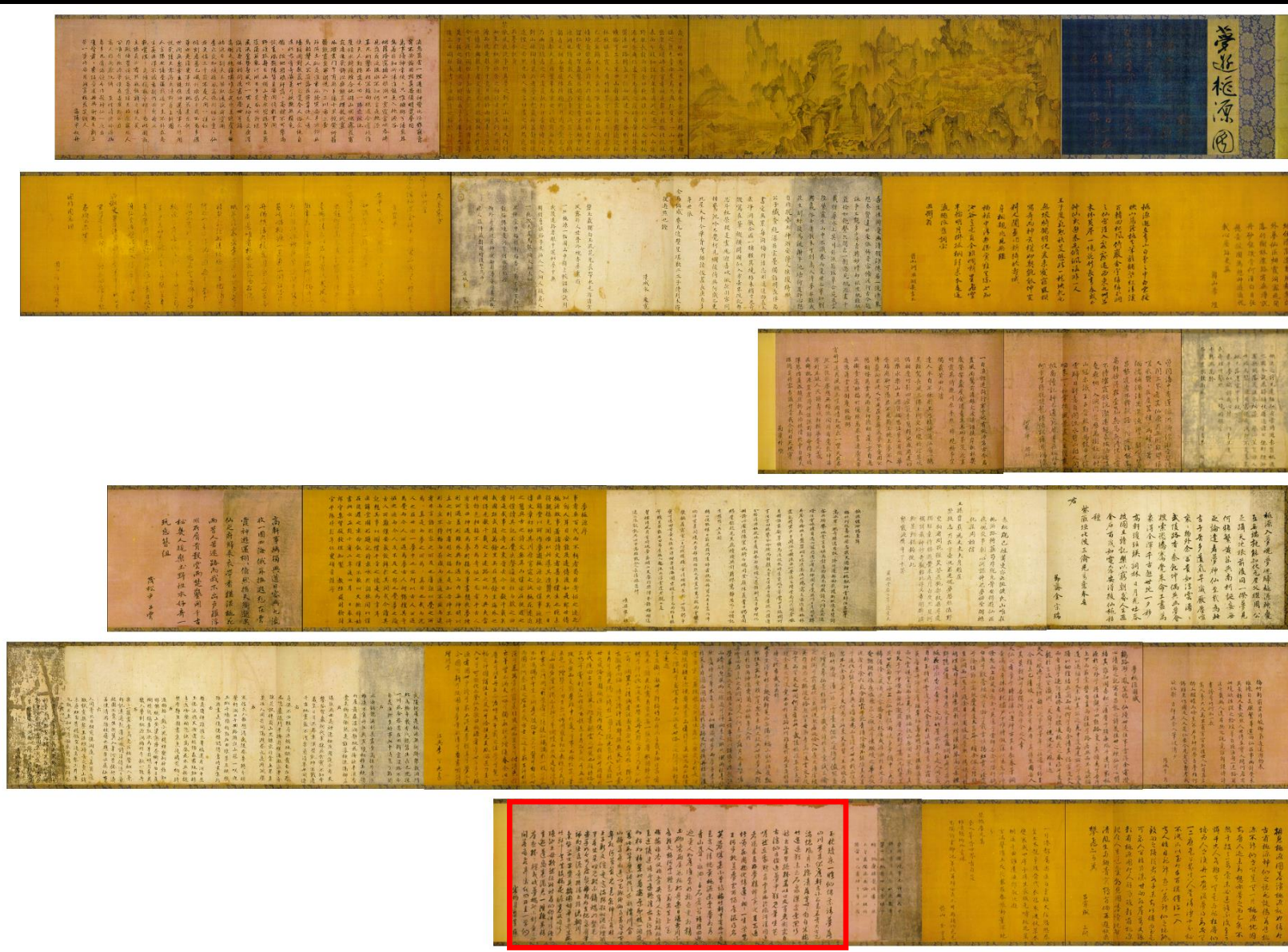




Prince Anpyeong and the Early Joseon Politics



Prince Anpyeong's *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land* scroll, including the painting by An Gyeon and 21 poetic writings by scholar-officials and a monk, 1447–1450. 38.7 x 1839.5 cm.



Choe Su, Poem:
 How outstanding the scholars of the Hall of Worthies are! With their skills distinguished across the country, they have composed the poems.

At Maejukeon [Building of Plum and Bamboo] we discuss [them] together and again travel to the Peach Blossom Spring.

Prince Anpyeong's *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land* scroll, including the painting by An Gyeon and 21 poetic writings by scholar-officials and a monk, 1447–1450. 38.7 x 1839.5 cm.

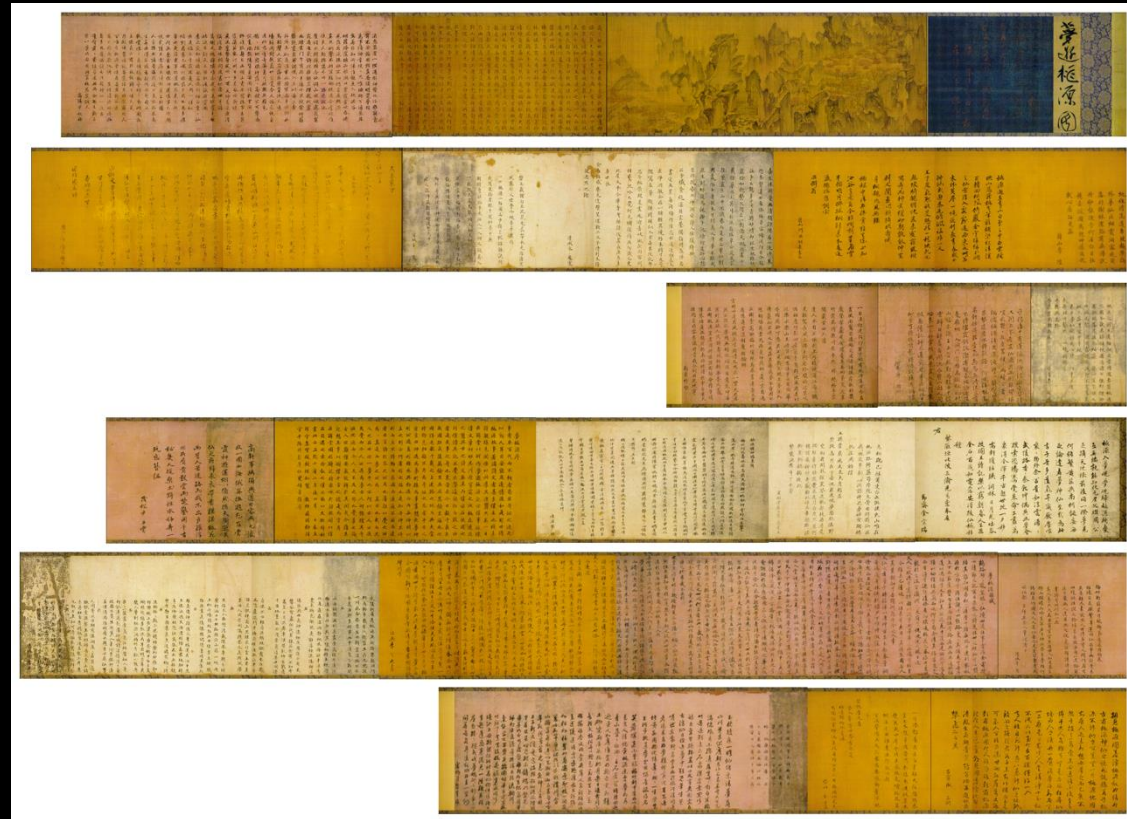
King Sejong (r. 1418–1450)

King Munjong (r. 1450–1452)

King Danjong
(r. 1452–1455)

Prince Suyang (later King Sejo)

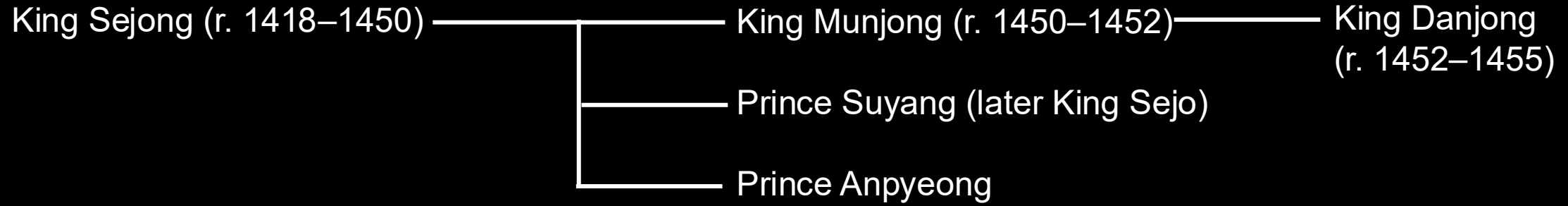
Prince Anpyeong



Hyebin [Yang-ssi] submitted a secret report:

Yong [Prince Anpyeong] sought to conspire with officials by pretending to be a “person of poetry.” Yi Hyeonro, Yi Seungyun, Yi Gae, Bak Paengnyeon, Seong Sammun, and others aligned themselves with him, made a vow with their heart, and called themselves “followers.” They each took a studio name and prided themselves with being literati of the time, but they had been deceived [by Anpyeong] all along. [Yi] Hyeonro and others addressed Yong as “Sabaek” and even “Dongpyeong.” Whenever Kim Jongseo wrote to Yong, he referred to himself as an “old comrade” or “elder of the alliance,” treating him as a peer, which fed Yong’s vanity and encouraged him to eye the throne. He [Anpyeong] increasingly displayed arrogance, amassing wealth and power, and adorned himself with elaborate objects.

—*Tanjong sillok* (Veritable Records of Tanjong’s Reign), vol. 6, 1453/5/19 #5

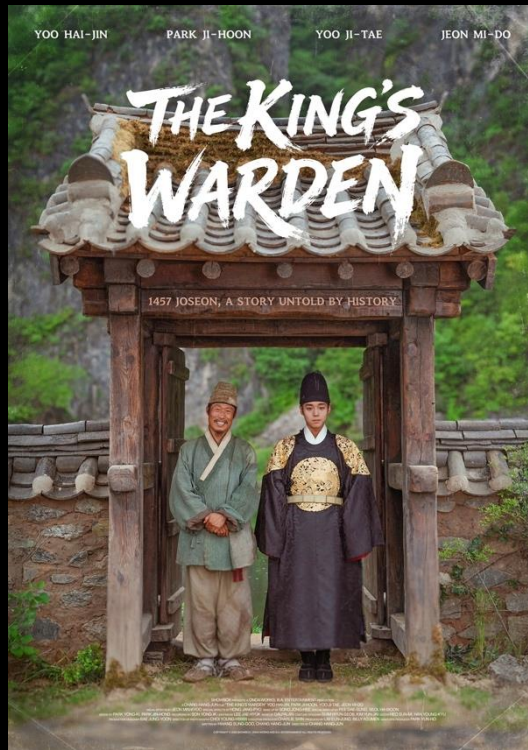


The Coup of Gyeyu Year (1453) (*Gyeyu jeongnan*): Prince Suyang's coup to take the throne for himself

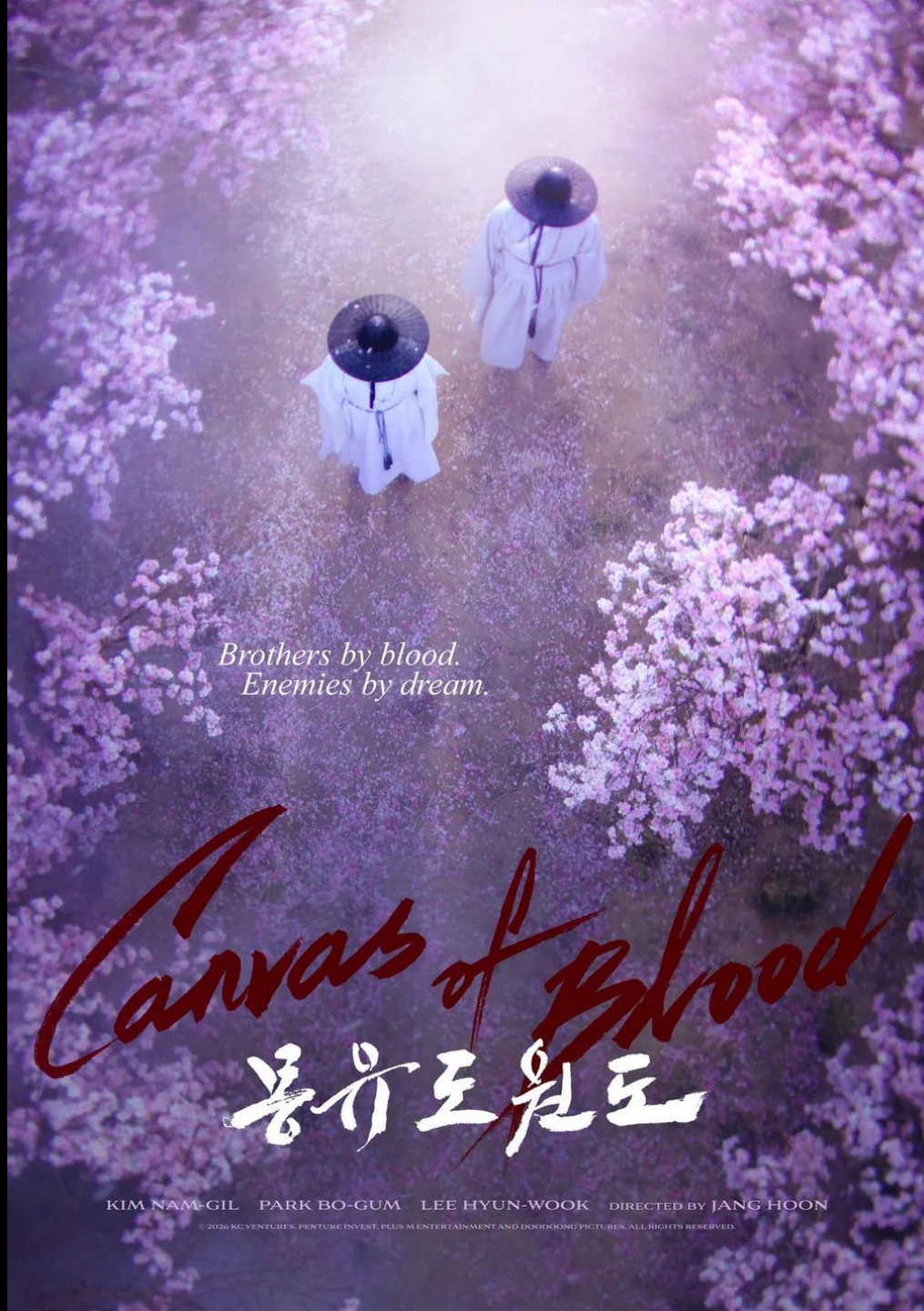


The Coup of Gyeyu Year (1453) (*Gyeyu jeongnan*): Prince Suyang's coup to take the throne for himself

The King's Warden (2026)



Actor Park Ji-hoon as King Danjong




Korean title: Mongyu dowondo (Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land)

English title: *Canvas of Blood*

to be released in late 2026



Park Bo-gum as Prince Anpyeong (left) & Kim Nam-gil as Prince Suyang (right)



Thank you!