

# SESSHŪ'S APPROACH TO TIME IN HIS INK LANDSCAPE PAINTING LONG LANDSCAPE SCROLL IN FOUR SEASONS (1486)

**Agnese Taivāne-Pizāno, PhD**

*University of Latvia, Latvia*

## Abstract

This article is devoted to the issue of time as reflected in Sesshū Tōyō (雪舟 東洋1420–1503) a Zen monk and one of Japan's greatest masters of ink painting masterpiece the *Long Landscape Scroll in Four Seasons* (四季山水長巻 *Shiki Sansui chōkan*, c. 1486, Mori Museum collection). *Long Landscape Scroll* expresses the quintessence of his religious, world views performed in brilliant ink painting techniques. Sesshu implies varied techniques in the description of time and there is little previous research focused on this aspect in this painting.

**Keywords:** *time, ink landscape painting, Sesshū.*

## Introduction

The treatment of time in East Asian cultures differs from Western views. While in Western culture influenced by Christianity time is conceived as a linear phenomenon, in East Asian cultures we find evidences of viewing time as cyclic rhythm. Very often the movement of time around the circle is expressed through the alternation of four seasons that found their visual reflection in various kinds of Japanese culture starting from painting, poetry, architecture, tea ceremony, stage arts, garden culture, textile art, traditional kitchen, and so on. In ink landscape painting, that entered Japan from China with already established archetypes, four seasons became one of the most beloved motifs in expressing the traditional view of time as a cycle.

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*Culture Crossroads*

Volume 34, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.55877/cc.vol34.760>

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ISSN 2500-9974



Chinese painters often expressed time through mist rising, rain clearing, or seasonal transitions. Guo Xi's *Early Spring* (1072) shows time as seasonal awakening, with layered mist revealing the slow shift from winter to spring [Cahill 1988:112].

This article will observe the techniques of rendering time and the underlying ideas in ink painting, focusing on Sesshū and his masterpiece. Sesshū's *Long Landscape Scroll* is a horizontal ink landscape scroll more than 15 meters in length and incorporates multiple techniques of approach towards time beyond the cyclic rhythm created by the change of four seasons.

The scroll depicts the Four Seasons in sequence, but it also incorporates various motifs drawn from Chinese traditions, including scenes inspired by the celebrated West Lake and the poetic cycle of the *Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang*, as well as elements derived from Sesshū's sketches done during his travel in China and other motifs [Hajjima 2009: 130–133].

While the four seasons provide the macro-cycle of time, the Xiao and Xiang motifs (such as *Evening Bell from a Mist-Shrouded Temple*, *Returning Sails off a Distant Shore*, *Autumn Market Scene*, and *Evening Glow on the Fishing Village*) punctuate the scroll with micro-cycles of daily, social, and atmospheric temporality.

Besides, time is expressed also with technical means such as brushwork, composition and colour.

Sesshū effectively uses blank spaces in the scroll: to separate compositional units in the scroll, but blank paper spaces also function as pauses, creating rhythm and silence. These gaps embody temporal suspension, akin to pauses in Zen meditation. These empty spaces are called *ma* (間) and hold a philosophical meaning: they function also as a temporal space and provide interval that gives rhythm and meaning.

The character *ma* 間 combines “gate” (門) and “sun” (日), symbolizing sunlight streaming through a doorway [Japan House Los Angeles: 2020].

With *ma* the space between words, sounds and actions takes on clarity and distinctiveness. *Ma* is about emptiness between things, about the silence between the sound, the respite between activity, and the pause between thoughts. *Ma* is typically Zen, and thus a very Japanese way of thinking about space and time [Japan Expert Insights: 2026].

Sesshū uses mist, rivers, and blank expanses to create breathing spaces between episodes. These pauses function like temporal ellipses: the viewer moves from one scene to another as if walking through time. In Zen aesthetics, *ma* is both spatial and temporal, embodying silence, pause, and impermanence.

The long horizontal scroll format – different than typical Western painting, makes the viewer actively involve into the opening process and gradually discover new scenes. According to Fong, as the viewer moves through shifting terrain – village, river, mountains – time becomes embodied in the act of viewing [Fong 1992: 67].

The scroll invites to a travel in time.

### Time in Sesshū's *Landscape Scroll in Four Seasons*

In the opening scene of the scroll that features a master and his disciple starting a journey along a path winding upwards through a craggy mountain range towards the houses partly obscured by mountains and evening mist – the season is spring. It is possible to view the scroll online at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Landscapes\\_of\\_the\\_Four\\_Seasons\\_by\\_Sesshu\\_\(Mori\\_Museum\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Landscapes_of_the_Four_Seasons_by_Sesshu_(Mori_Museum).jpg)

Spring is the season when nature wakes up from a winter sleep to start a new cycle of activities. Sesshū links this period of time in the year with the initialization of his own picturesque story. In East Asia it is traditionally the time when a new farming season starts and is the beginning of a new year. Lush green trees growing on the rocks bring the feeling of spring suggesting that the power of life in this season is so strong that even on almost bare rocks the trees have grown a dense foliage. The time of the day is early morning when the two main characters – the master and his disciple start their journey. It is the beginning of a new activity. The road leads upward the mountain – possibly adding a philosophical meaning – this new activity – the road started, has a religious objective – to lead to the enlightenment. As the eye follows the mountain path, the viewer finds out that the goal of the first day journey is a temple hidden behind the cliffs, only the roofs are visible. This kind of composition has old historical roots in Chinese painting: it belongs to the topic of one of the *Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang* developed in China by poet and painter Song Di (宋迪, 11<sup>th</sup> century) and is called *Evening Bell from a Mist-Shrouded Temple*.

Song Di, the Northern Song official credited with creating the *Eight Views*, originally conceived *Evening Bell from a Mist-Shrouded Temple* as a poetic image of exile and melancholy [Murck 1996: 113–144]. His interpretation emphasized the resonance of the temple bell through mist at twilight, a sound that symbolized both distance from home and the passage of time. The bell's echo, fading into obscurity, became a metaphor for impermanence and longing [Murck 2000:111–115].

The original poems by Song Di have been lost, but later poets in East Asia interpreted this topic in different times, varied ways, giving slightly different interpretations.

Chan Buddhists interpreted the scene from a religious point of view.

Juefan Huihong's poem *Evening Bell from a Mist-Shrouded Temple*:

*Light mist covers the evening, twilight comes on,  
Sororous distant bell carries to a remote village;  
Small bridge spans a stream, signs of men are gone,  
A barely visible flag flutters at the foot of the mountain.* [Murck 2000: 286]

Yang Wanli's (1127–1206), one of the "Four Masters" of Southern Song poetry, interpretation seem to fit best for Sesshū's painting. Sesshū being a painter and also a Zen monk was well informed on the traditions of the Song and later period

Chinese poetry. Yang Wanli's version of *Evening Bell from a Mist-Shrouded Temple* emphasizes sound dissolving into emptiness that could resemble Sesshū's message:

*Through mist the temple roofs are hidden,  
Evening bell resounds across the valley.  
The echo lingers, then fades into silence,  
Time itself vanishes with the sound.* [Yang 2000]

Yang Wanli's Chan Buddhist sensibility turns the bell into a meditation on emptiness. The poem links auditory experience to the dissolution of time.

Sesshū interprets twilight as a spiritual threshold. Mist and fading sound embody impermanence. Time is experienced as dissolution, aligning with Zen meditation.

After dawn, evening bells and rest at the misty temple comes a new day and the travel continues. A stretch of mist symbolizes the passage of time, the change of circumstances. This blank space also suggests openness and potential, echoing the pause before a new phase of development.

The next set of the composition is a group of lush green pine trees and a plum tree growing on almost bare rocks – another symbol of spring and the renewal of the cycle. Pine trees and the plum are growing on the almost bare rocks – a scene rarely found in the nature might symbolize nature's power of renewal even in difficult conditions, meanwhile the composition becomes a meditative pause in the journey. The act of viewing the picture becomes a meditation.

In Chinese Song painting the depiction of trees had meanings beyond their natural looks. M. Powers quoting Guo Ruoxu – Chinese 11<sup>th</sup> century Master of Landscape naturalism, wrote:

*Their bleak, weathered landscapes portray not only the ravages of frost, wind, and drought but, metaphorically, the depredations of unjust government. Their tall pines, trunks stripped of bark by ill winds, were metaphors for men of integrity who defied the attacks of powerful adversaries. It was these masters-men like Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, and Guo Zhongshu, who studied the imprint of weather and time on trees, rocks, and soil, as well as the effects of light and mist. They did so, not to mirror God's truth, but to convey even more poignantly their social message.* [Powers 2017: 58]

Throughout the picture, Sesshū inserts motifs of gnarled trees growing on bare rocks or mystically attached to the almost vertical bare rocks. Despite unwelcome growing conditions these trees have green leaves but their wind torn trunks and branches speak of numerous difficulties they have experienced. Sesshū lived in times of unrest. He painted the *Landscape Scroll of Four Seasons* in Yamaguchi – far away from the capital, where he had found a retreat from warfare that has ravaged

the capital Kyoto. Like Song traditions in painting these motifs could suggest political and military storms going on in his country.

Another cluster of buildings and a winding path in the mountains leading in the depths of the picture, creates the feeling of vast space behind the frontal compositions. After a while in the mist, in the distance we see the roofs of another village. Sesshū often depicts time-worn humble cottages that reflects his sympathy towards ordinary people, their activities and uneasy life.

It is another evening and we imagine that the travellers will take a rest. This element suggests a miniature pause after which probably on a new day – Sesshū continues the composition with the master and his disciple crossing a bridge over a mountain stream – the travel continues. Another set of flat bare rocks crossing each other with fir trees mystically growing on them erupts the composition – thus reminding the viewer about the ascetism, discipline, rigidity, patience, endurance despite harsh conditions and other Zen Buddhist values as well as possibly suggesting social unrest in the country. The sceneries that Sesshū depicted pleased the eye of a person admiring mountain hermits' life and in Zen temples the monks and their disciples often viewed similar pictures to replace actual walks in the mountains. The scenes have little reminiscence of the usual worries and troubles of the human life – rather, it is a distancing from the worldly matters, taking a meditative pause.

Behind the craggy mountain slabs unwinds the path – Sesshū invites to the continuation of the journey – the viewer arrives to the village on the banks of some river or lake. Light green willow trees suggest that the season has changed to the end of spring – beginning of the summer. The windows of the houses are widely open; the clothes are hung out for drying. Warm and bright sunrays reflect on the water; the sky is clear. Tiny human figures are seen inside the house and boats. Sesshū creates an impression that it is a rather hot early summer day full of human activity. After meditative stretches of pure nature as a contrast Sesshū inserts a scene full of human activity, yet the human figures are extremely tiny and distanced as if just a background observed during the journey.

After a dense scene with multiple details as a contrast next comes a vast stretch of water that suggests the passage of time and change in the daytime and the season. Time is experienced as intensity, yet Sesshū's pauses remind us that fullness is temporary. These vast intervals of emptiness invite to a pause and meditation. He leads the eye to the tiny boats returning to a distant shore – scarlet red tints in the sky suggest evening. The flow of time slows down.

Literati painters often expressed time by suspending it. Empty pavilions, still water, and distant peaks evoke a sense of timeless continuity, the long duration of nature beyond human life [Clunas 1997: 54].

Boats returning to a distant shore in the evening glow – this set of elements belongs to the scene *Returning Sails off a Distant Shore* – one of the topics of the *Eight scenes of Xiao and Xiang*. Numerous poets in East Asia have dedicated their verses to this scene and artists have created their variations of visual sceneries.

The motif of *Returning Sails* was one of the most evocative in the *Eight Views* cycle, symbolizing the end of labour, the return home, and the passage of time marked by evening light.

According to A. Murck, Southern Song poetry often emphasized the melancholy of exile and the beauty of dusk [Murck 2000: 82–84]. Fan Chengda (1126–1193) wrote:

「遠浦歸帆暮色中，斷雲疏雨幾家東。客心已逐孤篷去，目送潮平一片空。」

*Returning sails at the distant shore in the dusk;  
Broken clouds and scattered rain drift eastward over a few riverside homes.  
My traveller's heart has already followed the lone sail;  
I watch until the tide levels and all becomes empty.* [Fan 1983: 412]

Another poem by Fan Chengda:

「遠浦歸帆帶夕陽，亂山深處起微茫。孤篷漸入瀟湘雨，萬里行人夢亦長。」 [Fan 1983: 427]

*A returning sail at the distant shore carries the setting sun;  
From deep among tangled hills a faint mist rises.  
A lone boat drifts slowly into XiaoXiang's rain,  
And the traveller's long journey stretches on into dreams.* ([Author's translation])

Here, the waning light and boats fading into distance mark time as both atmospheric and narrative. This verse emphasizes impermanence and the cyclical rhythm of departure and return.

Ming dynasty elaborations developed the theme with more social and communal imagery:

Wu Kuan (1435–1504):

「浦口歸舟帶夕煙，漁歌斷續過汀邊。網收水闊魚聲亂，隔岸人家火正然。」 [Wu 1987:259]

*A returning boat at the river mouth carries the evening mist;  
Fishermen's songs rise and fall as they pass the shoal.  
Nets drawn in, the wide water stirs with splashing fish;  
Across the bank, household fires burn bright.* [Author's translation]

Here, time is communal – the day's labour ends in shared relief and joy.

Bihaedang's Joseon album (16<sup>th</sup> century) also includes verses describing sails furled at dusk, underscoring the ritual of return as a daily temporal marker [Park 2016: 121].

In the *Long Landscape Scroll*, Sesshū translates these poetic atmospheres into ink:

Boats gliding across misty expanses are depicted with minimal strokes, emphasizing emptiness (*ma*) around them. The sails are simplified forms, often half-furled, suggesting the slowing of movement and the day's closure. Time is expressed through transition: the boats move from clustered dwellings toward open water, embodying the shift from labour to rest.

Unlike the poets, who emphasize sound and communal voices, Sesshū emphasizes silence and space – the boats dissolve into mist, their return marked by absence rather than presence. Examples in both poetry and painting emphasize impermanence and cyclical return, but Sesshū's ink painting shifts the focus from human sound to natural silence, aligning with Zen aesthetics. *Returning Sails* scene embodies time as both narrative and atmospheric: poets emphasize sound and communal return, while Sesshū emphasizes silence, emptiness, and spatial rhythm.

After open riverbanks, Sesshū invites to a new shore – a mountain landscape with tiny figures escaping heat in a cooling cove, engaged in meditation. The entrance of the cave is covered by trees adding more shade. The scene suggests that outside temperatures are high and it is the middle of summer. Behind the cave in the misty valley there are visible roofs of the building and a pagoda nearby. After which come flat rocks with gnarly trees growing on them, another cluster of buildings, vertical rocks with buildings on the top and on the side of the mountain, a wide terrace with a pavilion overlooking another misty water scenery. The pavilion offers a pleasant shade for travelers in the summer season. In the pavilion the passage of time stops for a while, the meditative wide water scenery stretching in the depths of the picture invites you to pause and reflect. The almost blank and misty scenery is a device to suggest the passage of time and the change of the season on the next shore when the travelers come to a fishing village. The harvested rice suggests that the season is autumn. Fishing boats peacefully rest on the shore – the day activities have finished; it is time to rest. This scene belongs to another topic from *Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang* – *Evening Glow on the Fishing Village*.

The *Evening Glow* motif in the *Eight Views* cycle captures the fleeting beauty of sunset, a liminal moment between day and night. Southern Song poets and later Ming literati elaborated on this theme to emphasize impermanence, melancholy, and the rhythm of daily closure.

Southern Song poet Fan Chengda (1126–1193) wrote:

江浦夕陽帶水紅，漁舟歸棹過蘆叢。潮平兩岸無人語，一笛風來月影中。

*At the river inlet the setting sun reddens the water;  
Fishing boats return, their oars brushing through the reeds.  
With the tide level, both banks fall silent;  
A single flute note drifts on the wind beneath the rising moon.* [Fan 1983: 462]

Here, time is atmospheric – the glow marks the day's end.  
A poem attributed to Yujian on *Fishing Village in Evening Glow*:

*Red sun in clear sky suffuses a sandy spit,  
Having sold the fish, half sobered up from wine.  
Straw hat, rain cape not yet dry, elm boards quiet,  
A sound of horizontal bamboo flute, many peaks are dark.* [Murck 2000: 287]

Here the moment is late afternoon moving toward dusk. Time is shown through light spreading and thinning, not through a clock. The sun's redness signals the day's decline, and the sandy spit becomes a surface that records this transition. Time is depicted as waning brightness. Besides, time is embodied in the rhythm of labour and rest, not in hours. Time is portrayed as daily routine. In the next lines time is shown through residue, the way objects remember what humans forget.

Ming dynasty poet and painter Shen Zhou (1427–1509) in both poetry and painting depicted evening glow as a moment of contemplative beauty, where “the red light lingers on the water, dissolving into mist” [Zhou 1988]. His work emphasizes emptiness and transition.

Another Ming dynasty poet Wu Kuan (1435–1504) wrote:

「漁舟一葉下寒潮，網重歸來語笑饒。隔岸炊煙生樹杪，斜陽深處水迢迢。」  
*A single fishing boat rides down the cold tide;  
With heavy nets they return, voices bright with laughter.  
Across the bank, cooking smoke rises to the treetops;  
In the slanting sun, the river stretches far and deep.* [Wu Vol. 5 1987: 173]

Here, time moves through the poem as a quiet sequence of transitions, each marked not by clocks or explicit hours but by light, labour, sound, and distance. The poem expresses time as something felt, not measured.

Southern Song painters often depicted evening glow with subtle ink washes and faint colour, emphasizing atmosphere over detail. The glow was suggested through tonal gradation rather than explicit depiction [Cahill 1994].



In Ming painting Literati painters like Shen Zhou used red washes and expansive skies to highlight the transience of sunset, often pairing poems with images to reinforce impermanence [Zhou 1988].

Sesshū uses layered washes to suggest fading light, with mountains and water dissolving into mist. Unlike Ming painters who used red, Sesshū relies on monochrome ink, emphasizing emptiness (*ma*) and tonal rhythm. The scene embodies impermanence – the glow is not depicted directly but implied through atmosphere, inviting the viewer to imagine the transition creating temporal rhythm. Whereas poets emphasize sound (songs fading, laughter rising) and colour (red glow), Sesshū emphasizes silence and emptiness, aligning with Zen aesthetics.

To summarize the above mentioned, the poets used sensory detail – sound, colour, communal activity – to mark sunset's temporality. The painters (Southern Song and Ming) suggested glow through tonal gradation or colour washes, emphasizing atmosphere. Sesshū distils the motif into ink emptiness, rendering evening glow as a visual pause – a moment of silence and impermanence. Together, they show evening glow as both communal and contemplative, a fleeting beauty that dissolves into emptiness.

After an evening in the fisherman's village the master and his disciple continue the travel. They cross a bridge over the river coming from the harvested fields – another seasonal marker of the autumn. Next comes a lively mountain market scene. The marketplace is full of colourful figures, one of the buildings is a pub with open door. The trees on the surrounding rocks have red fruit – the symbol of autumn and abundance. Just behind the market there is an entrance to the cave. Through the openings in the vertical rock, we can partly see that the cave has a road leading upwards with bigger and smaller rooms for contemplation. Sesshū draws a stunning contrast between the worldly affairs symbolized by the market and the sacred area, the hermit's road – the cave. These contrasting worlds co-exist close to each other.

This topic again belongs to one of the scenes of the *Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang* – *The Mountain Market, Clearing Mist* scene.

Traditionally in Chinese poetry *The Mountain Market Scene* in the *Eight Views* cycle emphasized the rhythms of human life within seasonal change. Southern Song poets and later Ming literati elaborated on this motif to highlight the bustle of trade, the atmosphere of harvest, and the melancholy of autumn.

Fan Chengda (1126–1193), a Southern Song poet is known for his pastoral poems. He wrote verses describing autumn markets as

「山市晴嵐曉色開，遠峰初霽帶青來。漁樵往返煙中路，一片人家市井隈」。  
[Fan Vol. 27 1983: 413]

*At the mountain market the clearing mist opens into morning light;*

*Distant peaks, newly washed by rain, return in shades of blue.  
Fishermen and woodcutters come and go along paths veiled in haze;  
A cluster of homes lies tucked within the market's bend.*

In this poem time moves through the poem as a gradual unfolding of morning, revealed through light, movement, and the slow reemergence of the world after rain. Nothing states the hour directly; instead, time is expressed through transitions – from mist to clarity, from stillness to activity, from obscurity to visibility.

Another Song poet Lu You (1125–1210) often used market imagery to evoke the social rhythms of rural life:

山市朝晴雲氣收，遠峰新洗帶青浮。行人踏徑煙中出，小店柴門犬自吠。  
[Lu Vol. 29 1979: 447]

*At the mountain market the morning clears as clouds withdraw;  
Distant peaks, newly washed, rise in drifting blue.  
Travelers step from misted paths as they emerge;  
At a small shop's brushwood gate a dog barks on its own.* [Author's translation]

Here, time appears as a gradual morning emergence, revealed through changes in light, atmosphere, movement, and sound. Nothing states the hour directly; instead, time is felt through transitions from obscurity to clarity and from stillness to activity.

Ming dynasty poet Wu Kuan (1435–1504) described autumn markets as places of communal gathering:

「山市朝來霽色新，行人語笑滿前津。柴扉小店炊煙起，樵客肩薪過渡頻。」  
[Wu Vol. 8 1987: 214]

*At the mountain market the morning clears with freshened light;  
Travelers' voices and laughter fill the ford ahead.  
From a small shop's brushwood gate cooking smoke rises;  
Woodcutters, bundles on their shoulders, cross the ferry again and again.*  
[Author's translation]

Time unfolds in the poem as a morning gradually taking shape, revealed through shifts in light, sound, movement, and repeated human activity. Nothing marks the hour explicitly; instead, time is sensed through transitions that show the world waking, his poetry emphasizes time as social experience.

Another Ming poet Shen Zhou (1427–1509), in painting and poetry, often depicted rustic markets with figures dwarfed by landscape, reinforcing the humility of human activity within nature's cycles. One of his poems on this topic reads:

山市朝來霽色新，微雲散盡見諸鄰。樵夫踏露行山徑，小店柴門犬自頻。  
[Zhou Vol. 4 1981: 212]

*At the mountain market the morning clears with newly brightened light;  
Thin clouds disperse, revealing the neighbouring homes.  
Woodcutters tread the dew as they walk the mountain path;  
At a small shop's brushwood gate a dog barks repeatedly.* [Author's translation]

In Southern Song painting handscrolls of the *Eight Views* often depicted market scenes with clusters of figures, stalls, and boats, framed by misty expanses. The emphasis was on temporal atmosphere – markets as fleeting gatherings within the larger rhythm of nature.

Ming painting has examples where literati scrolls expanded the motif with more detailed depictions of human interaction but always subordinated to landscape. The market was a temporal punctuation in the scroll's unfolding journey.

Sesshū's interpretation in the *Long Landscape Scroll* is slightly different. While Sesshū integrates the *Autumn Market Scene* into his seasonal progression, small human figures and market stalls appear, but they are dwarfed by mountains and rivers. Large blank expanses of mist or *ma* around the mountain scenery separate clusters of activity, emphasizing the intervals of silence around human bustle.

Sesshū creates temporal rhythm: the market scene marks autumn as a social season, but Sesshū renders it with restraint – activity dissolves into emptiness, suggesting impermanence.

In comparison to poetry, whereas poets emphasize sound (voices, laughter) and sensory detail (smoke, grain), Sesshū emphasizes visual emptiness and spatial rhythm. The market becomes a fleeting punctuation in the scroll's meditative journey through time.

To summarize the above mentioned, poets highlighted sound, smell, and communal exchange to mark autumn's temporality. Painters (Southern Song and Ming): depicted markets as clusters of activity within misty landscapes, emphasizing atmosphere. Sesshū uses *ma* and ink wash to render the market as a subdued, transient moment – human life dwarfed by nature's cycles. Together, they show autumn as both communal and impermanent, a season of gathering that dissolves into silence and emptiness.

After the lively Mountain market scene comes an interval formed by the group of fir trees growing on the rocks, compressed in the lower part of the picture while most of the space is filled by the depiction of sky. This almost empty part of the composition suggests the passage of time. Sharp and rounded brushstrokes in the sky suggest that a storm has come, weather conditions have changed. Immediately after that starts a new scenery with solitary, massive city wall, dark sky and snow-covered mountains – the season is winter.

The scroll ends with a composition of a plum tree and a pine in the mountains – a symbol of a new beginning, another cycle of four seasons and the passage of time around a circle.

### Brushstroke rhythm, calligraphy, and temporal tension

Sesshū's brushwork itself conveys time. In his painting angular strokes contrast with soft washes, creating tension between immediacy and timelessness.

This gestural quality links Sesshū's painting to Zen calligraphy (*shodō*). Each brushstroke is a temporal event – a record of the artist's embodied movement in the present moment. The stroke cannot be erased or repeated; it is both instantaneous and permanent. Sesshū's landscapes inherit this philosophy: his brushwork is not merely descriptive but temporal, capturing the rhythm of lived time.

Dense, calligraphic passages accelerate perception; soft washes and dispersed ink slow it. By alternating these modes across *Eight View* episodes and seasonal transitions, Sesshū sculpts a viewing tempo that mirrors natural cycles.

### Conclusion: Time, *ma*, and the poetic landscape in Sesshū's scroll

Sesshū's *Long Landscape Scroll* is a meditation on time and impermanence, deeply rooted in Chinese poetic traditions and Zen aesthetics.

Four Seasons provide the macro-cycle of time – emergence, fullness, decline, stillness – each expressed through *ma* as openness, compression, separation, and emptiness.

Xiao and Xiang motifs provide micro-cycles – daily rhythms (morning, evening), social rhythms (market, return), atmospheric transitions (mist, glow).

Sesshū's innovation is that by combining seasonal cycles with poetic episodes, Sesshū creates a layered temporality where emptiness (*ma*) becomes the medium of time.

Sesshū's scroll embodies *impermanence* (*mujō* 無常) and *emptiness* (*mu* 無). By translating poetic sound and colour into visual silence and space, he creates a contemplative journey where the viewer experiences time as both cyclical and ephemeral.

### Epilogue: Contemporary resonances

Sesshū's aesthetics are evident in Japanese culture today. The principles of *wabi-sabi* and *yūgen* are found in the tea ceremony (*chanoyu* 茶の湯), where silence, pauses, and seasonal awareness embody *ma* and impermanence. In Japanese architecture, minimalist spaces emphasize emptiness and rhythm, echoing Sesshū's use of blank paper. Contemporary designers such as Tadao Ando have drawn on Zen aesthetics, using light, shadow, and void to create temporal experiences in concrete and glass.

Similarly, Japanese minimalism in design and lifestyle reflects Sesshū's vision: impermanence, simplicity, and subtlety are celebrated as sources of beauty. Just as Sesshū's brushstrokes dissolve into emptiness, modern interiors embrace uncluttered spaces where time and silence can be felt. His ink landscapes thus remain a living philosophy, shaping not only art but the very way Japanese culture experiences time.

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