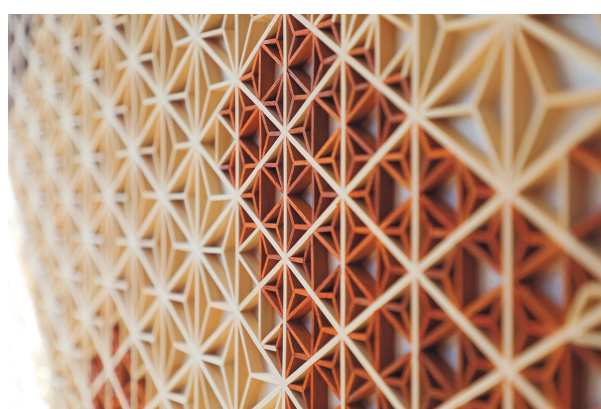




Above: Students are eager to learn in Zhou Wenxiang's joinery courses at the Shanghai Citizen Art Night School. — Photos by Liu Yijian

Left: Zhou's artwork, "Spring is Here," measures 1.4 by 2.1 meters and presents a miniature world of spring. Inset: The colors of the window lattice represent the natural hues of various woods.



'Spring' comes alive at an exhibit in 27,000 interlocking wooden pieces

Liu Yijian and Yang Di

Zhou Wenxiang, a dedicated advocate of traditional Chinese craftsmanship known as *sunmao* (mortise and tenon structure), has crafted a stunning window lattice titled "Spring is Here." This artwork will be showcased in Anting Town during this year's Shanghai Citizens Art Festival, offering the public a rare opportunity to experience the extraordinary charm of *sunmao* handicraft up close.

The mortise and tenon joint is a major traditional method of connecting wooden components in China, renowned for its strength and precision.

The mortise and tenon respectively refer to the protruding and recessed parts at the joints of traditional wooden furniture and architecture, which are mainly used to connect two components. By joining the mortise and tenon, pieces of wood can be connected to form sturdy joints, without the need for nails or glue.

Currently, Zhou's masterpiece, "Spring is Here," is on display at Muzhi Mujue Studio on Minfeng Road. Reminiscent of a vibrant painting, it measures 1.4 by 2.1 meters and astonishes visitors with its incredible craftsmanship, incorporating nearly



Zhou Wenxiang is at work. Precision is crucial in *sunmao* craftsmanship.

27,000 separate joinery components.

It took Zhou over 300 hours to complete, and the intricate work presents a miniature world of spring that vividly depicts the earth, blooming flowers and four lively butterflies.

Surprisingly, the window lattice's brilliant hues are not painted; instead, they emerge organically from various woods, including mulberry, Japanese cypress, golden phoebe and green phoebe, each contributing its

own characteristic color.

Zhou used *sunmao* techniques such as three-wood cross joints, clip joints, and intersecting straight joints, as well as geometric triangle concepts, to create various patterns. Nearly 4,000 parts make up each butterfly, and the total length of all the wooden pieces attached end to end is about 1,000 meters.

According to Zhou, *sunmao* is the soul of traditional Chinese

architecture and furniture, carrying thousands of years of cultural heritage. With this piece, he wants to show the limitless possibilities of the craft and let more people appreciate its beauty.

Zhou comes from a family of carpenters and is committed to safeguarding this intangible cultural legacy. When confronted with the problem of constructing 27,000 precise components, he concedes that each piece must be accurately made, and it requires continual adjustments to make sure that all components are tightly fitted, seamless and stable, due to the properties of different woods.

But these hurdles just fuel his obsession. He appreciates problem-solving, which is a process that every *sunmao* inheritor must go through.

Zhou is also an aesthetic education teacher. He has been teaching *sunmao* courses at the Shanghai Citizen Art Night School for two years.

Speaking of his teaching work, he beams with pride. Community aesthetic education provides a broad platform for preserving intangible heritage.

"The curiosity and eagerness to learn I see in every student gives me hope for the future of traditional culture," Zhou said.