

## *Yui*

Part of what made life possible in Shirakawa-gō's harsh climate was a concept called *yui*. Written with the Chinese character for “binding” or “joining” (結), *yui* refers to an agreement among the villagers to offer mutual aid and assistance.

One clear example of *yui* is the way in which a large group of villagers came together to rethatch a *gasshō*-style roof over the course of a single day. With larger homes, 100 to 200 people might be working on the roof at the same time. Others would assist from the ground, hauling bundles of miscanthus grass, preparing food, or helping with other tasks.

*Yui* was also important in other communal activities, such as gathering horse chestnuts and other natural materials and organizing events like weddings and funerals. The concept of *yui* included a strict standard of reciprocity and fairness. For this reason, contributions by families or groups, such as those during a rethatching, were recorded in a book called a *yui-chō*. The oldest surviving *yui-chō* in Shirakawa-gō dates to 1792.

These days, the concept of *yui* still exists in the Ogimachi neighborhood. Local residents performed a rethatching in 2023—the first in five years, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rethatching of the roofs in the Gasshozukuri Minkaen Open-Air Museum, however, is performed by professional thatchers.