**Sorihashi Bridge (Taikobashi)**

Although there are records of a bridge here since the thirteenth century, the bridge in its current form was built around 1600 with funds donated by Yododono (1567–1615). Yododono was a consort of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), the warlord who ruled Japan from 1582 to 1598. Yododono was seeking the gods’ favor for her son Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615), who was at war with future shogun and founder of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616).

 The official name of this steeply curved bridge is Sorihashi, or “arched bridge,” but the structure is often called Taikobashi, or “drum bridge,” after the shape created by its reflection in the water below. According to popular tradition, crossing the bridge is an act of spiritual purification.

 The bridge is thought to have been constructed by shipwrights as the circular construction is reminiscent of an upside-down ship’s hull. Before the steps were added in 1955, the only footholds were gaps between the bridge’s wooden slats. Shipbuilders have played a leading role in maintaining the structure and have rebuilt or repaired it numerous times. In 2009, the bridge was restored by an Osaka-based shipbuilding company, and now has a steel frame and new cypress-wood boards. It is approximately 21 meters long, 5 meters high, and 6 meters wide. The slope is 41 degrees at its steepest point.

 The bridge gave its name to a short story by Nobel Prize–winning author Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972). “Sorihashi” tells of a mother who reveals a painful secret to her son at the top of the bridge. The son tells the reader that descending the slope on the far side, his illusions shattered, was more frightening than the initial climb.