Wanishi Bridge

Wanishi Bridge is a landmark on the Hagi Okan highway. The bridge spans the Fushino River and is named after a rock formation on the riverbank that was said to resemble a crocodile, *wani* in Japanese. When the water levels of the river were higher and the rocks partially submerged, the formation is said to have looked like a crocodile opening its mouth.

The Hagi Okan runs between the cities of Hagi in the north of Yamaguchi Prefecture and Hofu in the south, passing through the city center of Yamaguchi. The highway was developed in 1604 for transport and trade between the coasts of the Sea of Japan and the Seto Inland Sea, and to connect the lands ruled by the Mori family, the lords of the Choshu domain (modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture).

Before Yamaguchi developed as a modern city, Wanishi Bridge stood outside the town. People crossed the bridge to embark on journeys along the Seto Inland Sea coast or return home from similar travels. It is probably also where townspeople saw off the lord of Choshu and his entourage on their journeys to the capital Edo (modern-day Tokyo) some 1,000 kilometers away. These journeys for alternate attendance at the shogun's castle (*sankinkotai*) were enforced by the Tokugawa shogunate.

The rock formation beside the bridge is popular with photographers, and in earlier times also inspired poetry. A monument in front of the formation displays a plaque engraved with a poem composed in the fourteenth century by a Ming dynasty emissary who visited the area en route to the capital in Kyoto.