

Fake names were to the fore in many a rise from humblest to highest

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Here's a beguiling irony: Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98), architect of Tokugawa Japan's rigid class structure and the author, in 1587, of a firm ban (not firmly enforced) on surnames for commoners, was himself born without a surname.

"Toyotomi," the family name under which his memory survives, was the last of several surnames he more or less arbitrarily gave himself. He took it (or rather had the powerless Emperor confer it upon him) a mere two years before he issued the ban. Its meaning is "rich abundance."

Similarly spurious is the appropriation by Matsudaira Takechiyo (1542-1616), aka Matsudaira Jirosaburo Motonobu, aka Matsudaira Kurandonosuke Motoyasu — such name changes are by no means unusual — of the Tokugawa surname in 1567. History knows him as Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder, in 1603, of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Hideyoshi as a child (he wasn't called Hideyoshi then) was a waif, a peasant wanderer in search of adventure. At age 11, he strayed into the Oda clan, lords of Omi Province (roughly modern Fukui Prefecture). He served as "sandal-bearer" to the clan head, Oda Nobunaga (1534-82) — the only one of the three great unifiers (Oda, Toyotomi and Tokugawa) to die bearing the surname he was born with.

Not that Nobunaga's name didn't go through its share of permutations in between. In 1549, writes Herbert Plutschow in "Japan's Name Culture," he called himself Fujiwara no Nobunaga; subsequently, in battle against the Ashikaga shogunate, which was of Minamoto stock, he took the name of the Minamoto's historic rival clan, Taira — claiming thereby (not very

convincingly, say scholars) Imperial ancestry.

Hideyoshi's rise from the lowliest origins to supreme power is unique in hierarchy-obsessed Japan. Along the way he tried on various surnames for size — Kinoshita, Hashiba, Taira. Determining that none did him justice, in 1585 he plucked Toyotomi out of thin air. The divine descent he was claiming for himself at this stage called for a name with no antecedents.

Hideyoshi's personal name — the one we know him by — has an interesting history too, as Plutschow tells it. In 1569, under the name Kinoshita Tokichiro, he distinguished himself in battle and was flattered to hear Nobunaga compare him to the 13th-century warrior Asahina Yoshihide. Tokichiro promptly took the name Yoshihide. But the shogun's name was Ashikaga no Yoshiteru, and appropriating a name starting with "Yoshi" was offensively presumptuous, if not taboo. He therefore reversed the order and became Hideyoshi.

Tokugawa Ieyasu, last of the three unifiers, was a son of Matsudaira Hirotada, *daimyo* (lord) of Mikawa province (roughly present-day Aichi Prefecture). Plutschow traces the name Tokugawa to a high-ranking 13th-century samurai who ruled an area known as Tokugawa, in today's Tochigi Prefecture. Claiming it for himself, Matsudaira, like Nobunaga, was in effect claiming Imperial descent.

"It was on the basis of this falsified genealogy that the title of shogun was transferred to him in 1603," writes Plutschow. "However, recent scholarship has revealed that Ieyasu submitted a falsified genealogy to the Emperor."

There's not much anyone can do about it now.

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