



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Do unique names fit people for creative work? Implications for job recruitment, name change, and product evaluation

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Abstract

Unique names have commonly been viewed as undesirable. However, our studies (total $N = 6049$) suggest the opposite: unique names are perceived as favourable to creativity in occupational contexts. Generally, people held a perception that unique-named individuals are more creative (albeit less likable) and therefore more suitable for jobs requiring greater creativity (Studies 1–2). Accordingly, participants tended to select candidates with more unique names for creative positions (Study 3) and recommend more unique names to workers in creative jobs for a name change (Study 4). Furthermore, real-world archival data revealed that artists (typical creative professions) tended to adopt more unique new names, which was replicated cross-culturally in American, British, and Chinese samples (Study 5), and that Chinese movie directors with more unique names received higher evaluations for the movies they directed (Study 6). Our findings demonstrate a novel form of name stereotype and its behavioural manifestations and real-world consequences.

KEYWORDS

creativity, name, occupation, social cognition, stereotype, uniqueness

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, human creativity and uniqueness have become increasingly important to our society and job market. In this context, the selection of individuals who are qualified and suitable for creative work assumes considerable importance. Despite numerous methods to assess human creativity, we may still resort to stereotypical beliefs about certain characteristics as markers of creative potential, particularly during initial interpersonal interactions. One of the most prominent sources of such characteristics is people's names. Existing scholarship has found various forms of name stereotypes that may be consequential to recruitment and occupational outcomes (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Cotton et al., 2008; King et al., 2006).

In this research, we focus on a novel form of name stereotype that is distinct from the well-documented gender and ethnic stereotypes

of names in previous research. Specifically, we tested whether people tend to associate names that are less frequently used in a given population (termed 'unique names') with jobs that demand a higher level of creativity (termed 'creative jobs'). More importantly, we investigated possible explanations for this perceived name–job association (Studies 1–2); revealed its behavioural manifestations in different directions (manipulating names to influence decisions about jobs, and vice versa; Studies 3–4), contexts (job recruitment and name change; Studies 3–5), and cultures (Western and Eastern cultures; Studies 5a–5b); and uncovered its real-world consequence for the evaluation of job performance (ratings of artistic products; Study 6). Together, these studies would establish a robust association between unique names and creative jobs in social perception, while providing new insights into the understanding of name stereotypes, creativity assessment, and person–job fit.

1.1 | Unique names in social perception

Name uniqueness can be defined as the degree to which a name is infrequently used in a particular population (Twenge et al., 2010).¹ Names have substantial variation in the level of uniqueness beyond their gender and ethnic characteristics. For example, in the 1990s, 'Larry' and 'Mia' were more unique than 'Michael' and 'Jessica' in the United States, as the former two names were given to fewer babies nationwide (0.08% and 0.07% vs. 2.25% and 1.54%, respectively; U.S. Social Security Administration, n.d.). Over the past half century, there has been an increasing trend in both Western (e.g., America and British) and Eastern (e.g., Chinese and Japanese) cultures to give babies more unique first names (Bao et al., 2021; Bush et al., 2018; Cai et al., 2018; Gerhards & Hackenbroch, 2000; Grossmann & Varnum, 2015; Mignot, 2022; Ogihara et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2010, 2016). In China, for instance, it has become increasingly common since the 1970s for individuals to have uncommon Chinese characters in their given names (Bao et al., 2021).

A person's name is often viewed as a symbol of their identity (Allport, 1937; Kulig, 2013). A unique name may imply an unconventional family or cultural background (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Lieberman & Bell, 1992) and may pose challenges to pronunciation and spelling (Laham et al., 2012). Consequently, people tend to perceive unique names as atypical and less favourable, resulting in relatively negative reactions towards those with unique names. In fact, individuals with unique names are often evaluated negatively by others, which could lead to adverse outcomes, such as in job applications and online dating (Cotton et al., 2008; Gebauer et al., 2012; Mehrabian, 1992, 2001). Therefore, negative implications are usually associated with unique names in social perception, although several studies contrastingly suggested that having an unusual name may not necessarily predict unfavourable real-life outcomes over the long term (Sadowski et al., 1983; Twenge & Manis, 1998; Zweigenhaft, 1977).

In occupational contexts, however, previous research has not arrived at a consensus on the impact of unique names on social perception. On the one hand, a survey of American business students suggested that they were less likely to hire someone with a unique name than someone with a common name (Cotton et al., 2008); also, a field study of low-qualified French candidates found that applicants with relatively unique first names had a lower chance of receiving job offers than those with relatively common first names (Pascual et al., 2015). On the other hand, one study revealed that artistic products (e.g., a poem or painting) paired with unique author names were evaluated as more creative than those paired with common author names (Lebuda & Karwowski, 2013). Therefore, depending on the contexts, unique (i.e., unusual, uncommon) names may have either positive or negative implications for social perception. In the current research, we focus on one potential positive implication of unique names for social perception, which is related to creativity.

¹ Following existing research, we adopt the term *name uniqueness*. But to be precise, we define 'unique names' not as those used by only one person, but as those *relatively unusual* names, with the unusualness quantified by an objective (rather than subjective) measure of name frequency within a given population.

1.2 | Uniqueness and creativity

Creativity is an essential human ability to produce novel and valuable ideas, products, procedures, and practices (Amabile, 1996; Sternberg, 1999). This novelty requires being distinct from convention, and thus necessitates uniqueness in both the processes and outcomes involved (Berg, 2016). Therefore, creativity is characterized by uniqueness. Moreover, the measurement of creativity emphasizes uniqueness. Divergent thinking tasks, such as the Alternative Uses Task, which are the most commonly used measures of creativity, quantify creative ability in three dimensions: fluency, flexibility, and uniqueness (Dietrich & Kanso, 2010). Furthermore, people's psychological need for uniqueness can motivate them to engage in creative activities and produce creative products (Dollinger, 2003). Additionally, on the societal level, the prevalence of unique personal names can be a measure of social creativity (Jackson et al., 2019). In sum, uniqueness is central to creativity.

Our current research focuses on examining the perceived association between name uniqueness and creativity in occupational contexts. Creativity has been found to facilitate problem solving (Newell & Simon, 1972), conflict resolution (De Dreu & Nijstad, 2008), and power acquisition (Sligte et al., 2011), making it increasingly important in organizations (Berg, 2016). Consequently, leaders may seek to enhance employees' creativity, and the increased need for uniqueness can serve as a motivation for individuals to engage in creative pursuits. To this end, leaders are recommended to promote employees' creativity by reinforcing their unique personal identities (Randel & Jaussi, 2017). Given this, individuals with unique names, which signify a unique personal identity, may be encouraged or self-motivated to engage in creative work in their jobs. Supporting this notion, evidence from real-world data has shown that chief executive officers (CEOs) with uncommon names tend to pursue strategies that diverge from industry norms (Kang et al., 2021). Therefore, preliminary evidence suggests that name uniqueness may be associated with creativity as manifested in job performance.

1.3 | Overview of the current research

Existing research, however, has not demonstrated whether people generally endorse a stereotypical association between name uniqueness and job creativity, let alone illustrate the explanations for and implications of this stereotype. Addressing these issues can reveal a new form of name stereotype and, furthermore, shed light on both social perceptions of names and social biases in creativity assessment. To this end, we conducted the current research. In particular, we hypothesized that due to the creativity implied by unique names, people tend to perceive individuals with unique names as more creative and thus better suited for jobs that require higher levels of creativity, such as artists and researchers, hereafter referred to as 'creative jobs' for brevity. Furthermore, we expected that this psychological association between unique names and creative jobs would extend to behavioural decisions and real life and have real-world consequences for creative industries.

We tested these hypotheses in seven studies. Studies 1 and 2 examined whether people in general endorse an impression of unique-named individuals being creative, and whether this impression can account for the stereotype of unique names matching creative jobs. Studies 3 and 4 examined whether this name–job association would be manifested in behaviours in relevant contexts (i.e., job recruitment and name change), and further tested in what directions this association would operate. To do so, we varied either the uniqueness of names (Study 3) or the creativity of jobs (Study 4) of the targets and tested whether such variation in names or jobs would make a difference to other people's choices of suitable jobs or names for the targets. To further demonstrate the behavioural manifestations of this name–job stereotype in real life and across cultures, Study 5 examined whether individuals in representative creative professions (artists) who actually changed their names tended to adopt more unique new names. This was tested in American and British samples in Study 5a and then replicated in China (with a comparison against a control group of nonartists) in Study 5b. Finally, to examine a potential real-world consequence of this name–job association, Study 6 (pre-registered) collected large-scale archival data on movie ratings of all available Chinese movies and examined whether Chinese movie directors with more unique names actually received higher evaluations for the movies they directed.

All studies were approved by the Ethics Committee of Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. Data were analysed using R (version 4.3.0; R Core Team, 2023) and the R package *bruceR* (version 0.8.10; Bao, 2023). Data and analysis code are available at <https://doi.org/10.57760/sciencedb.o00115.00091>.

2 | STUDY 1: A PERCEIVED NAME–JOB ASSOCIATION AND ITS EXPLANATION

In Study 1, we aimed simply to demonstrate a perceived association between unique names and creative jobs at a conceptual level. We presented participants with the definition of 'name uniqueness' and described unique and common names in a general way. Moreover, we tested whether an impression of unique-named people being more creative could explain this name–job association. In testing the role of the name–creativity impression, we controlled for other forms of name impressions on the fundamental dimensions (i.e., warmth and competence) of social cognition (Fiske et al., 2007).

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

We recruited 127 Chinese participants (76 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 29.63 \pm 8.07$ [$M \pm SD$] years) from the participant pool of WJX.cn, an online survey platform in China that is similar to Qualtrics and MTurk. A sensitivity power analysis (two-tailed $\alpha = .05$) indicated

that this sample size was sufficient to achieve 80% power for detecting an effect of Cohen's $d = 0.25$ (or larger) in paired-samples t -tests and $r = .25$ (or larger) in correlational analyses.

2.1.2 | Job categories and levels of creativity

We adopted a representative taxonomy of jobs that contains 18 broad categories (Table 1; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). An extra group of 150 raters (91 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 26.71 \pm 11.39$ years) evaluated the creativity required by these jobs. To help the raters understand the jobs, we provided four exemplars for each category. They rated 'how much creativity is needed to occupy this job' on an 11-point Likert scale (0 = very low, 10 = very high) for each job, with high inter-rater agreement: intraclass correlation (ICC) = .987. Thus, we averaged their ratings for each job and computed the standardized z scores across the 18 categories (as presented in Table 1).

2.1.3 | Measures and procedure

Participants first read the definition of 'name uniqueness': 'based on the actual frequency of a given name in the national population, a name is more unique if it is less frequently used by people'. Then, they rated the probability (in percentage) of people with common names occupying each of the 18 categories of jobs. Taking legal practitioners for example, participants estimated how likely a person with a common name was to be a legal practitioner (0 = very unlikely to do such a job, 100 = very likely to do such a job). To help them understand the job categories, we provided four exemplars for each category (e.g., lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and notaries for legal practitioners). Next, the participants completed the same 18 ratings for people with unique names. Note that we randomized the order of jobs within each condition (i.e., common- or unique-name) across participants.

Then, we measured a range of name-trait impressions. We considered four traits that align with the two basic dimensions of social perception (Fiske et al., 2007): the warmth dimension which features likability and trustworthiness, and the competence dimension which features general ability and creativity. Each trait was measured by three items: (1) likability by *likable*, *nice*, and *friendly*; (2) trustworthiness by *trustworthy*, *moral*, and *honest*; (3) general ability by *competent*, *intelligent*, and *accomplished*; and (4) creativity by *creative*, *ingenious*, and *open* (Chen et al., 2016). Taking the item 'likable' for example, participants first rated the probability (in percentage) of people with common names to be likable (0 = very unlikely to have this characteristic, 100 = very likely to have this characteristic); then, they did the same rating again for people with unique names. For the likability, trustworthiness, general ability, and creativity ratings of people with common names, the internal consistency (Cronbach's α) of the three items of each trait was .87, .82, .80, and .84, respectively; and the four corresponding estimates for judging people with unique names were .89, .89, .93, and .90, respectively.

TABLE 1 Job categories and the level of creativity required by these jobs (Studies 1 and 4)

Job category	Job category (in Chinese)	Level of creativity (standardized z score)	Used as items in Study 1?	Sampled as materials in Study 4?
Researcher/analyst	研究分析人员	1.968	X	X
Artist/designer	艺术设计人员	1.574	X	X
Engineer/technician	工程技术人员	1.094	X	
Manager/CEO	企业负责人员	1.086	X	
Journalist/editor	记者编译人员	0.778	X	X
Teacher/trainer	教育培训人员	0.534	X	X
Financier/trader	金融证券人员	0.354	X	
Institution officer	公共机构人员	0.059	X	
Salesperson	销售采购人员	-0.138	X	X
Lawyer/judge	法律法务人员	-0.258	X	
Doctor/nurse	医疗护理人员	-0.335	X	X
Farmer/fisher	农林牧渔人员	-0.528	X	
Service worker	生活服务人员	-0.828	X	X
Accountant/auditor	经济财会人员	-0.836	X	X
Clerk/secretary	行政办公人员	-0.960	X	
Blue-collar worker	生产施工人员	-0.977	X	
Police/guard	安保消防人员	-0.995	X	
Driver/dispatcher	仓储运输人员	-1.590	X	X

Note. There are 63 categories in the original classification by the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2010). However, many of those categories are similar and only differ in nuances. Thus, to ensure that our participants could differentiate between those jobs, we merged similar categories into one, resulting in 18 broader categories that were used in our studies. The level of creativity required by the jobs was evaluated by an independent group of 150 raters (see Study 1 for details).

2.2 | Results

First, we tested the overall perception of the name–job association by examining the correlation between the level of creativity demanded by each job and the level of uniqueness of the workers' names as matched to each job. Note that these two indices were obtained from two separate groups of raters to avoid potential response bias. The results indicated a strong positive correlation ($r = .81, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.55, .93]$; Figure 1), suggesting that jobs requiring greater creativity were more likely to be associated with unique-named people.

Then, to measure individual differences in this perceived name–job association, we computed a *difference score for each participant*: $\text{diff} = \Sigma[Z_{\text{creativity}} \times (P_{\text{unique}} - P_{\text{common}})]/18$, where $Z_{\text{creativity}}$ denotes the z score of job creativity, and P_{unique} and P_{common} respectively denote the perceived probability of people with unique and common names doing this job. A positive value of this index indicates a perception in the hypothesized direction (i.e., associating more unique names with more creative jobs). The results showed that participants generally held this perception, $M_{\text{diff}} = 11.97 \pm 14.90, t(126) = 9.05, p < .001, d = 0.80, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.63, 0.98]$.

Next, to test the four facets of impressions of names, we used the averaged ratings of each facet (likability, trustworthiness, general ability, and creativity) for unique and common name conditions, and

computed their *difference score for each participant*. A positive value indicates a stronger tendency to associate unique-named people with that trait. As expected, the participants perceived unique-named (vs. common-named) people to be more creative, $M_{\text{diff}} = 18.60 \pm 21.52, t(126) = 9.74, p < .001, d = 0.86, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.69, 1.04]$. Additionally, they perceived unique-named people also to be (1) more competent, $M_{\text{diff}} = 10.93 \pm 18.60, t(126) = 6.62, p < .001, d = 0.59, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.41, 0.76]$; (2) less likable, $M_{\text{diff}} = -11.31 \pm 18.46, t(126) = -6.91, p < .001, d = -0.61, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.79, -0.44]$; and (3) equally trustworthy, $M_{\text{diff}} = -1.61 \pm 15.76, t(126) = -1.15, p = .25, d = -0.10, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.28, 0.07]$.

More importantly, a regression analysis revealed that individual differences in the name–creativity impression could positively predict individual differences in the perceived name–job association, $\beta = .414, t = 5.08, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.253, .575], r_{\text{partial}} = .41$. This effect remained significant ($\beta = .314, t = 3.23, p = .002, 95\% \text{ CI } [.122, .507], r_{\text{partial}} = .28$) when we controlled for both the name–likability and name–trustworthiness impressions.²

² The perceived name–job association could not be positively explained by the name–likability impression ($\beta = -.210, t = -2.17, p = .032, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.402, -.019], r_{\text{partial}} = -.19$) or name–trustworthiness impression ($\beta = -.071, t = -0.86, p = .39, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.236, .093], r_{\text{partial}} = -.08$). We did not control for the name–ability impression, because it was highly correlated with the name–creativity impression ($r = .70, p < .001$) and thus would cause a problem of multicollinearity.

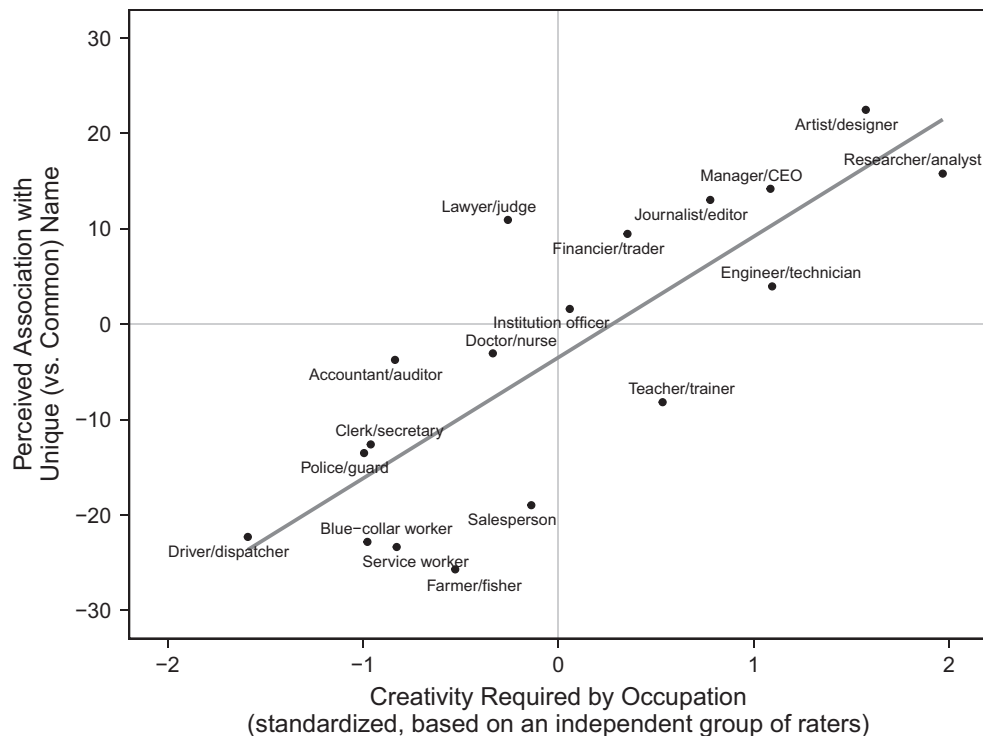


FIGURE 1 The perceived association between unique names and creative jobs (Study 1).

2.3 | Discussion

Study 1 demonstrated a perceived association between more unique names and more creative jobs at both the aggregate level and individual level. This perception could be explained by the tendency associating name uniqueness with individual creativity (rather than how likable or trustworthy an individual is).

However, since we directly asked participants to indicate their general perceptions of hypothetical people with ‘unique’ and ‘common’ names (without any specific exemplars), the results might be biased by their awareness of a possible relation between uniqueness and creativity. Meanwhile, the lack of control of the confounding features of occupations (e.g., social status) might also limit the validity of the findings. To address these limitations, we aimed to replicate the findings with a different approach in Study 2.

3 | STUDY 2: REPLICATING STUDY 1 WITH EXEMPLARS OF NAMES AND JOBS

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate the main findings of Study 1 by using a more fine-grained design where we presented participants with specific and representative exemplars of both names and jobs. In selecting these exemplars, we controlled for as many confounding features as possible.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

We recruited 212 Chinese undergraduates (118 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.83 \pm 1.56$ years) from the participant pool of WJX.cn. A sensitivity power analysis (two-tailed $\alpha = .05$) indicated that this sample size was sufficient to achieve 80% power for detecting an effect of Cohen’s $d = 0.19$ (or larger) in paired-samples t -tests.

3.1.2 | Exemplars of names and jobs

To select appropriate exemplars of jobs, we searched a popular job-hunting website in China (www.51job.com). Based on the search results, we used ‘Product Design’ to represent creative jobs and ‘Project Operation’ to be a control condition (uncreative jobs). To validate our selection, we asked an extra group of 100 raters (63 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.48 \pm 1.89$ years) to evaluate the two jobs. They read the descriptions of the two jobs, including monthly salary, required education level, job responsibilities, and job qualifications/requirements (see Online Supplemental Materials). Then, they evaluated the two jobs on an 11-point Likert scale (1 = very low, 11 = very high) for each of the following characteristics: income level, social status, creativity required, and comfort of work environment. ‘Product Design’ was perceived to require greater creativity than ‘Project Operation’ ($d = 0.88, p < .001$). No significant differences were found in

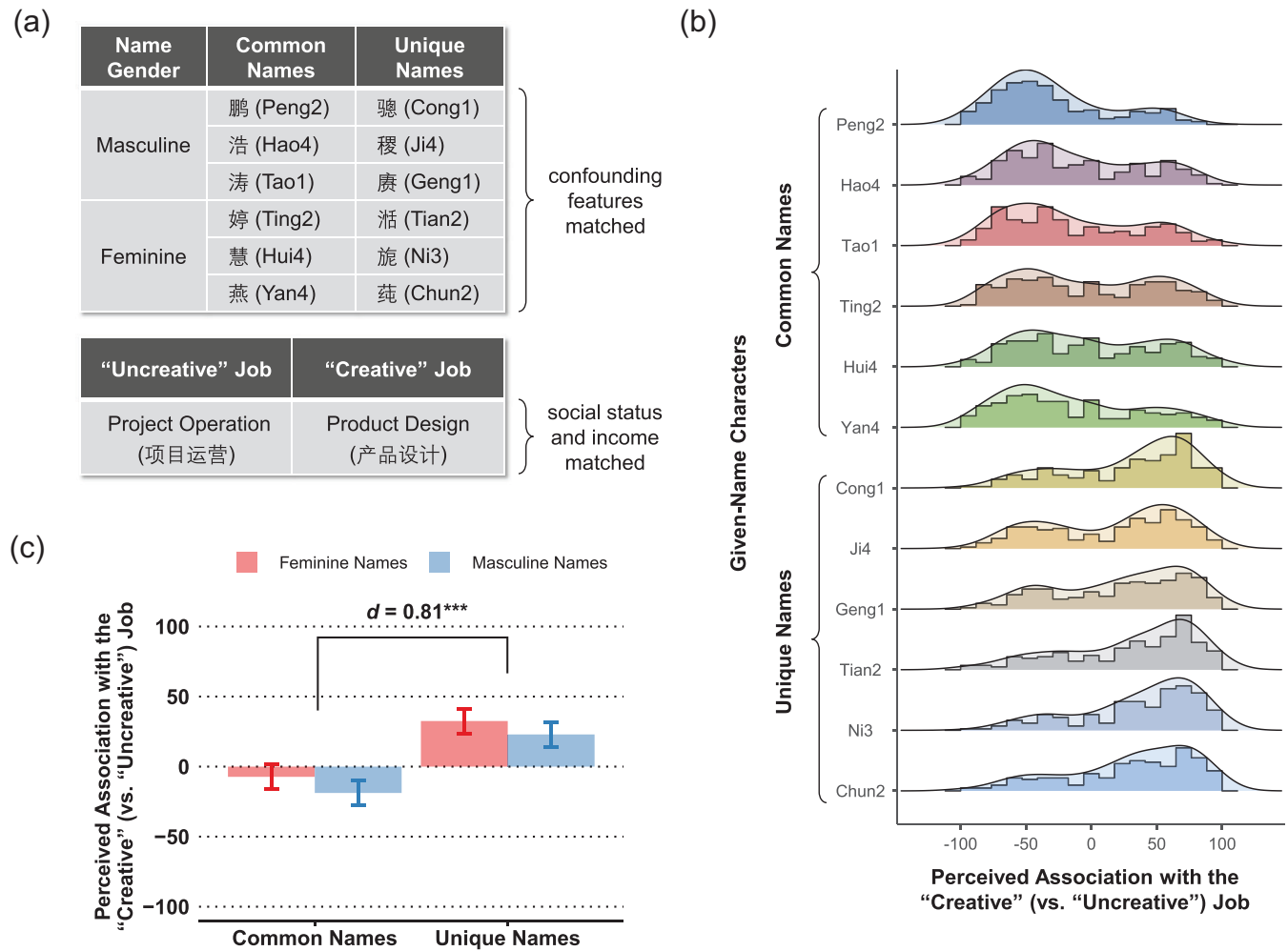


FIGURE 2 The perceived association between unique names and creative jobs (Study 2). (a) the materials (in Chinese with *Pinyin*). (b) the perceived association of each name with the two jobs. (c) the group means of the perceived associations between common or unique names and the creative job. ‘Creative’ Job = a job which is perceived as demanding a higher level of creativity (to the ‘100’ end). ‘Uncreative’ Job = a job which is perceived as demanding a lower level of creativity (to the ‘-100’ end). d = Cohen’s d . Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. *** $p < .001$.

perceived income ($d = 0.01, p = .95$), social status ($d = 0.16, p = .12$), and comfort of work environment ($d = 0.13, p = .21$). Therefore, ‘Product Design’ and ‘Project Operation’ can represent jobs that demand higher and lower creativity, respectively, with matched confounding features.

For the exemplars of names, we selected six relatively unique and six relatively common single Chinese characters (Figure 2a) from a Chinese name database (Bao, 2021). These characters vary substantially in uniqueness and are matched on confounding features, such as name valence and name gender (for details, see Online Supplemental Materials, Table S1).

3.1.3 | Measures and procedure

First, participants read detailed descriptions of ‘Project Operation’ and ‘Product Design’ (the same descriptions as above; see Online Supplemental Materials). Then, they estimated to what extent

someone with each of the 12 names might be associated with the two jobs ($-100 =$ strongly associated with ‘Project Operation’, $100 =$ strongly associated with ‘Product Design’). The names were displayed in a pseudo-random order that was kept consistent across participants. Notably, participants were not informed whether the 12 names were unique or common. Finally, they inferred the level of creativity for someone with each of the 12 names ($0 =$ of extremely low creativity, $100 =$ of extremely high creativity). They also completed some filler items (e.g., inferring the level of sociability based on the names), which could prevent participants from guessing the research purpose. Nonetheless, as these items were not central to our hypothesis, we did not analyse them.

3.2 | Results

The participants tended to associate all the relatively unique name characters more with ‘Product Design’ and all the relatively

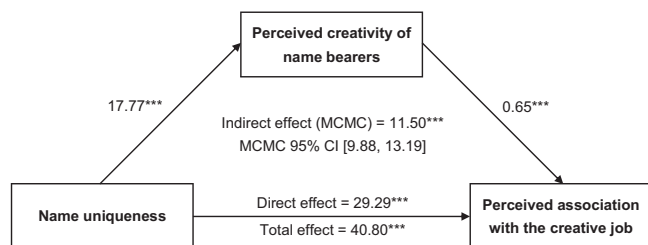


FIGURE 3 The name-creativity impression explains the perceived name–job association (Study 2). Name uniqueness: $-0.5 = \text{common}$, $0.5 = \text{unique}$. Perceived creativity: from 0 (extremely low) to 100 (extremely high). Perceived association with the creative job: from -100 (Project Operation, which demands less creativity) to 100 (Product Design, which demands greater creativity). Unstandardized coefficients from Linear Mixed Models are displayed. MCMC = Markov Chain Monte Carlo. *** $p < .001$.

common name characters more with ‘Project Operation’ (Figure 2b): $M_{\text{unique names}} = 27.75 \pm 28.45$ vs. $M_{\text{common names}} = -13.05 \pm 28.21$, $t(211) = 11.76$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.81$, 95% CI [0.67, 0.94]. The results were consistent between masculine and feminine names (Figure 2c). Besides the perceived name–job association, we also replicated the name-creativity impression that unique-named people were perceived as more creative: $M_{\text{unique names}} = 65.76 \pm 16.03$ vs. $M_{\text{common names}} = 47.99 \pm 18.53$, $t(211) = 12.37$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.85$, 95% CI [0.71, 0.99].

We further tested whether this impression could account for the name–job association by using multilevel mediation analysis based on linear mixed model, which was more rigorous than Study 1 and accounted for the data structure of repeated measures (Level 1) nested within participants (Level 2). We included name uniqueness ($-0.5 = \text{common}$, $0.5 = \text{unique}$) as the predictor, perceived creativity (from 0 to 100) as the mediator, and association with the creative job (from -100 to 100) as the outcome variable. We fitted LMM using the R package *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015), performed mediation analysis using the R package *mediation* (Tingley et al., 2014), and estimated indirect effect and its 95% CI using the Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method based on 1000 simulations. Supporting our hypothesis, the name–job association could be explained by the impression that people with more unique names are more creative: indirect effect (MCMC) = 11.50, $p < .001$, MCMC 95% CI [9.88, 13.19]; the proportion of indirect to total effect was 28.2% (Figure 3).

3.3 | Discussion

By using rigorously selected exemplars of names and jobs (with matched confounding features), Study 2 replicated the main findings in Study 1. While these two studies used different materials, measures, and analytic strategies, the results converged to support a stereotype that people hold: individuals with more unique names may be better suited for creative occupations.

Furthermore, both studies provided an explanation for this stereotype: individuals with unique names appear to be more creative.

Despite the consistent findings of both studies, we acknowledge their limitations. First, because both studies used a correlational research design and self-report measures which were relatively straightforward, some response bias may occur among participants, confounding the results. Second, the scenarios presented in both studies were vague and disconnected from meaningful settings, which may limit the implications of these findings. Third, the analytic strategies of the two studies, especially Study 1, were quite diverse, which made the evidence less focused, although the findings substantiated each other. Last, and more importantly, it was not examined whether this stereotype of names and jobs could be extended from a conceptual association to a behavioural tendency, and if so, in what directions.

To address these limitations and to test the directionality of the perceived name–job association, we conducted two studies using within-subjects experimental manipulations that incorporated more meaningful contexts. Specifically, we examined whether manipulating job applicants’ names could influence jobs assigned to them in job recruitment (Study 3) and whether manipulating employees’ jobs could influence new names recommended to them for name change (Study 4). These two studies would use a similar data analysis strategy to make the tests more focused and comparable.

4 | STUDY 3: BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATION IN JOB RECRUITMENT

Study 3 tested whether the perceived name–job association could be manifested in behaviours in a relevant context, while examining one possible direction of this association. Specifically, in a job-recruitment scenario, we examined the effect of name uniqueness on personnel selection by testing whether job candidates with more unique (vs. common) names were more likely to be selected for creative (vs. uncreative) positions.

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

We recruited 116 graduate students (75 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 23.52 \pm 1.08$ years) from a Chinese university and 143 employed persons (59 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.02 \pm 7.92$ years) from the participant pool of WJX.cn. They completed the same online experiment. Because we would use a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) to test our hypothesis (see ‘Analytic Strategy’ below for details), we conducted a simulation-based power analysis (two-tailed $\alpha = .05$; 100 Monte Carlo simulations) using the R package *simr* (Green & MacLeod, 2016). The analysis showed that the total sample

size of 259 could achieve 76% power to detect γ (unstandardized GLMM regression coefficient) = 0.20 and 97% power to detect $\gamma = 0.30$ for the key predictor of this study (i.e., name uniqueness).

4.1.2 | Materials and procedure

We adopted a 2 (gender of target persons: male vs. female) \times 2 (name of target persons: unique vs. common) within-subjects experimental design. The exemplars of names and jobs were the same as those in Study 2. Half of the 12 name characters were typically used by males and thus paired with male candidates, while the other half, which were typically used by females, were paired with female candidates. To control for surnames, all the 12 given names were combined with one of three most popular Chinese surnames (Wang/王, Zhang/张, Li/李) to make up full names for the assumed job candidates (Table S1).

We implemented and presented the experiment with Qualtrics. In this experiment, participants were instructed to imagine themselves as an assistant to a human resources manager who was recruiting new staff for two different job positions in a company. The job positions, denoted as Job A ('Project Operation') and Job B ('Product Design'), were to be filled by a total of 12 candidates, comprising six males and six females who had passed the initial examination and were interested in both positions. To ensure that the most suitable candidates were selected for each job position, participants were tasked with assigning candidates to interviews for either Job A or Job B. To avoid potential gender bias, the participants were required to assign the same number of candidates to each position and to ensure an equal number of male and female candidates (i.e., three males and three females).

Then, the participants were presented with the gender and full name of each candidate one by one randomly, along with brief descriptions of Jobs A and B (see Online Supplemental Materials). Notably, they were not informed whether the 12 names were unique or common. They were asked to choose one of the two jobs for each candidate and received immediate feedback on how many male and female candidates had been assigned to each job. In this way, both the number of candidates for each job and the gender ratio within each job were balanced and would not confound the results.

4.1.3 | Analytic strategy

To account for the statistical dependence between the assignments of the two jobs, and because the outcome was a binomial variable, we performed a GLMM analysis using the R package *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015). We included name uniqueness (-0.5 = common, 0.5 = unique), name gender (-0.5 = feminine, 0.5 = masculine), samples (-0.5 = graduate students, 0.5 = employed persons), and all their interactions as predictors. Note that such an orthogonal sum-to-zero coding (-0.5 vs. 0.5) can avoid multicollinearity and ensure their main effects

to be correctly interpreted (see Bao et al., 2022). We specified cross-classified random intercepts '(1 | Sub) + (1 | Name)' in the R formula to account for the random effects of participants and names (Barr et al., 2013; Snijders & Bosker, 2012). We reported γ as the unstandardized GLMM regression coefficient and odds ratio (OR) as the effect size.

4.2 | Results

As predicted, participants more often assigned candidates with unique (vs. common) names to the creative job 'Product Design' (vs. the uncreative job 'Project Operation'), $\gamma = 0.337$, $z = 4.66$, $p < .001$, OR = 1.40, 95% CI [1.22, 1.61] (the difference in raw probabilities was 8.4%). This main effect was consistent between male and female candidates ($\gamma_{\text{interaction}} = 0.050$, $z = 0.34$, $p = .73$) and the two samples ($\gamma_{\text{interaction}} = -0.133$, $z = -0.92$, $p = .36$).

4.3 | Discussion

Study 3 demonstrated that in a recruitment scenario, people tend to assign candidates with more unique names to more creative job positions. This illustrates one specific behavioural manifestation of the name-job association in the direction from name uniqueness to job assignment.

5 | STUDY 4: BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATION IN RECOMMENDATION FOR NAME CHANGE

Study 4 tested the behavioural manifestation of the name-job association in the reverse direction: from job uniqueness to recommendation for name change. Specifically, we developed a name-change scenario to examine whether participants would recommend a more unique new name to employees in more creative occupations. According to our previous three studies, people tend to associate creative professions with more unique names, which may influence what new names they tend to recommend to those who would change names. Note that we did not provide participants with any cues about name uniqueness or job creativity.

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

To ensure that participants were familiar with different occupations, we recruited 130 employed persons (61 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.63 \pm 7.50$ years) from the participant pool of WJX.cn. Similar to Study 3, we would adopt GLMM analysis (see 'Analytic Strategy' below for details). A simulation-based power analysis (two-tailed $\alpha = .05$; 100 Monte Carlo simulations) using the R package *simr* (Green & MacLeod, 2016)

indicated that the sample size of 130 could achieve 84% power to detect $\gamma = 0.30$ and 91% power to detect $\gamma = 0.40$ for the key predictor of this study (i.e., job creativity).

5.1.2 | Materials and procedure

We adopted a 2 (gender of target persons: male vs. female) \times 9 (job of target persons: the creativity needed for each job varying from low to high) within-subjects experimental design. From the 18 job categories used in Study 1, we selected nine representative ones that differ in creativity and are relatively familiar to the general public (Table 1).

The target persons who were assumed to change names, therefore, contained nine males and nine females. Each one was paired with an original full name and two optional new given names (single characters) for participants to choose (Table S2). To control for the impacts of surnames and original given names, a common Chinese surname was combined with a moderately unique given name for their original full name. To reduce the influences of name pronunciation (Laham et al., 2012), we used two characters with the same pronunciation (i.e., Pinyin in Chinese) but different levels of name uniqueness (high vs. low) for the optional new given names. The names were paired with jobs in two random orders, as detailed in Table S2.

The experiment was conducted online via Qualtrics. Participants first read the information of 18 target persons who were going to change their names, including job, gender, and original full name. Notably, we did not provide any information about job creativity or name uniqueness for participants. They were then asked to recommend a new first name for each target person by choosing one of two options, one more common and one more unique. The order of the 18 targets was randomized across participants.

5.1.3 | Analytic strategy

Since the outcome variable was binomial (1 = unique name, 0 = common name) and nested within participants and jobs, we conducted GLMM using the R package *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015). Predictor variables included job creativity (standardized z scores; Table 1), target gender ($-0.5 =$ female, $0.5 =$ male), and their interaction. We specified random intercepts '(1 | Sub) + (1 | Job)' in the R formula to account for the random effects of participants and jobs (Barr et al., 2013; Snijders & Bosker, 2012). Additionally, we controlled for the two versions of random combinations of names and jobs.

5.2 | Results

As expected, we found a main effect of job creativity on name recommendation, $\gamma = 0.500$, $z = 4.24$, $p < .001$, OR = 1.65, 95% CI [1.31, 2.08]. This main effect of job creativity held consistent between male and female target persons, $\gamma_{\text{interaction}} = 0.149$, $z = 1.82$, $p = .068$. The versions of the random name-job combinations had no significant

effect, $\gamma = 0.115$, $z = 0.88$, $p = .38$. Furthermore, the model-based estimates of the probabilities of recommending a unique (vs. common) new name to workers in different jobs were 61.2% for jobs of higher creativity ($z = +1$), 48.9% for jobs of medium creativity ($z = 0$), and 36.7% for jobs of lower creativity ($z = -1$). These results convergently demonstrated that people tended to recommend more unique names for a possible name change to workers in more creative occupations.

5.3 | Discussion

Study 4 validated the manifestation of the name-job association in behaviour in a different context (name change). Furthermore, Study 4 extended Study 3 by showing that the name-job association can function in the opposite direction: shifting one's job creativity influences others' choice of names for the individual. The result again confirmed that people perceive unique (vs. common) names as more suitable for employees in creative professions.

6 | STUDY 5: BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATION IN REAL-LIFE NAME CHANGE

In Study 4, we demonstrated a behavioural tendency of people to suggest more unique names for individuals in creative occupations. To test if people's choices for name change in real life would show a similar tendency, we examined real name changes in Study 5, focusing on individuals in typical creative occupations such as movie directors, actors, musicians, and writers. The decision to change one's name can be influenced by one's own perceptions or others' expectations of the relationship between name uniqueness and job creativity. In other words, individuals may change their names via a self-fulfilling or other-fulfilling process, or even both. Notably, unique names may enhance memorability and identification but may also sabotage social acceptance (Gebauer et al., 2012; Laham et al., 2012; Mehrabian, 1992, 2001). Hence, two competing hypotheses arise: one posits that individuals in creative professions may adopt more unique names to become more distinctive from others, while the opposite hypothesis suggests that individuals may instead eschew unique names to maintain social acceptance.

To test these competing hypotheses, we conducted Studies 5a and 5b to analyse actual changes in given names (not surnames) among artists from the United States, the United Kingdom, and China. Moreover, given the increasing prevalence of unique names in these countries over recent decades (Bao et al., 2021; Bush et al., 2018; Cai et al., 2018; Grossmann & Varnum, 2015; Twenge et al., 2010, 2016), it is possible that people in general, whether or not in creative jobs, would pursue unique names. To examine this alternative explanation, Study 5b also compared artists to a group of non-artists who had actually changed their given names. Notably, while Study 5a sampled American and British artists, Study 5b was conducted in China, a culture where uniqueness was traditionally discouraged (Markus & Kitayama,

1991). Therefore, Studies 5a and 5b can provide further insights into the cross-cultural variation or universality of our findings.

6.1 | Study 5a (American and British samples)

6.1.1 | Method

In Study 5a, we retrieved data on American and British artists from the internet movie database (IMDB.com), a website with public profiles of almost all movie actors and directors worldwide. To scrape the data, we developed a web crawler program in R and adhered to the IMDB's crawling policy. The collected data consisted of each artist's current name, previous name (if any), gender, and year of birth, as presented in their IMDB profile.

We finally identified 1624 American artists (402 females; birth year: 1880–2000, $M = 1936.73 \pm 27.28$) and 320 British artists (103 females; birth year: 1880–1997, $M = 1926.86 \pm 26.52$) who actually changed first names but not surnames. Notably, the sample did not include those (1) whose new names were only abbreviations, nicknames, or hypocorisms of former names (e.g., from *Elizabeth* to *Liza*, *Beth*, or *Ellie*); and (2) whose names did not exist in the name databases we used for computing name uniqueness (see below for details). A sensitivity power analysis indicated that the total sample size would guarantee 80% power to detect an effect with size no less than $f = .032$ (partial $\eta^2 = .001$) in a mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) or $d = 0.06$ in a paired-samples *t*-test.

Because the uniqueness of a name is often contingent on birth cohort, a more precise approach to estimating a person's name uniqueness is to consider the frequency of that name within their birth cohort rather than across the entire population (Twenge et al., 2010). Thus, we accessed (1) an American name database including the frequencies of first names among all U.S. newborns between 1880 and 2017 ($N = 348,120,517$), obtained from the R package *babynames* (Wickham, 2021) which was based on the birth records provided by the U.S. Social Security Administration; and (2) a British name database of name frequencies for a nationally representative sample of U.K. newborns between 1838 and 2014 ($N = 22,355,702$), obtained from a published dataset (Bush et al., 2018) which was sourced from the U.K. Local BMD (births, marriages and deaths) Project.

Following previous research (Bao et al., 2021), we computed birth-cohort-specific name uniqueness (NU) for each person's former and current names, respectively, by using the formula: $NU = -\log_{10}(P_{\text{name}} + 10^{-6})$, where P_{name} denotes the proportion of people born in a certain year who used a particular name. A small constant, 10^{-6} , is added to adjust for those extremely low frequencies (less than one millionth). NU ranges from 1 to 6, with a higher value indicating a more unique name. For instance, $NU = 2$ means that 1% of the national population are given this name, whereas $NU = 3$ means that 1‰ are given this name. To increase the robustness of this index, we averaged NU across a 10-year time window for each person (i.e., the birth year plus 5 years behind this year and 5 years ahead this year).

6.1.2 | Results

To estimate the effect for American and British artists respectively (rather than to assume the effects to be equal between nationalities), we conducted a full-factorial 2 (name change: before vs. after) \times 2 (nationality: American vs. British) mixed-design ANOVA. The results indicated that the changes in name uniqueness were significant, $F(1, 1942) = 606.68, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .238$, 90% CI [.212, .306]; the main effect of nationality was not significant, $F(1, 1942) = 0.71, p = .40$; but the degree of changes in name uniqueness varied between nationalities, $F(1, 1942) = 13.29, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$, 90% CI [.002, .014]. Simple-effect analysis (with the same residual degree of freedom as in ANOVA) revealed that the artists adopted more unique new names, although the effect size was larger for the British sample ($M_{\text{after}} = 3.91 \pm 1.31$ vs. $M_{\text{before}} = 2.57 \pm 0.98$, $t(1942) = 15.47, p < .001, d = 0.86$, 95% CI [0.76, 0.97]) than for the American sample ($M_{\text{after}} = 3.77 \pm 1.01$ vs. $M_{\text{before}} = 2.78 \pm 1.04$, $t(1942) = 25.86, p < .001, d = 0.64$, 95% CI [0.59, 0.69]) (Figure 4).

We further controlled for gender and birth year, obtaining consistent results: (1) name change, $F(1, 1940) = 16.87, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$, 90% CI [.003, .017]; (2) nationality, $F(1, 1940) = 0.01, p = .92$; and (3) the name change \times nationality interaction, $F(1, 1940) = 17.65, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$, 90% CI [.003, .017]. Also, the simple effects remained similar for both samples: American, $t(1940) = 22.88, p < .001, d = 0.65$, 95% CI [0.59, 0.70]; British, $t(1940) = 15.91, p < .001, d = 0.91$, 95% CI [0.80, 1.02]. In addition, we conducted a supplemental analysis to test whether changes in name uniqueness were confounded by changes in ethnic features of the names, but the results did not support this alternative possibility (see Online Supplemental Materials for details).

6.2 | Study 5b (Chinese sample)

6.2.1 | Method

In Study 5b, we sought to replicate the above findings in a different culture that traditionally discouraged uniqueness, and to address an alternative explanation that people, perhaps following a popular trend, might change for a more unique name regardless of whether they had a creative job. We sampled both artists (including movie directors, actors, musicians, singers, composers, writers, and poets) and non-artists (as the control group) in China.³ Data for artists were manually collected from various websites in China (e.g., Sina Weibo, Baidu) by browsing the public profiles of mainland Chinese artists and searching for name change keywords such as 'previous

³ The non-artists consisted of people doing non-artistic work and students. It was possible that some of the students might become artists in the future. If this was the case, then the expected interaction between name change (before vs. after) and job (artists vs. non-artists) would be weaker, resulting in a more conservative estimate. Given this, if we still observed a significant interaction, it would provide stronger evidence for our hypothesis. Hence, we still included students in our analysis.

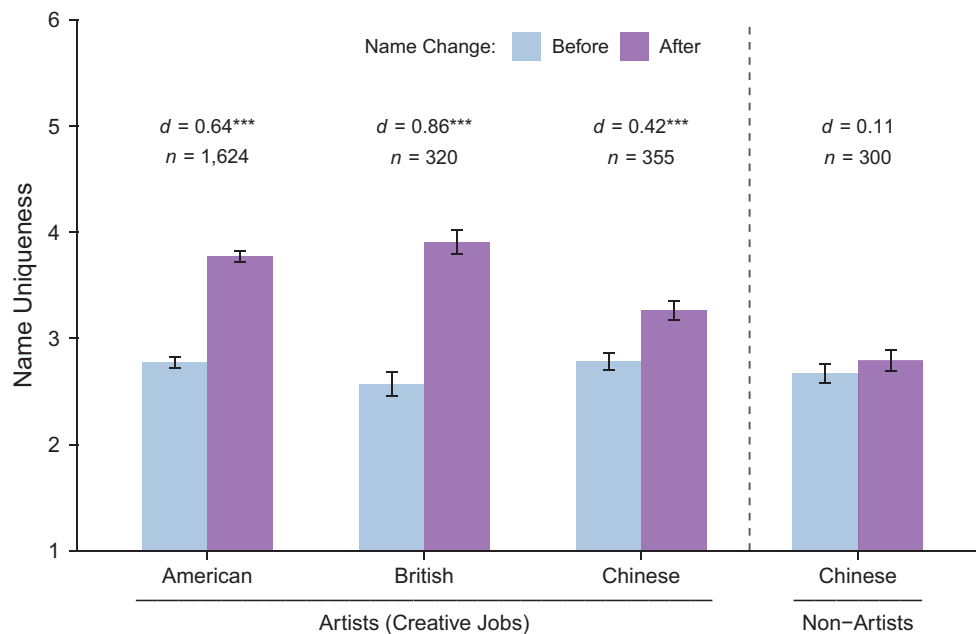


FIGURE 4 Name uniqueness before and after name change in real life (Study 5). *d* = Cohen's *d*. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. ****p* < .001.

name' ('曾用名' in Chinese). Data for non-artists were collected both by searching the keywords relevant to name change as above, and from an online survey asking participants to report if they or someone they personally knew had changed their first name. For both groups, we collected each person's previous name, current name, gender, and birth year. We focused on Han Chinese and did not include other ethnic groups in China, because (1) Han Chinese made up approximately 90% of the mainland Chinese population, (2) the availability of a Chinese name database was limited to Han Chinese only, and (3) this would allow us to further rule out potential ethnic confounds.

We finally collected 355 Chinese artists (149 females; birth year: 1890–2007, $M = 1961.17 \pm 27.69$) and 300 Chinese non-artists (154 females; birth year: 1899–2006, $M = 1985.36 \pm 15.57$) who changed given names but not surnames. A sensitivity power analysis indicated that the total sample size would guarantee 80% power to detect an effect of $f = .055$ (partial $\eta^2 = .003$) in a mixed-design ANOVA or $d = 0.11$ in a paired-samples *t*-test.

Following previous research (Bao et al., 2021), the computation of name uniqueness was based on a Chinese name database covering 1.2 billion Han Chinese born between 1930 and 2008, who constituted 96.8% of the Han Chinese population in 2008 (Bao, 2021). We computed name uniqueness with the same formula as in Study 5a: $NU = -\log_{10}(P_{\text{name}} + 10^{-6})$, where P_{name} is an estimate of the percentage of a name character in a person's birth year, using the weighted character frequencies of the two closest birth decades (see source code of the 'compute_name_index()' function in the R package *ChineseNames*; Bao, 2021; Bao et al., 2021). For those given names consisting of multiple characters, we averaged the values of NU across all characters (Bao et al., 2021; Cai et al., 2018).

6.2.2 | Results

A 2 (name change: before vs. after) \times 2 (job group: artist vs. non-artist) mixed-design ANOVA showed significant main effects of (1) name change, $F(1, 653) = 45.65, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .065$, 90% CI [.038, .098]; and (2) job group, $F(1, 653) = 38.10, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .055$, 90% CI [.030, .086]. More importantly, the interaction between name change and job group was also significant, $F(1, 653) = 16.04, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .024$, 90% CI [.008, .047]. Simple effects demonstrated that artists adopted more unique new names, $M_{\text{after}} = 3.26 \pm 0.94$ vs. $M_{\text{before}} = 2.78 \pm 0.81, t(653) = 7.95, p < .001, d = 0.42, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.32, 0.53]$; in contrast, non-artists showed only a trivial change in name uniqueness, $M_{\text{after}} = 2.79 \pm 0.76$ vs. $M_{\text{before}} = 2.67 \pm 0.76, t(653) = 1.87, p = .062, d = 0.11, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.01, 0.22]$ (Figure 4).

An additional ANOVA controlling for gender and birth year revealed a similar result for the name change \times job group interaction, $F(1, 651) = 13.40, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .020$, 90% CI [.006, .042]. Gender and birth year showed neither main effects ($ps > .28$) nor interactions with name change ($ps > .15$). Again, we found an increase in name uniqueness after name change among artists, $t(651) = 7.65, p < .001, d = 0.43, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.32, 0.54]$, but not among non-artists, $t(651) = 1.72, p = .087, d = 0.11, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.02, 0.23]$.

6.3 | Discussion

Studies 5a and 5b jointly demonstrated that individuals in creative professions who underwent name changes tended to adopt more unique names, and this finding was replicated across cultures with varying

degrees of emphasis on personal distinctiveness. Moreover, in Study 5b, we compared artists with non-artists and found that only individuals engaged in creative work tended to adopt more unique new names. These results supported one of the two competing hypotheses, that is, individuals in creative jobs tend to adopt more unusual names to distinguish themselves from others. Notably, it was possible that artists changed their names either to fulfill their own perceptions of the association between unique names and creative work, or to conform to others' expectations regarding the name–job association. However, regardless of the exact motivation behind the name changes, they actually adopted more unique names that would be perceived as better suited to their creative work.

7 | STUDY 6: REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCE FOR PRODUCT EVALUATION (MOVIE RATING)

To uphold the ecological validity of our findings and to shed light on the real-world consequences of this name–job association, Study 6 examined whether people in creative professions with more unique names received higher evaluations for their creative products. Preliminary evidence suggests that unique author names may increase evaluations of their creative/artistic products (Lebuda & Karwowski, 2013). However, this evidence was based on a single experiment with a small sample size ($N = 119$, approximately 24 participants for each condition). To replicate this effect with a large sample and, more importantly, to extend it to the real world, we selected movie directors as a test case. In particular, we tested whether the uniqueness of movie directors' names predicted higher evaluations of their products (i.e., audiences' ratings of movies) in a naturalistic real-world context.⁴ We collected ratings on all qualified mainland Chinese movies available to date and their directors' information. We pre-registered our hypothesis, exclusion criteria, and analytic strategy (<https://aspredicted.org/bc73x.pdf>).

7.1 | Method

7.1.1 | Sample

We collected information on all mainland Chinese movies and their directors available at Douban.com, a popular website launched in 2005 for people to rate movies and write movie reviews. Specifically, we restricted the *production region* to 'mainland China' in its online database (<https://movie.douban.com/explore>), retrieved all entries of

⁴ Movie ratings can be influenced by multiple factors, including but not limited to directors, scriptwriters, actors, movie content, topics, and genres. We tested the uniqueness of directors' names rather than actors' or scriptwriters' names because a movie is usually directed by a single director who supervises all processes of the movie's production, takes the main responsibility for the movie's quality, and showcases their creativity in the movie. In contrast, each actor or scriptwriter only contributes to part of the production process and is supervised by the director; thus, it is difficult to identify and also inappropriate to use the specific contribution of one of them as an indicator of the overall quality of a movie. Therefore, we focused on directors, whose leading role in movie production is well established and whose contribution to a movie can be more clearly discerned.

the movies, and developed a web crawler program to scrape the data on these movies and their directors.

Each movie has a unique movie ID, with information on title, release date, genre(s), length (in minutes), production region, director(s), and actor(s). The data also include an average score (2–10) of all ratings made to date, total number of raters, and distribution (%) of raw ratings, which are indicated on a five-level scale from '1-star' (= 2) to '5-star' (= 10). An example is provided in Online Supplemental Materials (Figure S1). Of note, all information is available to a person who intends to rate a movie on Douban (see Figure S1). Hence, the evaluation of a movie takes place in a realistic context, instead of a controlled or hypothetical setting. The average score of the ratings for each movie displayed on the web page is a rounded number with only one decimal place. To get a more accurate average score for each movie, we used the distribution of the raw ratings to calculate an average score with a precision of three decimal places.

Each movie director also has a unique personal ID, with complete or incomplete data on gender, birth date, occupation(s), and 'more names' (e.g., nicknames, previous names). Following Study 5b, we used the R package *ChineseNames* to compute NU for each director, $NU = -\log_{10}(P_{\text{name}} + 10^{-6})$, with the estimate of NU adjusted to their birth decade using the same approach as in Study 5b (Bao, 2021; Bao et al., 2021). Likewise, we computed surname uniqueness as a control variable.

In accordance with the pre-registration, we scrutinized the data and excluded invalid cases: (1) records of a non-movie genre, such as concerts, evening parties, festival parties, and talk shows; (2) movies that were directed by more than one director or lacked a rating; and (3) directors whose name was not a Han Chinese name (because our name database was for Han Chinese names only). The final sample consisted of 2722 Chinese directors (361 females; birth year: 1850–2001, $M = 1970.75 \pm 19.09$; number of movies directed: 1–32) and 5956 mainland Chinese movies (release year: 1905–2023; movie rating: 2.12–9.60, $M = 6.05 \pm 1.63$; number of raters per movie: 35–2 million), with a total of 174 million movie ratings (data retrieved until the end of May 2023). Note that for 38% of these directors, birth year was not available from Douban, so we replaced these missing values with the difference (e.g., $2020 - 36 = 1984$) between the release year of their first movie (e.g., 2020) and the median age at which all the other directors (whose birth year was available) released their first movie (i.e., 36 years old). We also replaced the 6% missing values in movie length (minutes) with the median minutes of all the other movies (whose length was available) of the same genre.

7.1.2 | Analytic strategy

We analysed the data with two approaches. First, to describe and visualize the relationship between the uniqueness of movie directors' names and the mean rating of their movies, we presented a director-level scatterplot with a test of zero-order correlation. Second, to examine the effect of name uniqueness more rigorously and to account for the data structure of movies (Level 1) nested within

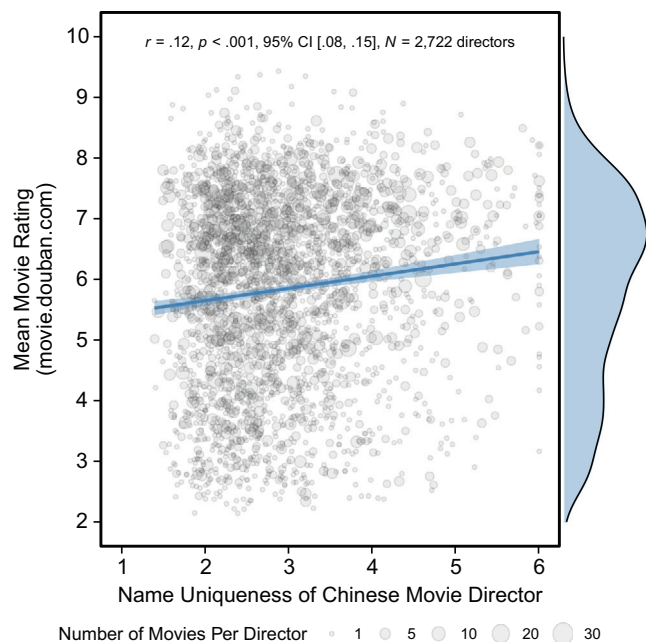


FIGURE 5 Name uniqueness and mean movie rating of Chinese movie directors (Study 6). The data were based on a total of 174 million ratings on 5956 movies (released in 1905–2023 in mainland China) directed by 2722 Chinese movie directors. Error bands indicate 95% confidence intervals.

directors (Level 2), we conducted LMM analyses and controlled for all available variables at both the movie level (total number of raters [log], movie length in minutes [log], genres) and the director level (gender, birth year, total number of movies [log], surname uniqueness). Movie length and total numbers of raters and movies were log-transformed because their raw values had high skewness and kurtosis. We reported γ as the unstandardized LMM regression coefficient and $\gamma_{\text{standardized}}$ as the standardized effect size. A simulation-based power analysis (two-tailed $\alpha = .05$; 100 Monte Carlo simulations) using the R package *simr* (Green & MacLeod, 2016) indicated that the total sample size of 2722 directors with 5956 movies could achieve 76%, 88%, and 99% power to detect $\gamma = 0.07$, 0.08, and 0.09, respectively, for the key predictor of this study (i.e., name uniqueness) with all available control variables included.

After retrieving the data from Douban, we found that a proportion of directors had changed their given names or full names ($n = 283$). Thus, in addition to the pre-registered analyses, we further explored whether the difference in name uniqueness between current and previous names, which reflects an effect of name change, could predict movie ratings. A score of zero was given to directors who did not change their names.

7.2 | Results

As shown in Figure 5, name uniqueness was positively correlated with mean movie rating at the director level, $r = .12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.08,

.15]. We replicated this relationship with a more rigorous analysis using LMM, where greater name uniqueness predicted higher movie ratings, $\gamma = 0.202$, $t = 6.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.138, 0.266], $\gamma_{\text{standardized}} = 0.111$ (Table 2, Model 1). Moreover, name uniqueness still predicted movie ratings when we controlled for all available variables at both the movie and director levels, $\gamma = 0.084$, $t = 3.49$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.037, 0.131], $\gamma_{\text{standardized}} = 0.046$ (Table 2, Model 4). In contrast, we found no evidence for the effects of name change (i.e., the difference in name uniqueness between the current and previous names; $ps > .20$) or surname uniqueness ($ps > .15$) on movie ratings (Table 2, Models 2–4).

A supplemental analysis of the name changes replicated what we found in Study 5. Chinese movie directors who had changed their names ($n = 283$) actually adopted more unique names, $M_{\text{current name}} = 3.23 \pm 1.05$ vs. $M_{\text{previous name}} = 2.87 \pm 0.82$, $t(282) = 5.39$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.44].

7.3 | Discussion

The analyses of large-scale archival data on movie ratings provide ecological evidence for the real-world implication of the name–job association for product evaluation. Chinese movie directors with more unique names received higher evaluations for the movies they directed, which remained true after controlling for demographic variables of the directors, the total number of movies they had directed, and potential confounding variables at the movie level, such as movie length, genres, and the total number of raters. Notably, while directors who had their names changed indeed adopted a more unique new name, as we showed here and in Study 5, this increase in name uniqueness did not predict an incremental increase in movie ratings. This suggests that the tendency to change to a more unique name among people in creative occupations is more likely to reflect a social belief than a social reality that name change can determine real-life outcomes. Taken together, regardless of various conditions of a movie, audiences tend to give higher ratings to movies directed by people with more unique names in a real-world evaluation context, confirming and extending the stereotype of unique names and creative professions.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across seven studies, we provide evidence that people tend to associate unique names with creative jobs. First, Studies 1 and 2 indicated that the perceived name–job association was particularly driven by an impression that unique-named individuals are more creative, rather than by an overall positive impression of them (e.g., more likable or trustworthy). By using within-subjects experimental designs, Studies 3 and 4 revealed that this name–job association could extend to behavioural decisions and operate in two directions: matching people with unique names to creative jobs, and matching people doing creative jobs to unique new names. Moreover, by analysing real-life name changes, Studies 5a and 5b demonstrated that individuals in artistic fields (rather than non-artists), no matter whether they were

TABLE 2 Linear mixed models (LMM) predicting movie ratings on Douban.com (Study 6)

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	5.879*** (0.030)	5.879*** (0.030)	6.872*** (0.145)	5.431*** (0.192)
<i>Level 2: Director</i>				
Name uniqueness (NU) of current name	0.202*** (0.033)	0.202*** (0.034)	0.132*** (0.031)	0.084*** (0.024)
Change in NU (current name – previous name)		–0.003 (0.079)	–0.083 (0.070)	–0.030 (0.055)
Surname uniqueness		0.050 (0.035)	0.031 (0.032)	0.000 (0.025)
Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)			–0.332*** (0.080)	–0.118 (0.064)
Birth year			–0.029*** (0.001)	–0.026*** (0.001)
Number of movies per director (log)			0.115** (0.037)	0.128*** (0.028)
<i>Level 1: Movie</i>				
Number of raters per movie (log)			0.135*** (0.009)	0.199*** (0.009)
Movie length in minutes (log)			–0.380*** (0.030)	–0.191*** (0.042)
Genres (25 dummy variables)	No	No	No	Yes
Marginal R ² (fixed effects only)	.012	.012	.176	.409
Conditional R ² (fixed and random effects)	.610	.611	.611	.622
Level 1 sample size: Movies	5956	5956	5956	5956
Level 2 sample size: Directors	2722	2722	2722	2722

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed, with standard errors in parentheses. To make the intercepts interpretable, we centred name uniqueness, surname uniqueness, and birth year (0 = mean value in this sample), which did not change the estimate of their own effect. Since a movie can belong to multiple genres, we recoded genres into 25 dummy variables (0 = not belonging to this genre, 1 = belonging to this genre). The 25 genres on Douban.com included: action, adventure, animation, biography, children, comedy, crime, disaster, documentary, drama, family, fantasy, film-noir, history, horror, music, mystery, opera, romance, science-fiction, short, sport, thriller, war, and western. 'Yes' and 'No' in this table indicate whether a model controlled for these 25 dummy variables of genres or not. None of the models had the problem of multicollinearity for NU and change in NU (variance inflation factors < 1.1). ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

from Eastern or Western culture, did change their first names to more unique ones. Finally, Study 6 addressed the real-world implications of this name–job association by showing that movies directed by people with more unique names tend to receive higher ratings from audiences. Overall, our findings suggest that unique-named people are perceived as more creative and therefore more suited to creative work, and that this stereotype can be manifested in behaviours in different contexts, directions, and cultures, with potential real-life consequences.

8.1 | Theoretical contributions

Our studies offer novel insights into the understanding of name stereotypes, creativity assessment, and person–job fit. First, there is controversy in the literature as to whether it is advantageous

(Kang et al., 2021; Lebuda & Karwowski, 2013; Sadowski et al., 1983; Zweigenhaft, 1977) or disadvantageous (Busse & Seraydarian, 1978; Cotton et al., 2008; Gebauer et al., 2012; Mehrabian, 1992, 2001; Pascual et al., 2015) to hold a unique (or unpopular) name. Our findings can help reconcile this theoretical debate by showing that individuals with unique (as opposed to common) names are perceived as less likable but more creative (Studies 1–2) and thus assumed as more suitable for creative occupations (Studies 1–4). These findings suggest the importance of considering different domains (e.g., warmth vs. competence) and contexts (e.g., creative vs. non-creative work) when investigating name stereotypes and their effects. Furthermore, our results suggest that the stereotype of unique names may be embodied in real name changes (Studies 5a–5b; cf. Kulig, 2013; Zwebner et al., 2017) and may have beneficial real-world consequences for product evaluation (Study 6). In summary, our findings suggest that

unique names can be a double-edged sword, with relatively positive perceptions and implications for creative domains.

Second, our research highlights potential bias in creativity judgments due to irrelevant information, such as a person's name. Creativity is often associated with, and thus involves the assessment of, uniqueness (Amabile, 1996; Dietrich & Kanso, 2010; Dollinger, 2003; Sternberg, 1999). Accordingly, people may infer an individual's creative ability from the uniqueness of their name, as shown directly in our research and indirectly in a previous study (Lebuda & Karwowski, 2013). However, individuals with unique names are not inherently more creative than those with common names. Therefore, it seems necessary to withhold creators' names when evaluating the creativity of their work to ensure that the evaluation is based on the quality of the work rather than on irrelevant personal characteristics.

Third, our findings advance the understanding of the relationship between personal names and job choices by suggesting a role for social perception. Although social psychologists have proposed various hypotheses to explain the effects of names on job choices, the underlying mechanisms remain subject to debate (Simonsohn, 2011). Existing theories propose individuals' motives or psychological needs, such as implicit egotism (Pelham et al., 2002) and the need for uniqueness (Bao et al., 2020), to explain how their names influence their job choices. According to our current findings, there may also be another mechanism through which an applicant's name may affect an employer's impression of the applicant, which in turn may affect the employer's decision regarding the applicant's position. In this way, the person–job fit may also be a result of others' stereotypes rather than merely one's own motives.

8.2 | Practical implications

Besides theoretical contributions, our studies also have several practical implications. Employers should be aware that applicants with unique names may give the impression of greater creativity, and this impression may bias their assessment of the applicant's suitability for creative jobs. Meanwhile, employers should be wary of negative perceptions associated with unique names (e.g., less likable). Therefore, hiring managers should consciously control any impressions associated with candidates' names during the hiring process to ensure fair and unbiased assessments. Additionally, employers may consider using blind hiring techniques that remove identifying information, including names, to reduce potential bias in the selection process.

On the part of applicants, if they are seeking creative jobs, they may take advantage of the association between unique names and creative jobs by adopting unique nicknames or even changing their first names to signal their creativity. However, given the potential negative implications of unique names, this strategy may result in candidates being treated unfairly, especially for jobs that do not require much creativity (Pascual et al., 2015). On the other hand, people with common names, who actually make up the majority of the population, can also be negatively evaluated and treated unfairly when the context emphasizes creativity. Therefore, people should carefully consider the potential

benefits and risks of having a unique name if they intend to change their name.

Beyond the workplace, the practical implications of our research may extend to marketing and branding. Companies may consider unique names for their products and services to increase their perceived creativity and appeal to consumers. However, companies should also be aware of the potential risks of unique brand names, such as pronunciation difficulties (Laham et al., 2012). Therefore, companies should conduct market research and carefully weigh the pros and cons before choosing a unique name for their brand.

8.3 | Limitations and future directions

While our research establishes that people endorse a stereotype of unique names and creative occupations, some limitations and open questions warrant future research. First, the investigation of the psychological mechanisms underlying the perceived name–job association in the current research is preliminary. Building upon basic dimensions of social perception (Fiske et al., 2007), both Studies 1 and 2 tested whether various impressions of names could explain the perceived name–job association, and found evidence for a creative impression of names as a potential explanation. However, we did not experimentally manipulate such an impression of names and then test its effect on the association between names and jobs. Thus, it is uncertain whether this explanation plays a causal role in people's tendency to associate unique names with creative jobs. Meanwhile, although Studies 5 and 6 found that individuals in creative professions tend to change to more unique names in the real world, we were unable to access the exact reasons for each individual's name change. Future research could leverage qualitative methods (e.g., structured interviews) to explore the underlying motives for such name changes and test these motives using experimental manipulations and random assignment of participants to different conditions. In this way, future studies may not only reveal the actual reasons why people match unique names to creative jobs, but also establish the causality of such mechanisms.

Second, in our research, we aimed to establish a perceived association between unique names and creative jobs, without testing whether there is a kernel of truth in this perception. Although Study 6 has indicated a real-world link between greater name uniqueness and higher product evaluation (i.e., movie ratings), it remains unknown whether people with unique names are actually more likely to choose creative jobs. Follow-up studies can test this possibility and examine the extent to which the stereotype may reflect reality.

Third, given the high correlation between impressions of creativity (i.e., creative ability) and competence (i.e., general ability) as shown in Study 1, it is necessary to disentangle creativity from competence when examining the association between name uniqueness and job creativity. In the present study, we made several attempts in this regard. We distinguished between competence and creativity in the ratings of names (Study 1), matched the required competence between occupations with different demand for creativity (i.e., 'Product Design' and 'Project Operation' in Studies 2 and 3), and focused on artistic

professions that value creativity more than general ability (Studies 5 and 6). Moreover, our finding of favourable impressions of unique names in terms of creativity contrasts with previous studies showing that unique names were associated with poor impressions of qualification for various jobs (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Cotton et al., 2008; Pascual et al., 2015). Nevertheless, follow-up studies using more sophisticated approaches to differentiate between creativity and competence are warranted.

Fourth, despite the consistency of our findings across the seven studies, only Study 6 was pre-registered and examined the real-world consequences of this stereotype about names and occupations. It would be desirable for future research to investigate other possible implications of this stereotype for the real world, particularly with large-scale pre-registered experiments.

Finally, our research highlights creativity as a positive correlate of unique names and explores its implications for employers and employees in the workplace. However, this may also have implications for many other domains, such as education, where creativity is highly valued. Does the uniqueness of students' names influence teachers' evaluations of them? Future research can test this with both laboratory experiments and field studies.

9 | CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current studies shed light on the social perception of unique names and creative jobs by identifying a perceived name–job association, illustrating its behavioural manifestations across contexts, directions, and cultures, and revealing its beneficial real-world consequences. The association between unique names and creative jobs exists in lay beliefs and can be manifested in both job recruitment and name change. Accordingly, people in creative professions with more unique names tend to receive higher evaluations for their products. Our findings underscore the need to minimize social bias related to unique names and promote fairer creativity assessment and job recruitment practices.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yu L. L. Luo and Han-Wu-Shuang Bao conceptualized the research. Han-Wu-Shuang Bao and Yu L. L. Luo designed the studies. Han-Wu-Shuang Bao and Huanhua Lu collected the data. Han-Wu-Shuang Bao and Yu L. L. Luo analysed the data. Yu L. L. Luo, Han-Wu-Shuang Bao, and Huanhua Lu wrote the paper.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data, analysis code, and codebook are available at <https://doi.org/10.57760/sciencedb.o00115.00091>

ETHICS STATEMENT

All studies reported in this article were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (H19042).

INFORMED CONSENT

All participants provided written consent prior to the study.

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