

## Scoping Review on Polyandry Study

Yi Ding<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Guangdong Experimental High School, Guangzhou, Guangdong 510000, China;

\*Corresponding author e-mail: yier.ding@protonmail.com

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**Abstract:** The polyandry, meaning a woman takes two or more husbands at the same time, has existed in some parts of Tibet for a long time. It is worthwhile to focus on this uncommon social phenomenon. In this paper, after investigating some published literature in Chinese and English, we provide an overview of existing research in polyandry. This scoping review maps out the characteristics and range of methodologies used in polyandry study. And it also summarizes and disseminates research findings and identify research gaps. It is concluded that there are few researchers in this field and there is a lack of primary data. In the future, more policy influences and practical Suggestions are needed to help improve it.

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, polygamous marriage in Tibet has received attention from many sociologists and anthropologists, especially those who study marriage and family [1]. Although polyandry is rare in modern society, it is a ubiquitous mode of family organization around the world. Polygamy exists in more than half the centuries (850/1170) [2]. Besides, our society is far from completely monogamous. About 40% of babies in the United States in 2018 were born to unmarried mothers, who were not cohabiting with the fathers [3]. Even though simultaneous marriages to different partners are not officially recognized, remarriage after divorce can result in a common phenomenon of "serial polyandry."

Due to the natural environmental conditions and economic and social development, fraternal polyandry is a common practice in Tibet. However, many studies are not strict and standardized, but "field works". Most researches are still based on second-hand data, which can't bring any progress and breakthrough in the study of polyandry. There still exist many controversies and conjectures in the social functions and causes of polygamous marriage. Moreover, the internal structure of the family and the relationship between family members are still not clear.

In this paper, we use a scoping review to provide an overview of existing research in polyandry. The three specific objectives of this paper were to conduct a systematic search of the published literature in Chinese and English, map out the characteristics and range of methodologies used in polyandry study, and summarize and disseminate research findings and identify research gaps.

### 2. Methods

The methodology for this scoping review was based on the framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley [4] and ensuing recommendations made by Levac et al. [5]. The review included the following five key phases: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. The optional 'consultation exercise' of the framework was not conducted. A detailed review protocol can be obtained from the primary author upon request.

#### 2.1. Research Question

The review was guided by the question, "what are the characteristics and range of methodologies used in polyandry study in the literature?" For the purposes of this study, a scoping review is defined as a type of research synthesis that aims to map the literature on a particular topic or

research area, offer a chance to identify key concepts and find the gaps in research.

## **2.2. Data sources and search strategy**

The initial search was implemented on Feb. 17, 2020, in an electronic database: CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure; 1999-present). The database was selected to cover research in Chinese and a broad range of disciplines. From 1980 to 2020, no limits on subject or type were placed on the database search. The search query consisted of terms considered by the authors to describe polyandry in Tibet and its reasons: polyandry, polygamy, Tibet, Chengdu. All the kinds of literature related to this review have been listed in the references part [1-52]

## **2.3. Eligibility criteria**

A two-stage screening process was used to assess the relevance of studies identified in the search. Studies were eligible for inclusion if they broadly described the phenomenon, reasons and system for polyandry and polygamy to identify and characterize the existing literature or evidence from anthropology, sociology and economics. Because of limited resources for translation, articles published in languages other than Chinese were excluded. Papers that described the polyandry and polygamy out of the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) were excluded. When the same data were reported in more than one publication (e.g., in a journal article and electronic report), only the article reporting the complete data set was used.

## **2.4. Title and abstract relevance screening**

For the first level of screening, only the title and abstract of citations were reviewed to preclude the waste of resources in procuring articles that did not meet the minimum inclusion criteria. A title and abstract relevance screening form were developed and reviewed by the authors using 20 citations to evaluate the reviewer agreement. The overall kappa of the pretest was 95%, where a kappa of greater than 0.8 is considered to represent a high level of agreement [6]. As there were no significant disagreements among reviewers and the reviewers had no revisions to recommend, no changes were made to the form.

The title and abstract of each citation were independently screened by two reviewers. Reviewers were not masked to the author or journal name. Titles for which an abstract was not available were included for subsequent review of the full article in the data characterization phase. Reviewers met throughout the screening process to resolve conflicts and discuss any uncertainties related to study selection [7]. The overall kappa was 95%.

## **2.5. Data characterization**

All citations deemed relevant after the title and abstract screening were procured for subsequent review of the full-text article. For articles that could not be obtained through institutional holdings available to the authors, attempts were made to contact the source author or journal for assistance in procuring the article. A form was developed by the authors to confirm relevance and to extract study characteristics such as publication year, publication type, study sector, terminology, use of a published framework, types of data sources included and reported challenges and limitations.

This form was reviewed by the research team and pretested by all reviewers before implementation, resulting in minor modifications to the form. The characteristics of each full-text article were extracted by two independent reviewers (A and B). Studies excluded at this phase if they were found not to meet the eligibility criteria. Upon independently reviewing a batch of 20 to 30 articles, the reviewers met to resolve any conflicts and to help ensure consistency between reviewers and with the research question and purpose [7].

## **2.6. Data summary and synthesis**

The data were compiled in a single spreadsheet and imported into Microsoft Excel 2013 for validation and coding. Fields allowing string values were examined for implausible values. Frequencies and percentages were utilized to describe nominal data.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Search and selection of studies

The original search conducted in April 2020 yielded 61 potentially relevant citations. After deduplication and relevance screening, 46 citations met the eligibility criteria based on title and abstract, and the corresponding full-text articles were procured for review. After data characterization of the full-text articles, all articles can be procured and were included in the analysis.

The updated search in March 2020 produced potentially relevant citations and resulted in another 3 studies being included. In total, 49 were included in the study.

Some citations were excluded upon screening at the title and abstract level as several terms used in the search algorithm also corresponded to other study designs. Research papers that do not fit within the scope of our topic are excluded from the scope of this paper, including biology. For example, a study on the paternity distribution of yellow-throated turtle under the condition of artificial culture by Zhang et al. and a study on the male competition strategy and its effect of water chestnut by Wang, which are excluded from the scope of this review [8, 9].

#### 3.2. General characteristics of included studies

The general characteristics of polyandry are reported from publication years to sectors. All included reviews were published between Jan. 1980 and Mar. 2020, with 94% (41/49) published after 2000. All reviews did not report the length of time taken to conduct the research.

Table 1. The year of publication of the selected core journal on polyandry in Tibet

Publication year	Number	Percent
1980-1985	4	3%
1986-1990	3	2%
1991-1995	0	0%
1996-2000	1	1%
2001-2005	7	5%
2006-2010	5	4%
2011-2015	15	11%
2016-2020	14	10%
Total	49	100%

Table 2 shows the types of publications about polyandry. Journal articles (80%; 39/49) comprised the majority of documents. The included studies varied widely in terms of the terminology. 'Polyandry' was the term most often used, reported in 68 % (34/49) of included articles. An explicit definition or description of what study authors meant by 'polyandry' was reported in 14 % (7/49) of articles.

Table 2. Publication Type

Publication Type	Number	Percent
Journal article	39	80%
Conference	1	2%
Thesis	7	14%
Government Report	2	4%

Total	49	100%
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Study authors reported that the main purpose or objective for the majority of articles was to identify, characterize, and summarize research evidence on a topic, including identification of research gaps. Only 14 % (7/49) of included articles conducted the polyandry and polygamy analysis methodology. As response options were not mutually exclusive, some reviews reported multiple purposes and/or objectives. The terms 'interview', 'questionnaires,' 'political analysis,' and 'theoretical analysis' were frequently used to describe the methodology.

The majority of the included studies addressed an anthropology/ethnology topic, making up 37% (18/49) of literature. Among studies from the economic sector, theory by political economics (5/5) was most commonly employed. The analysis from the law has increased in recent years, with all (4/4) published after 2010. The topics examined in the included polyandry ranged greatly, mainly discussing dispute resolution. For example, Guo and Liu analyzed polyandry from the perspective of sociology law [10].

Table 3. Research Sector

	Number	Percent
Sociology	18	37%
Law	6	12%
Economics	5	10%
History	4	8%
Ethics	18	37%
Politics	2	4%
Total	49	100%

### 3.3. Methodological characteristics of included research

The methodological characteristics of the included literature are reported in Table 4. Approximately 70% of the papers (73%; 36/49) reported using qualitative methodological frameworks for carrying out the polyandry analysis.

Second-hand evidence use varied greatly between researches from different sectors, such as in 47% (8/18) of studies from the ethics sector and in 27% (5/18) of the sociology sector. However, first-hand evidence was seldom applied, by interview (12%; 6/49) and survey (7%; 3/49). For first-hand research, fewer details were generally reported about the data characterization (or charting) of individual studies. Nearly one-third of researches (33%; 3/9) did not report any detail as to how the included literature was characterized, and it was unclear as to how many interviewers were involved. The majority of included studies (90%; 8/9) did not assess the methodological quality of individual studies.

The use of a quantitative method increased over time, from 33% (3/9) of reviews published from 2000 to 2005, to 57 % (5/9) of researches from 2005 to 2009, and to 89% (8/9) of studies published from 2010 onward.

Table 4. Methodological characteristics

Methodology	Number	Percent
Interview	6	12%
Survey	3	6%
Literature	4	8%
Theoretical	36	73%

Total	49	100%
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### 3.4 Reports of results

Table 5 summarizes how some of the results of the included analyses were reported and 'charted.' A narrative text was used to display the flow of articles from the initial search to final selection in 14.90% of studies (7/49). Characteristics of included studies were also displayed in tables (30 %; 15/49) and in histograms (30%; 15/49). Study characteristics were also mapped graphically in literature, often in the form of scatterplots, or pie charts.

Table 5 Reports of Results

Types	Number	Percent
Narrative Text	7	15%
Flow Diagram	0	0 %
Table	15	30%
Histogram	15	30%
Others	12	20%
Total	49	100%

### 3.5. Reported challenges and limitations

In summarizing the reviewed literature, 10.64% (5/49) of reviews noted gaps where little or no research had been conducted, and 10.64% (5/49) recommended topics or questions for future research.

After realizing the limitations of their own research or investigation, researchers put forward a lot of suggestions or methods that can be improved. 10.64% (5/49) recommended topics or questions for future research, 4.26% (2/49) inform the design of future method, and 19.25% (9/49) suggest policy implications or recommendations for policy or practice.

The balance between breadth and depth of analysis was a challenge reported in some researches. The depth of analysis was said to be limited by the time available to conduct investigations [11]. Additionally, papers reported that their results could not be used to make recommendations for policy or practice because they did not assess the quality of included methodologies [12, 13].

Table 6. Reported Challenge and Limitation

Types	Total number	Percent
Implications of findings(different aspects)	27	57.45%
Identified gaps in the research	5	10.64%
Recommended topics or questions for future research	5	10.64%
Recommended quantitative research be conducted	0	0%
Inform the design of future method	2	4.26%
Policy implications or recommendations for policy or practice	9	19.25%

## 4. Conclusions

This scoping review of polyandry research characterized and described the nature of polyandry in the published literature. Although polyandry is rare in modern society, it is a very common mode of family organization around the world.

After a systematic search of the published literature in Chinese, we find that most studies (94%) are published after 2000. Journal articles (80%; 39/49) comprised the majority of documents. The majority of the included studies addressed an anthropology/ethnology topic, making up 37% (18/49) of literature. For methodology, 73% of the papers (36/49) reported using qualitative methodological frameworks for carrying out the polyandry analysis. Compared with first-hand data, second-hand evidence use more commonly from different sectors. For limitations and extensions, policy implications and practical recommendations are most suggested.

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