A Research on ancient Chinese tomb-guard figures

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This dissertation develops a research on tomb-guard figures, which are grave goods at the entrance of tombs to ward off evil spirits. Burying tomb-guard figures was a traditionally burial custom that had continually prevailed over the periods of ancient China, including the Spring and Autumn Period, the Northern and Southern Eras, and the Sui and Tang Dynasties across China's territory. The formation, development, and termination of these figures are closely associated with the change of the dynasties, the movement of ethnics, and the communication with the outside world. The rise and fall of these figures could be a miniature of China's cultural history.

These figures' use and function have been investigated by art history and literature history since they were discovered. However, analyzing historical materials is a limited method due to lack of archival data. Although the archeological academia has emphasized the relative study according to eras, few discussions showed a whole picture. Currently, not only has a sufficient collection of data, but also a systematically chronological structure has not been completed. Hence, this research firstly aims at a chronological construction of the discovered figures by the method archeological typology. By doing this, it provides criteria for tombs' periodization, and this work will also be meaningful to the research of ancient Chinese tombs.

This dissertation categorizes and redefines the entire tomb-guard figures on the basis of the well-explored previous literature. In terms of body features, it divides these various figures into three classifications: tomb-guard gods, tomb-guard beasts, and tomb-guard warriors. Furthermore, it concludes eight types by categorizing these three classifications in detail. It then differentiates the various regions and periods of these figures to complete the chronicles. Therefore, this research indicates the transformation, periodization, and distribution of these figures, which consequently provides a vigorous proof of the hypotheses.