The New Horizon of Research Using Materials on Han Tombs : Using Early Han Society of the Changsha Region as a Model

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One major challenge in the archeological approach to materials on Han tombs has been the attempts to use materials on Han tombs to construct burial practices, extract groups of people buried from the differences in practices, and to examine social dynamics from the relationships between these groups and changes thereof. Discovering and understanding social structure within the Han Dynasty is also important from the perspective of considering trends in the nearby regions of East Asia. As one specific example of this kind of analysis, the study outlined in this paper focuses on the Changsha region (长 沙) from the Western Han period. The various attributes of Han tomb materials such as the scale and structure of the main burial areas and the composition of funerary accessories, are examined from various perspectives in order to reconstruct burial practices and extract the groups of people who were buried. This has resulted in the discovery of four classes in both the early and late periods of the Western Han period. It became clear that these four classes correspond roughly to the early and late periods of the Western Han period and that there was diversification within the classes during the late period. It was also possible to deduce the social structure in the Changsha region during the late Western Han period from the composition of tombs in the late period. This research has made it possible to use materials on Han tombs to build a bridge to an approach for studying the social structure of Han society.