

Preface

This book is about portraits that were not intended to be physical likenesses of their subjects and about why they look the way they do. It began when, reading several studies of recent archaeological finds in China, I wondered why someone in the fourth century would want to be buried with portraits of men who had lived a century earlier. I had not expected that answering this question would be so time-consuming, so intricate—and so intellectually rewarding. Although I do not know who first created the composition of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi, studying these works of art from the other side, that of the patrons, has increased my appreciation of the artist's genius. As is proper for a rhetorical work, that creation has instructed, moved, and delighted me. I continue to be in awe of the artist's ability to translate ideas into an enduring work of visual art, precisely as Lu Ji, in his great third-century *Rhyme-prose on Literature*, had insisted for another art form. "The function of style is, to be sure, to serve as a prop for your ideas," he noted (in Achilles Fang's translation).

I first encountered Lu Ji's essay years ago in a seminar on early Chinese painting and aesthetics directed by Martin Powers, who introduced me to the important critical and aesthetic ideas of the Period of Disunion. Analyzing these ideas under his guidance, I came to understand that theories of the arts could not be divorced from practice, and that neither could be divorced from the social values of those who wrote about, created, or commissioned works of art. My greatest debt, therefore, is to my former teacher, Martin Powers. His unflagging encouragement and counsel when I, naive and blithe, first leaped into uncharted waters—and much later, when I was less naive and even less blithe—were the buoys that kept me afloat. Above all, he taught me the true meaning of style, for which I am most grateful.

Ellen Johnston Laing's fine studies of the Seven Worthies theme in Chinese art were the initial stimuli for my interest in their earliest known portraits. My own examination of the theme gazes up to contemplate the ancients and is offered as the parallel to her demonstrations of the patterns it bequeathed to the future.

I have incurred many other debts in the course of this research and regret that I can here acknowledge only a few. That which I owe to Richard B. Mather is evident throughout this book. I have learned much both from his published works and from his private communications. In addition, I should like to thank him for the pleasure I continue to derive from his wonderful translations, so copiously quoted in this work. May all his *youtiao* be crisp.

I am indebted also to Chi-yun Chen for his early guidance through the vast historical literature of the period. James F. Cahill first enabled me, long ago, to study good photographs of the Seven Worthies murals and to formulate some of the issues. His continued interest in my research has been much appreciated. Joanna-Woods Marsden thoughtfully recommended appropriate studies in the field of Renaissance portraiture; Sheldon Nodelman gave generously of his time for lively and stimulating discussions of the genre of portraiture.

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For the sake of uniformity, the romanization of Chinese characters throughout the text conforms to the Hanyu pinyin system of phonetic transcription. Bibliographic citations, of course, appear in their original forms.

