Abstract: The 1130 “tales of the world” in the Shishuo xinyu 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World) are organized in 36 chapters, each focuses on one category of human character or behavior. Judging from the great interest and intense relish with which the Shishuo compilers enjoy the full array of human traits—both the praise-worthy and the detestable—in the raw, one can hardly shake off the impression that they care more about descriptive presentation than about prescriptive value judgement. As the criteria for a tale to be included in the text is not the consideration of ethics and morality, merely being very good or very bad does not guarantee one a spot in the Shishuo taxonomy of human nature; one just has to be good or bad “in style.” To live in the world of the Shishuo, a character has to be unusual, extraordinary, and, better yet, idiosyncratically different from the norm.

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