(The characters and their respective role types are listed in the order of their first appearance in the play)

Fan Shi 范石 / Shi Jian 石堅 (courtesy name Jiefu 介夫), the sheng 生 role type (the young male lead)

Fan Shi, who first appears in scene 2, is a young scholar in his early twenties, born as Shi Jian into the Shi family of Jiahe Prefecture in Zhejiang Province. (Before the play begins, Shi Jian was adopted by an uncle on his mother’s side of the family who had no son and thus became that uncle’s heir, changed his name to Fan Shi, and then moved to Yangzhou.) He reverts to his original name in scene 23 and moves back to his birthplace to take the civil service examination after being designated the “worst-behaved scholar,” which had disqualified him from taking examinations in Yangzhou. Fan Shi marries Cui Jianyun in scene 2, later becomes the nominal love object of Cao Yuhua, and he eventually (as Shi Jian) marries her so that the two women can be together.

Cui Jianyun 崔箋雲, the dan 旦 role type (the young female lead)
Cui Jianyun, who first appears in a nonspeaking part in scene 2, is one of the play’s two female protagonists. She is a young lady in her late teens or early twenties from a gentry family. Jianyun becomes the bride of Fan Shi / Shi Jian in scene 2, but she later falls in love with Cao Yuhua, the second female protagonist of the play, and comes up with a plan for her husband to marry Yuhua so that the two of them can be together.

Zhang Sanyi 張三益 (courtesy name Zhongyou 仲友), the xiaosheng 小生 role type (the supporting young male)

Zhang Zhongyou, a childhood friend of Fan Shi / Shi Jian and the cousin of Cui Jianyun, first appears in scene 2. He acts as the matchmaker for Fan Shi and Jianyun and is later entrusted with the task of attempting to broker a match between Fan Shi / Shi Jian and Yuhua. That plan fails, however, because of Zhou Gongmeng’s interference and slander.

Jianyun’s maid, Hualing 花鈴, the chou 丑 role type (the clown role)

She appears for the first time accompanying her mistress in scene 2. In the stage directions she is identified as Jianyun’s maid, but other characters in the play address or refer to her by her given name.

Zhou Gongmeng 周公夢, the jing 净 role type (the painted-face role)

Zhou Gongmeng, the villain of the play and the actual “worst-behaved” scholar, relies on bribes and cheating to pass
examinations. He first appears in scene 2. Zhou also wants to marry Cao Yuhua and thus slanders Fan Shi / Shi Jian in order to block his marriage to her.

**Cao Yourong 曹有容 (courtesy name Gechen 個臣), the *wai* 外 role type (the older man role)**

Cao Gechen, as he is primarily called throughout the play, first appears in scene 3. He is an elderly scholar who passed the provincial-level examination in his twenties but failed multiple subsequent metropolitan-level examinations until finally passing it in old age. He is a widower with a young daughter, Cao Yuhua, but has no sons. At the beginning of the play, he is traveling with his daughter on his way to the capital to take the metropolitan examination and stops at Yangzhou to meet his old friend Wang Zhongxiang, who had passed the provincial examination the same year as Cao. In later scenes, as the result of slander leveled at Fan Shi / Shi Jian by Zhou Gongmeng, Cao opposes the idea of a marriage between the young scholar and his daughter, but he agrees to the marriage after Fan / Shi passes the metropolitan examination.

**Cao Yuhua 曹雨花, the *xiaodan* 小旦 role type (the supporting young female role)**

Cao Yuhua, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Cao Gechen, is the second of the two female protagonists of the play. She appears for the first time in scene 3, where she meets Cui Jianyun in the Rain-Flower Nunnery and falls in love with her. As a way to achieve her dream of living with Jianyun, her true love object, Yuhua agrees to marry Jianyun’s husband.
Yuhua’s maid, Liuchun 留春, the tiedan 贴旦 role type (the assistant young female role)

She first appears in the scene 3 accompanying Yuhua. In the stage directions she is identified as Yuhua’s maid, but other characters in the play address or refer to her by her given name.

Jingguan 静観, the laodan 老旦 role type (the older female role)

Jingguan, the abbess of the Rain-Flower Nunnery where Jianyun and Yuhua meet, first appears in scene 3.

Wang Zhongxiang 汪仲襄, the fujing 副净 role type (the secondary painted-face role):

Wang Zhongxiang first appears in scene 4. He and Cao Yourong (Gechen) are old friends who passed the provincial examination in the same year, making them “classmates.” He is a teacher working for the local dynastic school that is helping xiucai or budding scholars prepare for the provincial-level examinations. He is miserably poor and relies on bribes he extracts from his students to make ends meet.

Sakyamuni Buddha, the sheng 生 role type (the young male lead)

Serving as one of four dei ex machina (see the others below) who conspire to ignite the passion between Jianyun and Yuhua and reward Fan Shi / Shi Jian with two worthy wives, Sakyamuni first appears in scene 5.

Mañjuśrī, Bodhisattva of Ultimate Knowledge, the wai 外 role type (the older man role)
Serving as the second deus ex machina who joins Sakyamuni in igniting the love between Jianyun and Yuhua, Mañjuśrī first appears in scene 5.

**Samantabhadra, Bodhisattva of Universal Benevolence, the mo 末 role type (the supporting male role)**

Serving as the third deus ex machina who joins Sakyamuni and Mañjuśrī in bringing Jianyun and Yuhua together, Samantabhadra first appears scene 5.

**Love Messenger, the xiaosheng 小生 role type (the supporting young male role)**

The Love Messenger first appears in scene 5, serving as the fourth deus ex machina, sent by the Daoist heavenly hierarchy to join Jianyun and Yuhua, which he accomplishes by sending a waft of Yuhua’s fragrance toward Jianyun with his fan.

**Shang Bazhi 尚巴志, the king of the Ryukyu Islands, the jing 净 role type (the painted-face role)**

As host of the Chinese visitors to the Ryukyus, he appears in scene 11; the king’s effusive praise and appreciation for Fan Shi / Shi Jian adds further embellishment to the latter’s brilliant achievements as imperial envoy.

**Wei Kai 魏楷, the chou 丑 role type (the clown role)**

Wei, who doesn’t appear until scene 32, is another unqualified scholar who passes examinations, including the highest (or metropolitan) level, by relying on family connections and pulling
strings. He intends to ask for Jianyun’s hand in marriage (after she has assumed a false identity as an unmarried woman), but she parries his proposal by revealing her prior betrothal to Fan Shi / Shi Jian.