Face Changing
Face Changing is a traditional Chinese magic.

变脸 - literally to change face

The performers wear brightly coloured costumes and masks. By raising a hand, swinging a sleeve or tossing their head, they can very quickly change their masks.

Within an opera the actor may want to change their face as part of the story. For example:

- the hero who doesn’t want to become famous, changes their face to save someone;
- the villain (bad person) may change their face to escape.
Sichuan Opera

Face Changing is an important part of Sichuan Opera.

川剧  chuān jù
Sichuan Opera  川剧

四川  si chuān
(china, the province, meaning 4 rivers)

川  chuān is short for Sichuan
剧  jù means play or opera.

Costumes

帽  mào zi  crown
袍子  páo zi  robe
扇子  shàn zi  fan
Methods

mǎ liǎn
Wiping Mask: 抹脸
The actor wipes special face paints over their face. The colourful paint can be hidden in parts of the face, especially the eyebrows.

chuí liǎn
Blowing Mask: 吹脸
The actor blows special make-up over their face. The make-up can be hidden in their hand or in a small box on the stage. The actor must keep their eyes and mouth closed and hold their breath when using this technique!

chē liǎn
Pulling Mask: 扯脸
The actor pulls down a mask over their face. Layers of masks can be hidden on top of their head. The actors are very skilled to quickly move each mask.
The Face

Meaning part of the character:
yuè means moon but can also mean body or meat. In this character it takes the meaning of the body.

Sound part of the character:
qiān is relating to the sound part of this character.

The meaning also helps to remember the character because qiān means all or whole. The whole self can be seen in the face. Your face is used to prove your identity.

Eyes, ears, nose & mouth

ear

鼻子

ear

耳朵

眼

眼

耳

Nose

Mouth

 cará

dí zuǐ
Colours

The colours of the masks show different characters and emotions.

For example:

- red: loyalty, courage and positive emotions
- yellow: brave
- green: violence (but can also mean brave)
- blue: cunning
- purple: serious
- black: fairness
- white: betrayal (usually the villain)
- silver and gold: fantasy characters

The masks are very colourful but the main colour of the mask will show its meaning.
Can you change your face?

你会变脸吗?

Use the form of this sentence to ask other questions.

你会...吗?

For example:

Can you make tea?

你会泡茶吗?

Can you cook Chinese food?

你会做中国菜吗?

Can you draw a giant panda?

你会画大熊猫吗?

To answer the questions, you need to learn how to say I can or I can’t.

I can

我会

I cannot / I can’t

我不会
Glossary of main terms

帽子  mào zǐ  crown
变脸  biàn liǎn  face changing
扇子  shàn zi  fan
袍子  páo zi  robe
川剧  chuān jù  Sichuan Opera
吹脸  chuī liǎn  blowing mask
扯脸  chě liǎn  pulling mask
抹脸  mā liǎn  wiping mask
Make your own mask

You will need:  
• three sheets of white paper  
• coloured pens  
• glue

1. Fold the three pieces of paper in half. Draw half a face and an eye on the top piece of paper.

2. Cut along the lines and cut out the eye.

3. Unfold one of the faces and lay flat. Separate the other two but keep the faces folded in half. Take one of the folded faces and glue one side onto half of the full face. Take the second folded face and again glue this on top. You will have a little booklet with three face sides.

4. Decorate the three faces with different patterns and colours.

5. Attach to a headband to wear over your face and then turn each flap to perform the face changing.
Beyond the Panda

This booklet has been produced with the help of the School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Jiaotong University, our Confucius Classroom partners and as part of the Beyond the Panda programme.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland’s Beyond the Panda educational programme is designed for cross curricular learning where pupils investigate and discover more about China, its culture, language, geography, giant pandas and other Chinese wildlife.

Free resources are available on beyondthepanda.org.uk

Free outreach for schools is also available throughout Scotland.

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