



AT WORK: Miss Jessica Min with Korean boy band B.A.P when they were in town last week.

TNP PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO, GARY GOH



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— Miss Jessica Min

SMU student shares experience of translating for Korean stars

She sometimes blanks out

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She loves her job, thanks to the down-to-earth K-pop stars she has met.

The first one she worked with was singer and Running Man star Kim Jong Kook.

Last week, soft-spoken Korean student Jessica Min made headlines after she was called the "Korean star whisperer" in an interview she did with a local newspaper.

The 23-year-old, who studies economics and finance at the Singapore Management University (SMU), has been the go-to translator — a job she does part time — for Korean stars here for the past year.

She was offered her first stage translation job, for Kim, last February when the agency who had hired her previously to be K-pop boy band SHINee's coordinator for one of their giveaway booths called her up for it.

After a pleasant working experience with Kim, she began embracing what many K-pop fans would call a dream job.

Since then, Miss Min has worked with the likes of Kim Soo Hyun, Hyun Bin, CN Blue, FT Island, Super Junior, Girls' Generation and the cast of popular Korean variety show Running Man, such as Lee Kwang Soo and Gary.

Miss Min, who most recently translated for K-pop boy band B.A.P at their press conference and fan meet here last Friday, told The New Paper: "I'm very grateful that Kim Jong Kook was the first celebrity I worked with because he showed me a different side to celebrities, which is that they are just ordinary people doing their jobs."

"He was very down to earth. I remember the last day that he was here was for sight-seeing and he thought he could just walk around, but the fans recognised him.

"He couldn't move freely, but when his fans asked to take photos with him, he was very willing.

"I could tell that he's very grateful for the successful career he's had. Fame has not gone to his head at all.

"My perspective about celebrities changed then, so I'll always be thankful that this started out with him."

Miss Min's job has its difficulties as well, especially when there is pressure to think on one's feet at all times.

At Kim's fan meeting at the Kallang Theatre, she recalled how the fans were screaming so loudly that she could not hear he had said on-stage.

Miss Min, who had to translate for him backstage, had no choice but to improvise.

She said: "I just said what I thought he was saying because I couldn't ask him, 'What did you say?'"

"I had to make a decision at that point and I remember I translated his words as 'Thank you for coming tonight, I had a wonderful time, thank you so much for the warm welcome and I'll definitely come back with my Running Man co-hosts.'"

"I still don't know what he actually said, but he told me after that that he was cool with it and everything was fine. He was really nice and understanding."

TOUGH

The toughest thing about translations for Miss Min is that she would sometimes blank out in the middle of one, especially when the statement from the artist is very long.

Apart from the stage translator, she said that a group of five other translators, which includes Korean-speaking Singaporeans, will also be working at each event to support the production team.

Miss Min said many people also assume that her job comes with plenty of perks when in reality, she said, there is nothing she can do for her friends if, for instance, they want to rub shoulders with K-pop stars.

She will also tell fans that she cannot help them when they ask her for information like the stars' flight details.

When they ask her to take photos with them, she would always decline as she feels that she is just an ordinary person "who doesn't deserve all that attention".

Miss Min added: "There are all these unflattering pictures on the Internet of me speaking in mid-sentence... My cousin will send them to me if he finds it on some Korean website. That is quite embarrassing."

She added: "Many people are nice to me just because I'm Korean and I feel like I get treated better even though I myself have done nothing to contribute to K-pop and I'm so grateful for that."

Born in the South Korean city of Daejeon, Miss Min lived there till she and her family moved to Kuala Lumpur when she was 10, when her father was posted there for work.

They lived in Malaysia for nine years before going back to South Korea.

Three years ago, Miss Min came to Singapore and has been studying at SMU since, where she is also a student ambassador for its Ambassadorial Corps.

This post requires her to engage external stakeholders, such as ministers, when they visit.

Said Miss Min, who used to be the president of SMU's Korean Culture Club: "In March, my school sent me to Korea to represent them in a conference, to showcase the student life that we're very proud of here in Singapore."

"I was very proud to share my story there. Living alone abroad has its difficult moments. I'm thankful that Singapore is a safe country with many opportunities."

She added: "A fan came up to me after the Kim Soo Hyun fan meeting and said that she has been to a few of his fan meetings around Asia and I did a very good job and she thanked me for it."

"That was very sweet of her."



Her memorable experiences at work

Here are other memorable K-pop stars whom translator Jessica Min has worked with

1 ACTOR KIM SOO HYUN

"For the Kim Soo Hyun fan meeting, it was meant to be very funny.

"I did okay for the first part. As for the second part, he made his quotes much longer so that I would have much more difficulty translating (so that the audience will laugh).

"I knew there was a segment like that, but they didn't share any content with me. They just told me that he might try to lighten the mood.

"I forgot the order of the information as he was talking about the photographs which he was showing on stage.

"He was also making a lot of sounds such as 'Bang!' and I felt very awkward as I couldn't do them.

"I apologised on stage. Because I couldn't remember the order, I was also making things up."



2 ACTOR JUNG WOO SUNG

"He's the best-looking in person and is a big star in Korea.

"As he has been filming movies in Asia for a long time, he speaks languages such as English and Mandarin well.

"Jung Woo Sung is very serious and professional about what he does.

"Most of the time, the translation work I do is very generic, but when he was here to promote his movie, Cold Eyes, I had a deeper understanding of what went on in the movie-making process.

"The press conference and many interviews I did with him were a lot more serious and once in a while, I enjoy these deeper conversations."



3 SINGER LEE HONG KI

"Usually for concerts, the singers would talk on stage and I would be translating for them backstage.

"Lee Hong Ki wanted me on stage and he made it very interactive, funny and entertaining.

"Sometimes, when the stars are nice enough to set the tone, I'll try my best to set the same tone.

"Korean jokes may not sound funny in English, so when he started calling me 'English teacher', that was a lot easier for me (to be funny)."

