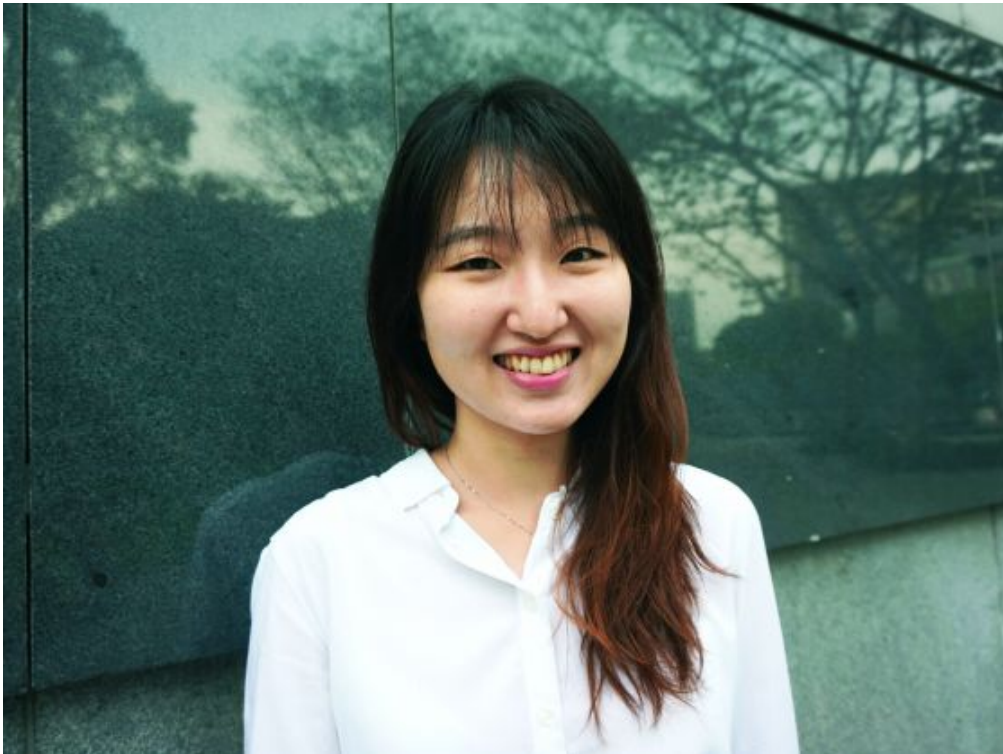


Publication: TODAY Online  
Date: 28 May 2014  
Headline: The Korean star whisperer

## The Korean star whisperer

Jessica Min hangs out with K-pop celebs but she's not a rabid fan

BY HON JING YI  
PUBLISHED: MAY 28



Jessica Min – the reason why we understand Korean stars. Photo: Hon Jing Yi

SINGAPORE — She has whispered in Kim Soo-hyun's ear. She has hung out backstage at Super Junior's concerts. She has even seen Song Ji-hyo try her hand at peeling chilli crabs. And you see her at almost every Korean pop event.

No, Jessica Min is not some corporate bigwig or rabid K-pop fan. She is, however, the go-to translator for Korean stars when they visit Singapore. And for the modest, soft-spoken student at Singapore Management University, what was meant to be a means for some "extra pocket money" has become an eye-opening adventure.

"Without this job, I would never have got to experience what life is like for the stars," the third-year Economics and Finance major said.

Min, who was born in South Korea and spent nine years in Malaysia before coming to Singapore to study, first applied to be a translator for Korean boy band SHINee. Although she didn't get the job, she was later asked to work with Running Man's Kim Jong-kook when he visited last year, an opportunity she humbly attributes to luck and chance.

Since then, she has served as an interpreter at numerous press conferences, interviews, concerts and fan meets for big-name Korean stars, including Soo-hyun, Hyun Bin, Lee Seung-gi, Jung Woo-sung, Big Bang's G Dragon, Super Junior, Girls' Generation and F.T. Island. Min also said she has begun to get requests for photos and Facebook friend invitations from some of the stars' fans because she is such a fixture at K-pop events.

Though the 23-year-old is usually hired to translate conversations from English to Korean and vice versa at these events, Min is sometimes asked to follow artistes and their entourages for several days, from the moment they arrive in Singapore until they leave. And even though she doesn't stay in touch with any of the stars she works with, she is fast friends with some of the people she has met.

"I remember the very first translation job I was involved in, with Kim Jong-kook, because I was following him everywhere during the three or four days that he spent in Singapore," Min said. "I thought he was very nice and very, very friendly. It was his first fan meeting outside Korea, so he was quite excited." Min added that she makes it a point not to start conversations with the artistes unless they speak to her first.

"Kim Jong-kook's manager asked me to contact them when I go back to Korea, but I felt quite bad — like who am I? I am really no one. I thought they were just saying it out of courtesy, but when they came back for Running Man again, he asked me why I didn't call them, because Kim met up with all the translators that were involved in his tour to Thailand and other places. I am sure they meet a lot of people, but the fact that they remember me ... I was quite touched."

And she should know. Min, who recently joined Running Man's Song Ji-hyo for some good old feasting at a seafood restaurant when the star was in town to promote her new television show, *Emergency Couple*, said the actress really liked the dish, although she also enjoyed trying different types of local food.

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“Actually, we ended up playing a game — whoever lost had to eat this durian mochi that we were served,” Min laughed. “Ji-hyo and her stylist had to eat one piece each — Ji-hyo was okay, but the stylist couldn’t really take it. It was quite funny.”

Though Min claims she is now too old to get too enthused about boy bands, she admits she is still sometimes very excited to meet and work with her favourite stars, including Kim Soohyun, whom she has been “drooling over for a long time”. But there is still one name she is hoping to add to her list.

“Kim Woo-bin from The Heirs. I am a huge fan!” Min smiled. “But I’ll keep my composure — nobody will know I have the biggest crush on him!”

Min is also sometimes asked to join the stars for dinner — an affair that often takes place either at, strangely enough, Korean BBQ restaurants or at restaurants with chilli crabs — a dish Korean stars seem to find irresistible in Singapore.

“Honestly, although there are other types of good local food, like satay or chicken rice, there isn’t a proper restaurant where they can go to, where there are rooms they can have to themselves,” Min explained. “But it’s also true that they really, really, really like chilli crab.”