

OUTLINE

1. Polyglots and the podcast.
 2. Which languages we learned and speak.
 3. How we got to know each other.
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CHING

Wassup guys, we are Ching and Xing! Welcome to the first episode of The DAMN RANDOM Podcast. As the name of the podcast suggests, we're here to talk randomly about things, but mainly with a focus on language, culture and society, topics we're interested in.

This podcast isn't meant to be a one-way dialogue where we do all the talking. We see this as a platform to answer frequently asked questions about language learning, as well as travel and living abroad, especially in South Korea. So if you have any questions, please feel free to ask. We'll try to answer them as much as possible. But try not to ask us questions like train timings, how to get from Taipei to Hualien, stuff like that. That's not what we're here for.

So... alright. Let's briefly introduce ourselves so you know who you're listening to. Okay, Xing. Introduce yourself.

XING

Hey guys, my name is Xing. It's spelled as X-I-N-G! I'm a Singaporean... Yeah.

CHING

Er... That's it? Can you tell us a little bit more about yourself?

XING

Hahaha.

CHING

The lack of effort is so evident lor.

XING

Okay, so I speak Singlish, Mandarin and Korean. My dialect is Cantonese but honestly, I don't really speak it lah. So currently, I'm doing some work related to language and... I guess audiovisual that sort of thing? So things like translation, transcription, typesetting, subtitling... Yeah. And what about you?

CHING

Hey guys, so for those of you who don't know me yet, I'm Ching. I'm also part of the slash generation, hence explaining what I do in a word is a major challenge. I'm a photographer and videographer; a writer and content creator; and I also interpret and translate from Korean, Mandarin and Cantonese to English; and I am also a certified English as Second Language teacher, which explains why some of you might not know me as the Ching who speaks singlish. Like Xing, I speak English, Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean, in order of fluency.

So I think that's it for now. Maybe we can talk about why we speak 4 languages for a start. As Singaporeans, English is our first language, although some might disagree, we'll leave that discussion in another episode.

We're ethnically Chinese, so we learned Mandarin in school. As for Cantonese, my mom's from Hong Kong and my paternal grandfather is from a part of China that speaks Cantonese.

XING

Oh, so your mom's from Hong Kong and your dad's Singaporean.

CHING

Yeah, my dad's Singaporean but he speaks Cantonese as well, so yeah.

XING

Oh...

CHING

Anyway, I started learning Korean because it was just the easiest language out of the other foreign languages that I've tried to learn. And... that included Japanese, French, German... what else? Malay. As well as Thai, but that was much later on. So anyways, I ended up in Yonsei University Korean Language Institute in Seoul to learn the language. And I think that's it from me. Xing probably has more interesting stories to tell, with regards to why she started learning Korean and why she speaks Cantonese.

XING

Hmm... Actually, I started learning Japanese and then I was in Polytechnic - Wait, do you call that a high school or what?

CHING

I guess? I don't know.

XING

Yeah. Anyway, there's this elective module that I had to take. I remember there were languages... Spanish, French, German, Italian... but I ended up taking Japanese. It was quite interesting at first, but I kind of lost it at the writing systems because it was sooo hard.

CHING

Hmm, yeah. Actually I started learning Japanese first too. At NTU. But then I stopped at maybe N3? For JLPT.

XING

Oh, N3, is it like intermediate?

CHING

Yeah, I think it's intermediate. Because... I think there's 5 or 6, no I think it was 5 for JLPT and 6 for TOPIK, so yeah, I think it was intermediate already.

XING

Oh...

CHING

So anyway, I liked Japanese partly due to childhood influences like... you know, anime and dramas.

And actually because it was also the easiest language module to get back then in NTU, together with French. There were so many classes and vacancies. Everything else was just super hard to get. You?

XING

Oh, for me, I thought it was the easiest language to learn, so-

CHING

Huh, you mean Jap?

XING

Yeah, Japanese. Correct. And then yeah, back then there was this J-Pop thing right? And then J-Drama.

CHING

J-Pop thing, you mean like Ayumi Hamasaki? HAHA.

XING

Hahaha. Yeah, I used to listen to... who was it? Arashi? No, no, no.

CHING

Arashi, I think.

XING

Kattun, Kattun.

CHING

There's a Kattun?

XING

Yeah. There's a Kattun. I also watch cartoons. LOL.

CHING

(awkward silence) Okay can. I only knew Arashi because my classmates were listening to them. Not that I listen to them, but.

XING

I do have friends who still like Arashi now.

CHING

Are you serious?

XING

Yeah.

CHING

They're still around? Haha. They must be some old uncles by now lor.

XING

Hahaha. Okay... I hope my Arashi friends don't listen to this.

CHING

Er... I bet they will sometime soon.

XING

Oh. No, I was learning a bit of Korean back then.

CHING

Korean?

XING

Yeah. So—

CHING

You mean in poly?

XING

Er... I think around that period of time. Yeah. Then I remember I got so confused learning two languages at the same time. Then there was once during this Japanese lesson, I said something that was very embarrassing.

CHING

Like what?

XING

Like when she tried to hand out some worksheets or whatever, then I said "Kamsahamnida" to my Japanese teacher. LOL.

CHING

Er... Congrats?

XING

Then I was like, oops!

CHING

Er... Actually I think it happens lah.

XING

Yeah. But I must admit lah, that Hallyu was starting to pick up back then. So... that was how I started learning Korean also. You know last time there was those J-dramas like 金田一¹ and those 木村拓哉² shows on Channel 8?

CHING

Kindaichi?

XING

Yeah, I always watch that at night, after school.

CHING

Yeah, I remember. I think it was like er... at 11pm or something? I remember watching with my mom. I think it's during the weekends. Saturday or Sunday. Something like that. OMG so age-revealing.

XING

HAHA, do you feel old now?

¹ Kindaichi

² Kimura Takuya

CHING

It's okay. We're not here to pretend to be young.

XING

Oh but for K-Pop, I used to listen to Dong Bang Shin Ki and then I became a fan. I guess that was how the Korean language began to interest me more, so I decided to sign up for courses at the Singapore-Korean International School. That was in Bukit Timah, I think.

CHING

Was that like the only school back then?

XING

Yes. I guess.

CHING

I think it was, right? Just that in recent years, suddenly a lot of Korean language schools. I don't even know how to begin naming them.

XING

Yeah. That's right.

CHING

So you completed the programme at SKIS, right?

XING

Yes, it took me about three years to complete it.

CHING

Three years? So long?

XING

Yeah. Three years. But I wouldn't say I learned the language for three years lah, because the programme was only... maybe like, it was twice a week and then one and a half or two hours per lesson.

CHING

But then that's the standard for... classes in Singapore.

XING

Yeah. So I guess, if you... complete the course in three years, it doesn't mean that you learned the language for three years.

CHING

That's quite true. I had this HK friend. She was in Yonsei and then she said she studied Korean. I can't remember which school in Hong Kong. It was some university as well. She studied for three years before that. And then... even back then, after three years, her Korean wasn't quite like... you know at the level we're at right now? So yeah lor, I think that three years of weekly classes isn't really three years?

XING

Yeah, I have to agree with you. 'Cause actually my SKIS teacher was the one who encouraged me to go to Korea to continue my language studies. So at that time, I was really keen to do it, so I worked hard, earned money, and then I applied for an intensive course at the Sogang University Language Education Center in Seoul. I remember after two weeks or so, they called me for a short interview. But because I wasn't in Korea back then-

CHING

You mean like on the phone, or like, skype video call?

XING

Yeah. A phone interview, for my placement test.

CHING

Skype call?

XING

No, phone call. Like international, long-distance call.

CHING

Serious? Oh... Then?

XING

I was working half way, and then they called. So I was like, oh okay let me pick this up.

CHING

How long was the... call?

XING

The call, maybe about 15 minutes? Yeah.

CHING

I never knew the school actually calls students.

XING

I mean that's only for people who cannot be in Korea at that point in time.

CHING

But like, what about the written placement test?

XING

There's no written placement test.

CHING

Only speaking test?

XING

Yeah. Er, I'm not sure. I'm not sure about those who are already in Korea. And then I'm not too sure how their placement test is like, but for those who cannot be in Korea at the point in time then they'll just have the oral interview.

CHING

Oh because for Yonsei right, we just have to apply to the school through email. And then they just tell you whether or not you've been accepted. And basically you'll be accepted lah, because they have so many classes.

XING

Yeah, it's quite big.

CHING

So anyway if you're not starting from level one, you'll have to take the placement test. It'll be held in school, and then there will be the written and speaking components.

XING

Actually I kind of forgot what happened. Because it was quite long ago, in 2013?

CHING

That's quite long ago.

XING

So... Quite long right? Yeah... but anyway I guess it's quite different for Yonsei and Sogang. 'Cause Sogang they focus a lot on speaking, maybe that's why? Then I had to be interviewed in Korean. So...

CHING

But we have a speaking component during the placement test too what.

XING

Oh, really?

CHING

Yeah, we have both written and speaking tests. I think it's more like Yonsei takes in too many students, so I don't think it'd be possible to call so many people. It'd be too much work. By the time they call finish, I think the semester would probably be over. So... yeah lor.

XING

Yeah, Sogang wasn't so popular back then. But now it's very~ popular.

CHING

No leh, but I don't know. Singaporeans always compare and contemplate between Yonsei and Sogang. I mean okay lah, there weren't many Singaporeans in Yonsei during my time. Maybe like, in my cohort, there was only two or three, and I was one of them. Out of like 15 classes of 12 students in each class. So the percentage is super small.

XING

Oh yeah, I think Sogang has more Singaporeans per cohort in recent years. But I think I was the only Singaporean back then in 2013 lah. So...

Yeah, there's definitely more Singaporeans after... 2015? I was quite disappointed back then, when I first started the course because not a lot of people know about Singapore. Not even my Korean teachers. They were very surprised that there's this Singaporean in the class.

CHING

Huh? They don't know Singapore?

XING

Exactly. But now they know lah.

CHING

During my time, everyone knows Singapore. Everyone is like, oh you mean Singapore, the country with 3 tall buildings with a boat on top, and then the merlion?

XING

Haha.

CHING

Yeah, so everyone knows that. But yeah lor.

XING

Oh... maybe my teacher is just ignorant.

CHING

Er, actually some of them are lah.

XING

Hahaha. Is this like a dissing time?

CHING

My teacher right... She once asked me, er... I heard Singapore is VERY clean. So... you can actually walk barefooted.

XING

Huh?

*뭐라고?*³

Barefooted?

CHING

Is it true?

XING

You... Maybe you can ask her to try LOL.

CHING

So I was... I... I didn't know how to answer her. So I said, yeah it's clean. I assume you could probably try to walk barefooted. But no one does that lor. Who does that?

XING

I wouldn't lah.

CHING

So yeah lor, anyway which level did you start with in Sogang?

³ What did you say?

XING

Er... I started with level 2.

CHING

Level 2? After 3 years?

XING

Hahaha. I knew you'd ask this. You know, in SKIS, I studied for 3 years right. I actually passed this advanced level. That means it's the highest level already. So on top of that, it's TOPIK classes or 1-to-1 classes. So...

CHING

But... why do they call it advanced? If... you're only going to be in level 2?

XING

I don't know. Because- but I realise for SKIS programme right, we were using like er... Kyunghee University's textbooks.

CHING

Oh yeah, I remember back then it was all Kyunghee.

XING

Yeah, it was all Kyunghee, right? And then it was very academic-based. So all we do is just read and then write essays. We seldom had any speaking sessions, so usually those are just short role plays. Yeah, so we really didn't have any chance to speak in front of our teachers lah, so... I guess that's why I was placed in level 2, because I couldn't really express myself well.

CHING

Okay lah.

XING

But I was really, really shocked. Like, how could I be in level 2 right?

CHING

Haha. Sounds like my HK friend that I mentioned just now.

XING

Oh...

CHING

So actually yeah, I think you really can't compare full-time studies with part-time classes in Singapore.

XING

That's quite sad.

CHING

Yeah, it's quite sad lah. 'Cause..

XING

But for me, I actually went to attend the first lesson in level 2, and then right after the lesson, I went straight to the teacher's office and then I appealed to go up to a higher level.

Okay, anyway I think we can talk more about Yonsei and Sogang in another episode.

CHING

Yeah, we probably should.

XING

I'm sure there are many Korean language learners out there who want to know more.

CHING

Yeah, I guess. Anyway some shameless selling. I have actually written an ebook on the comparison between Yonsei, Sogang and Ehwa, which I recently updated for the 2020 edition. So if you can't wait for the podcast to come out, you can actually go to my website to purchase the book. It's at <https://saysching.com/bookshop>, says Ching!

XING

Says Ching!

CHING

So anyway, enough of that. We're going to move on to why Xing speaks Cantonese. So, what's your family's history?

XING

Okay. My dad is a Singaporean, but I think my ancestors were from Guangzhou, China.

CHING

Oh, really?

XING

Yeah.

CHING

I think mine was from like, what's that place called. Er... My dad's side, they were from Foshan.

XING

Foshan, oh...

CHING

I think my mom was Zhongshan, or... one of those 山⁴. What about your mom?

XING

My mom? My mom was from Malaysia.

CHING

So, like what, she speaks Cantonese?

XING

Yeah, they speak Cantonese and Hakka.

CHING

Oh, so do you know Hakka?

XING

I don't know Hakka, but I can understand just a bit. But my parents, they speak to each other in Cantonese, but they speak to me in Mandarin.

CHING

Serious? Why?

XING

Er... I don't know.

CHING

Why can't they speak to you in Cantonese? But if they speak to you in Mandarin, then how do you learn Cantonese?

XING

Listening. Based on my listening skills.

⁴ Mountains.

CHING

Er... Okay.

XING

And also because they like TVB dramas. So usually we'll just sit together like during dinner time, and then we'll just watch together. I think that's how I get to learn and how I get in touch with Cantonese every day.

CHING

Haha. Like my dad. TVB dramas every day from 7pm to 9pm.

XING

Yeah. So in a way, I have never learnt Cantonese but I can listen and speak. Then... but of course lah, not as good as you. I know you can speak Cantonese very well.

CHING

What makes you think I'm good?

XING

I've heard you speak. And then you sound like a Hong Konger lor. Hahaha.

CHING

Really meh, no leh. I don't think so. My aunt and relatives always laugh at how poor my Cantonese is. Then they will be like...

XING

Aiya, that's just because they're Hong Konger themselves right?

CHING

Maybe lah, but my aunt and relatives, they always say I sound 鬼鬼啲⁵. You know what 鬼鬼啲 means?

XING

Yeah.

CHING

You know, like an ang moh* speaking Cantonese? So anyway, my parents speak to each other, like your parents, in Cantonese. Actually they speak to us in Cantonese as well. But because me and my sister, we learn Mandarin in school, so somehow along the

⁵ Foreign sounding.

primary school years, we started to reply to them in Mandarin, because... I think we didn't learn the exact pronunciation at home? So it was difficult to actually pronounce some words. But we learn Mandarin in school, you know, there's 汉语拼音⁶? So yeah, anyway in essence, we don't really speak much Cantonese at home. We only speak it when we're with our Cantonese relatives or friends who speak Cantonese. When it's awkward to not speak Cantonese.

XING

Oh... That's quite interesting. When I was in Sogang right, I have this Hong Kong friend.

CHING

Then?

XING

So we got very close together. And then because her Korean is not too... good. So usually she'll communicate with me in Cantonese, because I told her that I can understand Cantonese. But then I don't really speak the language, so you see, I kind of learned and spoke the most Cantonese in my entire life during that period in Korea. Haha.

CHING

Actually I think I spoke most Cantonese in my entire life during my Yonsei days. Like... seriously.

XING

Because of your Hong Kong friends?

CHING

Yeah. Actually I didn't really have Hong Kong friends in Yonsei. I think most of them were from my 고시원⁷, they were from Ewha. Er... yeah. They were all from Ewha language school. Then... you know, friends of friends that become friends, so my network grew and I have a lot of Hong Kong friends now.

XING

Oh... that's why you have so many Hong Kong friends.

CHING

Yeah, actually I have more Hong Kong friends in Korea than I have Hong Kong friends in Hong Kong.

⁶ Hanyu Pinyin

⁷ A type of housing in South Korea, mainly for students.

XING

For me, I only have like just that one friend, and maybe her friends?

CHING

Oh, serious?

XING

Yeah. So maybe just her and er... in total less than 3 Hong Kong friends.

CHING

I think my network... my network grew. I have a lot of Hong Kong friends, after I came to Korea.

XING

Oh, but speaking about friends, how did we meet? Do you still remember?

CHING

Er... I've no idea. I don't know. I think I found out about this open chat that Shanna happened to open during the time I was... I don't know what made me want to kaypoh⁸ her blog again. I actually stopped reading her blog for quite a while. But anyway I decided to open her blog again, and then somehow it just happens that she... just opened an open chat on Kakao.

I think you were in Sogang during that time, so maybe that's why she opened one during that period of time. So... anyway somehow hmm... I think we were in that open chat when we were all in Korea, so we just somehow decided that those who were in Seoul should have a meetup. So, anyway I found Shanna's blog wayyyy back when we were both in NTU.

XING

Oh, by the way, Shanna is one of the few popular language bloggers in Singapore. She used to also organise many language exchange meetups.

CHING

Who's the other few?

XING

Who's the other few? Um... you know, like, saysching.com

⁸ To nosy.

CHING

Haha, yeah, thanks, thanks.

XING

And I don't know who else, hahaha.

CHING

Thanks for the promotion.

XING

Yeah. I started following Shanna's blog quite a long time ago also.

CHING

I think that was during my uni days.

XING

Uni days... yeah, that was quite a long time ago. So that's how we met in Seoul... and... yeah, then we started exploring the country together. We visited many, many places in South Korea.

CHING

Hmm... yeah. It was fun. Still is. We went to so many places together, and we still have so many places that we want to visit together. I'm not sure why Korea is so big.

But anyway, I think the funniest thing right, is how after we sort of became friends already, then somehow we found out that we were both actually from the same agency way before we even met.

XING

Oh right. Yeah, I didn't know that until you told me about it one day.

CHING

It's quite funny lah. Like, how did that even happen. What is this sorcery... Okay! Anyway, we've talked quite a bit for this episode and we should start to sum things up.

XING

Oh yeah. So basically... this is what the podcast is going to be like. We'll be talking about language learning, and then maybe in the future episodes, a little more about what we think about the Korean society and culture... stuff like that. It's just going to be a bit random, casual and funny, maybe.

CHING

Yep, that's it for today. If you have any topic that you'd like us and perhaps our guests to talk about, or if you would like us to feature you in the podcast even, please feel free to leave us a message on the podcast page at saysching.com/podcast, or DM me on my social media accounts.

The transcripts for the podcast will be made available on my website for those of you who are speed readers more than you're listeners, or if you just want to recap certain bits of information in the podcast.

XING

Hahaha. Okay, please feel free to leave us comments! Although we're introverts, we really love to hear from others, so send us some love!

Alrighty, see y'all in the next episode. 说好不见不散。또 뵈요!

END