Oppa Gangnam Style

In 2012, “Gangnam Style” exploded throughout mainstream media. Collecting over three billion views on Youtube, the catchy Korean song is one of the most viewed in history.

I used to despise it, not because of the tune or the crazy music video, but because of how the singer, Psy, portrayed Asians: wild, raunchy, weird. I hated how he automatically represented me. My classmates asked me if I knew Psy through my Chinese relatives (although he’s Korean), sprung into his strange dance moves around me, and mimicked his accent to my face. I grew embarrassed of not just Psy, but of my “Asianness” and how it was associated with him.

However, I couldn’t escape the viral “Gangnam Style” fever, and one day, I stumbled across the translated lyrics:

*I'm a guy who seems calm but plays when he plays*

*A guy who goes completely crazy when the right time comes*

*A guy who has big ideas rather than muscles*

*That kind of guy.*

I went to the Youtube video. Psy shamelessly danced to the electronic beat, wearing the loudest suit imaginable. As an almost forty year old man, he was acknowledging in his lyrics that although he wasn’t the youngest or strongest, he still chose when and where to take action. And here he was, boldly making waves in an industry with almost no support for Asian representation.

I realized that while the world might laugh, it’s beautiful to celebrate who you are, your ideas, and your beliefs. Instead of apologizing for my “Asianness,” I embraced it and took action. At my high school, I joined Melting Pot, the diversity club, and was eventually elected vice president. I helped organize “International Lunch” for teachers and students, where we brought dishes from our cultures and decorated our library to represent different parts of the globe. We took song requests to blast through speakers, and “Gangnam Style” was the first one recommended.

With every action I took to discovering my confidence, I overcame my internal struggle of accepting my Asian identity and fell in love with being Chinese. I love my almond eyes and golden skin. I love the way Mandarin sounds, like birds twittering, concise yet musical. I love the hum of a traditional guzheng and the thump of the tanggu.

And like Psy, I’ve fallen in love with dancing like there’s nobody watching.