

Oreos, BTS, and Me

When we were new immigrants, my mother sent me to school with Oreos to make friends

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Courtesy: Oreo

BTS' collaboration with Oreo cookies has been released! I must admit that I wasn't expecting much from them. I say this as someone who ate Oreos as a child, but never loved them like I did (and do) chocolate chip cookies. Frankly, I was expecting these limited-edition *hotteok*¹-flavored cookies to taste like, well, regular Oreos.

But *au contraire*! While they do *not* taste like *hotteok* at all to me, they are seriously good.



Photo: Jae-Ha Kim

So what does it taste like then?

When I opened the package of cookies², I noticed a strong whiff of kinda-sorta burnt sugar. And I mean that in the best possible way, because it reminded me of the snacks

I had as a child. Do you remember how the hapless contestants in “Squid Game” had to meticulously carve out shapes in a cookie³? That’s what the smell reminded me of more than anything else. I still remember my sister melting sugar and baking soda in a spoon, directly over our stovetop. And I remember patiently waiting until the sweet treat cooled down so that I wouldn’t burn my tongue eating it.

My own nuclear household agreed that these cookies are delicious, and not cloyingly sweet like store-bought desserts often are. I have squirreled the rest of the cookies away in a hidden area of our pantry so that we can savor them for at least a few more days. Because to be honest, I could’ve eaten a whole sleeve by myself with my morning cup of coffee.

OREO & BTS

OREO Cookie



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While promoting this cookie collaboration, BTS said, “For Oreo to be the first snacking brand we’ve collaborated with globally is a huge honor. We ate them as kids, we eat them in the studio, and now Oreo is helping us share a taste of home with the world. We’re just so proud to add our own chapter to Oreo’s amazing story.”

I have a childhood history with Oreos, too.

When my family emigrated from South Korea to the United States, there weren't a lot of Asians in my neighborhood. Or at school. So it was not surprising that when I entered kindergarten as a four year old, my classmates weren't sure what to make of me — this little girl who looked nothing like them and spoke with a strong, foreign accent that may or may not have been English as they knew it.

A few wanted to know how I got my hair so straight. Since I wasn't Caucasian, they assumed that I must have been African American.⁴

To help me make friends, my mother sent me off to school with bags of Oreo cookies (and M&M's) to share with my classmates. Many years later, she told me that she used to watch from a distance as I passed treats out at recess, hoping somebody would play with me.

It must've broken her heart to see them accept the sweets, but not me.

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This didn't last forever, though! When we moved and I switched to a different kindergarten, I met the little girl who would become my best and longest-lasting friend. At first, we just followed each other around like puppies, because I wasn't fluent in English yet and she spoke no Korean. But we found each other to be amusing and just clicked, even at that age.

When I would go to her house, her mother would give us Hostess Ho Hos to snack on before a dinner of spaghetti and garlic bread. (Her mom made the *best* homemade spaghetti sauce that I still dream about.) And when my BFF would come over to my house, my mom would serve us Oreo cookies and milk. My friend had immediately taken a liking to kimchi, so my mother always made sure she had a jar to take home after eating dinner with us.

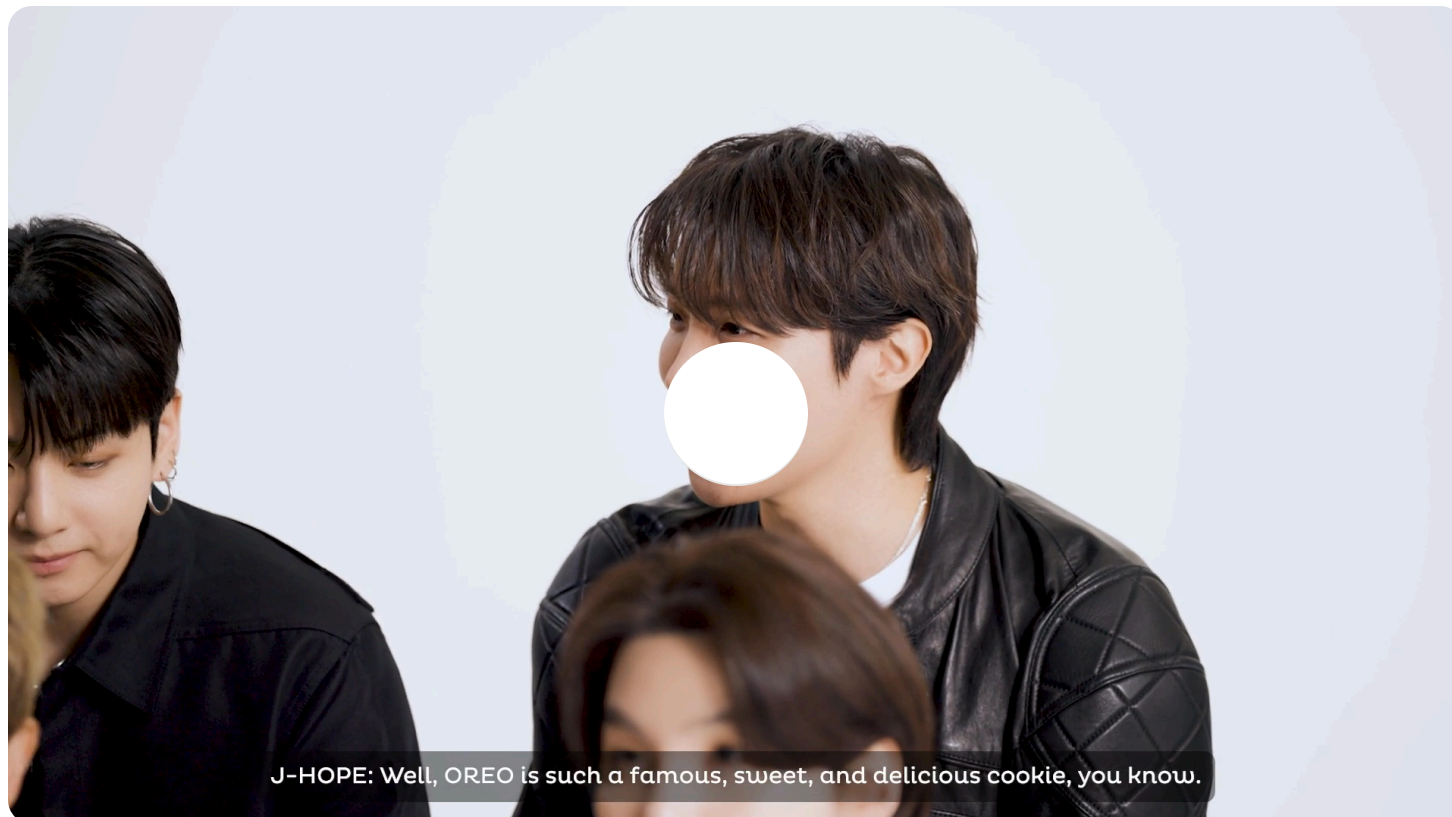
Today, my father and my best friend's mother are buried in the same cemetery, not too far from each other. When one of us visits, we leave flowers for both.

It may sound odd that a box of Oreo cookies brought back all these memories. But that's how the mind works, right?

I'd like to think that BTS wanted to do this collab because this American snack brought back fond memories of when they were children, during an era when they couldn't have imagined who they would one day become.⁵

I don't know. All I can say is that even though this collab has absolutely nothing to do with me, the fact that it exists makes me feel 정⁶ (jeong/jung) for this amazing group of Korean artists. They helped create a cookie that evokes all these memories of home for those of us who are no longer there.

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- 1 *Hotteok* is a popular Korean street food snack that looks like a puffy small pancake that's filled with a brown-sugar syrup. Sometimes there will be other ingredients, like cinnamon or walnuts (or pecans).
- 2 Oreo sent packages of the *hotteok*-inspired cookies to journalists, and I received one of them.
- 3 The treats in “Squid Game” were dalgona — 달고나 — also known as popppi (뽑기).
- 4 Naysayers have questioned this, saying I couldn't possibly have been mistaken for a Black girl. Believe me or not, but I have witnesses.
- 5 Of course for naysayers like [James Eppler](#), this collab is little more than a ‘joke.’ For whatever reason, he made the unhinged and defamatory comment on-air that BTS’ Oreo cookies contained the message, “Death to America.”
- 6 정 or jeong/jung is a word used to express an emotion that isn't necessarily love or friendship (though they could be part of it), but rather a deeper bond that Koreans have for one another. 정 grows over time.

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