

Jjalbang (짤방), the Korean Meme

Seong-Young Her January 6, 2020

Fundamental Concepts In International Meme Studies: Jjalbang, the Korean Meme

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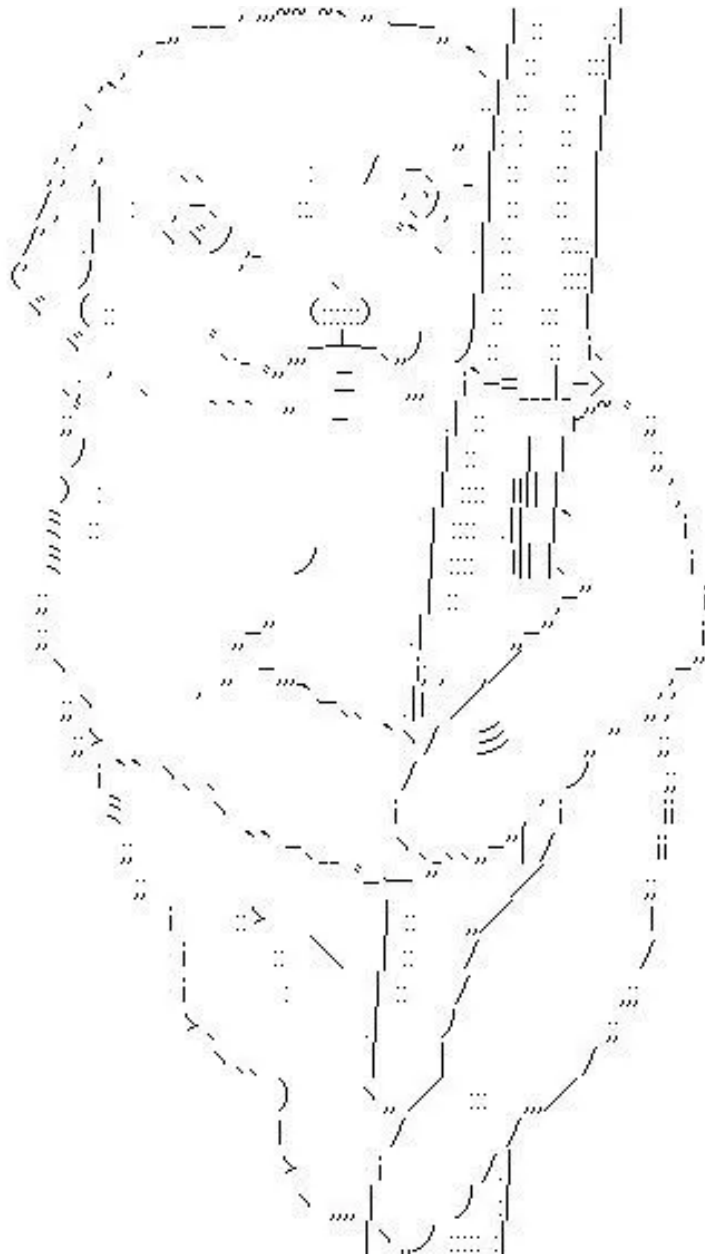
Fundamental Concepts In International Meme Studies: Jjalbang, the Korean Meme

Jjalbang (짤방, lit. “prune prevention”) is the Korean equivalent to the Internet meme. While “meme” typically refers to a set of content as well as the individual videos or images, jjalbang traditionally refers only to individual images, typically random and humorous in nature. The concept is founded on the notion that the basic unit of content online is the individual file. The practice of posting jjalbangs along with text posts was developed by users on the popular digital camera hobbyist website, dcinside (디씨인사이드, short for Digital Camera Inside).



Gaejoogi (개죽이, Bamboo Doggy), an iconic Korean jjal from 2001.

When the users began using the site for general socialisation, moderators aggressively pruned off-topic posts in order to maintain quality. Since this was a camera and photography forum, the mods usually detected off-topic posts by whether they included a photo. Users began including random images on their shitposts in order to prevent them from being detected by moderators. Eventually these images became a genre.



An ASCII art version of Gaejoogi made in Japan.

However, the jjalbang was first and foremost a material object, and by no means the same thing as a meme. The term does not refer to the genre itself as a collective in the way “meme” can. Purists among contemporary users still refuse to apply the term to anything other than image files, making exception for animated jjalbangs called oomjjal (움짤, lit. “moving jjalbang”).

1. Namuwiki. Jjalbang. Available at: <https://namu.wiki/w/%EC%A7%A4%EB%B0%A9>
2. Money Today. (2009). News article about Gaejoogi. Available at: <https://news.mt.co.kr/mtview.php?no=2009042416153570569>
3. International Meme Studies. Original post about jjalbang. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/intmeme/permalink/554498085403987/>