

## Inferring Myths from The *Bangudae* Petroglyph

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### 1. Introduction

The *Bangudae* petroglyph is located in Ulju, in the southeastern part of Korea. It is assumed to have been made sometime between the Neolithic Age and the Bronze Age. Figure 1 presents the petroglyph in its entirety:



<Figure1>

I will go through the following process to perform a semiotic interpretation of the significance of the *Bangudae* petroglyph.

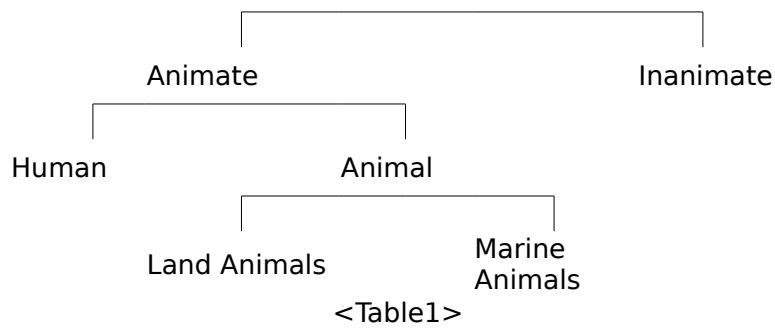
- 1) I will identify forms present in the petroglyph.
- 2) I will classify the forms I have identified.
- 3) I will construct a semantic triangular model via macro- and micro- observations of the classified forms.
- 4) I will discuss the verbs or predicates that are suggested both explicitly and implicitly by the depicted movements of the forms.
- 5) I will discuss three myths that I have inferred from my reading of the petroglyph.

### 2. Identifying and Classifying the Forms Present in the Petroglyph

Forms Present in the Petroglyph:

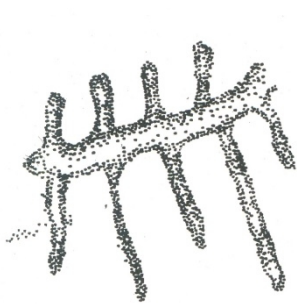
deer, tiger, boar, cow, rabbit, weasel, lizard, whale, seal, sea turtle, human beings, mask, whale, boat, fishing net, hedge, bird, ritual tools (pipe, entertainment toy)

Classification:

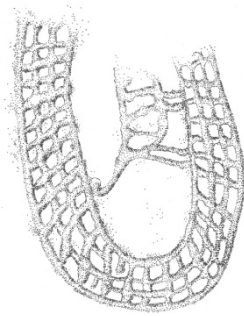


### 3. Semantic Triangular Model Constructed from Analysis of Forms Present in the Petroglyph

#### 1) Inanimate



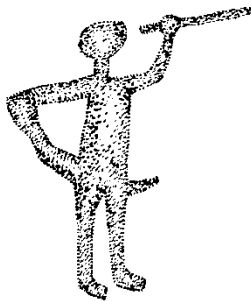
<Figure2>



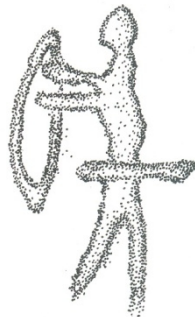
<Figure3>



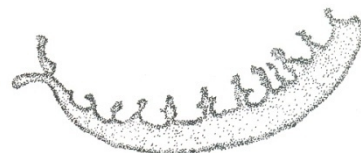
<Figure4>



<Figure5>



<Figure6>

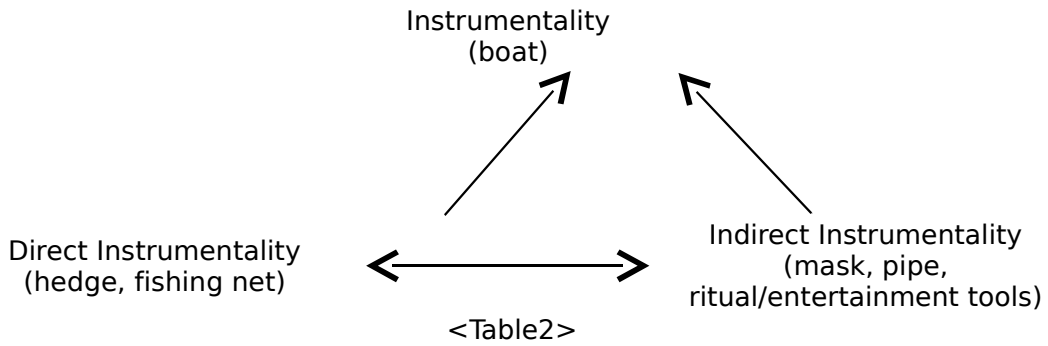


<Figure7>

Most of the inanimate forms appear to be instruments, indicating the presence of a culture that widely utilizes implements.

The hedge and fishing net (Figure2 & Figure3) are mainly related to animals; the hedge to land animals and the fishing net to marine animals. The mask, pipe and ritual tools for entertainment (Figures 4, 5, and 6) differ from the preceding instruments in that they are not related to animals. The boat (Figure7) may be related to whale hunting, but could also function simply as a mode of transportation. If I call the instrumentality related to hunting "direct instrumentality" and the instrumentality related to entertainment or rituals "indirect instrumentality," it is possible to read the instrumentality of the boat as mediating between the two opposite instrumentalities.

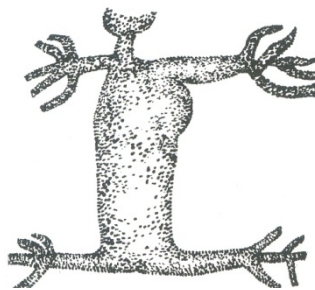
Mediating



2) Animate: Human Beings



<Figure8>

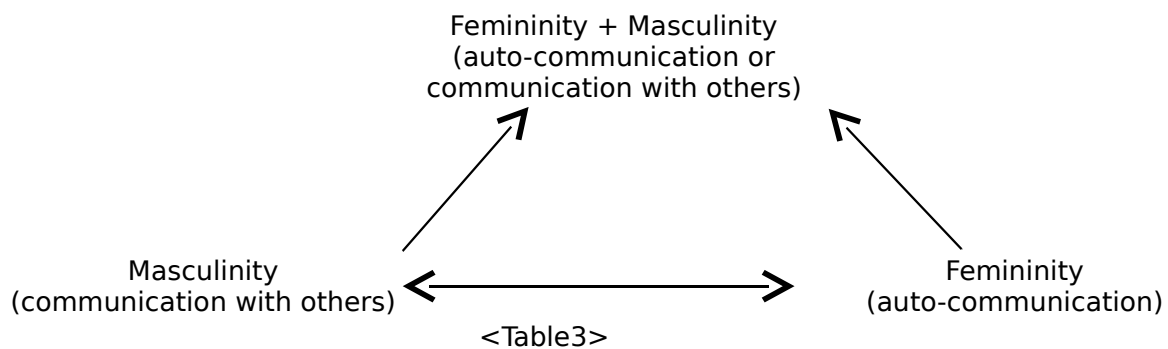


<Figure9>

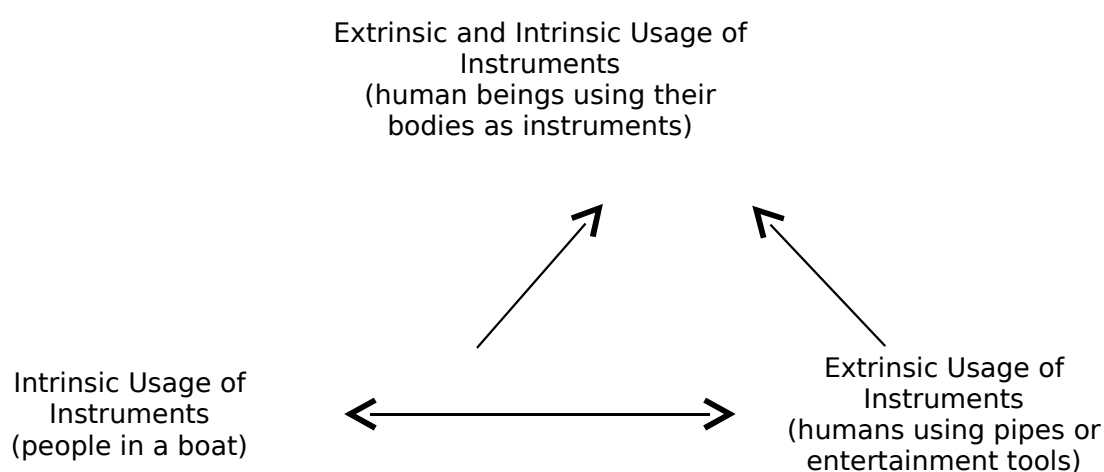


<Figure10>

Human beings appear in Figures 4 to 10. Among them, Figure 9 clearly shows female characteristics. Figures 5, 8, and 10 are clearly marked as male through the display of genitalia. The gender of the person using entertainment tools in Figure 6 and of the people in the boat in Figure 7 is ambiguous, as these figures lack identifiable features. In order to explain the meaning of such gendered differences, we need to examine the semantic markedness of figures in the act of communication. The woman in Figure 9 does not show any directivity in her action. All the other figures show a certain directivity in their actions. Therefore, we can analogically reason that masculinity corresponds to active communication with others while femininity corresponds to passive auto-communication. Figures 6 and 7, which are ambiguously marked in terms of gender, show corresponding ambiguity in the nature of the acts of communication in which they are engaged. The person in Figure 6 is turned toward a particular direction, but seems to be engaged in solitary play; the people in the boat in Figure 7 do seem to have a certain directivity but one that is not part of an act of communication.



We can divide the human figures into two groups according to whether or not they use instruments, and we can construct a semantic triangular model of the significance of the instruments used. In Figures 5 and 6, instruments perform auxiliary functions as they simply intensify the meaning of actions--I call this "extrinsic usage of instruments." In these cases, the presence of instruments does not affect the meaning of the figures. In Figure 7, because the boat has a mediating instrumentality closely related to the cognitive and practical dimensions of human action, it performs intrinsically as an instrument--I call this "intrinsic usage of instruments." Whether human beings use instruments extrinsically or intrinsically, they act through their bodies. Thus, human beings, who use their own bodies as instruments, display both extrinsic and intrinsic usage of instruments.

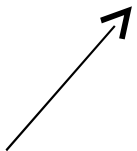


<Table4>

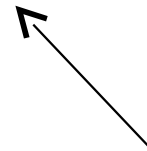
### 3) Animate: Animal

The animals in the petroglyph can be classified into land animals and marine animals. They are indexical signs that represent the land and the sea, respectively. We can describe the significations of the animal signs using spatial articulations such as left/right and top/bottom. In the petroglyph, marine animals appear mainly on the left side, and land animals mainly on the right side. However, there does not appear to be a similar distinction between top and bottom. Top/bottom as an articulation of habitat seems to be meaningless in this petroglyph. However, the contrast between top and bottom does have significance in terms of directionality. Whereas land animals are shown moving horizontally, marine animals are depicted as moving vertically. Top/bottom is the most important scheme in interpreting the movements of marine animals. It is possible to read the horizontal movement of land animals as a representation of the real world. Although marine animals move both horizontally and vertically in the natural world, they only move vertically in this petroglyph. This indicates that they are signs that represent concepts rather than the real world. In the petroglyph, we can also find animals that cannot be classified exclusively as land or marine--these are the sea turtle and seal, amphibians that inhabit both land and sea. Considering that they are depicted as moving vertically, we can also read them as signs that stand for concepts rather than a representation of reality.

Vertical Movement  
 Concept  
 Land Animals + Marine  
 Animals  
 Left + Right  
 (sea turtle + seal)



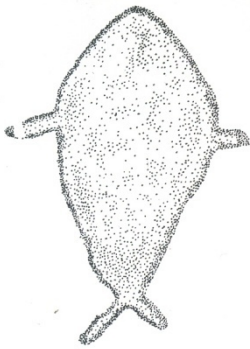
Vertical movement  
 Concept  
 Marine Animals  
 Left  
 (whale)



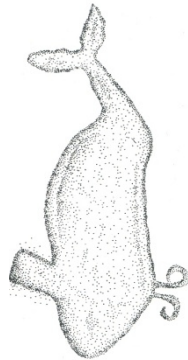
Horizontal Movement  
 Reality  
 Land Animals  
 Right  
 (tiger, deer)

<Table5>

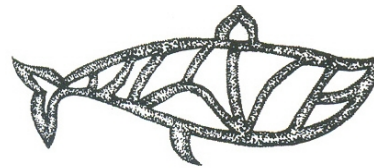
Now I will examine individual figures in detail.  
 First, let us look at various figures of whales.



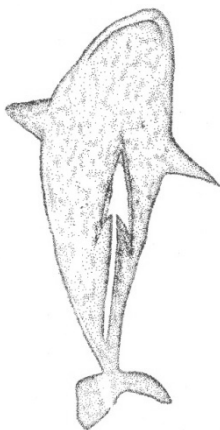
<Figure11>



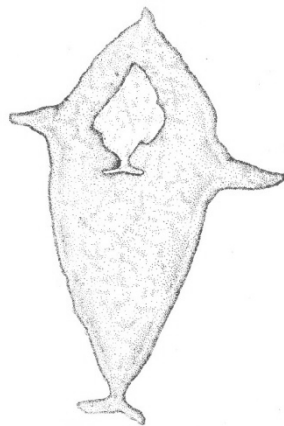
<Figure12>



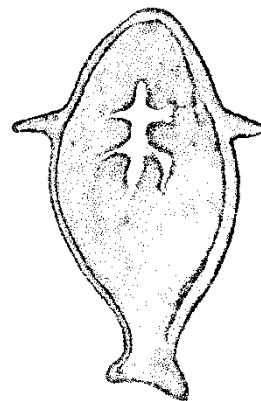
<Figure13>



<Figure14>



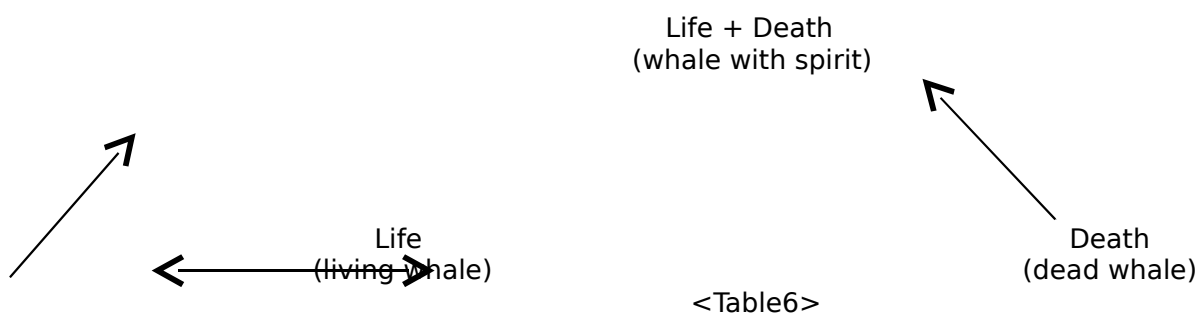
<Figure15>



<Figure16>

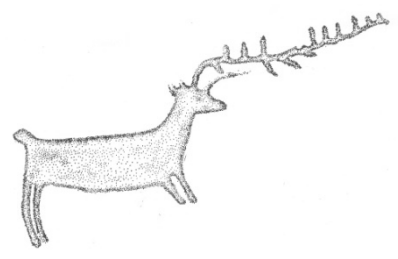
Figure 11 represents an unmarked whale. We can read it as representing a whale that is alive as it does not show any wounds or other damage, and thus as symbolizing life. By adding specific features, whales become marked. In Figure 12, the feature of spouting is added, thereby intensifying the representation of life. Figure13 represents a

disemboweled whale, thus making it possible to read it as representing death. Figure 14 shows a whale shot by an arrow, emphasizing the significance of death through the representation of the unnatural death that is the end result of hunting. Figures 15 and 16 show whales mediating life and death. Figure 15 shows a whale containing a smaller whale in its head, suggesting that it represents the spirit of whales. Figure 16 shows a whale containing a human figure. The human figure inside the whale is not just a dead human who has been swallowed by the whale, but also a symbol of the spirit world as it is located in the spot where the whale spirit is seen in Figure 15. Both spirits shown in Figures 15 and 16 mediate life and death.

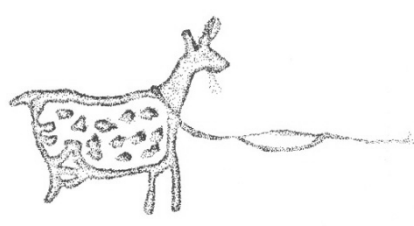


<Table6>

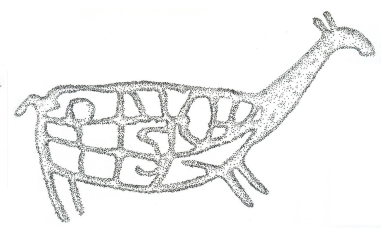
Next, I will analyze the figures of land animals.



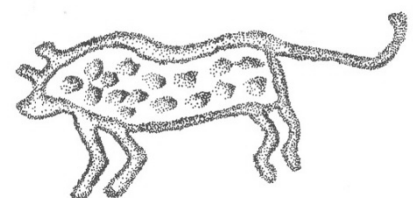
<Figure17>



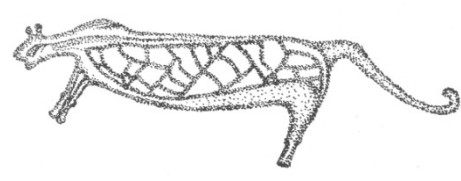
<Figure18>



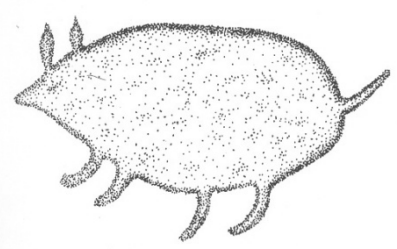
<Figure19>



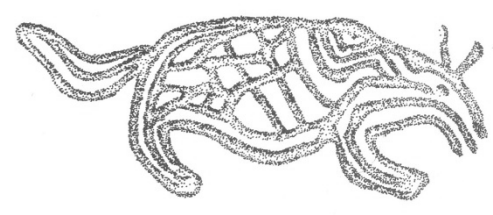
<Figure20>



<Figure21>

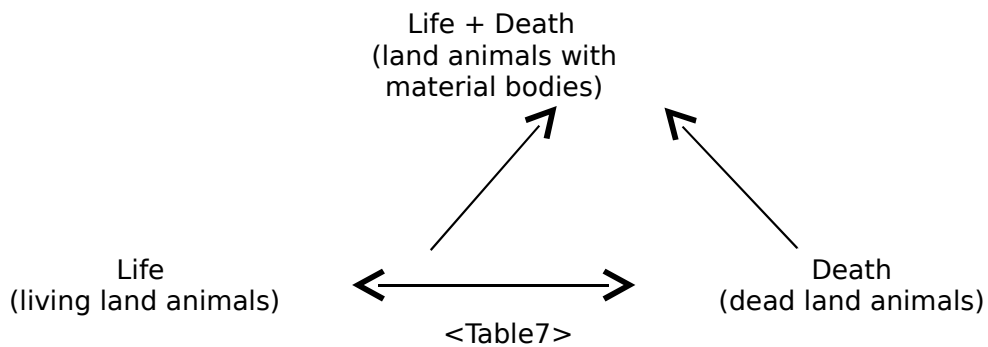


<Figure22>

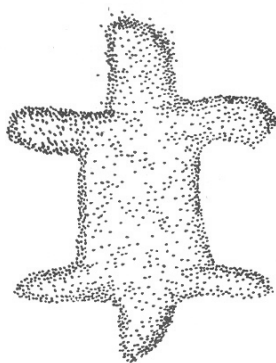


<Figure23>

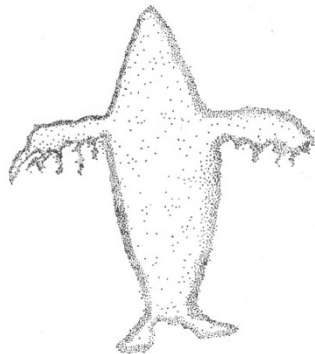
Figure 17 is an unmarked deer that symbolizes life. Figure 18 represents a spotted deer that emphasizes the feature of life. Figure 19 represents a disemboweled deer, which can be regarded as signifying death. Figure 20 is a spotted tiger that emphasizes the feature of life. A disemboweled tiger in Figure 21 stands for death. A wild boar in Figure 22 is unmarked and represents life. A disemboweled boar in Figure 23 stands for death. Land animals and marine animals are the same in that they both show the binary opposition of life vs. death, but only marine animals are depicted as having spirits. Therefore, in the case of land animals, the mediating role between life and death is performed by animals with material bodies, not spirits.



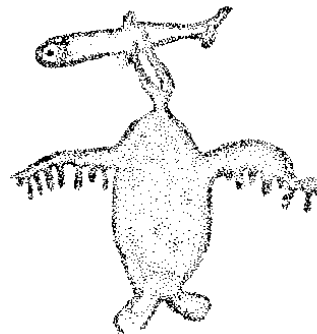
Now I will examine animals that show characteristics of both land and marine animals, and that seem to function in roles of mediation.



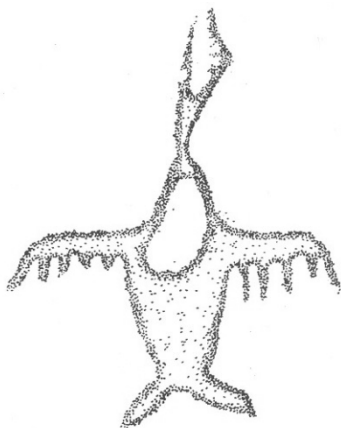
<Figure24>



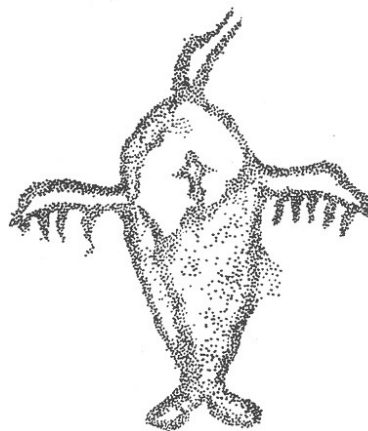
<Figure25>



<Figure26>



<Figure27>



<Figure28>

Figures 24 and 25 represent unmarked living sea turtles that symbolize life. The seal in Figure 26 holding a fish in its mouth emphasizes the feature of life. Figures 27 and 28

are seals with spirits that do not show any features of death. Since these mediating figures represent life, it is possible for us to interpret the petroglyph as signifying directivity toward life. Thus, we can see that spiritual life is recognized as the most essential in that it mediates the opposition between life and death.

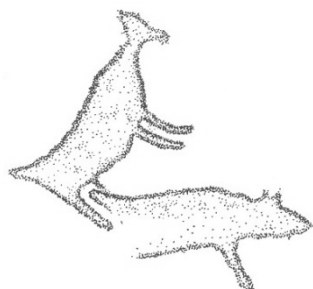
#### 4. Creation of Stories

In the petroglyph, human beings and animals show various movements. We can present such movements as verbs and construct stories by implicitly and explicitly connecting descriptions of those predicates.

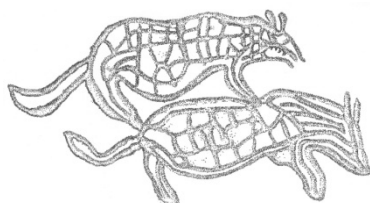
First, I will examine the cases in which the movements of figures are shown explicitly.

Figure 26 represents an animal devouring another animal. The verb “devour” drawn from this figure is related to death in that it implies slaughter, but is also related to life in that it sustains life by means of the consumption of the slaughtered animal. Therefore, “devour” can mediate the opposition between life and death; “devour” makes “survive” possible.

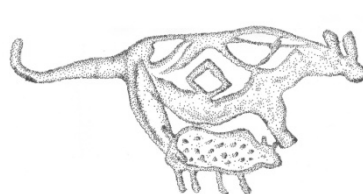
Figures 29 to 31 depict copulating animals:



<Figure29>



<Figure30>



<Figure31>

Copulation of deers in Figure 29 emphasizes the feature of life in that it results in procreation. Thus, “copulate” is implicitly followed by “procreate.” Figure 30 represents copulation between dead disemboweled boars, suggesting that dead boars can have the feature of life and that they mediate the opposition between life and death by their copulation. Such mediation can be regarded as directivity toward life in that it results in procreation. Figure 31 represents copulation between a living tiger with spots and a dead disemboweled tiger, and this can also be seen as an act toward life by means of mediation between life and death. Considering this, we can say that “copulate→procreate” is a mediating process of opposition between life and death.

Interactions between human beings and animals can be described as a linkage of predicates. I will focus on instruments used by human beings to explore these interactions and the predicates describing those actions. The fishing net and hedge are related to hunting. The whale shot by an arrow in Figure 14 also implies hunting. From these figures, we can draw the verb “hunt.” People hunt to eat and survive. Sometimes, human beings and animals devour each other to survive. Thus, we can link predicates from the interaction between human beings and animals as following:

(Human beings)	use instrument	→	hunt	→	devour	→	survive
(Animals)			hunt	→	devour	→	survive

<Table8>

Interaction between human beings does not appear explicitly. We can only infer several acts between human beings from the marked features of human figures. Male genitals are markedly shown in Figures 5, 8, and 10, and female breasts are shown in Figure 9. We can infer copulation between man and woman from them. As copulation is usually followed by procreation, we can draw the following linkage of predicates:

copulate → procreate



<Table9>

Devouring, copulating and procreating are acts that both human beings and animals generally do in their lives. As such acts are depicted in the same petroglyph, human beings and animals become metaphoric figures that represent one another.

Human figures show movements other than the instinctive biological acts I have analyzed so far. Such predicates inferred from the petroglyph are as following:

- mask
- play a pipe
- play with an instrument for entertainment
- call
- dance
- gesture

<Table10>

Paradigmatic relations are inferred from these, rather than syntagmatic. They are disposed in two opposite paradigms:

Auto-communication	Communication with others
mask	mask
play a pipe	play a pipe
dance	play with an instrument for entertainment
play with an instrument for entertainment	call
	gesture

<Table11>

All of these predicates are related to communication and almost all belong to both paradigms simultaneously. This means that they have very ambiguous features, but also that they have intrinsic features by containing opposite features. They create a story on their own, instead of combining with other predicates. These are not biological, but cognitive acts; that is, interpreting everything in life and perhaps suggesting some direction of life.

In the petroglyph, we can find figures showing such directivity from which I can draw predicates. This can be seen more in the case of marine animals than land animals. This directivity can be described using the predicate "proceed" from which I can infer the predicate "arrive."

proceed    →    arrive  
<Table12>

Directivity also appears in the figure of people in a boat in Figure7. Because of the indirect instrumentality of the boat, the directivity of it can be transposed to the cognitive dimension. Therefore, it can be described using a linkage of predicates selected from possible predicates in the paradigm.

proceed    →    arrive  
|  
|  
|

<Table13>

### 5. Three myths

I will infer three myths from the preceding analysis:

- 1) Myth of survival: Devouring is for survival, but it also inevitably involves death. It makes the cognitive logic in which death can be converted into life possible.
- 2) Myth of communication: Auto-communication and communication with others appear ambiguously. The message and receivers are also unclear, so we have to infer them from other stories in the petroglyph.
- 3) Myth of directivity: Human beings show spiritual inclinations. This is represented by the figure of people in a boat.

These three interrelated myths create the meaning of the petroglyph as a whole. One myth contextualizes another, and contributes to the interpretation of it. The myth of survival shows both the actual lives of human beings and animals and human cognition of those lives. This becomes the message of the myth of communication. Human beings codify their lives and deaths by communicating such myths to someone or interpreting them on their own in the paradoxical process of survival that contains both life and death. However, such codes tend to become symbols when there is a lack of a clear message or specific receiver due to their deep ambiguity. In the myth of directivity, the goal is not clear, so we have to infer it from the preceding two myths. If we find a medium that converts death into life or reality into cognition, that may be the ultimate goal of the myth of directivity.

\*Figures in this paper are cited from Hwang, Suyoung & Mun, Myeongdae, *Bangudae Ambyeokjogak*, Dongkuk University Museum, 1984.