THE RESISTANCE OF THE CHEROKEE WOMEN AGAINST "THE CIVILIZATION PROGRAM" (1789 – 1839)

Perlawanan Wanita Cherokee terhadap "Program Civilization" (1789-1839)

Siti Rojiyah 1 dan Djubertet Imam Muhni 1

American Studies
Graduate Studies Program Gadjah Mada University

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an effort to find out the roles of Cherokee women in the eighteenth century before the application of the civilization program. The objective of the civilization program peculiarly for Cherokee women are explored here to reveal the roles of Cherokee women both which were changed or eradicated through the application of the civilization program. This thesis also aims to analyze the result of Cherokee women resistance towards the civilization program.

In order to have a total comprehension on the issue, this thesis applies the interdisciplinary approach and studies the problems from the perspective of sociology, anthropology, literature, and religion. The sociological viewpoints enable the writer to comprehend the behavior and attitudes of Cherokee women in the era before the application of civilization program and when it is implemented. Anthropological viewpoint is used to find out the culture of Cherokee as non-literate society. Economic and political approaches are used to understand the condition of economic and politics when the civilization program took place. Religious perspectives are necessary to know the different viewpoints of Christianity and Cherokee religion especially about the position and men-women relationship. Literary approach is also employed to study the values of Cherokees that was represented in their myth, legend, song, and poetry.

The result of this thesis indicates that the struggle of Cherokee women were successful in many ways, such as in defending their authority of teaching the custom of their tribe to their beloved children, preserving their roles in their fields as farmers, maintaining their participation in society meeting, and persisting their own religion. Their struggles were successful because they had high motivation to preserve their old and traditional culture. Their refusal was influenced by the fact that Wive's gender norms were not appropriate to them. It was derived from the consideration that their important roles and position would change and vanish. On the other hand, their struggle was less successful in opposing the removal policy. It was not caused by the weakening of their motivation in struggle. The environmental condition or the unsupporting members are the main factor of this failure.

Key words: perspective, preserve, persist, refusal, vanish

1. Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Sanata Dharma, Yogakarta
2. Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogakarta

87
INTRODUCTION

The well-known program in the late of eighteenth century that was practiced by the United State government for Cherokee was the “Civilization Program”. This program was performed based on the consideration that Cherokees was in a difficult condition. They were also the uncivilized people who lived in natural world. The declining of the deer skin and war captives trade, and also the destruction as the result of the Revolutionary War brought Cherokee and the other tribe in the Southeastern in a deteriorate situation. This situation was aggravated by the spread of a series of epidemics. All of this condition emerged the sympathy among Europeans. European believed that the condition of the Indian might be bettered if they civilized Native America (Pearce 60). Civilization, therefore, was regarded as the best way to bring the Cherokees to a better condition and to save them from the extinction.

The idea to civilize Native American was not a new one. In the sixteenth century when Whites came to Carribbean, Native America was a creature whose way of life showed that they were not civilized and Christian (Pearce 4). The idea to call the Native American as savage or uncivilized people, according to Pearce, was based on the culture of Native American which was different with the culture of Whites. Native American became important for Whites consideration was just for showing that they were civilized men and Native American were not (5).

The civilization program had some purposes. One of those purposes was dedicated to Cherokee women. Since the culture of Cherokees was different with Whites, the United Stated was eager to make an alteration for Cherokee women. Before the coming of European, most of the southeastern Indian tribes, including Cherokee, were matrilineal. Women’s status was central in the tribe. Women had many power and role in their society. They had a responsibility in the family, economic, politics and religious life. In the family, women became a mother and housewife. In the economic life, Cherokee women farmed and men hunted. This division of labor according to the gender based on the myth of Kanati and Sehu that gave the explanation why men and women in their society lived basing on this division. In political life, Cherokee women, in their position as a matron, gave their great influence in selecting the chiefs of their tribe and making a decision for their war captives. They also could become a warrior and chief in their tribe.

The “Civilization Program”, therefore, wanted to change the matrilineal culture of Cherokees. Karen Anderson and Theda Perdue studied that Native American faced intensified efforts by Whites to civilize them
through a process of gender-specific acculturation or the transformation process of gender conception (Anderson 37 and Perdue 112). Whites’ efforts to civilize Cherokee women by applying the acculturative of gender conception was based on the reality that Cherokee women had a central position in this tribe. They had the authority and a significant role in the family, economic, religion, and political life. The matrilineal culture of this society was not the same as what Whites society exercised, since the Whites were patriarchal. There was a difference form of society between Cherokees and Whites, as a result, Whites encouraged the shifting of the form of Cherokee society into their own form. Matrilineal society should be shift to patriarchal society through a transformation process of gender conception (Allen 22 and Anderson 38).

The transformation or acculturation process of gender conception became the ultimate way to civilize Cherokee women. The goals of this process included the abandonment of their traditional values and activities, subordination to and economic dependence on husbands, and the loss of the crucial authority over their children (Anderson 37).

This study attempts to reveal the application of civilization program in changing and even deleting the traditional roles of Cherokee women to the role and position as what applied by White woman. Hence, this study will focus on the analysis of the resistance of Cherokee women to that program. This study also wants to examine the result of their resistance.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

In this study, the present writer uses library research as the method research in order to find out the data of the traditional role of Cherokee women, the civilization program, and the resistances of the Cherokee women toward that program. The writer makes use of some printed materials containing information related to the topic that she would discuss. The data is gathered from printed materials such as books, magazines, journals, and literary works and other data from the electronic media or the internet.

In elaborating the resistance of Cherokee women, the writer uses the American Studies perspectives of Henry Nash Smith’s interdisciplinary approach and McDowell’s Past-Present-Future theories.

Tremain Mc Dowell in his book American Studies (82) says that American Studies moves towards the reconciliation of tenses, the reconciliation of the academic discipline, and a third long range goal, namely a reconciliation of region, nation, and the world. Based on this view, the writer
will use the concept of tenses. The reconciliation of tenses means that this study needs to consider the concept of time sequences: past, present, and future. The sequences of past, present, and future are seen as a continuity and integration. The past experiences affect the present ones, and the present ones contribute to the future experiences. American studies does not only study the experiences at the past and present, but it also at the future. This study therefore studies the result of Cherokee women resistance towards the "Civilization Program".

The second theory which is applied in this study is the reconciliation of the academic disciplines. This shows that this research is based on sociological, anthropological, historical, economical, political, literary, and religion perspectives. The application of the interdisciplinary analysis was in accordance with what Henry Nash Smith proposed in his article "Can American Studied Develop a Method?" he pointed out that:

"The best thing we can do, in my opinion, is to conceive American Studies as a collaboration among men working from within existing academic disciplines but attempting to widen the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry. This implied a sustained effort of the student of literature to take account sociological, historical, and anthropological data and methods and of the sociologist or the historian to take account of the data and methods of scholarship in the fields of the arts" (qtd. in Kwiat and Turpich 34).

Sociological approach, to begin with, is employed to reveal the human behavior and the social settings that influence that behavior (Dobb 7). Therefore, in this study we can see various attitudes and behaviors of Cherokee women and how the society supports those behaviors.

Anthropology is closest to sociology in theory and research. It has concentrated on the cultures of non-literate societies (Cosser et al. 21). Since this research studies Cherokees, a society which handed down their culture orally, anthropological approach is also significant to be used to understand the oral tradition which seem to have very deep roots in Cherokees culture.

A historical approach is also important because this thesis relates to the past time. As what it was said by Louis Gottschalk that history is interested in the past and human individually and particular human action on the line of human development (9-10). The role of Cherokee women before the application of civilization program, the applications of civilization program, and the resistance of Cherokee women to that program were mainly the data that happened in the past.

Political and economical approaches are employed to elucidate the
condition of economics and politics in the eighteenth century. Religion perspectives is also applied for the purpose of getting the information of Christianity and Cherokees religion perspectives especially about the position and role of men and women. The data would be used to understand the two different perceptions.

In addition, the writer will try to apply literary approach. Some literary works especially Cherokees myth, legend, poetry, and songs are used to show the values in Cherokees society.

Analysis

The transformation or acculturation process of gender conception became the ultimate way to civilize Cherokee women. The goals of this process, according to Anderson who observed it, included the abandonment of their traditional values and activities, subordination to and economic dependence on husbands, and the loss of the crucial authority over their children (Anderson 37). For men, Whites urged the assumption of power over women and children that were ostensibly to be secured by masculine privilege in a capitalist economy and in political life (37).

1. The Application of the Civilization Program and the Resistance of Cherokee Women towards the Program

a. In the Family Life

The application of these programs included many aspects of life where Cherokee women play a significant role in it. In the family life, the United States wanted to take the authority of Cherokee parents to teach their children. In the colonial eyes, the culture of Cherokee was regarded as the culture of savage people, meaning the culture and lifestyle of uncivilized people. They lived in uncivilized environment which was full of forests and animals in it. The Cherokee children did not go to school or attended other educational institution (Driver 465).

The way to educate children according to English missionary showed that Cherokee was really a savage people. The methods of the Cherokee parents to educate their children were very different with the European. Cherokee parents usually used traditional literature (myth, legend, tale and song) to teach their children. They believed that through these literatures they could transfer the values of their tribe to their children. The way of teaching that focused on direct learning and the use of the traditional literature were an effective method in Cherokee.

In order to bring American Indians to the habits and manners of
civilized life, the English missionaries tried to establish schools for Cherokee children. Education, according to British and French, would bring these savage people to become civilized people. Udall stated that the responsibility obligation of the White missionaries to educate the American Indian including Cherokee children was based on their fundamental philosophy. Their philosophy stated that the condition of the Indian should be improved and corrected by a superior White father (qtd. in David 144). As a result, missionaries who came in Cherokee worked hard to teach Cherokee children so that they would become the civilized people.

In the early effort to civilize the Cherokee children, missionaries tried to establish the schooling days. Unfortunately the day school did not succeed. Most of the Cherokee children did not go to the school regularly. To solve the problem of irregular attendance that made the education program to civilize the Cherokee failed, some planners suggested the establishment of a boarding school. It was expected that Cherokee children would learn seriously without disruption from their environment. But more than that, the purpose to establish the boarding school was to separate Cherokee children with their society especially with their parents (David 145). It was done in order to lessen the influence of their parents and society. Minimizing the influence of the Cherokee parents that taught Cherokee children values of their tribe was the aim of the establishment of these boarding schools.

These boarding schools provided an elementary education for girls as well as boys. They learnt reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, geography, history, and the Bible. They also must dress uniform and wore a hat, a customary that was strange for Cherokee children. Those boarding schools also provided a domestic lesson for girls. A Baptist missionary told that at the American Board Schools, the Cherokee girls showed specimens of knitting, spinning, weaving and fine needlework. The Cherokee boys, in the other hand, must learn the way of farming. The missionaries believed that teaching the domestic tasks for the girls and the ways of farming for the boys was one way to civilize Cherokee. The civilized people, in Euro-American eye, placed women in the house with all of their domestic tasks and male in the farming. The missionaries trained all of the young Cherokee child to be non-Indian in every way, hopefully before the student followed his/her Indian predisposition (Boyer 117).

Facing these efforts, Cherokee mothers tried to resist by hiding their children when the agents wanted to send their children to the boarding schools, took their children whenever they wanted, and did not send their daughters to these schools. Mothers conducted all of these efforts since they wanted to attack the eradication of their culture in these schools.
c. In the Economic Life

In the economic life, Cherokee women were farmers and gatherers, while Cherokee men were hunter and also fisher. The Cherokees divided the labor division according to gender and it was based on their core myth. This myth explained that there was a balance position of Cherokee men and women in the division of labor and defined what kind of labor that Cherokee men and women should do. Their ancestor had practiced this division of labor in their society since the ancestral time (Perdue 14).

The coming of Whites with their idea to civilize the Cherokees, transforming the Cherokee economic system to White’s system, started to erase their traditional division of labor. The first step applied in this program, especially in economic life, was shifting the hunting way of life to agriculture. It was expressed in the content of the treaty that consisted of President Washington’s first Secretary of War, Henry Knox. This treaty explained that the federal government would furnish the Cherokees with “implements of husbandry” and send residential agents to give instructions in how it was practiced in the Cherokees. As a result of this “help”, according to Knox, “the Cherokees may be led to a degree of civilization” (Perdue and Green 11). The agriculture, therefore, was substitution of hunting.

Becoming civilized was not only shifting from hunting to farming. It also meant that the responsibility of agriculture rested on men. It was what civilized people constructed in their society on White’s perception: Whites men worked in the fields and the women in the houses (Axell 241).

In the relationship with the ownership of land, the Cherokees had a concept by themselves. The Cherokees regarded that they only had the right to use their land, and this right belonged to the entire members of their clan. It also could be said that land, for Cherokees, was the communal property. Since Cherokees was matrilineal, the right to use the land belonged to the female descent and the right to use or to farm in that land could be inherited to the members or the generation of the same clan (Perdue 136). Cherokees would not allow all of the members of the clans to sell or to give the land to whomever they desired (Boyer 98). This principle was also applied for the chiefs or the sachems of their clans. The same attitude was still persisted for the chiefs or sachems: “No chief had the right to sell a whole nation’s land” (98). Chief and individual did not have a prerogative to sell their land. Land, as Cherokees believed it, was their “mother earth” (Perdue 119). For them, their land was not a
the fate of war captives. As Beloved Women, they had the right to make a decision whether war captives should be killed or to be saved.

The form of Whites government was different with Cherokees form. In Anglo-American tradition, the right to participate in political activities such as jury duty, office holding, and voting was for men. Politics was considered as "a male domain", whereas women were simply not political beings (Kerber and Mathews 12). Further Kerber and Mathews described that in Anglo-American's view the right to participate in political activities, to vote and to hold the office, was "conditioned on the holding of property" (24). When a woman married, any property that held by that woman would be passed to her husband's control. He would hold both his own property and his wife's property. It therefore seemed logical to Whites that political rights be granted only to men (24).

Through the civilization program, Whites intended to bring Cherokees to their government pattern that eliminated the active participation of women in the political life, such as creating eight judicial districts and asking to these districts to elect their delegates to the National Council, establishing a National Superior Court to hear appeals from the district courts, electing the Principal Chief, John Ross, and disenfranchising women in the new constitution (Reid 61).

Whites also wanted to erase the role of Cherokee women in the war. Traditionally, Cherokees went to a war to avenge relatives who killed by enemy. The death of kin was a family matter, not a foreign issue. Because Cherokees was matrilineal, war itself directly concerned women (Perdue 88). It was reasonable that war and women had a relationship. Women always perpetuated clans and lineages. If one of members of her clan died because of killing, she would take a revenge on the killer: The attack on one member of a lineage meant an attack on that lineage, clan, and even tribe (88). Although not all of Cherokee women became warrior, Cherokee permitted their women to become a real warrior, fighting with the enemy such as Nancy Ward.

In 1806, Cherokees formed The Lighthouse or the National Police Force. It was Cherokee military unit which had a duty to protect the Cherokee against bandits (Perdue 139). The establishment of the Lighthouse took over the responsibility of the retaliation which traditionally rested on Cherokee women warriors.

The Cherokee mother resisted this program by continuing their participation in the local meeting. Cherokees regarded that their women had a power and useful suggestions in making a decision for their tribe.
d. In the Religious Life

Traditionally, Cherokee women involved in religious activities. Their roles in the religious life was important as well as in the family, economy, and politics. Whites with their civilization program wanted to lead these people to Christianity. In Whites' view, Cherokees were pagan and their beliefs in rituals are primitive (Allen 96). Whites could not understand why they must worship the spirit of animals or plants before hunting or cutting took place.

Whites believed that women were supposed not to be the priests or religious leaders. It was in accordance with the Apostle Paul's doctrine which stated that a woman was to "hold her tongue in church and be careful not to teach nor to usurp authority over the man. She must to be silent" (Kerber and Mathews 37). Whites regarded that intellectual activities such as becoming a priest with the duty to preach the Gospel was not suitable for women. Consequently, missionarieds did not also agree with Cherokee women shamans, and they also wanted to bring them to Christianity and force them to leave their position as shamans. Missionaries asserted that Cherokee women shamans were "influenced by Satan and therefore unable to perform the necessary function of womanhood" (45).

Missionaries, thus, tried to associate the doctrine of Christianity to Cherokee women. They usually held regular service, met privately, and even itinerated through out the nation on horseback (Perdue 167). This duty to Christianize Cherokee women did not only rest on men (preists).

Cherokee mothers were not interested to Christians doctrines. They could not accept the doctrine which placed them in subordinate position from their men. They believed that their position was in balance with men. They also could not accept if the position of Selu would be placed by Eve. Selu sacrificed her life for her children and gave the corn and beans for her children's subsistence. While Eve created sin for their children. Selu had met Eve, but her position could not be replaced. Missionaries was less successful to bring Cherokees to Christianity. From the collecting data, "only 1000 of 15,000 joined to churches (qtd. in Perdue 171)."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

