



Tribal education : a case study of Northern Cheyenne elders  
by Franklin Clay Rowland

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

Although culturally relevant education is recognized as a vital element for the self-determination of Indian people, success in this area has been limited and is essentially non-existent for the Northern Cheyenne people in southeastern Montana. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, an examination of the knowledge and the experiences of the tribal elders on the reservation today was conducted in order to get a more precise idea of how education is defined within the traditional framework of the Northern Cheyenne system. Second, the perspectives of the elders were used as a basis to make recommendations about how educational practice can adapt to the current needs of the Northern Cheyenne.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 elders in order to define the tribal concepts of wisdom and knowledge, the characteristics of Cheyenne teachers and students, the learning environment, and the role of education within the Northern Cheyenne community. Findings indicated a stark contrast between tribal and non-Indian views of education. Due to the oppressiveness of reservation life, the elders described how the holistic learning environment of the Cheyenne was ignored and violated by their experiences in the non-Indian government and Christian boarding schools. According to the Cheyenne, knowledge is perceived as a gift from the Creator, assumes a moral quality to benefit the community, and contrasts with the non-Indian practice of using education to assimilate and control.

The first phase of Cheyenne education must include dealing with the oppression and internal strife of the tribe. Tribal spirituality and mentorships should be involved in reservation education in order for learning to be meaningful for the purposes of the tribe. Conclusions and recommendations were made on the following topics: The Cheyenne Holistic System: A mechanism for Tribal Regeneration; The Latent Effects of Oppression; and The Primary Components of Cheyenne Education. Significantly, Dull Knife Memorial College, the tribal college on the reservation, can play an essential role in using the voice of the elders to -empower the community.

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APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

Although culturally relevant education is recognized as a vital element for the self-determination of Indian people, success in this area has been limited and is essentially non-existent for the Northern Cheyenne people in southeastern Montana. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, an examination of the knowledge and the experiences of the tribal elders on the reservation today was conducted in order to get a more precise idea of how education is defined within the traditional framework of the Northern Cheyenne system. Second, the perspectives of the elders were used as a basis to make recommendations about how educational practice can adapt to the current needs of the Northern Cheyenne.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 elders in order to define the tribal concepts of wisdom and knowledge, the characteristics of Cheyenne teachers and students, the learning environment, and the role of education within the Northern Cheyenne community. Findings indicated a stark contrast between tribal and non-Indian views of education. Due to the oppressiveness of reservation life, the elders described how the holistic learning environment of the Cheyenne was ignored and violated by their experiences in the non-Indian government and Christian boarding schools. According to the Cheyenne, knowledge is perceived as a gift from the Creator, assumes a moral quality to benefit the community, and contrasts with the non-Indian practice of using education to assimilate and control.

The first phase of Cheyenne education must include dealing with the oppression and internal strife of the tribe. Tribal spirituality and mentorships should be involved in reservation education in order for learning to be meaningful for the purposes of the tribe. Conclusions and recommendations were made on the following topics: The Cheyenne Holistic System: A mechanism for Tribal Regeneration; The Latent Effects of Oppression; and The Primary Components of Cheyenne Education. Significantly, Dull Knife Memorial College, the tribal college on the reservation, can play an essential role in using the voice of the elders to empower the community.

## CHAPTER 1

## BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Introduction

During the 1960's many people in this country demanded social change. Although social unrest, turmoil, and sometimes tragedy accompanied this movement for human dignity, seeds of reform were undoubtedly planted during this era of American history. Along with other segments of society that were systematically denied their human rights, the Native American was a beneficiary of a heightened sense of pluralism and equality in this society.

Although educational policies toward the Native American began in early colonial times, religious conversion and assimilation into the dominant culture were the driving themes until recent times (McNickle, 1973, p. 114). It was not until the establishment of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (P.L. 92-638) that tribes gained greater control over their own educational policies. With this legislation Indian tribes could contract with the federal government for services such as education, law enforcement, and health. Formerly these community functions were administered by the

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). According to this act, Indian control of education was perceived as an important element for the future development and progress of Native American communities.

Propelled by the sentiment for Indian self-determination, Congress passed the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act in 1978 (P.L. 95-471) and acknowledged that Indian communities could rightfully charter their own institutions of higher education. The importance of this legislation was twofold. First, by providing greater access to higher education, tribes could begin to address the desperate social and economic conditions on reservations. Second, the form and function of these new educational programs were to be culturally relevant to provide a basis by which Indian people could rebuild their tribal identities. Subsequent to the Tribal College Act, Indian institutions of higher education were firmly established. Today, tribal colleges number 24 and serve approximately 4,400 full-time students (Boyer, 1989, p. 30).

The distinguishing feature of Indian colleges is the dual nature of each of the school's mission statements. For example, the Blackfeet Community College mission provides that the college will "achieve a balance between educational advancement and cultural preservation" (Blackfeet Community College Catalog, p. 13). Stein

(1992), an authority on the history of tribal colleges, states that:

It is the philosophy and curricula which make tribally controlled colleges unique in United States higher education. Tribal community colleges have many aspects within their make-ups which are not different from other community colleges, but each has a statement adhering to its Native American (tribal) roots. These statements and academic programs which are Native American in nature have been deliberately inserted into the curriculum and philosophy to address the needs of tribal members. Each tribal college addresses its own tribal background in a philosophical statement, and each has developed curricula which enhance that tribal background. Tribal college founders and current participants believe that in order to succeed on the reservation, each college must be true to its tribal values and traditions and must carefully blend them with a comprehensive community college program of education. (p. 145)

From recent evidence it is clear that tribal colleges have been successful in forming culturally relevant academic programs. According to Boyer (1989), tribal colleges are a vital part of the reservation fabric, and "while non-Indian schools and colleges have long ignored Indian culture, tribal colleges view it as their curricular center" (p. 4). Moreover, "beyond the classroom, traditional values also are embedded in the very spirit of these institutions" (p. 4). In addition, Janine Pease-Windy Boy (1990), President of Little Big Horn College, indicates that her school "was designed and created over a period of about 20 years with the good wishes of elders who had an idea about our own scholarship, our own interest,

and our destiny" (p. 37). Further, Windy Boy stated that "we determined that we would have the largest department in our college called Crow Studies and have it based on that eminent community scholarship" (p. 38).

#### Statement of the Problem

In light of the foregoing examples, there are indeed tribal colleges effectively providing a culturally enriching experience for their communities. However, this task has thus far proven itself to be formidable for many tribal institutions. From his seminal study of the incorporation of Indian values within tribal colleges, Bad Wound (1990) found that with few exceptions, board members, administrators, faculty, and staff were sorely lacking in their understanding of how their school's mission statements could effect institutional life (p. 101). Further, in reference to integrating tribal cultures in the institutional setting of tribal colleges, Bad Wound concluded that "in view of their missions to promote tribal culture, the issue is how tribal beliefs frame the actions of constituents in tribal colleges. My analysis suggests that they do not" (p. 265).

In addition, from interviews conducted with Montana tribal colleges (St. Pierre & Rowland, 1990), it was found that a number of schools have yet to emphasize tribal cultures (p. 217). Indeed, it was insisted by one tribal

college president that cultures must be infused throughout the community and not a minor fraction of it and that it is naive and unrealistic for reservation communities to expect the colleges to act alone or take the lead role in perpetuating tribal cultures (Belcourt, Gordon, Personal Communication, January 23, 1990).

Tribal cultures and philosophies provide the moral and intellectual rationale for the practice of Indian higher education. From the evidence provided thus far, the task of blending theory and practice in Indian higher education is indeed difficult. However, Friere (1970) states that "praxis" or thinking critically about the past is careful reflective thought before taking actions in order to make intelligent choices in society.

Just as an objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance. If men produce social reality (which is the "inversion of praxis" turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for men. (p. 36)

By looking at the past a sense of purpose will be found about the future. Horton (1989) succinctly said, "I would rather know where I am going and not be able to get there, than be able to get there and not know where I am going" (p. 9). In regard to the professional field of education, "true professionals know not only what they are to do, but are also aware of the principles and the reasons for so acting" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 9).

In addition, careful reflection on the possible consequences of educational practice must be an ongoing process. "Learning is not an isolated inquiry; instead it is exploration, followed by reflection and by action. In this dialectical process, the action stimulates a need for further inquiry. This in turn is followed by reflection and action in a continuous pattern" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 14).

Institutional mission statements should clearly define how the philosophical underpinnings of the organization will be implemented. Bolstered by legislation and the continuing legitimization of Indian higher education within the greater realm of American higher education, the tribal college movement has certainly made strides since its inception nearly two decades ago. However, there are factors that have evidently refocused Indian higher education. For example, the demands of accreditation authorities outside the reservation, such as the Northwest Accreditation Association, have resulted in an unfair balance away from efforts of cultural maintenance within tribal colleges (Bad Wound, 1990, p. 276). In addition, because of fiscal constraints tribal colleges have been limited in the degree to which they can pursue their mission to culturally enrich their communities (Sooktis, personal communication, April 2, 1990).

For those tribal leaders and congressmen who had the foresight and wisdom to frame Indian self-determination, tribal colleges were deemed an essential ingredient for Indian communities to rise above nearly 200 years of federal domination. Although various factors may have led some tribal colleges neglecting or ignoring the charge they have inherited, the diminution of tribal cultures within tribally controlled colleges can no longer go unheeded. In order to maintain credibility within the tribal communities, each of the schools must critically examine how the institutional life of the college is guided by tribal culture and philosophy.

The framers of Indian controlled higher education set out on a noble and worthy journey in 1968. In order to continue in the true spirit of Indian self-determination, it is imperative that each school become attuned to the cultural needs of their respective tribes. In short, Indian higher education, which is one major measure of Indian self-determination, can only occur when the successes of tribal colleges are in harmony with the ideals of Indian communities.

#### Statement of Purpose

The aim of this study was to help resolve the current dilemma facing the Cheyenne. By using qualitative research strategies such as interviews, the fundamental concepts of

the educational process of tribal people can be effectively explored (Bad Wound, 1990, p. 268). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of selected Northern Cheyenne elders concerning the educational process and the implications these have for the tribal college and other elements present within the system of education on the Northern Cheyenne reservation.

For nearly two centuries federal policies have been aimed at dispossessing the American Indian (Deloria, 1985, p. 4). By not accepting or appreciating the richness and complexity of Indian cultures, government mandates have often tried to assimilate Indian people (McNickle, 1973, p. vi). In addition, because arbitrary federal policies have often been adverse to Indian people, it is only recently that Indian people have gained minimal control of how their world is interpreted.

As a substrata of a larger system, American education has not acknowledged the culture of Indian people. Rather, American educational policies and practices toward Indian people assumed that tribal cultures were destined to succumb to the dominant society (Guyette, 1983, p. xiii). Although American Indians have diverse cultures and languages, they stand apart from non-Indians in their belief systems and worldviews (Cornell, 1987, p. 63).

Like many other tribes, the Northern Cheyenne are marked by a distinct interpretation of life (Sooktis, 1976,

pp. 1-14), yet no one has critically analyzed the educational needs of the Cheyenne. Traditional values and current needs have not been systematically examined. The views of the elders of the community have not been incorporated into the argument. Thus, there has been a general failure to uncover Cheyenne perceptions of education and how these realities can be infused within the institutional setting.

By not having a coherent and systematic connection between educational theory and practice education may be random at best and adverse in the worst case. For the Northern Cheyenne, who have been historically isolated on the reservation, the vigorous new spirit of self-determination combined with the demands of modern society have placed an increasing importance on the need for praxis for Cheyenne education.

The integrity of the Cheyenne worldview was recently tested. During the 1970's, geological studies confirmed that the reservation was resting on massive reserves of low sulfur coal. Based on the market value of this resource, it was calculated that if coal was mined, every member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe could receive an excess of a million dollars. Considering the impoverished condition of reservation life, the potential for economic and social development (in many instances this development was based on non-Indian ideals) from coal was indeed great. After

carefully reflecting on ancient teachings and values, the Cheyennes chose not to mine their coal. However, despite the magnitude of this decision on the life of the tribe and implications it has for the contrast of being "Cheyenne" in the face of the main culture, the problem remains that the beliefs and culture of the Northern Cheyenne have yet to be defined in relation to the present systems of education on the reservation.

More recently, the tribe debated whether the reservation should have a public high school. Presently, there is one small dilapidated tribal K-12 school, and the only other option is for reservation youth to leave the reservation to attend nearby public or private schools. Proponents of the public school argued that having a new, large public school would mean less travel to schools outside the reservation. Conversely, those arguing against this school indicated that the tribal school at Busby, Montana, was chartered by the tribe and was represented by a school board which was elected from each of the districts on the reservation. Eventually, the tribal council voted to support the new public school. However, throughout these discussions, Cheyenne elders, who are the traditional and legitimate Cheyenne teachers, were never consulted in any systematic way, and their views were never critically examined.

In light of the foregoing circumstances on the Northern Cheyenne reservation, it is now apparent that Dull Knife Memorial College, the reservation tribal college, could play a vital role in reconciling the disquieting events that have recently unfolded. According to Boyer (1989), a primary aim of tribal colleges are to provide "long-standing cultural skills and beliefs that Indians can build a strong self-image and participate, with confidence, in the dominant society" (p. 4). In addition and more relevant to the needs of the Northern Cheyenne people is that part of Dull Knife Memorial College's Mission Statement that indicates that the school will "enhance and support the Northern Cheyenne cultural values, language, and traditions . . . for all students" (p. 9).

Undoubtedly, the Northern Cheyenne are having difficulties and ostensibly they could seek a resolution through their tribal college. Indian people have a distinct view of reality and when tested tribal groups like the Northern Cheyenne may choose alternatives very much unlike choices that would be made in the dominant culture. It is a safe assumption that education provides a vital role in transmitting culture for future generations. To date, however, little if any research exists describing how Cheyenne philosophy and beliefs can be incorporated within the present system of education on the reservation.

### Limitations

The focus of this study was limited to selected elders on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in southeastern Montana. Further, by imparting knowledge from a distinctive Cheyenne point of view, the contributions of the elders is reflective of a belief system which is not necessarily a part of the conventional paradigm of epistemological constraints (Deloria, 1993, p. 64).

### Definitions

Bands: The band was the traditional social organization by which the Cheyenne organized their society and law ways. Unlike Clans, which are familial, the composition of the band is made up of members who are not necessarily related.

Breed: With the advent of federal control over the Cheyenne, tribal members were entered on "Rolls" which were a comprehensive listing of tribal members and maintained by the federal government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Full-Blood" Cheyenne were those individuals that were recognized as full members of the tribe during the first phases of the roll process. Since then, certain Cheyennes have ancestors and family members that are of white or another

tribe's blood, and these individuals are considered "Breeds" and are of mixed-blood origin.

Cheyenne: For the purposes of this study, the tribal affiliation of the elders in this study was referenced in one of two ways. Therefore, the terms of Northern Cheyenne and Cheyenne were used interchangeably and were in reference to the enrolled members of the Northern Cheyenne reservation located in southeastern Montana. This tribe's name for themselves is "Tsistsistas" and means "The People." The Southern Cheyenne, who now live in Oklahoma, are differentiated from the Northern Cheyenne who chose to remain in the north during historical times.

Elder: Although elder primarily denotes chronological age in western society, this designation is a compilation of a number of variables according to the Northern Cheyenne perspective. Accordingly, being an "elder" in the Northern Cheyenne sense is indicative of experience along the Journey of Life, the gifts of knowledge provided by the Creator, the propensity to draw wisdom from knowledge, and the status one enjoys by virtue of service and sharing in the community.

Journey of Life: The spiritual quest of each individual Cheyenne beginning in the womb and ending upon death when the person would rejoin all of the ancestors in the spirit world.

Maheo: This is the Cheyenne name for the Creator. The terms Maheo and Creator will be used synonymously.

Reservation: Indian reservations are tracts of land that have been reserved for Indian people through treaty, congressional act, or executive order.

Tribe: The Northern Cheyenne are members of a tribe of Indians which is one of more than 500 nation-wide. By virtue of being the original inhabitants of this country, tribes were at one time sovereign political entities. However, due to their incompatibility and resistance to the Euro-American presence in this country, these tribes were either disbanded or removed to reservations in which they now reside. In lesser cases certain identifiable tribes, such as the Little Shell Band of the Chippewa in Montana, are unrecognized by the federal government and therefore have no rights, lands or powers afforded to other tribes.

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIVING THE CIRCLE

Introduction

A primary function of a literature review exists because "no problem in education exists in isolation from other areas of human behavior. Consequently, there is always some research study, some theory, something related to the problem that can be reviewed to inform the study at hand" (Merriam, 1988, p. 63). Although a plethora of historical, anthropological, and sociological research exists regarding the Northern Cheyenne tribe of Indians, these studies are narrow in their approach and understanding. Moreover, little research has been conducted regarding the worldview of the Northern Cheyenne, and nothing has been completed examining how this way of knowing could be incorporated within the contemporary views of education.

In effect, the purpose for Northern Cheyenne education has been virtually ignored. Indeed, the problem of this study indicates that the values and beliefs of the Northern Cheyenne, which is espoused by the tribal elders who are the traditional leaders of the tribe, have yet to be

systematically included in reservation educational programs. In order to accomplish this, being Northern Cheyenne must be clearly understood particularly in terms of the tribe's holistic worldview. Within this context the role of the tribal elders as caretakers of Cheyenne knowledge will be discussed. In addition, the Cheyenne concept of wisdom and its relationship to education will be described. Finally, a discussion of recent barriers to the Cheyenne way which in effect have prevented the Northern Cheyenne from incorporating their way of knowing within the formal systems of education on the reservation today will be presented.

### The Northern Cheyenne

Now residing on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in southeastern Montana, the Northern Cheyenne are essentially two bands: the Suhtai and the Tsistsistas. These two bands are of the same Algonkin linguistic stock and have now lived together since the early nineteenth century (Grinnell, 1915, p. 3). The following will describe who the Northern Cheyenne are and what changes they have had to adapt to particularly after contact began between the Cheyenne and the non-Indian. The Cheyenne are now referred to as the "Northern" Cheyenne and are distinguished from their cousins the "Southern" Cheyenne now living in Oklahoma. In this section, the terms of Cheyenne, Northern

Cheyenne, Tsistsistas, and Suhtai are used interchangeably in reference to the tribal group which is the focus of this study. This review will also provide anecdotal information about the Southern Cheyenne.

### Pre-reservation History

According to legend, the Cheyenne first lived in the upper Great Lakes regions of present day Canada. Because of harsh weather and the difficulty of survival, the Cheyenne moved south into the western Great Lakes region (Weist, 1970, p. 10). From pressure by the Ojibwa, Cree, Assiniboine, and Sioux, the Cheyenne began moving westward and out onto the Plains by the middle of the eighteenth century (p. 20). By the end of the same time frame, the Cheyenne ventured further west and were living with the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people along the upper Missouri River near present day Bismarck, North Dakota (Grinnell, 1915, p. 10). While in the Missouri River area, the Tsistsistas met the Suhtai. According to legend, a fight ensued when these two tribes met. It was during this skirmish that someone realized that both parties were speaking the same language. After holding a joint council, the tribes befriended one another and began to camp together.

### The Plains Era

After the introduction of the horse in about 1750, the Cheyenne began to move from their horticultural existence on the Missouri to dependence on buffalo hunting out on the plains (Weist, 1977, p. 19). By 1800, the Cheyenne completely abandoned their sedentary village existence along the Sheyenne River in favor of one that was based on an equestrian way of life. During the 1830's, the Suhtai were incorporated and became one of 10 bands within the Tsistsistas system (p. 24).

In 1832, Bent's Fort was established along the upper Arkansas River in present day Colorado. During this time, the tribe split into two groups. The "Southern" Cheyenne led by Yellow Wolf, head chief of the Hair Rope band, chose to stay south and trade at Bent's Fort. By this time, the "Northern" Cheyenne located themselves in the north near the Black Hills (Grinnell, 1915, p. 37). After this time, the Northern Cheyenne are composed of part of the original Tsistsistas, which means "The People" when translated from Northern Cheyenne, and most of the Suhtai.

### The Invasions of the Homelands

During the late 1840's, particularly after the discovery of gold in California in 1849, the United States government was compelled to make a treaty with the Plains

tribes in order to insure the safety of whites moving westward through Indian lands (Weist, 1970, p. 44). In 1851, the Cheyenne like many of the other Plains tribes signed the Horse Creek Treaty at Fort Laramie. This treaty stipulated that lands comprising a good part of the present state of Colorado and the surrounding area (see Figure 1) would be reserved for the Southern Cheyenne. In 1858, gold was discovered in the present area of Denver, Colorado. Again, under the guise of protecting migrating whites, the government had the Southern Cheyenne sign another treaty. According the Fort Wise Treaty of 1861, the Southern Cheyenne could claim only a sliver of land in southeastern Colorado (Andrist, 1982, p. 74).

During this time, the government supported the wanton slaughter of buffalo (pp. 147-48). The Southern Cheyenne relied almost entirely on the buffalo for food, clothing, and shelter. Tragically, in the years that followed the Fort Wise Treaty, it has been reported that buffalo could not be found within a 200 mile radius of the reserved lands in southeastern Colorado, and many southern Cheyennes were forced to migrate off their "reservation" in order to provide for their families (p. 75).



Figure 1. Cheyenne Lands - 1851. Taken from A History of the Cheyenne People by Tom Weist.

At War

While hunting off the reservation, a band of Southern Cheyenne were slaughtered in what has become known as the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864. This band, which was composed largely of old people, women, and children, was under the renowned peace chief, Black Kettle. Black Kettle had worked hard to maintain good relations with the government. This slaughter of innocent Cheyennes marked a turning point in relations between the tribe and the United States government. After Sand Creek, all of the Southern Cheyennes except for Black Kettle and a few of his followers moved northward to join the Northern Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho in war against the government. This pivotal moment in Cheyenne history is discussed at length by Grinnell (1915), Weist (1970), and Hoebel (1960).

The Northern Cheyenne, who also signed the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, were at this time located in the Black Hills region of present day South Dakota and were closely allied with the Dakota and Arapaho. After the Southern Cheyenne joined their northern cousins, this marked the first time the two had been together in more than two decades (Weist, 1970, p. 54).

During the 1860's to mid 1870's, these tribes effectively repelled white expansion into their lands and government attempts to subdue them (55-75). In 1868, the

government was forced to abandon its post at Fort Fetterman along the Bozeman Trail near present day Cody, Wyoming (p. 63).

However, in 1874, gold was discovered in the Black Hills of present day South Dakota. These lands were considered sacred to the Dakota and Cheyenne. Very quickly after the discovery of this coveted metal, the tribes were given an ultimatum to either get out of the Black Hills or become the mortal enemy of the government. When members of the Cheyenne, Sioux, and their allies did not comply, it became clear that war was inevitable (Andrist, 1982, p. 247). During this time, the Sioux and Cheyenne rightfully settled on "unceded Indian territory" in the Powder River country as established by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 (Weist, 1970, p. 68). However, an order directing all tribes in this area to move back on the reservation located further eastward out on the Plains was initiated in the winter of 1875-76. Not surprisingly, the "hostiles" in this region refused, and a contingent under General Custer was dispatched to subdue the Cheyenne, Sioux, and their Arapaho allies. In the battle of the Little Big Horn in June of 1876, the tribes were victorious. Government retaliation for this embarrassment was inevitable, and the victory was short-lived. By 1877, the Cheyennes were under the firm grasp of the military (Stands In Timber, 1967, p. 225).

In late winter of 1877, the Cheyenne who were under the direction of General Crook, unwittingly agreed to go to Oklahoma to stay with their relatives the Southern Cheyenne. They were told this visit did not have to be more than one year if they did not want it to be. The year in Oklahoma was filled with misery, sickness, and death. Although the government intended this stay to be permanent, the Northern Cheyennes under Little Wolf and Dull Knife eventually, in 1878, escaped and returned north (Weist, 1977, pp. 80-84).

By the early 1880's, the Northern Cheyenne were detained at Fort Keogh near present day Miles City, Montana, at Fort Robinson in Nebraska, and at other posts in and around the Powder River country. The Cheyennes at Fort Keogh befriended commanding officer General Miles. Because of this friendship, General Miles advocated for and was instrumental in acquiring a reservation for the Northern Cheyenne (Stands In Timber, 1967, p. 240).

#### Historical Summary

The Cheyenne adapted successfully to rapid changes around them. The perseverance of their society was fueled by the integrity of a distinct way of knowing. According to Weist (1970), a major theme in Cheyenne history is

the remarkable story of how during a period of less than 350 years, the Cheyenne were able to adjust to different environments and adapt to

what were essentially four different ways of life--as hunters and fishers living on the shores of lakes in Northern Woodlands, as planters living in earth lodges, villagers on the Minnesota, Sheyenne and Missouri rivers, as mounted buffalo warriors in the Black Hills and on the Great Plains, and their more recent years on the reservation. (p. 6)

Although ravaged by warfare against invading whites, by diseases introduced from the Old World, and by misguided and often tragic federal policies, the moral and ethical belief system endured. Today the Cheyenne belief in Maheo the Creator, the importance of spiritual cleansing and renewal, and the tantamount belief in tribalism continue to persist and indicate that the Cheyenne have a profound knowledge of the world and their place in it. Indeed, Cheyenne myth and cosmology contain essential directives for the proper conduct of modern Cheyennes (Moore, 1974, p. 12)

#### The Reservation

The Tongue River reservation was established in 1884 by executive order of President Chester A. Arthur. Today this reservation, which is properly referred to as the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, is located within the Big Horn and Rosebud counties of southeastern Montana (Figure 2). Of the 446,784 acres that comprise the reservation, approximately 98% or approximately 436,000 acres is Indian owned. Slightly more than 2% or 10,000

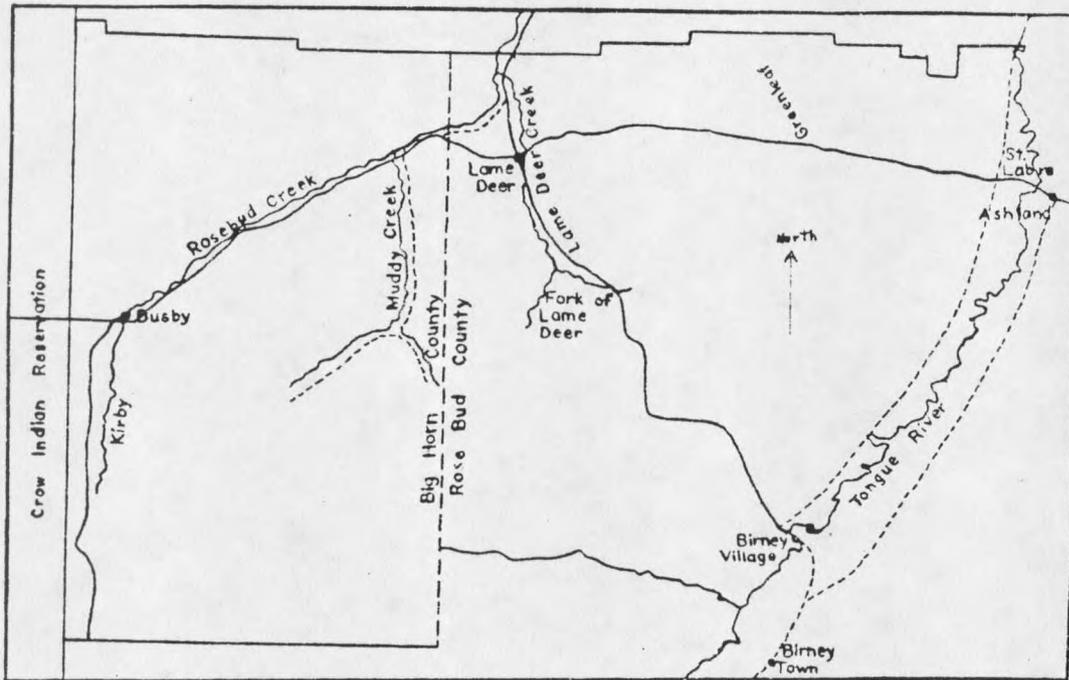


Figure 2. The Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Taken from A History of the Cheyenne People by Tom Weist.

acres is owned by non-Indians (Northern Cheyenne Research Project, 1977, pp. 4-15).

Currently, 2,213 Northern Cheyenne live on the reservation. This total equals 81.78% of those with a tribal affiliation on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. In addition, 344 or 12.71% are "Other Indians," and 149 or 5.51% are "Non-Indians." Presently, there are 2,706 people living on the Northern Cheyenne reservation (pp. 4-15).

### The Cheyenne Worldview

Because of the sacred nature of Cheyenne religion, very little is known about it by the non-Indian lay person. However, the important ceremonies and rituals of the Tsistsistas are widely discussed by such scholars as Powell (1969) and Grinnell (1923). The works of these authors can be drawn upon to provide a brief explanation of the cultural heroes of the Tsistsistas and the ceremonies which they gave to the Cheyenne and to reveal important insights into the belief systems of the Northern Cheyenne. Precise models and descriptions of the worldview of the Cheyenne are delineated in the final portion of this section.

### Cheyenne Cultural Heroes

The Suhtai and Tsistsistas have two cultural heroes that brought sacredness and law to the people. Erect Horns of the Suhtai instructed the Cheyenne in the proper way of

living through the Sacred Buffalo Hat, the Sun Dance, the Sweat Lodge, and the Buffalo Ceremonies. Sweet Medicine of the Tsistsistas taught the Cheyenne the use and purpose of the four Sacred Arrows. Both of these heroes received their instructions and accompanying ceremonies for these sacred objects from the Creator. Revealing the unanimity of the tribe, all of the ceremonies are held in reverence by all bands of Cheyenne (Grinnell, 1962, p. 337). In addition, Sweet Medicine was given a code of laws that were to be used to govern all of the Cheyenne people. From these instructions, the Cheyenne established a clear and meaningful definition of reality in traditional times.

#### Cheyenne Ceremonies

Because the Sun Dance is held annually and is witnessed by the entire tribe, it is the most widely known on the reservation today. The Sun Dance is a renewal ceremony and is conducted during the summer months when the Cheyennes gather together. During this time, a pledger, someone who has made a promise to dance in the Sun Dance and endure suffering from this ceremony, demonstrates spiritual obligations in the presence of the entire tribe. During this ceremony, the pledger publicly thanks the Creator for hearing his plea and seeks pity for his suffering in the Sun Dance medicine lodge. From this suffering the Cheyenne believe that the Creator would grant

new life to their loved ones and to the entire tribe for the coming year (Powell, 1969, p. 612).

The Sweat Ceremony is a purifying ceremony. In order to conduct this, a Sweat lodge is constructed and is covered with robes. After rocks are heated, they are placed in the lodge. Those who are participating must enter the lodge in a prescribed order, and the Sweat lodge door is then closed. During the Sweat, prayers are offered for all those in the Sweat, and additional prayers are said for those who need it in the community. During this time, water is poured on the rocks in the lodge to intensify the heat of the Sweat. After a prescribed number of "rounds," the Sweat is complete.

Ceremony and ritual surround the purification and maintenance of the sacred objects: The Sacred Hat and Arrows. These sacred objects represent a covenant between the Creator and the Cheyenne. The care and protection of these objects document the good standing the tribe has with the Creator. Conversely, if something was to happen to one or both of these objects, it is believed that something bad could befall the tribe unless repentance and cleansing occurs.

Perhaps the foremost scholar on the sacred traditions of the Tsistsistas, Powell (1980) states,

To the people, tribal history is sacred. For their history centers upon the Prophets Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns, great holy men who are

historical personages to the Cheyennes just as truly as John the Baptist and Moses are historical personages to Christians and Jews. In the same way, traditions concerning Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns are both truth and fact. (p. 11)

### Cheyenne System of Reality

The worldview of the Cheyenne is addressed by such authorities as Campbell (1987), Turpin (1975), and Sooktis (1976). In discussing this worldview, they describe the Cheyenne concepts of physical and spiritual realities as well as the perception of the individual, the role of the community, and the sacredness of the circle of life.

### Physical Reality

According to Campbell (1987), the Cheyenne believe the universe is a system of interrelated parts. For example, the "Heammahestonev," above the ground, includes a three part sub-system. The first part "Otatavoom," blue sky space, houses the Sun, the Moon, the stars, and the Milky Way. "Setovoom," nearer sky space, includes the clouds, wind, birds, and all the holy places. "Taxtavoom," which is the air and is a gift from the Creator, provides the breath of life. Below the surface are two sub-parts: "Votostoom," which is that part of the Earth that holds the roots of plants and trees which provide life-giving nutrients, and "Nsthoaman" or deep Earth (p. 380).

In addition, Turpin (1975) suggests that the Cheyenne believe that the world has a limited energy quotient which diminishes as it is used and which must be recharged periodically through ritualistic arts. Because the world is seen as a harmonious unit, it is symbolized by the circle. To symbolically reflect the human existence and the regeneration of life through the four seasons, the circle is divided into four quarters with a special "power" for each quarter. Therefore, the number four has great cosmic significance (p. 1171-A).

The Cheyenne believe that nature is basically good, and people must keep in close harmony through careful and tight control. All living things share creation and a Creator and, therefore, are considered relatives. Each has its own purposes and unique qualities. People are dependent upon everything in creation for existence. Because all species of life are looked upon as tribes of "peoples," all species can communicate and learn from each other. Humans can change into other forms of life, and other species can change at will into people.

Regarding the material world, the Cheyenne believe that all goods should be shared generously with others even though they are private property (p. 1171-A). This rationale is based on the belief that human relationships and spiritual development are considered of higher value than economic or political achievement. Because sex

interests generate jealousy and hostility, they must be held to a minimum with chastity and abstinence admired in both men and women.

### Spiritual Reality

Each of the sub-parts of the Cheyenne system of reality have spirits associated with them that are helpers for the Cheyenne people. These spirits are beneficial to the people and act under the Great Spirit. Accordingly, Hoebel (1960) states the Cheyenne believe that:

The great objective or religious practice is to relate to the spirit beings in such ways that life will be enhanced. . . . They [spirits] are generous in their blessings upon mankind. They are not niggardly and withholding by nature. They are not vindictive, punishing, cruel, or fearsome; although there are things to be feared, neither Cheyenne religion nor worldview rests on fear of the "Gods." (p. 83)

Further, the Cheyenne believe that they cannot control nature. "It is one . . . which people must keep in close tune through careful and tight self-control. Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns warned the ancients of the decline of the Cheyennes which would take place if they failed to act as they were instructed" (p. 84).

According to Turpin (1975), four principles from the spiritual and ceremonial functions frame the worldview of the Cheyenne. First, the Cheyenne believe there is one principle deity, Maheo, who is the primary creator and the all encompassing spirit of the universe. Although regarded

as separate spirits, all other "powers" are in reality merely aspects of one spirit, Maheo. Humans are part of that spirit and a part of the Earth, which is regarded as "grandmother." The entire Cheyenne world is subjective with each "thing" having its own life and spirit. These spirits are basically beneficent, and humans are subordinate to supernatural forces and spiritual beings which possess superior knowledge. Every Cheyenne individual can receive supernatural power through the tutelage of the spiritual beings. Once gained, it is expected that this power be shared with fellow tribal members (p. 1171-A).

#### The Cheyenne Community

Tsistsistas believe the social order is fragile and is primarily threatened by aggressive tendencies in human character (p. 1171-A). For example, the killing of a Cheyenne by another Cheyenne pollutes the sacred tribal objects, the tribe, and the murderer who must be banished by the tribal authorities. Because the physical and spiritual worlds are intertwined, the Council of Forty-Four, which is the traditional government of the Cheyennes, derives its authority from the supernatural through Sweet Medicine and is supreme over all other elements in the society.

Though survival and prosperity are essential to promote the family and the community, the Cheyenne hold these endeavors in perspective by virtue of the belief that each individual is responsible to and for the members of the tribe and has a special obligation to care for the aged, children, and the needy. All land and sacred tribal objects are public property. Because respect and courtesy are the basis for all relationships, the Cheyenne understand not to be impatient nor too direct in dealing with others.

#### The Path of Life

Although life is sacred, the Cheyenne understood the duality in life and the potential for good as well as for bad in the nature of humankind. Thus, the Cheyenne believe that Maheo, the Creator,

blesses all living things in this way. His special blessing to human beings is the gift of breath/power (Omotome) and associated spiritual potential (Mahta Sooma) . . . under the direction of his parents, especially during the first twelve years of his life, the human being develops his Mahta Sooma. . . . When the Mahta Sooma is differentiated into its four parts, two of them "good" (representing the ordered cultural existence of man), two of them "crazy" (representing his unordered animal heritage), the individual will demonstrate in his behavior that he knows the difference; that is, comprehends the moral order within which he must live. (Straus, 1978, p. 2)

The order of existence is demonstrated by the Journey of Life (Sooktis, 1976, p. 2) (see Figure 3). In regard to















































































































































































































































































































































