

# Tax Collection Practices Of The Tagins From Tibet: A Historical Perspective.

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## Abstract

Tax collection serves as a pivotal mechanism for resource mobilization within economic and socio-political systems, shaping interactions between communities and governing entities. This study examines the historical tax collection practices of the Tagin community, with a particular focus on the Nah and Mra subgroups, in their economic engagements with Tibet, an independent sovereign entity during the period under consideration. By systematically tracing the sources and mechanisms through which the Tagin procured taxes from Tibet, the research elucidates the socio-economic dynamics that facilitated these transactions and explores the factors contributing to the respectful treatment extended to these tribal groups by Tibetan authorities. The analysis reveals a distinctive economic relationship between the Tagin and Tibet, characterized by mutual dependence and structured exchange, which likely positioned the Nah and Mra subgroups as significant economic hubs within regional trade networks. Situated within contemporary academic discourse, this study contributes to anthropology, economic history, and post-colonial studies by highlighting indigenous agency in pre-modern economic systems. It challenges conventional narratives by centering the role of tribal communities in shaping regional economic landscapes and enriches discussions on sovereignty, cross-border trade, and cultural exchange, offering new insights into the complexities of pre-colonial economic and socio-political interactions.

**Keywords:** Tax Collection, Tagin, Nah, Mra and Tibet

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## I. Objectives Of The Study

- To find out the reasons that established for Tagin to collecting tax from Tibet.
- To analyze what were the ways of collecting tax from Tibet.

## II. Methodology

The present work is mainly descriptive and analytical in nature. The descriptive method is used to write acquiring data in the way, it was being told. To make the data further more accurate, it is being carried out by analytical method. Wherein, each and every aspect of data does comprehensively cross examination with the available sources for the less error would be there in the work. For the collection of data, it is used both primary and secondary data ways of collection. For the primary data, mixed interview schedule and field survey is used to gather the information. And for the collection of secondary data, books, thesis and articles are used.

## III. Introduction

The Tagins are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They are said to belong to the Abu Tanyi group of the people. They are primarily residing in the Upper Subansiri district, from Dumporijo to Taksing circles, forming a majority of the population. Apart from this, they are also dispersed in the neighboring regions such as Mechuka circle of the Shi Yomi district, Ligu and Liruk area of the Kamle district and some parts of the Papum Pare district.

According to 2011 population census, the total population of Tagin tribe is 62,931. Within Tagin population, they are categorized into number of clans, represented by their clan-based organisations (CBO) which are also known as "Society". At present, the Tagins have twenty clan-based organizations namely Bagang, Tamin, Nalo, Leyu, Boning, Dukam, Sunyi, Dugam, Heche, Topo, Tator, Reri, Kojum, Pombu, Yingki, Gyama Maying, Gumsing, Cherom etc, which are the registered societies under the umbrella of Tagin Cultural Society (TCS) which is the apex body for the entire Tagin community probably wherever they may stay.

Each clan-based organization is subsequently divided into following sub-clans or clans. For example, the sub-clans like Raji, Leriak, Gumsar, Gumja, Gumto, Nidak, Digli etc comes under the Tamin Welfare Society (TWS). Similarly, Gyadu, Natam, Nacho, Doyom etc comes under the Bagang Welfare Society (BWS) and so on.

In the broader sense of nomenclature, as informed by the Tibetan worldview, the Tagins along with the Nyishis, the Galos, the Apatanis, the Adis and the Idu Mishmis comes under the nomenclature of Lopa tribes, due to their “barbaric” mannerisms. Thus, the relationship between these tribes with the Tibetan people needs a review.

### **Tagin-Tibet Relations.**

Like other peripheral tribes such as the Nyishi, Adi, Monpa, Mishmi etc who were neighbors of the Tibet in the past, the Tagin too had a relation with it. Before the advent of the present Indian government system, like other tribes, the Tagins mainly depended on the Tibet in terms of exchange goods and services, which is called *Yira Lwkmi Sunam*. This could be better elaborated in the following statement ‘*Nyipak nyigam nyitv chaatv madv ngulu gv nyi kurium kulu lokv, Nyimv moku vngdu nala dwrw tibam lagabv*’. Our elders, when we are asked them about our past generation, used the above statement to explain their relationship with the Tibet. which can be roughly translated into as:

“We, Tagins, had a good economic known relations with Tibet (Nyimv) since the time immemorial for our survival in day-to-day life before our merger into India.”

The economic activities and tax collection practices of the Tagin tribe in Arunachal Pradesh were notably distinct and more pronounced compared to those of other peripheral tribes in the region. In addition to engaging in barter trade with Tibet, the Tagins also levied various forms of taxation on Tibetan counterparts. This tax collection was primarily administered by the Nah and Mra clans, which are affiliated with the Kojum Welfare Society (KWS), a registered clan- based organization under the Tagin Cultural Society (TCS). The Nah and Mra clans primarily reside in the last two administrative circles of the Upper Subansiri district, specifically Limeking (Mra) and Taksing (Nah).

The Nah and Mra clans, as border-dwelling Tagin communities, benefit from their geographical proximity to Tibet, which has historically positioned them as significant actors in the eyes of Tibetan authorities. This strategic importance stems from their ancestral lands, specifically Longju (Mra) and Lung (Nah), which are situated within the Tsari district of Tibet.

**Pilgrimage and Religious Sites:** The Tsari region is revered as a sacred landscape due to the presence of significant religious sites, including *Dakpa Siri* (also known as Takpa Siri), a revered crystal mountain, *Purang Yamju* (or Potrang Lake), a holy lake, and various protective deities such as *Dorjee Phagmo*, *Tsari Shingkyong*, and *Dorje Yudronma* (Huber, 1999). These sites are located within a contested territory between India’s Upper Subansiri district and China’s Tibet Autonomous Region. For Tibetans and their religious leaders, the Tsari region, particularly *Dakpa Siri*, holds profound spiritual significance. It is believed that visiting this sacred mountain at least once in a lifetime bestows blessings and purifies past misdeeds, fostering spiritual renewal.

The Tibetans, along with Buddhist devotees and tourists, undertake pilgrimages to *Purang Yamju*, known as *Niger* or *Kingkor*, annually. Additionally, every twelve years, a significant circumambulation (*Loger* or *Ringkor*) of *Dakpa Siri* is performed, a month-long pilgrimage involving a complete circuit (*Kora*) of the sacred mountain. This twelve-year pilgrimage attracts a substantial number of devotees, reportedly drawing participants from across the Tibetan region (*Nyimv Moku*), as well as from Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim, rendering it a global pilgrimage event of considerable religious and cultural importance.

**Inaugural Ritual Daapo Ceremony:** Prior to the commencement of the circumambulation, Tibetan authorities invited representatives or leaders from the Nah and Mra clans to the Migyitun district to participate in a ceremonial ritual known as *Daapo* (Krishnatry and Pandey, 1997). This ceremony was likely officiated by religious figures from both sides, including Tibetan Lamas and Tagin priests (*Nyibv* or *Nyibu*) from the Nah and Mra clans (Huber, 1999). During the *Daapo* ceremony, the Tagin representatives pledged not to harass or attack Tibetan pilgrims and tourists, ensuring their safe and peaceful passage through Tagin territory. If necessary, the Tagins also committed to protecting and guiding the pilgrims against potential threats from hostile tribes. This pledge was formalized through the ritual sacrifice of yaks, symbolizing a binding agreement akin to a legal treaty, referred to as *Daapo*, which served as a rite of peace and friendship (Krishnatry, 2005).

Within Tagin tradition, this ceremony is known as *Daapo Pvnang* or *Pvnaam Uyu*, likely referenced by Geeta Krishnatry in her travel diary. The ritual, performed by Tagin priests through animal sacrifices, aimed to invoke protection and guidance from epidemics, misfortunes, and unforeseen adversities, while reinforcing the commitment to uphold the vows made in the presence of spiritual entities. Thus, ensuring the safety and guidance of pilgrims was a primary objective of the *Daapo* ceremony for both the Tibetans and the Tagins (Nah and Mra).

The necessity of this agreement was underscored by the international scope of the month-long circumambulation, which attracted pilgrims from various countries seeking to visit the sacred sites of Tsari. Consequently, it was incumbent upon the Tibetan authorities to ensure the safety and security of these visitors.

Additionally, the influx of international pilgrims likely generated royalty taxes for the Tibetan government, which may have been a key factor motivating their proactive organization of the pilgrimage. To facilitate this, the Tibetan government-initiated preparations months in advance, including the collection of nationwide donations and sponsorships through appointed officials.

As the *Daapo* ceremony involved Tagin priests, adherence to the agreement was not only a practical necessity but also a cultural imperative, given the high value placed on upholding oaths and vows in Tagin custom during that era. This mutual commitment reinforced the ceremonial bond between the Tibetans and the Tagins, ensuring the protection of pilgrims and the smooth execution of the sacred pilgrimage.

**Tax Collection Process:** Following the conclusion of the *Daapo* ceremony, the Tibetan government or its officials commenced the distribution of taxes to the Nah and Mra clans, primarily in the form of in-kind payments. These included various types of clothing such as *jvtv lwlik* (full-length red coat), *jvtv* (large cloth), *namu* (woolen cloth), *namming* (knee-length black half coat), and *gunang* (light knee-length cloth), as well as local ornaments including *riokse* (local sword), *talu* (aluminum plate), *tasing* (bead), *maji* (Tibetan ritual bell), *kaji* or *kotv* (precious bangle), *kopu* (ordinary bangle), *jungrung* (earring), *daaching* (Tibetan singing bowl), and *ayin papok* (prayer tower or Buddha stupa). Additional items provided encompassed *alu* (salt), *jaa* (potato), *komla* (apple), *jakok* (onion), *svya* (sheep), *siki* (horse), *siyak* (yak), *mobuk* (gun), *pala* (indigenous ice cow from Tibet), *nyimv so soyab* (equivalent to modern butter and ghee), *mapv* (barley powder), and various utensils. According to Mra clan accounts, each household reportedly received substantial quantities, such as 30 yaks, 30 bags of salt, 30 pieces of *jvtv lwlik*, and 30 pieces of *jvtv*, among other items. Notably, three types of Tibetan swords were also distributed: the less valuable *water sword* and *fire sword* (collectively known as *Riokmi* or *Riokching Riokse* in Tagin language) and the highly prized *rainbow sword* (*Rioktv Riokse*), valued for its craftsmanship and cost. This month-long tax distribution ceremony was referred to as *Dolo Kinaam* or *Kinaang*.

The allocation of these taxes was determined either by a pre-established uniform distribution or through negotiation. Uniform taxes were distributed equitably among households, as the population size during that period was relatively small and easily accounted for. In contrast, negotiated or bargained taxes often resulted in higher shares for skilled orators or group leaders. For instance, Tabe Mra is recorded as receiving the largest share in one such instance (Krishnatry, 2005). Bargaining typically occurred when the Tagins' expectations for tax quantities were not met, compelling the Tibetan authorities to meet these demands due to their reliance on safe passage through Tagin territory. A notable example from the 1956 circumambulation illustrates this dynamic: Tabe Mra, dissatisfied with his allocation, forcibly seized two additional yaks, reflecting tensions and occasional disputes among the Tagins over tax distribution.

Another instance involved a rivalry between Tabe Mra and Tayee (Gei) Mra, where Tayee's cunning reportedly secured him a larger share despite Tabe's leadership status within the Mra clan, leading to Tabe's frustration (Krishnatry, 2005). Historical accounts also suggest that during Pushing Mra's era, his monopolistic control over trade relations with Tibet sparked envy and discontent among other Mra clan members, as noted in Geeta Krishnatry's interviews with Pushing Mra's daughter-in-law, the mother of Tayee Mra. These accounts highlight the competitive and occasionally contentious dynamics among the Tagins in relation to tax collection.

The provision of these taxes served several critical purposes. First, they ensured that the Tagins would refrain from harassing or attacking Tibetan pilgrims, allowing safe and undisturbed passage through their territory. Second, they obligated the Tagins to protect the pilgrims from hostile tribes, such as the *Tinglo* or *Tingba*, and possibly lower Tagin groups, who were perceived as threats (Huber, 1999). Finally, the Tagins served as guides, porters, and translators for the Tibetans throughout the pilgrimage, facilitating the journey across challenging terrain. These multifaceted roles underscored the strategic importance of the Nah and Mra clans in maintaining peaceful and secure access to the sacred Tsari region.

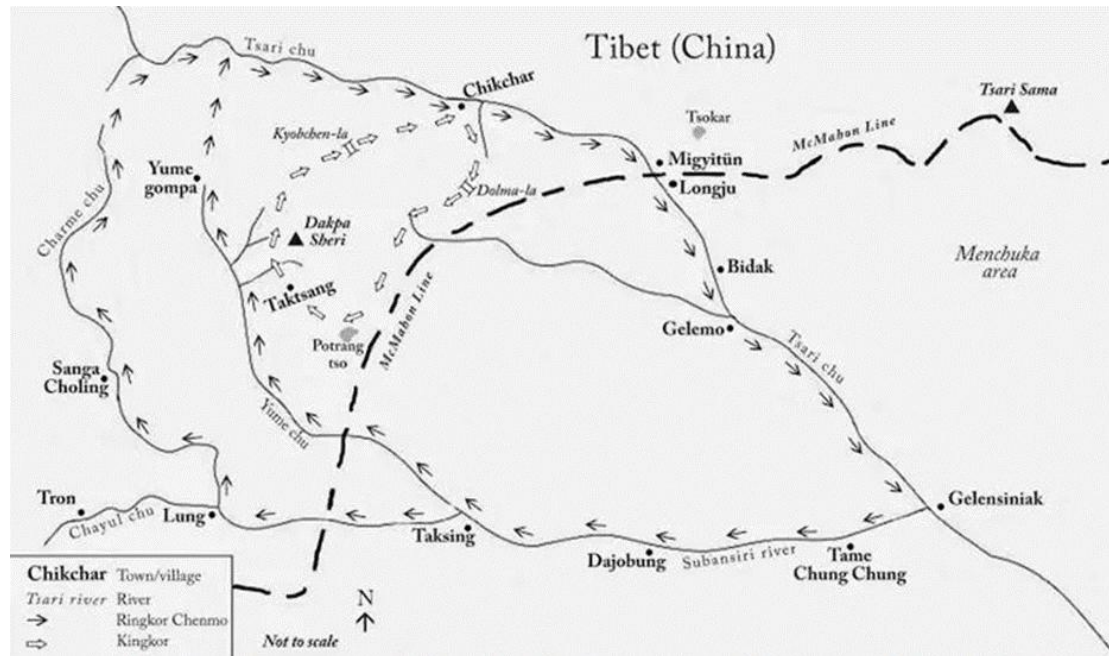
**Pilgrimage Route:** To facilitate the circumambulation of the sacred Tsari region, Tibetan pilgrims and their accompanying tourists were required to traverse the territories of the Nah and Mra clans of the Tagin tribe. Their route commenced at Chikchar, a Tibetan town, and proceeded through the Mra clan's territories, including Migyithun, Longju, Maza, Bidak, Galemo, Gelensynik, Tama Chung Chung, Dajubong, and Dadu, before reaching Taksing, the territory of the Nah clan (Hiri, 2017). From Taksing, the pilgrims continued through Yume Chu and Charne Chu to return to Tibetan territory.

During their passage through Tagin lands, the Nah and Mra clans constructed a wooden barrier known as the Lopa Obstruction at a designated point along the pilgrimage route (Huber, 1999). This structure served as a controlled passage gate where Tagins permitted pilgrims to proceed one by one upon payment of a passage fee. The fee was not standardized, often leading to negotiations and bargaining between the Tagins and the Tibetan pilgrims.

The Nah clan specifically collected taxes at two strategic locations: Piibe Vada and Suga. Piibe Vada, a V-shaped valley along the Subansiri River, required pilgrims to cross a suspension bridge constructed from

*Tare Oso*(cane), necessitating the payment of a toll to the Nah for safe passage. Similarly, at Suga, located a few kilometers from Taksing, another suspension bridge was built, where pilgrims were again required to pay a tax to the Nah.

Likewise, the Mra clan collected taxes at Lakhing (Lagun), presumed to be situated between Migyitun and Longju, likely marking the entry point into Mra territory. These tax collection points underscore the critical role of the Nah and Mra clans in regulating and facilitating the safe passage of pilgrims through their territories during the sacred circumambulation.



**The Pilgrimage Route** (Source: Mra, Tase, 'Forgotten pilgrimage: The Sacred journey of the Dakpa Tsari Circumambulation')

**Role of Nah and Mra (Porters, Translators and Guides):** In addition to their roles in tax collection, the members of the Nah and Mra clans, along with other Tagins, were temporarily engaged as porters, guides, and translators during the Tsari pilgrimage. Their recruitment served two primary purposes:

- First, as local inhabitants of the regions through which the pilgrims traveled, they possessed intimate knowledge of the terrain, including its challenges and intricacies. This expertise enabled them to guide and monitor the pilgrimage, assisting with tasks such as crossing deep valleys, mountains, streams, and rivers by constructing bridges and wooden ladders, repairing paths or tracks, and building temporary shelters for rest or meals. They also provided support by carrying individuals who fell ill during the journey.
- Second, their role as translators facilitated communication between Tibetan officials or pilgrims and local tribes, including other Tagin clans whose languages the Tibetans did not understand. It is believed that some ancient Nah, Mra, and other Tagin individuals likely spoke Tibetan, enabling effective mediation. A notable example is Lingdo Onge, a Tibetan assistant to the headman of Migyithun, who conversed in Tibetan during an interaction with Geeta Krishnatry, with the conversation translated into Tagin by Taring Puri (Puri Tarin), a member of the Puri clan of the Tagin tribe. However, the Mra clan noted that translators were also recruited from the Tibetan side to assist Tagins who were not proficient in the Tibetan language, ensuring effective communication between the two groups. These roles underscored the indispensable contributions of the Nah and Mra clans in ensuring the smooth and safe execution of the pilgrimage.

**Leadership and Internal Conflict:** The Nah clan indicated that the pilgrimage journey was typically led by their most capable leader, known as the *Gingbu Gyeji*, who was supported by a deputy leader, the *Gingbu Kuje*. Similarly, among the Mra clan, leadership was recognized by the Tibetans, primarily to facilitate the resumption of trade relations that had been temporarily disrupted due to conflicts over trade monopolies. This trade relationship was restored under the leadership of Tache Mra, the father of Tabe Mra, when he assumed a prominent role within the Mra community (Krishnatry, 2005). Notably, there was no formal hierarchical structure within the entire Mra clan; instead, leadership was likely attributed to individuals based on their oratorical skills and leadership qualities.

This recognition of leadership also influenced the distribution of taxes, with the Mra clan reportedly receiving a larger share during Tache Mra's leadership compared to the period under Pushing Mra's dominance. Toni Huber, in his work, elaborates on the types of local leadership recognized by the Tibetan government during such interactions, categorizing them as *chimi* (leader), *thumi* (representative), and *thuntsob* (deputies) (Huber, 1999). These roles were instrumental in coordinating services and facilitating the payment of taxes in exchange for the Tagins' support during the pilgrimage.

**Involvement of Other Tagins:** During the Tsari pilgrimages, lower Tagin groups, often categorized as *Tingba* or *Tinglo* and identified as aggressive Lhoba tribes, were also reportedly recipients of taxes. These groups were known for frequently attacking and attempting to loot pilgrims' goods and services. According to Tadi Baki (Baki Tadi), the Tibetan government paid substantial taxes to the Mra and other Tagins to ensure unobstructed passage along the pilgrimage route and to prevent harassment of the pilgrims (Krishnatry, 2005). It is likely that similar taxes were extended to the lower Tagin to deter them from harming, looting, or attacking the pilgrims.

In narratives surrounding Mra's tax collection, notable figures from other Tagin clans, such as Lamnyok Marok, Kanya Nalo, Topu Ebiya (Eba Topu), Nalo Bamar, Tadi Baki, and Tarik Nguju, are mentioned. These names may refer either to specific clans within the Tagin tribe or to individuals who were historical figures (Krishnatry, 2005). The involvement of these groups was further evidenced by the inclusive invitation extended to all Tagins, particularly those from Nacho upwards, who shared lineage with the Nah and Mra clans. These individuals, now associated with the Kojum Welfare Society, are recognized as relatives of the Nah and Mra, sharing the same ancestral lineage.

These related Tagin groups also received a portion of the taxes, often as a commission for their services during the pilgrimage. The Nah and Mra permitted their participation in these activities. However, the Tibetan authorities regarded the claims of these lower Tagin groups as less legitimate compared to those of the Nah and Mra, as the pilgrimage route primarily traversed the territories of the latter. Despite this, the possibility that lower Tagins received taxes suggests their involvement in the pilgrimage dynamics. The aggressive behavior of these groups toward Tibetan pilgrims may have contributed to the Tibetan designation of such payments as *Lodzong* or Barbarian Tribute, reflecting the strategic necessity of appeasing potentially hostile tribes to ensure the safety and success of the pilgrimage (Huber, 1999).

**Trade Goods and Export Items:** In addition to their roles during the Tsari pilgrimage, the Nah and Mra clans of the Tagin tribe received annual taxes from the Tibetans in exchange for exported goods. These goods included *ambin* (local rice), *tare oso* (cane used for constructing suspension bridges and ladders), *tamen* (color dye for clothing), *taruk vsing* (firewood or materials for matchstick boxes), *susang* (a tree used for papermaking), *sumerma* (a resource for perfume production), *pattha* (a type of salt), *thong* (bee), *tami* (millet), and various animal skins such as *sotum* (bear), *patv* (tiger), *svbi* (monkey), *sodum* (deer), *takv* (squirrel), and *svcha* (fox). These skins were utilized to craft bags, clothing, belts, caps, and other items.

Certain items, such as cane, animal skins, rice, and millet, were not readily available in the territories of the Nah and Mra clans. To acquire these, the Nah and Mra engaged in barter trade with lower Tagin groups, who supplied these scarce resources. Consequently, lower Tagins indirectly benefited from the taxes paid by the Tibetans, receiving commissions for providing items like cane, millet, rice, and animal skins.

In return, the Nah and Mra received Tibetan goods, including ornaments such as *talv* (aluminum plate), *maji* (Tibetan ritual bell), *riokse* (local sword), *tasing* (bead), and *takam* (unspecified ornament), as well as clothing like *jvtv lwlik* (full-length red coat), *tayin* (belt), and *namming* (long black coat). Other goods included *alu* (salt), *mapv* (barley), and *nyimv so soyab* (Tibetan butter or ghee), which were widely used among the Tagins. This exchange system highlights the interconnected trade networks and the strategic economic relationships between the Nah, Mra, lower Tagins, and the Tibetans.

**War Indemnity and Ritual Taxes:** In addition to the taxes and trade benefits, the Nah and Mra clans of the Tagin tribe received war indemnity or land taxes from the Tibetan government. This was in response to their displacement from ancestral lands, which were subsequently settled and cultivated by Tibetans. It is believed that the entire Tsari region, encompassing areas such as Yume and Chikchar, originally belonged to the Nah, while Migyithun was the ancestral territory of the Mra.

The Mra clan further claimed that they received death compensation from the Tibetan government in cases of natural or unnatural deaths of their members. This compensation was formalized through a ritual ceremony known as *Dongpo Mvnang* or *Mvnaam*, conducted by the Tibetan authorities. According to Pongpo Mra, the Tibetans regarded the Mra as akin to family members, reflecting a deep socio-cultural bond. Additionally, another ceremony, referred to as *Lvchwng Mvnang* or *Mvnaam*, was performed by the Tibetan government, involving the sacrifice of a *pala* (mountain cow) to honor any Mra individual visiting Tibet for the first time. These practices underscore the complex interplay of economic, territorial, and ritual obligations

between the Nah, Mra, and the Tibetan government, reinforcing their interconnected relationship.

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

The foregoing discussion underscores that during the period in question, the Nah and Mra clans of the Tagin tribe enjoyed a privileged economic position, characterized by a relatively affluent lifestyle due to their strategic role in the Tsari pilgrimage. Their control over key territories through which Tibetan pilgrims were compelled to pass granted them significant leverage in collecting taxes from the Tibetan government. These taxes were often determined based on the expectations of the Tagins, reflecting their dominant position in these economic interactions. This system of tax collection stands out as a uniquely lucrative economic activity compared to other peripheral tribes of Arunachal Pradesh bordering Tibet.

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that lower Tagin groups likely benefited indirectly from these taxes, as they supplied goods such as cane, millet, rice, and animal skins to the Nah and Mra for trade with Tibet. The Tibetan authorities did not entirely dismiss the claims of these lower Tagin groups to taxes or payments, indicating their partial inclusion in the economic framework. Collectively, the tax collection during the Tsari pilgrimages represented not only a significant economic opportunity but also a culturally and socially momentous occasion for the Tagin clans, particularly the Nah and Mra, reinforcing their pivotal role in the regional socio-economic landscape.

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