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Analysing the Distinctive Traits of the Kojum Descendants (Kojum Welfare Society) in the Tagin Culture

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Abstract: The fundamental aim of this study is to illuminate the unequivocal characteristics of the Kojum descendants within the Tagin tribe by foregrounding their distinctive social, cultural, and historical attributions. These attributes not only distinguish the Kojum subdivision of a group but also enhance their prominence within the broader Tagin community. Their exceptional position has long drawn the attention of scholars and authors, often resulting in more focused inquiry into the Kojum lineage than the Tagin tribe as a whole. Driven by the need to address this academic interest and uncover new research directions, this study endeavours to explore previously overlooked or under-examined aspects of Kojum heritage. By delving into their tradition, identity, and social organization, the research seeks to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding. In doing so, it will fill significant gaps in our knowledge and offer well-founded interpretation that can guide and enrich future research on both the Kojum descendants and the wider Tagin community.

Keywords: Kojum descendants, Tagin, Attribution, Uniqueness and Interrogation.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate and inquiry the distinctiveness of the Kojum Welfare Society, throwing a light on its unique social, cultural, or organizational hallmark.
- To look into the central reasons, causes, grounds and factors that contribute to the emergence and sustenance of the distinctive cult or recognition linked with the society.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes two complementary methods: Descriptive Method – To present field data exactly as observed, described, and recorded. Analytical Method – To interpret and validate those observations by comparing them with existing literature (e.g., books, articles, vlogs, theses), enhancing accuracy and bolstering the study's credibility.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data came from unstructured interviews and field surveys, while secondary data was sourced from books, academic articles, vlogs, and published theses.

INTRODUCTION

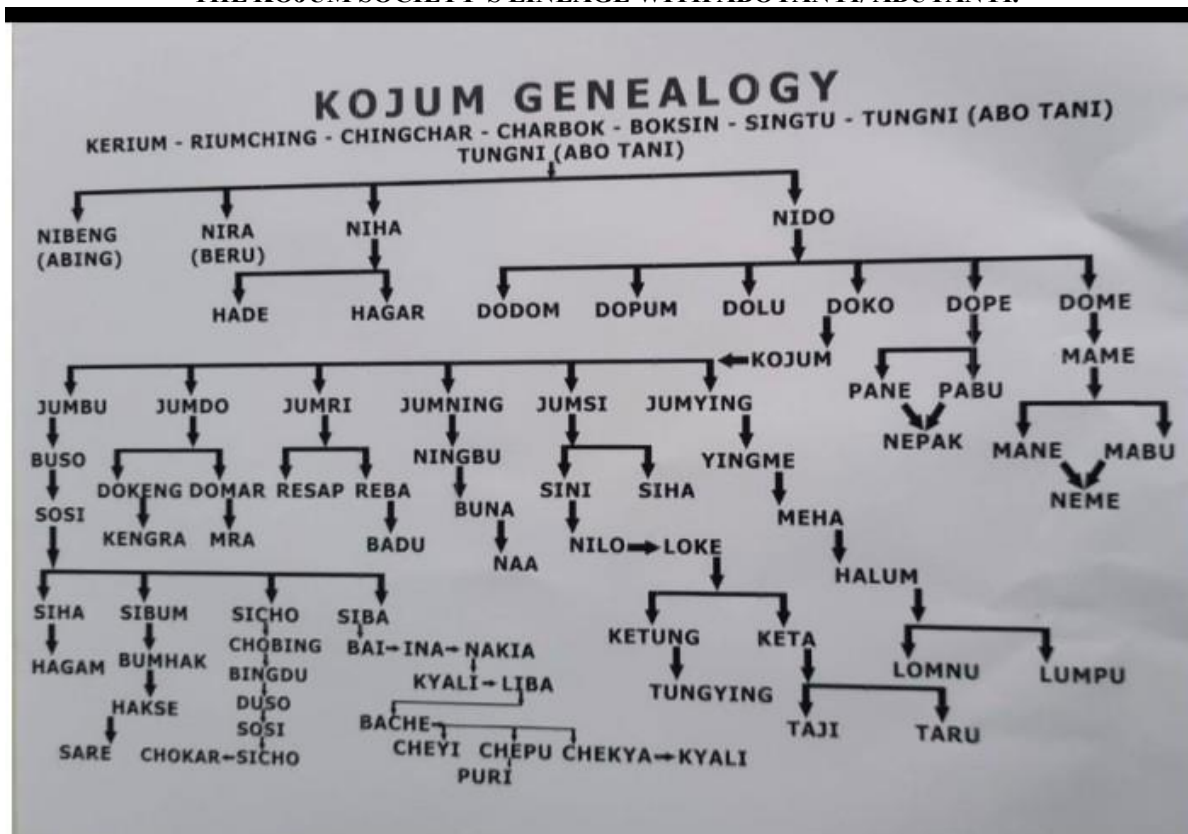
The Tagin are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, traditionally considered descendants of the ancestral “*Abotani/Abutanyi*” like other tribes the Nyishi, Galo, Apatani, Adi, and Mishing Tribes. The Tagin tribe as a community, so called the clan-based groups/organizations hold a position of the proactive

torchbearer that plays a pivotal role in moulding and operating the society. So, the Kojum Welfare Society (KWS) is a formal recognition and registered clan-based body that governs, operates and works under the broader body viz Tagin Cultural Society (TWS), which is the pinnacle organization representing all the Tagin people.

The Kojum Welfare Society constitutes of many clans and sub-clans' progeny from the legendary forefather *Atu* Kojum. This collective includes groups such as Rebi, Chokar, Puri, Nilo, Kyali, Nah, Mra, Sare, Badu, and more, they are traditionally unified under the ancestral figure of *Atu*(forefather) Kojum. Their unity was reinforced through priestly chants recounting genealogies. Though, the Kojum Welfare Society is formally registered only in 2019, as one of the clan-based organisations under Tagin Cultural Society. However, their shared kinship lineage has endured through unwritten, oral and verbal traditions and rituals across countless generations.

The Kojum clan population are primarily concentrated in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Subansiri district, with their central hub at Daporijo, which systematically also becomes the headquarters of the Kojum Welfare Society. In the district, the *Atu* Kojum population is scattered among various administrative circle such as Chetam, Giba, Taliha, Siyum, and Nacho. However, the largest concentration and settlement of the population of the Kojum group is settled in the Limeking and Taksing circles, which are considered, the last two administrative circles of the district.

THE KOJUM SOCIETY'S LINEAGE WITH ABOTANYI/ ABUTANYI.



Source: Kojum Welfare Society Genealogy

(provided by Chatung Mra, the President of Kojum Welfare Society, 2025)

So, the premier specialness and often bewildering outlooks of the Kojum group involves tracing their genealogy. A widely held belief among scholars, authors, writers, observers, besides some members of the Tagin tribe too thinks that the Kojum are not explicit lineages of *Abu Tanyi* (also cited to as *Abo Tanyi* or just as *Tani*), who, according to Tanyi philosophical tradition and mythological belief, is recognized as the primogenitor of the Tanyi tribes encompassing the Tagin, Nyishi, Galo, Apatani, Adi, and Mishng communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

Among the Tanyi tribes, genealogy forms the bedrock of identity wherein each person's line traces directly back to *Abu Tanyi*, the revered progenitor of the Tanyi peoples. Central to this identity is a distinctive suffix-based naming convention: the child's name preserves a syllable of two or three from the end of the father's name, thereby creating an uninterrupted chain of the generational continuity visible in their names. This naming method functions as a living lineage record.

A practical example among the Kojum clans illustrate this beautifully in a generational sequence: from Mra Pusing, then Mra Singe, Mra Gei, Mra Emi, Mra Medie (also known as Tedie Mra) where "Te-/Ta-" is attached before the name as a prefix to address masculine gender in the Tanyi naming pattern). Hence, in each step, the final syllables of the father's name

become the defining element in the child's name ensuring that every generation remains explicitly linked to its predecessor.

This genealogical method not only enables precise tracing of family lines but also underpins the broader social structure, inheritance systems, and ritual life of the Tanyi tribes as a whole and Tagin in particular. Through this suffix-based naming tradition where each generation's name carry elements of the father's lineage becomes actively imprinted culturally rooted. This continuity reinforces an individual's role within their clans, dictating marriage alliances, property successions, and responsibilities in tribal ceremonies. Ultimately, the suffix-based naming system is a cultural cornerstone. It maintains verbal genealogical archives, structures social hierarchy and inheritance rights, organizes the ritual calendar, and fosters a sense of belonging and ancestral continuity, all without written records making it an uncommon and indispensable pillar of the Tanyi identity and cultural life.

Nevertheless, the Kojum community's connection to *Abu Tanyi*, the mythic progenitor of the broader Tanyi tribes, is a topic of ongoing debate and cultural significance. While many Tanyi tribes of the clans trace their ancestry back to *Abu Tanyi*, the Kojum descendants linked with the genealogical counting traced from *Abu Tanyi* is not a clean comprehensively appear

such diverge from this lineage. It gives a unique heritage creates a distinct cultural and genealogical identity that sets them apart from other clans of the Tagin in particular and *Abu Tanyi* tribes as a whole.

The bone of contention around the Kojum genealogy mostly due to link with the similarity in nomenclature. While analysing their lineage, it is significant to pen down that the Kojum too locates their family tree begins from *Kerium Kulu* (*Korium Kulu*) that indicates an evolution period of the formation and creation of the cosmos according to the Tagin mythology and philosophy. Henceforth, the genealogy carries on with *Tungni* or *Tungnyi* (another nomenclature for *Abo Tanyi* or *Tanyi*), followed by *Nido* (also referred as *Nyido*).

In many narratives, whether among scholars, writers, authors or even within the Tagin community, the term *Nido* (*Nyido*) is often misunderstood or misinterpreted. When tracing genealogy, those unaccustomed with the cultural background may mistakenly link *Nido* to the Tagin dialect word for “Rain”. The confusion stems from homophony: *Nido* is both the personal name of an ancestor of the Kojum people and the word also used locally to denote rainfall. This overlap in pronunciation leads to unintended misinterpretation unless one pays careful attention to the genealogical and cultural background. So, it is certainly acknowledged that this confusion or lack of clarity is basically an outcome of the homophone.

It is important to filter in black and white that in the genealogical account of the Kojum Welfare Society (KWS), the term “*Nido*” refers not to the anthropomorphized concept of “*Rain*” in the Tagin dialect, but to the revered descendant of *Abo Tanyi*, an important ancestor of the Kojum lineage. This distinction is crucial: the term has been mistakenly conflated with rainfall due to linguistic overlap, but in this context, *Nido* is a personal name, not a natural phenomenon. Recognizing this helps prevent misunderstanding and ensures a more accurate appreciation of the genealogical and ancestral heritage of the Kojum clans, where the misnomer stems largely seem from a purely linguistic issue, rather than historical or mythological association.

It is important to clarify that the genealogical confusion surrounding and around, the Kojum clans likely originated in the 1950s, during an anthropological expedition led by Geeta Krishnatry and her team, including her husband and local scouts across the undivided Subansiri belt (from Ziro to Limeking) as part of an administrative survey in what is now Upper Subansiri district. Geeta noted that in her tour diary the *Mra* and *Nilo* (which was mentioned as *Nyilo*) clans were described as the descendants of “*Nyido* (Rain)”, a misinterpretation stemming from a faulty translation that conflated the personal name *Nyido* (an ancestor) with the Tagin dialect word for “Rain”. She also generalized this

to all Tagin people from the Nacho area, further perpetuating the misconception that these clans descended from “Rain”. This mistranslation, rooted in linguistic overlap rather than cultural reality, has since clouded both oral and written accounts of Kojum genealogy.

Although, with the current context, the Tagin people settle ahead the Nacho area, these people are primarily belonged to the clans such as *Puri*, *Nilo*, *Kyali*, *Nah*, *Mra*, *Sare* and others descend from the so-called “Rain” lineage is fundamentally flawed. This misinterpretation appears to derive from a mistranslation during the 1950s anthropological expedition led by Geeta Krishnatry. The underlying error was linguistic, compounded by the use of interpreters namely *Nguri Tem* and *Tato Riba*, who were neither professionally trained in anthropological translation nor deeply versed in Tagin culture. As a result, the original genealogical meaning was probably lost in translation. In Geeta’s diary, while meticulous in many respects, inevitably captured the information relayed by her interpreters. Without the cultural and contextual expertise to discern homophonic nuance, the interpreters unintentionally conveyed that since Nacho-area all the Tagin clans traced their origins to the “Rain” figure. This miscommunication subsequently coloured both oral traditions and written histories, mistakenly shaping the narrative of Kojum clan lineage.

Later, L. R. Sailo also recorded that the *Mra* clan descended from *Nyido* (“Rain”), repeating a similar error. His account was based primarily on narrations from *Chabe Mra* (*Mra Chabe*), a prominent member of the *Mra* clan. However, this too appears to have stemmed from linguistic misunderstanding rather than genealogical reality. As an administrator from Mizoram, Sailo was not trained in anthropology or local dialects of Arunachal Pradesh particularly in Tagin; his reliance on oral accounts filtered through limited interpretive context that led him to record the same homophonic misinterpretation. The absence of cultural accustom with the nuances of Tagin language and lineage semantics likely reinforced the narrative that *Mra* were descended from “Rain.” Consequently, Sailo’s interpretation perpetuated the earlier mistranslation from the 1950s, further entrenching the misconception in both scholarly and community narratives.

Afterwards, this misconception has been reinforced by numerous subsequent writers and scholars, including members of the Tagin community themselves. A prominent example is Dr. Ashan Riddi, a respected Tagin historian and author, who in his book “*The Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh* (2006)” too asserted that the *Nah* and *Mra* clans descended from “*Nyido* (Rain).” However, when I inquired personally about his sources, Dr. Riddi acknowledged that his conclusion was drawn entirely from examining earlier written accounts such as those by Krishnatry and Sailo rather than through any independent genealogical investigation.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the widespread misconceptions surrounding Kojum genealogy are fundamentally attributable to language and semantic barriers during early ethnographic inquiries. Initial errors such as conflating *Nyido*, the revered ancestor, with *Nyido*, the Tagin word for “Rain” originated during 1950s expeditions like that of Geeta Krishnatry and were further echoed by L. R. Sailo. These mistakes were not rigorously examined or questioned by subsequent scholars. Even Tagin intellectuals like Dr. Ashan Riddi, in “*The Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh* (2006)”, relied heavily on this flawed earlier narrative. The absence of critical linguistic awareness and original fieldwork allowed these early misinterpretations to be uncritically reproduced propagating a lineage myth rather than an accurate ancestral record. Concluding, the myth of descent from “Rain” survives not in genealogical fact, but in the echoes of homophone-driven translation errors perpetuated across decades of secondary account.

Engagement With Tibet

Due to their strategic location along the Himalayan frontier, the Tagin people especially the Kojum lineage have historically maintained deep cultural and social ties with Tibet. The Kojum clan predominantly inhabits the Subansiri River valley, flowing from Nacho to Taksing.

Geeta Krishnatry’s travel diary offers vivid insight into the rich, kin-like ties between the Kojum Tagins and their Tibetan neighbours. She observed that traditional clothing woven patterns, styles, and adornments among people since Nacho bore clear influence from Tibetan dress, highlighting how Tibetan fabrics and garment designs were integrated into local attire. Besides that, the Kojum Tagins referred to Tibetans affectionately as “*Nyimv Nyi*,” and considers them as “our(their) family,” signalling a bond far deeper than commerce, this was an extension of social and familial networks.

In toto, the Kojum Tagins’ association or connection with Tibet wasn’t only political but it was aligned in lived everyday association from dress, language, religious observances, and familial bonds all-inclusive Tibetan influence, the Kojum descendants stood as a palpable testament to the interlinked or interconnected history of Arunachal’s high-altitude periphery and its Tibetan adjacent

By means of their strategic location and control of the key Himalayan passes particularly the Tibetan route (*Nyimv Geeko*) that route running through Nacho and Taksing Circle to Tibet, the Kojum Tagins effectively monopolized barter trade with Tibet. This mountain corridor served as their economic lifeline, bringing a wealth of Tibetan goods into their community. Their advantageous positioning allowed access to a diverse array of both everyday essentials and luxury

items. Through barter exchanges, the Kojum Tagins procured: local ornaments & jewellery: bangles (*Kopu/Kopung*), beaded necklaces (*Tasing*), lightweight aluminum plate (*Talu*), earrings (*Jungrung*), and swords (*Riokse*), textiles & clothing: knee-length red cloth (*Jviv lwlik*), longer wraps (*Jviv*), light garments (*Gunang*), woollen cloth (*Namu*), belts (*Tayin*), footwear and essential commodities: salt, yaks, and horses that were keys for both subsistence and trade logistics.

This control over trade goods not only sustained their communities materially but also elevated their socio-economic status within the broader Tagin region. The Kojum Tagins were thus central to the frontier economy, serving as vital conduits of Tibetan resources into the other’s Tagin area.

The trade chain expanded far ahead local barter, merging the Kojum Tagins with the Tibetan periphery market in a vibrant economic system. They traded with them in metal goods, textiles, livestock, and foodstuffs in exchange for Tibetan staples such as salt, wool, and barley products. As this network emerged as a key commercial artery, it underpinned the Tagins’ strategic importance, not passive recipients, they actively dominated the trade. Drawing on their geographical advantage, deep social networks, and expert navigation skills, the Tagins built a robust, self-reliant, and culturally rich economy. Their material culture from intricate jewellery and traditional clothing to prized livestock and diverse grains, stands as enduring proof of their long-standing, dynamic engagement across borders.

The Kojum Tagins held a unique and honoured position in the Migyitun region located within Tibet’s sacred Tsari area, home to ancestral clan sites of Nah and Mra. Invited by Tibetan authorities, the Kojums were entrusted with collecting taxes and safeguarding pilgrims, a clear mark of local authority and cultural duty. During the renowned Tsari pilgrimage cycle constituting the annual week-long (*Kingkor*) and the grand twelve-year (*Ringkor*), the Tibetans sought formal permission from the Kojums to traverse their lands. At Migyitun, Tibetan officials presented taxes not in currency, but “in kind”, acknowledging and reinforcing the Kojums’ sovereignty. These offerings, delivered as tribute and logistical support, included clothes, ornaments, livestock such as horses (*Siki*), yaks (*Siyak* or *Seyak*), sheep (*Syya*), and *Pala* (ice cow), tools & equipment: mills and even firearms (*gun/Mobuk*).

The Kojum Tagins exercised commanding authority over the Migyitun–Tsari pilgrimage corridor, a fact recognized by Tibetan officials who paid their dues directly to them. Through in-kind taxation, they reinforced their sovereignty and served as the essential administrators of the pilgrimage. In short, through managing in-kind taxation and overseeing pilgrimage logistics, the Kojum Tagins cemented their economic prosperity, cultural prestige, and political influence. They

emerged not just as regional guardians, but the de facto owners of these sacred routes and the adjoining villages, integrating the flow of goods, people, and power between Tibetan authorities and the Tagin hinterlands.

Harbingers In Socio-Cultural and Religious Field.

Within the broader Tagin community especially among the Kojum lineage, the Nah clan emerged as innovators by introducing water-powered mills for processing ghee, butter, and barley powder. At a time, when mechanized food processing was virtually unknown in the region, this adaptation of the traditional watermill marked a major leap in both agri-technology and economic potential. This adoption of watermill technology positioned the Nah not only as early technologists but also as strategic agents reinforcing Kojum dominance in commerce and cultural progress. Through their innovations, they are:

- **Elevated local living standards**—by increasing production capacity and food quality.
- **Solidified Kojum leadership**—by linking technological advancement with trade influence.
- **Spurred economic diversification**—laying groundwork for further mechanization and cultural exchange.

In essence, by pioneering mechanized food processing, the Nah clan catalysed a transformative era in Tagin society, cementing the Kojums' economic clout and cultural stature along the Himalayan trade and pilgrimage corridors. This revision highlights the technological innovation, economic impact, and cultural significance of watermill adoption, grounded in credible evidence from Himalayan ethnographic research and watermill studies.

Religious Field.

Among the Kojum lineage viz Nah clan, the embrace of Buddhism marked a pivotal religious transformation. This adoption likely resulted from sustained interactions and trade ties with Tibet, gradually integrating Tibetan Buddhist beliefs into their spiritual life. Hence, the Nah clan were the first among the Tagin and particularly the Kojum to formally adopt Buddhism (locally referred to as Siju within the Tagin context), reflecting their deep and ongoing engagement with Tibetan culture.

Siju now coexists alongside Si-Donyi, the traditional animist faith of the Tagin, creating a distinctive dual religious identity within their society: Siju is practiced by the Tagin Buddhists particularly Nah clan within the Kojum descendants and Si-Donyi is practiced by the majority of Tagin community. Indeed, this dual religious identity was formally recognized by the Arunachal Pradesh Government's Department of Indigenous Affairs in 2024, underscoring its cultural and societal significance.

By introducing Siju, the Nah clan catalysed a religious diversification that rippled across the Kojum and broader Tagin community. Their conversion highlights how cross-border trade and Tibetan influence reshaped not only material culture but also the spiritual landscape of their society.

During the formative days, when Si-Donyi was officially inaugurated as the sole festival of the Tagin community in 1975, the prominent figures such as Taser Mra and Gyaju Chader, stood as one of the founding members of the Si-Donyi Festival House's Discussion Committee, played key roles in shaping its identity.

Moreover, the mutual influence between the Nah clan and Tibetan Buddhists led to a unique religious fusion during the Siju festival. Unlike most festivals led by a single religious authority, Siju features the presence of both: *Nyibu* or *Nyibe* (local animist priest), and Lama (Buddhist monk), both highlighting a distinctive coexistence. This dual-religious ceremony is notable for its inclusivity; rather than excluding either tradition, both the *Nyibu* and Lama play central, significant roles underscoring the Tagin community's ability to harmonize indigenous animist and Tibetan Buddhist practices.

Social Field

In the sphere of social life, Puri Taring's marriage to a Tibetan woman stands out as a notable early instance of intermarriage between the Tagin and Tibetan communities. This union suggests, he may have been among the first from the Tagin society to establish such a cross-border matrimonial alliance. Similarly, the relationship between Pushing Mra and Sasra Taji, though extramarital, further highlights that inter-community relationships were not uncommon. Historically assume that, Tibetan society did not strictly prohibit marrying outside one's ethnic or religious group, and interethnic marriages have indeed been relatively common.

These examples imply there were likely other individuals within the Kojum society who married Tibetan women, even if their stories were undocumented or lost. Genealogical records show that several Tagin clans, including the Nah and Mra, have genealogical connections to Tibet, making inter-marriage a natural outcome of their close ties. Within the Kojum Tagin lineage, notably the Nah clan, two distinctive cultural practices set them apart: unique practice of slaver, in the past Nah clan practiced a form of slavery, an uncommon trait among other Tagin groups. Secondly, distinctive burial rites, their burial customs were markedly different and deeply symbolic, which is likely to call "Body Preparation" wherein the deceased was fully wrapped in cloth, with salt placed inside the coffin or wooden box to control odor, the wrapped body was placed within a rectangular stone pillar structure, surrounded by stones rather than being interred in the cultivated earth. This was rooted in the belief that burying in tillable soil would

defile its sacredness and possibly cause disease if disturbed. These traditions, including the salt-filled coffin and stone enclosure, are still believed to practice by those Nah clan members who have maintained their traditional beliefs and not adopted Christianity.

Among the Nah and Mra clans, there is strong evidence that they were among the first within the Tagin community to acquire firearms (*Mobuk*), distinctive in contrast to other Tagin groups. These guns were likely obtained through barter trade with Tibet or as part of the tribute system during pilgrimage cycles in the Nah and Mra territories. Such armaments were not merely functional; they served as powerful symbols of autonomy and strategic importance for the Nah and Mra clans. Possessing firearms would have elevated their social status, reinforced their control over trade routes, and emphasized their role as local power brokers in a geopolitically sensitive Himalayan frontier.

Persistence of Traditional Political System

While the system of Political Interpreters (P.I.), also known locally as Kotokis, might have disappeared in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh, it remains alive within Kojum society. The Nah and Mra communities have retained this unique position, currently embodied by Takia Bai (Nah) and Yapung Mra (Mra), who are probably the last remaining P.I. post-holders. This enduring tradition grants them a distinctive status, marking them as the final custodians of an ancient role in regional diplomacy and cross-cultural communication

Pioneering in Words.

Over time, Tagin has been enriched in many vocabulary words so called 'Tagin *Gaamchar*' has been likely contributed of the Kojum descendants, the words like *Komla* (apple), *Jaa* (potato), *Jakok* (onion), *Syaa* (sheep), *Siki* (horse), *Siyak/Seyak* (yak), and *Pala* (the hybrid "ice cow" or dzong). These items, firstly might be encountered or domesticated in Kojum territories, were assimilated and popularized across Tagin-speaking areas. The Tagin Cultural Society (TCS) during the tenure of Lardik Kare as Sceretary General formally acknowledged of those words as the part of Tagin *Gaamchar* (words) by passing resolution during the tour of Tasking area in 2019 -2020.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the earliest waves of Tibetan globalization took strong root within the Kojum lineage. As trailblazers in areas like technology, trade, language, religion, and governance, they introduced innovations that later spread across broader Tagin society, making lasting contributions to the community's cultural and social fabric. Yet, many of these remarkable traditions, especially those of the Nah clan, now stand on the brink of extinction. Because these unique contributions remain

under-recognized within the wider Tagin narrative, some Kojum descendants may feel an impulse toward asserting a separate identity, a response to the limited awareness of their heritage and its importance to the larger Tagin community.

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