

Examining the Internal Factors Underlying Language Change in the Kaili Language

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ABSTRACT

Research on language change has always captured the attention of linguists. This is because language is constantly evolving. This study explores and analyzes the factors driving language change in the Kaili language using linguistic and historical-linguistic approaches. These approaches are used to uncover, understand, and describe the internal factors of language change in Kaili. The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. The data collection techniques used in this study are interviews, observation, and literature review. The data analysis technique used in this study involves identifying the internal factors causing changes in the Kaili language. The results of this study reveal the presence of internal factors of language change, namely (1) phonetic assimilation, (2) analogy, (3) simplification or elimination of elements considered less important, and (4) innovation.

Keywords: change, Kaili, internal.

INTRODUCTION

Language change is a natural phenomenon that occurs in all languages. Language change is inextricably linked to the factors that cause it. There are two main factors driving language change: internal and external. Internal factors include changes that arise from within the language system itself, such as the simplification of phonological, morphological, or syntactic structures, in the interest of communicative efficiency. According to Bloomfield (1933), language change often arises as a result of speakers' tendency to simplify and adapt language patterns to make them easier to use.

On the other hand, external factors relate to social, political, cultural, and economic interactions that influence a language community. Hock and Joseph (2009) assert that interaction with other groups through trade, migration, or colonization often serves as the primary driver of linguistic innovation. Thus, both internal and external factors interact in shaping the evolutionary dynamics of a language, which ultimately reflects the language's adaptation to the communicative needs and social context of its speakers.

Changes in regional languages are influenced not only by external factors, such as contact with other languages, but also by internal factors stemming from the dynamics of the language system itself. Internal factors include phonological (sound), morphological (word forms), syntactic (sentence structure), and semantic (word meaning) changes that develop naturally within the speaker community. In the context of social transformation, these internal changes often respond to changes in mindsets, values, and societal communication needs. When societies experience social transformations, such as modernization, urbanization, increased education, and technological developments, speakers of regional languages tend to create language forms that are more efficient, simpler, and relevant to the new social realities. As a result, a number of old vocabulary words experience shifts in

meaning, simplifications, or even replacements by new forms deemed more appropriate to current communication needs. Thus, internal linguistic factors and social transformation have a close reciprocal relationship, whereby changes in social structures drive linguistic innovation, while language change reflects the ongoing transformation process within society.

From a linguistic perspective, language can be viewed as a form of social structure because it contains a set of rules used by society to communicate. However, language is not a static system; it is continuously reproduced and modified by its speakers in everyday social practices. Social transformations—such as modernization, urbanization, globalization, the development of information technology, and changes in societal interaction patterns—will influence the way individuals communicate. When society experiences changes in values, norms, and social needs, speakers begin to create new vocabulary, change the meanings of words, simplify language structures, or adopt language forms that are considered more appropriate to the new social context. These language changes then become part of the new social structure and are reused by subsequent generations (Giddens, 1984).

REVIEW LITERATURE

Like any language used by its speakers, the Kaili language is believed to change. Language changes in Kaili can be observed through their causal factors, both internal and external. Research on the causal factors of language change is scarce, and for the Kaili language, such studies are virtually nonexistent, especially comprehensive ones. The following are some studies on language change viewed from the perspective of their causal factors, including those by Herlina (2018), Saad (2020), Saniyah and Aulia (2023), Al Khoir and Devani (2023), Sitanggang et al. (2025), and Nain et al (2025).

Herlina (2018) discusses the linguistic situation in the Pangandaran region, which is a tourist area. According to her, there is a possibility of a language shift. Language shift typically occurs in bilingual or multilingual communities due to language contact. Many factors contribute to language shift, including the influence of global culture, migration, industrialization, economic changes, urbanization, and prestige. However, based on the language-usage situation in the Pangandaran region, it can be said that the linguistic phenomena occurring there tend to indicate language maintenance within a multilingual community rather than language shift.

Saad (2020) discusses variation and change in the Abui language (one of the Papuan languages on Alor Island, Indonesia) as a result of intensive contact with Alor Malay, a local lingua franca that has been dominant in the community for approximately 50–60 years. The impact of this contact is particularly evident among the younger generation, who were raised with Alor Malay as their first language and only learned Abui after childhood, resulting in differing patterns of language acquisition and use across age groups. The researchers employed a combined approach of descriptive linguistics, variationist sociolinguistics, and bilingualism studies to compare variations in Abui usage across four distinct age groups: (pre)teens, young adults, adults, and the elderly. The findings reveal significant variations in linguistic structural aspects such as reflexive possessive markers, verb usage, and reduplication, reflecting the strong influence of Alor Malay on Abui grammar. These differences indicate that a language shift is underway in which proficiency in Abui is declining among younger speakers, while older speakers tend to preserve traditional forms of Abui.

Aulia (2023) discusses the role of foreign language borrowing in the evolution of the Indonesian language. Historically, it has been noted that Malay (Indonesian) has extensively borrowed from foreign languages. Borrowed elements—including phonemes, affixes, and words—have enriched the Indonesian lexicon. Positively, the presence of loanwords can enhance the expressive power of the Indonesian language.

Al Khoir and Devani (2023) discuss social factors in language change within a Facebook group for buying and selling used cell phones in the Solo metropolitan area. According to them, the language used in cell phone buying and selling activities in this group is influenced by three factors: (1) educational level, (2) age, and (3) social class. Language changes influenced by educational level tend to make it easier for them to write words in a foreign language, thereby affecting the form of those words. Meanwhile, the age factor influences shifts in the meaning of a word. Meanwhile, the social class factor is marked by the use of *kromo inggil* and *krama madya*, indicating that they uphold etiquette or respect for fellow members.

Sitanggang et al. (2025) discuss how language changes due to the use of social media, identifying the factors that cause the emergence of new words or language styles, and analyzing their impact on the use of good and correct Indonesian. The findings suggest that language change on social media is a systematic phenomenon reflecting linguistic adaptation to socio-cultural contexts. Data show that platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok dominate the use of informal language, each with its own unique characteristics. Social media also creates new language hierarchies, blending formal and informal language and even incorporating foreign languages. This phenomenon impacts education, communication, and cultural identity, necessitating a cross-disciplinary approach to understand it more deeply.

Nain et al (2025) discuss the dynamics of modernization and its implications for social structures, cultural practices, and community responses in rural South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The findings indicate a significant shift in social structures, with leadership legitimacy increasingly tied to education and professional competence rather than hereditary or customary authority. Cultural practices have also undergone transformation: rituals, language, and artistic expressions have been selectively retained, abbreviated, or reinterpreted to accommodate modern time constraints, digital technology, and economic demands.

METHOD

The method used in this study is the qualitative descriptive method. The qualitative descriptive method is a research approach that aims to describe and understand phenomena in depth based on data in the form of words, expressions, or behavior without using statistical procedures. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) state that qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. Moleong (2017) adds that this method seeks to understand phenomena holistically by describing them in words and language within their natural context. In line with this, Sukmadinata (2011) emphasizes that qualitative descriptive research depicts and interprets objects as they are, while Creswell (2014) asserts that this approach is used to explore and understand meanings considered important by individuals or groups regarding a social issue. Thus, the qualitative descriptive method emphasizes understanding, meaning, and the context of the phenomenon under study.

The techniques used in this study are observation, interviews, and a literature review. According to Spradley (1980), observation allows researchers to understand the behavior and meanings inherent in subjects' actions within a natural context (Participant Observation). Interviews are used to elicit deeper information, as stated by Kvale (1996), who notes that research interviews are guided conversations aimed at gaining knowledge about subjects' life experiences. Meanwhile, the literature review serves to complement field data with theoretical analysis, as explained by Nazir (2014), who states that the literature review provides a conceptual foundation and a framework for research data analysis. Thus, the combination of observation, interviews, and literature review in the qualitative descriptive method helps researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Data analysis in this study was conducted qualitatively through the following stages. Data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation were then selected to focus on elements relevant to the research objectives. Next, the selected linguistic data are categorized based on internal and external causal factors. Subsequently, the categorized data are synthesized (combined) to identify the factors causing linguistic changes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language change is a natural phenomenon in the life of a language community. The Kaili language continues to evolve. The following is a description of the internal factors causing changes in the Kaili language.

Internal factors of language change are related to dynamics occurring within the language's structure, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and the lexicon. These changes are often driven by the need for efficiency, simplification, or natural tendencies in everyday language use. For example, changes in word pronunciation (phonetics), the restructuring of grammatical patterns, or the simplification of word forms are examples of internal changes.

Studies of the internal factors of language change provide a deeper understanding of how language evolves and how speakers unconsciously influence language development. By understanding these factors, we can appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the natural evolution of language within a society.

Internal language changes are influenced by mechanisms rooted in the dynamics of the language system itself. Internal language changes in the Kaili language take the form of (1) phonetic assimilation, (2) analogy, (3) simplification or elimination of elements considered less important, and (4) innovation. The following is a description of each.

Phonetic Assimilation

One of the primary mechanisms of internal language change is phonetic assimilation, which is the tendency for sounds to become more similar to the sounds surrounding them. For example, in some languages, consonant or vowel sounds change to make them easier to pronounce in sequence. This process is often driven by the need for articulatory efficiency, where speakers unconsciously simplify pronunciation to speed up communication.

Phonetic assimilation is one of the key mechanisms driving internal language change. This process occurs when a sound within a word becomes more similar to the sounds surrounding it, whether in terms of place of articulation, manner of articulation, or other phonetic features. The primary goal of assimilation is to simplify

pronunciation and improve speech fluency. This phenomenon often occurs naturally and goes unnoticed by speakers, but its effects can alter a language's phonological structure over time.

A simple example of phonetic assimilation can be found in changes to consonant sounds. In Indonesian, the word "menjadi" is sometimes pronounced as "mejadi," where the /n/ sound merges into a /j/ sound due to the influence of the following sound. A similar process is also observed in English, for example, in the phrase "input," which is often heard as "imput," where the /n/ sound changes to /m/ because it approaches the /p/ sound, both of which are articulated with the lips (bilabial). This change reflects a natural tendency to align sounds for the sake of efficiency in pronunciation.

Chaer (2003:132) explains that assimilation is the phenomenon of a sound changing into another sound as a result of the sounds in its environment, so that the sound becomes the same as, or shares characteristics with, the sound influencing it. Kridalaksana (2008:20) posits that assimilation constitutes a phonological process in which a sound undergoes modification, resulting in its approximation to, or identity with, an adjacent sound.

Assimilation can also affect vowel changes. In some languages, vowels within a word tend to become more similar to other vowels around them. This phenomenon is known as vowel harmony, as seen in some Turkic or Uralic languages. Vowel harmony creates a more regular and consistent pattern, thereby making it easier for speakers to process and pronounce long words.

In the Kaili language, the phoneme /c/ from foreign vocabulary is assimilated and pronounced as the phoneme /k/ in Kaili. The phoneme /c/, which is a voiceless palatal affricate, changes to the consonant /k/, which is a voiceless velar stop in Kaili. For example:

actor --> aktoro
advocaat --> advoka
banco --> bangku
cadeua --> kado
calor --> kaldu
school --> sikola

In addition to the assimilation of the phoneme /c/ into the phoneme /k/, there is also the assimilation of the phoneme /w/ into the phoneme /b/. The phoneme /w/, which is a voiced bilabial stop, becomes the phoneme /b/, which is a voiced bilabial stop in the Kaili language. Example:

waskom --> baskomo
wingkel --> bengkele

The long-term effects of phonetic assimilation often lead to systemic changes in a language. A process that initially involves variations in everyday pronunciation can alter the standard forms of words in a language. For example, many words in Latin underwent phonetic assimilation, which was then passed down to Romance languages such as Italian, Spanish, and French. These words undergo morphological changes due to the influence of neighboring sounds, which ultimately create new lexical variations in the derived languages.

Thus, phonetic assimilation plays a central role in language evolution. This process not only simplifies pronunciation but also creates new sound patterns that can ultimately influence a language's phonological and grammatical structures. This phenomenon demonstrates how dynamic and adaptive the Kaili language system is in meeting human communication needs, just as changes occur within Kaili society or the Kaili ethnic group.

Analogy

An internal factor in language change is analogy. Language change can occur through analogy, which is the process of aligning grammatical patterns or word forms with other patterns that are more frequently used or considered more "logical." For example, in Indonesian, past tense forms such as "berkata-kata" may shift to a more consistent form like "berbicara" because speakers are more familiar with certain affixation patterns. The purpose of analogy is to create harmony and regularity within the language system.

According to Keraf (1991), analogy is a process that alters morphemes or combinations of morphemes or linguistic patterns based on existing forms or creates new morphemes based on existing ones. Analogy also occurs in the Kaili language, particularly in the adoption of new vocabulary from foreign languages. The Kaili language incorporates loanwords, reflecting the progression of time. One word used in daily life to refer to a mode of transportation is "sepeda motor," commonly known as "motor." A motor is a two-wheeled vehicle powered by an engine. The word "motor" has been adopted into the Kaili language as "motoro." Since Kaili is a vowel-based language, a vowel is added to the end of the word. Furthermore, the introduction of agricultural technology in the

form of a rice-field plowing machine, known as a tractor. A tractor is a vehicle specifically designed for high traction at low speeds, or for pulling trailers or implements used in agriculture or construction. The word "tractor" was adopted into the Kaili language as "traktoro." Then came the device that assists humans in calculations: the computer. A computer is a machine capable of performing mathematical or logical operations quickly and automatically. Today, a computer is understood as a digital electronic device that performs tasks under a series of instructions called a program. The word "computer" was adopted into the Kaili language as "komputoro." This is an example of an analogy, where words ending in a consonant change to end in a vowel in the Kaili language.

Simplification

Simplification, or the elimination of elements considered less important in linguistic structure, is also a mechanism of internal change. For example, in language development, long word forms tend to be shortened or condensed. This occurs because speakers naturally seek ways to convey a message with minimal effort without compromising clarity. This phenomenon is evident in the loss of certain final sounds in words across various languages, which ultimately leads to significant phonological changes.

One of the internal mechanisms that causes language change is the simplification of word sounds, which often occurs to facilitate articulation and speed up communication. This mechanism includes processes such as elision, where certain sounds are omitted in word pronunciation. For example, in Indonesian, the word "tidak" 'not' is often shortened to "tak" in everyday speech.

In the Kaili language, a process similar to elision occurs, where certain sounds are omitted in word pronunciation, specifically the phonemes /h/ and /t/ at the end of words. The omission of the phoneme /h/ in words derived from Indonesian includes: the word "hadiah" 'prize' becoming "hadia," "sudah" becoming "suda," "mentah" 'raw' becoming "menta," and "terima kasih" 'thank you' becoming "tarimakasi." The omission of the phoneme /t/ in words derived from Indonesian includes: the word "dapat" 'get' becoming "dapa," "tempat" 'place' becoming "tampa," and "logat" 'dialect' becoming "loga."

Another phenomenon is contraction, where two or more words are combined into a shorter form, such as in English, "I am" becoming "I'm." According to Kridalaksana (2007), contraction is the process of combining and shortening words by omitting some syllables. Examples include the word "tidak" becoming "tdk," the word "dalam" becoming "dlm," and so on. In Kaili society, contractions occur, such as the word *komiu* 'you (polite)' becoming *miu*, the word *ledo naria* 'none' becoming *leria*, the name *Muhammad* (the Prophet's name) becoming *hama*, the word *daeng* 'a term for an elderly Bugis man' becoming *dae* or *dg*, the word *tina* 'mother' becoming *ina*, the word *tidak* 'not' becoming *te*, the word *saya* 'I am' becoming *sa*, and the word *punya* 'have' becoming *pe* or *p*. The following are examples of the use of these shortened forms.

1. Ledo **komiu** najadi narau. --> Ledo **miu** najadi narau.
'Don't you get angry?'
2. **Ledo naria** tuamaku.--> **Leria** tuamaku.
'My father isn't here.'
3. **Muhammad** (nama Nabi), nagaya mpuu. --> **Hamma**, nagaya mpuu.
'Muhammad (name of a prophet), so stylish?'
4. Naria **daeng** ante mangge. --> Naria **dae** ante mangge.
'Daeng and paman come.'
5. Nanguli **tina** hei. --> Nanguli **ina** hei.
'This mother is speaking.'
6. **Saya tidak** tahu. --> **Sa te** tahu
'I don't know.'
7. **Saya punya** buku. -->**Sa pe** buku
I have a book

In addition, sound changes such as monophthongization (the shift of diphthongs or double vowels into single vowels) and the deletion of final consonants also frequently occur, especially in the evolution of a language over time. The process of monophthongization occurs in the Kaili language when it borrows vocabulary from foreign languages that use diphthongs or double vowels. Examples: *handboek* becomes *handu*, *koelkast* becomes *kulkasa*, *koekies* becomes *kukisi*, and *normaal* becomes *normala*. The deletion of final consonants in the borrowing of foreign words into the Kaili language also frequently occurs. Examples: laptop becomes *lapto*, function becomes *fungsi*, jacket becomes *jake*, and *prestasion* becomes *prestasi*.

Innovation

Finally, internal changes can also be influenced by innovations from individuals or small groups within a language community. For example, the creation of new terms or modifications to syntactic patterns that are subsequently adopted on a wide scale. These innovations often arise from dialectal variations, everyday usage, or even creativity in literature and the linguistic arts. Gradually, these changes take root and become an integral part of the new language system.

Internal language change is often triggered by innovations originating from individuals or small groups within the language community. These innovations emerge as forms of linguistic creativity or adaptation to unique communication needs in specific environments. These individuals or groups, whether consciously or not, create or modify linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammatical structures, or pronunciation patterns. If the innovation is deemed effective, appealing, or aligned with social norms, its use can spread to a broader community and eventually become part of the language system.

An example of an individual innovation with significant impact is the creation of new terms or neologisms. In many cases, these terms emerge to describe new concepts, technologies, or phenomena that lack existing equivalents. For instance, the term "swafoto" in Indonesian emerged as an adaptation of the word "selfie," introduced by a specific group. If this term is deemed relevant and easy to understand, the general public tends to adopt it.

Innovation can also occur through the creative use of language in art, literature, or popular media. Writers, poets, musicians, and cultural figures often serve as pioneers in introducing new expressions or linguistic styles. Within smaller communities, subcultures or regional groups may create linguistic variations that are eventually adopted more widely. For example, slang terms that initially emerge among teenagers or specific communities often spread to the general public through social media or films. Within the Kaili community, terms have emerged that are distinctive to the Kaili ethnic group. Examples include the term *pata pensil*, meaning someone who has dropped out of school, and the term *hamma*, used to express surprise.

Additionally, linguistic innovations can emerge in response to practical or social needs. In some cases, small groups create abbreviations, codes, or new grammatical patterns to facilitate communication among group members. This phenomenon is evident in slang or professional jargon, which was initially used only within a limited scope but later adopted in broader contexts.

This also occurs among the Kaili ethnic community residing in the city of Palu and its surroundings, where many teenagers use new terms to name places or areas, such as: "Jakarta," which is an abbreviation (acronym) for the upper section of Kartini Street; the term "Palupi" is an abbreviation (acronym) for "Palu pinggir"; the term "Bali" replaces "Baliase"; the term "Sigma" replaces "Sisingamangaraja"; the term "Birma" replaces "Biromaru"; the term "Tokyo" replaces "Toaya"; and the term "Zimbabwe" replaces "Sigi in the Pombewe region."

The use of code forms in communication, and the use of emojis in communication via social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, is now also spreading among the Kaili ethnic group, particularly among the tech-savvy younger generation, such as: (👍) thumbs-up, (😊) smile, (🙏) thank you, and (❤️) heart.

New grammatical patterns in the Kaili language include (1) the use of the prefixes *ba-*, *ta-*, and *baku-*, (2) the use of certain words (particles) at the end of sentences, such as *le*, *ee*, and *jo*, and (3) sentence structures that now resemble those of Indonesian. The use of the prefixes *ba-*, *ta-*, and *baku-* in the Kaili language is becoming increasingly widespread among the Kaili people. The prefix *ba-* is equivalent to the prefix *ber-* in Indonesian. The prefix *ta-* is equivalent to the prefix *ter-* in Indonesian. The prefix *baku-* means "mutual." The following examples are words using the affixes *ba-*, *ta-*, and *baku-* that are commonly heard in everyday speech. Example:

bapukul 'hit'
baronda 'patrol'
bacabut 'pull out'
batarik 'pull'
tataban 'held back'
tabembe 'hanging'
tagate 'depending on'
tatempel 'stuck'
bakusayang 'loving each other'
bakupeluk 'hugging each other'
bakumarab 'angry with each other'

The use of certain words (particles) at the end of a sentence, such as *le*, *ee*, and *jo*. The word "le" is used at the end of a sentence to emphasize a request or 'please.' The word "le" means a bound form used to emphasize the meaning of the preceding word, and used after another word or sentence to soften or sweeten the meaning. Example:

Tulungi yaku le. 'Please help me.'
Nikande kukisina le. 'Eat the cookies.'

The word "ee" is used at the end of a sentence to emphasize a statement describing a particular condition. It can also be used to comment on a specific situation. The word "ee" means 'yes'. Example:

Yaku mosampe ee. 'I've arrived.'
Nacepa sembu ee. 'Get well soon.'

The word "jo" is used at the end of a sentence to emphasize something. It is also often used as a particle. The word "jo" means 'only.' Example:

Tasera kau jo. 'It is up to you.'
Kamai jo. 'Just come here.'

The pattern of Indonesian sentences follows a Subject-Predicate (SP) structure, whereas Kaili sentences follow a Predicate-Subject (PS) structure. Today, sentences in Kaili generally follow the Subject-Predicate pattern. The older PS structure is rarely used nowadays; the SP pattern is more common. Here are some examples of sentences in Kaili:

Montulisi yaku buku. --> *Yaku montulisi buku.*
 'Write a book.' 'I'm writing a book.'
 P S S P O

Montarima yaku doi. --> *Yaku montarima doi.*
 'Receive money.' 'I receive money.'
 P S S P O

Nangepe yaku suara tona. --> *Yaku nangepe suara tona.*
 'Hearing people's voices.' 'I hear people's voices.'
 P S S P O

Thus, innovations by individuals or small groups play a crucial role in driving internal language change. These changes, which are initially local or experimental in nature, can—if relevant and functional—develop into an integral part of language evolution within a community. These innovations reflect the flexibility of language in adapting to the communicative needs of its speakers.

These mechanisms demonstrate that language is dynamic and adaptive. Internal changes not only reflect the evolution of linguistic structure but also serve as a response to speakers' communicative needs within an ever-changing context.

CONCLUSION

Internal changes in the Kaili language are a natural process stemming from the dynamics of the language system itself, encompassing phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. These changes occur in response to the need for efficiency and ease of communication. One of the primary mechanisms is phonetic assimilation, which refers to sound changes caused by the influence of surrounding sounds, such as the transformation of the phoneme /c/ into /k/ and /w/ into /b/ in several loanwords. This assimilation process demonstrates the tendency of Kaili speakers to adjust their pronunciation to make it easier and more fluent, while also highlighting the adaptive nature of the Kaili phonological system.

In addition to assimilation, internal changes in the Kaili language are also influenced by morphological analogy and sound simplification. Analogy is evident in the adaptation of foreign words to align with Kaili vowel patterns, such as the addition of a vowel at the end of a word (*motor* → *motoro*, *traktor* → *traktoro*, *komputer* → *komputoro*). Meanwhile, sound simplification occurs through processes of elision, contraction, monophthongization, and the deletion of final consonants; for example: *hadiab* → *hadia*, *dapat* → *dapa*, and *laptop* → *lpto*. These mechanisms reflect speakers' efforts to streamline communication without compromising clarity of meaning.

Internal changes in the Kaili language are also driven by linguistic innovations emerging from individuals or small groups, particularly the younger generation, whether in the creation of new terms, the use of abbreviations

and acronyms, or changes in grammatical patterns. This is evident in the increasing use of the prefixes *ba-*, *ta-*, and *baku-*, sentence-final particles such as *le*, *ee*, and *jo*, as well as the shift in sentence structure from the Predicate–Subject pattern to the Subject–Predicate pattern, influenced by Indonesian. Overall, these mechanisms confirm that the internal changes in the Kaili language are part of a dynamic and ongoing process of linguistic evolution, in line with the changing communication needs of the Kaili ethnic community with social transformation.

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