Chinese Schools in Brunei: Chinese Language, Cultural Maintenance and the Rise of China

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Chinese schools are an important site for cultural maintenance of the Chinese identity in Brunei. Currently, there are five Chinese schools offering pre-primary to primary education (i.e. ‘primary schools’), and three Chinese schools offering pre-primary to secondary education (i.e. ‘middle schools’). These schools are run and financed by the ethnic Chinese communities, they offer the Chinese language as a compulsory subject, and the majority of the students are ethnic Chinese (including locals and foreigners). In recent years, however, non-ethnic-Chinese students’ enrolment in Chinese schools are proliferating, partly due to the rise of China and the economic opportunities associated with Chinese language competency. This paper will examine whether there is a ‘Chinese fever’ phenomenon in Brunei, and to what extent is effective Chinese language learning possible in the context of a Muslim and English-Malay bilingual majority country where the ethnic Chinese diasporic minority community has been historically marginalised.