

ETHNIC MINORITY RIGHTS

Findings

- During the Commission’s 2019 reporting year, the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Department continued to promote ethnic affairs work at all levels of Party and state governance that emphasized the importance of “sinicizing” ethnic and religious minorities. Officials emphasized the need to “sinicize” the country’s religions, including Islam. Official “sinicization” efforts contributed to the increasing marginalization of ethnic minorities and their cultures and languages.
- Reports indicate that official efforts to repress Islamic practices in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) have spread beyond the XUAR to Hui communities living in other locations. Developments suggest officials may be starting to carry out religious repression in areas outside of the XUAR that are modeled on restrictions already implemented within the XUAR. In November 2018, official media reported that Zhang Yunsheng, Communist Party official of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, had signed a counterterrorism agreement with XUAR officials during a trip to the XUAR to learn about its efforts to fight terrorism, maintain “social stability,” and manage religious affairs.
- During the reporting year, authorities carried out the physical destruction and alteration of Hui Muslim spaces and structures, continuing a recent trend away from relative toleration of Hui Muslim faith communities. Officials demolished a mosque in a Hui community in Gansu province, raided and closed several mosques in Hui areas in Yunnan province, closed an Arabic-language school serving Hui students in Gansu, and carried out changes such as removing Arabic signage in Hui areas. These changes narrowed the space for Hui Muslim believers to assert an ethnic and religious identity distinct from that of the dominant Han Chinese population.
- Mongol herders in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) protested and petitioned the government over the loss of traditional grazing lands. As in past reporting years, authorities detained some of the Mongol herders who peacefully protested.

Recommendations

Members of the U.S. Congress and Administration officials are encouraged to:

- Urge Chinese authorities to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that includes a definition of racial discrimination in full conformity with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); to amend Chinese domestic laws to expressly define and criminalize all forms of racial discrimination in full conformity with Article 1 of ICERD; and to expressly prohibit both direct and indirect racial discrimination in all fields of public life, including law enforcement and other government powers.

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- Urge Chinese authorities to establish independent national human rights institutions in accordance with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (the Paris Principles).
- Urge Chinese authorities to formulate and establish comprehensive statistics, surveys, and administrative records on acts of racial discrimination and related administrative and civil complaints, investigations, procedures, and sanctions.
- Urge Chinese authorities to allow Hui and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority populations to freely engage in Islamic religious rituals, as a matter of their right to religious freedom, and in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as China's Constitution, which prohibits discrimination based on religion.
- Call on the Chinese government to allow Mongol herders to exercise their fundamental rights of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to be free from arbitrary detention. Convey to Chinese officials the importance of consulting with ethnic minority communities regarding the impact of proposed development on their traditional grazing lands.
- Raise the cases of Mongol political prisoners, including detained Mongol historian Lhamjab Borjigin and detained Mongol writers O. Sechenbaatar and Tsogjil, in public forums and meetings with Chinese officials, and call for their immediate release from detention.

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Introduction

During the Commission's 2019 reporting year, Chinese Communist Party and government authorities promoted policies and regulations restricting rights guaranteed to ethnic minority groups under Chinese and international law. The PRC Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law contains protections for the languages, religious beliefs, and customs of these "nationalities," in addition to a system of regional autonomy in designated areas.¹ Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed and declared its intention to ratify, contains safeguards for the rights of "ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities" within a state.² In practice, however, Chinese authorities reportedly implemented policies that marginalized the cultures and languages of ethnic minority populations.³ International human rights organizations submitted reports in advance of the November 2018 session of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review that criticized China's controls on ethnic minorities' religious freedom and cultural identity.⁴ [For additional information on ethnic minority rights, see Section IV—Xinjiang and Section V—Tibet.]

Party and State "Sinicization" of Ethnic Minorities

During this reporting year, the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department (UFD) continued to promote ethnic affairs work at all levels of Party and state governance that emphasized the importance of "sinicizing" ethnic and religious minorities.⁵ The UFD promoted an approach to ethnic affairs that stressed ethnic unity;⁶ the "five identifications" (*wu ge rentong*) (referring to identification with the Chinese nation, the Chinese people, Chinese culture, the Chinese Communist Party, and "socialism with Chinese characteristics");⁷ the primacy of Mandarin Chinese;⁸ a resistance to foreign culture;⁹ and the use of both material assistance and propaganda efforts to manage "ethnic problems."¹⁰ At the March 2019 meetings of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing municipality, officials emphasized the need to "uphold the Party's leadership over religious work [and] persist in advancing the sinicization of our country's religions."¹¹ During the March 2019 National People's Congress (NPC), Premier Li Keqiang delivered the annual government work report, telling NPC delegates that they must "uphold the sinicization of religion in China."¹²

Policies Affecting Hui Islamic Communities

Officials implemented policies and restrictions in Hui communities in ways that represented intensified efforts to promote the "sinicization" of ethnic and religious minorities. In the past, Chinese officials have allowed Hui Muslims to practice religion more freely than Uyghur or other Turkic Muslims, but in recent years have placed more limits on Hui Muslim traditions.¹³ International observers have reported that official efforts to repress Islamic practices in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) appear to have spread beyond the XUAR to Hui communities living in other

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locations.¹⁴ In November 2018, official media reported that Zhang Yunsheng, Communist Party official of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, had signed a counterterrorism agreement with XUAR officials during a trip to the XUAR to learn about its efforts to fight terrorism, maintain “social stability,” and manage religious affairs.¹⁵ A researcher for the NGO Human Rights Watch expressed concern the agreement signaled that officials would carry out religious repression in areas outside of the XUAR modeled on restrictions already implemented within the XUAR.¹⁶

During this reporting year, authorities carried out the physical destruction and alteration of Hui Muslim spaces and structures. Officials demolished a mosque in a Hui community in Gansu province,¹⁷ raided and closed several mosques in Hui areas in Yunnan province,¹⁸ and closed an Arabic-language school serving Hui students in Gansu.¹⁹ Officials in provinces with significant Hui populations promoted “anti-halal” and “sinicization” efforts during the year, requiring the removal of Arabic signage on buildings and crescent domes on mosques, and also discontinued halal food standards, in order to stop the spread of Islamic influences officials deemed “foreign.”²⁰ In July, Reuters reported that officials in Beijing municipality had ordered some local restaurants and stores to remove words and symbols with Islamic significance from their signage, including the word “halal” written in Arabic.²¹ [For more information on freedom of religion for Muslims in China, see Section II—Freedom of Religion.]

Grassland Protests in Inner Mongolia

During this reporting year, authorities detained Mongol herders who protested or petitioned the government over the loss of traditional grazing lands. As in past reporting years,²² authorities detained some of the Mongol herders who peacefully protested.²³

Representative examples of protests and petitioning by Mongol herders included the following:

- In **April 2019**, authorities administratively detained three Mongol herders who had traveled to Hohhot municipality, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), to petition authorities over access to grazing lands.²⁴ Authorities escorted herders **Haaserdun, Tegshibayla, and Oobuuren** back to their hometown in Zaruud Banner, Tongliao municipality, IMAR, and ordered them to serve eight days’ administrative detention for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.”²⁵
- On **April 22, 2019**, more than 100 Mongol herders in Urad (Wulate) Middle Banner, Bayannur (Bayannao’er) municipality, IMAR, protested in front of local government offices to demand a meeting with IMAR chairwoman Bu Xiaolin, who was visiting the area.²⁶ Authorities detained around a dozen herders, including **Bai Xiurong** and **Altanbagan**, each of whom security personnel ordered to serve 14 days’ administrative detention for unknown charges.²⁷ On the evening of April 22 and the early morning of April 23, some of the herders protested in front of a local government building to call for the release of Bai, Altanbagan, and other herders still detained.²⁸

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Detention of Mongol Writers

Authorities in the IMAR tried a Mongol historian on charges related to a book he wrote and detained two Mongol writers who had advocated on behalf of herders' rights:

- **Lhamjab Borjigin.** On April 4, 2019, the Xilingol (Xilinguole) League Intermediate People's Court in Xilinhot city, Xilingol League, tried 75-year-old Mongol historian Lhamjab Borjigin on the charges of "ethnic separatism," "sabotaging national unity," and "illegal publication and illegal distribution."²⁹ A Xilinhot official previously linked the first two charges to a book Borjigin self-published in 2006 about Mongols' experiences during the Cultural Revolution.³⁰

- **O. Sechenbaatar.** On April 12, 2019, security personnel in Heshigten (Keshenketeng) Banner, Chifeng municipality, detained 68-year-old Mongol writer O. Sechenbaatar on suspicion of "obstructing official business," after he participated in a nearby protest involving more than 200 herders over government plans to restrict local herders' access to traditional grazing lands.³¹ Sechenbaatar has authored numerous books and other materials on Mongolian culture, and he has hosted group discussions about Mongol herders' concerns on the messaging service WeChat.³² On April 16, 2019, more than 100 herders protested in front of a government building in Heshigten to call for O. Sechenbaatar's release from detention.³³

- **Tsogjil.** On April 16, 2019, security personnel in Hohhot took into custody 40-year-old Mongol writer Tsogjil, and authorities subsequently took him back to his hometown in Heshigten Banner, and detained him on April 17 on the charge of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble."³⁴ According to a U.S.-based Mongol rights organization, prior to his detention, Tsogjil had advocated for Mongols' language and cultural rights, as well as their access to natural resources, including by hosting WeChat discussion groups.³⁵ Tsogjil had traveled to Hohhot to submit a complaint to regional government officials regarding Mongol herders' rights.³⁶

Notes to Section II—Ethnic Minority Rights

¹ *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Minzu Quyu Zizhi Fa*, [PRC Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law], passed May 31, 1984, effective October 1, 1984, amended February 28, 2001. For protections related to languages, religious beliefs, and customs, see Articles 10, 11, 21, 36, 37, 47, 49, and 53.

² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, art. 27.

³ See, e.g., Rustem Shir, “China’s Effort to Silence the Sound of Uyghur,” *The Diplomat*, May 16, 2019; Sang Jieja, “Why Is China So Terrified of Tibetan Language Classes?,” *La Croix International*, March 4, 2019; Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “SMHRIC Statement at UN Forum on Minority Issues 11th Session and Chinese Delegate’s Response,” November 29, 2018.

⁴ See, e.g., Amnesty International, “China: Human Rights Violations in the Name of ‘National Security’: Amnesty International Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review, 31st Session of the UPR Working Group, November 2018,” March 1, 2018, 7, 11–12; Society for Threatened Peoples, “Third Cycle, Thirty-First Session of the UPR, UPR Submission on China,” accessed June 11, 2019, 2–3; Human Rights Watch, “Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of China,” March 29, 2018.

⁵ Gerry Groot, “The Rise and Rise of the United Front Work Department under Xi,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation 18, no. 7, April 24, 2018; “Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa ‘shenhua Dang he guojia jigou gaige fang’an’” [CCP Central Committee issues “plan for deepening reform of Party and state government agencies’ reform agenda”], *Xinhua*, March 21, 2018; CECC, *2018 Annual Report*, October 10, 2018, 137. At the March 2018 meetings of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in Beijing municipality (Two Sessions), the UFWD assumed control of the government departments overseeing ethnic affairs (the State Ethnic Affairs Commission) and religion (the State Administration for Religious Affairs).

⁶ Shen Guiping, “Jiang qingchu Zhonghua wenhua, zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtong ti yishi—‘Shehui Zhuyi Xueyuan Gongzuo Tiaoli’ xuexi tihui” [Clearly explain Chinese culture, forge a unified Chinese consciousness – “Socialism Institute Work Regulations” learning experience], *China Ethnicity News*, February 1, 2019.

⁷ Tao Wenzhao, “Zai gongtong fanrong fazhan zhong zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtong ti yishi” [Forging Chinese collective consciousness while collectively prospering in development], *Guangming Daily*, January 5, 2018.

⁸ Hao Shiyuan, “Zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtong ti yishi bixu tuiguang guojia tongyong yuyan wenzi” [To forge Chinese collective consciousness the national common language and characters must be promoted], *People’s Daily*, October 31, 2018; Shen Guiping, “Jiang qingchu Zhonghua wenhua, zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtong ti yishi—‘Shehui Zhuyi Xueyuan Gongzuo Tiaoli’ xuexi tihui” [Clearly explain Chinese culture, forge a unified Chinese consciousness – “Socialism Institute Work Regulations” learning experience], *China Ethnicity News*, February 1, 2019.

⁹ Shen Guiping, “Jiang qingchu Zhonghua wenhua, zhulao Zhonghua minzu gongtong ti yishi—‘Shehui Zhuyi Xueyuan Gongzuo Tiaoli’ xuexi tihui” [Clearly explain Chinese culture, forge a unified Chinese consciousness – “Socialism Institute Work Regulations” learning experience], *China Ethnicity News*, February 1, 2019.

¹⁰ State Ethnic Affairs Commission, “Guojia minwei zhaokai quanguo minzu xuanchuan gongzuo huiyi Guo Weiping chuxi bing jianghua” [SEAC holds national ethnic propaganda work meeting, Guo Weiping attends and delivers a speech], March 27, 2019.

¹¹ “You Quan: Jianchi Dang dui zongjiao gongzuo de lingdao, chixu tuijin woguo zongjiao Zhongguohua” [You Quan: uphold the Party’s leadership over religious work, persist in advancing the Sinicization of our country’s religions] *Xinhua*, March 20, 2019. See also John Dotson, “Propaganda Themes at the CPPCC Stress the ‘Sinicization’ of Religion,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, April 9, 2019, 2.

¹² State Council, “Zhengfu gongzuo baogao” [Government work report], reprinted in *Xinhua*, March 16, 2019; Nectar Gan, “Beijing Plans to Continue Tightening Grip on Christianity and Islam as China Pushes Ahead with the ‘Sinicisation of Religion,’” *South China Morning Post*, March 6, 2019.

¹³ See, e.g., Mimi Lau, “Chinese Arabic School to Close as Areas with Muslim Populations Are Urged to Study the Xinjiang Way,” *South China Morning Post*, December 9, 2018; Sam McNeil, “Hui Poet Fears for His People as China ‘Sinicizes’ Religion,” *Associated Press*, December 28, 2018.

¹⁴ Ian Johnson, “How the State Is Co-Opting Religion in China,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 7, 2019; Chun Han Wong, “China Applies Xinjiang’s Policing Lessons to Other Muslim Areas,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2018; Nectar Gan, “Chinese Hui Mosque Protest Ends after Authorities Promise to Consult Community,” *South China Morning Post*, August 15, 2018; “China’s Ningxia to ‘Learn From’ Xinjiang’s Anti-Terror Campaign,” *Radio Free Asia*, December 3, 2018. Hui Muslims also live in the XUAR, but reports from the past reporting year have focused on increased repression of Hui communities outside of the XUAR. See, e.g., Joanne Smith Finley, “Now We Don’t Talk Anymore,” *ChinaFile*, Asia Society, December 28, 2018.

¹⁵ Ji Yuqiao, “Ningxia Learns From Xinjiang How to Fight Terrorism,” *Global Times*, November 27, 2018; Deng Zhihua, “Ningxia dangwei zhengfa wei deng bumen fu Xinjiang kaocha duijie fankong weiwen gongzuo” [Ningxia political-legal committee department travels to Xinjiang to inspect counterterrorism and stability maintenance work], *Ningxia Daily*, November 27, 2018. See also “China’s Ningxia to ‘Learn From’ Xinjiang’s Anti-Terror Campaign,” *Radio Free Asia*, December 3, 2018; Sophia Yan, “Fears China’s Internment Camps Could Spread as Area Home to Muslim Minority Signs ‘Anti-Terror’ Deal,” *Telegraph*, November 29, 2018.

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¹⁶Sophia Yan, “Fears China’s Internment Camps Could Spread as Area Home to Muslim Minority Signs ‘Anti-Terror’ Deal,” *Telegraph*, November 29, 2018. See also David R. Stroup, “The Xinjiang Model of Ethnic Politics and the Daily Practice of Ethnicity,” *China at the Crossroads* (blog), December 19, 2018.

¹⁷“Gansu Linxia yi qingzhensi zao qiangchai duo ren bei ju” [A mosque in Linxia, Gansu, is demolished, many people are detained], *Radio Free Asia*, April 12, 2019; William Yang, “Zhongguo xu tui Yisilan Hanhua Gansu qingzhensi zao ‘mieding’” [China continues Hanification of Islam, Gansu mosque “extinguished”], *Deutsche Welle*, April 12, 2019; Bai Shengyi, “Gansu yi qingzhensi gang jiancheng jiu zao qiangchai Muslim laoren tang de tongku” [Mosque in Gansu demolished just after being built, elderly Muslims lie on the ground and weep], *Bitter Winter*, April 12, 2019.

¹⁸Liwei Wu, “Love Allah, Love China,” *Foreign Policy*, March 25, 2019; Meng Yihua, “Three Hui Mosques Raided in China’s Yunnan Province,” *Muslim News*, January 25, 2019.

¹⁹Zhao Yusha, “Gansu Shuts Down Arabic School over Regulations,” *Global Times*, December 4, 2018; Mimi Lau, “Chinese Arabic School to Close as Areas with Muslim Populations Are Urged to Study the Xinjiang Way,” *South China Morning Post*, December 9, 2018; Chun Han Wong, “China Applies Xinjiang’s Policing Lessons to Other Muslim Areas,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2018.

²⁰James Palmer, “China’s Muslims Brace for Attacks,” *Foreign Policy*, January 5, 2019; Liu Caiyu, “Gansu Removes 4 Halal-Linked Standards to Curb Religious Extremism,” *Global Times*, December 17, 2018; “China: ‘Arabic-Sounding’ River Renamed to Curb Islamic Influence,” *Al Jazeera*, October 2, 2018; Liwei Wu, “Love Allah, Love China,” *Foreign Policy*, March 25, 2019. See also Liu Caiyu, “Islamic Communities Urged to Uphold Sincization, Improve Political Stance,” *Global Times*, January 6, 2019; Nectar Gan, “Beijing Plans to Continue Tightening Grip on Christianity and Islam as China Pushes Ahead with the ‘Sincisation of Religion,’” *South China Morning Post*, March 6, 2019; Sam McNeil, “Hui Poet Fears for His People as China ‘Sincizes’ Religion,” *Associated Press*, December 28, 2018.

²¹Huizhong Wu, “Sign of the Times: China’s Capital Orders Arabic, Muslim Symbols Taken Down,” *Reuters*, July 31, 2019.

²²See, e.g., CECC, *2018 Annual Report*, October 10, 2018, 139; CECC, *2017 Annual Report*, October 5 2017, 148–49.

²³See, e.g., “Chinese Police Hold Another Ethnic Mongolian Writer over Protest,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 16, 2019; Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Two More WeChat Group Administrators Detained,” April 26, 2019.

²⁴“Chinese Police Hold Another Ethnic Mongolian Writer over Protest,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 16, 2019; “Nei menggu duo wei mumin shangfang bei juliu Neimeng xuexiao jinggao bu de wangyi lingdao ren” [Many herder petitioners detained in Inner Mongolia, Inner Mongolian school warned against discussing leaders], *Radio Free Asia*, April 8, 2019.

²⁵“Chinese Police Hold Another Ethnic Mongolian Writer over Protest,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 16, 2019; “Nei menggu duo wei mumin shangfang bei juliu Neimeng xuexiao jinggao bu de wangyi lingdao ren” [Many herder petitioners detained in Inner Mongolia, Inner Mongolian school warned against discussing leaders], *Radio Free Asia*, April 8, 2019.

²⁶Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Two More WeChat Group Administrators Detained,” April 26, 2019; “Two More Ethnic Mongolians Jailed in China, WeChat Groups Deleted,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 26, 2019.

²⁷Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Two More WeChat Group Administrators Detained,” April 26, 2019; “Two More Ethnic Mongolians Jailed in China, WeChat Groups Deleted,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 26, 2019.

²⁸Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Two More WeChat Group Administrators Detained,” April 26, 2019; “Two More Ethnic Mongolians Jailed in China, WeChat Groups Deleted,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 26, 2019.

²⁹Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Writer Tried behind Closed Doors as ‘National Separatist,’ Pending Sentence,” April 11, 2019; “China Tries Ethnic Mongolian Historian for Genocide Book, in Secret,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 12, 2019. For more information on Lhamjab Borjigin, see the Commission’s Political Prisoner Database record 2019–00105.

³⁰Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Southern Mongolian Writer Faces Charges of ‘National Separatism’ and ‘Sabotaging National Unity,’” July 23, 2018; “Neimeng qi xun zuojia jiu zuo fanyi Hanzhi zao qingsuan dangju ni yi fenlie zui qisu” [Inner Mongolian writer in his seventies faces criticism for older Chinese translation work, authorities plan to indict him for separatism], *Radio Free Asia*, July 23, 2018; “China Holds Ethnic Mongolian Historian Who Wrote ‘Genocide’ Book,” *Radio Free Asia*, July 23, 2018.

³¹Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Writer Placed under Criminal Detention for Defending Herders’ Rights,” April 16, 2019; “Chinese Police Hold Another Ethnic Mongolian Writer over Protest,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 16, 2019.

³²Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Writer Placed under Criminal Detention for Defending Herders’ Rights,” April 16, 2019; “Chinese Police Hold Another Ethnic Mongolian Writer over Protest,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 16, 2019.

³³Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Writer Placed under Criminal Detention for Defending Herders’ Rights,” April 16, 2019.

³⁴Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Activist Placed under Criminal Detention for ‘Picking Quarrels and Provoking Troubles,’” April 19, 2019; “Third Ethnic Mongolian Writer Held in China’s Inner Mongolia,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 22, 2019.

³⁵Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Activist Placed under Criminal Detention for ‘Picking Quarrels and Provoking Troubles,’” April 19, 2019; “Third Ethnic Mongolian Writer Held in China’s Inner Mongolia,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 22, 2019.

³⁶Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Activist Placed under Criminal Detention for ‘Picking Quarrels and Provoking Troubles,’” April 19, 2019; “Third Ethnic Mongolian Writer Held in China’s Inner Mongolia,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 22, 2019.