



# Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Memory, and Gender in Contemporary Mongolia

*Manduhai Buyandelger*

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The collapse of socialism at the end of the twentieth century brought devastating changes to Mongolia. Economic shock therapy—an immediate liberalization of trade and privatization of publicly owned assets—quickly led to impoverishment, especially in rural parts of the country, where *Tragic Spirits* takes place. Following the travels of the nomadic Buryats, Manduhai Buyandelger tells a story not only of economic devastation but also a remarkable Buryat response to it—the revival of shamanic practices after decades of socialist suppression.

Attributing their current misfortunes to returning ancestral spirits who are vengeful over being abandoned under socialism, the Buryats are now at once trying to appease their ancestors and recover the history of their people through shamanic practice. Thoroughly documenting this process, Buyandelger situates it as part of a global phenomenon, comparing the rise of shamanism in liberalized Mongolia to its similar rise in Africa and Indonesia. In doing so, she offers a sophisticated analysis of the way economics, politics, gender, and other factors influence the spirit world and the crucial workings of cultural memory.

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