A. **Project Purpose**
My research question is if there is gendered material culture in the archeological record in the Soya site in Mongolia, specifically from the Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages. This project is to explore the experience of a large segment of the population of prehistoric Central Asian nomadic societies through archaeological excavation and ethnographic metaphor. It will also provide a basis for ongoing research in women’s lives in a poorly understood area and time.

B. **Project Importance**
This project will be important for the field of archaeology, understanding women’s experiences, and cultural heritage of Central Eurasian peoples. The site of the proposed excavation, in northern Mongolia close to the border of Russia, has a record of over 10,000 years of continuous human activity. A robust assemblage from 3,000-6,000 years ago, the Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages, allows for the opportunity to explore the transition from hunting and gathering to nomadic pastoralism. This is key as the steppes are one of the few areas without the presence of agriculture in the region. Thus, this site is unique for understandings of domestic life and food production. The Mongol Empire is the largest ever established, but Mongol history lacks many of the elements that are associated with successful empires, like high population density, bureaucratic systems, and strict hierarchies. Researching this transition to nomadic pastoralism, which defines so much of Mongol society, can help archaeologists learn what a successful society is without the cultural western bias.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this research is a better understanding of cultural heritage, particularly the heritage of women. Modern Mongolian women deserve to know
how their ancient mothers lived. While Mongolian women can certainly look to historic ancestors, such as the Queens who ruled the Mongol Empire as regents, often for longer than men, prehistoric women are as important in establishing a historical precedent for empowerment. Mongolian women are in an incredibly unique situation. According to the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, produced by the World Economic Forum, Mongolian women experience gender equitable health and survival and educational attainment. In fact, they are ranked 1 out of 150 countries in this area. However, they are ranked 109 out of 150 in political empowerment. This different societal approach to gender equity almost certainly comes from a different cultural context that is best understood with an historical background.

There are cultural heritage issues for Mongolian culture at large, as well. One of the goals of the excavation group is outreach to local Mongolians. One man has tried to create a tourist camp directly on the site, and so the hope is create community engagement in a shared heritage to promote pride and buy-in. Beyond man-made threats, the permafrost is rapidly melting. Extreme cold, such as permafrost, preserves organic materials that are not preserved in any other setting. However, as it is currently melting, this organic material is being exposed and has begun to degrade. Excavation will record this heritage before they are lost forever. NOMAD Science, the organization that is facilitating the excavation, is a collaboration between archaeologists in the west and in Mongolia, including the National Museum of Mongolia. This allows for national control of artifacts. The excavation will also be implementing cutting-edge techniques, such as
paleoethnobotany, zoo mass spectrometry, and remote sensing which will produce entirely new information on the region.

C. **Project Overview**
Nomadic prehistory is often overlooked. Material remains of a mobile people are much scarcer than the remains of a sedentary society, which discourages archaeologists.
However, artifacts do exist, and information can still be learned through excavation, especially at a site like Soyo. Much of the research done of this region is done through historical sources. However, the historical sources (almost exclusively about the Mongol Empire) are from the areas that were conquered. The most important sources are from Persian historians and Chinese dynasty accounts, with a few European (Papal) accounts. The one exception, but by far the most important source, is *The Secret History of the Mongols*. This source is the account of the founding of the Mongol tribe and Chinggis Khan, for the inner circle of the Mongol court. It was most likely written by a foreign historian for Ogedai Khan, the son of Chinggis Khan and the man who made the conquered territories into an empire. This is the source of almost all of the biographical information of Chinggis Khan. The true value, however, lies in the cultural context of the story. It is called *The Secret History* because until the late 1800’s, it has only been read by the direct descendants of Chinggis Khan. It was not translated into a western language until 1941. Thus, the details are written by Mongols for Mongols, and so provide an incredible snapshot into the values of medieval culture.

For the purposes of this project, it is incredibly important how often women are important and agential characters in *The Secret History*. The longest monologue is Hoelun,
Chinggis Khan’s mother, chastising Chinggis (then Temujin) and his younger brother Khasar for killing their half-brother Belgutei. This extraordinary story is a fiery speech, holding nothing back in laying out the character flaws of the founder of the Mongol Empire. Temujin’s father, Yesugei, was killed in his early childhood, and he was raised by women alone. And Hoelun is not the only woman to be given a prominent role. Temujin’s first and favorite wife, Borte. Is also a major figure in his journey. Not only is it her kidnapping that spurs him to create the first coalition that provided the first leadership opportunity, Borte is the one to suggest to him that he should attempt any type of conquering. Critically, Temujin did not become Chinggis Khan to pursue a dream of ruling. He became Chinggis Khan to please his wife and protect his family, and the empire came about by happenstance. There are more women in The Secret History that have agential roles, but it is remarkable that women are mentioned at all in a story transcribed in the 1300’s.

In more modern sources, Jack Weatherford’s The Secret History of the Mongol Queens and Anne F. Broadbridge’s Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire are both incredibly helpful books that survey the broad range of historical documents. Modern ethnographic sources, such as “Tea Practices in Mongolia: A Field of Female Power and Gendered Meanings” by Gaby Bamana explores the way materials are modernly manipulated to express gender identity. Archaeological research of nomadic societies is also a useful source, even nomadic societies in other regions. “Alternative Complexities: The Archaeology of Pastoral Nomadic States” by William Honeychurch is an excellent example of an archaeological methodology that can approach gender. However, there is
very little scholarship on archaeological gender in the Eurasian steppes. While there is a long and rich history of feminist archaeology, starting in the 1970’s, most archaeology is done without the lens of gender, or modern interpretations of gender norms are applied to the past. Unwittingly, most things are associated with men simply due to bias. However, women are half of the population and a large part of any archaeological record.

In Central Eurasian nomadic studies, no one has really asked what material culture is specifically gendered. We know that in other cultures in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age that specific jobs, such as textile or ceramic production were assigned culturally to one gender, and it is often taboo for other genders to participate in it. We also know that modern Mongolian culture has gendered materials. Femininity, particularly motherhood, is often established through tea practices, and women own the traditional nomadic homes, a **ger**. In accounts from the Mongol Empire in the 1300’s, a first wife was able to force the Khan and his new wife to leave her **ger** on their wedding night, because she was in complete control over the space. Any possible ethnographic or historical metaphor to this time period involves clear and defining gender material culture. It would be foolish to believe that prehistorical nomadic cultures in the region did not share in the tradition of gendered material. If this question is never asked of this region, women as a whole lose a unique perspective on what being a woman is. The archaeological record is not created solely by men, and women of the past need a voice just as much as modern women. This research intends to use all of these potential metaphors, as well as artifacts discovered in the course of the excavation, to ask about the gendered material culture of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age nomadic Eurasian steppes.
The methodology of the excavation itself was determined by the director of the field school I will be attending. The organization is called NOMAD Science, and the director of the field school is Dr. Julia Clark, an anthropological archaeologist who is the founder of NOMAD Science. She focuses on using diverse methods, both technological and theoretical.

D. Thesis Committee

   a. Faculty Advisor:
      Dr. Zach Chase is a historical archaeologist who works in colonial Peru. His experience is not in this area, but his help will still be invaluable. I have a good working relationship with Dr. Chase and enjoy discussing papers with him. He is also the professor who teaches the anthropology thesis writing course, and so will be very involved in the writing process. He is also highly versed in theoretical methods, and so will be helpful in exploring theoretical approaches. I have specifically asked for his mentorship because of positive experiences in writing papers with him.

   b. Faculty Reader:
      Dr. Cynthia Finlayson is also in the archaeology department. Her research is in Classical Old World archaeology, specifically in the Middle East. While her research sites, Palmyra, Syria and Petra, Jordan, are from before the Mongol Empire control over the Islamic world, she is still very knowledgeable about Mughal rulers and the Mongol Empire from a different perspective than the typical East Asian research. However, I specifically asked for her input because she is feminist archaeologist, and so focuses on the experiences of women. She will be great for the evidence of women in archeological record, a task that is
difficult. In past classes I have taken from her, she has improved my writing significantly with honest criticism.

c. **Honors Coordinator:**
The honors coordinator for the anthropology department is Dr. Charles Nuckolls. He does social-cultural anthropology, not archaeological research, but he will still be a helpful resource. His anthropological research has taken him all over, most prominently India, but he has extensive experience in Japan as well. While the Mongols tried and failed to conquer both the Indian subcontinent and Japanese archipelago, there is still an element of pan-Asian culture that is worth considering. He, as the honors coordinator, will also be helpful in the writing process.

E. **Project Timeline**

*Winter Semester 2019:*

April 1st: Submit Thesis Proposal

April 8th: Submit and receive feedback on term paper for class History of the Mongol Empire, entitled “Historical Material Culture in Gender Formation”

July 8th - July 28th 2019: Participate in excavation in Mongolia, through NOMAD Science

*Fall Semester 2019:*

Take Global Women’s Studies Capstone and write term paper on Mongol Femininity. Go through writing process and critique from the perspective of gender studies.

November 15th: Finish graduate school applications

*Winter Semester 2020:*

March 2nd: First Draft of Archaeological thesis due
March 25th: Submit poster of research to Mary Lou Fulton Conference (BYU)

March 27th: Present at Anthropological Senior Symposium

April 5th: Present at HEX conference, through BYU Museum of Peoples and Cultures

April 10th: Finish final edits of thesis and submit for defense

April 15th: Defend (this is the last day, so the defense may happen before this)

April 23rd: Graduation

Spring 2020: Prepare paper for publication

F. Funding
The expenses for this project are as follows:

NOMAD Science Field School:
   $2900 for housing, food, transportation and equipment
   $300 for First Responder Wilderness Paramedic Training
Airfare:
   About $1600 for flight from Salt Lake to Ulaanbaatar

$4800 total

I am requesting the maximum amount of $1000 from the Honors department to begin covering these costs. I would take more if more was available. I am also seeking funding from the Global Women’s Studies department and archaeology department. I am currently applying to receive finding from the Kennedy Center as an individual experience. In addition, I have applied to outside grants and scholarships. I cannot apply for mentored research grants such as ORCA, as this field school is not with a BYU faculty member. Any extra funding with either come out-of-pocket or from student loans.

G. Culminating Experience
I am planning on presenting this research at the Utah Conference for Undergraduate Research, as well as the 2021 Society for American Archaeologists Conference. The application deadline for this conference is in September, and so will have to be done after I have graduated. I am also planning on presenting in the Mary Lou Fulton Conference and Hex Conference at BYU. I will submit the research for publication through various archeological and women’s studies journals; this will also be done after graduation in order to edit the research after defense for the best product.

H. Conclusion
Information on the specific excavation I am attending can be found at

https://www.nomadsciencesmongolia.com/soyo-archaeology. The excavation was found through personal online research and is not affiliated with BYU. Nevertheless, it is a credible organization with peer-reviewed publications and outreach programs.

I. Preliminary Bibliography


