Group 2: Project Proposal and Team Charter

1. **Research Question**

What economic trends can be observed in VOC salaries over time, and how did wages differ across ranks, regions, and roles?

Relevance of RQ

Plenty of research has been done on the Dutch East India Company; while many papers investigate socio-political or logistical topics, little research has gone into workforce compensation and whether these wages changed overtime, or if changes followed larger economic trends. This paper aims to extend the research done by C. Rei by looking at a larger dataset and taking wages as potentially variable throughout the decades. The paper will use research done by B. van Gerwen, and J. Lucassen as a basis to better understand the goings-on of the VOC.

2. Thesis Statement

This study examines the evolution of wage structures within the VOC during the 17th and 18th centuries, focusing on how salaries and employment patterns shifted over time. By contextualizing these changes within broader economic, social, and political developments, the research aims to provide insight into how global forces shaped labor practices in both Europe and Dutch colonies.

3. Dataset Description

Advantages:

1. The VOC ships' pay ledgers provide detailed information on the wages of seamen and soldiers, with surviving data for 3,248 voyages.
2. Contains over 460,000 unique entries derived from 774,200 logbooks.
3. Temporal depth: spans several decades, enabling an analysis of long-term economic trends during the 18th century.

4. Standardized place names and integrated related data sources through automated and manual processes.

5. Data on ranks, roles, and geographic origins enable a nuanced analysis of how wages differed based on career level and location.

6. Allows for extensive statistical analysis of labor trends.

7. Useful for sociological studies, network analysis, and exploring migration trends.

Limitations:

1. Fragmented dataset due to several jobs of the same individual being recorded separately, obstructing tracking long-term career paths.

2. Wide variation in the way locations are recorded, making geographical analysis difficult without further data preprocessing.

3. The dataset focuses mainly on European workers, excluding a significant portion of the Asian workforce.

Disadvantages:

1. The reliance on automated processes for standardizing names and clustering has resulted in quality issues, including phonetic errors and transcription mistakes.

2. Some errors in transcription and data enrichment processes may affect the datasets accuracy.

4. Action Plan

Step-by-step process to answer the RQ:

1. Clean and merge fragmented individual records.
2. Standardize and classify data:
     - Standardize toponyms and geographic data across datasets.
     - Normalize wages and classify jobs, ranks, and roles.
3. Data integration:
     - Integrate external datasets on Asian labor forces to provide a broader context for analysis.
4. Wage analysis:
     - Conduct statistical modeling to identify wage trends by rank, region, and role.

5. Regional comparison:
   - Regional salary comparison for insight into discrepancies across regions.
6. Statistical modeling:
   - Identifying wage trends and factors influencing wages by rank, region, and role.
7. Answer the research question.

Data Consistency and Completeness :

The data is inconsistent because of incorrect geographic designations and fragmented career pathways, in which the employment of the same person is reported differently.Thus, accurate regional analysis and long-term pay trend tracking are limited.

Data manipulation :

- **Selection:** We will ignore variables we deem unimportant to our RQ, like trip logistics or other crew statistics, in favor of variables like wages, ranks and locations.
- **Modeling:** To link individual wage data across trips and positions, the dataset will need to be restructured due to fragmented career records.
- **Normalization**: To compare wages across time, wage data should be adjusted for inflation. Decisions need to be made on how to handle missing wage values. Standardizing job titles and regional names is necessary for comparability throughout the collection.
- **Linking**: We will link relevant datasets to each other (e.g. voyages to place names), and to external sources on the Asian labor force of the VOC, to determine differences in pay.
- **Classification**: The workforce will be divided into roles, ranks, and regions.

5. Team Charter

Schedule and Communication: The team communicates through a WhatsApp group and coordinates work through Github and Google Docs. We meet once a week to reassess our work.

Practical Matters: To make work easier to navigate as a 6 person group we split into smaller teams and delegate tasks. Our timeline aims to stay ahead of deadlines by a day.

Potential Challenges:

- Different schedules due to varying work and courses.
- Learning to use digital humanities tools necessary in our project.

Our team:

Jorge Crespo Rubio: Major in EBE, well versed in economic analysis and technologically savvy for processing data and visualizing it.

Boris Braun: In third year for Communication & Information Sciences. I enjoy group work and am good at writing.

Stanislaw: In third year of Bachelor in Media, Art, Design and Architecture. I enjoy conducting research, and enjoy handling the visual components of presentations.

Roza Bračić: Third year Mathematics student. Can work with data and write programs to efficiently process, analyze it, and make visualizations.

Rebecca Casalini: Student of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology. I enjoy exploring the intersection of culture, technology, and society and aim to apply digital tools to sociocultural research.

Natalia Bielecka: Pursuing a Bachelor in Media, Art, Design and Architecture. I enjoy literature research and writing as well as team organization/management.

References:

1. van Gerwen, B. (2014). *Growing Labour Demand of a Starting Company. The Dutch Maritime Labour Market and the Emergence of the Dutch East India Company (1602-1622).* Utrecht University. Accessed September 19, 2024.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the VOC's labor market and wage structures during its formative years from 1602 to 1622. It offers detailed insights into wage trends, including salary fluctuations, stabilization, and differences across ranks. It also examines the financial tools and recruitment strategies used by the VOC to meet labor demands in a competitive maritime economy.

2. Lucassen, J. (2004). A Multinational and its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company, 1595–1795. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, *66*, 12–39. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0147547904000158

This paper explains how the Dutch East India Company amassed its workforce, where workers came from and what the working culture at the Company actually was like. The paper helps us contextualize our dataset, providing us more insight into the circumstances of workers of the VOC and helps us understand why so many contracts ended prematurely. Seeing as this paper makes use of a different dataset to ours, it would also be interesting to compare the two.

3. Rei, C. (2013). Careers and wages in the Dutch East India Company. *Cliometrica*, *8*(1), 27–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11698-013-0093-3

This paper investigates the careers of workers at the Dutch East India Company during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It explains how the company was structured and seeks to find which factors (e.g. worker's age, job level, potential exit motives) best explained the average tenure at the Dutch East India Company. Moreover, it explains how wages were structured and differed across roles within the VOC. This paper is of particular interest to us as it does explain the wage structure, but takes wages as being stable throughout time. We would be interested in extending this research by investigating the changes in wages throughout time. We are also interested in whether a different and much larger dataset yields similar results for wage differences across job roles within the VOC.

Our dataset: Petram, L., Koolen, M., Wevers, M., van Koert, R. & van Lottum, J. (2024). The Dutch East India Company's Eighteenth-Century Workforce: an Enriched Data Collection, *Journal of Open Humanities*, *10*, 1-17 44. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10599527