

Touching things from afar: Global history, bodies and the material turn

Anne
Gerritsen

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Abstract

The field of history has been transformed in the last decade and a half by the study of global connections and globalization. Instead of focusing on nation-based narratives, historians have shifted their attention to economic, political and increasingly also cultural interactions between nations. One of the problems with this development is the suggestion of homogeneity it creates. The study of global material culture and the bodily experience of touching new materials and surfaces, I suggest, offers one way of challenging that homogeneity and understanding better the processes of appropriation and rejection that were part of the global circulation of goods.

Speaker profile

Anne Gerritsen is professor of History at the University of Warwick, and holds the Kikkoman Chair of Asia-Europe Exchange at the University of Leiden. She studied Sinology in Leiden and Cambridge, and holds a PhD from Harvard University. She is currently Director of the Global History and Culture Centre at Warwick. Her teaching and research is in the field of Chinese history, but more recently she has worked on the early modern exchange between Asia and Europe, focusing on porcelain, but also on foodstuffs like soyasauce and rhubarb.

Institute of Comparative Culture (ICC) Sophia University: 7-1 Kioicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8554, JAPAN
+81-3-3238-4082 / +81-3-3238-4081(fax)
Email: i-comcul@sophia.ac.jp
Web: <http://icc.fla.sophia.ac.jp>



Thomas Hees with his Nephews Jan and Andries Hees and a Servant. Oil on canvas, 1687, by Michiel van Musscher. H 76 cm × W 63 cm. Mauritshuis, from the bequest of Jonkheren Jacob Hendrik and Wiardus Hora Siccama, The Hague, 1914; since 1932 on loan to Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-C-1215.