



Album leaf from China, ca 1866. Painted with the process of sieving the tea leaves in order to separate into different grades. Watercolour and ink on pith. From the Horniman Collection.

*“Tea leaf”*



"Tea leaf" is Cockney rhyming slang for 'thief'. Idioms and sayings (particularly Cockney rhyming slang) enfold meaning within a complex set of references and rhymes that appear impenetrable to an outsider, and almost impossible to translate for a non-English speaker.

Tea is a common subject for expressions within the English language, due to its omnipresence in the lives of Brits in every social class- from the working 'builder's brew' to 'tea with the Queen'.

**What does our language around the subject of tea reveal about the role it plays in our lives?**

reveals how we were  
reared / ~~and~~ our ~~class~~  
social status / the  
importance of eating  
drinking in lives.



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Though tea is such an integral part of everyday life I'd never considered its relation to language or geography before.  
The personal is political.



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It's a fairly British approach to act as if we are the origin of everything - the world is centred from our perspective. In our language we speak as if we own it, invented it, grew it... and bestowed it upon the world.



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social

→ it nominally defies  
'social categories' even  
though the language  
surrounding it is  
exclusionary, e.g. tea w/  
queen, it as an object/  
activity is inclusive