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杨树芳◎编著

# 英国社会与

# 文化概况

A Brief Introduction To British  
Society And Culture

光明日报出版社

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## 前 言

语言的学习和文化的学习是密不可分的。语言学习不仅包括对语言本身的学习和语言知识的学习,也包括文化知识方面的学习。本书根据这一实际需要,本着社会知识与文化知识相结合、知识文化与交际文化并重的原则,以英国社会与文化为主线,重点介绍了英国的地理环境、人文特征、政治体制、经济概况、教育特色、节日风俗、体育娱乐和社会习俗等方面内容,旨在帮助读者在强化语言能力的基础上,了解英国社会与文化概貌,从而丰富英语国家文化背景知识,最终提高跨文化交际能力。

全书共分八章,每章包含两个部分,第一部分为主体信息文章,第二部分为相关知识拓宽文章。为了便于读者学习,每章后均有部分难词和专有名词的中文释义和部分重要文化背景的介绍,同时配有相关内容的练习题,方便读者课后复习。本书结合编者开设的《英美文化课程》讲义,同时参考了众多国内外出版的报刊、图书、教材和相关网站,力争选用最新的数据和资料,内容客观,知识丰富。

本书可作为非外语院校的普通工科本科院校、师范类院校的英语专业及非英语专业高年级学生英美文化课程教材,也供具有同等英语水平的自学者使用。

由于英国社会与文化内容庞杂,一本教材很难做到面面俱到,只能择主干而弃枝叶,再加之编者水平有限,书中有不足之处,敬请读者批评指正。

编者

2012年9月于北京

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## Chapter One Geography: the Land

### I. Geographical Features

The full name of Britain is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. When people refer to the country, they often use different names such as Britain, Great Britain, England, the British Islands, the United Kingdom, or the UK.

Located to the northwest of mainland Europe, it is made up of many islands collectively known as the British Isles, covering an area of about 244,820 square kilometers. The British Isles are made up of two large islands and hundreds of small ones. The two large islands are Great Britain and Ireland. Accounting for more than 90% of the country's landmass, Great Britain is the larger of these two islands, on which lie the three main divisions of the United Kingdom: England, Scotland and Wales. Ireland is the smaller of these two islands. It is divided into two political units: Northern Ireland, which is the fourth division of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (Eire), which is an independent country on the southern part of Ireland.



## 1. England

England is the largest part of Britain, located in the south of the island, with Wales to the west and Scotland to the north. It has an area of 130,423 square kilometers, and covers nearly 60% of the whole island. England is the most populous and wealthiest part of the country, so people sometimes refer to the whole country as England, a name that people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not like very much because they have a culture and a language of their own and they do not regard themselves as English.

England consists mostly of lowland terrain which mostly comprises low hills and plains, especially in the central and southern part. However there are uplands in the north and in the southwest. The upland moors of the Pennine Chain in the north region, known as the "backbone of England", divides northern England into western and eastern sectors. There is no peak in England that is 1,000 m or higher with the highest being 978m (Scafell Pike). The Thames River, the second largest and the most important river in Britain, originates in southwestern England and flows through the Midlands of England to London and empties into the North Sea. There are many lakes in England, the largest being Windermere, with the Lake District in the northwest. The Lake poets, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey made the region very famous, for they once lived in the Lake District in the 19th century and drew inspiration for much of their poetry from the scenery there.

England is highly urbanized, with 80% of its population living in cities, and only 2% of the population working in agriculture. London, the capital of both England and the United Kingdom, is located in southeastern

England. Occupying over 620 square miles London is the biggest city in Britain and in Europe. About 12% of Britain's overall people live in London and therefore it has the highest population density in Britain, with 4,699 people per square kilometer. It is home for the headquarters of all government departments, parliament, the major legal institutions and the monarch. It is the country's business and banking center and the center of its transport network. It contains the headquarters of the national television networks and of all the national newspapers. What's more, it is also one of the three international financial centers in the world.

Situated on the northern bank of the Thames, London administratively consisting of the city of London, the original nucleus, and Great London, a metropolitan county, is made up of 12 Inner London boroughs and 20 Outer London boroughs.

To the east of the city of London is the large area called the East End, which is the industrial area and the port of London. With houses for workers, this is the poorest quarter of London, the home of cockney, and large numbers of immigrants have settled here. To the west are the fine shops, cinemas and theatres of the area called the West End. The southern part of this area is the City of Westminster, the political center of the country, the location of the Buckingham Palace, the Palace of Westminster, White Wall, No. 10 Downing Street and Hyde Park.

There are many museums and art galleries in London, among which the most famous one is the British Museum.

In recent years it has been claimed that London is on the decline. It is losing its place as one of the world's largest financial centers and in comparison with many other western European cities, it looks rather dirty

and neglected. Nevertheless, its popularity as a tourist destination is still growing. This popularity probably is the result of its combination of apparently infinite cultural variety and a long history.

## 2. Scotland

Scotland, with an area of 78,822 square kilometers, occupies the northern portion of Britain. It is the second largest of the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom, both in population and in area. Scotland, geographically speaking, is the most rugged part of the UK and can be divided into three areas. The Southern Uplands are the fertile plains and hills bordering England. The Central Lowlands contain one - fifth of the land area but three quarters of the population in Scotland. Most of the industrial and commercial centers and much of the cultivated land as well can be found here. The Highlands are mountain ranges (between 1350 - 1200 m) rising to their heights at Ben Nevis (1344 m), Britain's highest mountain. There are also deep valleys and numerous small islands off the west coast. This area of spectacular natural beauty occupies the same land as southern England but fewer than a million people live there. Tourism is important in the local economy. Loch Lomond is the longest lake in Scotland and the Clyde, which flows through the city of Glasgow, is Scotland's most important river and serves as a transportation outlet to the Atlantic Ocean.

Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, is the second largest city in Scotland. It is located at the east of Scotland near the North Sea. As the political, economical and cultural center of Scotland, the city attracts over 2 million tourists all over the world for its beauty and annual Edinburgh Festival. Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries. Tourists from all over

the world come to enjoy the beauty of Scottish scenery, to drink Scotch whisky and to see Scotsmen wearing kilts and playing bagpipes.

### 3. Wales

Wales is very close to the most densely populated parts of central England. Its entire area is about 20,776 square kilometers and it covers less than 9% of the whole island. Most of Wales is mountainous, with hills rising steeply from the sea and rather flat on the top. Much of the country is pasture, but only 12% of the land is arable. The longest river of Britain, the Severn River, which is 354 kilometers long, originates in mid-Wales and flows through western England to the Bristol Channel. About two-thirds of the population in Wales live in the southeastern part of the country.

Wales has been dominated by England longer than the other parts of the union. However, it retains a powerful sense of its difference from England. Wales is officially bilingual, its own language, Welsh, and English languages having equal status. Welsh language spoken by about 20% of the population is an important element of Welsh culture and is well preserved and supported by national policy.

The capital of Wales is Cardiff. It is the biggest city with around 340,000 people of Wales. and it is Wales's chief commercial center, the base for most national cultural and sporting institutions. Cardiff also has beautiful coastal view and two national parks, so it is a famous tourist destination.

### 4. Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is the smallest of the four regions, both in population and in area. It has an area of 14,139 square kilometers and occupies the northern one sixth of the island of Ireland. Lough Neagh, the largest lake in

the United Kingdom, is located in Northern Ireland. Although small, Northern Ireland is quite significant partly because of the political troubles there.

The capital of Northern Ireland is Belfast. As an important, historic city, it is full of spectacular landmarks and monuments, most of which dated back many hundreds of years are in remarkable condition. In recent years this city has undergone a remarkable transformation. Many areas have been redeveloped, new restaurants and hotels have been opened, and impressive new shopping areas have been built. It is also home to the largest shipbuilder in the UK—Harland and Wolff.

## II. Climate and Weather

The climate of Britain varies greatly according to season and location, but the overall climate here can be described as temperate maritime, mild with few extremes and a relatively small fluctuation in temperatures. It means that winters tend to be generally mild, and summers cool.

Generally speaking, it is colder in the north than in the south and the western coast tends to be warmer than the east. Spring includes March, April and May. The hottest months are from June to August. In these three months the days are very long, with the sun rising at 4:00 a. m. and setting at about 8:00 p. m. Even at about 10:00 p. m. there is still twilight. Summer temperature is usually around 20°C, with the highest not exceeding 32°C. Autumn, like other regions in the world, is a season for harvest. The coldest months in the county are from December to February. The average daily low temperature in January is around 0°C and seldom

gets below 10°C even in northern Scotland. There is sometimes snow in England, but not to the amount that can gather on the ground. In the Highlands of Scotland, snow can be heavy enough for sports lovers to go skiing.

The British Isles are one of the most interesting places in the world in which people can live for exciting weather. The most typical feature of climate in Britain is that it is so changeable and unpredictable. In no country other than England, it has been said that one can experience four seasons in the course of a single day. Such uncertainty about the weather has had a definite effect upon the Englishman's character; it tends to make him cautious. And the weather has also helped to make the Englishman adaptable. It has been said that one of the reasons why the English colonized so much of the world was that, whatever the weather conditions they met abroad, they had already experienced something like them at home. Another effect is that weather is often the initial topic in any conversation. When you meet an Englishman and do not know how to start your conversation, you may say, "it is a nice day, isn't it?" or "It looks like rain." The weather is a subject which is quite safe to talk about.

The climate of Britain is also characterized by its rainfall. Britain has a steady reliable rainfall throughout the whole year, with the average annual rainfall of over 1000 mm, which makes the country unusually green. On the whole, the east and south with an annual rainfall of less than 800 mm is drier than the north and west which has an annual rainfall of more than 1,600 mm. As a result of rainfall distribution in Britain, there is a water surplus in the north and west, and a water deficit in the south and east. Generally throughout the year, the late winter/spring (February to March) is the driest period and autumn/winter (October to January) the

wettest. Although in Britain it does not rain every day, it is still advisable to bring some type of waterproof clothing and keep yourself psychologically prepared for people never know what the weather will be like from one day to the other. It can be sunny one day and rainy the next.

### III. Energy Resources

Britain has the richest energy sources in the European Union (EU), and its abundant resources of oil and natural gas are of vital importance to the British economy. Until the 1970s small amounts of oil were produced from onshore wells, but this amount was far less than what Britain needed. In 1969 large supplies of oil and natural gas were discovered in the North Sea off the eastern coast of Britain, particularly off the coast of Scotland. Oil and natural gas production soared after supplies were brought ashore in 1975. Today Britain is the world's eighth largest producer of crude oil and natural gas liquids, with more than 60 offshore fields. Refined oil products are one of Britain's major exports today, most of which are sold to European nations.

For many years coal was mined extensively, providing the primary source of energy in Britain. It was also exported. Coal production reached its peak in 1913, when more than 300 million tons were mined. Today production is less than a sixth of that figure and coal is far less important to the British economy. Britain imports much more coal than it exports.

Britain also has a number of nuclear energy facilities. Britain meets 26% of its energy needs through nuclear energy. Recently much research has been devoted to developing biofuel—energy from wastes, landfill gas,

and crops —as well as to developing solar energy, wind power, and water-power.

### Words and Expressions

- |                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| arable            | adj. 适合耕种的(土地)              |
| bagpipe           | n. 风笛                       |
| Ben Nevis         | n. 尼维斯山(英国苏格兰中西部,为英伦三岛的最高峰) |
| Bristol Channel   | n. 布里斯托尔海峡                  |
| cockney           | n. 伦敦腔;伦敦人                  |
| constituent       | n. 成分;选民;委托人                |
| distribution      | n. 分布;分配                    |
| Great Britain     | n. 大不列颠岛                    |
| kilt              | n. 苏格兰式短裙                   |
| landmass          | n. 大陆                       |
| Loch Lomond       | n. 罗蒙湖(位于苏格兰)               |
| maritime climate  | n. 海洋性气候                    |
| metropolitan      | adj. 大都市的                   |
| moors             | n. 沼泽地                      |
| pasture           | n. 牧场;草原                    |
| Pennine Chain     | n. (英国)奔宁山脉                 |
| Populous          | adj. 人口稠密的;人口多的             |
| Scafell Pike      | n. 斯科费尔峰                    |
| terrain           | n. (地理)地形;地势                |
| The British Isles | n. 不列颠群岛                    |



- the Central Lowlands n. 苏格兰低地, 苏格兰中央平原
- the Clyde River n. 克莱德河
- the Highlands n. 苏格兰北部高地
- the Lake Poets n. 湖畔派诗人
- the Lough Neagh n. 内伊湖, 英国第一大湖, 地处北爱尔兰中央平原
- The Republic of Northern Ireland n. 爱尔兰共和国
- the Severn River n. 塞文河
- the Southern Uplands n. 苏格兰南部丘陵
- the Thames River n. 泰晤士河

#### Notes

**Belfast:** 贝尔法斯特, 自 1920 年起成为北爱尔兰首府, 是北爱尔兰政治、文化中心和最大的工业城市。

**Cardiff:** 加的夫, 威尔士首府, 英国西南部重要的港口、服务业和工业中心。

**Edinburgh:** 爱丁堡, 苏格兰首府, 始建于 11 世纪晚期的文化古城, 是苏格兰的经济中心, 也是英国仅次于伦敦的旅游城市。

**Lake District:** 大湖区, 位于康布里安, 通称为“康布里安湖区”(the Lake District of Cumbria)。一直以来大湖区就是英格兰风景最美丽的地区, 拥有英格兰最高峰斯科费尔峰(Scafell Pike)和英格兰最大的湖——温德米尔湖(Windermere)。温德米尔湖位于英格兰西北海岸, 靠近苏格兰边界, 方圆 2300 平方公里, 1951 年被划归为国家公园, 是英格兰和威尔士的十一个国家公园中最大的一个。湖区夏季平均