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Social and Cultural Mosaics
of English-Speaking Countries

英语国家

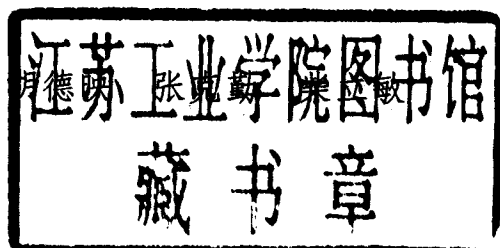
社会与文化


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主编：段洁云
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Preface

With the fast pace of globalization, English is learned and practiced by more and more people. Furthermore, the English language we are exposed to today is not merely British English and American English but “Englishes” of different English-speaking countries. In order to understand English better and be more efficient in communication with English speakers, English learners should have some social and cultural knowledge about the English-speaking countries. *Social and Cultural Mosaics of English-speaking Countries* is a book intended for English majors and non-English majors who are fond of English both as a textbook and a kind of reading material. The aim of this book is to provide the students with a brief and comprehensible introduction of the social and cultural aspects of the Major English-speaking Countries so that they can have a better understanding of the English materials they are learning or reading and be able to communicate efficiently with English speakers.

Unlike many other survey textbooks which may cover too much about cultural knowledge or focus more on history or whose language is too difficult for the students to understand, *Social and Cultural Mosaics of English-Speaking Countries* touches upon not only the cultural knowledge and history but also aspects like literature, music, mass media, family and other cultural aspects a language student should know about the major English-speaking countries. The characteristics of the book lie in its comprehensive social and cultural aspects, simplicity in language and brevity in introduction.

The idea of compiling such a book originated in our teaching and research. Both Chinese and foreign teachers teaching this course suggested adding more topics to the textbooks available to make this course an integrated course on social and cultural aspects of the major English-speaking countries so as to help students lay a knowledge base for their future academic study and in understanding their English reading materials. The topic-oriented format and wide range of subjects lead to the choice of the term “mosaics” in the name of the book. The whole book consists of 17 units.

To facilitate the use of this book, a couple of pre-reading questions are designed to arouse students' interest in reading and learning. Besides, different types of post-

reading activities are designed to help students in their understanding of each unit, as well as to motivate them to explore further on each topic. It also offers some visual aids like “the Maps of the Major English-speaking Countries” and “the National Flags of the Major English-speaking Countries” in the appendixes for teachers and students to refer to.

We would like to acknowledge our indebtedness to all the authors of the books and materials that we have read or cited in the process of compiling this book. They are listed in the bibliography at the end of the book.

Compilers

Of Social and Cultural Mosaics of English-speaking Countries

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Unit 1

Part 1 An Introduction to Britain (1)

Pre-reading Questions:

1. What do you know about Britain? List as much information as you can.
2. Compared with Chinese culture, what are Britain's most striking cultural features?

1. Key Facts about the United Kingdom

The full official name of this country is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The UK is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Great Britain (or just Britain) does not include Northern Ireland. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are not part of the UK.

The United Kingdom or the UK, generally, is the short term for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom is sometimes called Britain, or Great Britain. The British Isles is a geographical term. It is not the name of any country. In fact, Britain is a nation that can be divided into several separate parts, and each part is an individual country. This nation consists of two large islands and 2, 000 smaller islands. The two large islands refer to the mainland, Britain, containing England, Wales and Scotland, and part of the Irish island. Strictly speaking, the terms "Britain" or "British" refer only to the mainland, not Ireland, because the citizens of the UK take pride in their own regions. If the native region of a person from UK is unknown, it is best to refer to him or her as British. Generally speaking, British refer to themselves as English, Welsh, Scots or Irish. Thus Britain is not just one country and one people, even if some of its inhabitants think so. That's why its full name is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The capital of the United Kingdom is London. Its national Anthem is God Save the Queen. Britain's Union Flag contains three colors: red, white and blue. Two Crosses in the middle are red, which is separated by white strips. The red crosses and white strips are against the color of sky. James I was the first common ruler of Scotland and England. He signed his name the French way—Jacques, which was Jack in English. Colloquially, people nick-named his new flag the "Union Jack".

The term therefore perpetuates the name of a specific king and one of the great moments of British history.

1.1 Overseas territories and Crown Dependencies

Britain's 14 Overseas Territories, spread throughout the globe, are diverse communities. They range from the tiny island of Pitcairn with its 47 inhabitants, set in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, to Bermuda, which has a population of 62,059 and is one of the world's major financial centers. The Overseas Territories are: Anguilla, British Antarctic Territory, Bermuda, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, St Helena and Dependencies (Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha), Turk and Caicos Islands, Pitcairn Island, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus.

The Crown Dependencies are not part of the United Kingdom but are internally self-governing dependencies of the Crown. The Crown Dependencies are the Isle of Man, the Bailiwick of Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

1.2 Location and Size

The United Kingdom is located off the northwest coast of Europe and it sits on the European continental shelf, which extends west 160 kilometers beyond Britain. The English Channel and the North Sea separate Britain from Europe. The surrounding sea is shallow. The land area of the UK is approximately 242,000 square kilometers. The island of Britain measures 1,000 kilometers. Its width varies from 500 to 150 kilometers.

England, which takes up nearly 60% of the whole island, lies in the southern part of Great Britain with Wales to its west and Scotland to its north. It occupies an area of more than 130,000 square kilometers.

Scotland locates in the north of the island with 80,000 square kilometers. As the name implies, the Highlands are the hilly or mountainous region of the country. Most people agree that the scenery in the Highlands is indeed magnificent.

Located in the southwestern corner of Britain, Wales is a land of mountains. It has an area of 20,764 square kilometers. On the western side of Britain lies one of the most beautiful parts of the British Isles—the principality of Wales. Wales is very popular for holidays. Thousands of people spend their summer holidays at the seaside resorts on the North Wales coast every year.

Most of the UK is located on the British Isles. Northern Ireland is a fourth region

of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, the UK portion, takes up only the north-eastern corner of the island. It occupies one-fifth of the northern part of Ireland and has an area of 14, 160 square kilometers, of which 628 square kilometers is inland water.

1.3 Climate

The UK has a remarkable climate. 'Other countries have a climate; in England people have weather.' Englishmen often describe the peculiar meteorological conditions of their country like this.

It has been said that one can experience four seasons in a single day in no country other than England. Day may break as a balmy spring morning; an hour or so later black clouds may appear from nowhere and the rain may be pouring down. At mid-day conditions may be really wintry with the temperature down by about eight or more degrees centigrade. And then, in the late afternoon the sky will clear, the sun will begin to shine, and for an hour or two before darkness falls, it will be summer.

In England one can nearly experience almost every kind of weather. Most foreigners seem to have an impression that for ten months of the year the country is covered by dense fog, which is actually not true. But one thing is true that no one knows when the different sorts of weather will occur. Moreover, one can experience winter in summer and vice-versa.

This uncertainty about the weather tends to make the Englishman cautious. The English weather has also helped to make the Englishmen 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. Although sometimes the Englishmen complain of the weather, even if they could, they would not exchange it for the more predictable climate of other lands.

1.4 Population

It was estimated in 2003 that the United Kingdom has a population of about 60 million, of whom over 80% live in England, especially around London and the Thames estuary areas. The rest are distributed in Scotland (over five million), Wales (around three million) and Northern Ireland (close to 1.7 million).

The majority of the population are decedents of the Anglo - Saxons, a term referring to the three groups of Germanic people from Europe who went to England between the 5th and the 7th centuries: the Angles, Saxons, and the Jutes. These peo-

ple tend to be tall, have blond hair and blue eyes. Their language became the official language of the country. These people settled in England and drove the native Celtic people there to the mountainous areas in Wales and Scotland.

Today, most people in Wales and Scotland are decedents of the Celtic people who were the earliest known inhabitants of Great Britain. The Irish people were also Celtic in origin. In spite of the fact that English is today the official language for the whole country, some of these people still adhere to their old mother tongues that are derived from the Celtic language that was popular throughout Europe in ancient times. Even when they do speak English, they speak it in their own ways, like Irish English, Welsh English or Scottish English.

Besides these early groups from Europe, the United Kingdom also has a considerable number of Italians, Greeks, Australians, and New Zealanders who have settled in the country as permanent residents.

In addition, Britain also has a considerable number of immigrants from Africa and Asia. Most of them are from former colonies of the British Empire, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Caribbean Islands, and countries in Africa. These immigrants tend to live in relatively compact communities in big cities of England like London, Manchester, Leicester, West Yorkshire and Birmingham. The Pakistanis, for instance, are mostly found in West Yorkshire and Manchester, while about 80% of the Africans live in the Greater London area. Since the 1970s, Britain has admitted tens of thousands of refugees from African countries like Uganda, Somalia and Southeast Asia countries like Vietnam and Afghanistan. Like everywhere else in the world, there are also Chinese living in Britain. In 1998, their number reached about 170,000, about one third of them living in London. Most of them are from Hong Kong.

All these immigrants have made the United Kingdom one of the most culturally divers countries in Europe. This is especially true of its urban areas.

Britain's immigration policy has become more flexible in recent years, making it possible for more people from various countries to work and settle in the island. Now, every year, a lot more people than before immigrate to the United Kingdom.

2. British Culture

After Southern Ireland became an independent republic in 1948, the United Kingdom included Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. By the end of

the 20th century nearly 59,000,000 people lived in the United Kingdom. There are many differences among the ways in which these people live, depending on their national traits.

2.1 English Character

Broadly speaking, Englishmen are quiet, shy, reserved people who are fully relaxed only among people they know well. Since they are not immediately friendly and open with strangers, it seems to be difficult for them to get on well with each other. They will not embrace friends with open arms and are offended by body contact, such as kissing and hugging, when meeting others. The British cherish their own space and privacy much more than Americans do.

It is not uncommon for people to live next door to each other for years and never exchange more than a polite greeting or know anything about each other's private lives. Englishmen tend to display his feelings far less, which is reflected in his use of language. Imagine a man commenting on the great beauty of a young girl, an emotional man might describe her as "extremely beautiful", whereas an Englishman will state flatly "Um, she's all right". This special use of language is particularly common in England, which is known as "restrained statement".

Besides this, the British have a wonderful sense of humor. The humor is a rather gentle, subtle humor, often directed against themselves, and they enjoy making fun of their own customs, class system and even their government. The criticism, "He has no sense of humor" is very commonly heard in Britain, where humor is highly prized. A sense of humor is an attitude to life rather than the mere ability to laugh at jokes. This attitude is never cruel or disrespectful or malicious. The Englishmen do not laugh at a cripple or a madman, or a tragedy or an honorable failure.

Sportsmanship, which not all Englishmen can live up to, is another English character. It must be realized that sport in its modern form is almost entirely a British invention. Boxing, rugby, football, hockey, tennis and cricket were all first organized and given rules in Britain. Rules are the essence of sport, and sportsmanship is the ability to practice a sport according to its rules and to show generosity to one's opponent. Even English schoolboys often show this sense of sportsmanship to a surprisingly high degree in their relations with each other.

2.2 English Meals

In many English homes four meals are served: they are breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner. These are the meals that are served in the homes of people who

are well-to-do.

Breakfast may be served any time from seven to nine. It consists of porridge, bacon and eggs, or bread-and-butter with marmalade. Instead of bacon and eggs, fish may be served. Either tea or coffee is drunk at breakfast.

Lunch comes at about one o'clock. It generally consists of cold meat, potatoes, and salad made of lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, carrots, beetroots, etc. Sometimes these dishes are placed on the sideboard. Each person takes his plate, helps himself and comes back to his place. On the table are pepper, salt, mustard and sometimes vinegar. After that there is bread or biscuits and cheese. Most people drink water at lunch time; some drink beer or wine. It is not the custom to drink spirits like whisky or brandy even in wealthy homes in the middle of the day.

Afternoon tea, taken between four and five, is the most informal meal of the day. If you are a friend of the family you may drop in for tea without an invitation or telling them that you are coming. Very often it is not served at a table. Each person has a cup and saucer, a spoon and a small plate for bread-and-butter and cake. Two pieces of advice: do not help yourself to cake first; bread-and-butter first, then cake if there is any; do not put more than one piece of bread or cake on your plate at the same time.

Dinner is the most substantial meal of the day and is a very formal meal. Many people even wear special clothes for dinner. Dinner is generally served at about half past seven. The first course is soup, served on shallow plates and eaten quietly with a fairly large spoon. Then comes fish. There is often a knife and fork of special shape by each person for this course. The next course is the most important, which may generally be a joint of meat, a leg of lamb, pork, chicken or duck. With it are served various vegetables, peas, beans, cabbage or cauliflower. Some sort of pudding (or sweets) is generally the fourth course. After the pudding, the table is cleared and the dessert is brought on.

However, it must not be imagined that all English people eat like this. Not 10% of them do so. As in all countries, the great majority of people are working class people who can afford neither the time nor the money to live like this. More than 90% of English people have their dinner in the middle of the day, and it is cooked, not by a servant but by the mother of the family. In most houses the meals are breakfast, dinner, tea and supper, which is a cold meal for which nothing is cooked.

Questions for reflection

1. How is the UK linked to Europe?
2. What is the typical quality of the British?
3. Do Chinese have a weaker sense of space than westerners?
4. How do you feel about the English sense of humor?
5. What are the major differences between English meals and Chinese meals?

True or false statements

- () 1. The full name of Britain is the United Kingdom of Great Britain.
- () 2. The Channel Island and the Isle of Man are not part of the UK.
- () 3. Generally speaking, the terms "Britain" or "British" refer only to the mainland, not Ireland.
- () 4. Britain's 14 Overseas Territories, spread throughout the globe, are similar communities.
- () 5. The English Channel separates Britain from Europe.
- () 6. Thousands of people spend their summer holidays at the seaside resorts on the West Wales coast every year.
- () 7. For ten months of the year the country of Britain is covered by dense fog.
- () 8. There are many differences among the ways in which 59,000,000 people in the United Kingdom live, depending on their national traits.
- () 9. It is impossible to know a reserved person in UK.
- () 10. In most houses the meals are breakfast, dinner, tea and supper, which is a cold meal for which nothing is cooked.

Part 2 An Introduction to Britain (2)

Pre-reading Questions:

1. Who is your favorite politician in Britain? Why do you admire him or her?
2. How much do you know about the economic situation in Britain?

1. Politics

The United Kingdom is a parliamentary monarchy; the head of the state is a monarch with limited powers. The British government is a unitary monarchy with strongly disciplined parties and few formal constitutional restraints on its powers. The British claims the will of the people as the source of political legitimacy, and uses in-

direct or representative democracy as the means for the people to express their will. In the British system there are few mechanisms for direct democracy. Britain's democratic government is based on a constitution composed of various historical documents, laws, and formal customs adopted over the years.

1. 1 The Constitutional Monarchy

Most British people regard the Monarchy as a long-established tradition, and the Monarch is the only unchangeable symbol of British itself. In 1952, Elizabeth II succeeded to the throne.

Politicians come and go according to election's won or lost, and at any given moment every politician always has many determined opponents among those who do not belong to his own party. But the Monarch is always there, above party quarrels, representing the nation as a whole, and lending dignity and significance to all things done in Queen Elizabeth's name.

The British have great affection for Queen Elizabeth. It seems the Queen has great right in presiding state functions. In fact, she is informed and consulted in every aspect of national life. However, the truth is that she has no power. In real life, she acts only on the advice of her Ministers, and must be impartial. The Queen never refuses anything, because she knows this would be unconstitutional. In any cases she has no ways of enforcing her own will.

The British Monarchy is the supreme illustration of the way British institutions develop. The existing system has been changed to suit new conditions. Although the Constitutional Monarchy seems to be illogical, it works well.

1. 2 Parliament

• The House of Lords

Its membership is composed of peers, life peers and bishops. A peer is a duke, marquis, earl, viscount or baron. The title can be inherited by his descendants.

Although restricted in its powers, the House of Lords can still serve a useful purpose. It has a very high standard debating ability. And it often puts forward useful amendments which are later accepted by the Commons. Apart from this, the House of Lords had special judicial function. It is the final court of appeal in civil cases and criminal cases, except criminal cases in Scotland, which are dealt with by the High Court of Justiciary.

• The House of Commons

The members in this House are produced by election. Six hundred and fifty

members of parliament are elected at intervals of not more than five years. The great majority represents English constituencies and only a few of them represents Scotland, Welsh and Northern Ireland, respectively.

The first task of a newly elected House of Commons is to elect a Speaker to preside over it. The Speaker is not allowed to make speeches at will. Once elected, he severs any connection with his political party and must be impartial in his behavior. He has to ensure that the rights, privileges and dignities of the House are maintained.

The functions of the House of Commons include three aspects. One is its critical function. The House of Commons has to scrutinize and criticize the activities of the government. Another function of the House is legislative. Bill can be issued by Members or the Cabinet. But now almost all the important Bills are moved by the Cabinet or the House of Commons. The third function of the House of Commons is that it has the power to supervise the Government's financial aspect. It should check the government in the Estimates and the Budget and control its expenditure.

1.3 Two Main Political Parties

The party system has existed since the 18th century. For the last 150 years, Britain has had a predominant two-party system. Since 1945, either the Conservative Party, whose origins go back to the 18th century, or the Labor Party, which emerged in the last decade of the 19th century, has held power. Most candidates in elections, and almost all winning candidates, belong to one of the main parties.

The party that wins most seats (although not necessarily the most votes) at a General Election, or which has the support of a majority of members in the House of Commons, usually becomes the Government. By tradition, the Sovereign invites the leader of that party to form a government. About 100 members of the governing party in the House of Commons and the House of Lords receive ministerial appointments (including appointment to the Cabinet) on the advice of the Prime Minister. The largest minority party becomes the official Opposition, with its own leader and "shadow cabinet".

The Conservatives are supported by most land-owners and businessmen, who have something to conserve. One of the central characteristics of Conservatives is a belief in "private enterprise". They believe in the capacity of a private individual to build up his own business. Thus, Conservatives are against too much government control of industry. They feel that businessmen are doing what is best for themselves

and can be trusted to do what is best for the community. Conservatives also tend to believe in a governing class. Certain kinds of people with certain backgrounds have a tradition of governing and therefore a natural aptitude for it.

The Labor Party is a comparatively new party, which is associated with the working class. In 2001, the Labor Party won in election and became the ruling party. The central belief of the Labor Party is that businessmen can not be trusted to serve the best interests of the community. Thus, the Labor Party believes in the supervision of industry by the government, and insists that in certain industries public ownership give way to private enterprise. They do not agree that a state-owned industry is necessarily less efficient than a privately-owned one. Naturally, the Labor Party does not believe that certain people have a natural right to govern and to enjoy special privileges. They hold a belief that everyone should have equal opportunity and achievements are the only standard.

2. Economy

Britain is fortunate in having a stable political situation and well-developed economy. With its advanced division and specialization of resources, Britain remains one of the world's wealthiest nations. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1997 was about 1.4 trillion US dollars. London alone accounts for more income than any of the other UK member states. Per capita GDP is lowest in Northern Ireland and Wales.

Britain has grown and prospered as a trading nation. Over the past few decades Britain has exported about 30 % of its GDP, a proportion that has been rising slightly but steadily in the past decade.

Related to the constitutional system are political parties and the press. Political parties represent economic policy stands before the electorate, thus serving as a means by which the electorate exerts its wishes concerning government economic activity. Meanwhile, the press reports to the public on anything it considers newsworthy, and in that way keeps the electorate informed on economic affairs and matters of policy. Britain was the first industrial country. The dominant economic philosophies in nineteenth century Britain were non-involvement of the government in business and free trade. The Britain government's view was that economic freedom of movement should not be confused with political union.

Britain has a 'mixed economy' in which there is some public ownership as well as privately owned businesses. In other words, markets, government, labor, consti-