

高校英语专业选修课系列教材 

# BRITISH SOCIETY AND CULTURE



# 英国 社会与文化

■ 苏立昌 / 主编

■ 南开大学 出版社

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# British Society and Culture

## 英国社会与文化



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# Preface

*British Society and Culture*, a textbook designed for English majors in four-year colleges and universities, is one of the set of textbooks on British and American Culture. The book covers a wide range of topics on early and modern British society and culture, including British geography, political system, constitutional monarchy, government, economy, social welfare, education, people, entertainment and literature. The contents of the book are carefully designed, aiming to provide students with an overall view of the social and cultural life of Great Britain, and in so doing, broadening the vision of students in the acquisition of the basic skills of English language at college.

Different from other introductory textbooks on Great Britain, *British Society and Culture* attempts to provide students with the latest information on British society and culture. The book covers a wide range of materials selected from the latest publications. In order to let students have some fresh readings, the format of the book has been changed somewhat with each chapter beginning with an introduction followed by one or two pieces of selected reading from reliable sources. The contents of the book are so designed to let students have more access to the latest information on the discussed issues through different perspectives.

*British Society and Culture* consists of twelve chapters, each of which contains an introduction and one or two pieces of selected readings concerning the topic in the chapter.

New words, expressions and cultural notes are provided for the introductory part in each chapter and are also listed for the selected reading. In addition, to assist students in their comprehension of the

complexity of British society and culture, topics for discussions are also provided after the introductory part of each chapter. They are by no means a complete coverage of the topics discussed in each chapter. Students are encouraged to join the discussions and air their own views on the subject.

The book can serve as a text for a course on British Society and Culture for English majors, and can also be used as a reading course book for students of non-English majors at the college level.

The completion of this book was the co-effort of many people. Our gratitude goes firstly to those scholars whose works we have had the honor of consulting in the process of compiling this book. We owe our debts also to the editors from the English Section of Nankai University Press, particularly Zhang Tong and Song Lijun whose valuable suggestions and careful proofreading have greatly improved the quality of the book. Errors and mistakes in the book are unavoidable, and we sincerely invite all readers to offer us their comments, advice and criticism.

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# Chapter 1 A Panoramic View of the British

## Land

### Physical Features

Britain comprises Great Britain (**England, Wales and Scotland**) and **Northern Ireland**. Its full name is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with the short forms “UK” and “Britain” being used for convenience.

Britain was **originally** part of the European mainland. But the melting of the **glaciers** in the last **Ice Age** caused the sea level to rise. The country lies northwest of the rest of Europe. It is separated from the continent by the North Sea at its widest, and by the English Channel at its narrowest points. At the Channel’s narrowest point France and England are only twenty-two miles apart.

The mainlands of England, Scotland and Wales form the largest island of Great Britain. Northern Ireland shares the second-largest island with the Republic of Ireland (Ireland or Eire), which has been independent of Britain since 1921-22. Smaller islands, such as Anglesey, the Isle of Wight, the Orkneys, Shetlands, Hebrides and Scillies, are also part of the British political union. But the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea and the Channel Islands off the French west coast are not part of the United Kingdom. They are self-governing **Crown Dependencies** which have a historical relationship with the British Crown and process their own

independent legal systems, **legislatures** and **administrative** structures. However, the British government is responsible for their defense and foreign relations and can **intervene** if good administration is not maintained.



**The map of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**



Britain's geographical position is marked by latitude 50°N in southern England and by latitude 60°N across the Shetlands. Although it lies within only 10° of latitude, it also possesses a great diversity of physical features. With an area of about 242,514 sq km, Britain is just under 1,000 km from the south coast to the extreme north of Scotland and just under 500 km across in the widest part. Most is land and the rest comprises inland water such as lakes and rivers.

Britain's physical **relief** can be divided into **highland** and **lowland** Britain. The highest ground is mainly in the north and west. Most of the lowland zones, except for the Scottish Lowlands and central areas of Northern Ireland, are in the south and east of the country, where only a few points reach 1,000 feet (305 metres) above sea levels.

The population is very unequally distributed over the four parts of the UK: England more or less constantly makes up 84% of the total population, Wales around 5%, Scotland roughly 8.5 %, and Northern Ireland (since 1921) less than 3%.

**Table 1.1 Population in UK**

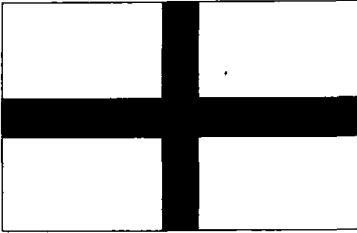
Administrative Division	Population (mid 2004)	Area Size (sq km)	Population Density (people per sq km)
England	50,093,800	130,281	383
Northern Ireland	1,710,300	13,576	125
Scotland	5,078,400	77,925	65
Wales	2,952,500	20,732	142
United Kingdom	59,834,900	242,514	246

Source: Office for National Statistics; National Assembly for Wales; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (updated November 2005)

From the table above you can see that England is the largest country and has the highest population density. These factors partly explain the

English dominance in Britain history and the mixed attitudes of Scotland, Ireland and Wales towards their large neighbor.

## England



Flag of St. George

England is located in the southern part of Great Britain. The name England comes from the words “Angle land”. The Angles were people who came from northern Germany in the 5th and 6th centuries, after the Romans had left.

There were also invasions of southern England by **Saxons** and **Jutes** (people from another part of northern Germany). English people are therefore sometimes called **Anglo-Saxons**. The Celts who used to live in this area were forced to move back into Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall and into Western France (the area known as Brittany).

England is **predominantly** a lowland country, although there are upland regions in the north (the Pennine Chain, the Cumbrian mountains and the Yorkshire moorlands) and in the south-west. Eastern England has the low-lying flat lands of the Norfolk Broads, the Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire Fens and the Suffolk Marshes.

Nearly 84% of the population of the UK lives in England. The greatest concentrations of population are in the largest towns and cities, such as London and in south-east England generally; the West Midlands region around Birmingham; the Yorkshire cities of Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield; the north-western industrial area around Liverpool and Manchester; and the north-east region comprising Newcastle and Sunderland.

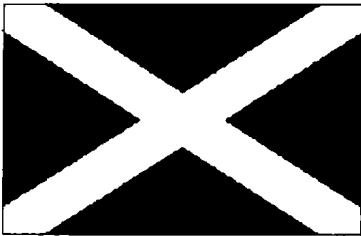
In contrast to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, England has no separate elected national body **exclusively** responsible for its central administration. Instead a number of government departments look after England's day-to-day administrative affairs. The British Government is **prepared to devolve** more power to the regions of England if there is a demand for it and has established a new London-wide authority, the Greater London Authority, for the capital. This authority consists of a directly elected **Mayor** (currently Ken Livingstone) who is able to influence policy on transport, economic development, strategic planning, the environment and culture, and a separately elected Assembly of 25 members with powers to question the Mayor on his or her activities and to **investigate** issues **on behalf of** Londoners. The first elections for the Greater London Authority took place on 4 May 2000.

England's history as a nation goes far back in time, and its influence has reached across the world. England **boasts** great writers including **Shakespeare, Dickens** and **Jane Austin**. The literary tradition is maintained today by authors such as **Julian Barnes, A. S. Byatt** and **Harold Pinter**. The creativity and inventiveness of such brilliant architects and engineers as Wren, Paxton, Brunel and Lutyens has been recognized around the world. Lord (Norman) Foster is among those who continue that great tradition today. The country has also produced many famous pop singers and groups, including the Beatles, Queen, Elton John and Oasis. The national sport is football: famous current football players include David Beckham and Michael Owen. English actors and actresses include Hugh Grant, Kate Winslet and Dame Judi Dench.

The English language is the main language spoken throughout England, although there are many different regional accents. It can be difficult to know how to spell or to pronounce some English words, because the language has been influenced by Latin and Greek (languages used at the time of the Romans, and used in religion and education until

recent times), German (the language of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes), French (the language of the Normans), Gaelic/Scots (Celtic languages) and Danish (the language of the Vikings). There are now many people throughout the United Kingdom who speak a foreign language either as their first or second language, mainly due to immigration from Europe or the Commonwealth.

## Scotland



Flag of St. Andrew

Scotland is located in the northern part of Great Britain. The name Scotland means the “land of the Scots”. The Scots were a tribe of Celts who migrated to Scotland from Ireland during the 5th and 6th centuries. The northern part (the highlands) was inhabited by a tribe known as the Picts. The Romans used to refer to the area as Caledonia. The Scots merged with the Pictish tribes to form the Scottish nation and so began a long and eventful history.

Scotland may be divided into three main areas. The first is the North-West and Central Highlands (Grampians), together with a number of islands off the west and north-east coasts. Though these areas are thinly populated, they comprise half the country’s land mass. The second is the Central Lowlands, which contain one-fifth of the land area but three-quarters of the population of Scotland. Most of the industrial and commercial centres and much of the cultivated land as well can be found in these areas. The third is the Southern Uplands, which cover a number of hill ranges **stretching** towards the border with England. Scotland contains larger areas of unspoilt and wild landscape, and the majority of Britain’s highest mountains — nearly 300 peaks over 913m (3,000 ft). The

Grampians in the Central Highlands contain Ben Nevis (1,343m, 4,406 ft), the highest peak in Britain.

The main population concentrations are around the administrative centre and capital of Edinburgh; the commercial and industrial area of Glasgow; and the regional centres of Aberdeen (an oil industry city) and Dundee.

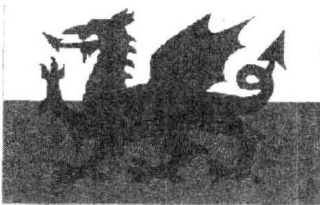
After many years of fighting between England and Scotland, in 1603 the two countries were united when the Scottish King James VI came to the throne as James I of England. However, Scotland retained her Parliament, and **genuine** political union did not come until the Act of Union in 1707. The Scottish Parliament was then dissolved by agreement and Scotland sent 45 members and 16 representative **peers** to a newly styled Parliament of Great Britain at Westminster. Along with the growing of the Scottish nationalism, in 1999 an elected Scottish Parliament with legislative and tax-varying powers is created. It allows the country to decide more of their own affairs, such as education, health, transport, environment, home affairs and local government. Scottish politicians continue to go to the Westminster Parliament in London, where many decisions affecting Scotland are still made.

In Scotland there are a vast array of universities and colleges offering courses to suit every interest. The country also has the highest percentage of university graduates in Europe. As an innovative and forward thinking country, Scotland has produced many fine inventors, actors and writers. Moreover, Scotland is recognised as one of the front runners in scientific and technological development, with discoveries such as **penicillin** and the p53 gene (the body's natural anti-cancer mechanism), and the cloning of Dolly the sheep. Besides, the nation has a strong and **vibrant** culture with many traditions. A well-known example is the **kilt**, widely **synonymous** with the Scottish character. Haggis is also commonly associated with Scotland.

Scotland has a thriving tourist industry, with travellers being attracted by the variety of Scotland's landscape and coastline and its renowned golf courses. The capital of Scotland Edinburgh is famed for the historic castle and the Royal Mile, as well as terrific shopping and a thriving nightlife. Besides, the Edinburgh Festival, where a host of talented artists perform for the public, is as well unforgettable.

English is the main language in Scotland, spoken with a wide range of accents. The traditional language spoken in the lowland areas in the south is known as Scots, while the traditional language spoken in the highland areas in the north is known as Gaelic (a type of Celtic language).

## Wales



**Flag of Wales**

Wales lies on the western side of Great Britain. The name Wales originally meant “stranger” or “foreigner”: the name was given to the country by the Anglo-Saxons because the people living there (Celts) spoke a different language and had a different way of life from them. The Welsh name for their own country is *Cymru*, which means “fellow countrymen”.

Wales is a highland country, with moorland plateau, hills and mountains. Around one-quarter of the land in Wales is above 1,000 ft (305 m). The upland mass contains the Cambrian mountains and descends eastwards into England. The highest mountains are in Snowdonia in the north-west, where the dominant peak is that of Snowdon (3,560 ft, 1,085 m). The lowland zones are restricted to the narrow coastal areas and to the lower parts of the river valleys in south Wales.

About two-thirds of the population of Wales live in the south-eastern

part of the country. The chief urban centres are Cardiff (the capital), Swansea, Newport and Wrexham. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Industrial Revolution had a major impact in south Wales, where the iron and steel factories and coal mines were concentrated. The capital, Cardiff, grew in the 19th century as a coal exporting port. In the 20th century these traditional industries fell into decline, to be replaced by those involving cutting edge technologies in electronics and IT, manufacturing, engineering and telecommunications.

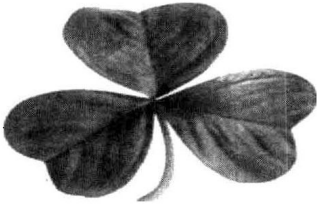
Wales was formally united with England by the Act of Union in 1536, under the Welsh **Tudor Dynasty**. The National Assembly for Wales (often called the Welsh Assembly) was opened in 1999, which was elected locally, but with no legislative and tax-raising powers. The Welsh Assembly therefore in practice lacks extensive powers. Many decisions affecting Welsh people are still made in the Houses of Parliament in London, which includes politicians from all parts of the United Kingdom.

Wales has the greatest concentration of castles in western Europe. There is a lot of beautiful scenery, including many attractive mountains, hills, valleys and rivers. There are three National Parks in Wales: Snowdonia, the Brecon Beacons and the Pembrokeshire Coast.

The country as well has a strong musical and cultural tradition. It is famous for its choirs, and singers of many different styles. The national sport is rugby. Famous Welsh actors/actresses include Sir Anthony Hopkins and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

English is the main language spoken in most parts of Wales, but the Welsh language is taught in many of the schools and is spoken by about 20% of the population. Signs and information are usually written in both English and Welsh.

## Northern Ireland



Irish Clover

Northern Ireland is situated on the island of Ireland, consisting of six north-eastern counties and is the only part of the United Kingdom with an external land border. It covers 13,576 sq km in the Northeast of the island of Ireland, about a sixth of the total area of the island. At its nearest point

Northern Ireland is only 21 km (13 miles) from Scotland. It has a rocky northern coastline, a south-central fertile plain and mountainous areas in the west, north-east and south-east. The south-eastern Mourne Mountains include the highest peak, Slieve Donard, which is 2,796 feet high (853 metres). Lough Neagh (153 square miles, 396 sq km), Britain's largest freshwater lake, lies at the centre of the country.

About half of the 1.7 million people in Northern Ireland are settled in the eastern coastal region, the centre of which is the capital, Belfast. Most industry is situated in this eastern part of the province. Northern Ireland generally has a **sparse** and scattered population and is a largely rural country.

The Irish name for Ireland is Eire and is believed to mean "western land". Ireland had been joined to England by conquest in 1801 and from then on, following the dissolution of its own Parliament, was represented at Westminster by 28 peers and 100 MPs (Members of Parliament). In 1921, the country was divided into two parts: the Irish Free State, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The number of MPs representing the North was then reduced to 12.

Northern Ireland has suffered from many years of fighting between **republicans** (who want the north of the island to be united with the south and to leave the UK) and **unionists** (who want to remain part of the UK).



After decades of violent conflict in Northern Ireland, the country achieved an elected Assembly (the Northern Irish Assembly) in 2000, which has legislative and executive authority, except for reserved UK powers over policing, security matters, prisons and criminal justice. However, the Assembly has been suspended since 2002.

With its improved international reputation, Northern Ireland has recently witnessed rising numbers of tourists who come to appreciate the area's unique heritage. Attractions include cultural festivals, musical and artistic traditions, countryside and geographical sites of interest, pubs, welcoming hospitality and sports (especially golf and fishing). In 1987, pubs were allowed to open on Sundays, despite vocal opposition.

English is the main language used in Ireland (spoken with an Irish accent). The traditional Gaelic language is spoken mainly in areas along the west coast of Ireland.

## **Climate**

### *Temperature*

The relative smallness of the country and the influence of a warm sea and westerly winds mean that there are no extreme contrasts in temperature throughout Britain. Generally the country has mild to cool winters and warm to hot summers with **moderate** variation in temperature throughout the year. Broadly speaking, temperatures are lower in the north than the south and nation average temperatures rarely reach 32°C in the summer or fall below -10°C in the winter.

The principle factors of influence on the climate include the UK's northerly latitude (which ranges from 50° to 60° N), its close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and, especially, the warming of the waters around the British Isles by the Gulf Stream. In general, January and February are the coldest months. The lowest temperature ever recorded in Britain fell to -27 °C,