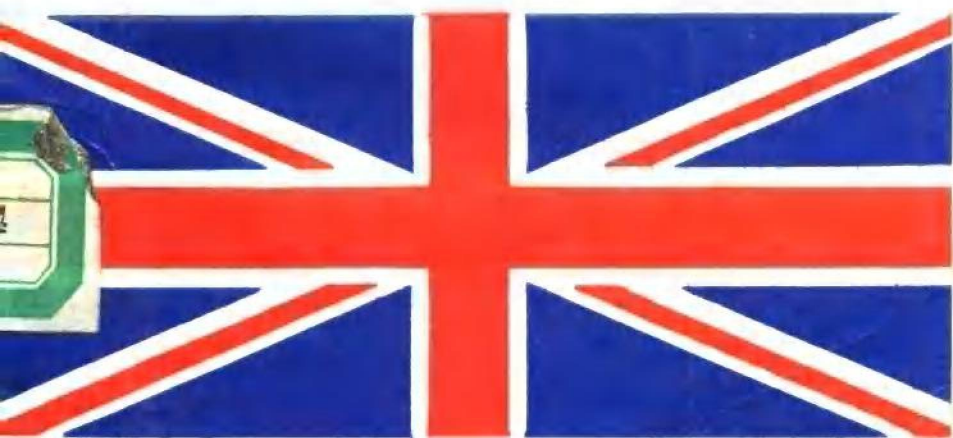


BACKGROUND TO THE U.K.

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英国背景



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前 言

《英国背景》一书知识性很强，在中国读者中影响很大。一些省市的电视大学把该书列为英语专业的教材，受到学员们的喜爱。为了满足教学的需要，我们正式出版该书的英汉对照版。

英汉对照版《英国背景》完全保持了原书的精神。为方便读者，英汉对照版给出了全部课文的参考译文，考虑到本书作为泛读教材这一特点及学员的实际情况，译文尽量采用了直译的形式。天津广播电大为本书配备了学习指导材料一册及录音带两盒。

本书由刘洁、牟彦参加了部分翻译、整理和校对工作。在本书编译过程中，得到了安然同志的大力协助，特此表示感谢。

由于时间仓促，加之译者水平所限，书中难免有不妥之处，恳请各界同仁、广大读者不吝赐教。

译者 谨识

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The British Isles and Great Britain

by Shi Jingwen

The full name of Great Britain is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It comprises England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Sometimes it is called the British Isles, Britain or Great Britain. We also call it England, Scotland, Wales. London is the capital of the United Kingdom. The total area of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is more than 24,000 square kilometres with a population of some 56 million.

To the west and off the European Continent, there are several thousands of islands on the Continental shelf. They are usually called the British Isles. Of all the isles, the largest one is called Great Britain. For the convenience's sake, it is often shortened to Britain. But officially it is still called Great Britain. It runs nearly 1,000 kilometres from south to north and extends, at the widest part, about 500 kilometres from west to east. Its area is about 23,000 square kilometres. The island of Great Britain itself is divided into three parts: England in the south, Scotland in the north, and Wales in the southwest.

England is the largest and most developed of all

the three. It has an area of over 130,000 square kilometres which takes up nearly 60% of the whole island. Its population is more than 43 million and makes up 85% of the country's whole population. The importance of England is so great in Britain that some foreigners just say 'England' when they mean Britain. The same is true of the custom of speaking of the British people as the English who are the majority.

Scotland is the second largest both in area and population. It is about 78,749 square kilometres, less than 30% of the whole island, with a population of more than 5 million, less than one-tenth of the total population.

Wales is the smallest of the three both in area and population. It is more than 20,700 square kilometres and takes up less than 9% of the whole island. The population of Wales is 2,724,000. It does not exceed 5% of the whole.

Northern Ireland has a population of one and a half million. About one-third of them are Roman Catholics.

Britain does not share land border with any other countries except the Republic of Ireland. To the north of the island the sea way is open between the coasts of Iceland and Norway to the Arctic Ocean. Britain faces Holland, Germany, Denmark, and Norway across the North Sea. To the southeast across the English

Channel is France, at the narrowest part the channel being only thirty-three kilometres in width. To the south across the Atlantic Ocean and the Bay of Biscay are Spain and Portugal. And America and Canada lie on the west side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Britain is over one thousand kilometres from south to north. Its coastline runs about 10,000 kilometres, making it one of the countries with the longest coastline. In Britain no place is more than 120 kilometres from the sea.

The British people are rather reserved. They don't like to talk of personal affairs such as money, wage, age, or wealth but they like to talk about the weather. Sometimes they even argue heatedly over what the weather is going to be like. Perhaps it is nothing more than mere custom. But the custom has something to do with the variability of the British weather.

Britain has a changeable weather. Even the most reliable of British weather experts find it hard to give a correct and exact weather forecast. So, partly out of curiosity and partly out of practical need, people look to join in a discussion of the weather whenever there is the possibility.

There is the variability of the British weather and small differences between the seasons. In spite of all this there are still seasons in Britain.

Broadly speaking, the English summer consists of

June, July and August. In summer the days are long. The temperature in summer is not so high as you might imagine, only about 20 °C for most time, scarcely more than 32 °C.

Winter includes December, January and February, January being the coldest month. Even in this coldest month, however, the average temperature is seldom below 30 °C.

Britain has very heavy rainfall. In west Britain the annual average rainfall is about 1,000 mm while in the east and southeast the yearly precipitation amounts to about 700 mm.

The English language is a language of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is divided by scholars into Old English or Anglo-Saxon (700—1150), Middle English (1150—1450) and Modern English (sometimes called New English, 1450 to the present). About 300 million use it as their mother tongue, and hundreds of millions use English as their second language, i.e. in public affairs. It is the vehicle of a great world literature, and the main language of commerce.

Now English is spoken as the native language in the United States, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Caribbean and South Africa. In some other countries, English is used as a language necessary for certain officials, and for social, commercial

and educational activities. These countries include India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, the Philippines, Ethiopia, and some other countries. It is also one of the working languages of the United Nations. English is the primary medium for modern science and technology. Almost all famous scholars and scientists seek to publish their research papers in English. If we take economic factors in consideration, we find that the combined GNP of the English-speaking countries and places takes up about half of the world's total. That's why English is still regarded as the most important international language.

Unit 1 As others see us

We are rarely able to see those who are very close to us as they really are because of our readiness to accept their faults and accentuate their virtues. The same is equally true when we come to look at ourselves. It is very difficult for anybody to be objective about his own character. Yet it is very good for us to try to be so from time to time. As the Scottish poet Robert Burns put it:

O wad¹ some Pow'r the giftie² gie³ us

To see oursels⁴ as others see us!

It wad frae⁵ mony⁶ a blunder free us

And foolish notion.

What Burns says about individuals is equally true of nations. Every country tends to accept its own way of life as being the normal one and to praise or criticize others as they are similar to or different from it. And unfortunately, our picture of the people and the way of life of other countries is often a distorted one.

Here is a great argument in favour of foreign travel and learning foreign languages. It is only by travelling in, or living in, a country and getting to know its inhabitants and their language, that one can find out what a country and its people are really like. And how different the knowledge one gains this way frequently turns out to be from the second-hand information gathered from other sources! How often we find that the foreigners whom we thought to be such different people from ourselves are not so very different after all!

Differences between peoples do, of course, exist and, one hopes, will always continue to do so. The world will be a dull place

¹ would ² gift ³ give ⁴ ourselves ⁵ from ⁶ many

Indeed when all the different nationalities behave exactly alike, and some people might say that we are rapidly approaching this state of affairs. With almost the whole of Western Europe belonging to the European Economic Community and the increasing standardisation that this entails, plus the much greater rapidity and ease of travel, there might seem some truth in this—at least as far as Europe is concerned. However this may be, at least the greater ease of travel today has revealed to more people than ever before that the Englishman or Frenchman or German is not some different kind of animal from themselves.

Yes, travel does broaden the mind. And learning the language and culture of another nation does liberalise one's outlook. It is to be hoped that more and more of the ordinary people in all countries will have the opportunity to do both things in the future. But when people travel they should be open to new experiences. Too often English people abroad create their own community, keeping to English ways of life no matter where they might be.

A Vocabulary

1. What does *objective* mean? What is its opposite?
2. Find a synonym for *readiness*.
3. Find an antonym of *virtue* (not *fault*).
4. What do you do when you *accentuate* something?
5. What sort of picture is a *distorted* one?
6. Explain the meaning of the phrase *turns out to be*.
7. Give a synonym for *blunder*.
8. What is *second-hand* information?
9. Find two or three synonyms for *dull*.
10. What is the opposite of *rapidly*?
11. Explain the meaning of *broaden* in the phrase 'travel does

broaden the mind.'

B Questions on 'As others see us'

- 1 What do we all find difficult to do?
- 2 What sort of picture do we tend to have of those who are close to us, and why?
- 3 What did the poet Burns consider to be the advantages of seeing ourselves as others see us?
- 4 What sort of attitude does each country have towards its own way of life?
- 5 Give an important argument in favour of foreign travel.
- 6 What is the only way of finding out what a foreign country is really like?
- 7 What is the opinion of some people concerning the differences between different nations?
- 8 What effect does travel have on one's mind?

C Grammar

- 1 Put the following sentences into reported speech.
 - a Which of these roads will take me into town?
 - b Run and tell father that supper is ready.
 - c How pleasant it is just to sit and do nothing!
 - d How many goals did you score when you played football this afternoon?
 - e Put your books away tidily when you leave the room.
 - f Leave your things here when you go and I will look after them.
 - g Next week I shall be starting my holidays.
 - h Please go away!

2 Insert a suitable interrogative pronoun or adjective in the following sentences.

a coat is this? Yours or mine?

b.....country do you come from?

c.....is wrong with you?

d is the name of this flower?

e.....answer did he give to my question?

f.....bus goes to London Bridge?

g.....sort of shoes are those you're wearing?

h.....is the matter?

D The adjective formed from the word 'England' is 'English'.
Give the adjectives formed from the following countries.

Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Russia, Finland, Scotland,
China, Spain, India, Wales, Japan, Ireland, Switzerland.

E Write an essay on your first impressions of any foreign country and its people.

Unit 2 The Cockney

Almost everyone who has heard of London has heard of the term 'Cockney'. Strictly speaking, in order to call oneself a Cockney one should have been born 'within the sound of Bow bells', that is to say within the sound of the bells of the church of St Mary-le-Bow, which stands nearly in the centre of the City of London. But, in fact, all London's citizens who were born and bred in the city may call themselves Cockneys if they wish. However, the term is generally reserved for the Londoner with a 'Cockney accent'.

The Cockney accent is not a particularly pleasant or melodious

one, and the Cockney's distortion of the English language is such that the foreigner often finds it impossible to understand the speaker until his ear has become acclimatised to the peculiar tones. The principal characteristics of the Cockney accent consist in a general slurring of consonants (the aspirate aitch is often ignored) and a distortion of vowel sounds. The best known example of Cockney speech in modern English literature is that of Eliza Doolittle, the heroine of Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion* and of the musical adapted from it, *My Fair Lady*.

But if Cockney speech is unpleasant, the Cockney himself is usually far from being so. The average Cockney is distinguished by his quick wit, his ready sense of humour, his ability to 'carry on' under unusual or difficult conditions and by his willingness to be of help if he can. The Cockney's humour is often satirical but it is never vicious; he is very ready to laugh at other people's peculiarities but he is equally ready to laugh at his own. He often makes jokes under the most difficult conditions, a quality that was very apparent during World War II. This rather lugubrious type of humour is well exemplified by the title of an old Cockney musichall song: 'Ain't It Grand To Be Blooming Well Dead'.

Nowadays, as the tempo of life in big cities grows ever faster (although the Cockney opposes this process when he can), the opportunities for the Cockney to exercise his wit and humour diminish. But if one keeps one's ears open on buses, in railway stations, in street markets and similar places, it will soon become evident that the spirit of Cockney humour is still very much alive, although the old Cockney pronunciation is less common than hitherto.

Most people who call themselves Cockneys usually do so with some pride. And, by and large, they are justified.

Many Cockney expressions seem mysterious because they are based on 'rhyming slang', where the original words are replaced by words that rhyme with them.

For example:

apples and pears	= stairs	Uncle Ned	= bed
mince pies	= eyes	bees and honey	= money
plates of meat	= feet	custard and jelly	= telly (television)

A Vocabulary

- 1 Find an alternative for the word *bred*.
- 2 What does *melodious* mean? Name three sounds which you consider to be particularly melodious.
- 3 What is the literal meaning of *acclimatised*? In what sense is it used in the passage?
- 4 Find a synonym for *principal* in the phrase 'principal characteristics'.
- 5 What is the *aspirate aitch*?
- 6 How would you define *slurred* speech?
- 7 What is *satirical* humour?
- 8 Find an alternative for *lugubrious*.
- 9 What is the *tempo* of life?
- 10 What does a thing do when it *diminishes*?

B Questions on 'The Cockney'

- 1 What is the strict definition of a Cockney?
- 2 Where is the church of St Mary-le-Bow situated?
- 3 What is the City of London?
- 4 What are the main characteristics of the Cockney accent?
- 5 What are the characteristics of the Cockney himself?