

The Changing Face of Britain

—Images and Reality—

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Abstract

There are many famous images of Britain held by people in Japan. Those images can be wide-ranging, influenced by tourist trips to Britain, television programs or school textbooks. Some of the popular images include things such as Royal weddings and “kiri no London” (foggy London). However, are these images truly representative of modern Britain? Other cultures, including Japan, are changing the face of Britain in many ways. This lecture shows how Britain is changing, and examines some of the challenges facing the country in a modern multicultural world.

Traditional images covering seven aspects of the social make-up of British society are examined and then compared with a more modern set of images. These aspects cover climate, social behavior, speech styles, literature, inventors and industry, architecture and food. From these images we can see the emergence of a changing Britain. We have changes in social behaviour, in speech (even of the Queen), in the ethnic makeup of Britain, in technology, and in the architecture of Britain.

The challenge for Britain in all fields of life is how to combine the best of the old with the best of the new. It is no use maintaining old values, old ways of thinking, and old technology just for the sake of it — just because it is the “British way.” In a modern world under the influence of globalization, it is important to adapt to ideas and beliefs that come in from the

outside. However, it is rash to abandon all the principles and building blocks upon which a nation has been built. Combining the traditional with the new is the key point for creating a new British identity for the modern day — an identity that doesn't abandon old traditions, but which is not afraid to change with the times.

Two of the issues facing modern Britain are then examined, the food and health issue and the issue of multiculturalism. I look at some of the influences Japan is having on Britain in the world of food and consider whether the influence of other cultures is helping Britain with one of its biggest challenges — to be healthier. Then we look at the multicultural nature of Britain, and discover some of the challenges that face people from different cultures who live in Britain. In conclusion, I will try and show that a new identity for Britain is developing, an identity that marries together the traditional with the new, and that this identity is both British and multicultural.

1. Introduction

This year was a big year for Britain, and on April 29 the eyes of the world focused on an event in London — the Royal Wedding. This event, a simple union of one man and one woman, reinforced many of the traditional images that people have of Britain. In fact, Prime Minister David Cameron actually said people from around the world can experience, “a great historical moment, and see some of the best of Britain.” Let us take a look at a 5-minute clip from that day. The images of Britain that you will see include: Union Jack flag waving; marching bands; military uniforms, smart dresses, hats and suits; the Queen; Westminster Abbey and the national anthem; horses and Buckingham Palace; and a happy married couple — Prince William and his Princess. However, are these images truly repre-

sentative of modern Britain?

2. Change

Change is an inevitable consequence for every country as times progress. These changes take place in all domains of life — in politics and government; in law and order; in economy and working life; in health and welfare; in education; in media and the arts; in the social makeup of a country with attitudes to class, gender, young people and minority groups; and in sum, in the identity of a country and its people. Looking in from the outside it appears as if some countries progress with the times more smoothly than others; it seems they can adapt well to changing times, and have few problems in combining their cultural and historical legacy with an innovative and forward-looking perspective for their country in the modern day. Today, I look at the case of Britain, a country that is often equated with its history, and look at some of the ways in which it is changing to meet the challenges of the modern day.

Ancient Britain has changed to modern Britain — just as ancient Japan has changed into modern Japan. In Britain, many of the changes in history have occurred due to influence from other countries. Britain was occupied first by the Celts; then the Romans came (their legacy shown by straight “Roman roads”, the city of Bath, and Hadrian’s Wall among others); then the Vikings from Scandinavia; then the Norman French in 1066. They all left things (including language) and changed Britain. These days we have a different influence - that of globalization. It is easier to travel and easier to cross borders and this has been part of the reason why Britain has changed so much.

First, we look at some of the popular images of Britain, see to what extent they still exist, and compare them to a more modern set of images.

3. Images of Britain

Many people the world over have images of Britain — it is a well-known country, for reasons both good and bad.

Image 1: Foggy London & Sherlock Holmes (the weather)

“Kiri no London” is a well-known expression in Japan, and one I have heard myself from many Japanese people after they hear I come from Britain. Is this image correct? In the late 19th and early 20th century there was a lot of smog due to burning coal for heating. The smoke from the chimneys caused smog and health problems at various times — in 1952 it is estimated more than 4000 people died due to a particularly bad case. But in 1956 there was a law that stopped people living in cities from burning coal.

Sherlock Holmes who lived in Baker Street, London, is often connected to foggy London due to books/films — many of which had fog (but not always in London). Therefore, the “kiri no London” image is a false one in the modern day. The weather is unpredictable in Britain. Some people say that you can get all four seasons in just one day. The latitude is similar to Hokkaido but the Gulf Stream keeps Britain warmer than Hokkaido, and in most parts of Britain there is very little snowfall. Summer is the best season to visit if you only consider the weather — in other seasons, you may well experience dull grey days (and a good chance of rain).

Image 2: The English Gentleman

The bowler hat was invented in the mid-19th century and was popular 100 years ago. These days it is rather rare to see one. Suits and umbrellas are still used, of course, although due to the wind umbrellas are often

replaced by a coat of some sort. A little rain never hurt anyone!

The “gentleman” is an image of Britain — we often hear “English gentleman”. But is it true? Well, yes and no. An old-fashioned “gentleman” may be thought of as sexist now. My grandfather taught me “always open a door for a lady” but some feminists may be angry if you do so now. Is walking on the side of the pavement nearest to the road (as taught by many fathers to their sons in previous generations) sexist or gentlemanly?

There are plenty of British people who still fit the old-fashioned definition of a “gentleman”, but not everyone. When the 2002 World Cup was co-hosted in Japan, a new word connected to the English — “hooligan” — became known in Japan. Many programs were broadcast on Japanese TV about English hooligans. They are very violent and have been a problem for about 30 years. I went to Saitama and Osaka to watch England play in 2002. Most of the hooligans didn’t come to Japan, but there were some unpleasant people there. However, there were no hooligan problems. This was due to good policing and good psychology. Inside the stadium all supporters had tickets checked, were frisked and had bags searched, but it was done differently from in Britain because the checks were done by young and middle-aged women. This seemed to me like a brilliant piece of psychology. Potential troublemakers seemed baffled by being checked by polite and friendly women rather than by intimidating large men (as is the case in Britain).

We also saw in the recent August riots, that took place in several cities in Britain, that not all British people are peaceful and law-abiding.

Image 3: The Queen’s English

“I want to speak the Queen’s English”. This is often heard. The Queen’s English is seen as proper English, a good way to speak. It is simi-

lar to BBC English, and many people think it is standard English (like 標準語 in Japan on NHK). However, the Queen's English is a little different from standard British English. My English is relatively standard, but it is very different from the Queen. However, the Queen's English is becoming less like the "Queen's English" and more "normal" in recent years. She used to say "hame" for her home — but now it is more like "home." She used to say "happay" but now "happee", for the word "happy." The BBC now uses presenters with many different accents, not just speaking "the Queen's English." Regional accents are much more accepted these days than in the past.

Image 4: Literature

When we think of British or English literature, the names of Shakespeare and Dickens spring to mind (every May we can see a Shakespeare play here on campus performed by a theatre company from London). When thinking of female authors we often think of Jane Austen and of Beatrix Potter (the creator of Peter Rabbit). In each of these cases, the author is white — a white face that fits many people's images of Britain. However, in the modern day, the literature world in Britain is a multicultural one. Very famous award-winning British authors with an African background include Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*) and the writer/poet, Benjamin Zephaniah. Those with an Asian background include the controversial Salman Rushdie (*Satanic Verses*), and Kazuo Ishiguro (resident of Britain from an early age).

Image 5: Inventors & Industry

In a previous century, Britain was seen as a world leader in many fields. It was famous for the Industrial revolution, and for the innovations that took

place around that time. Two of the more famous inventors of the time were George Stephenson — “The Rocket” steam train inventor — and Alexander Graham Bell (telephone inventor). In many people’s minds, Britain has fallen well behind many countries in the world in terms of innovation and new inventions. However, all is not lost. A spirit of entrepreneurship does exist. One of the most popular TV programs in Britain is a show in which potential entrepreneurs showcase their new ideas for products to a panel of experts. An entrepreneur, and entrepreneurial spirit, is highly regarded. Perhaps, two of the most famous modern-day inventors are Tim Berners-Lee (a name that many have never heard of) and James Dyson. Berners-Lee is credited with inventing the World Wide Web — perhaps the most important invention of recent times. Dyson has become a multi-millionaire thanks to his inventive brain and the production of his vacuum cleaner. So, there is hope for Britain still, although the combined power of India and China is fearsome in its potential in comparison.

Image 6: Old Buildings

Students visiting Britain for the first time often say that they are looking forward to seeing the buildings — and they mean the old buildings. The rows of houses are an attraction, but also there are the famous landmarks such as Oxford University buildings and cathedrals. The 1960s and 1970s were a time when so-called modern architecture produced many buildings that are now seen as ugly. It was not a golden time for architecture. Today, modern architecture is taking on the challenge of building new styles of buildings that are functional, and fit in well with the older architecture that surrounds them. Some of the landmarks are more highly regarded than others. Generally speaking, the London Eye is highly thought of. It is functional, serves its purpose, and in spite of stand-

ing in close proximity to some of the world's most famous buildings it doesn't seem to feel out of place — modern Britain meeting old Britain in a good way. “The Gherkin” is another story. It is more controversial. Designed by Norman Foster it is equally loved and hated, and many feel it is too futuristic and ugly for the London skyline.

Image 7: Roast Beef & Fish ‘n Chips

British food does not have a very good reputation in the world. Most people associate Roast beef and fish ‘n chips with Britain (in fact, the French use “rosbif” as a nickname for British people). However, the most popular food in Britain now is reported to be an Indian curry dish called *chicken tikka massala*, and perhaps more people eat a *kebab* (associated with the Middle East, Turkey and Greece) than fish ‘n chips.

I think we can see a picture of a changing Britain emerging just from looking at these few pictures. We have changes in social behaviour, in speech (even of the Queen), in the ethnic makeup of Britain, in technology, and in architecture. The challenge for Britain is how to combine the best of the old with the best of the new. In a modern world under the influence of globalization, it is important to adapt to ideas and beliefs that come in from the outside. However, it is rash to abandon all the principles and building blocks upon which a nation has been built. Combining the traditional with the new is the key point for creating a new British identity for the modern day.

4. Two Challenges facing modern Britain

I would like to look briefly at two of the challenges facing Britain to see if the country is managing to combine the traditional with the new to create

a new British identity — the first challenge is in food & health; the second in multiculturalism.

4.1 Food & Health (Challenge 1)

So how is Britain changing in its food culture? Well, for some people the answer is a lot, but for others it is not at all — it depends on who you are. There is no doubt that Britain's food culture has been greatly affected by people who have entered Britain from other countries to live, as well as by globalization in general. There are many examples of foods brought to Britain by immigrants. The most famous of these is probably Indian curry. People say that *chicken tikka massala* is now the most popular dish in Britain. Chinese food is very popular, as is Greek, Thai, and Vietnamese, among others. One good example of the good influence of foreign food culture is the growing popularity of Japanese food in Britain.

Japanese (food) influence on Britain

The fact that Japanese food has become well known in Britain is shown in the number of Japanese food words that have become English. An English dictionary now holds words such as *sushi*, *soba*, *udon* and *wasabi*, along with other Japanese words such as *tsunami*, *karaoke* and *manga* — although it must be remembered that these words do have a very British-style pronunciation, and may sound very strange to a Japanese person.

On a short trip to Britain, I decided to see how far Japanese food had become part of British life, and I took some photos on Waterloo station (in London), and in a supermarket in a small country town. The Waterloo station photo shows a small shop selling *sushi*, *bento*, and healthy fast food for travelers using trains. Even though the photo shows Japanese customers waiting, the shop also has British customers.

The supermarket shows that *wasabi* and *edamame* are used in snacks



Photo 1: Waterloo Station sushi and bento shop *Wasabi*



Photo 2: Wasabi peas on sale at a British supermarket

in Britain. *Shiitake*, *enoki* and *shimeji* are in the vegetable section. *Ramen*, *udon* and *soba* can be bought. *Shoyu*, *teriyaki* sauce and *mirin* are on the shelves. And *sushi nori*, *wasabi* and *miso* are also available.

There is no doubt that Japanese food is healthier than traditional

British food and that it is having a good influence on British people. In fact, most countries' cuisines seem to be healthier than Britain's, so the influence of foreign food culture on Britain can only be good for the health of the nation. However, how many people are eating Japanese food? It tends to be the more "well-off" members of British society, and those people already have comparatively healthy eating habits. The poorer people, and a lot of the nation's young people, are eating lots of unhealthy fast food. Rather than sushi or a bento, they prefer fried foods. This is a challenge for the government and for schools. British school meals are nowhere near as healthy as Japanese school meals, and there is a serious lack of food education in Britain. It is hoped that other countries' food cultures can help to solve the problem of unhealthy food habits in children, but the problems are serious and difficult to solve.

Video scenario

A famous British celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver, is trying to improve the eating habits of schoolchildren in Britain. He is visiting schools in Britain trying to educate children, their parents and teachers about healthy eating. We can see that he has a difficult task. Only 37p (about 50 yen) is spent per child per meal on school dinners by the government. Children are ignorant about food, not knowing the names of fresh vegetables, but immediately recognizing fast food brands. Many children in Britain eat unhealthily at home and therefore their school meal becomes very important. However, the school meals are unhealthy and the children often bring unhealthy packed lunches (bento). This causes health problems for the nation's young people.

4.2 Britain is a multicultural nation (Challenge 2)

There is no doubt that Britain is a multicultural nation, and that globalization is affecting Britain profoundly. For detailed examples of statistics visit the Office of National Statistics website, but here are a few examples to support the fact that Britain has become multicultural:

- There are more than 8000 Indian restaurants in Britain (Storry, 2010).
- There are 40 Asian TV channels (Storry, 2010).
- Britain is 8% non-White (but elementary school population is 20% ethnic minority).
- Southall (London) is less than 18% English; Tottenham (London) has 113 different ethnic groups.
- Polish population in Britain has risen from 75,000 to more than half a million since 2003 (10% of Southampton is Polish with Polish signs in banks) (Polish Migrants UK, 2011).
- 50,000 Japanese live in the UK (Wikipedia, 2011).

Of the immigrant communities in the UK:

- Indians are most likely to have their own homes.
- Pakistanis are most likely to be self-employed.
- Chinese get best exam results.
- Bangladeshi men smoke most!

(Office of National Statistics, 2005)

The immigration can be broadly split into two groups — those that came to Britain 50 to 60 years ago (after WW2) and those that arrived recently. Representative of the first group are people from the Caribbean, and from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Many of these people make

Britain their home and plan for their families to live in Britain for ever. Representative of the second group are those from Eastern Europe, such as the Polish. Many of these people plan to stay for a shorter time, eventually returning to their home countries after earning money from working very hard.

Is multiculturalism working?

Well, various groups of people who traditionally do not get on well in their own countries tend to get on without too many problems in Britain. Hindus and Muslims live side by side; Protestants and Catholics generally live peacefully together; Greeks and Turks forget their bitter rivalry when living in Britain.

However, this year Prime Minister David Cameron said, “multiculturalism has failed.” He feels that certain groups of immigrants feel no “collective identity” in Britain, do not integrate into Britain, and live in segregated communities. There is a worry that some of the more radical groups will turn to terrorism.

Immigrants’ British Identity

Most of the immigrant groups within Britain do feel British. The following statistics show the percentage of people from different groups who described their national identity as British:

- Caribbean 86%
- Pakistani 83%
- Bangladeshi 82%
- Indian 75%

(Office of National Statistics, 2005)

One of the most well-known immigrant groups in Britain is the British Indian community. There is often a clear distinction between the way of

thinking of different generations. The older generation tend to be more “Indian” (respecting traditional Indian culture), whereas the younger generation tends to be more “British” (and often no different from other British youths). One movie that shows this difference is “Bend it Like Beckham” (ベッカムに恋して). It shows the identity of British Indians of different generations — their troubles with living in Britain, and what they like about the country. I thoroughly recommend it.

Video scenario

A young British Indian woman is dreaming of becoming a soccer player. In her dream, she scores a goal for a famous football team, Manchester United. But her mother appears in the dream and is angry with her for abandoning traditional Indian beliefs that she should not show her legs in front of men. There is a generation gap between the more “Indian” mother and the more “British” daughter. For example:

- The mother speaks English with an Indian accent (and also Punjabi language); the daughter speaks like a typical London girl.
- The mother wears a *sari*; the daughter wears British style clothes.
- The mother is a traditional Indian; the daughter is a modern British Indian.

5. Conclusion

Britain is a diverse country. We need to talk about British cultures now, rather than British culture. It is important that British people understand this and respect people who have come from other countries. Also, immigrants need to respect two cultures — their original culture and traditions (Indian culture in the movie) and also British culture. Immigration can be a positive influence on a country.

The British Prime Minister has said that, “Mucicultural society has

failed.” He said this because he felt that too many immigrants in Britain are not respecting British traditions and values. There is a growing dilemma of how to be multicultural yet respect your own culture at the same time. However, many people believe the British Prime Minister is wrong, believing that multicultural Britain has more positive influences than negative influences.

Japan may face a similar challenge in the near future. As the birth rate falls in Japan, will Japan allow more foreigners to enter (for example nurses from South East Asia) — will they be treated like Japanese? Will Japan become a more multicultural country? Many countries in the world have these challenges ahead as the world becomes globalized. With mutual respect, then the challenge can be met successfully and the positive side of multiculturalism can be understood.

In 2012, the Olympics will be held in London. I sincerely hope that it will be a successful event, and one that shows the world the reality of modern Britain. I am sure there will be many traditional images of Britain on show, but also plenty of modern ones too. I hope that you enjoy it.

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