Overcoming stereotypes

"I bet people are drinking tea ALL the time" "They all sound so posh, don't they?" This is what my Japanese friends around me say about England. Their impressions of the British seem to be based on generalized symbols such as the Royal Family and afternoon tea, and although they are a huge part of its culture, they do not fully epitomize its people. This is a story about how four years of living in Britain made me realize the imbecility of judging people and generalizing them with stereotypes based on their ethnicity.

Looking back, my time as a student at an all-girls British private school remains one of the most enchanting and enriching memories of my life. Everything differed immensely from the school I attended in Japan, but what struck me most was that each grade consisted of around ten girls. It really fostered an intense sense of unity and connection throughout the school. I got to know each of them well and they made up a huge part of my childhood.

However, on my first day of school, I did have a fear of getting picked on by being the 'odd' one out. The eight-year-old me was expecting a British school to be full of children who had ocean-deep blue eyes and shimmering blonde hair - or at least, that was how London was depicted in a book I read when I was a toddler. I assumed that I would be the only one who wasn't fluent in English, with pitch-black eyes and brownish hair. But actually, things were very different. 12 girls from various countries such as England, India, China, Africa, Japan, and South Korea, were all gathered inside a

classroom, and I was astounded by the amount of diversity which I had never encountered in Japan. Nobody treated me differently because I was 'Japanese,' they just talked to me because I was new, and even offered to help me with my awkward English.

Spending time with these 12 girls at school fluctuated all the stereotypes that I had inside me over time. For example, the only interaction I had with Chinese people was hearing them jabber on about something on the street, so I thought they were aggressive and loud, also being math wizards like my dad had told me. But Hei-Lam, who was a Chinese girl in my class was the quietest and was so sophisticated (yes, a math wizard) that she skipped grades. But her sister, Hei-Tou, was so cheeky and bubbly that she often got scolded by the teacher. It really wasn't about their race. Moreover, there were two Indian girls named Prisha and Preet, who both believed in Hinduism. Because I had thought Indians were not allowed to eat meat based on their religion, I gaped when Preet only put potatoes and vegetables on the plate but Prisha gobbled down a slice of roast beef. Seeing my worried face, she chuckled and kindly told me, "Not all Hindus are vegetarians Miyu, some eat dairy but not meat, and some reject both. I'm a Hindu but I still eat meat." All these experiences gradually instilled the importance of dispelling stereotypes as they often did not reflect reality. These experiences gradually impressed upon me the importance of dispelling stereotypes as they often do not align with reality. Each of these girls was different, unique, and beautiful in her own way. Their personalities might be influenced by their upbringing, but never solely by the color of their skin or the type of passport they hold.

To address the questions posed at the beginning, not all British people are tea enthusiasts, nor do they all talk like the Royal Family. My journey through the halls of a British school shattered these preconceived notions and replaced them with the vivid reality that individuals are defined by their unique stories, aspirations, and personalities. By embracing curiosity and open-mindedness, I believe we can embark upon a world where people are valued for their unique identities, rather than harmful generalizations. Our shared experiences, shared stories, and shared humanity, can be the keys to unlocking a world free from the shackles of stereotypes. [692 words]