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# Is Moving Abroad Enough to Build an International Life?


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When people think about having an international life, the first image that often comes to mind is moving to another country. The allure of new landscapes, cultures, and opportunities can be powerful. However, as someone who has lived in China since 2018, working in international education and acting as a bridge between institutions and students worldwide, I must ask: Is moving abroad enough to develop a truly international mindset? My answer is a resounding no.

## **The Bubble Effect**

A surprising pattern I've noticed among expats is their tendency to recreate their home countries abroad. For example, in China, it's not uncommon to see British expats working for British companies, socializing exclusively with other Brits, and frequenting British pubs to watch British football. While this is understandable—similar cultures, shared languages, and familiar comforts make it easier to settle into a new environment—it begs the question: why travel thousands of miles to a country with a vastly different culture only to stay within your own bubble?

The bubble effect is even more pronounced in communities from larger or more powerful countries, where there are often enough compatriots to form a microcosm of home. But what about people from smaller or less influential nations? They are often forced to step out of their comfort zones—working in companies from other countries, mingling with people from different cultures, and learning languages besides their own. This necessity can foster a more authentic international experience.




If you're considering studying, working, or living abroad, here's my advice:

- **Break the Bubble:** Step out of your comfort zone. Socialize with locals, try unfamiliar foods, and embrace cultural differences.
- **Learn the Language:** Language is the gateway to understanding a culture. Make the effort to learn and use it.
- **Seek Authentic Experiences:** Go beyond tourist attractions. Visit local neighborhoods, attend traditional events, and engage with the community.
- **Build Diverse Relationships:** Form connections with people from different countries and backgrounds. This will enrich your perspective and challenge your assumptions.
- **Be Curious and Humble:** Approach new environments with curiosity and a willingness to learn. Avoid assuming that your way of doing things is universally best.

## **Moving Beyond Survival**

Living abroad shouldn't be about merely surviving within a recreated version of home. Instead, it's an opportunity to thrive by immersing yourself in new cultures, broadening your perspective, and cultivating an international mindset. This requires effort and vulnerability but offers rewards far beyond what a superficial "international life" can provide.

Let's move beyond the illusion of internationalism and embrace the true essence of global living. Whether you're in China, Europe, or anywhere else, the key to an international life lies not just in where you are but in how you engage with the world around you.



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