Designing for Acculturative Stress of International Postgraduate Students

Are you an international student in the Netherlands, navigating life in a completely new culture for the first time? If you've ever felt overwhelmed, frustrated, or even discouraged by challenges like language difficulties, adjusting to a new educational system, differences in social norms and customs, identity conflicts, or instances of discrimination, you are not alone. Many international postgraduate students—both master's and PhD students—face what is known as **acculturative stress**.

Acculturative stress is the emotional and psychological strain that comes from trying to adapt to a new culture, especially when there is a big gap between your culture and the one you're in now. This type of stress can significantly impact international students, leading to issues like reduced academic performance, mental and physical health issues, feelings of isolation, limited engagement in campus life, and a general decline in overall well-being.

But as a designer, you have the unique power to make a difference. This master's project offers you the opportunity to design innovative solutions to help alleviate the acculturative stress that you, your peers, or other international students may be experiencing. The goal is to create a design intervention—be it a physical product, digital tool, or workshop format—that enhances the international student experience by promoting cultural integration, social connection, and emotional well-being. This project is not only about addressing a problem; it's also about fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for the entire international student community.

If you're passionate about exploring the intersections of design, mental health, international education, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), this project could be a perfect fit for you. You'll work closely with PhD researcher Zhuochao Peng (z.peng@tudelft.nl), who will mentor and guide you throughout the project. Check out his profile on the IDE website or LinkedIn to learn more about his work, and get in touch if you're ready to make a meaningful impact.