

OSCAR-WINNING FEMALE FILMMAKERS INSPIRE FELLOW AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER SHIYUE XU

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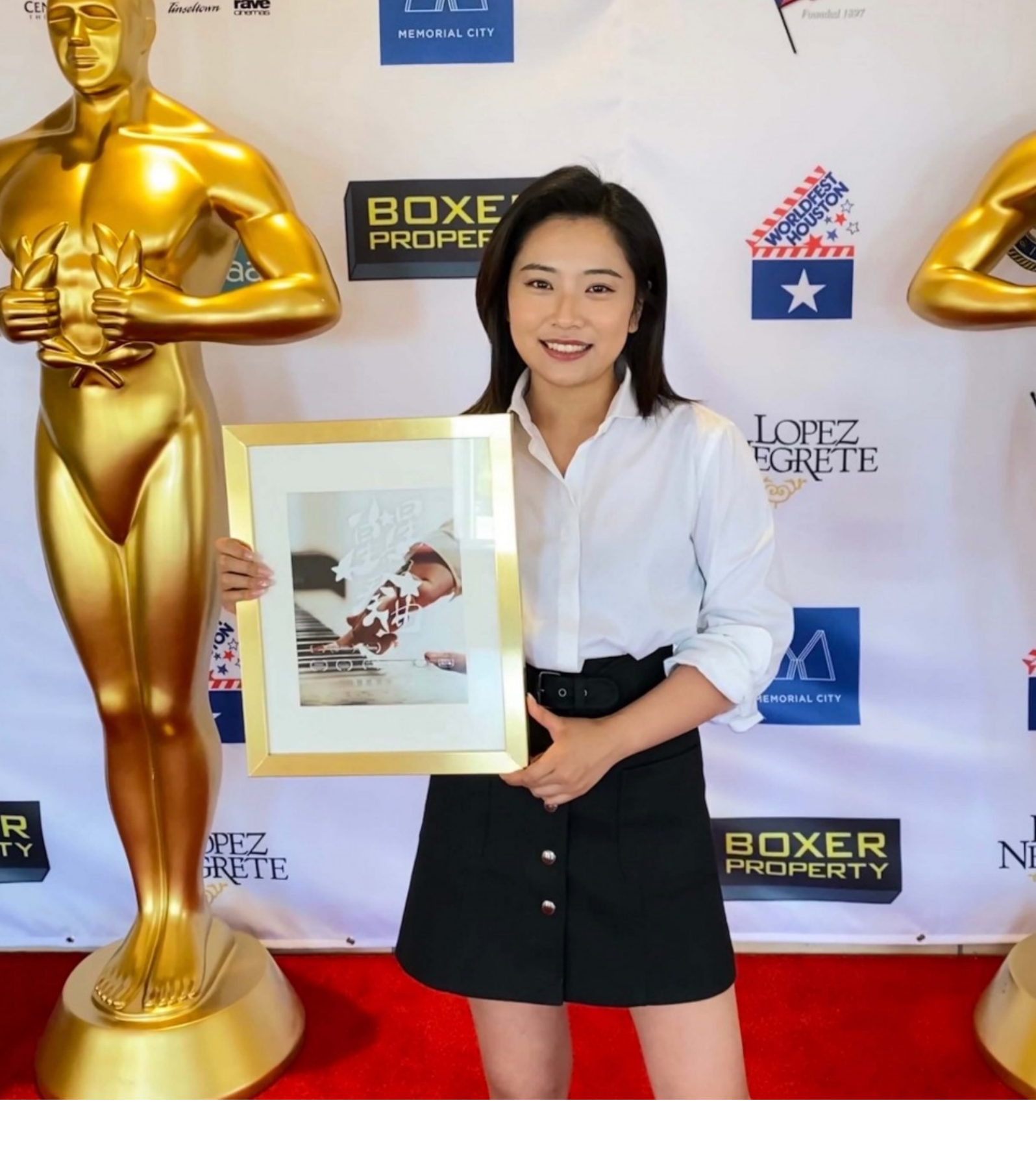
 Ashley Jude Collie 20 hours ago

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Filmmaker Shiyue Xu's short film, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, has earned worldwide recognition, earning the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival Silver Remi Award, the Fargo Film Festival Best Student Film and the North Hollywood CineFest Best Student Short Film.

And, Shiyue was overjoyed when another short, the documentary *Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone (If You're A Girl)*, won the Best Documentary Short Subject at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2020—the prestigious award was shared by director Carol Dysinger and producer Elena Andreicheva. Shiyue says, "I think director Dysinger is a great female filmmaker, someone who was very brave to choose the topic of the documentary set in war-torn Afghanistan. I would like to emulate that success."



Indeed, Shiyue herself is part of the new wave of female filmmakers. Her acclaimed short *YuanYuan* also earned the best short film award at the LA Femme International Film Festival. Additionally, the Long Island International Film Expo (LIFE) recently nominated *YuanYuan* for the "Best of Foreign Shorts," and she was excited to do a red carpet interview with LIFE.

More importantly, she's proud to be part of the growing community of female filmmakers, enthusing, "I was very happy to be recognized by female filmmakers at the LA Femme festival. The truth is, as females, we have to work more, and work hard. But all the females I've seen in this industry, they're all very strong and talented."



So far, Shiyue's fictional shorts, such as *Locust Tree* (2017) and *YuanYuan* (2019), have won much acclaim. Her *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (2019) has also achieved additional recognition, earning a Director's Choice Award at the Thomas Edison Film Festival, and earning several Academy Award Qualifying selections at the Foyle Film Festival, Flickers Rhode Island International Film Festival, and the LA Shorts International Film Festival.



Above all, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* was "taken from my personal life" as Shiyue wanted to say goodbye to all her past regrets, explaining the message of this beautiful movie:

"There were a lot of things I used to do, such as learning ballet for six years. But, in the end, my teacher said that I wasn't physically fit to do professional ballet, so I had to give it up. And I used to play drums for ten years, but I stopped playing drums after college, so I thought I couldn't succeed at these things, that I just fell by the wayside. However, through making films like *YuanYuan* and my documentary, *Island*, I now tell myself that the most important thing is to always keep my dreams and passion alive."

As a result, Shiyue has studied various areas in art, film and television, studying Radio Television Video and Film at New York's Hofstra University, as well as attending the New York Film Academy.

Moreover, she wanted to further expand her skills and knowledge, and is also working on an MFA Documentary from Chapman University in California. So, she is now focusing on making documentary films which she describes as "absorbing real stories from the outside world." For example, she was emotionally moved by being the director/reporter for her powerful documentary called *Left-Behind Children* which focused on children left behind year-round by parents who work in large cities to earn money to support their families. Shiyue explains:

"We went into the most remote and poorest village in China where the only permanent residents are the elderly and these left-behind young children. When I focused my camera at these innocent kids, the strength and kindness that exuded from their eyes touched me. No matter how troubled society is today I understood the truth of an old saying back in China that goes, 'Even in the crevices of the sandstones where the sun is most lacking, beautiful flowers will still bloom.'"

Secondly, she's working on getting her feature documentary *Island* into film festivals—it deals with depression, something that's not often talked about in China, where Shiyue suggests over 95 million people suffer under the radar. The director/executive producer's goal for this insightful, eye-opening documentary has evolved:

"My objective was to showcase a real look into how it is living in a world with depression. But after making this doc, my goal is no longer as big as 'bring hope.' It's much smaller but maybe more realistic. When I was making it, one patient with depression, one of my subjects, said to me, 'I am very happy to participate in your documentary. You make me understand that I am not alone, so I want to live longer in this world now.' After hearing this, I think I achieved my goal—I hope my film can help others, even if it's only one person."

Moreover, with an overall goal to gain more of a unique name and identity through her work, Shiyue has now learned many facets of filmmaking, explaining, "When I was doing my own documentaries, sometimes, I had to be a solo one-man crew—learning how to use camera/lighting and sound on the job—and that gave me the experience on using camera and know all the facets of filmmaking. Even when I worked on live-action projects, I liked to do the shot-list and storyboarding by myself because I always have my own thoughts on what the camera sees."

Consequently, she has a broad range of strengths, further offering: "As a female storyteller/filmmaker, I believe that I possess a quiet and gentle strength. My previous documentary experiences have also made me better at observing and showing compassion for others. All of these traits fuel my desire to produce and direct more movies focusing on children as well as documentaries focusing on social issues. As for doing commercials, which I've also been working on, they have given me the opportunity to work on bigger budget projects, and learn the experience of working with a larger crew."

Above all, Shiyue's childhood has turned into a positive. She was sent to boarding school, but she learned to grow up on her own. She became a "very independent person" developing that passion for film and being influenced by the likes of one of today's greatest contemporary filmmakers, Ang Lee: "Even though Ang Lee has now won two Best Director Oscars (*Life of Pi* and *Brokeback Mountain*), I loved his early trilogy of Taiwanese-culture/generational films including *Pushing Hands*, *The Wedding Banquet*, and *Eat Drink Man Woman* which received a Best Foreign Film Oscar nomination. Now, with my focus on documentaries, one thing the Chapman documentary program teaches is to be respectful to the truth."

With that in mind, Shiyue goes back to her admiration of female documentarians, saying of Carol Dysinger, who directed *Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone*, "Carol is the type of talented and fellow filmmaker I'd really want to work with."

Drop in on Shiyue Xu's website, and on IMDb. Also, check out the trailer to her documentary *Island*, and links to *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*.

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THE LIMITS OF POSITIVE THINKING

 Paul Sloane 02/11/2021 1

The magical potency of positive thinking has been a common theme among motivational speakers for a long time.

In 1952 Norman Vincent Peale published his seminal book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. He advocated that you should always be optimistic. You should build a mental picture of yourself succeeding. And at the same time you should drive out negative thoughts, doubts and self-criticism. His book became a best-seller. Evangelists for positive thinking such as Anthony Robbins built on these messages. The ideas were taken to an extreme by Rhonda Byrne who claimed in her best-selling book, *The Secret*, that thinking positive thoughts was the supernatural ingredient which would guarantee success in almost any situation. It was the only thing you needed. Positive thoughts would attract success and negative thoughts would attract failure.

Unfortunately for the advocates of positivity, most of the available research shows that the power of positive thinking is greatly overrated. Gabrielle Oettingen, professor of psychology at the University of New York, has carried out extensive studies in this area. In one experiment, obese people were divided into two groups and given the objective of losing weight. One group was encouraged to think very positive thoughts about weight loss and to visualise a slimmer version of themselves. After one year the results were striking. Those people who had had the most positive thoughts had lost the least weight. Why? The hypothesis is that visualising success can give you a feeling of satisfaction and achievement before you have properly earned it. And so diminish the motivation to work at it. In other research optimists who thought more positively about their retirement saved less than pessimists who were more down to earth about the future. And students who were very positive before an exam scored less well than the control group who had no illusions. Professor Oettingen says, 'The more positively people fantasize and daydream about their future success, the less well they do in terms of having actual success.'

She does not dismiss positive thinking. She believes that it is very useful in helping us explore different possibilities for the future. But she thinks it must be tempered with caution. An optimistic outlook is a good starting point if it is allied to a clear understanding of the difficulties that have to be faced and the work that needs to be done.

In her book, *Rethinking Positive Thinking*, she advances an approach she calls WOOP. It stands for Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan. You should start by articulating your dearest wish. Then you visualise the outcome. Next you identify the main obstacle that might prevent you from achieving your goal. Then you put in place a plan to overcome the obstacle. And finally you work your plan.


Imagine an entrepreneur who has fallen in love with his innovative idea – it is going to change the world and make him a fortune. He can clearly see a wonderful future for the idea, the company, the customers and for himself. When he pitches his darling idea to a venture capitalist, she pours some cold water on his dreams with searching questions which expose all the impediments to success that he has overlooked or wished away. It is only if he can come up with a plan which overcomes the obstacles that she will release the investment that he needs to found the business. It is an example of WOOP in action.

So it seems that we need a marriage of positive thinking and realism, of optimism and cold calculation. We need to be positive realists who build plans and adapt them as we work our way forward.


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 Paul Sloane

Innovation Expert

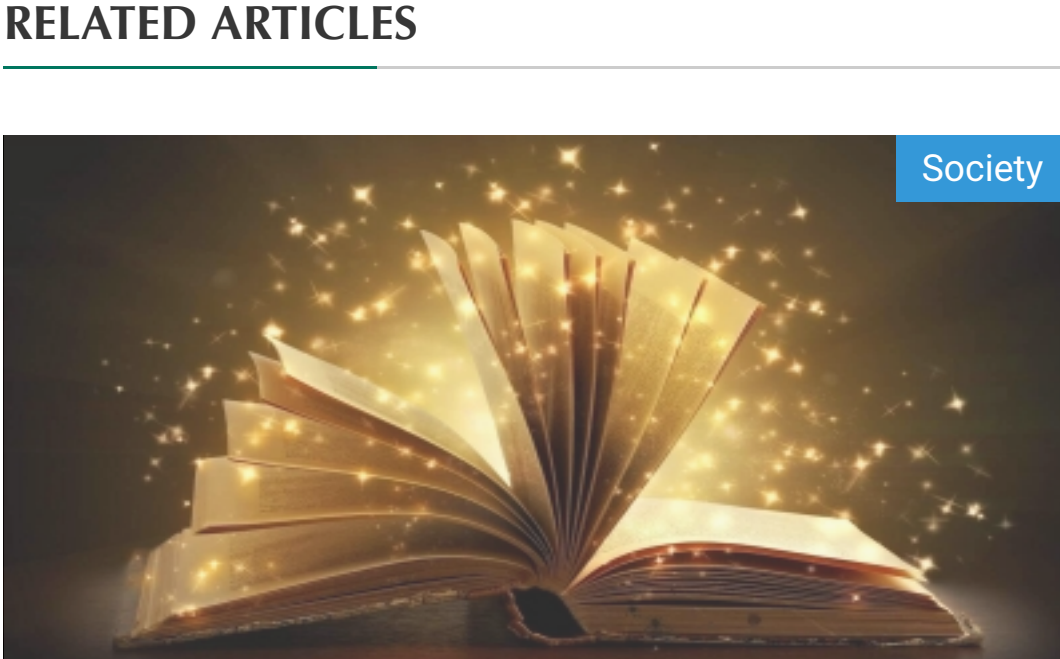
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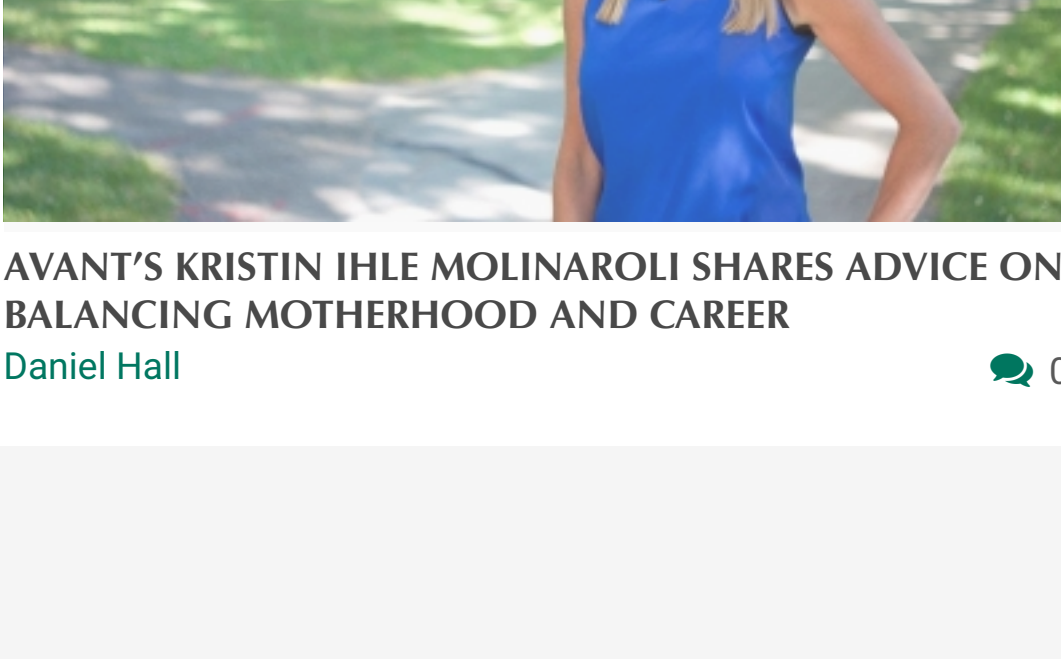
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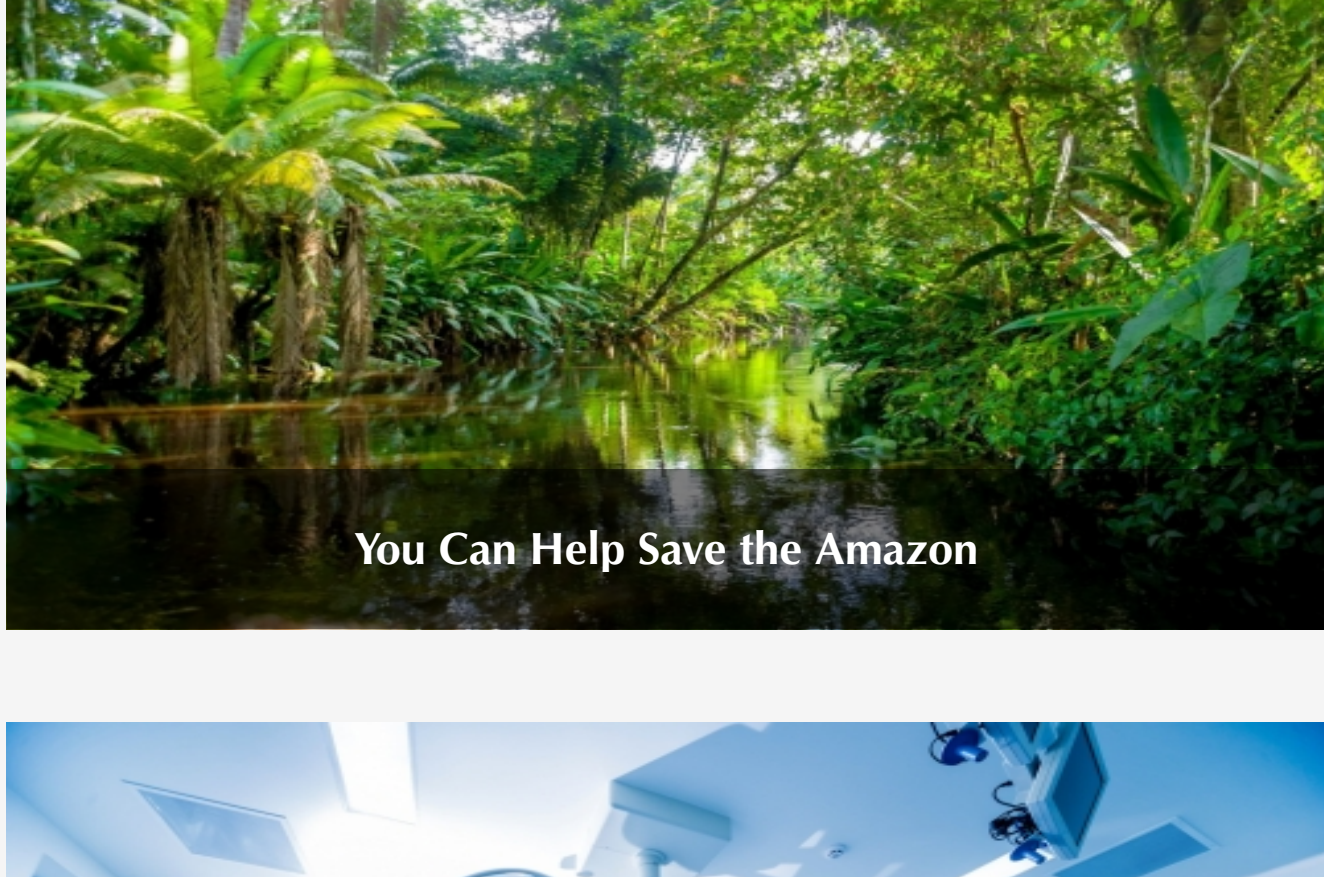
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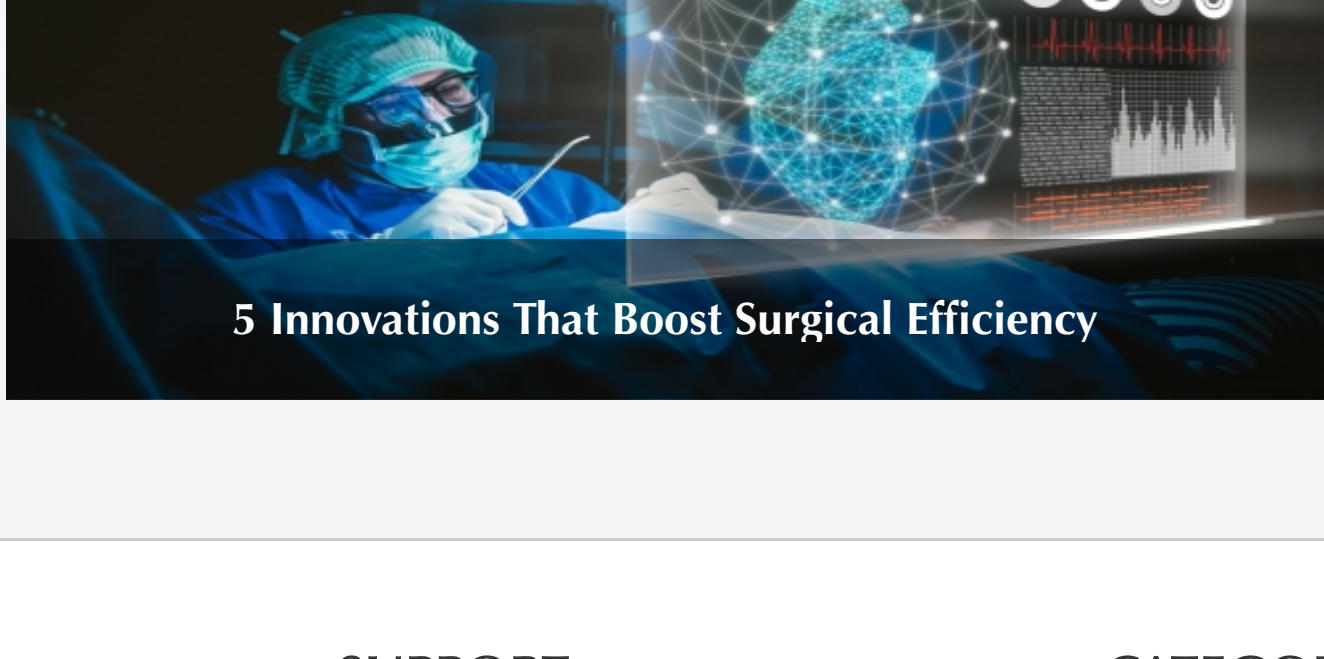
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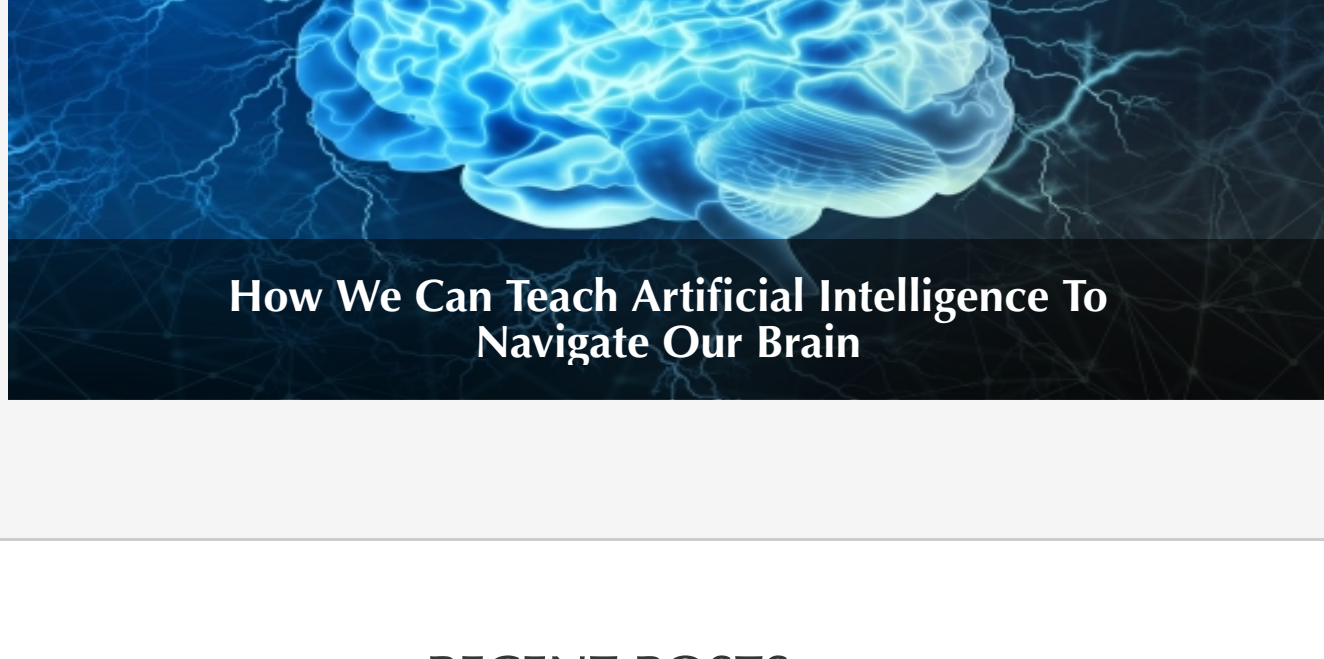
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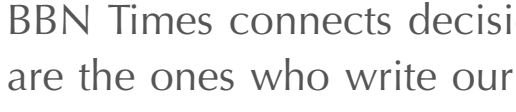
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