Good morning and welcome to The UWI, Cave Hill Campus. I am extremely delighted that so many of you could join us today for this important symposium,\textit{Navigating Globalisation – China’s Belt and Road Initiatives: Implications for the Caribbean}.\par

Last evening, some of us were quite fortunate to receive an insightful and thought provoking presentation by Professor Hongsheng Ren, Associate Dean, School of Politics and Public Administration at the China University of Political Science and Law (CUPL). He gave us an exceptional Sino-centric perspective of China’s Belt and
Road Initiative, – a modern geo-political development that is reshaping the world’s economic order. One of the many areas that stood out for me was the comparative value system defining China’s place in the world and that of western countries. Professor Ren’s lecture was entitled **One Belt, One Road and the Development of the Caribbean Region**. He presented a critical perspective to those among us who have grown accustomed to assessing China on the basis of our western ideologies and values and how these have shaped our understanding of the ongoing modernization process in the 21st century.

In the West, China has long been considered to be a developing nation (according to western-derived metrics including WTO and other assessments); though, based on China’s global economic footprint, its sphere of economic influence has grown in a manner, that has fostered narratives of creeping imperialism. Its wealth and soft power, have enabled it to achieve such dominance that, some say, China has already become – (though others hold the view that it is still evolving as) – It has already become the new standard bearer for globalization. Whether you subscribe to one of these opinions, or neither, it is undeniably clear, that the world has entered a new historical era, where Western dominance is today challenged by this
Asian super nation state - that represents a period of enormous political and economic complexity.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt that China presents to us a conundrum – a country’s whose phenomenal growth and meteoric rise as a global power, has catapulted it into corridors of power and influence that few could have imagined it occupying a quarter of a century ago. We have seen the Chinese economy evolve from about one twentieth of the size of the US economy, a few decades ago, to rivalling it for economic supremacy today.

As a result of this expansion, that has placed China’s economy second to that of the US, we are witnessing revolutionary changes occurring across the globe. The growth and transformation of the Chinese economy has introduced a seismic shift, to an extent whereby the global economy is being reshaped by China’s immense economic power and growing political influence. The emergence of international megaprojects and China-sponsored or influenced developments is raising economic expectations in some quarters that are similarly matched in intensity, by the rising tensions between Beijing and Washington. The focus is increasingly
shifting to the East, where China has become the biggest trading partner of an increasing number of countries around the world.

Already, there are well entrenched claims that Mandarin, rather than English, could become, overtime the lingua franca – the dominant international language. I pause here to inform you that should this become a reality, we at the Cave Hill Campus with the assistance of the Confucius Institute are already well positioned to prepare the country and the region for this, through the presence of a vibrant Confucius Institute which is making a tremendous impact in its teaching of Chinese language and culture.

So what are we to make of all that China is doing across the globe and within our geographic space? Indeed, even if we suspend accusations of imperial ambitions, how are we to assess China’s quest to spread their culture and influence, even as we seek to understand and reposition the Caribbean’s role in the world? Ladies and gentlemen, communicate in whatever language will be dominate in the mud 21st century. Should we continue to think of China through a western prism, according to traditional western values? Hence the usefulness of Professor Ren’s presentation last night.
The University of the West Indies plays a critical role of confronting questions about the times in which we live and interrogating issues within a context that seeks to help determine our collective sustainable futures. Besides the students we train every year, our researchers assist in scientific breakthroughs, medical discoveries and climate adaptation techniques. They assist in fashioning ideas around social policy re-engineering, performance management, urban transformation, design-thinking, governance and economic renewal; and in redefining equity, justice and other issues that help to strengthen our societies. For example, very soon the Faculties of Law; Social Sciences and SALIES will offer a symposium on the crime situation affecting the country.

Indeed, our teaching, writing, researching, advising and activism address the Caribbean way of life, its socio-political status, its political geography and its contemporary fate. In so doing, the storying of our UWI, has also been about a critical questioning of global processes, the march and zeal of modernity, and imperial manifestations in the making of world orders.

It is within this context that today’s Symposium, will seek to examine the implications of China’s Belt and Road Initiative for the Caribbean.
Launched in 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strives to improve infrastructure, trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds across more than 80 countries. Its digital dimensions are far-reaching, including fiber optic cables, 5G networks (and this is a major source of political and economic contestation), satellites, and devices that connect to these systems. Discussion of these developments and their implications for Caribbean economic, social and regional interests should prove fascinating over the course of the day. Certainly, what this also implies for the region, in its diplomatic and strategic relations with territories such as the USA, Canada, Britain, France and the European Union as well as Latin America is a subject for further examination.

As you seek to engage in a much deeper way with the questions that have been thrown up by the creation of the (BRI), I am sure you will do so, fully aware of the region’s historic realities of its colonial past and the current imperatives of globalisation. The internationalisation of China’s currency renminbi (RMB); its substantial cross-border lending to developing countries; and the listing of over 100 Chinese State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the Fortune 500 list of the world’s largest companies, are all indicators of China’s global expansion and pragmatic adaptation to select Western-ideals, that collectively underpin the neo-liberal financial order.
China’s bank finance strategy is reminiscent of aid that was historically granted with ties and conditions, where credit lines were often extended to developing countries by the US, Japan, Europe and others, through commercial bank loans, bilateral development loans, and supplier credits from export-import banks, in exchange for the purchase of goods and services from the creditor nation. This is inherently part of the precedence and processes that we call globalization.

Conventional wisdom about China disseminated via the western media, carries a common theme. This theme, is that China’s novel pathway to globalisation, its ambitious New Silk Route agenda, constitutes part of a story of ongoing dynamics and inter-penetrating relations among states and systems that are creating shifting solidarities and antagonisms. This kind of scenario unsettles systemic equilibrium, since, as we are well aware, when alliances are tightened in one sphere, new tensions are created elsewhere. Understanding these dynamics is critical to navigating our future.

In this regard I applaud the initiative of the leadership of SALISES to establish a research network dedicated to the study and production of knowledge about the Belt and Road – developing country relationships. If we are to access such financing, diversify our trade and investment relations, expand our market share in
the tourism and international business sectors, and leverage bio-design technology for the makeover of our economies then it becomes critical that our University enjoin and enlist other researchers across the Global South to be a part of what is now the UWI-Global Belt and Road Research Network. Of course, this is what I expect. SALIES has to function as a thought leader and regional think tank. I take this opportunity to welcome several of you who have signaled your support to be a part of this Network, some of who are either in attendance or are scheduled speakers.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am well aware of the tremendous gains to be derived from the BRI including multi-sectoral investment. I speak of possible investment in our tourism sector, research and collaboration in our academic sector, investment in our energy sector and such like. Chinese are the largest producers of solar power and the largest wind turbine manufacturers and any collaboration in these areas from them would assist us to become less reliant on fossil fuels and accelerate our efforts at self-sustainability in renewable energy.

Indeed, an enhanced China-Caribbean collaboration offers exciting prospects which I am sure the many economists, social scientists, policy developers,
academics and others gathered here are eager to discuss. If pressing administrative obligations did not require my urgent presence elsewhere I would join you in your exercise.

Nonetheless, I look forward to hearing of your deliberations and wish you a very successful symposium.

I thank you.

Professor V. Eudine Barritteau, GCM
Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal
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