

**WORLD CLASS 2.0: CHINA'S MAJOR  
INITIATIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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## **Executive Summary**

1. China has embarked on the “Double World-Class Project” since 2015, the most important initiative in higher education under the Xi Jinping leadership to develop world-class universities and world-class disciplines by 2050.
2. This project builds on the “211 Project” launched in 1995 and especially the “985 Project” in 1998, which have effectively uplifted Chinese universities to a new level.
3. In September 2017, China released a list of 42 selected universities that are to be developed into world-class universities and 95 with one or more disciplines to be developed into world-class disciplines.
4. The “Double World-Class Project” will become a new basis to stratify Chinese universities/colleges. Those not included in the project—over 2,000—would be clearly disadvantaged. Among those on the list, the 42 “World-Class Universities” have an edge over the 95 “Universities with World-Class Disciplines”.
5. China will concentrate resources, talents and policy support on “World-Class Universities” and to a lesser extent on “Universities with World-Class Disciplines”, a practice it has adopted since the “211 Project” and “985 Project”.
6. It will also expose selected universities to greater competitive pressure through international benchmarking, and “dynamic adjustment” of world-class university list and financial support based on regular performance evaluation.
7. The concentrated support and heightened competition are expected to improve the international standing of Chinese universities. After Peking University and Tsinghua University, a dozen universities are looking to break into the top 100 list in various world-university rankings.

8. Nevertheless, the “Double World-Class Project” faces a number of challenges, such as the over-steering and micromanagement of Chinese universities, the flawed funding system with poor judgment and *guanxi*-based misallocation.
9. Moreover, world competition for talents works both ways. After years of attracting talents from overseas, Chinese universities have begun to lose some of their brightest minds—not students, but leading scholars—to American universities.
10. While the best Chinese universities aspire to equal the world’s best, deeper changes are needed in the governing of universities, allocating of research funding and fostering of conducive research environment, which are lacking in the current plan of the “Double World-Class Project”.