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China: Chinese educational certificates

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Introduction

The following note describes the Chinese educational certificates of the formal education system of China with a particular focus on the graduation certificate and the degree certificate. The focus is to provide information on recognised Chinese educational certificates for the purpose of understanding what they attest to as well as how to identify them.

Initially, the note introduces the context of which Chinese educational certificates stem from and a structural overview of the education system of China. Subsequently, the different types of Chinese educational certificates are presented (certificate of completion and certificate of incompleteness) with a particular focus on the differences between graduation and degree certificates of the dual certificate system. Furthermore, the graduation certificate and the degree certificate are presented in their own individual sections, including information on issuing bodies over time, document formats over time, certificate serial numbers, etc.

The note is based on online open sources and interviews conducted by NIDC in Beijing in October 2019 with representatives from the Ministry of Education of China (MoE) as well as representatives of government agencies directly under the MoE.

Background

The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MoE) is the competent educational authority in China. The MoE is responsible for the official and formal education system of China, which adheres to the entire country, except for the two SAR (Hong Kong and Macau), as they operate individual education systems.¹

¹ MoE, Beijing, October 2019; Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a; Gu, Mini et al., 17 December 2019.

Only institutions that are recognised by the MoE may offer and issue recognised Chinese regular and adult educational qualifications as well as appertaining educational certificates, belonging to the official and formal education system of China.

Structure of the Chinese education system

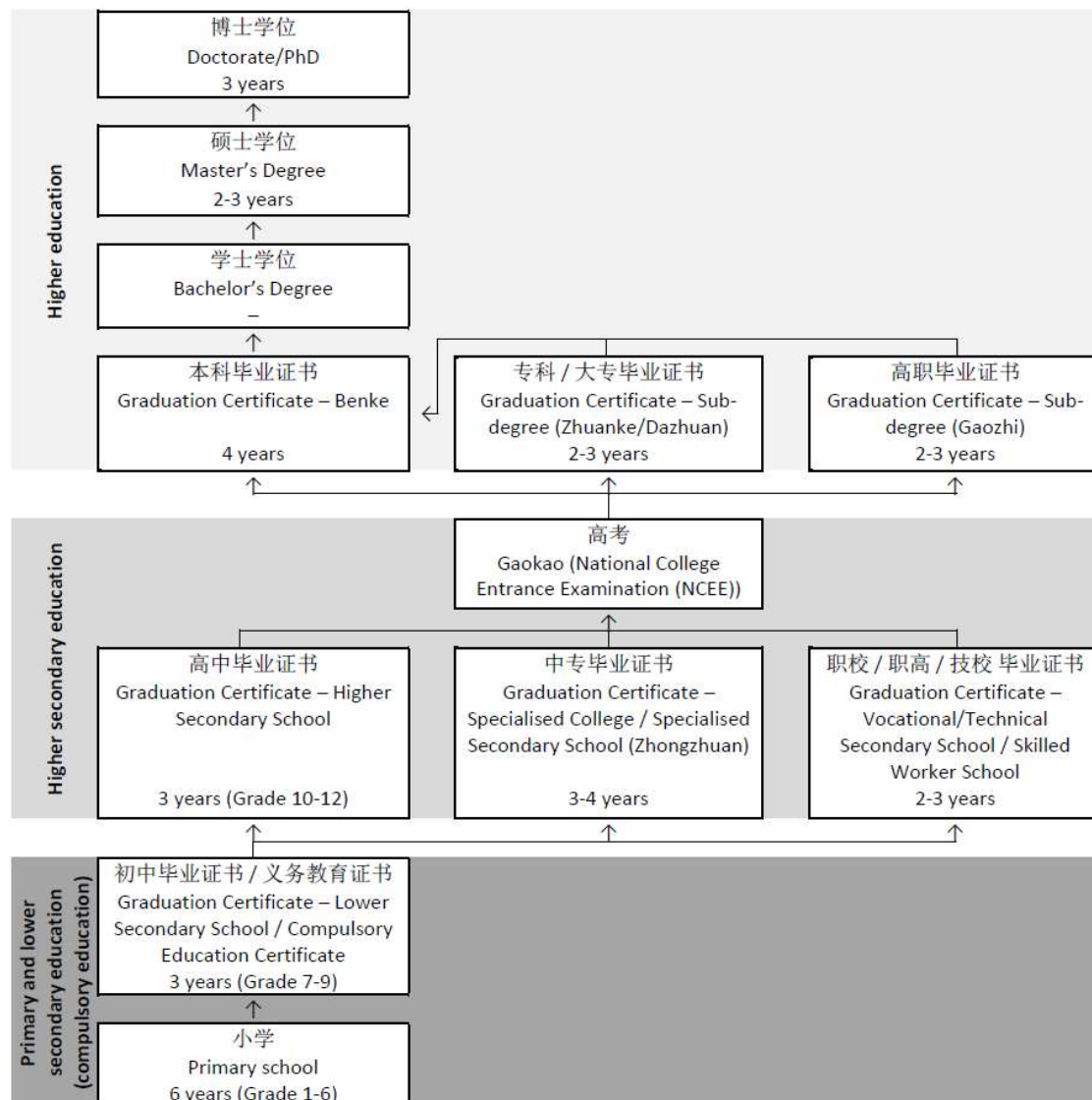


Image 1: Structure of the Chinese education system.

Types of educational certificates

Educational institutions that are recognised by the MoE are allowed to issue Chinese educational certificates, confirming formal educational experience and the conferral of formal educational qualifications. The following types of recognised educational certificates exist and attest to the following statuses:

Certificate type	Status
Graduation certificate (毕业证书 or 毕业文凭)	The holder has successfully completed the graduation requirements of and graduated from the educational programme in question
Degree certificate (学位证书)	The holder has been awarded the degree in question
Certificate of completion (结业证书)	The holder has completed the programme in question, but does not meet the graduation requirements
Certificate of incompleteness (肄业证书)	The holder has not completed the programme in question

Image 2: Types of educational certificates.

Graduation certificate vs. degree certificate (the dual certificate system)

Since 1985, the education system of China has operated with a dual certificate system.² This entails that two different educational certificates, the graduation certificate and the degree certificate, exist alongside each other, and attest to different educational achievements. The graduation certificate attests to study experience, while the degree certificate attests to the conferral of an academic degree and thus proves that a certain academic level has been reached. Furthermore, the graduation certificate applies to all educational programmes at all levels of the education system, while the degree certificate only applies to educational programmes at degree level, i.e. bachelor's degree, master's degree and PhD degree programmes.³

As a result, the required educational certificate for a Zhuanke qualification for instance would be the Zhuanke Graduation Certificate only, because it is not at degree level, hence the degree certificate does not apply. On the contrary, the required educational certificates for a bachelor's degree would be both the Benke Graduation Certificate and the Bachelor's Degree Certificate.

In the event that a holder of a Benke Graduation Certificate does not possess a Bachelor's Degree Certificate, it would normally entail that (s)he has fulfilled the requirements for graduating the Benke programme, but not the additional requirements for being awarded the bachelor's degree. It might of course be the case that (s)he only opted for the Benke qualification and not the bachelor's degree. Alternatively, it could also be the case that (s)he opted for the bachelor's degree, but

² CDGDC, Beijing, October 2019; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

³ MoE, Beijing, October 2019; CDGDC, Beijing, October 2019; CHESICC, Beijing, October 2019.

failed the final exam project or did not obtain high enough grades in order to reach the required academic level and be awarded the degree.⁴

Certificate of completion

The certificate of completion attests that the holder has completed the educational programme in question, but (s)he does not fulfil the graduation requirements. As a result, the holder has not been allowed to graduate.⁵

Certificate of incompleteness

The certificate of incompleteness attests that the holder has been studying at the educational programme in question, but dropped out before completion.⁶

Graduation certificate

The graduation certificate applies to all levels of education. It attests that the holder has been a student in an educational programme in the formal education system and that (s)he has fulfilled its graduation requirements, e.g. attended the required classes, obtained the required number of educational credits and the required grade point average (GPA), etc.⁷

Issuing body

From 1985 to 2001, the MoE issued all graduation certificates, but from 2001, the higher education institutions (HEIs) started issuing the higher educational graduation certificates instead.⁸ Since then, the HEIs have been required to register all issued graduation certificates with the MoE.⁹

Adult self-study or independent learning graduation certificates are issued in collaboration between the relevant provincial higher education self-study examination committee and the appointed HEI, responsible for the self-study examination in the region.¹⁰

Non-standardised formats from 1950 until 1994

From 1950, when the graduation certificate was introduced and until 1994, the format did not follow national standards. Furthermore, during this time the graduation certificate and the degree certificate have sometimes been issued as a joined

⁴ Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a.

⁵ Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

⁶ Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

⁷ MoE, Beijing, October 2019; CHESICC, Beijing, October 2019; CDGDC, Beijing, October 2019.

⁸ Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

⁹ CHESICC, Beijing, October 2019.

¹⁰ IQAS, December 2016.

certificate, i.e. as a graduation certificate on which it was stated, if a degree was conferred along with graduation, rather than two separate certificates.¹¹

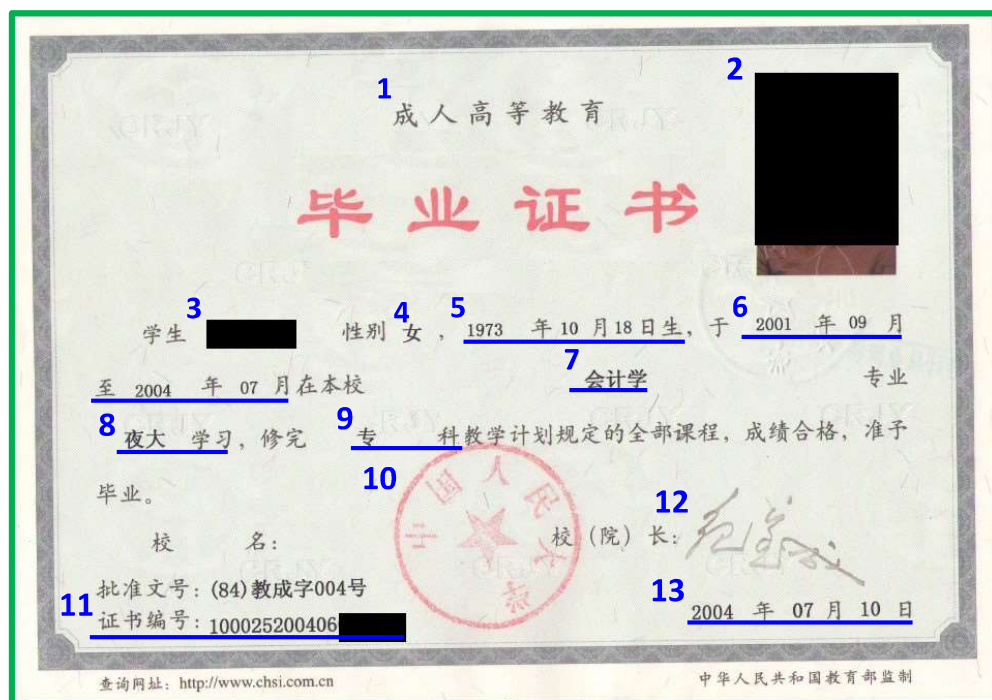
National standard formats introduced in 1994

From 1994, the MoE has operated with national standard formats of graduation certificates. The national standard format has changed a few times since.

In relation to national standard formats, it should be noted that a few selected HEIs, generally those that enjoy high status, have been allowed to issue graduation certificates in their own design all along. Furthermore, the graduation certificate for adult self-study normally does not follow the same national standard format as that of regular education and other adult education.¹² Moreover, formats for graduation certificates attesting to qualifications below the higher educational level do not follow the same national standard formats as those attesting to higher education.

National standard format for higher education since 2004

Since 2004, the following national standard format applies to both regular and adult higher educational qualifications, except for those obtained through adult self-studies. Furthermore, as mentioned above, a few selected HEIs continue to issue graduation certificates in their own design.



¹¹ CHSI, 24 July 2013; Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

¹² Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

Image 3: GC, example 1 (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The standard format applicable since 2004 features a number of standard information, which has been pointed out in the above example with blue numbers. The numbers match the following information:

1. Type of graduation certificate (adult (成人) higher education graduation certificate)
2. Attached facial picture of the holder – partly covered by the issuing institution's stamp (normally a dry stamp, which can be difficult to detect without the physical document)
3. Holder's name
4. Holder's gender (female)
5. Holder's date of birth; year, month, day
6. Period of study (from 2001, 9th month to 2004, 7th month)
7. Study major/specialisation
8. Length of study programme or study mode (evening university)
9. Level of studies (Zhuanke)
10. Issuing educational institution
11. Certificate serial number
12. Signature of the educational institution's principal/head
13. Date of issuance (2004 year, 7th month, 10th day)

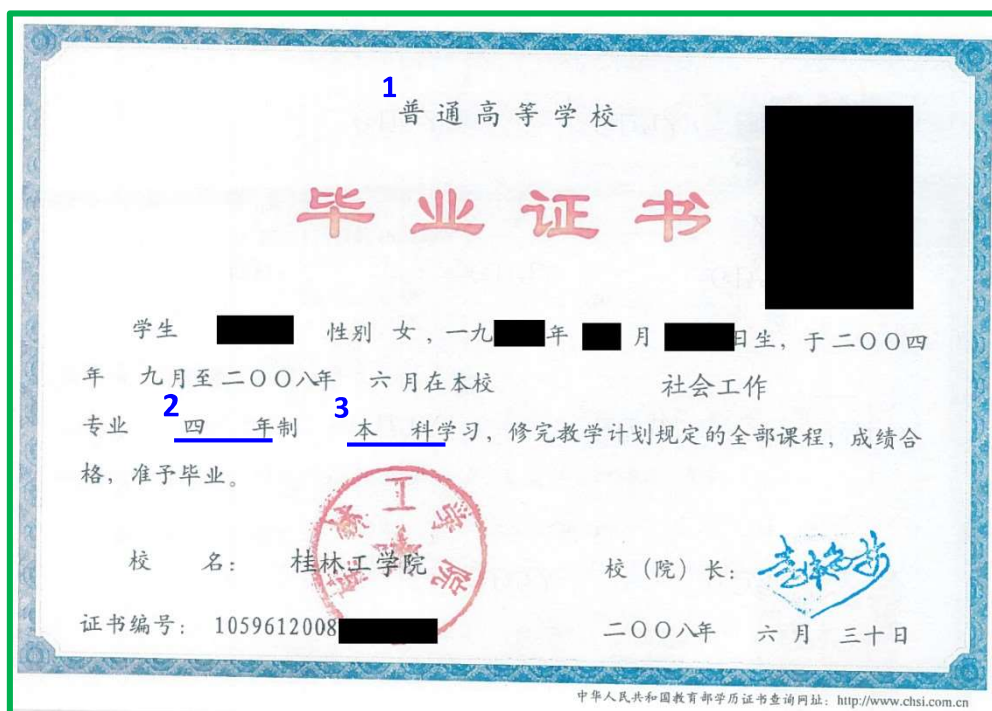


Image 4: GC, example 2. Please notice that the colours are off due to the low quality scan (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The blue numbers in the above example match the following information:

1. Type of graduation certificate (regular (普通) higher education graduation certificate).
2. Length of the educational programme (4 years).
3. Level of studies (Benke).



Image 5: GC, example 3 (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The blue numbers in the above example match the following information:

1. Type of graduation certificate (master's graduation certificate).
2. Level of studies (master).

Standard information

A number of elements and standard information must be included in graduation certificates for higher education and normally also apply for graduation certificates attesting to lower levels of education:

- The holder's recent picture, partly covered by the issuing educational institution's stamp (often a dry stamp)
- The holder's name
- The holder's date of birth
- The holder's gender
- The study major and the level of studies

- The type of education that the graduation certificate attests to (regular (普通), adult (成人) or self-study (自学))¹³
- Length of the educational programme or study mode
- Issuing educational institution
- Date of issuance
- Certificate serial number
- Signature of the educational institution's principal/head
- (For adult self-study graduation certificates, the relevant provincial higher education self-study examination committee will also be included)¹⁴

Degree Certificate

The degree certificate applies to the three highest levels of educational qualifications, i.e. bachelor's degree, master's degree and PhD. Generally, the degree certificate is issued in addition to the graduation certificate and it attests that the holder has fulfilled the degree requirements and reached the required academic level as well, thus the holder has been awarded the degree.¹⁵

It is possible to be awarded a degree certificate based on educational competence, rather than on a graduation certificate and the formal study experience it attests to. This entails that experience other than study experience in the formal education system, e.g. informal educational experience and work experience, under special circumstances can lead to the conferral of a degree and thus the issuance of a degree certificate. In such cases the term “tongdeng xueli” (同等学力) is used, roughly translated as “comparable educational competency”.¹⁶

Issuing body

The degree certificate was introduced in 1985 and until 2000 they were issued by the MoE. Since 2000, the educational institutions started issuing the degree certificates instead, which is still the case.¹⁷

National standard format from 1998 until 2008

From 1998 until 2008, the national format of the degree certificate was shaped as a small two-sided and A5-sized booklet. The overall design of the degree certificate is the same whether it attests to a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or a PhD degree. However, the background print on the right side of the degree certificate

¹³ CHSI, 25 April 2012; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

¹⁴ MoE, 5 February 2001.

¹⁵ MoE, Beijing, October 2019; CDGDC, Beijing, October 2019; CHESICC, Beijing, October 2019.

¹⁶ CHESICC, Beijing, October 2019; CDGDC, Beijing, October 2019; IQAS, December 2016.

¹⁷ Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017; MoE, Beijing, October 2019; Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a.

normally differs in colour for the different degree types.¹⁸ The background print on the right side of the Bachelor's Degree Certificate is in the colour yellow.



Image 6: DC, example 1 (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The standard format features a number of standard data, which have been pointed out in the above given example with blue numbers. The numbers in the above example match the following:

1. National emblem
2. Title (Bachelor's Degree Certificate)
3. Programme/graduate type (graduate of regular (普通) higher education)
4. Attached facial picture of the holder – partly covered by the issuing institution's stamp (normally a dry stamp, which can be difficult to detect without the physical document)
5. Holder's name
6. Holder's gender (female)
7. Holder's birth year and month
8. Study period (year 2002, 9th month to year 2006, 6th month)
9. Study programme length (4 years)
10. Degree type (Bachelor of Engineering)
11. Issuing HEI
12. Signature of the chair of the academic degree evaluation committee at the HEI

¹⁸ Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a.

13. Date of issue (2006 year, 6th month, 30th day)

14. Certificate serial number

National standard format from 2008 until 2016

From 2008 until 2016, the degree certificate is in a one-side, A4-sized, landscape and non-folded format. The national emblem is placed centrally at the top of the page.



Image 7: DC, example 2 (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The standard format features a number of standard data, which has been pointed out in the above example with blue numbers. The numbers match the following:

1. National emblem
2. Title (Bachelor's Degree Certificate)
3. Attached facial picture of the holder – partly covered by the issuing institution's stamp (normally a dry stamp, which can be difficult to detect without the physical document)
4. Holder's name
5. Holder's gender (male)
6. Holder's date of birth; year, month, day
7. Institution of study
8. Study major/specialisation
9. Degree type (Bachelor of Engineering) – Note that lists of existing degree types are available in the NIDC note "China: Introduction to the education system"
10. Issuing HEI

11. Signature of the chair of the academic degree evaluation committee/principal of the HEI
12. Certificate serial number
13. Date of issue (2006 year, 6th month, 30th day)
14. Programme/graduate type (graduate of regular (普通) higher education)

It should be noted that the statement of programme/graduate type (information number 14) is not always included, when regular education led to the degree as in the above example. On the contrary, it is normally stated when adult education has led to the degree.

The overall design of the degree certificate is the same whether it attests to a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or a PhD degree. However, the background print including the border of the degree certificate is in different colours according to the degree type, as can be seen in the below figures of degree certificate examples:



Image 8: DC, example 3 (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The blue numbers in the above example match the following information:

1. Title (Master's Degree Certificate)
2. Degree type (Master of Engineering)



Image 9: DC, example 4. Please notice that the barcode in the top left corner is specific for this particular sample and not a general feature). (The Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Science – Denmark).

The blue numbers in the above example match the following information:

1. Title (PhD Degree Certificate)
2. Degree type (PhD in Engineering) – Note that lists of existing degree types are available in the NIDC note “China: Introduction to the education system”.

Format from 2016 until today

In 2016, the national standard format of degree certificates was abolished. Since then, HEIs have been allowed to issue degree certificates in the format of their choice. This also entails that the national emblem should no longer be included on the degree certificates.¹⁹

Standard information

Even though the educational institutions have been allowed to issue degree certificates in the format of their choice from 2016, selected standard information and a few specific elements must still appear on the degree certificate:

- The holder’s name
- The holder’s date of birth
- The holder’s gender

¹⁹ Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, year of issue n/a; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

- The holder's recent picture, partly covered by the issuing educational institution's stamp (often a dry stamp)
- Degree type (e.g. Bachelor of Arts, Master of Science, PhD in Engineering, etc.) – Note that lists of existing degree types are available in the NIDC note "China: Introduction to the education system"
- The study major/specialisation
- The title of the awarding educational institution
- The date of issuance
- The signature of the educational institution's principal/head
- The degree certificate serial number²⁰

²⁰ MoE, Beijing, October 2019; Zheng, Claire Mengshi, 4 April 2017.

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