

Here are the three important steps for document authentication:

Notary: A notary public must first notarize the document for non-government documents such as affidavit or power of attorney. For academic records such as university/college diplomas, we recommend to request for a notarized copy (also known as certified copy) from your school to avoid damage to your original. If you are having a government document authenticated, you will need to obtain a certified copy from the State. Notary is not needed. Government documents include vital records such as birth certificates and marriage certificates or business documents such as good standing certificates.

State Authentication: The Secretary of State Office must certify the notary seal or the certified copy of your document by adding a statement page with a state seal. Some states will require certification of the notary seal by a County Clerk first. Federal documents and documents issued in states under the jurisdiction of the Chinese Embassy in DC will require authentication from the US Department of State afterwards.

Consulate Authentication: The Chinese Embassy or Chinese Consulate will verify Secretary of State's authentication. After verification, the Chinese Embassy or Consulate General will affix a Chinese Consulate authentication seal and signature to the document. Your document is approved and authorized for use in China.

* The long-awaited Apostille Convention finally entered into force in China on 7 November 2023. The legalization process for foreign documents was replaced by an apostille by designated authorities in a foreign state.

Certification Procedure: Before vs After

Before China's joining the Convention, the general practice of document delivery between China and other countries or regions was by the consular authentication process, which refers to the activity in which consular authentication agencies verify the authenticity of domestic foreign-related notarial deeds, other certification documents, or the last seal or signature on relevant foreign documents based on application.

Certification under this traditional model used to require "three-step certification", or even "five-step certification" when the documents were to be delivered to some specific countries. More detailly, certification of documents started with notarization by notary offices in the country of origin, followed by the certification by the Ministry of Justice or Ministry of Foreign Affairs if required. After going through the certification procedure, the documents then were transferred to the embassy or consulates of the country of destination for further processes. In some cases, the legalization Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country where the document would be used was needed in addition to all the steps. The whole process was complex and might take at least one month or even longer, costing a great amount of energy and money. In addition, embassy or consular authentication can only be used in one country. In other words, if the documents are to be sent to different countries, a separate certification needs to be obtained for every receiving country.

After the Hague Convention comes into effect, this process will be greatly shortened. You only need to obtain the notarized document from the country of origin first, and submit it to the authorized department in the country of origin for apostille before it can be recognized by any contracting parties of the Convention. This whole process is greatly simplified compared to the traditional certification procedure and can save applicants valuable time and money.

