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Qualifications and Degrees: Understanding the Chinese Dual-Credential System

International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)
Alberta Advanced Education

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IQAS Research on International Educational Systems and Credentials

International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) within the Alberta Government evaluates educational credentials from other countries and compares them to educational standards in Alberta and other Canadian provinces.

IQAS issues assessment certificates that facilitate the entry of foreign educated individuals into the labour force and postsecondary institutions.

IQAS is developing an **information repository on international educational systems and credentials**. The aim is to create **country education profiles** that will provide detailed information on educational systems in other countries.

This information repository will be made accessible to outside stakeholders to help them make accurate and efficient decisions regarding the recognition of international credentials.

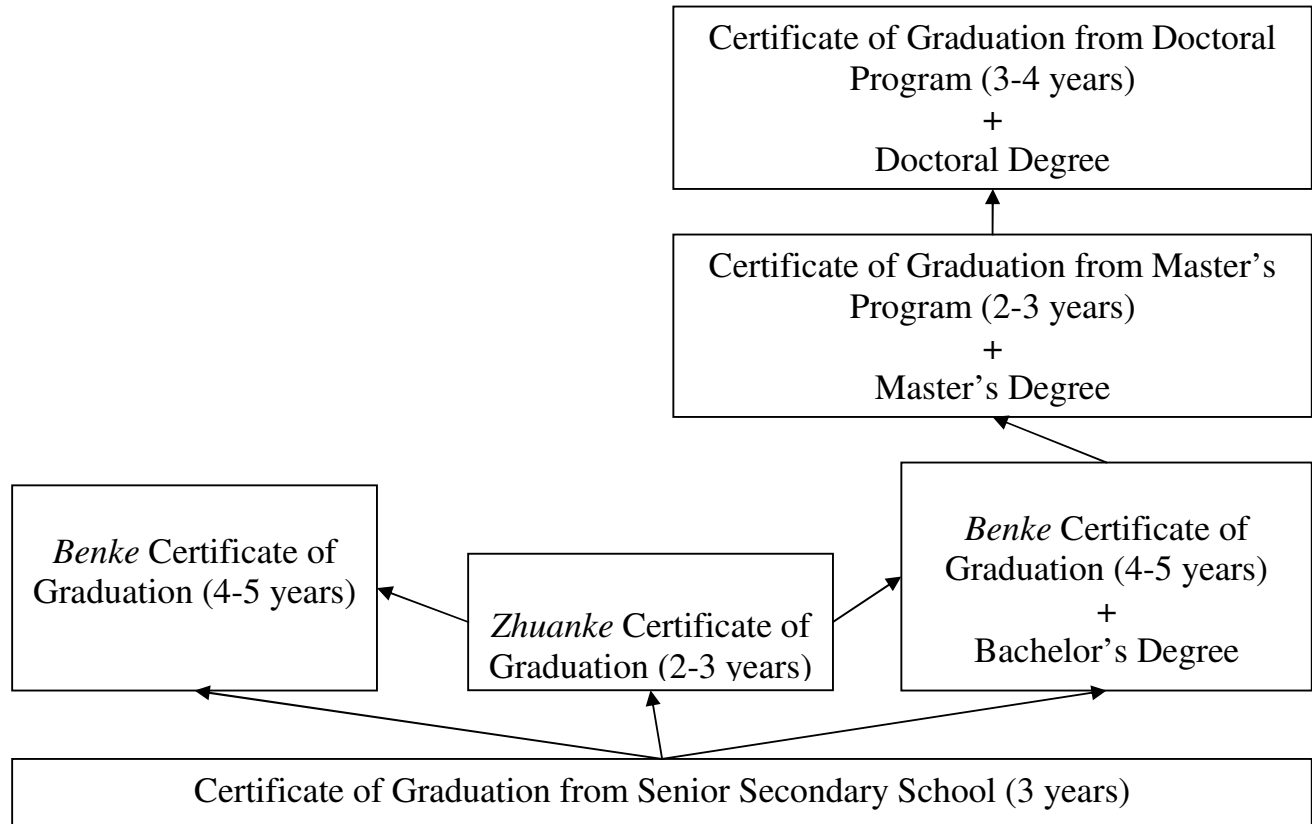
The vision is that organizations that need to know whether an applicant with international credentials meets the educational requirement for employment, educational admission or professional licensing will be able to access the repository to obtain information on how the applicant's credentials compare to standards in Alberta and Canada.

A comprehensive database on how international credentials compare to educational standards in a Canadian province for public use has not yet been developed. This project is a first within Canada.

IQAS is in the initial phase of this project and has completed country profiles on China and the Philippines. Country profiles for the United Kingdom, Columbia, South Korea, India and Russia will be completed over the next year.

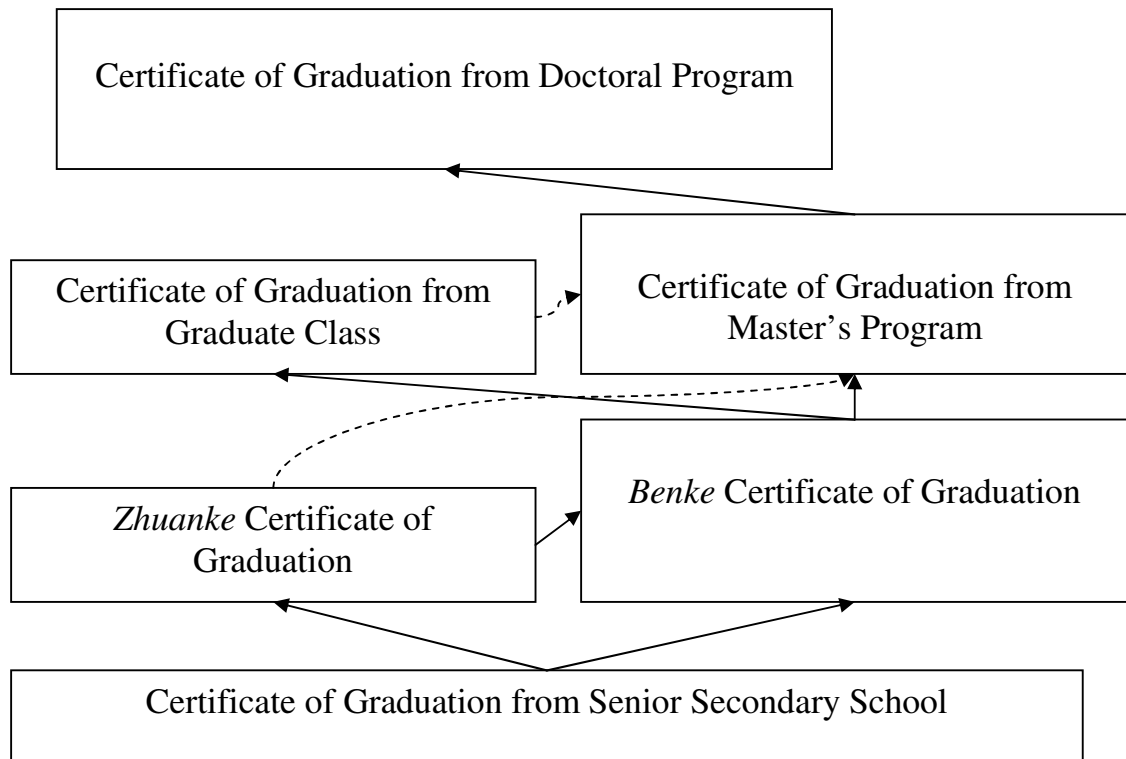
The IQAS Country Profiles on China and the Philippines can be accessed at:
http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/iqas/docs/CountryProfile_China.pdf
http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/iqas/docs/CountryProfile_Philippines.pdf

Qualifications and Degrees: A Simplified Outline



- In English, “educational qualification” is a general term that encompasses degrees. In China, qualifications and degrees are two separate types of credentials represented by separate documents – certificates of graduation and degree certificates respectively.
- The presentation aims to clarify the interrelationship of qualifications and degrees and identify the various possible paths a student can take in the Chinese higher education system. This knowledge will help us better understand the academic background of Chinese students based on their credentials, especially if they have followed a somewhat “unconventional” path.
- A *Zhuanke* Certificate of Graduation is often translated as a Diploma of a (2-year or 3-year) junior college course.
- A *Benke* Certificate of Graduation is often translated as a Diploma or Graduation Certificate of a (4-year or 5-year) undergraduate course.

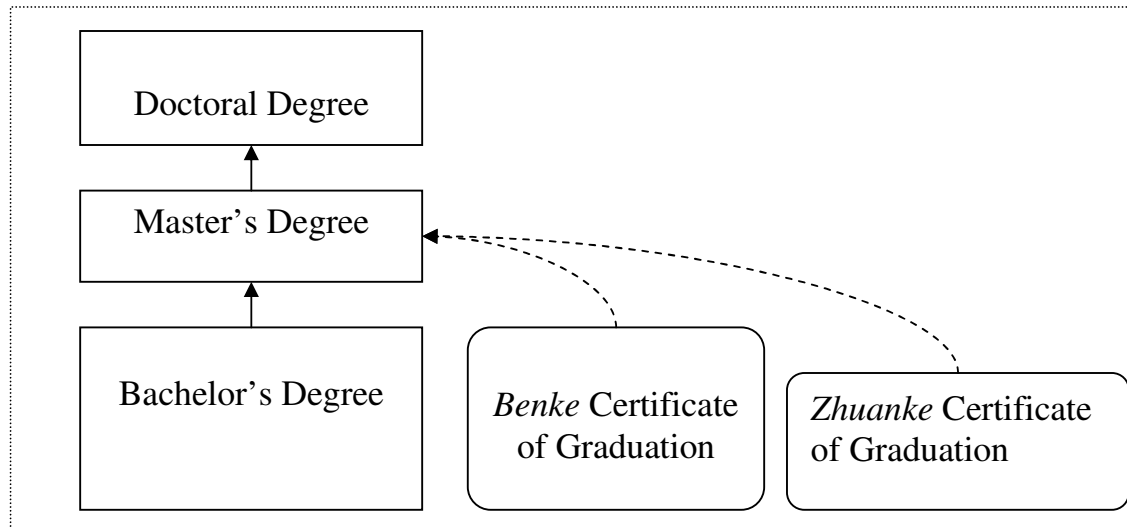
Qualifications



- The Chinese term for educational qualifications (*xueli*, 学历) literally means “educational experience”. It represents the completion of a recognized educational program of a defined level.
- Qualifications are documented by (毕业证书 / 毕业文凭), usually translated as Certificate of Graduation.
- Graduate Class is a graduate coursework program offered in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- Non-qualification includes (1) short-term, highly specialized training programs and (2) academic programs not fully recognized. Non-qualification programs issue Certificates of Completion (结业证书).
- A Certificate of Completion from a qualification program indicates deficiencies.
- Certificates of Graduation are considered complete exit credentials and give access to both employment and further education. Employers traditionally require qualifications rather than degrees, especially at the *benke*/bachelor level. *Benke* qualification is accepted on par with a bachelor’s degree for admission into master’s programs, but a master’s degree is required for admission into doctoral programs.

Note: A curved dotted connector indicates a possible but somewhat unconventional path.

Degrees



- The Chinese term for academic degree (*xuewei*, 学位) literally means “academic position/status”. It represents academic achievement of a defined level. Only the bachelor’s degree has to be based on a same-level qualification – no *benke*, no bachelor degree.
- Degrees are separate from qualifications, and degree certificates are separate from certificates of graduation. The bachelor degree certificate was combined with the *benke* certificate of graduation for a number of years (1985-1991/92). They were called certificates of graduation but doubled as bachelor degree certificates. Master’s and doctoral degrees have always had separate certificates.
- The dual-credential system was born at the introduction of academic degrees in China in 1981. The general rule: qualification + additional requirements = degree
 - *Benke* Certificate + additional requirements = Bachelor’s Degree
 - Certificate of Graduation from Master’s Program + additional requirements = Master’s Degree
 - Certificate of Graduation from Doctoral Program + additional requirements = Doctoral Degree
- Provincial academic degrees committees and institutions prescribe the additional requirements based on the *Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People’s Republic of China* (1980).
- Exception to the rule: graduate degrees issued without same-level qualifications:
 - Master’s degree - some professional degrees and independent study
 - Doctoral degree - outstanding achievement or invention

Degree Requirements

General

- Support the leadership of the Communist Party of China and Chinese Constitution
- Good or excellent academic grades
 - Provinces and/or institutions decide what constitutes “good or excellent” academic grades. Generally speaking, they must be at least 70-75% - the passing grade is 60%.

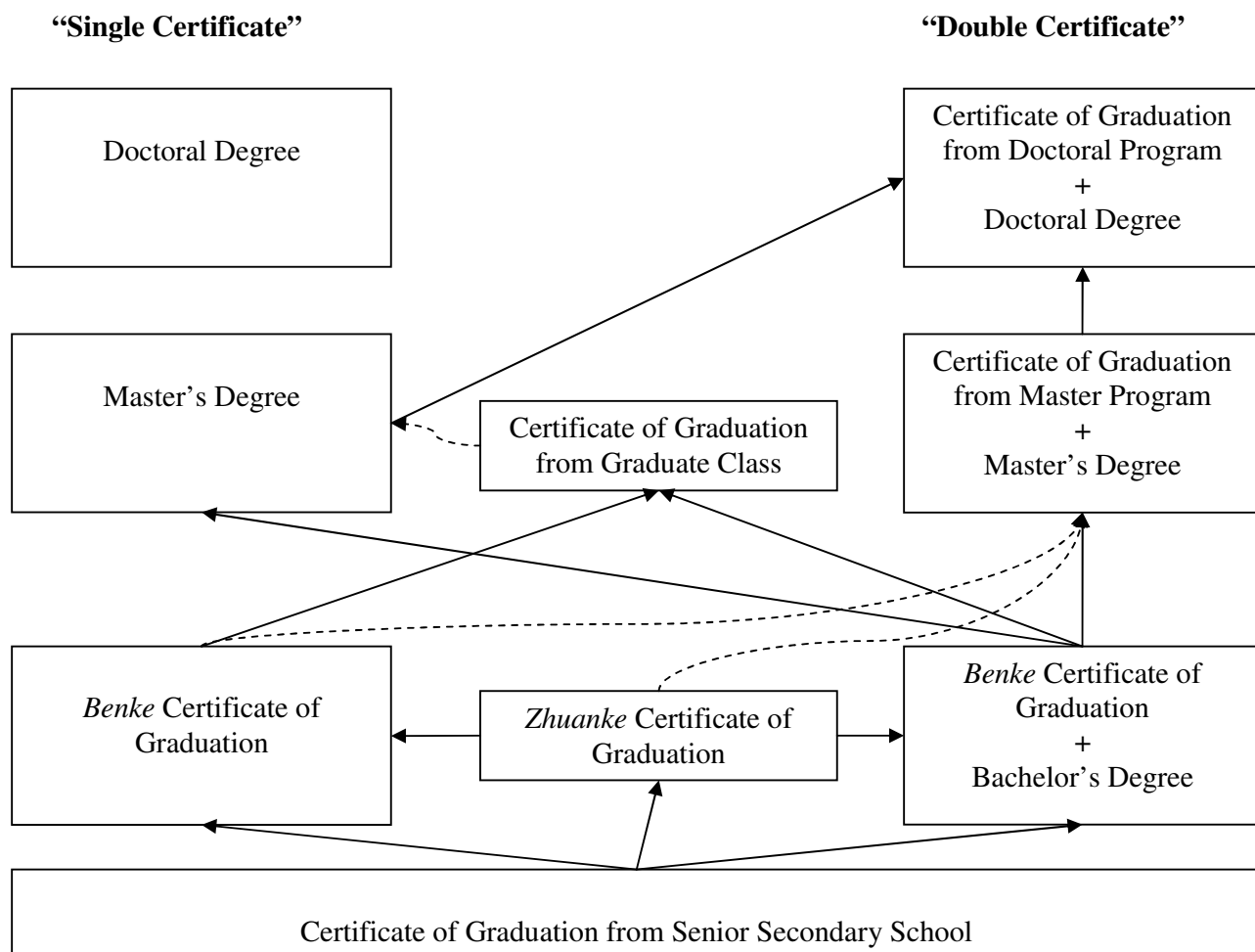
Bachelor’s Degrees

- Successful completion of a *benke* program
 - It is impossible to get a bachelor’s degree without *benke* qualification.
- Good or excellent grades in major courses
 - Provinces often decide acceptable grades for students in adult higher education and self-study examinations to be awarded a bachelor’s degree. In the regular higher education sector, it is up to the institutions.
- May have to pass foreign language test
 - Many institutions require students to pass the CET (College English Test) Band 4 or an English “degree exam” to get the bachelor’s degree.
- Have not suffered any disciplinary action
 - A student may receive disciplinary actions for political and other non-academic reasons.

Master’s and Doctoral Degrees

- Regular academic programs: both qualification and degree (“double certificates”)
 - Successful completion of a graduate program
 - Good or excellent grades in degree courses
 - Pass foreign language test (s) – one foreign language for master’s and two for doctoral programs
 - Have not suffered any disciplinary action
- Alternative routes: degree only (“single certificate”)
 - Independent study: application for master’s degree by claiming “comparable educational competence”
 - Some professional master’s degrees – e.g. professional master’s degree in engineering (工程硕士专业学位) and professional master’s degree in education (教育硕士专业学位)
 - A bachelor’s degree is required to earn a master’s degree through independent study or a professional master’s degree.
 - Doctoral degree for outstanding achievement or invention

Qualifications and Degrees



Examples of “unconventional” credential patterns

- *Benke* certificate of graduation, no bachelor's degree
 - In regular higher education, about 90% of *benke* graduates receive bachelor degrees. In adult higher education, only 20~30% do.
- *Benke* certificate of graduation, no bachelor's degree, master's certificate of graduation, master's degree
 - It is possible, but unusual. A bachelor's degree is not required for admission into master's programs. However, graduate admission is highly competitive even for bachelor degree holders.
- *Zhuanke* certificate of graduation, master's certificate of graduation, master's degree
 - It is possible, but very unusual. A *zhuanke* certificate holder with several years' work experience can apply to a regular master's program by

claiming “comparable educational competence” and passing a few extra exams.

- Bachelor’s degree, no *benke* certificate of graduation: unacceptable
- Master’s certificate of graduation, no master’s degree
 - It is possible, but very unusual. Only high-performing students can get into graduate programs, and few would graduate but fail to get their master’s degree due to poor grades.
 - Verify the English translation to make sure it is not something else – such as a certificate of graduation from graduate class or a certificate of completion of graduate coursework, which is a non-qualification program.
- Master’s degree, no master’s certificate of graduation
 - First, make sure the applicant really does not have the certificate of graduation.
 - It might be a professional master’s degree – an accurate translation is needed to confirm this. Or it might be obtained through independent study and passing national master-level exams.
 - The accompanying transcript would not indicate 2 or 2.5 years of full-time study as in a regular master’s program. For example, a master of education professional degree can be completed in as little as six months.

Questions and Answers

Appendix I. Qualifications and Degrees: A Chinese-English Glossary

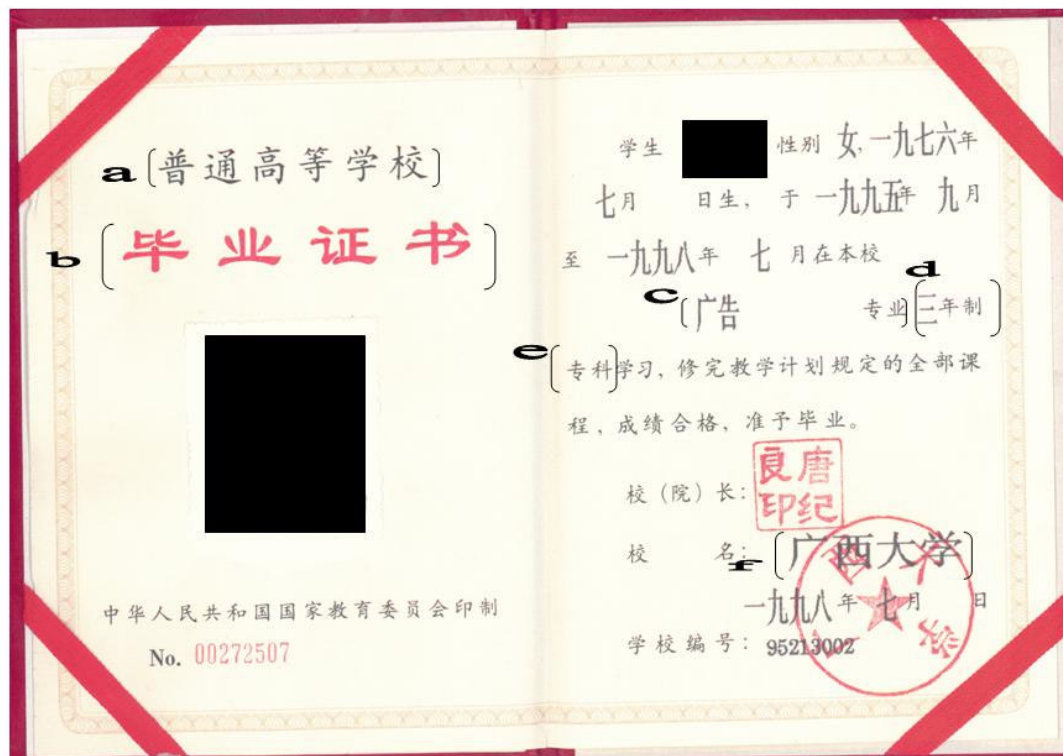
Chinese	English
高中毕业证书	Certificate of Graduation from Senior Secondary School
专科毕业证书 (普通高等学校)	<i>Zhuanke</i> Certificate of Graduation (Regular Higher Education)
专科毕业证书 (成人高等教育)	<i>Zhuanke</i> Certificate of Graduation (Adult Higher Education)
专科毕业证书 (高等教育自学考试)	<i>Zhuanke</i> Certificate of Graduation (Self-Study Examinations)
第二专业专科毕业证书 (成人高等教育)	<i>Zhuanke</i> Certificate of Graduation in Second Specialty (Adult Higher Education)
本科毕业证书 (普通高等学校)	<i>Benke</i> Certificate of Graduation (Regular Higher Education)
本科毕业证书 (成人高等教育)	<i>Benke</i> Certificate of Graduation (Adult Higher Education)
本科毕业证书 (高等教育自学考试)	<i>Benke</i> Certificate of Graduation (Self-Study Examinations)
专升本毕业证书 (成人高等教育)	<i>Benke</i> Certificate of Graduation through Upgrading Program (Adult Higher Education)
学士学位证书 (普通高等学校)	Bachelor's Degree (Regular Higher Education)
学士学位证书 (成人高等教育)	Bachelor's Degree (Adult Higher Education)
学士学位证书 (高等教育自学考试)	Bachelor's Degree (Self-Study Examinations)
研究生班毕业证书	Certificate of Graduation from Graduate Class
硕士研究生毕业证书	Certificate of Graduation from Master's Program
硕士学位证书	Master's Degree
博士研究生毕业证书	Certificate of Graduation from Doctoral Program
博士学位证书	Doctor's Degree

Appendix II. Twelve Categories of Academic Degrees

1. Philosophy	哲学
2. Economics	经济学
3. Law	法学
4. Education	教育学
5. Arts	文学
6. History	史学
7. Science	理学
8. Technology/Engineering	工学
9. Agriculture	农学
10. Medicine	医学
11. Management	管理学
12. Military Science	军事学

- The categories refer to the name of the degree, not the major or specialty of the programs (over 200 at the *benke* level, and over 300 at master's level).
- Among the 12 categories, ten were introduced in 1981, while “military science” and “management” were added in 1983 and 1997 respectively.
- 工学 is often translated as “engineering”, but a more accurate translation is “technology”.
- Since 1990 China has introduced about 16 professional degrees (专业学位). The aim is to eventually make the professional degrees a requirement for entering certain professions. Examples:
 - MBA (工商管理硕士)
 - Bachelor's degree in Architecture (建筑学学士专业学位) and Master's degrees in Architecture (建筑学硕士专业学位)
 - Master's degree in Clinical Medicine (临床医学硕士专业学位) and Doctor's Degree in Clinical Medicine (临床医学博士专业学位)
 - MPA (行政管理硕士专业学位)
 - Professional degrees in Veterinary Medicine (兽医专业学位)
 - Master's degree in Engineering (工程硕士专业学位)
 - Master's degree in Agricultural Promotion (农业推广硕士专业学位).

Appendix III. Sample Documents



Zhuanke Certificate of Graduation, Regular Higher Education, 1998

a: (普通高等学校) Regular Higher Education Institution

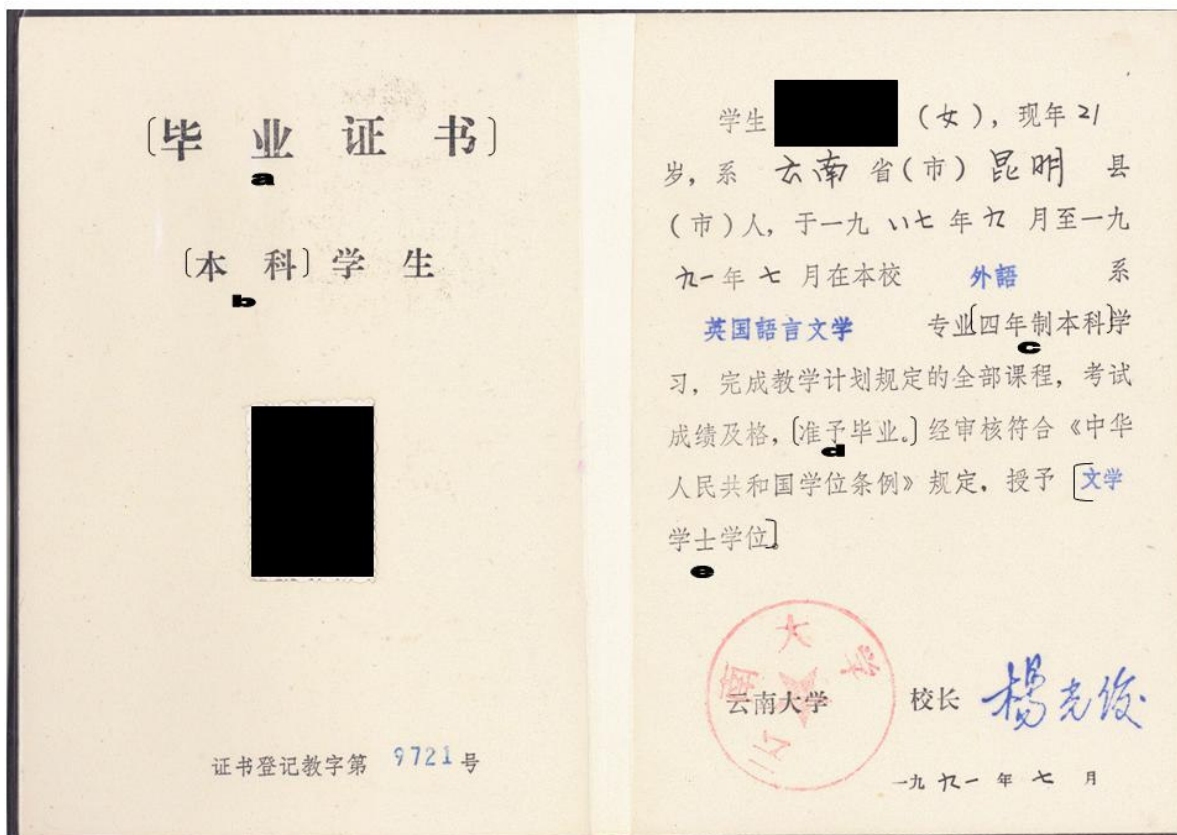
b: (毕业证书) Certificate of Graduation

c: (广告专业) Major in Advertising

d: (三年制) Three-year program

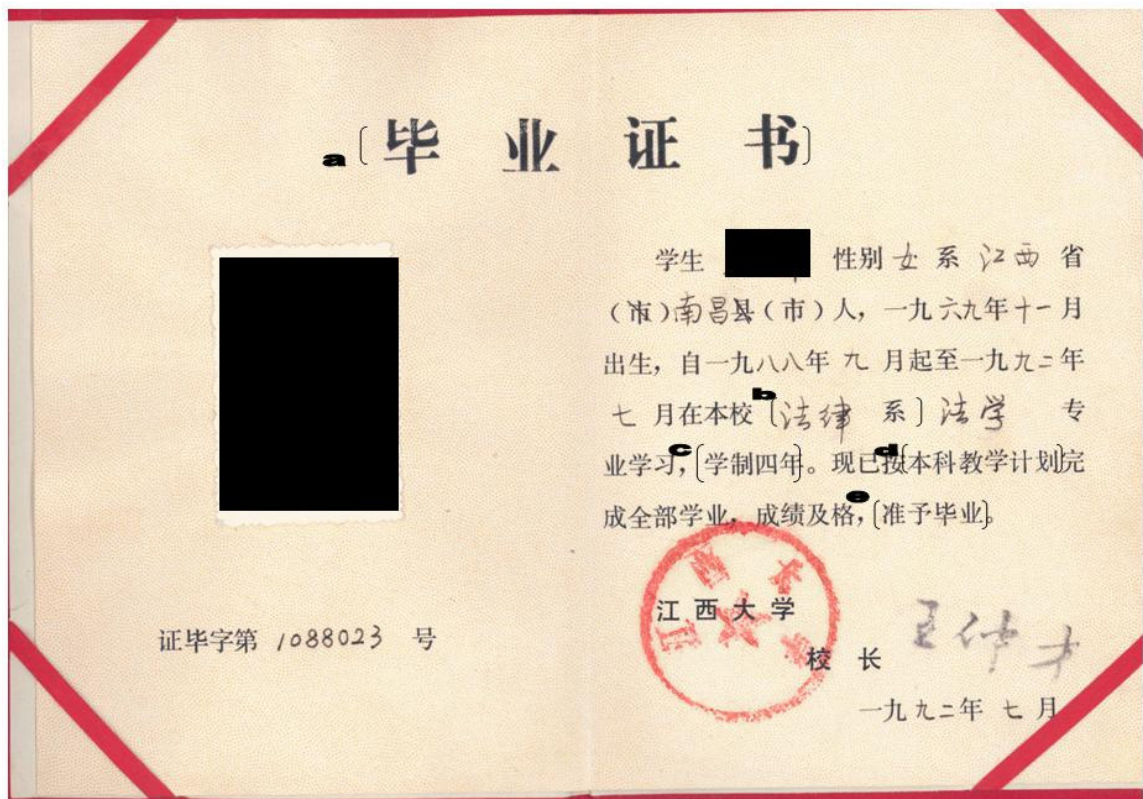
e: (专科) *Zhuanke*

f: (广西大学) Guangxi University



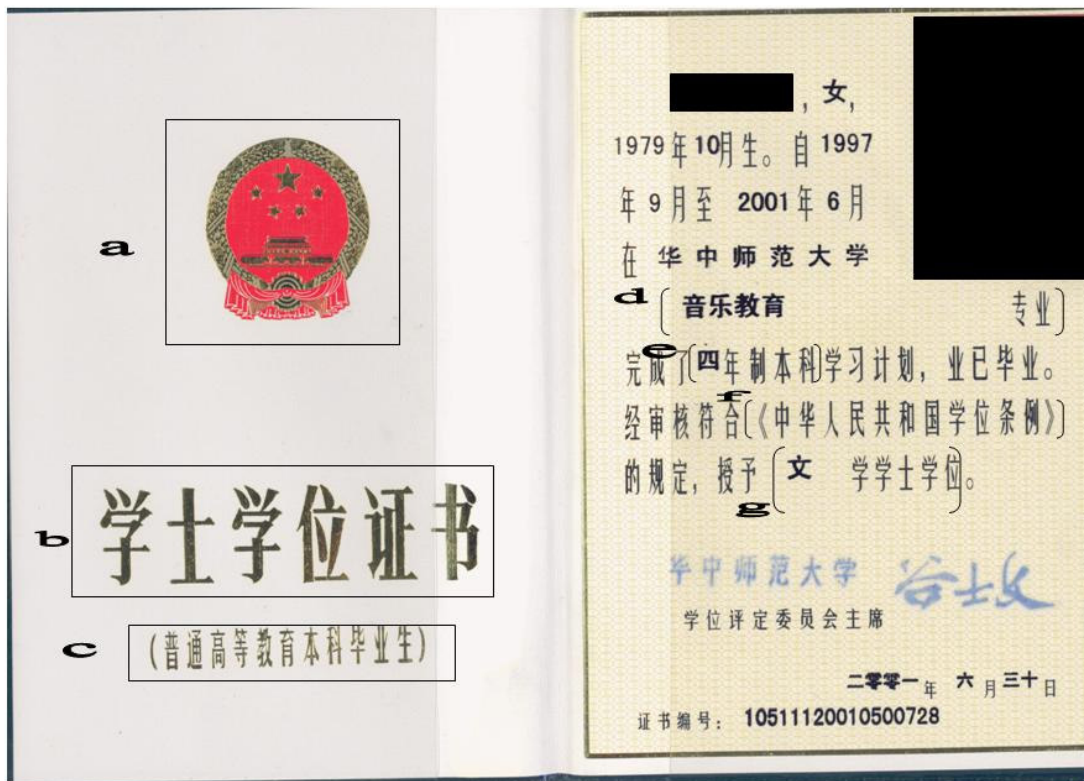
Combined *Benke* Certificate of Graduation and Bachelor's Degree in Arts, 1991

- a: (毕业证书) Certificate of Graduation
- b: (本科) *Benke*
- c: (四年制本科) Four-year *benke*
- d: (准予毕业) Approved for graduation
- e: (文学学士学位) Bachelor's Degree in Arts



Benke Certificate of Graduation, Regular Higher Education, 1992

- a: (毕业证书) Certificate of Graduation
- b: (法律系) Department of Law
- c: (学制四年) Four-year program
- d: (本科教学计划) *Benke* curriculum
- e: (准予毕业) Approved for graduation



Bachelor's Degree in Arts, 2001

a: National emblem of the People's Republic of China

b: (学士学位证书) Bachelor's Degree Certificate

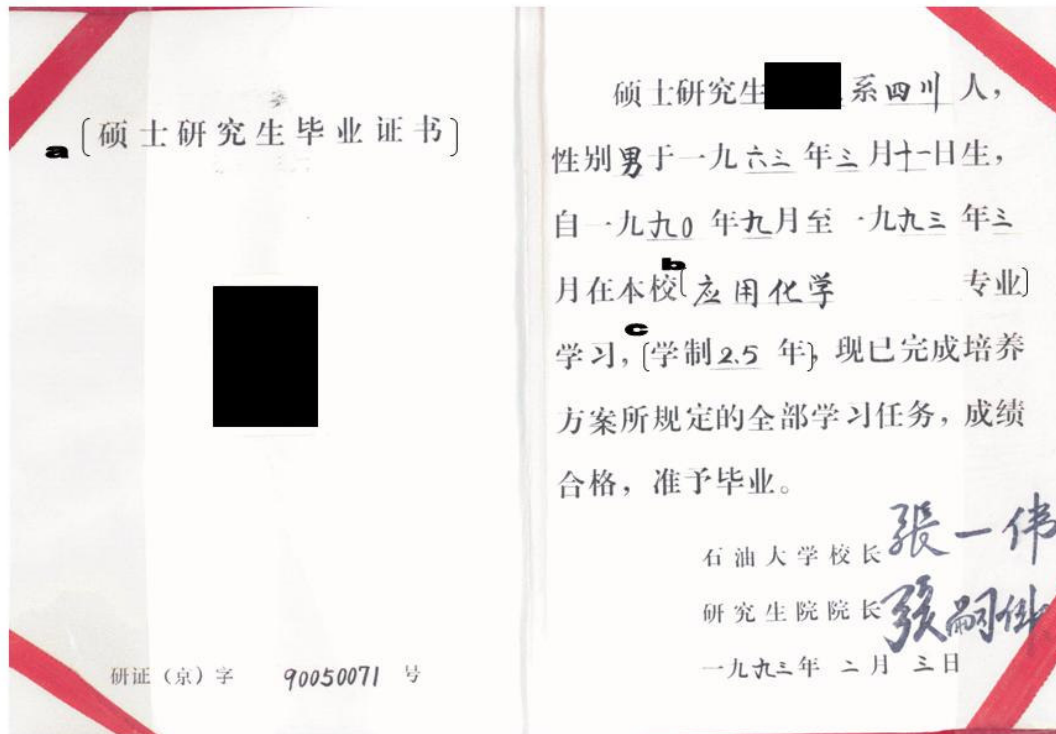
c: (普通高等教育本科毕业生) Regular Higher Education *Benke* Graduate

d: (音乐教育专业) Major in Music Education

e: (四年制本科) Four-year *benke*

f: (中华人民共和国学位条例) Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China

g: (文学学士学位) Bachelor's Degree in Arts

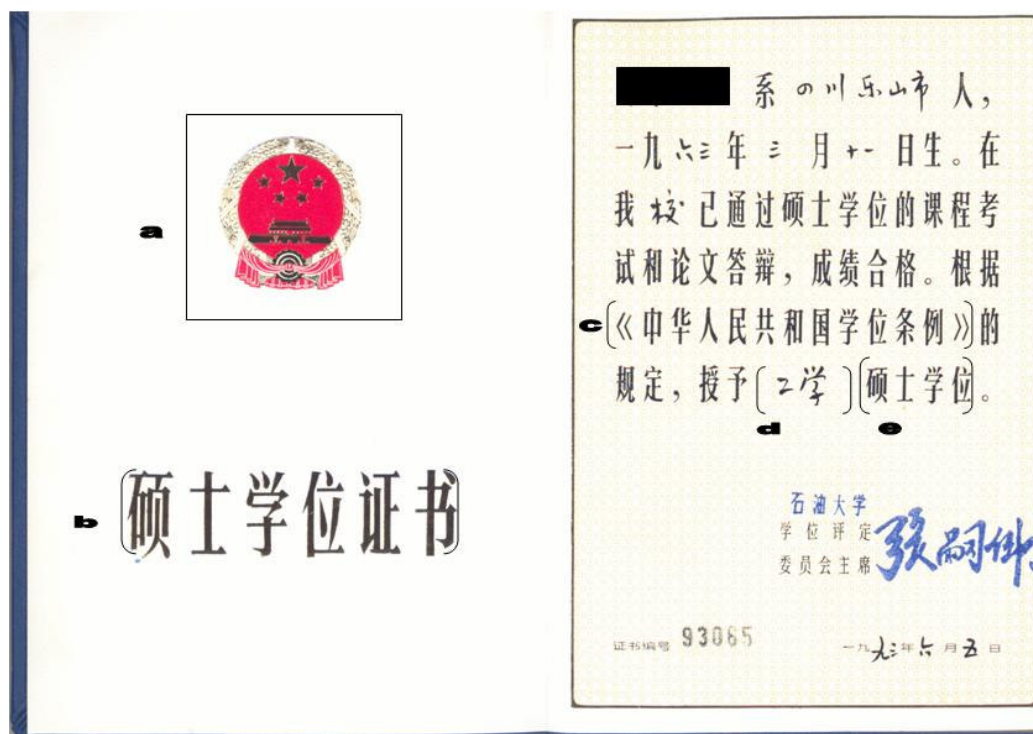


Certificate of Graduation from Master's Program, 1993

a: (硕士研究生毕业证书) Master's Graduate Student Certificate of Graduation

b: (应用化学专业) Major in Applied Chemistry

c: (学制 2.5 年) 2.5-year program



Master's Degree in Technology, 1993

a: National emblem of the People's Republic of China

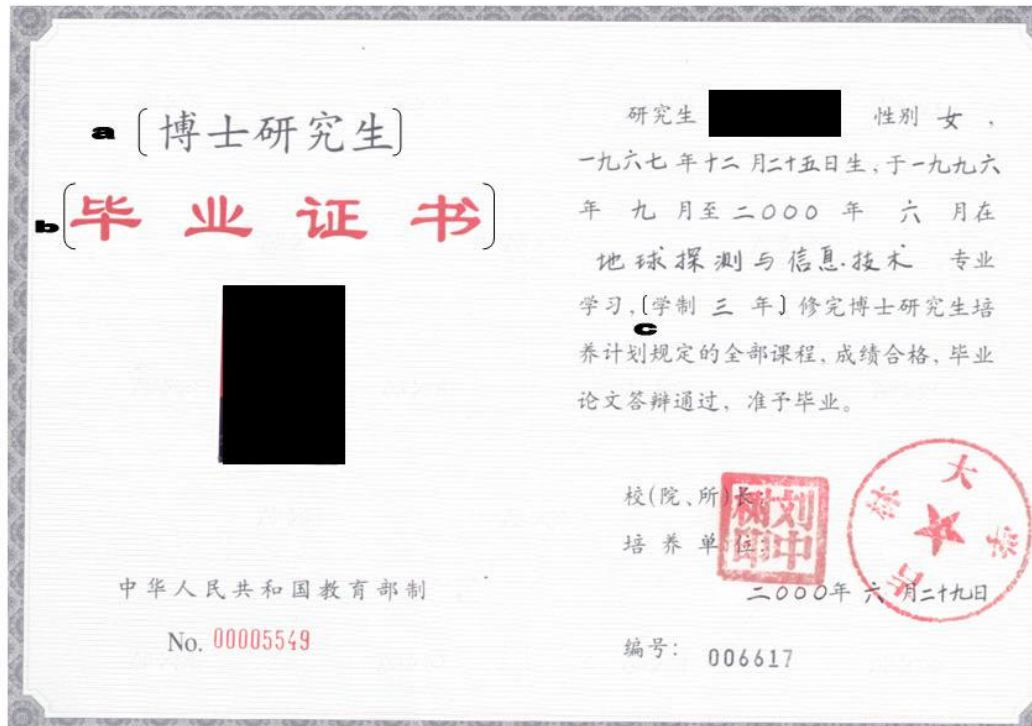
b: (硕士学位证书) Master's Degree Certificate

c: (中华人民共和国学位条例) Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China

d: (工学) Technology (often translated as engineering)

e: (硕士学位) Master's Degree

* The above two credentials, the certificate of graduation from master's program and the master's degree certificate, were issued for the same program to the same student.

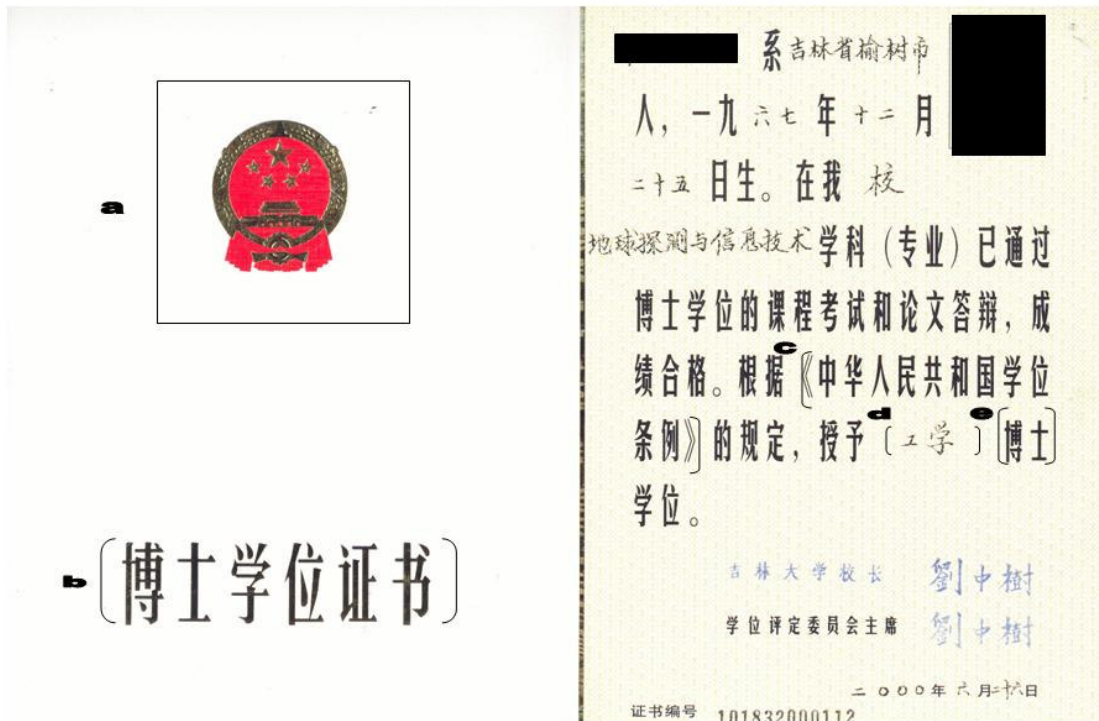


Certificate of Graduation from a Doctoral Program, 2000

a: (博士研究生) Doctoral Student

b: (毕业证书) Certificate of Graduation

c: (学制三年) Three-year program



Doctor's Degree in Technology, 2000

a: National emblem of the People's Republic of China

b: (博士学位证书) Doctor's Degree Certificate

c: (中华人民共和国学位条例) Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China

d: (工学) Technology (often translated as engineering)

e: (博士) Doctor

* The above two credentials, the certificate of graduation and the degree certificate, were issued for the same program to the same student.