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# Brain drain estimates '30pc under'

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THE number of people who emigrated from Hongkong last year is likely to be higher than Government estimates, following the disclosure that the official calculations may be flawed.

Just the number who left for Canada is believed to have been under-estimated by almost 30 per cent.

Staff at the Canadian Commission say about 21,000 new Hongkong immigrants arrived in Canada last year, whereas the Hongkong Government figure is 16,400.

As Canada is the largest emigration destination for Hongkong people, a margin of error of 30 per cent across the board would put the brain drain for last year at 54,600.

And if the trend continued, more than 71,000 people could be expected to leave this year.

The Government says its figures are based on applications to the police for certificates of no criminal conviction and information supplied by foreign consulates in Hongkong.

Immigration Department figures comparing the number of people coming and going are also used in the equation.

Although officials admit the figures are not accurate,

they are the best available until people are required to inform the Government of their plans.

The Hongkong Government has said it expects emigration to level out in the next two or three years at between 55,000 and 60,000 a year.

The figure fluctuated at around 20,000 a year from 1980 to 1986 but rose to 30,000 in 1987.

After an extensive Government study, the official estimate for the number of people who joined the brain drain during 1989 was put at 42,000.

The Government has estimated the total number of people who will emigrate this year will rise to 55,000.

According to one official at the Canadian Commission, the final figure from all immigration points has not yet been calculated but it "looks like last year's landings will be close to 21,000".

The figure is consistent with estimates made by the commission earlier last year and the disparity has been pointed out to Hongkong officials.

The number of immigrant visas issued to Hongkong people by the commission last year was 22,130, a slight increase on the 22,097 issued in 1988.

But staff point out the visas do not have to be used immediately and some people wait for a year or even longer before emigrating.

Many of those who left Hongkong last year would have been issued with visas in 1988 while most of those who rushed to apply for emigration after June 4 would not be expected to leave for several years.

The application procedure, especially for those in the family class, can mean it is several years before a visa is finally granted.

The majority of those who went to Canada emigrated under the independent category, which is for those with a job skill for which there is a demand in the country.

The second biggest category was business migration for those who invested cash in projects approved by the Canadian Government or who showed plans to establish a business which would create employment in Canada.

The Hongkong Government estimated 12,800 people would emigrate to the United States last year while 10,900 would take up residence in Australia.

A further 1,900 were expected to emigrate to other destinations, including the United Kingdom.

The Canadian and Australian Governments have made it clear they are keen to support the territory but have no intention of changing their immigration programmes or developing right of abode programmes.