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Canada top choice in student stakes

CANADA surpassed the United States to become the most popular destination for Hongkong students last year.

And Australia experienced the largest percentage growth of visitors, according to statistics.

All told 5,096 student visas were issued by the Canadian Commission in 1989, representing a 34 percent increase from 3,808 in 1988.

Meanwhile, Australia issued 4,680 visas to Hongkong students, an increase of 49 percent from 1988's 3,149.

Applications for Australian student visas last August almost doubled the previous year's total.

Commenting on the overall increase, Canadian Commission senior counsellor (Immigration) Mr Robert Puddester said that close ties between Hongkong and Canada, the high quality of education and reasonable costs were the major factors.

He said that the drop of applications in 1984 and 1985 might be related to the recession Hongkong experienced during the

same period. Australian Vice-Counsel (Education) Ms Denise Faulkner also cited high quality and low costs as the two reasons for the increase of Hongkong students studying Down Under.

She also attributed the increase to the rise of awareness among students of education opportunities in Australia, due partly to the frequent education seminars and exhibitions held by the consulate.

But Dr Glenn Shive, director of Institute of International Education, said the reasons were more opportunistic in nature.

"We do not want study abroad to be the source of the brain drain. If you have dramatic changes in student intake, it is not education that is making the changes," he said.

Hongkong students, Dr Shive added, had a perception that it is easier to transfer from a student visa to an immigration visa in Australia.

He said if the US was to ease immigration regulations, it would also see a student boom.