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## 300 families eye South Africa

THREE hundred wealthy Hongkong families have applied to settle in South Africa, the Home Affairs Department said yesterday.

If approved, it would be the largest influx of ethnic Chinese to South Africa in decades and would swell the country's 11,000-strong Chinese population by more than a tenth.

The department said the families were "of the entrepreneurial middle class who own their own businesses or other enterprises and who have at their disposal liquid cash resources of not less than \$3 million".

The applications were being considered "in view of the industrial development and job creation which such

a venture could generate", the department added.

First International Contacts, the South African immigration consultants handling the applications, said the families wanted to buy land in the Johannesburg area where they could live as a close-knit community. The area is South Africa's industrial heartland.

A spokesman for the consultants, Mr George Ford, said the search for property got off to a difficult start last month when the town of Springs, controlled by white rightists, refused a residency application from the families.

But he later had favourable response from five other municipalities, he said.

They include South Africa's wealthiest white suburbs where the local governments are controlled by either anti-apartheid parties or the reformist National Party, which rules nationally.

They are officially designated for white residents only, but a handful of wealthy blacks live there too.

The local authority for Springs is controlled by the white supremacist Conservative Party, which advocates hard-line apartheid policies that racially segregate residential areas.

Mr Ford said land for the families had been inspected in two of the five municipal-

ities that had responded favourably.

He said the project was taking advantage of recent changes South Africa has made to its traditionally European-oriented immigration policy to attract skilled Chinese.

More families would be brought in if the project was successful, he said.

Chinese are treated in effect as "honorary whites" in South Africa, but unlike European-descended whites they have no vote at national level.

Most live in shabby so-called "grey" areas in and around Johannesburg inhabited by both blacks and whites.

Reuter