

Surge in numbers making British Columbia their home Boom draws emigrants

From ALAN MERRIDEW
in Vancouver
and ANDY GILBERT

ECONOMIC growth in British Columbia is luring Hong Kong emigrants who might otherwise have gone to Canada's two biggest provinces, Ontario and Quebec.

The number of Hong Kong people who headed for British Columbia in the first three months of the year was 3,808, compared to 1,531 in the first quarter of last year, a 148 per cent increase.

Preliminary figures suggest a similar number of

Hong Kong immigrants in the second quarter. The increase for the same period in 1992 and 1993 was 12 per cent.

Ontario and Quebec together are home to 63 per cent of Canada's 27 million people.

And they still attract, from all other countries and territories, most immigrants. But their pull is weakening.

British Columbia is home to about 12.5 per cent of Canada's people. But in the first three months of this year, 23.9 per cent — 11,137 — of all immigrants to Cana-

da landed there. A similar total is likely for the second quarter.

The main reason for the surge in emigrants is British Columbia's economic growth, the most steady of Canada's 10 provinces.

Hong Kong immigration consultant Kishore Sakh-rani, a director with ICS International, said he was surprised there were not more people flocking to British Columbia.

"Vancouver is very much like Hong Kong, with a similar skyline, hills behind, and a big Chinese population," he said.

"The traditional manufacturing bases of Ontario and Quebec were decimated by the Free Trade Agreement with the United States which made a lot of businesses relocate to across the border.

"On the other hand, British Columbia has a much more stable economy and positive business environment.

"It also has a more desirable climate and is five hours nearer Hong Kong than Toronto, for instance," he said.

He said it would be dangerous to link the rise in im-

migrants to British Columbia to the pullout in 1997, saying that could be revealed only by total migration figures.

Not everyone is pleased with the increase in immigrants. The leader of the British Columbia Reform Party, Ronald Gamble, this month called for a cutback in Asian immigrants.

He said Asian immigrants were "a drain on our resources".

The Vancouver Association of Chinese Canadians, Victor Wong, called Mr Gamble's remarks ignorant and offensive.

In the first quarter of this year, people from Hong Kong represented 34 per cent of foreign immigrants to British Columbia.

Commission for Canada spokesman Neil Reeder said: "We are seeing a trend in increasing numbers of Hong Kong people settling in British Columbia as opposed to Ontario, we admit that."

"But we don't see it as being very significant. We only expect to see a small increase in the number of total visas issued this year as opposed to 1993. But it is too early to tell for sure."

SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST
24 OCT 1994