

In the 19th century Chinese women seldom, if ever, accompanied their menfolk abroad. Chinese custom dictated that the first duty of married women was to their parents-in-law and women remained in China to care for their husbands' families.³⁹ These wives had to fend for themselves and raise children, but many were independent enough to earn their own living through occupations such as rice-growing, silk production or fish farming.⁴⁰

In their new country of adoption Chinese men would either lead a bachelor existence, or take advantage of Chinese law which permitted a man to have as many concubines as he could financially support by cohabiting with a local woman.⁴¹ Only years later, when they were financially established, did some of them return to China to fetch wives or children.

ORIGINS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHINESE

Most South African-born Chinese are descendants of independent immigrants who arrived in the country from the 1870s onwards. They originated from two areas, about 400 km apart, in the Kwangtung (Guangdong) province of south China and could be

Cantonese-speaking Chinese originated from villages in the vicinity of Canton (Guangzhou) while the Hakkas emigrated largely from areas surrounding Moiyeen (Meixian).

