

Making Silk in Ancient China

The making of **silk fabric** was one of the most important discoveries in ancient China. The ancient Chinese discovered that **silkworms** make tiny strands of **silk**, and these strands can be used to make a **fabric** that is beautiful and very strong. Read on to find out how the ancient Chinese made silk.

Step 1: The eggs laid by silkworm moths are collected and kept in a cool place where the **temperature** can be controlled. Over time, the temperature is slowly increased to about 77°F (25°C). The silkworms will then **hatch** from the eggs.

Step 2: Silkworms are fed fresh **mulberry leaves**. They eat constantly until they grow very fat. The fat provides the **energy** the silkworms need to create a **cocoon**.

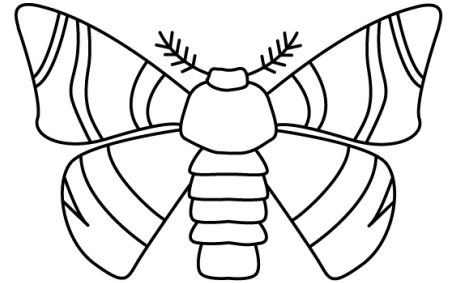
Step 3: Silkworms produce a **jelly-like material** that hardens into a thin **strand** of silk when it is exposed to air. The worm wraps itself in the long strand to create a white cocoon.

Step 4: The cocoons are kept in a dry place for several days. The cocoons are then **steamed** or **baked** to kill the silkworm inside before it starts to break out. Each cocoon is then dipped in hot water to loosen the strand of silk.

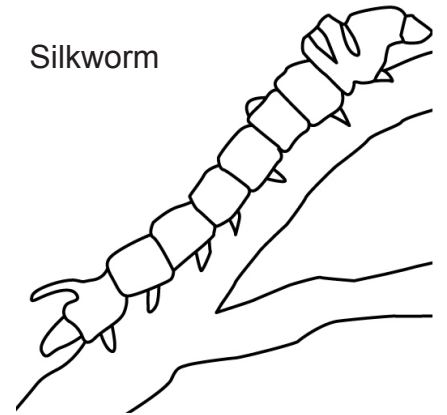
Step 5: Each cocoon is then unwound to get the long strand of silk. This strand is between 656 yards (600 meters) and 984 yd (900 m) long. The strands are then wound onto a **spool**.

Step 6: Several strands of silk are then **twisted together** to make strong silk **thread**. Natural materials are used to **dye** the threads different colors. The threads are then woven into colorful fabric.

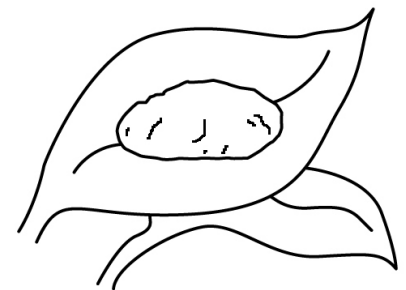
Silkworm



Silkworm



Silk cocoon



Fun Fact

According to Chinese legend, Empress Hsi Ling Shi, wife of Emperor Huang Ti (also called the Yellow Emperor), was the first person to accidentally discover silk. It happened when a silkworm cocoon fell into the cup of tea she was drinking under a mulberry tree. When she pulled out the cocoon, the strong silk fiber came loose.