Fifteen hundred years ago in China, silk production was a state secret.

The silk trade was so valuable that anyone who tried to take silkworm eggs or mulberry seeds out of China was put to death. Then in 552 AD, two monks smuggled silkworm eggs to Constantinople, and silk production spread worldwide. Now that the secret’s out, we can safely talk about how silkworms and humans make luxurious silk cloth.

A silkworm actually isn’t a worm at all. It’s a type of caterpillar that once existed in the wild, but now only survives in domesticated form. Silkworms are fussy eaters, dining only on mulberry leaves. When a silkworm has had its fill, it spins a cocoon from a single strand of silk, two to three thousand feet long!

According to legend, a Chinese empress discovered how to harvest silk when a cocoon fell into her tea. She plucked it from the teacup by the loose end of the silk, then unraveled the whole cocoon. To harvest silk commercially, cocoons are first steamed to kill the pupae inside. This is because the silkworm would break the silk if it began to emerge as a moth. Next the cocoon is dunked in hot water, rather than tea, to dissolve the sticky coating that binds the silk. Then a machine unwinds the single strand that makes up each cocoon. Twisted together, these strands make the fine thread used to weave silk cloth.

一千五百年前，在中国，丝绸生产是一个国家机密。

丝绸贸易非常有价值，任何试图将蚕卵或桑椹种子带出中国的人都被处死了。然后在公元552年，两名僧人将蚕卵走私到君士坦丁堡，丝绸生产遍布全球。现在秘密已经出来，我们可以安全地谈论蚕和人类如何制作奢华的丝绸布料。

蚕实际上根本不是蠕虫。它是一种曾经存在于野外的毛虫，但现在只能以驯养的形式存活下来。蚕是挑食的，只在桑叶上用餐。当一只蚕有它的填充物时，它就会从一条长达两到三千英尺的丝绸上旋转出一个茧！

根据传说，一位中国女皇发现了当茧落入茶中时如何收获丝绸。她用松散的丝绸末端将茶叶从茶杯中取出，然后解开了整个茧。为了在商业上收获丝绸，首先将茧蒸熟以杀死里面的蛹。这是因为如果它开始作为飞蛾出现，蚕会破坏丝绸。接下来，将茧浸泡在热水中而不是茶中，以溶解粘合丝的粘性涂层。然后一台机器展开构成每个茧的单股。扭曲在一起，这些股线使用细线编织丝绸。