



The Legend of the Silk Goddess

Silk cloth was first invented in China around 5,000 years ago. According to legend, it was a fourteen-year-old girl, named Leizu, who discovered the silkworm and came up with the process for weaving silk thread into cloth.

Leizu was married to the Yellow Emperor of China, Huangdi. Next to the palace where Leizu and Huangdi lived was a beautiful garden with a large grove of mulberry trees. Leizu loved walking through the garden and sitting in the shade of the mulberry trees.

One day, as she went to sit under her favorite tree, she noticed that its leaves were full of holes. Leizu walked to another tree, sat down in the shade, and wondered about what had caused the damage. She decided that something must be eating the mulberry leaves, but she couldn't figure out what it was.

The next day she discovered that the leaves of another tree had been eaten away as well. That evening, Leizu spoke to her husband about the mysterious creature that was eating the mulberry leaves.

The next day Huangdi went with Leizu to the mulberry grove to see what was going on. They found the trees teeming with tiny worms that were hungrily eating away at the leaves, but they had no idea what to do about it.

Leizu began watching the trees. She watched day after day as the tiny worms ate the mulberry leaves. She watched the little creatures grow and grow until they were big and fat.

Name: _____

The Silk Road

After three weeks, the worms suddenly stopped eating and began to spin a fine silky thread that they wrapped around their bodies until they were completely enclosed in a soft white cocoon.

Leizu was fascinated by the silky threads the worms had spun. She thought to herself, "I wish I could find a way to weave those threads into cloth—If only I could unwind them without their breaking!" But the fine threads of the cocoons were stuck together, and no matter how carefully Leizu worked, she could only unwind them a little bit before the thread broke in her fingers.

Leizu did everything she could think of to loosen the fragile threads, but with no success. Then one day, by chance, she brought a cup of tea with her to the mulberry grove. And just as she was about to sit down under one of the few trees with any leaves left on it—PLOP—a cocoon from the tree fell into her tea cup.

As she fished the cocoon out of the tea, she noticed something strange begin to happen. The warm tea had softened the outside of the cocoon and Leizu saw a loose thread. Cautiously, she began winding the thread around her finger. To her delight, the thread remained intact. When Leizu had completely unraveled the cocoon, the delicate thread around her finger was so long that it stretched from one end of the mulberry grove to the other.

The fine silky threads from the cocoon were unlike fibers that anyone had ever used before. The fine strands sparkled and shimmered in the sunlight. Individually, they were very fragile, but when several strands were spun together they became surprisingly strong.

Even so, Leizu had to create a special loom before she could weave her new thread into cloth. Once it was woven, the silk cloth shone and shimmered in the light and was more beautiful than anything anyone had ever seen before.

Leizu asked her husband to plant more mulberry trees and soon she had a forest of trees for her silkworms to feed on. She then taught the rest of China how to make silk.

Leizu's discovery made China a rich and powerful country. Silk was prized for its beauty and softness, and traders from the west were willing to travel thousands of miles and pay very high prices for it.

Leizu became known throughout China as the Silk Goddess. The people of China built a lovely temple for her, and every spring they would hold a special Silk Festival in her honor.