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The Legend of the Silk Goddess

The Legend of the Silk Goddess has all the elements of a folktale. It's an old story about the past, told by a particular culture, which tells us something about the customs and values of that culture.



But is it a *legend*? Most legends contain something that makes them too hard to believe. Is The Legend of the Silk Goddess really all that unbelievable? If not, if it's just a story about something that happened long ago, then why is it called a legend?

The reason it's called a legend is because historians (people who study the past) don't know that it really happened. They do have evidence that silk was first invented in China about 6,000 years ago. But, except for this story, there is no evidence that the Yellow Emperor's wife, Leizu, is the one who invented it. So, historians have their doubts that the story ever happened. And since they think that the story may have been made up, they call it a legend.

1. Do you think the story about Leizu sounds convincing? Explain.
2. If the story never happened, why might someone have made it up?
3. Why would people want to believe it?

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The things the legend says about silkworms and silk thread are true. The doubtful part of the story is just how these things were first discovered.

4. According to the story, where does silk thread come from?

5. At first, Leizu wasn't able to unwind the silk thread without breaking it. How did that change?

6. What do silkworms feed on?

7. What makes silk thread special? Why were traders willing to travel thousands of miles and pay very high prices for it?

8. Why was the discovery of silk very important to China?