



THE LEGEND

According to an ancient Chinese legend, **empress Hsi Ling Shi**, Emperor Huang Ti's wife, (also called the Yellow Emperor, the legendary father of Chinese civilization lived around 3.000 b.C.) was sipping tea under a mulberry tree, when a **cocoon** accidentally **fell into her cup**, beginning to lose cohesion and show the wires of which was composed. The Empress fell in love with those shiny yarns, and discovered their source (the silkworm *Bombyx mori*) **in a white mulberry**: she soon developed the art of sericulture, inventing the coil and frame.

Thus begins the silk story. Whether this legend is true or not, it is certain that historical and geographical references to silk history seem accurate, guaranteeing to **China** for almost **3 millennia** the global silk **monopoly**.

Today, thanks to archaeological finds, this tradition has found confirmation by ancient silk finds brought to light from Liangzhu's late-Neolithic culture sites, flourished in China between 3.300 and 2.200 b.C.

Silk began to come out from China, the jealous guardian of its production the secrets, with a certain regularity, at the end of the 3rd century b.C. circa, both as part of the goods raided by the nomads following their raids on Chinese territory, or as an official gift sent to nomadic leaders from the early emperors.

Some denominations such as **"Silk Road"** have a strong evocative power. With this term we want to point to that set of caravan routes and commercial routes that connect East Asia, and especially China, the Near East and the Mediterranean basin. The Silk Road stretches for **about 4,000 miles long** and expanded from eastern China to the Mediterranean area by caravanning the Great Wall of China, northwest, overtaking the Takla Makan Desert, climbing the Pamir Mountains, crossing what is now Afghanistan, with an important exchange market in Damascus. From here the goods were shipped through the Mediterranean Sea.



In 200 b.C. **Korea** saw the rising of its own silk industry, thanks to Chinese immigrants who had settled there. In 300 a.C. sericulture was **widespread in India, Japan, and Persia**. In 550 a.C. silk made its **appearance in Europe** under the Roman Empire through the Byzantine one. According to a legend, emperor **Giustiniano's monks smuggled silkworm eggs** to Constantinople by inserting them into bamboo quarry canes. Even for Byzantines, as for the Chinese, the weaving and marketing of silk fabrics represented an imperial secret. In the 7th century, the Arabs conquered Persia and confiscated their magnificent thirst, allowing the spread of sericulture and silk weaving through Africa, Sicily and Spain. Andalusia was for years the main silk production center in Europe in the 10th century. In the **13th century**, however, **Italy gained domination** in the silk production segment. Venetian merchants based many of their trading success on the exchange of silk fabrics, and encouraged silk growers to settle in Italy. Francesco I ° of France invited Italian producers in order to create a French silk industry, which grew particularly well in the Lyon area.

The 19th century and **industrialization** era saw the **fall of the European silk industry**. The presence of **Japan's cheaper silk**, the opening of the Suez Canal, the advent of **artificial nylon fiber** and the two world wars irreparably ruined European silk industry.

After the Second World War Japan's silk production suffered a dramatic increase as a result of state policies, with the simultaneous improvement in production and quality of raw silk. Japan remained the world's largest silk producer until 1970. Demonstrating that history follows its own principles and origins, **China today gained back its dominance** in silk production and export.