The Origin of Silk

Silk is an elegant fabric that was first made centuries ago in countries in Asia. All of the original silk fabrics were woven there, because the silkworms that produced silk were found only in that locality. As people became more mobile, they brought silkworms to other areas and the silk industry spread. Silkworms today are extinct in the wild. They can survive only in silkworm farms, as they have lost the ability to fly in their moth phase. Also, almost all types of silkworms eat only mulberry leaves, of which they must have a constant supply.

Like all insects, silkworms go through normal stages as they develop. During one stage, the caterpillars form cocoons. The cocoons are woven from silk fibers. During the final stage, the moths come out of the cocoons. The cocoons left behind are processed and the fine silk threads are taken from them. The threads are woven into silk fabric. The type of silkworm the silk comes from affects the type of silk that can be made. However, all of the individual types of silk are alike in general ways: the fibers feel fragile but are strong, they are lightweight, and they have a lustrous sheen.

The first uses of silk were in more formal garments. Today, clothing designers and fiber artists use silk in all kinds of creative ways that show their originality and individuality. Artists also paint on silk, and it is used in other ways that highlight its versatility.