



The Empress and the Silkworm

By Lily Toy Hong

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Almost five thousand years ago, a young Chinese empress was having tea in the garden. A cocoon from a mulberry tree fell into her cup. Through a dream and her persistence, the first silk cloth was made.

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The Empress and the Silkworm By Lily Toy Hong Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Falling into the truth-is-stranger-than-fiction category, the story of silk—its path from pupa to necktie—is inherently pretty interesting. But toss in a 5000-year-old Chinese legend about the discovery of silk, and the story becomes even more intriguing. One morning, around 2700 B.C., a cocoon falls into the empress Si Ling-Chi's teacup. The cocoon unwinds in the hot tea, revealing its delicate strands and prompting the empress to dream of seeing her husband, the Yellow Emperor, "clothed in a robe woven from the heavenly thread." Silk production begins, the emperor gets his robe, and the empress becomes known as "the Lady of the Silkworm." Unfortunately Hong's (Two of Everything) illustrations deaden the brilliance of their subject. Airbrushed, her acrylics and gouache pictures feel pale and washed out, the characters moon-faced and silly. The static quality of the art, sadly, dominates the volume. Ages 4-8.

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From School Library Journal

Kindergarten-Grade 4? Tradition honors Si Ling-Chi, wife of the legendary "Yellow Emperor," Huang-Ti, who ruled China nearly 5,000 years ago, with the discovery of silk. In Hong's well-paced narrative, the empress is a creative, curious, and determined woman who heeds omens and dreams. When a cocoon falls out of a mulberry tree into her morning tea, she is intrigued by it and unwinds a softened lustrous thread from its core. In a dream, she sees her husband garbed in a "shimmering yellow robe" woven of this thread, and she pursues her vision in the face of ridicule by courtiers, eventually creating the first silk cloth. An endnote summarizes what is known about the history of Chinese silk and explains how it is made. The illustrations feature Hong's soft, clear blocks of color and static, doll-like figures, familiar to readers of *How the Ox Star Fell from Heaven* (1991) and *Two of Everything* (1993, both Albert Whitman). The gorgeous gowns and buildings suggest China during the Ching Dynasty (A.D. 1644-1912). Readers will find this era more recognizably "Chinese" than any pictures attempting to show mythic times. A useful addition, particularly in elementary schools where China is studied. Margaret A. Chang, North Adams State College, MA

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From [Booklist](#)

Ages 4-8. Five thousand years ago in China, a cocoon fell into Empress Si Ling-Chi's hot tea. When she pulled on a loose end, it unraveled into a shiny strand "like a thread fallen from heaven." Realizing the thread's potential, she enlisted the aid of her enormous supply of servants and began collecting silkworms, feeding them the mulberry leaves they require, winding the threads onto reels, and eventually weaving them into a dazzling robe for the emperor. The story's only drama takes place at the beginning, but children will be intrigued by the idea that tiny silkworm larvae are responsible for creating silk. The flatness of Hong's airbrushed gouache and acrylic paintings can't capture the sheen of silk, but the pictures are streamlined and uncluttered, with sweetly simple faces peering out from billowing garments. A final note gives further information on the history of silk. *Susan Dove Lempke*

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