

## Brocade *Karaori* with Paulownia and Phoenixes

This brocade kimono is a *karaori*—a luxurious garment worn in noh theater by actors portraying female roles. *Karaori* production flourished in Japan during the Edo period (1603–1867), but this particular example dates to the turn of the seventeenth century.

The term *karaori* can refer to both the garment and the fabric, which consists of a ground weave overlaid with a float weave. The float weave is a pattern of supplementary, decorative weft threads that are woven in on top of the base weft threads to create embroidery-like patterning.

Later *karaori* often used significant amounts of gold thread in their designs, but the more sedate style of this piece is typical of the Momoyama cultural period (1573–1615). Rather than gold, the pattern uses colored silk threads over a dark green twill ground. Another feature characteristic of the period is the way the brocade designs form alternating bands from the top of the garment to the bottom. The phoenixes on the sleeves, for example, face left in the top row but right in the one below it.

In the highly stylized noh tradition, costumes indicate what type of role an actor is playing. A *karaori* with a red ground weave, for example, is reserved for younger female characters. Other ground colors, like the green used here, indicate a middle-aged or older character. The regal motif of phoenixes and paulownia suggests someone of particular majesty.

This *karaori* was designated an Important Cultural Property in 1974.