

## AN IMPERIAL CHINESE SCEPTRE

A RARE example of Chinese art recently acquired is to be seen in the new exhibits. It is a Chinese sceptre which in some unknown way had been taken from one of the imperial Chinese palaces. It has the usual conventional curved form and is wrought in diapered silver filigree embellished with enameled designs. At either of the two ends and at the middle it is mounted with a jade plaque, and the whole rests on a pink silk base which is bordered by a series of recurrent shou characters on a white ground. It has been assigned to the era of Ch'ien-lung, 1736-95.

The Chinese sceptre in this characteristic form was kept on a table in the presence of the emperor where he received the high officials of the kingdom. These, during their official visits, held the sceptre in front of them and looked upon it and not upon their emperor's face. Its native name "ju-i" signifies "as you desire" or "according to your wishes," and it is regarded as an emblem of good fortune. Hence the form of the ju-i was adopted among the mandarins for presents made for their friends on such occasions as birthdays and weddings.

Besides its imperial use as an emblem of authority, in old Buddhist paintings, the ju-i is sometimes pictured in the hands of canonized priests or deities. It is believed to have originated as a sceptre in India from whence it reached China, probably before the first century A. D., but its real origin and history remain obscure.

The example of the ju-i which the Museum has acquired was obviously made for imperial use. The green jade plaque at the upper end has a trefoil contour and is carved in relief to represent a dragon amidst cloud scrolls. The oblong center plaque of the same green jade is carved in relief to represent a pair of lions, while the square plaque of the same material at the lower end is carved to represent the mythical ch'i-lin, a composite beast emblematic of good government.

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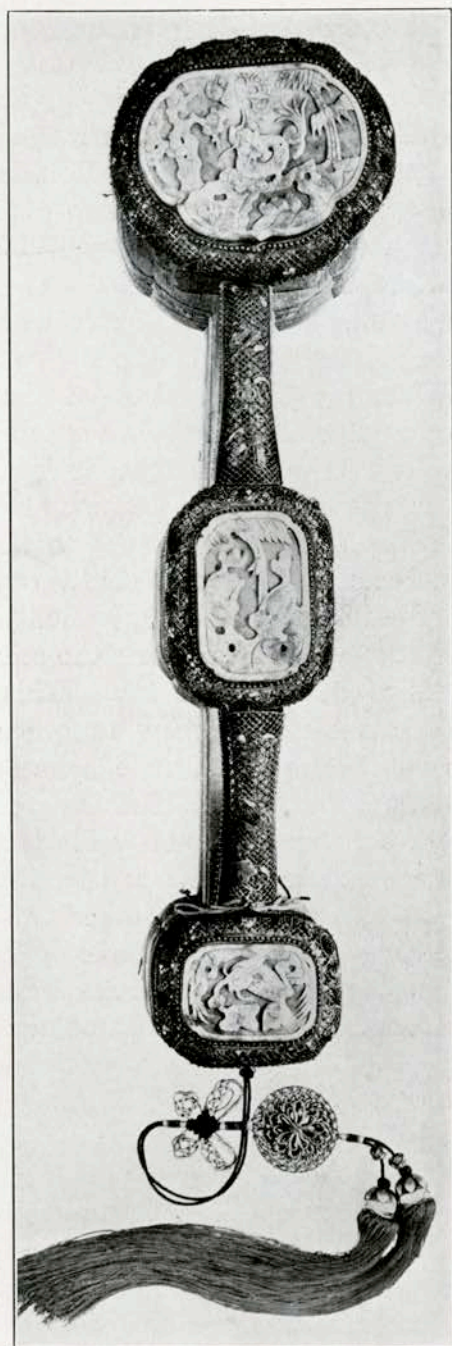


FIG. 14.—An Imperial Chinese Sceptre,

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(originally a 1432)