A REAPING KNIFE FROM LANTAU ISLAND, HONG KONG

Plate 21 shows a locally-made agricultural tool from Pui O Lo Wai, a three hundred year old mixed settlement of Hakka and Cantonese on Lantau Island.* It is said to have been made about thirty years ago.

It is very simply made from the fork of one of the lesser branches of a common local tree, the China Fir. A slender blade has been added that could have been made by one of the itinerant blacksmiths who visited Lantau each winter until recent years, or else have been purchased in the shops of the nearby market centre of Cheung Chau.

The size of the handle of such a knife could obviously vary from branch to branch though there were obvious minimum and maximum limits dictated by usability. In our example the handle measures approximately 13" and the blade is 4" long. Despite appearances the blade is not broken off at the tip but was made with the squared-off end.

This knife, together with the more usual type shown at Plate 22, was used to cut the rice stalks in the paddi fields. The first type was — and is — generally used for the first crop which is harvested in June and July. This is a wet crop because the fields are not dried out at reaping time as in the case of the second crop (October-November) when the second knife is normally favoured.

The construction of the first knife enables the user to gather four or five stalks between the arms of the handle and draw them together, after which a deft flick of the wrist turns them over to be dealt with by the cutting edge of the blade. In cases where the stalks are lying flat or at an angle and may be tough through being wet the advantages of using such a knife are obvious.

I do not know if it is in general use on Lantau, or elsewhere in the New Territories.

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JAMES HAYES