Les tons du Mun de Houei Sai, une langue Mien (ou Yao) du Nord Laos, s'opposent par la mélodie ainsi que par le mode phonatoire : on y observe cinq combinaisons distinctes de modes phonatoires. Historiquement, les tons du Mun ont subi une tripartition. Certains contrastes de mode phonatoire ont pu se développer à partir de l'aspiration de la consonne initiale, tandis que d'autres semblent remonter au Proto-Mien.

(*) I am grateful to Mr. Chang, and to his wife, Vandy Chang, for their kindness and interest in my research. Brenda Johns and Laurent Sagart listened to my tape recordings of Mr. Chang's speech and I am indebted to them for many suggestions concerning the transcription of particular tones and in general for their advice and encouragement in the preparation of this paper. I would also like to thank Gordon Downer for sharing with me some of his own fieldnotes on the Houei Sai dialect of Mun, which served as a check against my observations of Mr. Chang's speech.

1. THE MUN LANGUAGE

The Mun language (also called the Kim Mun language) belongs to the Mien-Kim division of the Mienic branch (also called the Yao branch) of the Hmong-Mien language family (also called the Miao-Yao language family), as shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the approximate geographical distribution of the Mun language in China, Viet Nam, and Laos. The principal Mun-speaking ethnic groups are as follows:

1. The Kim Mun or Hainan Miao on the island of Hainan.

2. The Kem Di Mun or Shanzi Yao (Mountaineer Yao) in eastern Guangxi Province, China.

3. The Kim Mun or Landian Yao (Indigo Yao) in Yunnan Province and western Guangxi Province, China.

4. The Kim Di Mun or Dao Xanh Y (Zao Dressed in Green) in northern Viet Nam.

5. The Dao Quân Trang (Zao with White Trousers) in northern Viet Nam.

6. The Lan Tien Zao in northern Viet Nam.

7. The Mun or Lanten in northwest Laos.

This paper describes the tones of the type of Mun spoken in the vicinity of Houei Sai in northwest Laos. It is based on the speech of Mr. Boonchan Chang, who is from Ban Nam Yong, Houei Sai District, Houa Khong Province, Laos. Mr. Chang refers to his ethnic group as /mun31/, a word which means both 'human being' in general and, specifically, 'Mun'. He refers to his language as /mun31 wa22/ 'the Mun language'. The Lao name for the people and the language is Lanten, but Mr. Chang prefers the name Mun.

Mr. Chang now lives in the United States. I first worked with him in 1981 in Owosso, Michigan. During 1981 I elicited from Mr. Chang in person; we spoke to one another in a mixture of English, Thai, and Lao. Subsequently (1983-1988) I have elicited from Mr Chang via correspondence; I mail him lists of words and phrases written out in Lao, which he translates into Mun and records on cassette tapes that he mails to me.

Previous studies providing information on Mun tone systems include the following: