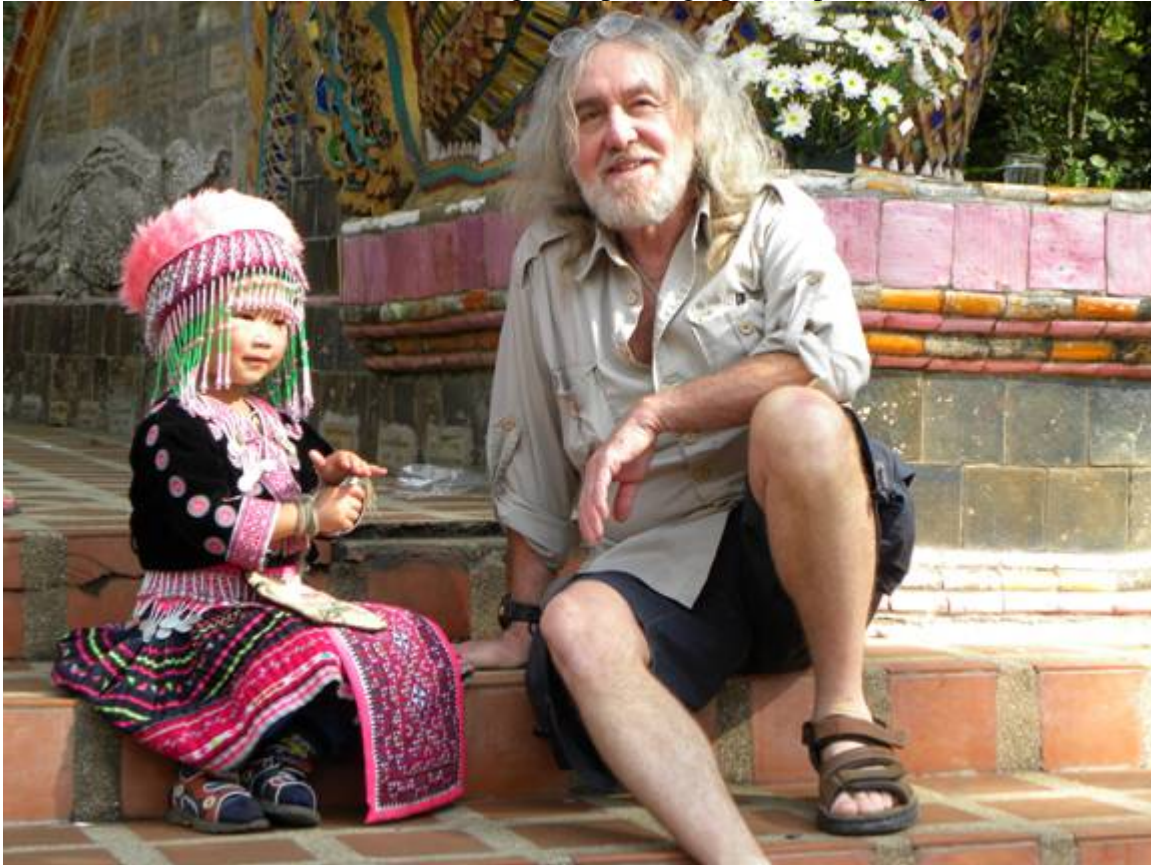


Ethnographic Collecting Among Southeast Asia's Hmong - January, 2011

There's nothing I love doing better (well, than *that*....) than being on a collecting rampage. The Dragon Lady and I have been piecing together a considerable Hmong ethnological collection for 15 years and I'd been working on it for 15 longer solo. This last week I hit the mother lode in Chiang Mai, picking up 106 splendid pieces.



I met this Hmong cutie at a temple.



I would have bought her on the spot but she unfortunately wasn't for sale.



Among other things the Hmong are famous for opium. Beside this grove of poppy heads, scored to allow the raw opium to ooze, was a patch of grass, and not the golf kind. I tried opium on three occasions while staying with hilltribes in The Golden Triangle and Laos and all it did was make me itchy, slur and stagger like a drunk, have weird dreams and a thick head the next day. Coleridge can have it. I prefer Islay. It doesn't make me itchy.



Hmong embroidery and design is the most creative and variable on the planet. Period.



After this generation, this tradition will be lost.



This master work in batik took the artist a month to create. She was an old lady. Probably younger than me. More examples:





Many thanks to Gerry “Jelly” Ivanochko, just retired as the government naturalist in Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan, and his girl friend Nok for their tremendous hospitality in Chiang Mai.



And to fellow adventure-thriller author Sean Bunzick (right) for paving my way to the city. I hadn't been there since 1986. This last night Sean had one of the best lines I've heard from a writer here: "Thailand is the land of living fiction." That *nails* it, he laughs.