

Kruba Srivichai, Patron Saint of Chiang Mai

By Josh Scoggins

(compiled from various sources)

Visitors to Chiang Mai, especially Thai massage students of Pichet Boonethumme, would do well to know a little about Pra Kruba Srivichai (1878-1938).

He is one of the most revered monks of the Lanna Kingdom, a broad area of northern Thailand that was an independent Kingdom before it was incorporated into Siam in 1897. Today, when Thai people speak of “Chiang Mai language”, it is a reference to the earlier Lanna language.

Pra Kruba Srivichai has been called the 'Engineer Monk' because he mounted and supervised over one hundred construction projects in northern Thailand, including the erection of many Buddhist wats (temples).

Of special note, he organized the building of a road leading to Wat Prathat Doi Suthep, the grandiose temple complex that sits on a mountain top overlooking the city of Chiang Mai. The road went under construction in 1934 (2477 in the Thai calendar).

At that time only the strong and devoted made the minimum five hour hike up the mountain to Doi Suthep through dense tropical forest. Ajahn Pichet Boonthumme has said that at that time the government couldn't raise sufficient money to build the road, so they called upon Kruba Srivichai to help. He sent word far and wide, and because of his great popularity, volunteers came from all over Thailand to lend a hand to the effort. It is said that as many as 3,000 to 4,000 people a day came to build the road, which was originally paved in stone.

Because so many volunteers heeded his call, Kruba's original request for each village group to complete 50 feet of road was decreased to 10-15 feet. Day by day, a massive volunteer workforce cleared the area and set stones on the roadway. The road was completed in 5 months and 20 days. Kruba Srivichai was the first to inaugurate the opening of the road on 30 April, 1935.



Above: Portrait of Kruba Srivichai as an elder monk. Below: Entrance to the monument in his honor on the road to Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai.



Prayer amulet with photo of Pra Kruba Srivichai
as a young monk.

Kruba Srivichai was famous for his kind, pious and compassionate nature. He ate very little, and spent long hours in meditation. He was very bright and was always doing good works for Thai people. Even as a youth he was regarded with great merit. He is known to have regularly released caged animals, and to have given away to others the food and alms that was given to him on his daily rounds, an act that angered many of his patrons who feared that they would not be blessed if he gave away their offerings.

Pichet Boonthamme considers Kruba a patron saint, and has very prominent altars and photos of him in his classroom, alongside the Buddha, Shivaga Komarpaj, (the father of Thai massage), and the Thai Earth Mother.



Kruba was ordained at Wat Ban Pang in Lampun, where he began studies at the age of eighteen. He was quickly recognized as a great and pious monk, even among the hill tribe people. He passed away on 20 February 1938 (BE 2481) at the age of 60. His bones remain in the stupa at Wat Chammadevi. He was given the title *Nak Bun Haeng Lanna*, which may be translated as Lanna Saint.

A very important and often visited monument honoring Kruba is located just past the Chiang Mai zoo, in front of Huay Kaew falls. Visitors and pilgrims to Doi Suthep routinely stop here to make offerings and send prayers on their way up (and down) the mountain.

