

# Are Friendship *Bonshō* Bells Buddhist Symbols? The Case of Oak Ridge

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IN FEBRUARY OF 1998 Robert Brooks, a citizen of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a town of twenty-seven thousand, brought suit in the Federal Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee against the City of Oak Ridge, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> He alleged that the “Friendship Bell” erected in a public park on the fiftieth anniversary of the city’s founding is a Buddhist symbol whose presence results in an endorsement of the Buddhist religion. Such endorsement by a city, he argued, violates the Establishment Clauses of the U.S. and Tennessee Constitutions. The district court granted summary judgment to Oak Ridge. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati, finding no constitutional violation in the city’s use of the Friendship Bell, affirmed the lower court’s ruling. But it also ruled that the bell was a Buddhist symbol.<sup>2</sup>

## History

In 1990 the Oak Ridge Community Foundation sought a project to help the City of Oak Ridge commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. They announced a competition for a “living memorial,” and let it be known that they could contribute three hundred thousand dollars to the project—a promise that could not be fulfilled.

The proposal to erect in Oak Ridge for the commemoration a Japanese *bonshō* (“Brahmin bell”) “Friendship Bell” was developed and submitted by two Oak Ridge citizens, Dr. Venkanta R.R. “Ram” Uppuluri, an Oak Ridge National Laboratory mathematician born in India, and his wife Shigeko Yoshino Uppuluri, a teacher of Japanese born in Kyoto and educated at Doshisha University. The Uppuluris had met as graduate students at Indiana University, had been working in Oak Ridge since 1963, and had raised their son there. Neither of the Uppuluris was a Buddhist in the North American sense of the term. That is, neither was a member of any Buddhist organization in the U.S., nor actively a member of any Buddhist organization abroad. Shigeko’s grandfather’s family in Fukui supplied rice to Higashi Honganji, the head temple of one of the Jōdo Shinshū organizations. Through that connection Shigeko’s grandfather was able to move to

Kyoto. Her grandfather was devout and active; when Shigeko was small, she went with her grandfather every day to the temple. But after her grandfather's generation, Shigeko's family in Kyoto was Jōdo Shinshū in the rather inactive way that many Japanese families belong to temples. "Buddhism is almost gone in Japan," Shigeko observed. "It is like a fine mist."

The bell was paid for through contributions raised by the Community Foundation through the tireless efforts of Shigeko Uppuluri and two retired Directors of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the eminent nuclear scientists Herman Postma and Alvin Weinberg. It turned out that the Foundation had not begun the project with any money to fund it. Nakamachi, Oak Ridge's sister city of thirty-eight thousand inhabitants where Japan's nuclear fusion project is located, donated \$23,000 early. Sōtetsu Iwasawa, a bell-maker in Kyoto, cast the bell at cost, and the Honda Motor Co. plant at Suzuka shipped the bell to Oak Ridge for free. The nuclear scientists of both the United States and Japan contributed money.

Several Oak Ridge citizens associated with the bell project traveled to Japan to observe the casting ceremony, including city councilman Ed Nephew.<sup>3</sup> In his deposition testimony, Nephew described the ceremony as follows:

There was a—some kind of person, a monk, they said, in kind of an orange cape who was chanting all the time, and at certain points when they thought the metal content had been suitably adjusted, they undertook some ceremonial symbolic gestures of putting in artifacts [such as manuscripts, dogwood twigs from Tennessee, and lotus blooms] into the molten metal.

Nephew also testified that he was told that the ceremony was a cultural tradition that was necessary to impart "soul" to the bell. At one point during the ceremony, he said, he was told to pray to whatever god he wished. Indeed, Shigeko reported that at the bell casting a Shingon Buddhist priest purified the fire in which the metal would be melted by chanting mantras and sutra passages and throwing a hundred or so handwritten portions of Buddhist texts into the fire.<sup>4</sup>

Once the bell arrived in Oak Ridge, the Foundation arranged for a professor of Architecture at the University of Tennessee in nearby Knoxville, Jon Coddington, to design a pavilion to house it. He incorporated both Eastern and Western architectural styles, most notably roof elements from the Shinto shrines at Ise and shapes inspired by Tennessee's cantilevered barns.<sup>5</sup>

A bitter opposition to the City's accepting and endorsing the bell developed in 1993. Many opponents felt that the bell was meant as an apology by Oak Ridge to Japan, or Hiroshima, for making the uranium for the Hiroshima bomb. After a compromise brokered by the City Council's

Bell Policy Committee, the City of Oak Ridge accepted ownership of the bell and pavilion, and held a dedication ceremony in May of 1996.

### Formal Elements

Weighing more than four tons, the bell measures approximately six and one-half feet tall and four and one-half feet in diameter. It is traditional *bonshō* shape: a hemisphere on top of a barrel that is slightly wider at the bottom than at the top. On the exterior of the bell are “nipples,” bosses or knobs—described in court documents as numbering 108 but in fact numbering 132. A frieze of lotus leaves and blossoms runs along the bottom border. The surface of the barrel of the bell is divided into four panels. The bell is hung from a dragon-shaped hanging loop. It is struck from outside on a chrysanthemum medallion with a palm-log striker.

Japanese visitors would no doubt associate the bell thus far described with Japanese Buddhist temples. But a historian of Asian bells would have to note that all of these design features were present and combined in Chinese bells tuned as musical instruments for royal courts prior to the introduction of Buddhism into China, much less the rest of East Asia.<sup>6</sup> Such bells were commonly used as city clocks in Chinese walled cities. Even in Japan such bells can also be found at Confucian temples, Shinto shrines, and, in the Tokugawa period, as city clocks. For example, a bell of similar size, shape, materials, and decoration hung in the Osaka Castle during the Tokugawa period. A second bell of similar size, shape, materials, and decoration hung in a municipal bell tower in Osaka as an “announcer of the hours.” That bell was cast and hung to express the city’s gratitude to the third Tokugawa *shōgun* (military ruler) of Japan for his favors to the city. One might argue that bells of this general size, shape, and décor have for sixteen hundred years been the pan-Asian bell, just as the Liberty Bell shape and design is the pan-Western bell, used in fire halls and schoolhouses as well as churches.

Bells hung in Buddhist temples in Japan often have inscriptions and reliefs on the panels that tie the bell to Buddhist cosmology and practice. In particular, reference is often made to the core belief of premodern Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Buddhists about temple bells: that the sound of the Buddhist temple bell is the voice of the Dharma, and has power to free permanently or temporarily those reborn in the hells or other bad forms of rebirth from their sufferings. Four stories from China and India support the practice of tolling the bells to give temporary or permanent relief. One is a story about the Indian king Kanishka of the Kuśana Dynasty who for his sins is reborn as a fish with a thousand heads. A wheel of knives slices off his heads one by one. When he hears the tolling of a bell in a Buddhist temple, the wheel stops and he gets temporary relief.<sup>7</sup> A second story concerns a

man who, when traveling on the road, dies and falls into a hell. There he tastes endless sufferings and pain, but when he hears the tolling of a monastery bell by the T'ang Dynasty monk Chih-hsing (588–632), he is suddenly released and attains rebirth in the Pure Land. He asks his wife in a dream to give the monk's temple a thank offering of ten bolts of silk. His wife, who has not heard any bad news about her husband, does not believe the dream. More than ten days later the bad news reaches her and she understands that the dream was truthful, so she does as her husband instructed. When asked why the ringing of the bell had caused such a response to manifest itself, the monk replies that because of the story of the Indian king Kaniṣka, he had set out to toll the bell to relieve the sufferings of those in the hells.<sup>8</sup> The third and fourth stories tell of Chinese figures whose sufferings are relieved: Emperor Wu of Liang and Li Wang of the Southern T'ang.

There are references to these four stories in the inscriptions found on a number of bells made for use in Buddhist monasteries in traditional Japan.<sup>9</sup> In some Buddhist monastic rulebooks it is stated that a server should toll the bell 108 times morning and evening for the sake of relieving the suffering of beings.<sup>10</sup> Before tolling, the server should chant the following verse: "When they hear the tolling [of the monastery bell], [those beings] of the Three Lowest Forms of Rebirth and those born into the Eight Difficult Circumstances [i.e., those who are unable to see the Buddha or hear the Dharma] are relieved of their sufferings, and all sentient beings in the Dharma realm attain awakening."<sup>11</sup> Inscriptions also make an analogy between a bell that wakes people from sleep and a bell that wakes beings from the dream-like illusion caused by desires and ignorance. Combining both of these emphases is the belief that on hearing the sound of the bell, a denizen of the hells would leave the sufferings of the hells and immediately reach the Pure Land, as demonstrated in the second story above.

The panels of the Oak Ridge bell do not contain these Buddhist references. Two of the panels present paired scenes. The East Tennessee scene shows the Tennessee mountains, a mockingbird (the state bird), irises, and dogwood flowers. Over them all is a rainbow with an atom on the end. The Japanese scene shows Mt. Fuji, cherry blossoms, flying cranes, and over all a rainbow with an atom on the end. The scenes are full of natural beauty, calm and peaceful. "Beauty, peace, and atoms for peace, in Oak Ridge and in Japan," the panels seem to say.

On one of the panels on the back of the bell, the words "Hiroshima" and "Nagasaki" are paired, accompanied by the dates "August 6, 1945" and "August 9, 1945." On the other panel the dates of Pearl Harbor and VJ Day are paired. On one side the words "International friendship" runs vertically between the panels; on the reverse is the word "Peace."

### The Oak Ridge Friendship Bell as Japanese and Buddhist

Despite the non-Buddhist content of the inscriptions and reliefs on its panels, the Oak Ridge bell is in form strongly reminiscent of an East Asian bell that in Japan or the United States would be recognized by every knowledgeable person as a Japanese, Chinese, or Korean Buddhist temple bell. Buddhist monastic and temple practice, Buddhist art, peace of mind, non-harming, detachment from the passions of the world which motivate conflicts—all these things are evoked by the sound of the bell. Those knowledgeable about Japanese Buddhism would know that the ringing of the temple bell has the power to alleviate the sufferings of the dead, of those in the hells. Yet hearing the sound of the temple bell is also a part of every rural Japanese person's intimate childhood experience whether he or she identifies as Buddhist or not. City dwellers no longer hear the sound of the bell daily, as temples don't add to noise pollution by ringing them. But whether city dwellers are "Buddhist" or not, they ring bells on visits to temples or listen to them being rung, particularly at the New Year. The *bonshō* bell thus strongly symbolizes "Japaneseness" as well as Buddhism. And thanks to the recent Japanese practice of donating such bells to cities and organizations abroad, bells of this kind that appear in Europe and North America have also come to symbolize a wish for friendship and peace.

#### The Bell and Peace

Shigeko and Ram Uppuluri could not have created the bell without the help of a host of others. But it is also true that they were able to create the bell because others were inspired by their vision. The core of that vision was an affirmation of and longing for peace.

The visions of Shigeko and Ram were not exactly the same. What moved Ram was the contrast between the Oak Ridge portrayed in the August 6 Hiroshima Day demonstrations every year, the Oak Ridge that built "the bomb" in the 1940s and builds bombs today, and the Oak Ridge of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory where Ram worked. The meaning of Oak Ridge continued to be defined for most who did not live there by the story of the past, the story of the creation of the Hiroshima bomb. It was important to Ram that others in the future understand that Oak Ridge's story was that of a community working in nuclear science on peaceful uses of atomic energy. Ram got the idea that there needed to be a monument in Oak Ridge that would last a thousand years and convey the message to future generations that Oak Ridge in the post-war period had really been

about peace. Ram's son Ram Y. Uppuluri, called "Rami" by his parents, recalls his father's interest in such a monument:

We had free-ranging discussions for several years over our kitchen table. Dad talked about installing a Nandi (a peaceful Hindu cow who is usually shown sitting at the feet of Shiva) after installing a Japanese bell in Bissell Park. He emphasized that all major religions have symbols of peace, and hoped to include them all. I (Rami) had not yet studied law, but I already had qualms about the separation of church and state. Dad didn't worry about things like that.<sup>12</sup>

A large Japanese bell in a temple high above the seacoast near Tokai-mura, seen on one of the couple's visits to Japan, inspired in Ram a desire for a *bonshō* bell in Oak Ridge. He appreciated the deep peace that shrines and temples in Japan made him feel, particularly those with tall trees and the deep tones of large bells. And he understood that such a bell would meet his three criteria for a monument: that there be no maintenance, that it carry a meaning, and that it last a long time. When the priest at the temple near Tokai-mura told him that a bronze bell should last one thousand years, Ram became committed to his project.

Ram felt that the potential significance of the bell went far beyond commemorating the events of fifty years ago, and making a statement about Oak Ridge's longing for peace. He wanted to build bridges between Japan and East Tennessee, between East and West.

Shigeko had her own reasons for liking Ram's idea. In the 1970s and 1980s, Shigeko had made herself useful to the young Japanese scientists and engineers and their families who came to Oak Ridge from Japan's nuclear laboratories and installations. These families stayed in Oak Ridge for at most two years, and then went back to Japan. Over the years Shigeko and Ram made many friends in the Japanese nuclear industry. They also returned regularly to Japan to visit Shigeko's family.

Shigeko and her Japanese friends in Tennessee thought Oak Ridge needed a bell, a Japanese *bonshō* bell. Japanese were now coming to Tennessee in greater numbers as Matsushita, Nissan, Toyota, and their suppliers built factories in the non-union South. In 1988 Japanese business investment in Tennessee totaled \$1.2 billion in capital and planned investment, with forty-five Japanese businesses in the state employing over eight thousand people. As Shigeko and her friends foresaw, these numbers have grown. As of July, 2003, Tennessee was home to one hundred forty-six Japanese-owned companies. These businesses invested \$7.88 billion in the state and employed just over thirty-seven thousand Tennesseans.<sup>13</sup> Japanese in Tennessee to help run these companies needed a bell they could ring 108 times at the New Year, at Obon on August 15, the day of the ancestors,

and on the anniversary of the ending of World War II. They needed the deep sonorous tones of the bell to go forth as they always had done in Japan to free the souls of their ancestors from the hells and assure their rebirth in the Pure Land. And perhaps, given Oak Ridge's history as a secret city founded in 1942 to enrich the uranium for the Hiroshima bomb, Oak Ridge itself needed a bell to help the souls of all the dead of World War II.<sup>14</sup> It needed a bell to pacify the unsettled spirits of the place so that it was safe for present residents. But most of all, Shigeko and her friends wanted a *bonshō* bell to ring for peace, and for enduring friendship between Oak Ridge and Japan. And they felt that Japanese in Tennessee would too. To Shigeko it was self-evident that the bell would be a *Jōdo shō*, a Pure Land bell.<sup>15</sup>

Shigeko and Ram did not speak of these motives that could be called "religious," but rather sought community support in Oak Ridge for a Friendship Bell to promote tourism. "The purpose of the friendship bell is to attract the tourism of the Japanese in Tennessee to the natural beauty of the area, and to symbolize friendship of the two countries. It is something unusual. There are enough Oprylands and Dollywoods; we need to enhance the beauty of our area," the Uppuluris are quoted as saying in 1988.<sup>16</sup> "We hope not only to unite the Japanese in the area, but to perform colorful celebrations on the days the bell will ring, that will attract people from all over."<sup>17</sup> Community leaders hoped for funding from Japanese companies.

As it happened, Japanese companies in Tennessee gave little support to the bell project. Rather, Shigeko found support in Japan and the United States. Shigeko's sincere longing for peace, and her hard work on its behalf, moved Sōtetsu Iwasawa to offer to cast the bell at cost when Oak Ridge fundraising flagged. Shigeko's devotion to peace, her courage in tackling such a large fundraising project on behalf of a very small town, and the amazing fact that Oak Ridge, birthplace of "the bomb," should reach out on its own initiative to express friendship toward Japan by commissioning a *bonshō* bell—these three elements brought the project attention in Japan.

All who see the Friendship Bell in Oak Ridge will ascribe meanings to it. Most will assume that it was donated by a Japanese group, as is true of other *bonshō*-style bells in North America and Europe. Some of those will see it as a marvelous accomplishment of medieval Japanese (indeed, East Asian) technology, one reason, no doubt, why Buddhists have drawn it into their web of sacred meanings.

Some will see the bell as part of Japan's effort to achieve moral respectability in the world community by declaring itself a "peace nation" after having been led to defeat by a militarist government and fought an imperial war. Rhetorically embracing peacemaking as the meaning of modern Japanese life is a startling shift for a nation long ruled by *samurai*. The Japan Association for the United Nations' donation of a Peace Bell to the United Nations in 1954 was the beginning of Japan's many offerings of

tokens of peace and friendship to former enemy nations to emphasize its new aspirations.<sup>18</sup>

Some will see the implanting of Japanese peace and friendship bells around North America and Europe as an effort by a militarily weak country, forbidden to rearm after World War II, to build safety for itself in a dangerous world. Some will see the Oak Ridge bell as part an effort of Japanese-Americans, interned in camps by the U.S. government in 1942, impoverished by the internment, and reviled after the war, to bid for friendly relations with the dominant Euro-American population.

Those who know that the bell is primarily the creation of the Oak Ridge Community Foundation and not a Japanese group may see it as an apology by Oak Ridgers to the Japanese for the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. In 1993 and 1995 many Oak Ridgers opposed the project because they read it as an expression of guilt and shame about something that was in fact a proud accomplishment. For example, William J. Wilcox, former Technical Director of the Oak Ridge nuclear weapons plants K-25 and Y-12, wrote to the City Council's Bell Policy Committee in 1995: "For months now . . . I've sat around hating the Bell. . . . A lot of us think its message and usage will officially change Oak Ridge *from* a once proud Atomic City and major part (for 50 years) of our Nation's nuclear defense *to* a city perpetually remembering with sadness the horror of Hiroshima and endorsing the political agenda of Banning-the-Bomb."<sup>19</sup>

Some may see the bell, with its inscription of the dates of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, as a rallying point for those who see atomic weapons as engines of atrocity, and those whose slogan is "Never Again." Some in Oak Ridge feared in 1993 and 1995 that the Friendship Bell, if erected in a city park, would give the Oak Ridge Environmental and Peace Alliance (OREPA) a symbol through which to attract further media attention. OREPA, a group of non-violent peace activists who demonstrate regularly outside the gate of Oak Ridge's atomic weapons plant, is studiously ignored by Oak Ridgers. Some saw this "ban the bomb" attitude as indistinguishable from the view of Alvin Weinberg, a Manhattan Project scientist who played a crucial role in the design and engineering of the "Little Boy" bomb. Weinberg chaired the Oak Ridge Community Foundation Friendship Bell Committee at the time that the inscription of the names and dates on the bell was chosen, and they reflect what he hoped viewers would see in the bell. Weinberg wanted the bell in Oak Ridge to strengthen the "tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons," a desire that some might see as similar to the "Never Again" movement. He believed that "the eternal commemoration" of the Hiroshima bombing and its effects "is needed to make forever taboo any further use of a nuclear bomb in warfare by any nation."<sup>20</sup> He viewed the "sanctification" of Hiroshima, the conversion of an historical event of great suffering and terror into a religious event which he saw happening in that city on the anniversary of the bombing, as a good



thing. It would be a means by which a powerful religious taboo against the use of nuclear weapons could be erected. He wrote: "I think Oak Ridge as well as Hiroshima should be sanctified. We produced the uranium-235 that went into the Hiroshima bomb . . . . The Oak Ridge Friendship Bell ought to acquire the same kind of transcendent, religious character as the Hiroshima Bell. It will forever symbolize Oak Ridge's recognition that the nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima should never be repeated."<sup>21</sup> These views were not widely shared in Oak Ridge, and certainly were not endorsed by the Oak Ridge Community Foundation or the City Council, but Weinberg was a respected, prominent citizen, he chaired the Foundation's Friendship Bell Committee, and he argued for them in public every chance he got.<sup>22</sup> Some may read its inscriptions of dates as morally equating the "sneak attack" on Pearl Harbor, an act of aggression, with the wartime bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended the war.

All these readings fueled the controversy that ended in a lawsuit accusing the city of Oak Ridge of endorsing Buddhism by hanging a *bonshō* bell in a city park. As it turned out, the opposition focused most strongly on the names and dates on the bell. As proponents pointed out, those names and dates reflect the city's early history. They also, as Rami Uppuluri mentioned recently, touch the "third rail" of the Fiftieth Birthday celebration and its motto: "Born of War, Living for Peace, Growing through Science." The third rail, touched on by that motto but unstated, was the reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>23</sup> The bell project was chosen from among others because it best expressed the motto of the birthday celebration. But a number of Oak Ridgers reacted negatively when the bell's inscriptions explicitly drew attention to the dates of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.

All of these readings miss what Ram and Shigeko Uppuluri meant to do. Ram was willing to stir up controversy. According to his son, Ram Uppuluri expected opposition to the idea of erecting objects symbolizing peace in an Oak Ridge city park. "People really struggled with the idea of the bell," Rami observed.

It was truly a symbol of Oak Ridge. At the core of our being here. There were a lot of senior citizens still alive in 1991 and 1993 who believed that the bell refuted the reasons why scientists, technicians, engineers and workers are in Oak Ridge. My father often said: "In Oak Ridge, peace is a four-letter word." By saying that, he was pointing to the general mood of Oak Ridge, its intolerance of any deviation from [approval of] the reasons for which the town was created. Dad regretted the opposition to the bell, but he took a certain delight in the controversy. He thought a dialogue about Oak Ridge was long overdue.<sup>24</sup>

To Shigeko, the meaning of the bell was fully expressed in the two relief panels by artist Susannah Harris. No inscriptions were necessary. Freedom, natural beauty, well-being, and peace—and atoms in the service of those goals in both countries. It was their intent that a thousand years hence, this is the message that future generations who saw those panels would come to understand.

The City of Oak Ridge, with the decision whether to accept or reject the bell locked in a bitter fight, faced a problem. The City Council decided to accept the bell and hang it in the city park on the condition that there also be a plaque to foreclose at least some of the readings that so angered its opponents. The plaque composed by the City Council's Bell Policy Committee read:

FRIENDSHIP BELL

THIS BRONZE BELL WAS DESIGNED IN OAK RIDGE AND CAST IN JAPAN IN 1993 TO SERVE AS A SYMBOL OF THE BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL REGARD THAT HAVE DEVELOPED BETWEEN OAK RIDGE AND JAPAN OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS.... FRIENDSHIP MADE SO MUCH MORE MEANINGFUL BECAUSE OF THE TERRIBLE CONFLICT OF WORLD WAR II WHICH OAK RIDGE PLAYED SUCH A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN ENDING. THIS BELL FURTHER SERVES AS A SYMBOL OF OUR MUTUAL LONGING AND PLEDGE TO WORK FOR FREEDOM, WELL-BEING, JUSTICE AND PEACE FOR ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD IN THE YEARS TO COME.

1996

GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE OF OAK RIDGE ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY BY THE OAK RIDGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION AND FRIENDS IN THE UNITED STATES, JAPAN AND OTHER NATIONS.

OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE  
BORN OF WAR, LIVING FOR PEACE,  
GROWING THROUGH SCIENCE

In this statement there is no apology to Japan, no expression of shame and guilt. No mention is made of "Never Again." Instead, the plaque expresses pride in Oak Ridge's role in ending the war and dedication to work for freedom, well-being, justice, and peace. In that plaque, in the selection of whose wording they were given no role, something of Shigeko and Ram Uppuluri's deeper motives is preserved.<sup>25</sup>

### The Court Case Revisited: Is It a Buddhist Bell?

The District court concluded that the Friendship Bell display was constitutional under the test laid out by the Supreme Court in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), and under Tennessee law. But as a threshold matter prior to applying the *Lemon* test, the court first considered whether the Friendship Bell is a religious symbol at all. "If the bell is not actually associated with Buddhism, its display cannot convey the message that the government endorses Buddhism," the Court wrote.<sup>26</sup> The Court cited an affidavit for the Plaintiff by scholar Steven Heine, and did its own research into the written works of a number of scholars. Based on these, the court concluded that the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell is a Buddhist bell, and that the bells in question "are clearly tied to the Buddhist religion as ritual implements invested with symbolic significance."<sup>27</sup>

Under the test laid out in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, a public display of a religious object must meet several requirements:

- (1) a statute or governmental practice must have a secular purpose;
- (2) its primary effect must be neither to advance nor to inhibit religion;
- (3) it must not foster excessive governmental entanglement with religion.

When evaluating (2), the effects prong, the Court applied the "endorsement test." Under this test, the Court considered whether a reasonable observer would conclude that the government endorses religion by allowing the practice in question. The endorsement test is particularly concerned with whether governmental practices create a "symbolic union" of church and state.

Clearly the City of Oak Ridge had accepted the bell and allowed it to be erected on public property for a secular purpose, as outlined in the plaque inscription and in a number of other places. It was to be a Friendship Bell. Its primary effect was to express the desire for friendship. And there were no organized groups of "Buddhists" in Oak Ridge with whom the City could become entangled. Shigeko Uppuluri, who did not in any case think of herself as a Buddhist, had never talked with reporters or with the Bell Committee of the Oak Ridge Community Foundation about any Buddhist meanings the bell might carry for Japanese people. She had talked early on about Japanese customs and the bell, about the bell and Japaneseness, but never about Buddhist meanings. She never spoke of the bell as a *Jōdo shō*, a Pure Land bell, never mentioned how for Buddhists the sound carries the ringer's intention or vow.<sup>28</sup> It was fine with her that the

bell would mean different things to different people, who would ring it for whatever was in their hearts.<sup>29</sup>

The Court considered Brooks' argument that "the bell was intended in part to symbolize atonement to Japan for Oak Ridge's role in World War II, and that this purpose was tantamount to a religious purpose, because the bombing of Hiroshima has acquired a religious significance for many people."<sup>30</sup> The Court commented: "We decline to read the Establishment Clause so broadly. We believe that the Establishment Clause regulates governmental conduct involving religion only, and not the official expression of sentiments that may have religious counterparts, such as sorrow and repentance, toward historical events like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."<sup>31</sup> The court explicitly addressed the matter of Alvin Weinberg's desire to use the bell to "sanctify" Oak Ridge. It wrote: "The newspaper articles written by private individuals allegedly imputing quasi-religious (but not particularly or uniquely Buddhist) significance to the bell would not, we believe, change the reasonable observer's understanding of whether the government was endorsing Buddhism."<sup>32</sup> Thus the Federal Court of Appeals, like the Federal District Court before it, found that the City in accepting the bell did not endorse Buddhism.

Surely scholars of religious studies can agree that Oak Ridge in accepting the Friendship Bell from the Oak Ridge Community Foundation had no intention of endorsing Buddhism, and did not do so. According to a definition of the concept of religion currently popular in religious studies, a religion comprises a variety of discourses (including the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like), or "practices of everyday life" that are characterized by an orientation to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal.<sup>33</sup> The inscriptions on the bell and the content of the plaque make it abundantly clear to any viewer that it was not intended to speak of the eternal and transcendent, but rather of local, historical matters and human aspirations. It was not intended to speak of those matters with a transcendent and eternal authority, but only with the authority of the City of Oak Ridge. In other words, by current scholarly definitions of religion, this bell was intended as a thoroughly secular bell. And it is primarily of mundane, temporal matters and with mundane authority that the bell speaks.

But what do we make of the court's decision to declare this bell a Buddhist symbol? The *bonshō* bell, as the court wrote, was in Japan used in temples as a Buddhist ritual implement invested with symbolic meanings, as well as to signal the time for gatherings. It is certainly associated with religion. But to what degree and in what way is it a religious symbol? It is not a central religious symbol, like a statue of the Buddha, a cross, or the person of Jesus. It has never been revered or focused on in worship as the *gohonzon* of a Japanese temple or sect. It does not have a large place in

the elements of the Buddhist discourse of the eternal and transcendent. To erect a bell is not to have a temple, or even a central element of a temple or altar. Apart from the daily ringing morning and evening, which often does not occur anymore, and the centrality of the bell in New Year's ceremonies, the *bonshō* bell in Japan is not a central ritual implement. It is not used in offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas. In fact, having a *bonshō* bell is such a long way from having a temple that the dream of Shigeko and her friends that Japanese in Tennessee would come to ring it at the New Year seems likely to be unfulfilled. As one Japanese resident of Tennessee told me, a *bonshō* bell by itself, without the temple, the Buddha images, and the monks, would not give one the feeling that one seeks out at the New Year. The City of Oak Ridge would have to bring into play a great many more Buddhist symbols and ritual activities to accompany it before this bell could sustain a Buddhist discourse of the eternal and transcendent in Oak Ridge.

Further, there is now around North America and around the world, a secular or quasi-religious use of the *bonshō* bell: to express friendship and a longing for peace. To feel and express a longing for peace and friendship need not be to take part in a discourse referencing culturally defined symbols of the eternal and transcendent. However, it is significant that Japanese and people of Japanese descent living outside Japan have chosen the *bonshō* bell for peace and friendship bells around the world. This must not merely be because *bonshō* bells symbolize Japaneseness, but because of what Buddhism brought to Japanese culture: the recognition of the universality of suffering, the value of the compassionate intention to end it, and the intention to realize freedom, well-being, and peace. These values and intentions, Buddhist but by no means limited to Buddhism, as the court discerned, are not so different from those secular intentions proclaimed on the plaque by the City of Oak Ridge.

In my view, there is no doubt that in Japan the pan-Asian *bonshō* bell is associated with Buddhist temples. The absence in Japan of walled cities meant that these pan-Asian bells were not used often for secular time-keeping purposes, or for ringing out warning that the gates were about to be closed, as they were in China. But it is also clear that no Buddhist temple would want to display and use the Oak Ridge bell. The bell is covered with non-Buddhist reliefs and inscriptions which convey its meanings in its context, the context of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. This bell belongs to the new genre of peace, friendship, and commemorative bells, not to the genre of temple bells. It speaks of Japaneseness, of building bridges between nations and cultures, of peace that has grown up following a war, and of the desirability of working for international peace.

## NOTES

1. I offer this essay in memory of Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi, my mentor in things Buddhist at Harvard Graduate School. It seems appropriate because, like his own life story, it is in part the story of a transnational Japanese person sharing knowledge of the deepest aspects of Japanese culture with non-Japanese Americans in the hope of bringing about understanding, friendship, and peace.

2. I want to thank my friend Edward W. Lollis for sharing my enthusiasm for this project and investigating with me the history of the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell.

3. Shigeiko Uppuluri led a trip to Japan that summer through the University of Tennessee. She, Ram Uppuluri, Herman Postma, and Pat Postma, a University of Tennessee Professor of Business, were on the trip, along with ten others who were not Oak Ridgers. Ed Nephew and his wife went to Japan separately, but joined with the University of Tennessee group beginning with their visit to Nakamachi. So the Uppuluris, the Postmas, and the Nephews were present together at the bell casting. Interview with Shigeiko Uppuluri, 21 August, 2003.

4. Interview with Shigeiko Yoshino Uppuluri, 6 June, 2003.

5. It is my interpretation that the roof forms remind one of the shrines of Ise. Professor Coddington says rather that the design is a blending of the ideal forms of both cultures: the golden rectangle of Greece, and the 2:1 ratio rectangle of the *tatami* mat in Japan.

6. On such bells in China, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music: Chime Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). The leading historian of Japanese bells writing in English is Percival Price. He published a paper called "Japanese Bells" as number 11 in the *Occasional Papers of the Center for Japanese Studies* at the University of Michigan in 1969, using no written Japanese sources. He repeated much the same information, with the same European and American citations, in his book *Bells and Man* published in 1983 by Oxford University Press. Price asserts, erroneously, that *bonshō* were not used in Japan outside of temples. The leading authority in the world on Japanese *bonshō* (large bronze bells, "Brahmin bells") is Tsuboi Ryōhei. His most important books are *Nihon no bonshō* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1971), and *Nihon koshōmei shūsei*, also published by Kadokawa Shoten in 1978. The latter has a complete transcription of a large collection of the inscriptions recorded on Japanese *bonshō*.

7. This story is recorded in a text attributed to Tao-hsuan (596–667 C.E.), the *Fu-fa-tsang yin-yuan chuan*. See T.50.317a.
8. This story is recorded in the Hsu Kao-seng chuan, T.50:695b-c. For more on this, see Yifa, “The Rules of Purity for the Chan Monastery: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996), p. 275.
9. See Tsuboi Ryōhei, *Nihon Koshōmei shūsei*.
10. Yifa, “The Rules of Purity,” pp. 46–47, 273f and 320–21.
11. Yifa, “The Rules of Purity,” p. 321, my paraphrase.
12. Telephone conversation, 31 December, 2003.
13. Exact figure is 37,024 according to “Japanese Investment in Tennessee,” Department of Economic and Community Development, State of Tennessee, 10 July, 2003, [www.state.tn.us/e cd / japan \\_ invest .htm](http://www.state.tn.us/e cd / japan _ invest .htm).
14. Interestingly, according to Shigeko Uppuluri it was Manhattan Project scientist Alvin Weinberg who voiced this idea in public.
15. Interview with Shigeko Uppuluri, 4 June, 2003.
16. Dollywood, owned by country singer Dolly Parton, and Opryland, developed by the radio show the Grand Ol’ Opry, are theme parks based on Tennessee regional music and culture.
17. Audrey Siemens, “Friendship Bell Is Planned for Oak Ridge Area,” *The Oak Ridger*, 14 July, 1988.
18. Akiko Hashimoto, “Japanese and German Projects of Moral Recovery: Toward a New Understanding of War Memories in Defeated Nations.” Presented at the Japan Forum of the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University, 16 October, 1998.
19. Memo from William J. Wilcox to Ms. Diantha Pare and [the Oak Ridge City] Council’s Committee on the Bell, 27 September, 1995, p. 1.
20. The Rev. Dwyn Mounger’s summary in personal correspondence with the author, 1 August, 2003.
21. Alvin Martin Weinberg, “Guest Column: Friendship Bell Could Be an Important Symbol Here,” *The Oak Ridger*, 18 October, 1991. Also Alvin Martin Weinberg, *The First Nuclear Era: The Life and Times of a Technological Fixer* (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1994).
22. The Oak Ridge Community Foundation did write that though the bell was not intended as an apology, the Foundation’s members did feel sadness for the loss of life and the hope that nuclear weapons will never have to be used again. This is of course not the same as a simple-minded “Never Again” position. See “Basic Information on Bell Issues,” approved for use by ORCF Board of Directors, August 1995.

23. Phone interview with Ram Y. Uppuluri, 31 December, 2003.
24. Telephone interview with Ram Y. Uppuluri, 10 February, 2004.
25. The plaque's wording and message was drafted by William J. Wilcox. Its content is outlined in the memo cited above.
26. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, 21 July, 2000, p. 5.
27. The works consulted by the Appeals Court were the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), Dietrich Seckel, *Buddhist Art of East Asia* (1989), M. Anesaki, *Buddhist Art in Relation to Buddhist Ideals* (1915), H. Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism* (1994) and H. Hackmann, *Buddhism as a Religion: Its Historical Development and Its Present Conditions* (1910).
28. Interview with Shigeo Uppuluri, 4 June, 2003.
29. Shigeo Uppuluri, "Guest Column: The Bell is for Everyone, the Young and the Old," *The Oak Ridger*, 7 August, 1995.
30. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, p. 5.
31. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, p. 5.
32. Robert Brooks v. City of Oak Ridge, Opinion, p. 5.
33. I have adapted slightly the definitional thesis proposed by Bruce Lincoln in "Theses on Method," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8, pp. 225–277; reprinted in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), p. 395, with modifications made by Willi Braun in "Religion," in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion*, London and New York: Cassell, 2000), pp. 10–11.