

Japan killed 17,000 Australians in WWII. Japanese who deny its WWII atrocities are no friends to Australia, so why are Australian politicians supporting them against our most important trading partner?

The Citizens Party is demanding to know why West Australian Liberal Senator Dean Smith used Senate Estimates yesterday to amplify the demands of a former Japanese ambassador to Australia who openly denies Japanese atrocities in WWII.

Senator Smith was citing the demand made by Japan's former Ambassador to Australia Shingo Yamagami in *The Australian* newspaper on 2 December that Australia should speak up in support of Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi against China.

"Some views about China are so one-sided in Australia that a Japanese person who openly denies his country's WWII atrocities is treated as a friend, while our biggest trading partner and WWII ally is treated as an enemy", Citizens Party Chairman Robert Barwick says.

"Japan bombed us, invaded our neighbours, brutalised millions, raped, beheaded, and starved thousands of prisoners, killing 8,000 Australian prisoners of war and 17,000 Australians total.

"The newest seat in Australia's parliament, Bullwinkel, is named after Vivian Bullwinkel, the only survivor of the Bangka Island massacre in Indonesia in 1942 when 22 Australian nurses and one civilian woman were raped by Japanese soldiers, ordered to walk into the sea and machine-gunned to death.

"Japanese who now deny its atrocities are no friends to Australia; they are insulting the thousands of Australians who made the ultimate sacrifice in WWII against their aggression, and Japan's millions of other victims in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia."

Barwick notes that Shingo Yamagami is part of a political faction in Japan who are WWII revisionists, regularly honour Japan's WWII war criminals who are memorialised in its notorious Yasukuni Shrine, and seek ways to sidestep Japan's pacifist constitution to re-militarise.

Yamagami is reportedly a close advisor to PM Takaichi, who is also part of that faction, as was her mentor the late Shinzo Abe—both regular visitors to the Yasukuni Shrine and opponents of its pacifist constitution.

Atrocity denialism

On 16 August this year, the day after the world commemorated the surrender of Japan 80 years ago, Yamagami attacked a BBC reporter on X (Twitter) for saying Japan has "never really confronted or acknowledged the atrocities committed by its imperial army".

Yamagami took fierce exception to the word atrocities: “Punitive lecturing by this ignorant and self-righteous BBC reporter is utterly sickening. ‘Atrocities’? Did Imperial Japan try to annihilate (*sic*) other race in an organized and planned manner?”

On 6 November, Yamagami openly denied the horrible truth about the thousands of women the Japanese forced into prostitution called “comfort women”, in a post on X congratulating a discredited academic for “refuting the notion of ‘comfort women = sex slaves’”.

When he was challenged about his “right-wing Japanese nationalist denialism for WW2 actions”, Yamagami responded: “You should open your eyes widely and follow the facts if you do not want to be brainwashed by post-war left-wing propaganda.”

From his time as ambassador, Yamagami is good friends with many Australian politics, especially in the Liberal Party.

His X account shows that his farewell dinner in 2023 was attended by now former Liberal politicians Scott Morrison, Peter Dutton, Marise Payne, Simon Birmingham, and current Secretary of the Department of Defence Greg Moriarty.

Barwick asks, “Why do the same Australian politicians who trashed our relationship with China choose to ignore Yamagami’s abhorrent views, which are an insult to our war dead?”

“Why is Senator Smith siding with him to attack Australia’s—and especially his own state’s—most important trading partner?”

“Australia should speak up—to denounce Yamagami’s views, and express concern to Japan about the growing trend, in the political faction pushing to re-militarise, of denying their WWII atrocities and honouring the perpetrators.”