

## **Japanese Canadians: A brief Demographic Profile with a Focus on Seniors**

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**DATA:** These data are based on the 2016 census, and represent the most recent figures available for “Japanese” ethnicity. The data are available by city and province, by gender (M/F), by place of birth (Canada/outside Canada), and by age (in ten-year cohorts). There are two important cautions: 1) The data come from a 20% sample of the population (when they find one, they multiply by five to get an estimate). Low numbers are unreliable, and any figure lower than 50 should be read as having a large margin of error. 2) Four years have passed since the 2016 census, with possibly significant changes in the population.

**TOTAL JC POPULATION:** According to the 2016 Census the approximate number who claimed “Japanese” ethnicity in 2016 was 121,485 (56,725 single, 64,760 multiple ethnicity). Over 90% live in 3 provinces: British Columbia (51,145), Ontario (41,145), and Alberta (16,545), followed by Quebec (6,495), Manitoba (2,645) and Saskatchewan (1,225). See Table 1 for a breakdown by single and multiple ethnicities, gender, and province.

**SURVIVORS:** Survivors of the government actions during the 1940s are defined as all those born prior to 1 March 1949, who were living in Canada on that date. They included nearly 22,000 people who were uprooted from within 100 miles of the BC coast, those who were already outside the 100-mile limit (approximately 1,000), and those who were born outside the limit between 1942 and March 1949 (approximately 3-5,000), a total of approximately 26-28,000. In 1988, those still alive within this population received a redress settlement. The redress recipients also included the surviving members of the group of over 4,000 people exiled to Japan in 1946.

Estimating the number of survivors today is difficult because the key community events occurred between censuses. The 1949 survivors are now virtually all over 70 years of age, and the majority of those are over 75. Almost all of them were children in the 1940s. A rough estimate would indicate that there were about 12,000 people aged 68 and over (i.e., born before 1949) in 2016, but only about half of them were born in Canada. Some have died since 2016 of course, but the population of survivors today is likely about 6,000. More than half reside in the province of British Columbia.

**POST 1940S POPULATION:** Population grows in two ways: by births and by immigration. Two major factors distinguish the JC population since the 1950s. First, beginning with the Sansei (third) generation, most of whom are “baby boomers,” the majority of marriages have occurred with a partner of non-JC ethnicity, with the result that today, a majority of JCs—their children—are of multiple ethnicity. Because of intermarriage (which increases the pool of parents) the JC community is growing at a rate of approximately 2% per year, or about twice that of Canada as a whole (but this figure indicates only how population growth is counted; it is not a measure of fertility).

Second, there has been steady immigration from Japan, especially since the 1970s, of approximately 1,000 persons per year. The vast majority of these new immigrants (Shin-Issei) are women, and they are overwhelmingly married to persons of non-Japanese ethnicity. Their children, of course, have multiple

ethnicities. In 2016, 27,245 Japanese-born persons resided in Canada, about half (13,360) in BC, and the majority of the balance in Ontario (8,140) and Alberta (3,060), followed by Quebec (1,725). Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia have over 200 each, and the balance of provinces and territories have very low numbers.

Given the rate of immigration, the fact that the majority of immigrants are of child-bearing age, and the overwhelming numbers of intermarriages, the JC-defined population will continue to grow by at least 2% per year for the foreseeable future.

**GEOGRAPHY:** As noted above, JCs are concentrated in large cities in Canada, notably Vancouver and Toronto. Recent immigrants are even more concentrated in urban areas than are JCs as a whole, creating specific social conditions in places such as Vancouver and Toronto. There will continue to be uneven social conditions between those places dominated by descendants of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century migration (including descendants of survivors), and those places where Shin-Issei and their children make up a significant group. The relative lack of JCs in the Atlantic provinces and in the Territories/Nunavut also creates specific social conditions in those places.

**SENIORS:** Table 1 shows a breakdown of the JC population by age, gender, and province in 2016. In very general terms, although intermarriage means that the “Japanese” identified population is growing, the population of seniors is growing faster. Approximately 14,915, or 12.3% of the JC population, was aged 65 or more. That proportion is slightly lower than the Canadian national proportion of 15.5%. But intermarriage, of both Japanese immigrants and the Canadian-born, has increased the relative numbers in the younger population by shifting the single:multiple ratio. As with the nation overall, without immigration the JC population would age even more quickly. Indeed, the JC population of single ethnicity, where most of the seniors fall, declined somewhat between 2006 and 2016. That number has continued to decline since 2016.

The number of seniors in provinces outside BC, Ontario, and Alberta, and to a lesser extent Quebec and Manitoba, is extremely small.

Immigration has had a profound impact upon the elderly JC population. The proportion of JC seniors born outside Canada is surprisingly high. In 2016, 52% of the 65-74 age group had been born outside of Canada (i.e., in Japan), but only 29% of the 75+ age group was born outside Canada. These figures show that while there was still a group of older survivors, a bulge of post-1940s immigrants had by 2016 entered the 65+ population. They were not, however, evenly distributed. In British Columbia, 55% of the 65-74 age group had been born outside Canada, and that group represented more than half (52%) of all people of Japanese ethnicity (born inside and outside Canada). The pattern varies by province, however, as there are relatively few seniors born in Japan in the prairie provinces.

Note, however, that significant changes have occurred since 2016. At that time, there were over 10,000 persons in the 55-64 age group, so we can assume that a more accurate count of seniors in 2020 (adjusting for deaths among the oldest group) would be 21-22,000, although (because of births and immigration) the proportion of elderly likely will not have changed much. But in the past four years, many of the original Issei in the 75+ age group will have died, and about half of those in the 65-74 age group will have passed the age of 75, which indicates two things: 1) that in 2020 at least half of the JC seniors in Canada are Shin-Issei; and that post-1940s immigration has contributed to a faster rate of aging in the JC population.

To get a very rough idea of what the aging of the JC population looks like, if we take the total of the 2016 population that was 55+ in 2016, it represented 20% of the JC total population. In other words, because of the impact of aging immigrants, the JC population is aging considerably faster than the Canadian population as a whole.

Summary points:

- Intermarriage has increased the population identified with JC ethnicity because it increases the number of potential parents, to the extent that the majority of JC are now of multiple ethnicity.
- Immigration from Japan, even at a current rate of about 1,000 persons per year, has significantly altered the demographic characteristics of the JC population. The majority are women who are married to people of non-JC ethnicity, who have added to the increase in number of children of multiple ethnicity.
- The JC population is aging more quickly than that of the country as a whole, mainly because of the impact of immigration.
- About half of the current estimate of 12,000 seniors are survivors of the uprooting and dispossession of the 1940s. The other half immigrated post-1940s.
- British Columbia has the largest number of JCs, and also the largest number of seniors born in Japan.

For more detailed analysis based on earlier censuses, please see my regular reports to the NAJC prior to 2016, and Takashi Ohki's demographic report based on the 2016 census.