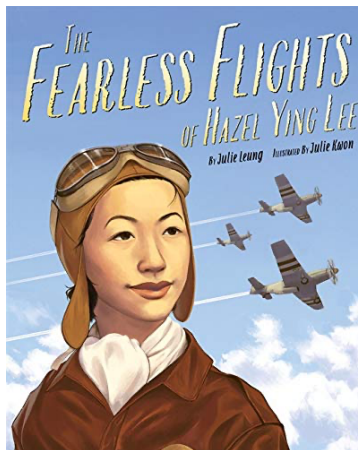


## First Opinion: The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee

Julie Leung. *The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee*. New York, NY: Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2021. Print.

*Caroline Marete*



Julie Leung's *The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee* is a page turner for children and adults alike. Everything about this book from the choice of words to the illustrations are weaved to unpack the complex societal issues faced by many minority women who choose to fearlessly pursue careers in fields where they have not always been welcomed. Hazel Ying Lee's story may seem like a tale from a distance past however, this is the reality of many women in aviation and aerospace careers even today.

Leung takes the readers through the journey of Hazel, a young Chinese American woman as she pursued her dream of becoming a pilot in 1930s America. While we can be certain that Hazel's life entailed much more than what we read in the book, a few highlights in the book caught my attention, and felt relatable as I am a female minority researcher in the aviation and aerospace field. In this review, I will focus on certain areas of Hazel's life that resonate with me, and I believe many women in my profession. These areas include our society's view of women in male dominated fields, the role of women in the history of aviation, challenges in financing pilot training, and the place of minority women in the aviation industry.

In the book we see an illustration of Hazel's family at the dinner table where Hazel declares she wants to be a pilot. In response, her mama warned, "But it's just not ladylike." This is a phrase that many women in aviation can relate to, whether it be from a close family member who means well, or from a stranger who has no clue what the women speaking can do. As Leung notes, in the 1930s less than one percent of pilots were women. According to the 2021, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) airmen data, about six percent of commercial pilots are women. Nearly a century later, and the number of women aviators has not significantly changed. For a long time, our society has viewed aviation as a career for men. Women that choose careers in aviation are viewed differently. Highlighting the fearlessness and persistence of women aviators like Hazel Ying Lee is key in changing our society's view of women aviators.

Hazel achieved her dream of becoming a military pilot by joining the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs). Throughout history of aviation, women have proven themselves as capable aviators. Amelia Earhart is well known for being the first female aviator to fly solo

across the Atlantic Ocean. However, less is known about women like Bessie Coleman, the first African American and Native American to hold a pilot license; or Hazel Ying Lee, the first Chinese American woman to fly for the US military. The WASPs contributed immensely to the World War II efforts by acting as the ferry and test pilots for the US military. Today, women like Eileen Collins, the first female astronaut to pilot a Space Shuttle; and Tammie Jo Schultz, a former navy pilot and Southwest Airlines pilot who safely landed a Boeing 737-700 after the aircraft suffered an uncontained engine failure, to name a few, continue to make momentous contributions to the aviation industry. Women are an important part of the future of aviation, as they have been since the inception of flight.

Hazel, like many aspiring pilots, was faced with the challenge of funding flight training. The cost of flight training is high which can hamper many students from pursuing a career in flight. In the book, we see Hazel working what she called “Invisible jobs” as an elevator operator to pay for flying lessons. As a Chinese American woman this was also one of the few jobs she was allowed to have. While the cost of pilot training is high for most students, the cost can be a deterrent especially for minorities who have less means of funding their training. To bridge this gap, aviation industry stakeholders including government agencies and the private sector should device measures to reduce cost of training and increase training for minority students.

Even at their best, minority women may not always feel accepted in their workplace. Despite safely crash landing in a field, a feat that many cannot accomplish, Hazel encounters a farmer who comments, “Well, you sure made a pretty landing.” Hazel wonders if she will ever

be accepted as American. Even in today's workplace, I believe this an unspoken concern many minority women harbor at the back of their minds.

Leung and Kwon, in the story of Hazel Ying Lee, capture the myriad and complex issues faced by minority women in the aviation field. This book offers great lessons for young girls who feel their interests and passions are untraditional. Furthermore, the book provides a brief history of aviation and the place of women in the aviation field. It is a story of courage and breaking barriers.

#### **About an Author**

**Caroline K. Marete** is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Purdue University, School of Aviation and Transportation Technology. Dr. Marete's research interests include air transportation sustainability, and gender issues in aviation/aerospace education and aviation/aerospace industry. She has previously worked in the global aviation industry in the airlines industry, international aviation regulation, aerospace manufacturing and transportation policy research. Dr. Marete is passionate about planning for the future of the aviation and aerospace sector which include an industry that embraces diversity, equity and inclusion of all people.