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*Wings for the Rising Sun: A Transnational History of Japanese Aviation* by Jürgen P. Melzer (2020, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center)

When you think of Japanese aviation, what comes to mind? Modern passenger jet planes with the names of JAL or ANA on them? Or something more historical, such as the Zero fighter or the infamous *kamikaze* planes? Of course, there is much more to aviation and Japan than images such as these. Indeed, Melzer's excellent study is not really concerned with either of them. Not only that, the book points to why the study of Japan's aviation world is of importance to those studying a much wider range of issues.

Having spent more than twenty years studying aspects of the transportation world in relation to Japan, one of the sources of constant frustration for me has been that, regardless of what studies have actually covered, there has been a tendency for far too many people to assume that transportation-related studies are not relevant to them as it involves transportation, whether it be trains or planes. For whatever reason, many seem to assume that such subjects are not likely to have wider relevance or that they will be overly concerned with engineering-related issues, for example. This is a situation that needs to change, and Melzer's study is a prime example of why. While the book contains a wealth of information about engineering and design, it is by no means the main thrust of the book.

The title of the book is both helpful and, to some degree, misleading. Beyond the main title, we are presented with a subtitle of 'A transnational history of Japanese aviation'. From this, it may be fair to assume that the book covers the whole history of Japanese aviation. It does not. Although there is a chapter, entitled 'Epilogue', that fills some key issues from 1945 to the present day, the book is primarily concerned with the period up to 1945. While the

‘Epilogue’ is an interesting addition, it was perhaps an unnecessary addition as it suffers somewhat from not presenting a full-enough picture of the domestic (let alone international or transnational, in terms of flights rather than plane manufacture) passenger or freight market, as well as the constant battle than many face when discussing contemporary issues that time moves on and what was up-to-date at the time of writing no longer fits by the time a book is published or read (this applies particularly to the section discussing the Mitsubishi Regional Jet, as it was still called at the time that the book was written).

My personal knowledge of the Japanese aviation world is based much more on the period that the book does not cover in detail – i.e., the contemporary and recent history (such as the JAL flight JL123 crash of 1985). However, a general interest in aviation and the need for all of us in Japanese studies to include more transnational approaches to our research and teaching attracted me to this book. My knowledge of the pre-1945 Japanese aviation world was based largely on the image mentioned near the beginning of my review and knowledge that the first plane flight in the world happened in Japan, albeit only about 36 metres long, in 1891 some 12 years before the Wright brother’s flight which is widely credited as being the world’s first powered flight. Sadly, I have never managed to find a way to include the achievements of Ninomiya Chūhachi in my work – and, somewhat surprisingly, it does not get a mention in Melzer’s study either.

Another aspect of Melzer’s study that interested me is that the period it primarily covers (1900 to 1945) overlaps with the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, and World War II (as well as other key events of this period) which I have some knowledge of, primarily for teaching undergraduate Japanese Studies, but also for contextual knowledge of understanding Japan. One of the aspects of Melzer’s book that I enjoyed the most was how this book has helped

me get a much more sophisticated understanding of some of the things that were happening in Japan during this period – indeed, some of what is written, and I have no reason to doubt its accuracy as the book comes across as meticulously researched, undermines some of my previously held assumptions and knowledge. There are two areas that particularly jump out in this respect.

I have always taken it as a given that there can be, and often is, a close relationship between the Japanese government and media companies in Japan. While such thoughts are mostly about the contemporary world, I have always assumed that it has long been the case – and indeed, that during a time when Japan was becoming more nationalistic and potentially gearing itself up for war, it would be even more the case. Melzer's study, however, points out how much of the development of the aviation industry in Japan was thanks to the work done by the media, largely in isolation from, and at times in contrast, to the stance that at least some parts of the state (keeping in mind that there were sometimes different positions being taken by the army, navy, and the rest of the government).

Another close relationship that I have always believed to have been of significance prior to World War II was that between the government and *zaibatsu*. After all, the breaking up of the *zaibatsu* was one of the goals of the Occupation as the relationship was seen as having been so significant. However, when it comes to aviation at least, the relationship between the government and companies (not all of which were part of the *zaibatsu*) was clearly not as cosy as I had assumed. Indeed, if one were to try to pin-point what single relationship was most significant in the development and aviation in Japan, it would be Japanese domestic aviation manufacturers and foreign aviation manufacturers.

That brings us to the other key word of the book's subtitle – 'transnational'. While the focus is first and foremost about the Japanese aviation industry, through chapters dealing with different countries, namely France, Germany, Britain, and the United States, we learn about how the 'transnational' relationships helped to transform Japan's aviation industry. But, if you are expecting to find discussion of how Japan copies from the 'West' to advance, you will find that this was not the case. This is despite the fact that countries – most particularly Britain and the United States – not only continued to supply Japan with information and materials but took a somewhat arrogant position of believing that the Japanese were still copying and had not managed to develop their domestic production and would not even be make good aviators. Even in the run up to Pearl Harbor there are elements of the American government that were unaware of just how far domestic production had become – despite the fact that there was no lack of evidence that Japan had long moved from copying to innovation and significant advances over their 'Western' counterparts.

One thing that the title of the book itself does not make clear, although the cover image conveys some of it, is the significant role that pubic enthusiasm played in the development of Japan's aviation world. While such public support did not exist in isolation and it was fostered and developed by the media and government in a variety of ways, the out-pouring of support, sometimes in the form of voluntary financial donations, is in perhaps stark contrast to an expectation that the aviation industry in Japan may have been born merely from a collaboration between the military, government and *zaibatsu*.

As noted above, in many respects I do not feel that the 'Epilogue' chapter was a necessity. Indeed, rather, I feel as though there is one area that was not fully explored or discussed and could have been worthy of this space in the book – the Zero. While the book is not devoid of

mentioning the Zero (albeit not consistently calling it by one name) – given that the book has the potential to become the primary source for people to turn to in relation to aviation in the first half of the twentieth century in Japan, it is a shame that more was not done to cover this most iconic and well-known of Japan's planes from this period. There may be other books, documentaries, and movies that handle the Zero in some way, but I, for one, would have been interested to learn more specifically how the Zero fits into the overall picture that Melzer presents in the book.

There are a few other things which could have been improved – there is a distinct lack of maps (though a very welcome inclusion of photographs and other figures), some inconsistency over spelling of Manchuria/Manchukuo and Gloster/Gloucester, but such things really should not, and largely do not, detract from what is an extremely well-written and beautifully presented book. While until now I suspect if someone were to read about Japan's development of transportation in the Meiji to Shōwa periods, they may have turned to those studies dealing with the railways or navy ships, Melzer's book has excellently made the case that aviation is worthy of study, not merely for understanding the development of the industry itself, but also for gaining a much better understanding of the workings of the Japanese state, media, and public during this period.

Reviewed by Dr Christopher Hood, Cardiff University