

A Brief History of the ALPO-Japan

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In a science magazine for young people, "Kodomo no Kagaku", Isamu Hirabayashi, a high school student in Tokyo addressed, in 1959, the readers of the magazine "If you are interested in observing the moon and planets, please come and join me." 3 high school students joined Hirabayashi. Their names are Hideyuki Karasawa, Masaharu Murakoshi and Norio Kaifu. Of these original 4, Kaifu became a professional astronomer and later became the director of the National Observatory of Japan and the president of the International Astronomical Union. Other 3 have continued to be active amateur astronomers until now.

Many young amateurs joined this group and it became larger and stronger. This group of observers was originally named "Japan Lunar and Planetary Observers Network (JALPON)." But this name was displaced by the name ALPO-Japan. Unfortunate point of the new name is that it leads to misunderstanding that the ALPO-J is the Japanese branch of the (American) ALPO. As told, the ALPO-J is an independent organization initiated by 4 high school students in Tokyo. Returning to the original name may cause larger trouble because the name ALPO-Japan is already known internationally.

In 1974 Makoto Adachi organized the Western Japan Branch of the ALPO-Japan. At first lunar observing was the center of the activity of the members of the branch. Later the center gradually moved to planetary observing. The branch opened their website in 1996. In 2008 it merged with the website of the headquarters of the ALPO-J. Accordingly, the branch ceased.

Telescopes used by the members of the ALPO-J in earliest days were self-made 8-cm and 10-cm Newtonian reflectors and commercial 5-cm or 6-cm refractors. The member's telescopes become larger and larger and the largest at present is a 40-cm Newtonian owned by Isao Miyazaki. Schmidt-Cassegrain of a little smaller in aperture are being used by many members. The method of observing was visual and drawing in early days. Gradually photographic observations increased and flourished during 1970s. At present imaging with electronic cameras and computer technology is common, but a few most experienced observers are still making visual observing.

On Aug.24-25,1974, the First Jupiter Conference was held at Sendai Observatory, Sendai City. On Sept.9-10, 2017, the ALPO-J celebrated the 40th Jupiter Conference at Meiji University, Tokyo. This is an amateur/professional conference because a fair number of ALPO-J members are now professional planetary scientists.

In 1981, two volume of a book titled "Planet Guidebook" was published by the ALPO-J. The most important part of the book is on Jupiter by Hirabayashi. It has 150 pages and describes detail of various phenomena on Jupiter. The most of observations used were made by the ALPO-J members.

Relation between the Oriental Astronomical Association (OAA)and the ALPO-Japan:

The OAA, too, has lunar and planetary sections. Is it a rival of ALPO-J ? No! Many members of the ALPO-J are also members of the OAA. Even a member of the ALPO-J, Kuniaki Horikawa is the director of the Jupiter-Saturn Section of the OAA. Also the president of the ALPO-J, Isamu Hirabayashi was the recipient of the highest award of the OAA in 2017. He was the director of Jupiter-Saturn Section of the OAA from 1971 to 1989.

Captions of photographs:

1) Original 4 and early members of the JALPON (later ALPO-J).

The photograph was taken at Mr.Komori's house on Jan.10,1960.

Mr. Komori served those young astronomers as an adviser.

2) Isamu Hirabayashi received the Highest Award of the OAA on Oct.28,2017,

The photograph was taken by Kuniaki Horikawa.



【Appendix】

* This document was written by Mr. Takeshi Sato in Hiroshima, Japan in December, 2017 for “The Strolling Astronomer” (2018 Spring Issue) of ALPO.

* He was the leader of the observation and research of Jupiter in Japan for long term and was the Director of Jupiter - Saturn Section of OAA from 1952 to 1971 .

* He was the member of BAA and ALPO.

* He received [The ASJ Award for the Outstanding Achievement by Amateur] of The Astronomical Society of Japan on March 28, 2006 and the Highest Award of the OAA on Sept. 27, 2003.

* He was passed away on 4th of March, 2018.

(Isamu Hirabayashi)

Mr. Takeshi Sato (50th Anniversary party of ALPO-J in 2009 at Tokyo)

