

WHAT CAN WE DO FROM JAPAN?

KEIICHI KODAIRA

National Astronomical Observatory of Japan,

Mitaka Tokyo 181, Japan.

e-mail: Kodaira@cc.nao.ac.jp

Although the importance of astronomy as a field of basic science and a discipline of fundamental education is well recognized among us, it is not always easy to share this recognition with those people whose interests are tightly bound to their daily lives on the Earth, even within one country. The activities of the Japanese within the "Neighborhood Program" are reviewed and brief discussions of them are presented.

1. Researchers' Collaboration Program

(1) Collaboration in research was promoted in the forms of two-country seminars and workshops and of exchange of researchers, supported by the Japan Society for Promotion of Sciences (JSPS) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). An NAOJ international meeting "Astronomy in Asia" (Kaifu 1996) was held in July 1995 in Tokyo, followed by a meeting "Astronomy Popularization in Asian Countries" (Kogure 1995) at the Bisei Observatory, by a non-governmental initiative, of which the second meeting took place in August 1996.

(2) Young Astronomers' Meeting. A voluntary meeting of young astronomers (mainly graduate students) in the north-east Asian countries took place each summer in the last four years, and one was held this year in Beijing. A few collaboration programs in actual research are taking a form which seem to be promising.

2. Facility and Material Supports

(1) Official Development Assistance (ODA). Several of education/research telescopes and also several of planetarium equipment were supplied to Asian countries through the ODA program (Kitamura 1997). This program is managed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and substantiated through consulates by JICA. Since the location, the building, and the personnel for operation are provided by the partner countries, it is important to secure their quality in advance in order to make the program actually effective (Kogure 1997).

(2) There are non-governmental voluntary movements to assist neighborhood countries by supplying small telescopes or astronomical journals. A trial in the former category is initiated by the Nishiharima Observatory. Among the latter category, the Astronomical Society of Japan has a special assistance program about its publication (PASJ), besides some personal activities.

3. Training Program

(1) In the 1980s the visiting lecturer program (VLP) was popular, but in the 1990s more long-term visitors came to Japan to get acquainted with observational technology and engineering at various national institutions. The visitors often became later the cores of collaborative research programs.

(2) A training program of public educators from Asian countries started at the Bisei Observatory by a voluntary initiative, partly driven by the necessity of the after-care of the ODA program. The local public observatories in Japan, such as the Bisei Observatory, can share their know-how in the popularization efforts in astronomy practised in the local districts, though the differences in the cultural and the economical background must be respected.

4. Discussion of Prospects

I am looking forward to new developments in the following.

(1) The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture is preparing an international cooperation program to send out "Education Advisers". If this project is realized, VLP may be supported.

(2) The local public observatories in Japan, together with their amateur supporters, may assist neighboring countries when they need to train public educators. If they are in charge of telescopes in their home countries, they may be integrated into a network of collaborative observations of, for example, variable stars, nova, or the Sun, comets, and planets (Isobe 1995). For such projects, computers and work-stations may be necessary, for which some assistance is already being provided through ODA as well as through a private initiative.

(3) The "Star Watching Program (SWP)" (Kosai 1988) might be recommended to the neighbor countries. SWP was introduced in Japan in the late 1980s; a nationwide campaign was led by the Ministry of the Environment to monitor the sky brightness by watching the faintest stars observable with the naked eye or simple equipment. The magnitude of the faintest stars observable in these ways can provide a rough index of the clearness and darkness of the night sky, which indirectly reflects the degree of energy consumption and the industrial activities of the local district (Isobe 1996). This kind of simple program may attract the interest of citizens as well as governments to their environment and, further, to the largest environment, the universe.

(4) IAU may serve as the central information server for contact persons who wish assistance in the popularization, education, and training in astronomy. Whoever feels a need for such help may contact the central server of IAU to find an appropriate counterpart, though personal initiative and commitment are essential in this kind of activity. The speed of communication may increase as networks develop.

5. References

- Isobe, S. (1995), *Highlights in Astronomy*, **10**, 160.
 Isobe, S. (1996), *Astronomical Herald, Astron. Soc. Japan*, **89**, 506, (in Japanese).
 Kaifu, N. (1996), *Proceedings of an International Meeting "Ground-Based Astronomy in Asia"*, (National Astron. Obs. Japan).
 Kitamura, M. (1997), *Astronomical Herald, Astron. Soc. Japan*, **90**, 228 (in Japanese).
 Kogure, T. (1995), *Proceedings of an International Meeting "Astronomy Popularization in Asian Countries"*, (Bisei Observatory, Okayama)
 Kogure, T. (1996), *Astronomical Herald, Astron. Soc. Japan*, **90**, 277, (in Japanese).
 Kosai, H. (1988), *Astronomical Herald, Astron. Soc. Japan*, **81**, 314, (in Japanese).