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●NASA、宇宙探査機復活させるクラウドファンディング・プロジェクト承認

【Chicago Tribune, 2014/05/26】

NASA は、1978 年に打上げられ、太陽風や彗星の調査に使われた後、1997 年に運用が終了した宇宙探査機「InternationalSun-EarthExplorer-3/International Cometary Explorer」を民間科学者グループに譲り渡すことを決めた。

同探査機は今年 8 月、地球周辺に戻ってくる見込みで、民間グループはこれを機に探査機の制御を取り戻すことを試みる。

同グループは、そのための資金として 12 万 5000 ドル超をクラウドファンディングで集めることに成功。NASA も同グループを支援する姿勢を見せており、グループが探査機との通信を確立するための技術データを提供することを約束している。

(参考) 本件報道記事

NASA OKs crowd funded bid to revive deactivated satellite

By Irene Klotz, Reuters

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A group of citizen scientists can take over a 36-year-old decommissioned robotic space probe that will fly by Earth in August, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said last week.

Launched in 1978, the International Sun-Earth Explorer-3 spacecraft studied how the stream of charged particles flowing from the sun, the so-called solar wind, interacts with Earth's magnetic field.

After completing its primary mission, the probe was given a new name, the International Cometary Explorer, and new targets to study, including the famed Halley's Comet as it passed by Earth in 1986.

A third assignment, to investigate powerful solar storms, followed until 1997, when NASA deactivated the spacecraft.

In August, the satellite's graveyard orbit around the sun will bring it back by Earth, a feat that caught the eye of a group of citizen scientists.

Last month, the team launched a successful crowdfunding project that raised

more than \$125,000.

The project has received NASA's blessings and access to technical data to help engineers make contact.

"We have a chance to engage a new generation of citizen scientists through this creative effort to recapture the ISEE-3 spacecraft as it zips by the Earth this summer," John Grunsfeld, NASA's associate administrator for science, said in a statement.

The agreement gives Skycorp Inc., a California company working with the citizen scientists, permission to attempt to contact and control the satellite, thought to still have fuel and working instruments.

"Our plan is simple: we intend to contact the ISEE-3 spacecraft, command it to fire its engines and enter an orbit near Earth, and then resume its original mission," wrote Keith Cowing, a former NASA engineer who runs the NASA Watch website.

"If we are successful, it may also still be able to chase yet another comet," Cowing said.

"New data resulting from the project will be shared with the science community and the public, providing a unique tool for teaching students and the public about spacecraft operations and data-gathering," NASA said in a media release. The spacecraft must change its orbit no later than mid-June if it is to have a shot at a new mission, the project website shows.

Photo(s) Photo: The International Sun-Earth Explorer-3 probe, built in 1978, may get a new lease on life. NASA ILLUSTRATION

Source: Chicago Tribune, 2014/05/26

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