

Preliminary examination plan and subsequent analytical procedure of captured samples by aerogel in the Tanpopo mission

Kyoko Okudaira^{1*}, Akihiko Yamagishi², Hajime Yano³, Hikaru Yabuta⁴, Makoto Tabata³, Shin-ichi Yokobori², Eiichi Imai⁵, Kensei Kobayashi⁶, Hajime Mita⁷, Hideyuki Kawai⁸, Masumi Higashide³, Satoshi Sasaki⁹, Tanpopo WG³

¹The University of Aizu, ²Tokyo University of Pharmacy and Life Science, ³JAXA, ⁴Osaka University, ⁵Nagaoka University of Technology, ⁶Yokohama National University, ⁷Fukuoka Institute of Technology, ⁸Chiba University, ⁹Tokyo University of Technology

The Tanpopo mission is a Japanese astrobiological experiment which will be conducted on the Japanese Experiment Module (JEM) of the International Space Station (ISS) [1]. The Tanpopo mission consists of several subthemes: 1) capture of microbes in space, 2) exposure of microbes in space, 3) exposure of organic compounds in space, 4) capture of organic compounds (in micrometeoroids) in space, 5) evaluation of ultra low-density aerogel developed for the Tanpopo mission, and 6) capture of space debris at the ISS orbit (approximately 400 km altitude).

Here, we overview Preliminary Examination Team (PET) analysis and subsequent analytical procedure of aerogel samples for the mission, i.e. analyses for the subthemes 1, 3, 5, and 6 described above. Silica aerogel with 0.01 g cm^{-3} density supported by higher density aerogel [2] will be used to capture micrometeoroid and space debris at LEO. Captured particles and their penetration tracks will be offered for various analyses after retrieval to Earth. These samples will be analyzed for mineralogical, organic and microbiological characteristics.

In this paper, current status of Tanpopo-Aerogel-PET preparation will be introduced. In Preliminary Examination (PE), Curation team covers the receipt of retrieved samples (Sample Aerogel Panels), sample catalog preparation for data archiving and sample storage. Whole documentation team deals with penetration track mapping, penetration track measurement (e.g. incoming angle, track depth and track volume) and evaluation of aerogel as a capture medium. Processing team prepares keystones and quickstones (small pieces of aerogel) containing particles and their penetration tracks for allocation to researchers. After preliminary characterization, the samples (tracks and/or particles in keystones/quickstones) will be properly processed in accordance with a request by each sub team for the subsequent detailed analyses.

Aerogel panels attached to zenith (space)-facing side will be allocated mainly to Organic and Inorganic Sub-Teams, and ones attached to ram-facing side (facing east) to both Debris and Microbe (terrestrial origin) Sub-Teams, while ones facing north to all Sub-Teams. We plan to preserve basically one of each aerogel panel for storage in the scope of future analyses and possible provision to researchers.

References

- [1] Yamagishi A. et al., *Trans. JSASS Space Tech. Jpn*, 7, (2009) Tk_49-Tk_55.
- [2] Tabata M. et al., *Biol. Sci. Space*, 25 (2011), 7-12.

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