

China builds observatory at South Pole

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An international team led by China has installed an automated space observatory at Dome Argus, the highest point on the South Pole.

The Polar Research Institute of China completed installation work last month on the fully robotic Plateau Observatory on the Antarctic icecap peak, which is 13,428 feet above sea level.

Texas A&M astrophysicist Lifan Wang said data from the observatory are expected to provide insights into the universe once possible only through observations from space.

"Dome Argus is believed to be the best site for ground-based astronomy," Wang, head of the Chinese Center for Antarctic Astronomy, said in a release. "Unlike the stormy Antarctic coast, the plateau is a very quiet place with very low wind speed. It is the coldest and driest place on Earth. These are critical conditions of a good site at which to build an observatory."

The observatory must operate completely unattended until Chinese scientists return to Dome Argus next January, the university said.

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