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Study: black diamonds came from outer space

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BEIJING, Jan. 10 (Xinhuanet) -- If you feel "spaced out" when you think of proposing marriage to the woman you love -- think black diamonds.

Scientists have long been puzzled by their origin, but new evidence reveals these charcoal-colored gems formed in outer space.

Stephen Haggerty and Jozsef Garai, both of Florida International University, analyzed the hydrogen in black diamond samples using infrared-detection instruments at the Brookhaven National Laboratory and discovered the quantity indicated the mineral formed in a supernova explosion.

Conventional diamonds form hundreds of miles beneath the Earth's surface, where high pressure and heat turn carbon into diamonds. Volcanic blasts send the gems in a short amount of time to the surface where they can be mined.

"This process preserves the unique crystal structure that makes diamonds the hardest natural material known," said Sonia Esperanca of the National Science Foundation, who was not involved in the research.

About 600 tons of conventional diamonds have been traded since 1900. Black diamonds reside in certain geologic formations in Brazil and the Central African Republic.

Also called carbonado diamonds, meaning "burned" or "carbonized" in Portuguese, black diamonds defy mineral-making rules and are never found in the world's mining fields where the clear and classic variety typically resides.

Haggerty has suggested black diamonds might have rained down on Earth inside meteorites billions of years ago. Their relative distribution on Earth could be explained by the timing of the formation of the continents, he said.

The new research was published in the journal *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

(Agencies)

Editor: Gareth Dodd

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