

57年出访苏联，毛主席观看3部秘密电影，回国后安排绝密任务

On a visit to the Soviet Union in 1957 Chairman Mao was shown three “secret films,”  
inspiring him to launch a top-secret mission on his return

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Image: 1957-Mao Zedong with the CPSU leaders at Kremlin's Red Square  
Source: kunlunce.com

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## Summary

*In November 1957, Mao Zedong was invited to visit Soviet Union; this was his second and the last visit to the country. On December 16, 1949, Mao Zedong led a delegation on his maiden visit to the Soviet Union. That was the time when the Sino-Soviet relation was in its honeymoon phase. Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin held talks, both the sides signed the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance”, which turned out to be a huge success considering the assistance New China received from the Soviet Union in its pursuit of economy building. During his second visit, Mao Zedong was invited to watch three secret films. Having watched them, he was profoundly stirred. Immediately on returning to China, he initiated a major top-secret task. This article will take you along on a look back journey to this rarely known phase of history.*

### **A Visit to the Soviet Union and Secret Film Screenings**

The year 1957 was the fortieth anniversary of the victory of the October Revolution. The Soviet Union had planned grand celebratory activities. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the council of ministers of the Soviet Union sent an invitation, graciously requesting

Mao Zedong attaching great importance to the invitation, decided to personally lead a delegation to visit the Soviet and join the great celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution. The objective of the visit was to further consolidate friendly ties between China and the Soviet Union, and to get assistance from it in fields such as economy, defence, etc. Even though some differences had started showing in the mutual ties, China and the Soviet Union were still each other’s most trusted partner.



**Image:** 5 November 1957 Mao paying revolutionary tributes to Lenin and Stalin in Moscow

**Source:** kunlunce.com

Being led by Peng Dehuai and Ye Jianying, and with Peng Dehuai as its head, a military delegation also accompanied Mao Zedong on this visit. The three chiefs of the People’s Liberation Army along with important officials from the army, navy and the air force were also a part of the visiting delegation. The main objective of this delegation was to learn about the Soviet Union’s advanced military experience, military technology and to seek

With only nineteen days from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> November, the time available for the visit was rather tight and the schedule was quite compact. However, packed amid such an intense schedule was a very special event, an event which remained wrapped in secrecy all these years.

After having participated in the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution, Mao Zedong held several meetings with the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. “Comrade Mao, today evening at the Kremlin, we have arranged a very special programme for you, after watching it you will certainly find it to be a real eye-opener,” said Khrushchev with an air of mystery while talking to Mao Zedong one day. “Is that so? I must watch it nicely then,” lighting a cigarette, Mao Zedong calmly remarked. Seeing that Mao Zedong was not excited at all, Khrushchev felt a little disheartened and said, “Are you not interested at all in knowing what the programme is all about?”



**Image:** Mao and Khrushchev in Moscow in November 1957  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

Mao looked at Khrushchev and said with a smile, “You see, the thing is that my biggest strength is that I am not a very curious person.

You wish to tell me, please be my guest. If you do not wish to tell me, I could not care any less.”

Khrushchev’s spirits were dampened suddenly, he said, “I will just tell you then. This evening you will watch three secret films related to the Soviet Union’s biggest military secret.”

Curling his lips in disbelief, Mao Zedong asked, “How come you want to show us your biggest military secret? Stop playing games with me.” Khrushchev smiled and said: “The screenings I have arranged for you are all about atom bomb and hydrogen bomb. No doubt these are our real military secrets. However, other members of your delegation can also join these screenings but that is your call.” Mao Zedong nodded, expressing thanks to Khrushchev.

That afternoon, Mao called over Peng Dehuai and said to him: “General Peng, this evening Khrushchev has arranged for some secret films for us to watch, about atom bomb and hydrogen bomb. You let other comrades know about it as well. These films are worth watching for sure. We also want to make atom bomb, hydrogen bomb. So, we must first learn from others, we must see how the Soviets made them.” Peng Dehuai replied, “That’s great! I too wanted to ask the Soviets about this! The United States of America and the Soviet Union both have atom bombs, and they use them to

intimidate others. I also want to see how big a deal it really is!”

*Time: Evening, eight o'clock; venue: screening room in Kremlin's mini-auditorium.*

Mao Zedong, Peng Dehuai, Deng Xiaoping etc. entered the venue. Waving his right hand, Mao Zedong greeted the other members of the delegation present there. He then sat in the middle seat of the first row, with Peng Dehuai sitting by his side.



**Image:** The first Soviet atom bomb explosion  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

The film began. It was a documentary film about the nuclear weapon, with a simple introduction of the explosion principles of the atom bomb and hydrogen bombs such as nuclear fusion, nuclear fission. Later the documentary talked about the might of the two bombs, their damage and destructive elements such as shock waves, radiation, radioactive contamination, electromagnetic pulse...

Soon the visuals of the explosion of the atom and hydrogen bombs appeared on the screen. The explosion had led to the formation of a

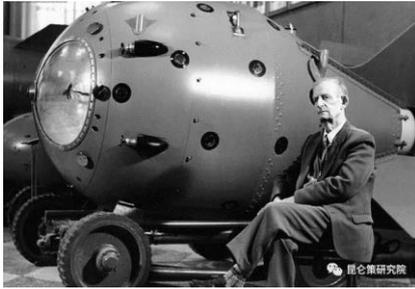
mushroom cloud reaching the sky. It was a shocking scene. The audience there indiscernibly felt a suffocating air of death. Peng Dehuai looked at Mao Zedong with a side-glance and discovered that Mao was watching the documentary with intense concentration.

Further in the documentary, real visuals of the damage and destruction caused by the bombs were shown, “these are the exhibits of the damage to the animals and the buildings caused by shock waves, radiation from different distances...”

Watching the corpses of animals on screen, the ruins of the buildings, Mao Zedong leaned towards Peng Dehuai and murmured, “Seems like this thing is really something.” “True,” Peng Dehuai inched a little closer and continued speaking: “However, there is always a way to deal with a new weapon such as this.”

From the screen came the sound of the commentary: “Ways are available to guard against nuclear weapon explosions.....coming up next is the way to estimate the radioactive contamination and the way to clear it up.....with such an equipment, damage can be reduced...” At this point Mao Zedong said smiling: “Not bad! It seems like the shield and the spear are being produced simultaneously, right?” Peng Dehuai nodded his head, saying: “Hmm... the Chairman is right. There would

certainly be a way to defend against the atom bomb.”



**Image:** First Soviet atom bomb  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

Later, the hosts also screened a film showing the Soviet army carrying out war-exercise under a mock nuclear war condition. The image of Peng Dehuai appeared on screen too. Actually, Peng Dehuai too had also participated in the mock military exercise. Pointing towards the screen, Peng Dehuai said to Mao Zedong: “It was the CPCCC and the Chairman who decided I must take part in the mock military exercise. However, I did not learn anything. The Soviets had concealed all their secrets really well from us!”

Nodding his head, Mao replied: “This is the biggest military secret of the Soviet Union. That we could watch these films is really wonderful.”

After three hours, the screening got over. Both Mao and Peng left the screening hall, but both seemed to be yearning for more, they were still talking eagerly. Turning towards Peng, Mao said: “The might of the atom bomb is really frightening, but it is absolutely necessary as

well. We must study the advanced science and technology of the Soviet Union. This time we have specially come with a military delegation. Comrade Jianying has also come, many high-ranking officials have come too. They all must be told to seize this wonderful opportunity, learn well, watch well the advanced science and technology of the Soviet Union, especially the cutting-edge strategic weapons like the atom bomb, hydrogen bomb, and the nuclear submarine which was recently launched. Our delegates must be instructed to learn more, do more of research and analysis, because in the future we too have to make atom bomb, hydrogen bomb! Am I right or wrong?”



**Image:** Soviet leader Khrushchev greets and welcomes Peng Dehuai, Ye Jianying in Moscow in 1957  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

“Absolutely, the Chairman is absolutely right. After two days, the hosts will arrange for our military delegation to visit different places, as instructed by the Chairman we will see well, learn well.” Peng Dehuai replied nodding his head again and again in agreement.

On their way back to the room, Peng Dehuai was telling others, “Atom bomb, Hydrogen bomb are really something, their damage and

destruction ability is immense. In the past only America had atom bomb, it used it to intimidate everyone everywhere. During the “War to Resist America and Aid North Korea,” America even tried to intimidate us (China) with the atom bomb. Now with the Soviet Union also having the atom bomb, the American monopoly has been smashed. The Chairman was said China too will make atom bomb in the future.”

Upon hearing these words from Peng Dehuai, the delegation members felt invigorated.

Peng Dehuai continued speaking, “No doubt we will have to spend a lot to make atom bomb, our economy is quite weak at present, we ‘should tie our stomach fast’ to get through such a tight situation. But in order to deal with the imperialist aggression, for the safety and security of our nation, we must make atom bomb, there is no other alternative. One day, we will hear the sound of our atomic bomb too.”

### **A Show of Great Foresight, Decision to Develop the Bombs**

In fact, way back in January, 1955, Mao Zedong had the foresight to make the strategic decision of developing China’s nuclear energy and develop nuclear weapons. Mao Zedong had once said in a talk, “Should we make atom bomb or not, hmm... in my opinion, we

should. However, we will not be the first one to use it for attacking others. Yes, if others bully us, attack us, then we must defend ourselves, we must counterattack.” Mao’s decision to develop atom bomb had a great deal to do with the “War to Resist America and Aid North Korea.”



**Image:** Hydrogen bomb  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

In 1951, MacArthur, infuriated with defeat after defeat in the North Korean battlefield, would raise a hue and cry exclaiming, “We have already prepared twenty-six nuclear weapons, and soon we will make the Chinese taste their might.” By 1953, the American forces were continuously retreating in defeat, making America anxious to extricate itself from the war. Yet President Eisenhower boasted that America was prepared to drop an atom bomb on the Korean peninsula to force China and North Korea into armistice. This had really upset Mao Zedong very badly.

In ‘*On the Ten Major Relationships*’ which Mao wrote in April, 1956, he put forth the main tasks for the building of socialism in the future, and he once again brought up the matter of developing atom bomb. He said: “Today we

are stronger than yesterday, tomorrow we have to be stronger than today. We do not just need to have more fighter planes and artillery. We also need to have atom bomb. In today's world, if we do not want to be bullied by others, we cannot not have atom bomb.”

The truth had forever stayed within the range of the cannon, and in the nuclear age, the truth was in the hands of those who had nuclear weapon.



**Image:** China's successful atomic bomb, October 1964  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

Mao Zedong was well aware of this aspect. That is why he put forth the idea that while the nation develops its economy, the national defence industry should be developed simultaneously as well. Otherwise though China's economy will bloom, but militarily China will be in a passive position and will be taking blows, will be bullied, just like it was humiliated during the late Qing dynasty.

Under the instructions of Mao Zedong, in September 1957, leading an industrial delegation Nie Rongzhen and Song Renqiong visited the Soviet Union. During the visit, they signed the “National Defence New Technology

Agreement” with the Soviet Union pertaining to modern weaponry equipments and industrial research on atom bomb. The Soviet Union had promised to provide China with technological assistance in the industrial arena of guided missiles and atom bombs. However, the signed agreement was a mere framework and it was still a long way to go before it was implemented on the ground.

No sooner did Nie Rongzhen returned from the Soviet Union than Mao Zedong reached the Soviet Union.

This time while in Soviet Union, Khrushchev invited Mao Zedong to watch three “secret films”. It was obvious that Khrushchev was showing off and flexing muscles. But having watched the formidable might with his own eyes, Mao Zedong's resolve to develop atom bomb, hydrogen bomb got even more resolute. Soon after returning to China, Mao Zedong decided to initiate a top-secret mission—the development of the bombs.



**Image:** A smiling Mao on 16 October 1964  
**Source:** kunlunce.com

On 21 June, 1958, the Central Military Commission held an enlarged meeting and the work of developing atom bomb was formally

included in the agenda of the meeting. During the meeting, the image of the mushroom cloud formed because of the atom bomb explosion was constantly flashing in the mind of Mao Zedong. He passionately elaborated his views, saying:

“Atom bomb is such a big deal that people say if you do not have it you are nothing. Okay, we will have it then. We will make atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, intercontinental missiles. I believe we can achieve the goal with working hard for ten years.”

Atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, guided missiles at that time were projects with the highest degree of technological difficulty. For example, America’s “Manhattan Project” had gathered the best scientists of its time. It took a total of more than one lakh people, in three years’ time, with a cost of two billion US dollars to develop just one atom bomb. But these words from the mouth of Mao Zedong, “atom bomb is such a big deal”, but it is not a colossal deal, “given ten years it is completely attainable”, abundantly displayed the revolutionary optimism of a great man.



**Image:** Sino-Soviet Friendship  
**Source:** agefotostock.com

So just like that, with these words of self-confidence, the mission “Two Bombs, One Satellite” was formally kicked off.

However, in June, 1959, the Sino-Soviet relations turned sour. The Soviet Union abrogated the “National Defence New Technology Agreement”, with it they also withdrew all their experts, only leaving behind some incomplete blueprints and spare parts, thus leaving many scientists and researchers completely dejected. Western nations like America, England etc. made fun of China saying “even after twenty years, China won’t be able to make atom bomb”. Khrushchev too made quite a fuss about the Soviets being indispensable in China’s quest for atom bomb.

In the face of being ridiculed by the great powers, Mao Zedong resolutely decided that China will make atom bomb on its own. In powerful and rousing words, he exclaimed, “Khrushchev refuses to give us advance technology, great! Had he given it to us, we would have always reeled under the burden of debt”.

True, had we tasted the flavour of assistance from a foreign nation, we would have never been able to master the nuclear technology; we would have always been under the control of others. Only when we stood on our feet, took initiative, became self-reliant were we able to have our own advanced weapons, without being indebted to others.

In June, 1959, China itself, formally named its atom bomb project as “Project 596”. All the scientists and researchers got going to make an atom bomb which will bring glory for the people of China.



**Image:** Mao being welcomed at Moscow Railway Station, 1957  
**Source:** net-film.ru

On 16 October, 1964, China successfully detonated its first atom bomb.

On 17 June, 1967, China followed this by successfully detonating its first hydrogen bomb.

Once while meeting foreign dignitaries, Mao Zedong in response to their high praises for the success of China’s “Two Bombs, One Satellite” enterprise replied humorously:

“All this is the result of the help from Khrushchev. By withdrawing experts, he forced us to pave our own path. We must thank Khrushchev, and to do so the Chinese people must bestow upon him a huge, one tonne medal!”

Deng Xiaoping once said:

“Had China not had atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, had it not launched satellites, today it would not have enjoyed the status of an influential nation, it would not have gained the international status it has today.”

Today when we are making huge strides along the path of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, it is even more essential for us to always remember the great contributions Chairman Mao made for the modernization of China’s armed forces and national defence.

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This text is dedicated to the great helmsman Chairman Mao, the people of China will always cherish your memories, because as the saying goes, when you drink the water, think of those who dug the well.

**[Series editor: Hemant Adlakha]**

*The views expressed here are those of the original author and not necessarily of the translator or of the Institute of Chinese Studies*

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