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China wants its values shown in cartoons

CARTOONS from page 11

commentators worry that some foreign comics, particularly violent, sexy Japanese cartoons, are a bad influence. And they complain they don't teach kids about China or Chinese things.

Parents browsing through the children's section of a big state-run bookstore in Beijing said they are picky about what their kids read.

"Children can't choose for themselves," said a politics teacher from neighboring Hebei province who identified himself only as Mr. Luo.

"I choose books I think will be good for my child," he said, referring to his 5-year-old daughter. "You have to be careful because some books aren't healthy."

A recent investigation in the central city of Wuhan found that 80 percent of children's books were based on foreign cartoons. Many were violent and bawdy, the China Education Daily said.

"One problem with some imported cartoons is their contents are unhealthy. Also, the life and family values they promote do not meet the country's requirements regarding children's development," said Kou Xiaowei, a senior publishing official.

"The children we rear today are China's builders of the next century. So first and foremost, we should give them things to read that reflect the special qualities of the Chinese race and cul-

ture," said Kou, the book publishing director of the Press and Publication Administration.

The administration, the government's overseer of books, including comics, has teamed up with the Propaganda Ministry to promote 15 Chinese-style cartoons.

Among the four already written are "Young Chinese Genius," which tells the stories of historical figures including Confucius, the godfather of Chinese philosophy, anti-opium campaigner Lin Zexu, and Li Bai, one of China's most revered poets.

It seems to matter little to officials that Li was also a drunkard who reputedly drowned, inebriated, in a stream. More than 200,000 copies have sold, netting the publishers \$120,500 in profits, Kou said.

"Soccer Boy" is another government favorite. It follows its young protagonist, Xindi, as he rises to the national team under a coach who preaches obedience and teamwork —

qualities the Communist Party is promoting in a public morality campaign that started this month.

"It reflects the life of young Chinese today," Kou said of "Soccer Boy," which is supposed to be on shelves before the year's end.

According to the official Guangming Daily, the government plans to pay bonuses to TV networks that broadcast Chinese-made cartoons, and tax the imports. That might help publishers of domestic cartoons compete with foreign companies, some of which have provided cartoons to broadcasters for free.

Kou said the government does not intend to ban high-quality cartoons, including Disney's, but "unhealthy publications" will have to go.

Ultimately, kids likely will decide the winner of China's cartoon conflict, said Kou's colleague, Chen Yingming: "If China's 300 million children all like Mickey Mouse, there's not much to be done."

'Sesame Street' takes on a Russian air

MOSCOW (AP) — "Sesame Street" is brought to you today by the letter "Ya."

The Russian version of the popular American children's program hit TV screens this week. Along with numbers and Cyrillic letters, producers hope it will help teach a new generation of Russians to live in a democratic society.

Ulitsa Sezam, as the show is called here, is not a pure American transplant and has a distinctly Russian air, reflecting Russian life and values.

The set has moved from New York's brownstones to a Moscow courtyard, the home of three new brightly colored Muppets, a Russian family and their neighbors.

Scenes filmed in Russia are combined with segments featuring familiar "Sesame Street" characters for messages that cross cultural boundaries.

Bert and Ernie have become Vlas and Enik, and the Cookie Monster is Kek, a kind of Russian muffin.

The Russian version is produced jointly by Children's Television Workshop in New York and the Russian firm VideoArt, relying on

funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Soros Foundation and the Nestle food company.

The producers sought suggestions from teachers and families on the show's content, and the new characters reflect their concerns.

For instance, a big blue Muppet named Zeliboba tries hard to be polite and show good manners.

The other Muppets — or Mukli in Russian, adapted from Kukli, the word for puppets — are bright pink Businka, who finds joy in everything, and neon orange Kubik, a pensive problem-solver.

"In the Russian program, we want to focus on independence and on building self-confidence, and give children the feeling that they can accomplish anything they want to," Natasha Lance Rogoff of CTW told The Moscow Times.

Action revolves around the home of 8-year-old Katya and her parents. Her mother is a pediatrician who tends a garden, while her father, a store manager, challenges the stereotype of a Russian man by cooking and helping care for his daughter.

They are joined by Aunt Dasha,

a neighbor, who is a preserver of Russian folklore and traditions.

The producers said one of their main goals was to help children understand what it means to live in a democratic, diverse society and give them confidence in a world vastly different from the one their parents knew.

Like the American program, the Russian version of "Sesame Street" promises to promote racial harmony and celebrate cultural diversity.

Although the Soviet state officially touted ethnic friendship, it persecuted some groups and did not address other, often bitter divisions that since have come to the surface in Russia.

Chechens and other people from the Caucasus Mountains face particularly harsh discrimination in Russia, and the Ulitsa Sezam producers have plans to introduce a family from the region.

The program airs during prime time, just before the evening news on NTV, Russia's top private television station.

"Sesame Street," which began in the United States in 1969, now has productions in 40 other countries in 14 languages. The American version is shown in 50 countries.

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Smithsonian exhibit displays great American musicals

WASHINGTON (AP) — Take the oompah of a German beer-hall band, the rhythm of African drums, the warble of Italian opera, the shuffle of an Irish jig, a twitter from England's Gilbert and Sullivan.

Throw them all into the melting pot and you get an American musical.

Two museums of the Smithsonian Institution have put them all together. They came up with "Red, Hot & Blue" — a show of some 400 videos, nickel-odeons, sheet music by George and Ira Gershwin and Irving Berlin and Judy Garland's red velvet dress from "Meet Me in St. Louis."

"When I went through it, I felt as if I were drowning — my whole life passed before my eyes," said Kitty Carlisle Hart, 82, actress, operetta singer, television star and two-term chairman of the New York State Council on the Arts.

She appeared at a news conference Tuesday to launch the show, which opens Friday at the National Portrait Gallery. It takes its title from a Cole Porter hit of 1936.

Dwight Blocker Bowers, co-curator of the exhibit from the National Museum of American History, said the American musical goes back long before that — to the day in 1866 when the New York Academy of Music burned down.

The 100 dancers of the Great Parisian Ballet Troupe had no place to perform. The manager of Niblo's Garden, a New York theater, was persuaded to incorporate them into "The Black Crook," a not-very-good drama adapted from a German opera.

"It was a great success," Bowers said. "The dancers didn't have anything to do with the play, but they wore flesh-colored tights and looked as if they were naked."

Or as the New York Tribune reported at the time:

"Though we cannot say that anything was done for the dramatic art ... we can heartily testify that Scenic Art has never, within our knowledge, been so amply and splendidly exemplified."

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