The importance and impact of arts and culture can be seen in world-class cities like New York, London, Paris, and, closer to home, Tokyo and Shanghai. Hong Kong as an international city has potential to be a world-class cultural hub, some would assert.

At The University of Hong Kong, the Endowed Professorships Scheme has played a role in advancing the arts and humanities on campus and off.

Although the number of such professorships in the arts is relatively small compared with other fields, it has been slowly gaining the attention of benefactors. Since 2005 the lone Endowed Professorship in the arts, the Hon-Yin and Suet-Fong Chan Professorship in Chinese, was joined by the M B Lee Professorship in the Humanities and Medicine in 2010.

Two other endowed professorships in the arts and humanities include the Tung Lin Kok Yuen Professorship in Buddhist Art and Culture and the Glorious Sun Professorship in Buddhist Studies, both launched in 2007.

For the Faculty of Arts, the Centre for the Humanities and Medicine is a major focus of the endowment. Kam Louie, recipient of the M B Lee Professorship in the Humanities and Medicine in 2010, is also the Dean of Arts.

The Centre, the by-product of an innovative partnership between the faculties of arts and medicine, was set up to explore areas including the relationships among disease, health, culture and society, and the humanisation of the understanding and practice of medicine.

The Centre has hosted seminars, lectures and conferences. Two events reflect those goals: a public lecture on “When Humanitarianism Goes to War” and a seminar on “Global Health and Conspiracy Theories.” The Centre is also keen on fostering faculty exchanges and is currently hosting Professor Didier Fassin, Visiting Research Professor from the Institute for Advanced Study in the United States.

Daniel Chua, Chairman of the Centre for the Humanities and Medicine, and Head of School of Humanities said: “Hong Kong needs people who can be advocates for culture. If you endow a professorship in music or literature you are making a significant statement about the value of the arts and cultural leadership.”

At HKU the humanities also includes Buddhist Studies. The University is home to one of the few centres of Buddhist Studies in the world, and grants undergraduate and advanced degrees. For Glorious Sun Professor in Buddhist Studies K L Dhammajoti, the endowment has allowed him to produce a dictionary of terms from Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan, which further foster the studies of Buddhism.
Venerable Dhammajoti, a Buddhist monk, is a leading scholar on the “Sarvastivada Abhidharma”.

The benefactor of The Tung Lin Kok Yuen Professorship in Buddhist Art and Culture said: “The Buddhist teaching is wondrously profound and art is a universal form of expression. We believe that the value of Buddhist art as a direct inspiration of wisdom and compassion could well serve humanity.”

At the Faculty of Social Sciences, Endowed Professorships have funded initiatives that have directly contributed to community wellness.

The community is the major beneficiary of the Endowed Professorships Scheme.

As the recipient of the Henry G Leong Professorship in Social Work and Social Administration, Nelson W S Chow has used the funding to study poverty and launch programmes that benefit the elderly. Chow is the course director for the Henry G Leong Programme on Holistic Care for Elderly People.

Cecilia L W Chan, Si Yuan Professor in Health and Social Work, launched “The Better Health for Better Hong Kong” Health Promotion Campaign. Chan runs HKU’s Centre for Behavioral Health, which offers training for healthcare professionals, degree programmes, and consultations and wellness programmes for community members.