SINGAPORE: Hong Kong's tycoon and philanthropist Li Ka Shing has been described as one of those good corporate leaders from the private sector who are willing to give back to society what they have gained from it.

Dr Li is also a person who is driven by a strong passion for education.

Speaking at the official launch of the Li Ka Shing Library at the Singapore Management University (SMU) Campus, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew noted that the entrepreneur and philanthropist had donated $19.5 million towards the endowment of the library and eight scholarships a year.

He said such private funding would help SMU build up a world-class education, much like the universities in the United States, such as MIT and Yale that have greater autonomy and flexibility to retain top talent.

Since 1980, the Li Ka Shing Foundation and other private charities associated with him have donated more than HK$7.6 billion to education and medical institutions in Hong Kong and other countries.

Mr Lee said: "Dr Li's donation underscores the importance of philanthropy and corporate support that our institutions of higher learning will need in order to become more independent like the US universities and become centres of excellence.

"The Li Ka Shing Library stands in a central location in this new city campus. It will be a rich repository of knowledge for those who tread through the vast collections within its shelves. Even with the internet and a myriad of online search engines and e-books, libraries will have a central role.

"In tune with the times, the Li Ka Shing Library has been designed to have a cafe, a 24-hour reading room and wireless connections. It will support SMU's teaching and research as an information gateway."

The library has about 100,000 books and another 12,000 electronic documents and journals in its collection.

But the University says that it is not about how big its collection is but what is more important is that the library provides access to information and services for faculty members.

Ruth Pagell, University Librarian, said: "Well the other libraries that I've seen or been part of has a long history of building up print collection and we obviously don't. It is five years old. I would like us to be emphasising access, service, delivery. One of my colleagues refers to it as "just-in-time" collection.

"What happens in academic libraries is that the books will sit on the shelf, because somebody might want them so we think in terms of what is it that SMU needs, find ways to get it for them and when they need it, to be looking at different electronic options, to be looking at different partners which we will take time to build up.

"I would like this library to be seen as the intellectual hub and a centre for research for faculty, as a place for students to come and collaborate." - CNA/de