

**The Representation of Power Through Space:
A Study of HSBC Building's Urban and Architectural Signifiers**

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Abstract

The Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) Building stands as the headquarter of the most powerful bank in Hong Kong. Designed by the renowned architect Sir Norman Foster and celebrated as an icon of High-tech architecture, it holds a significant position among the city's landmarks. In addition to its significance, the HSBC Building has also been involved in numerous major events in Hong Kong, particularly those related to financial and political power. Given the prominent background of HSBC Building, what urban and architectural elements signify financial and political power? How does the perception of power within the building evolve over its forty-year history? This research investigates the two questions by examining HSBC Building's interaction with financial and political power across the urban, architectural exterior, and architectural interior scales. This thesis argues that power, though abstract and multifaceted, manifests in tangible forms within HSBC Building. Significant displays of power are evident in the building's urban setting, architectural style, construction, and spatial arrangement. However, recent architectural alterations and gestures suggest a shift in power dynamics. This change reveals the role of architecture as a tool for showcasing, providing, and retracting power.

Keywords: power and space; symbolism in urbanism and architecture; financial power and architecture; political power in architecture; public spaces; protest spaces

Introduction

Architecture serves as a symbol of its creators and occupants, with design choices carrying significant connotations of power¹. HSBC Building commands power not only by housing the biggest bank incorporated in Hong Kong but also through its architectural elements².

HSBC Building is a compelling subject for study due to the significant events it has witnessed throughout its forty-year history in Hong Kong. From 1985 to 2024, the Hong Kong has undergone pivotal events closely intertwined with the building's existence. In the early 1980s, Hong Kong experienced economic growth, benefiting HSBC. HSBC subsequently expanded and required a larger headquarter, leading to the construction of HSBC Building³. Its completion not only symbolized the bank's pride but also represented a source of pride for Hong Kong, as evidenced by its depiction on banknotes and the hosting of its opening ceremony by the British governor at the time^{4 5}. Constructed during the British colonial era, the building witnessed the handover of Hong Kong to China and served as a backdrop for significant protests, including those that originated in its ground floor lobby⁶. Following major protests, alterations to the lobby suggest a shift in its openness to protestors, linking to the recent political atmosphere in Hong Kong. Throughout its history, HSBC Building has been intimately involved in many critical Hong Kong events, particularly those concerning financial and political power dynamics. Given that spaces are both shaped by and can shape power dynamics, studying how

¹ Minkenberg, Michael. *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2014.

² HSBC, "HSBC in Hong Kong," About HSBC, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://www.about.hsbc.com.hk/#:~:text=%E7%AE%80%E4%BD%93-,HSBC%20in%20Hong%20Kong,bank%20incorporated%20in%20Hong%20Kong>.

³ HSBC, "Taking shape: 1986 Hong Kong head office," accessed February 12, 2024, <https://history.hsbc.com/collections/snapshots/housing-the-bank/taking-shape-1986-hong-kong-head-office?>.

⁴ HSBC, "1985 HK100 banknote design," accessed February 12, 2024, <https://history.hsbc.com/collections/snapshots/serving-our-customers/100-years-of-hkd100-banknotes/1702208-1985-hk100-banknote-design?>.

⁵ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

⁶ Ibid.

HSBC Building reflects and interacts with these dynamics offers valuable insights into the manifestation of financial and political power in architectural space⁷.

While HSBC Building has been studied by many, a comprehensive and in-depth study of the building's connection to power remains elusive. A study has explored the significance of the siting and location of HSBC Building along Victoria Harbour⁸. However, this study has not sufficiently focused on how the unique location of HSBC Building contributes to its display of power⁹. While one publication touches upon the importance of HSBC Building's location in Statue Square, particularly in relation to urban power dynamics, this discussion could be further elaborated¹⁰. An existing study shows how HSBC had influenced the urban fabric of Statue Square, indicating the bank's power in Hong Kong¹¹. However, by integrating the concept of Feng Shui, a more robust discourse can be formed, providing deeper insights into the relationship between architecture, power, and local cultural beliefs. Some studies on HSBC Building primarily focus on its High-tech architectural style and structural innovation, with limited exploration of the deeper meanings conveyed by the building^{12 13}. The cutting-edge architectural design of HSBC Building has been briefly linked to the progress of Hong Kong and the financial power of HSBC¹⁴. Yet, there is a lack of in-depth explanation of this statement¹⁵. Furthermore, there are a few studies that delve into the empowerment of the wider public facilitated by the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building^{16 17}. However, these studies are somewhat outdated, failing to account for recent changes to the ground floor space following major protests from 2011 to 2019. These changes, indicative of shifting power dynamics, warrant further investigation. Currently, research on the connection between HSBC Building and power is fragmented across multiple publications, suggesting the need for a more cohesive and comprehensive analysis. Additionally, other relevant studies on power and HSBC Building will be discussed in the section titled 'Power and Space of HSBC Building.'

Research on power and HSBC Building appears to be fragmented and lacking a cohesive focus. This research aims to address this issue by synthesizing existing studies on power shown in HSBC Building, expanding upon these concepts, and providing a comprehensive update on the topic. The aim is to contribute to the architectural discourse in Hong Kong, offering insights into the layers of power inherent in arguably one of the most powerful structures in the city. The study of the power shown in HSBC Building can provide a reference for architects, designers, developers, and members of the public. This research could help readers understand the architectural elements that contribute to a powerful structure. Furthermore, this study endeavours to demonstrate how abstract concepts can be translated into tangible architectural elements across different scales. This conceptual framework has the potential to extend beyond the confines of this specific building, shedding light on how other abstract ideas have shaped architectural endeavours elsewhere.

Although the research may be beneficial to the architectural discourse of Hong Kong, there are two main limitations. As the research of HSBC Building is based on a qualitative method, it may result in relatively objective findings. There could also be a high chance that the results of this research may not be directly

⁷ Edelman, Murray. *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

⁸ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bremner, G. A. "Fabricating Justice: Conflict and Contradiction in the Making of the Hong Kong Supreme Court, 1898–1912." *In Harbin to Hanoi*, 151-. Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2013.

¹¹ Alain Le Pichon. "In the Heart of Victoria: The Emergence of Hong Kong's Statue Square as a Symbol of Victorian Achievement." *Revue LISA* 7 (2009): 605–25. <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.151>.

¹² Heathcote, Edwin. 2018. "How 'High Tech' Became the Architectural Style of Globalisation." London: Ft.com.

¹³ Williams, Stephanie, and Cape, Jonathan, "Hongkong Bank: The Building of Norman Foster's Master," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1989, Dow Jones & Company Inc.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

¹⁷ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

applicable to other structures in another context. Some of the architectural features could only show power in this context.

This research aims to study how the intangible concept of power is materialized in the urban and architectural features of HSBC Building. This research will focus on financial and political power shown in HSBC Building. This research endeavours to offer a comprehensive exploration of the manifestations of power within HSBC Building, spanning multiple levels and encompassing diverse scales. This research is motivated by the following questions. How does HSBC Building in Hong Kong demonstrate power across various scales from 1985 to 2024? How does HSBC Building's siting and orientation amplify its display of financial power? How does the incorporation of costly High-tech features and structural innovation convey notions of financial power within HSBC Building's design? How does the elevation of a building and the liberation of ground floor space contribute to empowering the wider public?

The thesis is structured into three distinct sections, each exploring the concept of power at one scale. The first section '**Victoria Harbour and Statue Square: The Urban Scale**' focuses on the urban scale, which encompasses the context and location of HSBC Building. This section touches on its siting in Statue Square along Victoria Harbour and its sightline to the harbour. The urban setting is linked to financial power. In the second section '**High-tech Style and Costly Construction: The Building Scale**', attention turns to the building scale, with a specific focus on the architectural exterior. In this section, the High-tech style of the building and the construction cost and process will be studied. Global acclaim of HSBC Building will also be linked to the financial power shown in HSBC Building. The third section '**The Ground Floor Space for Public Access and Assemblies: The Interior Scale**' focuses on the architectural interior of the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building. The nature of power in this scale is seen differently from the urban and building scales. Political power is investigated in this scale. This section examines how the elevated design of the building facilitates a crucial connection between two main roads, enabling pleasant daily passage for office workers. Moreover, the expansive and sheltered ground floor space, accessible to the public, empowers individuals from diverse backgrounds, including foreign domestic workers and protesters. The three sections will explain how power is represented spatially and how the form of power differs from one scale to the other. The research will conclude with a comparative analysis of the three sections and offer a comprehensive summary of the entire study.

Power and Space of HSBC Building

Power is identified as 'the ability to control people and events'¹⁸. The study of power and space lies at the intersection of multiple disciplines, including politics, urban planning, architecture, and art¹⁹. Architecture is often linked to the concept of power. Architecture serves as a visible manifestation of power, wealth, and the ideals upheld by its creators²⁰. A building can be a medium through which authorities convey meaning, often shaped by the political and cultural contexts in which it exists²¹. Architecture is usually seen as the symbol and identity of its builders and users²². On the one hand architecture and works of art reflect realities, they also create realities²³. In this sense, architecture not only embody its social-political environment, but it also helps create the environment.

¹⁸ Cambridge Dictionary, "Meaning of power in English," accessed February 29, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/power>.

¹⁹ Minkenberg, Michael. *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2014.

²⁰ Braunfels, Wolfgang. *Urban Design in Western Europe. Regime and Architecture, 900–1900*. Translated by Kenneth J. Northcott. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

²¹ Vale, Lawrence J. *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

²² Minkenberg, Michael. *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2014.

²³ Edelman, Murray. *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Power is observed mostly in public architecture²⁴. Albeit not being a public building, HSBC Building display power in two main ways. One of them being the financial power, the other being the power to assemble, which is about political power. First, financial power is shown in HSBC Building. The prime location along Victoria Harbour of HSBC Building reflects its power in Hong Kong²⁵. Victoria Harbour is a competitive arena for buildings to stand out prominently amidst the cityscape²⁶. HSBC Building sits at the heart of Victoria Harbour, enjoying an unobstructed view without any neighbouring structures²⁷. Statue Square, the site of HSBC Building, holds significant political weight as it houses notable institutions such as the Hong Kong Supreme Court, City Hall, and the Hong Kong Club²⁸. HSBC Building not only occupies a prominent position within Statue Square but also owns a portion of the square²⁹. The bank made a commitment to preserve Statue Square as open space in perpetuity, ensuring an unobstructed view of Victoria Harbour³⁰. Financial power is also shown in HSBC Building with its influential High-tech architectural style and international recognition³¹. The building garnered widespread praise and continues to exert influence to this day³². Being designed by a world-famous British architect, Sir Norman Foster, makes HSBC Building more prestigious³³. HSBC Building was the costliest building at its time of completion, showcasing the bank's wealth and influence in the 1980s³⁴. Second, the power to assemble is shown in the bank headquarter. HSBC Building is associated with the empowerment of domestic workers, as it facilitated their gathering by freeing up the ground floor space for their use³⁵. In addition to empowering domestic workers, the ground floor space of HSBC Building also served as the starting point for protesters during a significant protest in Hong Kong from 2011 to 2012³⁶. HSBC Building has been linked to power across various scales despite being a private bank headquarter.

Historic Background: Hong Kong and HSBC Building

The construction of HSBC Building in the 1980s was necessitated by the expanding financial power of HSBC. The bank had outgrown its previous headquarter and required a larger space to accommodate its operations³⁷.

Located at 1 Queen's Road Central, Central, Hong Kong, HSBC Building was designed by a British architect, Sir Norman Foster. The structural design was by Ove Arup. Hong Kong is a territory located at the southern tip of China. Hong Kong has been a British overseas colony for more than 150 years from 1841 to 1997. The HSBC was started for British trade in China. The bank has been headquartered in Hong Kong for over a century, consistently ranking as one of the top global financial institutions. Until today, HSBC is still the biggest bank in Hong Kong, a city boasting its status as an 'international financial hub'. Construction of HSBC Building started in 1981 and is completed in 1985. HSBC Building is the 4th headquarter building for HSBC. In the 1980s, HSBC benefited from the thriving economy of Hong Kong since China opened its doors in 1978. Many consider

²⁴ Minkenberg, Michael. *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2014.

²⁵ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

²⁶ Sullivan, Maureen. "Architect Shapes Hong Kong Skyline --- Remo Riva Wants to Build Churches and a 100-Story Tower." 1997. *Wall Street Journal*, B10: 10.

²⁷ Wang, Weijen. "Feedback." *domus*. June, 2016.

²⁸ Bremner, G. A. "Fabricating Justice: Conflict and Contradiction in the Making of the Hong Kong Supreme Court, 1898–1912." *In Harbin to Hanoi*, 151-. Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2013.

²⁹ Alain Le Pichon. "In the Heart of Victoria: The Emergence of Hong Kong's Statue Square as a Symbol of Victorian Achievement." *Revue LISA* 7 (2009): 605–25. <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.151>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ HSBC, "Taking shape: 1986 Hong Kong head office," accessed February 12, 2024, <https://history.hsbc.com/collections/snapshots/housing-the-bank/taking-shape-1986-hong-kong-head-office?>

HSBC Building to be an exemplar of the High-tech architectural style. The design utilizes a suspension structure to create a column-less internal space.

Victoria Harbour and Statue Square: The Urban Scale

The study of HSBC Building's relationship with financial power on the urban scale focuses on examining the location and urban setting of the site in Statue Square along Victoria Harbour.

Located at the centre of Victoria Harbour skyline makes HSBC Building powerful. Victoria Harbour is a harbour between Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula (**Figure 1**). The view of Hong Kong Island from across Victoria Harbour is one of the most photographed scenes of Hong Kong from it being a small fisherman village to becoming an international financial hub³⁸. The creation of the Victoria Harbour skyline and the colonial history of Hong Kong are inseparable. The harbour's deep, sheltered waters and strategic positioning along the South China Sea played a pivotal role in the establishment of Hong Kong as a British colony, laying the foundation for its evolution into a prominent trading hub in the region. The British aimed to utilize the unique geography of Victoria Harbour as a trading port. Consequently, they initially acquired Hong Kong Island in 1843, followed by the acquisition of the Kowloon Peninsula in 1860, to leverage both sides of Victoria Harbour for trade. Victoria Harbour served as a vital trading port and gateway to China, establishing Hong Kong as a pivotal international business hub in Asia. Victoria Harbour arguably serves as the genesis of the modern Hong Kong we witness today. Renowned as the quintessential symbol of Hong Kong, Victoria Harbour is inseparable from the city's identity, often serving as the focal point of its recognition. Victoria Harbour is a tangible embodiment of Hong Kong's essence³⁹. Victoria Harbour, especially on the side of Hong Kong Island, vividly showcases the density and commercial vibrancy that define Hong Kong. The skyline of Victoria Harbour on the Hong Kong Island side is notably more prominent than that on the Kowloon Peninsula. This prominence stems from the fact that Hong Kong Island was the first to be developed by the British, resulting in the concentration of major buildings on this side. The side on Hong Kong Island, from Kennedy Town to Causeway Bay, was named 'City of Victoria', which was the capital of Hong Kong during British rule⁴⁰. Consequently, buildings situated on the Hong Kong Island side often carry greater significance. Additionally, this side is frequently photographed as a quintessential representation of Hong Kong. The skyline is dominated by a myriad of towering commercial structures, each catching attention with its distinctive architectural flair. Light-emitting diode (LED) signs and decorative lighting further accentuate the competitive atmosphere, drawing gazes from across the harbour. It's a competitive arena where buildings strive to distinguish themselves amidst the bustling crowd, each one making a bold statement in the competitive landscape of Victoria Harbour⁴¹. HSBC Building is among the multitude of structures that grace the waterfront of Victoria Harbour. The bank building is situated on Queen's Road Central. As the name suggests, Central is near the centre of Victoria Harbour skyline (**Figure 1**). The Central district is located at the centre of the northern side of Hong Kong Island, garnering the most attention and focus within the region. In addition to its geographical location, the Central district also held historical significance as the centre of Hong Kong⁴². During the British colonial era, Central was referred to as the heart of the 'City of Victoria'⁴³. Earning a spot in Central along the skyline of Victoria Harbour symbolizes both power and wealth for building owners. Typically, the structures lining the harbour on Hong Kong Island belong to companies and organizations wielding significant influence in Hong Kong's socio-economic landscape. Among these iconic landmarks are the Central Government Complex, the twin International Finance Centre (IFC) towers, the Bank of China, and HSBC

³⁸ Hong Kong Tourism Board, "10 spots to marvel at Victoria Harbour," accessed February 22, 2024, <https://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/explore/attractions/best-ways-to-marvel-at-iconic-victoria-harbour.html>.

³⁹ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

⁴⁰ Wordie, Jason. *Streets: Exploring Hong Kong Island*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2002.

⁴¹ Sullivan, Maureen. "Architect Shapes Hong Kong Skyline --- Remo Riva Wants to Build Churches and a 100-Story Tower." 1997. *Wall Street Journal*, B10: 10.

⁴² Wordie, Jason. *Streets: Exploring Hong Kong Island*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2002.

⁴³ Ibid.

Building (**Figure 2**). Together, these towering edifices stand as emblems of the most influential institutions in Hong Kong, asserting their dominance over the city's skyline. Securing the central position along the harbour, HSBC Building stands as one of the most formidable structures in Hong Kong, symbolizing power and influence.



Figure 1: Annotated satellite photo of HSBC Building's position along Victoria Harbour. 2024. Source: Leung, Clarisse.

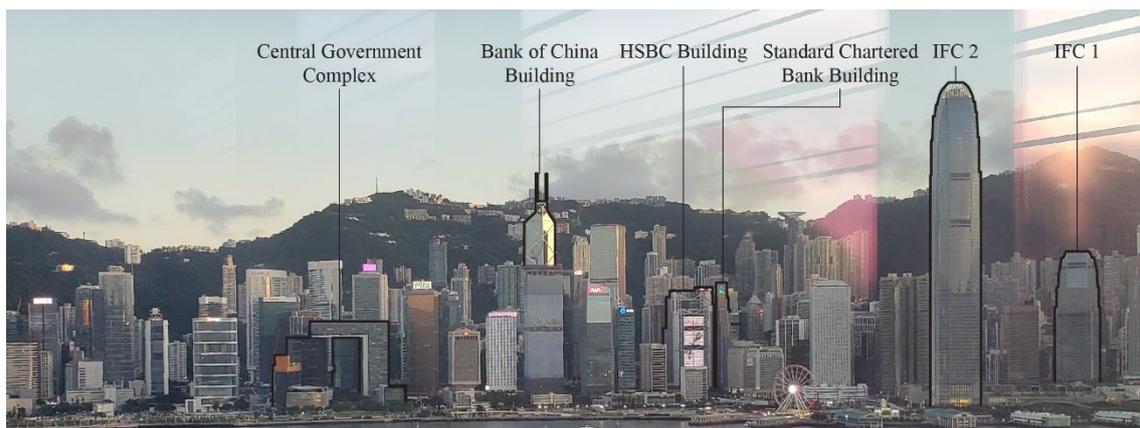


Figure 2: Annotated photo of the key landmarks of Victoria Harbour on the Hong Kong Island side. 2024. Source: Leung, Clarisse.

Zooming into the area surrounding Statue Square in Central, HSBC Building exerts its financial power by being situated amidst some of the most significant buildings in Hong Kong and influencing the urban landscape of

Statue Square. Statue Square has deep roots in the colonial history of Hong Kong, originally named ‘Royal Square’ as a dedication to the British royalty. At its inception, the square housed the statue of Queen Victoria, symbolizing the colonial connection to the British Kingdom. Additionally, Statue Square features a war memorial honouring those who served in Hong Kong during the two world wars, representing the sacrifices made by individuals in the Royal Navy, British Army, and Royal Air Force. Statue Square carries considerable colonial and political weight, being home to institutions such as the Hong Kong Supreme Court, City Hall, and the Hong Kong Club⁴⁴. These important buildings are all related to the colonial history of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Supreme Court symbolizes the legal administration by the British in Hong Kong, the City Hall represents the provision of leisure and education to the public by the British government, and the Hong Kong Club suggests the gathering of the elite during the British colonial rule. HSBC Building, also being a part of Statue Square, indicates British trade in Hong Kong. HSBC Building's position overlooking Statue Square underscores its significance as a presence in a historically and culturally significant colonial site. HSBC Building not only occupies a prestigious site within Statue Square but also plays a role in shaping the overall urban setting of this iconic location. 1 Queen's Road Central, the site of HSBC Building, was originally situated directly by Victoria Harbour^{45 46 47} (**Figure 3**). Statue Square was built on reclaimed land from Victoria Harbour as a part of the 1895 Reclamation Scheme⁴⁸. The former HSBC head office was built a decade prior to the Reclamation Scheme. HSBC wanted to keep its view of Victoria Harbour unobstructed. Hence, a pact was made between the bank manager, Sir Thomas Jackson, and the governor at that time to preserve the space in front of the HSBC head office as an open space⁴⁹. The west plot of Statue Square is owned by HSBC and the east part is owned by the government^{50 51}. In 1901, both the government and HSBC committed to never building on their allotted lots, thus securing the preservation of the open space. The bank affirmed its dedication to maintaining Statue Square as an open space indefinitely by consenting to the proposal⁵². Even though the statue of Queen Victoria has been removed, the presence of the statue of Sir Thomas Jackson serves as a reminder of the significant influence wielded by the bank over Statue Square. This historical narrative of Statue Square underscores the significant financial power and influence held by HSBC. The distinctive urban landscape of Statue Square was shaped partly by HSBC, illustrating how financial power can manifest in the physical fabric of a city. Being situated in the historically significant colonial site of Statue Square, surrounded by other prominent buildings, and remaining unobstructed even during reclamation works on Victoria Harbour are tangible testaments to HSBC Building's enduring power and influence.

⁴⁴ Bremner, G. A. “Fabricating Justice: Conflict and Contradiction in the Making of the Hong Kong Supreme Court, 1898–1912.” *In Harbin to Hanoi*, 151-. Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2013.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ hkmmaps.hk, “Hong Kong Harbour Stages of Public Reclamation,” accessed December 14, 2023, <https://hkmmaps.hk/map.html?1995>.

⁴⁷ Wang, Weijen. “Feedback.” *domus*. June, 2016.

⁴⁸ Bremner, G. A. “Fabricating Justice: Conflict and Contradiction in the Making of the Hong Kong Supreme Court, 1898–1912.” *In Harbin to Hanoi*, 151-. Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2013.

⁴⁹ Alain Le Pichon. “In the Heart of Victoria: The Emergence of Hong Kong’s Statue Square as a Symbol of Victorian Achievement.” *Revue LISA* 7 (2009): 605–25. <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.151>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Bremner, G. A. “Fabricating Justice: Conflict and Contradiction in the Making of the Hong Kong Supreme Court, 1898–1912.” *In Harbin to Hanoi*, 151-. Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2013.

⁵² Alain Le Pichon. “In the Heart of Victoria: The Emergence of Hong Kong’s Statue Square as a Symbol of Victorian Achievement.” *Revue LISA* 7 (2009): 605–25. <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.151>.

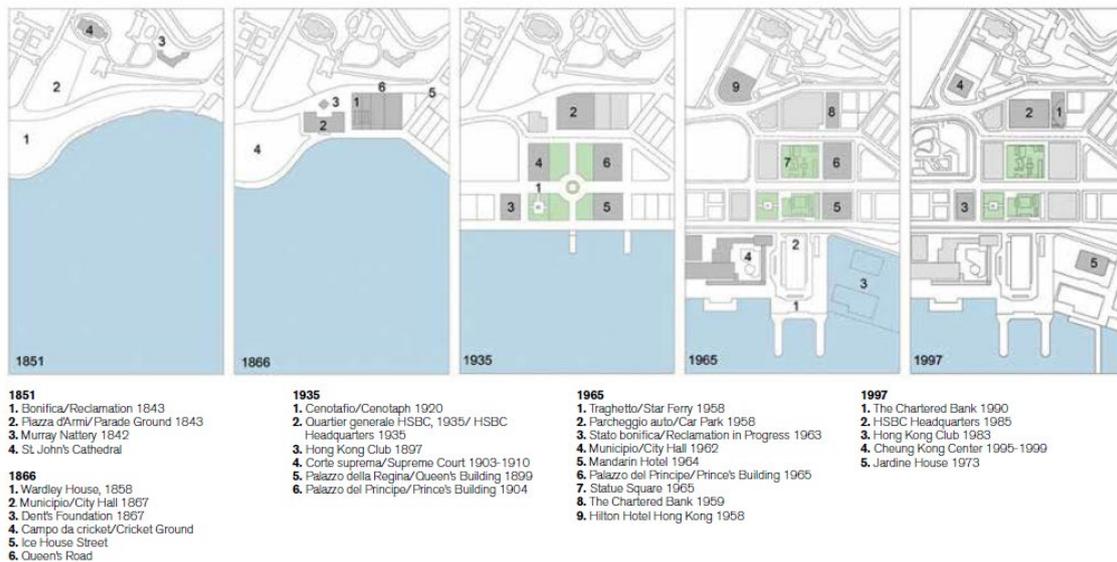
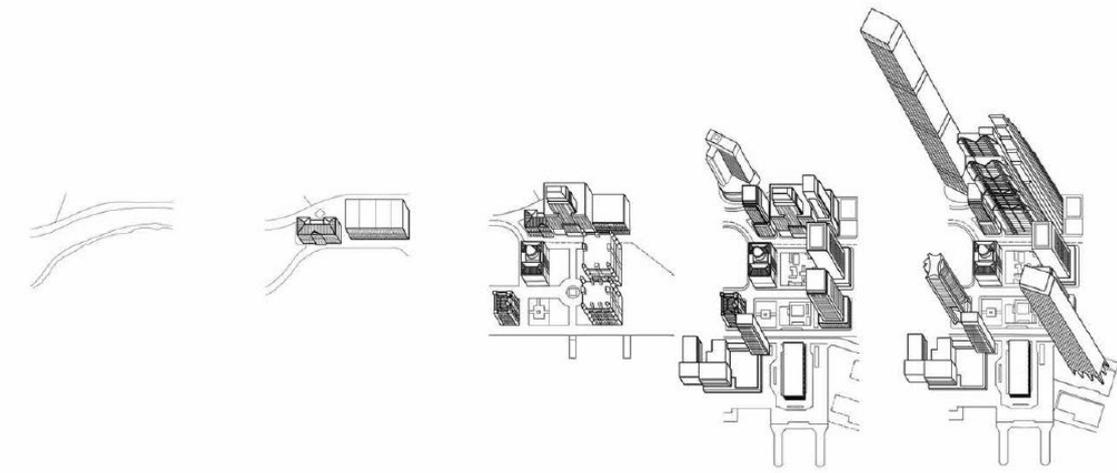


Figure 3: Drawing of the transformation of the buildings around the Statue Square. From “Feedback.” *domus*, June, 2016. Source: Weijen, Wang.

Power is showcased through the sightline of HSBC Building directly facing Victoria Harbour, a design crafted to embody the principles of 'Feng Shui' for fostering financial prosperity. 'Feng Shui' is 'an ancient Chinese belief that the way your house is built or the way that you arrange objects affects your success, health, and happiness'⁵³. The concept of 'Feng Shui' is very often extended from a house to all kinds of buildings with the hope to garner success in multiple aspects⁵⁴. In modern-day Hong Kong, 'Feng Shui' is still widely believed, particularly within the business industry. Securing a site with favourable 'Feng Shui' adds another dimension to the power and potency of the structure. HSBC Building has a rectangular plan that is in parallel to Victoria Harbour, giving the building a strong directionality facing the harbour to the north (**Figure 3**). The sightline from HSBC Building to Victoria Harbour is so pronounced that it seems to establish a visual axis guiding one's gaze from the bank to the waterfront. Flanked by towers on either side of Statue Square, this natural framing

⁵³ Cambridge Dictionary, “Meaning of feng shui in English,” accessed March 15, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/feng-shui?q=feng+shui+>.

⁵⁴ Matthew Keegan, “Hong Kong: the city still shaped by feng shui,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2018.

accentuates the prominence of HSBC Building within the urban landscape⁵⁵. A clear corridor of visibility facilitates unobstructed views between the bank and the harbour, enhancing the building's allure despite its slight distance from the shoreline. This visual corridor to Victoria Harbour is considered excellent 'Feng Shui'⁵⁶. The presence of Statue Square as a garden in front, coupled with its direct orientation towards the waters, contributes to the accumulation of wealth for HSBC Building⁵⁷. It is due to water being associated with wealth in 'Feng Shui'⁵⁸. Desirable 'Feng Shui' conditions are believed to bring financial success and power upon the bank. The site of HSBC Building exemplifies superb 'Feng Shui', wanted by every financial institution in Hong Kong⁵⁹. This form of excellent 'Feng Shui' is absent in the locations of the other two major bank headquarters in Hong Kong, namely the Bank of China and Standard Chartered Bank. Despite being situated on Hong Kong Island, both offices lack a direct visual pathway to Victoria Harbour, as their views of the water, a symbol of wealth, are obstructed by surrounding structures (**Figure 3**). Therefore, it can be inferred that HSBC Building holds the greatest power in terms of its urban positioning, thanks to its alignment with the principles of 'Feng Shui'.

HSBC Building exudes power on an urban scale. HSBC Building occupies a central location along Victoria Harbour, which is a prime location in a fiercely competitive arena. Its site directly facing Statue Square, a pivotal area hosting several significant structures, further enhances its prominence. The fact that HSBC Building will never be blocked by any structures signifies the significant financial power of the bank. Notably, the creation of a visual corridor from HSBC Building to the harbour underscores its prominence within the urban landscape. The excellent 'Feng Shui' of the site of HSBC Building indicates power. These factors collectively reveal the formidable power and influence wielded by HSBC Building within the Hong Kong cityscape.

High-tech Style and Costly Construction: The Building Scale

The study of HSBC Building's linkage with financial power is conducted on the building scale to explore how the High-tech style and costly construction contribute to making the building powerful.

HSBC Building possesses a unique and powerful architectural style, the High-tech style. The High-tech architectural style is generally defined by its lightweight construction, flexible interiors, and expressed construction⁶⁰. High-tech architecture emerged as an evolution of Modern architecture, characterized by its futuristic and innovative design principles. Sir Norman Foster, the architect of HSBC Building, is one of the key influencers of the style⁶¹. The High-tech style conveys notions of power due to its ultramodern and revolutionary nature, setting it apart from other conventional buildings in Hong Kong⁶². The High-tech style conveys the idea that the bank is forward-thinking and ahead of its time. HSBC Building becomes a manifestation of HSBC's power for being innovative. The High-tech architectural style was uncommon in Hong Kong, particularly at the time of HSBC Building's completion in the early 1980s. At the time, traditional high-rise structures typically employ a structural core with stacked typical floor plates⁶³. Instead of opting for a compressive structure, HSBC Building is supported by a tensile structure, which was extremely unique. The tensile structure is prominently expressed on the facade, pushed to the exterior to create a visually striking architectural statement (**Figure 4**). This unique High-tech architectural style makes HSBC Building powerful as it stands out from the crowd. Standing tall at 180 meters, the structure comprises 47 stories and 4 basement

⁵⁵ Wang, Weijen. "Feedback." *domus*. June, 2016.

⁵⁶ Matthew Keegan, "Hong Kong: the city still shaped by feng shui," *The Guardian*, July 19, 2018.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ RIBA, "High Tech in architecture," accessed February 22, 2024, <https://www.architecture.com/explore-architecture/high-tech>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Williams, Stephanie, and Cape, Jonathan, "Hongkong Bank: The Building of Norman Foster's Master," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1989, Dow Jones & Company Inc.

⁶³ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

levels, with a total gross floor area of 70,398 square meters. The structure is supported by 8 groups of steel columns and 5 groups of V-shaped horizontal trusses. Lightweight and movable floor plates are suspended from the columns. This structural design minimizes obstruction within interior spaces while maximizing openings to the exterior. As a result, HSBC Building boasts extensive curtain walls that offer expansive views and ample natural daylight. This result can hardly be achieved by a compressive structure, which typically has bulkier components on the façade, as seen in most structures in Hong Kong. Additionally, the design incorporates a row of mirrors on the 11th floor to reflect light into the atrium, further enhancing the abundance of natural daylight within the interior spaces. HSBC Building is renowned for its transparency, adaptability, and column-less interior, distinguishing it as a quintessential example of High-tech architecture⁶⁴. As architecture represents its builders and users, the choice of an architectural style conveys meanings⁶⁵. The High-tech style of HSBC Building acts as a physical embodiment of the bank's innovation and power.



Figure 4: Photo of the structure shown on the façade of HSBC Building. 2024. Source: Leung, Clarisse.

The international construction process and associated costs contribute significantly to the financial power of HSBC Building. Its structure of HSBC Building is composed of modular components akin to a Lego set⁶⁶. Much of the structure's elements are modular and prefabricated off-site. Prefabricating components off-site minimizes the required on-site work and ensures the construction's buildability⁶⁷. The structural system utilized for HSBC Building was uncommon in Hong Kong, and the production of the modules posed challenges for

⁶⁴ Heathcote, Edwin. 2018. "How 'High Tech' Became the Architectural Style of Globalisation." London: Ft.com.

⁶⁵ Minkenberg, Michael. *Power and Architecture: The Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2014.

⁶⁶ Williams, Stephanie, and Cape, Jonathan, "Hongkong Bank: The Building of Norman Foster's Master," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1989, Dow Jones & Company Inc.

⁶⁷ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

Chinese factories in the early 1980s⁶⁸. The construction companies in China did not have the skills to produce the required quality for the modules⁶⁹. That is why most modules were manufactured internationally and transported to the site for assembly (**Figure 5**). Structural steel components originated from the UK, service modules from Japan, and the aluminium shell, floor plates, and glass from the US⁷⁰. The construction process of HSBC Building was a collaborative effort involving countries from various continents. This international collaboration adds another dimension to the building's global significance. The elaborate construction process of HSBC Building was accompanied by an exceptionally high cost. At the time of its completion, it held the distinction of being the costliest building in the world, with a price tag of HK\$5,200 million (US\$645 million)⁷¹. This significant investment also played a role in elevating HSBC Building to international fame. The substantial cost of the building is indicative of HSBC's financial power during the early 1980s. The Chairman of the bank associated the grand design to the commitment of HSBC to Hong Kong throughout the years⁷². The building is so iconic to both the bank and Hong Kong that it is featured in the HK\$100 banknote design in 1985⁷³. This demonstrates the mutual pride of both HSBC and Hong Kong in HSBC Building. The collaborative international construction effort and its substantial cost position HSBC Building as one of the most powerful structures, particularly during the 1980s.



Figure 5: Photo of the construction of HSBC Building. From Avery/GSAPP Architectural Plans and Sections (Columbia University). 1979. Source: Foster Associates.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² HSBC, "Taking shape: 1986 Hong Kong head office," accessed February 12, 2024, <https://history.hsbc.com/collections/snapshots/housing-the-bank/taking-shape-1986-hong-kong-head-office?>

⁷³ HSBC, "1985 HK100 banknote design," accessed February 12, 2024, <https://history.hsbc.com/collections/snapshots/serving-our-customers/100-years-of-hkd100-banknotes/1702208-1985-hk100-banknote-design?>

HSBC Building commands power due to its international acclaim and recognition. The building boasts exceptional structural design, leveraging daylight and pioneering construction methods, rendering it a highly esteemed tower globally⁷⁴. An opening ceremony of HSBC Building was held in 1986, hosted by Sir Edward Youde, the British governor of Hong Kong from 1982 to 1986⁷⁵. William J. R. Curtis, the British author of the book *Modern Architecture since 1900*, referred to HSBC Building as a 'building of the Pacific era'⁷⁶. HSBC Building was featured in international magazines and newspapers as a 'masterpiece' of architectural achievement⁷⁷. The modular structure of the building was praised for its precision and the poetic fusion of technology and aesthetics⁷⁸. Interestingly, HSBC Building was the first high rise building by Foster⁷⁹. Foster's rise to global fame was notably propelled by the success of the building⁸⁰. This reflects the immense power and renown of HSBC Building, elevating the architect to the status of a star architect. In 1999, Foster was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize, and in the Jury Citation, HSBC Building was highlighted as 'much-acclaimed'⁸¹. The Pritzker Architecture Prize is one of the most internationally acclaimed architectural awards. Even after a few decades, HSBC Building remains the icon of High-tech architecture worldwide and one of the most recognized works by Sir Norman Foster⁸². The global appreciation contributes to the power of HSBC Building.

HSBC Building asserts its financial power on the building scale through multiple facets. The distinctive High-tech style, innovative suspension structural design, and quality lighting effects set it apart amidst Hong Kong's skylines. The High-tech style symbolizes HSBC's innovation and power. The international collaboration involved in manufacturing construction modules adds a layer of global influence to the building. Its status as the most expensive building of its time underscores the financial prowess of the bank. Furthermore, the international acclaim garnered by HSBC Building further solidifies its power on a global level. Collectively, these elements imbue the building with significant financial power on the building scale.

The Ground Floor Space for Public Access and Assemblies: The Interior Scale

On the scale of architectural interior in HSBC Building, power is studied differently compared to the urban and building scales. Instead of financial power, political power is investigated in the architectural interior. Here, power takes the form of empowerment facilitated by the ground floor lobby, which serves as a public space for a diverse array of individuals. This section will exclusively delve into the interactions between the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building and its role in empowering individuals.

The elevated ground floor space of HSBC Building empowers members of the public by providing enhanced accessibility and connectivity. The entrance of the bank is elevated three stories above ground level. During the bank's office hours, access to and from the upper floors of HSBC Building is facilitated by two 20-meter escalators. Upon passing through the curved glass ceiling, visitors arrive at the bank hall, featuring a 52 meters high atrium (**Figure 6**). With the bank hall situated on an elevated platform, the ground floor remains empty, creating an open space that extends north and south. The ground floor space of HSBC Building is a legal public passageway connecting two major thoroughfares in Central: Des Voeux Road Central to the north and Queen's

⁷⁴ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Curtis, William J. R. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. 3rd ed. 1996. New York: Phaidon Press, 1996.

⁷⁷ Williams, Stephanie, and Cape, Jonathan, "Hongkong Bank: The Building of Norman Foster's Master," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1989, Dow Jones & Company Inc.

⁷⁸ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ The Pritzker Architecture Prize, "Jury Citation," accessed March 16, 2024, <https://www.pritzkerprize.com/laureates/1999#laureate-page-227>.

⁸² Heathcote, Edwin. 2018. "How 'High Tech' Became the Architectural Style of Globalisation." London: Ft.com.

Road Central to the south. This strategic location ensures constant foot traffic, as the building stands at the nexus of Central's bustling office district⁸³. On weekdays, from morning till night, during peak rush hours, thousands of office workers from neighbouring office buildings traverse this area, using the ground floor space as a vital pathway to reach their destinations (**Figure 7**). Adjacent to the building, commuters have easy access to Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and tram stations on Des Voeux Road Central, as well as a bus station on Queen's Road Central, facilitating seamless connectivity for commuters utilizing public transportation. In addition to facilitating the flow of people, the elevated ground floor space of HSBC Building serves a crucial climatic function by allowing air to circulate to the two major roads. Given Hong Kong's subtropical climate, characterized by hot and humid conditions, especially in the summer months, the Central district—home to HSBC Building—often experiences the urban heat island effect⁸⁴. This phenomenon is marked by slower cooling rates in urban areas compared to rural ones due to dense buildings blocking the release of heat energy and reduced wind speed limiting cooling by convection⁸⁵. The design of the elevated ground floor lobby, uncommon in Central, creates a wind tunnel effect, facilitating the flow of air to dissipate heat and humidity. Furthermore, the covered nature of the space ensures a more comfortable environment, particularly during hot and rainy days. This sheltered area provides refuge for individuals seeking respite from inclement weather conditions, offering a comfortable space to pass through or wait for someone without being exposed to the strong sunlight or heavy rain. The passive climatic strategy enhances comfort for the thousands of people traversing the ground floor lobby daily. HSBC Building empowers members of the public, ensuring a comfortable and efficient thoroughfare for office workers who regularly navigate this space twice on weekdays.



Figure 6: Perspective rendering of people entering the bank hall with the 20 meters escalators in HSBC Building by Helmut Jacoby. 1979-1983. Source: Norman Foster Foundation Archive.

⁸³ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

⁸⁴ Hong Kong Observatory, "Urbanization Effect," Last modified November 19, 2020, https://www.hko.gov.hk/en/climate_change/urbanization.htm.

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Figure 7: Photo of office workers passing through the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building during peak hours on a weekday (6:09pm on February 5, 2024, Monday). 2024. Source: Leung, Clarisse.

The empowerment of foreign domestic workers can be discerned in the design of the ground floor space within HSBC Building. As of 2022, there are approximately 340,000 overseas domestic workers in Hong Kong, primarily hailing from the Philippines, Indonesia, and various Southeast Asian nations⁸⁶. First introduced to Hong Kong in the 1970s to boost the economy of the Philippines, these workers are mandated by law to live and work in their employers' homes in Hong Kong⁸⁷. However, on Sundays and public holidays, when they are off duty, many of these workers seek refuge in public spaces, as they lack the means to rent private accommodations to spend time with friends or relax. With a minimum monthly allowance of HK\$4,870 (US\$624) as of 2023, the cost of renting a hotel room for a single day, approximately HK\$400 (US\$51), is prohibitively expensive⁸⁸. Moreover, many migrant workers are responsible for supporting families and children in their home countries, making it financially impractical for them to rent suitable accommodations on a regular basis. Consequently, public spaces serve as the only viable option for these workers during their leisure time. Residents in Hong Kong Island, particularly those in Central, often possess significant wealth due to the high housing prices in the area. Consequently, many of these residents can afford to hire foreign domestic workers to manage household responsibilities such as childcare and elderly care. As a result, there is a considerable population of domestic workers seeking suitable public spaces to spend their holidays in Central. However, Central is not known for its abundance of quality public spaces, leaving domestic workers with limited options for leisure activities⁸⁹. The ground floor space of HSBC Building presents itself as an appealing choice for these workers (**Figure 8**), particularly on Sundays and public holidays when the bank is closed and the escalators leading to the bank lobby are inactive^{90 91}. Additionally, given that it is a holiday, foot traffic from office

⁸⁶ Data.gov.hk. 2021, "Statistics on the number of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong," accessed March 21, 2024, https://www.immd.gov.hk/opendata/eng/law-and-security/visas/statistics_FDH.csv.

⁸⁷ Guzman, Odine de. "Overseas Filipino Workers, Labor Circulation in Southeast Asia, and the (Mis)management of Overseas Migration Programs." *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, no. 4 (2003).

⁸⁸ Labour Department. 2024, "Foreign Domestic Helpers," last modified March 18, 2024, <https://www.fdh.labour.gov.hk/en/news.html>.

⁸⁹ Frampton, Adam, Solomon, Jonathan, and Wong, Clara. *Cities without Ground*. Novato: ORO editions, 2012.

⁹⁰ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

⁹¹ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

workers during rush hours is significantly reduced, rendering the ground floor space relatively underutilized. As previously noted, the comfortable climate created by the design of the ground floor lobby further enhances the appeal of this space to domestic workers, making it a popular choice for leisure and relaxation in the hectic and expensive environment of Central. The target demographic of domestic workers during holidays is not explicitly addressed in any of the publications authored by the architect of HSBC Building, Sir Norman Foster. It is speculated that the design elements facilitating the empowerment of domestic workers were unintentional by both the architect and the owner of HSBC Building. Although the space is owned by HSBC, foreign domestic workers are permitted to occupy it as it has been legally designated as a public area. Despite the original design intent, the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building has transformed it into a space that empowers overseas domestic workers during holidays.

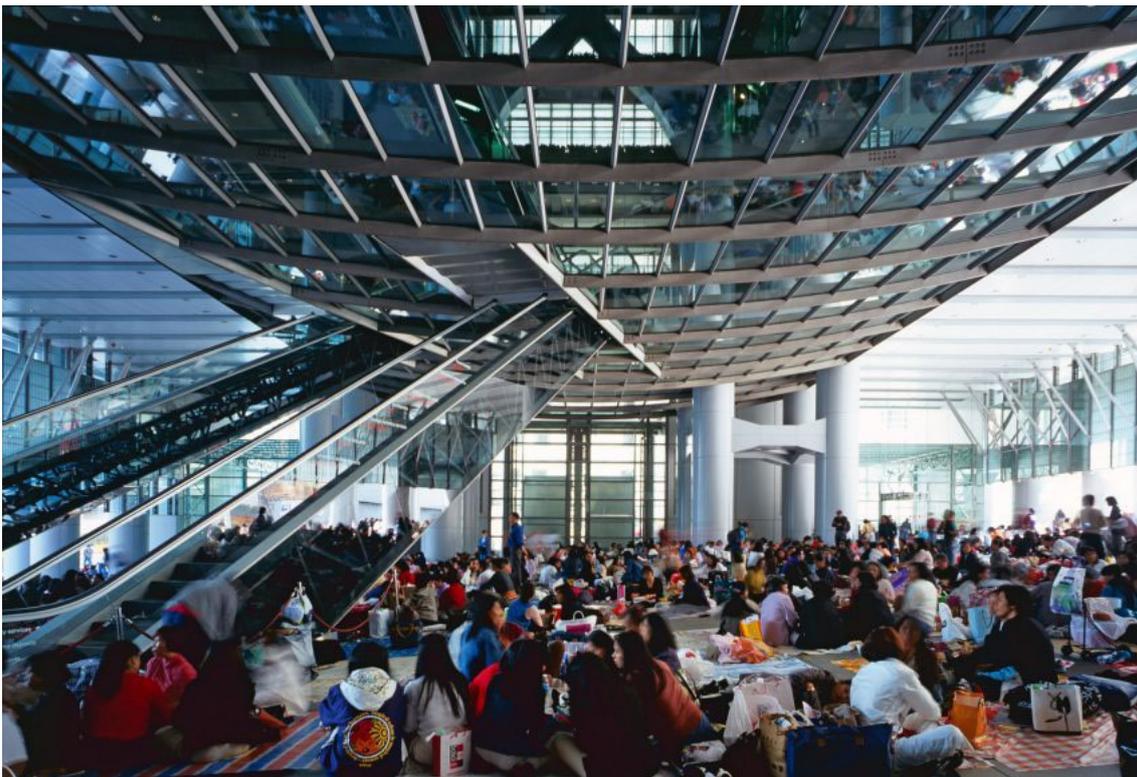


Figure 8: Photo of the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building used by foreign domestic workers on a holiday when the bank is closed. From “Foster's HSBC building in Hong Kong is a revolutionary high-tech skyscraper.” *dezeen*, November 27, 2019. Source: Johnson, Ben.

The ground floor lobby of HSBC Building empowered protesters of the ‘occupy Central Hong Kong’ (OCHK) movement. The ground floor lobby of HSBC Building served as a starting point for protesters during OCHK from 2011 to 2012⁹² ⁹³. The occupied spaces of protesters spread from HSBC Building to across Central and Admiralty⁹⁴. Originating from the global ‘Occupy movement,’ OCHK advocated against corporate excess and

⁹² Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

⁹³ Xue, Charlie Q. L. *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015: From Colonial to Global*. 1st ed. 2016. Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016.

⁹⁴ Seng, Eunice. *Resistant City: Histories, Maps and the Architecture of Development*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2020.

economic inequality⁹⁵ ⁹⁶. The choice of HSBC Building as a focal point was strategic, given its location in the politically charged area of Statue Square and its association with financial influence in Hong Kong. Unlike other major banks in the city, such as the Bank of China and Standard Chartered, HSBC Building offered a unique public space on its ground floor for protesters to gather. The activists occupied this space, hanging banners, setting up tents (**Figure 9**), and staging demonstrations⁹⁷. In 2012, HSBC sought to intervene through legal actions to reclaim the space, a judge ruled that the activists' demonstrations in the ground floor space was beyond its designated use as a public passageway⁹⁸ ⁹⁹. The utilization of the ground floor lobby as a space for protests was likely not planned by the architect as there is no indication of such a purpose in the original drawings and publications of HSBC Building. The architect and owner of HSBC Building did not intend for the ground floor lobby to serve as a space for protests. However, the design of the elevated ground floor space, its strategic location, and the bank's association with capitalism inadvertently made it a significant venue for expressing opinions and staging protests. The ground floor lobby of HSBC Building played a significant role in empowering protesters during OCHK.



Figure 9: Photo of the tents and stations set up by protesters of OCHK in the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building. From “The Anarchists of Occupy Central.” *The New Yorker*, December 10, 2014. Source: Lee, Thomas.

⁹⁵ Adam, Karla, “Occupy Wall Street protests go global,” *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/occupy-wall-street-protests-go-global/2011/10/15/gIQAp7kimL_story.html.

⁹⁶ The Guardian, “Occupy Hong Kong camp cleared from HSBC headquarters,” *The Guardian*, September 11, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/11/occupy-hong-kong-camp-hsbc>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Bradsher, Keith, “Occupy Hong Kong Protesters Forcibly Removed,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/business/global/occupy-hong-kong-protesters-evicted.html>.

⁹⁹ The Guardian, “Occupy Hong Kong camp cleared from HSBC headquarters,” *The Guardian*, September 11, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/11/occupy-hong-kong-camp-hsbc>.

In recent years, there have been efforts by HSBC to reclaim ownership of the ground floor space of HSBC Building, thereby diminishing the empowerment of the public. Speculated to be a response to OCHK and subsequent protests in 2019 to 2020 in Hong Kong, HSBC has taken steps to assert its control over the space. Prior to these events, the space was minimalist in design, consistent with the principles of High-tech architecture, with little indication of HSBC's presence (**Figure 9**). There are no decorative elements adorning the glass panels or floor tiles, maintaining a clean and sleek aesthetic. The panels on the north and south sides of the lobby are completely open, creating a seamless transition between Des Voeux Road Central and Queen's Road Central. This design choice enhances the sense of openness and connectivity, allowing for easy movement and access through the space. However, recent changes include the addition of bank advertisements on the glass panels, colourful floor lighting, and large installations with railings, transforming the space into a less inviting public passageway (**Figure 10**). Furthermore, half of the panels facing Des Voeux Road Central have been closed off, creating a more enclosed environment (**Figure 10**). Exhibition panels about the history of HSBC have also been introduced, further emphasizing the bank's presence and diminishing the space's original purpose as a public space (**Figure 11**). Architecture is not only shaped by its socio-political context, but also contribute to shaping a new reality¹⁰⁰. By introducing elements that suggest ownership and control by the bank, a new reality of restriction and exclusion is formed. These actions by HSBC signify a deliberate attempt to privatize the space and curtail the power of public assembly, thereby altering the dynamics of the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building.

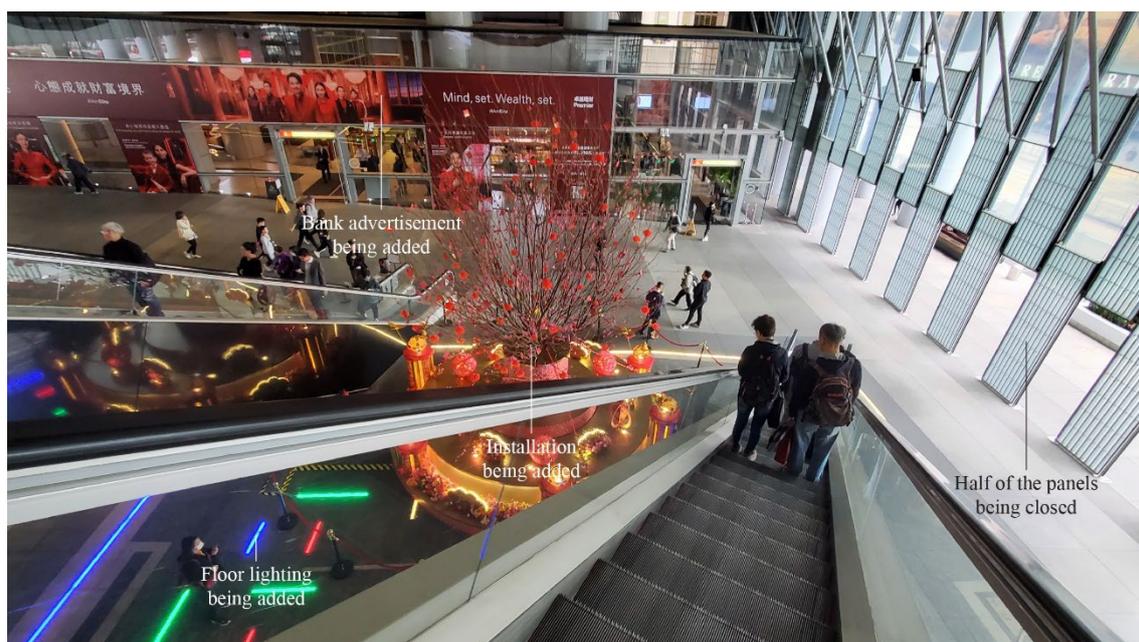


Figure 10: Annotated photo of the newly added decoration elements and the half-closed panels in the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building to signify the ownership of the space by HSBC. 2024. Source: Leung, Clarisse.

¹⁰⁰ Edelman, Murray. *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

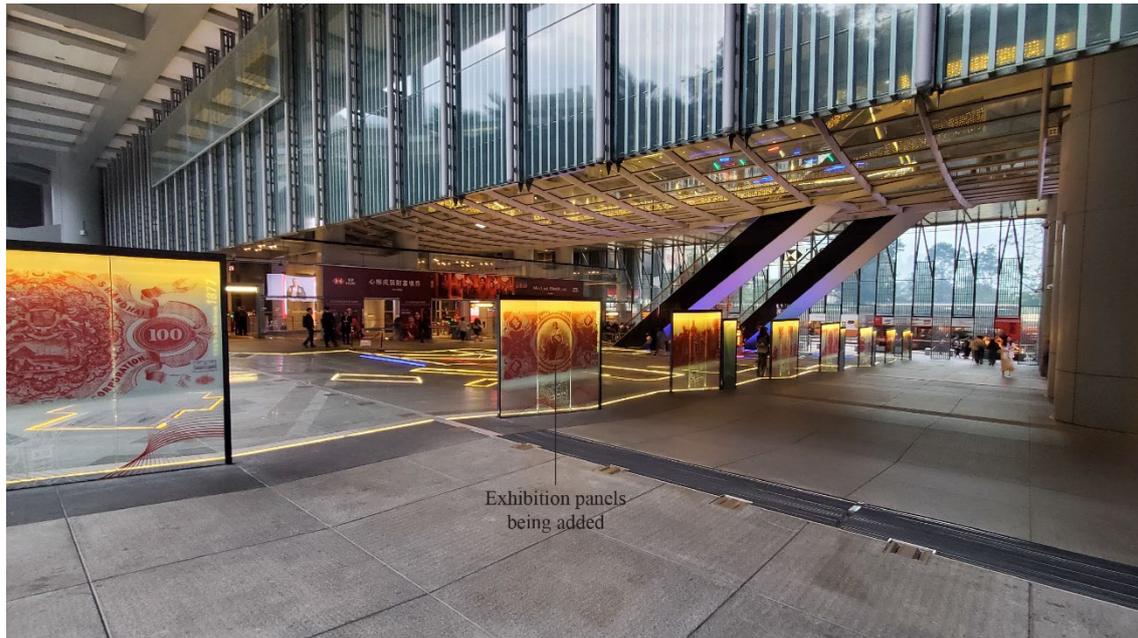


Figure 11: Annotated photo of the exhibition panels added in the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building to signify the ownership of the space by HSBC. 2024. Source: Leung, Clarisse.

Power manifests itself in a different way within the interior scale of HSBC Building. Rather than showcasing financial power, the ground floor space of the building serves to empower different groups of people at different times. During weekdays, office workers benefit from a convenient and comfortable passage between two major roads, enhancing their mobility and accessibility. On Sundays and public holidays, foreign domestic workers find empowerment in the quality and sheltered public space provided, allowing them to gather and socialize. In 2011 to 2012, the space served as a platform for protesters to voice their grievances against capitalism, further illustrating its role in facilitating empowerment. However, recent alterations to the space by HSBC suggest an attempt to reclaim ownership and restrict public access, signalling a shift in power dynamics.

Conclusion

A building can serve as a medium for conveying ideas by those in power, typically influenced by the political and cultural landscapes within which it is situated¹⁰¹. In HSBC Building, many of the urban, building, and interior elements are closely related to notions of financial or political power. Its prominent location in Statue Square and unobstructed visual corridor to Victoria Harbour exemplify financial power on the urban scale. Meanwhile, features such as the High-tech architectural style, international construction methods, and global acclaim contribute to its financial power on the building scale. However, within the interior scale, particularly in the ground floor lobby, another form of power is identified. Political influence is evident within the ground floor lobby as it serves to empower a diverse range of individuals from the public. The ground floor lobby of HSBC Building serves as a vital intersection of major roads, providing a comfortable and sheltered environment, and existing as a significant protest space within a politically charged area beneath a bank. The recent alterations to the ground floor lobby of HSBC Building underscore the dynamic interplay between architecture and power. They serve as a testament to the idea that while architecture can be influenced by power, it also possesses the ability to shape and manipulate power itself.

¹⁰¹ Vale, Lawrence J. *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

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