

Court Buildings

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of Macao's reunification with the motherland, a set of philatelic products on the theme of "Court Buildings" is issued. It is a celebration of the effective implementation of the Macao SAR's judicial system under the framework of *the Basic Law of the Macao Special Administrative Region* (hereinafter called "*the Basic Law*"), and depicts the course of development of the courts as Macao's judicial organs amidst the social changes in the past two decades.

According to *the Basic Law*, the Macao SAR enjoys independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication, which is a significant embodiment of the principles of "One Country, Two Systems", "Macao people ruling Macao", and a high degree of autonomy.

Prior to 1993, Macao did not have its own independent judicial system, it was only a small judicial district within the Portuguese judicial organization framework, and all appeals must be filed with a higher court in Portugal. In 1993, the High Court (Superior Court of Justice) established under the Macao Judicial Organization Framework Law as the court of second instance in Macao had the power to hear appeals, but the power of final adjudication of important cases was still vested in the highest judicial organ in Portugal.

It was not until the formal implementation of *the Basic Law* along with the return of Macao to the motherland on 20 December 1999 that things changed. In accordance with *the Basic Law*, the Macao SAR enjoys independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication; its courts exercise judicial power independently, and are subject only to the law and free from any interference. *The Basic Law* also clearly sets out Macao's three-tier court system: the Court of First Instance, the Court of Appeal, and the Court of Final Appeal are established, the formerly created Examining Magistracy is retained while the Administrative Court is set up. The Court of Final Appeal is the highest level of court, and exercises the power of final adjudication endowed by the country in accordance with *the Basic Law*.

The development and evolution of the courts over the two decades could be traced to the changes in their buildings. The Old Court Building located at Avenida da Praia Grande (Nam Van) had already been used as a courthouse before Macao returned to China, and remained in service for the Base Court in the early days of the reunification. However, with economic and societal changes, the Base Court moved out in 2003 considering the insufficient space of the Building. Up till 2017, the number of cases received by the Base Court rose threefold compared to the early period of the reunification; to cater for the heavy workload, the Base Court Criminal Building was put into use in 2017. Completed in 1999, the Court of Final Appeal and the Court of Appeal Building has been operating since then.

Twenty years since the reunification, the courts have been strictly complying with the stipulations of *the Basic Law*, and upholding judicial independence and justice. In the days to come, the courts will continue to pursue its goals of "interests of justice" and efficiency, further advance judicial reformation, and ensure the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" to be fully applied in the judicial domain.

Office of the President of the Court of Final Appeal
of the Macao Special Administrative Region