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HISTORY



History

Macao Has Been Part of China Since Ancient Times

Historical records show that Macao has been Chinese territory since long ago. When Qinshihuang (the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty) unified China in 221BC, Macao came under the jurisdiction of Panyu County, Nanhai Prefecture. Administratively, it was part of Dongguan Prefecture in the Jin Dynasty (AD265-420), then Nanhai County during the Sui Dynasty (AD581-618), and Dongguan County in the Tang Dynasty (AD618-907). In 1152, during the Southern Song Dynasty, the Guangdong administration joined the coastal areas of Nanhai, Panyu, Xinhui and Dongguan Counties to establish Xiangshan County, thus bringing Macao under its jurisdiction.

Macao has been known variously. Besides Macao (“Aomen” in Chinese), it has also been called Haojing (Oyster Mirror), Jinghai (Mirror Sea), Haojiang, Haijing, Jinghu (Mirror Lake), Haojingao and Majiao. Haojing is the earliest name recorded in written documents.

The name “Aomen” first appeared in 1564, in the following passage in Pang Shangpeng’s *Memorandum to the Throne Concerning Long-Term Coastal Security*, which was presented to the Ming Emperor: “Xiangshan County in the south of Guangdong Province is a coastal area. It takes one day to travel from Yongmai to Haojingao. In Haojingao there are Nantai (South Tower) and Beitai (North Tower), two hills facing each other like two towers of a city gate. People call the place where the two hills stand Aomen (Gate to Ao). Aomen is surrounded by sea, and is only connected to the mainland at Zangge. It is a trading port where foreign ships and merchants anchor.”

Aomen Jilue (Chronicles of Macao) by Yin Guangren and Zhang Rulin – the first and second Qing officials appointed to the place – which was published during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, records: “The name ‘Haojingao’ can be found in the documents of the Ming Dynasty. To the south of Haojingao lies Shizimen (Cross-Gate), where the sea runs both north-south and east-west between four island hills. Combining ‘ao’ from Haojingao and ‘men’ from Shizimen, people call the place ‘Aomen’.”

The earliest known written record of the name “Macau” in a foreign language is in a letter dated 20 November 1555.

In the 15th century, the Portuguese began to expand their trade to the Far East, taking control of several places in Africa and Asia. In 1553, claiming that they needed some land to air their soaked goods, the Portuguese gained permission from local Chinese officials to stay temporarily on the Macao peninsula to carry out commercial activities. Around 1573, the Portuguese began paying land rent to the Chinese government. From then till the Opium War, for nearly 300 years, the Ming and subsequent Qing governments exercised sovereignty over Macao, levying taxes and implementing various controls.

The Ming and Qing Governments’ Exercise of Sovereignty Over Macao

The Ming and Qing governments maintained irrefutable sovereignty over Macao, and under the principle of sovereignty exercised strict and comprehensive land, military, administrative, judicial

and customs controls.

While exercising sovereignty over Macao in all aspects, the Ming and Qing governments used the strategy “let foreigners take charge of foreigners” to control the Portuguese in Macao. They did not directly interfere with the internal affairs of the Portuguese community, but allowed the Portuguese to exercise self-administration to keep their social and economic affairs in order. In 1583, the Portuguese in Macao were permitted to form a Senate to handle various issues concerning their community, on the understanding that they recognised overall Chinese sovereignty and that this autonomous organ was not politically independent.

The Portuguese Occupation of Macao and the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Amity and Commerce

After the Opium War, the Chinese and British signed the Treaty of Nanking, stipulating the cession of Hong Kong to Britain. The Portuguese seized the opportunity to put forward various requests – including exemption from the annual land rent – and gradually occupied Macao. In 1887, the Qing government was forced to sign the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Amity and Commerce, under which the Portuguese obtained the right to permanently settle in Macao as well as control over the region. In 1928, the foreign affairs ministry of the then Kuomintang government officially notified the Portuguese side that it was abrogating the treaty.

The Signing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government declared the abolition of all unequal treaties. In March 1972, China’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations sent a letter to the UN Special Committee on Decolonization, stating the country’s principled stand on the issues of Hong Kong and Macao. On 8 February 1979, when China and Portugal established diplomatic relations, the two governments reached the following agreement on the issue of Macao: Macao is a Chinese territory currently under Portuguese administration; the issue of Macao is a question left over from history, which will be settled through friendly consultation between the two governments when appropriate.

In 1984, as soon as the question of Hong Kong was solved, the issue of Macao was put on the agenda. June 1986 saw China and Portugal begin negotiations concerning the issue of Macao. After four rounds of talks, on 23 March 1987 the two governments reached a consensus on the entire text of the agreement and memorandum, thus bringing to a satisfactory conclusion of the Sino-Portuguese negotiations, which lasted eight months and 14 days. On the morning of 26 March 1987, the Joint Declaration of the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Portuguese Republic on the Question of Macao was initialled in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, by Deputy Foreign Minister Zhou Nan, head of the Chinese government delegation, and his Portuguese counterpart, Ambassador Rui Medina.

The Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration was officially signed on 13 April 1987 in Beijing. A grand ceremony for the occasion was held in the Great Hall of the People. On behalf of their respective governments, the Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Zhao Ziyang,

and the Prime Minister of the Portuguese Republic, Anibal Antonio Cavaco Silva, signed the Joint Declaration, which stated that China would resume the exercise of sovereignty over Macao from 20 December 1999 onwards. Deng Xiaoping attended the ceremony in person. The National People's Congress (NPC) of the People's Republic of China and the Portuguese parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, ratified the Joint Declaration in June and December, respectively. On 15 January 1988, the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration came into effect, and Macao thus entered a transition period leading to the Handover.

The Enactment of the Basic Law and the Transition Period

In order to specify and legalise the basic principles and policies of the Central Government concerning Macao that were set forth in the Joint Declaration, the First Session of the Seventh NPC decided on 13 April 1988 to establish the Drafting Committee of the Basic Law of the Macao Special Administrative Region. On 5 September 1988, the list of members of the committee was approved at the Third Session of the Seventh NPC. It comprised experts and representatives from all walks of life, from both the mainland and Macao. For more than four years, the committee carried out extensive and painstaking investigations, consultations, democratic discussions and revisions, and finally in January 1993, the Drafting Committee approved the draft of the Basic Law and the designs of the flag and emblem of the Macao Special Administrative Region.

On 31 March 1993, the First Session of the Eighth NPC passed the Basic Law of the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, its annexes, and the designs of the flag and emblem of the Macao SAR. On the same day, President Jiang Zemin signed Presidential Decree No. 3, promulgating the Basic Law of the Macao Special Administrative Region, which was to come into effect when the Chinese government resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Macao on 20 December 1999.

The nearly 12-year period from 15 January 1988, when the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration came into effect, to 20 December 1999, when the Central Government resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Macao, was called the transition period. The Portuguese government prepared, in this period, for the handover of the government in 1999. Maintaining Macao's social stability, boosting economic development and creating favourable conditions for a smooth handover were the main tasks at that stage.

The Sino-Portuguese Joint Liaison Group and the Sino-Portuguese Land Group, founded under the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration, resolved issues that arose during the transition period through negotiation. The two governments also reached agreement on the establishment of the Macau International Airport, the Bank of China becoming a Macao currency-issuing bank, and the amendment and renewal of the casino gaming franchise. Three key issues that had attracted much attention – the localisation of the civil service, the localisation of the law and the official status of the Chinese language – were also settled satisfactorily.

On 29 April 1998, the Second Session of the Ninth Conference of the Standing Committee of the NPC passed the list of members of the Preparatory Committee of the Macao Special Administrative Region. The Preparatory Committee was established in Beijing on 5 May 1998. One of its chief missions was to establish, in accordance with the NPC decision, a broadly representative Selection

Committee comprising 200 members, all of them permanent residents of Macao, to select the first Chief Executive of the Macao SAR. On 15 May 1999, in a secret ballot at the third plenary session of the Selection Committee for the First Government of the Macao SAR, Edmund Ho Hau Wah was elected the first Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. On 20 May 1999, Zhu Rongji, Premier of the State Council, issued State Council Decree No. 264, appointing Edmund Ho Hau Wah as the first Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, to assume office on 20 December 1999.



**The 20th Anniversary of the
Inscription of the Historic Centre of
Macao on the World Heritage List**



On 15 July 2005, the “Historic Centre of Macao” was successfully inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, becoming China’s 31st World Heritage site. The “Historic Centre of Macao” comprises eight squares, 22 buildings, and the streets connecting the various squares and historic buildings. It preserves traditional buildings and streetscapes in both Chinese and Portuguese styles, fully demonstrating Macao’s character of blending Chinese and Western cultures and of harmonious coexistence between varied religious beliefs, customs and traditions.

