The courts

Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Of Counsel, KGP Legal LLC
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland and Germany), Solicitor (England & Wales and Hong Kong)

The Supreme Court of Judicature Act 1969 structures the superior courts. Since 2 January 2021 the Supreme Court consists of the Court of Appeal and the High Court, the latter divided into a General Division and an Appellate Division. The General Division holds the original civil and criminal jurisdiction that the former High Court held. The Appellate Division hears those civil appeals from the General Division that are not allocated to the Court of Appeal and has no criminal jurisdiction. The Court of Appeal remains the apex court and hears all criminal appeals together with prescribed categories of civil appeal, which include appeals in matters of insolvency and restructuring, arbitration, constitutional and administrative law and appeals from the Singapore International Commercial Court.[1] The allocation matters for crypto practice because the insolvency of a custodian or exchange is a Court of Appeal matter from the first appeal, while a commercial dispute between an exchange and its customer usually travels to the Appellate Division.

Below the Supreme Court sit the State Courts, whose District Courts hear civil claims up to S$ 250,000 and whose Magistrates' Courts hear smaller claims and most criminal prosecutions at first instance. Serious fraud and money-laundering prosecutions involving digital assets are brought in the District Court or, where the sentence sought exceeds the District Court's powers, in the General Division. The Small Claims Tribunals handle consumer disputes up to S$ 20,000, a forum that retail crypto customers have occasionally used against platforms.[2]

Neutral citations identify every reported and unreported judgment. The citation [2023] SGHC 199 denotes the 199th judgment of the General Division of the High Court in 2023 and [2020] SGCA(I) 02 the second judgment of the Court of Appeal in 2020. The suffixes (I) and (A) mark the Singapore International Commercial Court and the Appellate Division respectively. Judgments are published within days on the Judiciary's website and on eLitigation, usually with a summary prepared by the court. For a Swiss practitioner the convention is simple to adopt and should be adopted, because a Singapore judge reading a brief expects the neutral citation and the paragraph number, never a page reference.

The Singapore International Commercial Court

The Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC) was launched on 5 January 2015 as a division of what is now the General Division of the High Court. Its establishment and jurisdiction are set out in sections 18A to 18M of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act 1969. Section 18A constitutes the court. Section 18D confers jurisdiction over actions that are international and commercial in nature, that the General Division could hear in its original civil jurisdiction and that satisfy the conditions in the Rules

Copyright © 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP – Of Counsel, KGP Legal LLC. SingaporeIQ is an information website and gives no legal advice. For Singapore law advice through KGP Legal LLC, please write to alexander.ressos@kgplegal.com.sg

of Court, together with certain arbitration-related and insolvency proceedings. Section 18L permits the court, in prescribed cases, to determine a question of foreign law on the basis of submissions instead of proof by expert evidence.[3] Judgments of the SICC carry the neutral citation SGHC(I) and appeals lie to the Court of Appeal.

The SICC matters for this book for three reasons. Its bench includes international judges from other common-law and civil-law jurisdictions, which gives a Swiss party a court experienced in reading foreign law. Parties to an "offshore case", one with no substantial connection to Singapore, may be represented by registered foreign lawyers, which allows a Swiss or German counsel to appear alongside Singapore counsel. And the court has shown itself ready to take technically dense disputes: the Quoine litigation over an algorithmic trading error was decided at first instance by the SICC and on appeal by the Court of Appeal sitting with an international judge.[4] Part N, Chapter V returns to the SICC's digital-asset case load and to the choice between the SICC, the General Division and arbitration.

Practice note

A Swiss company contracting with a Singapore exchange, custodian or token issuer should decide at the drafting stage whether disputes go to the SICC, to the General Division, to the Singapore International Arbitration Centre or to a Swiss forum. You can choose the SICC by a written jurisdiction clause that names it. The clause may also carry an agreement to waive the right to appeal or to limit the grounds of appeal if the parties so wish. A clause that merely says "the courts of Singapore" leads to the General Division, from which transfer to the SICC is possible but not guaranteed. If Swiss law governs the contract, section 18L lets the SICC decide Swiss law on written submissions from Swiss counsel, which is faster and cheaper than a battle of experts. Part J, Chapter VIII and Part N, Chapters V and VI set out the full choice.

Notes

1. Supreme Court of Judicature Act 1969 (2020 Rev Ed), s. 3 (superior courts of record), Part 3 (General Division, ss. 10–29E), Part 4 (Appellate Division, ss. 30–47, s. 31 on the absence of criminal jurisdiction); on the allocation of appeals from 2 January 2021 see Allen & Gledhill, "New appellate structure in Singapore Supreme Court implemented on 2 January 2021".
2. State Courts Act 1970 (2020 Rev Ed), ss. 19–20 (District Court civil jurisdiction limit of S$ 250,000) and ss. 50–52 (Magistrate's Court); Small Claims Tribunals Act 1984, s. 5 (prescribed limit S$ 20,000, raisable to S$ 30,000 by consent).
3. Supreme Court of Judicature Act 1969, ss. 18A (establishment), 18D (jurisdiction), 18L (determination of foreign law on submissions), text as published on Singapore Statutes Online; launch date 5 January 2015 per CNPLaw, "Asia's first: the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC)".
4. Quoine Pte Ltd v B2C2 Ltd, 2020 SGCA(I) 02, on appeal from B2C2 Ltd v Quoine Pte Ltd, 2019 SGHC(I) 03. On registered foreign lawyers see Legal Profession Act 1966, Part 9, and the Legal Profession (Representation in Singapore International Commercial Court) Rules 2014.

Copyright © 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP – Of Counsel, KGP Legal LLC. SingaporeIQ is an information website and gives no legal advice. For Singapore law advice through KGP Legal LLC, please write to alexander.ressos@kgplegal.com.sg