

Handout #3

Mourning Relationships in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

According to Qing law, one had to observe a period of mourning when a relative passed away. The closer and more senior the deceased family member, the longer the period of mourning dictated by law. The longest period of mourning stretched for three years and the shortest lasted three months. During this period, the bereaved had to stay at home, excuse himself from public service, refrain from celebrations of all sorts, and practice abstinence, among other things. The legal terms for the mourning relationships, listed from longest to shortest, are as follows:

1. Three years (*zhancui*) (example: son to parents, grandson to grandparents, and wife to husband, daughter-in-law to parents-in-law)
2. One year (*zicui*) (example: great grandson to great grandparents)
3. Nine months (*dagong*) (example: nephews to uncles or father's brothers, first cousins, or father's brothers' sons.)
4. Six months (*xiaogong*) (example : Mother's parents, mother's brothers, brothers' wives)
5. Three months (*sima*): (example: son-in-law to parents-in-law)

These relationships played a crucial role in the administration of justice under the Qing. Penalties were heavier for crimes committed against senior relatives within the family hierarchy. Age could also play an important role. A younger brother was inferior to his elder brother, for example. Similarly, an elder sister was ranked higher than her younger brother. Generally speaking, penalties were harshest when junior family members committed crimes against their seniors. Crimes committed against those outside of the mourning hierarchy (that is, outside of the extended family) were punished less severely. And crimes committed by senior family members against their inferiors within the family hierarchy were least likely to elicit harsh sentences.

“Your Honor, I am Innocent”: Law and Society in Late Imperial China (Ming-te Pan)

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MOURNING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MALE RELATIVES

Generation from Ego	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning
IV	FFFF	2								
III	FFF	2	FFFEB FFFFYB	5						
II	FF	2	FFFEB FFFYB	4	FFEBS FFFYBS	5				
I	F	1	FEB FYB	2	FEBS FFYBS	4	FFEBS FFFYBSS	5		
	EGO		EB YB	2	FEBS FYBS	3	FFEBS FFYBSS	4	FFEBS FFFYBSS	5

MOURNING RELATIONSHIPS OF A WIFE AND HER HUSBAND’S RELATIVES

Generation from Ego	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning	Relation to Ego	Degree of Mourning
IV	HFFFF HFFFFW	5				
III	HFFF HFFFW	5				
II	HFF HFFW	3	HFFS/W	5		
I	HF HM	1	HFB/W	3	HFFBS/W	5
	EGO (W)	H	HEB/W HYB/W	3	HFB/W	5

Key:

I, II, III, IV indicate generations removed from “ego,” or oneself.

F=father, M=mother, EB=elder brother, YB=younger brother, S=son, H=husband.

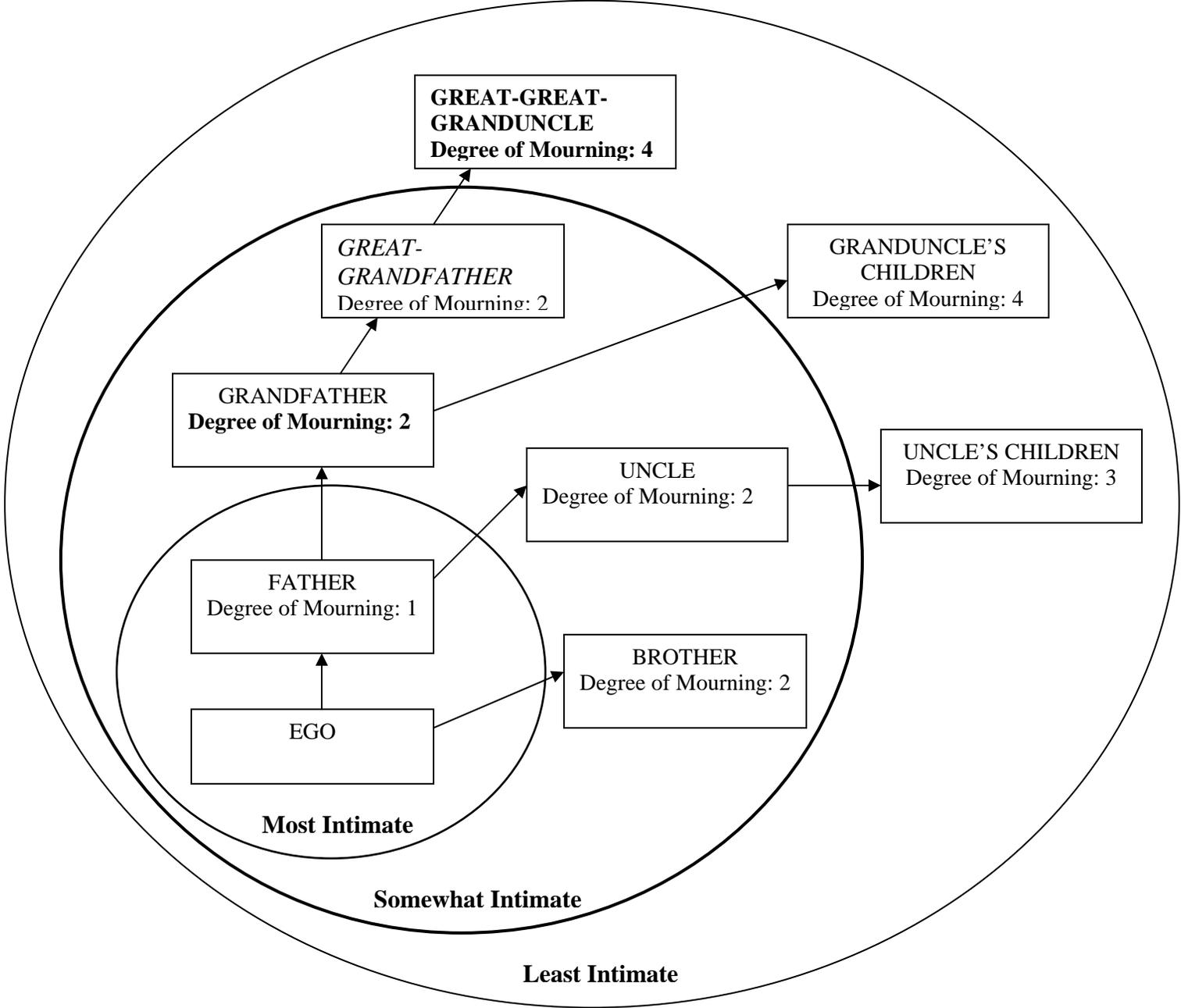
“Ego” is the center of this chart.

The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 to the right of each column are to indicate the five degrees of mourning relationships.

Source: Ding Linghua, *Zhongguo Sangfu Zhidu Shi* [The History of the Chinese Mourning System]. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2000. pp. 122-123, pp. 128-129.

Note: Please see the following two pages for examples of how to use this chart in determining mourning relationships.

Mourning Relationships Among Male Relatives



Mourning Relationships of a Wife and Her Husband's Relatives

