From "connected presence" to "panoptic presence": Reframing the parent–child relationship on mobile instant messaging uses in the Chinese translocal context

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Abstract

In the high-speed translocal social setting, intergenerational solidarity is arguably weakening in Chinese society. The proposed study adopts an interactionist perspective, using semistructured interviews as well as communicative behavior records provided by interviewees to analyze the interactions between young adults and their geographically distant parents through a mobile instant messaging (MIM) service application. Taking WeChat as a case, this study focuses specifically on the use of MIM to manage and maintain parent–child relationships in a translocal context. Findings confirm the interaction patterns of "connected presence" and further suggest an emerging "panoptic-presence" consciousness among the young adults, leading to a performative mode of interaction with their parents. Meanwhile, though individualism prevails among the younger generation, family values and norms rooted in traditional Chinese culture are found to be both explicitly and implicitly practiced. Limitations and future directions are also discussed.

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The mobilities paradigm (Büscher & Urry, 2009; Urry, 2007) has provided an alternative
theorization for reassessing communicative practices. In this paradigm, time and space
have been restructured to fit a mobile world in which the affordances of mobile commu-
nication technologies (e.g., qualities, functions, or cues) have extended the possibilities of
everyday communicative behaviors (Nagy & Neff, 2015; Wellman et al., 2003). Thanks
to the progress made in today's telecommunication technology, mobile instant messaging
(MIM) applications such as WhatsApp, WeChat, LINE, and Kakao Talk, have further
enlarged communicative affordances by enabling people to use text messaging, voice
messaging, group chat, emoticons, photographs, and short videos to share experiences
through a wireless broadband Internet connection. Thirty-six percent of smartphone own-
ers in the US report using MIM (Pew Research Center, 2015), while 91% of Chinese
mobile netizens have adopted MIM ("The 36th Report of the Internet," 2015). Combining
free multimedia instant messaging services and social network services (SNS), MIM has
de facto brought fundamental challenges to the short message service (SMS; Holtz, 2013).
What is more, MIM provides different levels of interactional modes for managing social
relationships and connections. In the "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004) level, people
continuously interact with each other, while in the "panoptic presence" (Silcock, Payne,
& Hocking, 2015), interaction involves more information exposure.

Following the research route of how mobile communication technologies are diffused
and how they impact interpersonal communication (Gergen, 2002; Ling, 2004), studies
showing increasing concern over MIM use have emerged. They ranged from factors
affecting the individual's (e.g., the young, the middle-aged, and elderly adults) use of
MIM (Chou & Liu, 2016; Lin & Li, 2014; C. Yoon, Jeong, & Rolland, 2015) to patterns
of MIM interaction among close friends (Cui, 2015) to ways of MIM use compared to
those of SMS (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). While communication plays a vital role in
effective family functioning (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993), few studies have been done to
examine the implications of MIM use for family solidarity (e.g., managing and maintain-
ing parent–child relationships).

Along with the urbanization, marketization, and globalization stemming from China's
"reform and opening," increasingly large numbers of young adults live in a translocal
social setting in which they have moved out of parental homes to pursue advanced edu-
cation and competitive jobs. However, this geographic separation does not isolate adults
from their parents. Instead, family cohesion is maintained through the use of modern
communication technologies (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). For instance, Lam (2013)
argues that a "translocal family solidarity" is retained in mediated communication based
on information communication technologies (e.g., Tencent QQ, MSN, and Skype)
between Chinese young adults and their geographically distant parents.

To explore the intergenerational communication mediated by MIM in modern China,
this study examines interaction modes of "connected presence" and their variant of

"panoptic presence" to determine how translocal Chinese young adults incorporate MIM use repertoires to manage and maintain connections with their parents. By revisiting the notion of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991), we try to provide an alternative understanding of how Chinese family values circulate among interlocutors in MIM use.

Literature review

"Connected presence" and "panoptic presence"

As mobile communication technologies are integrated into individuals' lives, the "connected presence" is a concept proposed by Licoppe (2004) to understand interactional modes of managing and maintaining relations. Connoting the characteristic of perpetual contact (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) facilitated by mobile phones, the "connected presence" highlights the continuous connection resulting from communicative behaviors allowed by telephony conversations and SMS. Specifically, it consists of two modes: the "conversational mode," referring to "open and relatively long conversations in which people ask about each other, at a time often set aside for that purpose" (Licoppe, 2004, p. 144) and the "connected mode," which points to "short and frequent communicative gestures: conversations or vocal or textual messages at irregular times" (Licoppe, 2004, p. 152). However, in practice, it is hard to distinguish between these two modes due to the complexity in mobile phone use and communicative situations. Thus, they are often used in a flexible way in which users shift from one to the other based on certain interactional needs. Also, choosing the modes can be a "strategic calculation" in the connected management of relations (Licoppe, 2004).

Furthermore, the interactional modes relate to the affordances of mobile communication technologies, including the material quality and the social implications of communication practices (Nagy & Neff, 2015). In this sense, the portable size, short and frequent calls, and SMS capabilities of mobile phones afford users the possibility to manage relations in a "connected presence" way. Since emerging mobile communication technologies like MIM provide new cues (e.g., emoticons), content, and cadence to our communication, the resulting interactional practices might help manage relations and sustain or even extend the "connected presence."

With new affordances such as free multimedia messaging, mobile SNS, and location sharing, MIM seems to have brought the "panoptic presence" into interactional practices. Drawing on a Foucaultian approach, the "panoptic presence," from a communication technology perspective, refers to the surveillance that emerges from the omniscient visibility afforded by technological use (Lyon, 2006). Meanwhile, under a panoptic circumstance, users are aware of being watched regardless of time and space and thereby self-police or self-discipline their own behaviors (Silcock et al., 2015). However, in this study, the connotation of "surveillance" is not of particular concern. The "panoptic presence" here highlights the condition of mutual exposure inherent to MIM use and the responses to such information exposure between young adults and their geographically distant parents. Taking the architectural metaphor of the panopticon while focusing on its open and reverse direction (Fiske, 1993), we can assume that the panoptic performativity

(Perryman, 2006), which is also derived from the idea of "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959), is a strategy that young adults use to modify their interactional practices or even resist the panoptic scenarios that characterize MIM use with their parents. That is to say, realizing that they are being watched all the time, young people might behave more decently or perform "better" according to their interpretation of the social rules between parents and children so that they can escape the effect of the panopticon to gain relative autonomy in everyday life.

Intergenerational solidarity and family values in the translocal Chinese context

To conceptualize intergenerational solidarity among adults and their parents, Bengtson and Roberts (1991) developed a multifaceted model with six dimensions: (a) "association" (i.e., the frequency of contact), (b) "affection" (i.e., positive affection or sentiments), (c) "consensus" (i.e., agreement on values, attitudes, and beliefs), (d) "function" (i.e., help, support, and exchange of resources), (e) "norms" (i.e., obligations to the family and performance of familial roles), and (f) "structure" (i.e., the availability of propinquity for family interaction). In light of the translocality in which digitally mediated communications take place, Lam (2013) proposed the idea of "translocal family solidarity" to highlight the new relational dynamics among adults and their geographically distant parents.

   Though this study follows an interactional approach, we, by no means, consider family values as absolutely emergent. Rather, as Carbaugh (2007) has suggested, daily verbal or nonverbal communication practices are historically rooted in a society. Thus we presume that young adults and their parents share the family values while actively appropriating and responding to the cultural codes that shape an intergenerational relationship. Intergenerational solidarity is, from this perspective, defined as family values and cultural meanings shared among family members. In addition, this solidarity is subject to the ongoing and mutual "construction, maintenance, repair, and change" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2006, p. 231) of daily interactional practices within the management of parent–child relationships.

   Speaking of the Chinese context, family values rooted in Confucianism and collectivism, such as *Hexie* (harmony; G. M. Chen, 2002) and *Xiao Shun* (filial piety; Chang & Holt, 1991), act as the main meaning pool for people to draw on to fulfill their roles or practices in everyday family life. Although China is undergoing dramatic economic, cultural, and societal changes due to increased modernization and globalization, relational harmony is still the most endorsed cultural value among young people (Zhang, Harwood, & Hummert, 2005). Behavioral doctrines stemming from filial piety, such as "showing respect, being obedient, and living with parents" (Cheng & Chan, 2006, p. 262), are also advocated.

   In this study, young adults are qualified as the "post-1980s generation" born between the 1980s and early 1990s under the one-child policy. This group is considered to be deeply influenced by the individualism (including the nuclear family, independence, self-reliance, autonomy, and freedom) that arose from the process of modernization that started in 1978 to open up the Chinese economy (Cao, 2009). In other words, Chinese

family traditions seem to be challenged by the individualistic values flourishing in translocal modernity.

However, individualism does not necessarily exclude the collectivism rooted in Chinese family values. Scholars found that individualism blends with collectivistic traits, producing relationships in which harmonies coexist with tensions between the older and younger Chinese generations (R. Chen, 2015; Cheung & Pan, 2006; Zhang & Hummert, 2002). Such coexistence is understandable in the sense that the nuclear family structure, which is enforced by the state policy, does not foster the same individualism as in a Western context. Social and spatial mobility deepens intergenerational separateness, as an increasing number of young adults are departing their parental homes in pursuit of better education and employment. Regardless, the "mutual agreement of a balance of individualism and collectivism to achieve upward mobility as reciprocal aspirations" (Lam, 2013, p. 336) allows family solidarity to be managed or maintained through the mutual support that is evidenced in the investment of time, money, and emotion between translocal young adults and their parents.

Taking the aforementioned debate over traditional family values and individualism into account, it is of interest for this study to further understand how negotiations of different values take place to achieve balanced family ties.

Mobile communication in the context of family relations

According to Castells, Fernández, Qiu, and Sey (2007), "the demand for mobile communication has long existed, as family members always want to stay in touch and adjust their activities to ensure the functioning of the family unit" (p. 87). Studies found the instrumental dimension, the expressive dimension, and a mixture of both in families' mobile phone use (Christensen, 2009). For the instrumental purpose, mobile communication has proven its usefulness for the "micro-coordination" (Ling, 2004, p. 70) and "nuanced instrumental coordination" (Ling & Yttri, 2002, p. 139) of daily family activities. For the expressive purpose, the content of calls and text messages can express emotions such as caring and support. Wei and Lo (2006) found that affection derived from cellphone use enhances people's ties to family, strengthening the family bonds among college students in Taiwan. Y. F. Chen and Katz (2009) even assert that a mobile phone is "a must" for American college students to share experiences, receive emotional and physical support, and fulfill their family roles through frequent contact with their parents. Also, because of the ambiguity in the content or practices (Vestby, 1996), a mixture of these two purposes can be reflected in families' mobile phone use (Christensen, 2009).

Moreover, parental control taking the form of limiting phone bills, disabling caller identification, and tracing calls was identified in young adults' mobile phone use in the context of translocal family relations (K. Yoon, 2003). Nevertheless, this control is interpreted from the parents' point of view as necessary for confirming the safety of their teenage children living outside the parental home (Vestby, 1996). Yet, as the youth grow older and can afford a mobile phone by themselves, they gain more independence from parental control (Ling, 2000). In this sense, freedom and flexibility in interactions between parents and their children via mobile phone depend on the children's life stage.

Aside from the positive implications of mobile phone use such as continuous reactivation, reaffirmation of security and ties, and emotional support between family members (Axelsson, 2010; Christensen, 2009; Wei & Lo, 2006), scholars have also argued that the introduction of mobile communication technologies might bring negative consequences such as the loss of rites for family togetherness (Caron & Caronia, 2007).

In sum, as MIM is being integrated into Chinese people's lives, the management and maintenance of family ties in today's China are faced with an accelerated and panoptically mediated communication environment. It is thus reasonable for us to assume that interactional patterns might change as a result of the communication practices afforded by MIM use. Therefore, we will attempt to identify patterns of MIM interactions in the context of family relations. We will also strive to address the questions regarding how different MIM interaction modes create new options for managing and maintaining parent–child relationships and about the role of MIM use in the dynamics of authority, responsibility, and competency in the family. Following the idea of understanding human relationships from the interactionist perspective (Duck, 2007), this study aims to interpret the communicative practices themselves rather than examining whether or not MIM use between the two generations associatively improves the quality of parent–child relationship or intergenerational solidarity.

Method

This study engages with the interpretation of communication practices via MIM use between Chinese young adults and their parents in a translocal context. By MIM, we mean WeChat—a popular MIM app in China that reached 600 million active users by the end of June 2015 ("Number of Monthly Active WeChat Users," 2015); 68.6% of its users range from 16 to 65 years old (Smith, 2016). WeChat enables users to take part not only in person-to-person instant communication activities such as voice messaging, text messaging, voice call, and video call, but also in social interaction activities such as the ones that take place through "Moments" (i.e., the social media function that allows users to post, share, "like," and comment using text, pictures, or video), group messaging, and "lucky money" (i.e., a gamification function for users to transfer money to other friends in a group chat).

To qualify for the theoretical interests of the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), we recruited participants who are pursuing studies or taking jobs in places that are geographically distant from parental homes and use WeChat to communicate with their parents. Specifically, we invited participants from the researchers' circles of acquaintances, then expanded the sample through referrals. In the end, 30 informants (nine men and 21 women) participated in the interview. The age of participants ranged from 21 to 29. Nineteen of them are in graduate programs or working in metropolitan regions in China, while the other 11 are studying or employed by companies in the US.

The interviews were semistructured, centering on interactional behaviors with parents through WeChat and on family values or responsibilities attached to WeChat for managing parent–child relationships in translocal daily life. As an exploratory study, we encouraged participants to share experiences and stories of their WeChat communication with parents in as much detail as possible. All interviews were conducted in Chinese

from mid-July to early September 2015. The transcripts were then translated into English in order to directly quote interviewees' statements in this study's Findings section. Given the geographical distance between some of the interviewees and the researchers, not all interviews were conducted face-to-face. Therefore, telecommunication tools such as WeChat voice call and mobile phone call were used in 10 interviews. The interviews lasted around 40 minutes on average, and all of them were digitally recorded with the interviewees' consent. Also, to explore young adults' natural use of WeChat in communicating with parents and present a realistic picture of people's real communication habits (Wood, Kemp, & Plester, 2014), we asked interviewees to provide screenshots of their five most recent communication behaviors with their parents via WeChat. Communication behavior here refers to the use of all WeChat functions such as text messaging, voice messaging, photo sharing, voice call, video call, and interactions within the "moments" feature, including "likes" and comments. A total of 150 WeChat user records were retrieved from the interviewees. Since the contents of voice messages, voice calls, and video calls cannot be visually assessed in the same ways as text messaging, photo sharing, and interactions through the "moments" feature, interviewees were further asked to explain the contents they communicated with parents using these functions for researchers to interpret the information.

Following the "open coding" technique (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in the thematic analysis approach and the theoretical frame of this study, we coded recurring themes into patterns and modes displayed in WeChat use when young adults communicate with their parents. The qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 12.0 was used to assist with coding in the preliminary analysis. Then, the interview data were categorized, classified, and synthesized into patterns and modes based on key themes (e.g., instrumental or casual chatting, spontaneous daily greeting, parental check-in, and manipulating "moments") that appeared in WeChat communication behaviors between informants and their parents. Direct quotes from the interviews were also retrieved to elaborate on the findings and to address the research questions.

Findings

"Conversational" interactions involving negotiations ahead of time

Synchronous communicative features of WeChat such as voice calls and video calls allow for "conversational" interactions between young adults and their geographically distant parents. Unlike mobile phone calls, participants are not charged money for these conversations due to wireless web support. Also, the built-in camera in smartphones allows for expressive richness in conversations (i.e., video call) via WeChat. Nonetheless, synchronous conversations require both parties to devote large amounts of time to communicate with each other (Licoppe, 2004). Thus, negotiations regarding the availability to converse are made ahead of time by young adults and their parents. Regarding WeChat calls, though negotiations are flexible, they are determined mostly by the availability of young adults. As most interviewees explained, their parents did not want their children's work or study time to be disturbed by WeChat calls. In this sense, the negotiation reflects that the hierarchical implications attached to the value of filial piety, in which the child

should always be obedient to their parents, are somewhat dissolved in parents' under-standing and support of their children's busy schedules.

> Zhang (a): My mom waited for my WeChat voice call around my off-work time from Monday to Friday. Then, I initiated a conversation that lasted around 30 minutes with her to talk about things for various purposes.

Spontaneous "connected" interactions

Compared to synchronous "conversational" interactions that need negotiation in the structural dimension, "connected" interactions that consist of "short and frequent com-municative gestures" (Licoppe, 2004, p. 152) are more popular among young adults and their parents in a translocal context. These spontaneous "connected" interactions can be categorized into two patterns according to communication purposes.

Connected interactions with a mutually instrumental goal. "Connected interactions" with an instrumental goal were treated as an extension of the "micro-coordination" (Ling, 2004, p. 70) afforded by MIM use in this study. Characteristics such as being free of charge, ease of use, convenience, and flexibility for switching communication modes were men-tioned by interviewees when asked why they adopted WeChat to microcoordinate with their geographically distant parents. Adopting the "function" dimension of Bengtson and Robert's (1991) model, the instrumental purpose of these interactions can be understood as offering help and support to each other anytime and anywhere. Meanwhile, communi-cation modes with rich cues, such as multimedia messaging, were strategically used by both sides to facilitate these interactions. For instance, the interviewee Zhang (b) said that her mom requested a popular American brand of facial cream with an antiaging function in a voice message, but her mom could not accurately describe the product since she had only heard about it from a workmate. Her mom finally identified the target prod-uct after receiving pictures of several popular American creams through WeChat. The pictures were accompanied by voice messages from Zhang (b) describing the products in each picture.

Additionally, communication interactions with an instrumental goal conducted by young adults or their parents via WeChat were usually not urgent ones because interlocu-tors cannot be reached when wireless Internet is not available. Under urgent circum-stances, a mobile phone call was the preferred choice. Nevertheless, interviewees said that as long as their parents and themselves had enough wireless Internet data to use WeChat, they would communicate as many things with instrumental goals as possible through the service. As most interviewees emphasized, "having no telecommunication fees is attractive!"

Connected interactions with a mutually expressive goal. For "connected" interactions with an expressive goal, young adults and their geographically distant parents widely adopted com-municative modalities with rich cues for articulating and displaying their daily lives and activities via WeChat. The "affection" and "consensus" dimensions of intergenerational solidarity were echoed by interactions focusing on displaying emotions. The interviewee

Cheng said that he and his parents always used voice messages in the Changsha dialect when having small talk with an expressive goal because Mandarin cannot not always convey the exact emotions certain Changsha words do. In addition to small talk via text or voice messaging, photo sharing, emoticons or sticker use, "moments" posts, and the "lucky money" feature also played a part in expressive-oriented "connected" interactions.

Wu: In fact, I enjoy sending photos. Thus, I would like to send a variety of photos to my parents to let them know my emotions.

Gu: I send "lucky money" to my parents on important Chinese festivals such as the Spring Festival through WeChat. Also, an animated effect of star rain made greeting words seem more interesting than those sent by SMS.

Shi: They [Shi's parents] usually click "like" and sometimes leave a comment. I think it depends on how frequently they use "moments"; they click "like" once they see my posts. They generally leave a comment on my pictures. They say something like "it looks delicious," "you look happy," etc.

What's more, for young adults, a nostalgic desire to have an in-person family gathering was often triggered during expressive-oriented "connected" interactions.

Zheng: My parents consoled me in interactions via WeChat when I felt frustrated and did not have a good day. Under these circumstances, I really wanted to go home.

Che: When my parents and I talked about some things that were happening at home during our interactions on WeChat, they for example, told me, using instant picture sharing, that the flowers at home were blossoming, which made me want to go home to have a look.

"Connected" interactions initiated by parents. In addition to expressive-oriented "connected" interactions, young adults received a variety of WeChat communication gestures sent by their geographically distant parents. These interactions initiated by parents somehow extend parental tracking down of actions into new modes.

Check-in interactions. The check-in interactions initiated by parents, mostly by mothers, served as a way for parents to monitor their geographically dispersed children's daily lives. According to young adults' understanding, expressing care and confirming safety were the two main purposes for their parents to initiate interactions in the form of small talk about trivial and mundane things and inquiries about their whereabouts. For small talk, questions such as "what are you doing now, are you busy?" "did you get home?" "have you already eaten?" and "how did you spend the day?" were used by parents to initiate interactions with their adult children. Text or voice messaging was used to start these talks. Interactions were mainly brief articulations of trivial and mundane things that had recently happened in each other's daily lives. Also, another form of check-in interactions—information inquiry—is shown in the following excerpt:

	[The interaction happened when Xu's mother saw a picture she posted in her "moment"]
Xu's mom:	Did you take pictures with those people before leaving?
Xu:	Yes.
Xu's mom:	Who is Mr. Wang in your picture?
Xu:	He is my manager. Today was my last day in Shanghai. So we took pictures.

Information inquiry interactions ease parents' worries regarding their adult children's lives by allowing them to closely keep up with their children's activities. Even though check-in interactions are aimed at expressing care and concern, they intrude into young adults' routines by asking questions that need a reply. Interviewee Feng complained that the check-in messages from his mother that need a quick reply tend to interrupt his work on school assignments.

Information-forwarding interactions. Information-forwarding interactions happen when parents occasionally forward information to their kids. The forwarded information has content that parents consider beneficial for their children. Such behavior is understandable in the sense that parents are adopting alternatives to care for and offer emotional support to their children due to the lack of face-to-face interactions. For instance, brief articles similar in style to the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul* were frequently forwarded to young adults by their geographically distant parents who consider these articles inspiring and a way to offer some affection and emotional support to their children. Information that parents thought their offspring should know on topics such as health care, relationship management skills, and other themes potentially interesting to young adults was frequently sent to their children via WeChat.

Gu:	My mom used to actively forward me around 10 articles about health care and inspiring topics each day once she learned how to forward information via WeChat.

Information-forwarding interactions, like check-in interactions, have the purpose of expressing care and they don't need a reply since they only involve the parent forwarding information. Therefore, information forwarding is considered to be less intrusive than check-in interactions. Interestingly, emoticons such as a smiley face and the thumbs up icon were used by most young adults instead of words to show their parents that the forwarded information had been viewed.

"Connected" interactions initiated by parents somehow mirror the associational, affective, and normative dimensions of intergenerational solidarity. Firstly, by checking in and forwarding information periodically, parents aim to increase the frequency of interaction to maintain a connection with their adult children. Also, by choosing inspiring topics in interactions with their children, parents try to manage the intergenerational relationship through affection and positive emotions. Furthermore, the caring and parenting goals of these interactive practices allow parents to fulfil their family roles and obligations, further maintaining family cohesion.

"Panoptic" interactions with cross-checking and performing

Given that the spontaneous "connected" interactions and activities of both young adults and their parents are visible through their exchanges via WeChat, it was easy to identify a panoptic interaction consisting of two patterns: cross-checking interaction and performative interaction.

Cross-checking interactions. Connecting to both parents simultaneously was one of the needs when geographically dispersed young adults communicate with their parents with either instrumental or expressive goals. The "group chat" is a technical feature of WeChat that enables interactions among family members in a cross-checking style. For instance, interviewee Lu (a) did not individually communicate with her mother or father through WeChat; instead, she chose to do so through her family group. In family chat groups, young adults can communicate with both parents at the same time and have the interactions be simultaneously viewed by everyone. Wu, for example, created a family group this year so that she had no need to repeat important information to both her parents. Fu (a), on the other hand, stated that she uses the family group mainly for sharing photos.

Cross-checking interactions between family members also serve to confirm the safety of family members. Interviewee Wang mentioned that in her family chat group, one member always reported his/her location and condition (*bao ping an*) when he or she was on a trip in order to set family members' minds at ease.

Performative interactions. Performative interactions during the "connected presence" result from the "panoptic presence" considering that the activities of both young adults and their parents are highly visible on MIM. In interactions with an expressive goal on WeChat, young adults interacted in a "performative" way (i.e., to construct and project a positive, optimistic, hard-working, happy, and healthy image to their geographically distant parents so as to avoid worrying them). Supported by the affordances of WeChat, performative interactions take place by manipulating interactive modalities and content. Interviewee Wei said that he does not use voice messaging to conduct expressive small talk with his mother when he is not happy because his voice could reveal his unhappiness, which might cause his mom to worry about him. Interviewee Zheng mentioned that she uses the "grouping" function (i.e., a technical feature that only allows posts to be viewed by selected users) to block her mom from viewing posts related to negative things such as rude words when in a bad mood.

Additionally, interviewee Gao, who checked all her WeChat posts and eliminated those that she deemed inappropriate once her parents joined her account, provides a telling case of her awareness of the panoptic presence in WeChat use. She would post something like "early to bed, early to get up" in her "Moments" to deliberatively assure her parents that she follows a regular schedule and gets enough rest "because once they [Gao's parents] realized that I posted things late at night, after 12:00 pm, they would post a message about the harm of staying up late." The experience provided by the interviewee Jiang also showed the "panoptic presence" in the connection between her and her dad. She previously blocked her dad from viewing her posts on "Moments" because she felt uncomfortable exposing her unhappiness to her dad. However, she unblocked her

dad after realizing that information could ease her dad's worry about her. According to Jiang, her dad viewed and clicked "like" on all her posts and downloaded her pictures from "Moments."

Although the use of WeChat affords young adults the ability to manage their connection to their parents' "panoptic presence," they control their panoptic exposure in a performative way. Nevertheless, the traditional Chinese family values—a harmonious relationship and filial piety obligation that spares parents conflict and worries—with the affective and normative domains of intergenerational solidarity, were still showed by young adults in expressive-oriented interactions with their geographically distant parents through the WeChat practice repertoire.

Discussion

Firstly, the investigation of the communicative interactions between young adults and their parents via MIM confirmed the notion of a "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004). Two major patterns of interaction—"conversational" interaction and "connected" interaction—were identified according to certain goals or prerequisites. The family group chat mode coexisted with "connected" interaction for both instrumental and expressive goals. In particular, in "connected" interactions with an expressive goal, the majority of the interactions were initiated by parents through check-in or information-forwarding modes. Meanwhile, "connected interactions" can turn into "conversational interactions" depending on the specific communicative needs of both parties. Some interviewees mentioned that they would have "conversational" interactions with their parents after having expressive-oriented small talk such as acknowledgement of traditional festivals or parents' birthdays. Patterns and interaction modes identified from the analysis of interview data are presented in Table 1.

Secondly, comparing precedents such as mobile phone calls and SMSs, the free telecommunication feature made both young adults and their parents increase the frequency of contact for both instrumental and expressive purposes when they were geographically apart. Specifically, the technical convenience, ease of use, and richness of communicative functions (C. Yoon et al., 2015) afforded young adults and their parents the opportunity to have more than a "connected presence" (Licoppe, 2004) through a variety of interaction modes. In this sense, the "panoptic presence" resulting from "panoptic interactions" seems to provide an illustration of the emerging scenario of parent–child communication via MIM in a translocal context. Also, the performative pattern in MIM

Table 1. Patterns of WeChat interactions within the family realm.

		Prerequisite		
		Negotiation ahead of time	Spontaneity	
Goal	Instrumental Expressive	"Conversational" interaction	Family group chat "Connected" interaction Family group chat	Initiated by parents

use also implies, to some extent, a "reverse panopticon" (Fiske, 1993) among young adults: they are not only aware of being watched by their parents, but also intentionally manage their behavior (e.g., showing only a positive image to reduce parental worry and selectively exposing themselves by "grouping" their parents into different categories to control visibility). These communicative channels can, in some ways, be understood as a resistance to the panoptic presence enabled by mobile communication.

Thirdly, our findings suggest that post-1980s generation young adults in translocal China actively maintain intergenerational solidarity and family values while also keeping some individualism. Specifically, the "association," "affection," "consensus," "function," and "norm" dimensions of intergenerational solidarity were displayed across different interaction patterns and modes for certain goals between young adults and their parents. Meanwhile, the translocal constraints to the "structure" domain (i.e., relating to geographical distance from the family) were somehow overcome by interactions relating to the "affection" and "consensus" dimensions through MIM use repertoires, according to experiences of some informants. In Chinese family values, *Hexie* (harmony) was embedded in MIM-mediated interactions between young adults and their parents through the selection of communicative issues and expressive modes. Although filial piety values can be somehow supported on the behavioral level, such as in the frequency and expressive modes of MIM use of some participants, others who had an individualism-oriented understanding of these values thought communicative interactions with their parents did not relate to filial piety or even conflict with it. Instead, for young adults, MIM use can be an alternative for keeping in touch with their parents in a peer relational way, exchanging information and knowing about each other's daily lives.

A few limitations should be mentioned before concluding. Firstly, the self-reported information provided by young adults might only offer a one-sided view of the MIM-mediated interactions with their parents. Thus, young adults' parents should be interviewed to cross-check their interactions via MIM with their geographically distant children in future studies. Secondly, the relatively high educational level of informants might have undermined the representativeness of the results. In spite of these limitations, two main patterns of MIM interactions in addition to panoptic interactions were identified in the Chinese translocal family context: conversational interaction and connected interaction. We also provided an alternative understanding of how intergenerational solidarity and family values were put into practice by both parties through the MIM practice repertoire. The findings of this explorative study can offer the basis to conduct future quantitative examinations of the impact of MIM practice repertoires on the quality of intergenerational solidarity between young adults and their parents in a translocal context. On the whole, this study enriched our understanding of the impact of mobile communication technologies on family life.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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