Abstract:
Four years ago, one of my best male friends came across “depressing situations” with his friends. All of them are straight men in their early twenties. When he disclosed his stories to me, I felt surprised that young straight males can be so sensitive, vulnerable and dependent on friendships with other men! This leads me to ponder on male friendships and masculinity, to be specific, the interrelations between this “decline” taking place at the transition from a male adolescent to a full-fledged adult and “how to be masculine”, “how to be a man”.

Not much literature has documented the connections between the decline of male friendships and masculinity; and if it does, it often takes up functional-essentialist positions such as biological determinism, psychosexual development theories, spiritual essentialism and religious fundamentalism, and socialization and sex role theory. These perspectives are largely based on consensus theories and hardly problematize this phenomenon, which is why they are inadequate. In this research, I propose to adopt a critical gender perspective to gain a fuller understanding of the decline of male friendships, in the context of contemporary Hong Kong.

From a constructivist stance, the present research adopts individual interviews and focus groups as the major research methods for understanding men’s perceptions of male friendships based on their narratives of their own experiences. The main purpose of this research is to draw attention to the structural hierarchy of masculinity and show how masculinity is constructed by social practices and discourses as well as the diversity and differences among men.

Speaker’s brief biography:
ZHANG Chi is currently a full-time PhD student at the Department of Applied Social Sciences of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She obtained her master’s degree in Gender Studies from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and bachelor’s degree in English (Translation) from The University of International Business and Economics, China.