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Announcing a Chinese Studies public talk:

## “Dao and Water: A Comparative Eco-Ethics”

by Jea Sophia Oh, Assistant Professor of Philosophy,  
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Friday, March 9, 12:00 p.m.

Moore Hall Room 104, (1890 East-West Rd, Honolulu, HI 96822)

**ABSTRACT:** In the *Dao De Jing* chapter one, Lao Tzu teaches, “the Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao” (Feng and English 1985: 9). Perhaps this sounds vague and mysterious. Nature is the manifestation of the Dao while the condition of its manifestation is its inner stillness (*xing*), the power within. It is the Way (Dao) of nature. It is not strange to say that nature comes out of nature. The Dao is everywhere and flows through everything. Therefore, the Dao is everything. It is not awkward to use naturalistic terms to describe Dao as the ultimate mystery that is manifested in nature natured (*natura naturata*) via nature naturing (*natura naturans*). In *Dao De Jing* chapter eight, Lao Tzu teaches, “The highest goodness resembles water. Water greatly benefits myriad things without contention. It stays in places that people dislike. Therefore it is similar to the Dao” (1985: 23). Reading *Dao De Jing* chapter eight, I deeply dive into the water of Dao and find how Dao and water resemble each other to say that nature is Dao inasmuch as Dao is nature. Then, I will ask an analytic question, “If Dao is like water, what is Dao of water?” The water metaphor in *Dao De Jing* signifies nature naturing as a gender neutral word, whereas water has been interpreted by many feminist scholars as a feminine metaphor and identified as the Primal Mother. Water in the *Dao De Jing* is non-binary and neutral and means neither female nor male but neutral. In contrast with the feminist essentialist notion of Daoism, I will suggest ‘fecundity’ as the inner power of nature in myriad things, including human males and more-than-human nature, which cannot be reduced to femininity alone. Finally, the Dao of nature will be presented as the basis for an ethic of nature that humans should follow in their relations with other humans and with nature as a whole.



DR. JEA SOPHIA OH is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Her research is highly interdisciplinary and cross-cultural, intersecting Western philosophy/theology, and Asian philosophy/spirituality, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Donghak [東學, Eastern Learning]. She is the author of *A Postcolonial Theology of Life: Planetarity East and West* (2011). Her recent publications include “In the Beginning was the Place...: An East-West Dialogue of Creatio ex Profundis,” Special Issue: An East-West Cultural Dialogue on “Place,” *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 2017:3, edited by Roger T. Ames and Peter D. Hershock, Beijing Normal University Press and Springer (July 2017).