2 exhibitions explore mysteries of ancient traditional medicine

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One of the pillars of Chinese culture, traditional Chinese medicine has long been underestimated, especially in the West.  
With the goal of peeling away the mystery of TCM, two exhibitions telling the story of Chinese medicine and practices in America will be on display at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) in New York from April 26 through Sept 9.  
The exhibitions, Chinese Medicine in America: Converging Ideas, People and Practices and On the Shelves of Kam Wah Chung & Co, combine the use of historical artifacts and contemporary art to demystify and deepen understanding of the discipline.  
Chinese Medicine in America explores medicine that combines ancient metaphysical concepts, including yin and yang, qi and five phases with the modern practices of Chinese medicine in the US, such as herbal treatments and acupuncture.  
The exhibition contains medical artifacts, contemporary art and profiles on notable figures in Chinese medicine to explore how the philosophy of medicine and history are linked.  
On the Shelves of Kam Wah Chung & Co celebrates the medical practice of Ing Hay (Doc Hay), who became a prominent figure in eastern Oregon after the California Gold Rush.  
Hay, who immigrated to the US in 1887, brought his knowledge of herbology and pulsology to a remote part of Oregon when Western medicine was in its infancy.  
With the presentation of the historical Kam Wah Chung general store, the exhibition includes patented medicines developed by the doctor, and archival materials such as photos, patient records and correspondence with non-Chinese settlers.  
The exhibition illustrates daily life in the region and the lesser-known history of Chinese immigration in the Pacific Northwest.  
At a press preview on Wednesday, Donna Mah, guest curator of Chinese Medicine in America, said that Chinese medical practices and medicines have proliferated.  
In the mid 19th century, these “mysterious and magical” practices and concoctions arrived with the earliest Chinese immigrants, who helped build the railroads and searched for gold.  
In the 1970s, this “alternative” medicine was best known as acupuncture. Today, Chinese medicine is becoming more integrated into US healthcare.  
However, “for a period of time in America, Chinese medicine seemed relegated to the past — particularly in contrast to the high-tech advances made in biomedicine during the 20th century”, said Mah, currently a faculty member at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, which has campuses in San Diego, New York and Chicago.  
“But it is fortunate that much has been preserved and brought forward, as Chinese medicine is relevant today in our evolving understanding of the human body, medical sensibilities and the nature of health and healing,” she said.  
“More than just a technical study about the practices of Chinese medicine, these exhibitions are actually an exploration of a Chinese worldview, if a singular one even exists,” said Herb Tam, curator and director of the exhibitions.

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