



Christopher Burke

**Louise Bourgeois (1994–1995).** From *The Insomnia Drawings*, 220 mixed-media works on paper of varying dimensions. Detail shown here: crayon, pencil and charcoal on paper, 22.7cm × 30.5 cm. Daros Collection, courtesy Cheim & Read, New York

a mechanism to rid the tired mind of circling demons. Three of the pictures are of clocks whose numbers join together in a circle and register the progression of time moving relentlessly forward with its mocking, tick-tocking march.

These pictures are filled with the anxiety of recurring thoughts and reveal the distress of irresolvable emotion. The repeated patterns of spirals and waves seem to be trying to lure obsessive ideas into peace through a process of self-hypnosis, but these drawings are not calming. Anxiety and the desperate desire to resolve this anxiety seem to chase one another around in circles, hoping for eventual fatigue. The images are filled with agitation. They grasp for peace. They go beyond the quest for sleep, and search for a deeper sensation of psychological well-being.

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*The Insomnia Drawings* were on display at the the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City from June 14 to Sept. 21, 2003.

### Past progressive

## James R. Menzies: healing and preaching in early 20th-century China

The image of physician as evangelist predominates early literature on Canadian missionary medicine in China. When James R. Menzies graduated in Toronto on 1895, his dual degrees in theology and medicine made him an ideal missionary candidate. The Presbyterian Church in Canada dispatched the reverend doctor to China to begin the first medical mission at Changte in Honan province (Anyang, Henan). In those years the practice of medicine by missionaries was considered an evangelistic strategy aimed at gaining the trust of prospective converts; the medical doctor was welcomed where the preacher and teacher were barely tolerated.<sup>1</sup> Canadian Methodist physicians in Szechwan (Sichuan) were reportedly winning their way to the hearts to the people, finding opportunities “multiplying” upon them “every day and hour, for preaching the Gospel in the most effective way.”<sup>2</sup> Two of the

earliest Honanese to embrace Christianity were Chou Lao-Chang and Li Chi Ching, blind patients cared for by Canadian doctors Frazer Smith and James Menzies.<sup>3-5</sup> Such legendary conversions solidified support for medical missionaries within the Presbyterian community, and may explain the subsequent official emphasis on doctors’ evangelistic role with their patients. This role was sometimes exaggerated, as a comparison between the published and unpublished versions of a photograph of Menzies will illustrate.

In 1913 the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions published a photo featuring Menzies standing and reading before a small Chinese audience.<sup>6</sup> Its title, “Preaching to patients,” contrasts with the caption of the original photo, which reads, “Dr. Menzies with his workmen at morning prayers.” There is a subtle but significant difference between the notion of patients receiving Biblical in-

struction from a physician before receiving care, and employees participating in morning prayers. Illness and injury make patients particularly vulnerable to exploitation, and it is possible that they could interpret conversion to Christianity as the price of receiving treatment, or interpret Christian rituals as magical cures. The discrepancy between the photographs suggests that evangelism by physicians may have been more rhetoric than reality. Whether or not it was common, mission supporters expected and idealized the practice of preaching to patients. For his part, Menzies believed that, while practical skills might improve lives, the Christian message could *transform* them. He lived by his Christian convictions.

Arguably, he also died by them. On Mar. 17, 1920, Menzies was murdered while coming to the aid of Sadie Lethbridge and Janet Brydon, two missionaries whose home had been stormed by



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*Dr. Menzies with his workmen at morning prayers*

The original photograph, later published with the caption "Preaching to patients."<sup>6</sup>

a band of robbers.<sup>7</sup> Having heard a call for help, Menzies approached the women's residence unarmed, and was beaten and fatally shot while Miss Lethbridge watched from a hiding spot on her verandah. This was the first time in the perilous history of the mission that the tragedy of a violent death occurred. Lethbridge never recovered from the shock and, as it happened, died 4 months later.<sup>8</sup> Nurse Brydon, however, remained in China until 1939.<sup>9</sup> Menzies' untimely death ushered in a new generation of medical missionaries to China, including his replacement at the new Menzies Memorial Hospital, Dr. Robert McClure,<sup>10</sup> and Menzies' daughter Jean, who was a nurse.<sup>11</sup> With the construction of three modern hospitals in Honan in the early 1920s, the practice of medicine in China gained acceptance as a legitimate expression of the

Gospel in itself and was no longer presented as simply a means to an evangelistic end.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent shift in Canadian missions from evangelism to service rendered the dual purpose "to heal and to preach" obsolete.

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