CHANGDEOKGUNG

In the secret garden the king provided pavilions for poets, straddling land and lake, to contemplate the maples’ changing light, the shape of water-lilies and mountain rock, the juniper’s thousand years of branching out.

The palace guide explains the harmony propitious for the dual art: the composing and the calligraphy – how thought will sketch about the page and meaning gather its strands within each inky stroke of tapered brush.

‘The bright square of pond is man’s invention, inside, Nature’s island of weeping trees, that’s the yin and yang’, she says, ‘this garden, where our exertions meet the gravelled earth, exhibits the essence of Korean philosophy’.

The same, if you scaled the palace wall guarding this kept remnant of fissured trees, you’d see the neon advertisements written on apartment blocks as grand as palaces, the shadowed bright and dark in harmony.