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583 Archival Remix Reflection

While digitizing the East Asian texts at Princeton University Library's Digital Studio (a temporary job that I started before the start of this course), I had been wondering about the characters in the texts I was digitizing. I wondered how the volumes were created (some texts were printed on incredibly thin paper, tissue-like), how they were printed (moveable type or other printing method), and what the characters meant. I have never written an Asian character before and don't know the meanings of any Asian characters, so the subject matter was all new to me.

This got me thinking that others are probably intrigued by Asian characters and the beautiful, ordered art form that makes up Asian calligraphy. With the prompts of this project, I figured I could incorporate all my wonderment with some of the texts that I spent so much time and effort digitizing. After all, the purpose of digitizing is not only to preserve the material in a digital format, but also to make the content more accessible and available to a wider audience.

Around the time that these ideas were swimming in my mind, I stumbled upon a handwriting article by Chris Wilson on Time's website which challenged users to see if they remembered how to write in cursive. The article included an interactive quiz component where users could quiz themselves and receive a grade based on their digital input of cursive letters. This interactive instantly made all my ideas meld together in a cohesive manner to make a tool where users could interact with the East Asian texts by practicing predetermined characters digitally, while remaining within the interface and looking at the original digitized text.

One problem I faced was finding open source code for the interactive component. I went to Twitter and tweeted the author of the Time article, Chris Wilson. To my surprise, he responded! After a few tweets back and forth, I sent him an email (I couldn't find his email on the original article or his LinkedIn page). He said that he wrote his own algorithmic code for the grading component, but for user input he used open source code called Sketch.js. I never thought at the start of this project that I would have any interaction with the author of this article, but out of curiosity for the code, I was pushed to use social media as a main form of contact.

I knew the components I wanted to include in *The East Asian Calligraphy Challenge*, but had to curate them from various sources including Chris Wilson's open source technology suggestion, Marie's Pastiche blog for the sample of how to write an Asian character, and finding a suitable example of East Asian text from Princeton University's Digital Library. In itself, this project *was* an East Asian calligraphy challenge!