

# The Hmong Cultural Landscape of Eau Claire, Wisconsin

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## Hmong Tombstones

Death is a part of life, but the way each culture perceives it varies. For the Hmong people, having a tomb stone was not common. This new practice has been introduced as they slowly convert to Christianity and assimilating to the American culture. Although this practice is fairly new, the burial location is still culturally based. The Hmong believed that the deceased must be buried in higher elevation and the head must be pointing to the east. The sun must rise over the head and set by the feet. They believed that this will bring wealth and success to the family and their descendants.

Some common themes such as Christianity, Shamanism, and the Hmong cultural life are embedded into the beautiful etching. Having a portrait of the deceased etched onto the tombstone has become very popular. Some feel it is important to have the engraved portrait to help the younger generation envision the loved one who had passed when they visit their memorial.



## Hmong Gardens



## Hmong Garden Tools

**Hlau**  
When in the garden, a traditional Hmong tool called hlau is still used alongside more modern-day ones. All the parts are hand made. The blades are made by Hmong blacksmiths that know the perfect curvature to allow the blade to work around the plants while extracting the weeds from the roots up. The wooden handles are then made by the buyer. He or she can custom them to fit their height and needs.

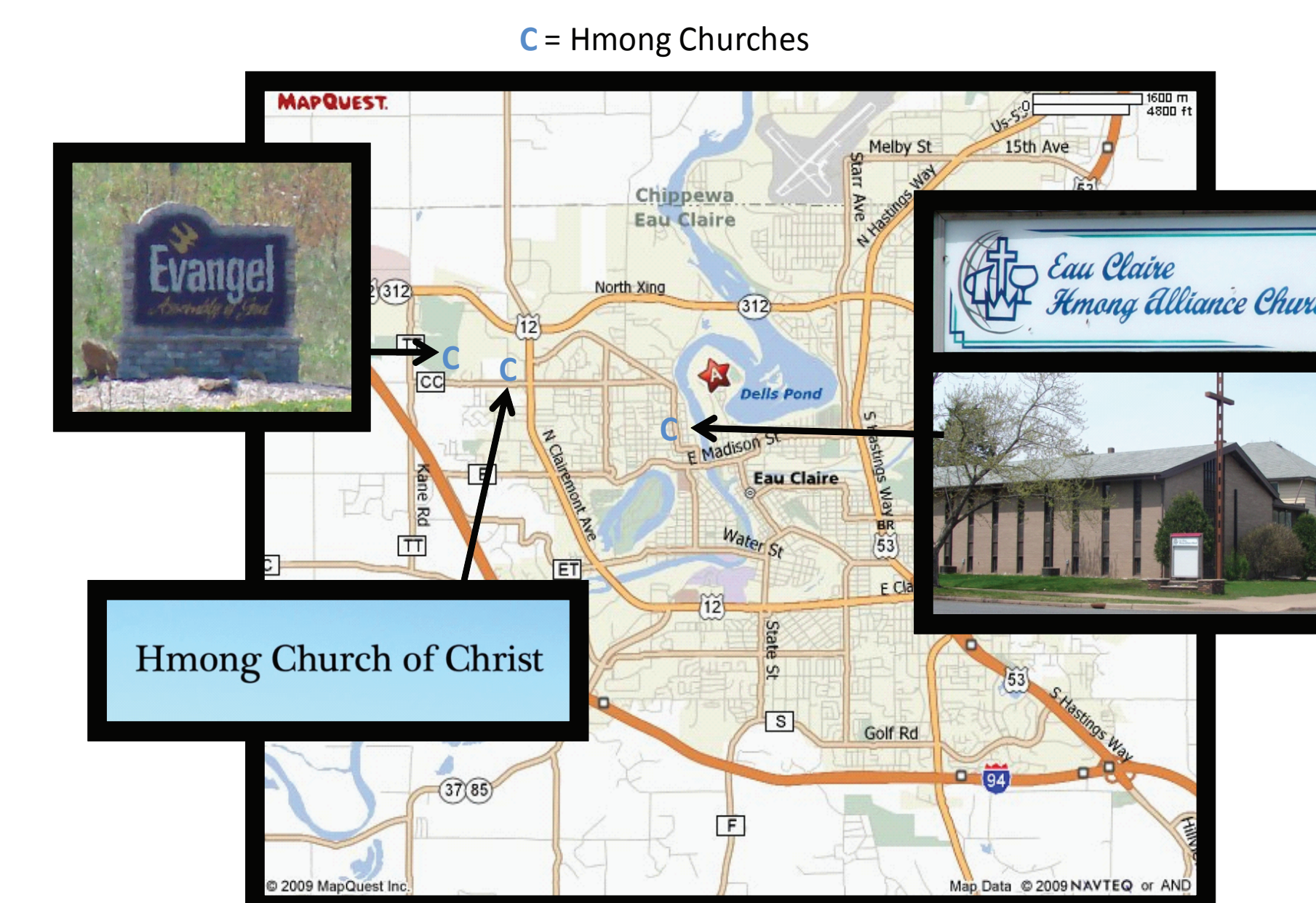


## Hmong Churches

The Hmong community in Eau Claire is slowly converting from Shamanism to Christianity. The younger generations lack the knowledge of the Shaman religion and are seeking a new and different faith. Christianity is still new to the Hmong culture. Due to misunderstanding between the two practices, family feuds arise and even in some cases, families break apart.

Eau Claire has four predominately Hmong congregations divided by three denominations of Christianity:

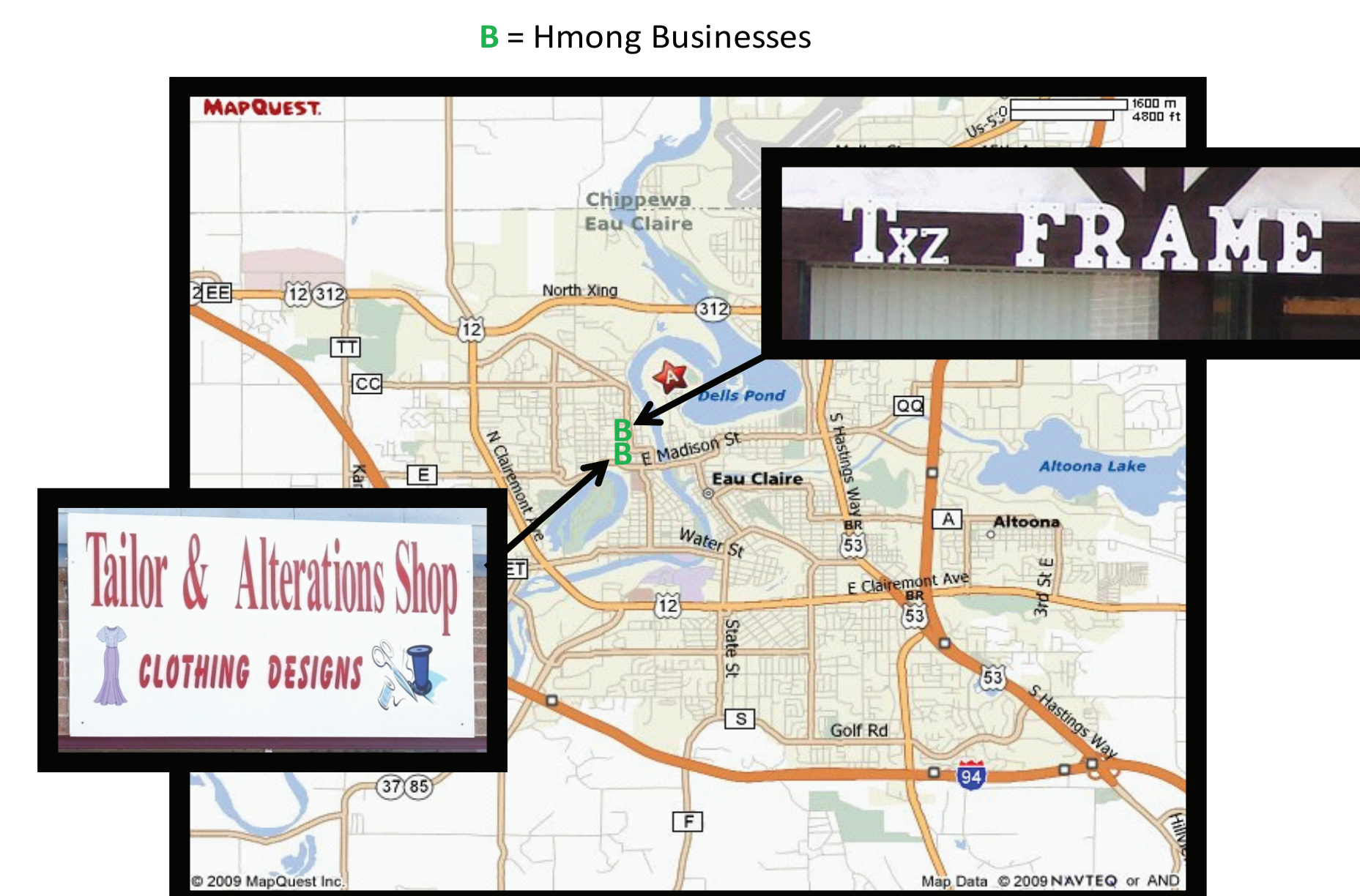
\* Alliance \* Baptist \* Assembly



## Hmong Businesses

In searching for a new way to make a living, a few Hmong families are branching out to expand their services to the community. Along Bellingier Street, Txz Frame and Tailor & Alterations Shop are small businesses that offer non-traditional services. Though the services that they provide are not cultural services, these owners hope to expand their talents and knowledge to the Hmong community. The skills that they have obtained were learned here in the United States. The owners of these little businesses chose this location due to the amount of Hmong customers that frequent this area.

"This is a good place. People can shop for their food, take their family to eat, and come to see what I do. It is good for my business."  
Txz Frame Owner



## Hmong at Farmer's Market

As a way of survival, Hmong people have always grown everything that is part of their diet. Their vegetations include mustard greens, bitter melons, cucumbers, cabbage, beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, lettuce, rice, and chili peppers. Today, this list has grown. Many of the Hmong farmers are now selling their produce at various farmer's markets in Eau Claire and surrounding cities.

The main market in which the majority of the Hmong farmers participate is the Phoenix Park Farmer's Market also known as the Downtown Farmer's Market. Hmong farmers of all ages comprise 80% of all the booths at this market. Some of the booths have been handed down from parents to children and some families to relatives.

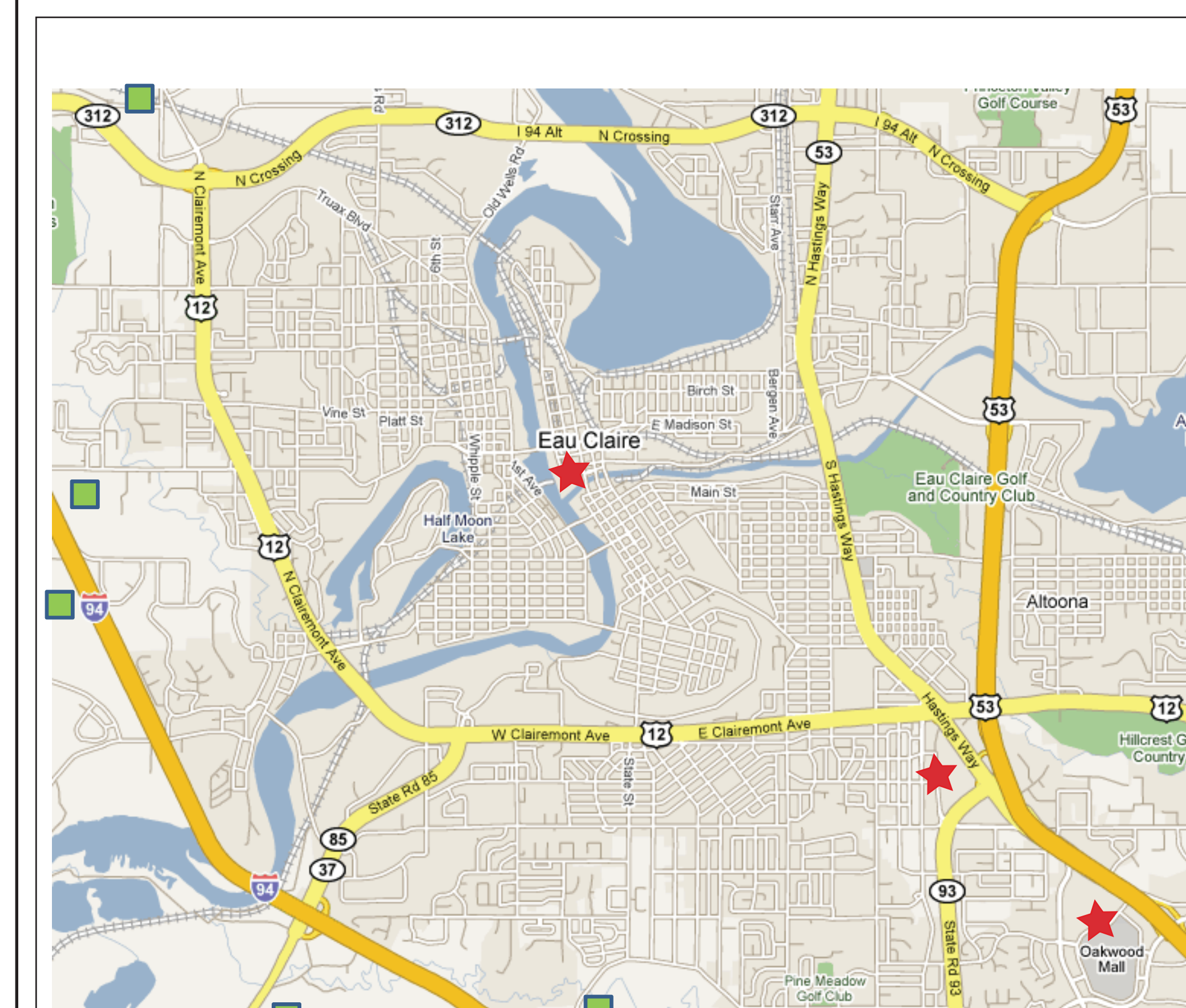
The Oakwood Mall Farmer's Market opened in the late 1990s. Although this is one of the newest markets, it has been the slowest to develop since it conflicts with the Downtown Farmer's Market schedule.

The newest Farmer's Market is located in the Festival Food parking lot. This market is open only on Sundays and the booths placement is established on a first come basis. Here the farmers do not have to pay a fee or function under union rules.

For all these markets, the farmers are beginning to sell some of their traditional vegetables alongside popular ones. Some of the popular vegetables are carrots, beets, potatoes, beans, peas, lettuce, bell peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, pumpkins, kohlrabi, radishes, and many more. The newest produce and products sold are strawberries, raspberries, and flowers.

The whole family participates in the farmer's market venture. Children help in the garden as well as in the booth, many times serving as language interpreters for their parents.

■ Hmong gardens ★ Farmers' Markets at which Hmong sell vegetables and flowers



## Hmong Grocery Stores

There are four oriental grocery stores that are owned by Hmong families. These stores carry various dry and canned goods that are imported from Asia. Many of the goods are used in daily meals for Hmong families. These stores are also located within the downtown area. Since this area is a service to the Hmong community with jobs, health care, education, and homes, it is a quick and easy way for them to access their food needs.

Long Cheng Market and L'oriental are on Bellingier Street among other Hmong businesses. Ameriental Food Store is located on Putnam Street off of Birch Street, and Amerasian Food is on Cameron Street near Clairemont.



These are various types of goods being sold in the Hmong oriental stores. Many of these items are imported and some have influenced Hmong families to produce their own goods.



Not only do these grocery stores carry food items, they also carry translated movies, music, cosmetics, and other ordinary products.

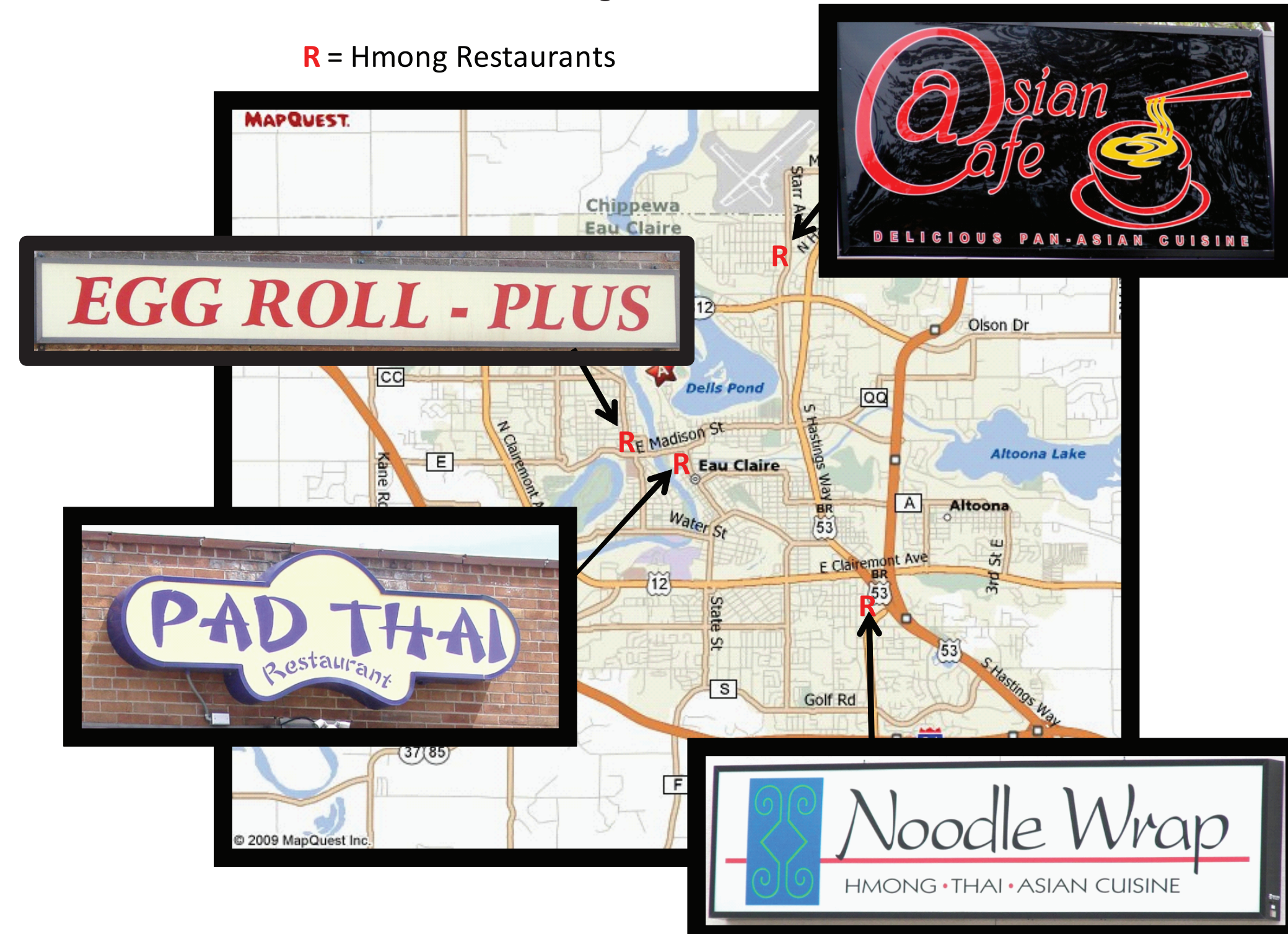
## Hmong Restaurants

Hmong restaurants are spread throughout Eau Claire, but with a closer examination, they are established in well-populated Hmong residential areas.

**Egg Roll-Plus** is located on Bellingier Street in the downtown area. A few blocks away is **Pad Thai**, located on North Barstow Street. This central area is the most populated locale for Hmong families and businesses. Many of these families live in state housing situations within a two mile radius of both restaurants. The Hmong Mutual Assistance Association is only a block north of Pad Thai and there majority of the Hmong community passes through this area on a daily basis.

On the north part of town, **Asian Café** is located on the corner of Starr Avenue and Eddy Lane. This is roughly two miles from Runway Avenue where great populations of low income Hmong families are housed and where many of the Hmong students attend school. Sam Davey Elementary School is directly across the street and North High School is less than quarter of a mile away.

On the south side of town, **Noodle Wrap** is located off of Mall Drive, behind Festival Foods. This restaurant is an outlier due to the funding they received from the state to maintain their business. Although their location is on the south side, many Hmong families still travel to this restaurant because the food is so good.



Hmong Foods

Though the Hmong restaurants are owned and run by Hmong families, the foods that they serve are not limited to Hmong cuisine. The dishes are influenced by other Asian fare such as Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese. Since Laos is surrounded by China, Thailand, and Vietnam, the Hmong refugees adapted to their neighboring countries and learned how to cook some of their dishes. When they immigrated to the United States after the Vietnam War, they brought some of the recipes to the United States and began to share them with family and friends.

At all of these restaurants, they serve a rice noodle soup called pho. Although it is not part of Hmong cuisine, it is a very popular soup and is among one of the favorite items ordered by Hmong customers at each restaurant. This big bowl of soup is a Vietnamese specialty soup that many of the Hmong missed when they came to the United States. Other dishes that are served such as fried rice, papaya salad, and pad thai are also not Hmong dishes.

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