Summary of IRD call on Monday August 02

WG members present: Edmon Chung, Avri Doria, Rafik Dammak, Bob Hutchinson, Yao Jiankang, Ram Mohan, James Galvin, Julie Hedlund, Dave Piscitello, Steve Sheng and Gisella Gruber-White

Apologies: Steven Metaliz, Andrei Kolesnikov

Discussions focused on displaying IDN variants in WHOIS.

Background:

Variant characters occur where a single character has two or more representations in a particular script, which may or may not look visually similar. For example, most Chinese characters have both a simplified representation and traditional representation, thus an IDN domain composed of Chinese characters would have many variants. As an illustration, the variants for IDN label 清华大学 (tsinghua university) will include: 清华大学、清华大學、清華大学、清華大學、**清**华大学、**清**华大學、**清華大学**、**清華大學**.

Previous WG discussions seem to ask that all variants for a given IDN domain can be queried and displayed. This means for example a WHOIS query of the name 清华大学 or 清华大學 or 清華大学 or 清華大學 or **清华大学** or **清华大學** or **清華大学** or **清華大學** should return the correct WHOIS result.   At Brussels, some community members expressed concerns that in some languages and scripts such as Indian and Chinese, the number of variants for a given domain could reach 10s or even hundreds, and requiring a query of all the variants could severely impact the registry's ability to meet the WHOIS service level agreement (SLA) with ICANN.

Different TLDs handle variants differently. For CNNIC, the variants are categorized into two types: activated variants and reserved variants. Activated variants are IDN variants whose A-label are put into the DNS zone file and thus resolvable. In the example above the activated variants are { 清华大学, **清華大學**}. The reserved variants are variants reserved by the registry/registrar for that IDN label, so no one can register it, but these names themselves are not used otherwise. In the example above, the reserved variants would be {清华大學、清華大学、清華大學, **清华大学**、**清华大學**、**清華大学**}

There are a couple of alternatives to query/display variants here:

Alternative 1: Enable query and display of all the variants. So a WHOIS query of the name 清华大学 or 清华大學 or 清華大学 or 清華大學 or **清华大学** or **清华大學** or **清華大学** or **清華大學** should return the correct WHOIS information for 清华大学.

Alternative 2: Enable query of only activated variants *only*. So in the above example, only query of { 清华大学, **清華大學**} would return the correct WHOIS.

WG discussions:

The WG seems to agree that if the name is in the DNS (activated variants) then WHOIS should respond. What is the only part not clear is that whether the reserved ones, the registry or registrar should respond to? Some suggested that the registry contract have no requirement for reserved names to appear in the Whois. So then it seems best to leave it to the registry to decide.

On this issue some WG members cautioned that it may not be the WG's mission to decide about which variant should Whois display? Instead, the WG should focus on what the capabilities ought to be rather than whether those capabilities should be deployed, or in what manner they should be deployed.

And in this area, we might be better advised to not only just call out the question, but to explicitly ask for some level of consultation for the major language groups that have to deal with variant issues. What is the local practice, or what is the best current practice? Or, to ask for such best current practices to get defined or documented. Because, one size may not fit all when it comes to variants.

Further, that the consultation with the language groups - can get coordinated from within ICANN. It can also be something that is done between the G, and the CC. The IRD-WG lays out the groundwork for what is the set of problems, or at least some set of problems, and then they might need to be further study groups created in order to actually determine what kind of answers are the appropriate answers.

Regarding idea of forming WG, some WG suggested that the IRD-WG should take up this task because of the cost and overhead just to charter another group. If the IRD-WG's mandate needs to be widened, so be it.

So the chair suggested that "we really shouldn't throw the ball away just yet. We - in our document that will come out we should talk about this that we need to do more study but not necessarily throw it out to any particular group."

One of the focal point of the study and consultation with other language groups is that beside reserved variants and activated variants, are there other types of variants exist?

In the next WG meeting, we will discuss the summary document that the staff have put together and try to find a roadmap forward for reaching consensus.