Research on the Beijing Academic Library & Information System

Lei Yi

Library, Beijing University of Chemical Technology, Beijing, China
Email: kant20042000@163.com

Abstract

Beijing Academic Library & Information System (BALIS) is the largest regional university library alliance (RULA) in Beijing, which has 100 member libraries, covering almost all university libraries (UL) of Beijing. BALIS was founded in 2007, through more than fifteen years of development, which has formed a certain business scale. Its services mainly cover six aspects: document delivery (DD), interlibrary loan (ILL), group procurement, joint consulting, business training, and technical support. BALIS is the representative of Chinese RULAS. The fifteen years of rapid development of BALIS are also the fifteen years of rapid development of RULAS in China. Through researching it, the construction ideals (CI), organizational structure (OS), and operation methods (OM) of the Chinese RULAS can be well revealed. Therefore, this article adopts the method of case analysis to grasp the development context and law of RULAS in China.

Subject Areas

Library, RULA, BALIS

Keywords

BALIS, RULAS, Construction Ideals, Organizational Structure, Operation Methods

1. Introduction

With the development of emerging information technology, contracts between university libraries have been continuously strengthened. How to break down barriers and truly achieve resource sharing among university libraries is a problem that every librarian needs to seriously consider. Taking the path of alliance and exchanging needed information with each other can better make full use of

literature resources. BALIS is one of the higher education public service systems under the leadership of the Beijing Committee for Academic Libraries (BCAL) [1], which is the largest regional university library alliance (RULA) in Beijing, and also represents the high ground of RULAS in China [2]. The past two decades have been a golden period for the development of Chinese RULAS, with almost all provinces establishing their own RULAS, which are directly related to the widespread application of emerging information technology. The present epoch is one of these critical times in which the way humans communicate information is undergoing a process of transformation. The exploding power of networking technology has dramatically changed how RULAS organize its Management and Services. BALIS formally established in 2007, has 100 member libraries, covering almost all Beijing university libraries (ULS). The purpose of establishing BALIS is to realize the sharing of literature information resources by utilizing emerging information technologies [3]. BALIS' emergence has greatly promoted resource sharing among ULS in Beijing. Just in 2019, 41,592 users have used the original text delivery services (OTDS), and 13,193 new registered users have been added, 53,202 documents have been transferred between member libraries. Despite the impact of COVID-19, there were still 13,731 readers registered for BALIS document delivery and 40,490 document requests were received in 2022. This indicates that BALIS has a broad impact, and many students still enjoy using BALIS to obtain the literature they need. Therefore, merely looking at it from practical side, the study of BALIS deserved to be attempted.

2. Organizational Structure

To ensure the operation of BALIS, the BMEC set up its executive organization—BALIS management center (BMC) [4], which is located in the library of Renmin University of China and is mainly responsible for the daily management of BALIS. (Figure 1) BALIS has six centers—Original Text Delivery Center (OTDC), Interlibrary Loan Center (ILLC), Joint Information Consulting Center (JICC), Resource Coordination Center (RCC), Training Center (TC), and Technical Support Center (TSC). Among the six centers mentioned above, the OTDC and ILLC serve readers directly, while the TC mainly serves librarians, which mainly provides services for the training and academic exchange of librarians. The RCC is mainly established to coordinate the procurement of literature resources from member libraries. The TSC is established to solve the technical problems existing in BALIS. The JICC mainly serves teachers and researchers from enterprises and universities. Although the six centers of BALIS are all concentrated on the homepage of BALIS, there is no business intersection between them. They are just put together, and there is no organic connection between them. This is also an important issue in the development process of BALIS, which means that the development of BALIS lacks top-level design and fails to integrate its various departments to form a joint force. Table 1 shows the six centers of BALIS.

Table 1. The 6 sub-centers of BALIS [1].

Sub-center	In charge	Main work
Original text delivery MC	Renmin University of China Library	Coordinate the original delivery service among member libraries
Interlibrary loan MC	Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications Library	Coordinating the interlibrary loan service among member libraries
Resource coordination center	Capital Normal University Library	Coordinate the group purchasing of the database by the member libraries
Training center	Beijing Normal University Library	Serving academic exchanges and training for librarians
Joint Information Consulting Center	Beijing University of Science and Technology Library	Coordinate scientific and technological novelty search and information consulting services among member libraries
Technical support center	Tsinghua University Library	Provide information technology guarantee for BALIS
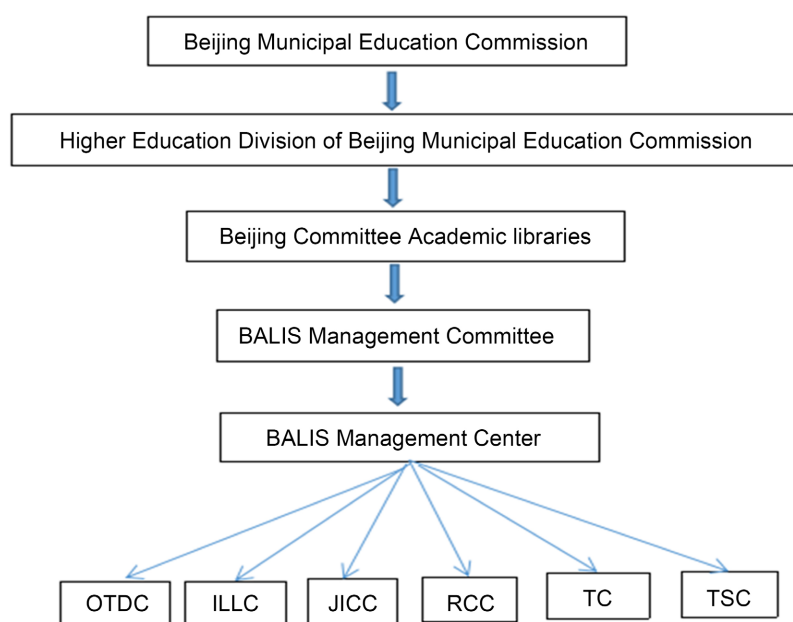
Figure 1. The organizational structure of BALIS. (The information from http://bjgxtgw.ruc.edu.cn/jggk/index.htm).

2.1. Original Text Delivery MC

BALIS original text delivery center (BOTDC) was officially launched in November 2007, whose purpose of construction is to adopt the combination of the centralized portal platform to provide the original text delivery services (OTDS) [5]. The BOTDC has its document delivery system, which is both a platform for readers to send document requests and for librarians to serve readers and meet their needs. In other words, BALIS has a unified working platform to accept readers' literature requests. This platform is essentially an information management system that allows readers and librarians to easily transfer document resources.

BOTDC is responsible for coordinating the OTDS of each library, and pro-

viding service support—if there is a malfunction in its document information management system, network engineers will immediately address it [6]. The service center of OTDC is located in the Renmin University of China, which has five Committee libraries—the library of the Renmin University of China, the library of Beijing University of technology, the library of Beijing Agricultural University, the library of Capital Medical University, and the library of Central University of Finance and economics (**Figure 2**). The collective resources of these five core member libraries are very rich, and their main task is to better meet the literature needs of readers. **Table 2** shows the top five BALIS original documents in 2019.

Beijing ULS that sign the agreement with the OTDC, can become member libraries of BALIS [7]. After 15 years of development, all university libraries in Beijing have become members of BALIS. The member libraries use the BALIS OTD system to provide OTDS [8]. After two major upgrades, this system has become increasingly convenient. Among the six major businesses of BALIS, the OTD is the fastest growing and receives the most funding.

2.2. Interlibrary Loan MC

BALIS Interlibrary Loan Center (BILLC) is located in the Beijing University of

Figure 2. The service platform of BOTD.

Table 2. The top five BALIS original documents in 2019.

Rank	Library name	Number of documents provided (pieces)
1	Library of Renmin University of China	3189
2	Beijing Sport University Library	3075
3	University Library of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	2444
4	Beijing Normal University Library	1304
5	Library of Communication University of China	1287

The data in the table is from the statistics of the BALIS OTD center.

Posts and Telecommunications Library. The purpose of the center's construction is to provide ILL services for Member Library Readers in Beijing. The main functions of the center are coordinating the ILL services between the member libraries and providing technical support, etc. [9]. The BILLC also has its service system through which readers can obtain the books they want. After readers apply for their books in the BILLC service system, the corresponding member library will deliver the books to the readers. Approximately 40,000 readers use the services of BILL every year (Figure 3). Table 3 shows the top eight users of BILL member libraries in 2019.

To facilitate the ILL, BALIS has developed a joint retrieval function (JRF) based on the OPAC system [10]. Through the JRF, readers can retrieve the literature resources they need. During the three years of the COVID-19 epidemic, the impact on BILL was huge, and its business was stopped many times. Table 4 shows the top 8 in the number of BILL in 2019.

The BILL system adopts a centralized processing method [11], the data management, the statistical analysis, and the cost settlement are all undertaken by the central system. This system has been in use for more than ten years and looks old. How to upgrade the BILL system as soon as possible is the main task currently facing BILL. If the BILL system cannot be upgraded as soon as possible, it will affect the development of the BILL.

Table 3. The top eight users of BILL member libraries in 2019.

Rank	Registered library	User count
1	Beijing Jiaotong University Library	5914
2	Library of Renmin University of China	2668
3	Central University of Finance and Economics Library	2027
4	Beijing Normal University Library	1820
5	China Agricultural University Library	1615
6	Beijing University of Science and Technology Library	1377
7	North China Electric Power University Library	1238
8	Beijing Sport University Library	1227

The data from BALIS IIL Center.

Figure 3. BILL's service platform.

Table 4. Top 8 in the number of BIL in 2019.

Rank	Library name	Number of ILL (books)
1	Library of Renmin University of China	1291
2	Tsinghua University Library	1227
3	Beijing Normal University Library	1143
4	China University of Political Science and Law Library	1078
5	Peking University Library	1069
6	Beijing University of Chemical Technology Library	489
7	Beijing Jiaotong University Library	475
8	Central University of Finance and Economics Library	447

The data from BALIS IIL Center.

2.3. Training Center

BALIS Training Center (BTC) was officially launched in November 2007, which aims to provide a platform for academic exchange and business learning [12]. To provide librarians with opportunities to communicate and learn from each other, the BTC holds a large number of academic and training conferences every year. Here are three examples to give us an intuitive feeling of BTC's work. First, on December 12, 2019, the BTC held the "Strategic Planning and Management Improvement Seminar for ULS in Beijing" at the Beijing Normal University Library [13]. Technology is moving so fast that people don't know what libraries will be available in the future. Therefore, it is very necessary to explore the future development of libraries from the perspective of strategic management. The conference attracted 150 participants from more than 50 ULS in Beijing. Secondly, on October 15, 2019, the BTC held the Fourth Curator Forum of ULS in Beijing. With the theme of "*Construction and Development of ULS in the Era of Big Data*", more than 100 leaders from 57 ULS in Beijing attended the forum [14]. In the era of big data, how to develop university libraries, how to manage and store big data, and how to make full use of big data to serve readers have become hot issues of great concern in university library circles in recent years. Thirdly, on November 16, 2018, the BTC held the "*First Scientific Research Evaluation Service Business Seminar of ULS in Beijing*" at the Beijing Normal University Library, and more than 190 librarians from 76 libraries participated in the training [15]. With the development of "dual first-class discipline construction" in Chinese universities, how to provide first-class discipline evaluation services is another important issue that university libraries are concerned about.

2.4. Joint Information Consulting Center

BALIS joint information consulting center (BJICC) was established in December 2009, which aims to gather the advantages of Beijing ULS' information consulting services and provide joint information consulting services for University and

social users. The BJICC is located in the library of the Beijing University of Science and Technology. The main customers of BJICC are researchers from universities and enterprises, so the scope of its service objects is very narrow. In practical work, the true service objects are very uncertain, so their functions have not yet been fully realized. At present, the BJICC not only lacks a platform to serve customers, but also lacks innovative means to serve customers. The proactive spirit of its services has yet to be developed. Among the six centers of BALIS, the TSC was established the latest, while the RCC and BJICC developed the slowest. Therefore, they will not be introduced in detail here.

3. The Management Mechanism

BALIS management committee (BMCE) coordinates and oversees the work of BALIS. The most important goal of BALIS is to achieve the sharing of literature resources among its members. Setting goals is important for BALIS, but so is deciding how BALIS is going to achieve them. The exploding power of networking technology has dramatically changed how BALIS organizes its work. So BALIS is structured to be more open, flexible, and responsive to the literature needs of readers. To more effectively meet the literature needs of readers, setting up subprojects to achieve their goals is an important means of BALIS. In terms of subproject management, BALIS also has its management mechanism. The most important of these is the monitoring and controlling role of BMC. To achieve the development goals of BALIS, the BMC will establish some subprojects every year. Based on member libraries' applications and expert evaluation, the BMC ultimately determines which member library will undertake the construction of the subproject. During the construction of the BALIS subproject, the BMC is responsible for process management and performance evaluation [16]. After the completion of the project construction, the BMC organized experts to check and accept the BALIS construction project [16]. Therefore, the strategic objectives are determined by the BMCE, while short-term plans are established by BALIS, and the implementation of specific subprojects is supervised and managed by the BMC, which constitutes a management mechanism for BALIS to develop itself.

4. Conclusion

BALIS is not only the largest regional library alliance in Beijing, but also a representative of Chinese university regional library alliances (CURLAS). Through the research on BALIS, we can see the organizational structure, Operation Mode, and Service Content of the CURLAS. As the main body of investment and management, the education authority of the local government plays a leading role in the development of CURLAS. Emerging information technology has also greatly promoted the development of the CURLAS. It can be seen from BALIS that a common network platform provides an indispensable tool for centralized management and decentralized services.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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