Influencing Factors of the Development of Green Building by Designers Based on Grounded Theory

Ying Zhang
School of Architecture, Harbin Institute of Technology, Key Laboratory of Cold Region Urban and Rural Human Settlement Environment Science and Technology, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Harbin, China
Urban Construction Research Institute of Heilongjiang Province, Harbin, China
Email: rourou_heaven@126.com

Jian Kang
UCL Institute for Environmental Design and Engineering, The Bartlett, University College London (UCL), Central House, 14 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0NN, UK
Email: j.kang@ucl.ac.uk

Hong Jin
School of Architecture, Harbin Institute of Technology, Key Laboratory of Cold Region Urban and Rural Human Settlement Environment Science and Technology, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Harbin, China
Email: jinhong1963@qq.com

Yan Zhang
Department of Architecture, Heilongjiang Institute of Construction Technology, Harbin, China
Email: 29292894@qq.com

Abstract—Green building has become a trend in the development of future buildings, thereby significantly changing the general direction of building development and creating an environment for sustainable development. In this study, 40 designers were selected to conduct in-depth interviews using the grounded theory method, and the interview data were deeply extracted, resulting in four core categories, namely technology determination, personnel resources, technology management, and economic factors. This study aimed to construct a theoretical framework around the core categories and analyse their relationship, explore the influencing factors of the development of green building in China from the perspective of designers, and encourage effectively improved development of green building.

Index Terms—green building development, grounded theory, designers, influencing factors

I. INTRODUCTION

With China’s rapid economic development, the problems of environmental pollution and excessive energy consumption are becoming increasingly severe, and finding a sustainable development strategy for the construction industry has become a new development trend. As an important means of sustainable development of the construction industry, the green building approach has gradually matured and has become well known to the general public. In the process of promoting green buildings, there are also some prominent contradictions; for example, some green buildings have poor economic efficiency, long design and operation times, high capital cost, general running-in effect of technical input and building in the market, and long cycle of ecological benefits [1]. Designers at the core of the initial stage of the green building process, facing new technology applications and management in green building design, construction, and operation, play a crucial role in the process. The use of designers, professional skills, and catering to the industry environment constitute the influencing factors, such as guiding the development of green building.

Grounded theory is an effective method for conducting qualitative research, and is based on using empirical data to establish theories. In the early stage of a study, qualitative research methods are adopted to design and collect data, and quantitative analysis methods are used to analyse data, thereby abstracting new concepts and ideas from empirical facts [2]. Therefore, in view of the current development status of green building in China, the
grounded theory method was applied to collect data by means of in-depth interviews. The qualitative software Nvivo12 was used as an auxiliary tool to explore the development and architecture of green building in China through in-depth interviews with designers without presupposition. Furthermore, the factors that influence the development of green building and its evaluation system in China were explored.

II. METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

Grounded theory was jointly proposed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in 1967. It is based on practical observations and construction of theories by summarising concepts from original data through repeated comparison, analysis, and coding processes. Its purpose is to build theories based on empirical data [3-5]. This theory was defined by the Chinese scholar Xu Zongguo as a research method, or a ‘germplasm’ research style [6]. This theory was applied to collect data through in-depth interviews, and Nvivo12 was used for the coding analysis to analyse, summarise, and supplement the data to form a theoretical framework of influencing factors for the development of green building.

A. Problem Generation

Green building, as a direction of building development, is slowly getting on the right track with the support of national policies and the change ideas of people. As presented in Table I, designers play different roles in each stage of the building cycle to identify technological breakthroughs and apply new technology to create more opportunities for green buildings. It is necessary to determine the influencing factors of green building for designers and the development direction of China in the future. In this study, interviewees were interviewed in depth concerning this central issue. The interview began with the following questions. ‘Have you, as a designer, been involved in the design process of green building?’ ‘What do you think are the requirements for designers of green building design techniques?’ ‘What do you know about the actual use of completed green buildings in the market?’ ‘Do you prefer to apply green technology to architectural design?’ ‘Did you feel that the design specification for green technology was improved during the design process?’ Other questions were also asked, and in-depth interviews were conducted. Based on the personal design experience or feelings of the interviewees, they expressed their thoughts and subjective feelings regarding green building.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE I. FLOW FUNCTION OF THE DESIGNERS IN THE PROCESS OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>plan production → Designers develops the positioning of the project star level and customizes the preliminary plan.</td>
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<table>
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<th>TABLE II. BASIC INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Classification categories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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III. DATA PROCESSING

A digital voice recorder was used to record the content of the interviews, sort and summarise 40 interview materials, form 40 valid texts, and randomly select 35 samples from them as the basic materials for grounded theoretical analysis, in the process of conceptualising the data and constructing the theory. New problems still existed, and the conceptualisation process was repeated for the new problems, facilitating the process of concept extraction and theoretical construction during data analysis. The remaining five samples were tested for the saturation of the grounded theory. In this process, no new concepts or main categories appeared — that is, the theory reached saturation.

A. Open Coding

‘Open coding’ is the process of conceptualising and abstracting the original data of the in-depth interviews and utilising repeated labelling and abstracting concepts to summarise and analyse preliminary concepts and categories. The specific procedures are 1) coding and labelling the interview data sentence by sentence, 2) conceptualising the preliminary generated text, and 3) categorising the result of conceptualisation. This complete process involves analysing, refining, summarising, and integrating interview data, exploring the original data, and identifying problems [7]. Repeating this coding process, 766 labels were created, 99 concepts were formed, and 20 categories were refined. Table II provides examples of coding, conceptualisation, and categories, and Table III provides examples of labelling, conceptualisation, and categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview data text (partial)</th>
<th>Label</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee A: “Working on actual projects, I found that when I had just graduated from University, there were still few opportunities to get in touch with green technology, including the designer friends around me. The technical requirements of this thing are relatively strong, and the cost of learning is also high. The professionalism (requirements) for us is relatively strict. You have to consider energy saving, materials, insulation, etc., because when you practice it in construction projects, it is necessary to consider its effect, and it will directly affect the quality of the building. Besides, now this market needs this kind of technology update, which forces us to use green technology, and now the country has begun some mandatory requirements in terms of energy saving. The application process of green technology itself is complicated. There are still some problems in the detailed rules of the actual use effect in the later operation of the construction industry in the construction market of our country, which makes the rationality of the design and the cooperation between the various disciples very important. However, once blindly pursuing and using this technology, it may cause certain waste and loss…”</td>
<td>Green buildings have high technical requirements for designers. The technology itself has a certain degree of complexity. It may cause waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee B: “In the days to come, the government will vigorously promote green building, but there is still a lack of regulatory verification methods. There are also some problems in these existing cases. Some developers should avoid certification for the sake of their immediate interests. Another concept of green environmental protection has not been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and has not realised the benefits of green buildings. Consumers have not yet formed the habit of paying for it. Therefore, we told our customers that some of them do not approve of green buildings and feel that it costs money. The green building itself also requires practitioners to have a certain knowledge reserve in cross-fields, which also increases the difficulty of green design. Before you do a type of project like this, you should check some information. The basic statistical research and related databases at the national level are complicated and the ecological footprint is difficult to calculate. These are all necessary preparations before doing the project…”</td>
<td>The concept of green environmental protection needs to be popularised by all people. Professional cross-field technical personnel are needed. The calculation of the data in the national database is complicated.</td>
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</table>

As presented in Table IV, the interview materials, such as ‘strong technology of green building design’ and ‘large learning cost’, are labelled a1–a3, during the analysis of the specific contents of the interview. Conceptualised from this type of label concept, it can be concluded that ‘a1 green technology is difficult’. This concept is classified into the same category as other concepts with the same attributes, and the category with similar concept is labelled as ‘A technology applications’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview data</th>
<th>a1</th>
<th>aa1</th>
<th>A1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green building design is more technical</td>
<td>strong technical</td>
<td>Green technology is difficult</td>
<td>technology applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High learning cost</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Integration with traditional techniques needs to be improved
There are differences or contradictions in the application procedures of other technologies

Not many relevant technical staff

Inadequate matching of technical reserves and capabilities
tech support

Many aspects need to be considered in the full cycle of green technology

The organization's own reform and innovation use of new technology is not strong

Have a certain misunderstanding of green building technology

The market technology demand is not strong

Many processes involved
Technology is not innovative

A2 Technologie-s updation

A49 Many processes involved
aa9 process involved

A50 Technology is not innovative
aa10 Technical process inertial thinking

A67 New technology is difficult
aa17 Certain resistance to technology application

A68 Accept the differences of new technologies

A69 Difficulty of pattern change
aa18 mode transformation

B. Associative Coding

This is a process of constructing the core category of grounded theory through keyword search, repeatedly studying and reasoning open coding, constantly summarising and discriminating, and further refining and conceptualising these codes. It was found that ‘A1 technology applications’, ‘A2 technologies update’, ‘A3 technical complexity’ and ‘A4 inertia thinking of technical processes’ are related to the core category of ‘AA1 technology determination’ in the coding process. This code can reflect the cognition of most visitors on green building and its design; thus, this concept is determined to be the core category of ‘AA1 technique determination’. In the process of categorisation, which seeks for a ‘core concept’ and the generic concept constantly expanding around it, and classifies, separates, and summarises the process to obtain the core category building the theory construction [7]. This study used the above theory construction to repeat the initial interview data, obtaining the four core categories, ‘AA1 technology determination’, ‘AA2 personnel resources’, ‘AA3 technology management’, and ‘AA4 economic factors’. As shown in Table V, the core relationships are obtained by coding a series of related logical models.
TABLE V. RELATION OF FOUR CORE CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core relationship</th>
<th>Core categories</th>
<th>Category meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conditional factors</td>
<td>AA1 technology determination</td>
<td>Green technology covers the overall planning of each link, affecting the final presentation of the design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational relationship</td>
<td>AA2 personnel resources</td>
<td>There is some resistance in the application of technicians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>AA3 technology management</td>
<td>It implies technical management and application execution, considering the difficulty of combination with traditional techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence</td>
<td>AA4 economic factors</td>
<td>Technology application and cost–performance ratio of investment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Selective Coding

Selective coding is the process of extraction and classification from core coding. In this stage, the relationship between the identified core categories is explored. The categories are coded, and the theoretical framework is constructed. In the interview process, four core categories — ‘technical determination’, ‘personnel resources’, ‘technology management’, and ‘economic factors’ — emerged around the central question of ‘designers’ influence factors on green building’. Among them, ‘AA1 technical determination’ was supported by 4 categories, 28 conceptualisations, and 157 labels. The core category ‘AA2 personnel resources’ was supported by 4 categories, 16 conceptualisations, and 102 labels. The core category ‘AA3 technology management’ was supported by 4 categories, 19 conceptualisations, and 161 labels. The core category ‘AA4 economic factors’ was supported by 4 categories, 15 conceptualisations, and 125 labels.

Through repeated data coding, the five reserved interview data were repeated in the process of theoretical sampling coding, and a theoretical saturation test was performed. The absence of new core categories in the main category indicated that the four core categories mentioned above reached a saturation state after selective coding. Fig. 1 illustrates the correlation coding diagram.

IV. THEORY CONSTRUCTION

Through the above coding process, four saturated core codes were obtained. Based on the qualitative and quantitative analyses methods, the influencing factors resulting from the technical determination, personnel resources, technical standards, technical management, and economic factors identified in the development of green building were determined from the perspective of designers. As depicted in Fig. 2, the theoretical framework of the influencing factors of green building development was constructed, and core coding was evaluated to make the theory more scientific and rigorous.

A. Technical Determination

With the upgradation of complex technologies in the construction market, traditional architectural design has been unable to fully meet the needs of various groups of people for buildings. The application of green building technology is a comprehensive and complex, continuous process of practical technology application, including the application of building materials, building structures, and other interdisciplinary disciplines. The technical determination affects the comprehensive effect of the design progress, quality, and application of the building. Designers play a critical role in promoting the entire design process. Factors such as technology application, technology update, technology complexity, and technology process comprehensively affect every stage of the entire life cycle of building application projects. Therefore, the determination of green technology is of great significance for future decision making and the development of green buildings.

B. Personnel Resources

From traditional architectural design to green architectural design, architects must meet the needs of the
market and fill the knowledge gaps in the application of new technologies. Variations in architect feedback on the application of new technologies also affect the effectiveness of the actual application of buildings. In the application process of green buildings and their technology, the development of green buildings in some areas is hindered because of the difficulty faced by designers in the practical application of green technology and the unfamiliarity and imperfection of the combination of technologies. The lack of motivation for technology application is also the main factor hindering the development of green buildings.

C. Technology Management

In the promotion of green building technology, there is a significant amount of information in the entire life cycle of a building project. In addition to technology application, technology management also involves the coordination of processes, time nodes, and other management aspects. The lack of control over technology management due to new technologies creates some obstacles for architects. According to the general design of the initial target, in the process of the management of a green building, the management of designers in the organisation, coordination of the products, design, management, operation, debugging, and process must be undertaken to control the entire project and estimate the cost of a suitable energy-saving goal. This would cause the building products to achieve optimal control of each detail; therefore, the technical management must undertake the project and control the positive direction of the key elements.

D. Economic Factors

The economy of green building is one of the important factors affecting its development. The practical application of green building can obtain an appropriate economic cost by determining an appropriate design scheme through suitable technology utilisation. It can also result in a better profit return in terms of energy consumption, environmental impact, and other aspects to provide better feedback to the building project itself. When designers use green technology to improve the design quality and the corresponding design cost, it is necessary to determine the optimal economic scheme. Therefore, designers should consider the economic cost of applying green technology to building design, which is also a long-term consideration for achieving an efficient return on investment.

V. DISCUSSION

From the perspective of intrinsic applicability, designers play a crucial role in promoting the application of green technology, which are comparable to ‘initiators’ and ‘boosters’. Green technology is a complex and full-cycle comprehensive technology. Although it needs an overall design from the designers, it affects every stage of the entire life cycle of the entire construction project and plays a pivotal role in all other units throughout the entire life cycle.

In the implementation of green building projects, the external driving force is also an important factor affecting its development. If a comprehensive technology cannot be better managed and organised in the process of popularisation and application, there will be a negative effect on designers. This may lead to more negative effects in the future. Because of the influence of external factors, such as the technical level, development, and promotion of green technology, in domestic building applications and management and operation research, the application effect of green technology in building projects still has some room for running-in. This influence is reflected in the proportion of energy efficiency of building projects, economic returns, and benefits.

Starting from the in-depth analysis of grounded theory, four core categories were obtained from the perspective of designers, their core relations were analysed, and the influencing factors of green building development were examined from the two macro directions of internal applicability and external driving force to provide a reference for the development strategy of green buildings.

VI. CONCLUSION

By conducting in-depth interviews with designers, combined with the substantive coding process and analysis of the emerging core codes, a framework was constructed for discussing the factors influencing the development of green buildings from the perspective of architects. The root causes were explored from the aspects of technology determination, personnel resources, technical roots, technical management, and economic factors. The development of green building requires internal applicability and external driving force, which are interrelated and mutually influential. Therefore, better application of green technology in construction projects must be initiated through the internal technical applicability, while considering the influence of external driving forces, to seek a better direction to adapt to the development of green building in China.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, Ying Z., J.K., H.J. and Yan Z.; methodology, Ying Z. and J.K.; validation, Yan Z.; formal analysis, Ying Z.; investigation, Ying Z.; resources, Ying Z.; data curation, Ying Z.; writing—original draft preparation, Ying Z.; writing—review and editing, Ying Z., J.K., H.J. and Yan Z. All authors had approved the final version.

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Ying Zhang: Ms. Zhang studied in Harbin Institute of Technology in China, majored in architectural technology, achieving master's degree in 2013. She mainly studies green building, green building evaluation system and acoustic environment. Her main work experience is engaged in green building research and urban construction policy and special technology research of Heilongjiang Province.

Jian Kang: Pro. Kang teaches in Academician of the Royal Academy of Engineering, Professor of Bartlett College, University College of London (UCL), visiting Professor of School of Architecture, Tianjin University. Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, School of Architecture, Tsinghua University, Ph. D., School of Architecture, Cambridge University, UK, Postdoctoral degree, Humboldt, National Institute of Architectural Physics, Germany. It is the first Chinese professor in European architecture, mainly in architecture and environmental acoustics. Presided over more than 80 research projects, more than 90 global engineering consulting projects; served as chairman of the noise committee of the European Acoustics Society and chairman of the European Sound View Alliance. "Sound environment of the city" and "A guide to theory and design" have attracted much attention.

Hong Jin: Pro. Jin teaches in Harbin Institute of Technology in China. Mainly engaged in green building, sustainable living environment, ecological city and rural areas and other fields of research. Presided over the completion of more than 40 national and provincial scientific research projects, Of which: Presided over 1 national science and technology support program and 5 sub-projects, Presided over the Ministry of Education Ph.D. Fund, Editor-in-chief of 10 technical standards (among which "existing building green transformation evaluation standard GB/T51141-2015 won the national" standard science and technology innovation award second prize "); Published more than 300 academic papers, Of which 20 were SCI and SSCI, EI 88 articles. In addition, Awarded "Outstanding Reviewer" by Building and Environment.

Yan Zhang: Ms. Zhang teaches in Heilongjiang Institute of Construction Technology, achieving master's degree in 2012. She mainly studies green building and green building evaluation system. Her main work experience is engaged in green building research and special technology research of Heilongjiang Province.