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Structure-property correlation of solid-emissive boron-fluorine derivatives

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ABSTRACT

A series of solid-emissive BOPIM (boron 2-(2-pyridyl)imidazole complex) dyes, bearing electrondonating or -withdrawing substituents (methoxy, hydrogen, or nitro), are facilely synthesized. The compounds were characterized by ¹H NMR, ¹³C NMR and MS. X-ray single crystal diffractions of BOPIM **1** and **2** indicate that nonplanar rigid structures were formed through intermolecular non-covalent interactions. Due to these non-covalent interactions, these dyes exhibit intense fluorescence in solution and also in solid state. According to ¹H NMR analysis, electronic effect of the substitutes plays an important role in contribution to these BOPIMs' electronic states. The photophysical measurements reveal that electron-donating groups (methoxy) lead to significant bathochromism of the absorption and emission. In contrast, electron-withdrawing moieties (nitro) play the reverse role. However, BOPIM **3** bearing nitro groups emits long wavelength fluorescence in solid state, probably due to the formation of intermolecular hydrogen bond. This work elucidates the spectroscopic structure—property relationship of solid-emissive BOPIMs, which would be valuable for design of solid-emissive dyes.

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1. Introduction

Fluorescent dyes have been under wide research because of their applications in various research fields, especially for these probes sensitive to environment and solvent polarity [1-5]. Among all these chromophores reported till now, organic boron-fluorine complexes (known as BODIPY) attract great interest, due to their large number of advantages over other dyes. They usually have high fluorescence quantum yield and absorption coefficient, excellent chemical- and photochemical-stability, plus a large number of BODIPYs exhibit environment-sensitive properties. However, typical BODIPYs are non-emissive in solid state, due to their high planarity which results in concentration-induced quenching [6-10]. And they usually have small Stokes shift, inducing reabsorption of the emission. To keep BODIPYs' emission in solid state for practical applications in light-emitting devices, it's essential to decrease the aggregate formation due to the π - π stacking of the chromophore. Some strategies have proved to be effective, such as attaching bulky groups on BODIPY core structure to inhibit intermolecular planar $\pi - \pi$ interaction [11–14], introducing rigid side chain on the chromophore core to enlarge the Stokes shift [15]. Recently it's found that boron-fluorine derivatives with intermolecular interactions (such as C-H···F-B, C-H···O, C···C and C···N)

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0022-328X/\$ - see front matter © 2012 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jorganchem.2012.07.043 can emit fluorescence in solid state with large Stokes shift, even though these molecules have neither bulky groups nor rigid side chains [16–21]. And the large Stokes shift is the result of efficient intramolecular charge transfer (ICT) from electron-rich groups to electron-accepting BOPIM skeleton. In these molecules, intermolecular non-covalent interactions provide a comparatively rigid structure, which exhibit non-planar packing mode. Boron 2-(2'pyridyl)imidazole complex (BOPIM) is one class of these samples, which exhibit no aggregate in concentrated solution according to concentration-dependent fluorescence measurement [22]. And they emit intense fluorescence both in solutions and also in solid state with large Stokes shift [23-25]. The synthesis is facile, and the chromophore can be easily functionalized, which make it ideal candidate for construction of functional materials. However, the introduction of electron donating and withdrawing substituents to these conjugated groups can significantly change the electronic environment of the chromophore core, resulting in shift of the emission wavelength [3,26]. In this way, emission of BOPIMs may be tuned by attaching different electron-donor or acceptor. So it's necessary to investigate qualitatively the effect of chemical structure and substituent groups on fluorescence characteristics, concerning fluorescence intensity, emission wavelength, Stokes shift, etc. In this report, three solid-emissive BOPIM dyes are synthesized, bearing different electron-donating or -withdrawing groups (Scheme 1). Then we study their photophysical properties to elucidate the relationship between the chemical structure and the photophysical properties.

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2. Experimental

2.1. Materials

The corresponding ligands for synthesis of BOPIM dyes are prepared according to literature procedures [27]. $BF_3 \cdot OEt_2$ is purchased from Aldrich. All other starting materials are obtained commercially as analytical-grade and without further purification. Moisture sensitive reactions were performed under an atmosphere of nitrogen. Anhydrous dichloromethane was obtained by distillation of commercial analytical-grade dichloromethane after treated with molecular sieve.

2.2. Measurements

¹H NMR and ¹³C NMR were recorded on Bruker 400 NMR or Varian 300 Mercury spectrometer. Chemical shifts are reported in parts per million with CDCl₃ as reference (7.26 ppm for ¹H NMR, and 77.0 ppm for ¹³C NMR). MS data were recorded on a Waters Quattro Micro API LC-MS spectrometer (Waters, USA) or Applied Biosystems Voyager-DE STR mass spectrometer. UV–vis and fluorescent spectra were obtained on Hitachi U-3010 and F-4500, respectively. The fluorescent quantum yield is calculated using quinine bisulfate as reference. Single crystals suitable for X-ray measurements were obtained by slow evaporation of mixed organic solutions, and single-crystal X-ray diffraction data were collected on a Bruker APEX II CCD diffractometer with graphite monochromated Mo K α radiation ($\lambda = 0.71073$ Å) at 298 K.

2.3. Synthesis

The typical synthetic procedure of BOPIMs was described as following: in a stirred mixture of ligand (8 mmol) and Et₃N (5 ml) in anhydrous CH₂Cl₂ (25 mL), BF₃·OEt₂ (5.6 mL, 44 mmol) was added dropwise at 0 °C. After the addition of BF₃·OEt₂, the reaction mixture was allowed to warm to room temperature and stir at room temperature overnight. The organic phase was washed with water several times, dried on Na₂SO₄, and evaporated in vacuo. Then the obtained crude residue was subjected to column chromatography on a silica gel column to provide products as solid.

2.3.1. BOPIM 1

Orange solid (30%). ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 400 MHz): δ 8.42 (d, J = 5.60 Hz, 1H), 8.16 (t, J = 7.60 Hz, 1H), 8.06 (d, J = 8.00 Hz, 1H), 7.55 (m, 4H), 7.46 (t, J = 5.60 Hz, 1H), 6.92 (m, 4H), 3.84 (s, 3H), 3.82 (s, 3H). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 100 MHz): δ 159.41, 158.85, 145.81, 144.85, 144.53, 141.18, 133.76, 129.98, 129.30, 127.42, 123.30, 122.35, 117.47, 114.06, 113.77, 55.20. MS [M + H]⁺: 406.2 calcd. 406.1.

2.3.2. BOPIM 2

Yellow solid (32%). ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 300 MHz) δ 8.43 (d, J = 5.40 Hz, 1H), 8.16 (m, 1H), 8.09 (d, J = 7.80 Hz, 1H), 7.60 (m, 4H), 7.46 (m, 1H), 7.36 (m, 6H). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 75 MHz) δ 144.68, 141.26, 134.56, 130.66, 128.68, 128.59, 128.34, 128.14, 127.31, 122.78, 117.73. MS [M + H]⁺: 346.1 calcd. 346.1.

2.3.3. BOPIM 3

Yellow solid (20%). ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 400 MHz) δ 8.59 (m, 1H), 8.31 (m, 2H), 8.29 (m, 1H), 8.24 (m, 2H), 7.85 (m, 3H), 7.68 (m, 2H), 7.36 (m, 1H). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃, 100 MHz) δ 149.03, 147.40, 147.25, 137.52, 128.41, 124.62, 124.23, 124.05, 120.50, 29.70. MS [M+2H]⁺: 437.2 calcd. 437.1.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. X-ray crystal structure

Crystals suitable for X-ray measurements were obtained by slow evaporation of mixed organic solutions. In the crystal structures of BOPIM 2 [25], intermolecular interactions (such as C-H···N, C–H···B, etc.) provide a rigid structure to inhibit planar $\pi - \pi$ stacking in crystal state, which is also found for BOPIM 1 (Fig. 1). It's interesting that the unit cell of BOPIM 1 contains two molecules and they exhibit different intermolecular non-covalent interactions. In the crystal structure of BOPIM 1, F1 atom forms B-F···H-C contact with the methyl protons on the neighboring donor group (2.621 Å). However, F2 atom associates with phenyl proton H16 (2.465 Å), and also H31 on pyridine ring (2.376 Å). The protons on pyridine ring are also active, easily to form hydrogen bond with neighboring atoms, especially with B, F atoms. Thus triangle structure was formed between H1A on pyridine ring with B, and F atoms on neighboring molecule (distance: H1A-F4 2.38 Å, H1A-F3 2.653 Å, H1A–B2 3.009 Å). Although the chromophore containing imidazole and pyridine fused with B was almost planar, there is almost no overlap between neighboring chromophore cores, indicating that planar $\pi - \pi$ stacking of the chromophores is inhibited by non-covalent interactions and the steric hindrance from twisted phenyl rings on the end of the chromophore. The solubility of BOPIM 3 in conventional organic solvents is poor, and the efforts to grow single crystal of 3 failed.

3.2. ¹H NMR analysis

To investigate the electronic effect of terminally electron donor (methoxy) and acceptor (nitro) on the chromophore, ¹H NMR analysis was carried out as shown in Fig. 2. To make a comparison, BOPIM 2 bearing terminal H atoms is chosen as reference. With electron donors attached (BOPIM 1), significant upfield shift was observed for all the protons on phenyl rings with the largest shift -0.46 ppm for H6, indicating that the existence of electron donor (methoxy group) enriches the electronic density of the phenyl rings, leading to a higher shielding effect on these protons. The protons on the chromophore core were only slightly affected, with upfield shift of resonance signal of H4 0.03 ppm, and H1 0.01 ppm. In contrast, the introduction of nitro group (BOPIM 3) lowers the electronic density of the whole π system on a large scale, and shifts most resonance signals to down-field pronouncedly, especially for these protons on phenyl rings. And the boron center is also highly electron deficient, resulting in the different electronic states of H5 with H5', and also H6 with H6'. These results indicate that the electronic density of the chromophore core can be tuned by the terminally attached electron donors and acceptors. And it needs to note that all the protons on BOPIM 3 exhibit multiple resonances (H1 for example), suggesting that nitro moieties on



Fig. 1. Crystal structure and packing diagram of BOPIM 1.

neighboring molecules may associate with these protons to form intermolecular non-covalent bonds.

3.3. Photophysical study

The photophysical properties of these three BOPIM dyes were studied in various solvents with different polarity. It's found that the electron-donating/withdrawing character of the terminal attached groups has a significant effect on the absorption. As reference, BOPIM **2** exhibits a broad absorptive band centered at 427 nm in hexane. With methoxy group as electron donor, the maximum absorption band shifts bathochromically to 452 nm. The 25 nm red-shift reflects the electron donating property of methoxy groups. In contrast, the absorption of BOPIM **3** bearing nitro groups blue-shifts to 363 nm. Compared to **2**, the absorptive difference reaches 64 nm, further proving that the electronic effect of nitro groups is greater than methoxy moieties, which is consistent with ¹H NMR results. Interestingly, all these three dyes are environmental sensitive and exhibit solvent-dependent absorptive bands.



Fig. 2. ¹H NMR of synthesized BOPIMs bearing different electron donors and acceptors.

Especially for BOPIM **1**, the maximum absorptive band was observed at 452 nm in hexane and 400 nm in methanol, manifesting an efficient intramolecular charge transfer (ICT) characteristics.

The fluorescent character of BOPIM **2** is complicated, which varies with solvents. The longest emission was observed at 537 nm in THF with fluorescence quantum yield 0.17. With electron-rich methoxy moieties attached, there appears a significant bath-ochromic shift. The emission in THF is centered at 560 nm, with 23 nm shift to the longer wavelength compared to **2**. In contrast, the effect of electron-withdrawing groups (nitro) blue-shifts the emission significantly. All these three dyes exhibit weaker fluorescence in polar solvents, due to the strong intramolecular charge transfer (ICT) characteristics. On the other hand, efficient ICT process can helps to increase Stokes shift, as presented in Table 1.

Surprisingly, the emission of BOPIM 3 is much more complicated than those of 1 and 2. There appear dual emission bands in mid-polar organic solvents. The emission around 420 nm should be ascribed to the monomer of BOPIM 3, just as exhibited in hexane and methanol. To ascribe the emission peak around 540 nm, concentration-dependent fluorescent analysis was conducted (Fig. 3F). In dilute chloroform solution such as 10^{-6} M, the main fluorescence was observed at 424 nm with minimal emission around 540 nm. With concentration increasing, the fluorescent intensity at 424 nm decreases, meanwhile the intensity around 540 nm increases. When the concentration was beyond 10^{-4} M, the blue emission was suppressed completely, and there appears only one intense peak at 542 nm. For comparison, concentrationdependent fluorescent spectra for BOPIM 1 (Fig. 3E) and 2 [25] only show one emissive peak with no shift at all. It indicates that BOPIM 3 may form other emissive species through intermolecular interactions of nitro groups [28-31], especially in concentrated solution. This result is also consistent with ¹H NMR measurement, from which only multiple resonance peaks were observed, indicating that all the protons on pyridyl and phenyl rings associates with intermolecular species, which is not observed for BOPIM 1 and 2.

The most interesting property of BOPIM dyes is their solidemissive character. In solid state, all these dyes exhibit intense fluorescent emission, mainly due to that planar π – π stacking is highly inhibited by the intermolecular non-covalent interactions, as proved by X-ray single crystal analysis. As a result, there is no sign of aggregate formation in solid state, and the absorption band even

Table 1	
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Absorption and fluorescent maxima (nm) and the Stokes shift (ν) of BOPIM dyes.

	1			2			3		
	$\lambda_{abs} nm (log \epsilon)$	$\lambda_{\rm em} \operatorname{nm} (\phi_{\rm F})$	ν nm	$\lambda_{abs} nm (log \epsilon)$	$\lambda_{\rm em} \operatorname{nm}(\phi_{\rm F})$	ν nm	$\lambda_{abs} nm (log \epsilon)$	$\lambda_{\rm em} {\rm nm} (\phi_{\rm F})$	ν nm
Hexane	452 (4.04)	544 (0.10)	92	427 (4.37)	515 (0.28)	88	363 (3.92)	416 (0.02)	53
THF	420 (4.06)	560 (0.25)	140	404 (4.24)	537 (0.18)	133	331 (4.52)	420, 521 (0.08)	89
Chloroform	416 (4.17)	556 (0.10)	140	388 (4.55)	528 (0.30)	140	352 (4.46)	424, 542 (0.04)	72
Dioxane	425 (4.10)	557 (0.28)	132	387 (4.70)	510 (0.23)	123	345 (4.55)	420, 513 (0.08)	75
Methanol	400 (4.18)	557 (0.03)	157	391 (4.30)	534 (0.08)	143	343 (4.41)	417 (0.01)	74
Solid	420	572 (0.37)	152	402	524 (0.18)	122	364	537 (0.02)	-



Fig. 3. (A) Absorption of BOPIMs in solution (hexane, 1.0×10^{-5} M); (B) fluorescent spectra of BOPIMs in solution (hexane, 1.0×10^{-5} M); (C) absorption of BOPIMs in solid state; (D) fluorescent spectra of BOPIMs in solid state; (E) concentration-dependent fluorescent spectra of BOPIM **1** in CHCl₃; (F) concentration-dependent fluorescent spectra of BOPIM **3** in CHCl₃ (Ex: 365 nm).

turns narrower compared to those in hexane solutions, which is quite unique and interesting. The fluorescent quantum yield of BOPIM **1** in solid state is measured to be 0.37 by integrating sphere method, which is much higher than **2**. It may be the result of more effective inhibition of planar $\pi - \pi$ stacking, since methoxy groups participate in the formation of intermolecular non-covalent bonds. As nitro group is a well-known quenching group of fluorescence [32], BOPIM **3** has rather low quantum yield (0.02) in solid as in

dilute solution, even though they may have formed dimer or trimer through intermolecular interactions.

4. Conclusion

Solid-emissive BOPIM dyes bearing different electron donating/ withdrawing groups were synthesized. They emit fluorescence with large Stokes shift in solution and also in solid state. Electron donor leads to red-shift of the absorption and emission with higher fluorescent quantum yield, and electron acceptor plays the reverse role. However, BOPIM **3** bearing nitro moieties also emits fluorescence at long wavelength in concentrated solutions and in solid state, probably due to the formation of dimer or trimer through intermolecular interactions.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

CCDC 870759 contains the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge from The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/ data_request/cif.

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