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Molecular Engineering of Mechanochromic Materials by Programmed C–H Arylation: Making a Counterpoint in Chromism Trend

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Supporting Information Placeholder

ABSTRACT: The development of facile accesses for screening organic functional molecules through the C–H bond activation is a revolutionary trend in material research. The prediction of mechanochromism as well as mechanochromic trend of luminogens is an appealing, yet challenging puzzle. Here, we present the design strategy of mechanochromic luminogens on the basis of the dipole moment of donor–acceptor (D–A) molecules. For this purpose, a highly efficient route to 2,7-diaryl [1,2,4]triazolo[1,5-*a*]pyrimidines (2,7-diaryl TAPs) has been established through the programmed C–H arylation, which unlocks a great opportunity to rapidly assemble a library of fluorophores for the discovery of the mechanochromic regularity. The molecular dipole moment can be employed to explain and further predict the mechanochromic trend. The 2,7-diaryl TAPs with electron-donating groups (EDGs) on 2-aryl and electron-withdrawing groups (EWGs) on 7-aryl possess a relatively small dipole moment and exhibit a red-shifted mechanochromism. While the two aryls are interchanged, the resulting luminogens have a relatively large dipole moment and display a blue-shifted mechanochromism. Seven pairs of isomers with an opposite mechanochromic trend have been given as illustrative examples. The aryl-interchanged congeners with a bidirectional emission shift are structurally similar, which would provide an avenue for deeply understanding the mechanochromic mechanism.

INTRODUCTION

Mechanochromic materials sensitive to mechanical stimuli have attracted extensive interest due to their promising applications in mechanical sensors, deformation detectors, security systems and memory devices.^{1–18} Mechanochromism of organic conjugated materials greatly depends on molecular packing associated with intermolecular interactions such as π – π , hydrogen bond and dipole–dipole interactions.^{19–21} Owing to the inherent intricacies of molecular structural factors and intermolecular forces, it seems difficult to predict the mechanochromic behavior of chromophores. Therefore, it is also greatly challenging to achieve a major breakthrough in the rational molecular design of mechanochromic materials.²¹ To date organic small molecule materials with mechanochromic properties are still limited and have often appeared as a single isolated event.^{1,21} Molecular engineering is an important part of pharmaceutical research and materials science. The establishment of a rapid gateway toward a large library of fluorescent molecules will doubtless unlock a golden opportunity to gain better understanding of the structure–property relationship of mechanochromic materials.

In this article, we wish to demonstrate a novel design strategy of mechanochromic luminogens based on the dipole moment of donor–acceptor (D–A) molecules. We would also like to exemplify the important role of the C–H bond activation in the lead-optimization phase of developing organic functional materials. Molecular engineering, established herein through the pro-

grammed C–H arylation of heteroaromatics, provides an opportunity to rapidly assemble a library of D–A-type luminogens and further discover the mechanochromic regularity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Molecular design. The electron-deficient (hetero)aromatic ring has proven well-suited to give birth to strong π – π interaction because of its low π -electron density.^{22,23} [1,2,4]Triazolo[1,5-*a*]pyrimidine (TAP), fused by pyrimidine and triazole together, is a typical, strongly electron-deficient heteroaromatic ring. Although the emission maximum of TAP is located in the ultraviolet region (389 nm in CH₂Cl₂), the introduction of electron-rich aryl moiety enables a red-shifted emission to visible region through an extended π -conjugation and intramolecular charge transfer (ICT).^{24,25} Given that the biaryls consisting of one six-membered ring and one five-membered ring (6:5) usually prefer planar geometries, while the biaryls consisting of two six-membered rings (6:6) favour more twisted conformations than the 6:5 biaryl systems,²⁶ 2-aryl-TAP (**A-TAP**) with the 6:5 system could adopt a coplanar conformation and 7-aryl-TAP (**B-TAP**) with the 6:6 system could take a twisted structure. Thus, in the absence of a steric hindrance group at the *ortho*-position of the **A** ring, the plane of the **A-TAP** segment of 2,7-diaryl [1,2,4]triazolo[1,5-*a*]pyrimidines (2,7-diaryl TAPs) is favorable to the face-to-face π – π interaction, and the rotation of the **B** ring can modify the molecular planarity and the plane-to-plane spacing. The face-to-face π – π and dipole–dipole interactions of two adjacent donor–acceptor (D–A) molecules, which places the do-

nor moiety of one molecule above the acceptor moiety of its neighbouring molecule,²⁷ may induce various molecular packing modes. The incorporation of donor/acceptor substituents on the **A** and **B** rings could alter the dipole moment of molecule and the dihedral angle of the **B-TAP** section. A mechano-dependent switching of molecular packing modes could be achieved through the rotation of the **B** ring and the shift of the π -plane to endow a chromism response. Herein, we envision that the 2,7-diaryl TAP core would be a promising candidate for molecular engineering investigation to assess the relationship between molecular structure and mechanochromic luminescent behavior (Figure 1).

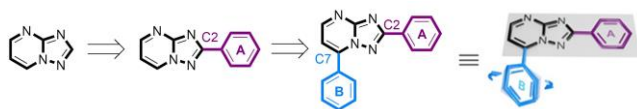
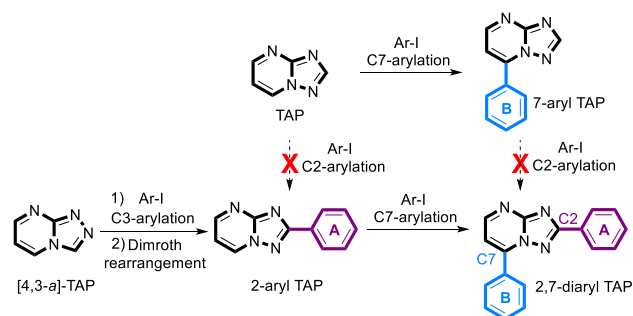


Figure 1. Molecular design of diaryl TAPs.

Synthesis and Photophysical Properties of Aryl TAPs. To test our hypothesis, it is necessary to develop a concise and rapid approach to a library of 2,7-diaryl TAP molecules. Conventional cyclization reactions to 2-aryl and 7-aryl TAPs generally suffer from several limitations such as multistep procedures and/or hardly accessible synthetic precursors,²⁸⁻³⁰ which limit the rapid assembly of a structurally diverse chemical library. Transition metal-catalyzed C-X/C-M coupling reactions are reliable approaches to access heteroaryl-aryl structures. We initially tried to perform the bromination at C2-position of TAP. However, the bromination of TAP occurred preferentially at C7 rather than at C2, and gave 7-bromo-substituted TAP as the only product (For details, see Section II in SI). Thus, the sequential insertion of a halide at C2 of TAP and C-X/C-M cross-coupling reaction is not a viable synthetic route to 2-aryl TAPs. Subsequently, we explored the direct C2-arylation of TAP to construct 2-aryl TAPs via a C-H/C-X coupling reaction.³¹⁻³³ However, the direct arylation of TAP with 4-iodotoluene occurred at C7 rather than at C2 (Table S1). Although the C7-arylation gave us an opportunity to assemble 2,7-diaryl TAPs by further C2-arylation of the resulting 7-aryl TAP, all efforts failed to reach the goal. Thus, we have to pursue other approaches to synthesize 2-aryl TAPs (Scheme 1).

Scheme 1. Programmed C-H Arylation for the Synthesis of 2,7-Diaryl TAPs



The Dimroth rearrangement is an isomerization of heterocycles through a ring opening/ring closure sequence, which can enable a transformation from [1,2,4]triazolo[4,3-*a*]pyrimidine to [1,2,4]triazolo[1,5-*a*]pyrimidine.²⁹ Thus, it is envisaged that 2-aryl TAPs (**3**) could be obtained by direct C3-H arylation of [1,2,4]triazolo[4,3-*a*]pyrimidine ([4,3-*a*]-TAP, **1a'**) and subsequent Dimroth rearrangement (Table 1). As expected, the sequen-

tial CuI-catalyzed C3-arylation of **1a'** with iodobenzene (**2e**) and Dimroth rearrangement in formic acid successfully delivered the 2-arylated **3e** in 71% yield in a one-pot process (Table S2). The intermediate **3e'** was isolated in the absence of formic acid and its structure was confirmed by single crystal X-ray diffraction (Table 1 and Figure S1). To investigate the relationship between structure and photophysical property,³⁴⁻³⁶ a library of 2-aryl TAPs with various substituents was assembled under the optimal conditions, and their photophysical properties are shown in Table 1. It is found that the introduction of an electron-donating group (EDG) on the **A** ring results in a red-shifted emission (Table 1, **3a-3d** and **3j**), while an electron-withdrawing group (EWG) has little influence on emission (Table 1, **3f-3i**). As we expected, the crystallography data of **3d** exhibit an almost planar conformation of **A-TAP** (a dihedral angle of only 5.6°) (Table 1).

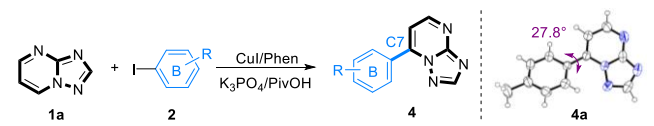
Table 1. One-Pot Synthesis and Photophysical Properties of 2-Aryl TAPs^a

Compd	A ring	Yield ^b	λ_{abs}^c (nm)	λ_{em}^c (nm) (Φ_f^d)	Stokes shift
3a	4-CH ₃ Ph	61%	310	392 (0.67)	6748 cm ⁻¹ (82 nm)
3b	4-CH ₃ Oph	73%	317	402 (0.57)	6670 cm ⁻¹ (85 nm)
3c	3,4-(CH ₃ O) ₂ Ph	38%	325	452 (0.81)	8645 cm ⁻¹ (127 nm)
3d	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	10%	358	519 (0.52)	8665 cm ⁻¹ (161 nm)
3e	Ph	71%	304	356 (0.86)	4805 cm ⁻¹ (52 nm)
3f	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	50%	294	351 (0.05)	5524 cm ⁻¹ (57 nm)
3g	4-ClPh	77%	305	358 (0.32)	4854 cm ⁻¹ (53 nm)
3h	4-CHOPh	79%	305	358 (0.19)	4854 cm ⁻¹ (53 nm)
3i	4-CNPh	52%	296	356 (0.29)	5694 cm ⁻¹ (60 nm)
3j^e	4-piperidylPh	45%	349	527 (0.32)	9678 cm ⁻¹ (178 nm)

^aReaction conditions: 1) **1a'** (0.25 mmol), **2** (0.375 mmol), CuI (10 mol %), PPh₃ (10 mol %), PivOH (50 mol %), K₂CO₃ (2.0 equiv) and 1,4-dioxane/DMSO (0.6/0.06 mL) at 120 °C for 24 h under N₂, 2) HCOOH (1.0 mL) at 110 °C for 12 h. PivOH = pivalic acid; DMSO = dimethyl sulfoxide. ^bIsolated yield. ^cAbsorption maximum and emission maximum in CH₂Cl₂ (10 μ M). ^dAbsolute quantum yield in CH₂Cl₂ (10 μ M) was determined with an integrating sphere system. ^eFor the synthetic details of **3j**, see section VIII in SI. Inset: X-ray crystal structures of **3e'** and **3d** with thermal ellipsoids at 50% probability.

Subsequently, we focused on the synthesis of 7-aryl TAPs. After screening several reaction parameters (For details, see Table S1), a library of 7-aryl TAPs was assembled in 1,4-dioxane using K_3PO_4 as the base and pivalic acid as the additive in the presence of CuI/1,10-phenanthroline. The crystal structure of **4a** reveals a 27.8° dihedral angle between 7-tolyl and TAP, demonstrating a twisted conformation of **B-TAP**. The spectral data of 7-aryl TAPs are collected in Table 2. All 7-aryl TAPs exhibit a short-wavelength emission of around 400 nm except **4d** (Table 2).

Table 2. Synthesis and Photophysical Properties of 7-Aryl TAPs^a



Compd	B ring	Yield ^b	λ_{abs}^c (nm)	λ_{em}^c (nm) (Φ_f^d)	Stokes shift
4a	4-CH ₃ Ph	90%	312	384 (0.88)	6010 cm ⁻¹ (72 nm)
4b	4-CH ₃ OPh	73%	326	389 (0.85)	4968 cm ⁻¹ (63 nm)
4c	3,4-(CH ₃ O) ₂ Ph	67%	339	411 (0.75)	5168 cm ⁻¹ (72 nm)
4d	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	62%	389	449 (0.99)	3435 cm ⁻¹ (60 nm)
4e	Ph	86%	310	374 (0.70)	5520 cm ⁻¹ (64 nm)
4f	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	79%	296	399 (0.99)	8721 cm ⁻¹ (103 nm)
4g	4-ClPh	77%	309	394 (0.80)	6982 cm ⁻¹ (85 nm)
4h	4-CHOPh	74%	309	390 (0.85)	6721 cm ⁻¹ (81 nm)
4i	4-CNPh	52%	300	400 (0.51)	8333 cm ⁻¹ (100 nm)
4j	4-piperidylPh	42%	387	460 (0.98)	4101 cm ⁻¹ (73 nm)

^aReaction conditions: **1a** (0.25 mmol), **2** (0.375 mmol), CuI (10 mol %), Phen (10 mol %), PivOH (50 mol %), K_3PO_4 (2.0 equiv) and 1,4-dioxane (0.6 mL) at 140 °C for 24 h under N₂. Phen = 1,10-phenanthroline. ^bIsolated yield. ^cAbsorption maximum and emission maximum in CH₂Cl₂ (10 μ M). ^dAbsolute quantum yield in CH₂Cl₂ (10 μ M) was determined with an integrating sphere system. Inset: X-ray crystal structure of **4a** with thermal ellipsoids at 50% probability.

To evaluate the electronic effect of substituents on the **A** and **B** rings, the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) and lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) distributions and energy levels of both 2-aryl and 7-aryl TAPs were calculated by the density functional theory (DFT) (For details, see Section IV in SI).³⁷ Compared with 2-phenyl TAP (**3e**), an EDG on the **A** ring has little influence on the LUMO level, but significantly pushes the HOMO level up, hence narrowing the bandgaps of 2-aryl TAPs (**3a**, **3b**, **3c**, **3d** and **3j**). Compared with 7-phenyl TAP (**4e**), an EDG on the **B** ring also reduces the bandgaps of 7-aryl TAPs (**4a**, **4b**, **4c**, **4d** and **4j**), but its influence is smaller than that on 2-aryl TAPs. On the other hand, an EWG on the **A** ring almost synchronously re-

duces both the HOMO and LUMO levels, and thus the bandgaps of 2-aryl TAPs remain almost unchanged in comparison with **3e**. In contrast, compared with **4e**, an EWG on the **B** ring causes a larger decrease of the LUMO level than that of the HOMO level (**4f**, **4g**, **4h** and **4i**). Thus, the bandgap is reduced more efficiently by an EWG on the **B** ring than on the **A** ring. In addition, we also chart the scatter plot of emission wavelengths versus Hammett constants (Figure 2).³⁸ These observations illustrate that an EDG on the **A** ring can cause a more red-shifted emission than on the **B** ring, while an EWG on the **B** ring can induce a larger red-shift than on the **A** ring. Thus, we rationalize that an EDG on the **A** ring and an EWG on the **B** ring would lead to a much more red-shifted emission.

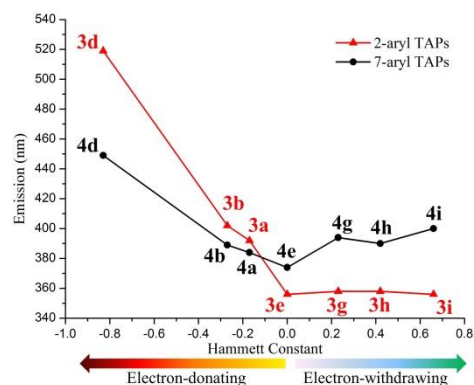
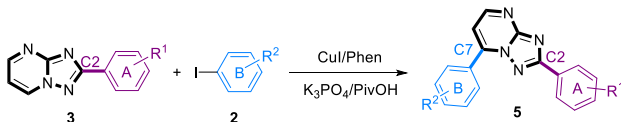


Figure 2. Electronic effect of substituents on the **A** and **B** rings. The scatter plot of the emission maxima of C2- and C7-aryl TAPs versus Hammett constants is charted.

As C2-arylation and C7-arylation of TAP proceed independently, 2,7-diaryl TAPs are easily constructed by using the programmed C3-H arylation, Dimroth rearrangement and C7-H arylation. Thus, a series of 2,7-diaryl TAPs with different substituents on the **A** and **B** rings were synthesized in satisfactory yields. Photophysical data of these fluorophores both in solution and in the solid-state are summarized in Table 3 (For details, see Table S3 and Figure S4). As expected, 2,7-diaryl TAPs with EDG on the **A** ring and EWG on the **B** ring (**5ji**, **5di**, **5df**, **5dg** and **5af**) exhibit a more red-shifted emission in solution compared with 2,7-diphenyl TAP (**5ee**). It needs to note that **5df** shows a significant red shift of emission in CH₂Cl₂ (λ_{em} = 620 nm) compared to its solid-state (λ_{em} = 539 nm), while its aryl-interchanged congener **5fd** displays a remarkable blue shift of emission in CH₂Cl₂ (λ_{em} = 462 nm) compared to its solid-state (λ_{em} = 620 nm). To get insight into the difference in their emissions between in solution and in the solid-state, the solvatochromic effects³⁹ and fluorescence spectra at different concentrations of **5df** and **5fd** were investigated (For details, see Section V in SI). The dipole moment changes ($\Delta\mu = \mu_e - \mu_g$) between the fluorescent excited-state and ground-state were calculated to be 15.76 D and 7.85 D for **5df** and **5fd**, respectively. The much larger $\Delta\mu$ value of **5df** indicates a more significant ICT effect than **5fd**. To further confirm the ICT effect, **5df** was subjected to the density functional theory (DFT) calculation at B3LYP/6-31G(d) level. The HOMO is primarily localized over the *N,N*-dimethylamino-substituted phenyl moiety (**A** ring), while the LUMO is mainly centered on the 3,5-ditrifluoromethyl-substituted phenyl moiety (**B** ring) (Figure S14). Both the large value of $\Delta\mu$ and the DFT calculation suggest that **5df** is a typical D-A type molecule with significant

Table 3. Synthesis and Photophysical Properties of 2,7-Diaryl TAPs^a


Compd	A ring	B ring	Yield ^b	λ_{abs}^c (nm)	λ_{em}^c (nm) (Φ_f^d)	Stokes shift	λ_{em}^e (nm)
Sji	4-piperidylPh	4-CNPh	64%	391	653 (0.01)	10262 cm ⁻¹ (262 nm)	574
Sdi	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	4-CNPh	61%	400	645 (0.01)	9496 cm ⁻¹ (245 nm)	615
Sdf	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	69%	402	620 (0.02)	8747 cm ⁻¹ (218 nm)	539
Sdg	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	4-ClPh	67%	378	573 (0.38)	9003 cm ⁻¹ (195 nm)	522
Sda	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	4-CH ₃ Ph	87%	373	553 (0.33)	8726 cm ⁻¹ (180 nm)	515
Sef	Ph	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	88%	318	401 (0.42)	6509 cm ⁻¹ (83 nm)	409
Saf	4-CH ₃ Ph	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	79%	324	420 (0.61)	7055 cm ⁻¹ (96 nm)	414
Saa	4-CH ₃ Ph	4-CH ₃ Ph	82%	317	390 (0.62)	5905 cm ⁻¹ (73 nm)	398
See	Ph	Ph	88%	317	389 (0.25)	5839 cm ⁻¹ (72 nm)	405
Sfa	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	4-CH ₃ Ph	79%	309	379 (0.64)	5977 cm ⁻¹ (70 nm)	404
Sfe	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	Ph	78%	305	389 (0.95)	7080 cm ⁻¹ (84 nm)	407
Sad	4-CH ₃ Ph	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	78%	391	450 (0.99)	3353 cm ⁻¹ (59 nm)	539
Sgd	4-ClPh	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	61%	394	453 (0.86)	3306 cm ⁻¹ (59 nm)	610
Sfd	3,5-(CF ₃) ₂ Ph	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	75%	401	462 (0.80)	3293 cm ⁻¹ (61 nm)	620
Sid	4-CNPh	4-(CH ₃) ₂ NPh	47%	402	464 (0.96)	3324 cm ⁻¹ (62 nm)	584
Sij	4-CNPh	4-piperidylPh	62%	400	473 (0.98)	3858 cm ⁻¹ (73 nm)	567

^aReaction conditions: **3** (0.25 mmol), **2** (0.375 mmol), CuI (10 mol %), Phen (10 mol %), PivOH (50 mol %), K₃PO₄ (2.0 equiv) and 1,4-dioxane (0.6 mL) at 140 °C for 24 h under N₂. ^bIsolated yield. ^cAbsorption maximum and emission maximum in CH₂Cl₂ (10 μM). ^dAbsolute quantum yield in CH₂Cl₂ (10 μM) was determined with an integrating sphere system. ^eEmission maximum in pristine powder.

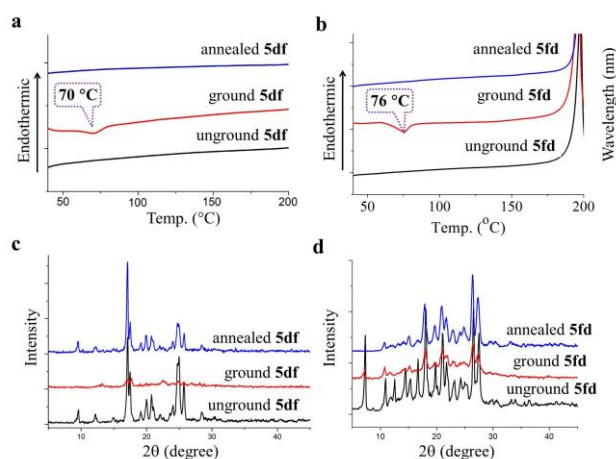


Figure 3. DSC curves of **5df** (a) and **5fd** (b) in different states. XRD patterns of **5df** (c) and **5fd** (d) in different states.

ICT effect.⁴⁰ In addition, the emission spectrum of **5df** powder (Figure S8) is similar to that of its dilute solution in low polar solvent (Figure S5), and no concentration dependent emission spectrum was observed (1×10^{-5} to 1×10^{-2} M) (Figure S7), which excludes the excimer formation.⁴¹ Therefore, a significant emission red shift of **5df** in solution compared to its solid-state may be mainly attributed to a significant ICT effect. In contrast, **5fd** exhibits a relatively small ICT effect due to the small $\Delta\mu$ value. An obvious

concentration dependent emission spectrum at approximately 595 nm is observed for **5fd** (1×10^{-5} to 1×10^{-2} M) (Figure S7), which is similar to its solid spectrum (Figure S8), indicating the excimer formation.⁴² These observations demonstrate that the remarkable emission red shift of **5fd** in the solid-state compared to its solution may be mainly attributed to the excimer formation.

Relationship between molecular structure and mechanochromic luminescent behavior. With 2,7-diaryl TAPs in hand, the mechanochromic behaviors of these luminogens were evaluated. The chromophores exhibit solid-state fluorescence covering the entire visible region (404–620 nm) (Table 3). Upon grinding, except 2,7-ditolyl TAP (**5aa**) and 2,7-diphenyl TAP (**5ee**), these molecules exhibit mechanochromic behaviors (Table S3 and Figure S8). Among them, **Sji**, **Sdi**, **Sdf**, **Sdg**, **Sda**, **Sef** and **Saf** show red-shifted mechanochromic luminescence properties. In contrast, their aryl-interchanged isomers, **Sij**, **Sid**, **Sfd**, **Sgd**, **Sad**, **Sfe** and **Sfa** exhibit blue-shifted mechanochromic behaviours (Figure 5). These results indicate that the exchange between the C2-aryl and C7-aryl moieties does make a counterpoint in chromism trends.

Taking **5df** and **5fd** as representative examples, the mechanofluorochromic behaviors were investigated in details. Grinding of the pristine powder **5df** induced a substantial red-shift with an emission color change from yellowish-green ($\lambda_{\text{em}} = 539$ nm) to orange-red ($\lambda_{\text{em}} = 588$ nm) (Figure 5). In contrast, the original powder of **5fd** shows a red emission with an emission maximum of 620 nm. Upon grinding, the emission color blue-shifts to orange-

yellow ($\lambda_{em} = 563$ nm). These observations indicate that the luminogens **5df** and **5fd** with the interchanged **A** and **B** rings exhibit an opposite mechanochromic trend. Differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) analyses for the different states of **5df** and **5fd** show that the ground samples present an obvious exothermal peak at approximately 70 °C and 76 °C, respectively, indicating a phase transition between the metastable ground state and the more stable original state or annealing state (Figure 3a,b). The emission of **5df** could be reversibly switched between different states by repeated grinding and annealing treatments with no obvious fatigue response (Figure S9). Moreover, the emission of ground **5df** could also be restored by solvent fuming in a wide range of solvent vapors for 1-3 min (Table S5). It needs to point out that the emission of ground **5fd** could only be restored to 582 nm by annealing.

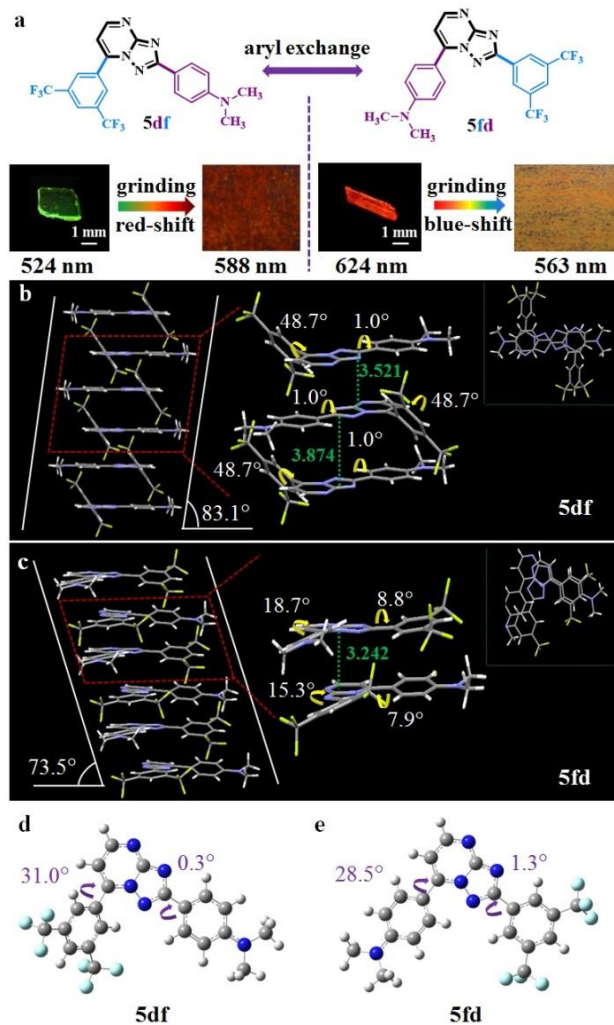


Figure 4. (a) Photographs of single crystals and ground samples of **5df** and **5fd** under UV light (365 nm). (b) Antiparallel packing mode of crystal **5df**. (c) Cross-parallel packing mode of crystal **5fd**. The top view of the crystalline packing is shown in upper right corner. Calculated molecular conformations of **5df** (d) and **5fd** (e).

To gain an in-depth understanding of structure-property relationship of these mechanochromic materials, the analysis of powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) of the pristine, ground and annealed **5df** and **5fd** was conducted (Figure 3c,d). The PXRD patterns of

the original powders exhibit sharp and intense reflection peaks, but these sharp peaks almost disappear after grinding treatment. These observations demonstrate a morphological transition between the crystalline (ordered) and amorphous (disordered) phases. Upon thermal annealing of ground **5df** and **5fd** at 120 °C for 10 min, the sharp peaks in the PXRD patterns could be recovered. In addition, the changes of UV-visible absorption spectra of the pristine and ground **5df** and **5fd** also manifest an evident change of the packing mode upon grinding (Figure S10).

By slowly evaporating EtOAc or CH₃CN solution of **5df** and **5fd**, the single crystals were obtained. The crystals of **5df** exhibit yellowish-green fluorescence with an emission maximum of 524 nm (Figure 4a). By grinding the crystals, the emission color red-shifts to orange-red ($\lambda_{em} = 588$ nm). Single crystal XRD analysis of **5df** reveals the face-to-face antiparallel packing between the two adjacent 2-aryl-TAP planes (Figure 4b). The electron-poor TAP moiety of one molecule is located above the electron-rich 4-dimethylaminophenyl moiety of its neighboring molecule. The TAP core frameworks form columnar stacked array along the *a* axis, in which the stacked molecules alternately take the opposite direction with the intermolecular distances of 3.87 and 3.52 Å, indicating relatively weak π - π interactions between the 2-aryl TAP planes. In each molecule, the **A** ring is nearly coplanar with the central TAP moiety with a negligible dihedral angle of 1.0°, which is indicative of a perfect π -conjugation in the 2-(4-dimethylaminophenyl)-TAP section. The **B** ring twists out of the **A**-TAP plane with a large dihedral angle of 48.7°. DFT calculation of the isolated molecule of **5df** discloses a twisting angle of 31.0° between the **B** ring and the **A**-TAP plane, which is smaller than that in the crystalline state (Figure 4d). The fluorophore takes a more distorted configuration to fit into the crystalline lattice. Once the crystalline lattice is broken upon grinding, the originally twisted segments may relax to become more planar. It means that the **B** ring may rotate from 48.7° to a smaller dihedral angle and finally approach 31.0° when external pressure breaks the bondage of partial lattice energy.⁴³ Thus, the π -conjugation degree as well as intermolecular π - π interactions are enhanced, thus leading to a red-shifted emission.¹⁰

While the **A** and **B** rings of **5df** are interchanged, the crystal structure of the resulting **5fd** displays an unusual cross-parallel packing mode, in which the electron-deficient 3,5-bis(trifluoromethyl)phenyl moiety of one molecule and the electron-rich 4-dimethylaminophenyl moiety of another molecule are oriented nearly parallel to each other, and the TAP cores of two different molecules are arranged in a cross-orientation (Figure 4c). Different from **5df**, the twisting angle between the **B** ring and the TAP moiety of **5fd** is decreased dramatically, which leads to a roughly coplanar arrangement of molecules. Each repeating unit of the crystal structure is composed of two molecules with different dihedral angles (8.8° and 18.7° for one unit, and 7.9° and 15.3° for another). A vertical distance between two 2-aryl TAP planes is measured to be approximately 3.24 Å, indicating a strong π - π interaction. The crystals of **5fd** exhibit a red fluorescence ($\lambda_{em} = 624$ nm) with a weak emission ($\Phi_f < 0.01$) due to the close face-to-face stacking which is consistent with the excimer character.⁴⁴ Upon grinding, the emission color blue-shifts to yellow ($\lambda_{em} = 563$ nm) with an enhanced emission efficiency ($\Phi_f = 0.04$) and a shortened lifetime (from 7 ns to 4 ns) (Figure S11), implying a diminished excimer formation. Thus, the fluorescence blue shift after grinding

crystals can be ascribed to the weakened intermolecular π - π interactions. In addition, DFT calculation of the isolated molecule of **5fd** indicates the **A-TAP** section adopts a planar conformation with a dihedral angle of 1.3° and the **B** ring adopts a twisted geometry with a dihedral angle of 28.5° (Figure 4e). The twisted **B** ring is probably ascribed to the steric repulsion between two aryl *ortho* hydrogen atoms of the 6:6 biaryl structure.²⁶ It is conceived that a great torsional tension existing in the molecule of the crystalline state may be balanced with the intermolecular face-to-face π - π and dipole-dipole interactions. The mechanical force enables to break such a balance and further induce more twisted conformations, which weakens intramolecular π -conjugation and intermolecular π - π stacking interactions to induce a blue-shifted emission.

To gain further insight into the opposite mechanochromic shifts for these aryl-interchanged isomers, the dipole-dipole interactions of 2,7-diaryl TAPs were investigated by DFT calculations (Figure 5 and Figure S16).⁶⁻⁸ As a comparable skeleton, bis-(4-tolyl) TAP (**5aa**) has a dipole moment (5.1 D) with the almost same direction

along the substituent at C7-position. The direction of the substituent at C2-position is almost orthogonal to that at C7-position. The donor or acceptor units at C2-position may change the direction of the total dipole moment. Compared with **5aa**, **5ad** (**A** ring: 4-tolyl; **B** ring: 4-dimethylaminophenyl) exhibits a larger dipole moment (8.0 D), and **5af** (**A** ring: 4-tolyl; **B** ring: 3,5-bis(trifluoromethyl)phenyl) has a smaller dipole moment (1.3 D), indicating that an EDG on 7-aryl may enhance the dipole moment, while an EWG on 7-aryl may cancel the intrinsic dipole moment. However, **5da** (**A** ring: 4-dimethylaminophenyl; **B** ring: 4-tolyl) shows a similar dipole moment (4.7 D) to **5aa**, and **5fa** (**A** ring: 3,5-bis(trifluoromethyl)phenyl; **B** ring: 4-tolyl) exhibits a larger dipole moment (7.7 D) than **5aa**, suggesting that an EDG on 2-aryl may have small influence on the electric dipole moment, while an EWG on 2-aryl may enhance the intrinsic dipole moment. Consistent with these trends, the dipole moments of **5df** and **5fd** were evaluated to be 2.4 D and 10.4 D by DFT calculations, respectively.

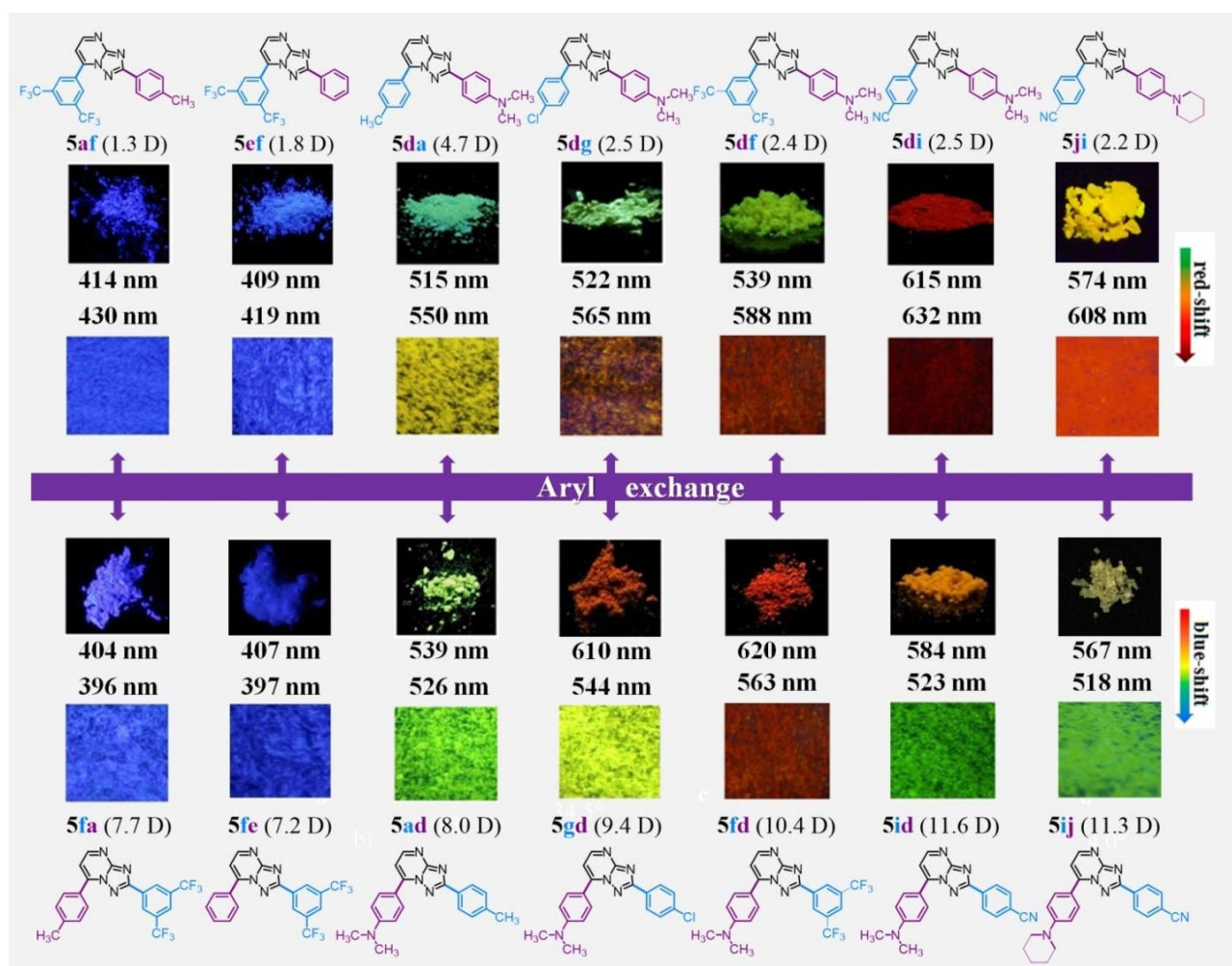


Figure 5. Calculated dipole moments of 2,7-diaryl TAPs and their fluorescent images before and after grinding.

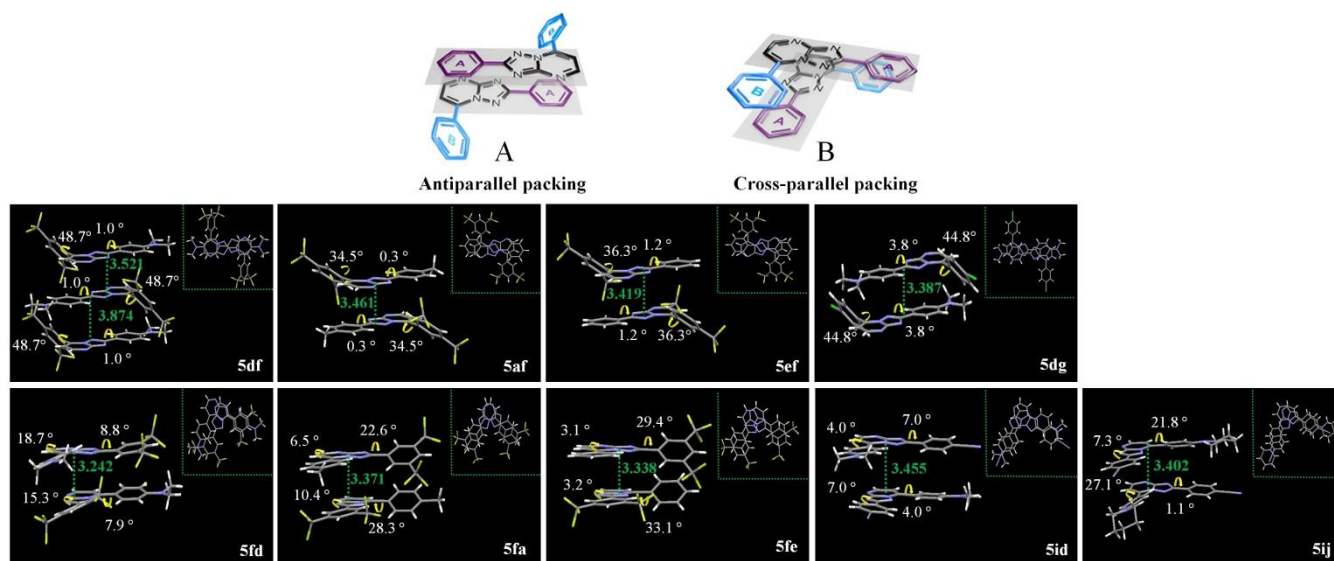


Figure 6. Packing modes of crystals of 2,7-diaryl TAPs. The top view of the crystalline packing is shown in upper right corner. Top: antiparallel packing mode; bottom: cross-parallel packing mode.

Given that the strong face-to-face π - π and dipole-dipole interactions enable to compensate the torsional tension,¹⁷ the **B-TAP** section of 2,7-diaryl TAPs may adopt a more planar geometry. Thus, a large molecular dipole moment of **5df** triggers a cross-parallel packing arrangement in the crystals, in which the dihedral angles of the **A** and **B** rings with the TAP core converge to render a roughly coplanar conformation (Figure 4c). The external stimuli can enable to destroy the molecular planarity of **5df** and weaken intermolecular π - π interactions, thus leads to a blue-shifted emission. For **5df**, the intermolecular dipole-dipole interactions cannot offer enough compensation for the torsional tension generated by the planarization of the twisted conformation due to a small dipole moment. Thus, **5df** adopts the antiparallel π - π stacking mode through the overlap of **A-TAP** planes (Figure 4b). External force can induce conformation planarization of the twisted **B-TAP** segment and increase intermolecular π - π stacking interactions, which is responsible for red-shifted emission. Thus, we conceive that the packing modes and mechanochromic trends of 2,7-diaryl TAPs are greatly related to the dipole moment. Like **5df**, the other six red-shifted mechanochromic luminogens (**5af**, **5ef**, **5da**, **5dg**, **5di**, and **5ji**) have relatively small dipole moments. Similar to **5df**, their isomers (**5fa**, **5fe**, **5sa**, **5gd**, **5id**, and **5ij**) with blue-shifted mechanochromism exhibit relatively large dipole moments (Figure 5).

Fortunately, in addition to **5df** and **5fd** mentioned above, we obtained other seven single crystals of 2,7-diaryl TAPs (**5af**, **5ef**, **5dg**, **5fa**, **5fe**, **5id**, and **5ij**) by slow diffusion of hexane or petroleum ether vapor into a solution of 2,7-diaryl TAP in dichloromethane or chloroform at 20 °C. The single crystal XRD analysis discloses that **5af**, **5ef**, and **5dg** take the antiparallel fashion similar to **5df**, and **5fa**, **5fe**, **5id**, and **5ij** trend to adopt the cross-parallel packing mode like **5fd** (Figure 6). It is worth noting that **5df** and **5fd**, **5af** and **5fa**, and **5ef** and **5fe** are three pairs of isomers with the interchanged **A** and **B** rings, which could provide further supports to understand the relationship between molecular structure and mechanochromic luminescent behavior.

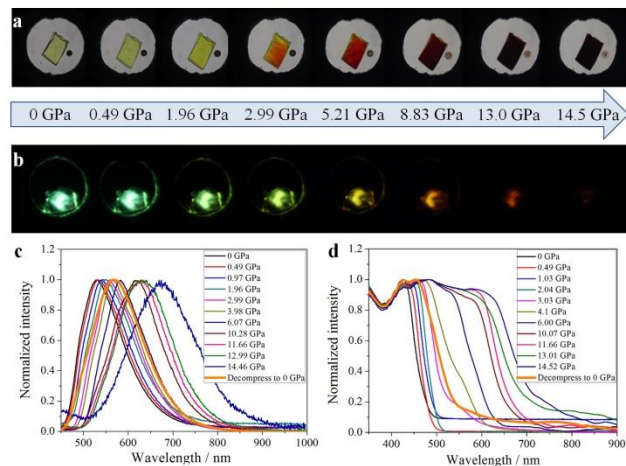


Figure 7. Visible (a) and fluorescent (b) micrographs of single crystalline **5df** under different pressures. Emission (c) and absorption (d) spectra of single crystalline **5df** under different pressures.

Mechanochromic Properties Using Silicone Oil and Argon as the Pressure-Transmitting Media. The mechanochromic behaviors of single crystalline specimen of **5df** were first investigated using silicone oil as a pressure-transmitting medium. The high-pressure experiments were performed by using a diamond anvil cell, and pressures were applied up to 14.5 GPa in silicone oil as the pressure-transmitting medium. The visible and fluorescent images of **5df** as well as the absorption and emission spectra under different pressures are shown in Figure 7. To our delight, the single crystalline **5df** also shows a red-shifted emission in silicone oil, which is more significant than that upon grinding. As the pressure increases to 14.5 GPa, the single crystalline specimen exhibits a color change from green ($\lambda_{em} = 524$ nm) to deep red ($\lambda_{em} = 676$ nm), which is one of the largest mechanochromic shifts (152 nm) reported to date.^{3,11,21,45,46} Under 6.07 GPa, the emission shifts to 585 nm similar to that of the powder after grinding (Figure S8), indicating that grinding is not powerful enough to give rise to a stronger mechanochromic effect. With the increase of the applied pressure, the

absorption peaks broaden with the formation of two new peaks at 483 and 581 nm. The change trends of both the emission and absorption of the single crystalline specimen in silicone oil are similar to those under grinding, implying the similar mechanochromic mechanism under different mechanical stimuli. It is worthy of note that the fluorescence and absorption spectra cannot entirely restore to the original state after releasing the pressure (from 14.5 to 0 GPa) (Figures 7 and Figure S12a,b). In addition, we also performed the high-pressure experiments using argon as the pressure-transmitting medium. The same change trends of both the emission and absorption of the single crystalline specimen were observed in these two pressure-transmitting media (Figure S12c-f).

Practical applications. The further practical applications of these mechanochromic materials are illustrated in Figure 8. The powder of **5df** dispersed on a filter paper as a thin-film exhibited a yellow-green emission upon excitation by UV lamp ($\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 365 \text{ nm}$). Then, the letters of "TAP" were written on the thin-film with a spatula as a "pen". Due to the writing-induced mechanochromism, the letters emitted an orange-red fluorescence (Figure 8a). These letters could be easily erased by using CH_2Cl_2 vapor as an "eraser" or heating at 120°C for 5 min (Figure 8b). Next, an orange flower was printed on the yellow-green-emitting paper under pressure (Figure 8c), and the printed flower could be erased by heating at 120°C for 5 min to restore the original emission color (Figure 8d). Further investigation demonstrates an approximately linear correlation between the mechanical pressure and the mechanochromic performance of **5df** with respect to the peak wavelengths (Figure S13). These results illustrate that the rewritable information storage systems could be constructed if we judiciously utilize the characteristics of the reversible chromism.

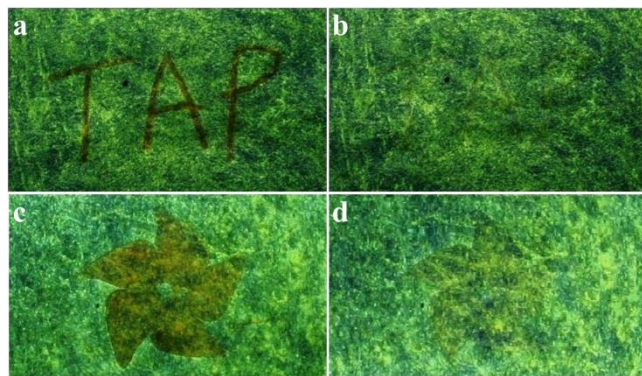


Figure 8. Mechanochromic application and relationship between mechanical pressure and emission maximum. Photographs a-d are shown under UV light (365 nm). (a) Letters of "TAP" were written on **5df**-coated filter paper using a spatula. (b) The letters were erased after treating the coating paper in CH_2Cl_2 vapor. (c) A pattern of flower was printed on **5df**-coated filter paper under mechanical pressure. (d) The pattern became invisible after treating the coating paper by thermal annealing.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, a novel design strategy of mechanochromic luminogens has been presented on the basis of the dipole moment of D–A molecules, exemplified by 2,7-diaryl TAPs. The programmed C–H arylation provides a straightforward gateway toward 2,7-diaryl TAPs, which unlocks an opportunity to rapidly assemble a

library of D–A-type luminogens and to better understand the structure-property relationship. The molecular dipole moment has been employed to explain and further predict the mechanochromic trends. 2,7-Diaryl TAPs with EDGs on 2-aryl and EWGs on 7-aryl exhibit a red-shifted mechanochromic trend. When the two aryls are interchanged, the resulting luminogens exhibit a blue-shifted mechanochromism. Finally, seven pairs of aryl-interchanged congeners with an opposite mechanochromic trend have been obtained through a rational molecular design. Using silicone oil as the pressure-transmitting medium, **5df** shows a significant red shift of 152 nm in emission wavelength, which is one of the largest mechanochromic shifts reported to date. The design principle of mechanochromic luminogens developed herein would give some inspirations to the development of novel mechanochromic materials.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information.

Detailed information on experimental procedures, computational, crystallographic and spectroscopic data, and X-ray crystal structures (CIF) of **3d** (CCDC-1009530), **3e'** (CCDC-1009642), **4a** (CCDC-1009643), **5df** (CCDC-1009644), **5af** (CCDC-1035081), **5ef** (CCDC-1009534), **5dg** (CCDC-1009542), **5fa** (CCDC-1493853), **5fe** (CCDC-1493853), **5fd** (CCDC-1009645), **5id** (CCDC-1009657), and **5ij** (CCDC-1495696) are available in the Supplementary Information. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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