Photochromism

Reversible Switching of the Luminescence of a Photoresponsive Gadolinium(III) Complex**

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Photochromism is a light-induced reversible change of color, and the fundamental concept and its applications have always fascinated scientists.^[1] Recently, photochromic metal complexes have been appealing because of their diverse structures and functions.^[2–5] Recent developments have been dominated by the metal complexes that connect well-established organic photochromic molecules such as diarylethenes, azobenzenes, and spiropyrans.^[2,4] However, the photochromic metal complexes based on their intrinsic light-induced behavior, which could open a new field of photochromic chemistry, are rare because of limited methodologies to construct the photochromic systems and compounds.^[3,5]

In our efforts to develop a new class of luminescent lanthanide complexes with a novel light-harvesting hexadentate ligand ({(PyrO)₃tacn}³⁻ = {(CH₂C₁₆H₈O)₃C₆H₁₂N₃}³⁻),^[6] we have serendipitously found an unprecedented luminescence photochromism of a gadolinium(III) complex [{(PyrO)₃tacn}Gd(THF)] (1) in THF at room temperature: Upon irradiation ($\lambda_{irr} < 405 \text{ nm}$)^[7], blue emission of 1 changes to intense red emission that reverts to the original blue emission after O₂ exposure (Scheme 1, Figure 1, and Movie S1 in the Supporting Information). In this photo-

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chromic system, room-temperature phosphorescence in solution, which is one of the rare properties of luminescent compounds,^[8,9] plays a key role. Herein we report the synthesis, structure, and luminescence properties of **1** and disclose a principle for the luminescence photochromism of **1** in THF at room temperature.

The N₃O₃ hexadentate trianionic ligand {(PyrO)₃tacn}³⁻ was synthesized through a Mannich reaction of 1,4,7-triazacyclononane (tacn) with 1-pyrenol and was isolated in the triprotonated form (H₃{(PyrO)₃tacn} = 1,4,7-tris[2-(1-hydroxypyrenyl)methyl]-1,4,7-triazacyclononane) in high yield (81 %, Scheme 1, see the Supporting Information).^[10] The



Scheme 1. Preparation of the photoresponsive gadolinium(III) complex **1**.



Figure 1. Unique luminescence photochromism of 1 $(3.3 \times 10^{-6} \text{ M})$ in THF at room temperature (λ_{ex} = 365 nm). Also see Movie S1 of the reversible switching of the luminescence of 1 by alternating light irradiation and O₂ exposure.

protonated ligand $H_3\{(PyrO)_3tacn\}$ was characterized by Xray diffraction analysis and ¹H NMR, ¹³C NMR, UV/Vis, and luminescence spectroscopy (Figures S1–S3 in the Supporting Information). In luminescent lanthanide complexes, energy levels of the lowest singlet and triplet ligand-centered excited states are crucial factors determining the photoinduced properties and can be estimated by measuring the photophysical properties of the gadolinium(III) complexes with the newly developed ligands.^[6h,11]

Reaction of $H_3\{(PyrO)_3 tacn\}$ with $Gd(OTf)_3$ in acetone/ THF at room temperature led to the formation of the gadolinium(III) complex **1** as a yellow powder (76%, Scheme 1, see the Supporting Information).

Yellow crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction analysis were grown from a saturated THF/AcOEt solution of 1 at room temperature. The obtained crystals consist of four complexes 1, five THF molecules, and three AcOEt molecules per asymmetric unit. The solid-state molecular structure of one of the four crystallographically independent complexes 1 in the crystals of 41.5THF.3AcOEt is depicted in Figure 2. The trivalent gadolinium ion in 1 is coordinated by three nitrogen and four oxygen atoms. The coordination polyhedron of the seven-coordinate gadolinium ion can be described as facecapped octahedron, in which the oxygen atom of THF caps the triangular face formed by the oxygen atoms of the $\{(PyrO)_3 tacn\}^{3-}$ ligand. The observed geometry of **1** is similar to that of the reported trivalent uranium complex with an N₃O₃ hexadentate trianionic ligand [{(^{Bu}ArO)₃tacn}U-(CH₃CN)][6f] $({({}^{tBu}ArO)_{3}tacn}^{3-} = {(CH_{2}tBu_{2}C_{6}H_{2}O)_{3}-}$ $C_6H_{12}N_3^{3-}$) rather than those of the corresponding trivalent



Figure 2. An ORTEP drawing of gadolinium(III) complex 1. One of the four independent complexes in the crystals of 41-5 THF-3 AcOEt is shown. Hydrogen atoms and cocrystallized solvent molecules (THF and AcOEt) are omitted for clarity; thermal ellipsoids are at the 50% probability level. Selected bond distances [Å] and angles [°]: Gd1–N1 = 2.555(4), Gd1–N2 = 2.621(3), Gd1–N3 = 2.604(4), Gd1–O1 = 2.216(3), Gd1–O2 = 2.189(3), Gd1–O3 = 2.219(3). Gd1–O4 = 2.447(3), N1-Gd1-N2 = 68.40(9), N1-Gd1-N3 = 68.58(11), N2-Gd1-N3 = 66.56(11), O1-Gd1-O2 = 111.08(11), O1-Gd1-O3 = 118.34(9), O2-Gd1-O3 = 115.01(11).^[18]

lanthanide complexes [{(^{tBu}ArO)₃tacn}Ln] (Ln = Sm, Eu, Lu).^[6a]

Figure 3 a displays the UV/Vis absorption spectrum of **1** in THF at room temperature. The absorption bands at 288, 366, 384, and 405 nm ($\varepsilon = 8.90 \times 10^4$, 7.27×10^4 , 8.38×10^4 , 10.35×10^4)



Figure 3. a) UV/Vis absorption spectrum of 1 (7.0×10^{-6} M). b) Corrected luminescence spectra of 1 (3.1×10^{-7} M) in nondegassed (blue) and degassed (red) THF at room temperature ($\lambda_{ex} = 285$ nm).

 $10^4 \text{m}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-1}$, respectively) are mainly corresponding to the $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ transition of the hydroxypyrenato moieties. The absorption bands are slightly red-shifted relative to those of H₃{(PyrO)₃tacn} (Figure S2 in the Supporting Information).

Under the excitation of **1** at $\lambda_{ex} < 405 \text{ nm}$,^[7] blue emission was observed in nondegassed THF at room temperature (Figure 3b, blue). Owing to the small Stokes shift and short emission lifetime (τ) , the blue emission can be assigned to the fluorescence from an intraligand excited state ($\lambda_{em}^{max} =$ 412 nm, $\tau < 50 \,\mu$ s, quantum yield (Φ) = 0.01; Figure S3).^[12,13] Surprisingly, continuous irradiation of **1** at $\lambda_{irr} < 405 \text{ nm}^{[7]}$ induces a change of the emission color from blue to red at room temperature. The obtained spectrum (Figure S4 in the Supporting Information, black dots), in which the original fluorescence band ($\lambda_{em}^{max} = 412 \text{ nm}$) is still observed with the same Φ , is identical to the emission spectrum of **1** in degassed THF at room temperature (Figure 3b, red). The red color originates mainly in a new emission band from 600 to 850 nm $(\lambda_{em}^{max} = 625 \text{ nm}, \tau = 430 \text{ } \mu\text{s}, \Phi = 0.12$; Figure S5 in the Supporting Information). The red emission is quenched by O_2 and goes back to the blue fluorescence only. On the basis of these results, the photoinduced red emission can be assigned to the phosphorescence from an intraligand excited state.^[13] The excitation spectra monitored at 460 and 625 nm (fluorescence and phosphorescence, respectively) are identical to the absorption spectrum of 1 (Figure S6a and S6b in the Supporting Information). Thus, the luminescence photochromism is based on the fluorescence and room-temperature phosphorescence of **1**. The heavy-atom effect of the Gd^{3+} ion



and the chelate effect of the ligand in **1** contribute to the observed rare room-temperature phosphorescence in solution. The proposed principle of the luminescence photochromism of **1** in THF at room temperature is summarized in Figure 4. Upon irradiation, **1** sensitizes triplet oxygen $({}^{3}O_{2})$ in nondegassed THF to generate singlet oxygen $({}^{1}O_{2})$, which



Figure 4. The proposed principle of the luminescence photochromism of 1 in THF at room temperature.

readily reacts with THF to produce tetrahydrofuran hydroperoxide (THF-OOH).^[14] Through these processes, ${}^{3}O_{2}$ is taken away from the system, and the red phosphorescence of 1 at room temperature becomes visible. The generation of ${}^{1}O_{2}$ was confirmed by the ¹O₂-trapping reaction with 1,5-dihydroxynaphthalene in CH₂Cl₂/MeOH and by the observation of ¹O₂ luminescence at 1275 nm in air-saturated CH₂Cl₂ (Figures S7 and S8 in the Supporting Information). The production of THF-OOH was analyzed by using the iodine test (Figure S9 in the Supporting Information). The lightinduced processes involving the THF-OOH production are additionally supported by the fact that the luminescence photochromism of 1 does not occur in benzene, toluene, and CH_2Cl_2 . Thus, the catalytic photooxidation of THF by **1** is indispensable to show the room-temperature phosphorescence of **1**. The backward process is simple phosphorescence quenching by ³O₂.^[15] Notably, the switching of the luminescence of **1** in THF at room temperature is reversible with alternating irradiation (365 nm) and O₂ exposure for at least ten cycles (Figure 5). This indicates that 1 has the appropriate stability toward the light irradiation, ¹O₂, and THF-OOH.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that the photo-responsive gadolinium(III) complex ${\bf 1}$ is a useful compound to



Figure 5. Reversible switching of the phosphorescence intensity of 1 (7.7×10^{-6} M) in THF at room temperature by alternating light irradiation ($\lambda_{irr} = 365$ nm, $810 \ \mu$ W cm⁻²) and O₂ exposure. The phosphorescence was monitored at 625 nm.

construct a unique luminescence photochromic system. The gadolinium(III) complexes have been widely investigated as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) contrast agents.^[16] However, other functions, especially photofunctions, of the gadolinium(III) complexes have been scarcely explored so far.^[9,17] Our findings offer attractive new insights into not only the construction of switchable and sensing materials but also the development of photo-oxidation catalysts, "photosensitizers", by using the photoresponsive gadolinium(III) complexes. Further work is currently in progress on the basis of these approaches.

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