

Tetraphenylethylene-Based Fluorescent Conjugated Microporous Polymers For Fluorescent Sensing Trinitrophenol

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Research Article

Keywords: Conjugated microporous polymer, Fluorescence sensor, Trinitrophenol, Tetraphenylethylene, Dinitrophenol

Posted Date: September 20th, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-837543/v1>

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Abstract

Two tetraphenylethylene-based fluorescent conjugated microporous polymers (TTTPT and TTDAT) were obtained by the Friedel–Crafts polymerization reactions catalyzed by $\text{CH}_3\text{SO}_3\text{H}$. In virtue of containing tetraphenylethylene, triphenylamine and s-triazine units in their porous skeletons, the resulting TTTPT and TTDAT show excellent fluorescence sensing performance for trinitrophenol with high quenching coefficients of 9.13×10^3 and $1.31 \times 10^5 \text{ L mol}^{-1}$, respectively. TTDAT can also sense to dinitrophenol with the K_{sv} of $2.70 \times 10^4 \text{ L mol}^{-1}$. The fluorescent quenching mechanisms of TTTPT and TTDAT for selective detecting TNP attribute to conventional photoinduced electron-transfer mechanism and/or the resonant energy transfer mechanism.

Introduction

As one of nitro-aromatic compounds (NACs), 2,4,6-trinitrophenol (Note it as TNP) is a significant threaten human health and national homeland safety [1]. TNP is not only one of the most dangerous explosives, but also severe environmental pollutants, and its extensive applications can cause hurt to the human body [2]. TNP can cause intense skin and eye irritation, severe respiratory disorders, liver or kidney damage, dizziness, as well as mutagenic effects, which gives rise to significant menaces to mankind health [2–5]. It is also the cause of sycosis, anaemia, gastritis, cancer, infertility and diarrhoea [5]. Because the frequent use of TNP in fireworks, dyes, leather and textile industries, a fungicide in agricultural, a powerful explosive in landmines and pharmaceutical industries, TNP unavoidably leads to its release to the environment in the process of production and utilization and brings about increased pollution of farmland and water bodies [3, 4, 6]. As it is characterized by high water-soluble, strong toxicity and low biodegradability, which can cause serious pollution to the supply of irrigation land and groundwater, and has a harmful impact on human health, TNP has already been placed at the forefront pollutants [4, 6]. Moreover, TNP has been considered an extremely dangerous explosive compared with other NACs, because of its low safety factor and high explosive energy [3, 5, 6]. Hence, fast, sensitive and selective detecting TNP is important [3–6].

Among the various TNP determination methods, for instance, gas chromatography, liquid chromatography, mass spectrometry, Raman spectroscopy, cyclic voltammetry, ion mobility spectroscopy, ion mobility spectrometry, field-effect transistor and fluorescence spectroscopy [1, 5–8], fluorescence sensing technique provides intriguing merits, for example, simplicity, excellent sensitivity, rapid response time, inexpensiveness, and it can test whether in solution or in solid-phase [3, 5–10].

Several electron-rich conjugated microporous polymers (CMPs) have been successfully prepared and reported as chemosensors. In particular, fluorescent CMPs have been widely used in the study of NACs detection [7, 10]. The microporous environment of the framework enables rapid diffusion of analytes, thus decreasing response time. The effective host-object interactions are valid to improve sensitivity [11]. The extended π -conjugate in CMPs can amplify signal transduction, hence further improving the sensitivity, which is known as the 'molecular wire effect' created by Swager group [5, 9]. Furthermore,

commercial NACs, for instance, TNP or DNP, all have the electron-withdrawing nitryl ($-\text{NO}_2$) that can interact with electron-donating CMPs, leading to effective excitation migration within the CMP porous structures to improve quenching sensitivity. Therefore, these conjugated and porous features of the organic frameworks make CMPs suitable for detecting the NACs [8, 9, 12].

Our group have developed two CMPs with the units of 1,3,5-triazine, triphenylamine (TPA) and tetraphenylethylene (TPE) (TTTPT and TTDAT, Scheme 1). TTTPT and TTDAT have the excellent porosity (564.8 and $44.1 \text{ m}^2 \text{ g}^{-1}$) (Table S1), high thermal stability (575 and $487 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$) and excellent performances for fluorescence sensing and adsorbing I_2 [13]. As a continuation of the work, we studied the fluorescence sensing properties of TTTPT and TTDAT for TNP and DNP in the contribution.

Results And Discussion

2.1. Fluorescence response time

When TTTPT and TTDAT were dispersed in some ordinary solvents, they emitted strong fluorescence. TTTPT dispersion in 1,4-dioxane (DOX) showed the most robust fluorescence under light excitation at 460 nm wavelength, while TTDAT dispersion in DMF emitted the maximum fluorescence upon excitation at 350 nm [13]. Therefore, we studied the relationships between fluorescence intensities of TTTPT dispersion in DOX and TTDAT dispersion in DMF (1.0 mg mL^{-1}) and the time after addition of TNP (5.0×10^{-4} and $2.5 \times 10^{-5} \text{ mol L}^{-1}$) (Fig. 1). The fluorescence of TTTPT and TTDAT decreased almost instantly, and reached the quenching equilibrium in less than 20 s , which indicated that the porous networks and extended conjugate structure have fast responses to TNP [14, 15].

2.2. Sensitivity of the CMPs

Since TTTPT and TTDAT are porous and fluorescent, we then investigated their chemosensing behaviour by choosing the NACs, including TNP, p-nitrophenol (p-NP), 4-nitrotoluene (p-NT), nitrobenzene (NB), 2,4-dinitrotoluene (DNT), paradinitrobenzene (p-DNB), m-nitrobenzene (m-DNB), 3-nitrophenol (m-NP), 2,4-dinitrotoluene (DNT), and DNP, as well as phenol (PhOH). Among them, the most toxic and damaging compounds, TNP and DNP, should be deserve particular attention [16]. Figure 2a-c showed the fluorescence spectra of TTTPT and TTDAT with the incremental addition of different amounts of TNP and DNP into the dispersions of TTTPT in DOX and TTDAT in DMF. Apparently, the fluorescence of TTTPT and TTDAT was quenched when TNP was gradually added into the dispersions. When other NACs were gradually added into the dispersion, respectively, the quenching efficiencies were very low, indicating that TTTPT and TTDAT have good selectivity for TNP over other NACs [1, 16, 17]. We used the Stern-Volmer equation, $(I_0/I) = K_{SV}[A] + 1$, to calculate the quenching coefficients (or Stern-Volmer constants, K_{SV}) of TNP [16, 18]. According to the Stern-Volmer curves, the K_{SV} values of TTTPT and TTDAT were estimated to be 9.13×10^3 and $1.31 \times 10^5 \text{ L mol}^{-1}$, respectively (Fig. 2d and Fig. 2e, Table 1), which are much bigger than those for other NACs (Table S2 ES†). Fluorescence spectrometric titration experiments proved that TTDAT can fluorescent sense DNP and has high sensitivity, and its K_{SV} reaches $2.70 \times 10^4 \text{ L}$

mol⁻¹. The detection limits (LODs) of TNP in DOX for TTTPT and in DMF for TTDAT are severally 1.15×10^{-13} and 5.56×10^{-13} mol L⁻¹ (Table 1). The LOD of DNP in DMF for TTDAT was determined to be 5.56×10^{-13} mol L⁻¹. These results showed that of TTTPT and TTDAT in dispersions possess the high sensitivity for TNP and DNP detection and are comparable to other CMPs (Table S2) [1, 16, 17, 19].

Table 1

The equation of I_0/I of TTTPT and TTDAT to the concentrations of TNP and DNP for suspension in DOX and DMF.

CMPs	Solvent	The equation	Regression coefficient (R)	The concentration range (mol L ⁻¹)	LODs (mol L ⁻¹)
TTTPT	DOX	$I_0/I = 0.9065 + 9.13 \times 10^3 [PA]$	0.9968	1.0×10^{-5} to 7.0×10^{-4}	1.64×10^{-11}
TTDAT	DMF	$I_0/I = 0.9302 + 1.31 \times 10^5 [PA]$	0.9834	0 to 1.0×10^{-5}	1.15×10^{-13}
TTDAT	DMF	$I_0/I = 0.9904 + 2.70 \times 10^4 [DNP]$	0.9966	0 to 1.5×10^{-5}	5.56×10^{-13}

2.3. Selectivity and competitiveness experiments for TNP detection

The sensing selectivities of TTTPT and TTDAT systems to TNP were investigated (Fig. 3, Red bar). 5.0×10^{-4} and 2.5×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹ NACs (p-NP, TNP, NB, p-NT, o-NP, p-DNB, DNT, m-DNB, m-NP, and DNP) and PhOH were added to TTTPT and TTDAT dispersions, respectively. The fluorescence of TTTPT and TTDAT was strongly quenched by TNP. In contrast, fluorescence intensities of TTTPT and TTDAT were not obvious changes after other NACs and PhOH added. The results indicated that TTTPT and TTDAT are well selective for detecting TNP [1, 20–22].

In order to check the selectivity of TTTPT and TTDAT for the actual detection of TNP, the competitive experiments were actualized in the presence of the various competitive NACs and PhOH with a concentration of 5.0×10^{-4} and 2.5×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹ for the dispersions of TTTPT and TTDAT, respectively. The changes of fluorescence intensities of TTTPT and TTDAT were monitored upon addition of TNP in the presence of other NACs and PhOH. As is seen from Fig. 3 (Green bar), neither of the other NACs nor PhOH have no interference with TTTPT detecting TNP except to DNP. Similarly, the anti-interference of TTDAT toward TNP was further validated. The results further showed that TTTPT and TTDAT are well selective for detecting TNP, indicating that the fluorescence intensities of TTTPT or TTDAT were slightly affected by the addition of other NACs and PhOH, and TTTPT and TTDAT dispersions have the excellent anti-interference ability [1, 6].

2.4. The quenching mechanism

The S–V plots are non-linear with the concentrations of TNP and DNP increasing, (Fig. 2c), indicating that a resonant energy transfer mechanism exists during quenching, and the static quenching processes coexists synchronously with the dynamical quenching processes during the detecting processes [6, 9, 23].

In order to comprehend the cause of the TTTPT or TTDAT selectivity to TNP, we measured the UV-Vis spectra of NACs and PhOH and compared them with the fluorescence spectra of the two CMPs, and employed the resonance energy transfer (RET) and photoinduced electron transfer (PET) mechanisms to explain the sensing mechanisms [6, 20]. Except for DNP, the UV-Vis spectra of NACs and PhOH hardly overlap the fluorescence spectrum of TTTPT, implying that there is no the RET process happening in the sensing process (Fig. 4a). As shown in Fig. 4b, there are overlaps among TNP, DNP, DNT, m-NP, p-NP and o-NP with TTTPT, which showed that there are energy transfer among TTDAT with TNP, DNP, DNT, m-NP, p-NP and o-NP (Fig. 4b) [20].

If the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) energy levels of the CMPs are higher than that of the analytes, the exciting electrons will transfer from CMPs to the analytes, and then perform fluorescence quenching, which is the PET quenching pathway [20]. Therefore, the HOMO and LUMO energy levels of TTTPT, TTDAT, the NACs and PhOH had been calculated (Fig. 5 and Table S3). The LUMO energy levels of TTTPT or TTDAT are lower than these of NB, p-NT and PhOH, which would hinder the radiative transition from TTTPT or TTDAT to NB, p-NT and PhOH, thus, there is no effective fluorescence quenching [8, 19, 20]. The LUMO energy levels of the TTTPT or TTDAT are higher than those of some NACs (such as TNP, p-DNB, DNP, m-DNB, o-NP, and DNT), which promotes the electrons transferring from TTTPT or TTDAT to electron-deficient NACs, and causes the fluorescence quenching phenomenon [9, 16, 20, 22, 24] (Fig. 5). Because the LUMO energy level of TNP is very lower than those of the other NACs and PhOH, TNP can quench more efficiently the fluorescence of TTTPT or TTDAT than other NACs and PhOH [22].

Conclusion

The fluorescent tetraphenylethylene-based conjugated microporous polymers containing triphenylamine and s-triazine units (TTTPT and TTDAT) were successfully used for fluorescence sensing trinitrophenol and dinitrophenol. Both TTTPT and TTDAT have the high sensitivity for trinitrophenol with quenching constants (K_{sv}) of 9.13×10^3 and 1.31×10^5 L mol⁻¹. TTTPT can also sense dinitrophenol with the K_{sv} of 2.70×10^4 L mol⁻¹. The fluorescent quenching mechanisms of TTTPT and TTDAT for selective detecting TNP were also studied by experiments and theoretical calculations, which could attribute to the conventional photoinduced electron-transfer mechanism and, or the resonant energy transfer mechanism.

Declarations

Author Declarations

We wish to draw the attention of the Editor to the following facts which may be considered as potential conflicts of interest and to significant financial contributions to this work.

-Funding (information that explains whether and by whom the research was supported)

This work was supported by Natural Science Foundation of Anhui Education Department (under Grant No. KJ2020A0887 and KJ2018A0319), Youth Talent Fund Key Projects of Anhui Education Department (under Grant No. gxyqZD2019114), and the Open Fund of AnHui Province Key Laboratory of Optoelectronic and Magnetism Functional Materials supported (under Grant No. ZD2021001).

-Conflicts of interest/Competing interests (include appropriate disclosures)

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

-Ethics approval/declarations (include appropriate approvals or waivers)

We further confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript that has involved either experimental animals or human patients has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies and that such approvals are acknowledged within the manuscript.

-Consent to participate (include appropriate statements)

We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and that there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. We further confirm that the order of authors listed in the manuscript has been approved by all of us.

-Consent for publication (include appropriate statements)

We confirm that we have given due consideration to the protection of intellectual property associated with this work and that there are no impediments to publication, including the timing of publication, with respect to intellectual property. In so doing we confirm that we have followed the regulations of our institutions concerning intellectual property.

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-Code availability (software application or custom code)

There is not applicable' forCode availability (software application or custom code).

-Authors' contributions (all authors should be individually mentioned in the author contribution statement. Please represent authors' names using their full initials, starting with the first name initial followed by the surname. Example: ABC edited the draft for general write up, DEF participated in mathematical design of the proposed method etc.)

The authors contributed as follows:

Liyang Ren: Investigation, Operation in experiment.

Xuechun Fang: Investigation, Operation in experiment, Data handling.

Fengqiang Wang: Investigation, Operation in experiment, Software.

Tongmou Geng: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Resources, Supervision, Writing- Original Draft, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

Signed by all authors as follows:

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Figures

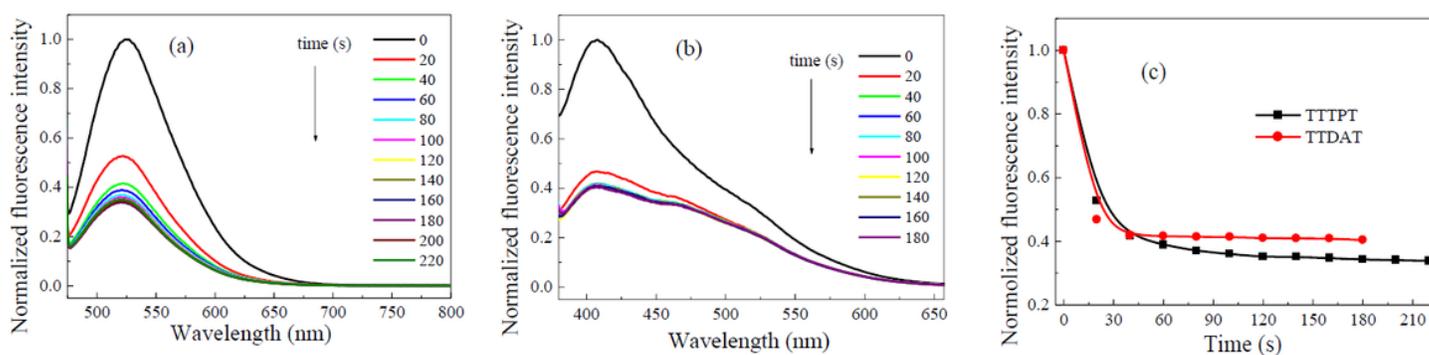


Figure 1

Normalized fluorescence intensities of the CMPs upon addition of TNP (a) TTTPT, (b) TTDAT for different periods of time. (c) The plots of fluorescence maximum of TTTPT and TTDAT as the functions of time (1.0 mg mL⁻¹, TTTPT in DOX: excited at 460 nm; TTDAT in DMF: excited at 350 nm).

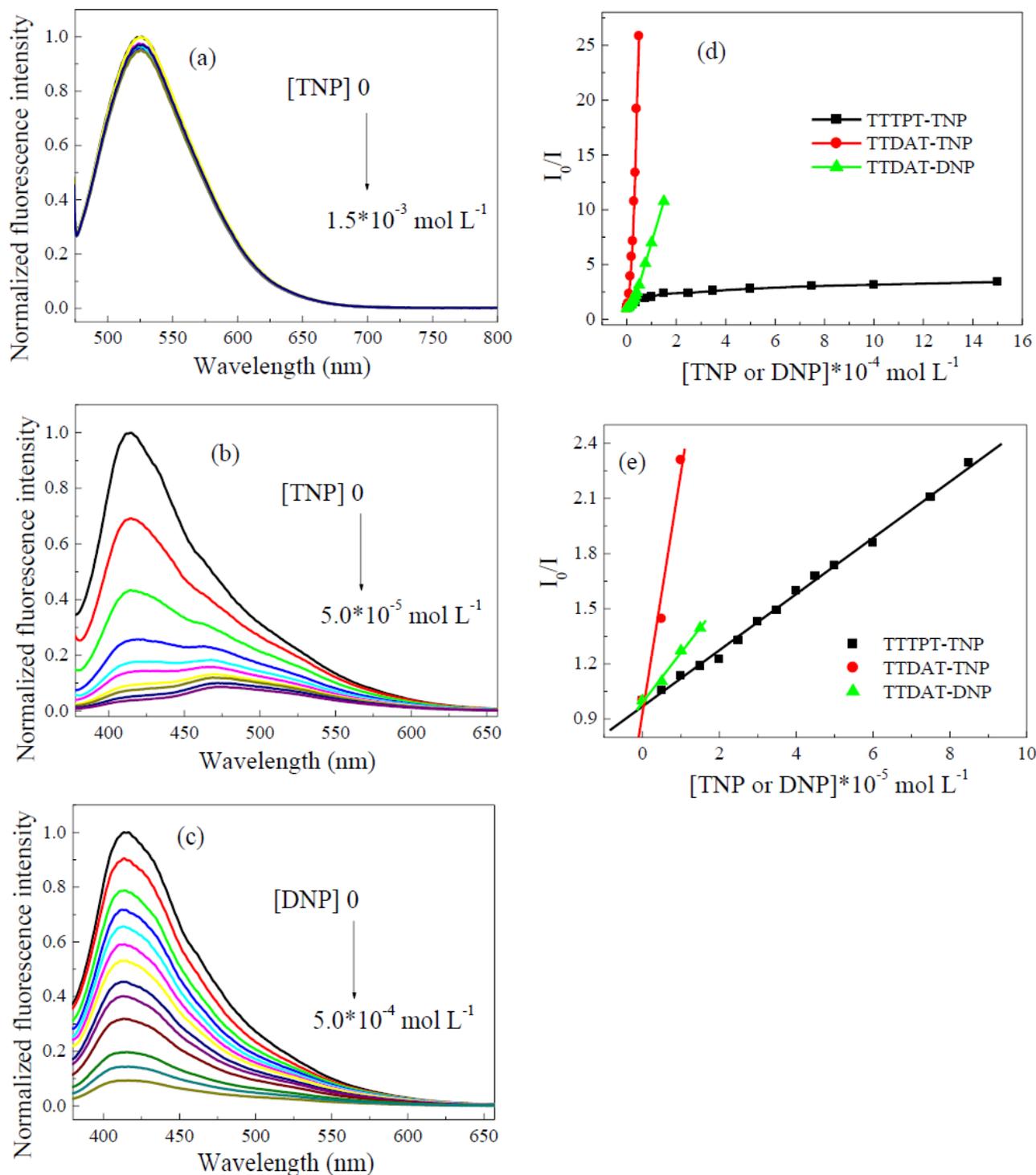


Figure 2

The changes of fluorescence spectra of the (a) TTTPT in dispersions of the DOX upon addition of TNP (1.0 mg mL^{-1} , excited at 460 nm); TTDAT in dispersions of the DMF upon addition of (b) TNP, (c) DNP (1.0 mg mL^{-1} , excited at 350 nm). Relative fluorescence intensity (I_0/I) of the (d) TTTPT and TTDAT in dispersions upon addition of various concentrations of TNP or DNP; (e) Stern–Volmer plots of TTTPT and TTDAT with various concentrations of TNP and DNP.

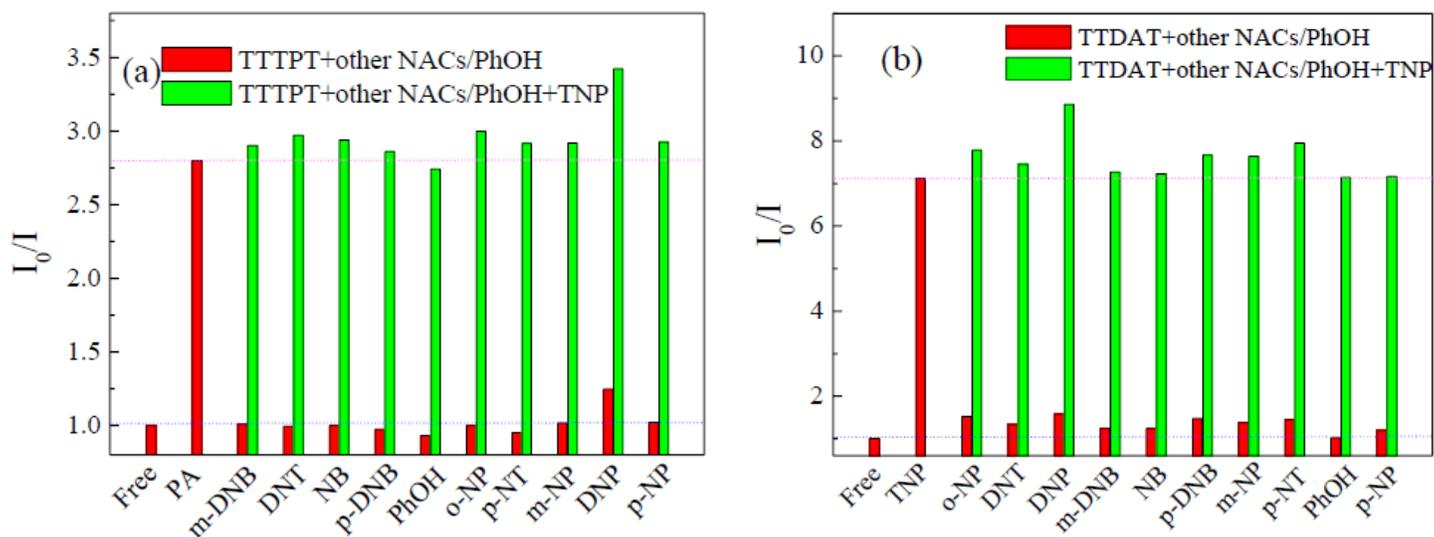


Figure 3

Selectivity and competitiveness of (a) TTTPT in DOX (the concentration of NACs and PhOH: 5.0×10^{-4} mol L⁻¹, $\lambda_{ex} = 460$ nm) toward TNP and (b) of TTDAT in DMF toward TNP (the concentration of NACs and PhOH: 2.5×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹, $\lambda_{ex} = 350$ nm). The red bars represent the relative fluorescent intensities of TTTPT and TTDAT in the presence of the competition NACs and PhOH, and the green bars represent the relative fluorescent intensity upon the addition of TNP to the above solutions.

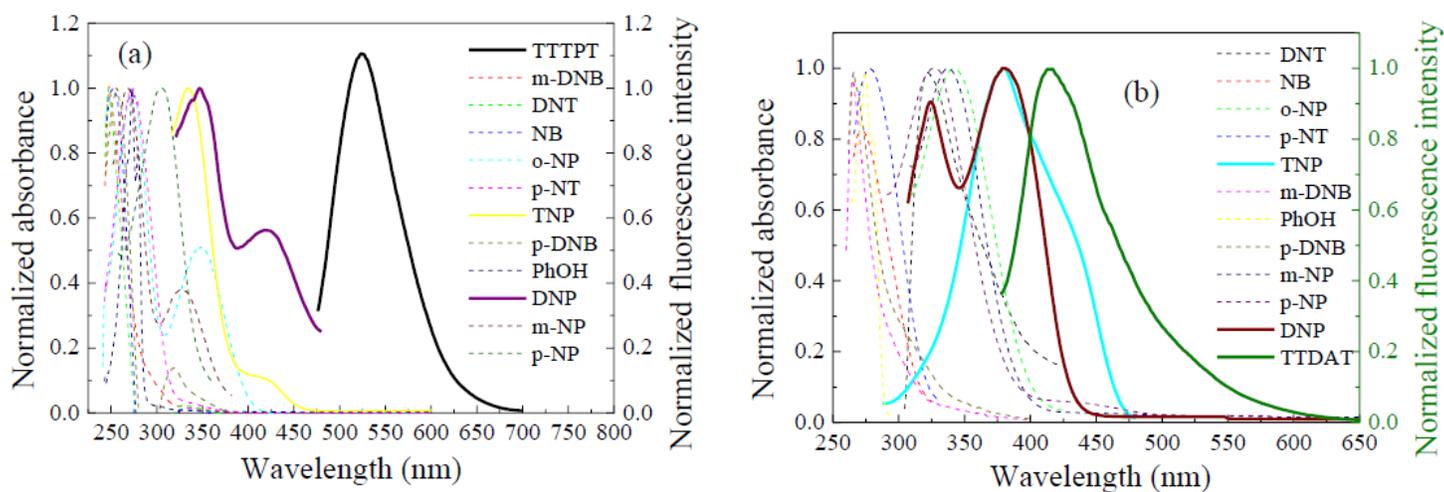


Figure 4

The absorption spectra of DNT, NB, NT, TNP, o-NP, PhOH, m-DNB, p-DNB, DNP, m-NP, p-NP as well as the emission spectra of (a) TTTPT ($\lambda_{ex} = 460$ nm, in DOX) and (b) TTDAT ($\lambda_{ex} = 350$ nm, in DMF).

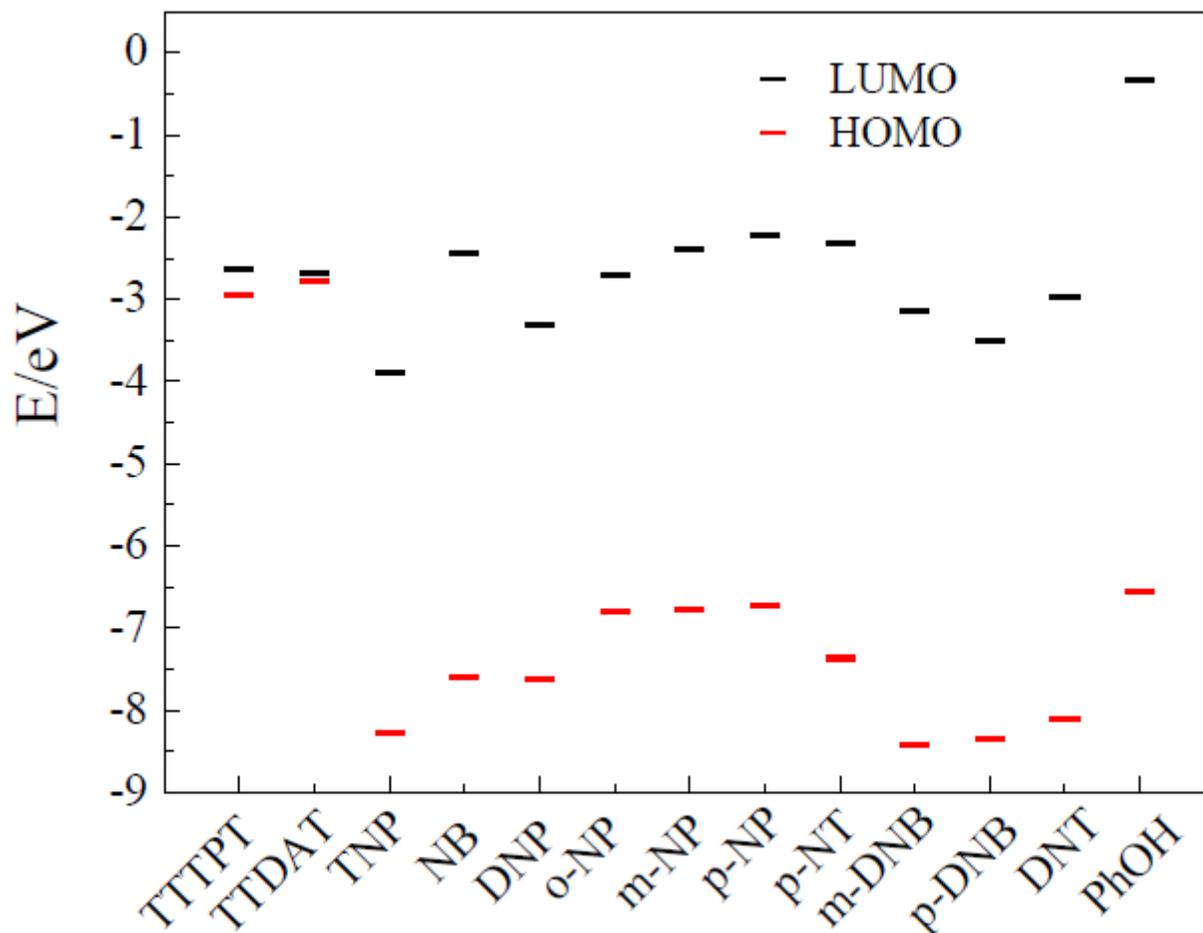


Figure 5

HOMO and LUMO calculations for CMPs, the NACs and PhOH. All the molecular orbital calculations were performed with the Gaussian 09 program at the B3LYP/6-31G* level.

Supplementary Files

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