

## COMMUNICATION

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[rsc.li/materials-c](https://rsc.li/materials-c)Full-range luminescence color tuning from blue  
to red in generic single-boron multi-resonance  
delayed fluorescence emittersDaiki Endo<sup>a</sup> and Takuma Yasuda<sup>†ab</sup>

**We report a family of sulfur-containing, single-boron multi-resonance thermally activated delayed fluorescence emitters that exhibit narrowband emissions spanning the full visible spectrum from blue to red. Site-specific incorporation of a carbazole unit and ring-fused  $\pi$ -extension with an indolocarbazole fragment enable extensive color tuning while maintaining sharp emission profiles.**

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) doped with heteroatoms have emerged as a prominent class of advanced organic functional materials owing to their tunable electronic structures and exceptional optoelectronic properties.<sup>1–4</sup> Their frontier orbital distributions, energy gaps, and excited-state dynamics can be precisely modulated not only by controlling the size and topology of the  $\pi$ -conjugated framework but also through the deliberate incorporation of heteroatoms such as boron (B), nitrogen (N), oxygen (O), and sulfur (S). A major breakthrough in this field occurred in 2016, when Hatakeyama *et al.* developed B,N-doped PAHs, typified by DABNA, which exhibit narrowband thermally activated delayed fluorescence (TADF) arising from the multi-resonance (MR) effect.<sup>5,6</sup> Since then, MR-TADF emitters have become key candidates for next-generation organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) that combine excellent color purity with high external quantum efficiency (EQE).<sup>7–11</sup>

With the implementation of the BT.2020<sup>12</sup> wide-color-gamut standard for ultrahigh-definition displays, there has been a growing demand for organic emitters with precisely controlled electroluminescence (EL) spectra. Consequently, the development of narrowband MR-TADF emitters covering the entire visible range, particularly the red region, has become a central challenge in OLED research. Although numerous MR-TADF emitters exhibiting blue to green emissions have been

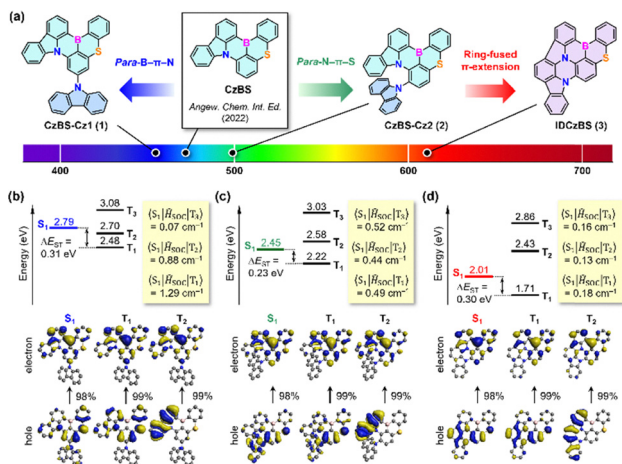
reported,<sup>5–11</sup> efficient red organoboron MR emitters remain scarce<sup>13–30</sup> (see SI for more details). The reported molecular design strategies for red MR-TADF can be broadly classified into three categories: (i) constructing *para*-D- $\pi$ -D (D = N, O, S) and *para*-B- $\pi$ -B architectures,<sup>13–15,17,18,21–23,29</sup> (ii) introducing strong donor and acceptor substituents at the periphery,<sup>19,25,28</sup> and (iii) expanding the  $\pi$ -conjugated MR core.<sup>16,20,26,27</sup> However, these approaches often involve complex multistep synthetic routes and lead to high molecular weights, thereby limiting emitter design diversity.

Herein, we report a universal and synthetically simple design strategy that enables full-range emission color tuning—from blue to red—within a versatile single-boron MR-TADF framework. As the parent MR scaffold, we employed a S-containing MR core (CzBS),<sup>31</sup> in which the S-induced heavy-atom effect facilitates the reverse intersystem crossing (RISC) process.<sup>31–33</sup> CzBS exhibits sky-blue narrowband emission with a high photoluminescence (PL) quantum yield ( $\Phi_{\text{PL}} = 99\%$ ) and high RISC rate ( $k_{\text{RISC}} = 4 \times 10^5 \text{ s}^{-1}$ ). With this scaffold, CzBS-Cz1 (1) and CzBS-Cz2 (2) were developed by introducing an additional carbazole fragment in the *para*-B- $\pi$ -N and *para*-N- $\pi$ -S fashions, respectively (Fig. 1a), leading to hypsochromic and bathochromic spectral shifts.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, IDCzBS (3) was designed *via* a novel ring-fused  $\pi$ -extension, which induced a further bathochromic shift into the red region. Remarkably, 3 (M.W. = 446) represents the most compact red MR-TADF emitter reported to date (SI), demonstrating that even a minimal single-boron MR core can deliver efficient narrowband red TADF. This conceptually simple yet powerful strategy thus provides a broadly applicable platform for color-tunable MR-TADF emitters compatible with wide-color-gamut OLEDs.

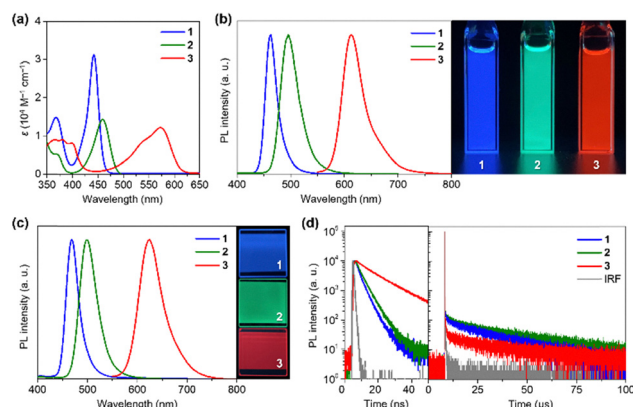
Compounds 1–3 were synthesized in three steps starting from commercially available haloarene (SI). The synthetic sequence comprises: (i) nucleophilic aromatic substitution ( $\text{S}_{\text{N}}\text{Ar}$ ) to introduce carbazole or indolocarbazole moieties, (ii) sulfidation using benzenethiol *via*  $\text{S}_{\text{N}}\text{Ar}$  or Pd-catalyzed C–S cross-coupling,<sup>35</sup> and (iii) intramolecular borylation *via* one-pot tandem lithiation–borylation–annulation.<sup>5,13</sup> Notably, the  $\text{S}_{\text{N}}\text{Ar}$  reaction with

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**Fig. 1** (a) Molecular design strategy for achieving blue-to-red narrow-band emissions based on the single-boron MR framework of **C2BS**. (b)–(d) Simulated energy-level diagrams and natural transition orbital (NTO) representations of the excited singlet ( $S_1$ ) and triplet ( $T_1$ – $T_3$ ) states for (b) **1**, (c) **2**, and (d) **3**, calculated using TDDFT at the PBE0/DZP level.



**Fig. 2** (a) UV-vis absorption and (b) PL spectra with corresponding emission photographs of **1–3** in toluene ( $10^{-5}$  M). (c) Steady-state PL spectra and emission photographs, and (d) transient PL decay curves of the doped films of **1–3** in mCBP host matrices at a doping concentration of 1 wt%. IRF denotes the instrument response function.

dihydroindolo[2,3-*a*]carbazole in the synthesis of **3** proceeded smoothly, affording a highly  $\pi$ -extended PAH framework incorporating two adjacent N atoms. Thermogravimetric analysis revealed high thermal decomposition temperatures ( $T_d$ , 5% weight loss) of 419, 394, and 449 °C for **1–3**, respectively, confirming their excellent thermal stability and suitability for vacuum thermal evaporation in OLED fabrication.

Time-dependent density functional theory (TDDFT) calculations predicted the lowest-excited singlet ( $S_1$ ) energies of **1–3** to be 2.79, 2.45, and 2.01 eV, respectively (Fig. 1b–d), indicating that their emission color can be tuned from blue to red. The corresponding spin–orbit coupling (SOC) matrix element ( $\langle S_1 | \hat{H}_{\text{SOC}} | T_1 \rangle$ ), which plays a pivotal role in governing the spin–flip RISC process, was calculated to be 1.29, 0.49, and  $0.18 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  for **1–3**, respectively. The relatively large SOC values for **1** and **2** can be attributed to the S-induced heavy-atom effect, suggesting efficient RISC processes comparable to those of the parent **C2BS**.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the  $\pi$ -extension in **3** attenuated the S-induced electronic perturbation, resulting in a reduced SOC value.

Subsequently, the photophysical properties of **1–3** were examined in dilute toluene solutions and in doped films employing 3,3'-di(carbazol-9-yl)-1,1'-biphenyl (mCBP) as the host matrix (Fig. 2 and Table 1). As expected, the absorption and emission maxima ( $\lambda_{\text{abs}}/\lambda_{\text{PL}}$ ) in solution exhibited systematic bathochromic shifts in the order of **1** (442/463 nm), **2** (459/495 nm), and **3** (573/612 nm), corresponding to blue, green, and red emissions, respectively (Fig. 2a and b). The  $\Phi_{\text{PL}}$  values in toluene were 95%, 90%, and 73% for **1–3**, respectively. The lower  $\Phi_{\text{PL}}$  observed for **3** was attributed to enhanced nonradiative decay pathways associated with the energy-gap law.<sup>36,37</sup> In the doped films, the PL spectra of **1–3** (Fig. 2d) showed modest bathochromic shifts (by 4–13 nm) and slightly broader full width at half maxima (FWHMs) relative to their solution states, likely because of host–guest electronic interactions. The  $\Phi_{\text{PL}}$  values of **1** and **2** remained high ( $> 90\%$ ), whereas that of **3** was somewhat decreased, presumably because of incomplete excited energy transfer from the host to the emitter. The singlet–triplet energy gaps ( $\Delta E_{\text{ST}}$ ) of **1–3**, estimated from their fluorescence and phosphorescence spectra, were comparably small (0.12–0.15 eV, Table 1 and SI), confirming the feasibility of the RISC process.

**Table 1** Photophysical data of MR-TADF emitters **1–3**

Emitter	State <sup>a</sup>	$\lambda_{\text{PL}}^b$ (nm)	FWHM <sup>c</sup> (nm eV <sup>-1</sup> )	$\Phi_{\text{PL}}^d$ (%)	$\Phi_{\text{p}}^e$ (%)	$\Phi_{\text{d}}^e$ (%)	$\tau_{\text{p}}^f$ (ns)	$\tau_{\text{d}}^f$ ( $\mu\text{s}$ )	$k_{\text{r}}^g$ ( $10^7 \text{ s}^{-1}$ )	$k_{\text{ISC}}^h$ ( $10^7 \text{ s}^{-1}$ )	$k_{\text{RISC}}^i$ ( $10^5 \text{ s}^{-1}$ )	$\Delta E_{\text{ST}}^j$ (eV)
1	Sol	463	25/0.15	95	23	72	2.9	37	8.0	27	1.1	0.13
	Film	468	30/0.17	91	23	68	3.4	25	6.7	23	1.6	0.14
2	Sol	495	39/0.20	90	24	66	3.0	25	8.1	25	1.4	0.13
	Film	499	41/0.21	91	20	71	4.0	31	5.1	20	1.4	0.15
3	Sol	612	46/0.15	73	73	~0	9.8	—	7.5	—	—	0.12
	Film	625	55/0.17	53	34	19	13	46	2.6	5.0	0.18	0.12

<sup>a</sup> Sol = deoxygenated toluene solution ( $10^{-5}$  M); film = 1 wt%-doped film in an mCBP host matrix. <sup>b</sup> PL emission maximum. <sup>c</sup> Full width at half-maximum of the PL spectrum given in wavelength and energy. <sup>d</sup> Absolute PL quantum yield evaluated using an integrating sphere. <sup>e</sup> Fractional quantum yields for prompt fluorescence ( $\Phi_{\text{p}}$ ) and delayed fluorescence ( $\Phi_{\text{d}}$ );  $\Phi_{\text{p}} + \Phi_{\text{d}} = \Phi_{\text{PL}}$ . <sup>f</sup> Emission lifetimes for prompt fluorescence ( $\tau_{\text{p}}$ ) and delayed fluorescence ( $\tau_{\text{d}}$ ). <sup>g</sup> Rate constant of fluorescence radiative decay ( $S_1 \rightarrow S_0$ );  $k_{\text{r}} = \Phi_{\text{p}}/\tau_{\text{p}}$ . <sup>h</sup> Rate constant of ISC ( $S_1 \rightarrow T_1$ );  $k_{\text{ISC}} = (1 - \Phi_{\text{p}})/\tau_{\text{p}}$ . <sup>i</sup> Rate constant of RISC ( $T_1 \rightarrow S_1$ );  $k_{\text{RISC}} = \Phi_{\text{d}}/(k_{\text{ISC}} \tau_{\text{p}} \tau_{\text{d}} \Phi_{\text{p}})$ . <sup>j</sup> Singlet–triplet energy gap estimated from the  $\lambda_{\text{PL}}$  positions of fluorescence and phosphorescence spectra.



Transient PL decay profiles of **1–3** in the doped films revealed distinct TADF behavior, featuring nanosecond-scale prompt and microsecond-scale delayed emission components (Fig. 2d). From these data, the photophysical rate constants for radiative decay ( $k_r$ ), intersystem crossing ( $k_{ISC}$ ), and RISC ( $k_{RISC}$ ) were determined (Table 1). Owing to the MR effect, all emitters exhibited large  $k_r$  values exceeding  $10^7 \text{ s}^{-1}$ . Compounds **1** and **2** showed relatively high  $k_{RISC}$  values on the order of  $10^5 \text{ s}^{-1}$ , consistent with the enhanced SOC induced by the heavy-atom effect. In contrast, **3** exhibited a  $k_{RISC}$  value approximately one order of magnitude lower than those of **1** and **2**, reflecting its reduced SOC (Fig. 1b).

To evaluate the EL performance of **1–3** as MR-TADF emitters, OLEDs were fabricated with the configuration: indium tin oxide (ITO, 50 nm)/2,3,6,7,10,11-hexacyano-1,4,5,8,9,12-hexaazatriphenylene (HAT-CN, 10 nm)/1,1-bis[(di-4-tolylamino)phenyl]-cyclohexane (TAPC, 40 nm)/1,3-bis(1,8-dimethylcarbazol-9-yl)-benzene (mMCP, 5 nm)/1 wt%-emitter: mCBP (30 nm)/2,8-bis(diphenylphosphinyl)dibenzo[*b,d*]furan (PPF, 5 nm)/1,3-bis-[3,5-di(pyridin-3-yl)phenyl]benzene (B3PyPB, 40 nm)/8-quinololato lithium (LiQ, 1 nm)/Al (100 nm).<sup>31</sup> The molecular structures of these materials and corresponding energy-level diagram of the devices are shown in the SI.

The OLEDs incorporating **1–3** exhibited sharp EL emissions with narrow FWHMs of 0.16–0.21 eV, corresponding to blue ( $\lambda_{EL} = 464 \text{ nm}$ ), green (493 nm), and red (617 nm) emissions, respectively (Fig. 3a). The Commission Internationale de l'Éclairage (CIE) chromaticity coordinates were (0.13, 0.08) for **1**, (0.11, 0.43) for **2**, and (0.64, 0.35) for **3**, demonstrating full-color tunability even at the device level (Fig. 3b). The OLEDs achieved maximum EQE ( $\text{EQE}_{\text{max}}$ ) of 21.4%, 20.7%, and 11.9% for **1–3**, respectively (Fig. 3c and d, and Table 2), consistent with their  $\Phi_{\text{PL}}$  values and TADF properties in the doped films. At a luminance of  $1000 \text{ cd m}^{-2}$ , the corresponding  $\text{EQE}_{1000}$  values

Table 2 OLED performance data

Emitter	1	2	3
$\lambda_{\text{EL}}^a$ (nm)	464	493	617
FWHM <sup>b</sup> (nm eV <sup>-1</sup> )	28/0.16	42/0.21	64/0.21
$V_{\text{on}}^c$ (V)	4.8	4.6	5.6
$\text{EQE}_{\text{max}}^d$ (%)	21.4	20.7	11.9
$\text{EQE}_{100/1000}^e$ (%)	19.3/12.0	18.5/12.7	7.2/2.1
CIE (x, y) <sup>f</sup>	(0.13, 0.08)	(0.11, 0.43)	(0.64, 0.35)
$\text{CE}^g$ (cd A <sup>-1</sup> )	15.8	44.5	15.6
$\text{PE}^h$ (lm W <sup>-1</sup> )	10.0	27.7	8.5

<sup>a</sup> EL emission maximum at  $1 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$ . <sup>b</sup> Full width at half-maximum of the EL spectrum given wavelength and energy. <sup>c</sup> Turn-on voltage at a luminance above  $1 \text{ cd m}^{-2}$ . <sup>d</sup> Maximum external EL quantum efficiency. <sup>e</sup> External EL quantum efficiencies at luminances of 100 and  $1000 \text{ cd m}^{-2}$ . <sup>f</sup> CIE chromaticity coordinates. <sup>g</sup> Maximum current efficiency. <sup>h</sup> Maximum power efficiency.

were 12.0%, 12.7%, and 2.1%, representing roll-off ratios of approximately 44%, 39%, and 82%, respectively. The smaller efficiency roll-offs observed for **1** and **2** are attributed to their relatively high  $k_{RISC}$  values, comparable to that of **CzBS**. In contrast, the pronounced roll-off in the **3**-based device likely originates from its lower  $k_{RISC}$ . In this case, a large accumulation of triplet excitons occurs at high excitation densities, leading to detrimental exciton losses *via* triplet-triplet annihilation (TTA) and singlet-triplet annihilation (STA).<sup>38</sup> This issue can potentially be mitigated by optimizing the emission layer through the introduction of a suitable TADF or phosphorescent sensitizer.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusions

In summary, we developed a series of S-containing, single-boron MR-TADF emitters that exhibited narrowband emissions spanning the entire visible range from blue to red. Notably, the ring-fused  $\pi$ -extension approach proved highly effective in inducing pronounced bathochromic shifts toward the red region, even within a structurally simple single-boron MR framework. This molecular design strategy provides valuable guidance for accessing low-energy narrowband emitters—an area long considered challenging—and expands the structural design landscape for red and near-infrared MR-TADF materials. We anticipate that further molecular refinements and device engineering will enable high-performance red narrowband OLEDs that combine exceptional color purity with high EL efficiency.

## Author contributions

Daiki Endo: conceptualization, investigation, writing – original draft, review & editing. Takuma Yasuda: conceptualization, project management, supervision, resources, writing – original draft, review & editing.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

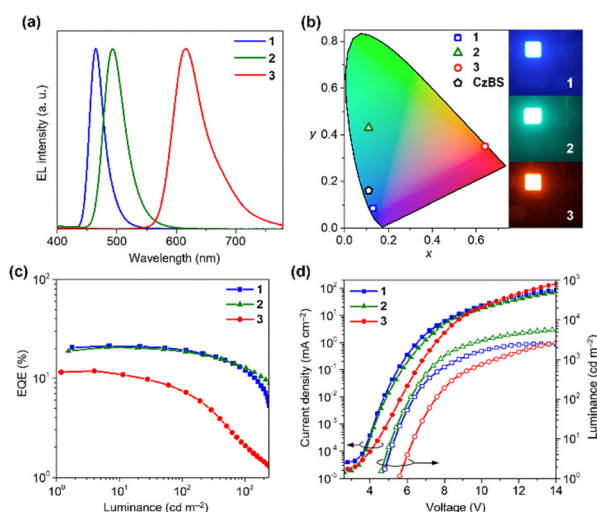


Fig. 3 OLED characteristics of the **CzBS**-derived MR-TADF emitters **1–3**. (a) EL spectra recorded at  $1 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$ , (b) EL emission images and corresponding CIE chromaticity coordinates, (c) External quantum efficiency–luminance ( $\text{EQE-L}$ ) plots, and (d) current density–voltage–luminance ( $\text{J-V-L}$ ) characteristics.





## Data availability

The data supporting this article have been included within the manuscript and its supplementary information (SI). Supplementary information: synthetic procedures, characterization data, supplementary figures, and detailed information. See DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1039/d5tc04007h>.

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