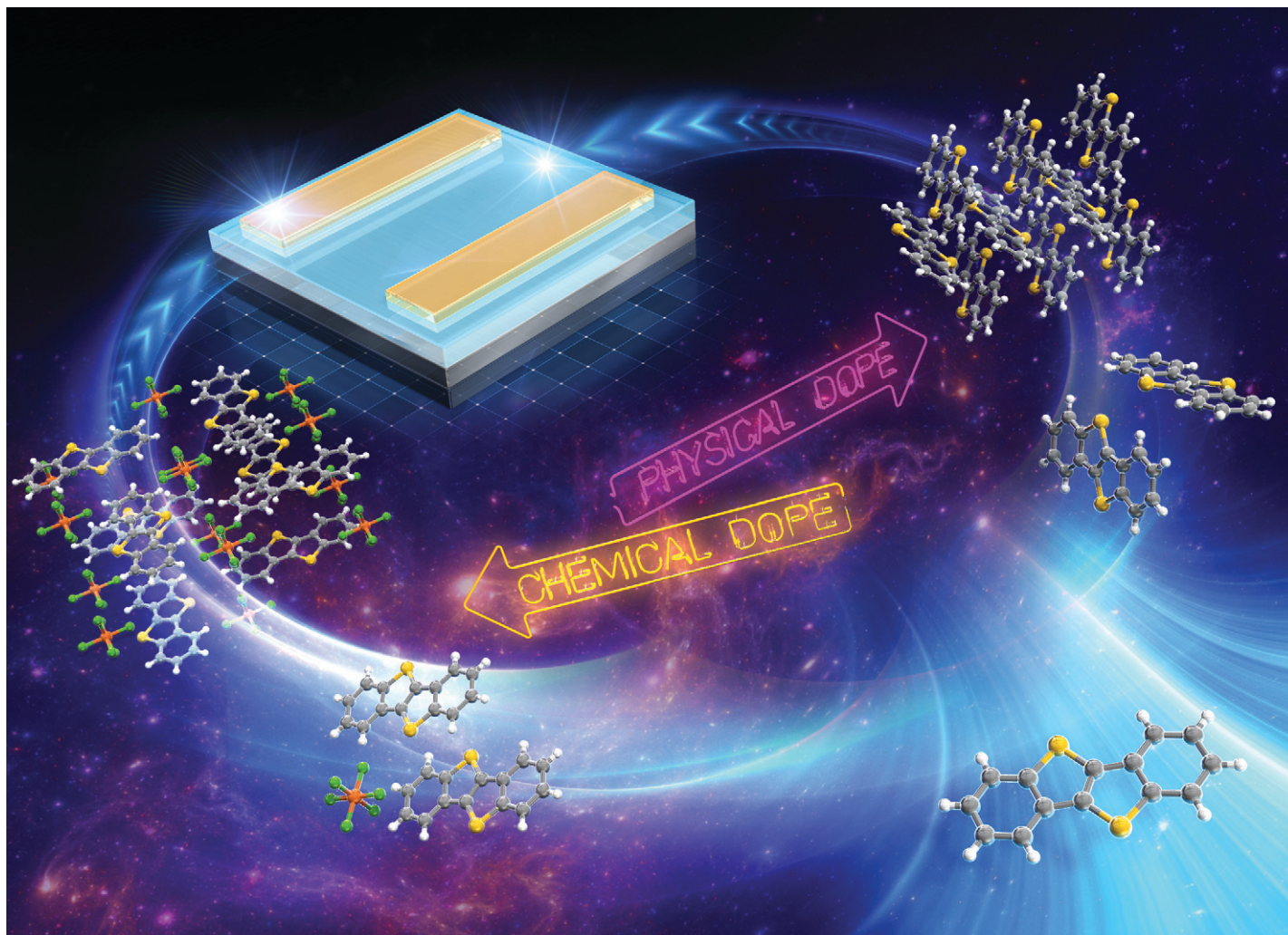


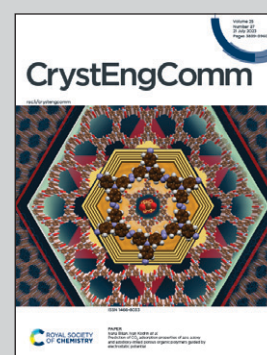


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Boundary research between organic conductors and transistors: new trends for functional molecular crystals

This review highlights a unique transistor-fabrication method, so-called “self-contact” approach, in which the electrodes are formed from a part of the organic semiconductor thin film through chemical doping with dry and wet process, and will provide a valuable insight on the advantages and challenges for designing and developing next-generation organic electronic materials/devices.

As featured in:



See Tomofumi Kadoya *et al.*, *CrystEngComm*, 2023, 25, 3846.



Cite this: *CrystEngComm*, 2023, 25, 3846

Boundary research between organic conductors and transistors: new trends for functional molecular crystals

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In organic transistors, the contact resistance at the interface between the organic semiconductor (OSC) and electrode reduces the device performance. To solve this problem, a buffer layer is inserted between the electrode and OSC layer to decrease the depletion layer that forms at the OSC surface. Especially in bottom-contact transistors, the effects of interfacial potentials and carrier traps can be suppressed using high-conductivity organic-conductors and carbon pastes as electrodes. Accordingly, a “self-contact” transistor was proposed based on chemically doping OSCs. This technique enables us to fabricate organic conductor electrodes specific to each OSC, resulting in transistors with low contact resistance. However, organic conductors based on OSCs are essential to expand the fabrication of these devices using the doping method. Consequently, OSCs have been used to develop a promising new class of organic conductors with high conductivity and excellent thermoelectric properties. Although developing organic conductors based on OSCs remains relatively unexplored, it is expected to become a new trend in functional molecular compounds.

Received 30th March 2023,
Accepted 1st June 2023

DOI: 10.1039/d3ce00305a

rsc.li/crystengcomm

1. Introduction

Organic semiconductors (OSCs) were ushered in by the discovery of electrical conduction in molecular crystals such as phthalocyanines and violanthrones in around 1950.^{1,2} The room-temperature conductivity of these materials was approximately 10^{-10} S cm⁻¹, and such π -extended aromatic molecules were pointed out as intrinsic semiconductors.³ The electrical conductivity of organic materials was greatly enhanced by the advent of charge-transfer (CT) complexes/salts (e.g. perylene–bromine salts showed a conductivity of 0.1–1 S cm⁻¹).⁴ The partial CT state between the constituent electron donor and acceptor acts as a high-concentration chemical doping. This doping method is quite efficient and reliable for generating conduction carriers in molecular materials, and has led to a number of CT complexes/salts exhibiting metallic and even superconducting states, thus greatly expanding the field of organic conductors.^{5–7} Needless to say, the progress in the field has been largely driven by the evolution of tetrathiafulvalene (TTF), a remarkably excellent donor.^{8–12} Note that although these CT complexes/salts are, in

many cases, formed as two- or multiple-component systems involving donors, acceptors, or inorganic ions, single-component organic conductors have also been developed through sophisticated molecular design and crystal engineering.^{13–30}

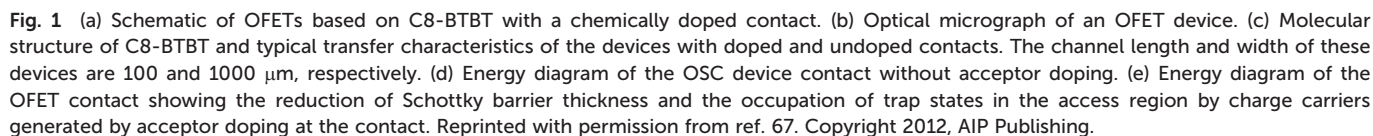
Steady progress has been made with conventional OSCs over the years based on their design versatility, as well as their intriguing properties such as low-environmental-impact processability, cost-effective applications, inherent light weight, and flexibility. These OSCs features, in combination with physical methods for generating currents or voltages through photoexcitation, thermal gradients, and electric field effects, have led to the development of next-generation organic electronic devices such as organic photovoltaics (OPVs),^{31–36} organic thermoelectrics (OTES),^{37–40} and organic field-effect transistors (OFETs).^{41–47} Among them, OFETs provide a platform for investigating the intrinsic carrier transport properties of organic materials, as well as their application in switching devices. Typically, carrier injection into the organic active layer of OFETs produces semiconducting resistivity, but metallic states can also be achieved by tuning the carrier density using high- κ dielectrics such as ionic liquids.^{48–52} Superconducting states can also be driven by controlling the band filling of Mott insulators.^{53–55} In this case, field-effect carrier injection causes only the band filling of the active layer (target material) to change without any influence on the chemical composition. Therefore, this is a suitable method for the rapid and precise control of the

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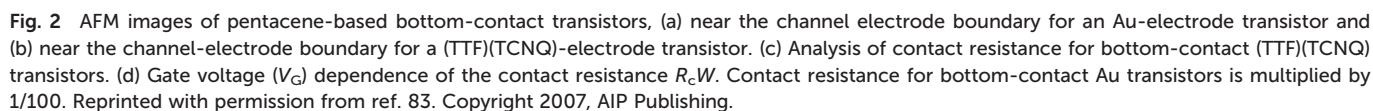
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Surface modifications of the source-drain electrodes are also effective for energy-level alignment. Self-assembled monolayers (SAMs) based on fluorinated molecules are used for bottom-contact devices with Au and Ag electrodes.^{76–79} The E_W of the modified electrodes shifts more deeply to accurately match the HOMO level of p-channel OSCs, significantly improving the carrier injection and stability of the OTFTs. Not only do SAMs increase the carrier concentration, but they also reduce the disturbance of the thin-film morphology at the electrode–semiconductor



Contact resistance depends on the device structure of OFETs, as well as the energy level at the OSC/electrode junction. The electronic state at the junction differs between the bottom- and top-contact configurations, even in the same combination of OSCs and metals. This is closely related to the morphology of OSC molecules in the active layer. Generally, the morphology of OSC layers is strongly affected by the physically adsorbed substrate, to afford distinct molecular packing/orientation with those of the bulk crystal,



which is known as thin-film phase. The morphological change largely depends on the surface energy of the substrate. Thus, it becomes more drastic when the OSC layer forms on the boundary region between the electrode and dielectric in bottom-contact OFETs, as seen in vacuum-deposited pentacene with the edge-on/face-on orientations. This morphological disorder causes a large contact resistance and significant degradation of the transistor performances (Fig. 2).^{82,83} Thus, the contact resistance tends to be lower for top-contact devices, where the electrode is created later on top of the OSC layer. Even for bottom-contact devices, this morphological problem can be mitigated by treating the electrode surfaces with SAMs. However, a particularly simple and effective method is to use high-conductivity organic materials instead of metal electrodes. Because the surface energies of organic materials are almost the same with each other, the morphological change of OSCs are considerably suppressed.

For example, (TTF)(TCNQ), a well-studied CT complex,^{84–87} can be used as an organic electrode, because of the high conductivity with metallic behaviour and the film-forming capability through vacuum deposition. When (TTF)(TCNQ) thin films are used as the electrode, the contact resistance is significantly reduced even with the bottom-contact device. The performance reaches nearly that of a top-contact Au-electrode device.⁸³ Moreover, the Fermi level of the CT complex can be controlled by changing the combination of the donor and the acceptor. Despite restrictions on the number of combinations, electron/hole injection into the OSC layer can be arbitrarily controlled.⁸⁸ Thus, organic electrodes not only eliminate the various factors that create depletion layers at the electrode-semiconductor interface, but also allow to control of the E_W of the electrodes. In addition to CT

complexes, CT salts can become organic electrodes by utilizing the nanoparticles formed with ionic liquids or dispersant polymers, instead of the vacuum deposition method.^{89,90} The nanoparticles are prepared as inks that disperse homogeneously in polar solvents, such as ethanol and water, enabling the use of simple solution processes to form conductive organic films. Alternatively, conductive carbon paste can be adapted to similar low-contact-resistance electrodes using a solution method (Fig. 3(a)).^{91–93} Carbon paste is also attractive because it is less expensive than metal paste. High-resolution carbon electrodes can be created from carbon paste by laser sintering. This technique provides a short-channel transistor with a channel length of approximately 2.5 μm , without using photolithography. The resulting carbon films are as thin as 60 nm and has high transparency, it is a promising candidate for an electrode material to replace indium tin oxide.

2.3. “Self-contact” transistors using chemically doped organic-conductor electrodes

Many OSCs, regardless of their carrier type, undergo carbonization through heat treatment by laser irradiation.^{94,95} The carbonized part in the OSC layer has sufficient conductivity for using as transistor electrodes (Fig. 3(b)). Such simple method for creating carbon electrodes by laser irradiation is applicable for various OSCs such as pentacene, oligothiophene, phthalocyanine, and C_{60} .⁹⁶ This type of transistor is called a “self-contact organic transistor” because the electrode is created directly from the OSC itself (Fig. 3(c)). Unfortunately, the carbon electrode in the self-contact transistors shows a relatively large contact resistance comparable to that of the bottom-contact Au-

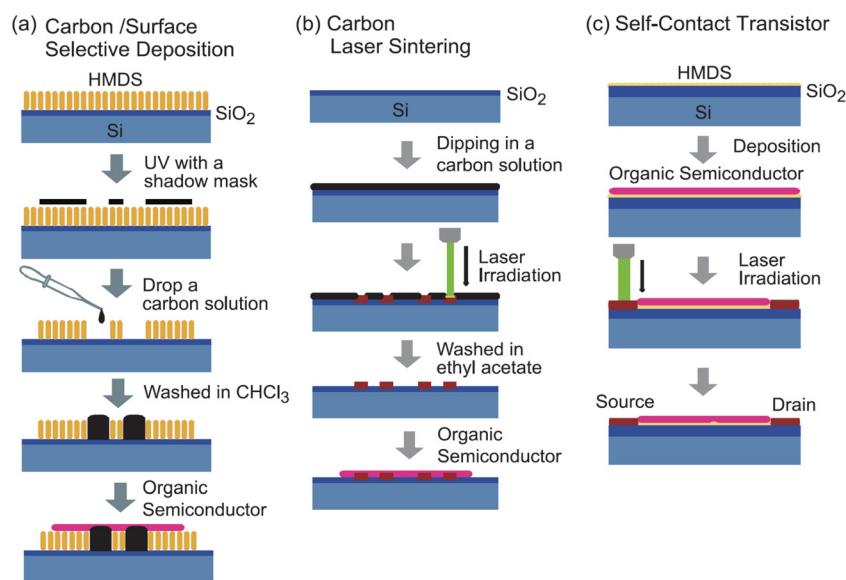


Fig. 3 Schematics of (a) solution-processed carbon electrodes, (b) laser-sintered short channel carbon electrodes, and (c) laser-irradiated self-contact transistors. Reprinted with permission from ref. 93. Copyright 2011, The Chemical Society of Japan.



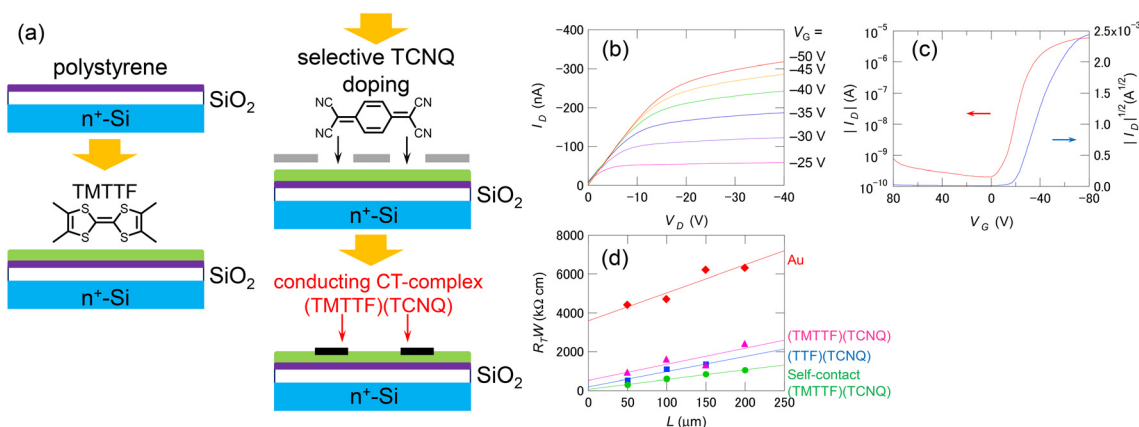


Fig. 4 (a) Schematics of the fabrication procedure of the chemical-doped self-contact transistors. (b) Output and (c) transfer characteristics of a self-contact transistor based on TMTTF/(TMTTF)(TCNQ). (d) Channel length dependence of the total resistance R_T normalized with respect to the channel width W for the top-contact transistors. Reprinted with permission from ref. 97. Copyright 2013, AIP Publishing.

electrode device, because of the morphological mismatch at the electrode–OSC boundary caused by the laser irradiation. However, the unique concept provides an opportunity to reduce the contact resistance using organic electrodes of CT complexes/salts directly formed by the OSC layer. Since most OSCs are either electron donors or acceptors, they can form highly conducting CT complexes/salts such as (TTF)(TCNQ) with appropriate chemical doping. Thus, the OSC layer can be selectively converted into organic electrodes to form chemical-doped self-contact transistors.^{97–99} Fig. 4 shows an example of a combination of a tetramethyl-TTF (TMTTF) semiconductor and a (TMTTF)(TCNQ) electrode. The TMTTF film on a polystyrene-coated substrate is selectively converted into (TMTTF)(TCNQ) by the vacuum deposition of TCNQ through a metal mask and the subsequent thermal annealing. The resulting self-contact transistors exhibit low contact resistance and good carrier-transport characteristics, similar to standard top-contact Au-electrode devices. In addition to vacuum evaporation, inkjet printing has been applied for doping. The inkjet method allows to use organic electrodes derived from CT salts, which are usually

decomposed *via* vacuum evaporation. Conductive Cu(DMDCNQI)₂ electrodes have been fabricated *via* inkjet printing of a CuI solution on a DMDCNQI semiconductor surface. The resulting transistors show stable n-channel operation and nearly the same performance as those of top-contact Au-electrode devices.⁹⁹ Furthermore, this doping method has been used to successfully fabricate flexible self-contact transistors composed entirely of organic materials, including electrodes.⁹⁸

After chemical doping, the CT complex has a partially filled energy band. In the case of Cu(DMDCNQI)₂, the CT complex is an anion-radical salt and this ensures that the electron transport is maintained by the organic acceptor. In Cu(DMDCNQI)₂, Cu is Cu^{4/3+} and DMDCNQI has a $-2/3e$ charge. Therefore, the resulting LUMO band derived from DMDCNQI is 1/3 filled. When the center of the Cu(DMDCNQI)₂ band is located at the same position as the original LUMO level of DMDCNQI (4.65 eV), after the band formation with a bandwidth of 0.8 eV and electrons are only 1/3 filled in the entire band, the Fermi level is shifted down by approximately 0.1 eV from the original LUMO level

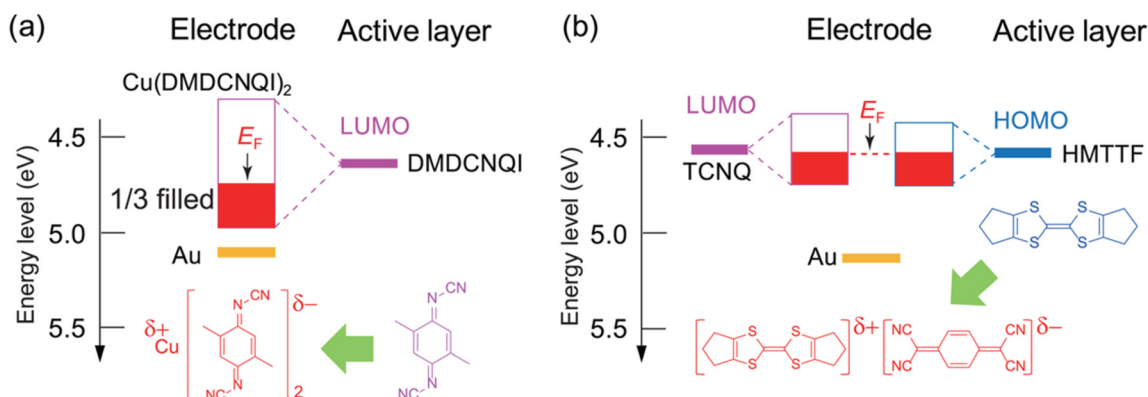


Fig. 5 Energy-level alignment between the semiconductors and electrodes in self-contact (a) DMDCNQI/Cu(DMDCNQI)₂ and (b) HMTTF/(HMTTF)(TCNQ) transistors. Reprinted with permission from ref. 88. Copyright 2014, American Chemical Society.



(Fig. 5a). On the other hand, the DA complex forms energy bands from both the donor and acceptor molecules. Upon band formation from both the donor and acceptor molecules, the Fermi level is expected to be located in between the HOMO of the donor and LUMO of the acceptor. Consequently, the Fermi level is located close to the energy level of the semiconductor layer (Fig. 5b).

The reported self-contact transistors have used redox-active materials such as TTF derivatives and DMDCNQI, which are well-known from studies on organic conductors. However, conventional OSCs of aromatic hydrocarbons such as pentacene and C₆₀ hardly form atmospherically stable and

highly conducting organic conductors. Thus, doping techniques have not been widely used in OFETs, in contrast to inorganic silicon, in which chemical doping has become standard. In the case of OSCs that do not form stable CT complexes, the conductivity in the doped electrode area is temporarily improved, but diffusion of dopants occurs, resulting in a decrease in the conductivity of the electrode. CT complexes that are stable as solids or crystals with strong intermolecular forces are necessary for self-contact transistors. Therefore, highly conductive organic conductors with excellent OSCs must be developed to expand the application of the chemical-doped device fabrication.

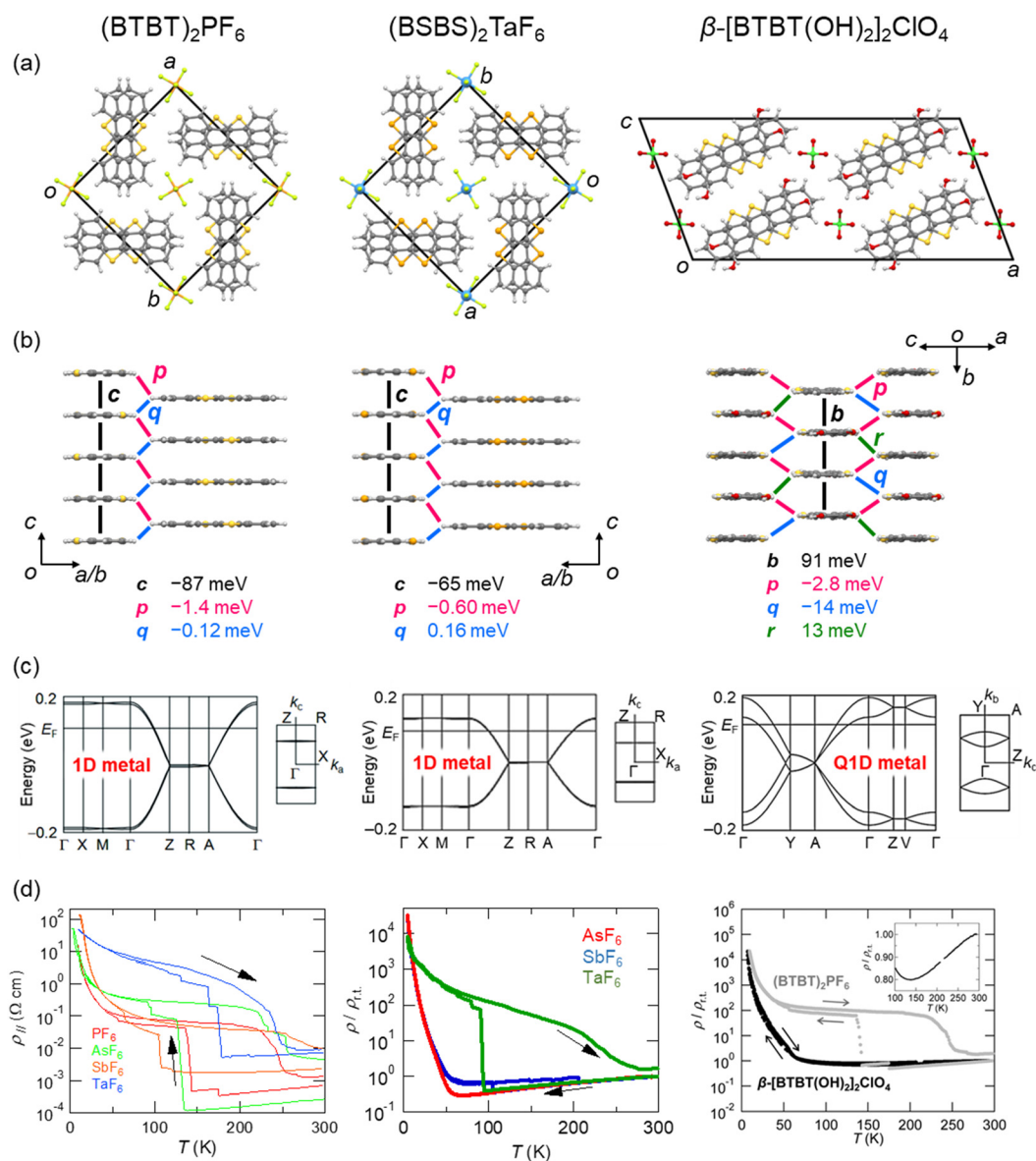


Fig. 6 (a and b) Crystal structures of (BTBT)₂PF₆ (CSD ref code: AFEBIY),¹⁶⁵ (BSBS)₂TaF₆ (CSD ref. code: ZOJREX),¹⁶⁷ and β-[BTBT(OH)₂]₂ClO₄ (CSD ref code: XAMRUB),¹⁷⁴ respectively. Transfer integrals between the BTBT (BSBS) molecules are shown. Anions are omitted for clarity. (c) Band structures and (d) electrical resistivities of BTBT salts (left, reprinted with permission from ref. 166. Copyright 2016, American Chemical Society), BSBS salts (middle, reprinted with permission from ref. 168. Copyright 2019, American Chemical Society), and BTBT(OH)₂ salts (right, reprinted with permission from ref. 174. Copyright 2017, Royal Society of Chemistry), respectively.



3.1. BTBT-based CT salts

thermoelectric power and reflection spectra analyses. All these salts undergo a discontinuous resistivity jump during the cooling process, which can be suppressed by physical hydrostatic pressure on the crystal and chemical modifications of the BTBT molecule as described below. Further cooling makes these salts insulating due to the 1D instability. Magnetic susceptibility and spectroscopic experiments suggest that the insulating state is attributed to a $4k_F$ charge-density wave with a slight dimerisation of BTBT molecules.

Benzenoseleno[3,2-*b*][1]benzenoselenophene (BSBS) is a selenium analogue of BTBT, and forms CT salts (BSBS)₂X (X = AsF₆, SbF₆ and TaF₆; Fig. 6), which are isostructural to the BTBT salts.^{167,168} Such heavy chalcogen substitutions have been frequently used in TTF-based organic conductors to enhance the intermolecular interactions, leading to a significant increase of the electrical conductivity and a complete suppression of the metal-insulator transition.^{169–173} This chemical modification to stabilise the metallic state is also effective in the BTBT system. The discontinuous resistivity jumps seen in the BTBT salts are shifted to lower temperatures or completely suppressed in the BSBS salts. However, the room-temperature conductivities are slightly less than those of the BTBT salts. The metallic state can also be stabilised by controlling the molecular arrangement using hydrogen-bonding interactions. Dihydroxy-substituted BTBT (BTBT(OH)₂) involves a catechol substructure with a strong hydrogen-bonding ability, producing a CT salt with a tetrahedral ClO₄ anion (Fig. 6), where the donor:anion stoichiometry is 2 : 1.¹⁷⁴ The resulting salt, [BTBT(OH)₂]₂ClO₄, forms hydrogen-bond chains through the catechol moiety of BTBT(OH)₂ and the ClO₄ anion, consequently constructing a sheet-type (so-called β-type) molecular arrangement of BTBT(OH)₂. This 2D molecular packing increases the dimensionality of the electronic structure from 1D to quasi-1D (Q1D) and consequently stabilises the metallic state, which is reminiscent of the very early days of TTF-based superconductors.^{161,162} Note that this molecule shows a quinoid-like bond alternation upon oxidation especially in the central thienothiophene part, as is well-known in oligothiophenes.^{175–178} These studies demonstrate that functionalised BTBT derivatives are promising electron donors in molecular conductors.

3.2. BTBT-based CT complexes

BTBT molecules form CT complexes when combined with strong organic acceptors. The first report on BTBT-based complexes is in combinations of alkylated BTBT (C_n -BTBT: $n = 10$) and TCNQ derivatives with a 1:1 composition. The BTBT and TCNQ molecules form an alternating mixed-stack structure.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, these complexes do not exhibit metallic conductivity, in contrast to the segregated-stack complexes represented by (TTF)(TCNQ) and the above-mentioned BTBT-based salts. The mixed-stack complexes form a unique layered crystal structure in which the



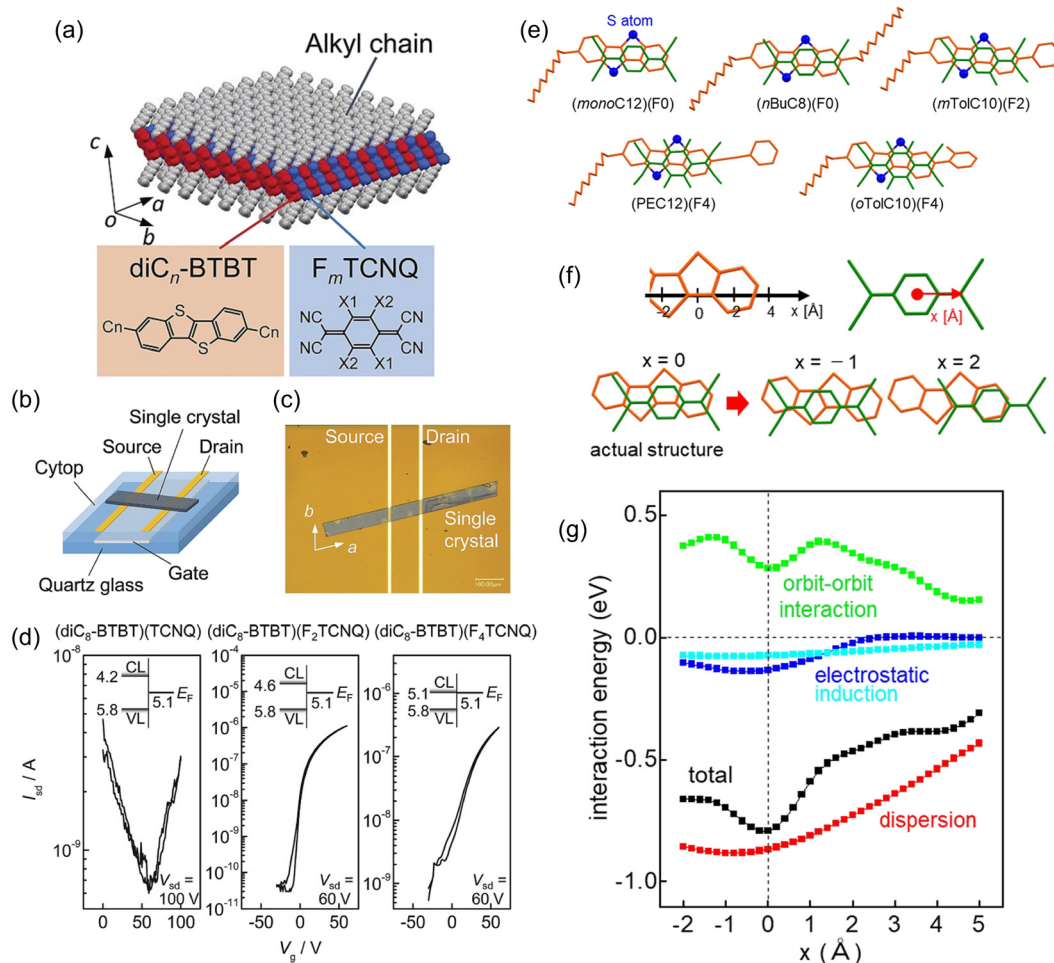


Fig. 7 (a) Molecular and crystal structures of $(diC_n-BTBT)(F_mTCNQ)$ ($n = 4, 8$, and 12 , $m = 0, 2$, and 4). (b) Schematic and (c) photograph of a single-crystalline OFET fabricated from $(diC_8-BTBT)(F_mTCNQ)$. (d) Transfer characteristics of $(diC_8-BTBT)(F_mTCNQ)$. Inset shows the interfacial energy-level alignment between $(diC_8-BTBT)(F_mTCNQ)$ and the gold source/drain electrode. CL and VL are the conduction and valence levels of $(diC_8-BTBT)(F_mTCNQ)$, respectively. E_F is the Fermi level of the Au source/drain electrode. Reprinted with permission from ref. 180. Copyright 2015, Royal Society of Chemistry. (e) Intermolecular arrangements of five TCNQ complexes BTBT derivatives along the alternating stacking axis. Sulphur atoms are represented by blue-filled circles. (f) Coordinates of BTBT and TCNQ core skeletons for the calculation of the intermolecular interaction energy with a fixed intermolecular distance. Origin of the x axis is set at the actual structure. (g) Profiles of total interaction and respective contributions by dispersion, electrostatic, induction, and short-range orbit-orbit interaction. Reprinted with permission from ref. 199. Copyright 2022, Royal Society of Chemistry.

π -conjugated moieties of the BTBT skeleton and TCNQ molecules are arranged in alternating 2D packing, regardless of the number of the fluorine atoms in F_mTCNQ ($m = 0, 1, 2$, and 4) and the alkyl-chain length of the C_n-BTBT ($n = 4, 8$, and 12 ; Fig. 7).¹⁸⁰ These TCNQ complexes of alkylated BTBTs exhibit basically n-channel semiconducting properties when used as an OFET active layer, as demonstrated in single crystals obtained by recrystallisation, polycrystalline thin films fabricated by vacuum deposition,¹⁸¹ and unidirectional crystalline films prepared by solution coating.¹⁸² The electron transport has long-term stability in air, which is ascribed to the sufficiently deep conduction levels of these complexes.¹⁸³ The dominance of electron transport is explained by the super-exchange mechanism closely related to the orbital symmetry matching, where transfers corresponding to the

acceptor-to-acceptor hopping are considerably larger than the donor-to-donor hopping.^{184–188} Interestingly, these complexes can also be formed by molecular thermal diffusion in bilayers consisting of single-component films.¹⁸⁹ The pristine bilayers with F_4TCNQ stacked on $C_{10}-BTBT$ show p-channel operation as well as single-component $C_{10}-BTBT$ films. In contrast, thermal annealing of the stacked films promotes only n-channel transport, indicating that the CT complexes are formed in the whole film. This carrier polarity conversion can be controlled by adjusting the molar ratio of $C_{10}-BTBT$ and F_4TCNQ in the stacked film.

The unsubstituted BTBT and BSBS can form mixed-stack CT complexes with (fluorinated) TCNQs and a π -extended analogue, tetracyanonaphthoquinodimethane (TNAP).^{190–196} These complexes have charge transfer degrees of

Highlight

approximately 0.1, irrespective of the acceptor strength, as revealed by the bond length analysis of the acceptor, the CN stretching frequency shifts, and the Raman spectra shifts. Thus, these complexes are classified as neutral complexes. The charge transfer degrees increase in the range of about 0.2 to 0.3 using alkoxy-substituted BTBT derivatives which are slightly stronger donors.^{197,198} Regardless of the type of BTBT donors, these TCNQ complexes exhibit robust electron transport with excellent ambient and long-term stability. Recently, it has been found that most of the co-crystals of BTBTs and TCNQs have common intermolecular stacking arrangements between the planar donor and acceptor skeletons, irrespective of the type of substituent (Fig. 7).¹⁹⁹ The dispersion force is the primary force of attraction between the donor and acceptor and the repulsive short-range (orbit-orbit) interactions play important roles in determining the stacking configuration in the co-crystals. However, it was often claimed that CT interactions could be the main contributors to the attraction in donor-acceptor compounds.

3.3. Extension of dimensionality in non-TTF-type conductors

Solid-state physics in low-dimensional electronic systems has progressed from 1D conductors as typified by (TTF)(TCNQ), and the dimensionality of the electronic structures in organic conductors has been extended by elegant molecular designs. Bis(ethylenedithio)tetrathiafulvalene (BEDT-TTF) is a pioneer TTF to form CT complexes with a rich variety of 2D molecular arrangements depending on the combined anions.^{200–214} This is attributed to the ethylenedithio group (*i.e.*, 1,4-dithiin ring) on the outside of the BEDT-TTF molecule, which plays two important roles:^{215–219} 1) the sulphur atoms increase the overlap of molecular orbitals in the molecular-short direction. 2) The carbon atoms suppress simple π -stacking by protruding sterically above and below the TTF plane. Such molecular designs have provided a large number of CT salts composed of BEDT-TTF and its analogues in various orientations,^{5,46,220,221} which have exhibited exotic physical properties such as superconducting transitions above 10 K,^{222–227} non-equilibrium charge ordering,^{228–232} metal-Mott insulator transitions,^{233–238} a zero-band-gap state,^{239–244} and quantum spin liquids,^{245–252} further advancing the materials science in organic conductors.

Recently, a non-TTF-type 2D CT salt, (BEDT-BDT)PF₆ (BEDT-BDT = benzo[1,2-*g*:4,5-*g'*]bis(thieno[2,3-*b*][1,4]dithiin)), has been reported (Fig. 8).²⁵³ In this salt, the donor comprises a thienoacene π -core like BTBT and ethylenedithio groups similar to BEDT-TTF. This report has demonstrated that introducing substituents with high structural degrees of freedom, such as ethylenedithio groups, is quite effective in extending the dimensionality of non-TTF-type conductors as well as TTF systems. In contrast, the conventional non-TTF-type conductors mostly have a 1D crystal/electronic structure (as seen in perylene, fluoranthene, phthalocyanine, chalcogen-bridged acene, and dithiapyrene systems). The

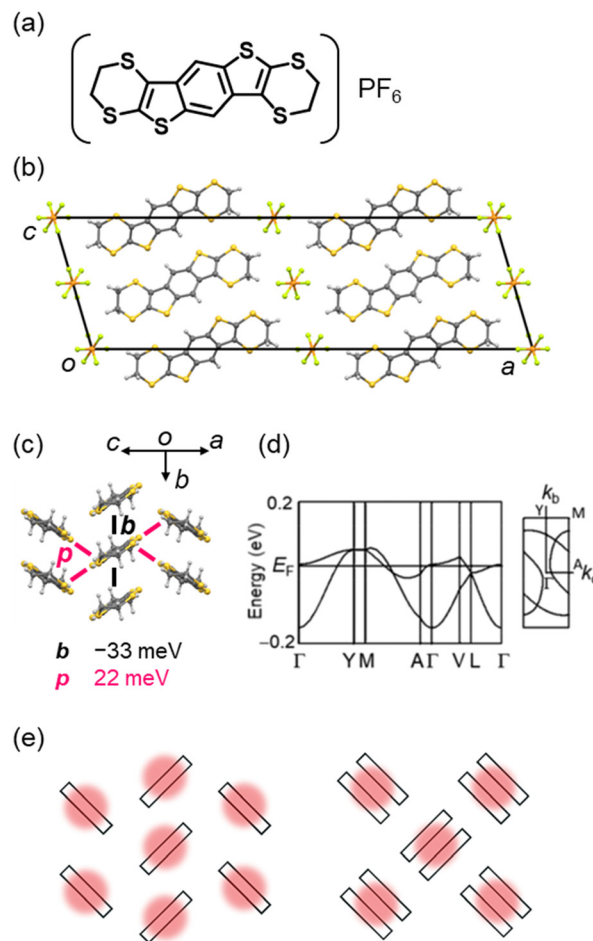


Fig. 8 (a) Chemical structure of (BEDT-BDT)PF₆. Crystal structures of θ -(BEDT-BDT)PF₆ (CSD ref code: FUSFEH),²⁵³ viewed along (b) the π -stacking (crystallographic b) direction and (c) the molecular long-axis direction with the intermolecular transfer integrals (PF₆ anions are omitted for clarity). (d) Electronic band structures of θ -(BEDT-BDT)PF₆. (e) Schematics of the hole distribution in a genuine Mott insulator with a θ -type molecular packing (left) and a representative dimerized Mott insulator with a κ -type molecular packing (right). Reprinted with permission from ref. 253. Copyright 2020, Royal Society of Chemistry.

BEDT-BDT salt is formed by a 2D donor arrangement classified as a θ -type (herringbone-like) packing in a 1:1 composition with an octahedral anion PF₆. This contrasts to the neutral BEDT-BDT crystal,²⁵⁴ which forms a pitched π -stacking similar to that of rubrene, one of the most high-performance OSCs.^{255–258} The salt is a genuine Mott insulator with a hole localised in a molecule without any dimerisation in contrast to representative Mott insulators based on BEDT-TTF with a κ -type dimerised molecular packing,²⁵⁹ and exhibits semiconducting behaviour because of the strong electronic correlations. The 2D electronic structure of the salt has been confirmed by tight-binding band calculations and magnetic susceptibility measurements. The 2D crystal/electronic structure can be finely modulated by chemical modifications using other octahedral anions or selenized donors,^{260,261} while maintaining the isomorphous structure, allowing other novel physical properties to be explored.



4. Conclusions

In this highlight, we presented examples of studies using organic conductors as electrodes to suppress the contact resistance (charge injection barrier) at the OSC–electrode interface of organic transistors. Conductive organic materials have similar chemical properties and surface energies in contrast to inorganic metals. Thus, the contact resistance of organic transistors can be significantly reduced by using organic electrodes, in addition to the use of dopants and SAMs as a buffer layer at the OSC–electrode interface. In particular, the transistor fabrication technique using direct chemical doping, which is the standard for silicon semiconductors, is a unique attempt to develop a new fabrication method for organic devices. The development of high-conductivity organic conductors with organic semiconductors is essential for the widespread application of this technique. New semiconductors that achieve not only high mobility but also air stability and redox activity should be developed. Thienoacene-based CT salts, such as BTBT, which have been developed for this purpose, have the potential to create new trends in research on the physical properties of organic conductors.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

Acknowledgements

This work was partly supported by the JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers 20K15356, 21K14699 and 23K04882, JST CREST Grant Number JPMJCR18J2, and The Mazda Foundation, Izumi Science and Technology Foundation, Research Foundation for the Electrotechnology of Chubu.

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