Tetrathiafulvalene derivative as a new hole-transporting material for highly efficient perovskite solar cell

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ABSTRACT

Hole-transporting materials play an important role in perovskite solar cells. In this study, we introduced a novel hole-transporting material without p-type dopant, a tetrathiafulvalene derivative anchored with eight carboxyl groups (TTA) into inverted structure perovskite solar cells. The devices with TTA as hole-transporting layer showed high power conversion efficiency of 16.7%, which was 44.5% improvement compared with the reference devices without hole-transporting layer. The performance improvement was ascribed to three factors: 1) the better match of energy level between ITO and perovskite layer; 2) enhanced hole extraction at anode interface; 3) improved perovskite morphology.

1. Introduction

Organic-inorganic hybrid perovskite solar cells (PSCs) have attracted worldwide attentions in the past few years due to their intriguing properties, such as large absorption coefficient, low excitation energy, long electron-hole diffusion length, easy fabrication and low cost [1–10]. The power conversion efficiency (PCE) of perovskite solar cells has rocketed over 22% from initial 3.8% in the last few years [11–14]. Throughout the development of PSCs, hole-transporting materials (HTMs) play an important role in rapid development of PSCs. The commonly used HTM in PSCs like 2,2′,7,7′-tetrakis-(N,N-di-p-methoxyphenylamine)-9,9′-spiro-bifluorene (spiro-OMeTAD) [15,16], poly-(triarylamine) (PTAA) [17] and so on, need p-doping to increase its conductivity [18,19], ascribe to the sp2 hybridization of the nitrogen atom leading to large intermolecular distances in their pristine and undoped form [20,21]. Although a tiny doping can marvelously increase fill factor (FF) and short-circuit current density (Jsc) by modulating conductivity, the p-type doping strategy for HTM requires strict optimization such as the doping concentrations and time [17,22], thus making the manufacture processing of the PSCs complicated and time-consuming for actual application. So it is important to develop novel and undoped HTM for cost-effective production of high-performance PSCs.

Tetrathiafulvalene and its derivatives have been extensively investigated as electron-donating unit in molecular conductors due to strong intermolecular π–π stacking [23,24]. They have presented wide applications in many areas of materials chemistry [25–29], while the employment of tetrathiafulvalene and its derivatives in PSCs was rare [30,31]. Jian et al. introduced a tetrathiafulvalene derivative TTF-1 into PSCs with typical structure, without the use of p-type dopants. The TTF-1 PSCs exhibited a comparable efficiency to the spiro-OMeTAD PSCs and better humidity stability. However, the efficiency is moderate and the typical structure PSCs needs a TiO2 layer with high temperature treatment. In this study, we employed a tetrathiafulvalene derivative 5,5′,5″,5‴-(tetrathiafulvalene-2,3,6,7-tetrayl)tetra(isophthalic acid (TTA) as an HTM without p-type dopant and achieved highly efficient inverted PSCs through low-temperature solution-processing. By the introduction

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of hydrophilic carboxyl groups into tetrathiafulvalene, we successfully modify the wetting property of tetrathiafulvalene and the inverted PSCs were fabricated. After introducing TTA HTM, the perovskite morphology can improved, leading to higher device efficiency and device lifetime. Importantly, notorious device hysteresis was reduced in PSCs with TTA as HTM. All these results indicated that TTA was a novel, efficient HTM in PSCs, which may enrich the material system of HTM in PSCs, further promoting the development of un-doped HTM.

2. Experimental section

2.1. Materials

CH$_3$NH$_3$I and PbI$_2$ were purchased from Xi’an, China Polymer Light Technology Corp. (6,6)-Phenyl-C$_6$1-butyric acid methyl ester (PC$_{61}$BM) and C$_{60}$ were purchased from American Dye Source. 2,9-Dimethyl-4,7-diphenyl-1,10-phenanthroline (BCP) was purchased from J&K Scientific Ltd. Poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene):polystyrene sulfonic acid (PEDOT:PSS) (Clevious P VP Al 4083) was purchased from H. C. Stark company. TTA was synthesized according to an unpublished work.

2.2. Device fabrication and characterization

ITO glasses were cleaned through sequential sonication in detergent, deionized water, acetone, and isopropyl alcohol for 20 min. Then ITO glasses were dried using N$_2$ flow and moved to Plasma chamber for 10 min. After that, TTA solution in anhydrous N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF, Aldrich) (10 mg/mL) was spin-coated on ITO glasses at 4000 rpm for 60 s to form approximately 20 nm thin films and then annealed at 140°C for 10 min. The substrates were transferred into glovebox (filled with N$_2$). The precursor solution of perovskite was prepared with CH$_3$NH$_3$I and PbI$_2$ at a mole ratio of 1:1 with the concentration at 1.4 M in 1 mL mixture of anhydrous DMF and anhydrous dimethylsulfoxide (DMSO, Aldrich) (8:2 by volume). Then the perovskite precursor solution was spin-coated at 4800 rpm for 30 s. During the spin-coating process, 400 µL of anhydrous chlorobenzene (CB, Aldrich) was slowly dripped on the rotating substrate to obtain a highly uniform and approximately 400 nm perovskite film. Then the substrate was annealed at 60°C for 1 min and 80°C for 2 min. Sequentially, PC$_{61}$BM solution in CB (20 mg/mL) was spin-coated on CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ layer at 2000 rpm for 1 min to form approximately 40 nm electron-transporting layer. Finally, the devices were transferred to vacuum chamber (10$^{-6}$ mbar), 20 nm C$_{60}$, 8 nm BCP and 100 nm Ag were evaporated respectively. The area of the device was defined to be 6 mm$^2$ with shadow mask. Current density-voltage (J-V) measurements were conducted using Keithley 2400 sourcemeter controlled by computer. All the PSCs were measured under Newport 6279 NS solar simulator (450 W) with 100 mW/cm$^2$. The EQE measurements were conducted through the Newport quantum efficiency measurement system (ORIEL IQE 200TM). The film thickness was measured using a surface profiler (Veeco, Dektak 150). The light intensity at each wavelength was calibrated by one standard Si/Ge solar cell. Ultraviolet photoelectron spectroscopy (UPS) measurements were conducted using Shimadzu Spectrometer (AXIS ULTRA DLD) with a He (21.2 eV) discharge lamp to measure energy level of the bare ITO and the TTA. X-ray diffraction (XRD) measurements were performed using a D8 Advance (Bruker AXS) with a Cu Ka (1.54 Å) radiation source to measure crystal structure of CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ based on different substrates. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM, S-4800, Hitachi) operated at an acceleration voltage of 8 kV to observe surface morphology of CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ layer and atomic force microscopy (AFM, Dimension 3100, Veeco, tapping mode) measurements were used to observe the surface morphology of the bare ITO and the TTA films. The photoluminescence (PL) measurements of perovskite films were conducted using Horiba (FL3-111) at ambient atmosphere. The films were photoexcited using a 600 nm monochromatic light and

![Fig. 1.](a) The device structure of the PSCs with TTA as HTM and Ag layer as the top cathode. (b) Chemical structures of TTA. (c) UPS of ITO glass and the TTA coated ITO glass. (d) Energy-level diagram of the PSCs, exhibiting the collecting process of photo generated charge carriers.)
detected the PL at 780 nm. The time-resolved photoluminescence (TRPL) measurements were obtained from a single photon counting spectrometer on Edinburgh Instruments (FLS920) with a Picosecond Pulsed UVLASTER (LASTER337) as the excitation light source.

3. Results and discussion

Fig. 1(a) illustrates devices architecture where the TTA film is used as the HTM, PC61BM and C60 as the electron-transporting materials, BCP as the hole-blocking layer and Ag as the top cathode. CH3NH3PbI3 was deposited using a fast crystallization method, which was first developed by Xiao et al. [32] The molecular structure of TTA is shown in Fig. 1(b). The work function (WF) of the ITO and ITO/TTA was measured using UPS measurement as shown in Fig. 1(c). The WF of the bare ITO is 4.80 eV, while its WF increases to 5.26 eV after deposition of TTA, which was much close to the valence band of perovskite (5.40 eV). Fig. 1(d) shows the energy level alignment of our PSCs. The decrease of mismatch would reduce the energy loss at ITO/perovskite interface, thus facilitating more efficient hole collection and extraction from perovskite light absorber to anode. Fig. 2(b) displays the incident photon-to-current conversion efficiency (IPCE) and the integrated product of the IPCE curves with the AM 1.5G photon flux. The integral Jsc value from the IPCE for the devices with TTA inserting is 19.7 mA cm⁻² and the reference is 16.6 mA cm⁻² which are comparable to the direct J-V measurements. Fig S2 displays the Jsc, Voc, FF and PCE distribution histograms of devices based on different substrates with the statistics. It appeared that all the key parameters of the devices with the TTA inserting had fairly narrow distribution, indicating that the PSCs with the TTA HTM presented very good reproducibility. For another reference, we also fabricated PSCs with PEDOT:PSS which was diluted 10 times with H2O as HTM. The PEDOT:PSS device displayed inferior performance for as-yet-unknown reasons, although the same processing conditions to the TTA devices (Fig. 2(a)). And the J-V curves of the PEDOT:PSS PSCs with different scanning direction are also shown in Fig S3.

The anomalous photocurrent hysteresis was shown to be a major issue in accurately characterizing device efficiency which was observed in many PSCs. It was reported that the hysteresis was originated from electromigration of ions, ferroelectric properties and the trap in the perovskite films [35,36]. By optimizing interfaces, some group successfully fabricated planar heterojunction PSCs by interface modification with bare hysteresis [37–39]. Therefore, J-V curves of these devices with different scanning direction and scanning rates were tested in our study. Fig. 2(c) presents the J-V curves of devices with TTA under different scan rates, showing little difference. The results indicated that the devices with TTA can effectively decrease charge accumulation due to the high hole mobility and support suitable energy level gradient. So insertion of TTA resulted in effectively decreasing hysteresis of the inverted PSCs. The J-V curves of TTA PSCs with different scanning direction are also shown in Fig S4 and corresponding photovoltaic parameters are presented in Table S1. There is also little difference (about 5%) between the forward scan and the reverse scan. The steady state photocurrent representing the actual power output

![Fig. 2.](image-url) (a) J-V characteristic curves of PSCs obtained from forward bias to short circuit (FB-SC). (PEDOT:PSS is diluted 10 times with H2O); (b) IPCE of PSCs based on different substrates. (c) J-V characteristic curves of the PSCs based on TTA measured with different delay between measurement points. (d) Steady-state efficiency and photocurrent density of the PSCs based on TTA as a function of time applied at a forward bias of 0.885 V.)
was used to characterize accurate device efficiency. In order to verify the enhanced efficiency, we recorded the photocurrent of the devices with TTA held at their maximum power point voltage (0.885 V for TTA modified device) under AM 1.5G 100 mW/cm² simulated solar light. As shown in Fig. 2(d), the steady-state current and PCE are nearly the same as that measured from the photocurrent measurement. This suggested that the improvement of PCE for the devices with TTA was reliable.

AFM was measured and the height images of the bare ITO glasses and the ITO/TTA films are presented in Fig. 3(a and b). When the TTA solution was spin-coated onto the ITO substrate, TTA formed a continuous film with uniform coverage. The root-mean-square (RMS) roughness decreased to 1.06 nm from 1.69 nm for the bare ITO substrate. Fig. 3(e) exhibits the optical transmittance spectrum of the bare ITO and the ITO/TTA film. The transmittance of TTA coated ITO is around 80% in the whole range from 380 nm to 800 nm, indicating that the ITO/TTA film would allow nearly the same photon flux to reach perovskite film.

To explore the origins of the increasing Jsc, the hole mobility was approximated using space charge limited current measurement in which device structure was ITO/PEDOT:PSS/TTA/MoO₃/Ag, the detailed process is shown in the Supporting Information. As shown in Fig. 3(f), the result was plotted as ln(JL²/V²) versus (V/L)⁰.⁵ by fitting to the Mott-Gurney law [40]. The hole mobility of TTA was calculated from the intercept of the corresponding lines on the axis of ln(JL²/V²). It was easy to obtain that hole mobility of the TTA based hole-only device was 9.68 × 10⁻⁴ cm² V⁻¹ s⁻¹ which was comparable to the high hole mobility of the well-known dopant enhanced spiro-OMeTAD HTM [41]. The high hole mobility of TTA contributed significantly to the high Jsc and FF for the PSCs.

In order to understand the influence of different substrates on the crystallization for perovskite films, the resultant films produced by different substrates were characterized by XRD measurements. XRD measurements on our perovskite thin films show typical CH₃NH₃PbI₃ (110), (220) and (310) peak at 14.2°, 28.5° and 32.0°, respectively (Fig. 4(a)) [37]. To further investigate crystal growth of perovskite deposited on different substrates, SEM was employed to investigate the morphology change due to the TTA inserting which influenced the growth of perovskite film. Fig. 4(b and c) shows the surface morphology of perovskite deposited on the bare ITO glasses and the TTA films, respectively. It was obvious that there was a striking contrast between the ITO/CH₃NH₃PbI₃ film and the TTA/CH₃NH₃PbI₃ film. There were lots of cracks in the ITO/CH₃NH₃PbI₃ film, while none of them could be seen in the TTA/CH₃NH₃PbI₃ film. Meanwhile, the crystal grain of perovskite film based on the TTA substrates was more uniform than the crystal grain of perovskite film on top of ITO substrates, leading to improved FF in the photovoltaic performance. So the high quality of CH₃NH₃PbI₃ film based on the TTA anode interfacial layer would also prevent the potentially direct contact of electrodes, thus inhibiting the leakage current and further improving the Jsc and FF. On the one hand, as upper mentioned TTA formed a continuous film with uniform coverage, this would contribute to the high-quality CH₃NH₃PbI₃ on the TTA. On the other hand, interface energy of substrates may also affect the perovskite film morphology on top [42]. Indeed, the TTA film was a suitable substrate for growth of the higher quality perovskite light absorber film.
In order to investigate whether TTA can efficiently extract photo-generated carriers from the perovskite film, PL and TRPL were carried out for CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ films on different substrates. Fig. 5(a) shows the steady state PL spectra of the ITO/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ and the TTA/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ under the same experimental condition. Compared to the ITO/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ sample, the PL intensity of TTA/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ was significantly quenched, further demonstrating that TTA was effective in hole extraction due to the high hole mobility and suitable energy level. Fig. 5(b) shows the TRPL for ITO/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ film and TTA/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ film. The lifetime of carriers were acquired by fitting the data with two exponential decay functions [43]. For ITO/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ film, the average PL lifetime was 10.6 ns, while the average PL lifetime for TTA/CH$_3$NH$_3$PbI$_3$ film was 6.8 ns. The decreased lifetime also indicated a faster hole-transfer process and more efficient hole extraction, leading to the high $J_{sc}$ and FF.

Since device stability is also a key factor to the practical application, we also investigated the durability of the TTA PSCs in inert atmosphere and ambient conditions. As shown in Fig S5, the PSCs with and without TTA both exhibited a good stability in glove box. However, under ambient conditions at room temperature with a humidity of about 40%, the TTA devices also exhibited relatively slower degradation while the PCE of devices without TTA decayed quickly to almost zero after 9 days (Fig. 6). These results suggested that TTA was a promising solution-processed HTM for achieving air-stable and high-efficiency PSCs.
In conclusion, we demonstrate that the employment of a carboxylic acid derivatives with tetrathiafulvalene core TTA at the ITO/CH3NH3PbI3 interface is effective in improving the photovoltaic performance of PSCs and PCE of 16.7% could be obtained. The improved performance originates from well-aligned energy level and high hole mobility of TTA which is partly confirmed in the quenched photoluminescence intensity and shortened carrier lifetime. Additionally, SEM measurements indicate that the high quality perovskite films without cracks can be obtained on the TTA substrates which also leading to enhanced Jsc and FF. Therefore, our work prove that the TTA is a promising hole-transporting candidate without p-type dopant for PSCs application.

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**Appendix A. Supplementary data**

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.dyepig.2017.08.007.

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