Upconversion Luminescence via Anion Exchange in Perovskite Quantum Dots for Anticounterfeiting Inkjet Printing

Xiang Zheng,* Yuan Wen, Jun Zhong, and Ai-Zheng Chen*

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ABSTRACT: Lanthanide-doped upconversion nanoparticles (UCNPs) and cesium lead halide perovskite quantum dots (PeQDs) are highly compatible with each other: UCNPs produce anti-Stokes upconversion luminescence (UCL) under near-infrared (NIR) excitation and the emissive profiles of PeQDs can be conveniently tuned by varying the halide composition ratio. Therefore, in this study, UCNPs and PeQDs are mixed together, producing colorful UCL under 980 nm laser excitation. In addition, ZnI\textsubscript{2} is used to vary the halide composition ratio of PeQDs and manipulate UCL in situ, thus adding more flexibility in UCL regulation. Finally, based on the above-mentioned discussion, a double-encrypted anticounterfeiting pattern is generated via sequentially printing ZnI\textsubscript{2} solution and UCNP suspension on an A4 paper. Using PeQDs as the decrypting reagent, under the NIR excitation and decryption channel, the hidden information can be fully decrypted. The combination of UCNPs and PeQDs greatly expands the upconversion possibility, offers more feasibility in UCL regulation, and further promotes the practical applications.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, cesium lead halide (CPX\textsubscript{3}, X = Cl, Br, and I) perovskite quantum dots (PeQDs) have attracted a lot of attention due to the outstanding optical properties such as the large absorption coefficient, high quantum yields, emission peaks with narrow full width at half maximum (FWHM), and so on.\textsuperscript{1,2} In addition, the ease of tuning the band gap via modulating the halide composition, thus shifting the single-peak emissive profiles from deep blue to red continuously, endows the materials with huge potential in wide applications such as displays, photovoltaics, optoelectronics, and so on.\textsuperscript{3−8} Meanwhile, lanthanide-doped upconversion nanoparticles (UCNPs), giving off anti-Stokes upconversion luminescence (UCL) under 980 nm NIR laser excitation, have demonstrated unparallel virtues against Stokes luminescence in various fields.\textsuperscript{9−17} However, unlike PeQDs, UCNPs critically rely on the dopants’ energy levels, with fixed UCL emissive peaks at certain wavelengths. Consequently, the UCL manipulation strategy has always been intensively focused over the decades. Notably, Tm\textsuperscript{3+}-doped UCNPs can produce efficient UV (345, 356 nm) and blue (450, 475 nm) emissions under 980 nm NIR excitation, which lie in the ideal excitation wavelength ranges of PeQDs.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, should UCNPs and PeQDs be coupled together, colorful UCL could be expected from the UCNP–PeQD pairs. There are quite a few articles featuring the coupling between UCNPs and PeQDs, e.g., Ruan et al. reported the synthesis of heterostructured upconversion perovskite nanoparticles, where PeQDs and UCNPs are merged together, generating a new nanocomposite;\textsuperscript{15} Wei et al. reported using UCNP and PeQD mixtures to generate UCL with different single-peak emission profiles;\textsuperscript{16} and Du et al. linked PeQDs on the surface of UCNPs via the seed growth strategy.\textsuperscript{17} UCNP and PeQD pairs have also demonstrated the application potential in various fields, such as photovoltaics, optics, patterning, and so on.\textsuperscript{18−20} However, using halide composition tuning strategy to vary UCL after UCNPs and

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PeQDs are coupled together, i.e., in situ UCL manipulation, has never been explored before. Therefore, in this study, we focus on modulating the UCL via PeQDs and tuning the UCL using ZnI₂: this in situ UCL tuning strategy is further used to generate anticontrol patterns with double-encrypted information that can only be extracted under the NIR excitation wavelength and decryption channel.

To begin with, NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm@NaYF₄ UCNPs and cesium lead halide PeQDs with different halide compositions are synthesized and characterized. Next, coupling between UCNPs and PeQDs is studied, different UCNPs–PeQD pairs exhibit colorful UCL under 980 nm laser illumination. Subsequently, ZnI₂ is used to manipulate the UCL, and emissive profiles are red-shifted with increasing ZnI₂ addition amount. Finally, based on the UCL manipulation strategy mentioned above, double-encrypted anticontrol patterns are generated via sequentially printing UCNPs and ZnI₂ solution into the designed region: by brushing a thin layer of PeQDs on top, under 980 nm laser illumination, the encrypted information could be extracted only under the right decryption channel.

2. EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

2.1. Chemicals. YbCl₃·6H₂O (Adamas, 99%), TmCl₃·6H₂O (Adamas, 99%), YCl₃·6H₂O (Adamas, 99%), Cs₃CO₃ (Adamas, 99.99%), PbCl₂ (Adamas, >99%), PbBr₂ (Adamas, 99.999%), PbI₂ (Adamas, >99%), oleic acid (OA, 90%, Sigma-Aldrich), 1-oleadecene (ODE, 90%, Sigma-Aldrich), oleylamine (OAm, 98%, Sigma-Aldrich), cyclohexane (98%, Sigma-Aldrich), methanol (Sinopharm, 99.9%), NaOH (Sinopharm, 98%), NH₄F (Aladdin, 98%), and toluene (98%, Sigma-Aldrich) are used. All chemicals are used as received without further purification.

2.2. Synthesis of β-Phase NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm Core Nanocrystals. NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm nanocrystals are synthesized using a well-developed high-temperature coprecipitation method previously reported by our group. Typically, based on the composition, a total amount of 1 mmol RECl₃ (RE = Y, Yb, Tm) aqueous solution is added into a 100 mL flask stoichiometrically. After water is fully evaporated, 15 mL of 1-oleadecene and 6 mL of oleic acid are added; the mixture is heated at 120 °C under vacuum for another 10 min to fully evaporate the water. The mixture is heated to and maintained at 150 °C under argon atmosphere to prepare for the hot injection. On the other hand, 1 mmol PbX₂ (X = Br, I) salts are mixed with 40 mL of ODE and 2.5 mL of OA into a tri-neck round-bottom flask. With vigorous stirring, the mixture is heated to 120 °C under vacuum. After the transparent Cs-oleate solution is formed, the reaction flask is maintained at 120 °C under vacuum for 10 min to fully evaporate the water. The mixture is then heated to and maintained at 150 °C under argon atmosphere to prepare for the hot injection. After the two reaction vessels reached and were stabilized at 150 °C, 2.4 mL of Cs-oleate solution is withdrawn from the first tri-neck flask and quickly injected into the second PbX₂ flask. After 10 s, the reaction vessel is taken out from the heating mantel and quickly cooled to room temperature via an ice bath. The resulting mixture is centrifuged and redispersed in cyclohexane and then sealed for further use.

2.3. Synthesis of NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm@NaYF₄ Core–Shell Nanocrystals. Core–shell UCNPs are prepared via the epitaxial growth method previously reported by our group. The as-prepared core nanoparticles of NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm are used as seeds for inert shell growth. In a typical process, an aqueous solution of YCl₃ (1 mL, 1 mmol) is added into a 100 mL flask; after water is fully evaporated, 15 mL of 1-oleadecene and 6 mL of oleic acid are added. The mixture is kept at 156 °C for 10 min to form Lu-oleate complexes. Upon cooling of the Y-oleate precursors to room temperature, the as-prepared core nanoparticles are added, and the resulting mixture is then heated at 120 °C for 20 min to fully evaporate the cyclohexane. Subsequently, the reaction solution is cooled to room temperature, followed by the addition of a methanol solution (5 mL) containing NH₄F (4 mmol) and NaOH (2.5 mmol). The resulting mixture is vigorously stirred and then heated at 120 °C for 10 min. After that, the reaction mixture is degassed for 10 min to evaporate the residual methanol and oxygen in the solution. Finally, the temperature is increased to 300 °C, and the mixture is kept under an argon atmosphere for 1.5 h. The resultant nanoparticles are precipitated after the addition of acetone under 8000 rpm centrifugation for 10 min, washed with acetone, and finally dispersed in 20 mL of cyclohexane for further usage.

2.4. Synthesis of PeQDs Via a Hot Injection Method. CPX₃ (X = Cl, Br, and I) PeQDs are prepared through a modified hot injection method using CsₓCO₃ as the Cs⁺ source. In typical synthesis procedures, 814 mg of CsₓCO₃ powder is mixed with 40 mL of ODE and 2.5 mL of OA into a tri-neck round-bottom flask. With vigorous stirring, the mixture is heated to 120 °C under vacuum. After the transparent Cs-oleate solution is formed, the reaction flask is maintained at 120 °C under vacuum for another 10 min to fully evaporate the water. The mixture is heated to and maintained at 150 °C under argon atmosphere to prepare for the hot injection. On the other hand, 1 mmol PbX₂ (X = Br, I) salts are mixed with 30 mL of ODE, 3 mL of OA, and 2.5 mL of OAm. With vigorous stirring, the mixture is heated to 120 °C under vacuum. After the transparent solution is formed, the reaction flask is maintained at 120 °C under vacuum for 10 min to fully evaporate the water. The mixture is then heated to and maintained at 150 °C under argon atmosphere to prepare for the injection.

After the two reaction vessels reached and were stabilized at 150 °C, 2.4 mL of Cs-oleate solution is withdrawn from the first tri-neck flask and quickly injected into the second PbX₂ flask. After 10 s, the reaction vessel is taken out from the heating mantel and quickly cooled to room temperature via an ice bath. The resulting mixture is centrifuged and redispersed in cyclohexane and then sealed for further use.

2.5. Ligand-Free UCNP Preparation. Ligand-free UCNPs are prepared by a ligand exchange method. Briefly, 0.1 M HCl solution is prepared by adding hydrochloric acid into water. Subsequently, 2 mL of UCNP cyclohexane solution is mixed with an equal amount of HCl solution. Then, the mixture is vigorously stirred and vortexed for 45 min, forming a white turbid mixture. The mixture is stood still for 5 min to separate it into two immiscible layers before pipetting out the top layer. Note that after the ligand exchange is completed, the top layer should not exhibit UCL under a NIR laser. The above-prepared ligand-free UCNPs are washed and purified using water and ethanol thrice to fully remove the HCl. The washed ligand-free UCNPs are dispersed in water and kept for further use.

2.6. Ink Preparation and Pattern Printing. A 1% weight in volume Pluronic F-127 water solution is prepared first. A total of 10 μL of the as-prepared F-127 solution is added to every 1 mL ligand-free UCNP water suspension. A total of 3 mL of the as-prepared UCNPs is added into an empty printer cartridge of a Canon MG3100 followed by normal printing steps. A total of 200 mg of ZnI₂ is dissolved in 10 mL of water followed by vigorous stirring to form a homogeneous solution.
A total of 3 mL of ZnI$_2$ solution is added into an empty printer cartridge of a Canon MG3100 followed by normal printing steps.

2.7. Physical Characterization. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images of UCNPs are recorded on a JEOL 2010F transmission electron microscope (Jeol Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) operating at an acceleration voltage of 200 kV. Luminescence spectra of UCNPs are recorded on a Hitachi F-500 fluorescence spectrophotometer (Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation, Tokyo, Japan) equipped with a NIR continuous-wave (CW) laser with emission at 980 nm (Photonitech (Asia) Pte. Ltd., Singapore). Optical decryption is performed under a μFluor-980 small-animal upconversion luminescence imaging system (Einst Technology Pte Ltd., Singapore).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Material Synthesis and Characterization. The study begins with the synthesis of UCNPs and PeQDs (Scheme 1). PeQDs are synthesized based on an adapted protocol. Details and abbreviations of the PeQD samples used in the study are summarized in Table 1. Under TEM, uniformly distributed PeQDs can be observed with a cubic shape and 10 nm in size (Figure 1a–d). XRD characterization reveals that the PeQDs are well crystalized with a cubic crystal phase (Figure S1). Under UV excitation, colorful luminescence can be captured using a camera (Figure 1e). Based on the UV–Vis absorption data, all PeQD samples exhibit a strong absorption band in UV and blue ranges (Figure 1f). Emission spectra of different PeQDs are obtained under 365 nm UV excitation; all of the PeQD suspensions give off intense single-peak emissive profiles; the emission peaks of PeQDs are gradually red-shifted as an increasing amount of the bromide ions within PeQD crystals is substituted by iodine ions (Figure 1g).

Since PeQDs can be effectively activated by UV/blue light, Tm-doped UCNPs with excellent UV and blue upconversion emissive peaks are selected and synthesized in our study. To improve the UV/blue emissive intensity, an inert protective NaYF$_4$ shell layer is epitaxially grown on the core. From TEM images, it is observed that core and core–shell UCNPs have uniformly distributed size and morphology (Figure 2a,b). Core UCNPs are spherical in shape, with the diameter focused at 40 nm, while core–shell UCNPs exhibit an elongated spherical shape, with 60 nm length and 50 nm width. XRD reveals that the UCNPs are well crystalized with a hexagonal phase (Figure S2). Under 980 nm excitation, strong UV and blue UCL can be detected using both spectrometer and CCD camera: compared with cores, core–shell UCNPs exhibit much stronger UCL, as the well-protected surface greatly reduces the surface quenching effect (Figure 2c,d). The as-prepared NaYF$_4$:30%Yb,0.5%Tm@NaYF$_4$ core–shell UCNPs are stored and used in the following experiments.

3.2. Coupling between UCNPs and PeQDs. After UCNPs and PeQDs are successfully prepared, we move on to exploring the coupling between PeQDs and UCNPs and using PeQDs to modulate UCL. The experiments start with CPX510. A total of 100 μL of UCNPs is mixed with increasing amount of CPX510 from 0 to 300 μL, with the overall volume kept the same at 1 mL throughout the experiments. Based on the spectra, it is obvious that the emissions from UCNPs are gradually absorbed by CPX510 and disappeared with increasing amount of PeQDs added; at the same time, emissions from PeQDs increased quickly and took over the overall emissive profile, generating a single emission peak (Figure 3a). Camera photos also support our findings as the color of the overall suspension shifted from purple (UCNPs’ intrinsic color) to green (Figure 3b,c). The coupling study is
further extended to other PeQDs, namely, CPX540, CPX610, and CPX650. Spectra showed that the same luminescence variation trends are observed for all PeQDs, with different single-peak emission profiles obtained based on the PeQDs used in the experiments (Figures S1−S3).

Obviously, these results demonstrate that the coupling between UCNPs and PeQDs is efficient and universal; therefore, we move on to tune the emission profiles of PeQDs after coupling with UCNPs by varying the halide composition ratio. ZnI₂ toluene solution is used as the halide exchange reagent to manipulate the UCL profiles of UCNP−PeQD pairs. ZnI₂ solution is obtained by dissolving 50 mg of ZnI₂ in 20 mL of toluene solution under sonication and vigorous stirring. A total of 100 μL of the as-prepared CPX510 cyclohexane suspension is mixed with different amounts of ZnI₂ toluene solution; the overall volume of the solution is topped up and kept the same at 1 mL throughout the experiment. The color of the mixture quickly changes right after the ZnI₂ toluene solution is added. Under 980 nm excitation, the emission peaks of the mixture are gradually red-shifted as the amount of the ZnI₂ toluene solution increased (Figure 4a). When 500 μL of the as-prepared ZnI₂ toluene
solution is added, the emission peak maximum is shifted to 650 nm. In addition, the emission of NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm@NaYF₄ core–shell UCNP cyclo-
hexane suspension mixed with different amounts of CPX510 samples.

Figure 4. PeQD-modulated upconversion spectra. (a) UCL spectra of a 100 μL NaYF₄:30%Yb,0.5%Tm@NaYF₄ core–shell UCNP cyclo-
hexane suspension mixed with different amounts of CPX510 samples. The added CPX510 suspension volume is specified alongside the curve, with the overall volume fixed at 1 mL. (b) Intrinsic and (c) CPX510-modulated UCL color under 980 nm excitation.

used as the ink and have been added in the cartridge before the printing tasks begin. The double-encrypted printing experiments begin with printing the UCNP suspension on a blank A4 paper; after it is completely dried, the ZnI₂ pattern is printed subsequently on the same A4 paper. To make sure that enough ZnI₂ is printed on the paper for the subsequent anion exchange, the ZnI₂ pattern is printed thrice. Notably, the A4 paper has to be completely dried after each printing job. Also, to make sure that the pattern is well collated, the paper needs to be well aligned before sending into the printer. To decrypt the hidden pattern, after the A4 paper is completely dried, a thin layer of CPX510 toluene solution as the decrypting reagent is evenly applied on top via brushing, and the paper is sent under the NIR animal-imaging system with 980 nm laser illumination to reveal the hidden pattern. As the control, in single-encryption design, only the UCNP suspension is printed on an A4 paper and the other steps are the same.

3.3.2. Decryption. Under 980 nm laser exposure, a hidden apple pattern in green color can be detected from both the double-encrypted A4 paper (with the hidden ZnI₂ pattern) and single-encrypted A4 paper (without the hidden ZnI₂ pattern) (Figure 5a,b). Note that the real-color figures are taken through a smartphone camera with a filter (blocking out the 980 nm laser signal), which made the camera go slightly out of focus; however, the boundary is clearly visible and sharp under a CCD camera (550/40) (Figure 5c,d). Notably, green rather than purple color is observed from the pattern, indicating that luminescence from UCNPs is fully absorbed and modulated by PeQDs. As the areas α and β are all decorated with UCNPs, under 980 nm NIR laser shining, the UV and blue emissions from UCNPs will illuminate all the PeQDs, giving off a full apple image; because the ZnI₂ pattern is printed first with a relatively small amount, the hidden information is covered at the bottom and not distinguishable. Therefore, if only a 980 nm laser is applied without choosing the right decoding channel, the secondary encrypted information is not decrypted. However, the emissive profile of the bottom PeQD layer applied on this region is red-shifted, and the hidden information can be detected in a longer wavelength range, i.e., using the decryption channel. When the imaging channel was switched to the decryption channel (660/50), a new pattern showing a cut-away apple is clearly observed because only the luminescence from area α, which contains the PeQDs that are modified with ZnI₂, can pass through the filter, while no hidden pattern is observed for the single-encryption group.

Figure 4. Tuning PeQD-modulated UCL via ZnI₂. (a) Normalized emission spectra and (b) excitation spectra of a 1 mL CPB510 cyclohexane suspension added with different amounts of ZnI₂, excited with 365 nm xenon light. (c) Revealing the upconversion luminescence pattern by shining the pattern with a 980 nm laser; patterns are created by stamping the above-mentioned PeQD and UCNP mixture added with different amounts of ZnI₂ on a paper.
due to the absence of the ZnI$_2$ pattern (Figure 5e–h). In addition, the pattern has been kept at room temperature for up to 24 h to study the stability of the pattern (Figure S6). Results show that the pattern can still maintain the distinguishable boundary and luminescence intensity for up to 10 min; after 1 h, the pattern gradually loses the boundary; due to the sensitivity of PeQDs to the environmental humidity, long-time exposure (24 h) in the atmosphere will lead to the luminescence quenching of PeQDs.

4. CONCLUSIONS
In this study, the coupling between NaYF$_4$:30%Yb,0.5%Tm@NaYF$_4$ UCNPs and different PeQDs is established. PeQDs render more luminescence possibility to UCNPs, while UCNPs provide PeQDs with anti-Stokes features, playing complementary roles to each other. Subsequently, ZnI$_2$ is introduced into the system to manipulate the UCL from the UCNP–PeQD pairs. Results show that the single-peak UCL profile of UCNP–PeQD pairs can be continuously shifted from green to red. Compared with varying the dopant concentration during the UCNP synthesis, our strategy offers great convenience and feasibility in UCL regulation, allowing the UCL emissive profile to be tuned after synthesis. Finally, a double-encrypted anticounterfeiting pattern is generated using an inkjet printer. The pattern encrypted information, which can only be decrypted under NIR laser excitation and a decryption channel. Notably, anion exchange and UCL regulation occur on the A4 paper; this in situ regulation strategy further expands the UCL manipulation possibility. A double-encrypted anticounterfeiting pattern is generated using an inkjet printer. The pattern encrypted information, which can only be decrypted under NIR laser excitation and a decryption channel. Notably, anion exchange and UCL regulation occur on the A4 paper; this in situ regulation strategy further expands the UCL manipulation possibility.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT
Supporting Information
The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acsomega.2c06464.

Material characterization and related spectrum data including the XRD characterization of UCNPs and PeQDs and UCL spectra of UCNP suspensions mixed with CPX540, CPX610, and CPX650 PeQDs (PDF)

AUTHOR INFORMATION
Corresponding Authors
Xiang Zheng — Institute of Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China; Fujian Provincial Key Laboratory of Biochemical Technology, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China; orcid.org/0000-0002-8442-3339; Email: zhengxiang@hqu.edu.cn
Ai-Zheng Chen — Institute of Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China; Fujian Provincial Key Laboratory of Biochemical Technology, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China; orcid.org/0000-0002-5840-3406; Email: azchen@hqu.edu.cn

Authors
Yuan Wen — Institute of Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China; Fujian Provincial Key Laboratory of Biochemical Technology, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China
Jun Zhong — Institute of Biomaterials and Tissue Engineering, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China; Fujian Provincial Key Laboratory of Biochemical Technology, Huaqiao University, Xiamen 361021, P. R. China

Complete contact information is available at: https://pubs.acs.org/10.1021/acsomega.2c06464

Author Contributions
X.Z. conceptualized the project. A.-Z.C. funded the project. A.-Z.C. and X.Z. supervised the project. J.Z. and Y.W. completed

Figure 5. Inkjet printing of the double-encrypted anticounterfeiting pattern. (a, b) Camera photo and the layout of the anticounterfeiting pattern. (c, d) Pseudo-color image showing the hidden information under 980 nm excitation. (e–h) Camera photo and pseudo-color image showing the double-encrypted information under 980 nm excitation. Scale bar: 1 cm. Panels (e) and (g) are half-blurred to avoid the copyright issue.
the main work of the experiment. X.Z. conducted the data analysis and wrote the original draft. J.Z. and Y.W. revised the article. All authors discussed the results and commented on the article.

**Notes**
The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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