Planar chiral cyclophanopillar[5]arenes with a fused oligo(oxyethylene) or polymethylene subring (MUJs), existing as an equilibrium mixture of subring-included (in) and -excluded (out) conformers, respond to hydrostatic pressure to exhibit dynamic chiroptical property changes, leading to an unprecedented pressure-driven chirality inversion and the largest ever-reported leap of anisotropy (g) factor for the MUJ with a dodecamethylene subring. The pressure susceptibility of MUJs, assessed by the change in g per unit pressure, is a critical function of the size and nature of the subring incorporated and the solvent employed. Mechanistic elucidations reveal that the in–out equilibrium, as the origin of the MUJ’s chiroptical property changes, is on a delicate balance of the competitive inclusion of subrings versus solvent molecules as well as the solvation of the excluded subring. The present results further encourage our use of pressure as a unique tool for dynamically manipulating various supramolecular devices/machines.

Introduction

Stimulus-responsive artificial molecular machines attract much research interest because of their ability to alter the structure and function through the molecular-level motion triggered by external factors. A wide range of external stimuli, such as light, temperature, redox, pH and chemical additives, have hitherto been exploited to achieve diverse stimulus-responsive supramolecular architectures and devices with the aid of deep insights into the kinetic and thermodynamic driving forces involved.

Hydrostatic pressure is another fundamental and ubiquitous stimulus that is orthogonal to the other stimuli yet substantially influences various biological, chemical, and physical phenomena. Indeed, hydrostatic pressure is known to cause conformational changes of biomacromolecules, such as DNA, RNA and proteins, and also affect the molecular recognition events. We have revealed that pressure can manipulate the supramolecular complexation and chiral photoreaction behaviors. Despite these intriguing findings, the pressure effects on artificial supramolecular devices and molecular machines still remain an uncharted realm.

As a relatively new class of synthetic macrocyclic hosts, pillar[n]arenes (P[n]s) have been the target of intensive studies in the past decade. In particular, planar chirality is one of the most intriguing aspects of P[n] chemistry. In a recent study, we synthesized a series of inherently chiral cyclophano-P[5] and -P[6] termed molecular universal joints (MUJs) and established their absolute configurations by comparing the experimental versus theoretical CD spectra. The P[5]-based MUJ1–MUJ3 (Scheme 1, left) employed in the present study incorporate a tetra(oxyethylene)-, dodecamethylene-, and hexa(oxyethylene)-bridged 1,4-hydroquinone unit, respectively, as a fused subring. The subring

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introduced lowers the symmetry and makes the conformation before/after chiral inversion not enantiomeric anymore. As illustrated in Scheme 1 (right panel), the subring-included “in” and subring-excluded “out” conformers of the MUJ are interconvertible through tumbling of the 1,4-bridged hydroquinone unit, which however occurs only between the in-(R) and out-(S) and between the in-(S) and out-(R) isomers without any racemization.

We now report an unprecedented supramolecular chirality inversion of MUJs, which is driven by hydrostatic pressure and facilitated or suppressed by solvation. We further elucidate its origin and operating mechanisms, the results of which allow us to develop a concept of using pressure as a powerful, otherwise-inaccessible, orthogonal-to-the-other-stimuli, yet widely applicable tool for manipulating supramolecular structures, properties, and functions and on/off-switching supramolecular devices and machines.

Results and discussion

Racemic MUJ1–MUJ3 prepared as reported51 were optically resolved by preparative chiral HPLC (Fig. S1–S3†). The second-eluted in-(R)1/out-(S)1-enantiomers of the MUJs in 95–99% enantiomeric excess were used throughout the work. Using a high pressure vessel equipped with birefringence-free diamond windows for spectral measurements, we examined the effects of hydrostatic pressure on the UV-vis and circular dichroism (CD) spectra of in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ1 in hexane (n-H), methylcyclohexane (MCH), carbon tetrachloride (CTC), tetrahydrofuran (THF), ethyl acetate (EA), chloroform (CHL), dichloromethane (DCM), and acetonitrile (AN) at pressures from atmospheric 0.1 MPa to 320 or 160 (for CTC) MPa.

Fig. 1 shows the two extreme CD spectral behaviors observed for in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ2 in (a) AN and (b) EA upon gradual increase of pressure up to 320 MPa, while Fig. 2 summarizes the pressure-induced variation ranges of the anisotropy (g) factors of in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ1, MUJ2, and MUJ3 in all the examined solvents (see Fig. S4–S72 and Table S1† for the original data); note that \( g = \Delta \varepsilon / \varepsilon \), where \( \Delta \varepsilon \) denotes the molar CD and \( \varepsilon \) the molar extinction coefficient. By releasing the applied pressure, the original spectra were immediately recovered without any hysteresis, indicating that the pressure-induced changes observed are fully reversible and no chemical transformation or conformational lock is involved.

The g factor of in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ2 was a vital function of both pressure and solvent, exhibiting a dramatic sign-inversion in AN (Fig. 1a) in the middle of the applied pressure range, but no such behavior in EA (Fig. 1b). Thus, in AN, the g factors at 258 and 310 nm \( (g_{258} \text{ and } g_{310}) \) are substantially enhanced (with a sign inversion) from \(-0.0035 \text{ to } +0.0039 \) and from \(-0.0016 \text{ to } +0.0034 \), respectively, by increasing the pressure from 0.1 to 320 MPa. The net change in g amounts to 0.0074 at 254 nm and to 0.0050 at 310 nm, which are the largest ever reported,24,30 and are expected to grow further at yet higher pressures. In contrast, the \( g_{310} \) factor in EA merely shows a modest initial increase

Fig. 1 Pressure-dependence of spectral analysis of in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ2. (a) The CD (top) and anisotropy (g) factor (middle) spectra and the pressure-dependence of the g factors (bottom) monitored at 310 (blue), 288 (red), and 258 (black) nm for in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ2 (92 \( \mu \)M) in AN at room temperature. (b) The CD (top) and g factor (middle) spectra and the pressure-dependence of the g factors (bottom) at 309 (blue) and 288 (red) nm for in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ2 (136 \( \mu \)M) in EA at room temperature. Pressure applied: 0.1, 40, 80, 120, 160, 200, 240, 280, and 320 MPa (from black to light blue).

Fig. 2 Pressure effect for the g factor of MUJs. Pressure-induced changes of the g factor at 310 (±1) nm \( (g_{310}) \) for in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ1 (blue), in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ2 (gray), and in-(R)1/out-(S)1-MUJ3 (green) in hexane (n-H), methylcyclohexane (MCH), carbon tetrachloride (CTC), tetrahydrofuran (THF), ethyl acetate (EA), chloroform (CHL), dichloromethane (DCM), and acetonitrile (AN) at room temperature.
Table 1 Anisotropy factors at 310 (±1) nm under atmospheric pressure ($g_{310}^{0.1 \text{ MPa}}$) and overall pressure susceptivities of $g_{310}$ ($\Delta g/\Delta P$) for MUJ1–MUJ3 in various solvents

| Solvent | $E_i$ | MUJ1 ($\times 10^3$) | MUJ2 | MUJ3 ($\times 10^3$) | $\Delta g/\Delta P$ (TPa$^{-1}$) |
|---------|-------|---------------------|------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| n-H     | 30.9  | -0.2                | 0.6  | +3.4                | -0.7                         | +1.4                         | -2.6                         |
| MCH$^a$ | ~31   | +4.1                | +3.7 | +4.9                | +0.6                         | +1.5                         | +0.9                         |
| CTC$^a$ | 32.5  | +1.7                | +2.0 | +2.2                | -5.1$^d$                     | +4.8$^d$                     | +4.7$^d$                     |
| THF$^d$ | 37.4  | -1.9                | +1.2 | +3.1                | -4.9                         | -2.0                         | -7.1                         |
| EA      | 38.1  | -1.2                | +2.3 | +2.4                | +3.4                         | +2.4                         | -0.2                         |
| CHL$^b$ | 39.1  | -0.8                | +3.4 | +0.8                | -0.0                         | -2.8$^d$                     | -2.9                         |
| DCM     | 41.1  | -3.6                | -1.9 | -3.9                | +3.0                         | +5.9                         | +3.0                         |
| AN      | 46.0  | -3.4                | -1.6 | -3.7                | +3.5                         | +15.6                        | +4.2                         |

$^a$ Reichardt’s empirical solvent polarity parameter. $^b$ Positive (negative) $g_{310}^{0.1 \text{ MPa}}$ factor indicates preference for the in (out) conformation at atmospheric pressure. $^c$ $\Delta g/\Delta P = (g_{310}^{P_{\text{max}}^{\text{in}}}/g_{310}^{P_{\text{min}}^{\text{in}}})/(P_{\text{max}}^{\text{in}} - P_{\text{min}}^{\text{in}})$, the pressure range applied ($\Delta P$): 0.1–320 MPa, unless noted otherwise. Positive (negative) $\Delta g/\Delta P$ value means equilibrium shift to the in-(out-) conformer upon pressurization. $^d$ Too bulky to be fully accommodated in the P[5] cavity (4.7 Å i.d.). $^f$ $\Delta P$: 0.1–200 MPa.

In an attempt to elucidate the origin of the dynamic pressure-dependence (including the sign inversion) of the g factor observed for MUJ2 in DCM and AN, we calculated the van der Waals volumes ($V_{\text{vdW}}$) of the out- and in-conformers of MUJ2 geometry-optimized in vacuo by the DFT method at the B3LYP/6-31G(d) level. It turned out that the $V_{\text{vdW}}$ obtained (Table S2†) is slightly larger for the out- than for the in-conformer, but the difference is mere 0.26–0.36 Å$^3$, which is rather negligible if compared with the whole volumes of the MUJ2 (944–1030 Å$^3$). This result reveals that the difference in $V_{\text{vdW}}$ between the naked in- and out-conformers is not a main driving force of the pressure-driven chirality switching of MUJ2.

Judging from the very disparate behaviors of g exhibited in different solvents (Fig. 2), we deduce that the pivotal role is played by solvent in determining the in/out conformation of MUJ2 and hence serves as a reliable tool for assessing the absolute configuration of the MUJ, i.e., in-(R$^\beta$) or out-(S$^\beta$). This criterion and the g factor monitored at 310 nm under the atmospheric pressure [$g_{310}^{0.1 \text{ MPa}}$] listed in Table 1 indicate that, at 0.1 MPa, MUJ2 favors the in-(R$^\beta$)-conformation in n-H, MCH, CTC, THF, EA, and CHL, but the out-(S$^\beta$)-conformation in DCM and AN.

To better understand the interaction of solvent molecules with the P[5] cavity, we attempted to determine the association constant ($K_a$) of the relevant solvents with 1,4-diethyloxyP[5] (a model host with comparable cavity parameters) in MCH (a nonpolar/non-solvent molecule that is oversized and hence impenetrable into the P[5] cavity). As shown in Table S3,† AN and DCM turned out to have 1–2 orders of magnitude higher affinities toward the P[5] cavity ($K_a = 50–550$ M$^{-1}$) than the other solvents ($K_a = 4–18$ M$^{-1}$), which well rationalizes the rich population of the out-(S$^\beta$) conformer in these two solvents at 0.1 MPa. In the other solvents of lower P[5] affinities, MUJ2 includes the subring in its own cavity to form the in-(R$^\beta$) conformer and hence exhibits positive $g_{310}^{0.1 \text{ MPa}}$ factors at 0.1 MPa.

Possessing a polyether subring, MUJ1 and MUJ3 afford twice larger $g_{310}^{0.1 \text{ MPa}}$ factors of $-3.4$ to $-3.9 \times 10^{-3}$ than MUJ2 in both DCM and AN (Table 1), indicating enriched populations of the out-(S$^\beta$)-conformers. This enrichment is most probably facilitated by the stabilization of the out-conformers through the solvation of the excluded polyether subring as well as the solvent inclusion in the P[5] cavity that is common to all the subring-excluded MUJ3s. In less polar solvents of lower P[5] affinities, the $g_{310}$ factor of MUJ3, though not exactly the same in magnitude, shares the same (positive) sign with that of MUJ2, while the $g_{310}$ factor of MUJ1 with the opposite sign behaves very differently in n-H, THF, EA, and CHL, implying nontrivial effects of the smaller subring on the in–out equilibrium. These observations and considerations led us to a tentative conclusion that the pressure-driven chirality inversion from out-(S$^\beta$)- to in-(R$^\beta$)-MUJ2 observed in AN and DCM was caused by self-

![Fig. 3](image-url) Reversible switching of the ellipticity signal of in-(R$^\beta$)/out-(S$^\beta$)-MUJ2 upon pressurization and depressurization: The ellipticity changes at 309 nm observed for an AN solution of in-(R$^\beta$)/out-(S$^\beta$)-MUJ2 (92 μM) upon repeated pressurization–depressurization cycles between 40 and 200 MPa.

followed by a slow decrease to give a much smaller net change of 0.0007.

As can be seen from Fig. 2, the pressure-dependent CD spectral behaviors of the three MUJ3s are distinctly different from each other in all the solvents examined (except CTC), but may be placed somewhere in between the two extreme cases mentioned above (Fig. 1a and b). One of the most intriguing (and unexpected) findings is the pressure-driven sign inversion of the g factor observed for MUJ2 in DCM and AN. The same phenomenon is seen also for MUJ3 in CHL and is anticipated to occur at much higher pressures for MUJ1 in CTC, EA, DCM, and AN, for MUJ2 in CTC, THF, and CHL, and for MUJ3 in n-H, CTC, THF, DCM, and AN with a smaller pressure-dependence in most cases (Fig. 2).
inclusion of the dodecamethylene-subring accompanied by the exclusion of polar solvent molecule(s) originally residing in the P[5] cavity.

In order to substantiate the above hypothesis and quantitatively discuss the pressure effects on the in–out conformer equilibrium, we wanted to estimate the in/out ratio or the equilibrium constant \( K_{\text{in/out}} = [\text{in}]/[\text{out}] \) from the observed \( g_{310} \) factor. This should be made possible if we could experimentally determine the \( g_{310} \) factors for both of the pure in-(\( R_p \)) and out-(\( S_p \))-MUJs, or if we could determine one of them and could claim \( g_{310} = g_{310}^* \).

1,4-Dicyanobutane (DCB) is one of the strongest-binding guests for P[5] hosts,\(^{29}\) and hence the addition of a large excess amount of DCB to an MUJ solution is expected to exert the subring out of the P[5] cavity. Upon addition of DCB of up to 2000 equivalents, the \( g_{310} \) factor gradually increased to reach a plateau in all the solvents. The ultimate values thus attained (Table S4†) are regarded as the \( g_{310} \) factors for pure out-(\( S_p \))-conformers of MUJs. However, these \( g_{310}^{\text{out}} \) factors for MUJ1–MUJ3 are not close to each other, but depend on the subring that stabilizes the out-(\( S_p \))-conformer. Thus, a dilute solution of MUJ1, MUJ2, and MUJ3 in MCH at 0.1 MPa was employed. In contrast, the out-(\( S_p \))-MUJ4′ and MUJ5′ factors are large positive (indicating a strong drive to the in-(\( R_p \)) conformer). Upon addition of CHL (Table S5†), the NMR spectrum of DEP[5] (4 3 6 1) showed small downfield shifts (0.10–0.13 ppm) of the aromatic and ethoxy protons in the presence of 2.8 M CHL (Fig. S79 and Table S5†); the least-square-means fit of the chemical shift changes to the 1 : 1 stoichiometry afforded \( K_p = 0.63 \pm 0.02 \text{ M}^{-1} \) (Fig. S80†). In contrast, the addition of 5.18 M CTC caused slight upfield shifts (0.005–0.045 ppm) of the same protons, which are substantially smaller in magnitude and opposite in direction when compared with those observed upon addition of CHL (Table S5†) and AN (Table S7†). We conclude therefore that the slight shifts observed upon addition of CTC are irrelevant to the conformational change but caused by the change in medium polarity. This conclusion is compatible with the very resembling pressure dependence behaviors commonly observed for all the MUJ5 examined (Fig. 2 and Table 1). These results reveal that DEP[5] weakly interacts with the seemingly oversized guests (THF and CHL, but not CTC), probably at its ethoxy-decorated portal. Combining this fact and the significant CD spectral changes of MUJs observed upon addition of CHL at elevated pressures (Figs. 2 and S22, S25, and S28†), we deduce that the supramolecular interaction of MUJ5 with the modestly oversized molecules through portal perching is promoted under pressure.

The wide dynamic range, quick and reversible response to pressure change, and dynamic sign inversion of the CD signal prompted us to scrutinize the capability of MUJ2 as a supramolecular chiroptical switching device driven by pressure.\(^{60-61}\) Thus, a dilute solution of MUJ2 in AN was subjected to repeated pressure-inversion–depressurization cycles between 40 and 200 MPa to afford the alternating positive and negative ellipticities of comparable intensities with good reproducibility, as shown in Fig. 3.

**Conclusions**

In this study to elucidate the pressure dependence behaviors of conformationally flexible planar chiral cyclophano-pillar[5]arenes (MUJs), we have shown that the in–out conformer equilibrium of MUJs is highly susceptible to hydrostatic pressure particularly in polar solvents that possess strong affinities to the pillar[5]arene cavity to achieve the pressure-driven chirality switching and the largest ever reported jump of anisotropy.
factor. These unique features of MUJs open a new avenue for the multidimensional control of molecular machines and advanced piezo-sensitive materials by using pressure, temperature, and solvents, and also help us understand and utilize the pressure effects on natural and artificial supramolecular systems.64-66

Author contributions

G. F., C. Y. and Y. I. initiated the project. J. Y., H. M., C. X. and W. W. conceived and designed the experiments, analysed the data and prepared the manuscript, with input from all the authors. J. Y. conducted the chemical synthesis. G. F. and H. M. performed CD and UV-vis spectral analysis.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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