Study on the Electronic Structure and Stability of Some OPE(oligo-phenylene-ethynylene derivative)-RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$ Dyads by PM7

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Abstract: In this paper, we investigated the electronic structure and stability of some mesomorphic OPE-RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$ dyads from the oligo-phenylene-ethynylene derivatives (OPE) and the trimetallic nitride template endohedral fullerenes (TNT-EMFs) - RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$ (RE=Sc,Y,La) by using PM7, the updated version of the semi-empirical Hartree-Fock method. In OPE-RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$, the fullerene cages were modified to have the opened cage (fulleroid) structure by addition of OPE on the [6,6] position of the fullerene cages. There was no considerable charge transfer between OPE and fullerene cage, but the fullerene cages had the remarkable minus charges mainly due to the electron transfer from RE$_3$N to the cage. The calculated electronic spectra showed that light absorption bands of OPE-C$_{80}$ were more red-shifted than that of OPE-RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$ and all of OPE-RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$ seem to have a couple of Vis-NIR absorption peaks.

Key-words: endohedral fullerene, oligo-phenylene-ethynylene derivatives, TNT-EMF, quantum chemistry, PM7

1. Introduction

Now it is well-known that fullerenes are not chemically inert and undergo various chemical reactions such as nucleophilic addition, Diel’s-Alder reaction, 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition, radical addition, oxidation, reduction etc.$^{[1,2,3]}$

In these decades many researches in the fullerenes chemistry have been focused on the synthesis of the endohedral metallofullerenes (EMFs), the so-called “cluster-fullerene”, containing metal atoms or clusters therein and on their application in manufacture of the novel nano-materials such as molecular devices, sensors and medical tools$^{[4]}$. Especially, a variety of the trimetallic nitride template endohedral fullerenes (TNT-EMFs) such as RE$_3$N@C$_n$ (RE = Sc, Y, La; n=78, 80, 82, ... ) have been synthesized and modified for utilizing their functionalities in
molecular electronics and bio-technology. One of the most prosperous applications of RE₃N@Cₙ can be found in organic photovoltaics due to their excellent electron acceptor abilities. A recent research was carried out for synthesis of some π-conjugated system – fullerene dyads for photovoltaic applications, where the donor units were either oligo-phenylene-ethynylene (OPE) or oligo-phenylene-vinylene (OPV) derivatives and for the acceptor, C₆₀ or Y₃N@C₈₀ were used. The liquid crystalline (LC) behavior, shown by the synthesized dyads was expected to improve the photovoltaic efficiency of the BHJ (block hetero-junction) organic solar cells by ambipolar charge transfer.

In this paper, PM7 in MOPAC2012, one of the updated semi-empirical Hartree-Fock methods, was applied in the theoretical study on the electronic structure and stability of OPE-C₈₀ and OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ dyads (RE = Sc, Y, La). There have been some reports on DFT (Density Functional Theory) study on RE₃N@Cₙ and their derivatives, but still no research has been done on theoretical calculation of the electronic structures of the OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ dyads.

2. Computational Models and Method

Here the quantum chemical study has been done on four OPE-FD dyads (OPE-C₈₀ and OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀), where FD means C₈₀ and three kinds of RE₃N@C₈₀ (RE=Sc,Y,La). For all the OPE-FDs, the geometry of C₈₀-Iₜₙ, one of the geometric isomers of C₈₀, was chosen as the fullerene cage, where Iₜₙ shows the geometric symmetry of the fullerene cage. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Models for FDs (RE=Sc,Y,La)

Figure 2 shows the chemical structures of the OPE-Y₃N@C₈₀ dyad, synthesized in the previous research. According to that experimental research, the models for OPE-C₈₀ and OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ dyad (RE=Sc, Y, La) were chosen as [6,6] adducts, where OPE was covalently linked to C₈₀ or RE₃N@C₈₀ just on the [6,6] addition site of the fullerene cage (the nearest site to RE atom in case of RE₃N@C₈₀). To simplify the task and avoid the overload in computation, the long alkyl chain R (-C₁₀H₂₅) in the OPE was shortened as -CH₃ in all the models for OPE-FDs.

The OPE-FDs can be separated as two individual subunits, OPE and FD, for comparing their electron donor – acceptor interaction. Here OPE₁ symbolizes a half part of OPE (Figure 3).
Figure 2. Models for OPE-FDs

Figure 3. Models for OPE and OPE₁
To consider the effect of RE$_3$N on the electronic structure of the OPE-RE$_3$N@C$_{80}$, the empty fullerene cage model without RE$_3$N was also calculated as OPE-C$_{80}$.

The geometric and electronic structures of the models were calculated by PM7 from MOPAC2012, the latest version of the semi-empirical MO software package, that has been well-known as one of the most efficient quantum chemical tools with the enhanced accuracy for a wide range of molecules, complexes, polymers, crystals, and TNT-EMFs.$^{[8,12]}$ Especially, it offers good parameter set for the calculation of most of the elements on the periodic table including rare earth elements.

The first step of calculation was the geometry optimization by EF (Eigenvector-Following) routine, which was followed by the configuration interaction (CI) calculation based on the single-point MO results. The configurations for the singlet electronic transitions were composed of 20 MOs near HOMO and LUMO (10 occupied MOs and 10 unoccupied MOs). The electronic spectra were drawn by using the Gaussian smoothing function based on the transition energies (mode positions) and the oscillator strengths (mode intensities).

Relative Stability of the OPE-FDs was evaluated by $\Delta E_t$, the difference of total energies ($E_t$) between the resulting model (OPE-FD) and the separated subunits (OPE and FD).

3. Results and Discussion

1) The geometric and electronic structures of the separated subunits (OPE and FDs)

Figure 4 shows the optimized geometric structures of OPE and its one branch (OPE$_1$), where the phenylethynyl unit (-C$_6$H$_4$-C≡C-C$_6$H$_4$-C≡C-C$_6$H$_4$-) is arranged to form a straight line, but its three phenyl rings are not on the same plane, which prevents to form larger $\pi$-conjugation plane in OPE.

Figure 4. The optimized geometric structures of OPE and its one branch (OPE$_1$)
It can be seen from the optimized geometric structures of RE₃N@C₈₀ in Figure 5 that RE₃N (RE = Sc, La) has the planar form, but Y₃N has the pyramidal form, which resembles the previous XRD measurement of Gd₃N@C₈₀-Iₘ and DFT calculation of Y₃N@C₇₈-D₃h. [13,14]

From the electronic structures of RE₃N@C₈₀ calculated from their optimized geometry, it was found out that the positive charge of RE atoms was increased and the negative charge of N atom decreased in the cluster fullerene compared with those in free RE₃N, which shows that in RE₃N@C₈₀ more portion of electrons of RE atoms was transferred to the fullerene cage, not to N atom. [12]

Figure 5. The optimized geometric structures of RE₃N@C₈₀

Figure 6 shows that OPE₁ and OPE have the similar HOMO-LUMO levels, which means there can not be apparent π-conjugation between two phenylethynyl branches in OPE. All FDs (C₈₀ and RE₃N@C₈₀) have lower LUMO levels than OPE, therefore they can accept electron from OPE. HOMO levels of RE₃N@C₈₀ are lower than that of the empty C₈₀. It can be explained as the result of stabilization of the C₈₀ cage by RE₃N incorporation. [15]

Figure 6. HOMO – LUMO energy levels of subunits of OPE-FDs

From Figure 7, it can be seen that OPE has UV absorption, but FDs can interact with visible light or even with NIR.
2) The geometric and electronic structures of OPE-FDs

Four models of the OPE-FDs discussed in this paper had the similar configurations after geometric optimization (Figure 8).

Figure 7. The electronic spectra of OPE and FDs
(red: mode positions, green: mode intensities)

Figure 8. The different views of the optimized structures of OPE-FDs
These configurations may be different from those of the real OPE-FD dyads[7] because these models have the shorten alkyl group (−CH₃) instead of the long chain (−C₁₂H₂₅) and can not express their well-assembled frameworks in the liquid crystalline phase.

Figure 9 shows $\Delta E_t$ of the OPE-fullerenes calculated as the total energy difference of OPE-FD from its separated subunits (OPE and FD). OPE-C₈₀ became to be unstable after the formation of the dyad and it can be considered as the result of structural deformation of the subunits, especially C₈₀ due to the formation of the dyad. The most stable one was OPE-La₃N@C₈₀ and other OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ were also more stable than OPE-C₈₀ because all of RE₃N@C₈₀ had been stabilized by electron transfer from RE₃N to C₈₀.

![Figure 9](image)

In all of OPE-FDs, the fullerene cages were modified to have the open-up cage (fulleroid) structures. Table 1 shows the C-C distances at the [6,6] OPE-addition sites of FDs and their increases ($\Delta R_{C-C}$) after OPE-addition, where more stable OPE-La₃N@C₈₀ had the less $\Delta R_{C-C}$ and less stable OPE-C₈₀ and OPE-Y₃N@C₈₀ had the larger $\Delta R_{C-C}$.

| model          | OPE-C₈₀ | OPE-Sc₃N@C₈₀ | OPE-Y₃N@C₈₀ | OPE-La₃N@C₈₀ |
|----------------|---------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| free FD        | 0.142   | 0.148        | 0.153        | 0.149        |
| OPE-FD         | 0.235   | 0.239        | 0.247        | 0.234        |
| $\Delta R_{C-C}$ | 0.093   | 0.091        | 0.094        | 0.085        |

Table 2 shows the local charges of the subunits (OPE, C₈₀ cage, RE₃N) in OPE-FDs, where there was no considerable charge transfer between OPE and FDs, but in OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ the fullerene cages had the remarkable minus charges mainly due to the electron transfer from RE₃N to the cage. It seems that the more electrons were transferred from RE₃N to C₈₀, the more stable OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ was formed.

| model | OPE-C₈₀ | OPE-Sc₃N@C₈₀ | OPE-Y₃N@C₈₀ | OPE-La₃N@C₈₀ |
|-------|---------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| OPE   | 0.012   | 0.071        | 0.037        | 0.069        |
| C₈₀ cage | -0.012 | -4.454       | -3.976       | -4.471       |
| RE₃N  | -       | 4.383        | 3.939        | 4.402        |
From the electronic spectra of OPE-FDs (Figure 10), it can be found out that light absorption band of OPE-C₈₀ was more red-shifted than that of OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀, but its maximum absorption intensity was far less than OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀, and all of OPE-FDs seem to have a couple of Vis-NIR absorption peaks.

Figure 10. The electronic spectra of OPE-FDs
(red: mode positions, green: mode intensities)

4. Conclusion

PM7 calculations were carried out on four OPE-fullerene dyads (OPE-FDs) such as OPE-C₈₀ and OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ (RE = Sc, Y, La).

In all of OPE-FDs, the fullerene cages were modified to have the open-up cage (fulleroid) structure by addition of OPE on the [6,6] position of the fullerene cages. The C-C distance at the [6,6] addition site of the cages was less increased in the more stable OPE-FDs.

There was no considerable charge transfer between OPE and FDs, but in OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ the fullerene cages had the remarkable minus charges mainly due to the electron transfer from RE₃N to the cage.

Light absorption bands of OPE-C₈₀ were more red-shifted than that of OPE-RE₃N@C₈₀ and all of OPE-FDs seem to have a couple of Vis-NIR absorption peaks.
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