

Effect of Crystallizable Solvent on Phase Separation and Charge Transport in Polymer-fullerene Films

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Abstract. The effect of 1,3,5-trichlorobenzene (TCB) as crystallizable solvent on poly[N-9'-heptadecanyl-2,7-carbazole-alt-5,5-(4',7'-di-2-thienyl-2',1',3'-benzothiadiazole)] (PCDTBT) and [6,6]-phenyl C₇₁ butyric acid methyl ester (PC₇₁BM) bulk heterojunction (BHJ) was investigated. We found that phase separation of PCDTBT and PC₇₁BM and formation of the condensed network of polymers were appropriately regulated by addition of TCB in the BHJ films, which were confirmed by optical microscopic, AFM, and TEM observations in addition to current-voltage analyses. Through the formation of a good continuous pathway for carrier transport by the addition of TCB, 2.5 times enhancement of the hole mobility in the BHJ film was attained from $5.82 \times 10^{-5} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ without TCB to $1.48 \times 10^{-4} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ with 20 mg ml⁻¹ of TCB.

1. Introduction

Organic photovoltaics (OPVs) have been attractive because they can be prepared onto flexible substrates by using simple printing techniques. [1-3] To improve the photovoltaic performance of OPVs, morphology and charge transport in bulk heterojunction (BHJ) solar cells are important. Many methods were used to optimize the morphology of polymers and fullerenes in BHJ such as thermal annealing [4, 5], solvent annealing [6, 7] and addition of solvent additives [8, 9]. One effective method to control the morphology of polymer-fullerene is adding high boiling point additive in polymer blend such as 1,8-diiodooctane (DIO) [10], 1,8-dibromooctane [11] and chloronaphthalene [12]. The solvent additive can selectively dissolve PC₇₁BM, which aggregates to smaller domains and promote a better donor-acceptor network into smaller domains.

In this work, we investigated the effect of 1,3,5-trichlorobenzene (TCB) as the crystallizable solvent on phase separation and formation of the highly oriented network of polymers in terms of the improvement of charge transport in poly[N-9'-heptadecanyl-2,7-carbazole-alt-5,5-(4',7'-di-2-thienyl-2',1',3'-benzothiadiazole)] (PCDTBT) and [6,6]-phenyl C₇₁ butyric acid methyl ester (PC₇₁BM) BHJ films. The concentration of TCB in PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM were ranged from 0 to 50 mg ml⁻¹ in dichlorobenzene (DCB). We found that the appropriate amount of TCB in the PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM



effectively improved the morphology and formation of the condensed network of polymers, which resulted in the enhancement of the hole mobility in the BHJ films.

2. Experimental

The hole-only devices were prepared with a device structure of indium-tin-oxide (ITO) coated glass/PEDOT:PSS/polymer-fullerene/Au. The polymer and fullerene are poly[N-9'-heptadecanyl-2,7-carbazole-alt-5,5-(4',7'-di-2-thienyl-2',1',3'-benzothiadiazole)] (PCDTBT) (1-Material) and [6,6]-phenyl C₇₁ butyric acid methyl ester (PC₇₁BM) (American Dye Source, Inc.), respectively. The glass-ITO substrates (Geomatec, 10 Ω sq⁻¹) patterned were ultrasonically cleaned with deionized water, acetone, tetramethylammonium hydroxide (Semico clean 56), deionized water and isopropyl alcohol for every 15 min. The glass-ITO substrates were dried with heat gun and treated with UV-ozone treatment for 15 min. PEDOT:PSS (Clevios™ P VP AI 4083) after passing through a 0.45 μ m filter was coated by convective deposition onto the cleaned glass-ITO substrate at 3000 μ m s⁻¹ solution volume at 20 μ L with two time coating. The sample was annealed on hot plate at 120 °C for 20 min under atmospheric conditions. The solvent mixtures were prepared by dichlorobenzene (DCB) (Sigma-Aldrich) and 1,3,5-trichlorobenzene (TCB) (Tokyo chemical industry co. ltd.) at a concentration of 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 mg ml⁻¹ stirred at 45 °C for 3 h. The mixed solvents with different concentration of TCB were added with polymer blend at same volume. The solution of polymer-fullerene from a 1:4 (w/w) of PCDTBT and PC₇₁BM were dissolved with the prepared solvents of TCB and DCB at a concentration of 40 mg ml⁻¹. The solution was stirred at 45 °C for overnight until PCDTBT and PC₇₁BM were dissolved completely. The polymer blend was coated on top of the PEDOT:PSS layer by convective deposition at coating speed 1250 μ m s⁻¹ with volume at 10 μ L one time coating. The bulk-heterojunction films were kept under vacuum for 1 h. Each sample was transferred to the vacuum chamber of the thermal evaporator. The vacuum chamber was pumped down to a base pressure of 2.4 x 10⁻³ Pa. The Au electrodes with a thickness of 100 nm were deposited onto the polymer layer via thermal evaporation.

3. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows the preparation process of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM film by convective deposition technique. Coating process starts from injection of a microliter droplet of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM:DCB:TCB mixture between the deposition blade and the glass substrate. When the substrate was moved from meniscus of polymer blend solution with constant velocity at a deposition angle (α) of 45°, a thin film of polymer blend was coated horizontal deposition on the glass substrate. TCB in the thin film of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM:TCB was removed by evaporation in a vacuum oven at room temperature.

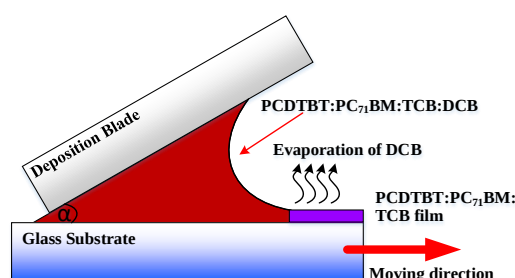


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of coating process of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM:DCB:TCB solution on the glass substrate by convective deposition.

The PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films with different concentrations of TCB were observed by an optical microscope with polarized light and high dynamic range (HDR) mode as displayed in Figure 2. In Figure 2a, phase-separated fullerene-rich clusters as shown in the dark areas and polymer-rich part in the bright areas were observed. [13,14] When the amount of TCB in polymer blend film was increased

to 10 and 20 mg ml⁻¹, the domains of PCDTBT-rich and PC₇₁BM-rich (bright and dark areas respectively) were observed as an uniform phase separation and smaller size than those of the film without TCB as indicated in Figure 2b and 2c, respectively. When TCB concentration increased more than 20 mg ml⁻¹, the domain size of the PCDTBT-rich part and the PC₇₁BM-rich one gradually increased as displayed in Figure 2d to Figure 2f. The phase separated states of donor and acceptor were improved in terms of homogeneously and uniformity by the addition of TCB as a crystallizable solvent. In addition, when TCB concentration was increased more than 20 mg ml⁻¹, the domain size of donor and acceptor became larger because of aggregation of TCB at higher nucleation density.

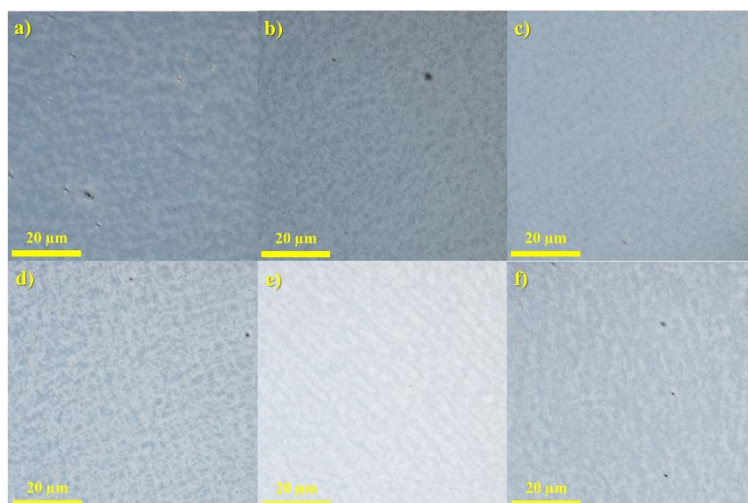


Figure 2. Optical microscopic images of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films prepared by convective deposition with different concentrations of TCB of (a) 0, (b) 10, (c) 20, (d) 30, (e) 40, and (f) 50 mg ml⁻¹, respectively. Films were observed under the conditions of polarized light with high dynamic range (HDR) function. Scale bar: 20 μm.

AFM topographic images (5 μm x 5 μm) of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films with different concentration of TCB are indicated in Figure 3. Figure 3a shows the topographic image of the film without TCB with large grain size of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM. The root mean square (RMS) roughness of polymer film without TCB was 0.51 nm. When the TCB was added from 10 to 50 mg ml⁻¹, the RMS roughness were slightly increased between 0.57 and 0.65 nm. As a result of the process for elimination of TCB in the polymer blend films under the vacuum conditions, vacancy and crevice on the surface of the films might be formed.

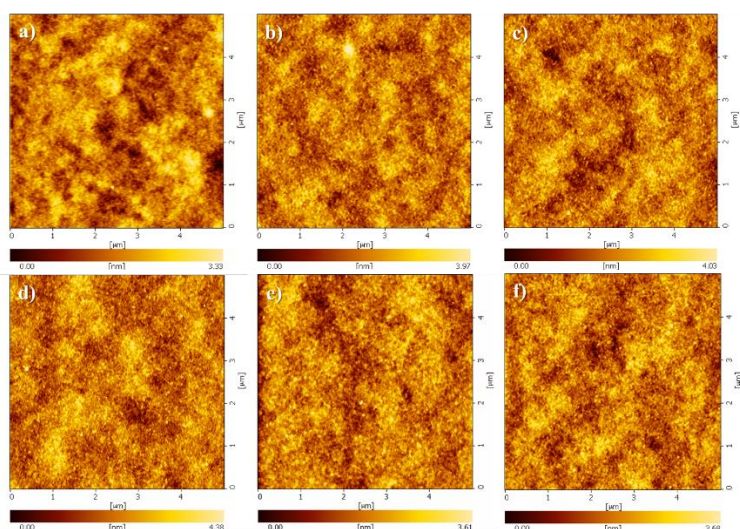


Figure 3. AFM images as tapping-mode of topography and phase mode of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films prepared by convective deposition with different concentrations of TCB of (a) 0, (b) 10, (c) 20, (d) 30, (e) 40, and (f) 50 mg ml⁻¹, respectively.

Figure 4 displays the bright-field TEM images and electron diffraction (ED) patterns (insets) of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films with different concentration of TCB. Small amount of fibrillar PCDTBT in the polymer blend films with TCB[15] was observed in Figure 4b-4f. As a result, the films with TCB had highly condensed PCDTBT network and better connected pathways for charge transport. The ED pattern of the film without TCB in Figure 4a presents a blur electron diffraction ring of its amorphous nature of PCDTBT. [16] Contrarily, crystallization of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM film with TCB was confirmed by the outer electron diffraction ring, which was indicated by white arrows right hand side of diffraction rings in Figure 4c-4f. [16]

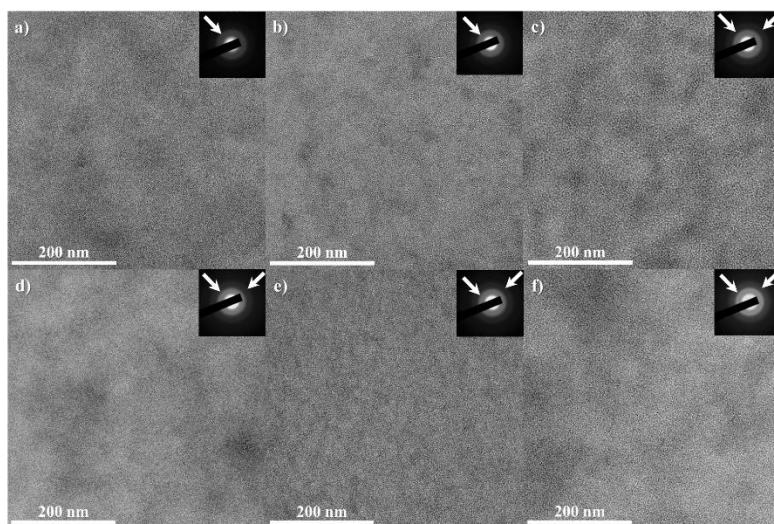


Figure 4. Bright-field TEM images of PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films prepared by convective deposition with different concentrations of TCB of (a) 0, (b) 10, (c) 20, (d) 30, (e) 40, and (f) 50 mg ml⁻¹. The insets are the electron diffraction patterns indicating the relative orientations to those of the bright field image.

To study the charge transport properties in the PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films, which were prepared with different TCB concentration, the hole-only devices in a configuration of glass-ITO/PEDOT:PSS/PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM/Au were prepared and characterized. The dark *J-V*

characteristics of the hole-only devices are displayed in Figure 5. The hole mobilities were estimated from the dark current voltage curves in Figure 5 by applying the space-charge limited current (SCLC) theory as shown in Equation (1). [17, 18]

$$J = \frac{9}{8} \epsilon_0 \epsilon_r \mu_h \frac{V^2}{L^3} \quad (1)$$

Where ϵ_0 is the permittivity of free space, ϵ_r is the dielectric constant of the polymer, μ_h is the hole mobility, V is the applied voltage, and L is the thickness of the polymer film. The field independent mobility in the PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM film without TCB was calculated as a reference with the positive charge mobility of $5.8 \times 10^{-5} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$. With the concentration of TCB at 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 mg ml^{-1} , the positive charge mobilities of the devices are 8.9×10^{-5} , 1.5×10^{-4} , 1.4×10^{-4} , 1.2×10^{-4} and $8.1 \times 10^{-5} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$, respectively. The maximum positive charge mobility of $1.5 \times 10^{-4} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ was observed when TCB concentration was 20 mg ml^{-1} . The increment of the hole mobility presumably dues to the improved crystallinity of PCDTBT, which was confirmed by the ED patterns as shown in Figure 5 and uniform phase separated states of PCDTBT and PC₇₁BM in Figures 3 and 4 resulted in the formation of continuous charge pathways. [6]

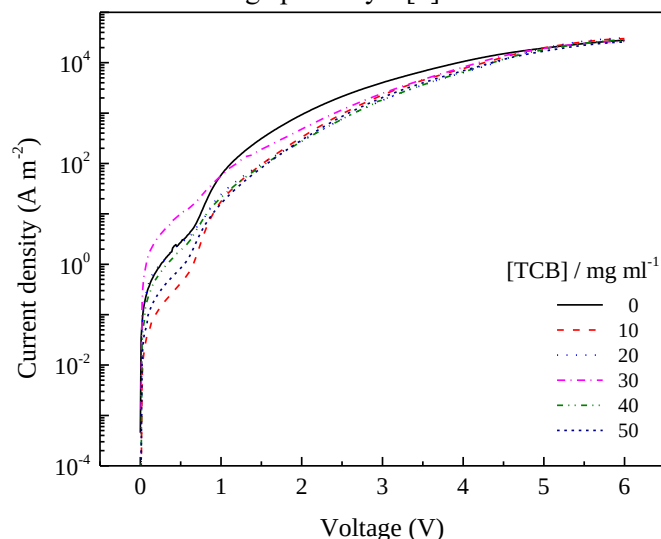


Figure 5. Dark current density (J)-voltage (V) curves of hole-only devices, consisted of glass-ITO/PEDOT:PSS/PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM/Au, at room temperature. The PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM layers were prepared with different concentrations of TCB from 0 to 50 mg ml^{-1} .

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have demonstrated the effect of TCB crystallizable solvent on the improvement of the morphology and charge transport in PCDTBT:PC₇₁BM films. The films with TCB can improve of phase separated states and the domain sizes of PCDTBT and PC₇₁BM bulk heterojunction. The improvement of the hole mobilities by using TCB is presumably derived from the improvement of phase separation of PCDTBT and PC₇₁BM, which made a formation of good continuous pathway for carrier transport. The highest hole mobility of $1.5 \times 10^{-4} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ in this series of the TCB addition was obtained when TCB was 20 mg ml^{-1} . That is 2.54 times improvement of hole mobility as compared to the device without TCB ($5.8 \times 10^{-5} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ V}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$). Therefore, addition of TCB as crystallizable solvent can be effective method for improvement of phase separation of polymer-fullerene and formation of the condensed network of polymers in the BHJ films for organic electronic applications.

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