

ARTICLE

Synthesis of Au₁₃-based building block clusters for programmed dimer formation and Au₁₃ cluster dimer photoexcitation properties

Received 00th January 20xx,
Accepted 00th January 20xx

DOI: 10.1039/x0xx00000x

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Recently, there has been increasing attention on the fabrication of ligand-protected metal clusters composed of a finite number of noble metal atoms and on their precise assembly to elicit novel properties that are not observed in individual metal clusters. In the present study, we investigated (1) the behavior of ligand exchange reactions and (2) the selective and efficient formation of dimers composed of Au₁₃ clusters. Specifically, we focused on a gold cluster consisting of 13 atoms coordinated to diphosphine ligands (dppe) and either chloride (Cl) or acetylide, *i.e.*, [Au₁₃(dppe)₅X₂]³⁺ (X = Cl or acetylide). The findings showed that Au₁₃ clusters containing counter anion Cl[−] undergo a transformation under specific conditions, where Cl[−] acts as a ligand (rather than an anion) directly coordinated to the Au₁₃ surface. The introduction of two types of ligands—chelating ligands that coordinate to the Au₁₃ cluster surface and end-capping ligands that suppress polymerization—enabled the synthesis of a building block molecule which are programmed to selectively and spontaneously form Au₁₃-based dimers upon the addition of metal ions. The designed building block clusters indeed selectively and efficiently formed stable dimers composed of two Au₁₃ clusters in the presence of iron ions. Furthermore, in the Au₁₃-based dimer, the phosphorescent Au₁₃ moiety is directly connected to a coordination site that exhibits quenching effects, enabling rapid intramolecular photoinduced charge transfer even with a small driving force.

Introduction

Ligand-protected metal clusters, which consist of a finite number of noble metal atoms (such as gold and silver), exhibit size- or composition-dependent luminescence properties, magnetic behavior, and catalytic activity. Owing to these characteristics, they are expected to be applied in luminescent materials, magnetic memory devices, and oxidation catalysts.^{1–6} The shape of the electronic orbitals in metal clusters resembles that of atomic orbitals (s, p, d, *etc.*). Therefore, metal clusters can be regarded as "superatoms".^{7–17}

In recent years, three main approaches (**Scheme S1**) have been explored for developing materials using superatoms as fundamental building units *i.e.*: (1) fusing superatomic cores to form superatomic molecules;^{18–35} (2) arranging and crystallizing metal clusters into superlattice structures, driven by interactions between surface ligands of adjacent clusters;^{36–42} and (3) linking metal clusters through ligand exchange reactions with bridging ligands to form covalently bonded assemblies.^{43–50} The materials obtained through

these approaches exhibit absorption and emission properties,¹⁹ as well as catalytic activity,⁵¹ that differ from those of individual metal clusters. Consequently, the fabrication of materials using metal clusters as building units has garnered attention as an effective strategy for unlocking novel properties based on metal clusters. However, core fusion between metal clusters in approach (1) is complex, thereby hindering its universal application to different systems. In approach (2), where crystal growth is driven by isotropic interactions between metal cluster surfaces, only a limited range of packing structures can be achieved.^{52,53} In approach (3), where metal clusters are linked *via* ligand exchange reactions, reaction control is challenging, often leading to the formation of randomly connected assemblies or amorphous polymers with multiple linkages.⁵⁴ Therefore, designing and precisely synthesizing metal cluster assemblies with the desired structures using approaches (1)–(3) is a significant challenge.

In this context, to explore alternative methods of linking, research has recently focused on introducing acetylide ligands and their analogs into gold (Au) clusters; the Au clusters are coordinated by diverse types of ligands, such as phosphines and halogens, through ligand exchange reactions.^{55–67} For example, Tsukuda *et al.* synthesized a building block superatom by exchanging the two terminal chlorine ligands of [Au₁₃(dppe)₅Cl₂]³⁺ (hereafter referred to as **1**; dppe = 1,2-bis(diphenylphosphino)ethane) (**Table 1, Fig. S1A**) with terpyridine derivative acetylide ligands (chelating ligands), thereby introducing terpyridine (EPTpy = 4'-(4-ethynylphenyl)-2,2':6',2''-terpyridine) at both ends of the Au₁₃ cluster. This exchange

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† Supplementary Information available.

subsequently enabled the formation of a one-dimensional polymer upon the addition of transition metal ions into the solution containing building block superatom, wherein the metal ions coordinated with terpyridine, which led to the formation of Au_{13} cluster-linked polymer chains (**Scheme 1A**).⁶⁸ Additionally, $(\text{IrAu}_{12})_2\text{L}$ dimers and $(\text{IrAu}_{12})_3\text{L}_2$ trimers were synthesized using the analogous compound $[\text{IrAu}_{12}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{PA})_2]^+$ (PA = phenylacetylide; **Fig. S2A**) to control the cleavage of the Au–C bond (dissociation of PA) within the cluster and by introducing diisocyanide linker L, which has isocyanide groups at both ends (**Scheme 1B**).⁵⁶ The approach used in **Scheme 1A** affords the facile synthesis of one-dimensional assemblies by simply introducing transition metal ions. However, controlling the number of linkages is difficult. By contrast, the approach in **Scheme 1B** allows for control of the number of linkages in the product by combining clusters where PA is dissociated from the clusters, with one PA remaining as an end cap to suppress polymerization. However, the number of strong acid reagents suitable for PA dissociation is limited, which restricts the types of clusters that can be used for linking.

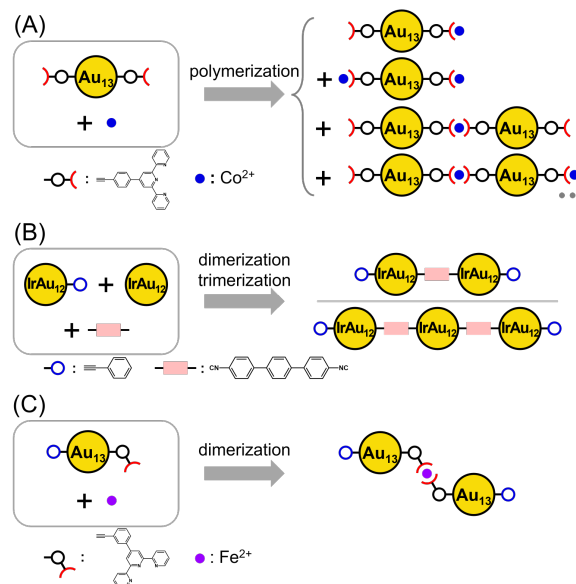
In the present study, we developed an alternative approach that focuses on driving the formation of oligomers through simple coordination between chelating ligands and transition metal ions. By introducing chelating ligands to the Au cluster surface and end-capping ligands to suppress polymerization, we developed building block molecules programmed to self-assemble into dimers upon the addition of metal ions (**Scheme 1C**). Indeed, the designed building block clusters efficiently formed stable dimers consisting of two Au clusters in the presence of iron ions. Furthermore, the dimers have been shown to exhibit photo-induced charge transfer property.

Experimental

Synthesis of $1\cdot(\text{BF}_4^-)_3$

First, the precursor complex $\text{Au}_2\text{Cl}_2(\text{dppe})$ was synthesized using a method reported by Corma *et al.*⁶⁹ Specifically, 350 μmol of tetrachloroauric acid was dissolved in 2.5 mL of methanol. To this solution, 109 μL (1.05 mmol) of thiodiglycol, dissolved in 500 μL of methanol, was added, and the reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature for 1 h. After the solution changed from yellow to colorless and transparent, 69.7 mg (175 μmol) of dppe, dissolved in 4 mL of a chloroform:toluene (1:1 v/v) mixed solvent, was added, and the mixture was stirred at room temperature for 2 h. The resulting white precipitate was washed with methanol to yield $\text{Au}_2\text{Cl}_2(\text{dppe})$.

Next, $1\cdot(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ (**Fig. S1A**) was synthesized using a method from the literature¹³ but without the addition of sodium sulfide. Specifically, 126 mg (100 μmol) of $\text{Au}_2\text{Cl}_2(\text{dppe})$ was added to 20 mL of dichloromethane. To this solution, a sodium borohydride aqueous solution (3.8 mg (100 μmol) per 1 mL) at 0 °C was added. The solution was then stirred at room temperature for 24 h. After evaporating the solvent, the resulting solid was washed with water, a hexane/dichloromethane mixture, and acetone to yield $1\cdot(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ (**Fig. S3 (curve a)**). The obtained $1\cdot(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ was dissolved in ethanol, and an excess of sodium tetrafluoroborate was added to exchange the counter anion from Cl^- to BF_4^- , yielding $1\cdot(\text{BF}_4^-)_3$ as a powder (**Fig. S3 (curve b)**).^{12,13}



Scheme 1 Synthesis strategies of Au_{13} -based cluster linkage.

(A) Polymer formation by coordination bonds between transition metal ions and chelating ligands.⁶⁸ (B) Au atom exposure by selective desorption of halogen and dimer and trimer formation by reaction with isocyanide linker.⁵⁶ (C) Selective dimer formation by complexation with building block molecules containing end-cap ligands and chelating ligands programmed to form dimers (this work).

Formation of dimers *via* complex formation

The acetylene derivative 4'-(3-ethynylphenyl)-2,2':6',2''-terpyridine ($\text{H-C}_2\text{PhTpy}$) (**Fig. S2B**), which contains a terpyridine unit that can coordinate with transition metal ions, was synthesized in the following three steps.^{70–72} The details of the organic synthesis are provided in the Supporting Information. First, the terpyridine framework ($-\text{PhTpy}$) was formed *via* Kröhnke pyridine synthesis using 3-bromobenzaldehyde, 2-acetylpyridine, and ammonia (**Fig. S4A**). Next, the Sonogashira coupling reaction was used to introduce a trimethylsilyl ethynyl group at the 3-position of the phenylene ring (**Fig. S4B**). Finally, the trimethylsilyl protecting group was removed using fluoride ions, yielding the white target compound $\text{H-C}_2\text{PhTpy}$ (**Fig. S4C**), with a final yield of 13%.

To prevent the formation of polymers larger than dimers, owing to coordination, we synthesized a Au_{13} cluster (building block cluster; BB cluster) containing $\text{H-C}_2\text{PhTpy}$ and the end-cap ligand phenylacetylene (H-PA). Specifically, 6.8 mg (1.39 μmol) of $1\cdot(\text{BF}_4^-)_3$ was dissolved in 33.4 mL of acetonitrile. To this solution, 19.4 μL (139 μmol) of triethylamine, 13.8 μL (126 μmol) of H-PA , and 4.6 mg (13.8 μmol) of $\text{H-C}_2\text{PhTpy}$ were added, and the solution was stirred (concentration ratio 1: H-PA : $\text{H-C}_2\text{PhTpy}$ = 1:90:10 or 1:74:26). Using this method, the BB cluster $[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{PA})_{2-x}(\text{C}_2\text{PhTpy})_x]^{3+}$ (where $x = 0–2$; hereafter referred to as **2**₀ ($x = 0$; **Fig. S1B**), **2**₁ ($x = 1$; **Fig. S1C**), and **2**₂ ($x = 2$), **Table 1**) was obtained, in which two types of acetylide ligands were introduced to the surface of the Au_{13} cluster.

Table 1. Chemical formulae and identification numbers of 1–3

Number	Chemical formula
1	$[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5\text{Cl}_2]^{3+}$
2 ₀	$[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{PA})_2]^{3+}$
2 ₁	$[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{PA})(\text{C}_2\text{PhTpy})]^{3+}$
2 ₂	$[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{C}_2\text{PhTpy})_2]^{3+}$
3	$[\text{Fe}(\text{TpyPhC}_2\text{H})_2]^{2+}$

The obtained BB cluster was dissolved in acetonitrile, and a solution of iron(II) tetrafluoroborate ($\text{Fe}(\text{BF}_4)_2$) in acetonitrile (12.3 μM) was added. Complex formation was monitored using ultraviolet–visible (UV–vis) absorption spectroscopy. The chemical composition of the products after complexation was evaluated by mass spectrometry. For products obtained by adding $\text{Fe}(\text{BF}_4)_2$ in excess of the equivalence point, mass spectrometry was conducted after removing excess Fe^{2+} .

Evaluation of luminescence lifetime and quenching experiments

The luminescence decay curves of the dimers obtained from complexation were obtained using a pico-TAS system from UNISOKU (Hirakata city, Osaka, Japan). Excitation light with a wavelength of 520 nm was used. Prior to the measurements, the solutions were deoxygenated by argon bubbling. The primary objective of the measurement was to observe the photoinduced charge transfer behavior of the BB cluster. The Fe^{2+} terpyridine complex ($[\text{Fe}(\text{TpyPhC}_2\text{H})_2](\text{BF}_4)_2$, hereafter referred to as **3**· $(\text{BF}_4^-)_2$ (Table 1, Fig. S5), was used as the quenching agent to quench the luminescence of the Au_{13} component.

Formation of dimers via the introduction of diyne

An attempt was also made to synthesize a linkage of Au_{13} clusters by reacting compound **1** with a diyne having ethynyl groups at both ends (Scheme S2B). Specifically, 49 mg (10 μmol) of **1**· $(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ was dissolved in 33 mL of acetonitrile. To this solution, 1.3 mg (10 μmol) of 1,4-diethynylbenzene (deb- H_2 ; Fig. S2C) and 14 μL (100 μmol) of triethylamine were added, followed by stirring the solution ($[\text{1}]:[\text{deb-}\text{H}_2] = 1:1$). The solution was then dried, and excess ligands, bases, and impurities were washed with water, hexane, and toluene. The chemical composition of the obtained product was evaluated by mass spectrometry.

Result and discussion

Influence of counter ions in ligand exchange reactions

We first discuss the effect of the counteranion type on the ligand exchange reaction.

Fig. 1 shows the electrospray ionization (ESI) mass spectra of **2**₀· $(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ (Fig. S1B, Fig. S3 (curve c)) and the product obtained by mixing **2**₀· $(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ with $\text{Fe}(\text{BF}_4)_2$. The mass spectrum of the product featured peaks corresponding to $[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{PA})_{2-x}\text{Cl}_x](\text{BF}_4)_3$ ($x = 0-2$). This finding indicates that during the reaction, ligand exchange occurred between the counteranion Cl^- of the Au_{13} cluster and PA (Equation 1).

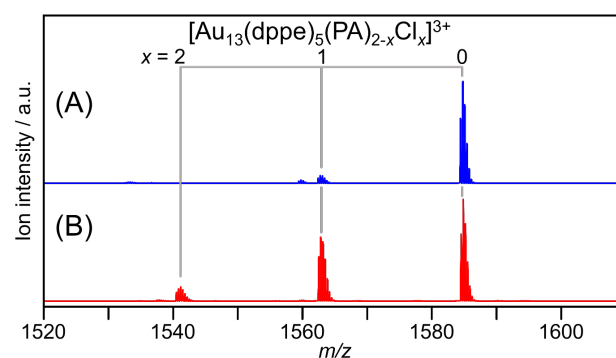
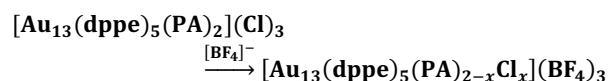


Fig. 1 Positive-ion ESI mass spectra of (A) **2**₀· $(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ and (B) product obtained by mixing **2**₀· $(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ and $[\text{BF}_4]^-$ in acetonitrile solution.



Equation 1

Thus, (1) the Cl^- changes its role from a counteranion to a ligand depending on the reaction conditions and (2) under conditions where Cl^- ions are present, ligand exchange occurs from the acetylide ligand to Cl^- .

To achieve dimer formation based on complexation, it is essential to introduce $\text{Fe}(\text{BF}_4)_2$ only into the system, while maintaining the structure of the BB cluster. To suppress the occurrence of the aforementioned ligand exchange during mixing, $[\text{BF}_4]^-$ was consistently used as a counteranion of the precursor Au_{13} cluster (e.g., **1**· $(\text{BF}_4)_3$ and **2**₀₋₁· $(\text{BF}_4)_3$). In the experiment, the addition of NaBF_4 to an ethanol solution of **1**· $(\text{Cl}^-)_3$ induced counteranion exchange and changes in the solubility of the cluster, resulting in the precipitation of **1**· $(\text{BF}_4)_3$ (Fig. S3 (curve b)).

Formation of dimers via complex formation

Fig. 2A (curve a) shows the ESI mass spectrum of the product obtained by adding H-PA and H- C_2PhTpy to an acetonitrile solution of **1**· $(\text{BF}_4)_3$ in the presence of a base (triethylamine). The mass spectrum mainly exhibited peaks attributed to **2**₀ and **2**₁. This result confirms that two Cl^- ligands on the Au_{13} cluster surface were substituted by PA or C_2PhTpy . When C_2PhTpy were introduced more excessively, **2**₂ forms and the subsequent addition of Fe^{2+} could result in the formation of dimers or larger assemblies (Scheme S2A). Therefore, during the synthesis of the BB cluster, the molar ratio of acetylide ligands to H-PA:H- C_2PhTpy was set to 0.9:0.1 to minimize the formation of **2**₂, while achieving the desired formation of **2**₁ (Fig S6, Table S1).

The composition distribution of the ligands in the obtained products differed from the binomial distribution predicted from the molar ratio of ligands added during synthesis (Fig. S6, Table S2). This result indicates that there is a difference in the ligand exchange ability between the two types of acetylide ligands used in this study. The observed deviation suggests that C_2PhTpy is more likely to replace the Cl^- ligand of Au_{13} cluster than PA. C_2PhTpy has a bulkier geometric structure than PA (Fig. S2A,B). Regardless, C_2PhTpy is more easily introduced into the Au_{13} cluster than PA, which is

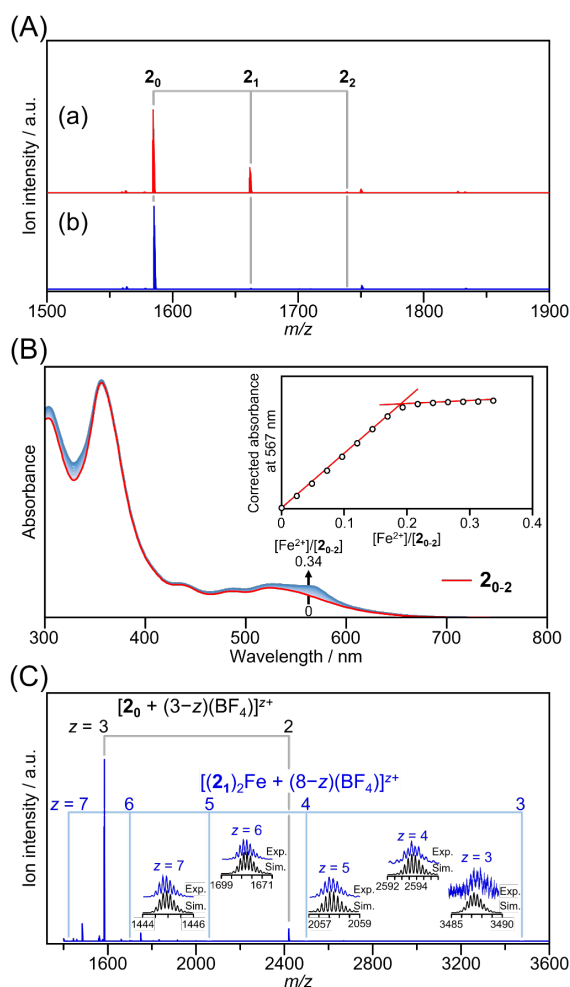


Fig. 2 (A) ESI mass spectra of BB cluster containing **20-2** prepared at a H-PA:H-C₂PhTpy molar ratio of 0.9:0.1 (a) and product obtained from the reaction between BB cluster containing **20-2** and Fe(BF₄)₂ (b). (B) UV-vis absorption spectra of BB cluster containing **20-2** as a function of concentration of Fe(BF₄)₂. Inset shows titration curve monitored at characteristic absorption peak of 567 nm, which can be attributed to MLCT transition of [Fe(Tpy)₂]²⁺ moiety. (C) Wide-range ESI mass spectrum of product obtained from the reaction between BB cluster containing **20-2** and Fe(BF₄)₂.

attributed to the difference in the ease of proton dissociation of the acetylene groups (*pK_a*) of both ligands. The ¹H NMR measurements revealed that the NMR shifts of the acetylene (H-C≡C) protons in H-C₂PhTpy and H-PA were 3.15 ppm (Fig. S4C) and 3.07 ppm (TCI Product Number: 3RJH1), indicating that the electron density of the hydrogen in H-C₂PhTpy is lower than in H-PA. This suggests that H-C₂PhTpy more readily deprotonates than H-PA. This difference makes H-C₂PhTpy more nucleophilic than H-PA and more likely to attack the Au₁₃ core; therefore, H-C₂PhTpy is more readily incorporated onto the Au₁₃ cluster than H-PA.

Fig. 2B shows the optical absorption spectrum of the BB cluster (red line). The absorption profile is comparable to those previously

reported for **20**·(PF₆)₃ and [Au₁₃(dppe)₅(EPTpy)₂](PF₆)₃.^{55,68} This similarity indicates that the structure of the terminal functional groups of the acetylide ligands has little effect on the optical absorption properties of the cluster.

The addition of Fe(BF₄)₂ acetonitrile solution to the BB cluster containing **20-2** resulted in an increase in absorbance at ~567 nm (Fig. 2B). The peak displayed a comparable shape and absorption wavelength to the metal-to-ligand charge transfer (MLCT) absorption peak of [Fe(Tpy)₂]²⁺, which is formed by Fe²⁺ and two Tpy molecules. This result suggests that the addition of Fe²⁺ led to the formation of a complex between Fe²⁺ and the Tpy sites of **21**.

The inset in Fig. 2B illustrates the correlation between the concentration ratio [Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**] and the absorbance intensity ~567 nm. As the [Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**] ratio increased, the absorbance increased linearly until at [Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**] = 0.18, where the absorbance plateaued with higher concentration ratios. This result suggests that [Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**] = 0.18 represents the equivalence point of complex formation ([Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**]_{eq}). Typically, for the formation of [Fe(Tpy)₂] from Fe²⁺ and two Tpy molecules, the equivalence point is at [Fe²⁺]/[Tpy]_{eq} = 0.5.⁷³ However, because the products obtained in this study mainly consist of **20** and **21**, the equivalence point is lower. By introducing the composition distribution obtained from the ESI mass spectrometry data into the stoichiometric equation (Equation S10), a value of [Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**]_{eq} = 0.13 is obtained. This value is in relatively good agreement with the value of [Fe²⁺]/[**20-2**]_{eq} = 0.18 determined from the absorbance measurements, suggesting that **21**, formed through ligand exchange, efficiently complexes with Fe²⁺.

Fig. 2A (curve b) shows the mass spectrum of the product obtained after adding an excess amount of Fe(BF₄)₂ beyond the equivalence point and removing excess Fe²⁺. The peak corresponding to **21** was absent and only the peak corresponding to unreacted **20** remained. When examining the mass spectrum over a broader range, peaks attributed to [(**21**)₂Fe + (8-*z*)(BF₄)]²⁺ (*z* = 3–7) were observed in the high mass-to-charge (*m/z*) ratio region (Fig. 2C). These peaks correspond to Au₁₃ dimers formed by the complexation of Fe²⁺ with two **21** units. For example, the charge state of +7 of the dimer molecule can be explained by a combination of two Au₁₃ units with a charge of +3, one Fe ion with a charge of +2, and one counteranion [BF₄][−]. Because the product used in this study (Fig. 2A, curve a) has a low propensity of forming larger aggregates—such as **22**, multimeric structures such as trimers (*n* = 3) or tetramers (*n* = 4), represented as (**21**)₂(**22**)_{*n-2*}Fe_{*n-1*} (*n* ≥ 3)—peaks corresponding to large aggregates were barely observed in the mass spectrum. These results indicate that BB clusters were successfully designed to selectively form dimers as the connected structure by simply adding Fe²⁺ (Fig. S7).

The Au₁₃ cluster carries a charge of +3, and during dimer formation, there should be electrostatic repulsion between the Au₁₃ units as well as between the Fe²⁺ ions. However, the stability constant (*β*) for the complexation between Fe²⁺ and Tpy, Fe²⁺ + 2Tpy ⇌ [Fe(Tpy)₂], is large (*β* = 10^{20.9} M^{−2}),⁷⁴ indicating that complex formation is thermodynamically favorable. This large stability constant likely contributes to the efficient formation of dimers through complexation despite electrostatic repulsion. This

thermodynamic driving force enables the successful formation of dimers despite competing repulsive interactions.

The formation of dimers *via* complexation was achieved but the ion intensity of the dimer in the mass spectrum was weak. These dimers have a significantly larger mass than the monomer, which reduces their detection efficiency in mass spectrometry. Additionally, because $[\text{BF}_4]^-$ attached to the dimer with various combinations, the peaks originating from the dimer were observed across a range of m/z ratios. Furthermore, the addition of $[\text{BF}_4]^-$ causes a widening of the isotope distribution, further decreasing the apparent intensity of the peaks. For example, in **Fig. 2C**, peaks corresponding to the addition of 1–5 $[\text{BF}_4]^-$ ions to the dimer were observed, resulting in charge states ranging from +3 to +7. These factors contribute to the apparent low yield of the dimer in the mass spectrum. However, from the data in **Fig. 2A (curve b)** and **Fig. 2B**, we estimate that all $\mathbf{2}_1$ units included in the mixture with 24.4% molar ratio were likely forming dimers at the equivalence point of $[\text{Fe}^{2+}]/[\mathbf{2}_{0-2}] = 0.18$.

Photoexcitation characteristics of dimers

To investigate the photophysical properties of the synthesized $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$ dimer, its luminescence decay curve was evaluated. **Fig. 3A** shows the emission decay curve of the sample containing $\mathbf{2}_0$ and $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$. The experimentally obtained decay curve could be fitted to a biexponential decay model with short and long lifetime components of 7.8 ns and 3.5 μs , respectively. To identify these two emission species, the luminescence lifetime of the BB cluster was evaluated. The emission decay of the BB cluster could be fitted to a nearly single exponential decay, with a lifetime of 3.5 μs (**Fig. 3B**). This value is consistent with the long-lived component observed in the sample containing $\mathbf{2}_0$ and $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$. Therefore, the luminescence lifetime of $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$ is 7.8 ns. From these results, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) the luminescence lifetime of the BB cluster remains roughly constant and is independent of the type of acetylide ligand;⁵⁵ (2) quenching of the Au_{13} -derived luminescence occurs upon complex formation between $\mathbf{2}_1$ and Fe^{2+} ; and (3) the luminescence of $\mathbf{2}_0$ is not quenched in the presence of the coexisting complex component, $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$ dimer.

Previous reports on Au_{13} clusters, such as $\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{EPTpy})_2$ and transition metal ions (Ni^{2+} , Co^{2+} , Cu^{2+}), have shown that the luminescence intensity of Au_{13} decreases upon complexation.⁶⁸ This phenomenon is believed to be due to the energy transfer from the excited state of Au_{13} to the transition metal ion. In our study of the complexation between $\mathbf{2}_1$ and Fe^{2+} , the MLCT transition of $[\text{Fe}(\text{Tpy})_2]^{2+}$ was observed in the long-wavelength region, but there was no significant overlap with the Au_{13} emission spectrum in that absorption wavelength region (**Fig. S8**). Therefore, the quenching observed upon Fe^{2+} complexation of $\mathbf{2}_1$ is likely due to photoinduced charge transfer, rather than Förster-type resonance energy transfer.⁷⁵ Our present study reveals that $[\text{Fe}(\text{Tpy})_2]^{2+}$ can act as a charge transfer quencher for Au_{13} luminescence. However, as mentioned earlier, $\mathbf{2}_0$ is not quenched by the coexisting complex component $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$ dimer.

To confirm this, a quenching experiment was conducted using $\mathbf{3} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_2$, which has a similar structure to that of the constituent unit

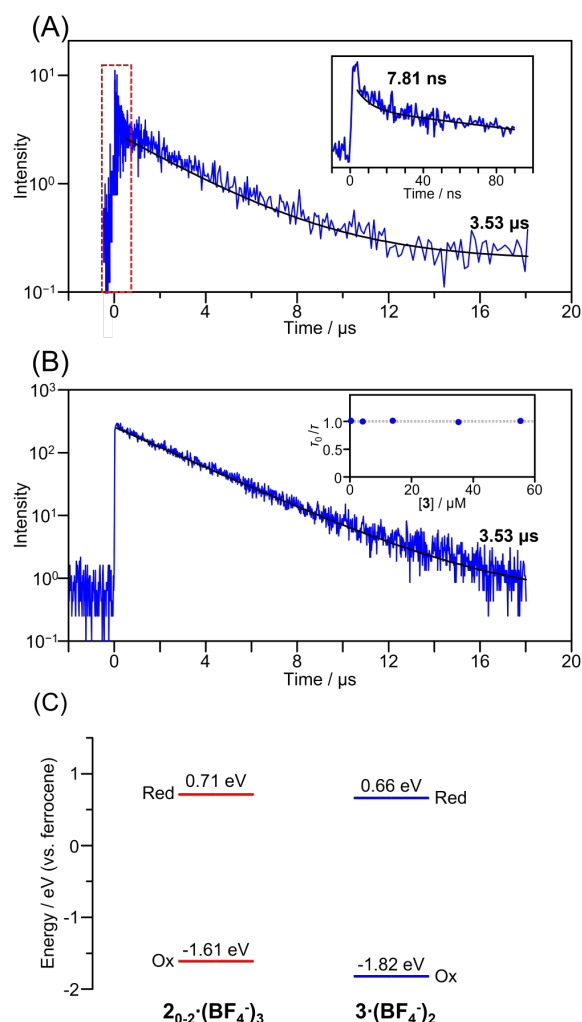


Fig. 3. (A) Photoluminescence decay curve of the sample containing $\mathbf{2}_0$ monomer and $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$ dimer. Inset shows an enlarged decay curve around 0–80 ns. (B) Photoluminescence decay curve of building block cluster $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$. Inset shows Stern–Volmer plot of $\mathbf{2}_{0-2} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_3$ and $\mathbf{3} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_2$. (C) Redox potentials of $\mathbf{2}_{0-2} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_3$ and $\mathbf{3} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_2$.

of the dimer, as the quencher against the $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$ -containing BB cluster (**Fig. 3B inset, Fig. S9**). Although attempts were made to observe quenching using steady-state luminescence, the absorption band of $\mathbf{3}$ overlapped with the entire absorption spectrum of $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$, resulting in a decrease in emission intensity owing to the excitation inner filter effect. Therefore, steady-state emission quenching experiments were deemed inappropriate. By contrast, time-correlated single-photon counting measurements of the emission decay confirmed that the emission lifetime of $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$ remained constant regardless of the concentration of $\mathbf{3}$, confirming that $\mathbf{3}$ does not act as a dynamic quencher for $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$ (**Fig. S10**). This finding indicates that $\mathbf{3}$ cannot function as a dynamic quencher for $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$, and considering the redox potentials of $\mathbf{2}_{0-2} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_3$ and $\mathbf{3} \cdot (\text{BF}_4)_2$, it is evident that the driving force for photoinduced electron transfer from $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$ to $\mathbf{3}$ is very small (**Fig. 3C, Fig. S11**). Therefore, the reduced emission lifetime of $\mathbf{2}_{0-2}$

upon formation of the $(\mathbf{2}_1)_2\text{Fe}$ dimer can be attributed to static quenching, where the Fe complex sites are chemically bound to the Au_{13} luminescent sites. This finding demonstrates that even combinations of clusters and transition metal ions that would not typically cause quenching can cause photoinduced charge transfer in molecules created by the linkage of these moieties, thereby enabling luminescence quenching.

Formation of dimers *via* the introduction of diyne

We also examined a different method to synthesize the linkage. An attempt was made to synthesize a linkage of Au_{13} clusters by reacting compound **1** with a diyne having ethynyl groups at both ends (**Scheme S2B**). **Fig. 4** shows the ESI mass spectrum of the product obtained by adding deb- H_2 (**Fig. S2C**) to an acetonitrile solution of $\mathbf{1} \cdot (\text{BF}_4^-)_3$ in the presence of a base (triethylamine). The peak with the strongest ion intensity was attributed to $[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{deb-H})_2]^{3+}$. This result indicates that the Cl ligands on the Au_{13} surface were substituted by the $[\text{deb-H}]^-$ anion generated through deprotonation of one of the hydrogens of deb- H_2 by the base. By contrast, no distinct peaks were observed in the expected m/z range (1550, 1565, 1580) associated with dimer formation. If both terminal hydrogens of $[\text{deb-H}_2]$ are deprotonated by the base, $[\text{deb}]^{2-}$ is expected to replace one Cl on each Au_{13} cluster, forming the desired dimer. However, if both Cl ligands on each Au_{13} cluster are replaced by $[\text{deb}]^{2-}$, this would lead to the formation of a polymer connecting multiple Au_{13} clusters (**Scheme S2B**). As the reaction proceeded to form structures linking many Au_{13} clusters, we conclude that selective formation of the desired dimer cannot be achieved using this method.

Accordingly, we speculated that selective dimer formation might be possible by replacing one of the Cl ligands of **1** with PA, forming $\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5\text{Cl}(\text{PA})$. However, the findings revealed that ligand exchange occurred between the halogen and acetylide ligands, as well as between the different acetylides on the Au_{13} cluster (**Fig. S12**). To examine the ligand exchange ability of the acetylide ligands, a model experiment was conducted by adding deb- H_2 and triethylamine to $\mathbf{2}_0 \cdot (\text{Cl}^-)_3$ (**Fig. S1B**, **Fig. S3 (curve c)**). As observed in **Fig. S12**, the mass spectrum of the product featured peaks

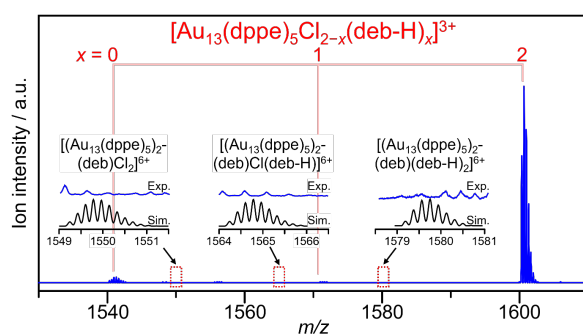


Fig. 4. Positive-ion ESI mass spectrum of the product obtained by mixing **1** and deb- H_2 in acetonitrile solution in the presence of a base.

corresponding to $[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5(\text{PA})_{2-x}(\text{deb-H})_x]^{3+}$. This indicates that ligand exchange reactions occur even between acetylide ligands, and that ligand exchange reactions involving halogens or acetylides on the Au_{13} cluster are reversible, similarly to thiol or thiolate exchange reactions in thiolate-protected Au clusters such as $\text{Au}_{25}(\text{SR})_{18}$.^{57, 76-80} Therefore, control over the reaction and selective formation of the desired linkage structure is difficult using bridging ligands such as deb- H_2 . By contrast, the approach using the aforementioned complexation and end-cap ligands is a more straightforward and precise synthetic approach.

Conclusions

In this study, we focused on Au_{13} clusters with phosphine ligands and chlorine or acetylide as the coordinating ligands, $[\text{Au}_{13}(\text{dppe})_5\text{X}_2]^{3+}$ ($\text{X} = \text{Cl}$ or acetylide) to investigate: (1) the behavior of ligand exchange reactions and (2) the development of selective and efficient methods for the formation of dimers using Au_{13} clusters. The following key findings were obtained. (1) Under certain conditions, Au_{13} clusters with Cl^- as a counteranion can undergo a transformation where Cl^- no longer acts as the counteranion but instead directly binds to the Au_{13} surface as a coordinating ligand. (2) The introduction of two types of ligands—chelating ligands that can complex and end-cap ligands that can suppress polymerization—resulted in the development of building block clusters that were programmed to form dimers consisting of two Au_{13} clusters. By applying Fe^{2+} ions to these designed building block clusters, the formation of Au_{13} dimers was actually achieved. Furthermore, these dimers, having a charge donor and acceptor chemically bound together, displayed a higher rate constant for light-induced charge transfer than typical endothermic complexes. Future studies are expected to further investigate the new properties caused by dimerization.

Author contributions

Y. Niihori. and Y. Negishi conceived the idea for this study and supervised the project. T. K. and Y. Niihori conducted the synthesis and characterization. T. K. and Y. Niihori wrote the manuscript. All authors discussed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts to declare.

Data availability

Relevant data are available from the corresponding authors (Y. Niihori and Y. Negishi) upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge Mr. Ryusei Kaneko and Prof. Shinichi Saito (Tokyo University of Science) for supporting the synthesis of

terpyridine derivatives. We thank Dr. Tatsuo Nakagawa and Toshiaki Suzuki in UNISOKU Co., Ltd. for the conducting the measurement of the photoluminescence decay curves. Computation was performed at the Research Center for Computational Science, Okazaki, Japan (project no. 24-IMS-C282). This research was financially supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) KAKENHI (grant nos. 22K04858, 22K19012, 23KK0098, and 23H00289), the Yazaki Memorial Foundation for Science and Technology, and The Sumitomo Foundation.

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