

## Facile synthesis of benzotrithiophene core-based hole-transporting molecules with carbazole-wings for perovskite solar cells by Pd-catalyzed direct C-H/C-Br coupling reactions

Wei-Kai Chang,<sup>a</sup> Kun-Mu Lee,<sup>\*b</sup> Yin-Chi Wang,<sup>a</sup> Kun-Hua Chiang,<sup>a</sup> Chuan-Pin Lee,<sup>c</sup> and Ching-Yuan Liu<sup>\*a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Chemical and Materials Engineering, National Central University, Zhongli District, Taoyuan City, Taiwan (R.O.C)

<sup>b</sup> Department of Chemical and Materials Engineering, Chang Gung University, Guishan District, Taoyuan City, Taiwan (R.O.C)

<sup>c</sup> Radioactive Waste Disposal Technology R&D Center, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu City, Taiwan (R.O.C)

Email: [cylu0312@ncu.edu.tw](mailto:cylu0312@ncu.edu.tw)

In Honor of Prof. Tien-Yau Luh

Received mm-dd-yyyy

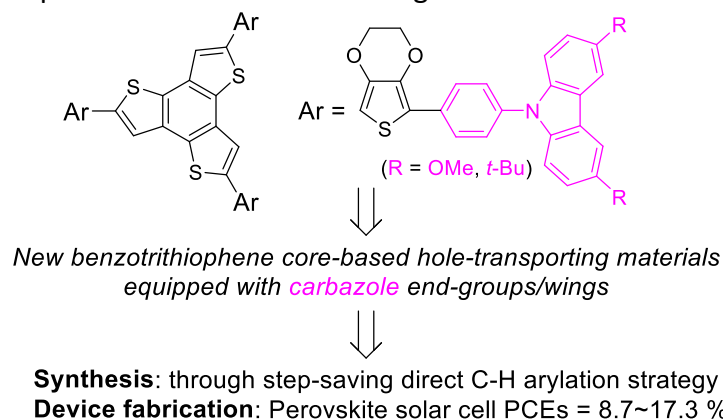
Accepted Manuscript mm-dd-yyyy

Published on line mm-dd-yyyy

Dates to be inserted by editorial office

### Abstract

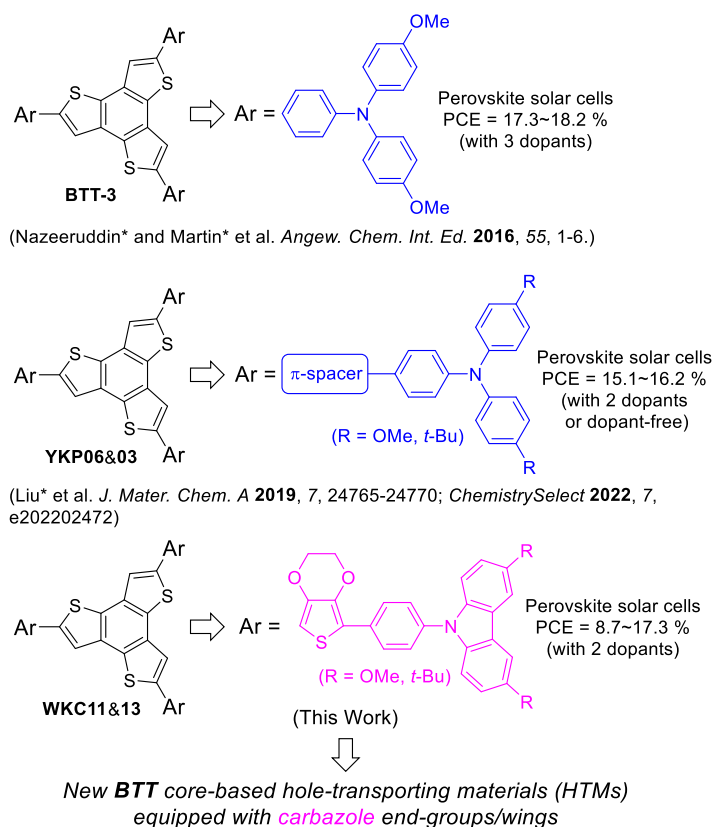
We report herein an efficient synthetic route to two benzotrithiophene core-based hole-transporting materials bearing carbazole end-groups/wings through threefold direct C-H/C-Br cross coupling reactions under optimized Pd-catalysis. Perovskite solar cells employing individual molecule as hole-transport layer exhibited promising power conversion efficiencies of up to 17.30 %. This work provides a step-saving synthetic strategy to access star-shaped new oligoaryls and also expands the substrate scope of end-groups from triphenylamine derivatives to present carbazole-based wings.



**Keywords:** Benzotrithiophene, Carbazole, Direct C-H arylation, Hole-transporting materials, perovskite solar cells

## Introduction

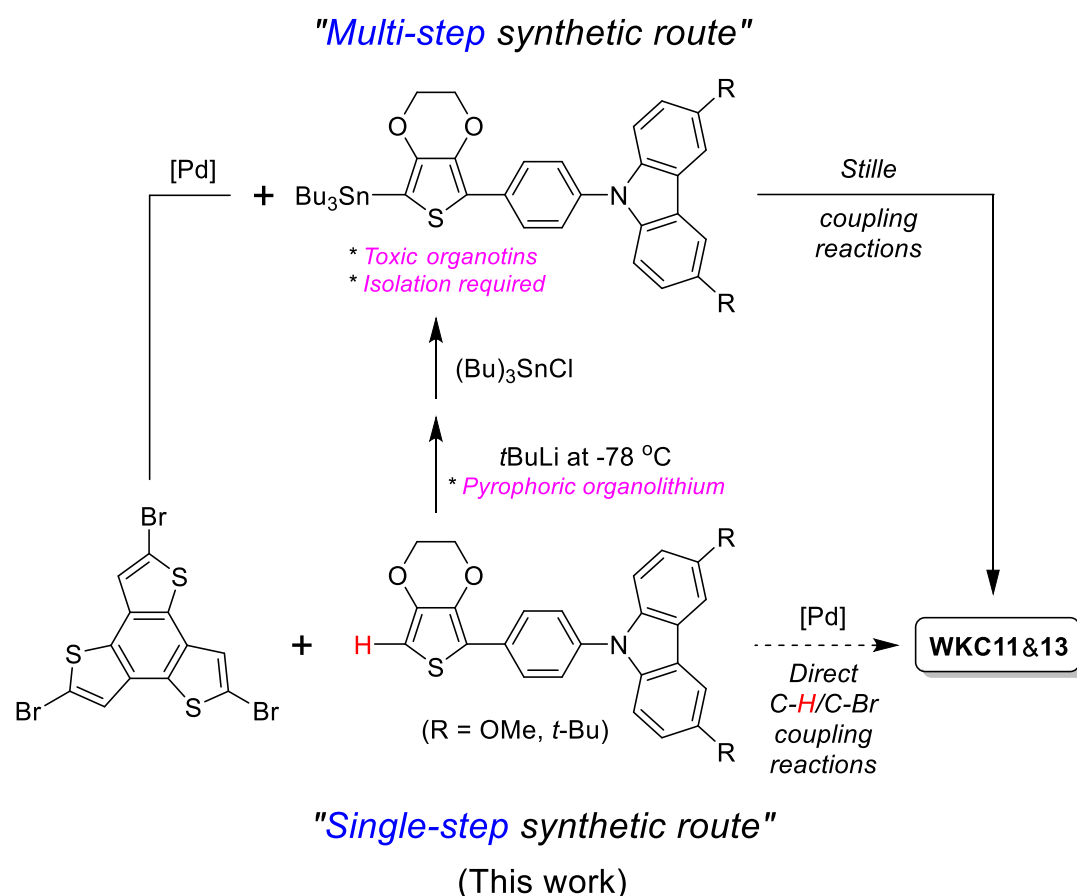
Application of the direct C-H activation/arylation reactions in the step-saving synthesis of small molecular  $\pi$ -functional organic materials has been emerging as a promising cross-disciplinary research topic for the past two decades.<sup>1-6</sup> For examples, Mori and coworkers reported a series of palladium-catalyzed C-H arylation strategies for the efficient preparation of various organic optoelectronic materials.<sup>7-11</sup> Yorimitsu described a straightforward access to functional small molecules such as aryl-substituted porphyrins and tetrathiafulvalenes via direct C-H arylation reactions.<sup>12-14</sup> Recently Bin and You demonstrated a regioselective C-H/C-H coupling protocol as synthesis shortcut to access (benzo)thiophene-containing biaryls for OLED materials.<sup>15</sup> Pasini group has been employing direct arylations as a sustainable approach to synthesize a variety of  $\pi$ -extended functional oligomers.<sup>16-20</sup> Recently, Kim synthesized A- $\pi$ -D- $\pi$ -D- $\pi$ -A-type hole-transporting materials (HTMs) for perovskite solar cells (PSCs) by sequential C-H arylation reactions.<sup>21</sup> In addition, since 2014, our group has been endeavouring to develop step-saving new synthetic routes to various  $\pi$ -conjugated small molecules via C-H activation/arylations for optoelectronic applications including dye-sensitized solar cells (DSSCs)<sup>22-26</sup> and new HTM-based perovskite solar cell devices.<sup>27-33</sup> One of our previous work showed an efficient synthesis of benzotrithiophene (**BTT**) core-based oligoaryls bearing triphenylamine end-groups, one of which (**YKP03**) was used as dopant-free and high-performance HTM for stable perovskite solar cells.<sup>31</sup> This result inspired us to design and synthesize **BTT**-based new HTMs. In order to further expand the scope of end-groups, we report herein two star-shaped new HTM molecules bearing carbazole wings (**WKC11** and **WKC13**, Figure 1). To the best of our knowledge, no report on the step-economical synthesis of benzotrithiophene core-based HTMs bearing carbazole wings has appeared to date. Fabrication of **WKC11** or **WKC13** in corresponding perovskite-based solar devices as hole-transport layer displayed promising power conversion efficiency of up to 17.3 %.



**Figure 1.** Benzotrithiophene (BTT) core-based star-shaped hole-transporting materials: facile synthesis and application in perovskite solar cells.

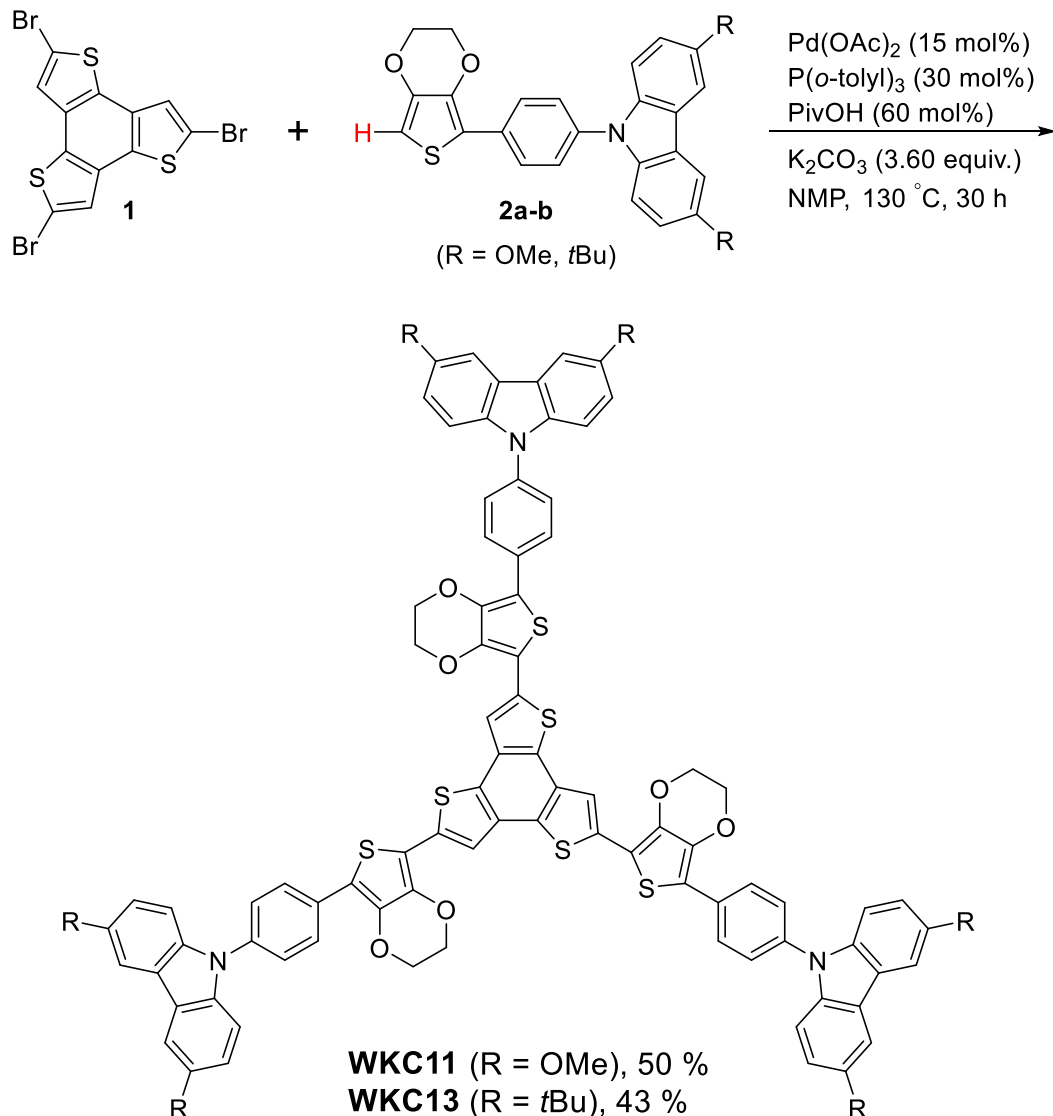
## Results and Discussion

Prior to materials synthesis, as shown in Scheme 1, we carried out an analysis in which two synthetic pathways were compared. Traditionally, **WKC11** or **WKC13** are supposed to be prepared using Stille coupling reactions as key transformation. Following the traditional approach is reliable, but it usually requires tedious prefunctionalizations like deprotonations and transmetalations. Additionally, Stille coupling strategy included the use and generation of toxic organotin reagents and their purification was somehow difficult. On the other hand, we proposed herein a step-saving route to efficiently access target **WKC11** or **WKC13** through straightforward C-H/C-Br cross-coupling reactions.



**Scheme 1.** Synthetic analysis of **WKC11** and **WKC13**: multi-step synthetic route via Stille reaction vs. single-step synthetic route via direct C-H arylations.

As shown in Scheme 2, reaction of tribromobenzotrithiophene **1** with the carbazole-containing end-groups **2a-b** by Pd-catalyzed threefold direct C-H/C-Br cross-coupling reactions afforded the desired HTMs in moderate isolated yields (**WKC11** = 50 %; **WKC13** = 43 %). The yields are not satisfactory probably owing to the relatively lower solubility of **WKC11** and **WKC13** in dichloromethane, tetrahydrofuran and acetone, which made the purification processes difficult.



**Scheme 2.** Synthesis of **WKC11** and **WKC13** using Pd-catalyzed threefold direct C-H/C-Br coupling reaction as key step.

UV/Vis absorption, electrochemistry, thermal stability, and hole mobilities of **WKC11** and **WKC13** were also investigated and the data were summarized in Table 1. **WKC11** and **WKC13** exhibited close optical band-gaps because of their similar conjugation lengths ( $\Delta E_g = 2.73\text{-}2.77$  eV, calculated by  $1240/\lambda_{\text{intersect}}$ ). By conducting the experiments of cyclic voltammetry, we found that both molecules displayed higher  $E_{\text{HOMO}}$  (-5.30, -5.34 eV) than that of perovskite layer (CH<sub>3</sub>NH<sub>3</sub>PbI<sub>3</sub>, -5.43 eV). This implied **WKC11** and **WKC13** were able to extract holes effectively from CH<sub>3</sub>NH<sub>3</sub>PbI<sub>3</sub>. Thermal properties were evaluated by performing thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) and the results revealed that **WKC11** bearing -OMe moieties possessed a superior decomposition temperature ( $T_d = 385$  °C). The hole mobilities of both HTMs were estimated by space-charge-limited currents (SCLCs) in the  $J$ - $V$  characteristics. **WKC11** exhibited a relatively higher hole mobility ( $6.13 \times 10^{-4}$  cm<sup>2</sup>V<sup>-1</sup>s<sup>-1</sup>), which may contribute to higher fill factor and power conversion efficiency.

**Table 1.** The optical, electrochemical, thermal properties and the hole mobility of **WKC11** and **WKC13**.<sup>a-d</sup>

HTM	$\Delta E_g^{\text{opt}}$ [eV]	$E_{\text{HOMO}}$ [eV]	$E_{\text{LUMO}}$ [eV]	$T_d$ [°C]	hole mobility [cm <sup>2</sup> V <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> ]
<b>WKC11</b>	2.73	-5.30	-2.57	385	6.13 x 10 <sup>-4</sup>
<b>WKC13</b>	2.77	-5.34	-2.57	316	9.59 x 10 <sup>-5</sup>

<sup>a</sup> UV-vis absorption spectra and photoluminescence were measured in dichloromethane solution. <sup>b</sup>  $\Delta E_g^{\text{opt}}$  was calculated from the intersection of absorption and PL spectra,  $\Delta E_g^{\text{opt}} = 1240/\lambda_{\text{intersect}}$ . <sup>c</sup>  $E_{\text{HOMO}} = -[E_{1/2}(\text{vs. Fc/Fc}^+) + 5.16]$  eV. <sup>d</sup>  $E_{\text{LUMO}} = E_{\text{HOMO}} + \Delta E_g^{\text{opt}}$ .

Fabrication and evaluation of perovskite solar cells (PSCs) using **WKC11** or **WKC13** as hole-transport layer were carried out and the obtained photovoltaic parameters were collected in Table 2. PSCs devices based on both HTMs demonstrated good open-circuit voltage:  $V_{\text{oc}} = 1.04$  V. However, PSCs with **WKC11** displayed higher short-circuit current:  $J_{\text{sc}} = 21.38$  mAcm<sup>-2</sup> and fill factor: FF = 77.57 %, thus leading to a superior power conversion efficiency (PCE) of 17.30 % that is close to the PCE of commercially available **spiro-OMeTAD**-based devices.

**Table 2.** Photovoltaic performances of the perovskite solar cells using **WKC11** and **WKC13** as HTMs.<sup>a-c</sup>

HTMs		$V_{\text{oc}}$ [V]	$J_{\text{sc}}$ [mAcm <sup>-2</sup> ]	FF [%]	PCE [%]
<b>WKC11(-OMe)</b>	best	1.04	21.38	77.57	17.30
	average	1.04 ± 0.01	20.95 ± 0.38	75.30 ± 1.89	16.39 ± 0.74
<b>WKC13(-tBu)</b>	best	1.04	14.75	57.02	8.72
	average	1.02 ± 0.06	10.34 ± 2.32	62.12 ± 3.34	6.48 ± 1.19
<b>spiro-OMeTAD</b>	best	1.06	23.05	75.84	18.59
	average	0.90 ± 0.12	22.12 ± 0.63	75.35 ± 1.28	17.62 ± 0.75

<sup>a</sup> The statistical data were calculated based on 6-8 cells. <sup>b</sup> Reverse scanning directions. <sup>c</sup> Both HTMs were doped with two dopants (Li-TFSI: lithium bis(trifluoromethane)sulfonimide and TBP: 4-*tert*-butylpyridine).

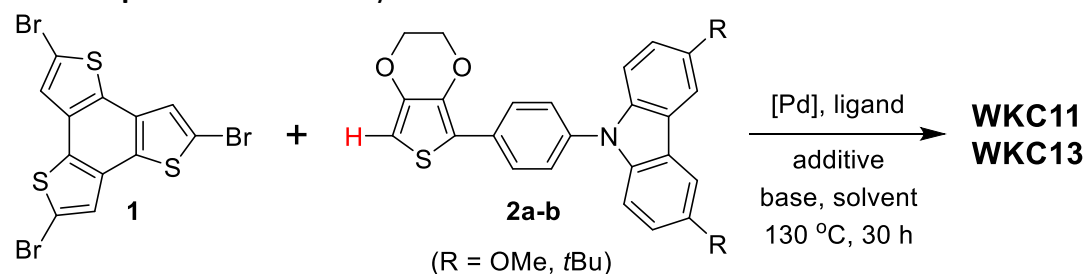
## Conclusions

Benzotrithiophene (**BTT**) is a widely used building block in functional organic materials due to its high planarity and simple synthesis. However, further  $\pi$ -extension from **BTT** usually relies on traditional synthetic routes via Stille- or Suzuki coupling reactions, in which the prefunctionalizations are required. This work provides a step-economical synthetic strategy to facilitate access to new **BTT** core-based hole-transporting materials with carbazole wings (**WKC11** and **WKC13**). Perovskite solar cells using **WKC11** or **WKC13** as hole-transport layer exhibit promising power conversion efficiencies of up to 17.30 %.

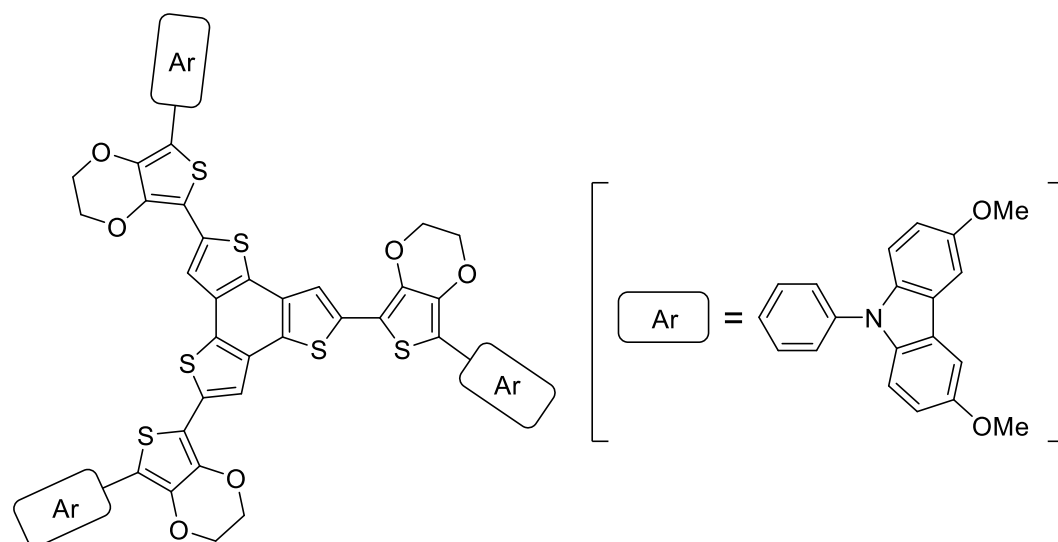
## Experimental Section

**General.** Materials and instruments. Required chemicals such as Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, P(*o*-tolyl)<sub>3</sub>, PivOH, and K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> are commercially available. Organic solvents such as mesitylene, *N*-methyl-pyrrolidone (NMP), dichloromethane, tetrahydrofuran (THF), hexanes, and acetone were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich, Acros, or Alfa Aesar and used directly without further purifications. NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker Magnet System 300 or 500 MHz instrument. The mass spectrum recorded by Matrix-Assisted Laser Desorption/Ionization (MALDI) techniques was operated with a Bruker autoflex speed. All details are described in the supplementary material file.

### General procedure for the synthesis of **WKC11** and **WKC13**

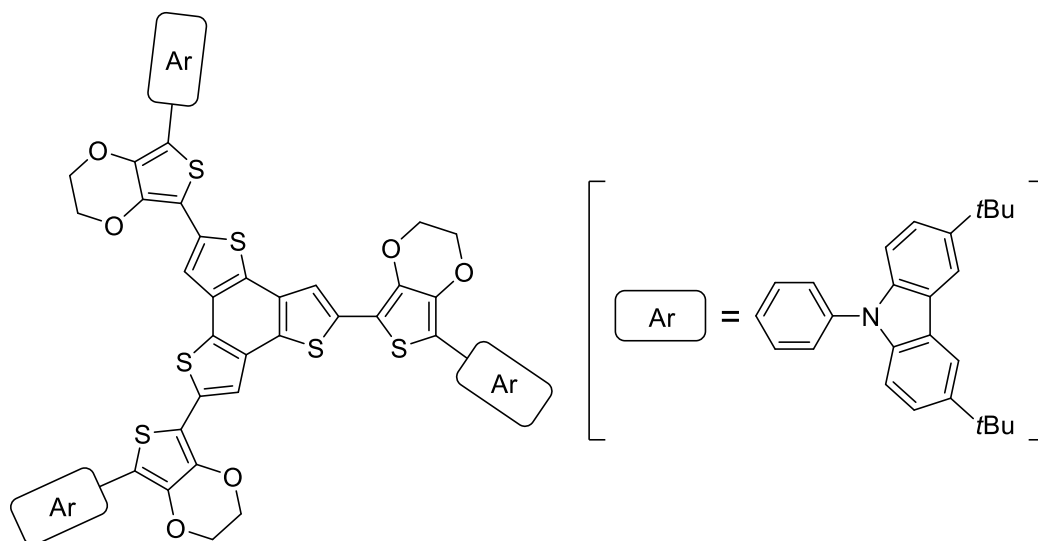


To a solution of Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> (15 mol%, 10 mg), P(*o*-tolyl)<sub>3</sub> (30 mol%, 27 mg), PivOH (60 mol%, 18 mg) and K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (3.60 equiv., 149 mg) in mesitylene or NMP (1.0 mL) in a sealed tube were added the tribromo-BTT (**1**) (0.30 mmol) and the corresponding end-groups<sup>30</sup> **2a-b** (1.05 mol) under N<sub>2</sub>. The reaction mixture was then heated at 130 °C under N<sub>2</sub> for 30 hours. After the reaction mixture had cooled to room temperature, water (15 mL) was added. The mixture was extracted with dichloromethane (3 × 30 mL), and the combined organic layers were washed with brine (80 mL), dried (Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) and concentrated *in vacuo*. Purification by column chromatography (eluent with a gradient polarity for a better separation: THF : hexanes = 50 : 50, then THF : hexanes = 90 : 10) followed by reprecipitation from acetone afforded the desired products **WKC11** or **WKC13**, respectively.



**WKC11** was prepared from trihalogenated BTT (**1**) (0.30 mmol) and **2a** (466 mg, 1.05 mmol) according to **General procedure** (reaction conducted in mesitylene) gave the pure product **WKC11** (235 mg, 50 %; we

obtained 343 mg as crude product prior to purifications). Yellow solid; mp 264.8-266.3 °C.  $^1\text{H}$  NMR ( $\text{CDCl}_3$ , 500 MHz, ppm):  $\delta$  7.79 (d,  $J$  7.5 Hz, 6 H), 7.49 (s, 6 H), 7.43 (s, 3 H), 7.40 (d,  $J$  7.5 Hz, 6 H), 7.31 (d,  $J$  8.3 Hz, 6 H), 6.96 (d,  $J$  8.3 Hz, 6 H), 4.43 (app s, 6 H), 4.30 (app s, 6 H), 3.91 (s, 18 H);  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR ( $\text{CDCl}_3$ , 125 MHz, ppm):  $\delta$  154.0, 138.4, 138.3, 136.0, 135.9, 133.3, 131.1, 130.8, 129.3, 126.8, 126.1, 123.6, 116.5, 115.0, 114.3, 111.1, 110.6, 102.9, 64.7, 64.5, 56.0; HRMS (MALDI): calcd. for  $\text{C}_{90}\text{H}_{63}\text{N}_3\text{O}_{12}\text{S}_6$ : 1569.2731, found: 1569.2746 ( $\text{M}^+$ ).



**WKC13** was prepared from trihalogenated **BTT** (**1**) (0.30 mmol) and **2b** (520 mg, 1.05 mmol) according to the **General procedure** (reaction conducted in NMP) gave the pure product **WKC13** (223 mg, 43 %; we obtained 353 mg as crude product prior to purifications). Yellow solid; mp >300 °C.  $^1\text{H}$  NMR ( $\text{CDCl}_3$ , 500 Hz, ppm):  $\delta$  8.14 (s, 6 H), 7.89 (d,  $J$  6.9 Hz, 6 H), 7.34-7.57 (comp, 21 H), 4.49 (app s, 6 H), 4.36 (app s, 6 H), 1.45 (s, 54 H);  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR ( $\text{CDCl}_3$ , 125 MHz, ppm):  $\delta$  143.0, 139.2, 138.6, 136.3, 133.5, 131.5, 130.9, 129.5, 127.1, 126.6, 123.8, 123.6, 116.8, 116.3, 114.5, 111.4, 109.4, 105.1, 64.9, 64.7, 34.8, 32.1; HRMS (MALDI): calcd. for  $\text{C}_{108}\text{H}_{99}\text{N}_3\text{O}_6\text{S}_6$ : 1725.5858, found: 1725.5868 ( $\text{M}^+$ ).

## Acknowledgements

Financial support provided by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Taiwan (MOST 111-2113-M-008-008 and 108-2628-E-182-003-MY3), National Central University (NCU), Chang Gung University (QZRPD181) and Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Linkou, Taiwan (CMRPD2M0041) are gratefully acknowledged. We also thank the instrument center (R&D office, NCU, MOST 110-2731-M-008-001) for the technical support of NMR and mass analysis.

## Supplementary Material

The data and spectra of mass (MALDI),  $^1\text{H}$  NMR, and  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR for **WKC11&13** were provided in Supporting Information.

## References

1. Mori, A.; Sugie, A. *Bull. Chem. Soc. Jpn.* **2008**, *81*, 548.  
<https://doi.org/10.1246/bcsj.81.548>
2. Schipper, D. J.; Fagnou, K. *Chem. Mater.* **2011**, *23*, 1594.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/cm103483q>
3. Burke, D. J.; Lipomi, D. J. *Energy Environ. Sci.* **2013**, *6*, 2053.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/C3EE41096J>
4. Okamoto, K.; Zhang, J.; Housekeeper, J. B.; Marder, S. R.; Luscombe, C. K. *Macromolecules* **2013**, *46*, 8059.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/ma401190r>
5. Mainville, M.; Leclerc, M. *ACS Appl. Polym. Mater.* **2021**, *3*, 2.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/acsapm.0c00883>
6. Liu, C. Y.; Lin, P. H.; Lee, K. M. *Chem. Rec.* **2021**, *21*, 1.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tcr.202100101>
7. Mori, A.; Sekiguchi, A.; Masui, K.; Shimada, T.; Horie, M.; Osakada, K.; Kawamoto, M.; Ikeda, T. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **2003**, *125*, 1700.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/ja0289189>
8. Masui, K.; Mori, A.; Okano, K.; Takamura, K.; Kinoshita, M.; Ikeda, T. *Org. Lett.* **2004**, *6*, 2011.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/ol049386z>
9. Shikuma, J.; Mori, A.; Masui, K.; Matsuura, R.; Sekiguchi, A.; Ikegami, H.; Kawamoto, M.; Ikeda, T. *Chem. Asian J.* **2007**, *2*, 301.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/asia.200600305>
10. Koumura, N.; Wang, Z. S.; Miyashita, M.; Uemura, Y.; Sekiguchi, H.; Cui, Y.; Mori, A.; Mori, S.; Hara, K. *J. Mater. Chem.* **2009**, *19*, 4829.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/B905831A>
11. Tamba, S.; Fujii, R.; Mori, A.; Hara, K.; Koumura, N. *Chem. Lett.* **2011**, *40*, 922.  
<https://doi.org/10.1246/cl.2011.922>
12. Kawamata, Y.; Tokuji, S.; Yorimitsu, H.; Osuka, A. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2011**, *50*, 8867.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/anie.201102318>
13. Mitamura, Y.; Yorimitsu, H.; Oshima, K.; Osuka, A. *Chem. Sci.* **2011**, *2*, 2017.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/C1SC00372K>
14. Yanagi, T.; Otsuka, S.; Kasuga, Y.; Fujimoto, K.; Murakami, K.; Nogi, K.; Yorimitsu, H.; Osuka, A. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **2016**, *138*, 14582.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/jacs.6b10278>
15. Shi, Y.; Yang, G.; Shen, B.; Yang, Y.; Yan, L.; Yang, F.; Liu, J.; Liao, X.; Yu, P.; Bin, Z.; You, J. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **2021**, *143*, 21066.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/jacs.1c11277>
16. Nitti, A.; Signorile, M.; Boiocchi, M.; Bianchi, G.; Po, R.; Pasini, D. *J. Org. Chem.* **2016**, *81*, 11035.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.joc.6b01922>
17. Nitti, A.; Bianchi, G.; Po, R.; Swager, T. M.; Pasini, D. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **2017**, *139*, 8788.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/jacs.7b03412>
18. Nitti, A.; Osw, P.; Calcagno, G.; Botta, C.; Etkind, S. I.; Bianchi, G.; Po, R.; Swager, T. M.; Pasini, D. *Org. Lett.* **2020**, *22*, 3263.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.orglett.0c01043>



19. Nitti, A.; Forti, G.; Bianchi, G.; Botta, C.; Tinti, F.; Gazzano, M.; Camaioni, N.; Po, R.; Pasini, D. *J. Mater. Chem. C* **2021**, *9*, 9302.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/D1TC01887F>
20. Corsini, F.; Nitti, A.; Tatsi, E.; Mattioli, G.; Botta, C.; Pasini, D.; Griffini, G. *Adv. Optical Mater.* **2021**, *9*, 2100182.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/adom.202100182>
21. Lu, C.; Paramasivam, M.; Park, K.; Kim, C. H.; Kim, H. K. *ACS Appl. Mater. Interfaces*. **2019**, *11*, 14011.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/acsami.8b20646>
22. Lin, P. H.; Lu, T. J.; Cai, D. J.; Lee, K. M.; Liu, C. Y. *ChemSusChem*. **2015**, *8*, 3222.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cssc.201500993>
23. Lu, T. J.; Lin, P. H.; Lee, K. M.; Liu, C. Y. *Eur. J. Org. Chem.* **2017**, 111.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ejoc.201601257>
24. Ciou, Y. S.; Lin, P. H.; Li, W. M.; Lee, K. M.; Liu, C. Y. *J. Org. Chem.* **2017**, *82*, 3538.  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.joc.7b00054>
25. Huang, J. H.; Lin, P. H.; Li, W. M.; Lee, K. M.; Liu, C. Y. *ChemSusChem*. **2017**, *10*, 2284.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cssc.201700421>
26. Lu, K. M.; Li, W. M.; Lin, P. Y.; Liu, K. T.; Liu, C. Y. *Adv. Synth. Catal.* **2017**, *359*, 3805.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/adsc.201700762>
27. Chang, Y. C.; Lee, K. M.; Lai, C. H.; Liu, C. Y. *Chem. Asian J.* **2018**, *13*, 1510.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/asia.201800454>
28. Lu, K. M.; Lee, K. M.; Lai, C. H.; Ting, C. C.; Liu, C. Y. *Chem. Commun.* **2018**, *54*, 11495.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/C8CC06791K>
29. Lin, P. H.; Lee, K. M.; Ting, C. C.; Liu, C. Y. *J. Mater. Chem. A*. **2019**, *7*, 5934.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/C8TA12274A>
30. Chang, Y. C.; Lee, K. M.; Ting, C. C.; Liu, C. Y. *Mater. Chem. Front.* **2019**, *3*, 2041.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/C9QM00309F>
31. Peng, Y. K.; Lee, K. M.; Ting, C. C.; Hsu, M. W.; Liu, C. Y. *J. Mater. Chem. A*. **2019**, *7*, 24765.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/C9TA09777E>
32. Chen, J. H.; Lee, K. M.; Ting, C. C.; Liu, C. Y. *RSC Adv.* **2021**, *11*, 8879.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/D0RA10190G>
33. Tu, C. H.; Lee, K. M.; Chen, J. H.; Chiang, C. H.; Hsu, S. C.; Hsu, M. W.; Liu, C. Y. *Org. Chem. Front.* **2022**, *9*, 2821.  
<https://doi.org/10.1039/D2QO00187J>

This paper is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)