

COMMUNICATION

Near-Infrared circularly polarized luminescence from chiral Yb(III)-diketonates

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We report a rare example of near infrared circularly polarized luminescence (NIR-CPL) in the 920-1050 nm region associated to the f-f transitions of Yb diketonate complexes bearing chiral ancillary ligands. Developing NIR-CPL emitters may have implications from CPL-based (bio)-assays to chiral optoelectronics.

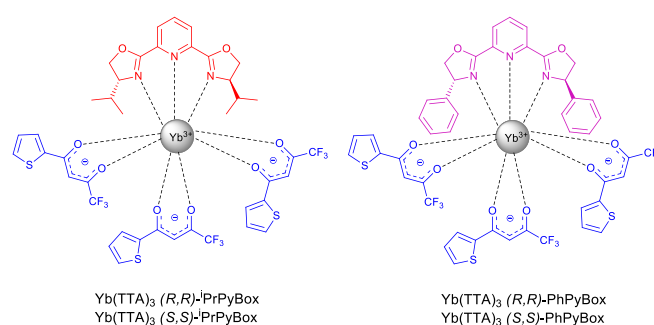
Circularly polarized luminescence (CPL) is a flourishing field gaining more and more interest thanks to its versatility and wide scope. For example, it is successfully employed in (bio)-assays^{1, 2} where a luminescent reporter interacts with a (bio)-analyte, triggering or changing its circular polarized emission.³⁻⁵ This technique provides advantages in terms of selectivity over non-polarized counterparts in tracking interactions with chiral environments. Moreover, CPL-emitting materials are finding applications in chiral electronics, such as in circularly polarized OLEDs.⁶⁻¹⁰

Extending and consolidating circularly polarized emission in the near infrared (NIR) region would be highly beneficial in order to increase the versatility and applicability of such technique. Indeed, tissues are relatively transparent to NIR light, due to weak absorption of skin, blood and water and reduced scattering in such wavelength region. In particular, an optimal optical window for such purpose ranges from 650 – 1200 nm, making Yb-centred emission (900-1050 nm) particularly suitable in this context.^{11, 12} Moreover, Yb luminescence joins the usual benefits associated to f-f lanthanide emission, such as large energy difference between excitation and emission, narrow emission bands and long emission lifetimes.¹³

So far NIR-CPL was only described in pioneering works by Parker et al. on chiral Yb and Nd complexes based on 1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclododecane (cyclen) under UV irradiation.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Since then, no further examples of NIR CPL have been reported.[†] This

is probably due to the generally weak emission so far attainable in such region combined with the lack of suitable apparatus for reliable NIR-CPL detection, which makes the measurement of NIR-CPL a difficult task.

Here, we committed to obtaining Yb-based NIR circularly polarized emitters, which could afford a good trade-off between total luminescence and circular polarization. We took advantage of Yb(TTA)₃ (TTA = 2-thenoyltrifluoroacetate) complexes which are known to show relatively good quantum yields¹⁷⁻¹⁹ under mild UV irradiation. The coordination sphere of such tris diketonate lanthanide complexes can be easily completed by using chiral neutral ancillary ligands, such as PyBox (pyridine bisoxazoline).²⁰⁻²² This strategy permits high tunability and modularity as allows one to tune independently the antenna (diketonate) and the chiral inducer (ancillary ligand). Therefore, we prepared both the enantiomers of Yb(TTA)₃PrPyBox and Yb(TTA)₃PhPyBox (scheme 1) and we studied their NIR-CPL properties.



Scheme 1. Compounds investigated in his work.

In order to measure NIR-CPL, we modified our spectrofluoropolarimeter apparatus,²³ as described in the ESI, by using a Ag-O-Cs photomultiplier tube as the detector, while polarization discrimination was performed by a photoelastic modulator coupled with an uncoated Glenn-Thompson polarizer (figure S1). Excitation was performed using a general purpose 365 nm LED source.

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Once assessed that the compounds gave an intense enough total NIR emission signal (figure 1 and 2, bottom), we started by investigating the CPL in the 900-1050 nm region of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PrPyBox}$. A manifold associated to ${}^2F_{5/2} \rightarrow {}^2F_{7/2}$ transitions, consisting of both positive and negative bands was observed (figure 1, top). The main feature in the CPL spectrum was the relatively sharp band around 972 nm with a g_{lum} factor of -0.025 and $+0.029$ for (R,R) and (S,S) enantiomers respectively (see also figure S2), corresponding to $1' \rightarrow 1$ transition (primed and unprimed numbers refers to ${}^2F_{5/2}$ and to ${}^2F_{7/2}$ state respectively). This transition is clearly visible in the total luminescence as well (figure 1, bottom). Other transitions, associated to $1' \rightarrow 2,3,4$, are visible at longer wavelengths. Importantly mirror image spectra were obtained for the two enantiomers ensuring that the spectra were not significantly affected by artifacts due to linear anisotropies in the detection apparatus.

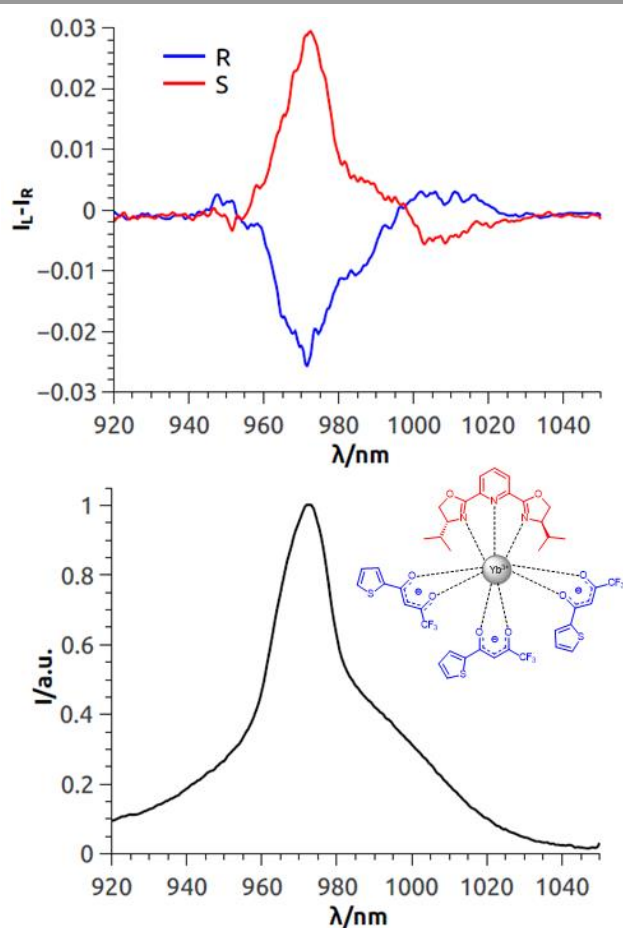


Figure 1. top: NIR-CPL spectra of both the enantiomers of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PrPyBox}$; bottom: total NIR emission. The spectra are measured in CH_2Cl_2 solution under 365 nm irradiation.

In the case of the NIR-CPL of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PhPyBox}$, a manifold was again observed with g_{lum} $+0.016$ and -0.019 (for (R,R) and (S,S) respectively) at 970 nm for $1' \rightarrow 1$ transition (figure 2, top and figure S3). In this case, however, such main band has an opposite sign with respect to the same band observed for $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PrPyBox}$ with the same given absolute configuration of

the PyBox unit (i. e. positive for $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3(S,S)\text{-PrPyBox}$ and negative for $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3(S,S)\text{-PhPyBox}$). This inversion is observed also in ECD and NIR-CD spectra (vide infra) and it is in line with what was previously reported for the chiroptical properties of analogous or similar Eu or Sm complexes.^{20, 22}

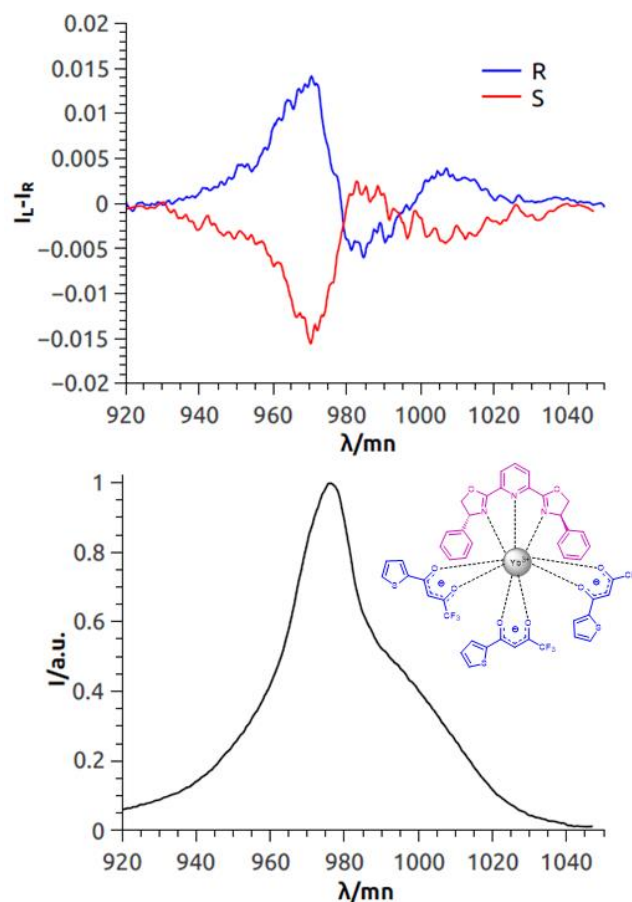


Figure 2. top: NIR-CPL spectra of both the enantiomers of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PhPyBox}$; bottom: total NIR emission. The spectra are measured in CH_2Cl_2 solution under 365 nm irradiation.

In both the compounds, the overall integral of the NIR-CPL spectra is not vanishing, featuring a significant imbalance of the area of one sign over the other (85:15 and 90:10 for $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PrPyBox}$ and $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PhPyBox}$ respectively). This apparent violation of the sum rule can be rationalized by taking into account that these f–f transitions gain rotational strength by coupling with the induced electric dipole transition moment of the $\pi\text{-}\pi^*$ transition on the diketonate moieties (dynamic coupling).^{2, 24, 25} Therefore, such transitions can no longer be considered isolated and sum rule needs not apply.

To complete the investigation, ECD studies in the UV and NIR region were undertaken.

ECD spectra in the UV domain of all the compounds showed relatively intense Cotton effects at wavelengths lower than 400 nm. With both the compounds, an exciton couplet band allied with the $\pi\text{-}\pi^*$ of the diketonate ligands (absorption band around 344 nm) was observed (figure S4 and S5). The couplet centre is blue-shifted in the case of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PrPyBox}$ with respect to $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PhPyBox}$, reflecting a different skew angle

between the diketonates in the two complexes. Moreover, the sign of the couplet is inverted for the two compounds, indicating that the arrangement of the ligands around the metal centre has an opposite handedness in the two compounds, given the same absolute configuration of the PyBox ancillary ligand. This is consistent with the results observed in CPL.

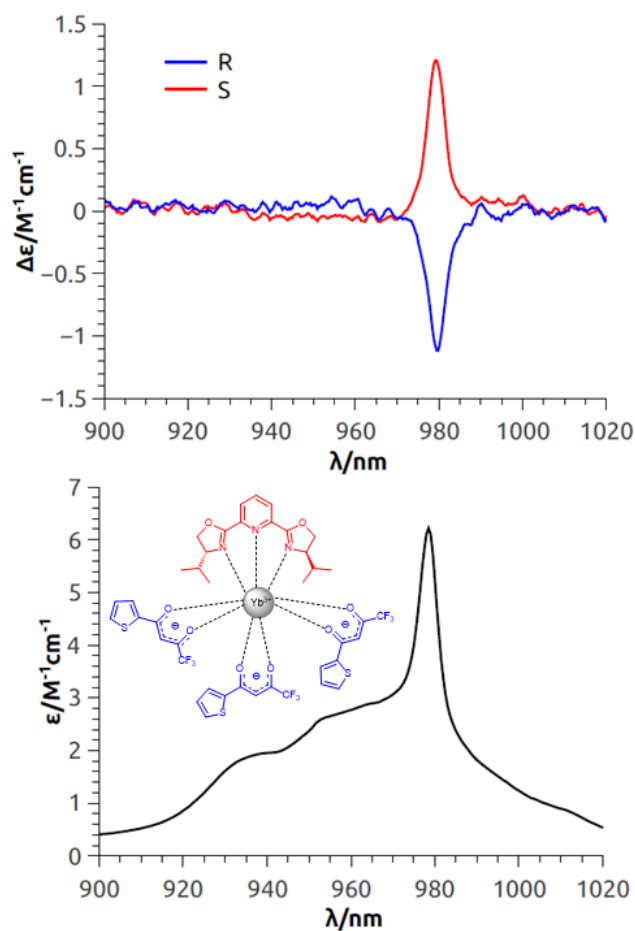


Figure 3. top: NIR-ECD spectra of both the enantiomers of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{iPrPyBox}$; bottom: total NIR absorption. The spectra are measured in CH_2Cl_2 solution.

Both enantiomeric pairs of the two complexes showed ECD signals associated to ${}^2\text{F}_{7/2} \rightarrow {}^2\text{F}_{5/2}$ transitions in the 900–1020 nm region. As in emission/CPL, the $1 \rightarrow 1'$ band around 975 nm is the main feature of the absorption/ECD spectrum (figure 3 and 4),²⁶ especially in the case of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{iPrPyBox}$. For all the compounds, this transition matches qualitatively (in terms of sign) in both ECD and CPL spectra, as it is expected since it involves the same electronic levels ($1/1'$). However, g_{abs} were found to be higher than the corresponding g_{lum} . This can be rationalized by taking into account that for very close transitions with possible different sign, a quantitative comparison between emission and absorption dissymmetry factors is not straightforward.¹⁵

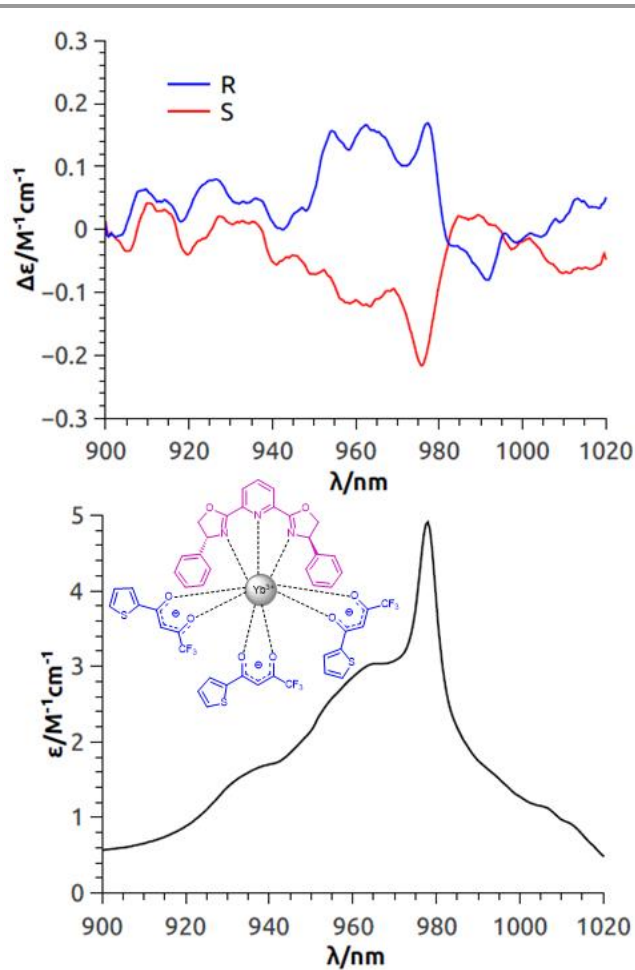


Figure 4. top: NIR-ECD spectra of both the enantiomers of $\text{Yb}(\text{TTA})_3\text{PhPyBox}$; bottom: total NIR absorption. The spectra are measured in CH_2Cl_2 solution.

In conclusion, we have shown that NIR-CPL can be effectively measured on tailored but relatively simple and flexible complexes, taking advantage of Yb emission. This work falls within the exciting context of circularly polarized emission, contributing a so far extremely rare example of NIR-CPL. This goes towards the direction of developing new NIR-CPL emitters for applications ranging from NIR-CPL (bio)-assays to chiral NIR optoelectronics.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

Notes and references

- † Here we refer to NIR-centred CP, as opposite to CPL allied with red-centred emission with low energy tails possibly stretching beyond the visible boundaries.
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