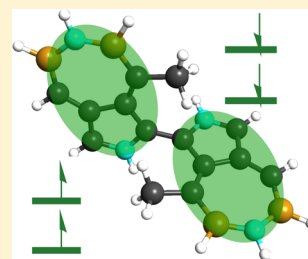


Design of Small Intramolecular Singlet Fission Chromophores: An Azaborine Candidate and General Small Size Effects

Tao Zeng^{*,†} and Prateek Goel[‡][†]Department of Chemistry, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario K1S5B6, Canada[‡]Department of Chemistry, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario N2L3G1, Canada

S Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: We report the first attempt to design small *intramolecular* singlet fission chromophores, with the aid of quantum chemistry and explicitly simulating the time evolution of state populations using quantum dynamics method. We start with three previously proposed azaborine-substituted *intermolecular* singlet fission chromophores. Through analyzing their frontier orbital amplitudes, we select a BN-substituted azulene as the building block. Covalently connecting two such monomers and tuning their relative configuration, we examine three dimers. One dimer is found to be an eminent candidate: the triplet-pair state is quickly formed within 1 ps, and the two triplets are ready to be disentangled. We elucidate the general small size effects in intramolecular singlet fission and focus on specific aspects which should be taken care of when manipulating the fission rate through steric hindrance.



Singlet fission (SF) converts one singlet exciton to two triplet excitons.^{1,2} The implied number doubling and life lengthening of excitons make SF a promising avenue to surpass the ~32% Shockley–Queisser³ limit for energy conversion efficiency of single-junction solar cells and realize the third generation of solar cells.^{1,2,4–6} The SF process is schematically demonstrated in Figure 1 using a 2 chromophores, 4 orbitals, 4 electrons picture. The single-excitonic *eg* and *ge* states that contain only one singlet excited chromophore first convert to the multi-excitonic *tt* state, with two triplet excitons on the two

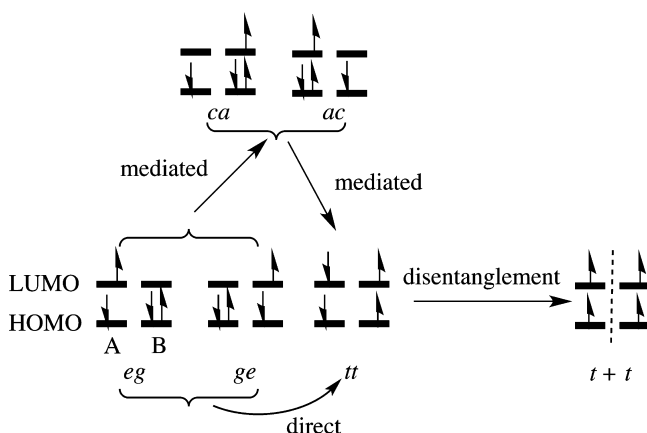


Figure 1. Electronic configuration prototypes involved in singlet fission and the discussion in this paper. “A” and “B” denote the two chromophores (or chromophore units in iSF) that undergo SF. Horizontal bars represent frontier orbital levels in the two monomers. Vertical arrows denote electronic spin-up and -down. The arrows with “direct” and “mediated” represent the two pathways in the spin-conserved step. The dashed line in the $t + t$ state means that the two triplet excitons have been disentangled.

chromophores and forming an overall singlet state. This spin-conserved step can go through the direct and the charge-transfer (CT) mediated pathways. The latter is usually more pronounced and involves the *ca* and *ac* states,^{7,8} for which *c* and *a* stand for cation and anion. The two triplet excitons are then disentangled by spin-dependent operators and thermalization to have random orientations of their spins, resulting in the $t + t$ state.⁹ See section S1 in the Supporting Information for more general discussion of SF.

To date, most of the effort has been dedicated to intermolecular singlet fission (xSF, “x” for external) studies, in which the SF occurs among more than one chromophore molecule. xSF usually occurs in solids of chromophores, and SF’s sensitivity to the intermolecular configuration of its participants^{10–12} is translated to a dependence on the morphology of the solid materials,^{13–15} which is “onerous to control experimentally.”¹⁶ Considering the power of synthetic chemists in controlling molecular configuration, an alternative route of intramolecular singlet fission (iSF) was recently proposed. The central idea is to attain SF-favored interchromophore configuration through the more controllable covalent bonding and intramolecular steric effects so that the difficulty of controlling crystal packing and morphology can be circumvented.¹⁷ iSF occurs within one photoexcited molecule, with the two resultant triplet excitons located on different moieties within the molecule.^{18–22} In 2015, several groups made significant breakthroughs in this direction and synthesized materials that feature >150% iSF yield,^{23–28} which is the number of triplet excitons generated per absorbed photon.

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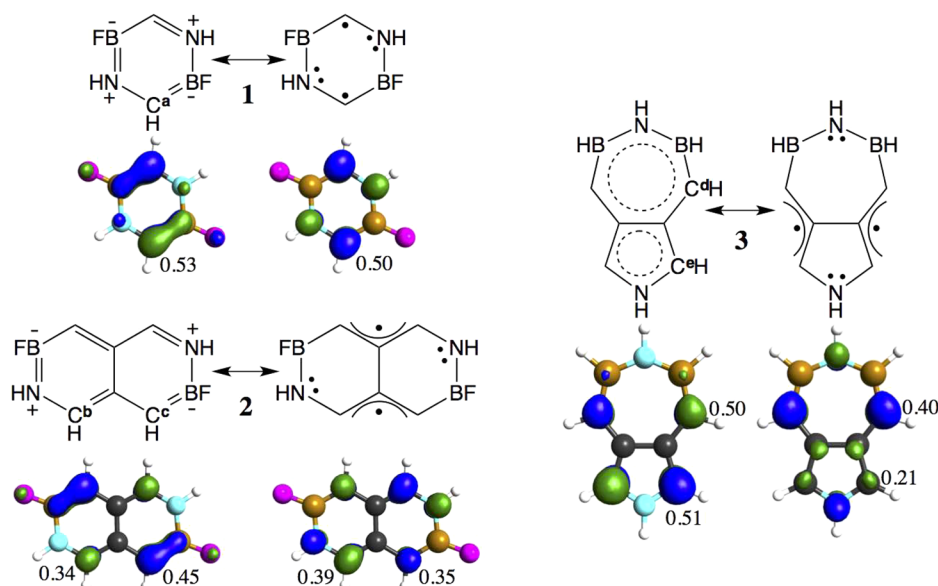


Figure 2. Three azaborine small SF chromophores proposed in ref 31. In addition to the conventional Kekulé or aromatic structure, another resonance structure is also given for each chromophore to highlight its diradical character. Under each chromophore are isosurfaces of its HOMO (left) and LUMO (right). The H, B, C, N, and F atoms are represented by white, brown, gray, cyan, and purple spheres. Blue and green indicate orbital phases. Symmetrically unique C atoms in each structure are labeled by superscripts. Numbers in the orbital pictures are the approximate amplitudes (in atomic unit, sign ignored) of the orbitals on those C sites.

A major obstacle in the field of SF is the paucity of SF-capable materials,^{16,17} and a number of new SF chromophore designs have been proposed in the recent past.^{29–32} Chromophores of small size are especially interesting for the following reasons: their theoretical studies are less resource-demanding, and they can serve as models to reveal fundamental SF mechanisms; small systems are usually, but definitely not always, easier to synthesize and process; and in practice, small chromophores imply high exciton density by weight and volume, facilitating the development of mini photovoltaic devices. Michl and co-workers pioneered this direction of research and proposed heterocyclic diradicaloid xSF chromophores with only about 10 non-hydrogen atoms.^{29,30} Other xSF designs based on azaborine-substitution³¹ and monosilicon-substitution³² have also been proposed.

To our knowledge, no attempt has been made to design small iSF chromophores. This fact motivates us to carry out the present theoretical research. Aside from designing the specific chromophores, we address the following questions: (1) Where are the appropriate sites to covalently connect two identical small SF chromophore units? (2) How should we tune the structure so that the triplet-pair can be appropriately coupled with other electronic configurations, facilitating the separation of the pair? (3) What are the unique characters of small iSF chromophores compared to their large counterparts? Our study is based on the recently proposed azaborine-substituted molecules.³¹ Azaborine chemistry is a rapidly advancing field,^{33–38} and the potential application of azaborine-substituted molecules in singlet fission is starting to be realized.³⁹ We hope that this study will further cross-link the two vibrant fields and lead to fruitful results in the future.

Details of computational methods are given in section S2 in the Supporting Information. In brief, structural optimization is carried out with the M06-2X density functional.⁴⁰ The general multi-configurational quasi-degenerate perturbation theory (GMC-QDPT)^{41–43} is used to calculate energies and wave functions of low-lying electronic states. The states are

diabatized⁴⁴ to generate diabatic states (diabats) that are dominated by and named after the configurations shown in Figure 1. All electronic structure calculations are performed using the cc-pVDZ basis set⁴⁵ and the GAMESS-US program package.^{46,47} The multi-configurational time-dependent Hartree (MCTDH) method^{48,49} is used to simulate the iSF dynamics of the chromophore designs, focusing on how fast and how much the *tt* configuration is populated.

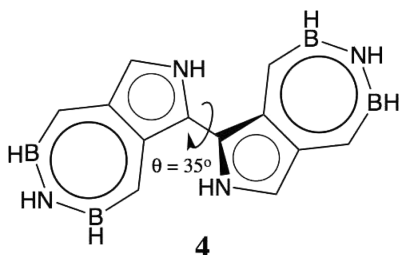
Which Chromophore(s) and Where to Connect Them? We aim at covalently connecting two identical small constituent chromophores (homodimers) so that symmetry can be exploited to facilitate calculations. Also, homodimers of small chromophores already tend to have low-energy CT states that bind the two generated triplets (see below). Connecting different chromophores (heterodimers) is likely to further lower the CT energy²¹ and bind the triplets more strongly, impeding their disentanglement and separation. To minimize the iSF chromophore, we would like to connect the two constituents directly without any spacer. The three azaborine-substituted chromophores proposed previously are shown in Figure 2 along with their highest occupied and lowest unoccupied molecular orbitals (HOMO and LUMO). The B and N atoms serve as electron-acceptor and -donor that captodatively^{50,51} strengthen the diradical character of the molecules to make them feature exoergic SF. To maintain this character for the monomers, we consider only C atoms as the connecting sites.

The effective coupling matrix element between *eg/ge* and *tt* determines the CT-mediated SF rate,^{1,2,8} and it is proportional to

$$\frac{t_{\text{HL}}t_{\text{LL}} - t_{\text{LH}}t_{\text{HH}}}{\Delta E_{\text{CT}}} \quad (1)$$

Here, t_{HL} stands for the transfer integral between the HOMO of one constituent chromophore and the LUMO of the other, i.e., the Fock matrix element of the two orbitals. t_{LH} , t_{LL} , and

t_{HH} have similar meanings. ΔE_{CT} stands for the energy difference between the mediating CT state and the single-excitonic state. If two constituents are symmetrically connected, $t_{HL} = t_{LH}$, $t_{LL} \neq t_{HH}$ is thus necessary to open the CT-mediated pathway.^{21,32,33} Figure 2 shows that the C' site of **3** features the largest difference in HOMO and LUMO amplitudes, which suggests the largest magnitude of $t_{LL}-t_{HH}$. Therefore, C' is the most ideal connecting site, and **3** is the best candidate to construct a covalent dimer for iSF. Below, we concentrate on the so-connected **4** and its derivatives in searching for good iSF chromophores.



4 *Itself*. The coordinates of **4** and the other dimers are given in section S15 in the Supporting Information. Overall, each constituent BN-substituted azulene retains its monomer structure. It is of C_2 symmetry, and the dihedral angle between the two BN-azulenes about the connecting C–C bond (θ) is 35° . $\theta = 0^\circ$ corresponds to the C_{2h} *trans*-structure. The HOMO–1 and HOMO of **4** are the bonding and antibonding combinations of the two **3** units' HOMOs (Figure S2); the LUMO and LUMO+1 are the analogues of the monomers' LUMOs. The interconnecting C–C bond is 1.44 \AA , close to the typical 1.47 \AA C–C single bond between two sp^2 C atoms.⁵⁴

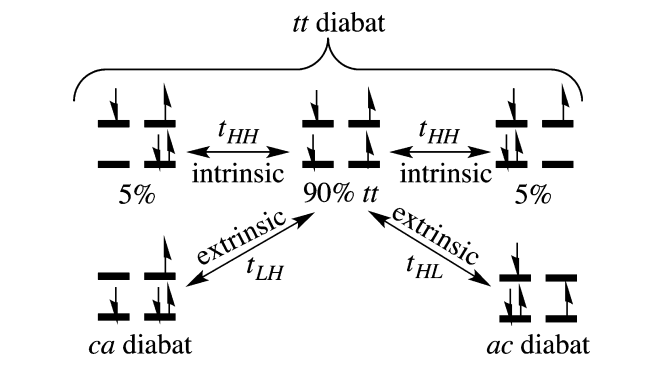
The diabatic Hamiltonian matrix of **4** at its optimized structure is

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \begin{array}{ccccc}
 & tt & xta & xtb & cta & ctb \\
 \begin{array}{c}
 tt \\
 xta \\
 xtb \\
 cta \\
 ctb
 \end{array} & \begin{pmatrix}
 1.51 & -0.08 & 0.00 & 0.24 & 0.00 \\
 -0.08 & 2.00 & 0.00 & 0.57 & 0.00 \\
 0.00 & 0.00 & 2.08 & 0.00 & -0.58 \\
 0.24 & 0.57 & 0.00 & 2.34 & 0.00 \\
 0.00 & 0.00 & -0.58 & 0.00 & 2.52
 \end{pmatrix}
 \end{array}
 \end{array} \quad (2)$$

Electronvolts are used as the energy unit, and the diagonal energies are relative to the ground-state energy. The same convention is followed throughout this paper. Here, a symmetry-adapted diabatic representation has been used: *tt* is symmetry-adapted already and transforms following the *A* irreducible representation (irrep) of the C_2 point group; *xta* and *xtb* are the linear combinations of *eg* and *ge* that transform following the *A* and *B* irreps; *cta* and *ctb* are the analogues of *ca* and *ac*. In this concise representation, the target state *tt* is coupled only to *xta* and *cta*, while in the representation using the local states in Figure 1, *tt* is coupled to all the other four (eq S3 in the Supporting Information).

Evidently, *tt* is the lowest in energy among the five diabats, suggesting an exoergic iSF. It however seems too exoergic: *tt* is $\sim 0.5 \text{ eV}$ lower than *xta* and *xtb*, while for the **3** monomer, $E(S_1) - 2E(T_1) = 0.09 \text{ eV}$ (section S3 in the Supporting Information; S_1 and T_1 are the lowest singlet and triplet excited states). This significant energy lowering is attributed to the 90:10 mixture of the *tt* and two CT configurations other than *ca* and *ac* within the *tt* diabatic, as shown in Scheme 1. The

Scheme 1



mixing stems from the -0.88 eV large t_{HH} (eq S1 in the Supporting Information), which results from **4**'s quasi-planar structure and **3**'s large HOMO amplitude at the interconnecting site. This coupling occurs within one diabatic, and we call it "intrinsic coupling" to differentiate it from the "extrinsic coupling" between diabats. The two types of coupling in **4** are illustrated in Scheme 1, and more discussion is given in section S6 in the Supporting Information. The large HOMO amplitude arises from the concentration of the orbitals in the small monomers. In comparison, we evaluate the HOMO and LUMO amplitudes of pentacene at the interconnecting site in bis-pentacene in ref 26 to be only ~ 0.13 , and the stabilization of the multi-excitonic state is expected to be smaller.

Along with the large intrinsic coupling in *tt* are the substantial extrinsic couplings, 0.24 eV between *tt* and *cta*, 0.57 eV between *xta* and *cta*, and -0.58 eV between *xtb* and *ctb*. All these couplings are approximately proportional to the cross-monomer transfer integrals t_{HH} , t_{HL} , and t_{LL} (see eqs S1 and S2 in the Supporting Information for their values).^{1,2} Again, the larger frontier orbital amplitudes at the interconnecting sites, due to the small size of **3**, are responsible for these large couplings. Even the usually negligible *tt*–*xta* coupling that involves two-electron integral of cross-monomer electron density^{1,2} is as large in magnitude as -0.08 eV .

The small size of **4** favors low-energy CT configurations. The positive and negative charge densities are concentrated in the small **3** moieties, and the geometrical centers between the two moieties are not far apart. Substantial Coulombic stabilization of the CT diabats is expected. In fact, *cta* is only 0.26 eV higher than *xtb*, and it can actively mediate the conversion from the two *xt* diabats to *tt*. In comparison, the CT states in the TIPS-pentacene dimer investigated by Sanders et al.²⁶ have the opposite charges dispersed over the respective large pentacene derivatives. The short-edge connection also leads to a large 14 \AA distance between the geometrical centers of the charges. Correspondingly, the CT states are $\sim 1 \text{ eV}$ above the single-excitonic states and cannot mediate SF. In general, the CT states should be more influential in iSF of small chromophores because of their low energies and the large intermonomer transfer integrals that couple them to the single- and multi-excitonic states. The influence is double-sided: if the CT states are too strongly coupled with *tt*, they hinder the disentanglement of the two triplets. Indeed, the coupling between *tt* and any CT configurations (e.g., configurations 7–14 in Figure S3), intrinsic or extrinsic, can be understood as binding of the triplet pair.⁹

The initial electronic state of the iSF dynamics simulation should be the lowest "bright" adiabatic state that has a large

transition dipole moment connected to the ground state. The S_0 -to- S_1 (S_0 stands for ground state) transition dipole of **3** is along the ring-shared C–C bond. Because the two such C–C bonds in **4** are largely perpendicular to the C_2 axis, the addition of the two **3** moieties' transition dipoles determines the lowest bright state to be a B state. Such a bright state is the S_2 state of **4**, and its excitation energy and oscillator strengths are evaluated to be 1.67 eV and 0.43. In comparison, the oscillator strengths of the surrounding A states are all <0.007.

To have an appropriate initial electronic state for the MCTDH simulation, we choose another diabatic representation, in which the electronic Hamiltonian matrix reads

$$\begin{array}{cc}
 & \begin{array}{ccccc} tt & xta' & xtb' & cta' & ctb' \end{array} \\
 \begin{array}{c} tt \\ xta' \\ xtb' \\ cta' \\ ctb' \end{array} & \begin{pmatrix} 1.51 & -0.21 & 0.00 & 0.15 & 0.00 \\ -0.21 & 1.57 & 0.00 & 0.00 & 0.00 \\ 0.00 & 0.00 & 1.68 & 0.00 & 0.00 \\ 0.15 & 0.00 & 0.00 & 2.78 & 0.00 \\ 0.00 & 0.00 & 0.00 & 0.00 & 2.92 \end{pmatrix}
 \end{array} \quad (3)$$

xta' and cta' are states that diagonalize the xta and cta block in eq 2. The prime of xta' indicates that it contains more xta component than cta , while cta' is the other way around. xtb' and ctb' are defined similarly. This semidiagonal representation gives us xtb' as the lowest bright adiabatic state in the vertical excitation and the optimal choice as the initial electronic state for the dynamics simulation. It also brings xta' and xtb' closer in energy to tt , while cta' and ctb' higher up. The highest ctb' is weakly coupled to the other states only through vibronic coupling and is discarded in the dynamics simulation to reduce computational effort. The exclusion of ctb' does not suppress the CT-mediating SF pathway, because xtb' contains ctb 's contribution. We keep cta' in the simulation, and the wave packet on this high-lying transiently populated diabatic can be described using a small number of single-particle functions (SPFs) in MCTDH simulation.⁵⁵ We emphasize that those semidiagonal diabats diagonalize only the respective sub-blocks at the S_0 structure. As the structure is distorted, the sub-blocks become nonzero. The summary and comparison of the different diabatic representations are given in section S7 in the Supporting Information. tt remains the same in all representations.

Our vibronic coupling Hamiltonian to describe iSF dynamics and the vibrational modes selection are detailed in section S8 in the Supporting Information. In brief, it contains linear vibronic coupling; dimer normal modes that reflect the structural distortion in the monomer's S_0 -to- S_1 and S_0 -to- T_1 excitations are included, as is the intermonomer torsional mode that modulates the transfer integrals t_{HH} , t_{HL} , and t_{LL} . The iSF dynamics starts with a B state (xtb') and the objective state is an A state (tt). The b -modes are coupling modes for the transition from the B state to the A manifold, while the a -modes are tuning modes. Taking the S_0 's ground vibrational state as the initial wave packet on xtb' , we run a 2 ps MCTDH simulation. The population evolution of the four diabats is shown in Figure 3. The eventual tt population is relatively low. The significant 0.75:0.20 eventual tt – xta' mixing can be traced back to their -0.21 eV strong coupling and 0.06 eV small energy distance. Considering only these electronic matrix elements leads to a 60:40 tt – xta' mixing. The two states are differently coupled to the vibrational modes, giving 0.44 and 0.16 eV reorganization energies of tt and xta' . These different couplings reduce the mixing but not completely. The

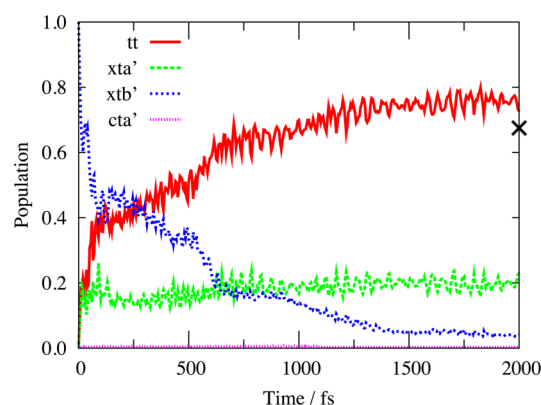


Figure 3. MCTDH evolution of the diabats' populations of **4**. The “X” marker at 2000 fs indicates the scaled eventual tt population after considering the intrinsic coupling in the tt diabatic.

consideration of the intrinsic coupling in the tt diabatic scales the genuine tt population down by 0.9 to 0.68, which is represented by the “X” marker in Figure 3. These mixings, intrinsic and extrinsic, hinder the disentanglement of the two triplet excitons. In this sense, **4** is very similar to tetracyanoquinodimethane bithiophene, which features a fast nonradiative decay from the lowest bright state to a “dark state” that contains a large portion of multi-exciton character⁵⁶ but also a substantial portion of other configurations.⁵⁷

Now let us review the problems of **4**. The 35° dihedral angle around the interconnecting bond leaves large overlap between the frontier orbitals of the two **3** units. They are responsible for the large intrinsic coupling in tt and its too low energy; also, they are responsible for the substantial mixing between tt and xta' . Both effects reduce the eventual population of the tt configuration and impede disentanglement of the two triplet excitons. To derive a good iSF chromophore from **4**, we need to reduce the overlaps. A natural way is to enlarge the dihedral angle, θ , and make the two **3** units more orthogonal to each other.

Methylation on N. Our first attempt to “orthogonalize” the two **3** units is to methylate the 5-membered ring N (structure **5**, Figure 4a). The steric repulsion between the methyl group on one unit and the 7-membered ring on the other increases the dihedral angle to 64° . The electronic Hamiltonian matrices in both the symmetry-adapted and the semidiagonal diabatic representations at the ground state structure are given in eqs S9 and S10.

As expected, all off-diagonal elements in the symmetry-adapted representation are smaller than the counterparts of **4** (eq S9 vs eq 2; also compare eqs S1 and S12 for the reduction of the intermonomer transfer integrals). The intrinsic coupling in tt is also reduced; the diabatic contains 97% tt configuration. However, the tt energy now seems too high. In the semidiagonal representation (eq S10), tt is ~ 0.07 eV higher in energy than both xta' and xtb' . The iSF of **5** is still exoergic because tt 's reorganization energy is 0.44 eV, much larger than the 0.16 and 0.19 eV of the xta' and xtb' counterparts, respectively.

The evolution of state populations of **5** is shown in Figure 5. Regardless of the θ value, the two substituent transition dipoles of the monomers are largely perpendicular to the C_2 axis. Therefore, xtb' is still the lowest bright and initial state for the MCTDH simulation. Despite the 30° larger θ , this methylation moderately increases the eventual tt population from 0.68 to

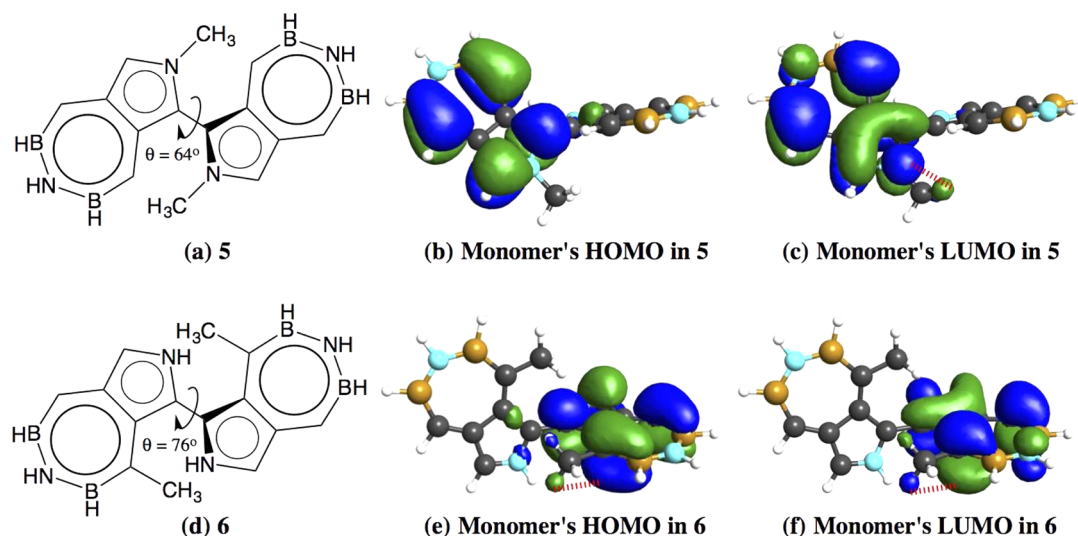


Figure 4. Sketch of structures **5** and **6** and their monomers' frontier orbitals. Wedged bonds are used to show the nonplanarity of the two methylated-3 units. Each 3 unit remains planar, except the three H atoms on the methyl. The red hashed lines indicate the antibonding interaction between the methyl and the HOMO and LUMO of **3**. The H, B, C, and N atoms are represented by white, brown, gray, and cyan spheres, respectively. Blue and green indicate orbital phases.

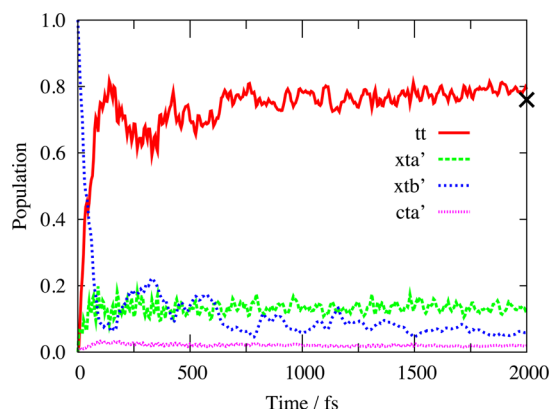


Figure 5. MCTDH evolution of the diabats' populations of **5**. The "X" marker at 2000 fs indicates the scaled eventual *tt* populations after considering the intrinsic coupling in the *tt* diabats.

0.76, which has been scaled by the 97% percentage of *tt* configuration in the *tt* diabats. The extrinsic couplings are certainly not small enough, and a larger θ is needed. The unanticipated high *tt* energy is another reason for this small population increase. *tt* is 0.06 eV higher than *xta'* at the Franck–Condon region, and their -0.10 eV coupling gives them a 44:56 mixing. The two diabats relax in the same direction along the modes that feature large diagonal vibronic coupling constants. For example, the 1556 and 1607 cm^{-1} *a*-modes give the largest vibronic coupling constants, ~ -0.2 and ~ -0.1 eV, for the *tt* and *xta'* diabats (section S14.B in the Supporting Information); they are both negative. The relaxation in the same direction of the two states also inhibits their decoupling.

If we replace the two methyls in **5** by H (**5H**) and keep all the other structural parameters identical to **5**, the *tt* energy is lowered from 1.84 to 1.72 eV, and the eventual *tt* population is raised to 0.81. The methylation has certainly done more than just enlarging θ . The effects of the methylation on the diabatic energies are analyzed based on an orbital interaction picture in section S9 in the Supporting Information. In short, the methyl

induces an antibonding interaction with the 3 unit's LUMO, but not with the HOMO (see Figure 4b,c). The consequent unbalanced energy raising of the monomer's frontier orbitals results in the high *tt* energy. The methyls also increase the intermonomer Coulombic attraction and lower the *cta* and *ctb* energies, because of the closer spatial contact of the HOMO and LUMO on the two monomers (section S9 in the Supporting Information). Overall, the proximity in energy of *tt*, *xta*, and *cta* counteracts the reduction of their extrinsic couplings, making it difficult to separate *tt* from the others.

Even the neutral and mild substituent, methyl, delivers side effects in addition to steric hindrance. The small chromophore size again plays a role. If the monomer frontier orbitals were delocalized over a larger unit and their amplitudes reachable by the methyls, or in general bulky groups, are correspondingly reduced, those side effects on electronic structure would be mitigated, and the methyls would only induce steric hindrance to give a desirable structure. This nontrivial difference between small and large iSF chromophores shall be kept in mind for future work in this direction.

Methylation on C. Guided by the failure of **5**, we try another structure with the two methyls on the 7-membered rings as shown in structure **6** (Figure 4d). The motivation is that **3**'s HOMO and LUMO have similar 0.50 and 0.40 amplitudes (Figure 2) on the methylated C site, so that both experience antibonding interaction from the methyl CH bonds (Figure 4e,f). (A detailed orbital interaction analysis is given in section S10 in the Supporting Information.) The undesired high *tt* energy may hence be avoided. The steric repulsion between the methyls and the 5-membered rings on the opposite units increases the dihedral angle to 76° . The longer CC bond between the methyl and C^d (Figure 2) than the NC bond in **5**, 1.51 versus 1.45 Å, makes the methyls more protruding, resulting in more steric hindrance; the two units are 12° more orthogonal to each other than in **5**.

The diabatic electronic Hamiltonian matrices in the symmetry-adapted and the semidiagonal representations at **6**'s S_0 structure are given in eqs S15 and S16 in the Supporting Information. Consistent with the more orthogonal structure, all

couplings are further reduced compared to **5** (eq S15 vs eq S9, also compare eqs S12 and S18 in the Supporting Information for the reduction of the intermonomer transfer integrals). The tt energy is 1.82 eV, very close to the 1.85 eV of Structure **6H**, which has **6**'s structure but with the methyls replaced by H atoms. The extra increase of the tt energy not due to the dihedral angle change is indeed avoided. There is no intrinsic coupling in the tt diabats; it contains 100% tt configuration after rounding.

The evolution of state populations of **6** is shown in Figure 6. The 0.9 eventual tt population is a significant improvement

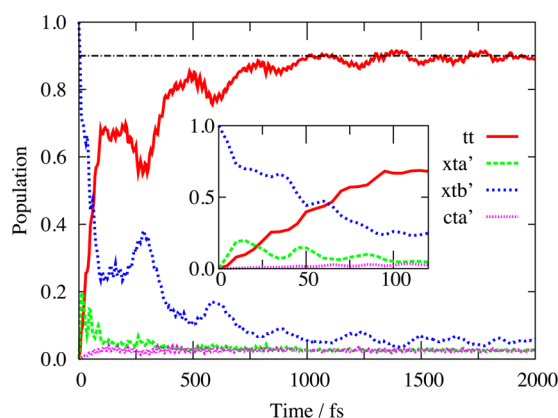


Figure 6. MCTDH evolution of the diabats' populations of **6**. The dot–dashed horizontal line indicates the 0.9 plateau of the tt population.

compared to **4** and **5**. The tt configuration is largely separated from the others in terms of both intrinsic and extrinsic coupling and is a prominent precursor for spin disentanglement.

The tt population plateaus at around 1 ps, indicating an efficient iSF process. It quickly rises to 0.7 within 100 fs. Photoinduced absorption with the tt character should be observable after this time elapse. The role of xta' in this ultrafast rise-up is different from that at the later time. Figure 6 and its inset show that in the first 100 fs, the xta' population oscillates with a period of ~ 35 fs and with amplitude >0.1 . This is a Rabi oscillation between xta' and xtb' induced by their pseudodegeneracy and the two 888 and 906 cm^{-1} b -modes, whose vibrational periods are 37 and 36 fs (section S11 in the Supporting Information). In the later time, the oscillation is no longer seen. xta' is then like cta' , a virtual state mediating the transition between xtb' and tt . xta' is more strongly coupled to xtb' through vibronic interaction due to their smaller energy distance, while cta' is more strongly coupled to tt through the electronic Hamiltonian (eq S16). Both channels contribute to SF.

To ensure that including the only four diabats in the MCTDH simulation is adequate, we extend the vibronic model to include eight diabats and the same set of modes, which are described by smaller numbers of SPFs. The results are presented in section S12 in the Supporting Information. The population evolution profile resembles Figure 6; all diabats other than the four are not populated. The negligible occupation of the diabats that closely resembles the ground state indicates that the nonradiative decay channel is not competitive with the iSF in **6**.

The high eventual tt population suggests that the spin-conserved step leaves us an adiabatic state mainly derived from

tt , which is the S_1 state of **6**. The C_2 symmetry of **6** determines that the spin disentanglement occurs through spin-flipping between S_1 and Q_1 (the lowest quintet adiabatic state), and the spin-flipping rate depends on the S_1 – Q_1 energy gap.¹ The minimum-to-minimum energy gap between the two states is evaluated to be 0.03 eV (section S13 in the Supporting Information). This is well within the energy released in the spin-conserved step, which is approximately the sum of the 0.09 eV xtb' – tt energy gap at the S_0 structure and tt 's 0.52 eV reorganization energy. Therefore, the spin disentanglement is expected to be an efficient process that occurs during the dissipation of the vibrational energy on S_1 . The relatively small S_1 – Q_1 gap is attributed to the two methyls that prevent further lowering of the S_1 energy (see more details in section S13 in the Supporting Information).

At **6**'s S_0 structure, the adiabatic state derived from xtb' is the S_2 state. Its vertical excitation energy is 1.91 eV, with a large 0.50 oscillator strength. The photon flux of the terrestrial solar spectrum at this red frequency is fairly high, $\sim 25 \text{ mA/m}^2\text{eV}$.⁵⁸ These features support **6** as a good iSF chromophore.

We employ quantum chemistry calculation and molecular quantum dynamics simulation to design small azaborine-substituted singlet fission chromophores. The consideration of a viable charge-transfer SF pathway and the analysis of the HOMO and LUMO amplitudes on the possible connecting sites make us choose an azaborine-substituted azulene (**3**) as the monomer chromophore to be covalently connected. We construct three dimers based on **3**, and one (**6**) is found to be an eminent candidate for further pursuit: it features efficient (in 1 ps) and complete (90%) single- to multi-excitonic state transition; its singlet and quintet multi-excitonic states are close in energy, so that the vibrational energy released in the iSF is enough to facilitate the spin disentanglement; it has intense absorption in the appropriate region of the solar spectrum.

We hope that this study will motivate azaborine chemists to synthesize the proposed molecule and enrich the highly limited collection of intramolecular singlet fission chromophores. Before this goal is achieved, this work will still be beneficial for other iSF studies because what we have learned about the small size effects on iSF dynamics from the failures of **4** and **5** is generalizable knowledge: (1) Couplings between the multi-excitonic configurations and the others are generally strong, hindering the triplet–triplet separation. (2) Charge-transfer states are generally low-lying in energy. They may bind the two triplets too strongly. In the way to attain **6**, we have shown that the negative impacts in these two points can be mitigated through modulating molecular structure. (3) In modulating chromophore structure, substituents can deliver more than steric hindrance. Careful selection of substitution sites is needed to exert the desired steric hindrance and avoid the undesired modification of the energy levels. All these features of small iSF chromophores can be traced to their concentrated frontier orbitals confined in a compact region.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/acs.jpclett.6b00356.

Additional introduction to singlet fission; computational methods; selection of active space; **4**'s frontier orbitals and local diabatic representation of electronic Hamiltonian matrix; details of diabaticization scheme; intrinsic

versus extrinsic couplings; summary and comparison of the different diabatic representations; vibronic model and selection of vibrational modes in MCTDH simulation; how the methyls affect the tt energies of **5** and **6**; diabatic population transfer in the first 100 fs of iSF in **6**; MCTDH simulation with eight diabats for **6**; S_1 and Q_1 energies of **6**; vibronic coupling constants in the MCTDH simulations; and coordinates of **4**, **5**, and **6** (PDF)

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Author

*E-mail: toby.zeng@carleton.ca.

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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