Folding of Coordination Polymers into Double-Stranded Helical Organization


Abstract: Self-assembling coordination polymers based on PdII and CuII metal ions were prepared from complexation of a bent-shaped bispyridine ligand and a corresponding transition metal. These coordination polymers were observed to self-assemble into supramolecular structures that differ significantly depending on the coordination geometry of the metal center. The polymer based on PdII self-assembles into a layer structure formed by bridging bispyridine ligands connected in a trans-position of the square-planar coordination geometry of metal center. In contrast, the polymer based on CuII adopts a double-helical conformation with regular grooves, driven by interstranded, copper–chloride dimeric interaction.

Keywords: coordination polymers · helical structures · self-assembly · supramolecular chemistry

The double-stranded helical organization is further confirmed by structure optimization from density functional theory with aromatic framework, showing that the optimized double-helical structure is energetically favorable and consistent with the experimental results. These results demonstrate that weak metal–ligand bridging interactions can provide a useful strategy to construct stable double-stranded helical nanotubes.

Introduction

One of the most significant recent highlights in the field of supramolecular polymer chemistry is the development of folded helical structures, which are important modules in the engineering of functional nano-sized objects, such as nanotubes, nanowires, and chiral materials.[1] In most cases, however, the supramolecular interactions lead to the formation of polymeric strands that fold into single helical conformations.[2] Because only a few supramolecular polymers have been reported to form infinite double-stranded helices,[3] the development of supramolecular double helices structurally comparable to those of DNA is a challenging topic of current research. Double-stranded helical structures can be constructed by the complexation of two oligomeric ligands twisted around metal ions,[4] attractive π–π interactions between two single strands,[5] and complementary interactions between two different strands.[6]

Previous publications from our laboratory have shown that extended polymeric chains formed from complexation between bent-shaped ligands and silver cations with a linear coordination geometry can give rise to a helical secondary structure depending on the size of the counter anion.[7] In addition, these helical polymers showed the dynamic conformational change from the nonfluorescent compressed state to the fluorescent stretched state, triggered by temperature.[8] One can envision that the coordination geometry of the metal center has influence on the secondary structure of coordination polymers.[9] With this in mind, we have prepared coordination polymers based on PdII and CuII ions, which are known to adopt a square-planar coordination geometry.[9a,10]

In this article, we present the formation of a double-stranded helical structure from coordination polymers, driven by interstranded metal–ligand dimeric interactions. The coordination polymers are based on PdII (1) and CuII (2) metal ions, prepared from complexation of a conformationally flexible, meta-linked bispyridine ligand containing a flexible dendritic side group and a corresponding transition metal. The polymer based on PdII self-assembles into an un-
folded zigzag conformation that organizes into a layered structure. In contrast, the polymer based on CuII adopts a double-helical conformation that organizes into a two-dimensional lattice, even though the coordination geometry of Cu complex is an essentially similar square-planar structure to that of Pd complex.

Results and Discussion

Synthesis and characterization: The synthesis of a bispyridine ligand containing a dendritic side chain started with a stepwise fashion according to the procedures described previously.[7] The resulting ligand was treated with [PdCl2(PhCN)2] or CuCl2 to afford the PdII (1) or CuII (2) coordination polymers, respectively. They were characterized by 1H and 13C NMR spectroscopy, elemental analysis, and matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization time-of-flight (MALDI-TOF) mass spectrometry and were shown to be in full agreement with the structures presented.

Both polymers were birefringent waxy solids that are readily soluble in common organic solvents such as CH2Cl2, THF, EtOH and water. The solid-state structures of the polymers were investigated by X-ray scattering. Small-angle X-ray scattering (SAXS) measurements of 1 showed several sharp reflections corresponding to a 1D lamellar structure with in-plane 2D order with a layer thickness of 3.6 nm (Figure 1, top). This structural identification was further confirmed by transmission electron microscopy (TEM) experiments that showed dark organized aromatic layers with a lattice dimension of approximately 4 nm (Figure 1, bottom). The lamellar structure with this dimension indicates that the coordination polymer backbone of 1 adopts an unfolded zigzag conformation that organizes into a layered structure (Figure 2). Bridging bispyridine ligands connected in the trans-position of the square-planar coordination geometry of PdII generates unfolded polymer chains.[8a,11]

In great contrast to polymer 1, CuII coordination polymer 2 self-assembles into a 2D oblique columnar structure with lattice constants of \( a = 4.9 \text{ nm} \), \( b = 4.2 \text{ nm} \) and \( \gamma = 122^\circ \), as identified by SAXS patterns (Figure 3, top). The evidence for the formation of the 2D oblique columnar structure was also provided by a TEM image that shows a 2D array of dark domains in a matrix of light aliphatic segments with dimensions of 4 and 5 nm, which is consistent with the results obtained from the SAXS (Figure 3, bottom). Another interesting point to be noted is the presence of two sharp reflections at the wide angles, corresponding to \( d \)-spacings of 0.88 and 0.55 nm, respectively (Figure 3, top inset). Additional information on the structural dimensionality of 2 was obtained by 2D X-ray diffraction with a sheared sample exhibiting macroscopic orientation. As shown in Figure 4, the reflections at wide angles were diffracted at an angle of 70° with respect to the SAXS scattering, indicative of the presence of a periodicity together with an additional order along the direction of the column axis.

To further corroborate the structural features of the coordination polymer, extended X-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) experiments were performed with 2 at ambient temperature. As shown in Figure 5, the profile revealed several peaks at 2.2, 3.5, and 4.4 Å, that can be indexed as Cu(1)–Cl(1), Cl(1)–Cu(2), and Cu(1)–Cu(2) scatterings, respectively. In particular, the Cu–Cu distance at 4.4 Å was also identified by the WAXS pattern.[12] All of these scattering peaks are consistent with the values for the pseudo-
square-planar, chloro-bridged dimers formed through weak axial coordination to one copper center by a chloride ligand located at the adjacent copper atom.\textsuperscript{[13]} It is worth noting that, considering the Cl(1)–Cu(2) distance (0.35 nm) together with the WAXS peak at 0.88 nm associated with a pitch, an additional X-ray diffraction peak at 0.55 nm can be described as the width of a groove along the direction of column axis. From the lattice constants and the density, the number of repeating units per pitch was calculated to be 4.2 units.\textsuperscript{[7a,14]} Considering the interstrand, copper–chloride dimeric interactions, this calculated number indicates that the columns are based on double-stranded helical chains.

On the basis of the results described thus far, it can be concluded that the Cu\textsuperscript{II} coordination polymer chains adopt a double-stranded helical conformation with a regular pitch of 0.94 nm (deduced from 0.88 nm/sin 70\degree) together with a groove of 0.55 nm in width (Figure 6). Subsequently, the double-stranded helices self-organize into a 2D oblique columnar structure. These results show how the complexation of the bent-shaped bispyridine ligand with a Cu\textsuperscript{II} metal ion and a pseudo-square-planar coordination geometry could lead to folded double-stranded helical polymers through complementary dimeric interactions. Considering that in the absence of the metal–chloride bridging interactions compound 1 self-assembles into a layered structure consisting of an unfolded zigzag conformation, the dimeric association through metal–chloride bridging interactions in the Cu\textsuperscript{II} coordination polymer seems to be essential for the formation of a double-stranded helical structure. Indeed, inspection of CPK models revealed that a cisoid double-helical conformation of two polymer chains maximizes these dimeric interactions (see Figure S4 in the Supporting Information).

In an effort to provide further evidence for the key influence of the dimeric association on the formation of a double-helical structure, we synthesized homologous Cu\textsuperscript{II} complex 3 containing a methyl group on the ortho-position of pyridyl unit that is expected to prevent the copper–chlo-
ride dimeric association due to steric crowding (Figure 7).[13] In contrast to 2, the resulting coordination polymer showed to self-assemble into a layered structure (Figure 7 and Figure 8, bottom), suggesting that the coordination geometry of CuII consists of a separated square-planar structure. Furthermore, the EXAFS profile showed no peak corresponding to a Cu(1)–Cl(2) scattering at 3.5 Å (Figure 8, top). These results further support that the double-helical conformation is attributed to the metal–chloride bridging dimeric association.

Computational structure modeling: To provide further information on the formation of a double-stranded helical organization, computational modeling was performed with model complex 4.[16] It should be noted that, similar to 2, the model complex exhibited the three strong reflections at the wide angles, corresponding to helical pitch of 0.88, groove width of 0.55, and π–π stacking distance of 0.35 nm, respectively, demonstrating that model complex 4 also adopt a double-helical conformation with the same dimensions as those of 2 (Figure 9). Structural modeling was performed by density functional theory (DFT) by using SIESTA (Spanish Initiative for Electronic Simulation of Thousands of Atoms).[17] To mimic periodic structure, the computation unit cell was chosen to contain two turns of double-stranded helix composed of eight monomers with 296 atoms. Atom-centered and strictly confined numerical functions were used as a basis set for solving the Kohn–Sham equations.[18] Norm-conserving pseudopotentials were constructed within improved Troullier-Martins scheme.[19] The electron configurations of used pseudopotentials with pseudoionization radii are given in Table 1 (given in Bohr). We used a double-$\zeta$ basis set for all atoms except Cu and Cl. While double-$\zeta$ polarization orbitals were used for both Cu and Cl, relativistic effects were taken into account only for Cu. The exchange-correlation was treated in GGA-PBE.[20] We performed a full optimization of the double-stranded helical structure by means of conjugate gradients allowing unit cell variation. The optimized structure is consistent with the double-stranded helical conformation predicted experimentally as shown in Figure 10. Table 2 shows that the geometric parameters for the double-helical system obtained from our simulations are in good agreement with the experimental profiles. In particular, the Cu(1)–Cl(2) dimeric interaction distance was reproduced excellently as well as the Cu(2)–Cu(1) groove with respect to the values obtained from the X-ray diffraction pattern given in Figure 9.

![Figure 7. Molecular structure and X-ray diffraction patterns of 3.](image)

![Figure 8. Top: EXAFS profile of 3 and the peak assignments. Bottom: TEM image of ultramicrotomed film of 3 revealing layered structures of alternating light dendritic, and dark aromatic layers.](image)

![Figure 9. Molecular structure and X-ray diffraction pattern of 4.](image)

![Table 1. Pseudoionization radii used for pseudopotentials.](image)
A bent-shaped bipyridine ligand containing a dendritic aliphatic side chain has been synthesized and forms complexes with Pd$^{II}$ and Cu$^{II}$ through a self-assembly process. These complexes were observed to self-assemble into ordered nanoscale structure in the bulk state. These results represent a unique example that weak metal–ligand bridging interactions can provide a useful strategy to construct stable double-stranded helical nanotubes.

### Experimental Section

**Materials:** NaH (60%), and $p$-toluenesulfonyl chloride (98%) from TCI and Tokyo Kasei were used as received. 3-Ethynylpyridine (98%) from Aldrich was used as received. Unless otherwise indicated, all starting materials were obtained from commercial suppliers (Aldrich, Lancaster, TCI, etc.) and were used without purification. Dichloromethane and ethyl acetate were distilled before use. Flash chromatography was carried out with Silica Gel 60 (230–400 mesh) from EM Science. Dry triethylamine was obtained by vacuum transfer from sodium and benzophene. $p$-toluenesulfonyl chloride (98%) from TCI, etc.) and were used without purification. Dichloromethane and ethyl acetate were distilled before use. Flash chromatography was carried out with Silica Gel 60 (230–400 mesh) from EM Science. Dry triethylamine was obtained by vacuum transfer from sodium and benzophene. A Nikon optical polarized microscopy (magnification: 100) equipped with a Mettler FP 82 hot-stage and a Mettler FP 90 central processor was used to observe the thermal transitions and to analyze anisotropic texture. Microanalyses were performed with a Perkin Elmer 240 elemental analyzer at Organic Research Center, Sogang University. X-ray scattering measurements were performed in transmission mode with synchrotron radiation at the 3C2 and 10C1 X-ray beam line at the Pohang Accelerator Laboratory (Korea). The scattered X-rays were detected on imaging plates for better 2D-XRD resolution.

### Conclusion

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[12] The broad reflection is attributed to overlap with (002) reflection and halo corresponding to liquid-like correlation of aliphatic chains.


[16] For computational simplicity, methoxy side groups are omitted in the computational modeling.


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