

Analytical Methods

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4 **A novel colorimetric sensor based on diarylethene derivative for**
5
6 **selective detection of Cu(II)**
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4 **Abstract:** A new diarylethene derivative with excellent photochromism and remarkable fatigue
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6 resistance in solution was synthesized. The interaction between its closed-ring diarylethene and
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8 Cu^{2+} caused a notable change in its absorption spectrum with an significant color change from
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10 purple to red. However, this as-synthesized diarylethene derivative did not have any obvious
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12 change with other metal ions. The 1 : 1 binding stoichiometry between Cu^{2+} and derivative was
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14 obtained using the Job's plot and ESI-MS analysis. The binding constant of $(1.29 \pm 0.17) \times 10^4$
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16 M^{-1} for diarylethene- Cu^{2+} complex was calculated from the Benesei-Hildebrand plot. The
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18 detection limit for the analysis of Cu^{2+} ions was found to be $1.62 \times 10^{-6} \text{ mol L}^{-1}$.
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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing demand for highly selective chemical sensors to detect metal ions in environmental and biological samples.¹ Although copper is an essential trace element and plays a critical role in many environmental, biological, and chemical systems,² Cu²⁺-polluted surroundings can cause neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Wilson's diseases, probably because it is involved in the production of reactive oxygen species in human body.³ Therefore, a reliable and convenient method to determine Cu²⁺ in environmental and biological samples is required.⁴

Except of atomic absorption spectrometry,⁵ fluorescence techniques,⁶ and electrochemical methods,⁷ colorimetric methods to detect toxic ions, including Cu²⁺, have attracted considerable attention recently due to its excellent sensitivity, low cost, convenience, and most importantly 'naked-eye' detection.⁸ Among the reported photoresponsive materials, diarylethenes are the most promising with excellent thermal stability, remarkable fatigue resistance and rapid response,⁹ because many ions can induce diarylethenes to undergo multi-state transformations.¹⁰ However, only a few colorimetric sensors based on diarylethenes for Cu²⁺ have been reported.¹¹

It is well-known that di-2-picolyamine has a high affinity to transition metal cations and has been used widely in the design and synthesis of many sensors.¹² Additionally, hydroxyl group could also affect the absorption spectrum by deprotonation or coordination with metal ions.¹³ Therefore, the constructed colorimetric sensor based on diarylethene with di-2-picolyamine unit and hydroxyl group may have excellent selectivity for transition and post-transition metal cations, such as Zn²⁺, Cd²⁺, Cu²⁺, et al. More importantly, a large shift in absorption spectrum could also be expected due to the significant enhancement of the intramolecular charge transfer (ICT) from

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4 the donating part (phenolic hydroxyl group) to the electronic withdrawing part (diarylethene), thus
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6 significant color change can be observed by the naked eyes.
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9 In this study, a novel diarylethene with a di-2-picolyamine unit and a hydroxyl group has been
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11 designed and synthesized for the first time. Its closed-ring isomers sensitivity and selectivity for
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13 Cu^{2+} ions were systematically investigated, in which Cu^{2+} ions caused significant changes in the
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15 absorption spectra and visible color change from the purple to red. The photochromic process of
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17 the diarylethene was shown in Scheme 1.
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21 < Scheme 1 >
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23 24 **2. Experimental**

25 26 **2.1 General methods**

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28 NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker AV400 (400 MHz) spectrometer with CDCl_3 as solvent
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30 and tetramethylsilane as an internal standard. IR spectra were carried out on a Bruker Vertex-70
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32 spectrometer. Mass spectra were measured on a Bruker AmaZon SL Ion Trap Mass spectrometer.
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34 Elemental analysis was carried out on a PE CHN 2400 analyzer. UV-vis absorption spectra were
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36 measured on an Agilent 8453 UV-vis spectrometer. Photo-irradiation was carried out with an
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38 SHG-200 UV lamp, a CX-21 ultraviolet fluorescence analysis cabinet and a BMH-250 visible
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40 lamp. Lights of appropriate wavelengths were isolated by different light filters. All solvents used
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42 were of spectrograde and purified by distillation prior to use. All other reagents were obtained
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44 from J&K Scientific Ltd. without further purification.
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49 50 **2.2 Synthesis**

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52 Diarylethene **10** was synthesized as presented in Scheme 2.
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54 3-Bromo-2-methyl-5-(4-methoxyl-phenyl) thiophene (**2**) was synthesized through Suzuki coupling
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56 reaction,¹⁴ 1-Fluorine-2-(2,5-dimethyl-3-thienyl) perfluorocyclopentene (**3**) was synthesized from
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(2,5-dimethyl-3-bromine) thiophene.¹⁵ Lithiation of **2** in THF at 198 K was followed by the addition of **3** to generate compound **4**, which was then treated with BBr₃ in dichloromethane at 198 K to produce diarylethene **5** (yield: 91%).^{10h} MS (ESI, *m/z*): [M⁺] calcd. of C₂₂H₁₆F₆OS₂, 474.1; found, 473.2 [M-H]⁺.

A mixture of di-2-picolyamine (0.24 g, 1.20 mmol) and paraformaldehyde (0.06 g) was refluxed in ethanol (10 mL) and became a clear yellow solution. The solution was refluxed for 48 h after compound **5** (0.28 g, 0.60 mmol) was added. The solvent was removed with rotary evaporation, and the residue was purified by column chromatography on silica gel with the eluent petroleum ether/ethyl acetate (2:1 v/v). The solvent was removed with rotary evaporation to give a yellow solid **1o** (yield: 76%). Mp. = 336-337 K; Anal. calcd for C₃₅H₂₉F₆N₃OS₂ (%): C, 61.30; H, 4.26; N, 6.13, found: C, 61.28; H, 4.28; N, 6.15; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃, TMS), δ (ppm): 1.78 (s, 3H), 1.80 (s, 3H), 2.35 (s, 3H), 3.75 (s, 2H), 3.84 (s, 4H), 6.66 (s, 1H), 6.85 (d, 1H, *J* = 8.0 Hz), 7.03 (s, 1H), 7.12 (t, 2H, *J* = 6.0 Hz), 7.16 (s, 1H), 7.27 (d, 3H, *J* = 7.2 Hz), 7.57 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.2 Hz), 8.51 (d, 2H, *J* = 4.0 Hz), 11.42 (s, 1H, -OH); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃, TMS), δ (ppm): 14.6, 14.8, 15.1, 56.8, 59.0, 117.2, 120.8, 122.3, 123.2, 123.5, 124.5, 124.7, 124.9, 125.8, 126.6, 127.6, 127.8, 136.8, 137.6, 139.8, 142.3, 148.9, 157.8, 158.2; IR (ν, cm⁻¹): 761, 823, 894, 983, 1051, 1115, 1191, 1271, 1337, 1373, 1436, 1479, 1596, 2823, 2922, 3427; MS(ESI, *m/z*): [M⁺] calcd. of C₃₅H₂₉F₆N₃OS₂, 685.2; found, 686.1 [M+H]⁺.

<Scheme 2>

2.3 UV-vis experiments

The diarylethene solution (2.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹) was prepared in CH₃CN. Metal nitrates were used as ion sources in this study, except of HgCl₂, MnCl₂, BaCl₂. All the metal salts were dissolved in

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4 distilled water (0.1 mol L^{-1}). The volume of the diarylethene solution used in the UV-vis
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6 measurements was 3.0 mL. The effects of Cu^{2+} ions on the diarylethene with a concentration of
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8 $2.0 \times 10^{-5} \text{ mol L}^{-1}$ in CH_3CN could be easily observed by the naked eye.

11 **2.4 Mass spectra experiments**

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13 The diarylethene solution ($2.0 \times 10^{-4} \text{ mol L}^{-1}$) was prepared in methanol (2.0 mL). After
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15 irradiation with 297 nm light to the closed-ring state, 12 μL of the Cu^{2+} solution (0.1 mol L^{-1}) were
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17 transferred to the solution. The mixture was shaken up for a few seconds, mass spectra were taken
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19 at room temperature.

23 **2.5 Determination of cyclization/cycloreversion quantum yields**

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25 The cyclization and cycloreversion quantum yields were determined using
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27 1,2-bis(2-methyl-5-phenyl-3-thienyl)perfluorocyclopentene as reference with values of 0.59 and
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29 0.013, respectively.¹⁶ The absorbance of the sample and the reference at the irradiation wavelength
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31 (297 nm) were adjusted to be the same for the cyclization quantum yield measurement. The
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33 reaction rate of the sample and the reference were measured in the same conditions and compared.
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35 For the cyclization quantum yield measurement, absorbance (A) at the absorption maximum of the
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37 closed-ring isomer was plotted against time. For the cycloreversion quantum yield measurement,
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39 $-\log A$ at the absorption of the irradiated wavelength was plotted against time. The measurement
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41 was carried out three times, and the value was determined by averaging.
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49 **3. Results and Discussion**

51 **3.1 Photochromic properties of **1o****

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53 Diarylethene **1o** showed favorable photochromism and could be switched between the colorless
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55 open-ring isomers (**1o**) and the colored closed-ring isomers (**1c**) through alternating irradiation
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4 with UV light and visible light. In acetonitrile, the absorption spectral and color changes of **1o**
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6 were shown in Fig. 1a. The absorption maximum of **1o** was observed at 299 nm ($\epsilon = 2.60 \times 10^4$
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8 $\text{L}\cdot\text{mol}^{-1}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1}$) due to $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ transition.¹⁷ Upon irradiation with 297 nm light, the colorless
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10 solution of **1o** turned purple and a new visible absorption band centered at 558 nm ($\epsilon = 1.20 \times 10^4$
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12 $\text{L}\cdot\text{mol}^{-1}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1}$) emerged due to the formation of closed-ring isomer **1c**. Reversely, the purple
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14 solution of **1c** could be completely bleached upon irradiation with visible light ($\lambda > 500$ nm) and
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16 the original absorption spectrum was recovered quantitatively. With
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18 1,2-bis(2-methyl-5-phenyl-3-thienyl)perfluorocyclopentene as the reference compound,¹⁶ the ring
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20 cyclization and cycloreversion quantum yields were determined to be 0.15 and 0.053, respectively.
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22 The fatigue resistance of **1** was tested in acetonitrile through alternative irradiation with UV and
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24 visible light in air at room temperature. As showed in Fig. 1b, the coloration and decoloration
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26 cycles of **1** could be repeated for 50 times with only 6.8 % degradation.
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34 <Fig. 1>
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36 3.2 Optical response of **1c** to metal ions

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38 The recognition between **1c** and different metal cations were investigated with UV-vis
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40 spectroscopy in acetonitrile solution. From the absorption spectrum of **1c** in acetonitrile, it could
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42 be found that an intensive absorption band appeared in visible region peaked at 558 nm. Variation
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44 of absorption spectra of **1c** upon addition of 5.0 equiv. of different metal cations, including Cu^{2+} ,
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46 Zn^{2+} , Cd^{2+} , Ni^{2+} , Co^{2+} , Pb^{2+} , Hg^{2+} , Mn^{2+} , Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , Ba^{2+} , Fe^{3+} , Cr^{3+} and Al^{3+} , was shown in Fig.
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2. Generally, di-2-picolylamine has been extensively used as a Zn^{2+} ligand for its high affinity and
excellent selectivity.¹⁸ Interestingly, there was a slight increase and red shift in the absorption
spectra of **1c** with the titration of Zn^{2+} as other metal ions, such as Cd^{2+} , Ni^{2+} , Co^{2+} , Pb^{2+} , Hg^{2+} ,

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4 Mn²⁺, Ca²⁺, Mg²⁺, etc. Small decrease at 558 nm was observed in the presence of Al³⁺ and Cr³⁺.
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6 Upon the addition of Fe³⁺, the absorption maximum had a slight increase and a minimal blue shift.
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8 The maximum absorption peak had an obvious blue shift from 558 to 504 nm upon the addition of
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10 Cu²⁺ to **1c**, which was accompanied by a color change from purple to red. These results indicated
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12 that the capture of Cu²⁺ by the receptor di-2-picolyamine could result in a decrease of the
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14 electron-donating ability of the phenolic hydroxyl group, thus resulting in a decrease in
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16 intramolecular charge transfer (ICT) efficiency.^{12e,18a} Upon irradiation with visible light ($\lambda > 500$
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18 nm), the red solution of **1c**-Cu²⁺ did not change again. The red solution could remained stable for
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20 ten days at room temperature in the dark.
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26 <Fig. 2>
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28 29 **3.3 UV-vis properties of **1c** and **1o** with Cu²⁺ ions**

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31 In order to study the interaction of **1c** and Cu²⁺, an ultraviolet absorbance titration experiment was
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33 carried out. The UV-vis absorbance titration study revealed a steady rise of absorbance at 504 nm
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35 on increasing the concentration of copper ions from 4.0×10^{-6} to 6.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹. Consistent
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37 with the UV-Vis spectral change, the color of **1c** solution changed from purple to red in the
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39 presence of Cu²⁺ ions (Fig. 3a). These results indicated that **1c** could serve as a potential candidate
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41 for a “naked eyes” sensor of Cu²⁺ with excellent selectivity. The color change could be due to the
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43 formation of the complex of Cu²⁺ and **1c**. Even with the addition of ethylene diamine tetraacetic
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45 acid disodium salt (Na₂EDTA) aqueous solution, the red solution of **1c** and Cu²⁺ did not change
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47 again (Fig. 3a insert), suggesting the sensing process of **1c** in response to Cu²⁺ ions was
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49 irreversible. From the absorbance titration data, according to the methodology presented in
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51 reference,¹⁹ the limit of detection (LOD) of 1.62×10^{-6} mol L⁻¹ was estimated from the calibration
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4 curve (Fig. 3b) and then compared with some recently reported Cu^{2+} sensors (Table 1). The
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6 significant changes in the spectra could be used to estimate the stoichiometry and association
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8 constant of the metal complex through spectrophotometric titration.
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11 <Fig. 3>

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13 <Table 1>

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16 Job's plot analysis of **1c** and Cu^{2+} was carried out according to the methodology presented in
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18 reference.²⁴ the Job's plot analysis of **1c** and Cu^{2+} has been carried out by UV-vis titration in
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20 acetonitrile as shown in Fig. 4 with the maximum mole fraction of 50% in accordance with the
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22 proposed binding stoichiometry of 1 : 1. With UV-vis titration results, the association constant (K_a)
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24 of **1c** with Cu^{2+} could be calculated from the Benesi-Hildebrand equation,²⁵ and the relationship
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26 between $A_0/(A-A_0)$ and $1/[\text{Cu}^{2+}]$ was linear with a good linear constant ($R = 0.998$) (Fig. 5). Based
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28 on the 1 : 1 stoichiometry and UV-vis titration data, K_a turned out to be $(1.29 \pm 0.17) \times 10^4 \text{ L}$
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30 mol^{-1} , which was within the previously reported values (10^4 - 10^5) for Cu^{2+} -binding
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32 chemosensors.²⁶
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38 <Fig. 4>

39 <Fig. 5>

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42 As **1c**, the interaction between **1o** and Cu^{2+} was also investigated through ultraviolet absorbance
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44 titration. Upon the addition of Cu^{2+} , there was not clear color changes of **1o** solution. As shown in
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46 Fig. 6, the absorption maximum at 299 nm of **1o** was decreased with a new absorption maximum
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48 at 360 nm, which could be ascribed to the MLCT transition and ($\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$), with some mixing of
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50 metal-perturbed intraligand (IL) ($\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$) transition.^{9b,27} These results indicated that **1o** also had
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52 significant binding affinity to Cu^{2+} .
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58 <Fig. 6>

3.4 Mechanism of **1c** with Cu^{2+} ions

In order to confirm the coordination between **1c** and Cu^{2+} , NMR, mass spectrometry (MS) and infrared (IR) spectra were also used to further study the binding affinity of **1c** to Cu^{2+} . ^1H NMR experiments were carried out in $\text{DMSO-}d_6$. But the ^1H NMR spectrum of **1c-Cu** $^{2+}$ does not provide useful information due to the paramagnetic character of Cu^{2+} .^{12e} An intensive peak at m/z 748.0 assigned to $[\mathbf{1c}+\text{Cu}]^+$ was observed (calcd 748.1) (Fig. 7a), which provided strong evidence for the formation of 1 : 1 complex between **1c** and Cu^{2+} in the electron-spray ionization (ESI) measurements. In IR spectroscopy, two new bands at 422 and 488 cm^{-1} and a new band at 655 cm^{-1} of **1c-Cu** $^{2+}$ corresponding to the characteristic vibration of Cu-N and Cu-O, respectively.²⁸ The band at 3427 cm^{-1} corresponding to the vibration of O-H was disappeared upon addition of Cu^{2+} ions (Fig. 7b). These results also confirmed the formation of complex **1c-Cu** $^{2+}$. Based on the IR spectra and ESI-mass spectrometry, the structure of a 1 : 1 complex from **1c** and Cu^{2+} could be determined. In this complex, Cu^{2+} may coordinate with nitrogen atoms of two pyridine groups, oxygen atom of hydroxyl group and nitrogen atom of the tertiary amine. The proposed interaction mode between **1c** and Cu^{2+} was given in Fig. 8.

< Fig. 7 >

< Fig. 8 >

3.5 Selective response of **1c** to Cu^{2+}

The selectivity of **1c** to Cu^{2+} was investigated. Variation of absorption of **1c** at 504 nm upon the addition of 5.0 equivalents of other metal cations, including Zn^{2+} , Cd^{2+} , Ni^{2+} , Co^{2+} , Pb^{2+} , Hg^{2+} , Mn^{2+} , Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , Cr^{3+} and Al^{3+} , were shown in Fig. 9a. The absorption at 504 nm showed no significant change upon the addition of the metal ions above mentioned. Only a slight increase at

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4 504 nm was observed in the presence of Ba²⁺ and Fe³⁺ as showed in Fig. 9b. However, the color of
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6 **1c** changed to red with the addition of Cu²⁺, which might be due to the special binding affinity
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8 between Cu²⁺ and the di-2-picolyamine moiety in diarylethene system.^{10b} The effect of
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10 competitive metal ions was studied by adding Cu²⁺ to **1c** solution in the presence of the above
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12 mentioned metal ions (Fig. 9c). The miscellaneous competitive cations did not lead to any
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14 significant absorption in the visible region. Moreover, in the presence of 5.0 equiv. of other
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16 competitive cations, the Cu²⁺ still resulted in the similar absorption change. These results indicated
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18 that the selectivity of **1c** for Cu²⁺ over other competitive cations is remarkably high, and that **1c**
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20 could serve as a potential candidate for colorimetric sensor of Cu²⁺.
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26 <Fig. 9>
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28 29 **4. Conclusion**

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31 In summary, a new photochromic diarylethene derivative with a di-2-picolyamine unit and a
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33 hydroxyl group was designed and synthesized firstly. This diarylethene derivative exhibited
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35 excellent photochromism with remarkable fatigue resistance. Furthermore, the closed-ring isomer
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37 of the diarylethene exhibited excellent sensitivity and selectivity to Cu²⁺ over other metal cations.
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39 A significant color change from purple to red could be observed directly with naked eyes,
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41 suggesting the possibility to make a diarylethene-based colorimetric sensor for detection of Cu²⁺.
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44 This study showed a simple and convenient method to detect Cu²⁺ based on a diarylethene
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46 derivative.
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Graphical Abstract

A novel colorimetric sensor based on diarylethene derivative for selective detection of Cu(II)

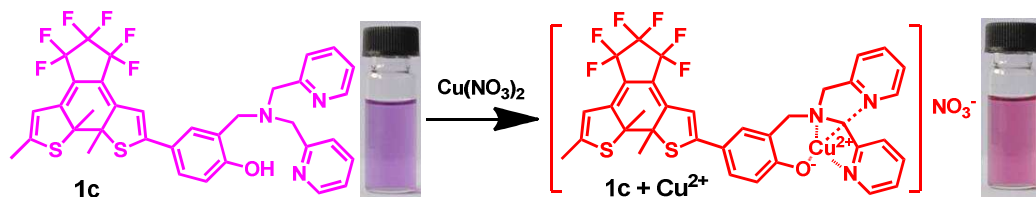
Shiqiang Cui^{a,b}, Shouzhi Pu^{a,b,*}, Yanfeng Dai^a

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A novel photochromic diarylethene derivative with a di-2-picoylamine unit and a hydroxyl group was designed and synthesized firstly. Its closed-ring isomers selective interaction with Cu^{2+} ions was investigated systematically. The results indicated that the diarylethene derivative could be used as a colorimetric sensor for the selective recognition of Cu^{2+} ions.

Table 1 Comparative study of analytical performance of **1c** with other reported sensors

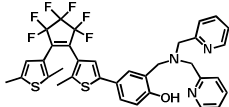
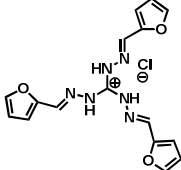
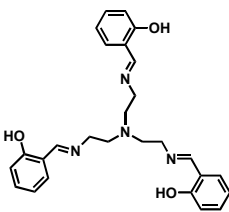
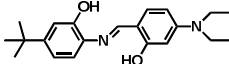
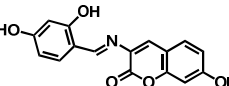
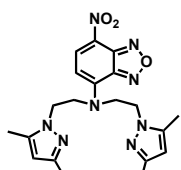
No.	Sensors	Association constant (Ka) (L mol ⁻¹)	LOD (mol L ⁻¹)	Approaches	Ref.
1		$(1.29 \pm 0.17) \times 10^4$	1.62×10^{-6}	Colorimetry	This work
2		1.1×10^5	2.7×10^{-6}	Colorimetry	20
3		5.0118×10^4	1.5×10^{-6}	Colorimetry	21
4		1.5×10^4	1.15×10^{-6}	Emission	19
5		NA	1.04×10^{-4}	Emission	22
6		2.62×10^4	NA	Emission	23

Figure captions

Scheme 1. Photochromism of diarylethene **1o**.

Scheme 2. Synthetic route of diarylethene **1o**.

Fig. 1. (a) Absorption and color changes of **1o** (2.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹, in CH₃CN) upon irradiation with UV-vis light; (b) Fatigue resistance of **1** in acetonitrile in air at room temperature.

Fig. 2. Absorption changes of **1c** (2.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹, in CH₃CN) upon addition of 5.0 equiv. of different metal cations.

Fig. 3. Absorption (a) and color (b) changes of **1c** (2.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹, in CH₃CN) upon addition with Cu²⁺ ions.

Fig. 4. Job's plot analysis of **1c** and Cu²⁺ in CH₃CN. The total molar concentration of **1c** and Cu²⁺ is 2.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹.

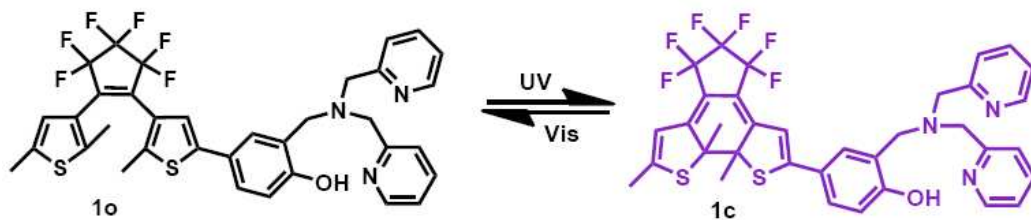
Fig. 5. Hildebrand-Benesi plot based on the 1 : 1 for **1c** with $K_a = (1.29 \pm 0.17) \times 10^4$ L mol⁻¹.

Fig. 6. Absorption changes of **1o** (2.0×10^{-5} mol L⁻¹, in CH₃CN) upon addition with Cu²⁺ ions.

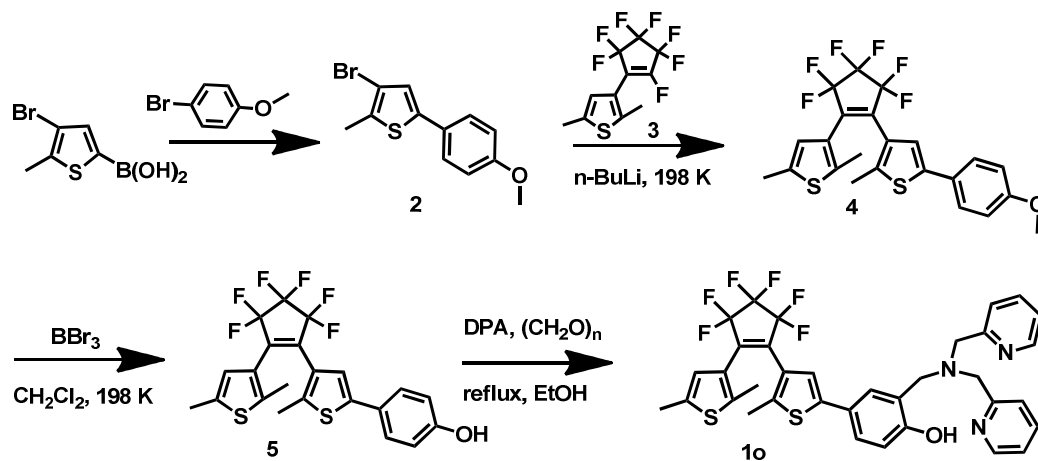
Fig. 7. (a) Mass spectra of [**1c**+Cu]⁺; (b) IR spectra of **1c** and **1c**-Cu²⁺.

Fig. 8. Proposed complexation mechanism of **1c** with Cu²⁺.

Fig. 9. The (A-A₀)/A₀ ratio of **1c** at 504 nm (a) and its color changes (b) in CH₃CN in the presence of 5.0 equiv. of respective metal ions; (c) The A /A₀ ratio of **1c** at 504 nm in the presence of various ions (5.0 equiv.) and additional Cu²⁺ ions (3.0 equiv.) in CH₃CN.



Scheme 1



Scheme 2

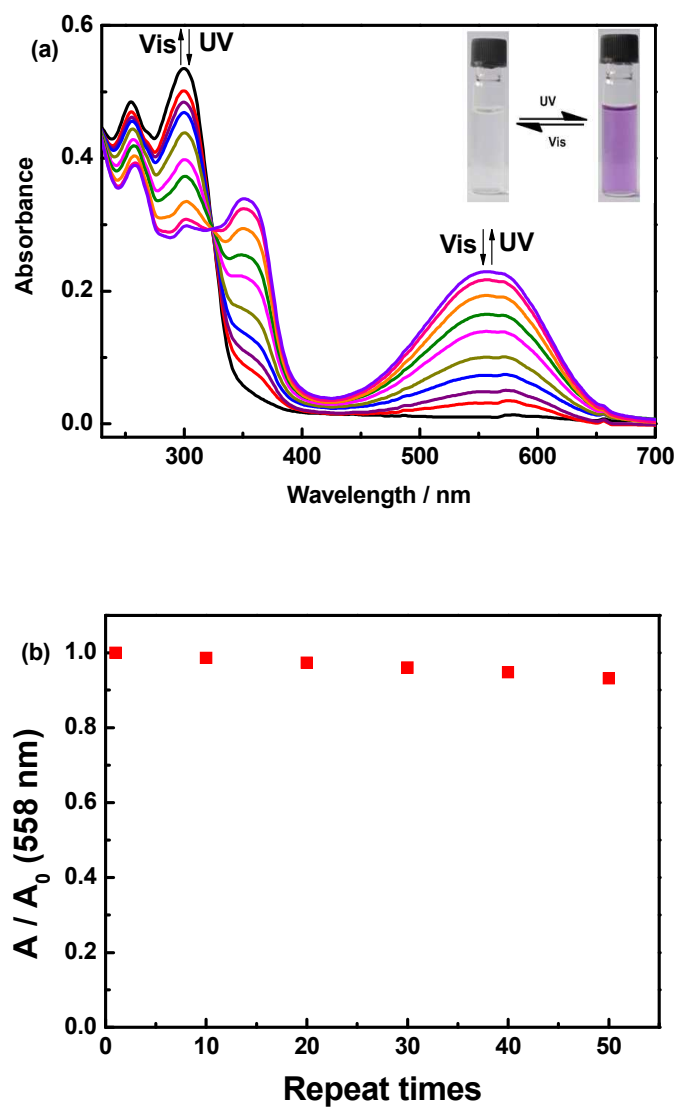


Fig. 1

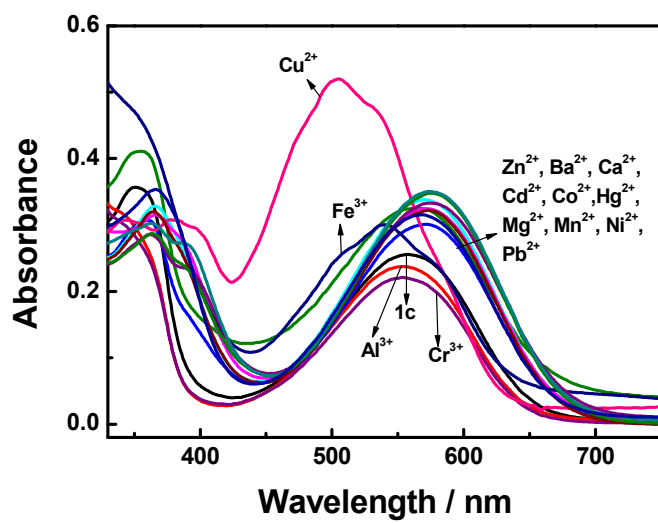


Fig. 2

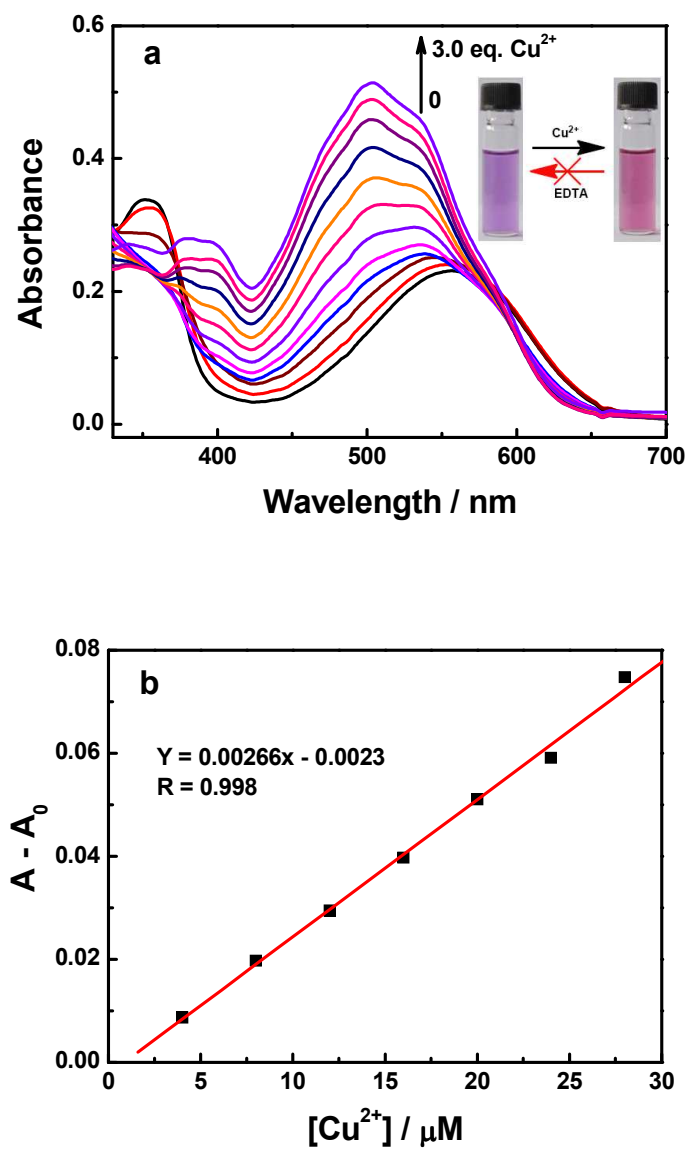


Fig. 3

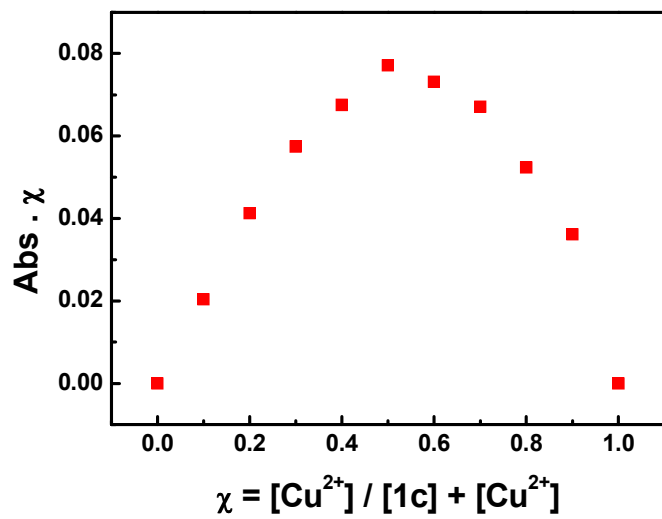


Fig. 4

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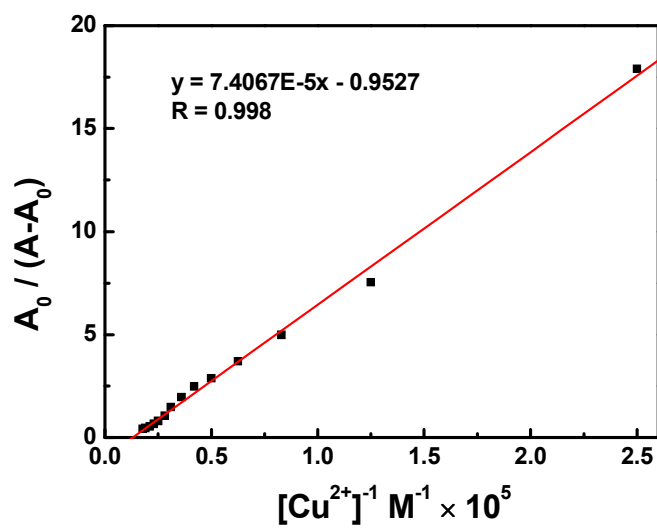


Fig. 5

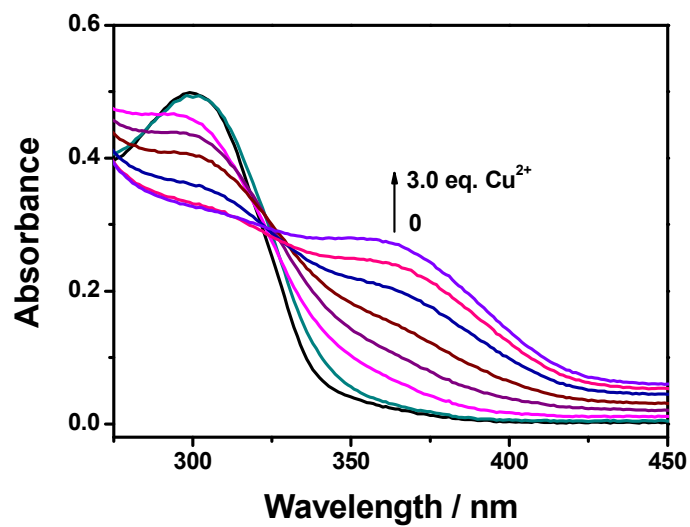


Fig. 6

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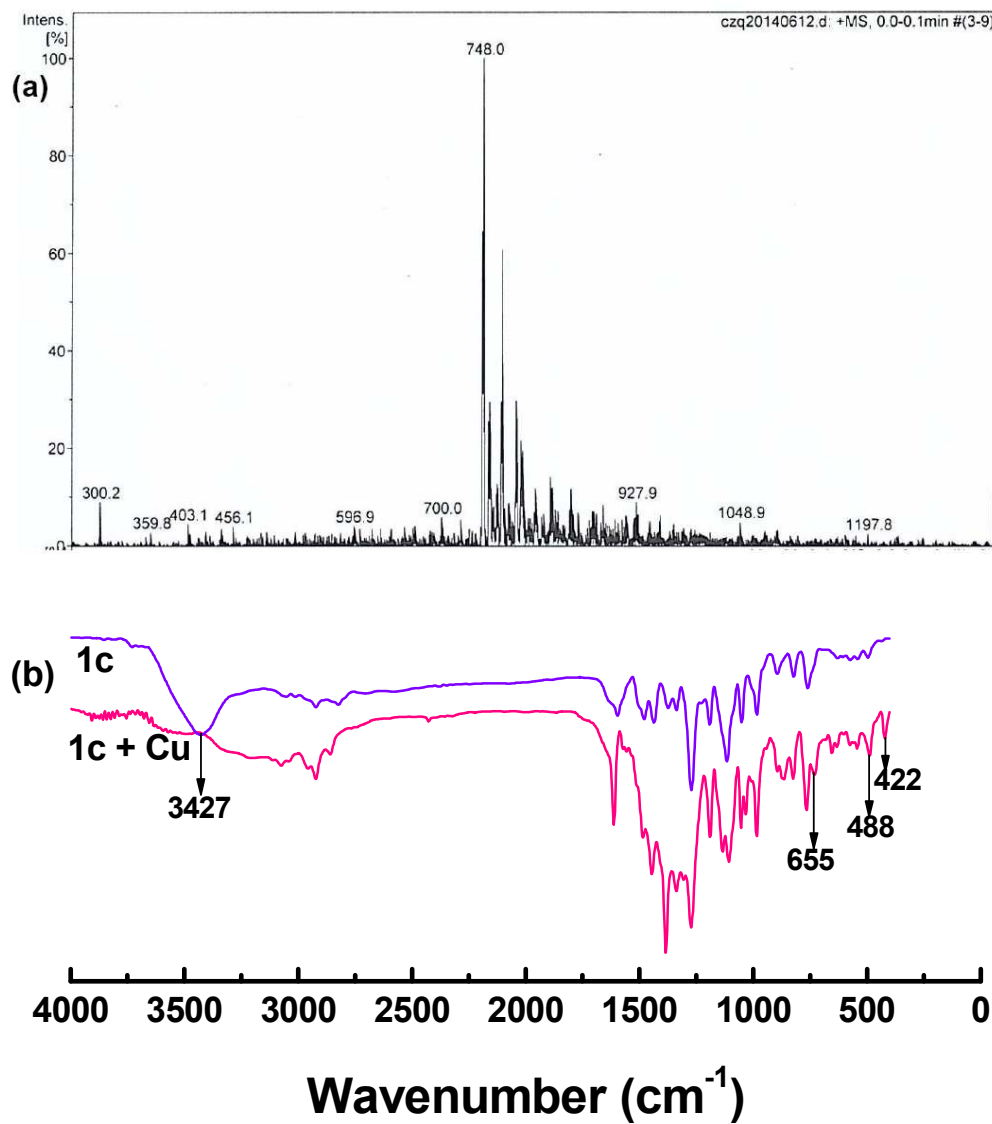


Fig. 7

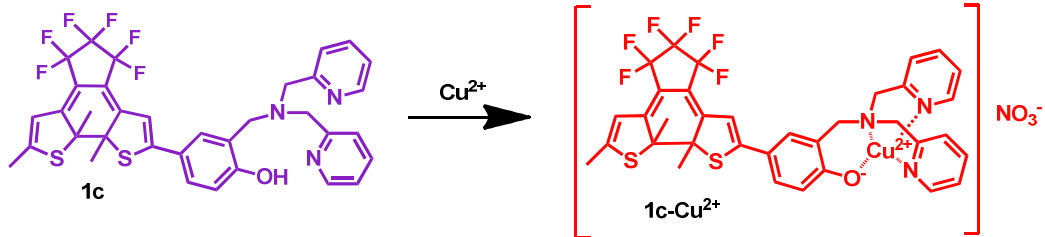


Fig. 8

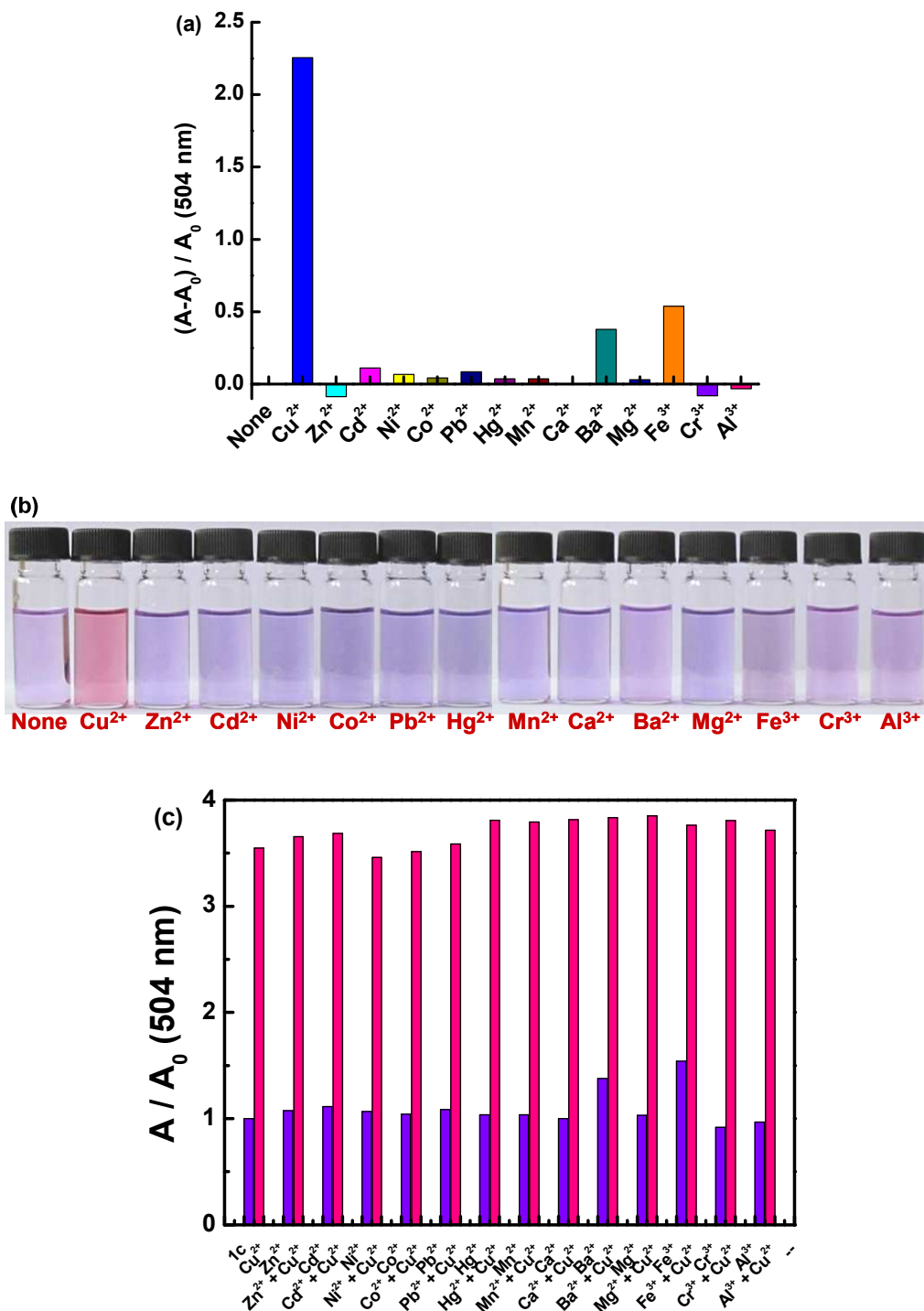


Fig. 9