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## ARTICLE

## Kinetic Processes of Phase Separation and Aggregation Behaviors in Slot-die Processed High Efficiency Y6-based Organic Solar Cells

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The morphology optimization is proved to be one crucial factor contributing to the 19% efficient Y6-based organic solar cells (OSCs). Although the relationship between the component miscibility and film morphology has been established, it's not clarified how the film formation processes proceed, especially for the large-area fabrication compatible methods, i.e. slot-die coating, which obstacles the further optimization of morphology. Herein, we comprehensively investigated the effect of miscibility and film-formation kinetic process on the film morphology during the processing of different solvents. A highest power conversion efficiency (PCE) of 17.38% can be obtained in the D18:Y6 device processed with slot-die coating in an open-air environment. However, due to their relatively poor miscibility, incorporating trace amount of chlorobenzene (CB) into CF can sufficiently promote the Y6 aggregation, leading to the increased phase separation and thus the average PCE drop to 15.16%. On the contrary, PM6:Y6 blend shows the insensitive changes of kinetic process as well as final morphology and thus the comparable PCEs when cast with different solvents, which is ascribed to their relatively good miscibility. This work provides the scientific guidelines for device optimization by integrating the intermediate gap from miscibility to kinetic process and their impact on final morphology.

### 1 Introduction

Organic solar cells (OSCs) have a bright future due to their various advantages including flexibility, light weight, low cost, translucency, and large-area processing<sup>1-6</sup>. During recent years, researchers have put great efforts into the material design, morphology control, device engineering, and large-area fabrication of OSCs<sup>7-14</sup>. In particular, with the advent of sparkling non-fullerene acceptor Y6<sup>10</sup> and its derivatives, the power conversion efficiencies (PCEs) of OSCs have exceeded 19%, suggesting the great potential in practical application<sup>13,14</sup>. The emergence of Y6 and its derivatives have greatly contributed to the great prosperity of OSCs, achieving a breakthrough in efficiency and substantially accelerating the development of OSCs. Y6 employs a ladder-type electron-deficient-core-based central fused ring (dithienothiophen[3.2-b]-pyrrolobenzothiadiazole) with a benzothiadiazole (BT) core to fine-tune its absorption and electron affinity<sup>10</sup>. The unique morphology that Y6 formed, such as 2D packing with a polymer-like conjugated backbone oriented normal to the substrate, is

beneficial for improving carrier transport, which is conducive to the improvement of efficiency<sup>15</sup>.

The morphology of active layer is one of the most critical factors in determining the device performance<sup>16-25</sup>. Typically, the solution-processed active layers feature a complex hierarchical structure, consisting of parameters with different length scale such as crystallinity, molecular orientation, domain size, and domain purity<sup>26-28</sup>. Small changes in material chemistry and process conditions can result in significant differences in morphology and the corresponding device performance<sup>29,30</sup>. The miscibility between donor and acceptor is a crucial thermodynamic factor reflecting the trend of phase separation during solution processing<sup>31-33</sup>. Different chemical species usually exhibit varied miscibility between the two materials, which tremendously affects their final morphology. For example, thermodynamic characterization indicates a room-temperature miscibility for D18:Y6 near the percolation threshold, which corresponds to an ideal quench depth and explains the near-ideal morphology for annealing using solvent vapor. In stark contrast, D18:IEICO-4Cl is a low-miscibility system with a deep quench depth during casting, which leads to poor morphology control and low performance<sup>34</sup>. Besides, the PDCBT-Cl:Y6 system with high miscibility results in a deficiency of phase separation, low domain purity, and poor crystallinity, and thus the poor PCE of

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1 only 0.46%<sup>32</sup>. On the other hand, the alterations in film formation  
2 kinetics, which probably adjust the phase separation and  
3 aggregation behaviors of organic semiconductor materials, can  
4 affect the final morphology, even if the miscibility between the  
5 components remains unchanged<sup>35-37</sup>. For example, Liu et al.  
6 found that the PM6:Y6 system had completely different  
7 morphology and performances when processed with CF and CB<sup>14</sup>.  
8 The reason is due to the different arrangement structures of Y6,  
9 in which the face-on orientation in CF film and the low  
10 crystallinity and random crystal orientation in CB film can be  
11 observed. This leads to the decreased PCE in CB device. Lin et al.  
12 concluded that by matching the preaggregation rates between  
13 donor and acceptor during the film formation process with  
14 temperature-controlled slot-die coating, the optimized domain  
15 size and crystallinity can be achieved, which contributes to a PCE  
16 of 13.2% in PM7:IT4F<sup>36</sup>. As analyzed above, although the  
17 relationship between the component miscibility and film  
18 morphology has been established, it is not clarified how those  
19 phase separation and aggregation processes occur in the systems  
20 with different miscibility, which obstacles the understanding of  
21 morphology evolution mechanism and thus the further  
22 morphology optimization in those efficient blend systems.

23  
24 In this paper, we select two high-efficiency systems to investigate  
25 the effect of miscibility and film-formation kinetic process on the  
26 film morphology during the processing of different solvents. In  
27 order to obtain the aggregation information and the spatial  
28 distribution of fluorophores and quencher within the blends  
29 during the solution-to-solid phase transformation, *in-situ*  
30 ultraviolet-visible (UV-vis) absorption and *in-situ*  
31 photoluminescence (PL) measurements were performed. We  
32 found that in the low miscibility D18<sup>11</sup>:Y6<sup>10</sup> system, the solution  
33 states of chloroform (CF) and mixed solvents (MS) (CF as the  
34 primary solvent with 0.5% v/v CB) are the same at the beginning  
35 of film formation. However, the solution concentration increases  
36 in the 0.5 s of film formation time while the strong interactions in  
37 chlorobenzene (CB) lead to enhanced aggregation and excessive  
38 phase separation and thus the deterioration of device  
39 performance. Therefore, the D18:Y6 exhibits the highest PCE of  
40 17.38% in CF device due to the optimal morphology. In  
41 comparison, the average PCEs for MS and CB devices exhibit  
42 15.16% and 13.44%, respectively. The film formation of the high-  
43 miscibility system PM6<sup>38</sup>:Y6 in CF and MS is analogous, leading to  
44 little variability in morphology and device performance.  
45 Therefore, the devices based on PM6:Y6 system obtain 14.70%,  
46 14.23%, and 14.01% average efficiency when processed with CF,  
47 MS and CB, respectively. Our results suggest a powerful strategy  
48 for morphology optimization by considering both the miscibility  
49 and kinetic factors so as to control the phase separation and  
50 aggregation behaviors.

51

## 52 Results and discussion

53 Here, we chose two efficient blend systems D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6  
54 to study the effect of miscibility and film-formation kinetic  
55 process on the film morphology and device performance. The  
56 chemical structures and energy levels of D18, PM6, and Y6 are  
57 displayed in Fig.1a and Fig.S1 (Supporting Information),  
58 respectively. The energy levels of D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 are well  
59 aligned to split photon-generated excitons. The selection of the  
60 solvent is pivotal in the device preparation and has a direct  
61 association with the final morphology. Currently, the device  
62 processing in laboratories needs to select solvents by the trial-  
63 and-error method as so to achieve efficient devices. While the  
64 intrinsic reasons for the different morphology caused by different  
65 solvents should be further clarified. In our work, we chose the  
66 two most commonly used solvents, CF and CB, to adjust their  
67 blend film morphology. We firstly performed the contact angle  
68 measurements to study the interaction and miscibility among  
69 different components. The results are shown in Fig.S2  
70 (Supporting Information). The interaction parameters, calculated  
71 according to Flory–Huggins model, are 0.64 for  $\chi_{D18, Y6}$  and 0.58  
72 for  $\chi_{PM6, Y6}$ , demonstrating better miscibility between PM6 and Y6  
73 compared to that between D18 and Y6 (Fig.1b). To further  
74 investigate the interactions between polymers and Y6, we  
75 designed an experiment that used the *in-situ* temperature  
76 photoluminescence (PL) spectra of bilayer structure to verify the  
77 diffusion ability between polymers and Y6. As shown in Fig.S3  
78 (Supporting Information), we prepared the structure with the  
79 lower layer as the donor D18 or PM6 and the upper layer as the  
80 acceptor Y6 to observe the change in the signal of Y6 under the  
81 effect of temperature. Time-dependent contour maps of PL  
82 spectra are shown in Fig.1c and 1d for PM6/Y6 and D18/Y6,  
83 respectively. The PL intensity of the bilayers of both systems is  
84 found to be reduced under the influence of temperature, as  
85 shown in Fig.1e. The bilayer absorbs photons to generate excitons  
86 under the light source, and the diffusion of excitons is intensified  
87 under the thermal effect, while the rapid quench of excitons is  
88 due to the presence of the donor-acceptor interface that causes  
89 the reduction of PL intensity. The donor-acceptor interface  
90 originates from two aspects, one is the original interface of the  
91 bilayer, and the other is the mixed region resulting from the rapid  
92 diffusion of Y6 into polymers upon thermal effect. In PM6/Y6, the  
93 intensity changed more strongly, while the signal changed  
94 relatively limited in the D18/Y6 system. The decrease in PL signal  
95 intensity may qualitatively respond to the diffusion of Y6 at the  
96 interface. Therefore, we qualitatively confirmed the better  
97 interdiffusion behavior between Y6 and PM6 from the above  
98 experiments, further suggesting their good miscibility.

99

100 To better understand the effect of CF and CB solvents on the  
101 morphology of active layer, a mixed solvent (MS) with the CF/CB  
102 blend ratio of 100/0.5 (V/V) was also employed to process the  
103 blend film so as to figure out the difference between CB and CF.  
104 The aggregation states of Y6 solutions and solid-state blend films  
105 were investigated by ultraviolet-visible (UV-vis) absorption  
106 spectroscopy. As shown in Fig.1f, the initial aggregation states of

1 Y6 in both CF and MS solvents are consistent, with the two lines  
 2 coinciding exactly. In CB solvent, there is a slight overall blue shift  
 3 of Y6 absorption peak, which proves its weaker aggregation state.  
 4 The aggregation state of Y6 in the solid film is enhanced  
 5 significantly compared to its solution state, and the peak position  
 6 is significantly red-shifted. Fig.1g and 1h show the thin film  
 7 absorption spectra of PM6:Y6 and D18:Y6 processed with  
 8 different solvents. For D18:Y6, trace amount of CB made the peak  
 9 position of Y6 significantly red-shifted (from 816 to 840 nm), close  
 10 to the position of CB-processed film. While for PM6:Y6, trace  
 11 amount of CB did not affect the peak position of Y6. This indicates  
 12 the dramatically different aggregation of Y6 in two blend systems  
 13 probably resulting from their various miscibility, we next studied  
 14 how those different processing solvents affect the device  
 15 performance and clarified the underlying mechanisms.

16  
 17 We prepared inverted devices with the structure of  
 18 glass/ITO/ZnO/D18(PM6):Y6/MoO<sub>3</sub>/Al using the slot-die coating  
 19 in ambient conditions. Fig.2a shows the schematic of slot-die  
 20 coating. The short-circuit current density-voltage (*J*-*V*) curves and  
 21 the corresponding parameters are shown in Fig.2b and Table 1,  
 22 respectively. In order to compare the PCE difference more  
 23 intuitively, a histogram of the PCEs is illustrated in Fig.2c. D18:Y6  
 24 and PM6:Y6 are both high-efficiency systems, but their efficiency  
 25 varies greatly when treated with different solvents. PM6:Y6  
 26 devices can obtain the high PCEs of around 14% processed with  
 27 CF, MS and CB, which are not significantly affected by solvents.  
 28 While only the D18:Y6 device cast with CF can obtain a high PCE  
 29 of 17.38%, when treated with CB, the reduction in short-circuit  
 30 current density (*J*<sub>sc</sub>) and fill factor (FF) leads to a serious reduction  
 31 in device performance. When using the MS, we found that the  
 32 introduction of trace amount of CB had a significant effect on  
 33 D18:Y6, while the efficiency of the PM6:Y6 system was slightly  
 34 reduced in comparison. Fig.2d shows the external quantum  
 35 efficiency (EQE) curves of the devices cast with different solvents.  
 36 The current densities obtained from the EQE curves are  
 37 consistent with those obtained from the *J*-*V* measurements.

38  
 39 Device physics processes including charge generation, transport  
 40 and extraction were studied to explain the efficiency difference  
 41 induced by the processing solvents. Firstly, the photocurrent  
 42 density (*J*<sub>ph</sub>) as a function of effective voltage (*V*<sub>eff</sub>) was  
 43 analyzed<sup>39,40</sup>, where *J*<sub>ph</sub> is defined as *J*<sub>ph</sub> = *J*<sub>L</sub> - *J*<sub>D</sub> (*J*<sub>L</sub> and *J*<sub>D</sub> are the  
 44 current density under light illumination and in the dark,  
 45 respectively) and *V*<sub>eff</sub> is defined as *V*<sub>eff</sub> = *V*<sub>0</sub> - *V*<sub>a</sub> (*V*<sub>0</sub> is the voltage  
 46 at *J*<sub>ph</sub> = 0 and *V*<sub>a</sub> is the applied voltage). As shown in Fig.2e, for  
 47 D18:Y6, the CF devices show higher *J*<sub>ph</sub>/*J*<sub>sat</sub> ratio (92.15%) than  
 48 that of the MS (86.19%) and CB ones (78.57%) under short-circuit  
 49 conditions, indicating the introduction of CB has affected charge  
 50 extraction and carrier recombination. The exciton dissociation  
 51 and charge extraction efficiency are more severely reduced in the  
 52 CB-processed D18:Y6 device. The *J*<sub>ph</sub>/*J*<sub>sat</sub> ratios of CF, MS and CB  
 53 in the PM6:Y6 system are 91.63%, 91.28% and 87.32%,  
 54 respectively, indicating that the CF device has the most efficient

55 dissociation efficiency and while it is slightly reduced in the MS  
 56 device. In addition, the carrier recombination mechanism was  
 57 studied by measuring the dependence of *J*<sub>sc</sub> and *V*<sub>oc</sub> under varied  
 58 illumination intensity. Generally, the dependence of *J*<sub>sc</sub> on light  
 59 intensity (*P*) can be used to characterize the bimolecular  
 60 recombination. *J*<sub>sc</sub> is proportional to *P*<sup>α</sup>, where α is the power-law  
 61 exponent that can be extracted from fitting the slope of the data  
 62 plotted on a log-log scale<sup>41,42</sup>. The relationship between *V*<sub>oc</sub> and *P*  
 63 can be used to distinguish whether bimolecular recombination  
 64 (slope of *kT*/*q*, where *k* is Boltzmann's constant and *T* represents  
 65 the absolute temperature) or trap-assisted recombination (2  
 66 *kT*/*q*) dominates the recombination mechanism<sup>42,43</sup>. As shown in  
 67 Fig.2f and 2g, for D18:Y6, the α values of CF, MS and CB devices  
 68 are 0.927, 0.918 and 0.907, respectively, indicating lower  
 69 bimolecular recombination of CF devices. While in PM6:Y6  
 70 system, the α values of CF, MS and CB devices are 0.951, 0.937  
 71 and 0.927, respectively, exhibiting a similar trend to D18:Y6  
 72 system. Besides, for D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6, the CF devices show a  
 73 small slope of 1.17 *kT*/*q* and 1.28 *kT*/*q*, while the CB devices show  
 74 a large slope of 1.45 *kT*/*q* and 1.37 *kT*/*q*, suggesting the weak  
 75 trap-assisted recombination of CF devices. For D18:Y6/MS device,  
 76 the introduction of CB leads to an increase in bimolecular  
 77 recombination and trap-assisted recombination, resulting in a  
 78 gradual decrease in device performance. The introduction of CB  
 79 in PM6:Y6 system has merely effect on the trap-assisted  
 80 recombination since the CF and MS devices have the same slope  
 81 of 1.28*kT*/*q*. Moreover, the hole mobility (*μ*<sub>h</sub>) and electron  
 82 mobility (*μ*<sub>e</sub>) were measured under different conditions using  
 83 space-charge-limited current (SCLC) method. As shown in Fig.2h  
 84 and Fig.2i, for D18:Y6 system, both *μ*<sub>h</sub> and *μ*<sub>e</sub> have higher values  
 85 and the *μ*<sub>h</sub> / *μ*<sub>e</sub> ratio is more balanced in CF device. However, the  
 86 values of *μ*<sub>h</sub> and *μ*<sub>e</sub> are severely reduced and out of balance in MS  
 87 devices. The values of *μ*<sub>e</sub> are calculated to be 4.14×10<sup>-4</sup> and  
 88 3.01×10<sup>-4</sup> cm<sup>2</sup> V<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for the CF and MS devices, respectively, while  
 89 the *μ*<sub>h</sub> values of the corresponding devices are 4.58×10<sup>-4</sup> and  
 90 4.09×10<sup>-4</sup> cm<sup>2</sup> V<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>. The weakened and unbalanced charge  
 91 carrier motions indicate the unfavorable competition between  
 92 charge recombination and charge generation, which further  
 93 affects the FF values. In PM6:Y6 system, the values of *μ*<sub>e</sub> were  
 94 calculated to be 3.42×10<sup>-4</sup> and 3.38×10<sup>-4</sup> cm<sup>2</sup> V<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for the CF and  
 95 MS devices, respectively, and the *μ*<sub>h</sub> values of the corresponding  
 96 devices were 3.71×10<sup>-4</sup> and 3.60×10<sup>-4</sup> cm<sup>2</sup> V<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>. The values of  
 97 *μ*<sub>h</sub> and *μ*<sub>e</sub> are weakly reduced when changing the processing  
 98 solvent from CF to MS, therefore the FF values are maintained.

99  
 100 The performance of OSCs is directly related to the morphology of  
 101 active layer. Therefore, the grazing-incidence wide-angle X-ray  
 102 scattering (GIWAXS)<sup>44</sup> measurement was used to study the  
 103 molecular packing and crystallinity in D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 films  
 104 prepared by slot-die coating with different solvents. Fig.3a-b and  
 105 Fig.3c show the 2D-GIWAXS images and the corresponding line  
 106 profiles of D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 blend films. All blends exhibit face-  
 107 on preferential orientation. In addition, to quantify the molecular  
 108 crystallinity, the crystalline coherence length (CCL), which is

1 closely related to the charge transport and device performance,  
2 is extracted from GIWAXS line profiles according to Scherrer  
3 equation<sup>45</sup>, as summarized in Table 2. With the incorporation of  
4 CB, the D18:Y6 blend shows sharper (100) lamellar packing ( $q =$   
5  $0.29 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$ ), while the PM6:Y6 blend shows no significant change in  
6 (100) lamellar packing ( $q = 0.28 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$ ), indicating the strong effect  
7 of CB on the D18 alignment and the limited effect on PM6 film.  
8 For D18:Y6 film the CCL of MS blends (99.66 Å) is higher than that  
9 of the CF film (94.27 Å). While the CCL of MS blends (69.98 Å) is  
10 only slightly improved than that of the CF blends (69.39 Å) in  
11 PM6:Y6. For CB films, the (100) peaks of both systems are greatly  
12 enhanced compared to CF films with CCL enhanced from 94.27 Å  
13 and 69.39 Å to 151.9 Å and 95.64 Å for D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6  
14 systems, respectively. The CCL of D18 is increased by 6% and 61%  
15 in MS and CB films, respectively, compared to CF film, which  
16 corresponds to a decrease in PCE from 17.1% to 15.3% and 13.4%.  
17 By comparing the changes in the arrangement of the two donors,  
18 we can observe that the effect of trace amount of CB on the  
19 crystallinity of D18 and PM6 is different. Trace amount of CB has  
20 a profound effect on the behavior of D18, while the arrangement  
21 of PM6 remains almost unchanged in comparison.

22  
23 Then we performed resonant soft X-ray scattering (RSOXS)<sup>46</sup> to  
24 further probe the phase separation in different conditions. We  
25 used 286.8 and 284.2 eV X-ray to gain high scattering contrast on  
26 D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 blend films, respectively, and Fig.3d and 3e  
27 show the RSOXS line profiles. The phase separation parameters  
28 are extracted and summarized in Table S2. Impressively, for  
29 D18:Y6, the CF and MS blend films show the scattering peaks at  $q$   
30 = 0.181 and 0.157 nm<sup>-1</sup>, respectively, exhibiting a much larger  
31 domain size of MS film (23.84 nm) than that of CF film (17.32 nm).  
32 However, the domain size is only weakly enhanced from CF (32.98  
33 nm) to MS (33.90 nm) in PM6:Y6 films. The trace CB has a  
34 profound effect on the morphology of D18:Y6. In addition, we  
35 also investigated the morphology of the active layer using atomic  
36 force microscopy (AFM) and transmission electron microscopy  
37 (TEM). For D18:Y6 system, as shown in Fig.S6a-b, the surface  
38 morphology of the CF film is relatively smooth, with an average  
39 mean square surface roughness ( $R_q$ ) of 1.26 nm and an obvious  
40 fibrous structure in the corresponding phase diagram. However,  
41 when processed with CB, the surface roughness increases  
42 significantly with  $R_q$  of 3.72 nm, which may have a negative  
43 impact on charge generation and collection. As a result, the  
44 relatively poor  $J_{SC}$  and FF values are observed in the CB-processed  
45 D18:Y6 devices. TEM images also show that D18:Y6 films have a  
46 highly regular arrangement structure when processed with CB,  
47 which exhibits a significantly larger phase separation as well as a  
48 large enhancement of the D18 arrangement regularity (Fig.S6e-f).  
49 In contrast, in the PM6:Y6 system, the surface roughness of the  
50 film increases slightly when processed with CB compared to CF,  
51 with the average  $R_q$  increasing from 1.44 to 1.56 nm (Fig.S6c-d),  
52 which corresponds well to a limited increase in the size of TEM  
53 phase region (Fig.S6g-h), and thus the nearly unchanged device  
54 performance. Therefore, D18 in the D18:Y6 system exhibits

55 strong aggregation behavior when processed with CB, resulting in  
56 a dramatic increase in crystallinity and phase separation, which  
57 severely affects the exciton dissociation and charge extraction  
58 processes.

59  
60 In order to gain a deeper understanding of the morphology  
61 evolution during film drying in slot-die coating under different  
62 conditions, *in-situ* spectroscopy measurements were performed.  
63 Fig.4a-c and 4e-g show the time evolution of UV-vis absorption  
64 contour maps of D16 and PM6:Y6 films in different solvents,  
65 where the raw *in-situ* UV-vis absorption spectra are shown in  
66 Fig.S7. The UV-vis absorption spectra are calculated from the  
67 transmission spectra according to the equation  $A_\lambda = -\log_{10}(T)$ ,  
68 where  $A_\lambda$  is the absorbance at a certain wavelength ( $\lambda$ ) and  $T$  is  
69 the measured transmittance after background correction using  
70 blank glass<sup>47</sup>. Fig.S8a-c and Fig.S8e-f show the time evolution of  
71 photoluminescence (PL) contour maps of D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6  
72 films in different solvents, where the raw data are shown in  
73 Fig.S9. Fig.4d and 4h show the time evolution of Y6 peak location  
74 extracted from *in-situ* UV-vis absorption in D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6  
75 films, respectively. The evolution of peak location represents the  
76 aggregation behavior of donor and acceptor. Fig.S8d and S8h  
77 show the time evolution of integral PL intensity, which can be  
78 correlated to the spatial distribution of fluorophores and  
79 quencher within the blends<sup>48</sup>. Y6 peak evolution can be divided  
80 into three stages: 1) during the first stage, as the solvent  
81 evaporates, Y6 absorption peaks do not evolve, while its integral  
82 PL intensity reduces slowly at the beginning and then decreases  
83 rapidly due to the increased solution concentration. The  
84 reduction of integral PL intensity indicates that the average  
85 distance between the homogeneously distributed fluorophores  
86 and quencher decreases as the relative concentration increases.  
87 Moreover, CB takes the longest time to complete this process  
88 from the view of time scale, while the time for MS is slightly  
89 longer than that of CF. 2) During the second stage, as the solvent  
90 continuously evaporates, the solution concentration crosses the  
91 solubility limit and reaches critical supersaturation. Under such  
92 extreme supersaturation, the absorption peak location of Y6  
93 starts to red shift, while the integral PL intensity further  
94 decreases, indicating the onset of Y6 aggregation. As shown in  
95 Fig.4d and 4h, the redshift onset of Y6 peak location in CF blend  
96 happens earlier than that in MS blend, indicating that Y6  
97 molecules aggregate in advance with the incorporation of CB. 3)  
98 As the solvent further evaporates, Y6 absorption peak exhibits  
99 the continuously red shift and then stabilizes when all the  
100 solvents are removed at the third stage. By comparing the signal  
101 changes, we found that the Y6 signal in the two systems had a  
102 dramatic difference after the solvents change. We found an  
103 interesting phenomenon that the introduction of trace amount of  
104 CB could cause a significant red shift of Y6 peak position in D18:Y6  
105 system, and the final state of Y6 in MS is consistent with that in  
106 CB, indicating the significant aggregation. However, we did not  
107 find this phenomenon in PM6:Y6 system, and the introduction of  
108 CB did not have an obvious effect on Y6 aggregation. The

1 aggregation behavior of Y6 in the mixture solvent is much closer  
 2 to that in CF. Therefore, Y6 in the D18:Y6 system is strongly  
 3 affected by trace CB. For D18:Y6 system, the trace CB changed  
 4 the aggregation and the position of the final absorption peak of  
 5 Y6 due to the increased film drying time combined with the poor  
 6 miscibility between D18 and Y6, which leads to the excessive  
 7 phase separation size and crystallinity of D18 in the film.

8  
 9 On the basis of all the results discussed above, we have gained a  
 10 whole picture (Fig.5) of how trace CB enables the aggregation of  
 11 Y6 in D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 systems. In the solution state, trace  
 12 amount of CB has not affected the aggregation states of Y6 in two  
 13 systems. During the film formation process, the total  
 14 concentration increases with the solvent evaporation, and the Y6  
 15 aggregation in D18:Y6 system becomes more obvious (Fig.4d) due  
 16 to the poor miscibility between D18 and Y6 and the extended  
 17 molecular diffusion time facilitated by the residual CB solvent (~  
 18 0.5 s), resulting in excessive aggregation in D18:Y6 blend. With  
 19 further evaporation of the solvent, the domains of D18 and Y6  
 20 grow rapidly based on the aggregates already assembled,  
 21 promoting the formation of ordered structures. As a result, the  
 22 over-crystallization of D18 and the excessive growth of phase  
 23 separation can be obtained. However, in PM6:Y6 system, the  
 24 aggregation state is not affected by trace CB and remains the  
 25 same as that in CF. Thus, the final phase separation and the  
 26 crystallization of PM6 are maintained.

27

## 28 Conclusions

29 In summary, we have comprehensively investigated the effect of  
 30 miscibility and film-formation kinetic process on the film  
 31 morphology during the processing with different solvents. We  
 32 found that in the low miscibility D18:Y6 system, trace amount of  
 33 CB causes a significant aggregation of Y6. The solution  
 34 concentration increases in the 0.5 s of film formation time while  
 35 the strong interactions in CB lead to enhanced aggregation and  
 36 excessive phase separation. Thus, the D18:Y6 exhibits the highest  
 37 PCE of 17.38% in CF devices due to the optimal morphology, while  
 38 the MS device exhibits only an average PCE of 15.16%. In  
 39 comparison, the film formation of the high-miscibility system  
 40 PM6:Y6 in CF and MS is analogous, which results in little  
 41 variability in morphology and the corresponding device  
 42 performance. This work has clarified the underlying mechanism  
 43 for the device optimization by connecting the relationships  
 44 among component miscibility, film-formation kinetic process,  
 45 and final morphology, which paves the way to further improve  
 46 the device performance in solution-processed OSCs.

47

## 48 Author contribution statement

49 JX and HN contribute equally to this work. JX fabricated the  
 50 solar cell devices and performed the UV, PL, AFM; HN made

51 an important contribution by completing the experiments  
 52 and data processing required for review comments during  
 53 the laboratory closure due to the Covid-19; HZ and BL  
 54 analyzed the RSoXS data; YW, QZ and BW analyzed the  
 55 GIWAXS data; ZB, XZ and CZ helped in the data  
 56 interpretation; WM and KZ conceived and directed the  
 57 experiment. All authors contributed to analysis and  
 58 manuscript writing.

## 59 Conflicts of interest

60 There are no conflicts to declare.

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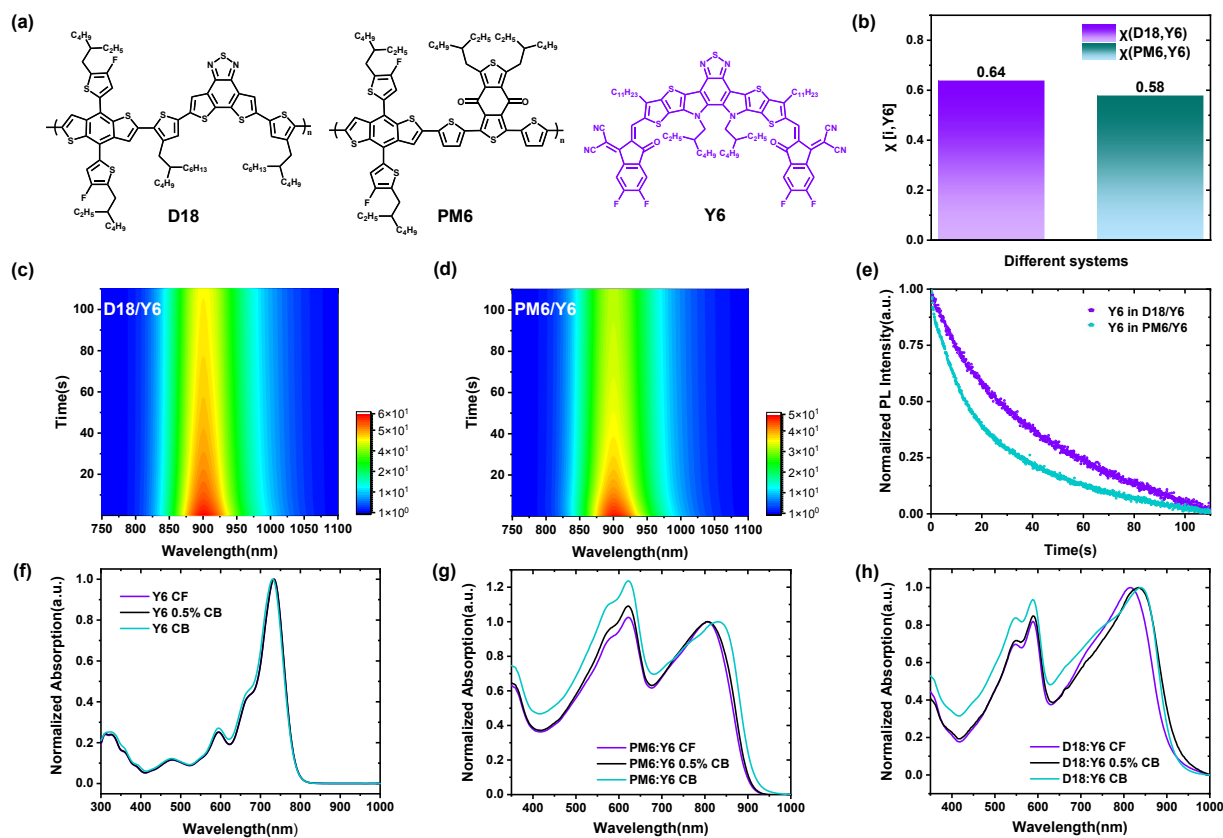
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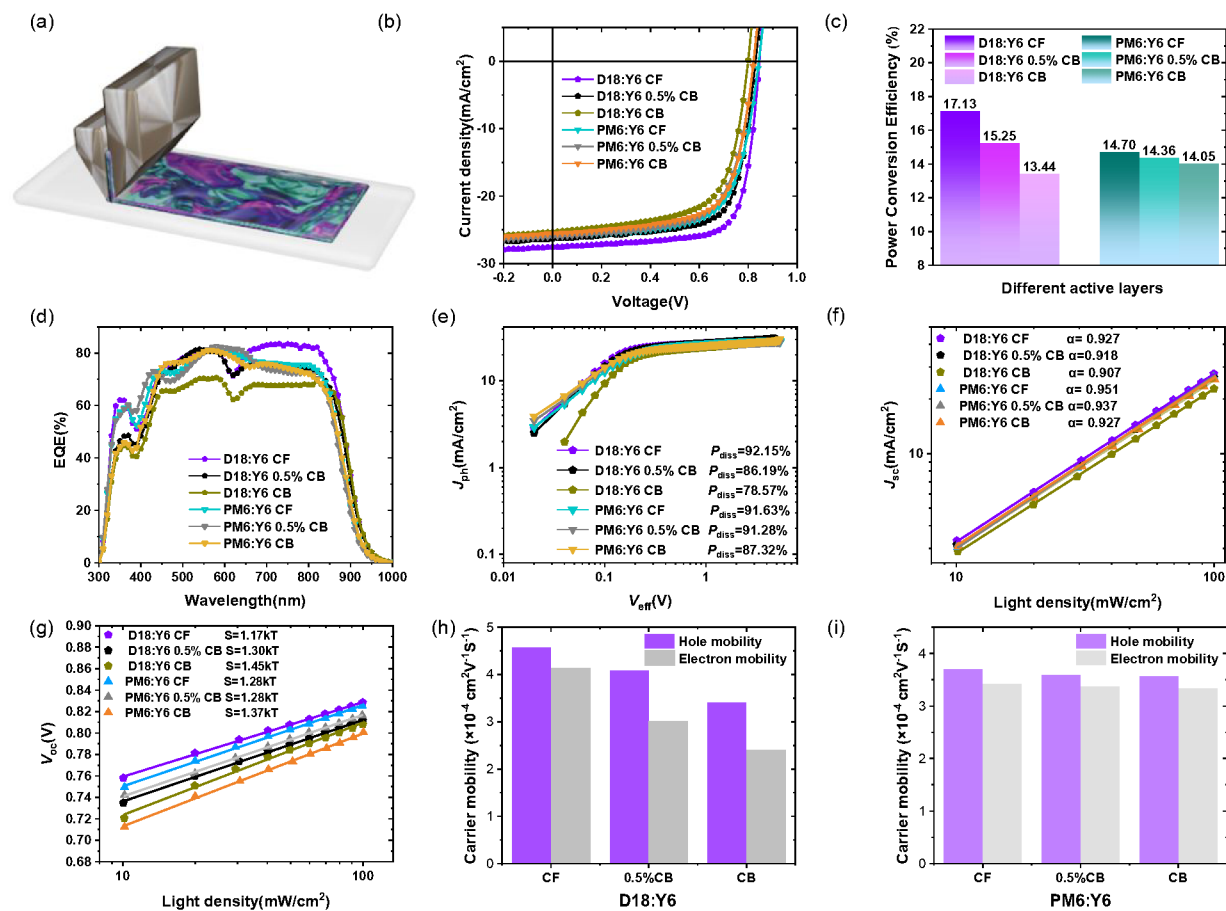
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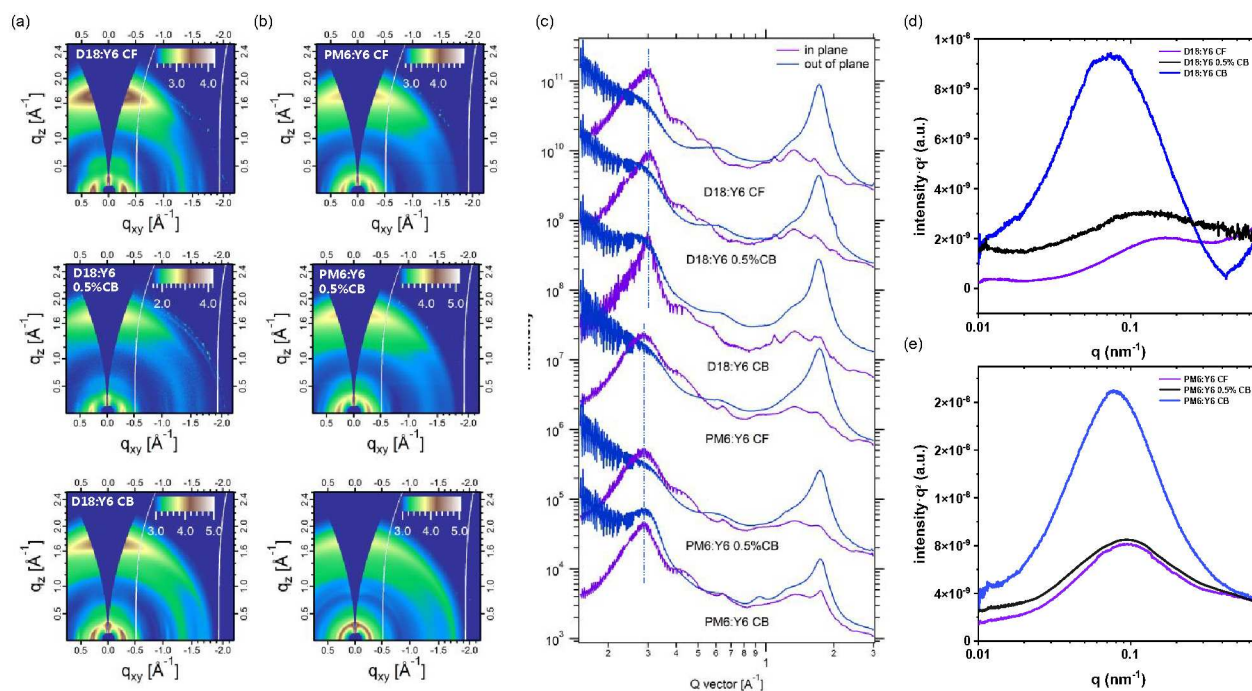
**Fig. 1.** (a) The Chemical structure of D18, PM6 and L8-BO. (b) The interaction parameters for PM6: Y6 and D18:Y6. Time-dependent contour maps of PL spectra for (c) D18/Y6 and (d) PM6/Y6. (e) Time evolution of normalized PL intensity of D18/Y6 and PM6/Y6. The ultraviolet-visible (UV-vis) absorption of (f) Y6 solutions and blend solid film for (g) PM6: Y6 and (h) D18:Y6.



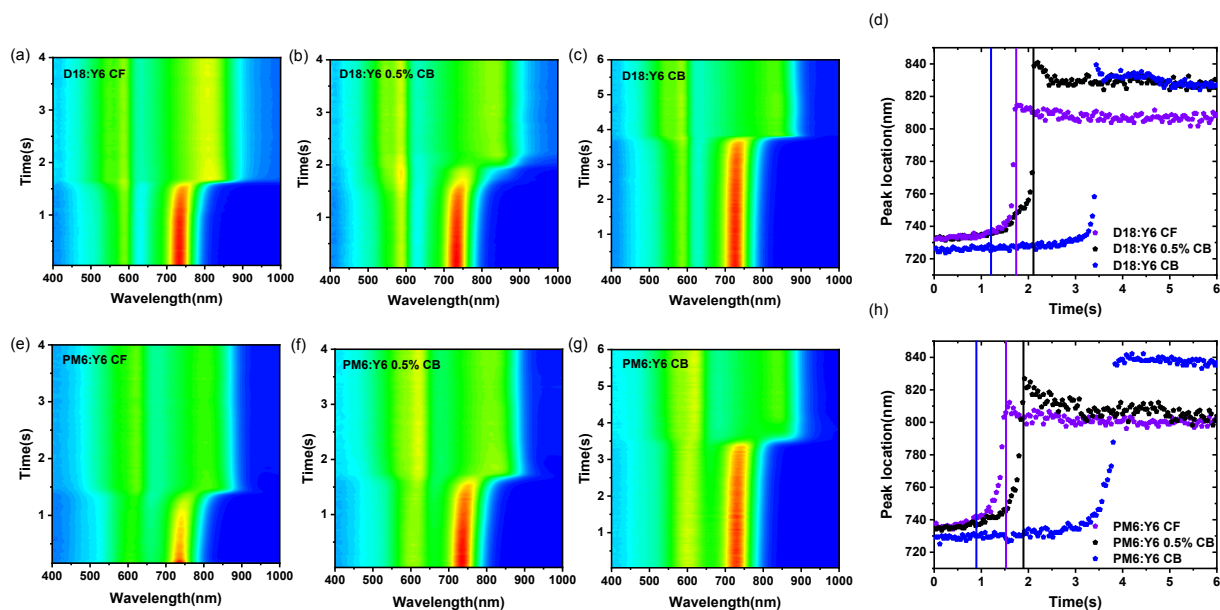
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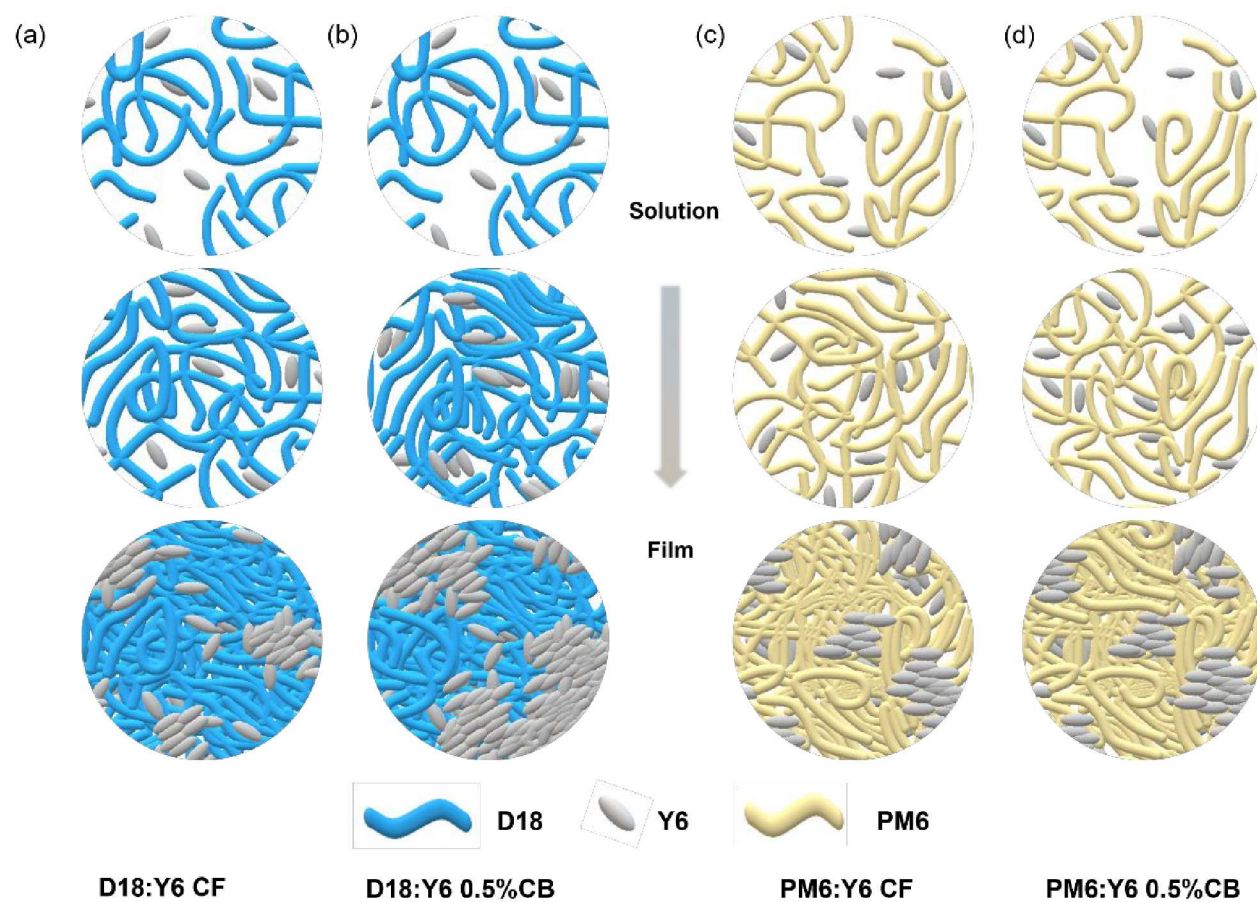
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2 **Fig. 2.** (a) Schematic illustration of slot-die coating. The (b)  $J$ - $V$  curves, (c) power conversion efficiency (PCE) comparison  
3 curves, (d) EQE curves, (e)  $J_{ph}$ - $V_{eff}$  curves, the dependence of (f) short-circuit current density and (g) open-circuit voltage on light intensity, and (h, i) charge  
4 carrier mobility histogram of D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 with different solvents.  
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1  
2 **Fig. 3.** GIWAXS (a-b) 2D patterns, (c) line profiles and RSoXS profiles of (d) D18:Y6 and (e) PM6:Y6 blend films with different solvents.  
3



1  
2 **Fig. 4.** Time-dependent contour maps of UV-vis absorption spectra for (a-c) D18:Y6 and (e-g) PM6:Y6 during slot-die coating with different  
3 solvent. Time evolution of peak location of Y6 for (d) D18:Y6 and (h) PM6:Y6 during slot-die coating with different solvents. The blue line  
4 indicates the onset, and the purple and black lines indicate the stop times for CF and 0.5%CB conditions.  
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**Fig. 5.** Schematic diagram of the aggregation status in solution and film for D18:Y6 (a, b) and PM6:Y6 (c, d) processed by CF and MS.

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2 **Table 1.** Photovoltaic parameters of OSCs with different active layer under the illumination of AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm<sup>-2</sup> (The average PCEs are  
3 obtained from at least 10 devices).

Active layer	Solvent	$V_{oc}$ [V]	$J_{sc}$ [mA/cm <sup>2</sup> ]	FF [%]	PCE [%]	PCE <sub>max</sub> [%]
	CF	0.844 ± 0.002	27.37 ± 0.17	73.91 ± 0.44	17.13 ± 0.13	17.38
D18:Y6	0.5%CB	0.826 ± 0.004	26.07 ± 0.39	70.28 ± 0.66	15.16 ± 0.12	15.42
	CB	0.818 ± 0.005	24.00 ± 0.29	68.64 ± 0.55	13.44 ± 0.16	13.67
	CF	0.841 ± 0.004	25.70 ± 0.24	68.04 ± 0.88	14.70 ± 0.15	15.03
PM6:Y6	0.5%CB	0.824 ± 0.006	25.66 ± 0.44	67.44 ± 0.98	14.23 ± 0.18	14.72
	CB	0.820 ± 0.008	25.24 ± 0.49	67.44 ± 0.86	14.01 ± 0.13	14.29

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5  
6 **Table 2.** The Structure Parameters of D18:Y6 and PM6:Y6 blend active layers with different solvents for (100) peak obtained from GIWAXS  
7 data.

	solvent	location [Å <sup>-1</sup> ]	d-spacing [Å <sup>-1</sup> ]	FWHM	CCL [Å]
	CF	0.293	21.44	0.060	94.27
D18:Y6	0.5%CB	0.298	21.11	0.057	99.66
	CB	0.297	21.16	0.037	151.9
	CF	0.283	22.22	0.081	69.39
PM6:Y6	0.5%CB	0.283	22.20	0.081	69.98
	CB	0.297	21.16	0.059	95.64

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