

Self-assembled construction of a sheet-type coordination polymer bearing cationic M2L4cages: creation of channel-like space for removal of ClO4–and NO3–from aqueous solutions

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	作成者: Sone, Eriko, Sato, Moeko, Yamanishi, Katsunori,
	Kamio, Chihiro, Takemoto, Hiroyuki, Kondo, Mitsuru
	メールアドレス:
	所属:
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# **Dalton Transactions**



## COMMUNICATION

# Self-assembled Construction of a Sheet-type Coordination Polymer Bearing Cationic M<sub>2</sub>L<sub>4</sub> Cages: Creation of a Channel-like Space for Removal of ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> from Aqueous Solutions

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Eriko Sone,<sup>a</sup> Moeko Sato,<sup>a</sup> Katsunori Yamanishi,<sup>b</sup> Chihiro Kamio,<sup>a</sup> Hiroyuki Takemoto<sup>c</sup> and Mitsuru Kondo<sup>\*,a,c</sup>

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Treatment of CuCl<sub>2</sub> with a bis-benzimidazole-type ligand, *p*-bbiteb, afforded a new 2D coordination polymer bearing cationic Cu<sub>2</sub>L<sub>4</sub> cages on the sheet framework. The regular arrangement of the cages created a channel-like space for anions. The compound removed  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  from aqueous solutions by exchange with  $Cl^-$  in the channels.

Fixation of functional discrete molecules on an infinite polymeric framework is a promising strategy for the preparation of polymer compounds that exhibit functionality due to the discrete molecular units.<sup>1-5</sup> For example, many types of molecular catalysts are bound to 1D organic polymers as pendant units, yielding new polymeric materials that exhibit catalytic reactivity due to the discrete units.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, various heterogeneous catalysts,<sup>3</sup> sensors,<sup>4</sup> and molecular devices<sup>5</sup> have been prepared by attaching discrete functional molecules to the surface of 2D organic films or inorganic layer compounds.

The treatment of metal ions with organic bridging ligands, using self-assembly processes, has afforded numerous coordination polymers with well-ordered structures.<sup>6</sup> Although some coordination polymers incorporating polyoxometalate units in the frameworks have been synthesized,<sup>7</sup> the preparation of coordination polymers bearing discrete molecules as pendant units is not well developed. The onestep construction of such functional structures by the simple treatment of one type of metal source and one type of organic ligand remains a challenging topic.

Flexible bis-imidazole- and bis-benzimidazole-type ligands,<sup>8-12</sup> as illustrated in Scheme 1, have been used for the

synthesis of coordination polymers<sup>8</sup> and for discrete molecules such as dinuclear<sup>9-11</sup> or trinuclear cage complexes.<sup>12</sup> In this paper, these types of bridging ligands are designated as L<sup>B</sup>. The type of compound obtained is largely dependent on the types of metal ions, counter anions, and reaction solvents used in the synthesis.



Scheme 1. Structures of *m*-bbitrb and *p*-bbiteb.

We have recently shown that  $[SO_4\_\_C_u2(m-bbitrb)_4]SO_4$ (*m*-bbitrb = 1,3-bis(benzimidazol-1-yl)-2,4,6-trimethylbenzene) (Scheme 1) efficiently removes  $CIO_4^-$  from aqueous solutions by exchange with the counter anion  $SO_4^{2-}$  located outside the cationic cage, despite this compound being insoluble in water.<sup>11</sup> However, to achieve sufficient anion removal activity with  $[SO_4 \_ Cu_2(m-bbitrb)_4]SO_4$ , it was necessary to grind the solid sample well, because the  $SO_4^{2-}$  embedded in the particle cannot be exchanged with  $CIO_4^-$ .

Following on from this, in the present study, we found that the water-insoluble cationic M<sub>2</sub>L<sup>B</sup><sub>4</sub> cages are useful units for the removal of ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> from aqueous solutions. We successfully synthesized and characterized a new water-insoluble coordination polymer  $[Cu(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-[Cl\cdot(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-[Cl\cdot(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-[Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-[Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-[Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(Ll-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(Ll-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(Ll-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(Ll-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(Ll-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(Ll-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(\mu-Cl-(H_2O)_2 \subset$ (1)  $bbiteb_{4}$ ])]Cl<sub>4</sub>·MeCN·(H<sub>2</sub>O)<sub>8</sub> (*p*-bbiteb = 1.4bis(benzimidazol-1-yl)-2,3,5,6-tetramethylbenzene) (Scheme 1), comprising the sheet framework and the cationic Cu<sub>2</sub>L<sup>B</sup><sub>4</sub> cages that are bound to the sheet. The regular arrangement of the cationic Cu<sub>2</sub>L<sup>B</sup><sub>4</sub> cages creates a channel-like space surrounded by the cationic cages. This paper reports on the new selfassembly synthesis and crystal structure of compound 1, and its NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> removal functions based on the channel-like space.

Compound **1** was conveniently obtained by the treatment of  $CuCl_2$  with *p*-bbiteb in the mixed solvent MeCN/H<sub>2</sub>O. The compound crystallized in the tetragonal centric space groups (*P*4/*n*). The structure was clarified by single-crystal X-ray

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a.</sup> Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science, Shizuoka University, 836 Ohya, Suruga-ku, Shizuoka, 422-8529, Japan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b.</sup> Graduate School of Science and Technology, Shizuoka University, 836 Ohya, Suruga-ku, Shizuoka, 422-8529, Japan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>c</sup> Research Institute of Green Science Technology, Shizuoka University, 836 Ohya, Suruga-ku, Shizuoka 422-8529, Japan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>d.</sup> E-mail: kondo.mitsuru@shizuoka.ac.jp

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>+</sup> Electronic Supplementary Information (ESI) available: Experimental procedures , spectral data and PXRD charts of all compounds, crystallographic data of **1**, and anion exchange chart for **1b**. CCDC 1422982 (**1**). For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format. See DOI: 10.1039/x0xx00000x

### COMMUNICATION

diffraction analysis (Fig. 1). The framework is composed of the sheet framework formulated as  $[Cu(p-bbiteb)_2]^{2+}$  and the cationic cages formulated as  $[Cl\cdot(H_2O)_2 \subset Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_4]^{3+}$ . The cages are bound to each Cu<sup>II</sup> site in the sheet via a  $\mu$ -Cl<sup>-</sup> bridge (*vide infra*). The structure of the cationic cage unit is shown in Fig. 1a. The two Cu<sup>II</sup> centers are bridged by four *syn*-formed *p*-bbiteb. The Cu(1) and Cu(2) are essentially in the N<sub>4</sub> plane defined by the four nitrogen atoms in the coordination environments. The cage space is well isolated with a gap of about  $1.8 \times 1.3$  Å<sup>2</sup> between the *p*-bbiteb in the [Cu<sub>2</sub>(*p*-bbiteb)<sub>4</sub>]<sup>3+</sup> framework (Fig. S1 in ESl<sup>+</sup>).



**Fig. 1** Structures of the cationic cage unit (a), the sheet framework (b), and the 2D structure that bears the cationic cage units (c) of **1**. The following are omitted for clarity: hydrogen atoms and co-crystallized MeCN molecules in (a)–(c), disorders of water molecules in the cage in (a) and (c), and phenyl rings of benzimidazole and methyl groups of the *p*-bbiteb in (b) and (c). Colour code: blue, copper; green, chlorine; red, oxygen; cyan, nitrogen; black, carbon.

The cage contains a Cl<sup>-</sup> and two water molecules. The guest anion and water molecule do not exhibit strong interaction with the cage framework. The Cl<sup>-</sup> associates with the Cu<sup>II</sup> site of the Cu<sub>2</sub>L<sup>B</sup><sub>4</sub> cage (Cu(1)—Cl(1) = 2.531 (3) Å). The distance is longer than the Cu—N distances (average 2.014 Å) in the coordination environment because of the Jahn–Teller effect. The Cl<sup>-</sup> also associates with hydrogen atoms of the imidazole ring of the *p*-bbiteb (Cl(1)---H(1) = 2.882 Å) and water molecules (Cl(1)---O(1) = 3.026 (8) Å). The water molecule is disordered at the four crystallographic equivalent positions (Fig. S1a in the ESI<sup>+</sup>). Fig. 1b shows a structure of the sheet framework of compound **1**. Each Cu<sup>II</sup> ion is connected by the *anti*-formed *p*-bbiteb, providing a 2D framework in the *ab* plane. The Cu—N distances (2.015 (4) Å) are similar to those observed in the cationic cages. The sheet

waves are largely as shown in Fig. 1c. The Cu<sup>II</sup> ions (Cu(3)) located at the tops of the waves are bound to the cationic  $Cu_2L^{B_4}$  cages via the  $\mu$ -Cl<sup>-</sup> (Cl(2)) bridge on both sides of the sheet, as shown in Fig. 1c. The Cu—Cl distances are similar for Cu(3)—Cl(2) (2.504 (2) Å) and Cu(2)—Cl(2) (2.553 (2) Å). The obtained sheet bearing cationic Cu<sub>2</sub>L<sup>B</sup><sub>4</sub> cages is stacked along the c axis (Fig. 2a). Fig. 2b shows the overall structure of the compound with van der Waals radii, exhibiting the creation of the channel-like space surrounded by the cationic cages. A channel, which has a size of about 8.3  $\times$  3.4 Å<sup>2</sup> in the channel window, is filled with four Cl<sup>-</sup> ions, one MeCN, and eight water molecules per three Cu<sup>II</sup> ions of **1** (Fig. S3 in ESI<sup>+</sup>). Regarding the solvent molecules, MeCN was easily removed under air or reduced pressure to afford  $[Cu(p-bbiteb)_2(-\mu-Cl-[Cl-(H_2O)_2]] \subset$  $Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_4])Cl_4(H_2O)_8$  (1b). Characterization by elemental analysis, powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) measurements (Fig. S4 in the ESI<sup>+</sup>) demonstrated that **1b** retains the overall framework of 1. Because it stores well, we used 1b to characterize the properties of the coordination polymer bearing cationic cage units.



**Fig. 2** Overall structure of **1** viewed along the *b* axis, illustrated with a ball-and-stick model (a) and van der Waals radii model (b). The following are omitted for clarity in (a): hydrogen atoms, phenyl rings of the benzimidazole, methyl groups of the *p*-bbiteb, and Cl<sup>-</sup> and water molecules in the cage. The following are omitted for clarity in (a) and (b): Cl<sup>-</sup>, water, and MeCN molecules in the channels.

The inorganic anions  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  are toxic to humans, and are particularly harmful to infants and children.<sup>13,14</sup> The former anion disturbs the uptake of iodide in the thyroid gland, inhibiting the formation of growth hormone,<sup>13</sup> while the latter anion disturbs the transport of oxygen by hemoglobin.<sup>14</sup> Recent reports also suggest that  $NO_3^-$  causes various cancers.<sup>15</sup> These anions have been detected in the environment and in drinking water, therefore the development of new materials that can be used to remove these anions is very important. However, these anions are difficult to remove from aqueous solutions because of their high solubility.

As mentioned, we have previously shown that waterinsoluble cationic  $Cu_2L^{B_4}$  complexes are useful for  $ClO_4^$ removal from aqueous solutions by anion-exchange reactions.<sup>11</sup> To determine whether **1** exhibits useful properties based on the cationic cages arranged on the 2D sheet, we

### Journal Name

studied the ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> anion removal properties of **1b**. Fig. 3a and 3b show changes in the concentration of  $CIO_4^-$  and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> (1.0 mM) in an aqueous solution (100 mL) as a function of time after the addition of 1b (147.5 mg, 0.05 mmol) with different particle sizes. When a powdered sample of 1b (147.5 mg, 0.05 mmol) was added to an aqueous solution of NaClO<sub>4</sub> (0.1 mmol in 100 mL), the concentration of  $ClO_4^-$  was reduced from 1.0 mM to 0.43 mM after 10 min, and then to 0.26 mM after 180 min (Fig. 3a). Similarly, the concentration of  $\rm NO_3^$ was reduced from 1.0 mM to 0.58 mM after 10 min, and then to 0.28 mM after 180 min. The anion removal activity was significantly increased when the microcrystalline form of 1b was used. The powdered sample of 1b became aggregated during the treatment, but the microcrystalline sample did not, leading to the better activity of the latter. In contrast to the case of  $[SO_4 \subset Cu_2(m-bbitrb)_4]SO_4$ , **1b** showed less dependency of the particle size on the anion removal activity. This is ascribed to the effects of the channel frameworks, as generally observed in porous materials with channel frameworks, such as zeolites, graphite, and metal-organic frameworks.<sup>6, 16</sup>



**Fig. 3** Changes in concentrations of  $ClO_4^-$  (1.0 mM) (a) and  $NO_3^-$  (1.0 mM) (b) in an aqueous solutions (100 mL) as a function of time after the addition of a fine-powdered (blue) and microcrystalline sample (red) of **1b** (147.5 mg, 0.05 mmol).



**Fig. 4** Changes in concentrations of  $CIO_4^-$  (1.0 mM) (a) and  $NO_3^-$  (1.0 mM) (b) in aqueous solutions (100 mL) that mimic groundwater as a function of time after the addition of **1b** (299 mg) (red) or anion-exchange resins (blue): Purolite A530E (299 mg) (a) and Purolite A520E (299 mg) (b).

In the  $CIO_4^-$  removal experiment in Fig. 3,  $CI^-$  appeared, and increased, in response to the removal of  $CIO_4^-$  (Fig. S6 in the ESI<sup>+</sup>) (and hence a reduction in its concentration). This indicated that the anions are removed in anion-exchange reactions. To study the  $CIO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  removal process by **1b**, we characterized the reaction products obtained by the treatment of **1b** with 10 equiv  $CIO_4^-$  or  $NO_3^-$  in aqueous solution. The PXRD measurements showed intense peaks, and the patterns of the reaction products were practically identical to those of **1** and **1b** (Fig. S5 in the ESI<sup>+</sup>). This indicated that

the framework of **1** is retained after the anion-exchange reactions. The inclusion of  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  in the products was conveniently confirmed by IR spectroscopy; the IR spectra showed new intense peaks, ascribed to  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$ , at around 1100 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 1400 cm<sup>-1</sup> (Fig. S7 in the ESI<sup>+</sup>).

Because of the increased  $d_{x2-y2}$  orbital level caused by the weak crystal field of the ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup>, the d–d absorption of the Cu<sup>II</sup> ions of the  $Cu_2L^{B_4}$  cage, which include  $ClO_4^{-}$ , is observed at the higher-energy region compared with  $Cu_2L^B_4$  cages that include SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> or Cl<sup>-</sup>. The d–d absorptions characterized by reflectance spectra of the reaction products were similar for 1 and 1b (Fig. S8 in the ESI<sup>+</sup>), indicating that  $CI^-$  in the cationic  $Cu_2(p-bbiteb)_4$ cage was not exchanged with  $CIO_4^-$  or  $NO_3^-$  during the anion removal experiments. Only Cl<sup>-</sup> in the channel-like space is exchanged with ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> by the anion-exchange reactions. We then investigated whether 1b could remove  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  from an aqueous solution that mimicked groundwater. We used a solution containing NaHCO<sub>3</sub> (3.0 mM), CaCl<sub>2</sub> (1.0 mM), MgCl<sub>2</sub> (0.5 mM), Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (0.5 mM), and KNO<sub>3</sub> (0.5 mM). For the removal experiments, NaClO<sub>4</sub> or NaNO<sub>3</sub> (0.10 mmol) was dissolved in 100 mL of this solution. Fig. 4a and Fig. 4b show the changes in concentrations of ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> as a function of time after the addition of **1b** (299 mg, 0.10 mmol). The concentration of ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> was reduced from 1.0 mM to 0.32 mM after 10 min and then to 0.13 mM after 180 min (Fig. 4a), while the concentration of  $NO_3^-$  was reduced from 1.0 mM to 0.42 mM after 10 min and then to 0.28 mM after 180 min (Fig. 4b). The higher ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> removal activity by 1b is due to the higher affinity of the anion to the hydrophobic space surrounded by the cationic cages. Although many coordination polymers showed anion exchange property,<sup>17</sup> the selective removals for ClO<sub>4</sub><sup>-</sup> and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> from aqueous solutions were unprecedented.

We studied the recovery process of **1b** from the anionexchanged products by the simple reverse anion-exchange reactions or the chemical degradation process. The yields of **1b** recovered from the  $ClO_4^-$ - and  $NO_3^-$ .absorbed products by treatments with excess NaCl in aqueous solutions were estimated to be 12% and 40% from ion chromatograph measurements (Fig. S11 in the ESI<sup>+</sup>). Lower yield for  $ClO_4^-$ included product is the result of high affinity of  $ClO_4^-$  in the channel space. As shown in the ESI<sup>+</sup>, it was also shown that analytically pure *p*-bbiteb was recovered by a general chemical degradation procedure from the anion-exchanged product in 47% (Fig. S12). The ligand could be used for re-preparation of **1b**.

For comparison, we carried out the  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  removal experiments with the mimicked solutions using the anionexchange resins Purolite A530E (299 mg) and A520E (299 mg). These resins are widely used for the removal of  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  from aqueous solutions. The results are shown in Fig. 4a and 4b. The removal of  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  is remarkably faster in the case of **1b** compared with the resins. This result means that **1b** is superior in terms of  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  removal; removal with **1b** takes place within a shorter period than with the anion-exchange resins.

#### COMMUNICATION

In conclusion, we have shown, for the first time, a one-step self-assembled construction of a 2D coordination polymer **1** which bears the regular arrangement of cationic  $Cu_2L^{B_4}$  cages on the sheet framework, creating a channel-like space for anions among the cationic cages. We have shown that the channels have high anion removal activity for the removal of  $ClO_4^-$  and  $NO_3^-$  from aqueous solutions via anion-exchange reactions. Furthermore, and significantly, the removal takes place within a shorter period than with anion-exchange resins.

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