# Perspective for aggregation-induced delayed fluorescence mechanism: A QM/MM study\*

Jie Liu(刘杰), Jianzhong Fan(范建忠), Kai Zhang(张凯), Yuchen Zhang(张雨辰), Chuan-Kui Wang(王传奎)<sup>†</sup>, and Lili Lin(蔺丽丽)<sup>‡</sup>

Key Laboratory of Medical Physics and Image Processing & Shandong Provincial Engineering and Technical Center of Light Manipulations, School of Physics and Electronics, Shandong Normal University, Jinan 250358, China

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To enhance the potential application of thermally activated delayed fluorescence (TADF) molecular materials, new functions are gradually cooperated to the TADF molecules. Aggregation induced emission can effectively solve the fluorescence quenching problem for TADF molecules in solid phase, thus aggregation-induced delayed fluorescence (AIDF) molecules were recently focused. Nevertheless, their luminescent mechanisms are not clear enough. In this work, excited state properties of an AIDF molecule DMF-BP-DMAC [reported in Chemistry-An Asian Journal 14 828 (2019)] are theoretically studied in tetrahydrofuran (THF) and solid phase. For consideration of surrounding environment, the polarizable continuum method (PCM) and the combined quantum mechanics and molecular mechanics (OM/MM) method were applied for solvent and solid phase, respectively. Due to the increase of the transition dipole moment and decrease of the energy difference between the first single excited state  $(S_1)$  and the ground state  $(S_0)$ , the radiative rate is increased by about 2 orders of magnitude in solid phase. The energy dissipation of the non-radiative process from  $S_1$  to  $S_0$  is mainly contributed by low-frequency vibrational modes in solvent, and they can be effectively suppressed in aggregation, which may lead to a slow non-radiation process in solid phase. Both factors would induce enhanced luminescence efficiency of DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase. Meanwhile, the small energy gap between  $S_1$  and triplet excited states results in high reverse intersystem crossing (RISC) rates in both solvent and solid phase. Therefore, TADF is confirmed in both phases. Aggregation significantly influences both the ISC and RISC processes and more RISC channels are involved in solid state. The enhanced delayed fluorescence should be induced by both the enhanced fluorescent efficiency and ISC efficiency. Our calculation provides a reasonable explanation for experimental measurements and helps one to better understand the luminescence mechanism of AIDF molecules.

**Keywords:** thermally activated delayed fluorescence, aggregation-induced delayed fluorescence, the combined quantum mechanics and molecular mechanics method

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### 1. Introduction

As the third-generation luminescent materials, thermally activated delayed fluorescence (TADF) emitters have received much attention in recent years, due to their potential application in organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) for display and illumination.<sup>[1-4]</sup> The OLEDs based on TADF emitters, which can make full use of both triplet and singlet excitons via reverse intersystem crossing (RISC), can achieve nearly 100% internal quantum efficiencies (IQE).<sup>[5-8]</sup> As we all know, most TADF molecules require complex doping techniques to suppress emission quenching and face severe efficiency roll-off, which limits the wild application of TADF molecules.<sup>[9,10]</sup> The aggregation induced emission (AIE) feature provides a valid strategy for solving this problem of TADF molecules.<sup>[11–15]</sup> AIE-TADF molecules were designed and synthesized by Tang's group, and most of them were based on substantial inhibition of the twisting of the individual groups in the solid state.<sup>[11–14]</sup> Besides, Chi's DOI: 10.1088/1674-1056/aba2d9

group also reported AIE-TADF molecules using a spatially close donor-acceptor (D-A) interaction with the D and A groups linked to the ortho-position.<sup>[15]</sup> In addition, Tang's group also innovatively developed a series of aggregationinduced delayed fluorescence (AIDF) molecules which can exhibit strong delayed fluorescence upon aggregate formation, and they are thought as a special kind of AIE-TADF molecules.<sup>[14,16–18]</sup> Although many studies have explored the AIE mechanism of luminescent molecules, little study focused on the aggregation-delayed fluorescence relationship.<sup>[19-22]</sup> How does aggregation enhance the delayed fluorescence in AIDF molecules? It is still not clear enough. In this paper, the D-A-D' type molecule (9, 9-dimethyl-9H-fluoren-2yl) (4-(9,9-dimethylacridin-10-yl)phenyl) methanone (DMF-BP-DMAC) (shown in Fig. 1(a)), which is an AIDF molecule synthesized by Tang's group,<sup>[23]</sup> is studied as a model system to investigate the DF mechanism theoretically. The excited states properties of DMF-BP-DMAC in both tetrahydrofuran (THF) and solid phases are studied using the polarizable con-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup>Corresponding author. E-mail: ckwang@sdnu.edu.cn

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>‡</sup>Corresponding author. E-mail: linll@sdnu.edu.cn

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tinuum model (PCM)<sup>[24]</sup> and the combined quantum mechanics and molecular mechanics (QM/MM) method<sup>[25]</sup> respectively. Besides, the decay rates of the excited states are calculated, and the DF mechanism for DMF-BP-DMAC is theoretically elucidated.

## 2. Theoretical methods and computational details

In our calculation, the PCM is adopted to include the solvent effect on the photophysical properties of the molecule. The geometric and electronic structures for DMF-BP-DMAC in ground state  $(S_0)$  are investigated using the density functional theory (DFT). The time-dependent density functional theory (TD-DFT) is adopted for the optimization of the excited states. The molecular configuration is shown in Fig. 1(b). To investigate the properties of DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase, the QM/MM method with a two-layer ONIOM approach is used.<sup>[26–30]</sup> The computational model is constructed based on the crystal structures of DMF-BP-DMAC obtained experimentally.<sup>[23]</sup> The model we used is shown in Fig. 1(c). The two-layer ONIOM method is adopted with one molecule in the center calculated with the QM method and the other molecules surrounded calculated using the MM method. For the QM calculation, the DFT is used to investigate the properties of the ground state and the TD-DFT is adopted to study the properties of the excited states. The MM calculation is treated using the efficient universal force field (UFF) method, and the MM part is frozen during the QM/MM geometry optimizations for the all states. All the calculations above are realized in Gaussian 16 program.<sup>[31]</sup>

Although TD-DFT method has been widely used for the calculation of excited states especially for organic systems, the properties of excited states were found sensitive to the functionals with different HF proportions (HF%) for different molecules.<sup>[32–36]</sup> So, several DFT functionals including B3LYP, PBE0, BMK, and M062X were tested (as shown in Table 1). It is found that the emission wavelengths calculated with the PBE0 functional for DMF-BP-DMAC in the THF and solid phase are 542 nm and 517 nm, respectively, which are in good agreement with the experimental values (534 nm in the THF and 510 nm in solid phase). Therefore, the PBE0 functional with 6-31G (d) basis set is adopted in our following calculations.

**Table 1.** Emission wavelength and oscillator strength calculated by dif-ferent functionals for DMF-BP-DMAC in tetrahydrofuran (THF) andsolid phase.

	T	HF	Solid		
	$\lambda/nm$	f	$\lambda/nm$	f	
B3LYP	590	0.0001	561	0.0068	
PBE0	542	0.0001	517	0.0089	
BMK	447	0.0006	430	0.0176	
M062X	394	0.0223	396	0.0055	
Exp. <sup>a</sup>	534	_	510	-	

<sup>a</sup>Exp. is the experimental emission wavelength.



**Fig. 1.** (a) Chemical structure of DMF-BP-DMAC. (b) The atomic labels and the interesting bond lengths  $(B_1, B_2)$ , bond angles  $(\theta_1, \theta_2)$ , and dihedral angles  $(\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3, \text{ and } \alpha_4)$ . (c) ONIOM model: surrounding molecules are regarded as low layer and the centered DMF-BP-DMAC is treated as high layer.

Furthermore, the radiative decay rate  $(K_r)$  from the first single excited state  $(S_1)$  to  $S_0$  can be calculated by Einstein spontaneous emission equation as follows:

$$K_{\rm r} = \frac{f\Delta E_{\rm fi}^2}{1.499},\tag{1}$$

where *f* is the oscillator strength and  $\Delta E_{\rm fi}$  is the vertical emission energy between the first single excited state (S<sub>1</sub>) and the ground state (S) in units of wavenumber (cm<sup>-1</sup>).<sup>[37]</sup>

The ISC rate  $K_{ISC}$  and RISC rate  $K_{RISC}$  between single and triplet excited states can be computed using the classical Marcus rate equation<sup>[38]</sup>

$$K_{ji} = \frac{V_{ji}^2}{\hbar} \sqrt{\frac{\pi}{K_{\rm B}T\lambda}} \exp\left[-\frac{(\Delta G_{ji} + \lambda)^2}{4\lambda K_{\rm B}T}\right]$$
$$= \frac{V_{ji}^2}{\hbar} \sqrt{\frac{\pi}{K_{\rm B}T\lambda}} \exp\left[-\frac{\Delta G^{\perp}}{K_{\rm B}T}\right].$$
(2)

Here,  $K_{\rm B}$  is the Boltzmann constant;  $V_{ji}$  is the spin–orbit coupling (SOC) between the S<sub>1</sub> state and the triplet excited states (T<sub>n</sub>), and it is calculated with the quadratic response function method which can be realized with the Dalton program;<sup>[39]</sup>  $\Delta G_{ji}$  is defined as the difference between the adiabatic energies of the final and initial states. In calculation of the ISC rate,  $\Delta G_{ji} = E_{\rm S_1} - E_{\rm T_n}$ ; and for the RISC process,  $\Delta G_{ji} = E_{\rm T_n} - E_{\rm S_1}$ . *T* is the temperature and  $\lambda$  is the reorganization energy. For

ISC process,  $\lambda_T$  is the difference between the triplet excited state energy at S<sub>1</sub> geometry and T<sub>n</sub> geometry. For the RISC process,  $\lambda_S$  is the gap between the singlet excited state energies at triplet excited state geometry and at the S<sub>1</sub> geometry.<sup>[40]</sup> Detailed analyses of DMF-BP-DMAC on excited state properties are illustrated in the following sections.

#### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Geometric structures

Molecular geometry determines both the electronic structures and photophysical properties. Thus, the geometric structures of DMF-BP-DMAC at  $S_0$ ,  $S_1$ , and  $T_n$  are theoretically studied in both THF and solid phase. Selected key geometric parameters (marked in Fig. 1(b)) of these structures are compiled in Table 2. It is found that the variations of bond lengths and bond angles are extremely small when the molecule is excited from  $S_0$  to  $S_1$  or  $T_n$ . However, the dihedral angles change significantly when the molecules are excited from one state to another. The variations of dihedral angles happened between two states in THF are larger than those in solid phase. Comparing data of the dihedral angles  $\alpha_1$ ,  $\alpha_2$ , and  $\alpha_3$  in THF, significant changes (4.8°, 10.6°, and 9.9°) between  $S_0$  and  $S_1$  are found. The  $\alpha_4$  alters from 39.06° in the S<sub>0</sub> state to 0.20° in the S<sub>1</sub> state. In solid phase, the changes of dihedral angles do not exceed 10°. The action of surrounding molecules in the aggregate state leads to the limitation of the rotation of the dihedral angle of the molecule. In addition, the dihedral angle variations for DMF-BP-DMAC in THF when it is excited from  $S_0$  to  $T_n$  are also larger than those in solid phase. In order to quantitatively characterize the change of geometry, the root of the mean of squared displacement (RMSD) is calculated by Multiwfn.<sup>[41,42]</sup> The geometry changes and the RMSD values are shown in Fig. 2. It is clearly shown that the geometric change between S<sub>0</sub> and S<sub>1</sub> in THF is mainly in two donors, and the value of RMSD is 0.829 Å. However, this value between  $S_0$ and  $S_1$  in solid phase is 0.089 Å, about one tenth of the value in THF. Since the non-radiative process is closely related to the geometric changes during state transition, the non-radiative energy consumption path in solid phase should be different from that in THF. In general, smaller geometric change would induce smaller reorganization energy and slower non-radiative rate, thus suppressed non-radiative process is expected for DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase. Meanwhile, the variations of geometric structures of  $S_1$  and  $T_n$  are heavily interrelated with the ISC and RISC processes, we thus present some comparison of their geometries (shown in Fig. 2). The RMSD between  $S_1$ and  $T_1$  in solid phase is 0.065 Å, which is much smaller than that in THF (RMSD = 0.482 Å). Since  $T_2$  may also contribute to the ISC and RISC processes in the THF, the RMSD of S<sub>1</sub> and  $T_2$  (0.423 Å) is also calculated. In the solid phase,  $T_2$  and  $T_3$  are close to  $S_1$  in energy, thus the values of RMSD between them and  $S_1$  are also calculated (0.062 Å and 0.063 Å). This indicates small reorganization energies for the ISC and RISC processes in the solid phase. Through above careful analysis on geometry, the non-radiative process and ISC process in solid phase are expected to be affected due to the influence of the surrounding environment. Different geometry changes in THF and solid phase are shown to have close relationship with the photophysical properties.

**Table 2.** Geometry parameters of S<sub>0</sub>, S<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>1</sub>, and T<sub>2</sub> states for DMF-BP-DMAC in THF and those of S<sub>0</sub>, S<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, and T<sub>3</sub> states for DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase. Bond lengths ( $B_1$ ,  $B_2$ ), bond angles ( $\theta_1$ ,  $\theta_2$ ), and dihedral angles ( $\alpha_1$ ,  $\alpha_2$ ,  $\alpha_3$ ,  $\alpha_4$ ) are marked in Fig. 1(b).

	THF					Solid				
	S <sub>0</sub>	$S_1$	$T_1$	T2		S <sub>0</sub>	$S_1$	$T_1$	T2	T <sub>3</sub>
$B_1$	1.23	1.27	1.27	1.27		1.22	1.26	1.26	1.25	1.25
$B_2$	1.43	1.44	1.43	1.43		1.42	1.45	1.44	1.44	1.44
$\theta_1$	120.39	121.71	121.88	121.71		119.17	119.01	119.50	120.26	120.24
$\theta_2$	119.27	120.20	119.92	120.17		119.96	120.58	120.38	120.05	120.05
$\alpha_1$	27.62	32.42	32.88	33.71		-40.28	-40.62	-41.10	-34.94	-34.98
$\alpha_2$	-79.38	-89.98	-67.94	-110.49		75.99	83.60	75.79	78.03	77.98
$\alpha_3$	81.24	-91.10	-69.22	-111.09		84.53	81.04	73.37	79.48	79.42
$\alpha_4$	39.06	0.20	-1.88	2.51		-38.53	-33.84	-34.64	-36.44	-36.52



Fig. 2. Geometry changes between two selected states for DMF-BP-DMAC in THF (a) and solid phase (b).

#### 3.2. Energy gap and transition property

For DMF-BP-DMAC, the  $S_1$  state is dominated by the transition from the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) to the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) in both THF and solid phase. The frontier molecular orbitals are shown in Fig. 3. The HOMO is mainly concentrated in the DMAC group, while the LUMO is mainly in the DMF and BP units. The transition properties in solid phase have not changed. Due to the smaller orbital overlap of HOMO-LUMO, the electron exchange energy is smaller, it may lead to the small single and triplet energy gaps in the solvent and solid phase. The energy of HOMO in the THF is -5.48 eV, and the energy of LUMO is -1.95 eV. In the solid phase, the energies of both orbitals increase, the energy of HOMO increases to -5.30 eV, and the energy of LUMO increases to -1.79 eV. Nevertheless, the energy gap between HOMO and LUMO is almost unchanged.



Fig. 3. Energy levels and distributions of HOMO and LUMO for molecule in THF and solid phase (isovalue = 0.02).

The excitation energies calculated based on the optimized geometries of the excited states of DMF-BP-DMAC in THF and solid phase are shown in Figs. 4(a) and 4(b). The calculated energy gap between S<sub>0</sub> and S<sub>1</sub> in solid phase is larger than that in THF. It is the reason that the emission wavelength is blue-shifted in solid phase, which is consistent with the experimental results. It also can be seen that there are two triplet excited states (T1, T2) below S1 in energy, and the energy values of the two triplet excited states are nearly identical in THF. In solid phase, there is only one triplet excited state  $(T_1)$  below  $S_1$ , and the energy gap is 0.05 eV, which is larger than that in THF (0.03 eV). Although the energy of  $T_2$  and  $T_3$  is higher than that  $S_1$ , they are close to each other, with energy gap of 0.14 eV. The efficient RISC process should also happen from T<sub>2</sub>, T<sub>3</sub> to S<sub>1</sub>. The small energy gap can efficiently favor the RISC processes from the triplet excited states to  $S_1$  in both THF and solid phase and it is indicated that the solid state provides more ISC and RISC channels. The transition properties and SOC between the single and triplet excited states also have important effect on the ISC and RISC processes.



**Fig. 4.** Adiabatic excitation energies for DMF-BP-DMAC in THF (a) and solid phase (b).



**Fig. 5.** Transition characteristics for  $S_1$ ,  $T_1$ , and  $T_2$  of DMF-BP-DMAC in THF (a) and transition characteristics for  $S_1$ ,  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ , and  $T_3$  of DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase (b) (isovalue = 0.02). The value below every arrow represents the component of localized excitation in the corresponding transition.

The natural transition orbital (NTO) analyses for  $S_1$ ,  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ , and  $T_3$  of DMF-BP-DMAC in THF and solid phase are performed. The particle and hole are shown in Fig. 5. The value below every arrow represents the component of localized excitation in the corresponding transition. According to previous reports, these values can be quantitatively analyzed with a ratio of 0%–40% for the charge transfer (CT) state, a ratio of 40%–75% for the hybridized local charge-transfer (HLCT) state, and a ratio of 75%–100% for the locally excited (LE)

state.<sup>[43,44]</sup> In THF, we can find that  $S_1$  is a CT state, and  $T_1$ and  $T_2$  are the HLCT states. However, the transition properties of  $S_1$  and  $T_1$  are the CT state in the solid phase. Meanwhile, according to the value of localized excitation, small  $\Delta E_{ST}$  and different transition characteristic between  $S_1$  and  $T_n$  lead to large RISC in THF. In the solid phase, the LE component of  $T_1$  state is 35.4%, the CT states tend to form a small  $\Delta E_{ST}$ , and the same is true for our calculations. Both  $T_2$  and  $T_3$  are HLCT states, and the LE components for them are 52.6% and 56.3%, respectively. Those also produce small  $\Delta E_{ST}$  and large SOC, in turn it is beneficial to the production of the RISC process.

#### 3.3. Radiative and non-radiative process

The radiative decay rates are calculated by formula (1). The  $K_r$  increases from solution  $(2.27 \times 10^4 \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ in THF})$  to solid phase  $(2.29 \times 10^6 \text{ s}^{-1})$  by about 100 times. The increased radiative rate would be helpful for enhanced fluorescence efficiency in solid phase. In THF, the oscillator strength is 0.0001, and the vertical emission energy between S<sub>1</sub> and S is 2.89 eV. In the solid phase, the oscillator strength has increased to 0.0068, and the energy gap becomes 2.39 eV. Therefore, we can find that the increase of radiative decay rate is mainly due to the increase of oscillator strength, this is caused by the enlarged transition dipole moment for DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase (0.99*D*) compared with that in THF (0.39*D*).

In addition, the non-radiative process is an important aspect of studying photophysical properties. Huang-Rhys (HR) factor is an effective parameter to measure the non-radiative process of excited states. To analyze the non-radiative process, the HR factor is calculated using the DUSHIN program.<sup>[45]</sup> Under the harmonic oscillator approximation, the HR is expressed as  $HR_i = \omega_i D_i^2/2$ . In the equation,  $\omega_i$  denotes the frequency of the *i*-th normal mode, and  $D_i$  is the difference of equilibrium geometries in two electronic states. Then, HR factors versus the normal-mode frequencies in THF and solid phase are drawn in Figs. 6(a) and 6(b). For the decay process in THF, the large HR factors  $27.4 (31.1 \text{ cm}^{-1})$ , 25.0 (58.8 cm<sup>-1</sup>), and 16.6 (594.5 cm<sup>-1</sup>) are corresponding to the vibration of the DMAC part. For the decay process in the solid phase, the large HR factors 0.55 (52.6 cm<sup>-1</sup>), 0.22 (381.2 cm<sup>-1</sup>), and 0.18 (437.5 cm<sup>-1</sup>) are also corresponding to the vibration of the DMAC part. However, the vibration amplitude in the solid phase is much smaller than that in the solvent due to the intermolecular interaction. It indicates the importance of low frequency modes couplings in the non-radiative decay from  $S_1$  to S. It can be seen that the HR factors of DMF-BP-DMAC in solid phase are all smaller by 15 times than those in THF, which indicates that the nonradiative rate in the solid phase would be smaller than that in the THF. Thus the non-radiative energy consumptions of the excited state would be hindered in the solid phase, and the AIE mechanism is expected for DMF-BP-DMAC.



**Fig. 6.** The calculated HR factors of DMF-BP-DMAC in THF (a) and solid phase (b). The corresponding vibration modes are shown in inset.

# 3.4. Intersystem crossing and reverse intersystem crossing process

The standards for evaluating effective TADF materials are generally combined with smaller  $\Delta E_{ST}$  and reasonably fast RISC rates. Qualitatively speaking, large SOC values not only benefit to the ISC process from  $S_1$  and  $T_n$  but also the RISC process form  $T_n$  to  $S_1$ . To determine quantitatively the photophysical processes, according to formula (2), in combination with the electronic structure calculations, the related SOC and associated reorganization energies as well as ISC and RISC rates at room temperature are calculated in THF and solid phase, which are collected in Table 3. In THF, the SOC values between  $S_1$  and  $T_1$  ( $T_2$ ) are all calculated respectively. The SOC values between  $S_1$  and  $T_1$  ( $T_2$  and  $T_3$ ) are also calculated in solid phase. The SOC values between  $S_1$  and  $T_1$  at  $S_1$  structure are calculated to be 0.01 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 0.19 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The values at  $T_1$  structure are larger than that at  $S_1$  minima  $(0.44 \text{ cm}^{-1} \text{ and } 0.39 \text{ cm}^{-1})$ . The SOC value between S<sub>1</sub> and  $T_2$  in THF is 0.67 cm<sup>-1</sup>, which is larger than that between  $S_1$ and  $T_1$ . Simultaneously, the SOC value between  $S_1$  and  $T_2$  at  $T_2$  structure in THF is 1.84 cm<sup>-1</sup>, which is also larger than that at S<sub>1</sub> structure. In solid phase, the SOC value between S<sub>1</sub> and  $T_2$  at  $T_2$  minima is 0.44 cm<sup>-1</sup>, which is larger than that at

 $S_1$  minima (0.38 cm<sup>-1</sup>). The SOC value between  $S_1$  and  $T_3$  at  $T_3$  minima structure is 0.81 cm<sup>-1</sup>, which is larger than that between  $S_1$  and  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ . The SOC values between  $S_1$  and triplet state at triplet state minima structure are larger than that at S<sub>1</sub> minima structure. It is indicated that the RISC processes are very likely to happen whether in solvent or solid phase. In addition to the SOC values, reorganization energies are another important factor to regulate the ISC and RISC rates. For the ISC process, the  $\lambda_T$  between S<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>1</sub> is 15.6 meV in THF, which is small than that between  $S_1$  and  $T_2$  (421.1 meV). The  $\lambda_T$  between S<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>1</sub> is also small (24.5 meV) in the solid phase. By contrast, the  $\lambda_S$  between S<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub> in THF are similar, which are 124.2 meV and 106.4 meV, respectively. In solid phase, the  $\lambda_S$  between S<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>1</sub> is 52.1 meV. According to formula (2), when the other values are fixed, the smaller the difference between reorganization energy and energy gap between two states, the greater the ISC and RISC rate.

Based on the calculated SOC,  $\lambda$ , and  $\Delta E_{ST}$  values, indepth analysis of the calculated  $K_{ISC}$  and  $K_{RISC}$  of DMF-BP- DMAC in THF is performed. In THF, the  $K_{RISC}$  values are always larger than those of  $K_{ISC}$ . For example, the ISC rate from  $S_1$  to  $T_1$  is  $1.98 \times 10^5$  s<sup>-1</sup>, and the RISC rate from  $T_1$ to  $S_1$  is  $1.87 \times 10^{10}$  s<sup>-1</sup>. This is due to the large SOC and small  $\lambda$  of the RISC process. The ISC rate from S<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>3</sub> is  $2.51 \times 10^7$  s<sup>-1</sup>. It is obvious that the ISC process mainly happens between  $S_1$  and  $T_2$ ,  $T_3$ . The RISC rate from  $T_3$  to  $S_1$  is 2.5 s<sup>-1</sup> and the RISC process mainly happens between  $T_1$  and S<sub>1</sub>. The ISC rate in solid phase  $(4.81 \times 10^7 \text{ s}^{-1})$  is larger than that in THF and the RISC rate in solid phase  $(2.68 \times 10^7 \text{ s}^{-1})$ is smaller than that in THF. The ISC rate from  $S_1$  to  $T_1$  in solid phase is  $4.81 \times 10^7$  s<sup>-1</sup>. It is larger than the ISC rate from S<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>2</sub> and T<sub>3</sub>. The RISC rate from T<sub>2</sub> to S<sub>1</sub> is  $1.30 \times 10^8$  s<sup>-1</sup>, and the RISC rate from T<sub>3</sub> to S<sub>1</sub> is  $4.40 \times 10^8$  s<sup>-1</sup>. It is larger than the RISC rate from  $T_1$  to  $S_1$  (4.81×10<sup>7</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>). For the RISC process, T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, and T<sub>3</sub> all contribute significantly. Thus more RISC channels are found in solid state than in THF. Both KISC and  $K_{\text{RISC}}$  are visibly affected by the SOC,  $\lambda$ , and  $\Delta E_{\text{ST}}$ .

**Table 3.** Spin–orbit coupling (SOC), reorganization energy ( $\lambda$ ), energy difference ( $\Delta E$ ), intersystem crossing rates (K<sub>ISC</sub>), and reverse intersystem crossing rates (K<sub>RISC</sub>) between single excited states and triplet excited states.

		$\rm SOC^a/cm^{-1}$	$\rm SOC^b/cm^{-1}$	$\lambda_S/meV$	$\lambda_{T}/meV$	$\Delta E/\mathrm{meV}$	$K_{\rm ISC}/s^{-1}$	$K_{RISC}/s^{-1}$
THF	$S_1-T_1$	0.01	0.44	124.2	15.6	24.1	$1.98 \times 10^{5}$	$1.87 \times 10^{10}$
	$S_1-T_2$	0.67	1.84	106.4	421.1	17.6	$4.14 \times 10^{6}$	$6.57 \times 10^{8}$
	$S_1-T_3$	0.33	0.34	271.5	292.3	-419.4	$2.51 \times 10^{7}$	2.5
Solid	$S_1 - T_1$	0.19	0.39	52.1	24.5	47.7	$4.81 \times 10^{7}$	$2.68 \times 10^{7}$
	$S_1-T_2$	0.38	0.44	148.3	225.4	-146.5	$2.00 \times 10^{5}$	$1.30 \times 10^{8}$
	$S_1-T_3$	0.60	0.81	148.5	510.3	-146.5	$3.47 \times 10^{4}$	$4.40 \times 10^{8}$

SOC<sup>a</sup> based on the optimized single excited state structures respectively; SOC<sup>b</sup> based on the optimized triplet excited states structures respectively.

Particularly, in order to clearly express the rate, we calculate the effective  $K_{ISC}$  and  $K_{RISC}$  rates based on the following formulas:

$$K_{\rm ISC}^{\rm Cal}(\rm S \to T) = \frac{K_{\rm S_1-T_1}^2 + K_{\rm S_1-T_2}^2}{K_{\rm S_1-T_1} + K_{\rm S_1-T_2}}, \tag{3}$$

$$K_{\text{RISC}}^{\text{Cal}}(\mathrm{T} \to \mathrm{S}) = \frac{K_{\mathrm{T}_{1}-\mathrm{S}_{1}}^{2} + K_{\mathrm{T}_{2}-\mathrm{S}_{1}}^{2}}{K_{\mathrm{T}_{1}-\mathrm{S}_{1}} + K_{\mathrm{T}_{2}-\mathrm{S}_{1}}}.$$
 (4)

The  $K_r$ ,  $K_{ISC}^{Cal}$ , and  $K_{RISC}^{Cal}$  in the THF and solid phase are listed in Table 4. Compared with the solvent value,  $K_r$  in solid phase is increased by two orders of magnitude. The  $K_{ISC}^{Cal}$  ( $K_{RISC}^{Cal}$ ) in the THF is  $2.18 \times 10^7 \text{ s}^{-1}$  ( $1.81 \times 10^{10} \text{ s}^{-1}$ ), and becomes  $4.81 \times 10^7 \text{ s}^{-1} (2.68 \times 10^7 \text{ s}^{-1})$  in the solid phase. It indicates that TADF phenomenon happens in both the THF and the solid phase. Although the TADF efficiency  $(\Phi_{TADF} = \frac{\Phi_{ISC} \Phi_{RISC}}{1-\Phi_{ISC} \Phi_{RISC}} \Phi_{PF})$  depends both on the ISC efficiency  $(\Phi_{ISC} = \frac{K_{ISC}}{K_r + K_{nr} + K_{ISC}}$ , with  $K_{nr}$  the non-radiative rate) and the RISC efficiency ( $\Phi_{RISC} = \frac{K_{RISC}}{K_{RISC} + K_{nrt} + K_{rr}}$ , with  $K_{nrt}$  and  $K_{rt}$  the non-radiative rate and radiative rate of the triplet state), it has large dependence on the fluorescence efficiency ( $\Phi_{PF} = \frac{K_r}{K_r + K_{nr} + K_{ISC}}$ ).<sup>[46]</sup> Based on the calculation results above, we can found that the fluorescent rates are significantly enhanced and the non-radiative process can be suppressed in aggregation, which can induce obviously enhanced fluorescent efficiency. That is also the reason that enhanced DF can be found in aggregation. In addition, the ratio of the delayed components was also increased in solid phase in experiment.<sup>[23]</sup> It should mainly depend on the ISC efficiency since the RISC efficiency should not be larger than the ISC efficiency due to the slower decay of the triplet states. The decreased non-radiative rate in solid state and increased ISC rate would be favor of the ISC efficiency.

**Table 4.** Calculated radiative rate  $(K_r)$ , effective intersystem crossing rates  $(K_{\text{ISC}}^{\text{Cal}})$ , and effective reverse intersystem crossing rates  $(K_{\text{RISC}}^{\text{Cal}})$ .

	THF	Solid
$K_{\rm r}/{\rm s}^{-1}$	$2.27 \times 10^{4}$	$2.29 \times 10^{6}$
$K_{\rm ISC}^{\rm Cal}/{ m s}^{-1}$	$2.18 \times 10^{7}$	$4.79 \times 10^{7}$
$K_{\rm RISC}^{\rm Cal}/{\rm s}^{-1}$	$1.81 \times 10^{10}$	$4.25 \times 10^{8}$

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, we comparatively investigated the photophysical processes for DMF-BP-DMAC in THF and solid phase using PCM and QM/MM methods respectively. Through analyzing the variation of the geometric parameters and RMSD values of the molecules in both THF and solid phase, we found that the geometrical changes for molecule excitation in THF are much larger than those in solid phase. Due to the increase of the oscillator strength, the radiation rate in solid phase is nearly 100 times larger than that in THF. In addition, the HR factors are decreased in solid phase and they are mainly induced by the inhibition of the dihedral angle rotation. Therefore, the non-radiative channel in solid phase would be suppressed. The AIE property of the molecule should be induced by increased radiation rates and suppressed nonradiative process. Moreover, the small energy gap between  $S_1$  and  $T_n$  as well as reasonable SOC and reorganization energy values cause efficient RISC rates in THF and solid phase. TADF phenomenon is confirmed in both THF and solid phase. Aggregation significantly influences both the ISC and RISC processes and more RISC channels are involved in solid state. The enhanced delayed fluorescence should be induced both by the enhanced fluorescent efficiency and ISC efficiency. Our calculations reasonably elaborate the experimental measurements, and help one to understand the AIDF mechanisms of DMF-BP-DMAC.

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