Development of Thermally Stable and Highly Fluorescent IR Dyes
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Introduction

Fluorophores are the core component in various optical applications such as sensors and probes. Fluorophores with low-energy or long wavelength emission, in particular, in NIR region, possess advantages of low interference and high sensitivity. In this study, we have explored several classes of imidazole-based compounds for NIR fluorescent properties and concluded: (1) thiazole-based imidazole compounds are fluorescent; (2) emission energy is tunable by additional donor groups; (3) they also possess impressive two-photon absorption properties; and (4) fluorescence emission can be induced by two-photon input. This report summarizes (1) synthesis of new series of fluorophore; (2) impact of electron-withdrawing groups on fluorescent property; (3) unique property of two-photon absorption; and (4) on-going development.

Chromophore/Fluorophore development

The first approach included two classes of compounds (I and II, Figure 1) that possessed tricyanovinyl as an electron-accepting group. The choice of this group is based on its high thermal stability and strong electron accepting property. These compounds have absorption bands around 550 nm. The emission would be in much lower energy region considering potential Stokes shift. The synthesis of these two series of compounds used the reported procedure developed in this group (Scheme 1). Simply, treatment of imidazole derivatives with butyl lithium in THF, followed by the addition of tetracyanoethylene led to the formation of I or II. R groups in these two series could be H, Me or OMe. These groups did not affect the designated reaction but did slightly red-shift the absorption band of long wavelength. The examination of fluorescent properties in various solvents indicated that neither I nor II are fluorescent.
The next approach included class III (Figure 2) compounds that possessed nitro group as electron accepting group. The nitro group is one of the strongest electron accepting groups, and has often been used as A (electron-accepting) component to pull electron in the charge transfer process. Again, this class of compounds is barely fluorescent.
All three classes (I, II, and III) undergo radiationless energy transfer from donor to acceptor or static quenching. Both tricyanovinyl and nitro groups are responsible for these mechanisms because of their extreme electron accepting properties. Moreover, these groups assembled in a conjugated pathway further facilitate charge transfer and static interaction.

Based on these results, we are prompted to investigate the role of electron-accepting groups on fluorescence. It is well known that the D-π-A structure possesses large molecular dipole, and will likely absorb at a longer wavelength originating from the charge transfer. The strength of D and A as well as length of the conjugation will dictate the location of the charge transfer band. It is obvious now that the strongest electron accepting groups will not generate radiative process. Thus, our new approach will be to retain the molecular design but use different electron accepting groups. This involves identification of new electron-accepting groups that will be conducive to the formation of radiative state. In order to maximize the electron accepting ability and have the charge transfer band in the lowest energy possible, we have chosen sulfonyl group. Measured by
Hammett constant, the $\sigma_p$ is 0.73 for SO$_2$Me group, right behind that (0.81) of NO$_2$ group. This means that the strength of sulfonyl group as an electron acceptor is only next to that of nitro group. It should be an ideal candidate to be explored in the D-$\pi$-A architecture for fluorescence purpose.

Chromophores (class IV, Figure 3) will be designed to possess imidazole and thiazolevinyl as conjugated chain, sulfonyl as acceptor, and R with electron donating property.

The development of both classes (III and IV) of chromophores was illustrated in Schemes I, II, and III. Three chromophores in class III are designated as 1 (R=H), 2 (R=Me), and 3 (R=OMe). Three chromophores in class IV are designated as 4 (R=H), 5 (R=Me), and 6 (R=OMe).

Two new series of chromophores 1-3 and 4-5 were synthesized via intermediates 13-15, which were obtained by starting the condensation of benzil derivatives with 2-formylthiazole to afford 7-9. The methylation of 7-9 with iodomethane in the presence of a base gave 10-12, which were treated with $n$-butyl lithium, followed by the addition of DMF to produce 13-15 (Scheme 2). The Wittig reactions of 4-nitrobenzyl triphenylphosphine bromide with 13-15 led to the formation of 1-3 while the reactions
with 4-methylsulfonylbenzyl triphenylphosphine bromide yielded 4-6. Chromophores 1-3 absorb with $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ in the range of 422-433 nm while 4-6 in the range of 398-410 nm.

![Scheme 2.](image)

**Fluorescence study**

All the chromophores in chloroform absorb around 400 nm (Table 1). Both series show substituent effect, and the bathochromic shift occurs in the increasing order when R goes...
from H→Me→OMe. Fluorescence property strongly depends on solvents, in particular for the first series of compounds. The first series (class III, chromophores 1, 2, 3) has quantum yield of ca. 0.01 (in chloroform) and in other polar solvents as well [DMSO (φ= 0.01) and MeCN (φ=0.01)]. However, in 1,4-dioxane, the emission has adequate efficiency. The quantum yields range from 0.27 to 0.43 (Table 2).

Table 1. Photophysical and electronic properties of chromophores 1-6 in chloroform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chromophore</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>λ&lt;sub&gt;max&lt;/sub&gt; (ε) (nm) (M&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;cm&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>422 (33,700)</td>
<td>427 (29,200)</td>
<td>433 (34,400)</td>
<td>403 (27,200)</td>
<td>407 (23,600)</td>
<td>415 (27,200)</td>
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<td>Φ&lt;sub&gt;f&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<td>Stokes shift (cm&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>λ&lt;sub&gt;em&lt;/sub&gt; (nm)</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>510</td>
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Table 2. Comparison of quantum yields in different solvents

<table>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>in CHCl&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>φ</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in 1,4-dioxane</td>
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<tr>
<td>φ</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.47</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>λ&lt;sub&gt;em&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the first series, the second series (class IV, chromophores 4-6) exhibits moderate quantum yields (ca. 0.5) in both chloroform and 1,4-dioxane. The value determined in MeCN (φ=0.43 for 4) also suggests that the moderate efficiency is relatively consistent in different solvents.

These results are quite interesting and significant in the following aspect: nitro group and tricyanovinyl groups are strong electron accepting groups with poor fluorescence properties; On the contrary, sulfonyl group possesses both strong electron accepting and fluorescent property, suggesting that chromophores can be furnished with sulfonyl group for fluorescent purpose.
The use of sulfonyl does not compromise the fluorescent property of fluorophores. Compound 7 (scheme 1) has intrinsic fluorescent property with ($\phi$=0.48, in chloroform). Upon conversion of 7 to 4 to extend the conjugation and attach sulfonyl group, the fluorescent property is eventually retained except the fact that 7 emits at 405 nm while 4 does at a longer wavelength by 90 nm. The conjugation extension and acceptor attachment primarily shift the emission band to lower energy region and does not reduce the fluorescence efficiency. Thus, this establishes sulfonyl as an excellent group for both electron acceptor and fluorescence.

Two-photon absorption (2PA) study

Nonlinear optical measurements for two-photon absorption properties of 1-6 were carried out with the Z-scan technique. Nonlinear absorption coefficients are determined by monitoring the transmittance change as the sample is scanned through the laser beam focal plane. In non-resonant conditions, a 2PA process is characterized by the absorption Z-scan signature: a decrease in the transmittance. The magnitude of the nonlinear process can be extracted through a fitting procedure.

Figure 4 shows the open aperture Z-scan measurements obtained with three distinct wavelengths for 3. For nonresonant excitation ($\lambda$= 600 nm), the decrease in the normalized transmittance indicates a 2PA process (Fig. 4, squares). When resonant excitation at 500 nm is used (circles), the transmittance increases, characteristic of saturated absorption due to the occurrence of excited state process. At 550 nm, no changes in the normalized transmittance are observed, where the 2PA and the SA effects cancel each other. Similar results were obtained for the other compounds.
The transmittance change (ΔT) measured through the Z-scan experiment as a function of the wavelength (solid circles) and the linear absorption spectrum (solid line) are displayed in Fig. 5 for 4.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 5 – Linear and nonlinear spectra for 4**

All 2PA spectra present a peak around 750 – 800 nm, which is almost twice the position of the lowest energy peak for the linear absorption, a feature generally observed in the 2PA spectrum of unsymmetric molecules. The increase in the 2PA intensity below 700 nm is due to resonance enhancement of the optical nonlinearity near the one photon transition, in agreement with the resonant denominator in the sum-over states model. By fitting each of the Z-scan signatures obtained at the nonresonant condition, the 2PA cross-section coefficients (δ) are determined and listed in Table 2.
Table 2. TPA cross-section coefficients obtained in chloroform solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound</th>
<th>Concentration</th>
<th>$\delta$ (GM)</th>
<th>$\delta$ (GM)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>550</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1100</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>1600</td>
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</table>

Two-photon excited fluorescence study

Figure 6 shows the two-photon excited fluorescence spectrum obtained for 5 with excitation at 650 nm. In order to verify the two-photon origin of this signal, measurements were carried out with two distinct laser irradiances. As seen in this figure, the fluorescence intensity decreases with the square of the excitation intensity, as expected for this kind of process. Furthermore, the results were obtained at nonresonant conditions.

![Figure 6 - Two photon excited fluorescence for 5. The excitation wavelength employed was 650nm](image-url)
Due to the higher 2PA cross section of the second series, the two-photon excited fluorescence signals observed is high. For the first series, a very low fluorescence (not shown) could be detected, due to their smaller 2PA cross-section and fluorescence quantum yield.

Two-photon absorption and excited fluorescence study again demonstrates that the sulfonyl group is advantageous in non-linear absorption and excitation process.

**On-going fluorophore development**

Since the fluorescence property is directly related to electron-accepting group as discussed above, we are interested in possible fine-tuning of fluorescence with electron-accepting groups. We have chosen the following compounds (7-9) to study this possibility. These three compounds have cyano-based electron-accepting groups. The number of cyano groups is from 1 to 3. In 1,4-dioxane, compound 7, which possesses one cyano group, has quantum yield of 0.90. As the number of cyano groups increases, such as in 8 and 9, the fluorescence decreases with $\phi_f = 0.36$ for 8, 0.01 for 9, respectively. The same trend exists in acetonitrile as well: 0.74 for 7, 0.25 for 8, 0.02 for 9.

![Chemical structures of compounds 7, 8, and 9](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound</th>
<th>$\lambda_{em}$</th>
<th>$\phi$</th>
<th>$\lambda_{em}$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>503 (in dioxane)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>533 (in MeCN)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These results indicate that mono-cyano or dicyano may be used as electron-accepting groups. In mono-cyano case, the quantum yield is higher. In di-cyano case, the quantum yield is moderate. But, the emission takes place in lower energy region compared to that from mono-cyano fluorophore, and this is particularly true in acetonitrile, a polar solvent.

**Outlook-Future Development**

As we have established the importance of electron-accepting group on fluorescence, it is expected that this finding will apply to the design of next generation of fluorophores. So far, we have concluded that three types of electron-accepting groups can be utilized in the building of molecules: mono-cyano, dicyanovinyl, and sulfonil groups. The potential may also exist in a combination of these groups.

The D-π-A system is an important architecture in the design of NIR fluorescent molecules. It will offer an ability through push-pull motif to shift charge transfer band to visible region. To the end, emission will likely take place at even lower energy region: NIR region. The identification of sulfonil group, mono-cyano, and di-cyanovinyl as an efficient fluorescent component will help design molecular systems with intriguing fluorescent properties. With an optimal combination with D components as well as π chain, the new NIR fluorophores with D-π-A motifs will be developed.

**EXPERIMENTAL**

All moisture-sensitive reactions were carried out under nitrogen atmosphere using flame-dried glassware. Solvents were dried over standard drying agents and freshly distilled prior to use. Other chemicals were used as received. Reactions were monitored by TLC on silica gel 60 F254. Column chromatography purifications were performed on silica gel (63 – 200μm). 1H NMR (400 MHz) and 13C NMR (100 MHz) spectra were recorded on a Bruker ARX-400 spectrometer using TMS as reference, and reported as ppm for chemical shifts. Elemental analysis was performed in Atlantic Microlab, Norcross of Georgia. MS spectra were obtained in an EI mode. UV-vis absorption spectra were
recorded on a Beckman DU 650 spectrophotometer. Fluorescence spectra were recorded on a PTI steady state fluorometer.

The open aperture Z-scan experiments for nonlinear absorption employed laser pulses from an optical parametric amplifier (TOPAS, from Light Conversion) pumped by 150 fs pulses at 775 nm delivered by a Ti:sapphire chirped pulse amplified system (CPA-2001, from Clark-MXR Inc.) operating at a 1 kHz repetition rate. Pulse energies used here were limited to 0.01 µJ to avoid photo-degradation of the chromophores. The FWHM pulse duration delivered by the OPA was about 120 fs, and the spatial profile of the laser beam presented an approximately Gaussian distribution. The beam waist size employed in our experiments was typically around 15 µm.

2-(2'-thiazol)-4,5-bis(phenyl)imidazole (7).
A mixture of benzil (4.185 g, 19.91 mmol) and ammonium acetate (15.35 g, 199 mmol) in glacial acetic acid (140 mL) was heated to 80 °C under nitrogen atmosphere. During stirring, 2-formylthiazole(2.930 g, 25.90 mmol) in 5 mL glacial acetic acid was added dropwise over 24 h. The resulting solution was cooled to room temperature and poured into 1200 mL of ice water. The viscous precipitate was obtained via filtration, then washed several times with water. Purification by chromatography on a silica gel (eluent: hexane/ethyl acetate/CH2Cl2 2:1:1 in volume) to give 7 (3.32 g, 55% yield) as a white solid. MP 218-220 °C. 1H NMR (CDCl3): δ 12.05 (s, 1H), 7.65 (d, 2H, J=7.2 Hz), 7.47 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 7.39-7.24 (m, 8H), 7.19 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz). 13C NMR (CDCl3): δ 160.1, 143.7, 143.1, 141.3, 134.6, 130.6, 130.0, 129.2, 128.9, 128.8, 128.6, 128.3, 127.7, 127.5, 119.9, 119.7. MS: m/z 303 (M+). Anal. Calcd for C18H13N3S: C, 71.26; H, 4.32; N, 13.85; S, 10.57. Found: C, 71.02; H, 4.30; N, 13.86.

2-(2'-thiazol)-4,5-bis(4'-methylphenyl)imidazole (8).
Similar procedure as for 7 led to 8 as a white solid (66% yield). MP 213-215 °C.

1H NMR (CDCl3): δ 11.06 (s, 1H), 7.61 (d, 1H, J=3.6 Hz), 7.55 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.31 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.27 (d, 1H, J=3.6 Hz), 7.13 (dd, 4H, J=8.0 Hz), 2.35 (s, 3H), 2.31 (s, 3H). 13C NMR (CDCl3): δ 160.1, 143.2, 142.9, 141.0, 139.4, 138.3, 137.1, 131.9, 129.7, 129.6, 129.5, 129.3, 129.2, 128.5, 128.3, 128.2, 128.0, 127.8, 21.8, 21.1. MS: m/z 331
2-(2'-thiazol)-4,5-bis(4'-methoxyphenyl)imidazole (9).
Similar procedure as for 7 produced 9 as a white solid (71% yield). MP 199-200 °C.

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): $\delta$ 10.74 (s, 1H), 7.66 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 7.58 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.36 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.30 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 6.88 (dd, 4H, J=8.8, J=8.4 Hz), 3.88 (s, 3H), 3.83 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): $\delta$ 160.3, 159.7, 159.2, 143.1, 142.8, 140.8, 138.9, 130.1, 129.9, 129.4, 129.2, 127.4, 123.1, 119.6, 119.3, 114.6, 114.3, 114.0, 56.3, 55.3. MS: m/z 363 (M$^+$). Anal. Calcd for C$_{20}$H$_{17}$N$_3$O$_2$S: C, 66.10; H, 4.71; N, 11.56; O, 8.80; S, 8.82. Found: C, 71.37; H, 4.81; N, 13.67.

1-methyl-2-(2'-thiazol)-4,5-bis(phenyl)imidazole (10).
To a mixture of 7 (2.500 g, 7.54 mmol) in anhydrous N,N-dimethylacetamide (80 mL) and potassium carbonate (2.08 g, 15.05 mmol) was added iodomethane (1.285 g, 9.05 mmol). The reaction mixture was stirred for 12 h at 45-50 °C under nitrogen atmosphere, and then poured into a water-ice bath. The precipitate was filtered and dried. The recrystallization in 300 mL methanol gave 10 as a greenish crystal (2.50 g, 96% yield). MP 190-191 °C. $^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): $\delta$ 7.82 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 7.53 (d, 2H, J=7.6 Hz), 7.46-7.35 (m, 5H), 7.30 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 7.20-7.11 (m, 3H), 3.90 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): $\delta$ 160.9, 143.5, 140.9, 139.1, 134.6, 132.5, 131.3, 130.9, 129.4, 129.3, 128.4, 127.4, 127.0, 119.7, 33.7. MS: m/z 317 (M$^+$). Anal. Calcd for C$_{19}$H$_{15}$N$_3$S: C, 71.90; H, 4.76; N, 13.24; S, 10.10. Found: C, 72.00; H, 4.75; N, 13.23.

1-methyl-2-(2'-thiazol)-4,5-bis(4'-methylphenyl)imidazole (11).
Similar procedure as for 10 led to 11 as a greenish crystal (90% yield). MP 159-160 °C

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): $\delta$ 7.86 (d, 1H, J=3.6 Hz), 7.43 (d, 2H, J=7.6 Hz), 7.35 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 7.28-7.22 (m, 4H), 7.04 (d, 2H, J=7.2 Hz), 3.92 (s, 3H), 2.44 (s, 3H), 2.29 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): $\delta$ 161.0, 143.5, 140.6, 139.2, 139.0, 136.6, 132.3, 131.7, 131.1, 130.2,

1-methyl-2-(2'-thiazol)-4,5-bis(4'-methoxyphenyl)imidazole (12).
Similar procedure as for 10 led to 12 as a greenish crystal (92% yield). MP 121-122 °C

¹H NMR (CDCl₃): δ 7.85 (d, 1H, J=3.6 Hz), 7.47 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.34 (d, 1H, J=3.2 Hz), 7.29 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.01 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.78 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 3.91 (s, 3H), 3.77 (s, 3H), 3.87 (s, 3H), 3.77 (s, 3H). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃): δ 160.3, 158.8, 143.5, 140.6, 140.4, 138.8, 132.6, 131.5, 128.5, 127.4, 122.8, 119.6, 114.9, 114.0, 55.7, 55.5, 33.7. MS: m/z 377 (M⁺). Anal. Calcd for C₂₁H₁₅N₃O₂S: C, 66.82; H, 5.07; N, 11.13; O, 4.63; S, 9.28. Found: C, 67.02; H, 5.10; N, 11.19.

1-methyl-2-[2'-(5'-formyl)thiazol]-4,5-bis(phenyl)imidazole (13)
To a solution of 10 (0.368 g, 1.16 mmol) in anhydrous THF (22 mL) was added dropwise n-butyllithium (2.5 M in hexane, 1.39 mL, 3.48 mmol) at -63 °C under nitrogen atmosphere. The reaction mixture was warmed to 0 °C and stirred at this temperature for 30 min. After it was cooled to -63 °C, anhydrous N,N-dimethylformamide (0.325 mL, 4.18 mmol) was added. The mixture was stirred at 0 °C for 2 h, then poured into 100 mL H₂O and neutralized with 2N HCl to near pH 6. The product was extracted with acetyl acetate, dried with sodium sulfate, and concentrated. Recrystallization in mixture of acetyl acetate and hexane (1/5 in vol.) gave yellowish product (0.33 g, 83% yield). MP 193-195 °C. ¹H NMR (CDCl₃): δ 10.07 (s, 1H), 8.39 (s, 1H), 7.52-7.50 (m, 5H), 7.39-7.37 (m, 2H), 7.23-7.17 (m, 3H), 3.96 (s, 3H). ¹³C NMR (CDCl₃): δ 182.4, 167.4, 152.1, 140.4, 139.7, 138.9, 134.3, 133.8, 131.1, 130.1, 129.6, 128.6, 127.5, 127.3. MS: m/z 345 (M⁺). Anal. Calcd for C₂₀H₁₅N₃O₅: C, 69.54; H, 4.38; N, 12.17; O, 4.63; S, 9.28. Found: C, 69.37; H, 4.32; N, 12.15.

1-methyl-2-[2'-(5'-formyl)thiazol]-4,5-bis(4'-methylphenyl)imidazole (14)
Similar procedure as for 13 led to 14 as a yellowish product (77% yield). MP 201-203 °C.

¹H NMR (CDCl₃): δ 10.00 (s, 1H), 8.33 (s, 1H), 7.40 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.29 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.24 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.03 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 3.91 (s, 3H), 2.43 (s, 3H), 2.29
(s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 182.4, 167.4, 152.3, 140.4, 139.6, 139.4, 138.7, 137.1, 134.1, 131.2, 130.9, 130.3, 129.3, 127.2, 127.1, 34.0, 21.8, 21.5. MS: $m/z$ 373 (M$^+$). Anal. Calcd for C$_{22}$H$_{19}$N$_3$OS: C, 70.75; H, 5.13; N, 11.25; O, 4.28; S, 8.59. Found: C, 70.67; H, 5.11; N, 11.14.

1-methyl-2-[2'-(5'-formyl)thiazol]-4,5-bis(4'-methoxyphenyl)imidazole (15)
Similar procedure as for 13 led to 15 as a yellowish product (72% yield). MP 186-188 °C. $^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 10.04 (s, 1H), 8.37 (s, 1H), 7.47 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.29 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.03 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 6.79 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 3.93 (s, 3H), 3.90 (s, 3H), 3.78 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 182.5, 167.4, 160.6, 159.1, 152.3, 140.2, 139.3, 138.8, 138.6, 133.5, 132.4, 128.5, 126.7, 122.1, 115.1, 114.0, 55.7, 55.6, 34.0. MS: $m/z$ 405 (M$^+$). Anal. Calcd for C$_{22}$H$_{19}$N$_3$O$_2$S: C, 65.17; H, 4.72; N, 10.36; O, 11.84; S, 7.91. Found: C, 65.32; H, 4.79; N, 11.25.

1-methyl-2-{2'-(5'-(4'-nitrophenylvinyl)thiazol]-4,5-bis(phenyl)imidazole (1)
To a mixture of 13 (0.618 g, 1.80 mmol), triphenyl(4-nitrobenzyl)phosphonium bromide(0.948 g, 1.98 mmol) and 18-crown-6(0.120 g, 0.45 mmol) in anhydrous dichloromethane (50 mL) was added potassium tert-butoxide by three times (totally 0.846 g, 7.56 mmol) in 5 h under nitrogen atmosphere. The reaction mixture was continued to stir for more 10 h at room temperature. Then the mixture was poured into 500 mL H$_2$O, extracted with dichloromethane, dried with sodium sulfate, and concentrated. Purification was performed by column chromatography (eluent: n-hexane/EtOAc/CH$_2$Cl$_2$ 6:1:12 in volume). Further purification by recrystallization in hexane/CH$_2$Cl$_2$ gave yellowish solid (0.51 g, 61% yield). MP 247-249 °C. $^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 8.22 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.83 (s, 1H), 7.59 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.60-7.49 (m, 5H), 7.41-7.37 (m, 3H), 7.24-7.17 (m, 3H), 6.98 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 3.93 (s, 3H). MS: $m/z$ 464 (M$^+$). Anal. Calcd for C$_{27}$H$_{22}$N$_3$O$_2$: C, 69.81; H, 4.34; N, 12.06; O, 6.89; S, 6.90. Found: C, 69.72; H, 4.36; N, 11.98.

1-methyl-2-{2'-(5'-(4'-nitrophenylvinyl)thiazol]-4,5-bis(4'-methylphenyl)imidazole (2)
Similar procedure as for 1 led to 2 as a yellowish solid (43% yield). MP 231-233 °C.

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 8.21 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.82 (s, 1H), 7.59 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.42 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.38 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 7.29 (d, 2H, J=7.6 Hz), 7.25 (d, 2H, J=7.6 Hz), 7.05 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 6.96 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 3.90 (s, 3H), 2.44 (s, 3H), 2.30 (s, 3H).

MS: $m/z$ 492 (M$^+$$)$. Anal. Calcd for C$_{29}$H$_{24}$O$_2$S: C, 70.71; H, 4.91; N, 11.37; O, 6.50; S, 6.51. Found: C, 70.82; H, 4.94; N, 11.32.

1-methyl-2-[(2'-[5'-(4'-nitrophenylvinyl)]thiazol)-4,5-bis(4'-methoxyphenyl)-imidazole (3)

Similar procedure as for 1 led to 3 as a yellowish solid (59% yield). MP 206-208 °C.

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 8.25 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.83 (s, 1H), 7.62 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.49 (d, 2H, J=9.2 Hz), 7.41 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 7.29 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.02 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 6.98 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 6.79 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 3.91 (s, 3H), 3.89 (s, 3H), 3.78 (s, 3H).

MS: $m/z$ 524 (M$^+$$)$. Anal. Calcd for C$_{29}$H$_{24}$N$_2$O$_4$S: C, 66.40; H, 4.61; N, 10.68; O, 12.20; S, 6.11. Found: C, 66.16; H, 4.64; N, 10.59.

1-methyl-2-[(2'-[5'-(4'-methylsulfonylphenylvinyl)]thiazol)-4,5-bis(phenyl)-imidazole (4)

To a mixture of 13 (0.130 g, 0.376 mmol), triphenyl(4-methylsulfonylbenzyl)-phosphonium bromide (0.226 g, 0.442 mmol) and 18-crown-6 (0.026 g, 0.10 mmol) in anhydrous dichloromethane (25 mL) was added potassium tert-butoxide by three times (totally 0.178 g, 1.585 mmol) in 3 h under nitrogen atmosphere. The reaction mixture was continued to stir for more 5 h at room temperature. Then the mixture was poured into 300 mL H$_2$O, extracted with dichloromethane, dried with sodium sulfate, and concentrated. Purification was performed by column chromatography (eluent: hexane/EtOAc 2:1 in volume). Further purification by recrystallization in hexane/EtOAc gave yellowish solid (0.13 g, 71% yield).

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 7.92 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.81 (s, 1H), 7.63 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 7.53-7.45 (m, 5H), 7.39-7.35 (m, 3H), 7.26-7.16 (m, 3H), 6.95 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 3.92 (s, 3H), 3.06 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 159.9, 144.0, 143.0, 142.3, 140.3, 139.5, 137.5,
134.2, 133.2, 131.3, 131.1, 130.4, 129.8, 129.7, 129.6, 129.4, 128.7, 128.5, 128.3, 127.4, 126.4, 122.7, 122.5, 44.9, 34.3, 33.5. MS: m/z 497 (M+).

**1-methyl-2-{2'-[5'-(4'-methylsulfonylphenylvinyl)]thiazol}-4,5-bis(4'-methylphenyl)imidazole (5)**

Similar procedure as for 4 led to 5 as a yellowish solid (26% yield).

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): cis- δ 7.97 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.70 (s, 1H), 7.57 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.43-7.20 (m, 7H), 7.09 (d, 2H, J=7.6 Hz), 6.80 (dd, 1H, J=12.4 Hz, J=12.0 Hz), 3.85 (s, 3H), 3.14 (s, 3H), 2.42 (s, 3H), 2.27 (s, 3H). trans- δ 7.92 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.81 (s, 1H), 7.64 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.43-7.20 (m, 7H), 7.05 (d, 2H, J=8.0 Hz), 6.96 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 3.91 (s, 3H), 3.07 (s, 3H), 2.44 (s, 3H), 2.30 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 160.4, 160.1, 145.7, 143.9, 142.9, 142.4, 140.1, 140.0, 139.5, 139.4, 137.6, 136.8, 133.6, 133.0, 132.8, 131.5, 131.1, 130.9, 130.3, 130.1, 129.6, 129.3, 129.2, 128.3, 127.3, 127.1, 126.4, 122.7, 122.6, 45.0, 34.3, 33.4, 22.5, 22.2, 21.6, 21.0. MS: m/z 525 (M+). 

**1-methyl-2-{2'-[5'-(4'-methylsulfonylphenylvinyl)]thiazol}-4,5-bis(4'-methoxyphenyl)imidazole (6)**

Similar procedure as for 4 led to 6 as a yellowish solid (52% yield). MP 217-219 ºC.

$^1$H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 7.92 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.81 (s, 1H), 7.64 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.47 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 7.38 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 7.29 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 7.02 (d, 2H, J=8.8 Hz), 6.96 (d, 1H, J=16.0 Hz), 6.79 (d, 2H, J=8.4 Hz), 3.90 (s, 3H), 3.89 (s, 3H), 3.78 (s, 3H), 3.08 (s, 3H). $^{13}$C NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 160.4, 160.1, 158.9, 143.9, 142.4, 140.0, 139.5, 139.3, 137.3, 132.6, 132.4, 132.3, 129.6, 128.6, 128.3, 127.3, 127.1, 122.7, 122.5, 115.0, 114.9, 114.1, 113.8, 56.2, 55.8, 55.3, 54.9, 44.9, 34.2. MS: m/z 557 (M+). Anal. Calcd for C$_{30}$H$_{25}$N$_3$O$_4$S$_2$: C, 64.61; H, 4.88; N, 7.53; O, 11.48; S, 11.50. Found: C, 64.37; H, 4.94; N, 7.23;