

Solution-Processed Barium Salts as Charge Injection Layers for High Performance N-Channel Organic Field-Effect Transistors

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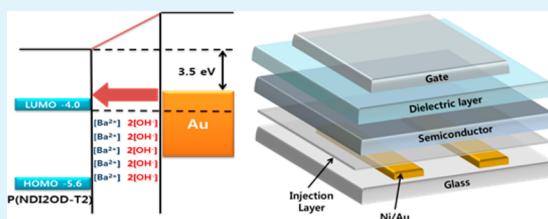
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ABSTRACT: N-channel organic field-effect transistors (OFETs) have generally shown lower field-effect mobilities (μ_{FET}) than their p-type counterparts. One of the reasons is the energetic misalignment between the work function (WF) of commonly used charge injection electrode, i.e. gold (Au), and the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) of n-channel electron-transporting organic semiconductors. Here, we report barium salts as solution-processed interlayers, to improve the electron-injection and/or hole-blocking in top-gate/bottom-contact n-channel OFETs, based on poly{[N,N'-bis(2-octyldodecyl)-naphthalene-1,4,5,8-bis(dicarboximide)-2,6-diyl]-*alt*-5,5'-(2,2'-dithiophene)} (P(NDI2OD-T2)) and phenyl-C61-butyric acid methyl ester (PC₆₁BM). Two different barium salts, barium hydroxide (Ba(OH)₂) and barium chloride (Ba(Cl)₂), are employed as the ultrathin interlayer (~2 nm); and they effectively tune the WF of Au from 4.9 eV, to as low as 3.5 eV. The resulting n-channel OFETs exhibit significantly improved μ_{FET} , approaching 2.6 cm²/(V s) and 0.1 cm²/(V s) for the best P(NDI2OD-T2) and PC₆₁BM devices, respectively, with Ba(OH)₂ as interlayer.

KEYWORDS: organic field-effect transistor, charge injection, interlayer, barium salts, work function



INTRODUCTION

During the past 20 years, organic field-effect transistors (OFETs) have been actively pursued for applications and fabrication methodologies that are complementary to those of conventional inorganic transistors.^{1–3} Among them, solution processability of the FET stack provides a new paradigm in device manufacturing, through the cost-effective graphic art printing process.^{4–6} State-of-the-art solution processed p-type OFETs show impressively high field-effect mobility (μ_{FET}) of over 10 cm²/(V s), which is mainly achieved via the synthesis/development of new organic semiconductors (OSCs) and gate dielectric materials, as well as improvement of the semiconductor molecular orientation, alignment, and thin-film crystallinity.^{7–9} However, the performance of n-channel OFETs remains lower than their p-type counterparts, because of several major restrictions. One of them is the generation of a large number of electron trapping sites within the semiconductor bandgap, by chemical functionalities on the dielectric surface, such as hydroxyl groups, or water and oxygen from the ambient atmosphere.^{10,11} These drawbacks can be overcome by using hydroxyl-free polymer dielectric materials, such as a divinyl tetramethylsiloxane-bis(benzocyclobutene) derivative, or an efficient encapsulation of the device.^{11–13} The other restriction is the poor electron injection properties, due to the energetic misalignment between the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) energetic level of n-channel

OSCs, and the work function (WF) of the common contact metal used in OFETs, i.e. Au. Generally, high WF metals such as Au and Ti are used as the contact electrode, due to their high ambient stability, and photo pattern-ability. However, the LUMO energy level of typical n-channel OSCs are located far away from the WF of stable metal electrodes, leading to a large injection barrier height.^{14,15} Therefore, several approaches to improve charge injection properties in n-channel OFETs have been reported.

The conventional approach to overcoming the above limitations is by utilizing low WF metals, such as Al and Ca, as an electron injection electrode; typically, they showed better charge injection properties than Au.^{16,17} However, these metals are easily prone to oxidation in air, and during photolithography processes for source/drain patterning. An alternative method is by inserting various interlayers^{17–22} at the metal/OSC interface, in order to shift the WF of the contact metal, by means of chemical/charge transfer, and/or dipole formation. In general, deposition of electron injection layers on the contact surface by thermal evaporation or solution processes, such as conjugated polyelectrolytes, nonconjugated polyelectrolytes, and metal oxides, is compatible with various

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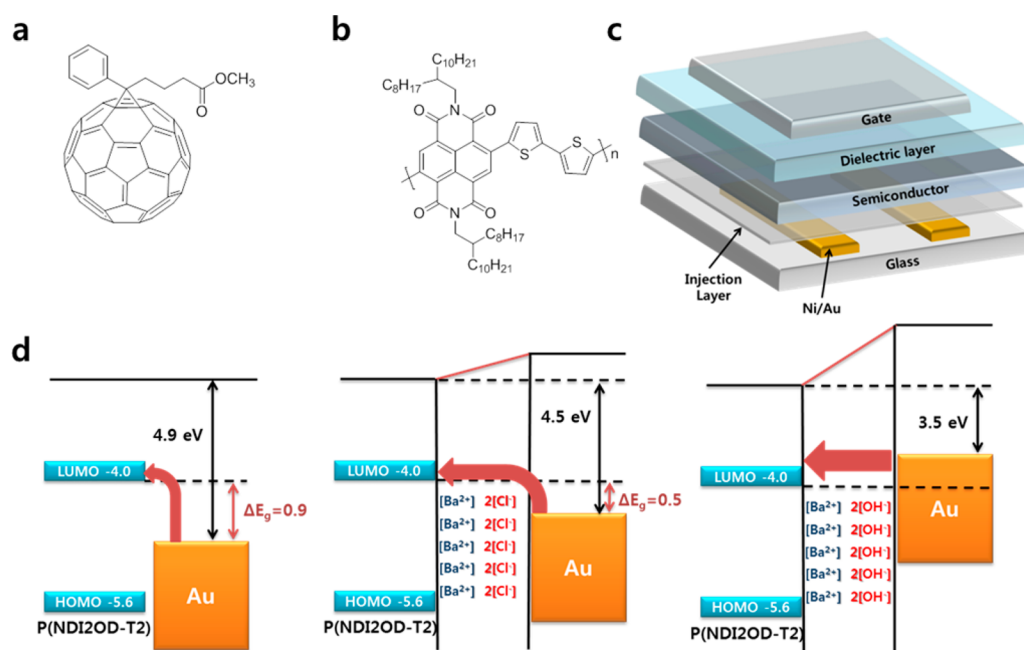


Figure 1. (a) Molecular structure of PC₆₁BM, and (b) P(NDI2OD-T2); (c) TG/BC OFET device structure with interfacial layer; (d) energy diagram of P(NDI2OD-T2) on pristine Au S/D electrode, and after incorporation of the Ba(OH)₂ and Ba(Cl)₂, between the P(NDI2OD-T2) and Au.

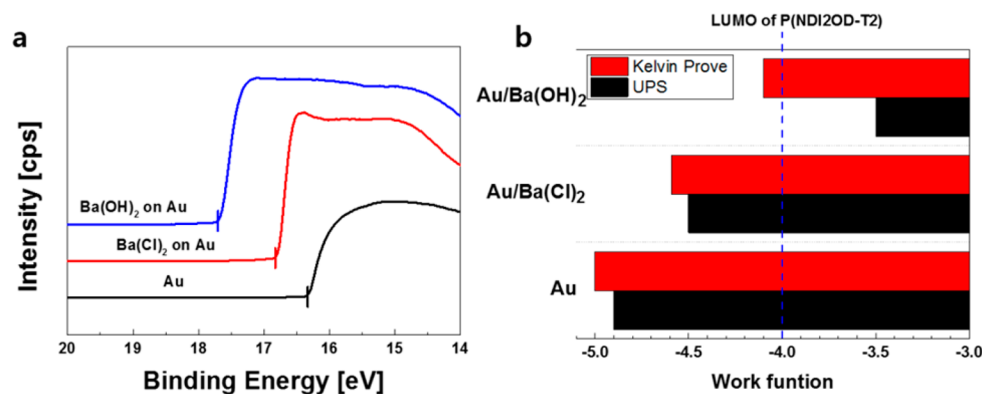


Figure 2. (a) Ultraviolet photoelectron spectra (UPS) of different barium interfacial layer on an Au contact. (b) Work function of an Au with and without barium interfacial layer, as independently measured by Kelvin probe in air, and by UPS.

kinds of electrode material. Several inorganic salts have also been pursued as electron injection interlayers in various organic electronic devices, where WF reduction of the metal contacts enhanced performance.^{23–26} Among these treatments, a double layer of barium hydroxide and zinc oxide has previously been utilized as an electron-injection interlayer in polymer light emitting diodes, and the resulting devices showed better charge balance between holes and electrons, and much reduced exciton quenching.²⁷ Therefore, a single layer of barium salts alone could be another good candidate for electron-injecting material in n-channel OFETs. In addition, it can be easily deposited by solution-based processing, and it is commercially available at very low cost.

Here we report two solution-processed barium salts, barium hydroxide (Ba(OH)₂) and barium chloride (Ba(Cl)₂), as electron-injection interlayers between the Au electrodes and the OSC, in top-gate/bottom-contact (TG/BC) n-channel OFETs. Our results demonstrate significantly improved charge injection efficiency (2–10× reduction in contact resistance),

and greatly enhanced device performance (3–5× increase in electron mobility). To elucidate these remarkable improvements, we systematically investigated the physical and chemical properties of the electrical contact metal surface and the contact-OSC interface, by using various tools, including atomic force microscopy (AFM), Kelvin probe, UV photoelectron spectroscopy (UPS), and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two representative n-channel organic semiconductors, the small molecule phenyl-C61-butyric acid methylester (PC₆₁BM) and the polymer poly{[N,N'-bis(2-octyldodecyl)-naphthalene-1,4,5,8-bis(dicarboximide)-2,6-diyl]-alt-5,5'-(2,2'-dithiophene)} (P(NDI2OD-T2)), were used in this study, and their chemical structures are shown in panels a and b in Figure 1, respectively. PC₆₁BM and P(NDI2OD-T2) are widely used in organic electronics, and their HOMO and LUMO levels are 6.1 and 3.7 eV for PC₆₁BM, and 5.6 and 4.0 eV for P(NDI2OD-T2),

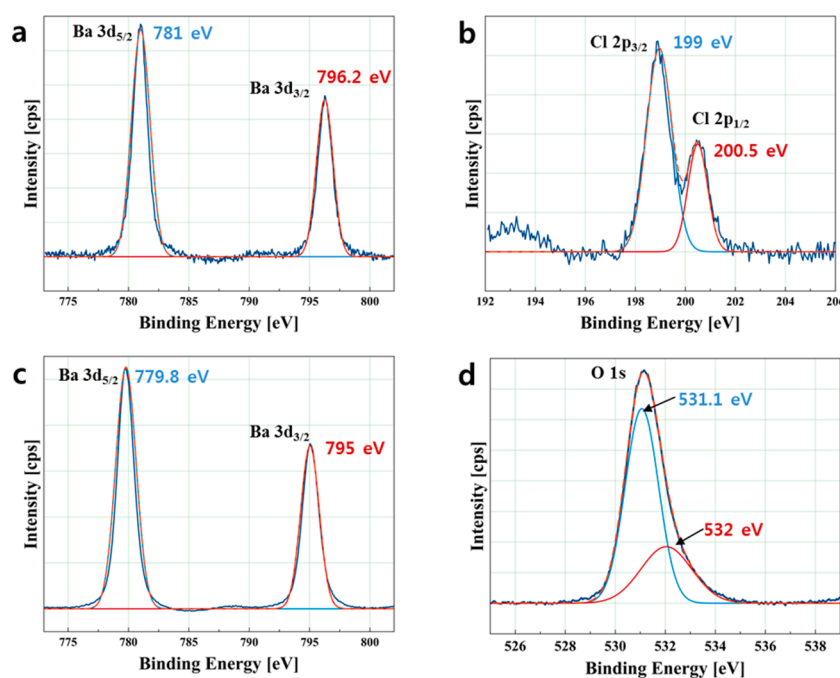


Figure 3. X-ray photoemission spectra of the spin-coated $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ and $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ films on Au contacts. (a) Ba 3d spectra, and (b) Cl 2p spectra of $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ films. (c) Ba 3d spectra, and (d) O 1s spectra of $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ films, respectively.

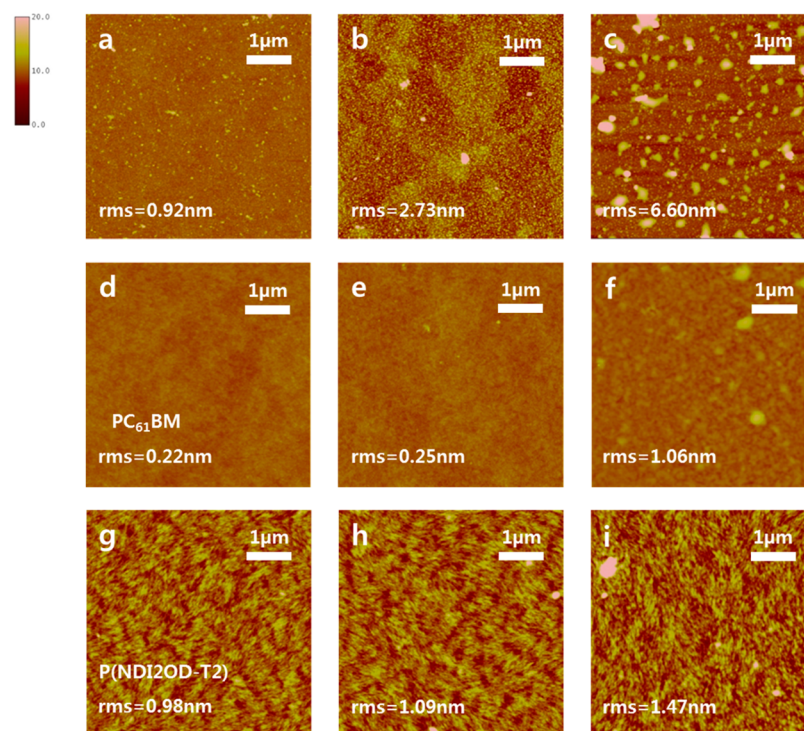


Figure 4. Tapping mode AFM images. (a) Bare Au surface, and with (b) $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ -coated and (c) $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ -coated Au surface. PC_{61}BM films were coated onto (d) bare Au, and with (e) $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2/\text{Au}$, and (f) $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2/\text{Au}$; and (g) P(NDI2OD-T2) on Au contact, and with (h) $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2/\text{Au}$, and (i) $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2/\text{Au}$ surface (rms: root-mean-square roughness).

respectively.^{12,28,29} The charge transport properties of these two materials were measured using top-gate/bottom-contact (TG/BC) OFETs fabricated on glass substrates, with Au source/drain contacts. $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ or $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ solutions were optionally spin-coated as an electron-injection interlayer (see Figure 1c). A spin-coated semiconductor layer, and subsequently a dielectric poly(methyl methacrylate) (PMMA)

layer, were deposited on top of the barium salt; and the OFET devices were completed by thermal evaporation of an aluminum (Al) top-gate electrode (see Experimental Section for details).

Figure 2 show UPS and Kelvin probe results of pristine Au, as well as $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ and $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ thin film on Au/glass substrates. Small discrepancy between UPS and Kelvin probe

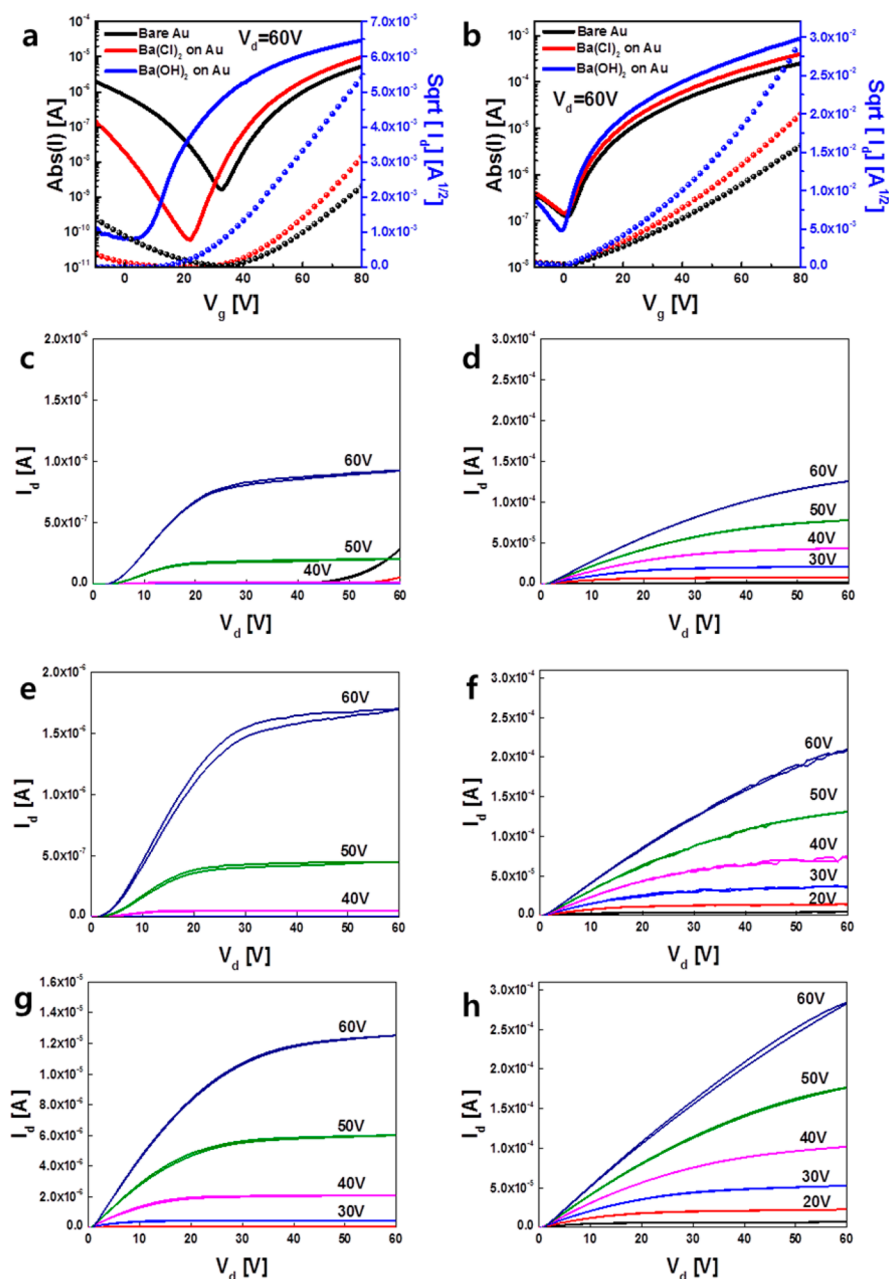


Figure 5. Transfer curve characteristics of the n-channel OFETs ($W/L = 1 \text{ mm}/20 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$) based on (a) PC₆₁BM, and (b) P(NDI2OD-T2), with and without Ba(Cl)₂ and Ba(OH)₂ interfacial layers. Output characteristics of the n-channel OFETs based on (c) PC₆₁BM on Au contact, and on (e) Ba(Cl)₂/Au, and (g) Ba(OH)₂/Au; and (d) P(NDI2OD-T2) on Au contact, and with (f) Ba(Cl)₂/Au, and (h) Ba(OH)₂/Au, at $V_g = 10, 20, 30, 40, 50,$ and 60 V .

results are due to different measurement environments, instruments and sensitivity.³⁰ Both measurements indicate that barium salts do indeed strongly reduce the WF of the Au electrodes, and that the magnitude of WF shift depends on the barium salt materials. The WF of Au was reduced from 4.9 to 4.4 and 3.5 eV, with Ba(Cl)₂ and Ba(OH)₂ interlayer, respectively. Thanks to this noticeable reduction of Au WF, electrons should be much more easily injected into the LUMO levels of our semiconductors, which are located at 3.7 eV for PC₆₁BM, and 4.0 eV for P(NDI2OD-T2). The shift of Au WF is presumably due to dipole formation on the Au surface; thus the degree of shifting can be influenced by the intrinsic magnitude of these salt dipole moments,^{20,31} the degree of coverage on Au, and the morphology of the interlayer film.

The chemical nature and surface morphology of Ba(OH)₂ and Ba(Cl)₂ ultrathin films (2–3 nm) were accessed by X-ray photoemission spectroscopy (XPS) and atomic force microscope (AFM) measurements. The XPS spectra were calibrated using adventitious carbon fixation at the binding energy of 285 eV, to compensate for the charge effects. Figure 3 shows the XPS profiles of the Ba 3d, Cl 2p, and O 1s of Ba(OH)₂ and Ba(Cl)₂, indicating that both Ba(OH)₂ and Ba(Cl)₂ interlayers do not react with the metal electrode. As shown in Figure 3d, the oxygen signal at EB(O 1s_A) $\approx 531.1 \text{ eV}$ corresponds to the hydroxide ions of the Ba(OH)₂ layer; and the peak at EB(O 1s_B) $\approx 532 \text{ eV}$ could be attributed either to the oxidation states of Au, or to surface contamination.^{32,33} The AFM images shown in Figure 4 reveal that the surfaces of Ba(OH)₂ and

Table 1. OFET Parameters of the PC₆₁BM and P(NDI2OD-T2) Devices, with Different Barium Salt Interfacial Layers

| OSC | interfacial layer | μ_e (cm ² /(V s)) | V_{Th} (V) | $S_{S,th}$ (V/dec.) | I_{on}/I_{off} | R_c (Ω cm) |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| PC ₆₁ BM | none | 0.034 (\pm 0.001) (max 0.036) | 45.19 (\pm 1.56) | 6.38 (\pm 0.26) | 3×10^3 | 1.3×10^6 |
| | Ba(Cl) ₂ | 0.062 (\pm 0.004) (max 0.07) | 48.20 (\pm 1.68) | 4.97 (\pm 0.23) | 2×10^5 | 8.3×10^5 |
| | Ba(OH) ₂ | 0.094 (\pm 0.009) (max 0.101) | 28.59 (\pm 0.62) | 4.59 (\pm 0.72) | 4×10^5 | 6.6×10^4 |
| P(NDI2OD-T2) | none | 0.37 (\pm 0.07) (max 0.44) | 16.86 (\pm 1.42) | 7.34 (\pm 1.08) | 10^3 | 3.6×10^3 |
| | Ba(Cl) ₂ | 0.79 (\pm 0.13) (max 0.98) | 20.98 (\pm 1.60) | 6.08 (\pm 0.57) | 3×10^3 | 1.1×10^3 |
| | Ba(OH) ₂ | 1.54 (\pm 0.54) (max 2.57) | 26.81 (\pm 4.67) | 4.51 (\pm 1.22) | 10^4 | 5.3×10^2 |

^aThe electron mobility (μ_e) and the threshold voltage (V_{Th}) were calculated at the saturation region ($V_d = 60$ V), using gradual channel approximation equations ($W/L = 1.0$ mm/20 μ m), whereas PMMA gate dielectric thickness and capacitance were \sim 500 nm and \sim 6.2 nF/cm², and CYTOP, \sim 350 nm and \sim 5.3 nF/cm², respectively. Contact resistance (R_c) was obtained using the transfer-length method ($V_d = 60$ V).

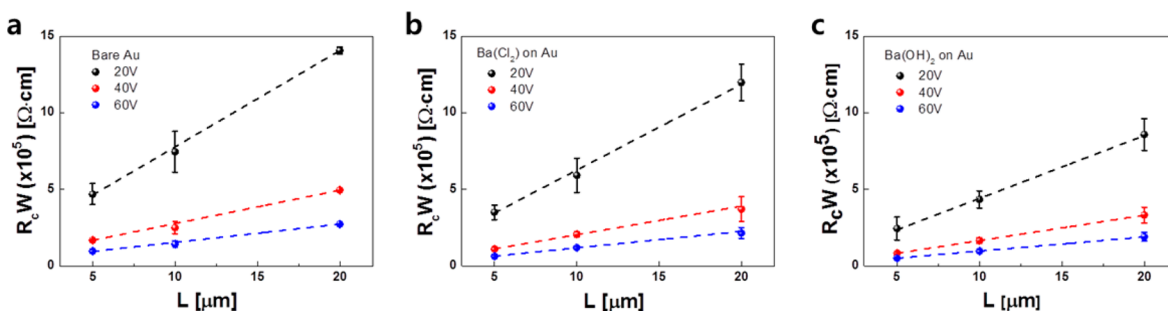


Figure 6. Channel width (W) normalized n-channel contact resistance ($R_c W$) of the (a) P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs, with (b) Ba(Cl)₂, and (c) Ba(OH)₂ interfacial layers.

Ba(Cl)₂ thin films exhibit different morphology on Au. Both surfaces showed aggregated nanosized dots, but the Ba(OH)₂ surface showed much smaller sized dots, with a larger coverage than the Ba(Cl)₂. The reduced surface coverage of Ba(Cl)₂ can partially explain the smaller WF shift of Ba(Cl)₂ deposited Au electrode. Despite the different morphologies of these interlayers, the morphology of subsequently deposited OSC film is not affected by the underlying surface topology. The AFM images in Figure 4d–i show that all PC₆₁BM films exhibit smooth surface morphology and all P(NDI2OD-T2) films always exhibit a highly ordered fiber-like morphology, independent of the underlying surface. Because the channel in top-gate OFETs is situated on the top surface of OSC film, the transistor characteristics are not greatly influenced by the underneath interlayers, as long as a chemical reaction does not occur, as in this case; and thus, the film morphology is unaffected.

Panels a and b in Figure 5 show the transfer characteristics of PC₆₁BM and P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs on bare Au, Ba(Cl)₂/Au, and Ba(OH)₂/Au contact. The untreated PC₆₁BM devices showed typical V-shape ambipolar transfer characteristics, with a field-effect electron mobility (μ_e), threshold voltage (V_{th}), on/off ratio (I_{on}/I_{off}), and a hole mobility (μ_h) of 0.034, +45.2 V, 3×10^3 , and 0.017 cm²/(V s), respectively. The small reduction (from 4.9 to 4.4 eV) of Au WF with Ba(Cl)₂ interlayer changes the balanced ambipolar characteristics to be n-channel dominant characteristics, with $\mu_e = 0.062$ cm²/(V s), $V_{th} = 48.20$ V, $I_{on}/I_{off} = 2 \times 10^5$, and $\mu_h < 0.005$ cm²/(V s). The larger WF shift (from 4.9 to 3.5 eV) by using Ba(OH)₂ leads to nearly unipolar n-channel characteristics, with $\mu_e = 0.094$ cm²/(V s) and a higher $I_{on}/I_{off} = 4 \times 10^5$, due to the much reduced injection barrier for electrons, and elevated barrier to holes. Enhanced n-channel performances are also observed in the output characteristics of Figure 5c, e, and g. The sublinearity at small drain voltage of the bare Au device is clearly alleviated by inserting a barium salts based interlayer, indicating a transition

from Schottky, to Ohmic-like contacts. In particular, PC₆₁BM OFETs with Ba(OH)₂ interlayer showed more improved device characteristics, than those with Ba(Cl)₂. Similar improvement by barium salt-based interlayers are observed for the OFETs with the polymeric semiconductor P(NDI2OD-T2). Typical P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs have exhibited μ_e of 0.1–1 cm²/(V s) in ambient conditions, with several polymeric dielectrics and Au contacts.^{34–36} Our control P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs with bare Au contacts also showed comparable μ_e of 0.37 cm²/(V s) (max 0.44 cm²/(V s)). The μ_e of P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs significantly increases to 0.79 cm²/(V s) (max = 0.98 cm²/(V s)) and 1.57 cm²/(V s) (max = 2.57 cm²/(V s)), by inserting BaCl₂ and Ba(OH)₂ interlayers, respectively. All of the OFET parameters are summarized in Table 1. This is the highest μ_e value reported so far for naphthalene diimide (NDI)-based polymer OFETs. The reported highest μ_e for P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs was 1 cm²/(V s), and other NDI derivatives exhibited a maximum μ_e of 1.8 cm²/(V s).^{37,38} These performances approach those of the best n-channel OSCs, with very few exceptions, at (\sim 2–4 cm²/(V s)).^{39–44} Thus, these results can potentially enable the fabrication of balanced p- and n-channel OFETs, for complementary integrated circuits.^{45,46}

With constant device miniaturization for high-speed operation and high-density integration, the contact resistance (R_c) is becoming greater than the channel resistance. For OFETs, this is closely related to the charge-injection properties between the S/D electrodes and the OSC.⁴⁷ The channel-width normalized contact resistance ($R_c W$) for our P(NDI2OD-T2)-based OFETs were extracted using the transfer-length method (TLM) for quantitative exploration of the charge injection efficiency, and thus rationalization of the observed OFET performance.⁴⁸ Figure 6 shows that the total resistance, including the contributions of the channel and the contact resistance, is proportional to the channel length (L); thus the R_c can be obtained from the intercept on the Y-axis, by performing a linear regression of $R_{tot} W$ versus L . The $R_c W$ of

P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs with bare Au contacts is found to be $3.6 \times 10^3 \Omega \text{ cm}$, a value comparable to the data reported in the literature.^{35,49} Importantly, these values are considerably reduced to 1.1×10^3 and $5.3 \times 10^2 \Omega \text{ cm}$, by using $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ and $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ as interlayers, respectively. The R_c reduction confirms that our devices were contact-limited, corroborating the effect of using the barium salts as interlayers.

CONCLUSION

We demonstrated high-performance n-channel OFETs, by using an ultrathin electron-injection interlayer, based on barium salts. By inserting $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ and $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl})_2$ thin films between the Au S/D electrodes and the OSCs, via a simple spin coating process, the performance of the corresponding TG/BC PC_{61}BM and P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs were dramatically improved. PC_{61}BM and P(NDI2OD-T2) OFETs exhibit the highest μ_e of ~ 0.10 and $\sim 2.6 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$, which are 3–5 times higher than the initial values of 0.034 and $0.37 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$, respectively. UPS, XPS, and AFM results showed that the WF of Au electrodes is reduced by insertion of the barium salt interlayers, through the formation of molecular dipoles. The degree of WF shift depended on the surface coverage, and the magnitude of the dipole moment of the interlayer. This study indicates that the electron injection property is one of the critical limitations to achieving high μ_e in n-channel OFETs; and that solution-processed barium salts can be an effective interlayer to control the contact properties, to realize high-performance n-channel OFETs and complementary integrated circuits.

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

Field-Effect Transistor Fabrication. Corning Eagle 2000 glass substrates were cleaned sequentially in an ultrasonic bath, with deionized water, acetone, and isopropanol, for 10 min each. The Au/Ni (12 nm/3 nm thick) patterns for source and drain electrodes were fabricated using conventional photolithography. $\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$ and $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl}_2)$ were purchased from Aldrich, and dissolved in methanol for use (2 mg/mL concentration). The charge injection layers ($\text{Ba}(\text{OH})_2$, $\text{Ba}(\text{Cl}_2)$) were deposited by spin-coating at 4000 rpm under N_2 condition, onto the Au patterned electrodes, over substrates. The n-channel semiconducting material, P(NDI2OD-T2), was purchased from Polyera Corporation; and PC_{61}BM was purchased from Nano-C, and used as received. P(NDI2OD-T2) and PC_{61}BM were dissolved in anhydrous chlorobenzene to obtain 10 mg/mL solutions, and were then each spin-coated at 2000 rpm, in a N_2 -purged glovebox. Each solution was filtered with a $0.45 \mu\text{m}$ polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) syringe filter, before spin coating. The P(NDI2OD-T2) polymers and the PC_{61}BM films were thermally annealed at 200 and 110 °C for 20 min, respectively, to remove the residual solvents, and induce an ordered crystalline phase, in a glovebox with N_2 atmosphere. PMMA (Aldrich, $M_w = 120 \text{ kDa}$) and CYTOP (Asahi Glass) were used as dielectric materials, without further purification. PMMA (80 mg/mL) was dissolved in *n*-butylacetate, and CYTOP was dissolved in CT-Solv.180 at 2:1 ratio, and the solution was filtered with a $0.45 \mu\text{m}$ PTFE syringe filter, before spin coating. After deposition, the devices were baked at 80 °C for 2 h, under N_2 conditions. Transistor fabrication was completed by deposition of aluminum top-gate electrode by thermal evaporation ($\sim 50 \text{ nm}$ -thick), using metal shadow masks.

Thin Film and Device Characterizations. The surface morphology of barium salts was investigated by tapping-mode AFM (Nanoscope III, Veeco Instruments, Inc.). The contact potential difference of each sample was detected by Kelvin probe (KP 6500 Digital Kelvin probe, McAllister Technical Service, Co. Ltd.), in air. The XPS and UPS measurements were carried out using AXIS-NOVA (Kratos, Inc.), with a base pressure of 4.2×10^{-9} Torr. The OFET

electrical characteristics were measured using a semiconductor parameter analyzer (Keithley 4200-SCS), in N_2 -filled glovebox. The field-effect mobility (μ_{FET}) and threshold voltage (V_{Th}) were calculated from the saturation regime, using equations for classical silicon MOSFETs.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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