



Wang, Tao and Yasukochi, Wataru and Korposh, Sergiy and James, Stephen W. and Tatam, Ralph P. and Lee, Seung-Woo (2016) A long period grating optical fiber sensor with nano-assembled porphyrin layers for detecting ammonia gas. *Sensors and Actuators B: Chemical*, 228 . pp. 573-580. ISSN 0925-4005

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1 **1. Introduction**

2 Ammonia is an important chemical that is widely used in the chemical industry.
3 Reliable detection of ammonia over a wide concentration range is necessary. Humans can
4 smell ammonia at a concentration of about 55 ppm [1], particularly when exposed to it
5 for the first time. However, repeated exposure causes inurement effects, and people
6 regularly exposed to ammonia become less sensitive to its smell. The US National
7 Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have recommended exposure limits of 35
8 ppm for general occupational exposure and 50 ppm for exposure in the industrial sector
9 [2], and these limits are close to or below the concentrations at which humans can
10 potentially smell ammonia.

11 The use of ammonia as a potential disease biomarker has recently attracted the
12 attention of researchers. Ammonia in the human body is mainly produced through the
13 metabolism of proteins, and the ammonia produced is converted into urea and excreted
14 in the urine [3]. However, ammonia is normally present at low concentrations in the blood,
15 feces, exhaled breath, and skin secretions [4]. The presence of ammonia at atypical
16 concentrations in these media has been suggested to indicate disease, particularly kidney
17 or liver disorders. Numerous investigations have recently been reported wherein the
18 potential has been assessed for using ammonia in human breath as a biomarker for
19 physical disorders such as renal insufficiency [5], hepatic dysfunction [6], *Helicobacter*
20 *pylori* infection [7], and halitosis [8].

21 Conventional methods of detecting ammonia usually use gas chromatography-mass
22 spectrometry (GC-MS) [9] because of the selectivity and sensitivity of GC-MS. However,
23 using GC-MS is expensive and time-consuming, and the operator must be well trained.
24 Thus, devices capable of detecting ammonia concentrations of 1–50 ppm in ambient air

1 are often required. Transducers for sensing ammonia that are frequently used include
2 resistive devices, acoustic wave devices, and field-effect transducers [10].

3 A long period grating (LPG) is a periodic modulation of the refractive index (RI) of
4 the core of an optical fiber that results in the coupling of light between the core and
5 cladding modes. Combining an LPG with nanomaterials could allow highly sensitive
6 sensors that could specifically bind target chemical species to be fabricated [11-13]. We
7 have recently demonstrated that optical fiber LPG sensors modified with different
8 functional coatings can be used to detect ammonia [11, 12], aromatic carboxylic acids
9 [13], and the RI of a sample [14, 15]. The sensitivity of an LPG to the RI arises from the
10 dependence of the phase matching condition on the effective RI of the cladding modes,
11 which is governed by equation 1 [16],

$$12 \quad \lambda_{(x)} = (n_{core} - n_{clad(x)})\Lambda, \quad (1)$$

13 where $\lambda_{(x)}$ is the wavelength at which coupling to the linear polarized (LP_{0x}) mode occurs,
14 n_{core} is the effective RI of the mode propagated in the core, $n_{clad(x)}$ is the effective RI of
15 the LP_{0x} cladding mode, and Λ is the period of the grating. The phase matching will reach
16 a maximum and exhibit a turning point, at which the sensitivity of the resonance bands in
17 the transmission spectrum of the LPG to perturbations caused by, for example, changes
18 in the RI of a coating deposited onto the fiber reaches a maximum [17]. The phase
19 matching turning point can be determined by selecting an appropriate grating period.

20 In this study, we examined the performance of an LPG-based ammonia gas sensor
21 modified with a nano-assembled thin film consisting of alternate layers of
22 poly(diallyldimethylammonium chloride) (PDDA) and tetrakis(4-sulfophenyl)porphine
23 (TSPP). We have previously demonstrated that an evanescent wave spectroscopy-based

1 fiber-optic ammonia gas sensor modified with a TSPP nano-assembled film induced
2 optical changes in the transmission spectrum of the optical fiber when the sensor was
3 exposed to ammonia [18]. The TSPP structures in such a film contain two distinct types
4 of aggregates, called *J*- and *H*-aggregates, together with monomers. The relative
5 abundances of those structures change as the degree to which the TSPP is protonated or
6 deprotonated changes [19-22]. In addition, detection of the ammonium in water was
7 achieved by infusion of the TSPP into mesoporous SiO₂ thin film [ref A]. This behavior of
8 the TSPP will probably lead to changes occurring in the RI of the coating, causing the
9 phase matching conditions, and therefore the transmission spectrum, of the LPG fiber
10 modified with a nano-assembled TSPP film to change. In this work, for the first time, to
11 the best of our knowledge, the changes in the RI of the TSPP LbL thin films were studied
12 in real time at the exposure to the ammonia gas.

13

14 **2. Experimental section**

15 **2.1. Materials**

16 TSPP (*M_w* 934.99) and PDDA (*M_w* 200,000–350,000, 20 wt% in H₂O) that were
17 used were purchased from Tokyo Kasei (Tokyo, Japan) and Sigma-Aldrich (St Louis, MO,
18 USA), respectively. The TSPP and PDDA chemical structures are shown in Figure 1.
19 Ammonia (ca. 30 wt% in H₂O), for use as an analyte gas, was purchased from Wako Pure
20 Chemical Industries (Osaka, Japan). All of these chemicals were of analytical grade, and
21 they were used without further purification. Deionized pure water (18.3 MΩ·cm) was
22 produced using a Direct-QTM instrument (EMD Millipore, Billerica, MA, USA), which
23 performed reverse osmosis, then ion exchange and filtration.

24

2.2. LPG surface modification

A 30 mm length of LPG with a period of 100 μm was fabricated in a boron–germanium co-doped single-mode optical fiber (PS750; Fibercore, Southampton, UK) with a cut-off wavelength of 670 nm, in a point-by-point fashion, side-illuminating the optical fiber using a frequency-quadrupled Nd:YAG laser operated at 266 nm. The period was selected such that the phase matching condition was satisfied at the phase matching turning point. Aqueous solutions containing different sucrose concentrations were used to calibrate the RI-sensitivity of the LPG as previously described [13, 14].

The region of the optical fiber containing the LPG was rinsed with deionized water and immersed in 1 wt% KOH in a 3:2 v/v mixture of ethanol and water for 20 min, to induce a negatively charged surface before the PDDA/TSPP coating was deposited. The section containing the LPG was then coated with a multilayer PDDA and TSPP film using the layer-by-layer method. A film was prepared by alternately depositing PDDA (0.5 wt% in water, pH=7.8) and TSPP (1 mM in water, pH=4.6) for one cycle, thereby producing a PDDA/TSPP bilayer. To deposit a layer, a coating solution (350 μl) was introduced into a Teflon deposition cell containing a recess (0.5 cm wide, 6.0 cm long, and d 0.3 cm deep). The deposition cell was washed with water and dried by flushing it with nitrogen after each layer had been deposited, as shown in Figure 1. The transmission spectrum (TS) of the LPG was measured after each deposition step had been performed.

A film was also deposited on a quartz plate using a procedure that was essentially identical to that used to deposit a film onto an LPG. The composition of the film was confirmed using UV–vis spectroscopy (using a V-570 UV–vis spectrophotometer; JASCO, Japan). Prior to deposition of the film, a quartz plate was cleaned with concentrated sulfuric acid (96%), rinsed several times with deionized water, treated with

1 1 wt% KOH in a 3:2 v/v mixture of ethanol and water for a few minutes, rinsed with
2 deionized water, and dried by flushing it with nitrogen gas.

3 4 **2.3. Gas measurements**

5 The TS of the optical fiber was acquired by passing the output of a tungsten–halogen
6 lamp (HL-2000; Ocean Optics, Dunedin, FL, USA) into the fiber and analyzing the light
7 that was transmitted using a fiber-coupled CCD spectrometer (HR-2000; Ocean Optics).
8 The response of the LPG to ammonia was measured by exposing the LPG to ammonia
9 vapor at different concentrations, generated by placing aqueous solutions of ammonia at
10 different concentrations close to the modified LPG sensor. The relationship between the
11 ammonia vapor concentration and the ammonia concentration in solution is shown in
12 Figure S1. The ammonia concentration was measured using an ammonia detection gas
13 tube (GasTec, Japan). A specified volume of a solution of ammonia at a selected
14 concentration was placed in a 50 cm³ measurement chamber containing the modified LPG.
15 The sensor response was recorded at a frequency of 1 Hz. The TS was acquired when
16 each analyte solution was present in the chamber and after the solution was removed. The
17 sensor response was restored after a series of ammonia gas measurements had been made
18 by treating the optical fiber with the vapor emitted from a 0.1 M HCl aqueous solution,
19 then the fiber was flushed using nitrogen.

20 21 **3. Results and discussion**

22 **3.1. Deposition of the PDDA/TSPP film**

23 In order to study the effect of the film deposition onto the TS of the LPG optical fibre
24 sensor TS were measured after each deposition cycle. The TS of the LPG changed

1 dramatically during the PDDA/TSPP film deposition process. The resonance band at
2 around 745 nm had split into two bands, 711 and 795 nm, by the time the fifteenth
3 deposition step had been completed, as shown in Figures 2a and 2b for the outermost
4 PDDA and TSPP layers, respectively. This band separation was observed after four
5 deposition cycles (of both components, see Figure 2S), and the shifts in the wavelengths
6 of both resonance bands changed linearly as the number of deposition cycles increased,
7 indicating that the film was uniformly deposited (Figure 3a). The mean wavelength shifts
8 for each layer that was deposited were estimated to be -3.27 ± 2.30 nm and 3.90 ± 3.26 nm
9 for the first and second resonance bands, respectively, for PDDA and -2.78 ± 3.26 nm and
10 4.45 ± 1.99 nm for the first and second resonance bands, respectively, for TSPP (Figure
11 3b).

12 It is clear from comparing Figures 3c and 3d that the TS changed more significantly
13 when the outermost layer was TSPP than when the outermost layer was PDDA. The TS
14 of the LPG exhibited a different shape depending on what the outermost layer material
15 was. Both resonance bands were almost symmetrical when the outermost layer was
16 PDDA but asymmetric when the outermost layer was TSPP. In a previous study, however,
17 we found almost symmetrical wavelength and transmission changes in both resonance
18 bands in the TS of a film deposited using poly(acrylic acid) as a polyanion [11, 12]. The
19 transmission of the first resonance band changed in a similar way when both outermost
20 layers were deposited until seven deposition cycles had been completed. Afterwards, it
21 dramatically increased when the outermost layer was TSPP (Figure 3c). In contrast, the
22 transmission of the second resonance band reached a plateau after nine deposition cycles
23 had been completed, especially when the outermost layer was PDDA (Figure 3d). The
24 transmission of the first band in the TS was ca. 63% before the bands separated and

1 reached 77% after 15 TSPP deposition cycles had been performed, so transmission
2 increased by 14% in total.

3 Most plausibly these changes in the TS of the LPG are related to the TSPP aggregation
4 structures in the film and the corresponding optical properties. In order to examine this in
5 more details, UV-vis absorption spectra of the alternate PDDA and TSPP layers deposited
6 on a quartz plate to characterize the TSPP assemblies in the film were acquired. The
7 evolution of the UV-vis absorption spectra during the deposition of a PDDA/TSPP thin
8 film over five deposition cycles is shown in Figure 4. The absorption spectra for films
9 with an outermost layer of TSPP were characterized by a double peak in the Soret band
10 at 429 and 485 nm and by a pronounced Q band peak at 700 nm (Figure 4b). However,
11 when the film had an outermost layer of PDDA there was a single peak in the Soret band
12 at 410 nm (Figure 4a). These spectral characteristics suggest that the TSPP molecules in
13 the film were preferentially present in the *J*-aggregate state when the TSPP had just been
14 deposited. The absorbance by the two Soret bands and the Q band increased linearly as
15 the number of deposition cycles increased (inset in Figure 4b). The formation of *J*-
16 aggregates of TSPP probably increased the RI of the film, influencing the phase matching
17 condition, and therefore, the transmission spectrum of the LPG. An increase in the
18 absorbance of the Q band at around 700 nm was found to lead to an asymmetrical change
19 in the first resonance band in the TS, because the complex part of the refractive index will
20 be strongly influenced by such a change.

21

22 **3.2. Ammonia detection**

23 **3.2.1 J-aggregation state enhancement**

24 In order to increase the population of *J*-aggregates of TSPP in the film before it was

1 exposed to ammonia the prepared PDDA/TSPP film was exposed to HCl vapor (produced
2 by aqueous 0.1 M HCl). As can be seen from Figure 5, the absorbance of the Soret band
3 at 485 nm and the Q band at 700 nm were enhanced significantly when the film was
4 treated with HCl, suggesting that exposure to HCl gas did increase the relative population
5 of *J*-aggregates of TSPP in the film. It should be noted that, pure water vapor has similar
6 to HCl effect on the absorption spectra of the TSPP (i.e. increase the relative population
7 of *J*-aggregates of TSPP in the film and hence absorption at 485 nm and 700 nm), but the
8 amplitude will be much smaller (data not shown). After exposure to the HCl, however,
9 further exposure to pure water vapor didn't lead to any modification of the absorption
10 spectra.

11 In LPG sensor, the HCl pretreatment led to more asymmetrical changes occurring in
12 the TS and the resonance bands at 710 and 785 nm were shifted to 709 and 800 nm,
13 respectively. The transmission of the first resonance band increased significantly, from
14 67% to 87%. The wavelength of the second resonance band was shifted by a relatively
15 large amount, ca. 15 nm (from 785 to 800 nm).

16 **3.2.2 Response to ammonia gas**

17 When the sensor was exposed to ammonia gas at different concentrations the second
18 resonance band wavelength shifted linearly relative to the ammonia concentration at
19 concentrations of less than 50 ppm (inset in Figure S4a). As can be seen in Figure 6, the
20 wavelength shift in the second resonance band in the HCl-vapor-treated LPG sensor was
21 more sensitive to the effects of exposure to ammonia than were the other TS features. The
22 sensor response became saturated at concentrations higher than 50 ppm. The sensitivity
23 of the sensor to ammonia within the linear range was estimated to be 0.4 %/ppm using
24 the first resonance band and 0.7 nm/ppm using the second resonance band. The limits of

1 detection for the first and second resonance bands were found to be 2.2 ppm ($3\sigma = 0.25\%$)
2 and 3.3 ppm ($3\sigma = 0.47$ nm), respectively.

3 **3.3.3 Refractive index determination**

4 In order to calibrate the LPG sensor to the RI change, the bare LPG sensor it was
5 exposed to the sucrose solutions of different concentrations [14]. The same RI sensitivity
6 for the modified LPG sensor could be assumed since the linear behavior of the RI
7 calibration curve (Figure S3). The RI calibration curve and the relationship between the
8 RI and the wavelength of the second resonance band at a given concentration of ammonia
9 gas could be used to calculate an equivalent RI of the TSPP film at the exposure to
10 ammonia (see Figure S4). The RIs for the HCl-vapor-treated 15 deposition cycle film
11 before and after the film was exposed to ammonia were estimated to be 1.4643 and 1.3585,
12 respectively (Figure S4a). This significant change in the RI when the PDDA/TSPP film
13 was exposed to ammonia was most likely caused by morphological changes in the TSPP
14 in the film, from *J*- and *H*-aggregates to monomers. Hasegawa et al. estimated that the RI
15 for a TSPP monolayer formed at a toluene/water interface was 1.42 [23]. However, this
16 value cannot be directly compared with the RI (1.4643) for the HCl-treated film because
17 Hasegawa et al. determined the RI at a wavelength of 481 nm, which is quite different
18 from the wavelength used in our study (approximately 800 nm).

19 Interestingly, the LPG sensor response to humidity is negligible as compared to the
20 ammonia-induced changes. This is a major advantage of the current LPG sensor because
21 most commercial sensors suffer from a pronounced cross-sensitivity to humidity. The
22 response of the sensor could be also restored by exposing the sensor to HCl vapor, which
23 caused the monomeric TSPP that had been deprotonated by ammonia to reform *J*-
24 aggregates. The response was completely restored when HCl vapor produced by an

1 aqueous 0.1 M HCl solution was used, as is shown in the inset in Figure S4b. The RI of
2 the film was completely restored, from 1.3585 to 1.4643, by this HCl treatment (Figure
3 S4b).

4 **3.3.4 Film thickness effect**

5 LPG sensors were modified with PDDA/TSPP films of six, nine, and fifteen
6 deposition cycles and were tested to determine the effect of the film thickness on the
7 sensor performance. The changes found in the TSs of the LPG fibers with different film
8 thicknesses are shown in Figure 7. The sensor with a 15-deposition-cycle film was more
9 sensitive than the other sensors. The shift in the wavelength of the second resonance band
10 when the most sensitive sensor was exposed to 100 ppm ammonia was estimated to be
11 about 16 nm (Figures 7c and 7d), which was approximately four times greater than the
12 wavelength shift found when the sensor with a film produced using nine deposition cycles
13 was exposed to 100 ppm ammonia (less than 4 nm, Figures 7b and 7d). The transmission
14 changes for the first resonance band followed a similar trend. The better sensitivity of the
15 thicker film to ammonia may have been caused by the number of sites to which ammonia
16 could become bound being higher in the thicker film. The response increased
17 exponentially as the film thickness increased.

19 **3.3. Ammonia gas sensing mechanism**

20 The mechanism through which the LPG sensor modified with a PDDA/TSPP film
21 sensed ammonia is shown in Figure 8. Initially, the TSPP molecules will be adsorbed
22 mainly in the form of *J*-aggregates on the PDDA layer. Exposure of the TSPP to ammonia
23 gas will lead to the TSPP being deprotonated and returning to the monomeric state. This
24 distorts and dilutes the *J*-aggregates, decreasing the RI of the film and changing the TS

1 of the film. The TSPP will become protonated again when the PDDA/TSPP film is
2 exposed to HCl vapor, and the *J*-aggregates will reform within the film, increasing the RI.

3 As is clear from the UV–vis spectra shown in Figure 8, the TSPP can be converted
4 between $\text{H}_2\text{TSPP}^{2-}$ and TSPP^{4-} by the protonation and deprotonation reactions caused by
5 the presence of HCl and ammonia. Repeated exposure of the film to ammonia and HCl
6 will cause NH_4Cl to be produced as a by-product; however, the NH_4Cl can easily be
7 removed by washing the film with water whenever necessary. Usually, the monomeric
8 TSPP^{4-} (free base form) that is produced under pH conditions higher than 4.8 shows a
9 strong Soret band at 413 nm, whereas below pH 4.8 the Soret band is red-shifted to 435
10 nm, indicating that the monomeric $\text{H}_2\text{TSPP}^{2-}$ (diacidic form) is formed [19, 20]. The
11 zwitterionic porphyrin $\text{H}_2\text{TSPP}^{2-}$ in the film, to which the absorption band at around 434
12 nm is attributed, can form a *J*-aggregate because of electrostatic interactions between the
13 protonated pyrrole rings and sulfonic acid groups. When this occurs, a Soret band is
14 produced at 485 nm and a Q-band is produced at 700 nm. Ammonia molecules will be
15 transformed into ammonium ions by receiving protons from the TSPP *J*-aggregate. This
16 will cause the two *J*-aggregation absorption bands to completely disappear and the film
17 only to give an absorption band for the free base monomer (TSPP^{4-}) at about 410 nm.

18 19 **Conclusions**

20 The use of a novel LPG fiber sensor modified with a film of alternating PDDA and
21 TSPP layers to sensitively detect ammonia gas was demonstrated. The sensor was highly
22 selective toward ammonia gas, and the sensing mechanism depends on the TSPP in the
23 film undergoing morphological changes, leading to changes in the wavelengths and
24 absorbances of characteristic UV–vis absorption bands. One advantage of the proposed

1 device is that it provides wavelength-encoded information on the binding of ammonia in
2 the visible range above 750 nm along with information on changes in the transmission
3 intensity associated with TSPP aggregate structures in the film. Another noteworthy point
4 about this approach is that the optimal film thickness (i.e., giving the best sensitivity) can
5 be precisely controlled because the film is produced using the layer-by-layer method. A
6 high RI (1.4643) was achieved using a PDDA/TSPP film produced using 15 deposition
7 cycles, and the RI decreased dramatically (to 1.3585) when this film was exposed to
8 ammonia. This sensor system could be used as a new biosniffer for the sensitive and
9 selective detection of amine odors in the environment or produced by the human body,
10 since the sensor response is almost not affected by humidity.

11

12 **Acknowledgments**

13 This work was supported by MEXT via the 2nd Kitakyushu Knowledge-based Cluster
14 Project. The authors would also like to acknowledge the support of a UK Engineering and
15 Physical Sciences Research Council Platform Grant (EP/H02252X/1) and a responsive
16 mode grant (EP/L010437/1).

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Schematic of the deposition of a film containing PDDA and TSPP onto an LPG optical fiber.

Figure 2. Changes in the transmission spectra of the LPG optical fiber as the number of layers deposited (marked next to each line) increased, when the outermost layer was (a) PDDA and (b) TSPP.

Figure 3. Dependence of the wavelength shifts (a and b) and the transmission changes (c and d) for the first and second resonance bands on the number of deposition cycles performed.

Figure 4. UV–vis absorption spectra of a PDDA/TSPP alternate film produced using five deposition cycles when the outermost layer was (a) PDDA and (b) TSPP. The insert in (b) shows the relationships between the absorbances at 429, 485, and 700 nm and the number of deposition cycles performed.

Figure 5. UV–vis absorption spectra of a PDDA/TSPP film deposited using five cycles before and after the film was exposed to HCl vapor produced by a 0.1 M HCl solution, and transmission spectra of a PDDA/TSPP film deposited using 15 cycles before and after the film was exposed to HCl vapor produced by a 0.1 M HCl solution.

Figure 6. (a) Changes in the transmission spectra and (b) responses of the sensor when the LPG sensor coated with a PDDA/TSPP film produced using 15 deposition cycles was exposed to ammonia gas, where 0 ppm means pure water vapor (containing no ammonia).

Figure 7. Transmission spectra of LPG sensors modified with PDDA/TSPP films produced using (a) six, (b) nine, and (c) fifteen deposition cycles before (blue lines) and after (red lines) the sensors were exposed to 100 ppm ammonia. (d) Comparison of the wavelength shifts and the transmission changes obtained using the sensors with films produced using six, nine, and fifteen deposition cycles.

Figure 8. (a) Evolution of the UV–vis absorption spectrum of a PDDA/TSPP film produced using five deposition cycles on a quartz plate. The black line is for the as-prepared film, the green line for the film after it had been exposed to HCl vapor produced

by a 1.0 M HCl solution, and the blue line is for the film after it had been exposed to ca. 500 ppm ammonia gas. (b) Schematic of the mechanism through which the PDDA/TSPP film deposited on an LPG fiber senses ammonia.

Figure 1

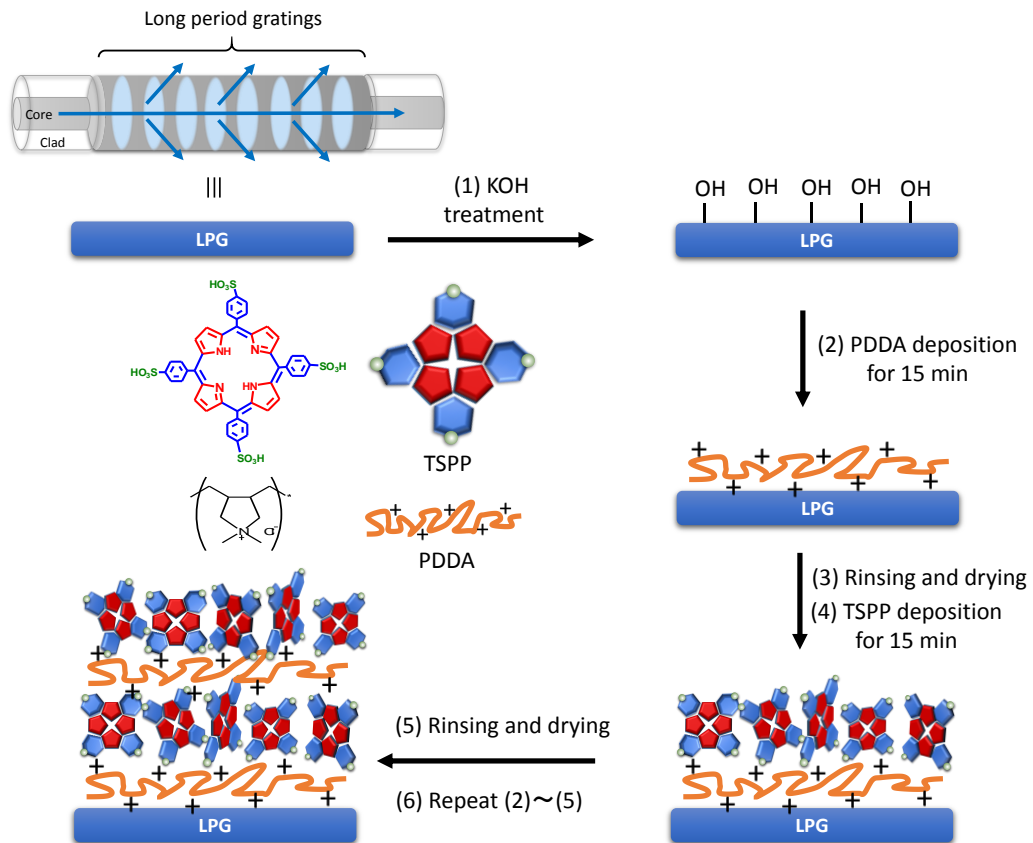
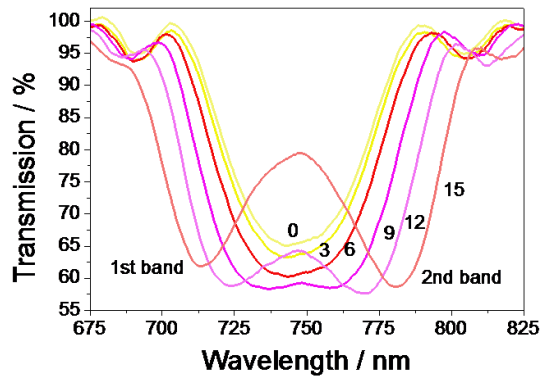
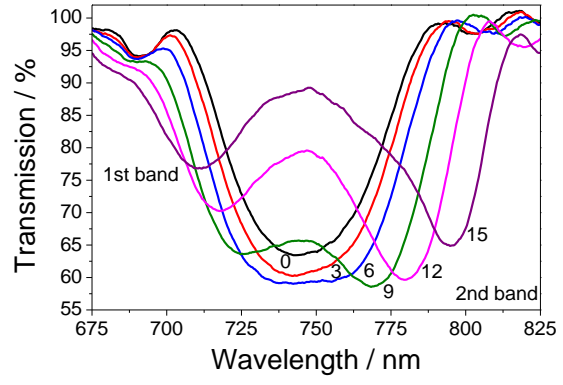


Figure 2

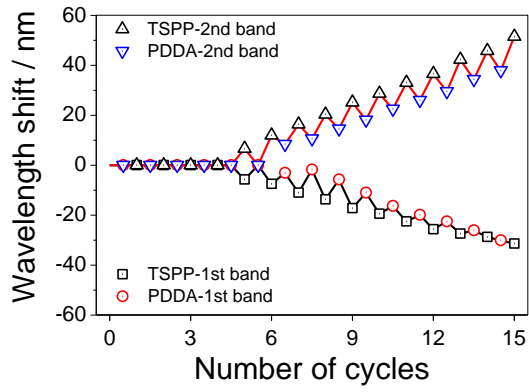


(a)

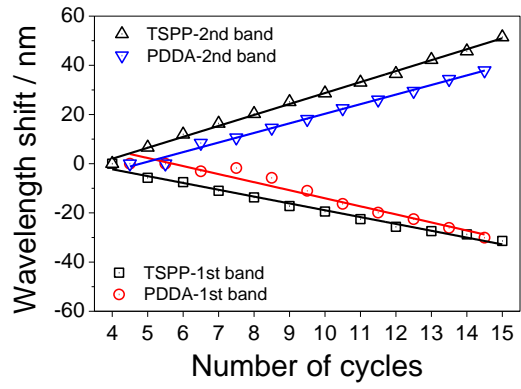


(b)

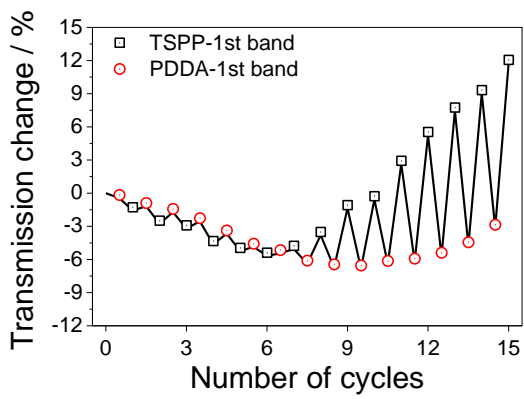
Figure 3



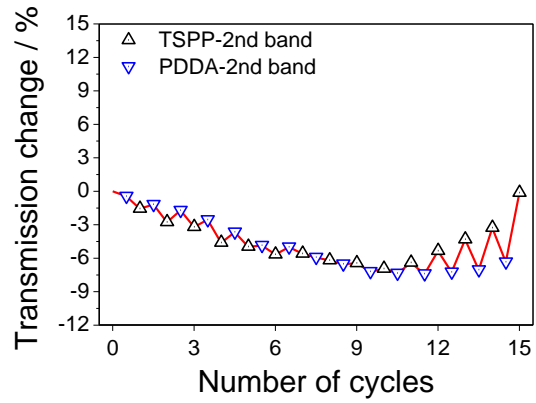
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 4

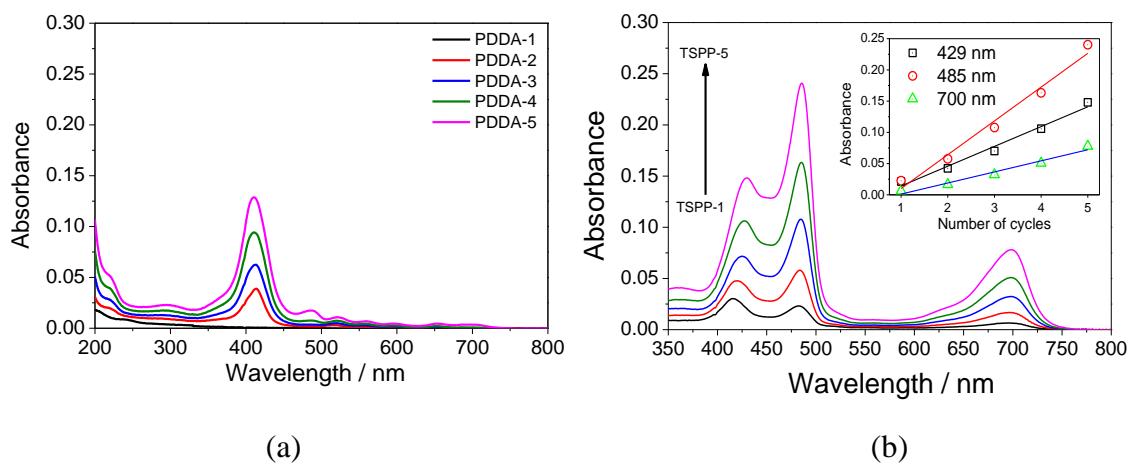


Figure 5

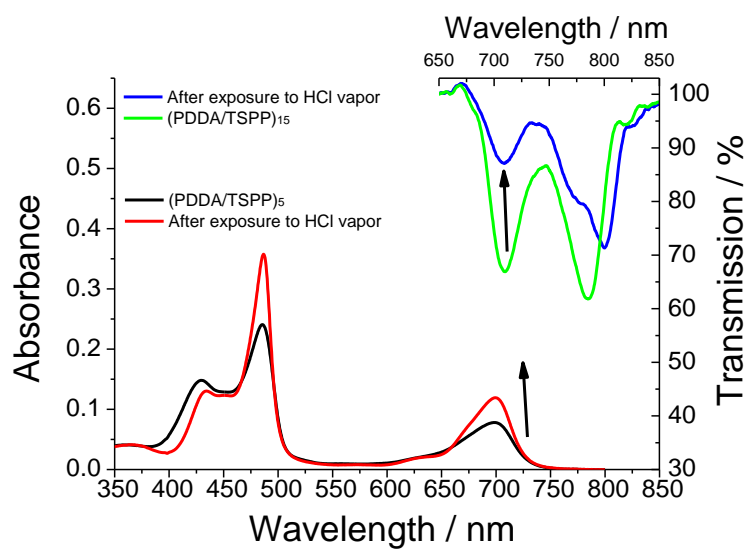
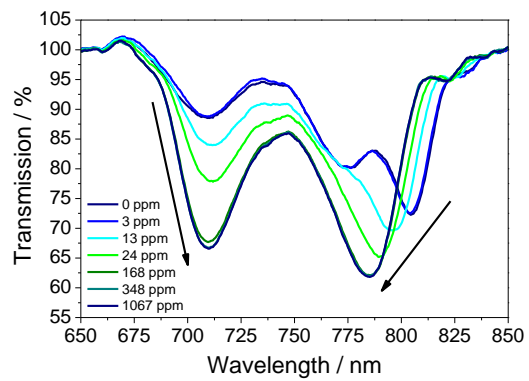
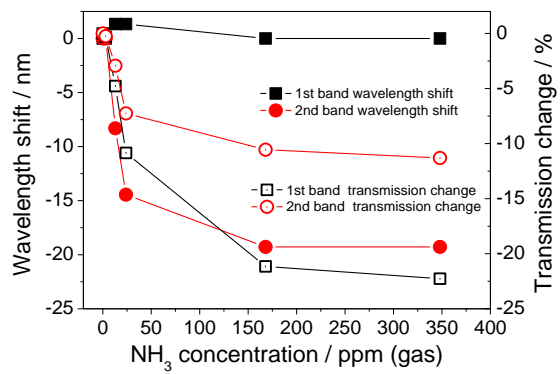


Figure 6



(a)



(b)

Figure 7

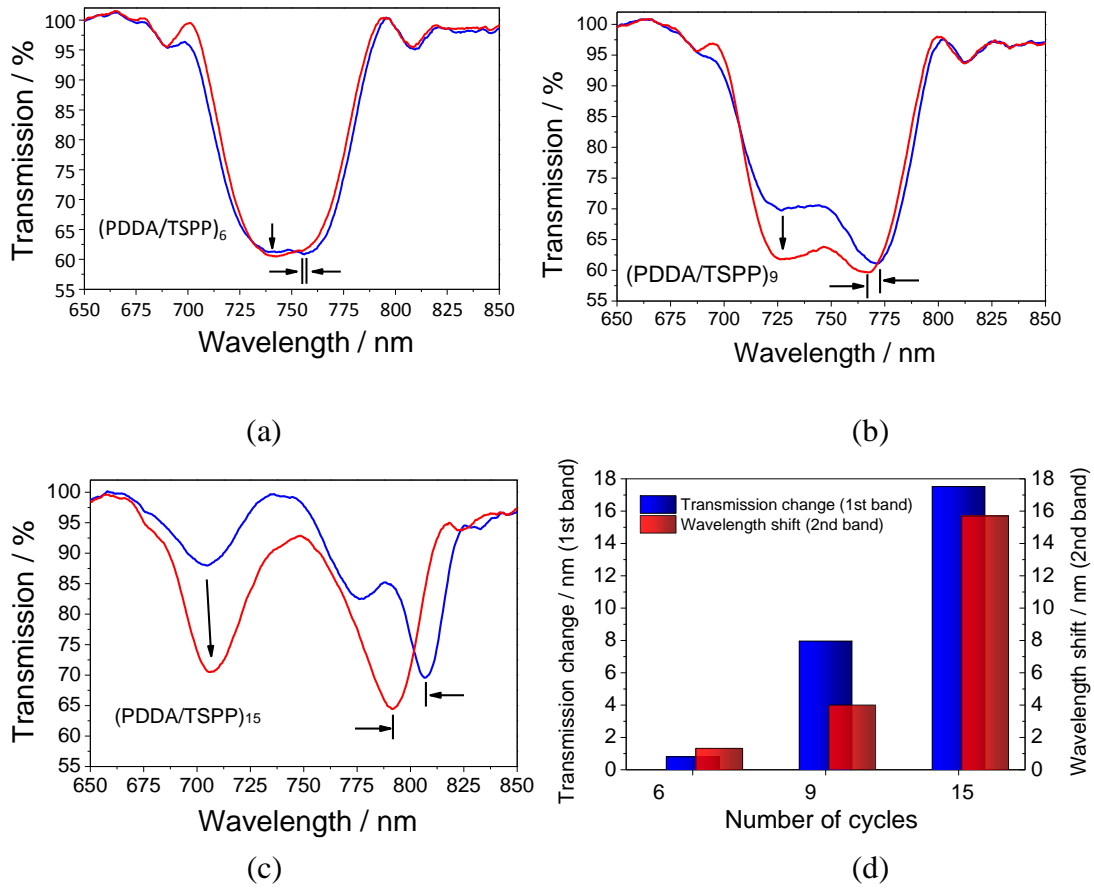
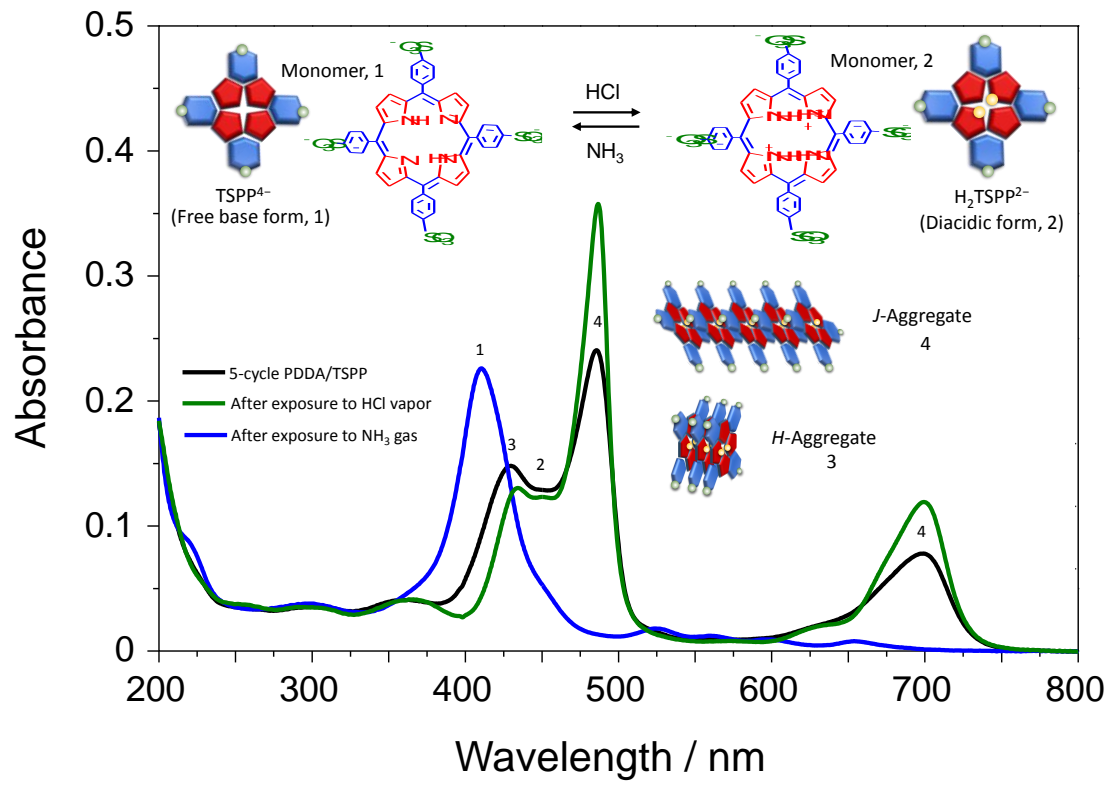


Figure 8

(a)



(b)

