Room temperature single-photon emission and lasing for all-inorganic colloidal perovskite quantum dots

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Abstract

Recent reports regarding metal halide semiconductors of perovskite nanocrystal structures have presented us a promising future on their optoelectronic applications such as laser and light harvesting devices. In this paper, all-inorganic perovskites CsPbX3 (X = Cl, Br and I) quantum dots (QDs) with tunable fluorescence from 400 nm to 700 nm were prepared by a facile hot-injection method. Besides, random lasing with coherent feedback was observed in films of CsPbX3 QDs. Under 400 nm optical excitation at room temperature, sharp lasing peaks emission at around 427 nm, 527 nm and 539 nm with low pump thresholds intensity were achieved by halide substitution. The dynamic fluorescence from one single quantum dot also was detailed investigated. These results demonstrated that all-inorganic perovskites could be used as low-threshold and wavelength-tunable gain materials for lasing application at room-temperature.

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, quantum dots (QDs) have been intensively studied as future optoelectronic materials due to their many attractive properties [1], including size-tunable band gap [2], high photoluminescence (PL) quantum yields (QYs) [3], excellent photostability [4], and versatile chemical processability [5]. The most well-known example is CdSe quantum dots, whose fluorescence wavelength can be tuned throughout the whole visible spectrum by changing the size around two nanometers [5,6]. Furthermore, excellent and repetitive optical properties of CdSe/CdS core/shell QDs with PL QYs up to > 90% has been analyzed by Wennuan Nan and his coworkers [7]. Recently, a new class of QDs based on lead halide perovskites, generally known as a versatile material, has attracted significant attention for its intriguing properties such as shallow defect, high light absorption coefficient (105 cm−1) and long diffusion length. Moreover, it also has been proved to have promising applications upon device fabrication including solar cells [8–10], light emitting diodes (LEDs) [11–13], and lasers [14–16]. As one class of the QDs, perovskite nanocrystals are tremendously drawn attention because of their excellent optoelectronic properties. In particular, hybrid organic-inorganic lead halide perovskites CH3NH3PbX3 (X = Cl, Br, and I) thin film solar cells with more than efficiency of 20% have reported in recent years [17]. On the other side, the studies on electrically driven light-emitting diodes and optical gain media for lasing applications based on perovskites CH3NH3PbX3 nanomaterials have drawn much attention [18,19].

Although there are promising developments of organic-inorganic lead halides perovskite nanocrystal materials because of their attractive properties, the problem of their unsolved photostability has greatly hampered their further practical and commercial applications [20]. As one kind of perovskite materials, all-inorganic CsPbX3 have been regarded as one kind of potential substitutes for hybrid organic-inorganic perovskite CH3NH3PbX3. Moreover, recent studies based on CsPbX3 perovskite nanocrystals demonstrate that they have many notable advantages over organic-inorganic metal halide perovskite in terms of optoelectronic device [21,22]. For example, green LEDs have been fabricated using all-inorganic cesium lead halide perovskite nanocrystals as emitters, which led to the three-fold increase in peak brightness reaching 1377 cd/m2, the highest reported value for CsPbX3.
colloidal nanocrystals (NCs) based LEDs so far [21]. The inorganic CsPbX3 perovskite solar cells with current-voltage curve measured efficiency up to 2.9% and power conversion efficiency of 1.7% also have been fabricated, which is even more stable than the hybrid organic-inorganic materials [22]. This report highlights that the inorganic perovskite is unlikely to be essential for efficient perovskite solar cells [22]. Besides, several reports have indicated that all-inorganic CsPbBr3 (X = Cl, Br, and I) materials could probably be a potential candidates in the application of laser due to their high optoelectronic quality, especially for the CsPbX3 (X = Cl, Br, and I) NCs [23–25]. There are a few reports about the all-inorganic perovskite nanomaterials including size control, shape adjustment, and optoelectronic device applications [21–27]. Despite all-inorganic perovskite CsPbX3 have superior properties as well as organic-inorganic perovskite materials, whereas, most of the studies about all-inorganic perovskite nanocrystals mainly focused on the fabrications of these materials such as quantum dots and nanowires [28,29]. After literature review, it could be found that there are only few studies about lasing application based on all-inorganic CsPbX3. There is also few experimental results about the dynamic fluorescence from one single quantum dot. Therefore, it is still a challenging task to prepare CsPbX3 for low-threshold and wavelength-tunable laser application.

In this work, a hot-injection method to fabricate all-inorganic perovskite CsPbX3 QDs with tunable photoluminescence (400–700 nm) was demonstrated. Moreover, the as-prepared CsPbX3 nanoparticles exhibited good crystal quality and low-threshold amplified spontaneous emission. Sharp lasing peaks emission at around 427 nm, 527 nm and 539 nm with low pump thresholds intensity were achieved. The peak of lasing emission spectra in blue region can reach ~427 nm. Furthermore, the dynamic fluorescence from one single quantum dot shows good photo-stability of all-inorganic perovskite nanoparticles under ambient environment.

2. Experiments

2.1. Fabrication of CsPbX3 QDs

To prepare the crude solution, a mixture of 100 mg Cs2CO3, 0.6 mL of oleic acid (OA), and 5 mL of octadecene (ODE) was degassed under nitrogen flow in a three-neck flask at 120 °C for 1 h until all the Cs2CO3 reacted with OA. 5 mL ODE and 0.36 mmol of PbX2 (X = Cl, Br and I) or their mixtures were mixed in a 100 mL three-necked flask which was placed in a heating jacket with nitrogen. This three-necked flask was heated to 120 °C under nitrogen flow for 1 h. Then the temperature was set up to 150 °C. 0.5 mL oleylamine (OLA) and 0.5 mL OA were injected into the PbX2 crude solution quickly when the temperature reached 150 °C. After complete solubilisation of PbX2 salts, 0.4 mL Cs-precursor solution was swiftly injected. The reaction kept for ~10 s, and then was cooled by the ice bath. For the isolation and purification of CsPbX3 NCs, the nanocrystals crude solution was centrifuged and precipitated by dissolving in toluene. After 3–4 centrifugations, the supernatant was discarded and the particles were dispersed in toluene forming long-term stable solutions.

2.2. Characterization of CsPbX3

The crystal phases of all samples were characterized by X-ray diffraction (XRD) with CuKα radiation (XRD-6100, SHIMADZU, Japan). The transmission electron microscopy was recorded using a Zeiss Libra 200FE microscope. The absorption spectra were adopted by a Scan UV–vis spectrophotometer (UV–vis: UV-2100, Shimadzu, Japan). The spectra were recorded at room temperature ranging from 200 to 800 nm. The photoluminescence spectroscopy were measured by a fluorescence spectrophotometer (PL: Agilent Cary Eclipse, Australia) which included a Xe lamp as an excitation source with optical filters.

2.3. Lasing experiment

For the lasing measurements, a femtosecond amplified laser system was employed as the pumping source. The optical wavelength of 400 nm was generated by frequency-doubling of output pulse (Wavelength: 800 nm, Repetition rate: 1 kHz, Pulse-width: 100 fs) from regenerative amplifier using β-barium borate (BBO) crystal.

3. Results and discussion

The CsPbX3 nanoparticles prepared here are fabricated following a recipe slightly modified from the literature [29], which take advantages of the ionic nature of the chemical bonding in these compounds. CsPbX3 are known to crystalize in orthorhombic, tetragonal, and cubic polymorphs of the perovskite lattice with the cubic phase for all compounds [29–32]. In our work, the XRD data (Fig. 1a) show that the nanocrystals have a well-defined three-dimensional structure, which agreed well with the formation of CsPbX3 QDs. As shown in the X-ray diffraction (XRD) of the CsPbX3 QDs, all CsPbX3 NCs crystallize in the cubic phase [30], which could be attributed to the combined effect of the high synthesis temperature and contributions from the surface energy. The typical cubic crystal structure diagram of CsPbX3 represented by CsPbBr3 is shown in Fig. S1 in Supporting information. To investigate the morphology and composition of the CsPbX3 QDs, the transmission electron microscope (TEM) (Fig. 1b), high resolution transmission electron microscope (HRTEM) image (Fig. 1c) and the energy dispersion spectrometry (EDS) (Fig. 1d) of CsPbBr3 QD are presented. The TEM image of CsPbBr3 QD as well as the size distribution. It is observed that typical CsPbBr3 QDs have an average diameter of ~9.0 nm (inset figure). The HRTEM (Fig. 1c) image reveals that the interplanar distance is 0.58 nm, corresponding to (110) planes, which is consistent with the XRD results. TEM and HRTEM information about CsPbCl3 and CsPb(Cl/Br)3 are also shown in Fig. S2. In comparison with CsPbBr3 QDs, the CsPbCl3 and CsPb(Cl/Br)3 nanoparticles demonstrated the similar shape, and the size distribution showed it is about 8 and 8.5 nm. From the HRTEM images of Fig. S2b and d, the interplanar distance of CsPbCl3 and CsPb(Cl/Br)3 was about 0.51 and 0.54 nm, which could be ascribed to the (110) planes [33–35]. The energy-dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) (Fig. 1d) measurement shows that CsPbBr3 nanoparticles have a Br/ Cs and Br/Pb molar ratio of ~1.0 and 3.9 respectively, which agrees well with the stoichiometry ratio.

Through compositional modulations, the band gap energies and photoluminescence are tunable over the entire visible spectral region from 400 nm to 700 nm (Fig. 2a). The optical images of colloidal solutions in toluene under ultraviolet lamp are from blue to red, when excited by 365 nm (Xe lamp) (Fig. S3), which are consistent with PL spectra. Remarkably bright PL of all QDs is characterized by narrow emission line widths of 12–25 nm. The optical absorption and emission spectra of CsPbBr3 NC film are showed in Fig. 2b, which have small Stokes shift. The PL peak wavelength of CsPbBr3 NCs is centered at ~527 nm (Fig. 2b). Through the injection of Cl ions, the wavelength of emission shifts to ~400 nm. Instead, the PL wavelength has red shift after injecting I ions. As well as the PL spectra, the absorption spectra of CsPbX3 also cover the entire visible spectral region (Fig. S4). Fluorescence intermittency, also referred as blinking, randomly switching between states of high (ON) and low (OFF) emissions, is
a universal property of molecular emitters found in nanos-
structures, such as nanocrystals, carbon nanotubes, and nanorods
[36,37]. It has been demonstrated that the CsPbX 3-based per-
ovskite QDs can serve as room-temperature sources of single
photons [38]. In order to better understand the dynamic fluores-
cence, the “blinking” property from one single quantum dot should
be investigated in detail. To obtain complete information about the
fluorescence dynamics of single CsPbX3 QD, the sample of CsPbBr3
QD is excited by 405 nm continuous wave laser. This method has
been described in detail in our previous work [39]. For single-
nanoparticle measurements, a dilute solution of QDs is mixed with
toluene and spin coated onto a glass substrate. Dark-field scat-
ering microscopy is utilized to locate the particles of interest
(Fig. 3a). Each bright spot corresponds to single CsPbBr3 QD or a
cluster of several CsPbBr3 QDs. Here we focus laser onto a single
bright spot by an oil-immersed objective (100 ×, NA=0.5), to
obtain fluorescence intensity time trace (100 ms bin time) (Fig. 3b,
spectrum 2). Fluorescence signal is also collected by the objective
(100 ×, NA=0.5), and filtered by 442 nm long pass filter. To detect
the fluorescence intensity fluctuation of QD, an avalanche photo-
diode (Perkin Elmer, SPCM-AQR-14) coupled with PicoHarp 300 is
used. In this measurement, to exclude the emission from the

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**Fig. 1.** (a) The XRD of the CsPbX3 (X=Cl, Br and I) nanoparticles with different composition. (b) TEM image of the CsPbBr3 nanoparticles, the scale bar is 50 nm, the inset figure is the size distribution of the CsPbBr3 nanoparticles in b. (c) HRTEM image of CsPbBr3 nanoparticles, and the scale bar is 5 nm. (d) The EDS of the CsPbBr3 nanoparticles.

**Fig. 2.** (a) The PL spectra of the CsPbX3 NC film with different compositions. (b) The absorption (black) and PL spectra (red) of CsPbBr3 NC film.
background, we set a glass substrate without sample as comparison, which has no emission intensity (Fig. 3b, spectrum 1). As shown in spectrum 2, the overall intensity of ON state has no obvious decrease with time, indicating that no signatures of degradation are observed with exposure under laser light. In spectrum 2, the measured fluorescence intensity from QDs fluctuates between two levels: high emissivity (ON) and low-emissivity (OFF), as well as other colloidal QDs observed previously [40–42]. This observation about the emission from individual QDs exhibits strong photon antibunching under continuous-wave (cw). As in the case of other known colloidal QDs, the antibunching arises from fast Auger recombination [43,44]. In spectrum b, the average signal from ON state is higher than that of OFF state after the dot freshly exposed to laser light for the reason of the stable structure of CsPbBr3 QDs with a small number of generations of surface defects under the exposure to laser light. Since the surface defects act as centers for nonradiative recombination, the reduction of the semiconductor core of QDs leads to an increase of the band gap energy. Nonradiative recombination is also observed by the time-resolved PL decay curves from CsPbBr3 QDs under 400 nm pulsed excitation (Fig. S5). According to the time-resolved PL decays of CsPbCl3, CsPb(Cl/Br)3 and CsPbBr2 QDs (Fig. S5), the \( \tau_r \) (average lifetime) are calculated in Table S1, which indicate that \( \tau_r \) (radiative lifetime) of CsPbBr3 (PL peak at \( \approx 527 \) nm) is longer than that of CsPbCl3 QD (PL peak at \( \approx 408 \) nm), which is consistent with the results reported before [34].

Many potential applications of semiconductor nanocrystals are hindered by nonradiative Auger recombination wherein the electron-hole recombination energy is transferred to a third charge carrier. This process severely limits the bandwidth of optical gain, leads to large nonradiative losses, which is believed to be responsible for blinking of emission from single nanocrystals. In the present work, despite the highly efficient intrinsic nonradiative Auger recombination of CsPbBr3 QDs, random lasing can also be developed under atmospheric environment through modified pumping configuration. To explore the stimulated emission, CsPbBr3 QD films are spin coated on glass at atmospheric environment. The thickness of the film is about 550–750 nm according to scanning electron microscope (SEM) image of the homogeneous and compact CsPbBr3 NC film (Fig. S6). Then the close-packed thin film of CsPbBr3 QDs is excited by 1 kHz, 100 fs laser pulses centered at 400 nm, as shown in Fig. 4c. The excitation is kept at low intensity to avoid the complication of reabsorption and amplification effects, and the measurements are performed at room temperature.

As is well known, the lasing action is a phenomenon that the photoluminescence stimulated emission (SE) overcome the spontaneous emission at some excitation level. Below the lasing threshold, the photoluminescence power rises slowly as the excitation power increases. Above the lasing threshold, as a lasing evidence, the slope of power vs excitation becomes orders of magnitude greater. In addition, the bandwidth of the lasing emission is orders of magnitude narrower compared with the one below lasing threshold. From the reported results before, the linewidths of the laser from colloidal quantum dots were gradually developed, and most of the reported results were about several nanometers [45,46]. In this work, as shown in Fig. 4a, the pump-power dependence of the emission and the threshold behavior of CsPbBr3 NC film, it is found that the PL spectra under low pump intensities \( (< \approx 970 \mu J/cm^2) \) is dominated by the relatively broad spontaneous emission located at \( \approx 527 \) nm (full-width of half maximum (FWHM); \( \approx 22 \) nm). When the pump intensity exceeds \( \approx 970 \mu J/cm^2) \), a narrower emission band located at \( \approx 539 \) nm with FWHM of \( \approx 6 \) nm appears on the longer wavelength side. This red-shifted stimulated emission may has its origins in re-absorbance during single-excitation lasing [47,48] or in the exciton binding energies in the bi-exciton optical gain mechanism [49]. Fig. 4b shows the peak emission intensity as a function of the excitation intensity (left axis) and FWHM of the emission (right axis). Around the lasing threshold \( \approx 0.97 \) ml/cm², it could be observed that an obvious transition change in gradient of the PL intensity curve and a sharp decrease for FWHM. Fig. 4d shows the real color optical images of CsPbBr3 NC film photoexcited with above lasing threshold fluorescence. We can observe the random lasing from the sample.

It is known that the band gap of lead halide perovskites could be tuned by changing their constituent stoichiometry. Fig. 4e–g display the blue and green stimulated emission from CsPbBr3/CsClx (x = 0, 2, 3), respectively. The spectra of CsPbCl3 (Fig. 4e) and CsPbBr3/CsCl (Fig. 4f) films also have red shift as well as CsPbBr3 film (Fig. 4g). In Fig. 4e, the wavelength of lasing for CsPbCl3 is at \( \approx 427 \) nm with \( \approx 6 \) nm FWHM when the pump intensity is high \( (> \approx 1.90 \) ml/cm²). The peak of spectra in blue region could reach \( \approx 408 \) nm. When the pump intensity is above the threshold, the lasing emission peak achieved \( \approx 427 \) nm with 11 nm shift (Fig. S7). The emission peak in blue region has blue shift to the report results [23]. As one systematic study based on the lasing application, the blue laser emission is an important part.

Although the lasing from quantum dots has been analyzed widely [50–52]. Unfortunately, the study about this exact mechanism for optical gain has been remaining question. This is also an open question in the MAPbX3-related materials [51]. As is well known, effective optical feedback from a high-quality optical
Fig. 4. (a) Pump-fluence dependence of the emission from CsPbBr$_3$ NCs film (pumping intensity range is 0.59–7.89 mJ/cm$^2$). (b) The lasing threshold behavior of the CsPbBr$_3$ NC film. (c) Schematic of the modified optical systems for pumping configuration, cylindrical lens (CL). (d) Photograph of CsPbBr$_3$ NC film excited above lasing threshold. (e–g) Pump-fluence dependence of the emission from CsPbX$_3$ (X=Cl, Br) NCs films. (e) CsPbCl$_3$ (pumping intensity range is 1.10–7.22 mJ/cm$^2$). (f) CsPb(Cl/Br)$_3$ (pumping intensity range is 0.85–8.51 mJ/cm$^2$). (g) CsPbBr$_3$ (pumping intensity range is 0.59–7.89 mJ/cm$^2$).
resonator is needed to obtain lasing [18]. But lasing can also be obtained without optical resonators. When the required optical feedback is provided via light scattering induced by intrinsic disorder in the lasing medium, leading to so-called random lasing [51]. As shown in Fig. 5a, when CsPbX3 NCs film is excited by a 400 nm pulse laser, random lasing could be obtained via light scattering caused by intrinsic disorder of CsPbX3 QDs in the film. The mechanism of random lasing emission in CsPbX3 NCs film could be explained as follows (Fig. 5b). We propose that light scattering phenomenon is significant in thicker films of several microns. When the CsPbX3 NCs film is excited by pump light source, generated photons disperse in highly scattering media of CsPbX3 QDs and randomly form closed loops. The generated photons propagate along the closed loops via coherent feedback, resulting in random fluctuations of lasing modes once the pump intensity over the threshold intensity. Furthermore, the high-quality (Q) factors of microlasers from CsPbX3 NCs have been calculated in Table S2 in Supporting information. The Q factor around 539 nm is about 90. The low threshold and high Q factor probably could be attributed to a combined contribution of several factors, such as the large absorption cross-section, the high photoluminescence quantum yield, the ultrafast buildup of population inversion and subsequent optical amplification, and the large Stokes shift of the SE peak [23]. This not only provides the obvious technological advantage of facile and inexpensive fabrication, but also enables various applications such as displays and lighting, which derive from the their broad spectral angular distribution of the emission.

4. Conclusion

In summary, all-inorganic perovskite CsPbX3 QDs are prepared by a facile hot-injection method. The dynamic PL from a single CsPbX3 nanocrystal reveals that the as-prepared CsPbX3 QDs are robust in atmospheric environment. The PL and amplified stimulated emission from CsPbX3 films possess superior optical gain properties, representing a new class of low-threshold and wavelength-tunable gain materials without cavity. The peak of lasing emission spectra in blue region can reach ~427 nm. All of these results suggest that all-inorganic perovskite CsPbX3 QDs with good crystal quality are superior to traditional nanocrystals for lasing and optical amplification, benefiting from the broad spectral distribution and low pump threshold of the random lasing.

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Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nanoen.2016.08.062.

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