

## Enhanced spectral response in polymer bulk heterojunction solar cells by using active materials with complementary spectra <sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

We have fabricated organic photovoltaic devices with blends of poly[9,9'-dioctyl-fluorene-co-bithiophene] (F8T2) and fullerene as an electron donor and electron acceptor, respectively. A significant improvement of the photovoltaic efficiency was found in device by using active materials with complementary spectra. The different weight ratios of composite film were also performed to correlate between morphology and the device performance. A power conversion efficiency (PCE) up to 2.0% with an open-circuit voltage of 0.85 V and a short-circuit current ( $J_{SC}$ ) of 5.3 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>, was achieved by blending the F8T2 with [6,6]-phenyl-C71-butyric acid methyl ester (PC[70]BM).

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, solar cells as a promising source of renewable and truly clean energy have become more and more attractive. Driven by the demand for inexpensive, clean, and renewable energy sources, the field of organic solar cells has grown as a result of their potential low cost, ease of processing, and the feasibility of fabricating on various substrates [1]. Until now, power conversion efficiency (PCE) up to 5% has been achieved from the bulk heterojunction (BHJ) of poly(3-hexylthiophene) (P3HT) blended with [6,6]-phenyl-C61-butyric acid methyl ester (PC[60]BM) [2]. Although the transport properties have been dramatically improved by vertical phase separation of both donor and acceptor, they still lack the absorption in the red and infrared regions [3]. Therefore, great deal of efforts have been undertaken

to enhance the  $J_{SC}$  of solar cells by utilizing low bandgap-conjugated polymers [4,5]. Indeed, the absorption spectra have been shifted by employing such low bandgap polymers. However, the low mobility limited the thickness of photoactive layer, resulting in weak absorption. Moreover, the power conversion efficiency was also limited by the fixed  $V_{OC}$  determined by the difference between the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) of donor and lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) of acceptor [6].

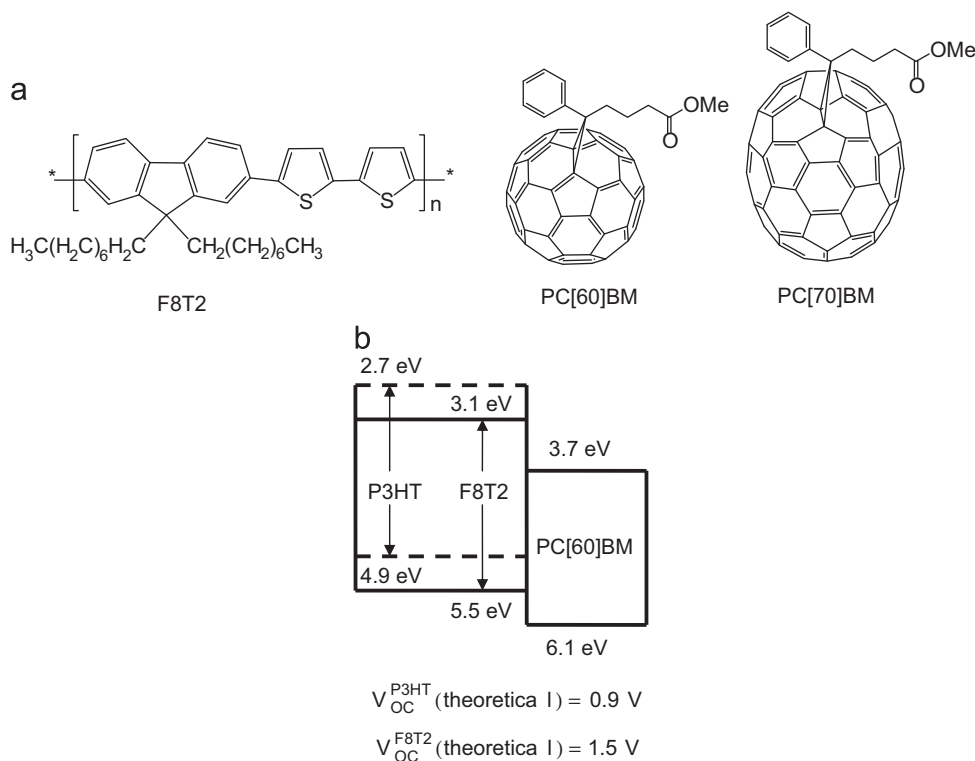
Polyfluorene (PF) copolymers are well known for their high charge carrier mobility [7–10], and the versatility of chemical structure. Recently, the BHJ polymer solar cells with larger  $V_{OC}$  (0.9–0.95 V) using PF-based alternating copolymers as donor have been reported [11–16]. For example, F8T2 has well been explored in the area of organic field-effect transistors, with good hole transporting properties. They exhibit excellent thermo tropic liquid crystallinity, which allows better chain packing via self-assembly [8,16]. On the basis of the result, it is expected that the charge transport in F8T2:PC[60]BM can be strongly balanced. Although, the polymer only absorbs light at wavelengths less than 500 nm which reduces the photocurrent dramatically [17], the absorption in the blue region of F8T2 make it an excellent donor polymer to blend with an acceptor having complementary spectrum or assemble a tandem cell with other low bandgap-conjugated polymers with absorption extended in the red region.

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**Fig. 1.** (a) Chemical structures of F8T2, PC[60]BM, and PC[70]BM. (b) Energy-level diagrams of F8T2:PC[60]BM and P3HT:PC[60]BM mixed films.

Therefore, it appears to be one of the most promising candidates among the conjugated polymers for high-efficiency polymer solar cells.

Recently, an approach to extend the photocurrent spectrum has been proposed by changing the acceptor in the BHJ solar cell, except utilizing a low bandgap polymer. The cell efficiency of the poly[2-methoxy-5-(3',7'-dimethyloctyloxy)-*p*-phenylenevinylene](MDMO-PPV):PCBM photovoltaic (PV) device could be improved to 3% by replacing the PC[60]BM with PC[70]BM [18]. Other blending systems were also reported [19,20]. This enhancement can be contributed to the broader and higher absorption of PC[70]BM compared with that of PC[60]BM. The low absorption coefficient of PC[60]BM can be attributed to a high degree of symmetry which forbids the lowest energy transition. Therefore, when the PC[60]BM is replaced by a less symmetrical fullerene, namely PC[70]BM, the transition will become apparent and a significant increase in light absorption can be expected [21]. In this letter, we report an increase of efficiency from 1.4% to 2.0% in BHJ solar cell of F8T2 blended with complementary acceptor, PC[70]BM, to replace the analogous PC[60]BM which possesses a very low absorption coefficient in the visible range of the spectrum.

## 2. Experimental

The polymer PV cells in this study consists of a layer of F8T2:PCBM blend thin film sandwiched between transparent anode indium tin oxide (ITO) and metal cathode. The F8T2 was purchased from American Dye Source. The average molecular weight of F8T2 is  $1 \times 10^4$ . The PCBM was purchased from Nano-C (99%). Before device fabrication, the ITO glasses ( $1.5 \times 1.5 \text{ cm}^2$ ) were ultrasonically cleaned in detergent, de-ionized water, acetone, and isopropyl alcohol before the deposition. After routine solvent cleaning, the substrates were treated with UVO (ultraviolet ozone cleaner, Jelight Company, USA) for 15 min. Then a modified ITO surface was obtained by spin-coating a layer

of poly(ethylene dioxythiophene): polystyrenesulfonate (PEDOT:PSS) ( $\sim 30 \text{ nm}$ ). After baking at  $130^\circ\text{C}$  for 1 h, the substrates were then transferred into a nitrogen-filled glove box. The polymer PV devices were fabricated by spin-coating blend of F8T2:PCBM on the PEDOT:PSS modified ITO surface. Prior to the deposition, the blend of F8T2:PCBM was prepared by dissolving it in 1,2-dichlorobenzene with various weight ratios, followed by stirring the solution for 12 h at  $50^\circ\text{C}$ . The active layer was obtained by spin-coating the blend at 600 rpm for 60 s. The active layer was then dried in covered glass Petri dishes to control the film growth rate. Subsequently, the films were annealed on the top of hotplate at various temperatures for 20 min. A 30 and 100 nm thick of calcium and aluminum was thermally evaporated under vacuum at a pressure below  $6 \times 10^{-6}$  Torr through a shadow mask. The active area of the device was  $0.12 \text{ cm}^2$ .

Current-voltage ( $J$ - $V$ ) characteristics were measured in the glove box under nitrogen atmosphere with simulated AM 1.5 G irradiation at  $100 \text{ mW/cm}^2$  using a xenon lamp-based solar simulator (Thermal Oriel 1000 W). The light intensity was calibrated by a crystalline-silicon photodiode with KG-5 color filter (Hamamatsu, Inc.). For measuring absorption properties of polymer films, samples were fabricated on a glass substrate. The UV-visible absorption spectra were measured using a Jasco-V-670 UV-visible spectrophotometer. Surface morphologies were observed by an atomic force microscopy (AFM, Digital instrument NS 3a controller with D3100 stage). The thickness of all polymer films was measured using a surface profiler. The external quantum efficiency (EQE) spectrum was obtained at the short-circuit condition. The light source employed for the EQE measurements was a 450 W Xe lamp (Oriel Instrument, model 6266) equipped with a water-based IR filter (Oriel Instrument, model 6123 NS). The light output from the monochromator (Oriel Instrument, model 74,100) was focused onto the photovoltaic cell under test. The effective range of the monochromator was 190–900 nm. The EQE( $\lambda$ ) is defined as  $\text{EQE}(\lambda) = 1240(J_{SC}/\lambda\Phi)$ , where  $\lambda$  is the wavelength,  $J_{SC}$  the short-circuit photocurrent ( $\text{mA/cm}^2$ ) recorded

with a potentiostat/galvanostat (PGSTAT 30, Autolab, Eco-Chemie), and  $\Phi$  the incident radiative flux ( $\text{W}/\text{m}^2$ ) measured with an optical detector (Oriol Instrument, model 71580) and power meter (Oriol Instrument, model 70310). The factor 1240 is derived from  $hc/q$ , where  $h$  is the Plank's constant,  $c$  the speed of light, and  $q$  the electron charge. This curve can be derived from the measured absorption spectrum of the photosensitizer for comparison.

### 3. Results and discussions

Fig. 1 (a) presents the structures of F8T2, PC[60]BM, and PC[70]BM. The energy-level diagram of the HOMO and LUMO of

F8T2 compared with that of PC[60]BM is shown in Fig. 1(b). The bandgap offset between the LUMOs of donor and acceptor is enough for electrons to be driven forward. Furthermore, the  $V_{\text{OC}}$  of devices based on a blend of a donor and PCBM can be predicted by  $V_{\text{OC}} = \frac{1}{e}([E_{\text{HOMO}}^{\text{Donor}}] - [E_{\text{LUMO}}^{\text{PCBM}}]) - 0.3$ , as suggested by Scharber et al. [6]. Apparently, larger  $V_{\text{OC}}$  can be achieved in the case of F8T2:PCBM compared with that of the P3HT:PCBM solar cells due to the lower HOMO level of F8T2.

Fig. 2(a) shows the absorption coefficient of F8T2, PC[60]BM, and PC[70]BM. All materials, F8T2, PC[60]BM, and PC[70]BM, contribute to the absorption within the blend. It can be seen that the absorption peak of F8T2 locates at 470 nm with an absorption coefficient of  $1.63 \times 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . Typical absorption bands at 330 nm for PC[60]BM and 370 and 460 nm for PC[70]BM are found [19,22].

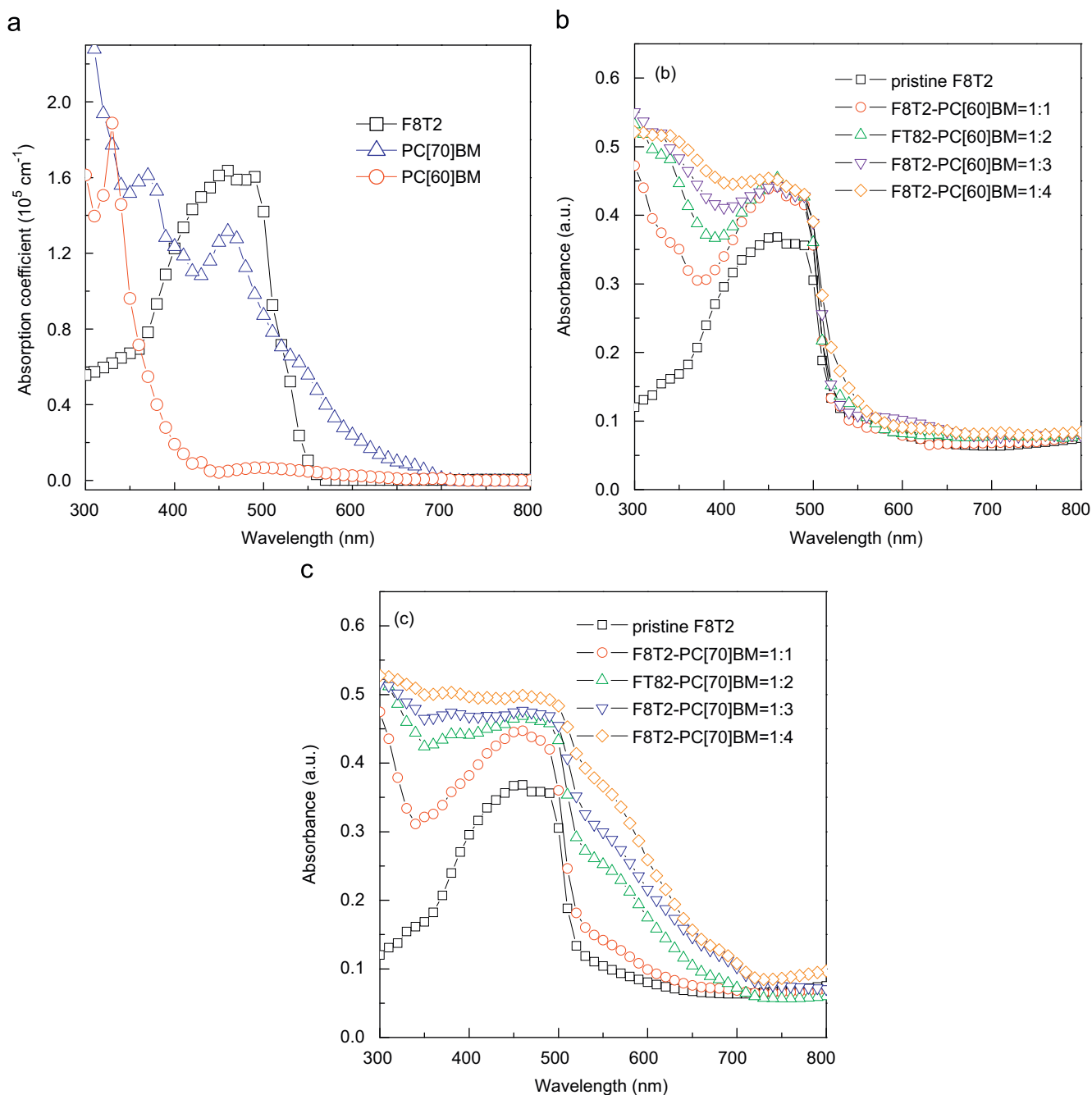
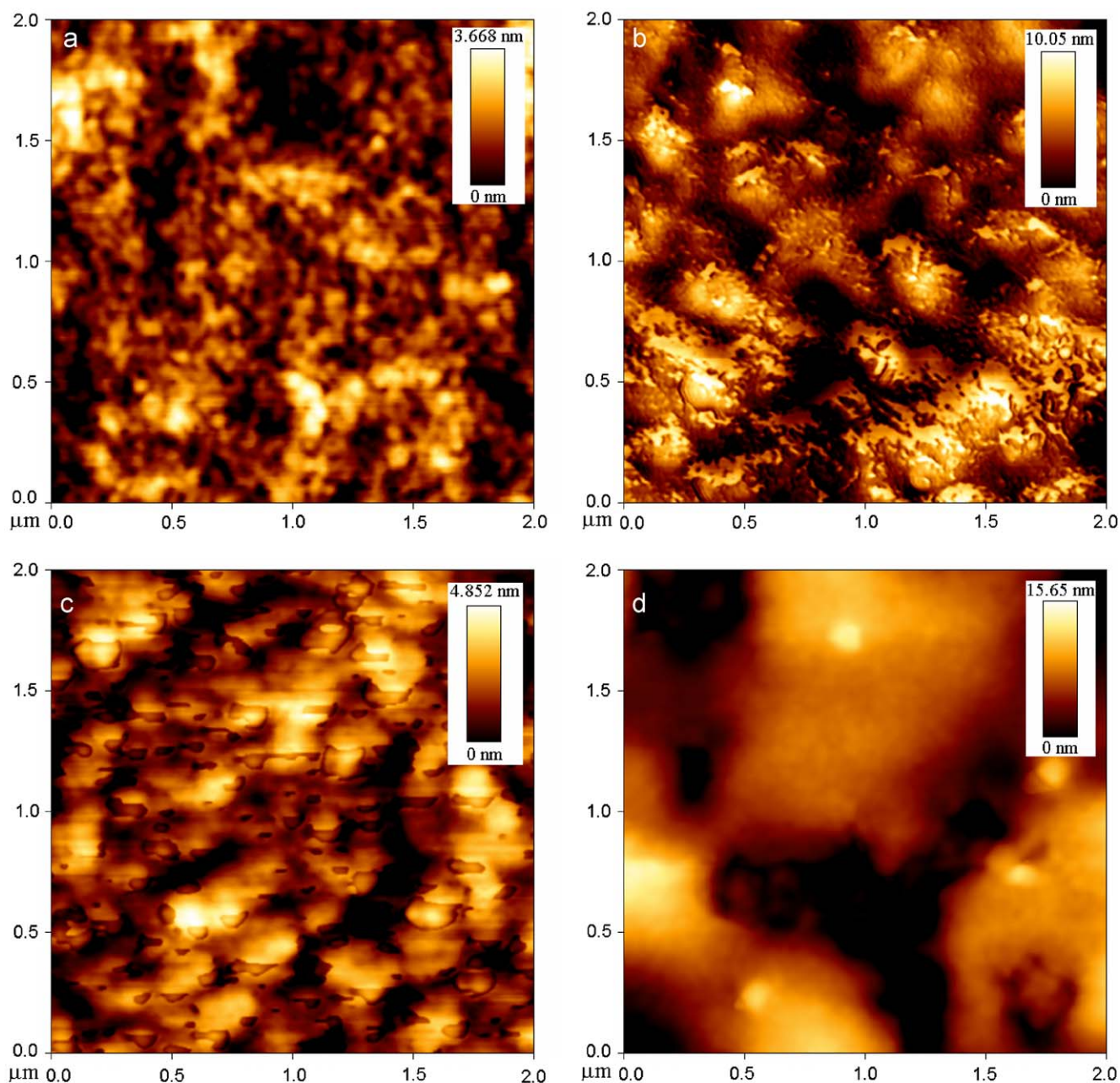


Fig. 2. (a) The absorption coefficient of F8T2, PC[60]BM, and PC[70]BM. UV-visible absorption spectra of the blended films in various ratios, (b) F8T2:PC[60]BM and (c) F8T2:PC[70]BM.



**Fig. 3.** AFM images of the blended films in various ratios (a) F8T2:PC[60]BM (1:1), (b) F8T2:PC[60]BM (1:4), (c) F8T2:PC[70]BM (1:1), and (d) F8T2:PC[70]BM (1:4).

The significantly higher absorption coefficient of PC[70]BM compared with that of PC[60]BM in the visible region is most relevant for the application in photodiodes, photodetectors, and photovoltaics. Fig. 2(b) and (c) shows the UV–visible absorption spectra of pristine F8T2 and their blend films with PC[60]BM and PC[70]BM at various weight ratios, respectively. Pure F8T2 reveals a broad absorption band located at 470 nm. The large band gap (2.4 eV) of F8T2 renders its absorption blue-shifted compared with P3HT. This feature makes it a limited light absorber. However, the absorption of F8T2 can be complemented by blending with PC[70]BM which shows strong absorption between 400 and 600 nm [23]. It appears that the absorption between 300 and 500 nm of F8T2 can be enhanced by blending with both PC[60]BM and PC[70]BM. But in the long wavelength region of 500–700 nm, where PC[60]BM is very close to transparent,

PC[70]BM still shows a significant absorption. Hence, a better match with sun radiation is observed for F8T2:PC[70]BM. As a result, higher current density was obtained which is explained in the subsequent sections.

Fig. 3 shows the AFM images for the composite F8T2:PC[60]BM (Fig. 3(a) and (b)) and F8T2:PC[70]BM films (Fig. 3(c) and (d)). It has been found that the surface of F8T2:PC[70]BM films is quite rough compared with F8T2:PC[60]BM films. The former films have a root mean square roughness of 2.2 nm, compared with 1.3 nm for the latter films. The image of film blended with PC[60]BM (50 wt%) reveals a more homogeneous blend without obvious separate domains, while the PC[70]BM-based film (50 wt%) shows a separate domains with feature size of 250–300 nm. This indicates that the PC[70]BM blend film formed vertical phase separation which dramatically increases ordering of

F8T2 and facilitates the charges to move towards the respective electrodes and reduce the recombination, leading to improved photocurrent generation with respect to the PC[60]BM blend film. An unfavorable morphology of both the PC[60]BM and PC[70]BM blend films can be observed with higher ratios of fullerene to F8T2. When the PCBM ratio increases to 80%, the domain sizes of the composite films are approximately increased to 300–350 and 500–550 nm for PC[60]BM and PC[70]BM, respectively. Therefore, they provided less junction interface for exciton dissociations, leading to a decrease in photocurrent generation.

Fig. 4 shows the measured device operating parameters  $J_{SC}$ , PCE,  $V_{OC}$ , and FF as a function of fullerene weight ratios. A value of  $J_{SC} = 5.28 \text{ mA/cm}^2$  for the F8T2:PC[70]BM (1:2.5) device is observed which is an increase of over 50% with respect to an optimized F8T2:PC[60]BM (1:1.5) cell. Although a non-uniform

mix of constituents is observed in the films based on F8T2:PC[70]BM (1:2.5) which can lead to a poor charge separation, the photocurrent is still larger enough, indicating the excitation of PC[70]BM also contributes to the photocurrent. In these cases, the measured values of  $J_{SC}$  and PCE show an increase and then decrease with a larger fullerene weight ratios as shown in Fig. 4(a) and (b), respectively. This means that a higher fullerene weight ratio leads to more phase separation between donor and acceptor, thus enhancing the charge transport. However, a larger fullerene weight ratio tends to be less soluble, and leading to a serious aggregation of the fullerene which influences the charge separation as shown in Fig. 3. Furthermore, a strongly unbalanced charge transport can also be expected due to a large fullerene ratio, which, in turn, decreases the photocurrent due to the build up of the space charge at the interface. Hence, both the  $J_{SC}$  and PCE

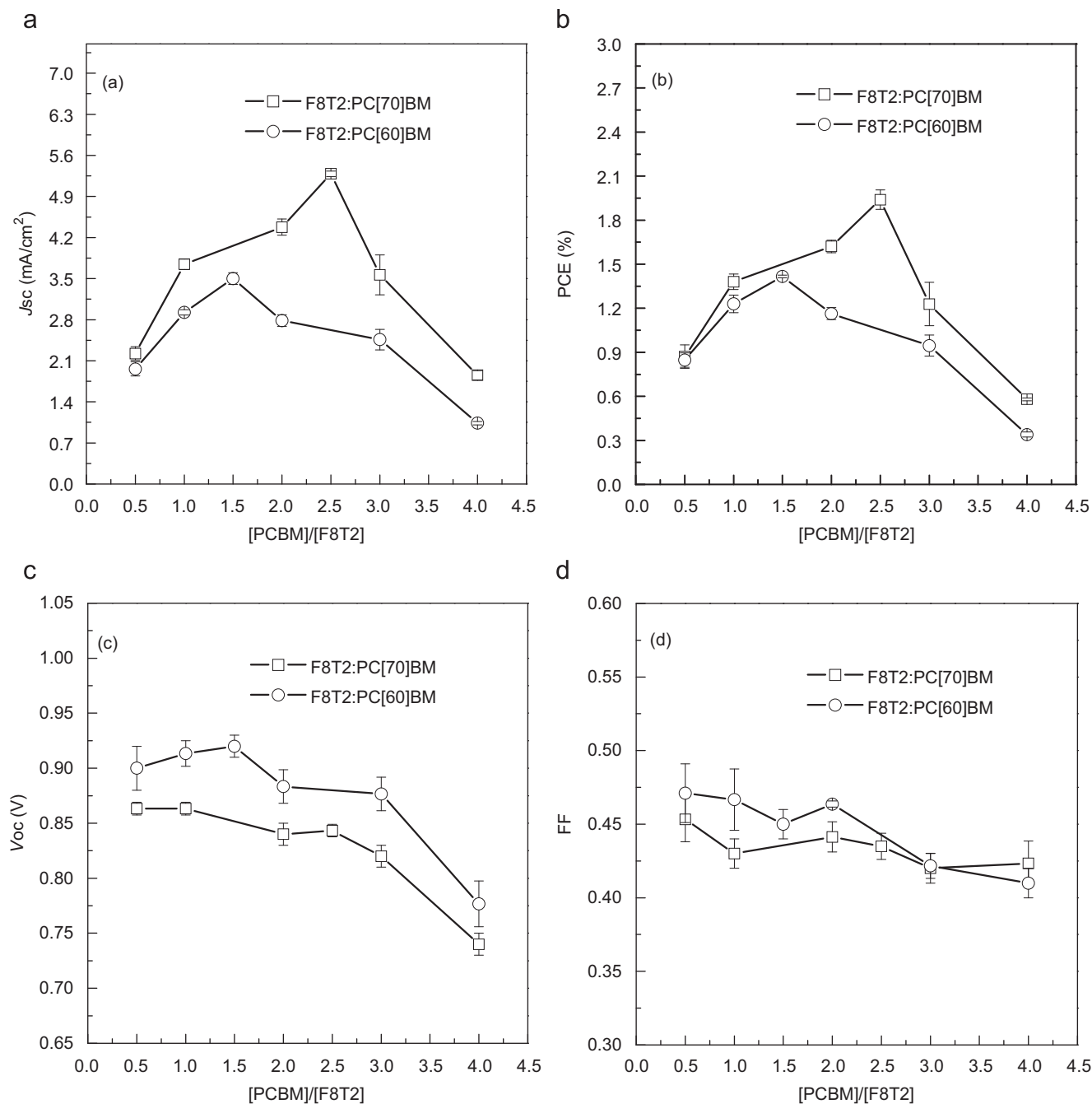


Fig. 4. Plots of  $J_{SC}$ ,  $V_{OC}$ , FF, and PCE as a function of the blending ratios of fullerenes to F8T2.

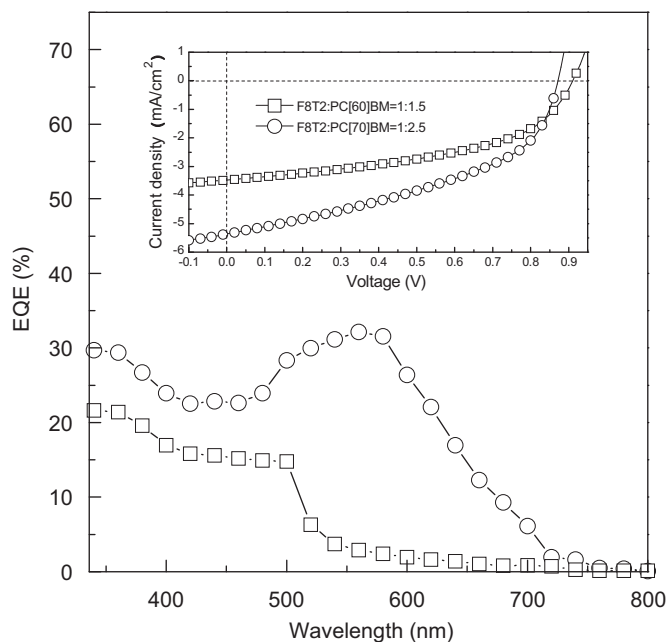


Fig. 5. EQE spectra of F8T2 blended with PC[60]BM (1:1.5) and PC[70]BM (1:2.5) devices. (Inset: corresponding  $J$ - $V$  characteristics.)

decrease with larger fullerene weight ratios based on the two reasons described above. It is worthy to note that the maxima in the PCE and  $J_{SC}$  of the F8T2:PC[60]BM and F8T2:PC[70]BM solar cells are observed at the fullerene concentration equaling to 60 and 71 wt%, respectively. This strongly manifests that the improved performance of F8T2:PC[70]BM solar cell, compared with the one based on the analogous F8T2:PC[60]BM, is mainly due to its significantly broader and stronger absorption, which resulted in a higher photocurrent. Although the photocurrent can be enhanced by replacing of PC[60]BM with PC[70]BM, the  $V_{OC}$  values are observed to be slightly smaller. The  $V_{OC}$  diminishes as a result of the slightly larger LUMO energy of PC[70]BM, leading to a narrow energy difference between  $HOMO^{F8T2}$  and  $LUMO^{PC[70]BM}$  [24]. On the other hand, the  $V_{OC}$  and FF show a quite distinct behavior with various fullerene weight ratios compared with the cases of PCE and  $J_{SC}$ . The values for  $V_{OC}$  and FF vary monotonically with increasing fullerene content in the BHJ films. This can be rationalized by the incomplete charge generation and transport resulted from the aggregation of the large amount of fullerenes [25]. The miscibility of PC[60]BM with F8T2 is better than that of PC[70]BM; therefore, a better junction interface can be expected for F8T2:PC[60]BM just as indicated in Fig. 3. This leads to a slightly higher FF for F8T2:PC[60]BM compared with PC[70]BM as shown in Fig. 4(c) and (d), respectively. The smaller  $V_{OC}$  value of PC[70]BM is expected to be the result of a smaller LUMO energy which PC[70]BM possesses. The best cell has an active layer thickness of about 230 nm, containing 71 wt% of PC[70]BM with a  $J_{SC}$  of 5.28 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>, a  $V_{OC}$  of 0.84 V, a FF of 0.44, and a PCE of 2.0%.

Fig. 5 shows the results of EQE measurements for F8T2 blended with PC[60]BM and PC[70]BM. The measured devices were fabricated with the best weight ratios of 1.5 and 2.5 for PC[60]BM and PC[70]BM, respectively. The inset is the  $J$ - $V$  characteristics under illumination for the as-fabricated device which show a larger photocurrent for PC[70]BM-based device, as compared with that of PC[60]BM. The EQE of PC[60]BM-based device shows a maximum of 21.6% at a wavelength of 340 nm and decreases dramatically after 500 nm which is consistent with the absorption data. On the other hand, for the PC[70]BM-based device, the EQE maximum increases by a factor of 1.5, reaching 32.1% at 560 nm.

Furthermore, the EQE stretches over the wavelength range of 500–700 nm which is wider than the PC[60]BM-based device. The increase in EQE is in good agreement with the absorption data of F8T2:PC[70]BM. This indicates that the excitation of PC[70]BM also contributes to the photocurrent.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, it has been demonstrated that BHJ solar cells with a PCE value of 2.0% were achieved by applying a superior electron acceptor PC[70]BM to replace PC[60]BM for F8T2. A broader absorption spectrum in F8T2:PC[70]BM film covers the visible solar spectrum, resulting in a broader photocurrent response. Based on these findings, F8T2 is a potential candidate for assembling a tandem cell with other low bandgap polymers to cover the solar spectrum.

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