

## Extracting Electronic Transition Bands of Adsorbates from Molecule–Plasmon Excitation Coupling

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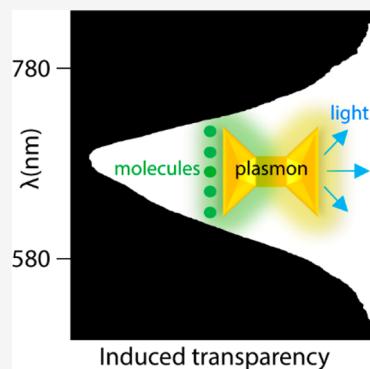
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**ABSTRACT:** The coupling between molecular electronic and particle plasmon excitations can result in various intriguing outcomes depending on how strongly or weakly the excitations couple to compete with their respective decay rates. In this work, using methylene blue and thionine dyes as model systems, we show that the electronic absorption band of resonant adsorbates can be determined with submonolayer sensitivity from the weak molecule–plasmon excitation coupling that results in the attenuation on the plasmonic absorption band. The extracted spectra are strongly similar to the absorption spectra of the corresponding molecules in solution, apart from the expected spectral red-shift and broadening. Interestingly, the adsorption isotherms determined on the basis of the magnitude of the attenuation correlate linearly with that determined from the adsorbate-induced plasmon resonance red-shift. The results demonstrate that in the weak coupling regimes the plasmon modes can be considered as an environment that supplies energy to and takes energy from the adsorbates.



The interaction between molecular electronic and particle plasmon resonances is a rich physical process that enables detection of a single molecule<sup>1,2</sup> and creation of entangled states for quantum information processing.<sup>3</sup> In the weak coupling regime, the molecular excitation and emission processes can be modified by the high mode density of the surface plasmon, which can result in surface-enhanced spectroscopy.<sup>1,4–7</sup> In the strong coupling regime, entangled states that can be used as a quantum information system can be generated.<sup>8,9</sup> The strong and weak coupling regimes can be distinguished on the basis of atom-field interaction theory using a coupling constant (*g*) defined by the equation  $g = \mu[\omega_0/(2\hbar\epsilon_0 V)]^{1/2}$ , where  $\hbar$  is the reduced Planck's constant,  $\epsilon_0$  the vacuum permittivity constant,  $\omega_0$  the transition frequency of the molecule,  $\mu$  the dipole matrix element of the atomic or molecular transition, and  $V$  the effective cavity volume.<sup>10</sup> To realize the strong coupling regime, *g* has to be large enough to overcome the resonant and nonresonant losses of the cavity.<sup>10</sup> The strength of the coupling scales with the number of atoms or molecules (*N*) in the cavity as  $\sqrt{N}g$ .<sup>10</sup> Practically, strong coupling has been observed at room temperature when a thick layer of J-aggregates is excited in the proximity of the plasmonic surfaces.<sup>11–21</sup> There is only one report that claims the observation of strong coupling for  $< 10$  molecules at room temperature.<sup>9</sup> In this experiment, spectral splitting has been observed when methylene blue (MB) molecules are aligned vertically along the electric field in a particle–film plasmonic system that provides an extremely small cavity volume. No spectral splitting has been observed when the MB molecules adsorb to the gold surface randomly. In general, observation of strong coupling requires significant

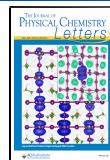
experimental perfection to achieve a large coupling constant by fabricating a cavity with a high quality factor and with the resonance tuned to the electronic transition energy of the emitter.<sup>8,10,22,23</sup>

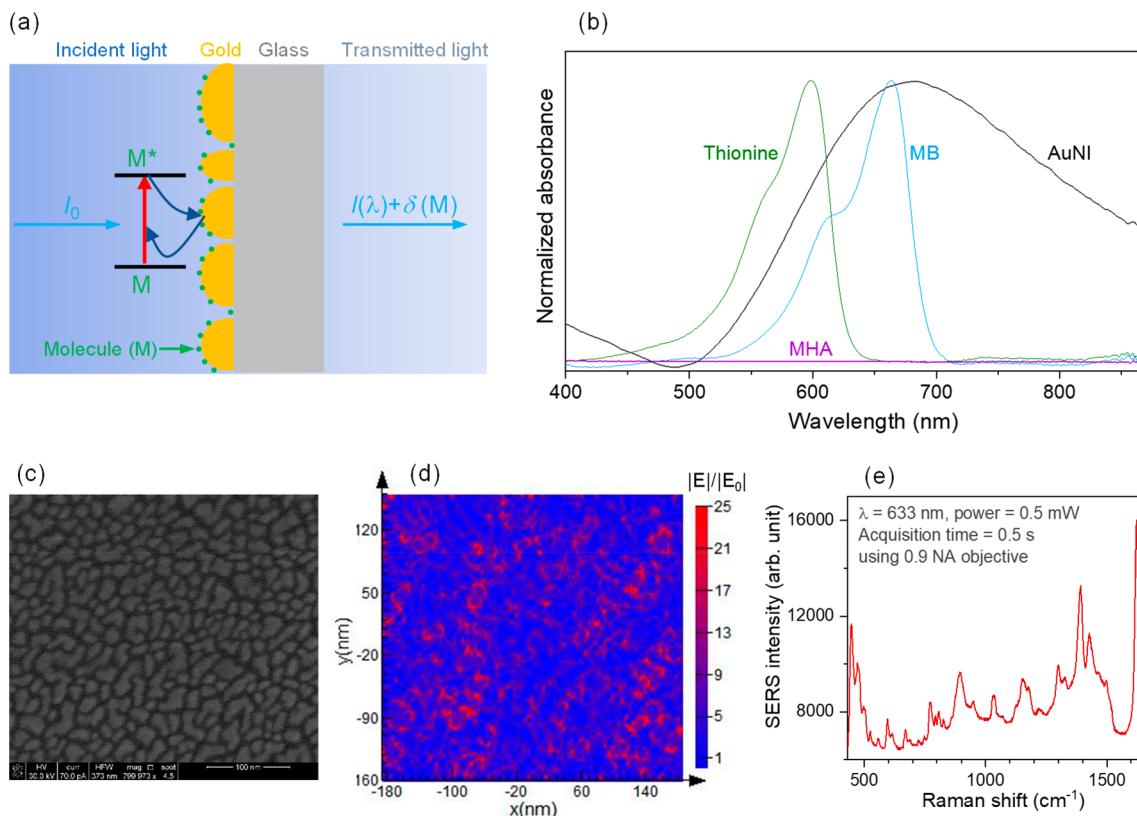
Despite the stringent requirements needed for strong coupling, the observation of spectral asymmetry in plasmonic systems coupled to molecular aggregates in a random geometry can be confused with strong coupling. For example, the broad absorption spectra of silver islands are split into two peaks upon adsorption of rhodamine B, while only one peak is observed in the fluorescence excitation spectra.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, a recent experimental demonstration indicates that splitting in photoluminescence spectra is more reliable evidence of strong coupling than the splitting in the dark-field scattering spectra.<sup>12</sup> In the weak coupling regimes, the surface plasmon may be treated as an environment that supplies and absorbs energy to and from the molecule depending on the molecule–surface proximity, spectral overlap, and orientation of the dipole with respect to the surface field.<sup>25,26</sup> The plasmon surface field enhances the excitation of the molecule, and the molecular excitation can efficiently couple back to the plasmon modes that can lead to plasmon-coupled photon emission.<sup>27–29</sup> This interaction can lead to the appearance of spectral splitting in the absorption

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**Figure 1.** Principle of excitation coupling between molecule and particle resonances. (a) Schematic showing the processes in the excitation and transmission measurement. The molecules, represented by the green dots, are adsorbed on the gold nanostructures that are supported on glass. The incident light with intensity  $I_0$  excites both the electronic transition of the molecule ( $M \rightarrow M^*$  transition) and the plasmon resonance of the gold nanostructures. The plasmon resonance enhances the rate of molecular excitation, and the excitation energy of the molecule couples back to the surface plasmon, modifying the intensity of the transmitted light. (b) Absorption spectra of AuNIs, MB, thionine, and MHA as labeled. (c) Scanning electron microscope image of the AuNIs formed by electron-beam evaporation of gold on glass. (d) Calculated electric-field distribution at the Au–glass interface at a  $\lambda$  of 680 nm. (e) Surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy of MB adsorbed on the AuNIs confirms the field enhancement.

and scattering spectra, although no new mixed states may be created. In principle, it should be possible to extract the absorption/emission band of molecular adsorbates from the plasmonic environment through careful analysis of plasmon–molecule excitation coupling. We note that the electronic transition energy of adsorbates is critical for understanding surface chemical, electronic, and optical properties. For example, determining the spectral overlap of the excitation wavelength with the molecular electronic and particle plasmon resonances should be the first step in explaining the mechanisms of surface-enhanced Raman scattering<sup>30,31</sup> and plasmon-driven photochemistry.<sup>32</sup>

In this work, the hypothesis of determining the adsorbate absorption band from molecule–plasmon excitation coupling is tested by analyzing the absorption spectra of plasmonic gold nanoislands (AuNIs) with MB and thionine adsorbates. We note that for  $\pi$ -conjugated molecules with a fused aromatic ring that includes our model systems, the molecules are oriented parallel to the surface due to a  $\pi$ -stacking type of surface–molecule interaction, resulting in the molecular dipole orientation mainly parallel to the surface.<sup>33,34</sup> For this adsorption geometry, strong coupling can be ruled out. However, because of rough surfaces, the less than perfect planar orientation of the molecules on the surface, and the availability of different plasmon modes,<sup>33,35</sup> the surface–molecule energy transfer can be efficient to completely quench

the fluorescence of the adsorbates.<sup>36</sup> In fact, fluorescence background quenching by metal surfaces is one of the reasons for the success of surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy.<sup>35</sup> Owing to the surface–molecule energy transfer and the subsequent plasmon-coupled photon emission that can lead to enhanced transmission, we observe attenuation in the absorption spectra of the AuNI at the absorption wavelengths of the adsorbed dye molecules. The absorption bands of the adsorbates are extracted from the changes induced on the absorption spectra of the plasmon resonances through systematic experimental and data analysis procedures.

The schematic in Figure 1a shows the principle of the experiment for extracting the perturbation  $\delta(M)$  on the optical transmission of the plasmonic system induced by the coupling of the molecular electronic excitation. The incident light with intensity  $I_0$  excites both the electronic transition of the molecule and the plasmon resonance of the AuNIs. The absorption spectra in Figure 1b indicate the overlap between the electronic transitions of the molecules (MB and thionine) and the broad plasmon resonance of the AuNIs (Figure 1c) that have a thickness of  $\sim 5$  nm as determined using an atomic force microscope (see Figure S1). It is well-known that evaporation of metals at this thickness creates island structures that support localized surface plasmon resonances.<sup>37</sup> The electric field at the metal–glass interface calculated using the finite-difference time-domain method of electromagnetics

simulation indicates the plasmon near-field enhancement around the AuNIs (Figure 1d). The surface-enhanced Raman scattering signal of submonolayer MB adsorbed on the AuNIs (Figure 1e) confirms the field enhancement. The enhanced surface field pumps the electronic excitation of the adsorbates, and the excitation energy of the molecule couples back to the surface plasmon, modifying the transmitted light intensity as  $I(\lambda) + \delta(M)$ , where  $I$  is the wavelength ( $\lambda$ )-dependent intensity of the transmitted light assuming that the effect of the adsorbate is limited to shifting the plasmon resonance wavelength. For AuNIs with nonresonant adsorbates for which  $\delta(M) = 0$ , the absorbance  $A_N$  can be expressed using Beers law as

$$A_N = -\log \left[ \frac{I(\lambda)}{I_0} \right] \quad (1)$$

Similarly, for the AuNIs with resonant adsorbates that induce a plasmon resonance wavelength shift similar to that of the nonresonant one, the absorbance  $A_R$  can be written as

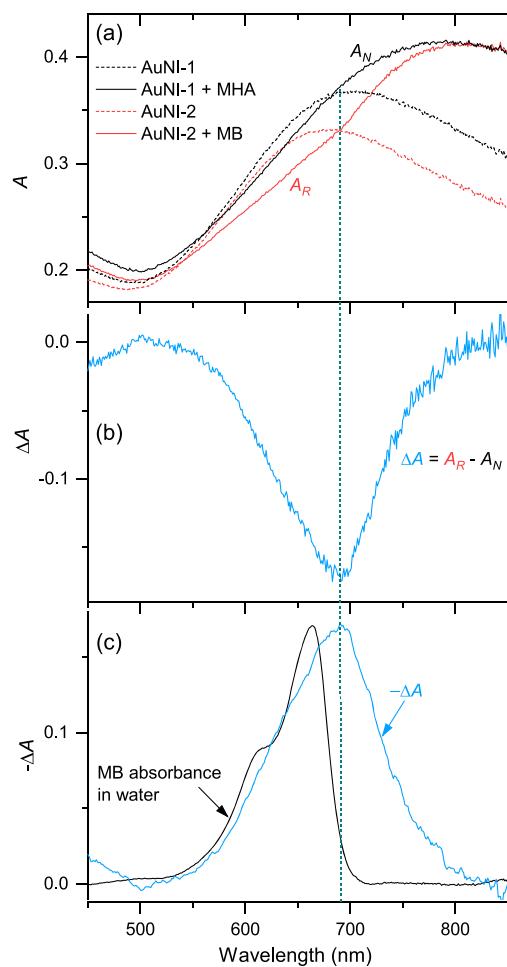
$$A_R = -\log \left[ \frac{I(\lambda) + \delta(M)}{I_0} \right] \quad (2)$$

Assuming that the coupling is weak such that the symmetry of the resonances is not affected by Fano-type interference effects,<sup>38,39</sup> the change in the absorbance ( $\Delta A$ ) due to molecule–plasmon excitation coupling of the resonant adsorbates can then be calculated using the nonresonant adsorbate as a reference.

$$\Delta A = A_R - A_N = \log \left[ 1 + \frac{\delta(M)}{I(\lambda)} \right] \quad (3)$$

where  $\delta(M) < 0$  when the plasmonic absorbance is attenuated due to the coupling of the molecular excitation energy to the surface plasmon mode that results in enhanced transmission at the absorption wavelength of the adsorbate. On the other hand,  $\delta(M) > 0$  when the adsorbate has an additive effect on the absorption. It is important to note that  $\delta(M)$  is extremely small compared to the large extinction cross section of the plasmonic metal nanostructures. Consequently, determining the absorption band of the adsorbate on the basis of eq 3 requires measurement of the plasmon resonance of the same metal nanostructures before and after adsorption of the analyte molecules.

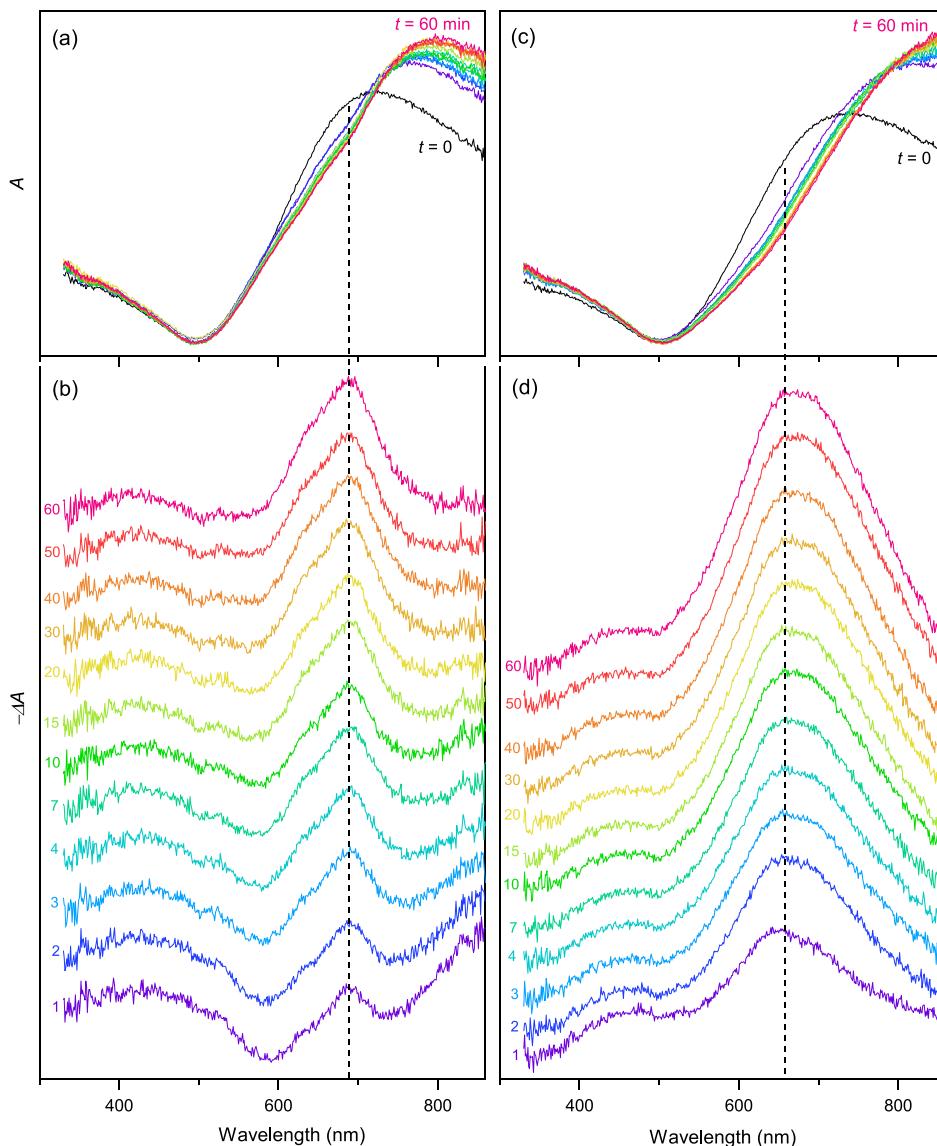
The principle described above is implemented by depositing the AuNIs on one of the outer surfaces of quartz cuvettes so that the rigid cuvette mount of the absorption spectrophotometer (see Methods for sample fabrication, preparation, and measurement details) ensures probing of the same plasmonic surfaces before and after adsorption of the analyte molecules. In Figure 2a, the absorption spectra of the bare AuNIs (AuNI-1 and AuNI-2) are shown by the dotted black and red lines. The absorption spectra of the same AuNIs after adsorption of nonresonant 6-mercaptophexanoic acid (MHA) and resonant MB molecules are shown by the solid black and red lines, respectively, as labeled in Figure 2a. The adsorption of both MHA and MB has resulted in significant and comparable red-shifting of the respective plasmon resonances. More importantly, the adsorption of MB has induced an attenuation (elbowing) effect as can be seen by comparing the solid red line ( $A_R$ ) to the solid black line ( $A_N$ ) in Figure 2a. The elbowing effect appears to take place at the absorption



**Figure 2.** Experimental demonstration of the principle for determining the adsorbate absorption band from induced absorbance attenuation of the localized surface plasmon resonance. (a) The dotted black and red lines are absorption spectra of two different plasmonic AuNIs (labeled as AuNI-1 and AuNI-2) before adsorption of the analyte molecules. The solid lines labeled  $A_N$  and  $A_R$  show the absorption spectra after the nonresonant MHA and resonant MB molecules are adsorbed on AuNI-1 and AuNI-2, respectively. (b) Difference spectrum obtained by subtracting  $A_N$  from  $A_R$ . (c) Inverted difference spectrum after adjacent averaging (blue) compared to the normalized absorption spectrum of MB in water (black).

wavelength of the adsorbate and is in agreement with the observation of wavelength-dependent attenuation of surface plasmon resonance reflectivity reported for a 40 nm thick silver film with a zinc phthalocyanine-tetrasulfonic acid adsorbate.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the attenuation effect in the presence of MB is attributed to enhanced transmission due to the coupling of the molecular excitation energy to the plasmon resonance.

The magnitude and shape of the absorbance reduction are obtained by subtracting  $A_N$  from  $A_R$  (according to eq 3) after normalizing the two curves such that they have the same minima and maxima, and the result ( $\Delta A$ ) is plotted in Figure 2b. Clearly, a window of transparency that closely matches the absorption band of the MB adsorbate is observed. The inverted spectrum ( $-\Delta A$ ) is reasonably similar to the normalized absorption spectrum of MB in water as shown in Figure 2c. We note that in Figure 2a, the peak position of the  $A_N$  spectrum does not perfectly match that of the  $A_R$ . To confirm the effect of the relative peak position of the reference spectra on the



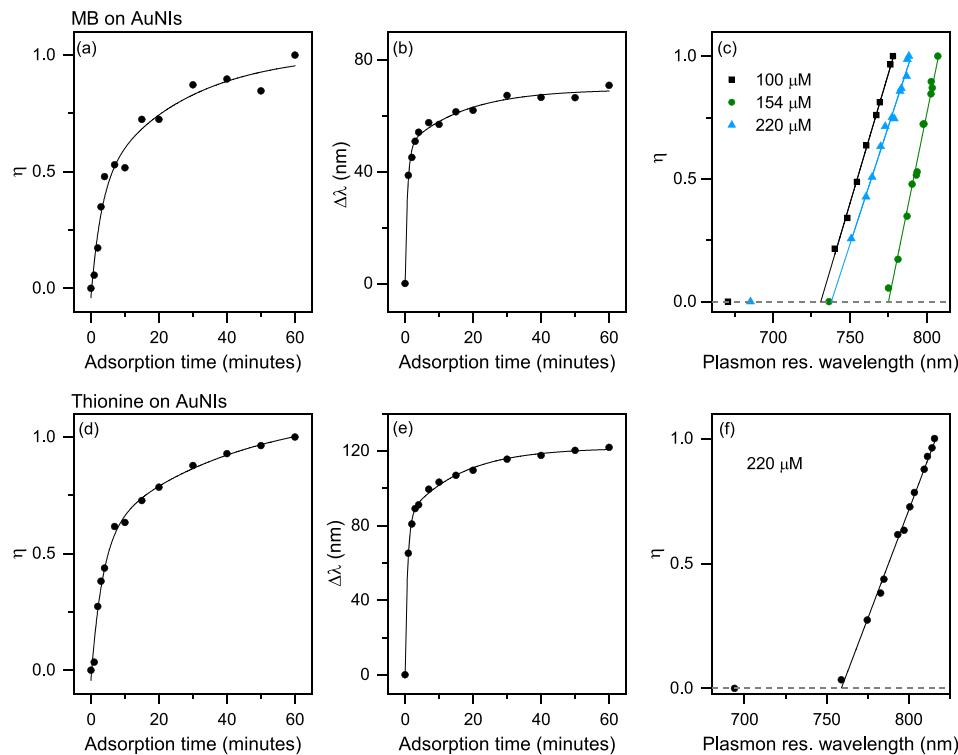
**Figure 3.** Dependence of absorbance attenuation on adsorption time. (a) Absorption spectra of the same AuNPs as the adsorption time of MB is increased from 0 min (black line, bare AuNPs) to 60 min (pink line). (b) Difference spectra obtained by subtracting the spectrum of AuNP-MHA from the AuNP-MB spectra at different adsorption times. The numbers next to each plot are the adsorption time in minutes. (c and d) Same as panels a and b, respectively, for the thionine adsorbate.

peak position of the  $\Delta A$  spectra, the adsorption time of MHA has been varied such that the  $A_N$  peak position is swept from the blue side to the red side of the  $A_R$  peak position as shown in Figure S2a. It is found that the peak position of  $\Delta A$  remains the same when the AuNP-MHA spectra with different peak positions are used as references (see Figure S2b). This is because the slope of the  $A_N$  lines is approximately constant in the region where attenuation is observed in the  $A_N$  spectra. As a result, the same reference spectrum is used in the rest of our analysis.

As one can see in Figure 2c, with respect to the solution phase absorption band, the inverted spectrum is broadened and is shifted to the red by  $\sim 24$  nm, which is in agreement with the results reported by Darby et al. using integrating sphere absorption spectroscopy of Rhodamine 700 adsorbed on silver nanoparticles.<sup>41</sup> We note that enhanced transmission at the absorption band of  $>30$  nm thick cyanine J-aggregates has been observed when the aggregates are supported on arrays

of 200 nm thick gold and silver nanoholes with 100 nm in diameter,<sup>42,43</sup> while our observation is for the submonolayer of adsorbates as demonstrated next.

In all of our experiments, the adsorption of the analyte molecules is carried out by immersing the AuNPs in 10–220  $\mu\text{M}$  solutions for 1–2 h. For concentrations of  $<10 \mu\text{M}$ , adsorption was not effective (see Figure S3). It has been reported that in this concentration range, adsorption of MB on gold results in submonolayer to monolayer surface coverage even when the gold surface is prefunctionalized to enhance the adsorption.<sup>44</sup> This is not surprising considering that the surface–molecule interaction is governed by van der Waals dispersion forces.<sup>34</sup> In our experiment, the adsorption properties are studied by measuring the absorption spectra of the same AuNPs after every successive increase in the adsorption times starting with a 1 min duration. The results presented in Figure 3a show that as the adsorption time increases, the plasmonic absorbance at the absorption



**Figure 4.** Adsorption isotherms and correlation. (a and d) Adsorption isotherms determined from absorbance changes induced by MB and thionine adsorbates, respectively, on AuNPs. (b and e) Adsorption isotherms determined from the plasmon resonance wavelength shifts induced by MB and thionine adsorbates, respectively. (c and f) Correlation between normalized absorbance changes and plasmon resonance wavelength shift for MB and thionine adsorbates, respectively. The three correlation plots in panel c indicate that the linear trend is reproducible at different concentrations of the solution in which the substrate is immersed for adsorbing the molecules.

wavelength of the MB adsorbate decreases continuously. The effect of the adsorption time is more apparent in the difference spectra plotted in Figure 3b. The signature of the adsorbate absorption band that results from molecule–plasmon excitation coupling is observed even after adsorption for 1 min. As one can see in Figure 3b, the magnitude of  $\Delta\lambda$  increases with an increase in adsorption time as the number of MB adsorbates per unit area increases. Interestingly, the shoulder peak that is observed in the solution phase absorption spectrum of MB (Figure 1b) is reproduced in the series of spectra in Figure 3b (see also Figure S4 for a more quantitative comparison).

The similarity of the adsorbate and solution phase absorption spectra indicates that the inherent electronic band of the molecule is not altered by the possible optical interference between the molecular and plasmon resonances. We note that it is easier to discern spectral asymmetry induced by Fano-type interference effects when the original spectra have Lorentzian line shapes.<sup>38</sup> To quantify the significance of optical interference effects, we compare the dark-field scattering spectra of gold nanorods (AuNRs) without and with MB adsorbates as shown in Figure S5. As one can see by comparing the results in panels a and b of Figure S5, adsorption of MB on the AuNRs has resulted in spectral broadening, red-shifting, and a decrease in the intensity on the single-particle plasmon resonance scattering spectra, which can be attributed to the damping effect due to the plasmon-pumped adsorbate excitation as in the well-known chemical interface plasmon damping effect.<sup>45–47</sup> However, the scattering spectra of the AuNRs with the MB adsorbate fit to a

Lorentzian function with an  $R^2$  value of  $>0.99$  (see Figure S5c), indicating the absence of spectral asymmetry due to interference effects. Therefore, the similarity of the adsorbate spectra to that of the solution phase suggests a coupling regime in which molecule–plasmon energy exchange takes place, while the optical interference effect between the resonances is negligible. It is also important to note that the observation of the elbowing effect at the absorption wavelength of the adsorbate is indicative of the richness of the plasmon modes in the evaporated metal film that is not possible in quasi-crystalline single particles that have plasmon resonances dominated by a particular mode.

In the absence of optical interference effects that alter the inherent resonance line shapes, we can assume that the adsorbate spectral properties are governed mainly by the surface–molecule chemical interaction. To obtain insight into the adsorption properties depending on the molecular structures, the results obtained for the MB adsorbate (Figure 3a,b) are compared to that of thionine (Figure 3c,d). The difference spectra in Figure 3d indicate that the absorption band for the thionine adsorbate has shifted to the red by  $>50$  nm with respect to the absorption band of thionine in water that peaks at 599 nm (see Figure 1b), compared to the 24 nm red-shift for MB. This large wavelength shift for the thionine adsorbate is accompanied by drastic line width broadening. The larger wavelength shift and broadening for thionine than for MB can be attributed to the replacement of the relatively bulky methyl groups at the N-terminus with hydrogen atoms that favors stronger thionine–surface interaction through the amine functional groups because there is less steric hindrance

as the adsorption geometry reported by Guo et al. suggests.<sup>34</sup> The stronger surface–molecule interaction for thionine than for MB can be the thermodynamic driving force for the plasmon-driven N-demethylation of MB.<sup>32,36,48</sup>

The absorbance changes observed as a function of adsorption time are analyzed on the basis of adsorption isotherms obtained using the integral area under the curves in panels b and d of Figure 3. To facilitate the analysis, we define an adsorption parameter as  $\eta = I_t/I_m$ , where  $I_t$  and  $I_m$  are the integral areas at any time ( $t$ ) and infinite time when a monolayer (m) surface coverage is assumed, respectively. As shown in panels a and d of Figure 4 for MB and thionine adsorbates, respectively,  $\eta$  increases with time first rapidly and then plateaus, indicating the saturation of surface coverage. The adsorption isotherms determined from the magnitude of absorbance attenuation compare favorably with the isotherms determined from the plasmon resonance wavelength shift (Figure 4b,e), which is a well-established procedure for quantifying adsorption properties.<sup>49</sup> However, it is important to note that the plasmon wavelength shift ( $\Delta\lambda$ ) increases much faster than  $\eta$  initially. Fitting a biexponential function ( $\Delta\lambda = \Delta\lambda_m - ae^{-t/\tau_1} - be^{-t/\tau_2}$ , where  $\Delta\lambda_m$  is the plasmon resonance wavelength shift at a monolayer surface coverage) to the specific data presented in panels b and e of Figure 4 produces the following values:  $\Delta\lambda_m = 69$  nm,  $\tau_1 = 0.74$  min, and  $\tau_2 = 17$  min for MB, and  $\Delta\lambda_m = 122$  nm,  $\tau_1 = 0.76$  min, and  $\tau_2 = 16$  min for thionine. The time constants for MB and thionine adsorbates appear comparable possibly due to the lack of data points for adsorption times of  $<1$  min. The wavelength shift varies significantly from sample to sample, ranging from 69 to 113 nm for MB on five different AuNIs within 1 h of adsorption time, while adsorption of thionine on most AuNIs shifts the resonance wavelength outside the detection window of our spectrometer as shown in Figure 3c. It is interesting to note that the larger plasmon resonance shift for thionine corresponds to the more pronounced molecular resonance shift as mentioned earlier in comparing the results in panels b and d of Figure 3, confirming the stronger surface–molecule interaction of thionine. Overall, the resonance wavelength shift observed in our experiment is larger than the maximum shift (55 nm) observed during the adsorption of rhodamine 6G on silver nanostructures.<sup>50</sup> However, it is important to note that the extent of the shift increases significantly with an increase in the resonance wavelength.<sup>50</sup> Hence, the plasmon shift around the MB resonance ( $\sim 688$  nm) is expected to be significantly larger than the shift around the rhodamine 6G resonance ( $\sim 560$  nm). In addition, in our experiment, the AuNIs are used as evaporated, and the rough structure and large surface area can result in a large number of adsorbates per unit volume of metal.

In panels c and f of Figure 4,  $\eta$  is plotted as a function of the plasmon resonance peak wavelength. Interestingly, a linear correlation is obtained excluding the data point for the bare AuNIs as shown by the plots. The deviation of the data point for the bare AuNIs from the linear trend can be attributed to the lack of a clear background reference for extracting the adsorbate-induced change in the absorbance, while the plasmon resonance shift can be monitored accurately and unambiguously. A more accurate procedure for extracting  $\eta$  is particularly important at very short incubation times that results in a low number density of adsorbates. We note that the magnitude of  $\Delta A$  depends on the relative peak position of the

reference spectra, although its peak position remains constant as illustrated in Figure S2b.

So far, the reduction of the plasmonic absorbance at the absorption band of the adsorbates has mainly been discussed in terms of the molecular electronic excitation energy coupling to the surface plasmon modes. However, it is important to note that the plasmon surface field also pumps the excitation of the adsorbates as illustrated by the schematics in Figure 1a. The plasmon–molecule interaction at the excitation step may be considered as a plasmon damping process in which the surface plasmon is dephasing through plasmon-pumped adsorbate excitation.<sup>24,45</sup> The excited adsorbates (emitters) can be considered as dipole sources that can excite plasmon modes. It has been theoretically predicted that dipole sources can excite plasmon modes that remain dark under incident plane wave source illumination.<sup>51–53</sup> Because the adsorbates are directly adsorbed on the metal surface, vibrational relation in the excited electronic state may be unlikely to compete with the excitation coupling to the plasmon mode. This may explain the similarity of the  $\Delta A$  spectral shape particularly for MB (Figure 3b) to the corresponding absorption band in solution as opposed to the fluorescence band, which appears as the mirror image of the former.

In summary, this work demonstrates that the electronic absorption band of molecular adsorbates on plasmonic surfaces can be determined on the basis of molecule–plasmon excitation coupling that attenuates the absorbance of the plasmonic metal nanostructures. The systematic analysis of the experimental results shows that in the weak coupling regimes the plasmon surface modes can be treated as an environment to which molecular excitations scatter, and in turn, the electronic absorption band of the adsorbates can be extracted from the environment. This procedure provides submonolayer sensitivity to determine the adsorbate electronic transition band, which is difficult to quantify using conventional approaches. The extracted spectra indicate that the absorption bands are broadened and red-shifted with respect to solution phase spectra due to surface–molecule interaction.

## ■ METHODS

*Preparation of Gold Nanoislands (AuNIs).* The AuNIs with different thicknesses are formed naturally during the electron-beam evaporation of gold on one side of the outer of a quartz cuvette at a rate of 0.2 Å/s at a chamber pressure of  $1\text{--}2 \times 10^{-6}$  Torr. For structural analysis, the metals are also deposited on an oxide-coated silicon wafer during the same evaporation process. The thickness and the deposition rate of films were monitored by using a quartz crystal microbalance. After the analysis of the optical responses of different thicknesses, the AuNIs with  $\sim 5$  nm are chosen for further studies of molecule–plasmon excitation coupling.

*Adsorption of Molecules on AuNIs.* The analyte molecules (methylene blue, thionine, and 6-mercaptophexanoic acid) are adsorbed on the AuNIs by immersing the metal-coated cuvette side into the solution for different durations ranging from 1 to 60 min. Methylene blue and thionine are dissolved in water, while 6-mercaptophexanoic acid is dissolved in ethanol, with concentrations ranging from 1 to 220  $\mu\text{M}$ . The adsorption on the AuNIs is carried out by carefully moving the gold-coated side of the quartz cuvette vertically with the aid of a mechanical stage until only the gold-coated side of the cuvette is sufficiently immersed in the solution. Then the system is covered with aluminum foil and incubated for a specified

period of time at room temperature. At the end of the incubation, the film is rinsed gently with ultrapure water and dried in air.

**Absorbance Measurement.** The absorption spectra of the AuNIs have been recorded with a Shimadzu UV-2450 ultraviolet-visible spectrophotometer using air as a baseline. That is, the quartz cuvette with the AuNI is placed in the sample cell, while the reference cell is empty. First, the absorption spectra of the cuvette with the bare AuNIs are recorded. Then, the measurement is repeated on the same AuNIs after the analyte molecules are adsorbed. In addition to the fact that the measurement before and after adsorption must be carried out on the same AuNIs, it is important that the spectrometer remain on during the adsorption process so that the adsorption effect is not obscured by the fluctuation of the incident light intensity.

**Structural Characterization.** The structure of the fabricated gold nanoislands is characterized using the scanning electron microscope (Quanta 3D FEG) to imagine the lateral distribution and the atomic force microscope (Neaspec GmbH) to determine the height.

**Electromagnetic Simulation.** The near-field distribution in Figure 1d is calculated using the finite-difference time-domain method of electromagnetic simulation using the Lumerical software. Two sources with orthogonal polarization in the sample plane are introduced into the simulation region using a total-field scattered-field source. The structure of the AuNIs is defined by importing the scanning electron microscope (SEM) image, and its accuracy in mimicking the actual structures is limited by the spatial resolution of the SEM. The gold structure is placed on a  $\text{SiO}_2$  substrate. Gold is modeled using the dielectric function data of Johnson and Christy, and  $\text{SiO}_2$  is modeled using the Palik data. A grid size of 0.5 nm is used in all three directions in the region where the source is introduced.

## ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### SI Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.jpcllett.0c00734>.

Supporting figures (PDF)

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## Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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