

Progress and Prospects of Solution-Processed Two-Dimensional Semiconductor Nanocrystals

Dmitry Porotnikov and Mikhail Zamkov*

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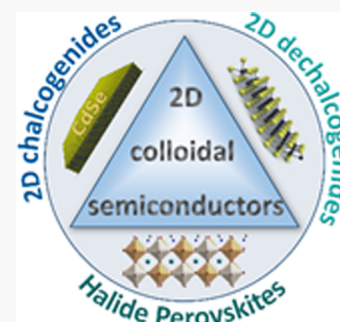
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ABSTRACT: Two-dimensional (2D) semiconductor nanocrystals processed from solution have become an attractive material platform for the development of optoelectronic devices. The synergy of the 2D charge carrier confinement and soft fabrication methods has enabled new paradigms in solid-state lighting, biosensing, and energy harvesting. In this Perspective, we will summarize recent research trends in the synthesis and applications of 2D semiconductor materials, focusing on three morphological classes: metal chalcogenides, halide perovskites, and transition metal dichalcogenides. Our aim is to describe the role that 2D geometry plays in the optical and electronic properties of these semiconductor nanostructures and to discuss emerging opportunities in their synthesis and applications.



INTRODUCTION

Two-dimensional (2D) colloidal nanomaterials have received a significant amount of attention in recent years. The synergy of the solution-phase processing and 2D quantum confinement has aided the development of novel optoelectronic materials, with a growing number of 2D semiconductors making the list of top-choice materials for electrocatalytic, photovoltaic, and light-emitting applications. The driving force behind the growing interest in 2D semiconductors stems from their appealing quantum properties that differ from those of lower dimensional nanostructures as well as bulk phases. Among the potential benefits, the 2D geometry offers a large surface area, enhanced optical extinction, strong exciton binding, and thickness-tunable band gap. Meanwhile, the solution route to the fabrication and deposition of 2D semiconductors offers a powerful strategy for producing on-demand shapes and sizes, developing heterostructured and intercalated compositions, or processing nanoparticles on substrates.

The family of 2D semiconductors can be subdivided into three basic categories (see Figure 1): (1) graphene-like, single or several-layered structures, including nitrides,^{1,2} transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDCs) (e.g., MoS₂), metal oxides,³ metal–organic frameworks nanosheets (MOFs),⁴ covalent–organic frameworks (COFs),⁵ MXenes,⁶ layered double hydroxides (LDHs),⁷ and 2D metals;⁸ (2) halide perovskite-derived 2D materials with either a layered hybrid morphology (e.g., Ruddlesden–Popper (RP) type) or a fully inorganic composition; and (3) transition metal chalcogenide (TMC) nanoplatelets (NPLs) and nanoribbons (e.g., CdSe or PbS). In recent years, colloidal routes to the synthesis and deposition of these materials have evolved as an alternative to more traditional methods based on chemical vapor deposition

(CVD),⁹ molecular beam epitaxy,¹⁰ and mechanical exfoliation,¹¹ offering superior capabilities in terms of nanoparticle design and substrate processability. In this Perspective, we will briefly review the basic properties and distinctive characteristics of three aforementioned 2D material classes and highlight some of the recent advances and emerging trends associated with each 2D morphology.

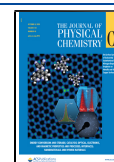
DISCUSSION

2D Transition Metal Chalcogenides. The remarkable light-emitting characteristics represent one of the primary reasons for the rising popularity of 2D TMCs. The beneficial effect of the 2D geometry on the optical properties of TMC colloids is illustrated through a side-by-side comparison between 0D and 2D CdSe-based quantum dots (QDs) in Figure 2a. Arguably, the most rewarding feature of the 2D architecture is a narrow emission line width (40–50 meV).^{12,13} Compared with 0D CdSe nanocrystals (NCs), the photoluminescence (PL) full width at half-maximum (fwhm) of 2D CdSe NPLs is about half the value, which represents a significant improvement in the color purity for potential applications (Figure 2a). Such narrow PL line widths result from the uniform thickness of 2D CdSe colloids, which are composed of a well-defined number of atomic layers. Small

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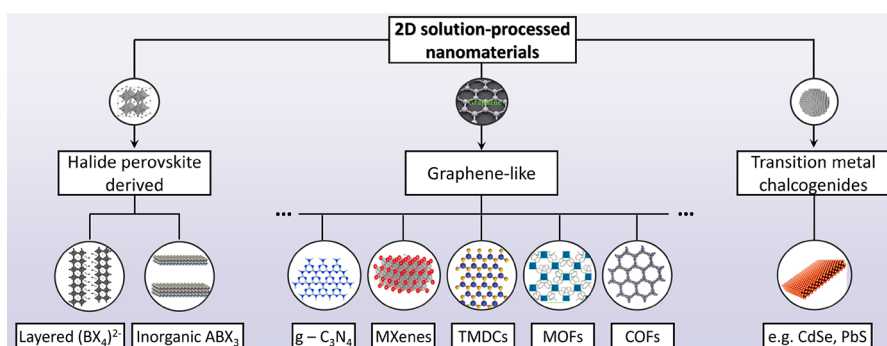


Figure 1. Popular classes of 2D solution-processed semiconductor nanocrystals.

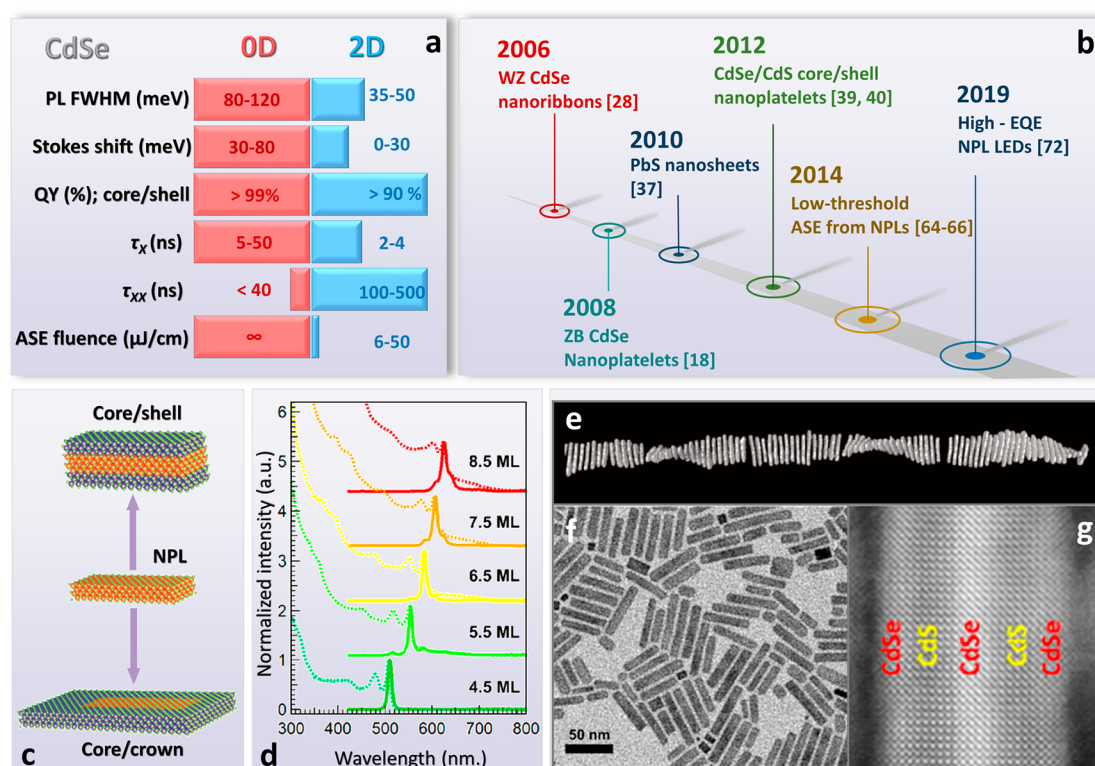


Figure 2. (a) Comparison of optoelectronic properties between 0D and 2D CdSe-based colloids. (b) Chronology of 2D TMC material development highlighting important milestones. (c) Representation of core/shell and core/crown NPL geometries. Adapted with permission from ref 40. Copyright 2012 American Chemical Society. (d) Optical characteristics of CdSe NPLs showcasing narrow emission line widths and a broad range of spectral tunability. Adapted with permission from ref 36. Copyright 2018 American Chemical Society. (e) Tomographic reconstruction of CdSe NPLs self-assembled into twisted ribbons. Adapted with permission from ref 27. Copyright 2017 American Association for the Advancement of Science. (f) TEM of 7.5 monolayer CdSe NPLs. Adapted with permission from ref 36. Copyright 2018 American Chemical Society. (g) High-resolution high-angle annular dark-field scanning transmission electron microscopy (HAADF-STEM) image of the 4CdSe/5CdS/4CdSe/5CdS/4CdSe NPL heterostructure. Adapted with permission from ref 57. Copyright 2019 American Chemical Society.

Stokes shifts are another testament to the uniform thickness of 2D TMC nanostructures. The lack of thickness variations across CdSe NPLs leads to a flat energy landscape, which gives rise to relatively low Stokes shifts of 0–30 meV¹⁴ (as compared with the typical 25–85 meV range reported for 0D CdSe NCs¹⁵). Finally, 2D CdSe NPLs exhibit a high photoluminescence quantum yield (PLQY) resulting from a low density of exciton and charge traps along the surface¹⁶ as well as strong exciton binding.¹⁷ Even without shelling, it is generally possible to achieve a PLQY in the 20–50% range.^{18–21} Meanwhile, the introduction of the wide-gap shell allows the CdSe-based nonresonant photoluminescence (NPL) emission QY to be extended to >90%.⁵⁷

A large density of states (DOS) represents another appealing characteristic of 2D TMC nanostructures. An increased DOS arises from the relaxed confinement in the two lateral dimensions of 2D TMCs, making this geometry the preferred option for light sensitization and biosensing as a high oscillator strength absorber. Owing to the large DOS, 2D CdSe NPLs can also exhibit an enhanced extinction for the intersubband absorption, with corresponding transitions tunable in the infrared range across important telecommunications wavelengths.²² Further advantages of the 2D geometry are evident in energy transfer applications, where the synergy of a large DOS and a low Stokes shifts contributes to an efficient cascade energy transfer in nanosheet assemblies.^{22,23} An increased

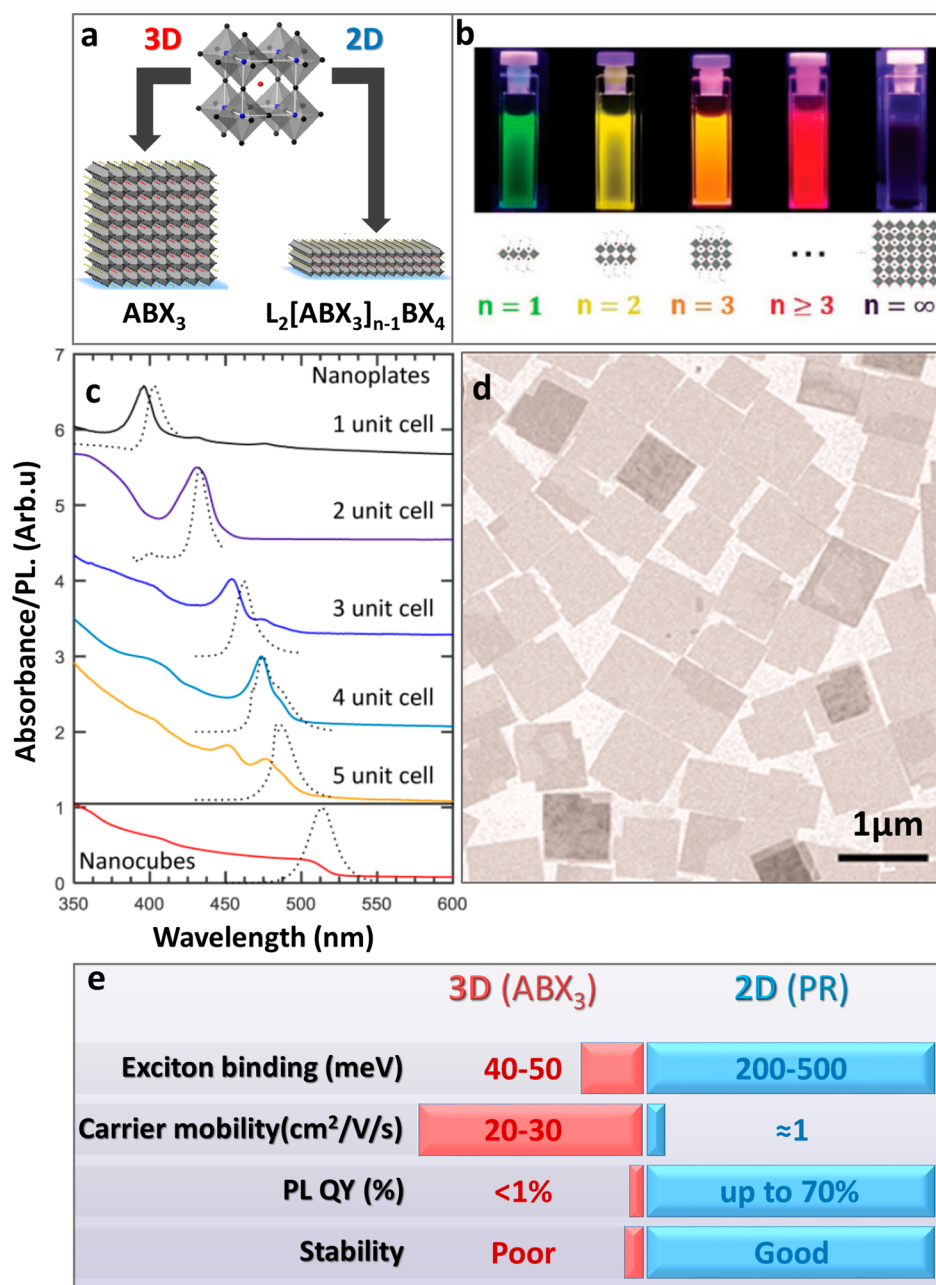


Figure 3. (a) Representation of cubic (3D) and nanosheet (2D) geometries of halide perovskites. A = cesium, formamidineum, methylammonium; B = Pb, Sn; X = Cl, Br, I; L = butylammonium, octylammonium. Adapted with permission from ref 127. Copyright 2017 American Chemical Society. (b) Images of cuvettes containing MAPbBr₃I_{3-y} NPL suspensions illuminated with UV light. From left to right, the thickness increases from a single monolayer ($n = 1$) stepwise to a bulk-like value ($n = \infty$). Adapted with permission from ref 115. Copyright 2016 Wiley-VCH. (c) Absorption (solid lines) and emission (dashed lines) spectra of all-inorganic, 2D CsPbBr₃ NPLs and 0D CsPbBr₃ nanocubes. Adapted with permission from ref 123. Copyright 2016 American Chemical Society. (d) TEM image of 2D CsPbBr₃ nanosheets. Adapted with permission from ref 125. Copyright 2016 American Chemical Society. (e) Comparison of optoelectronic properties between bulk 3D (red) and quasi-2D (blue) hybrid halide perovskites.

number of states in 2D semiconductors is also important for multiexciton properties and applications. First, a high degeneracy of band edge excitations in 2D TMCs allows more excitons to be injected within the same particle as compared with lower dimensional colloids.²⁴ This property is potentially useful for multielectron photocatalytic applications, which require more than a single photoinduced charge to complete a full catalytic cycle (e.g., H₂ production or water oxidation). Second, a large DOS in conjunction with a low electron–hole overlap in 2D TMCs give rise to long-lived

multiexciton populations. For instance, the biexciton lifetime of 2D CdSe NPLs exceeds that of 0D CdSe QDs by more than an order of magnitude. (See Figure 2a.) The ability to achieve long-lived biexciton populations in 2D NPLs has been actively explored toward the realization of a low-threshold amplified stimulated emission (ASE) in QD lasing media. Other interesting phenomena associated with the 2D geometry include the possibility of surface-spin-polarized exciton emission²⁵ and electron shakeup in 2D TMC NPLs.²⁶

Chronologically, the development of 2D TMCs has commenced with the demonstration of 1.4 nm thick wurtzite CdSe nanosheets, called nanoribbons or quantum belts.^{16,28–30} (See Figure 2b.) The synthesis of these nanostructures employed a so-called soft templating approach,¹⁹ which was presumably driven by the oriented attachment of preformed (CdSe)₁₃ clusters into stripes. Annealing of these cluster stripes produced 1.4 nm colloidal sheets with an atomically uniform thickness.^{16,19,31} Following the demonstration of CdSe nanoribbons, similar protocols were developed for the synthesis of 2D CdS,³² CdTe,²⁹ ZnS,³³ and ZnSe³³ colloids. Tunable-thickness, zincblende (ZB) 2D TMCs were first demonstrated by Ithurria in 2008.¹⁸ These nanostructures exhibited more complicated growth dynamics, recently investigated in the work of Norris et al.³⁴ It was proposed that in the case of ZB NPLs, faster growth occurred on thin facets, which, in comparison with large planar surfaces, had lower activation barriers. A similar approach was subsequently adapted for the fabrication of CdSe nanodisks.³⁵ With a proper postsynthetic treatment, these strategies have allowed the NPL thickness to be tuned in a broad 1–3 nm range (up to eight monolayers, Figure 2c–f).³⁶ A comparable method was employed for the synthesis of PbS nanosheets that were formed through the oriented attachment of <3 nm NCs in the presence of chloride compounds.³⁷

The synthesis of 2D TMCs progressed over the years, bringing about a broad diversity of morphologies and materials. An important milestone was the demonstration of CdSe/CdS core/shell NPL heterostructures exhibiting PLQYs of up to 80%.³⁸ (See Figure 2b,c.) The shell growth procedure could be performed with monolayer-level precision through the use of the colloidal atomic layer deposition method (c-ALD),^{39,40} which employed self-limiting growth steps. In addition to a regular core/shell CdSe/CdS NPL geometry, a novel heterostructured morphology comprising a CdSe/CdS core/crown arrangement has also been reported (Figure 2c).^{41,42} In this case, a CdSe core domain was overgrown by CdS only in lateral dimensions. The resulting CdS crown was shown to efficiently funnel optical excitation into the CdSe core.⁴² The crown deposition strategy was subsequently adapted for the synthesis of type-II core/crown NPLs comprising CdSe/CdTe semiconductor combination.⁴³ Going beyond Cd-based NPLs, 2D colloids of other semiconductors have been synthesized through various strategies. Cation exchange techniques⁴⁴ have been employed to convert CdSe/CdS NPLs to Cu₂Se/Cu₂S, PbSe/PbS, and ZnSe/ZnS.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, a popular Pb → Cd cation exchange strategy was applied to grow a CdS shell in PbS NPLs, enabling strongly emissive PbS/CdS core/shell NPLs (PLQY = 11%).^{46,47} The synthesis of noncadmium 2D TMC colloids, including Cu₂S⁴⁸ and SnSe⁴⁹ NPLs as well as layered FeS₂⁵⁰ and InSe,⁵¹ followed similar hot-injection chemistries. For instance, SnSe⁴⁹ NPLs were grown via the coalescence of smaller dots and sheets into larger NPL structures. Mn²⁺ doping further diversified the library of 2D TMC materials, enabling a giant exciton Zeeman splitting.^{52,53} It was shown that Mn²⁺ ions could substitute one or two Cd²⁺ ions in (CdSe)₁₃ clusters prior to their oriented attachment into nanosheets. Meanwhile, highly luminescent copper-doped ultrathin CdSe NPLs have proven promising as phosphors for white-light generation.⁵⁴ In addition, more complex structures,^{55,56} such as core/barrier/crown and double-well NPLs (Figure 2g),⁵⁷ have recently been synthesized.⁵⁸ A more

detailed description of the 2D TMC synthetic progress is available in several recent review papers.^{59–63}

The unique properties of 2D TMC colloids have been exemplified through the demonstration of high-efficiency optoelectronic devices. Active lasing media represent one of these applications. A combination of long-lived biexcitons and narrow emission line widths in 2D core/shell NPLs has enabled a low pump threshold fluence for ASE in the 4.4–6 μJ/cm² range under pulse excitation.^{64–66} Narrow emission line widths have also spurred the development of NPL light-emitting diodes (LEDs).^{67–69} Although these devices are relatively young,⁷⁰ NPL-based LEDs have already reached an impressive external quantum efficiency (EQE) of 19.2%,⁷¹ which is comparable to those of the best QD LEDs⁷² and organic light-emitting transistors (OLETs).⁷³ From the point of view of electronic transport, 2D materials are generally of utmost interest for achieving improved conduction. Nevertheless, a somewhat slower pace has been observed in the development of electron-transport applications, which, thus far, has resulted in the successful demonstration of a prominent photoconductivity response from PbS and CdSe NPLs.^{37,74}

2D Halide Perovskites. The first reports of 2D solution-processed halide perovskites date back to 30 years ago.^{75–77} It was not until recently, however, that the renewed demand for these materials had risen in the wake of high-efficiency 3D perovskite photovoltaic devices.^{78–82} Following the inaugural demonstration of dye-sensitized solar cells,⁷⁸ utilizing ABX₃ hybrid perovskite absorbers (A is an organic cation, B is commonly Pb²⁺, and X is a halide; see Figure 3a), the 2D hybrid morphology gained considerable interest as a quantum-confined version of these materials. Many benefits of quasi-2D^{83–86} halide perovskites have been associated with one particular geometry featuring an RP-type, (L)₂(A)_{n–1}B_nX_{3n+1}, chemical composition (where L = RNH₃⁺ = organic spacer; A⁺ = Cs, CH₃NH₃; B²⁺ = Pb, Sn, Ge; X[–] = Cl, Br, I; see Figure 3a). It employs a quantized number of (BX₄)^{2–} single layers, decoupled from each other by organic chains, which resembles the structure of traditional semiconductor quantum wells. Central to the success of RP perovskites was the possibility of tuning the number of 2D monolayers, which allowed the band gap (Figure 3b) and the flow of the excitation energy in light-emitting or light-harvesting assemblies to be controlled.^{87,88} Meanwhile, the presence of a strong 2D quantum confinement in each (BX₄)^{2–} nanosheet has given rise to an enhanced exciton binding energy⁸⁹ and improved humidity stability as compared with the 3D ABX₃ counterparts.^{84,87}

The ability to assemble quantum-well structures via the solution processing of quasi-2D halide perovskites^{90–93} has inspired the development of solar cells,^{84,94} LEDs,⁹⁵ resistive switching memories,⁹⁶ and photodetectors.⁹⁷ In the case of light-emitting applications, the quasi-2D morphology provided a unique tool for funneling electrical charges from large-band-gap components (thin layers) into small-band-gap recombination phases (thick layers) for an efficient concentration of energy. Along with the high PLQY (up to 70%)⁹⁸ and improved stability, the benefits of the quasi-2D RP perovskites have materialized in LEDs, with electroluminescence quantum efficiency (EQE) of 20.1%,^{95,99–102} which nearly matches that of commercialized devices.¹⁰³ Similar to LEDs, perovskite solar cells have taken advantage of quasi-2D quantum wells to control the energy flow across 2D layers. Aided by the hot-casting film deposition strategy,¹⁰⁴ the best examples of quasi-2D perovskite solar cells were able to achieve a power

conversion efficiency (PCE) of 17.5%.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, stacking 2D/3D phases has enabled additional improvements in device performance and stability, leading to PCE of 22%.¹⁰⁶ These characteristics have inspired the development of quasi-2D perovskite photodetectors.¹⁰⁷ With the optimized thickness of $n = 4(\text{BX}_4)^{2-}$ layers, quasi-2D hybrid perovskite nanowire photodetectors showed a responsivity of 1.5×10^4 A/W and a detectivity of 7×10^{15} Jones.⁹⁷ Remarkably, the latter figure of merit was two orders of magnitude greater than that of commercial silicon photodiodes. It should be noted that most of the aforementioned application examples have relied on solution-phase processing of 2D films. Nevertheless, applications requiring large sheet areas have been known to employ CVD^{90,108–110} or exfoliation-based¹¹¹ techniques for the direct growth of 2D flakes (e.g., MAPbI_3) for utilization in photodetectors.¹¹² These noncolloidal strategies have been the subject of several recent reviews.^{113,114}

All-inorganic, 0D CsPbX_3 perovskites were first introduced by Protesescu and Kovalenko et al.¹¹⁶ in 2015. The key benefit of this morphology was the absence of a volatile organic component, which usually compromised the device stability of quasi-2D hybrid perovskites. The 0D geometry also offered the highest degree of quantum confinement, enabling narrow emission bandwidths (<100 meV), high PLQYs (up to 90–100%), and short radiative lifetimes (1–29 ns).¹¹⁶ These promising characteristics of 0D CsPbX_3 QDs have quickly materialized in the demonstration of all-inorganic perovskite solar cells,^{117,118} lasing media,^{119,120} and high-efficiency LEDs.¹²¹ Shortly after the demonstration of 0D CsPbX_3 QDs, the original synthetic strategy was adapted to fabricating 2D NPLs with monolayer thickness control (Figure 3c,d).^{122–133} These 2D CsPbX_3 colloids represented the first all-inorganic 2D materials of halide perovskites, offering some interesting optoelectronic characteristics. For instance, the exciton binding energy of 2D NPLs (120–280 meV) was three to five times greater than that of 0D QDs, which implied a greater stability for optoelectronic devices (Figure 3e). Furthermore, the 2D morphology allowed the blue spectral region to be accessed¹³⁴ with better overall PLQY than that of 0D counterparts, which has prompted the development of blue LEDs.^{135,136} Finally, 2D CsPbX_3 were deemed more compatible for large-area devices, such as photodetectors.¹³⁷

2D Transition Metal Dichalcogenides. Starting with the discovery of graphene,^{138,139} atomically thin 2D nanomaterials have drawn the vast attention of the scientific community.¹⁴⁰ The promise of novel optoelectronic properties in 2D layered structures has given rise to a vast library of materials, which now include nitrides (h-BN, $\text{g-C}_3\text{N}_4$),^{1,2} TMDCs (e.g., MoS_2), layered metal oxides,³ MOFs,⁴ COFs,⁵ MXenes,⁶ LDHs,⁷ and metals⁸ (see Figure 1). In this Perspective, we focus on TMDCs as representatives of 2D semiconductors and one of the most studied classes of layered 2D materials given by a generalized formula of MX_2 (e.g., MoS_2 , WS_2 , MoSe_2 , WSe_2 , and MoTe_2 ; see Figure 4a,b).^{141,142} These structures exhibit a number of extraordinary properties, which include a layer-dependent band gap, high activities for hydrogen evolution at unsaturated edge sites,¹⁴³ and high theoretical capacity for charge storage (due to a large surface area).^{144,145} Furthermore, colloidal 2D TMDCs can be hybridized with graphene and other materials to achieve superior electrochemical and photocatalytic properties.^{146–149}

Early strategies for the fabrication of TMDC materials have relied on mechanical/chemical exfoliations and CVD. CVD

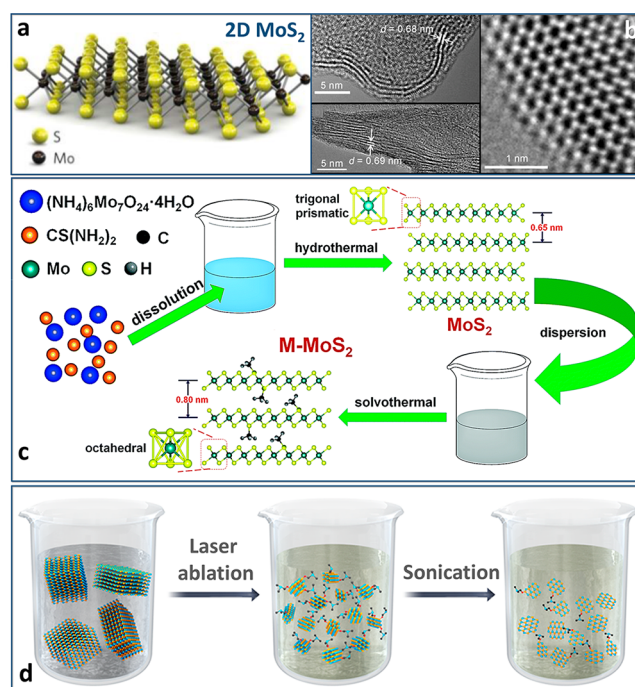


Figure 4. (a) Schematic illustration of a single-layer MoS_2 . Adapted with permission from ref 150. Copyright 2011 Springer. (b) High-resolution TEM images of MoS_2 layers. Adapted with permission from ref 157. Copyright 2014 American Chemical Society. (c) Schematic illustration for the solvothermal synthesis of pristine MoS_2 and interlayer-expanded methyl-functionalized (M-MoS_2) nanosheets. Adapted with permission from ref 151. Copyright 2017 The Royal Society of Chemistry. (d) Two-step synthesis of colloidal 2D TMDCs by means of femtosecond laser ablation and sonication-assisted liquid exfoliation. Adapted with permission from ref 152. Copyright 2019 Nature Research.

has been particularly effective for growing high-quality sheets with controllable size and thickness;¹⁵³ however, the experimental requirements of high temperature, high vacuum, and specific substrates have inherently limited the feasibility of CVD-grown TMDCs in a number of applications. The colloidal synthesis of 2D TMDCs,^{154,155} on the contrary, promises low cost and scalability, which are essential prerequisites for energy storage/conversion applications.¹⁵⁶ Solution-based strategies also provide a rich platform for the chemical functionalization and hybridization of TMDCs with other materials. In recent years, colloidal techniques for the synthesis and processing of 2D TMDCs, including top-down liquid-phase exfoliation methods¹⁵⁴ and bottom-up chemical synthesis,^{157–160} have gradually evolved to achieve uniform compositions and sizes as well as to attain particular metastable phases of TMDCs (Figure 4c,d).

The advent of colloidal strategies for processing of 2D TMDCs has opened up new opportunities for device applications.^{145,161,162} Rechargeable batteries represent one of such examples, where TMDCs offer a high charge storage capacity owing to the large surface area and low intercalation barriers. The main issue of exfoliated TMDC flakes is that they are subject to van der Waals aggregation back into a layered bulk configuration. Colloidal processing can help the avoidance of such limitations by enabling the intercalation of TMDCs with other conductive materials to form composite electrodes.¹⁶³ Solution-phase methods have also contributed to electrocatalytic applications of TMDCs, where materials such

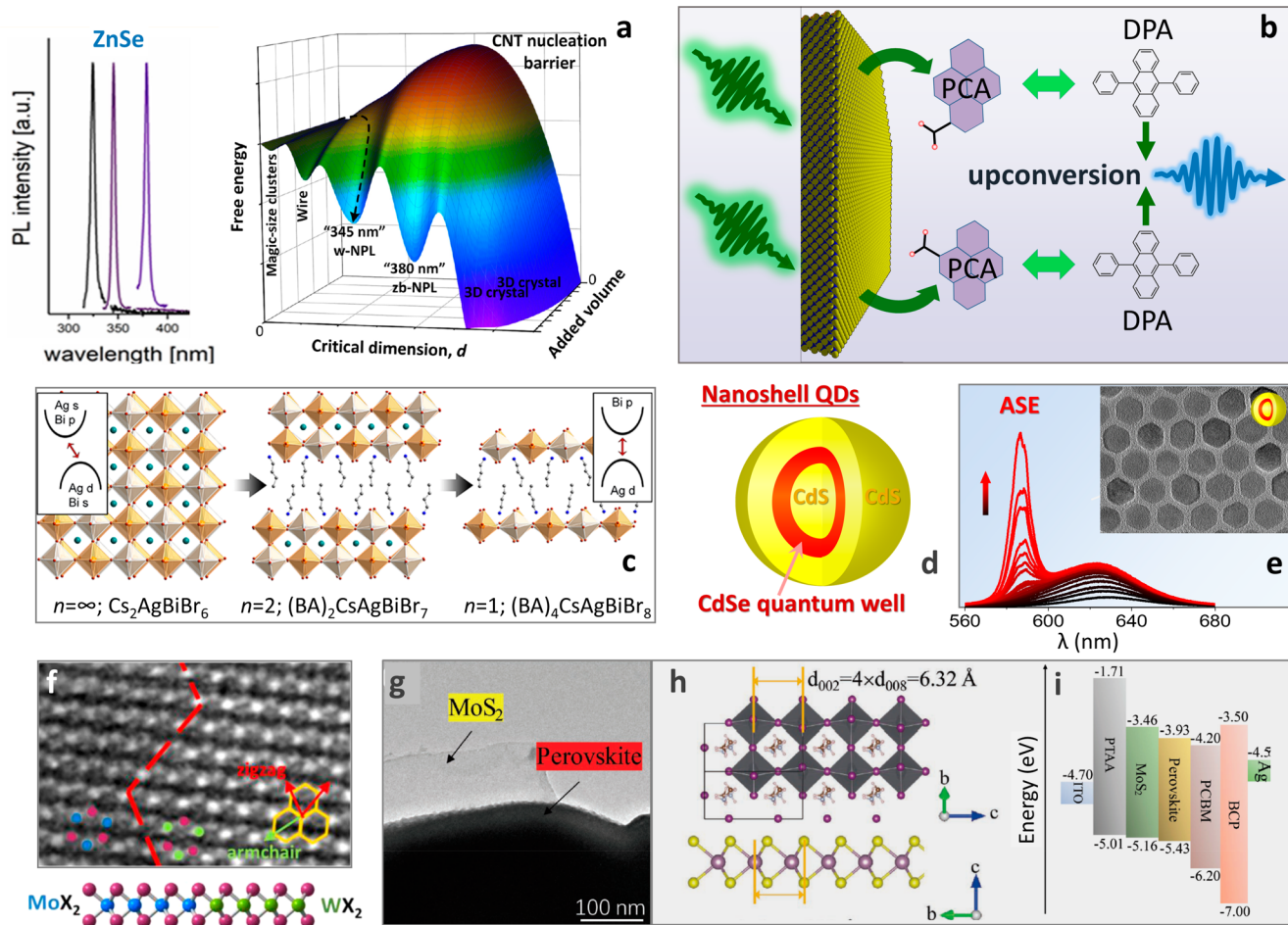


Figure 5. (a) Emission of ZnSe NPLs and the potential energy landscape for the formation of different-dimensionality structures (magic-sized clusters, 1D, 2D, or 3D) with a characteristic evolution of the free energy. An example of the reaction trajectory leading to “345 nm” ZnSe NPLs is shown by the dashed arrow. Adapted with permission from ref 180. Copyright 2020 American Chemical Society. (b) Proposed green-to-blue upconversion in an assembly of CdSe NPLs and (1-pyrenecarboxylic acid (PCA)). Triplet energy transfer from an NPL to a PCA molecule is enhanced by the surface localization of charges and is followed by triple–triplet annihilation in diphenylanthracene (DPA). (c) Layered double perovskites with heavy-metal-free compositions: $(\text{BA})_4\text{AgBiBr}_8$ ($n = 1$; $\text{BA} = \text{CH}_3(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{NH}_3^+$) and $(\text{BA})_2\text{CsAgBiBr}_7$ ($n = 2$) and the 3D double perovskite $\text{Cs}_2\text{AgBiBr}_6$. Adapted with permission from ref 173. Copyright 2018 American Chemical Society. (d) Schematic illustration of a 2D $\text{CdS}_{\text{bulk}}/\text{CdSe}/\text{CdS}_{\text{shell}}$ quantum-well nanoshell geometry. (e) Amplified stimulated emission from 2D $\text{CdS}_{\text{bulk}}/\text{CdSe}/\text{CdS}_{\text{shell}}$ QDs observed at a low excitation fluence threshold of $38 \mu\text{J}/\text{cm}^2$. (f) High-resolution (HAADF-STEM) image of the heterointerface of the WSe_2 - MoS_2 lateral heterostructure. Adapted with permission from ref 174. Copyright 2015 American Chemical Society. (g) Top-view TEM image of MoS_2 with a MAPbI_3 perovskite layer grown on its surface. (h) Side view of the atomic crystal heterojunction of MAPbI_3 and MoS_2 . (i) Energy band structure of the perovskite solar cell with a MoS_2 interlayer. Panels g–i are adapted with permission from ref 175. Copyright 2019 Wiley-VCH.

as MoS_2 show promise as low-cost catalysts for the electron-driven hydrogen-evolution reactions (HERs).¹⁶⁴ As a result of solution processing, MoS_2 could be conjugated with noble-metal NCs, leading to enhanced catalytic performance.^{165,166} Similarly, metal oxide catalytic heterostructures were developed by hybridizing TiO_2 ¹⁶⁷ and Fe_3O_4 ¹⁶⁸ with MoS_2 nanosheets. More recently, solution methods were used to fabricate TMDC/chalcogenide heterojunctions (e.g., MoS_2/CdS and WS_2/CdS) suitable for photocatalytic H_2 production.¹⁶⁹ In addition to catalytic and battery applications, solution-processed TMDCs have also been employed in biomarkers,¹⁷⁰ sensors,¹⁷¹ and field-effect transistors.¹⁷²

■ CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Solution-processed 2D semiconductors represent a relatively new generation of nanomaterials. Like most quantum-confined structures, 2D materials benefit from a tunable band gap. In addition, the 2D geometry leaves a unique imprint on the

optoelectronic characteristics of semiconductor QDs, leading to such attractive features as ultranarrow emission line widths and long-lived biexcitons in TMCs, improved humidity stability and strong exciton binding in 2D halide perovskites, and large reactive surfaces in TMDCs.

Many properties of 2D semiconductor nanostructures originate from surfaces. Notably, the effect of surfactants on both the and structural properties of these materials is uniquely different for the three structural classes investigated in this Perspective. For instance, most Cd-based 2D TMC colloids (e.g., CdSe, CdS NPLs) are structurally static with respect to surface ligand interactions and do not undergo morphological changes upon ligand desorption. As a result, 2D TMCs are stable both in solution and in a solid form under ambient conditions. The main issue of colloidal 2D TMCs concerns the effect of surface ligands on optoelectronic properties. This is because even a partial loss of surfactants in the majority of 0D and 2D TMC nanostructures produces surface states within

the nanoparticle band gap. These low-energy states quench optical and electrical excitations in 2D TMC colloids, degrading their performance. Consequently, shelling of 2D TMCs is often required for device applications. In contrast with TMCs, the more dynamic halide perovskite system is easily destabilized by surface chemistry manipulations, leading to halide vacancies or phase transformations. This appears to be the main obstacle for both hybrid and inorganic perovskite devices. Contrary to TMCs, however, the properties of halide perovskites are more defect-tolerant. The dynamic changes in their surface passivation do not always produce low-energy states that quench the PL or trap photoinduced charges. In short, halide perovskites have poor structural stability, but their optoelectronic properties are less affected by the loss of surfactants. Similar to TMCs, TMDCs are structurally stable with respect to ligand interactions. TMDC colloids are also more soluble than TMCs and perovskite nanostructures and generally require lower ligand densities. The main issue of solution-processed TMDCs concerns their electrical performance in solids. Molecular ligands, which are a byproduct of the solution synthesis or processing, inhibit the transfer of charges, presenting significant hurdles for device applications of 2D TMDCs. Consequently, improved protocols for removing surface molecules from chemically prepared TMDCs and TMDC-based heterostructures are in a great demand.

2D Transition Metal Chalcogenides. The future development of 2D TMC materials is likely to explore their attractive PL characteristics. Ultranarrow PL line widths and high QYs of Cd-based chalcogenide NPLs have already materialized in the demonstration of efficient LEDs⁷¹ and will undoubtedly continue to generate research activity in light-emitting materials. Colloidal 2D TMCs are also likely to emerge at the forefront of nanoscale morphologies for QD lasing.¹⁷⁶ This is because 2D TMCs are among the very few nanoscale materials that offer a combination of long multi-exciton lifetimes¹⁷⁷ and low exciton recombination losses, the synergy of which warrants a low-threshold ASE.¹⁷⁸ Finally, one could envision the implementation of 2D core/crown TMC films in luminescent solar concentrators,⁴² where high optical extinction and strong exciton binding could lead to a competitive performance.¹⁷⁹

A smooth transition of the 2D TMC materials to device applications is contingent upon the successful resolution of several synthetic issues. One of those concerns the toxicity of cadmium and other heavy-metal ions, which is likely to cause restricted applications. At the present, NPLs of “green” semiconductors are much less explored. The synthesis of these materials requires a mechanistic understanding of the complex growth reactions associated with 2D TMC phases. A step forward toward addressing this issue was recently made through the realization of Zn-based NPLs exhibiting UV emission (Figure 5a).¹⁸⁰ A novel synthetic approach used in that study may suggest future strategies for the fabrication of non-Cd 2D TMC materials. Synthetic scalability represents another potential issue of 2D TMCs. A typical colloidal synthesis of NPLs yields a high fraction of non-2D structures (e.g., clusters and spherical QDs) that need to be isolated and discarded. Whereas separating heavier NPLs from the reaction byproduct is usually possible, a more directed synthesis of NPLs would prove to be more economical and scalable.

Several future directions for the possible expansion of 2D TMC materials could be expected as a result of emerging research in this field. For instance, photocatalytic systems

utilizing 2D NPLs are likely to receive attention due to their large multiphoton absorption cross sections relative to 0D and 1D nanostructures. Because most photochemical reactions require multiple excited electrons (e.g., two-electron H₂ production or four-hole water oxidation),^{181,182} a single semiconductor QD must capture a minimum of several photons to complete the photocatalytic cycle. Considering that multiphoton absorption grows proportionally to the particle volume,¹⁸³ larger size 2D TMCs should result in enhanced photocatalytic rates.^{184,185} These expectations are strongly supported by early reports of an enhanced H₂ production yield in 2D CdS NPLs.^{186–188} Future applications of 2D TMCs are also likely to target triplet energy transfer reactions. Recent studies have shown that 0D semiconductor NCs can transfer triplet excitons to a surrounding solid matrix or acceptor dyes^{189,190} through a Dexter electron-transfer mechanism. This is a short-range process that benefits from a strong overlap of donor and acceptor wave functions. In this regard, 2D TMCs may represent the preferred geometry of a triplet exciton donor because both excited charges in nanosheets are located on the surface (Figure 5b). Other possibilities for the development of 2D applications could be associated with a relatively new member of the 2D TMC family known as nanoshell QDs^{191–193} (Figure 5d,e). These colloids represent a modification of quantum dot quantum wells (QDQWs),^{194–196} where the 2D spherical shell of CdSe is grown onto bulk-size CdS seeds, as illustrated in Figure 5d. The presence of a bulk-size core in nanoshell QDs allows the volume of the quantum-confined layer to be increased beyond that of NPLs, which results in a lower exciton density and long multiexciton lifetimes.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, the thickness of the 2D layer in nanoshell QDs is not limited to six to eight monolayers, as in the case of NPLs, and can offer broader spectral tuning of the emissive shell. Meanwhile, a nearly spherical shape of nanoshells is expected to facilitate their assembly into close-packed solids, a task that is notoriously challenging in the case of 1D or 2D semiconductor colloids.

2D Halide Perovskites. 2D halide perovskites already outperform their 3D counterparts in photovoltaic and light-emitting devices. With reported device performance often matching or surpassing industry standards, the future challenges are likely to focus on ensuring the long-term stability of organometallic halide perovskites in moist environments.¹⁹⁷ A promising route to achieve this goal relies on incorporating graphene or other 2D TMDCs structures in 2D perovskite films, which may offer a feasible solution to the stability issue.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, interfacing halide perovskites with other 2D materials or carbon nanotubes¹⁹⁹ may allow the realization of new functional materials and devices.²⁰⁰ We should also mention that many opportunities lie ahead for a relatively new class of all-inorganic 2D perovskites (e.g., CsPbX₃ nanosheets). One of the challenges in the future development of these materials concerns the ability to fabricate large-area structures. Stacking layers of different thicknesses represents another important goal that could enable energy funneling in assemblies of 2D inorganic perovskites. Significant progress in this direction was recently achieved by Urban et al.,²⁰¹ who demonstrated an assembly of CsPbBr₃ NPLs exhibiting cascade FRET, similar to energy funnels in RP perovskite films.

Replacing or substituting lead with nontoxic metal ions will result in more environmentally friendly compounds with new properties and functionalities. Lead-free perovskites such as

AsSnX_3 , $\text{Cs}_2\text{AgBiBr}_6$, and $\text{A}_3\text{M}_2\text{X}_9$ ($\text{M} = \text{Bi}$ or Sb) have been identified as promising semiconductors with low toxicity.²⁰² Another notable example is double perovskite crystals (e.g., $\text{Cs}_2\text{AgBiBr}_6$ and $\text{Cs}_2\text{AgInCl}_6$; see Figure 5c).^{173,203} Reducing the dimensionality of such 3D double perovskites to 2D will open up new space to explore their optical and electronic properties.

2D Transition Metal Dichalcogenides. The colloidal synthesis of TMDC materials provides a straightforward strategy for the scalable production functionalization and hybridization of nanosheets, thus facilitating their exploration for various applications. A number of colloidal methods have been developed for the preparation of 2D TMDC nanosheets, including solvent-phase exfoliation, surfactant-assisted exfoliation, ion intercalation and exfoliation, and wet chemical methods. After their transfer to a solution, 2D TMDC nanosheets offer great opportunities for the preparation of functional hybrid heteronanostructures with a variety of nanoscale partners, including biomaterials, MOFs, metals, metal oxides, and metal chalcogenides. Presently, the development of colloidal routes to process 2D TMDCs faces a few obstacles, one of which is related to the change in the TMDC surface energy. This interaction is particularly significant in the case of atomically thin layers. Careful analysis of TMDC–ligand systems has to be performed, as many characteristics of the 2D geometry could be suppressed due to ligands. Consequently, the future development of colloidal TMDCs will likely focus on controlling the aforementioned ligand–sheet interactions. As an alternative strategy, effective ligand stripping techniques could be employed for the treatment of deposited or assembled nanosheets.

Synthetic efforts for the development of colloidal TMDCs are likely to focus on two main aspects. The first one is the structure-engineering task, which will focus on the morphological optimization of these materials toward increasing the number of active sites and improving the edge morphology. The other goal is likely to focus on achieving an efficient charge transfer across TMDC materials by means of elemental doping, strain/interface engineering, and 2D heterostructure assembly (Figure 5f–i). The two synthetic efforts will ultimately create a next-generation material platform for achieving novel physical and chemical properties. Future synthetic efforts are also likely to focus on solution-based methods for the preparation of 2D lateral and vertical epitaxial heterostructures,^{204,205} providing new opportunities for device applications.²⁰⁵ The general goal of the colloidal synthesis should also focus on the product scalability. Currently, the amount of colloidal 2D TMDC nanosheets, especially the single-layer TMDC nanosheets, is still relatively low for practical applications in supercapacitors and batteries. Therefore, the high-yield production of a single-layer 2D TMDC is in high demand. Ultimately, solution-phase methods will provide a viable path toward the scalable production, functionalization, and hybridization of TMDC nanosheets, thus facilitating the exploration of TMDC-based nanomaterials.

In summary, 2D semiconductors exhibit unique optoelectronic properties enabled by a relaxed motion of electrical charges along two spatial dimensions. Owing to recent advances in the colloidal synthesis and solution-processing of these materials, the stage is set for the low-cost and scalable production of high-performance light-emitting, charge-transport, and light-harvesting devices. This work summarizes

recent research trends in 2D solution-processed semiconductor materials by focusing on three morphological classes: metal chalcogenides, halide perovskites, and TMDCs. We have described the unique role of 2D geometry in the optical and electronic properties of these semiconductor nanostructures and discussed emerging opportunities in their synthesis and applications.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Author

Mikhail Zamkov – The Center for Photochemical Sciences and Department of Physics, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43402, United States; orcid.org/0000-0002-8638-2972; Email: zamkovm@bgsu.edu

Author

Dmitry Porotnikov – The Center for Photochemical Sciences and Department of Physics, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43402, United States

Complete contact information is available at:

<https://pubs.acs.org/10.1021/acs.jpcc.0c06868>

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

Biographies

Prof. Mikhail Zamkov obtained his Ph.D. degrees from Kansas State University in 2003. He is now an Full Professor at Bowling Green State University. His research focuses on the electronic, chemical, and optical properties of semiconductor nanostructures (QDs) and hybrid nanoscale materials prepared by means of colloidal synthesis. Web: <http://physics.bgsu.edu/~zamkovm/>.

Dmitry Porotnikov is a Ph.D. candidate in Photochemical Science at Bowling Green State University. He obtained his M.S. degree in Material Chemistry in 2017 at Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia. He works under the supervision of Prof. Zamkov at Bowling Green State University. His research is focused on the synthesis and application of colloidal semiconductor nanocrystals.

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