

Stabilization of anti-aromatic and strained five-membered rings with a transition metal

Congqing Zhu¹, Shunhua Li¹, Ming Luo¹, Xiaoxi Zhou¹, Yufen Niu¹, Minglian Lin², Jun Zhu^{1,2*}, Zexing Cao^{1,2}, Xin Lu^{1,2}, Tingbin Wen¹, Zhaoxiong Xie¹, Paul v. R. Schleyer³ and Haiping Xia^{1*}

Anti-aromatic compounds, as well as small cyclic alkynes or carbynes, are particularly challenging synthetic goals. The combination of their destabilizing features hinders attempts to prepare molecules such as pentalyne, an 8 π -electron anti-aromatic bicycle with extremely high ring strain. Here we describe the facile synthesis of osmapentalyne derivatives that are thermally viable, despite containing the smallest angles observed so far at a carbyne carbon. The compounds are characterized using X-ray crystallography, and their computed energies and magnetic properties reveal aromatic character. Hence, the incorporation of the osmium centre not only reduces the ring strain of the parent pentalyne, but also converts its Hückel anti-aromaticity into Craig-type Möbius aromaticity in the metallapentalynes. The concept of aromaticity is thus extended to five-membered rings containing a metal-carbon triple bond. Moreover, these metal-aromatic compounds exhibit unusual optical effects such as near-infrared photoluminescence with particularly large Stokes shifts, long lifetimes and aggregation enhancement.

Aromaticity is a fascinating topic that has long interested both experimentalists and theoreticians because of its ever-increasing diversity^{1–5}. The Hückel aromaticity rule⁶ applies to cyclic circuits of $4n + 2$ mobile electrons, but Möbius topologies favour $4n$ delocalized electron counts^{7–10}. In general, aromatic compounds are substantially more stable thermodynamically—and anti-aromatic compounds less stable—than appropriate non-aromatic reference systems. Accordingly, anti-aromatic compounds (such as pentalyne (**I**), Fig. 1a) are often hard to prepare and isolate because of their unfavourable energies and high reactivity¹¹.

The realization of small cyclic alkynes also challenges synthetic chemists because the angle strain associated with the highly distorted triple bonds^{12–18} must be overcome. Thus, tetramethylcycloheptyne¹⁵ is the smallest isolable carbocyclic alkyne, and benzyne, cyclohexyne and cyclopentyne have only been trapped as reaction intermediates¹⁴ or observed by infrared spectroscopy at low temperatures¹⁶. Not surprisingly, pentalyne **I** has never been reported because the extreme strain in its five-membered cycloalkyne ring further compounds its expected anti-aromatic instability.

The introduction of a metal fragment is an efficient strategy to stabilize cyclic alkynes by reducing ring strain^{19–31}. Two outstanding examples are 1-zirconacyclopent-3-yne¹⁹ and osmabenzynes²³ (the smallest isolated cyclic alkyne and metal carbyne, respectively), which were synthesized recently in the pioneering works by Suzuki and Jia. These two molecules can be regarded as the result of replacement of one sp^3 or sp hybridized carbon atom in cyclopentyne or benzyne, respectively, by a transition metal. We show here that the introduction of a transition metal into pentalyne **I** allows the realization of the smallest cyclic metal carbynes to date (Fig. 1). Moreover, the involvement of transition-metal d orbitals in the π conjugation switches the Hückel anti-aromaticity of pentalyne **I** into the Möbius aromaticity of a metallapentalyne (**II**, Fig. 1a). This significantly enhances the stabilization due to transition-metal substitution.

Results and discussion

Synthesis, characterization and reactivity of osmapentalynes.

Treatment of complex **1** (ref. 32) with methyl propiolate ($\text{HC}\equiv\text{CCOOCH}_3$) at room temperature produced osmapentalyne **2a** (Fig. 1b) in 80% yield in only 5 min. Remarkably, solid **2a** can be stored at room temperature for three months and is even persistent thermally at 120 °C in air for 3 h. Similarly, ethyl and tert-butyl propiolates also react with complex **1** to give the corresponding osmapentalynes in 77% and 50% yields, respectively. A plausible mechanism for the formation of osmapentalynes is proposed in Supplementary Fig. S1. Osmapentalyne **2a** was characterized by high-resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS) and by ¹H, ³¹P and ¹³C NMR spectroscopy. Three strongly down-field ¹H chemical shifts of osmapentalyne **2a** at 14.25, 9.27 and 8.32 ppm suggest that the metallabicycle is aromatic (Fig. 2a). Consistently, the Os \equiv C signal, observed at 324.5 ppm in the ¹³C NMR spectrum, is at an only slightly lower field than the 264.9–316.4 ppm range for osmabenzynes^{23–27}.

X-ray diffraction revealed the key structural features of **2a** (Fig. 1c). It is an essentially planar eight-membered metallabicycle, and the mean deviation from the least-squares plane is 0.0415 Å. The C–C bond lengths (1.377–1.402 Å) are similar to those of benzene (1.396 Å), suggesting aromatic π -conjugation, as represented by resonance structures **2A–2E** in Fig. 2b. Structure **2B** shows cumulative double bonds in a five-membered metallacycle. Similar features have been reported previously, for example, in metallacycloallenes^{20,33} and metallacyclocumulenes^{34,35}. The 1.845 Å Os \equiv C triple bond length in **2a** is slightly longer than those of Os \equiv C triple bonds in acyclic osmium carbynes (1.671–1.841 Å)²⁵ (based on a search of the Cambridge Structural Database, CSD version 5.33, in November 2011). Notably, the 129.5° carbyne carbon bond angle in **2a** is the smallest yet observed, and such distortion must result in considerable strain. Bond angles at carbyne carbons range from 147° to 156° in metallabenzynes^{23–27},

¹State Key Laboratory of Physical Chemistry of Solid Surfaces and Department of Chemistry, College of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China, ²Fujian Provincial Key Laboratory of Theoretical and Computational Chemistry, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China, ³Department of Chemistry, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602, USA. *e-mail: jun.zhu@xmu.edu.cn; hpxia@xmu.edu.cn

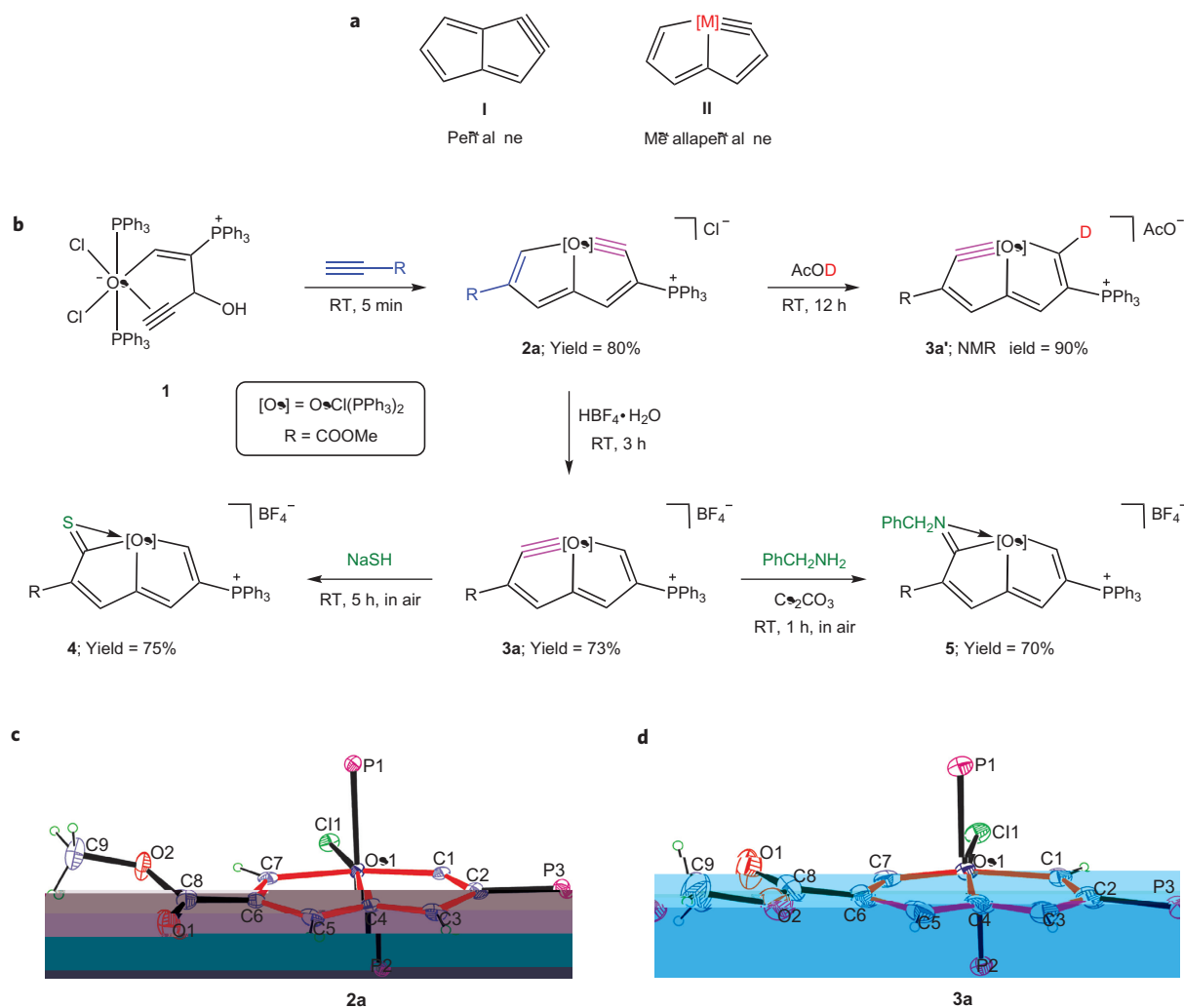


Figure 1 | Synthesis, structure and reactivity of osmapentalynes. **a**, Anti-aromatic pentalyne **I** and aromatic metallapentalyne **II**. [M] = metal fragment. **b**, Synthesis of osmapentalynes **2a** and **3a** and their reactions to deuterated **3a** (**3a'**) as well as **4** and **5**. The reactions of **2a** with electrophiles (AcOD or HBF₄) shift the metal-carbon triple bond, whereas the reactions of **3a** with sodium hydrosulfide or benzylamine nucleophiles illustrate the electrophilic character of the carbyne carbon in osmapentalynes. **c,d**, X-ray molecular structures for cations of **2a** (**c**) and **3a** (**d**) drawn with 50% probability (the phenyl groups in the PPh₃ moieties are omitted for clarity). RT, room temperature.

the smallest cyclic metal carbynes previously reported, as well as in metallacyclopentynes^{19–22}, the smallest cyclic alkynes.

Treatment of **2a** with HBF₄·H₂O forms **3a** (Fig. 1b) through a tautomeric shift of the Os≡C triple bond to the other five-membered ring. The X-ray structure of **3a** (Fig. 1d) reveals a similar Os≡C bond length (1.777 Å) and Os≡C–C angle (131.2°), as well as its near planarity (the mean deviation is 0.0218 Å from the least-squares plane). Such tautomeric shifts, which indicate π-conjugation, were also observed for analogous osmapentalynes with ethyl and tert-butyl substituents. Reaction of **2a** with CH₃COOD (AcOD) gave the deuterated osmapentalyne, **3a'** (Fig. 1b). HRMS of **3a** and **3a'** showed molecular ion peaks at 1159.2416 and 1160.2454 (*m/z*), respectively. Protonation (electrophilic attack) demonstrates the nucleophilic character of the carbyne carbon of the osmapentalyne Os≡C triple bond. Metal carbynes are ambiphilic and can also be attacked by nucleophiles^{25,36}. Thus, products **4** and **5** were formed by reacting **3a** with sodium hydrosulfide and benzylamine, respectively (Fig. 1b).

DFT computations on osmapentalynes. Model density functional theory (DFT) computations³⁷ provided estimates of the strain of cyclopentynes and of **2a** due to nonlinear distortion of the carbyne

carbon angles. The 116.0° angles computed at the two carbyne carbon atoms in the parent cyclopentynes (C₅H₆) are much smaller than that at the carbyne carbon in **2a** (129.5°). Accordingly, the metal replacement significantly reduces the ring strain. Indeed, the 24.3 kcal mol⁻¹ computed strain energy of the in-plane π-bond in **2a** based on the chosen cyclic reference molecule is much smaller than the 71.9 kcal mol⁻¹ in cyclopentynes (Supplementary Fig. S2). However, such a strain in **2a** is still larger than that of osmabenzynes (9.6 kcal mol⁻¹)³⁸. As discussed below, in addition to the reduction in ring strain, the aromaticity induced by metal incorporation into the metallabicyclic system further stabilizes **2a** significantly.

DFT computations on **2'**, a simplified model complex in which the PPh₃ ligands of **2a** are replaced by PH₃, help understand the aromaticity of osmapentalynes. The four occupied π-molecular orbitals of **2'** selected in Fig. 3 (of the six shown in Supplementary Fig. S3) reflect the π-delocalization along the perimeter of the bicyclic system. These four molecular orbitals are derived principally from the orbital interactions between the *p_z* atomic orbitals of the C₇H₅ unit and two of the *d* orbitals of the Os atom (*5d_{xz}* and *5d_{yz}*). Accordingly, the eight-membered ring in the model complex **2'** is regarded as a cyclic eight-centre eight-electron (8c–8e)

Craig-type Möbius aromatic system^{7,9}. This assignment is in line with the resonance structures depicted in Fig. 2b, in which Os–C4 is always a single σ -bond and is further reinforced by the results of canonical molecular orbital (CMO) nucleus-independent chemical shift (NICS)^{39–42} computations⁴³. The NICS(0)_{zz} values at the centres of rings **A** and **B** in **2'** are -11.1 and -10.8 ppm, respectively (Supplementary Fig. S3). In general, negative values indicate aromaticity and positive values anti-aromaticity. These NICS(0)_{zz} values are comparable to that of benzene (-14.5 ppm) and in sharp contrast to those of pentalyne ($+45.0$ and $+60.3$ ppm, Supplementary Fig. S4). The net aromaticity of model complex **2'** can be attributed mainly to the total diamagnetic contributions from the four key occupied molecular orbitals (HOMO, HOMO-3, HOMO-9 and HOMO-11, shown in Fig. 3), which have negative CMO–NICS(0)_{zz} value sums of rings **A** and **B**.

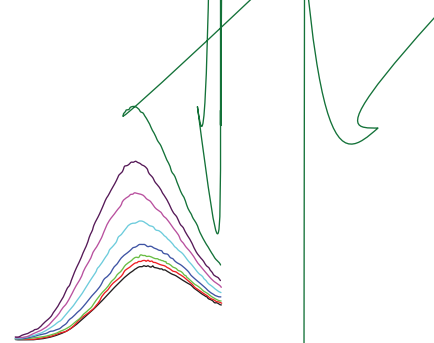
Notably, Hoffmann's predictive extension of the fundamental concept of aromaticity to metallabenzene⁴, first realized by Roper⁵, has now been extended to such metallabicycles as osmapentalynes, which have $8c-8e$ effective $d_{\pi}-p_{\pi}$ Craig-type

conjugation/delocalization of Möbius aromaticity. The osmapentalynes are examples of such rare Möbius aromatic compounds⁹.

Our theoretical analyses verify the aromaticity of the osmapentalyne cations **2a** and **3a**. We first optimized the geometry of **2a** (Supplementary Fig. S5), which is consistent with the X-ray structure. In addition, our computations indicate that **3a** is thermodynamically more stable than **2a** (by 2.3 kcal mol⁻¹ in free energy at 25 °C). The isomerization stabilization energy (ISE) method of Schleyer and Pühlhofer, which is particularly effective for probing the magnitude of aromatic π conjugation for highly strained systems⁴⁴, was applied to compare osmapentalyne with related systems, as shown in Fig. 4. The six ISE reactions presented retained the same total number of *anti* diene units in the reactants and products. The positive values, 8.8 and 6.8 kcal mol⁻¹, respectively, of the pentalene and pentalyne reactions demonstrate and quantify their anti-aromaticity. In sharp contrast, the large and comparable



...stabilization of the
...the intramolecular
...collisions are greatly
...hypothesis is supported
...es of **2a** in aggregates
...nt with the above analysis,



...the
...ative
...alynes.

...efficiency of
...and pyrene as
...osmapentalyne
...excitation in the
...red emission of **2a** in
...of the coordinated
...caused an unusually large
...between the excitation and
...to that of lanthanide complexes
...luminescence⁴⁷. The luminescent
...is partially forbidden because of the *d*
...system. This was reflected by the long
...in the range 10^{-7} to 10^{-6} s (Supplementary
...level typical of luminescence from ruthenium
...coordination complexes⁴⁶. Near-infrared dyes are
...in bioimaging research, with advantages including
...offering fluorescence from biological samples, reduced
...and enhanced tissue penetration depth. However, most
...organic near-infrared dyes (for example, cyanines)
...intrinsically short lifetimes ($<1 \times 10^{-8}$ s) and small
...Stokes shifts⁴⁸. The long emission lifetimes and large Stokes shifts of
...osmapentalynes encourage exploration of their potential application

intense red emission could be observed in the crystals of **2a** (Fig. 5b). Similar aggregation-enhanced near-infrared emission behaviour was observed for the other osmapentalynes. Hence, this study illustrates the inherent structure–property relationship between metallaromatics-based luminophores and aggregation-induced emission, which should help guide the fabrication of high-efficiency luminescent materials by taking advantage of crystallization or high-density immobilization of the luminophores.

Conclusions

We have described the synthesis and X-ray crystallography characterization of persistent, highly unusual bicyclic pentalyne systems. Computational analyses show that the incorporation of transition-metal moieties not only relieves considerable strain, but also results in aromatic stabilization of the rarely realized Craig/Möbius type⁵⁰. These new metal–aromatics exhibit unusual aggregation-enhanced near-infrared photoluminescence with unusually large Stokes shifts and long lifetimes. Our findings encourage further efforts to realize novel metal-incorporated aromatic systems with $4n$ mobile electrons as well as the exploitation of their materials science applications as near-infrared luminophores.

Methods

Absorption and fluorescence spectra were recorded on a Hitachi U-3900 ultraviolet–visible spectrophotometer and a Hitachi F-7400 fluorophotometer, respectively. The emission decay times were acquired with a HORIBA Jobin Yvon FluoroMax-4 TCSPC time-resolved fluorophotometer. The electronic structure computations used the Gaussian03 program³⁷. Harmonic frequency calculations were also performed to confirm the nature (for example, minima) of stationary points. X-ray crystal structure information is available at the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre (CCDC) under deposition numbers CCDC 820684 (**2a**), CCDC 820685 (**3a**), CCDC 820688 (**4**) and CCDC 897827 (**5**). See Supplementary Information for detailed experimental procedures, and crystallographic, spectroscopic and computational analyses. The synthetic details given here for **2a** and **3a** are representative of all the compounds described. All syntheses were performed at room temperature under a nitrogen atmosphere using standard Schlenk techniques unless otherwise stated.

Synthesis of 2a. Compound HC≡CCOOMe (67 μ l, 0.80 mmol) was added to a suspension of compound **1** (300 mg, 0.27 mmol) in dichloromethane (15 ml). The mixture was stirred at room temperature for 5 min to give a yellow solution. The solution was evaporated under vacuum to a volume of \sim 2 ml and then purified by column chromatography (neutral alumina, eluent: dichloromethane/methanol = 20:1) to give a yellow solution. Solid yellow **2a** (258 mg, 80%) was collected after solvent evaporation under vacuum.

Synthesis of 3a. A solution of HBF₄·H₂O (85 μ l, 0.50 mmol) was added to a solution of compound **2a** (300 mg, 0.25 mmol) in dichloromethane (15 ml). After stirring at room temperature for 3 h, the resulting reddish-brown solution was evaporated under vacuum to a volume of \sim 2 ml, and diethyl ether (20 ml) was then added. The yellow precipitate was collected by filtration, washed with diethyl ether (2 \times 5 ml), and dried under vacuum to give **3a** (227 mg, 73%) as a yellow solid.

Received 28 September 2012; accepted 23 May 2013;
published online 23 June 2013

References

- Minkin, V. I., Glukhovtsev, M. N. & Simkin, B. Y. *Aromaticity and Antiaromaticity: Electronic and Structural Aspects* (Wiley, 1994).
- De Proft, F. & Geerlings, P. Conceptual and computational DFT in the study of aromaticity. *Chem. Rev.* **101**, 1451–1464 (2001).
- Cyranski, M. K. Energetic aspects of cyclic pi-electron delocalization: evaluation of the methods of estimating aromatic stabilization energies. *Chem. Rev.* **105**, 3773–3811 (2005).
- Thorn, D. L. & Hoffmann, R. Delocalization in metalocycles. *Nouv. J. Chim.* **3**, 39–45 (1979).
- Elliott, G. P., Roper, W. R. & Waters, J. M. Metallacyclohexatrienes or ‘metallabenzenes.’ Synthesis of osmabenzene derivatives and X-ray crystal structure of [Os(CSCHCHCH)(CO)(PPh₃)₂]. *J. Chem. Soc. Chem. Commun.* 811–813 (1982).
- Hückel, E. Quantum-theoretical contributions to the benzene problem. I. The electron configuration of benzene and related compounds. *Z. Phys.* **70**, 204–286 (1931).
- Craig, D. P. & Paddock, N. L. A novel type of aromaticity. *Nature* **181**, 1052–1053 (1958).
- Heilbronner, E. Hückel molecular orbitals of Möbius-type conformations of annulenes. *Tetrahedron Lett.* **29**, 1923–1928 (1964).
- Rzepa, H. S. Möbius aromaticity and delocalization. *Chem. Rev.* **105**, 3697–3715 (2005).
- Mauksch, M., Gogonea, V., Jiao, H. & Schleyer, P. v. R. Monocyclic (CH)₅⁺ — a Heilbronner Möbius aromatic system revealed. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **37**, 2395–2397 (1998).
- Wiberg, K. B. Antiaromaticity in monocyclic conjugated carbon rings. *Chem. Rev.* **101**, 1317–1331 (2001).
- Gleiter, R. & Merger, R. in *Modern Acetylene Chemistry* (eds Stang, P. J. & Diederich, F.) Ch. 8 (VCH, 1995).
- Wittig, G. Small rings with carbon–carbon triple bonds. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed. Engl.* **1**, 415–419 (1962).
- Montgomery, L. K., Scardiglia, F. & Roberts, J. D. Evidence for cyclohexyne and cyclopentyne as intermediates in the coupling reactions of phenyllithium with 1-chlorocyclohexene and 1-chlorocyclopentene. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **87**, 1917–1925 (1965).
- Krebs, A. & Kimling, H. 3,3,7,7-Tetramethylcycloheptyne, an isolable seven-membered carbocyclic alkyne. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed. Engl.* **10**, 509–510 (1971).
- Chapman, O. L. *et al.* Photochemical transformations. LII. Benzynes. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **95**, 6134–6135 (1973).
- Chapman, O. L., Gano, J., West, P. R., Regitz, M. & Maas, G. Acenaphthyne. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **103**, 7033–7036 (1981).
- Krebs, A. & Wilke, J. Angle strained cycloalkynes. *Top. Curr. Chem.* **109**, 189–233 (1983).
- Suzuki, N., Nishiura, M. & Wakatsuki, Y. Isolation and structural characterization of 1-zirconacyclopent-3-yne, five-membered cyclic alkynes. *Science* **295**, 660–663 (2002).
- Suzuki, N., Hashizume, D., Koshino, H. & Chihara, T. Transformation of a 1-zirconacyclopent-3-yne, a five-membered cycloalkyne, into a 1-zirconacyclopent-3-ene and formal ‘1-zirconacyclopenta-2,3-dienes’. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **47**, 5198–5202 (2008).
- Suzuki, N. & Hashizume, D. Five-membered metallacycloalkynes formed from group 4 metals and [n]cumulene (n = 3, 5) ligands. *Coord. Chem. Rev.* **254**, 1307–1326 (2010).
- Suzuki, N. *et al.* Characterization of the E isomer of tetrasubstituted [5]cumulene and trapping of the Z isomer as a zirconocene complex. *Organometallics* **30**, 3544–3548 (2011).
- Wen, T. B., Zhou, Z. Y. & Jia, G. Synthesis and characterization of a metallabenzynes. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **40**, 1951–1954 (2001).
- Jia, G. Progress in the chemistry of metallabenzynes. *Acc. Chem. Res.* **37**, 479–486 (2004).
- Jia, G. Recent progress in the chemistry of osmium carbyne and metallabenzynes complexes. *Coord. Chem. Rev.* **251**, 2167–2187 (2007).
- He, G. *et al.* A metallanaphthalene complex from zinc reduction of a vinylcarbyne complex. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **46**, 9065–9068 (2007).
- Liu, B. *et al.* Selective synthesis of osmanaphthalene and osmanaphthalene by intramolecular C–H activation. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **48**, 5461–5464 (2009).
- Jones, W. M. & Klosin, J. Transition-metal complexes of arynes, strained cyclic alkynes, and strained cyclic cumulenes. *Adv. Organomet. Chem.* **42**, 147–221 (1998).
- Rosenthal, U. Stable cyclopentynes—made by metals? *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **43**, 3882–3887 (2004).
- Lamač, M. *et al.* Formation of a 1-zircona-2,5-disilacyclopent-3-yne: coordination of 1,4-disilabutatriene to zirconocene? *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **49**, 2937–2940 (2010).
- Jemmis, E. D., Phukan, A. K., Jiao, H. & Rosenthal, U. Structure and neutral homoaromaticity of metallacyclopentene, -pentadiene, -pentyne, and -pentatriene: a density functional study. *Organometallics* **22**, 4958–4965 (2003).
- Xia, H. *et al.* Osmabenzene from the reactions of HC≡CCH(OH)C≡CH with OsX₂(PPh₃)₃ (X = Cl, Br). *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **126**, 6862–6863 (2004).
- Ugolotti, J. *et al.* Five-membered metallacyclic allenoids: synthesis and structure of remarkably stable strongly distorted cyclic allene derivatives. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **47**, 2622–2625 (2008).
- Rosenthal, U. *et al.* Synthesis and structure of the smallest cyclic cumulene; reaction of 1,3-diynes with zirconocene complexes. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed. Engl.* **33**, 1605–1607 (1994).
- Rosenthal, U., Burlakov, V. V., Arndt, P., Baumann, W. & Spannenberg, A. Five-membered titana- and zirconacyclocumulenes: stable 1-metallacyclopenta-2,3,4-trienes. *Organometallics* **24**, 456–471 (2005).
- Luecke, H. F. & Bergman, R. G. Synthesis, structural characterization, and chemistry of a monomeric cationic iridium carbyne complex. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **120**, 11008–11009 (1998).
- Frisch, M. J. *et al.* Gaussian 03, Revision E.01 (Gaussian, 2004).
- Ng, S. M., Huang, X., Wen, T. B., Jia, G. & Lin, Z. Theoretical studies on the stabilities of metallabenzynes. *Organometallics* **22**, 3898–3904 (2003).

39. Schleyer, P. v. R., Maerker, C., Dransfeld, A., Jiao, H. & Hommes, N. J. R. v. E. Nucleus-independent chemical shifts: a simple and efficient aromaticity probe. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **118**, 6317–6318 (1996).
40. Jiao, H., Schleyer, P. v. R., Mo, Y., McAllister, M. A. & Tidwell, T. T. Magnetic evidence for the aromaticity and antiaromaticity of charged fluorenyl, indenyl, and cyclopentadienyl systems. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **119**, 7075–7083 (1997).
41. Chen, Z., Wannere, C. S., Corminboeuf, C., Puchta, R. & Schleyer, P. v. R. Nucleus-independent chemical shifts (NICS) as an aromaticity criterion. *Chem. Rev.* **105**, 3842–3888 (2005).
42. Fallah-Bagher-Shaidaei, H., Wannere, C. S., Corminboeuf, C., Puchta, R. & Schleyer, P. v. R. Which NICS aromaticity index for planar π rings is best? *Org. Lett.* **8**, 863–866 (2006).
43. Glendening, E. D. *et al.* NBO 5.0 (Theoretical Chemistry Institute, University of Wisconsin, 2001).
44. Schleyer, P. v. R. & Pühlhofer, F. Recommendations for the evaluation of aromatic stabilization energies. *Org. Lett.* **4**, 2873–2876 (2002).
45. Wannere, C. S. *et al.* On the stability of large [4n]annulenes. *Org. Lett.* **5**, 2983–2986 (2003).
46. Lakowicz, J. R. *Principles of Fluorescence Spectroscopy* 3rd edn (Springer, 2006).
47. Moore, E. G., Samuel, A. P. S. & Raymond, K. N. From antenna to assay: lessons learned in lanthanide luminescence. *Acc. Chem. Res.* **42**, 542–552 (2009).
48. Escobedo, J. O., Rusin, O., Lim, S. & Strongin, R. M. NIR dyes for bioimaging applications. *Curr. Opin. Chem. Biol.* **14**, 64–70 (2010).
49. Hong, Y., Lam, J. W. Y. & Tang, B. Z. Aggregation-induced emission. *Chem. Soc. Rev.* **40**, 5361–5388 (2011).
50. Mauksch, M. & Tsogoeva, S. B. Demonstration of “Möbius” Aromaticity in Planar Metallocycles. *Chem. Eur. J.* **16**, 7843–7851 (2010).

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the National Science Foundation of China (grant nos. 20925208, 21172184, 21175113 and 21273177), the National Basic Research Program of China (nos. 2012CB821600 and 2011CB808504), the Program for Changjiang Scholars and Innovative Research Team in University of China, and US-NSF Grant CHE 105-7466. The authors thank E. Meggers at Philipps-Universität Marburg, Zhenyang Lin at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Yirong Mo at Western Michigan University, and Xinzheng Yang at the University of California, Berkeley, for their suggestions, and, in particular J. I-Chia Wu, Georgia, for instructive discussions and her assistance with aromaticity analyses.

Author contributions

H.X. conceived the project. C.Z., M.L. and X.Z. performed the experiments. S.L. and Y.N. conducted the luminescence study of osmapentalynes. C.Z. and T.W. recorded all NMR data and solved all X-ray structures. H.X., C.Z. and T.W. analysed the experimental data. J.Z. conceived the theoretical work and, with M.-L.L., conducted theoretical computations. J.Z., X.L., Z.C., M.-L.L. and P.v.R.S. analysed and interpreted the computational data. J.Z., H.X., S.L. and C.Z. drafted the paper, with support from Z.C., X.L., T.W. and Z.X., as well as language editing by P.v.R.S. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the preparation of the final manuscript.

Additional information

Supplementary information and chemical compound information are available in the online version of the paper. Reprints and permissions information is available online at www.nature.com/reprints. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to J.Z. and H.X.

Competing financial interests

The authors declare no competing financial interests.