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Synthesis of a NIR fluorescent dye and its application for rapid detection of HSO_3^- in living cells

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ABSTRACT

 SO_2 and its derivatives (HSO₃⁻⁷, $SO_3^{2^-}$) play a significant important role in many industries and organisms. Based on coumarin and benzopyranose, a promising NIR ratiometric fluorescent probe BAOA (11-oxo-2,2',3,3',6,7,7',8'-octahydro -1H,1'H,5H,6'H,11H- [10,12'-bipyrano [2,3-f] pyrido [3,2,1-ij] quinolin]-13'-ium perchlorate) was designed and developed to detect HSO₃⁻⁻ rapidly and sensitively. The sensing mechanism was Michael addition reaction, in which, strongly nucleophilic HSO₃⁻⁻ attacked carbon-carbon double bonds and BAOA-HSO₃ was formed. A superior linear calibration curve between the fluorescence ratio I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ and concentrations of HSO₃⁻⁻ was obtained in the range of 1.25–8.75 µmol/L and the LOD was figured out as 63.0 nmol/ L. Cell experiments showed that BAOA could not only locate mitochondria, lysosomes, ER and Golgi but also detect exogenous HSO₃⁻⁻ in living cells.

1. Introduction

Sulfur dioxide (SO₂) plays an extremely important role as the most common sulfur oxide. SO₂ is widely dissolved in aqueous solution to form equilibrium mixtures, which are bisulfite and sulfite (HSO₃^{-/} SO₃²⁻, with a molar ratio of about 3:1). HSO₃⁻ has been widely used in many health-related industries such as food, beverages and pharmaceuticals [1–3]. However, overexpression of HSO₃⁻ will consume a variety of diseases, which cause atherosclerosis, essential hypertension, hypoxic pulmonary hypertension and fibrosis of the lung tissue [4–9]. Endogenous HSO₃⁻/SO₃²⁻ is generated from thiol-containing amino acids such as cysteine and glutathione, which play an important role in various physiological processes such as vasodilation, antioxidation and mitigation of inflammation [10–15]. Hence, it is necessary to develop excellent methods for efficient and sensitive detection of HSO₃⁻.

With the development of detection technology, various methods of detecting HSO_3^{-}/SO_3^{2-} have been discovered and reported by researchers, such as chromatography, titration analysis,

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chemiluminescence, electrochemistry, enzyme technology and fluorescence, etc [16-25]. Compared with other technologies, fluorescence analysis method has overwhelming advantages of simple operation, high sensitivity, short response time, high specificity and selectivity, high spatial and temporal resolution, and can be used in vitro and biological imaging [26-31]. It has widely been considered as a promising method for the detection of small molecules. Up to now, explosive molecular fluorescent probes had been fabricated and investigated for detecting HSO₃⁻. The main reaction mechanisms includ nucleophilic reaction with aldehydes and nucleophilic reaction with carbon and carbon double bonds [32–34]. Among numerous types of fluorescent probes, ratiometric fluorescent probes with improved signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) have attracted wide attention because of their internal self-calibration, reducing interference from the background and improving the detection accuracy of HSO₃⁻ [35–40]. However, the reported probes still had some limitations, such as low fluorescence intensity and long response time. In addition, compared with fluorescent probes with short emission wavelengths, near-infrared (NIR) probes

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were more attractive in the wavelength range of 650–900 nm, in which biomolecules had almost no interference, the depth of sample penetration was large and it has minimal harm to biological system [41]. Therefore, it is urgent to develop NIR fluorescent dyes that can sensitively detect HSO_3^{-}/SO_3^{2-} .

Keeping these considerations in mind, herein, using 3-aminophenol as raw material, a new NIR ratiometric fluorescent probe BAOA (11oxo-2,2',3,3',6,7,7',8'-octahydro -1H,1'H,5H,6'H,11H- [10,12'-bipyrano [2,3-f] pyrido [3,2,1-ij] quinolin]-13'-ium perchlorate) was designed and developed (ba, figures S1, S2 and S3), in which the oxygen positive ion on the benzopyran ring was a strongly electron-absorbing group, reducing the electron cloud density and making the C=C double bonds strongly electrophilic. The strong nucleophilic HSO₃⁻ can attack carboncarbon double bond to form BAOA-HSO3 by Michael addition reaction. The sensing mechanism had been verified by nuclear magnetic titration experiments and high resolution mass spectrometry. Probe BAOA can quantitatively detect HSO₃⁻ in the concentration range of 1.25–8.75 µmol/L and the LOD was calculated to be 63.0 nmol/L. Cell experiments showed that BAOA could not only locate mitochondria, lysosomes, ER and Golgi but also detect exogenous HSO₃⁻ in living cells. Further studies showed that probe BAOA had good selectivity and antiinterference ability toward HSO₃⁻ against common anions, cations and small biomolecules. Moreover, BAOA not only had good localization ability in mitochondria, lysosomes, ER and Golgi but also could detect exogenous HSO₃⁻ in living cells.

2. Experimental

2.1. Materials

3-Aminophenol, 2-bromo-3-chloropropane, acetoacetic ester, N,Ndimethylformamide, acetic ether, dichloromethane, anhydrous ethanol, anhydrous methanol, petroleum ether, dimethyl sulfoxide, methyl sulfonic acid, NaHCO₃, POCl₃, K₂CO₃, Na₂SO₄, NaHSO₃, NaOH, NaF, NaCl, NaBr, NaI, KCl, CaCl₂, AlCl₃, ZnCl₂, FeCl₂, FeCl₃, SnCl₂, Pb (NO₃)₂, CuCl, CuCl₂, MgCl₂, AgCl, Ni(NO₃)₂, MnCl₂, Co(NO₃)₂, Cd (NO₃)₂, Na₃PO₄, Na₂HPO₄, NaH₂PO₄, Na₂CO₃, NaBF₄, NaI, NaN₃, NaSCN, NaNO₃, NaHSO₄, Na₂C₂O₄, NaNO₂, Ala, Arg, Asp, Cys, Gln, Glu, Gly, GSH, Hcy, His, Ile, Leu, Met, Phe, Pro, Ser, Thr, Trp, Val, H₂O₂. All reagents and drugs were analytical grade and used without any further purification. Twice-distilled water was used throughout all the experiments.

2.2. Laboratory apparatus

Dual-beam UV-vis Spectrophotometer (TU-1901), Fluorospectrophotometer (F-4600), pH meter (PHS–2F), 400 M NMR spectrometer (AVIII HD 400), 600 M NMR spectrometer (AVIII HD 600), Highresolution mass spectrometer (IonSpec4.7), Rotary evaporator (RE-2000B), Electronic analytical balance (FA2004), Vacuum drying oven (DZF-6020), Constant temperature magnetic stirrer (85-2), Uultrasonic cleaner (SB-100D), Circulating water vacuum pump (SHB-3), Vacuum oil pump (2XZ-4), Digital camera (D3300), Portable UV analyzer (ZF-5).

2.3. The parameters of the solution in spectra

In Fig. S4, the solution containing 2100 μL PBS and 900 μL DMSO was chosen because it has the most excellent fluorescence change before and after adding HSO_3^- . The concentration of BAOA was 1×10^{-3} mol/L (dissolved in DMSO solution). The BAOA solution of 30 μL was removed with a liquid transfer gun and added to 3000 μL solution containing 2100 μL PBS and 900 μL DMSO (VPBS:VDMSO = 7:3), the final concentration of BAOA in the test system was 1×10^{-5} mol/L.

The concentrations of anion ions, metal ions and small biomolecules used in the detection were 0.01 mol/L initially. The concentration of $\rm HSO_3^-$ was 0.0025 mol/L.

2.4. Synthesis of B1

3-aminophenol (2.05 g, 18.785 mmol), NaHCO₃ (6.3125 g, 75.14 mmol) and 1-bromo-3-chloropropane (11.83 g, 75.14 mmol) were added to a 100 mL round bottom flask and were evenly dissolved in DMF (30 mL). Then the reaction mixture was stirred at 70 °C for 12 h until the reaction was completed. After cooling to room temperature, the reaction solution was poured into ice water. The solution was extracted with ethyl acetate, and then washed with water. The remaining solution was dried by Na₂SO₄ and further purified by silica gel column chromatography ((PE: EA = 20 : 1, v/v) to get white solid B1 (900 mg, yield: 25.3%). ¹H NMR (600 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 8.63 (s, 1H), 6.48 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 1H), 6.00 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 1H), 3.03–2.97 (m, 4H), 2.57 (t, *J* = 6.5 Hz, 2H), 2.51 (d, *J* = 6.3 Hz, 2H), 1.86–1.80 (m, 4H). ¹³C NMR (151 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 153.0, 143.6, 126.0, 112.0, 107.7, 103.0, 49.6, 49.1, 26.7, 22.1, 21.4, 21.0.

2.5. Synthesis of B2

2 mL of dried DMF was placed in a round neck flask and stirred in an ice-water bath for 15 min. Then 0.5 mL of POCl₃ was added dropwise to the flask and stirring for 30 min. The product B1 (189.2 mg, 1 mmol) from the previous step dissolved in DMF was added dropwise to the reaction system and stirred at room temperature for 1 h. Then, the temperature was raised to 100 °C for 1 h and the heating was stopped. After cooling to room temperature, 10 mL of water was added to the reaction flask while the pH of the reaction system was adjusted to 6-8 with saturated potassium carbonate solution, and stirring was continued for 1 h. After the reaction was completed, it was extracted with CH₂Cl₂, and then the organic phase was washed with saturated brine, and dried overnight with anhydrous sodium sulfate. After silica gel column chromatography, a light yellow solid product was obtained. (154 mg, yield: 70.9%). ¹H NMR (600 MHz, DMSO-*d*₆) δ 11.85 (s, 1H), 9.36 (s, 1H), 6.98 (s, 1H), 3.28 (dd, J = 12.2, 7.3 Hz, 4H), 2.62 (t, J = 6.2 Hz, 2H), 2.54 (t, J = 6.4 Hz, 2H), 1.83 (dd, J = 12.1, 6.1 Hz, 4H). ¹³C NMR (151 MHz, DMSO-d₆) 8 191.6, 158.4, 149.2, 130.9, 113.4, 110.0, 104.2, 49.5, 49.0, 26.5, 21.0, 19.9, 19.2.

2.6. Synthesis of B3

B2 (217 mg, 1 mmol) was dissolved in 5 mL of absolute ethanol, and ethyl acetate (260 mg, 2 mmol) and piperidine (80 µL, 0.81 mmol) were added to the reaction solution. Under the protection of argon, it was heated to reflux for 5 h and then cooled to room temperature. Filtered with suction and washed with *n*-hexane to obtain an orange solid (205.6 mg, yield: 72.6%). ¹H NMR (600 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 8.33 (s, 1H), 6.96 (s, 1H), 3.34 (dd, *J* = 12.0, 6.5 Hz, 4H), 2.88 (t, *J* = 6.4 Hz, 2H), 2.76 (t, *J* = 6.2 Hz, 2H), 2.67 (s, 3H), 2.01–1.94 (m, 4H).¹³C NMR (151 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 196.0, 161.2, 153.8, 148.8, 147.8, 127.8, 114.9, 108.1, 105.6, 50.4, 50.0, 30.6, 27.4, 21.2, 20.2, 20.1.

2.7. Synthesis of BAOA

B3 (283.4 mg, 1 mmol) and B2 (260.4 mg, 1.2 mmol) were dissolved in methyl sulfonic acid and stirred at 90 °C for 6 h. After the reaction was cooled to room temperature, the reaction droplets were added to the ice salt water to form precipitate, the precipitate was filtered and washed with water, and the crude product was separated by silica gel column chromatography to obtain blue and black solid (220 mg, yield: 47.3%). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 8.54 (s, 1H), 8.25 (d, *J* = 8.3 Hz, 1H), 8.17 (d, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 1H), 7.39 (d, *J* = 16.9 Hz, 2H), 3.72–3.61 (m, 4H), 3.47 (dd, *J* = 10.1, 5.3 Hz, 4H), 3.16 (t, *J* = 5.8 Hz, 2H), 2.93–2.81 (m, 6H), 2.16 (d, *J* = 27.5 Hz, 8H). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 162.0, 158.7, 153.4, 153.0, 152.2, 150.8, 145.1, 143.8, 129.0, 127.4, 127.3, 121.4, 117.9, 110.3, 109.9, 105.8, 105.4, 104.9, 51.3, 51.0, 50.4, 27.7, 27.3, 27.2, 20.9, 20.3, 19.9, 19.8, 19.4.



Fig. 1. (a) UV–vis spectral changes of 1×10^{-5} mol/L BAOA with various concentrations of HSO₃⁻ (0–17.5 µmol/L) in PBS buffered aqueous solution (V_{PBS}:V_{DMSO} = 7:3, pH = 7.4); inset: Linear plot of the ratio A₄₂₂/A₆₈₅ against HSO₃⁻ concentrations in the range 0–7.5 µmol/L. (b) Fluorescence spectral changes of 1×10^{-5} mol/L BAOA with various concentrations of HSO₃⁻ (0–17.5 µmol/L) in PBS buffered aqueous solution (V_{PBS}:V_{DMSO} = 7:3, pH = 7.4); inset: Linear plot of the ratio I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ against HSO₃⁻ concentrations in the range 1.25–8.75 µmol/L.



Fig. 2. (a) Emission spectral responses of BAOA solution (V_{PBS} : V_{DMSO} = 7:3, 1 × 10⁻⁵ mol/L) with different anions ions at I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ (red bars) and the ratio of BAOA for HSO₃⁻ (17.5 µmol/L) at I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ in the presence of anions ions (17.5 µmol/L) (green bars) (λ_{ex} = 425 nm). Numbers 1–25 represent Blank, F⁻, Cl⁻, Br⁻, I⁻, PO₄³⁻, HPO₄²⁻, H₂O₄⁻, CO₃²⁻, HCO₃⁻, SO₄²⁻, HSO₄⁻, N₃⁻, NO₂⁻, NO₃⁻, BF₄⁻, C₂O₄²⁻, SCN⁻, SiO₃²⁻, S₂O₃²⁻, ClO⁻, P₂O₇⁴⁻, H₂S and S²⁻ respectively. (b) Real-time records of fluorescence emission ratio I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ changes of BAOA with different concentrations of HSO₃⁻ (0, 6.25, 12.5, 17.5 µmol/L). (c) Fluorescence intensity ratio I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ of BAOA (V_{PBS}:V_{DMSO} = 7:3, 1 × 10⁻⁵ mol/L) in the absence (black) and presence (red) of HSO₃⁻ (17.5 µmol/L) under pH values of 6–11. (d) Fluorescence intensity ratio I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ of BAOA (V_{PBS}:V_{DMSO} = 7:3, 1 × 10⁻⁵ mol/L) as irradiation time changing (λ_{ex} = 425 nm).

3. Results and discussion

To further investigate the response ability of BAOA to HSO_3^- , UV-vis absorption spectra were performed. As shown in Fig. 1a, with the increasing HSO_3^- concentration, absorbance at 422 nm (A₄₂₂) was increasing while that at 685 nm (A₆₈₅) was declining gradually. Insert of Fig. 1a proved that BAOA had a linear calibration curve between A₄₂₂/A₆₈₅ and the HSO_3^- concentration in the range of 0–7.5 μ mol/L (R² =

0.9965). Fig. 1b explored the fluorescence sensing properties of BAOA for HSO₃⁻. The fluorescence intensity at 490 nm (I₄₉₀) was significantly enhanced with the increase of HSO₃⁻ concentration at 425 nm excitation, but that at 722 nm (I₇₂₂) decreased. A linear calibration curve was obtained between the fluorescence intensity ratio I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ and HSO₃⁻ concentration in the range of 1.25–8.75 μ mol/L (R² = 0.9942) (The inset of Fig. 1b). A minimum detection limit was calculated to be 63.0 nmol/L [42]. The above studies showed that the synthesized BAOA can be used



Fig. 3. ¹H NMR titration spectra of probe BAOA without and with 2.0 eq. of HSO₃⁻ in DMSO-d₆.

as a ratiometric fluorescent probe for quantitative detection of HSO_3^- . In Table. S1, obvious wavelength changes, Stokes shift and molar extinction coefficient were observed, indicating that BAOA had a better response to HSO_3^- .

The changes in the fluorescence emission spectra were studied to determine whether BAOA was specific to HSO3⁻. As indicated in the red bars of Fig. 2a, the selected anions only didn't cause significant changes in the fluorescence intensity ratio I_{490}/I_{722} . The fluorescence intensity ratio I490/I722 increased obviously only after adding HSO3⁻, which indicated that BAOA has good selectivity toward $\mathrm{HSO}_3^-.$ In the mixture of probe BAOA and the mentioned anions, addition of HSO3⁻ could increase the fluorescence intensity ratio I_{490}/I_{722} (green bars of Fig. 2a), indicating that the above anions didn't interfere with the detection of HSO₃⁻. As shown in Table S1, absorption wavelength changes from 685 nm to 422 nm and excitation wavelength changes from 722 nm to 490 nm. Molar extinction coefficients have changed greatly before and after reaction with HSO₃⁻ (ε_{422} changes from 8500 L mol⁻¹ cm⁻¹ to 17,600 L mol⁻¹ cm⁻¹, ε_{685} changes from 40,000 L mol⁻¹ cm⁻¹ to 10,000 L mol⁻¹ cm⁻¹). As mentioned in Fig. S5, similar results were obtained as for the mentioned metal ions and small biomolecules. Thereby, BAOA can specifically detect HSO₃⁻.

Dynamics of BAOA to detect HSO_3^- was investigated in Fig. 2b. BAOA and HSO_3^- can react completely in about 1 min, which indicated that BAOA could quickly response to HSO_3^- . The fluorescence response of BAOA to HSO_3^- at different pH values was discussed in Fig. 2c. The fluorescence intensity ratio (I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂) of BAOA was constant in the range of 6–11. When HSO_3^- was added to the test system, I₄₉₀/I₇₂₂ increased sharply in the range of 7–11. Therefore, BAOA can be used to

detect $\mathrm{HSO_3}^-$ in an extensive range of pH values. In Fig. 2d, $\mathrm{I_{490}}/\mathrm{I_{722}}$ of BAOA solution basically unchanged during 1 h of irradiation time indicating that BAOA had good photostability.

¹H NMR titration experiments (Fig. 3) and high resolution mass spectrometry analysis (Fig. S6) were carried out to explore the response mechanism of BAOA toward HSO3⁻. The sensing mechanism based on Michael addition reaction was proposed (Scheme 1) [43]. The ¹H NMR titration spectra showed that the peaks at the chemical shifts of 8.05 ppm (H1) and 8.30 ppm (H2) of BAOA gradually disappeared and two new peaks appeared in the high field region, which were 6.45 ppm (H1') and 4.28 ppm (H2'). The movement of the two hydrogenated displacement signals was consistent with ¹H NMR of the putative response mechanism. The mass spectrum peak of m/z = 547.1902(Fig. S6) was consistent with the hydrogenation ion peak of the speculative product ($C_{30}H_{30}N_2O_6S$, m/z = 547.1897), which further proved that the inferred response mechanism was correct. Compared with the reported fluorescent probes toward HSO₃⁻ (Table 1), probe BAOA has shorter response time, lower LOD, and could be used as a NIR ratiometric fluoresecne probe.

To explore the localization ability of probe BAOA, the co-localization experiments of commercial dye Mito-Tracker deep-red, lyso-Tracker deep red, ER-Tracker Red and Golgi-Tracker Red with BAOA were carried out, respectively. As shown in Fig. 4, the Pearson co-localization coefficient of the mitochondrial co-localization experiment was calculated as 0.762. Similar to the result, the Pearson co-localization coefficient of lysosomal, ER and Golgi co-localization was 0.864, 0.877 and 0.940, respectively. According to the above data, BAOA could serve as mitochondrial, lysosomal, ER and Golgi localization tracker. Moreover,



BAOA-HSO3

Scheme 1. Synthetic route of BAOA and its detection mechanism toward HSO₃⁻ (The anion of BAOA was CH₃SO₃⁻).

Table 1	
Comparison of this work with previously reported methods for HSO-	⁻ detection.

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probe	Detection mode	Detection condition	Response time	LOD	Linear ranges	Ref
Probe 1	On-off	PBS solution	30 min	0.46 μM	0–200 µM	[42]
probe 2	On-off	PBS/ DMSO	10 min	2.01 μM	0–150 µM	[43]
ASHTI	On-off	PBS/ DMSO	15 min	0.27 μM	0.8–60 μM	[44]
L2	Off-on	PBS/ DMSO	13 min	0.59 μM	0–9 μΜ	[45]
L	On-off	HEPES solution	Not mention	0.45 μM	1–13 µM	[46]
BAOA	Ratiometic	PBS/ DMSO	1 min	63.0 nM	1.25–8.75 μM	This work

the toxicity experiment of BAOA on HeLa cells was carried out. As shown in Table S2, when the concentration of BAOA was 10 μ mol/L, the cell survival rate was as high as 0.826, showing low toxicity of BAOA.

To explore the potential applications of BAOA toward exogenous HSO_3^{-} in living cells, cell experiments were characterized. The fluorescence imaging results were shown in Fig. 5, which exhibited weak green fluorescence after co-incubating with HeLa cells. The green fluorescence was enhanced by further incubation containing BAOA and HSO_3^{-} . The morphology of HeLa cells in the bright field images didn't change remarkably, indicating that HeLa cells still survived. These phenomena suggested that BAOA had membrane permeability and could be capable of detecting exogenous HSO_3^{-} in HeLa cells.

4. Conclusion

The NIR ratiometric fluorescent probe BAOA was synthesized by four-step reaction based on coumarin and benzopyranose. BAOA can quantitatively detect $\rm HSO_3^-$ in the range of 1.25–8.75 μ mol/L via



Fig. 4. (a) (d) (g) (j) Fluorescence photo of the green channel of BAOA (10 μ M) in HeLa cells. (b) (e) Fluorescence photo of the red channel of Mito-Tracker Deep Red (10 μ M) and lyso-Tracker deep red (10 μ M) in HeLa cells. (h) (k) Fluorescence photo of the orange channel of ER-Tracker Red (10 μ M) and Golgi-Tracker Red (10 μ M) in HeLa cells. (c) (f) (i) (l) Intensity correlation plot of BAOA and Mito Tracker Deep Red, lyso-Tracker deep red, ER-Tracker Red and Golgi-Tracker Red.



Fig. 5. (a) Fluorescence image of the green channel of BAOA (10 μ M) in HeLa cells after incubating 30 min and (c) Bright-field image; (b) Fluorescence image of the green channel of BAOA (10 μ M) and HSO₃⁻ (17.5 μ M) in HeLa cells and (d) Bright-field image.

ratiometric fluorescence method and the LOD was 63.0 nmol/L. Moreover, BAOA not only recognized HSO_3^- in a wide range of pH values (7–11), but also could detect HSO_3^- in short response time (1 min). The mechanism of BAOA toward HSO_3^- was proved to be Michael addition reaction. Cell experiments showed that BAOA had the ability to localize mitochondria, lysosomes, ER and Golgi and could also detect HSO_3^- in living cells.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Qiang Zhang: Writing – original draft. Dandan Bu: Data curation. Haohui Ren: Visualization. Mingming Yu: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. Hongyan Zhang: Software, Validation. Zhanxian Li: Supervision, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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