



# A neoteric dual-signal colorimetric fluorescent probe for detecting endogenous/exogenous hydrogen peroxide in cells and monitoring drug-induced hepatotoxicity

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## ABSTRACT

Hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>), one of the most important reactive oxygen species (ROS), can be generated endogenously in the liver and has been deemed as a biomarker for evaluating drug-induced liver injury (DILI). Therefore, it is highly crucial to construct an effective method for detecting H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> in the liver in order to evaluate DILI. Herein, a neoteric dual-signal colorimetric fluorescent probe XH-2 for sensing hydrogen peroxide was engineered and synthesized. Borate was grafted as a specific recognition group onto the fluorophore XH-1 ( $\Phi_F = 0.34$ ) to establish a structurally unprecedented probe. The experimental results manifested that probe XH-2 ( $\Phi_F = 0.15$ ) was able to detect hydrogen peroxide using a fluorescence method with an excellent linear range of 0–140  $\mu\text{M}$  ( $R^2 = 0.9974$ ) and an especially low detection limit of 91 nM ( $\lambda_{\text{ex/em}} = 570 \text{ nm}/638 \text{ nm}$ ). In addition, the probe was capable of monitoring hydrogen peroxide in a colorimetric manner with the linear range of 0–110  $\mu\text{M}$  ( $R^2 = 0.9965$ ). Furthermore, the specificity, applicability in serum (98.6–109.1%) and indirect detection of glucose make the probe XH-2 a superior probe. Based on its low cytotoxicity, the probe was successfully applied to monitor endogenous/exogenous hydrogen peroxide and quantitatively determine the concentration level of hydrogen peroxide at a range of 0–120  $\mu\text{M}$  ( $R^2 = 0.9859$ ) in HepG2 cells. Ultimately, the probe could effectively monitor the level of hydrogen peroxide during DILI in HepG2 cells.

## 1. Introduction

Reactive oxygen species is a single electron reduction product of oxygen produced in the human body [1] that has a significant impact on many physiological processes [2] and pathological processes. As one of the most important reactive oxygen species, hydrogen peroxide plays a vital role in physiological processes such as cell migration, proliferation [3], differentiation and immunity [4]. However, abnormal levels of hydrogen peroxide in the cell can damage nucleic acids, proteins [5], and biofilms, and can cause many diseases [6], such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, cardiovascular disease, and cancer [7], diabetes, neurodegenerative diseases [8,9], etc. Therefore, it is

important to develop a highly sensitive and selective method for the rapid and effective detection of intracellular hydrogen peroxide concentration.

Thus far, various analytical methods for detecting hydrogen peroxide have been developed, which can include fluorescence spectroscopy [10–25], spectrophotometry, electrochemistry [26], titration method, positron emission tomography [27], chemluminescence [28], electron spin resonance [29], and mass spectrometry [30]. Among all, the fluorescence spectroscopy has increasingly become the method of choice because of its noninvasiveness, high sensitivity, high selectivity, low cost, simple operation, and high spatiotemporal resolution, and its target analytes can be monitored and imaged in living cells [31–34].

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Additionally, long-wavelength emission fluorescent probes are preferred because long-wavelength photons have deeper tissue penetration and less interference from auto-fluorescence [35]. To further rule out influences of other interferences, such as detection conditions and human errors, NIR fluorescent probes with multiple response signals can be used, especially in the biomedical fields, so that the detection results are more convincing and trustable. Therefore, it is very important to develop colorimetric and fluorescent dual-signal NIR probe for the detection of hydrogen peroxide.

Herein, a neoteric dual-signal colorimetric fluorescent probe XH-2 for detecting hydrogen peroxide was designed and synthesized. Compound XH-1 was designed to function as a fluorophore and borate a recognition group. In the absence of hydrogen peroxide, probe XH-2 exhibited infinitesimal fluorescence because of the photoinduced electron transfer (PET) activated by  $\lambda_{\text{ex/em}} = 570 \text{ nm}/638 \text{ nm}$ . In the presence of hydrogen peroxide, the chemical reaction between hydrogen peroxide and the borate recognition group of probe XH-2 eventually caused the borate part to separate, while caused probe XH-2 to be converted into compound XH-1. These events led to the enhancement of fluorescence, accompanying by the color change from bright yellow to bright red under a 365 nm fluorescent lamp or from yellow to red under visible light when observed with the naked eye. Probe XH-2 was also successfully applied to indirectly detect glucose, which was a proof of its universality. Based on its long emission wavelength, high selectivity and sensitivity, and low cytotoxicity, probe XH-2 was subsequently successfully applied to detect endogenous/exogenous hydrogen peroxide and to quantitatively detect hydrogen peroxide in HepG2 cells, as well as in the monitoring the hydrogen peroxide level in drug-induced liver cells.

## 2. Experimental section

### 2.1. Synthesis

The synthetic route of probe XH-2 is shown in Scheme 1.

#### 2.1.1. Synthesis of compound 1

The synthesis of compound 1 was carried out according to the previously published method [36].

#### 2.1.2. Synthesis of compound XH-1

At room temperature, compound 1 (0.153 g, 1.1 mmol) and 1-naphthol (0.144 g, 1 mmol) were mixed with 5 mL of  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  in a reaction bottle, and the mixture was then stirred evenly. After that, 3 mL of hydrochloric acid was added dropwise to the reaction bottle for 5 h. The product was purified by silica gel chromatography using a mixture of petroleum ether and ethyl acetate ( $v/v = 5:1$ ) as the mobile phase, from which compound XH-1 as a dark red solid (130 mg, 65%) was afforded.  $^1\text{H}$  NMR (300 MHz,  $\text{DMSO}-d_6$ )  $\delta$  8.60 (d,  $J = 8.0$  Hz, 1H), 8.14 (d,  $J =$

7.8 Hz, 1H), 7.85 (t,  $J = 7.5$  Hz, 1H), 7.78 (d,  $J = 7.4$  Hz, 1H), 7.70 (d,  $J = 8.7$  Hz, 1H), 6.85 (d,  $J = 8.8$  Hz, 1H), 6.76 (s, 1H), 6.36 (s, 1H) (Fig. S4).  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR (75 MHz,  $\text{DMSO}-d_6$ )  $\delta$  182.42, 161.50, 151.35, 145.32, 142.41, 132.03, 131.33, 131.20, 131.09, 131.01, 126.14, 125.11, 123.82, 114.02, 105.70, 105.64, 101.77 (Fig. S5). MS (LC-HRMS,  $m/z$ ) for  $\text{C}_{16}\text{H}_{10}\text{NO}_3^+$  [ $\text{M}+\text{H}$ ] $^+$ : calculated, 264.0655; found: 264.0658 (Fig. S1).

#### 2.1.3. Synthesis of probe XH-2

At room temperature, compound XH-1 (0.263 g, 1 mmol), 4-bromo-methylphenylboronic acid pinacol ester (0.594 g, 2 mmol) and  $\text{Cs}_2\text{CO}_3$  (0.651 g, 2 mmol) were mixed with 5 mL of DMF in a reaction bottle, and the mixture was stirred evenly for 6 h. The product was purified by silica gel chromatography using a mixture of petroleum ether and ethyl acetate ( $v/v = 10:1$ ) as the mobile phase, and probe XH-2 as lightly yellow solid (283 mg, 59%) was obtained.  $^1\text{H}$  NMR (300 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ )  $\delta$  8.71–8.66 (m, 1H), 8.32–8.28 (m, 1H), 7.86 (d,  $J = 8.1$  Hz, 2H), 7.80–7.70 (m, 3H), 7.45 (d,  $J = 8.2$  Hz, 2H), 6.99 (dd,  $J = 8.8, 2.7$  Hz, 1H), 6.87 (d,  $J = 2.6$  Hz, 1H), 6.43 (s, 1H), 5.20 (s, 2H), 1.35 (s, 12H) (Fig. S6).  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR (75 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ )  $\delta$  183.74, 161.33, 151.19, 145.31, 144.25, 138.69, 135.16, 131.89, 131.74, 131.38, 131.11, 130.81, 127.58, 126.47, 125.74, 124.26, 113.44, 106.88, 101.11, 83.88, 70.52, 24.83 (Fig. S7). MS (LC-HRMS,  $m/z$ ) for  $\text{C}_{29}\text{H}_{27}\text{BNO}_5^+$  [ $\text{M}+\text{H}$ ] $^+$ : calculated, 480.1977; found: 480.1980 (Fig. S2).

## 2.2. Studies of absorption and fluorescence properties

The reactions in PBS solution (10 mM,  $\text{pH} = 7.4$ ) were monitored using an UV-Vis spectrophotometer and F-7000 fluorescence spectrometer. Both the probe XH-2 and compound XH-1 have excellent water solubility. When observed with the naked eye in PBS (10 mM,  $\text{pH} = 7.4$ ), they appeared light yellow and light red respectively. The fluorescence intensity increased 7.0 times in detecting hydrogen peroxide. The fluorescence measurements from 590 nm to 750 nm were conducted at an excitation wavelength of 570 nm with a slit set of 5.0/5.0 nm. Prior to the measurement, the probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) in PBS solution was treated with various concentrations of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  for 40 min. The selectivity of the probe XH-2 toward  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  was determined by comparing the results from  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  with those from other possible competing species under the same experimental conditions.

## 2.3. Preparation of solutions used in spiked recovery experiment

Firstly, human serum was 200-fold diluted, then a mixture of probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) with 40, 80, or 100  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  separately was prepared and used for fluorescence experiment.

## 2.4. Indirect detection of glucose

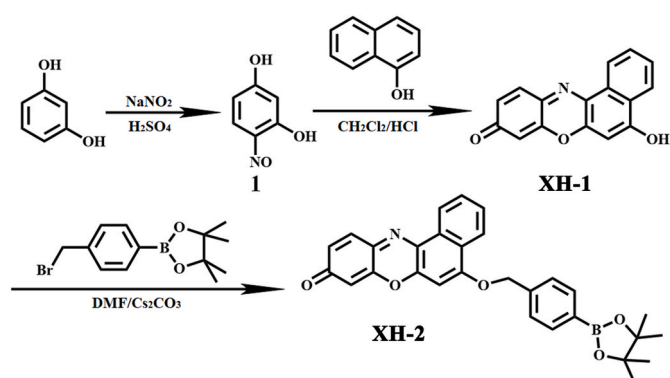
Glucose oxidase solution (20  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ) and glucose solution (0–140  $\mu\text{M}$ ) were incubated in PBS ( $\text{pH} = 8$ ) at 37  $^\circ\text{C}$  for 30 min; Subsequently, probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) was added and the incubation was continued for 40 min.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Optical characterizations of probe XH-2

In the fluorescence spectrum shown in Fig. 1(A), with the excitation wavelength at 570 nm, a weak emission band centered at 638 nm was observed in the absence of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  ( $\Phi_{\text{F}} = 0.15$ ), and upon the addition of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ , the intensity of the band significantly enhanced ( $\Phi_{\text{F}} = 0.34$ ). As can be seen, under the radiation of 365 nm fluorescent lamp, the color of the solution changed tremendously from bright yellow to bright red.

In the UV-Vis absorption spectrum shown in Fig. 1(B), probe XH-2 exhibited a main absorption band centered at 455 nm ( $\epsilon = 2.8 \times 10^4$



Scheme 1. The synthetic route of probe XH-2.

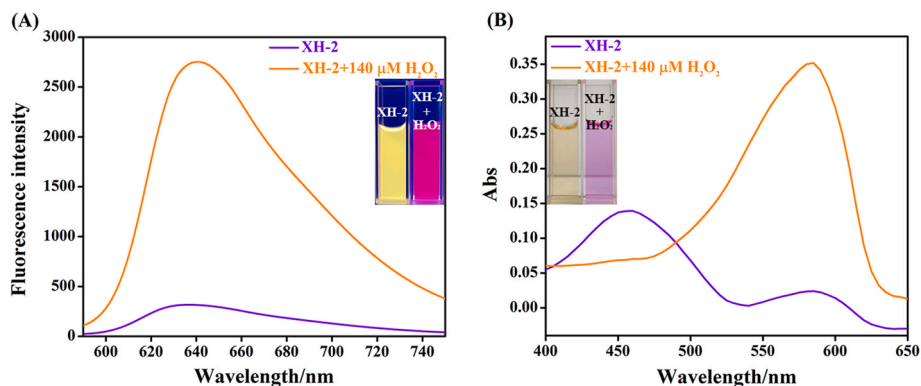


Fig. 1. (A)/(B) Fluorescence spectra/absorption spectra of probe XH-2 in PBS in the absence and presence of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ .

$\text{M}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-1}$ ) in the absence of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ , and the solution was visibly yellow. By contrast, the addition of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  resulted in a newly generated absorption band centered at 585 nm ( $\epsilon = 4.9 \times 10^4 \text{ M}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-1}$ ), and the color of the solution changed completely from yellow to red.

### 3.2. Quantitative detection of $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ by probe XH-2

In the fluorescence spectrum (Fig. 2(A)), probe XH-2 was used to detect different concentrations of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  (0–140  $\mu\text{M}$ ). It was found that the fluorescence intensity of the peak centered at 638 nm increased with increasing concentration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ . As shown in Fig. 2(B), the concentration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in a range of 0–140  $\mu\text{M}$  had a linear relationship ( $R^2 = 0.9974$ ) with the fluorescence intensity, indicating that the probe XH-2 could quantitatively detect  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ . The detection limit was determined, using the formula  $\text{DL} = 3\sigma/k$ , to be as low as 91 nM, which indicates that

the probe XH-2 could accurately detect  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ . According to Table S1, the detection limit of probe XH-2 was lower than that of most previously reported fluorescent probes. Under irradiation by a 365 nm fluorescent lamp, the solution color gradually changed from bright yellow to bright red.

In the UV–Vis absorption spectrum, as depicted in Fig. 2(C), the intensity of the absorption band centered at 455 nm gradually decreased with increasing concentration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ , while that of the absorption band centered at 585 nm increased. As presented in Fig. 2(D), the concentration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  at a range of 0–110  $\mu\text{M}$  had a linear relationship ( $R^2 = 0.9965$ ) with the absorbance at 585 nm, indicating that probe XH-2 can quantitatively detect  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in a colorimetric manner, as well as by the transition of color from yellow to red, which can be observed by the naked eye.

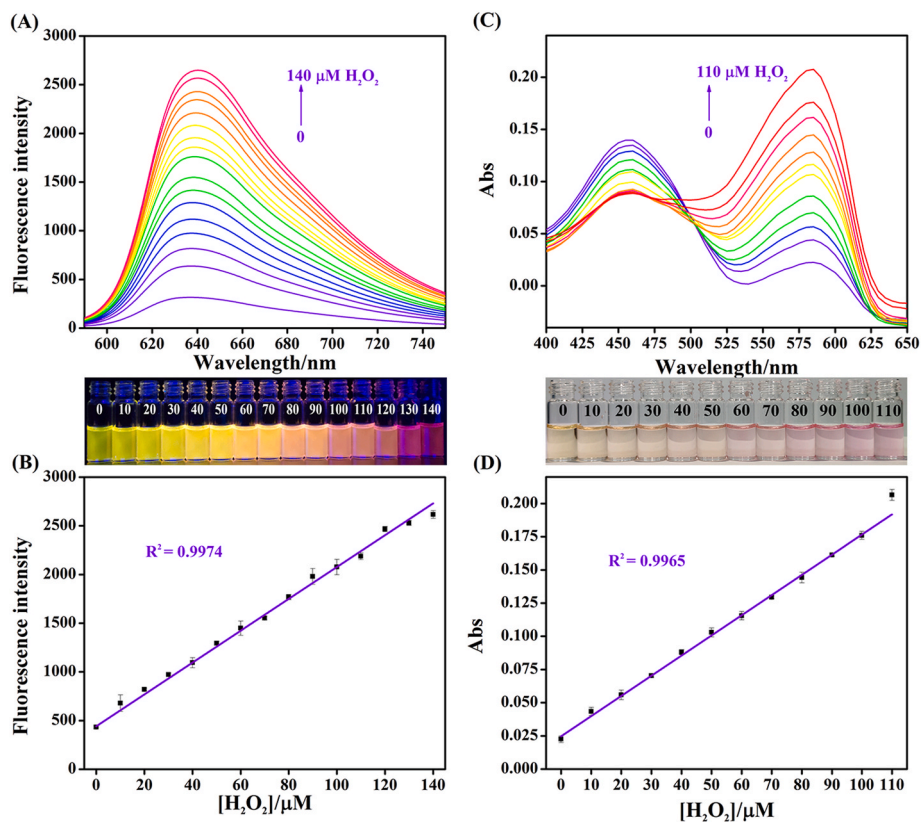


Fig. 2. (A) Fluorescence spectra of probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) in the presence of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  (0–140  $\mu\text{M}$ ). (B) Variation of fluorescence intensities of probe XH-2 as a function of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  concentrations (0–140  $\mu\text{M}$ ). (C) Absorption spectra of probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) in the presence of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  (0–110  $\mu\text{M}$ ). (D) Variation of absorbance of XH-2 as a function of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  concentrations (0–110  $\mu\text{M}$ ).

### 3.3. Optimizing the detection conditions

The stability is an important property of probe, and the high stability of probe is beneficial to the accuracy of the detection results. Firstly we evaluated the stability of XH-2, as shown in Fig. S8, the results indicated that XH-2 had a relatively good stability.

The effect of pH on the detection of  $H_2O_2$  by probe XH-2 was studied. As shown in Fig. S9(A), neutral pH to alkaline pH was more beneficial to the detection of  $H_2O_2$ . Considering the physiological pH of the living system, pH = 7.4 was selected as the optimum pH and used in subsequent experiments.

Since the response time is an important parameter that can be used to evaluate the performance of reaction-based fluorescent probes, the kinetics of the reaction of XH-2 with  $H_2O_2$  was studied by fluorescence spectroscopy (Fig. S9(B)). As the reaction time progressed, the fluorescence intensity gradually increased and became stabilized at 40 min; Thus, we used 40 min as the test time in subsequent experiments.

### 3.4. Selectivity of probe XH-2 toward $H_2O_2$

In order to evaluate the specificity of the probe XH-2 toward  $H_2O_2$ , potential interfering substances including cations, anions, reactive oxygen species and small molecules were added to the probe XH-2 solution (10  $\mu$ M), and the results were compared with those when  $H_2O_2$  (200  $\mu$ M) was added. The results were shown in the Fig. 3. Unlike  $H_2O_2$ , all these potential interfering substances had no effects on the response of the probe XH-2, which indicated that the probe XH-2 had excellent specificity toward  $H_2O_2$ , guaranteeing that the probe XH-2 is suitable for use in complex living systems.

### 3.5. Sensing mechanism and theoretical calculations

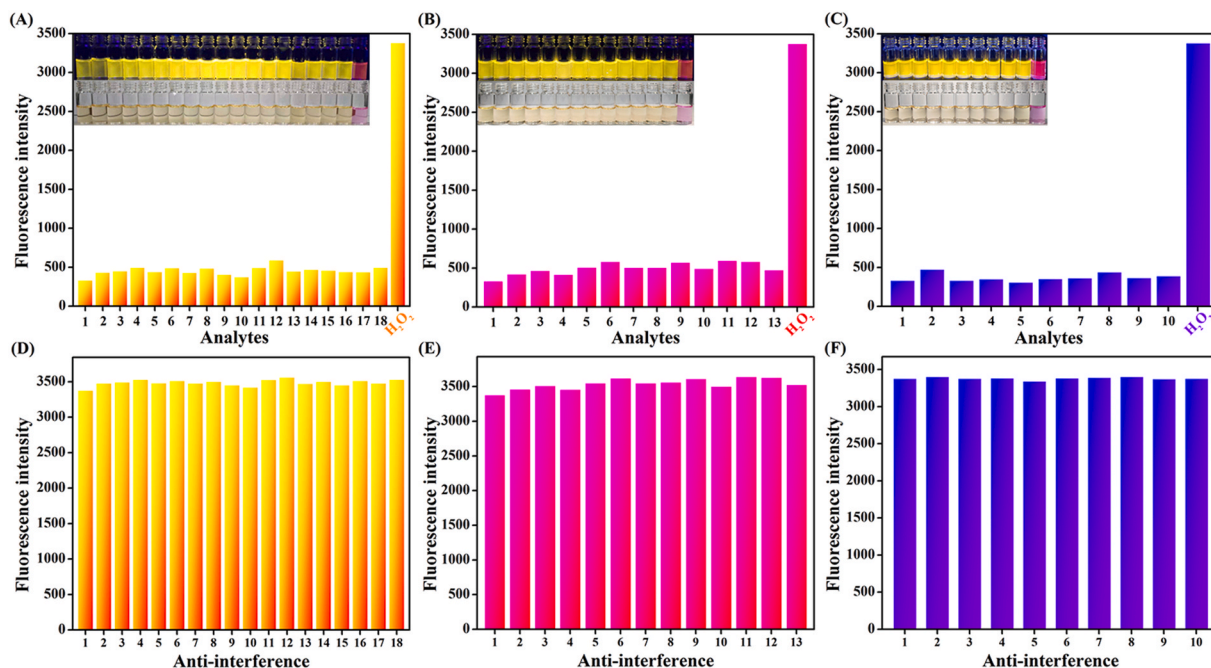
To determine the mechanism of probe XH-2 in sensing  $H_2O_2$ , we first analyzed the fluorescence spectrum and UV-Vis absorption spectrum. As presented in Fig. 4, in both the fluorescence spectrum and the UV-Vis

absorption spectrum, the peak intensity, peak shape, and peak position of probe XH-2 (10  $\mu$ M) with 200  $\mu$ M  $H_2O_2$  were almost the same as those of compound XH-1 (10  $\mu$ M), and the sensing mechanism may be in the direction that we expected (Scheme 2). To further prove our assumption, mass spectrometry was also employed (Fig. S1-S3). As shown in Fig. S1 and Fig. S3, the  $m/z$  of the mixture containing 10  $\mu$ M probe XH-2 and 200  $\mu$ M  $H_2O_2$  under the test conditions for 40 min was consistent with compound XH-1, indicating that the mechanism of probe XH-2 in sensing  $H_2O_2$  was consistent with our assumption.

We carried out theoretical calculations to understand and explain the  $H_2O_2$ -recognition mechanism of probe XH-2. The geometries of the ground and excited states and the electron structures of probe XH-2 and compound XH-1 were optimized by DFT and TDDFT calculations at the B3LYP(GD3BJ)/def2-SVP level. The result is outlined in Fig. 5. The HOMO (-6.69 eV) of the recognition unit (methylphenylboronic acid pinacol ester) was found located between the HOMO (-7.46 eV) and LUMO (-1.43 eV) of the excited-state probe XH-2, indicating that the fluorescence of probe XH-2 could be quenched by methylphenylboronic acid pinacol ester fragments as a result of intramolecular PET process. The TDDFT calculations also revealed that the maximum adsorption peak of compound XH-1 was 547.9 nm ( $f = 0.8051$ ), the strong fluorescence emission peak was 625.7 nm ( $f = 1.1193$ ), and the data obtained from the theoretical calculations closely resembled the experimental data. These TDDFT calculations revealed the theoretical optical properties of probe XH-2 and compound XH-1.

### 3.6. Detection of $H_2O_2$ in human serum

To further evaluate the practicability of the probe XH-2, we performed the spiked recovery test by spiking  $H_2O_2$  into serum (200-fold dilution). The concentration of  $H_2O_2$  in the serum sample was measured by the fluorescence method mentioned above. The results (Table 1) indicated that the probe XH-2 could successfully detect  $H_2O_2$  in human serum samples.



**Fig. 3.** (A) The fluorescence intensity of XH-2 (10  $\mu$ M) to cations (1 mM) in PBS: 1. blank; 2.  $K^+$ ; 3.  $Na^+$ ; 4.  $Mg^{2+}$ ; 5.  $Ca^{2+}$ ; 6.  $Ag^+$ ; 7.  $Pb^{2+}$ ; 8.  $Li^+$ ; 9.  $Zn^{2+}$ ; 10.  $Cu^{2+}$ ; 11.  $Ba^{2+}$ ; 12.  $Fe^{3+}$ ; 13.  $Ni^{2+}$ ; 14.  $Mn^{2+}$ ; 15.  $Cd^{2+}$ ; 16.  $Co^{2+}$ ; 17.  $Hg^{2+}$ ; 18.  $Al^{3+}$ . (B) The fluorescence intensity of XH-2 (10  $\mu$ M) to anions (1 mM) in PBS: 1. blank; 2.  $H_2PO_4^-$ ; 3.  $HPO_4^{2-}$ ; 4.  $HSO_4^-$ ; 5.  $SO_4^{2-}$ ; 6.  $CN^-$ ; 7.  $F^-$ ; 8.  $Cl^-$ ; 9.  $Br^-$ ; 10.  $I^-$ ; 11.  $SCN^-$ ; 12.  $AcO^-$ ; 13.  $ClO_4^-$ . (C) The fluorescence intensity of XH-2 (10  $\mu$ M) to ROS and small molecules (0.5 mM) in PBS: 1. blank; 2. TBHP; 3. TBO; 4. NO; 5.  $\cdot O_2^-$ ; 6.  $ClO^-$ ; 7.  $\cdot OH$ ; 8. GSH; 9. Cys; 10. acetaminophen (APAP). (D), (E) and (F) represent respectively the fluorescence intensity of XH-2 (10  $\mu$ M) in the presence of possible interference species together with  $H_2O_2$  corresponding to (A), (B) and (C).

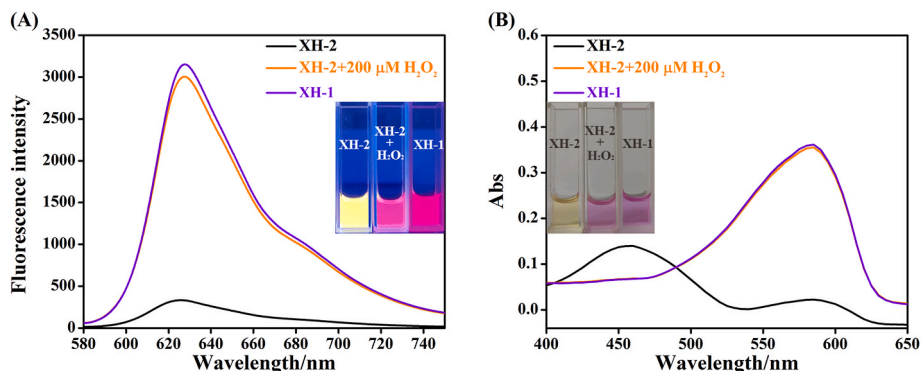
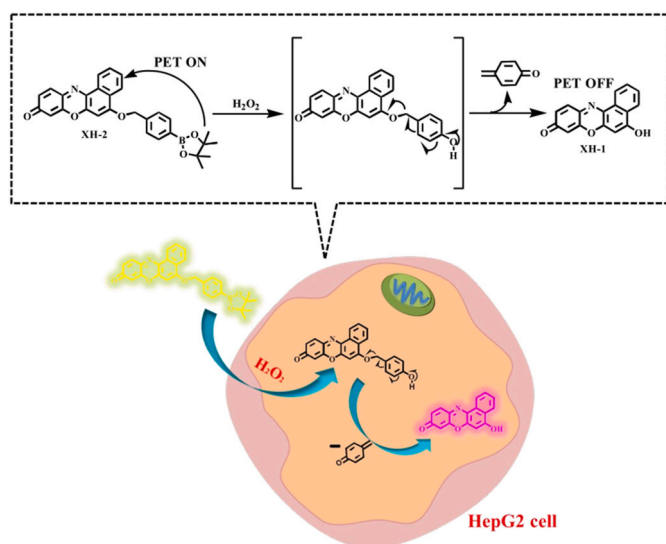


Fig. 4. (A)/(B) Fluorescence/Absorbance spectra of probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ), probe XH-2 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) with 200  $\mu\text{M}$   $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ , and XH-1 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ).



Scheme 2. The assumed  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ -sensing mechanism of probe XH-2.

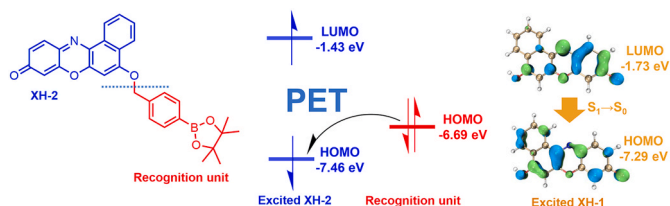


Fig. 5. HOMO/LUMO energy levels of probe XH-2 and compound XH-1 calculated based on their optimized structures of the ground and first excited states at the TDDFT levels.

Table 1

Results on recovery of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  spiked into human serum ( $n = 3$ ).

| Sample | Spiked ( $\mu\text{M}$ ) | Recovered ( $\mu\text{M}$ ) | Recovery (%) |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1      | 40                       | 40.56 $\pm$ 0.37            | 101.4        |
| 2      | 80                       | 87.33 $\pm$ 1.39            | 109.1        |
| 3      | 100                      | 98.66 $\pm$ 1.22            | 98.6         |

### 3.7. Application of indirect detection of glucose

It is known that glucose can be broken down to produce the same amount of hydrogen peroxide after interacting with glucose oxidase. To further explore the versatility of probe XH-2 in biological fields, in terms

of its sensitivity and specificity, probe XH-2 was applied to detect an  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ -related analyte, glucose. After glucose was enzymatically oxidized by glucose oxidase, probe XH-2 could satisfactorily respond to the mixture. As presented in Fig. 6(A), with increasing concentration of glucose, the intensity of the fluorescence peak centered at 638 nm gradually increased. As depicted in Fig. 6(B), probe XH-2 could indirectly detect glucose with excellent linearity ( $R^2 = 0.9930$ ) at glucose concentration range of 0–140  $\mu\text{M}$ . These results proved the eminent performance of probe XH-2 in indirect detection of glucose.

### 3.8. Fluorescence imaging of exogenous and endogenous $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ in HepG2 cells

Before performing cell imaging, we first evaluated the cytotoxicity of the probe XH-2 to HepG2 cells. The results depicted in Fig. S10 confirmed that the probe XH-2 had negligible toxicity to HepG2 cells. With the probe XH-2 at a concentration of up to 100  $\mu\text{M}$ , the cell survival rate remained as high as 80%, which is a prerequisite for applying the probe XH-2 in cell imaging.

Subsequently, probe XH-2 was applied to detect exogenous/endogenous  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in HepG2 cells. As exhibited in Fig. 7(A) and (B), the control group did not exhibit fluorescence, while HepG2 cells displayed weak fluorescence when treated with only the probe XH-2. The third group exhibited weaker fluorescence than the second group when successively treated with NAC (N-Acetyl-cysteine, an efficient antioxidant which can eliminate  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  or inhibit its production in cells) and probe XH-2. The last group, which was successively treated with NAC,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  and probe XH-2, exhibited intense fluorescence. Thus, we drew the conclusion that probe XH-2 can be applied to monitor exogenous/endogenous  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in HepG2 cells.

### 3.9. Quantitative detection of $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ in HepG2 cells

Hereafter, probe XH-2 was employed to detect different concentrations in HepG2 cells. As demonstrated in Fig. 7(C) and (D), the fluorescence of HepG2 cells became more intense as the concentration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  increased. A good linear relationship between fluorescence intensity and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  concentration in a range of 0–120  $\mu\text{M}$  ( $R^2 = 0.9859$ ) was also observed, which demonstrates that probe XH-2 can be used for quantitative detection of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in HepG2 cells.

### 3.10. Evaluating drug-induced hepatotoxicity in HepG2 cells

Acetaminophen (APAP) is a common medicine for treating pain and fever. Excessive amounts of APAP can induce liver toxicity due to its ability to induce the production of large amounts of ROS. Therefore, with the aid of probe XH-2, the liver damage induced by APAP was evaluated using HepG2 cells and confocal imaging. As shown in Fig. 8, the fluorescence intensity of cells had an upward trend as the

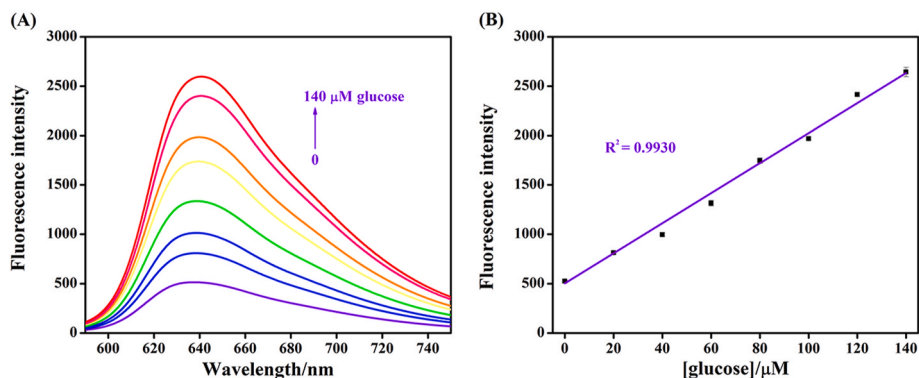


Fig. 6. (A) Change of fluorescence spectrum of probe XH-2 (10 μM) in the presence of different concentrations of glucose (0–140 μM). (B) Change of fluorescence intensity of probe XH-2 as a function of glucose concentrations (0–140 μM),  $\lambda_{ex}/\lambda_{em} = 570 \text{ nm}/638 \text{ nm}$ .

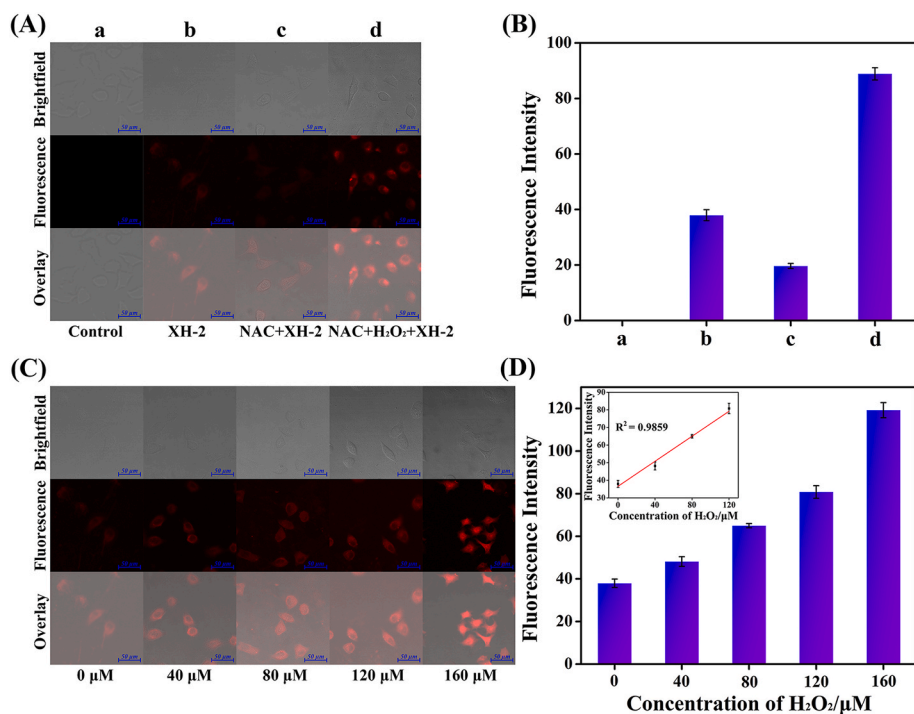


Fig. 7. (A) Fluorescence imaging of exogenous/endogenous  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  in HepG2 cells: a, control group; b, cells treated with probe XH-2 (10 μM) only; c, cells successively treated with NAC (1 mM) and probe XH-2 (10 μM); d, cells successively treated with NAC (1 mM),  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  (140 μM) and probe XH-2 (10 μM). (B) Bar graphs representing the fluorescence intensities of a, b, c, and d in (A). (C) Fluorescence imaging in HepG2 cells during the quantitative detection of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  at different concentrations (0–160 μM). (D) Bar graphs representing the corresponding fluorescence intensities of samples in (C).

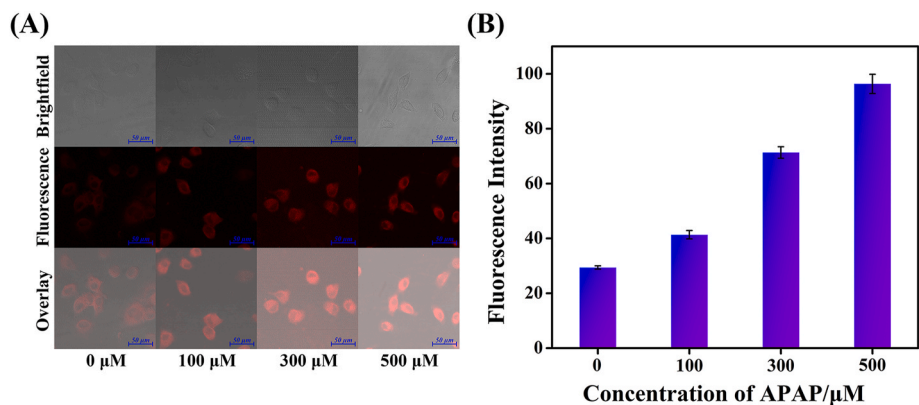


Fig. 8. (A) Fluorescence images in HepG2 cells successively treated with different concentrations of APAP (0, 100, 300, and 500 μM) and probe XH-2 (10 μM). (B) Bar graphs representing the corresponding fluorescence intensities of samples in (A).

concentration of APAP increased, which not only proves the generation of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> induced by APAP in HepG2 cells, but also indicates the universality of probe XH-2. As all the above results manifested, probe XH-2 is suitable for use in visualizing the liver damage induced by APAP.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we reported a neoteric dual-signal colorimetric fluorescence probe for the detection of hydrogen peroxide. Probe XH-2 had high sensitivity and specificity owing to its specific recognition group. Based on its extremely low cytotoxicity, the probe was successfully applied to detect endogenous/exogenous hydrogen peroxide, to quantitatively determine the concentration level of hydrogen peroxide in HepG2 cells, and to visualize the liver injury induced by APAP. Collectively, based on these prominent performances, the probe XH-2 is a promising tool for evaluating and elucidating the diverse cellular functions of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> in the living system to reveal the pathogenesis of many diseases.

#### Credit author contribution statement

Lanlan Xu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Investigation, Validation, Data curation, Writing - original draft. Yu Zhang: Data analysis. Lihe Zhao: Data analysis. Hao Han: Data analysis. Siqi Zhang: Data analysis. Yibing Huang: Software, Validation. Xinghua Wang: Data curation. Daqian Song: Writing - review & editing. Pinyi Ma: Data curation, writing - review & editing. Ping Ren: Data curation, writing - review & editing. Ying Sun: Data curation.

#### 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

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.talanta.2021.122578>.

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