

**5-Hydroxymethylfurfural modified rhodamine B dual-function
derivative: Highly sensitive and selective optical detection of pH and
Cu²⁺**

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24 **Abstract:** A dual-function optical chemosensor (RBF) was designed and easily
25 synthesized by condensation reaction of 5-Hydroxymethylfurfural and rhodamine B
26 hydrazide. RBF exhibited highly sensitive, highly selective and quick response to
27 acidic pH. The fluorescence intensity of RBF exhibited a more than 41-fold increase
28 within the pH range from 7.50 to 3.73 with a pKa value of 5.02, which could be
29 successfully applied to monitor intracellular pH in living PC12 cells and Hela cells.
30 Additionally, the spectroscopy of UV-Vis and EDTA-adding experiments indicated
31 that RBF was a highly selective and reversible colorimetric chemosensor for Cu²⁺ in
32 Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.2) aqueous buffer solution as well as other metal ions had no
33 obvious interference. Moreover, RBF has been successfully applied to detect Cu²⁺ in
34 real water samples.

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36 **Keywords:** Rhodamine B, Fluorescent, pH, Cu²⁺, Colorimetric, Live-cells imaging

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47 **1. Introduction**

48 pH plays a fundamental role in various systems [1-4], especially within cells [5]
49 such as apoptosis [6,7] and cell growth [8,9], signal transduction [10] and autophagy
50 [11,12]. Abnormal intracellular pH values indicate abnormal cell events and are
51 observed in some diseases including cancer and Alzheimer's disease[19]. Many
52 methods for measurement of pH values have achieved highly successful including
53 nuclear magnetic resonance [13], microelectrodes [14], acid-base indicator titration
54 [15], potentiometric titration [16] and fluorescent probes. On the other hand, among
55 the heavy- and transition-metal (HTM) ions, Cu^{2+} plays a very crucial role in several
56 physiological processes in organisms [17]. Especially, it is a cofactor for plentiful
57 enzymes. The total Cu^{2+} content of the adult human body usually contain 70-80 mg
58 under normal conditions [18]. It exhibits toxicity to certain biological systems under
59 overload conditions, however, Cu^{2+} in abnormal levels is connected to oxidative stress
60 and neurological disorders such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Menkes', and Wilson's
61 diseases [19-22]. Similarly, there are many methods for measurement of Cu^{2+} . Optical
62 chemosensors have been made more attractive among these methods owing to their
63 operational simplicity, high sensitivity, low-cost and real-time detection [23, 24].

64 As an excellent model, rhodamine B framework relies on its long absorption and
65 emission wavelength, large absorption coefficient and high fluorescence quantum
66 yield [25]. Rhodamine B derivatives with a spirocyclic structure are colorless and
67 non-fluorescent, while the ring-opening of spirocyclic structure exhibits a pink color
68 and a strong fluorescence emission. This makes rhodamine B derivatives serve as

69 excellent “off-on” fluorescent probes. To date, a great number of optical
70 chemosensors based on rhodamine B have been widely developed as “off-on”
71 fluorescent or colorimetric chemosensors for the detection of metal ions, such as Hg^{2+}
72 [26-30], Al^{3+} [31-34], Fe^{3+} [35-37], Pb^{2+} [38], Cr^{3+} [39,40], Cu^{2+} [41-46] and Pd^{2+} [47].
73 There are also many fluorescent chemosensors for the measurement of intracellular
74 pH [48-54]. To the best of our knowledge, a hugely limiting factor of the above
75 rhodamine B probes is that they can detect only the same kind of analytes using
76 fluorescence and UV-Vis absorption spectrometry method at the same time.
77 Furthermore, although dual-function fluorescent chemosensors designed for detecting
78 different metal ions are plentiful [55-59], for pH and metal ions using different optical
79 signals are relatively few [60].

80 As a continuation of our research efforts devoted to fluorescent probes for metal
81 ions recognition, we designed and synthesized a bifunctional rhodamine B
82 chemosensor (RBF) exhibited not only highly sensitive for pH but also highly
83 selective recognition of Cu^{2+} by fluorescent and colorimetric detection, respectively.
84 The chemosensor (RBF) with a pKa value of 5.02 showed great enhanced
85 fluorescence intensity and visible color changes from colorless to pink over a pH
86 range from 7.50 to 3.73, which was suitable for monitoring intracellular pH in living
87 cells. Furthermore, the feasibility of the chemosensor (RBF) for detecting Cu^{2+} in real
88 water samples was also investigated.

89 **2. Experimental**

90 **2.1. Apparatus**

91 ^1H and ^{13}C NMR spectra were measured on a Bruker DMX-300 spectrometer
92 operating at 400 MHz. The MS spectra were performed on Bruker ESQUIRE
93 HPLC-MS AB 4000Q. UV-Vis absorption spectra were recorded on a U-4100
94 spectrophotometer. Fluorescent spectra were recorded on a Hitachi F-7000 FL
95 spectrofluorometer. FT-IR spectra were measured on Thermo Nicolet AVATAR360
96 spectrometer. An Olympus Zeiss 710 laser scanning confocal microscopy was used
97 for fluorescence image of cells. The pH measurements were measured by use of a
98 PHS-3D digital pH-meter (Jingke, Shanghai). All measurements of spectra were
99 carried out in aqueous solution with 1% ethanol as cosolvent.

100 2.2. Materials

101 Rhodamine B was purchased from Beijing chemical plant,
102 5-Hydroxymethylfurfural was purchased from J&K, Hydrazine hydrate was
103 purchased from Tianjin reagent plant. The solution of metal ions was prepared from
104 their nitrate salts and chloride salts of analytical grade. The solvents were used as
105 received without further purification. Distilled water was used throughout.
106 Britton-Robinson (B-R) buffer was prepared with 40 mM acetic acid, boric acid, and
107 phosphoric acid. Dilute hydrochloric acid or sodium hydroxide was used for adjusting
108 pH values. Tris-HCl aqueous buffer solutions (10 mM, pH=7.20) were prepared using
109 20 mM Tris(hydroxymethyl)aminomethane (Tris) and proper amount of HCl under
110 adjustment by pH meter.

111 2.3. Cells culture

112 PC12 cells were seeded in glass bottom culture dishes and grown in Dulbecco's

113 modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) supplemented with 2.5% fetal bovine serum (FBS)
114 and 15% horse serum at 37°C with 5% CO₂ atmosphere. HeLa cells were cultured in
115 DMEM supplemented with 10% FBS, 100 µg/ml penicillin and 100 µg/mL
116 streptomycin in the same incubator environment until harvesting for the experiment.
117 When harvesting, the DMEM was drawn out from the culture dishes, and the dishes
118 were rinsed three times with 10 mM phosphate buffer saline (PBS) and then treated
119 with 4 mL trypsinase solution containing 0.25% EDTA for 3 min in the incubator. The
120 cells were centrifuged at 1500 rpm for 5 min, then removed the supernatant.

121 2.4. Synthesis of RBF

122 RBF was facilely synthesized by simple condensation reaction of Rhodamine B
123 Hydrazide (RBH) and 5-Hydroxymethylfurfural. The synthesis and structure of RBF
124 were depicted in Scheme 1. RBH was synthesized according to the literature methods
125 by a one-step reaction of rhodamine B with hydrazine hydrate (80%) in ethanol [61].
126 To a 100 mL round-bottomed flask, RBH (2.19 mmol, 1 g) and
127 5-Hydroxymethylfurfural (2.4 mmol, 0.30 g) were dissolved in 40 mL absolute
128 ethanol. The mixture was stirred and refluxed for 20 h at 80°C under N₂ atmosphere.
129 Then the solvent was removed under reduced pressure, after cooling to room
130 temperature, and then brown solid was washed with cold ethanol for three times. The
131 crude product recrystallized from 10 mL absolute ethanol, obtaining 0.89 g of RBF
132 (yield 68.5%). IR (KBr) ν_{OH} : 3371 cm⁻¹; Mass spectrometry: m/z, calcd: 564.27, found:
133 565.3 ([M+H]⁺), 587.4 ([M+Na]⁺). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ (ppm) : 8.00-7.98
134 (m, 1H), 7.97 (d, *J* = 1.8 Hz, 1H), 7.45 (s, 2H), 7.06 (d, *J* = 7.1 Hz, 1H), 6.55 (d, *J* = 8.7

135 Hz, 2H), 6.51 (d, J =3.4 Hz, 1H), 6.43 (s, 2H), 6.26 (s, 1H), 6.24 (d, J =3.4 Hz, 2H),
136 4.56 (d, J =5.2 Hz, 2H), 3.33 (q, J =7.1 Hz, 8H), 2.26 (s, 1H), 1.16 (t, J =7.1 Hz, 12H).
137 ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ (ppm): 164.50, 158.63, 152.71, 152.54, 148.90,
138 138.93, 134.26, 129.05, 128.21, 127.89, 123.90, 123.42, 115.96, 109.87, 108.57,
139 105.56, 97.96, 65.63, 56.03, 44.12, 12.89.

140 **3. Results and discussion**

141 **3.1. Colorimetric recognition of Cu^{2+}**

142 The 3D absorption spectra of RBF (20 μM) toward various metal ions was first
143 explored in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.20) aqueous buffer solution in the presence of 2
144 equiv. of different metal ions and the results are shown in Fig. 1A. The probe RBF
145 exhibited a very weak absorption band over 500 nm region, which indicated that
146 probe RBF existed as a spirocycle-closed form [26]. When Cu^{2+} and other metal
147 cations were added into the solution, only the mixture solution with Cu^{2+} exhibited a
148 significant absorbance at 565 nm coupled with an obvious color change from
149 colorless to pink (Fig. 2), which results from the Cu^{2+} -induced ring opening of the
150 spirolactam form. The results showed that probe RBF could be served as a “naked eye”
151 probe with a characteristic of high selectivity toward Cu^{2+} over other competitive
152 metal ions.

153 **3.2. Fluorescence spectral responses of RBF**

154 Changes of fluorescence emission spectra of RBF (10 μM) caused by H^+
155 (pH=4.50) and various metal ions (20 μM) in B-R buffer solution (pH=7.20) were
156 record in Fig. 1B. The spectrum of RBF showed nearly no fluorescence above 550 nm,

157 while the addition of H^+ (pH=4.50) caused a strong fluorescence at 591 nm. The
158 fluorescence emission spectra of probe RBF at different pH are shown in Fig. 3A.
159 RBF (10 μ M) emitted a very weak fluorescence when the pH value of system was
160 above 6.50, which was ascribed to its spirolactam form in solution. When the value of
161 pH fell to less than 6.50, the fluorescence intensity of probe RBF gradually increased
162 (about 41-fold within the pH range of 7.50-3.73) and the pink color gradually deepen
163 (Fig. 3B), indicating the formation of the ring-opened amide form and highly sensitive
164 to acidic pH.

165 3.3. The investigation of pH and response time

166 For practical application, the absorbance intensity response of RBF in the
167 absence and presence of Cu^{2+} in different pH values were evaluated. Increased
168 absorbance intensity of RBF was observed at acidic condition, which was likely due
169 to the H^+ -induced ring opening of rhodamine spirolactam. The absorbance intensity of
170 RBF remained stable in a comparatively wide pH range from 7.00 to 10.00 (Fig. 4).
171 However, the addition of Cu^{2+} led to the absorbance enhancement, which was
172 attributed to a Cu^{2+} -induced opening of the rhodamine ring. Therefore, probe RBF
173 was favorable for its application in real samples which exist in neutral conditions.

174 Fig. 5 shows that the time dependence of the response of RBF (20 μ M) to Cu^{2+}
175 (40 μ M) was investigated. The absorbance intensity of RBF with Cu^{2+} reached its
176 maximum value at about 30 min, after that the absorbance intensity remained almost
177 constant. Therefore, a 30 min reaction time was selected in subsequent experiments in
178 order to make the metal ions chelated with the sensor sufficiently. Furthermore, we

179 examined the time course of fluorescence intensity of RBF (10 μ M) with pH=4.50 at
 180 room temperature. After 2 min, the fluorescence remarkably increased to its maximum
 181 value and then remained stable.

182 3.4. Linearity

183 To further investigate the interaction of Cu^{2+} with RBF, an absorbance titration
 184 experiment was carried out in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.2) aqueous buffer solution, as
 185 shown in Fig. 6, a linear increase of absorbance intensity could be observed under the
 186 optimum conditions with increasing Cu^{2+} concentration over a range (0-5 μ M), then
 187 obtained a detection limit of 0.15 μ M based on $3 \times \delta_{\text{blank}}/k$ (where δ_{blank} is the standard
 188 deviation of the blank solution and k is the slope of the calibration plot). The
 189 regression equation is $Y=0.01816+0.05538X$ ($R=0.9953$). Subsequently, as shown in
 190 Fig.7, the fluorescence pH titration of RBF exhibited that the fluorescence intensity of
 191 RBF were gradually increased about 41-fold within the pH range from 7.50 to 3.73
 192 with a pKa value of 5.02 and linearly proportional ($R=0.9924$) to pH values in the
 193 range from 4.40 to 5.30. The relative fluorescence quantum yields in acidic condition
 194 (pH=4.50) were determined to be 0.30 with Rhodamine B ($\Phi_F=0.97$) in ethanol as a
 195 standard and calculated using the following equation [62].

$$\Phi_x = \Phi_s \left(\frac{F_x}{F_s} \right) \left(\frac{A_s}{A_x} \right) \left(\frac{\lambda_{\text{exs}}}{\lambda_{\text{exx}}} \right) \left(\frac{n_x}{n_s} \right)^2$$

196 Where subscripts X and S refer to the unknown and the standard, Φ stands for
 197 quantum yield, F represents integrated area under the emission curve, A is the
 198 absorbance intensity at the excitation wavelength, λ_{ex} exhibits the excitation
 199 wavelength, n is index of refraction of the solution.

200 3.5. Proposed binding mode

201 As shown in Fig. 8, a Job's plot experiment was established. Total concentration
202 of Cu^{2+} and RBF was maintained constant at 20 μM and mole fraction of Cu^{2+}
203 changed from 0 to 1. The maximum absorbance intensity at 565 nm was appeared
204 when the molecular fraction of Cu^{2+} was close to 0.33, which indicated that the 1:2
205 stoichiometry was the most possible binding mode of Cu^{2+} and RBF.

206 In order to better understand the complexation behavior of Cu^{2+} with RBF, the
207 ESI-MS experiment was conducted to prove the reaction mechanism [42]. As shown
208 in Fig. 9, the peak at $m/z=565.3$ and 587.4 corresponded to $[\text{RBF}+\text{H}]^+$ and $[\text{RBF}+\text{Na}]^+$,
209 respectively. And the peak at $m/z=596.3$ corresponded to $[2(\text{RBF}-\text{H})+\text{Cu}+2\text{H}]^{2+}$. The
210 results supported the 1:2 stoichiometry of the Cu^{2+} to RBF complex concluded from
211 the Job's plot.

212 3.6. Reversibility and reaction mechanism

213 As shown in Fig. 10, the EDTA-adding experiment was implemented to analyze
214 the chemical stability and reversibility behavior of the binding of RBF and Cu^{2+} . The
215 absorbance intensity of the mixture solution of RBF and Cu^{2+} was significant
216 decreased when excess EDTA was added, then signals were almost completely
217 restored when excess Cu^{2+} was added to the system. The results also further indicated
218 that the spectral response of RBF to Cu^{2+} was likely due to the chelation-induced ring
219 opening of rhodamine spirolactam, rather than other possible reactions [46].
220 Furthermore, Fig. 11 shows that the fluorescence intensity of the chemosensor was
221 reversible between pH 4.50 and 7.20, which means it was suitable for the detection of

222 a system with a shifty pH value. As the above (Figs. 8, 9, 10 and 11), the possible
223 coordination modes of RBF for H^+ and Cu^{2+} were proposed in the Scheme 2.

224 3.7. Tolerance of RBF to Cu^{2+} and pH over other metal ions

225 The effects of other metal ions on Cu^{2+} and pH measurements were evaluated
226 through competitive experiments. As shown in Fig. 12, the absorbance intensity
227 changes of RBF (20 μM) in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.20) aqueous buffer solution
228 were measured by the treatment of Cu^{2+} (40 μM) in the presence of other interfering
229 metal ions (40 μM) including Pb^{2+} , Na^+ , K^+ , Cd^{2+} , Ba^{2+} , Zn^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , Ag^+ , Ni^{2+} , Ca^{2+} ,
230 Al^{3+} , Cr^{3+} and Fe^{3+} . The results indicated that the recognition of Cu^{2+} by RBF was
231 hardly affected by other coexisting metal ions. Moreover, Fig. 13 shows that the
232 fluorescent selectivity of RBF for H^+ at different pH values. Except Cu^{2+} caused
233 fluorescence quenching to different degrees, the addition of Pb^{2+} , Na^+ , K^+ , Cd^{2+} , Ba^{2+} ,
234 Zn^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , Ag^+ , Ni^{2+} , Ca^{2+} , Al^{3+} , Cr^{3+} and Fe^{3+} had no effect on fluorescence
235 intensity in B-R buffer solution at pH 7.20 and 4.50. Because of the low content of
236 Cu^{2+} within cells, this quenching did not affect cell imaging [50].

237 3.8. Laser scanning confocal microscopy experiments of PC12 and Hela cells

238 We used RBF with PC12 cells (A) and Hela cells (B) to investigate the potential
239 biological application of RBF for fluorescence imaging. PC12 cells and Hela cells
240 were incubated with RBF (10 μM) at different incubation time (0.5, 1, 1.5 h) at $37^\circ C$,
241 respectively. As shown in Fig. 14, after three times washed with Tris-HCl buffer
242 solutions, the blank 1 and blank 2 groups without RBF exhibited no fluorescence, and
243 other groups showed the increase of fluorescence intensity with increasing time (Fig.

14a, b, c and a_i, b_i, c_i). The different fluorescence intensity within individual cell demonstrated that intracellular pH is not equably distributed [50]. Bright-field measurements after treatment with RBF confirmed that the PC12 cells and Hela cells were viable throughout the imaging experiments (Fig. 14d, e, f and d_i, e_i, f_i). The above facts indicated that probe RBF showed excellent cell membrane permeability and staining ability in living cells.

3.9. Preliminary analytical application

In order to investigate the applicability of the proposed method in real sample analysis, the chemosensor RBF was applied in the determination of Cu²⁺ in lake water which collected from the campus of Henan university and tap water samples. Then the lake water was simply filtered. All these samples were adjusted pH by Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.2) aqueous buffer solution. As shown in Table 1, Cu²⁺ was undetected from both of the lake water and tap water. Moreover, the results showed satisfactory recovery and R.S.D. values for all of the samples. As a consequence, RBF seems available to detect Cu²⁺ in lake water and tap water.

4. Conclusion

In summary, we have designed and synthesized a dual-function rhodamine B-based fluorescent chemosensor (RBF). RBF exhibited specific fluorescent response to acidic pH and reversibility between pH 4.50 and 7.20. The fluorescence intensity of RBF exhibited a more than 41-fold increase within the pH range from 7.50 to 3.73 with a pK_a value of 5.02, and also showed a clear color change from colorless to pink, which was very available to monitor intracellular pH in living PC12 cells and Hela

266 cells. Moreover, RBF showed highly sensitive and selective colorimetric recognition
267 of Cu^{2+} , which could be served as a “naked eye” probe. It has been successfully
268 applied to detect Cu^{2+} in real water samples.

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398 **Figure captions:**

399 **Scheme 1.** Synthesis of RBF

400 **Fig. 1.** (A) UV-Vis absorbance spectra of RBF (20 μ M) in Tris-HCl buffer solution
401 (10 mM, pH=7.20) upon addition of different metal ions (40 μ M). (B) Fluorescence
402 spectra of RBF (10 μ M) with the presence of H^+ in B-R buffer solution (pH=4.50)
403 and various metal ions (20 μ M) in B-R buffer solution (pH=7.20).

404 **Fig. 2.** Colors of RBF (20 μ M) and RBF with different metal ions (40 μ M).

405 **Fig. 3.** (A) Fluorescent spectra of RBF (10 μ M) in B-R buffer with different pH,
406 λ_{ex} =520 nm. (B) (a) Changes of color of RBF (10 μ M) in B-R buffer with different pH.
407 (b) Changes of Fluorescent intensity of RBF (10 μ M) in B-R buffer with different pH.

408 **Fig. 4.** Absorption intensity (565 nm) of free RBF (20 μ M) and RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} in
409 Tris-HCl buffer solution with different pH conditions.

410 **Fig. 5.** (a): The time courses of fluorescence intensity of RBF (10 μ M) in B-R buffer
411 solution (pH=4.50); (b): The time courses of absorbance intensity of RBF (20 μ M) in
412 Tris-HCl buffer solution (10 mM, pH=7.20).

413 **Fig. 6.** Absorbance spectra of reaction solution of RBF (20 μ M) in Tris-HCl buffer
414 solution (10 mM, pH=7.20) with different concentrations of Cu^{2+} . Inset: absorbance at
415 565 nm as a function of Cu^{2+} concentration.

416 **Fig. 7.** Fluorescence intensity at 591 nm (λ_{ex} =520 nm) by pH values according to the
417 fluorescent pH titration (pH 3.73-7.50). The inset shows the linear relationship of
418 fluorescence intensity at 591 nm and pH values from 4.40 to 5.30.

419 **Fig. 8.** Job's plot of the complex formed by $[Cu^{2+}]/[Cu^{2+}]+[RBF]$. The total

420 concentration of RBF and Cu^{2+} was 20 μM .

421 **Fig. 9.** ESI-MS spectrum of reaction between RBF and Cu^{2+} : (A) RBF (40 μM), (B)
422 RBF with 2 equiv. of Cu^{2+} .

423 **Fig. 10.** Absorbance spectra showing reversibility of Cu^{2+} coordination to RBF by
424 EDTA in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.20) buffer solution. (a): only RBF (20 μM); (b):
425 RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} ; (c): RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} +5 equiv. EDTA; (d): RBF+2 equiv.
426 Cu^{2+} +5 equiv. EDTA+7 equiv. Cu^{2+} ; (e): RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} +5 equiv. EDTA+9
427 equiv. Cu^{2+} ;

428 **Fig. 11.** pH reversibility study of RBF (10 μM) between pH 7.20 and 4.50.

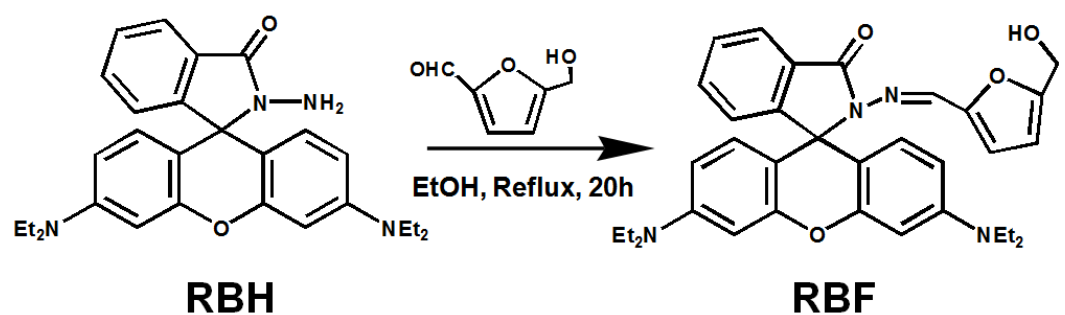
429 **Scheme 2.** Proposed mechanism of RBF for H^+ and Cu^{2+} respectively.

430 **Fig. 12.** Metal ions selectivity of RBF (20 μM) in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.20) buffer
431 solution. The black bars represent the absorbance intensity of the solution containing
432 RBF (20 μM) and different metal ions (40 μM). The red bars represent the absorbance
433 intensity changes that occur upon addition of Cu^{2+} (40 μM) to the solution containing
434 RBF and different metal ions.

435 **Fig. 13.** (A) Emission change at 591 nm of **RBF** (10 μM) in the presence of different
436 metal ions in B-R buffer solution at pH 7.20, λ_{ex} =520 nm. (B) Emission change at 591
437 nm of **RBF** (10 μM) in the presence of different metal ions in B-R buffer solution at
438 pH 4.50, λ_{ex} =520 nm. The final concentration of K^+ , Na^+ , Ca^{2+} and Mg^{2+} are 200 μM ,
439 respectively, while that of other metal ions are 50 μM .

440 **Fig. 14.** Confocal fluorescence images of PC12 cells (A) and Hela cells (B) (λ_{ex} =515
441 nm). Blank 1 and Blank 2: Only PC12 cells and Hela cells without probe RBF,

442 respectively. (a), (b) and (c) of PC12 cells incubated with probe RBF (10 μ M) for 0.5
443 h, 1 h and 1.5 h at 37 °C, respectively. (a_i), (b_i) and (c_i) of Hela cells incubated with
444 probe RBF (10 μ M) for 0.5 h, 1 h and 1.5 h at 37 °C, respectively., (d), (e), (f) and (d_i)
445 (e_i) (f_i): Bright-field view of panel. (g), (h), (i) and (g_i), (h_i) (i_i): Overlay image of dark
446 field and bright field.



Scheme 1. Synthesis of RBF

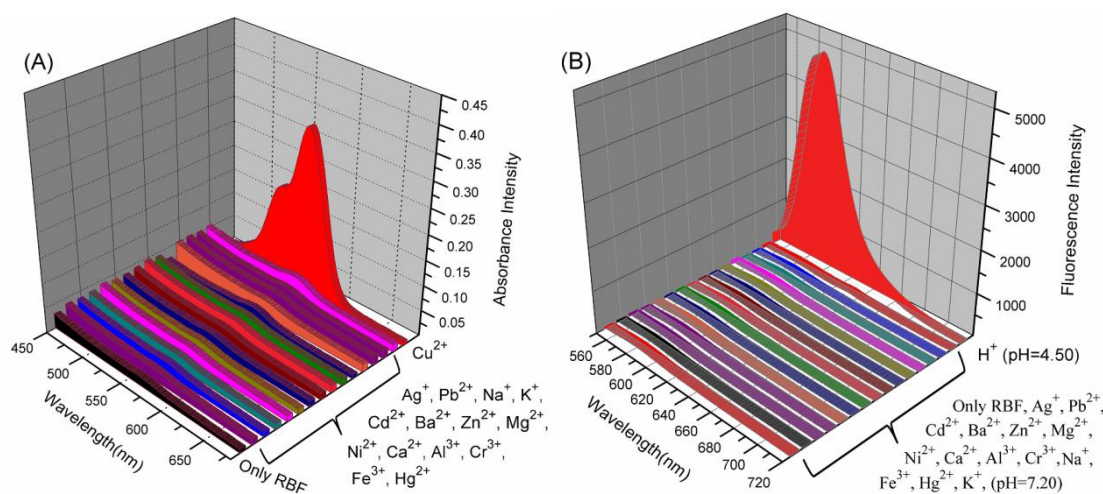


Fig. 1. (A) UV-Vis absorbance spectra of RBF (20 μ M) in Tris-HCl buffer solution (10 mM, pH=7.20) upon addition of different metal ions (40 μ M). (B) Fluorescence spectra of RBF (10 μ M) with the presence of H^+ in B-R buffer solution (pH=4.50) and various metal ions (20 μ M) in B-R buffer solution (pH=7.20).

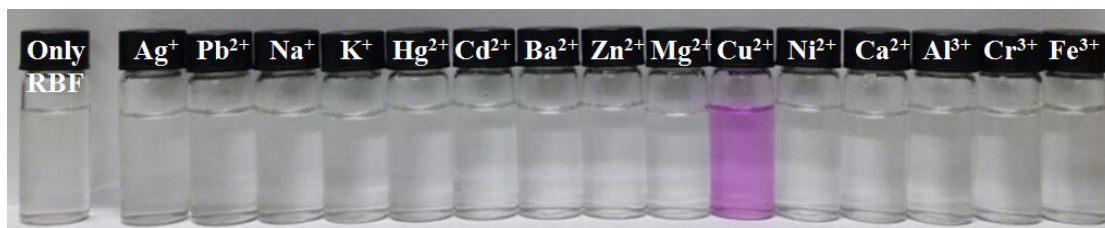


Fig. 2. Colors of RBF (20 μM) and RBF with different metal ions (40 μM).

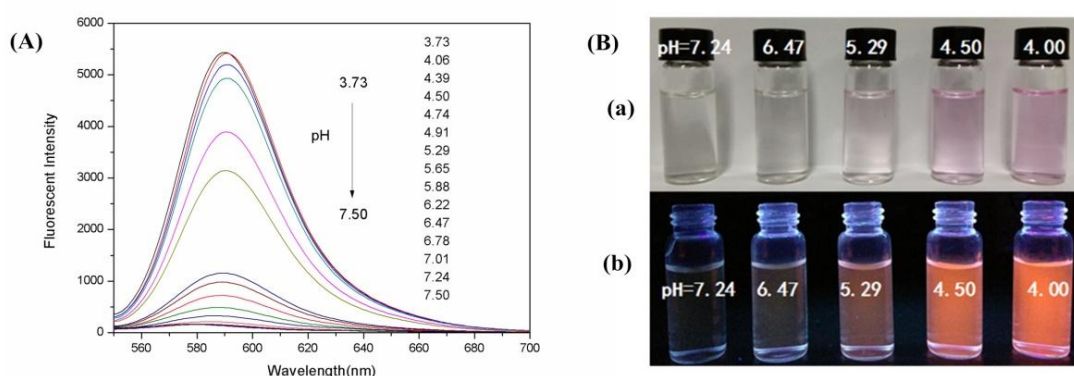


Fig. 3. (A) Fluorescent spectra of RBF (10 μM) in B-R buffer with different pH, $\lambda_{\text{ex}}=520$ nm. (B) (a) Changes of color of RBF (10 μM) in B-R buffer with different pH. (b) Changes of Fluorescent intensity of RBF (10 μM) in B-R buffer with different pH.

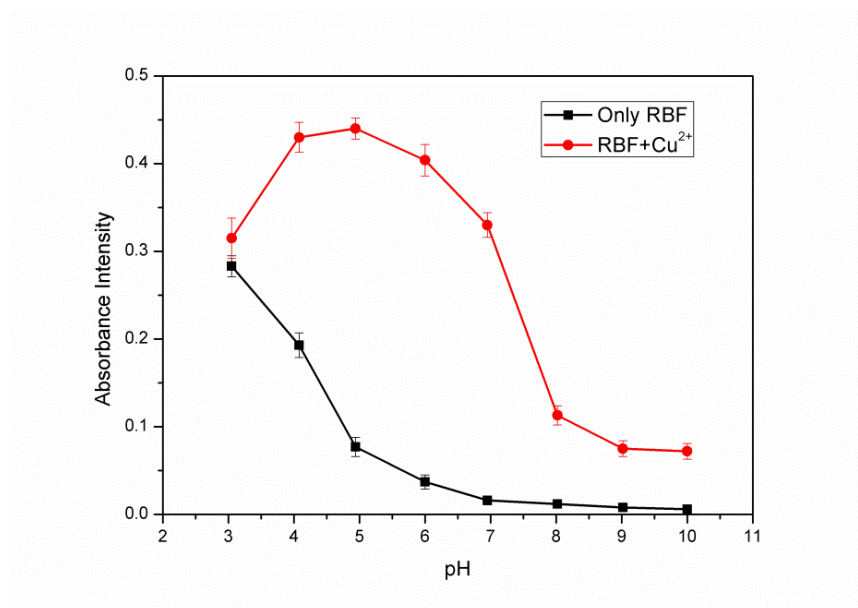


Fig. 4. Absorption intensity (565 nm) of free RBF (20 μ M) and RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} in Tris-HCl buffer solution with different pH conditions.

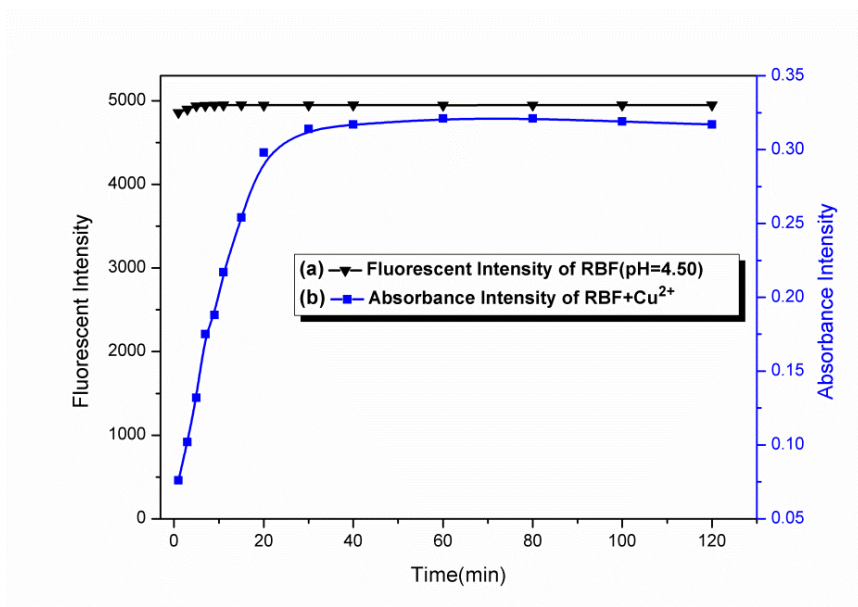


Fig. 5. (a): The time courses of fluorescence intensity of RBF (10 μ M) in B-R buffer solution (pH=4.50); (b): The time courses of absorbance intensity of RBF (20 μ M) in Tris-HCl buffer solution (10 mM, pH=7.20).

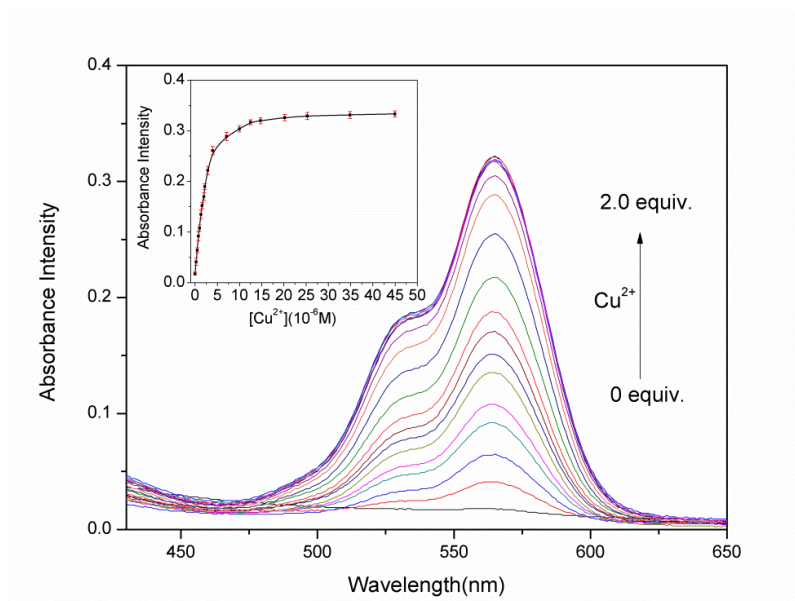


Fig. 6. Absorbance spectra of reaction solution of RBF (20 μM) in Tris-HCl buffer solution (10 mM, pH=7.20) with different concentrations of Cu^{2+} . Inset: absorbance at 565 nm as a function of Cu^{2+} concentration.

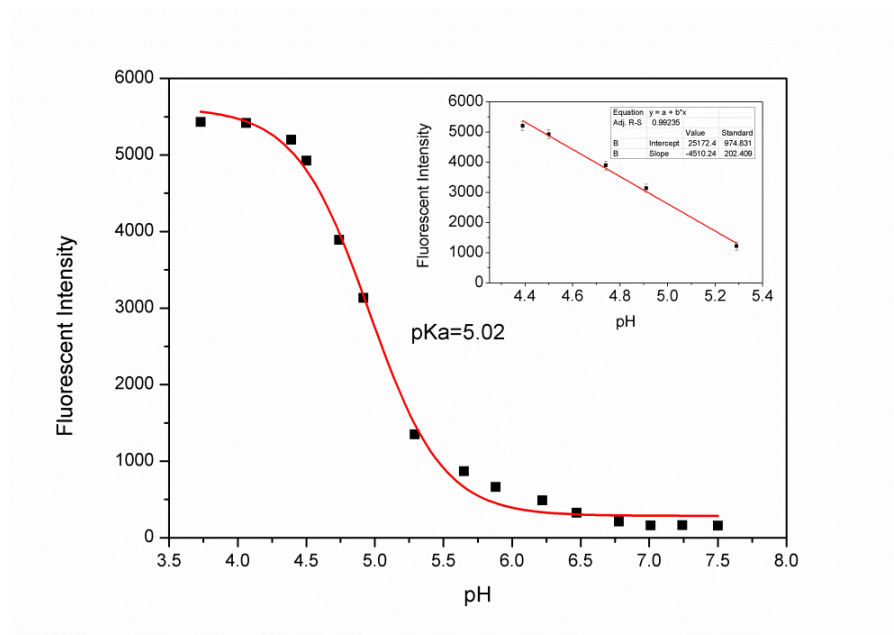


Fig. 7. Fluorescence intensity at 591 nm ($\lambda_{\text{ex}}=520$ nm) by pH values according to the fluorescent pH titration (pH 3.73-7.50). The inset shows the linear relationship of fluorescence intensity at 591 nm and pH values from 4.40 to 5.30

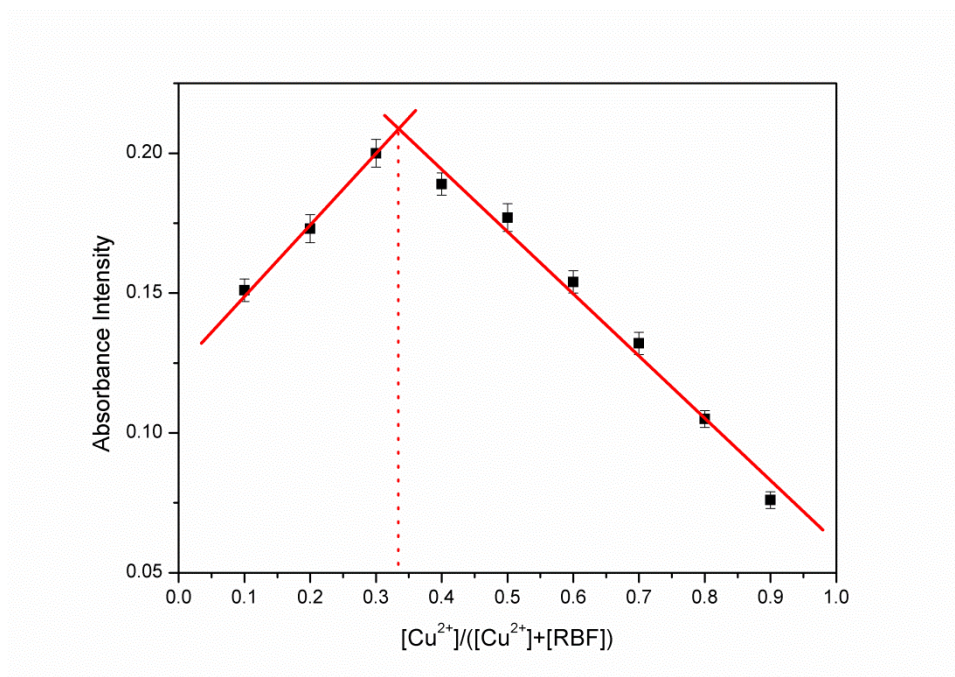


Fig. 8. Job's plot of the complex formed by $[Cu^{2+}]/[Cu^{2+}]+[RBF]$. The total concentration of RBF and Cu^{2+} was 20 μM .

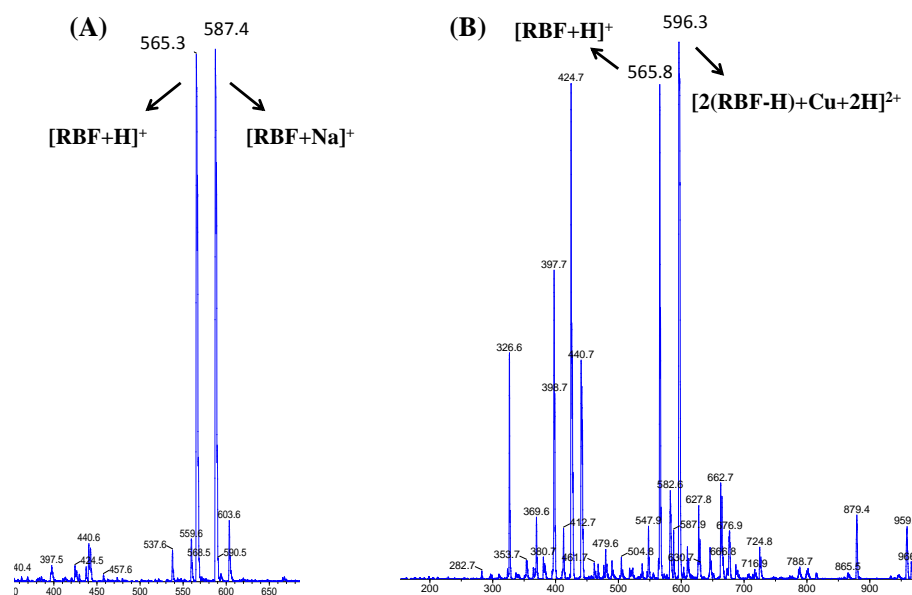


Fig. 9. ESI-MS spectrum of reaction between RBF and Cu^{2+} : (A) RBF (40 μM), (B) RBF with 2 equiv. of Cu^{2+} .

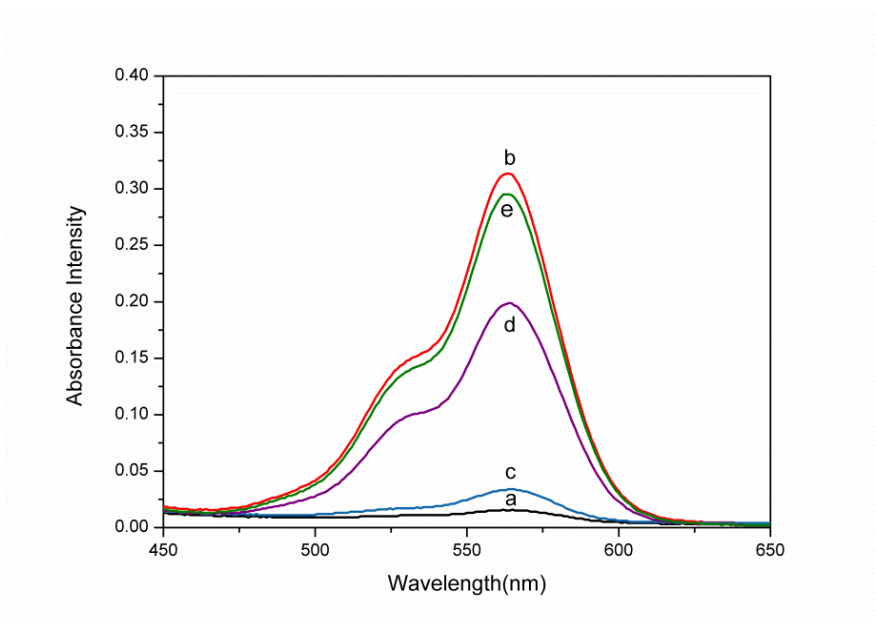


Fig. 10. Absorbance spectra showing reversibility of Cu^{2+} coordination to RBF by EDTA in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.20) buffer solution. (a): only RBF (20 μM); (b): RBF+ 2 equiv. Cu^{2+} ; (c): RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} +5 equiv. EDTA; (d): RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} +5 equiv. EDTA+7 equiv. Cu^{2+} ; (e): RBF+2 equiv. Cu^{2+} +5 equiv. EDTA+9 equiv. Cu^{2+} ;

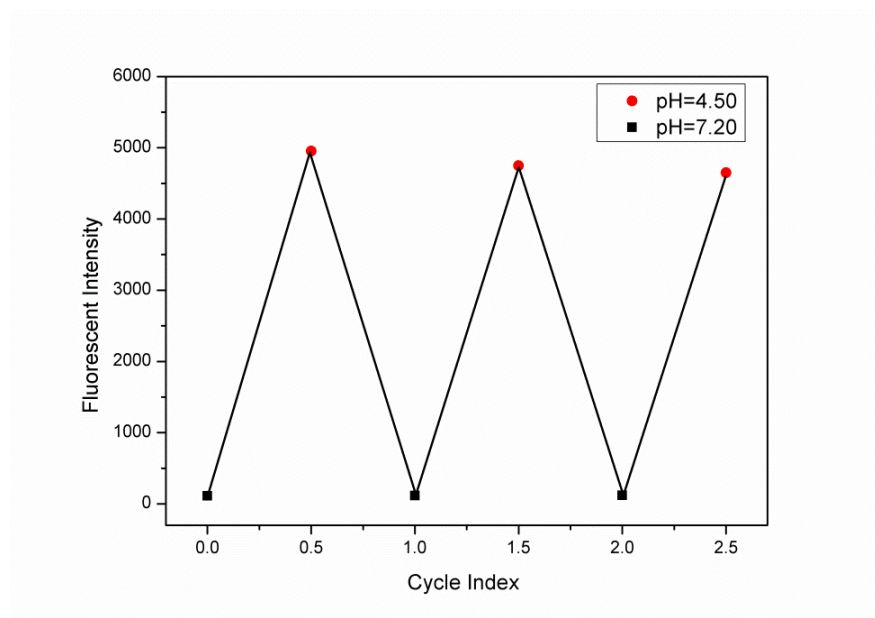
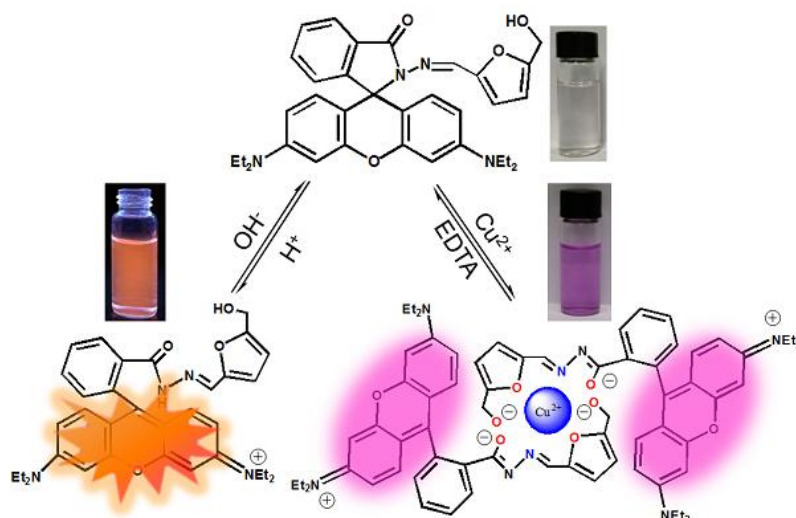


Fig. 11. pH reversibility study of RBF (10 μM) between pH 7.20 and 4.50.



Scheme 2. Proposed mechanism of RBF for H^+ and Cu^{2+} respectively.

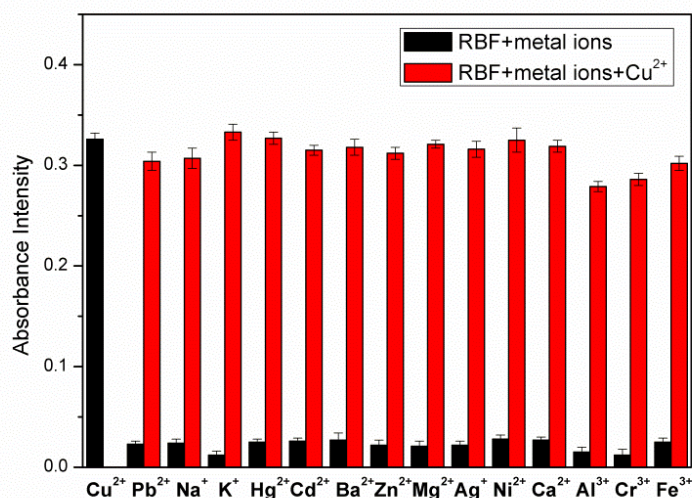


Fig. 12. Metal ions selectivity of RBF (20 μM) in Tris-HCl (10 mM, pH=7.20) buffer solution. The black bars represent the absorbance intensity of the solution containing RBF (20 μM) and different metal ions (40 μM). The red bars represent the absorbance intensity changes that occur upon addition of Cu^{2+} (40 μM) to the solution containing RBF and different metal ions.

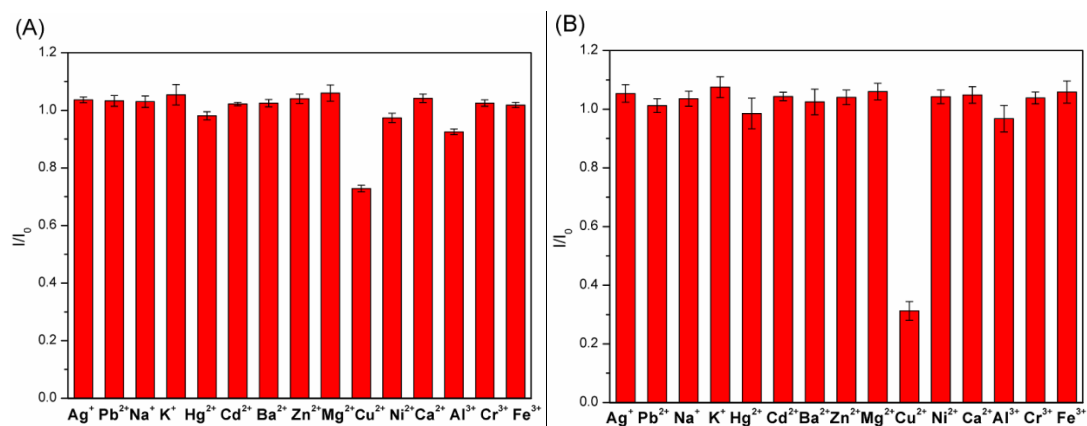


Fig. 13. (A) Emission change at 591 nm of RBF (10 μ M) in the presence of different metal ions in B-R buffer solution at pH 7.20, λ_{ex} =520 nm. (B) Emission change at 591 nm of RBF (10 μ M) in the presence of different metal ions in B-R buffer solution at pH 4.50, λ_{ex} =520 nm. The final concentration of K⁺, Na⁺, Ca²⁺ and Mg²⁺ are 200 μ M, respectively, while that of other metal ions are 50 μ M.

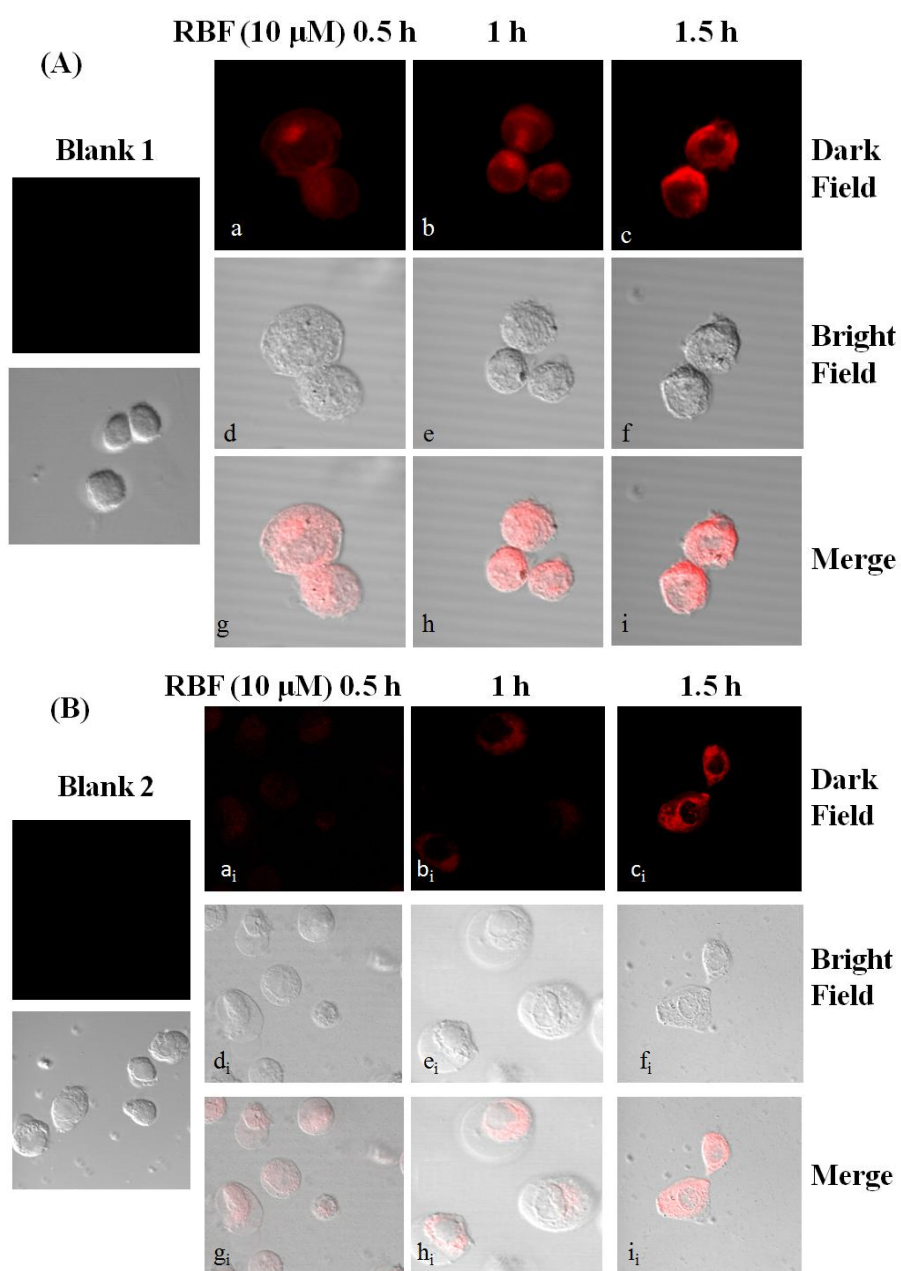


Fig. 14. Confocal fluorescence images of PC12 cells (A) and HeLa cells (B) ($\lambda_{\text{ex}}=515$ nm). Blank 1 and Blank 2: Only PC12 cells and HeLa cells without probe RBF, respectively. (a), (b) and (c) of PC12 cells incubated with probe RBF (10 μ M) for 0.5 h, 1 h and 1.5 h at 37 $^{\circ}$ C, respectively. (a_i), (b_i) and (c_i) of HeLa cells incubated with probe RBF (10 μ M) for 0.5 h, 1 h and 1.5 h at 37 $^{\circ}$ C, respectively., (d), (e), (f) and (d_i) (e_i) (f_i): Bright-field view of panel. (g), (h), (i) and (g_i), (h_i) (i_i): Overlay image of dark field and bright field.

Table 1. Determination of Cu²⁺ in samples (n = 5).

Sample	Cu ²⁺ added (μM)	Cu ²⁺ found (μM)	Recovery (%)	R.S.D. (%)
Lake water	0	Undetected	-	-
	0.25	0.253	101.2	2.3
	1.25	1.220	97.6	1.8
Tap water	0	Undetected	-	-
	0.25	0.241	96.2	2.8
	1.25	1.231	98.5	2.6