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Supporting Information

A series of water-soluble A- π -A' typological indolium derivatives with two-photon properties for rapidly detecting HSO₃^{-/}SO₃²⁻ in

living cells

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Two-photon cross-section

Two-photon absorption cross-sections of the samples were obtained by the two-photon excited fluorescence (2PEF) method with fluorescein as reference. The fluorescein was dissolved in NaOH aqueous solution (pH = 13, $\Phi = 0.95$, $\delta = 38$ GM before 850 nm, and $\delta = 11$ GM after 850 nm) with concentration of 5×10⁻⁴ mol/L in a 1 cm standard quartz cell. The average power used in 2PEF was 200 mW adjusted by a Glan prism. Thus the cross-sections could be measured using the equation below:

$$\delta = \delta_{ref} \frac{\Phi_{ref}}{\Phi} \frac{C_{ref}}{C} \frac{n_{ref}}{n} \frac{F}{F_{ref}}$$

Here, the subscripts *ref* represented for the reference molecule. δ was the 2P absorption cross-section value, c was the concentration of solution, n was the refractive index of the solution, F was the integrated area of the detected two-photon-induced fluorescence signal, and Φ was the fluorescence quantum yield.

Lippert-Magata equation

The Lippert-Mataga equation is shown as follow:

$$\Delta v = \frac{2\Delta f}{4\pi\varepsilon_0 h ca^3} (\mu_e - \mu_g)^2 + b$$
$$\Delta f = \frac{\varepsilon - 1}{2\varepsilon + 1} - \frac{n^2 - 1}{2n^2 + 1}$$

in which $\Delta v = v_{abs} - v_{em}$ stands for Stokes shift, v_{abs} and v_{em} are absorption and emission frequency (cm⁻¹), \hbar is the Plank's constant, c is the velocity of light in vacuum, a is the Onsager radius and b is a constant. Δf is the orientation polarizability, ε is the refractive index, n is the dielectric constant, μ_e and μ_g are the dipole moments of the emissive and ground states, respectively and ε_0 is the permittivity of the vacuum. (μ_e - μ_g)² is proportional to the slope of the Lippert-Mataga plot. The Onsager radius and the dipole moment (μ_g) were obtained by geometry optimization using b3lyp/6-31g* method.

MTT method

The cytotoxicitie (IC_{50}) of **L3** was determined using a MTT assay, a standard method to detect cell survival fraction, by incubating cancerous cells (HepG2). The cells were cultured in 96-well

glass-bottom plates for 48 h with the initially cell number 5000 per well. Then the cells were incubated with various concentrations of L3 (5 μ mol/L, 10 μ mol/L, 15 μ mol/L, and 20 μ mol/L) for 24 h. After that, the suspension medium was removed and 10 μ L (5 mg/mL in PBS solutions) MTT (5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide) was added to each well and performed for 4 h. When the incubation was finished, culture supernatants were aspirated away and purple formazan crystals were dissolved into 150 μ L of DMSO for additional incubation of 15 min. The concentration of the reduced MTT in each well was measured at a reference wavelength of 630 nm while using a test wavelength of 570 nm employing a microplate reader (318C, INESA Instrument, China). The cell viability was estimated according to the following equation:

Cell viability (%) =
$$OD_{treated}/OD_{control} \times 100\%$$

 $OD_{treated}$ was obtained in the presence of L3, while $OD_{control}$ was got in the absence of L3. The experiments were performed in sextuplicate. The value of p < 0.05 was considered in significance.

Confocal microscopy imaging and co-localization with liveing cell

HepG2 and Hela cells were chosen to use in confocal microscopy imaging. The cells were plated in 24 well glass-bottom plates (cellvis) and cultured for 48 h. The cells were solely incubated with 1 mL media containing 1×10^{-5} mol/L of L3 for 30 min (37 °C, 5% CO₂). The excess L3 was washed away by PBS for 3 times, after that the confocal microscopy imaging was carried out. For co-localization, the HepG2 cells were incubated with Mitotracker®Red, LysoTracker® Red DND-99 and NucRedTM Live 647 for 10 min before washed way the excess trackers by PBS for 3 times.

Confocal microscopy imaging was acquired with a Carl Zeiss LSM 710 confocal microscopy and $63 \times \text{oil-immersion}$ objective lens. The incubated cells were excited at 405 nm for L3, 579 nm for Mitotracker®Red, 543 nm for LysoTracker® Red DND-99, and 618 nm for NucRedTM Live 647 with a semiconductor laser, and the emission signals were collected at 450-490 nm and 560-600 nm for L3, 600 ± 20 nm for Mitotracker®Red, 590 ± 20 nm for LysoTracker® Red DND-99, and 640 ± 20 for NucRedTM Live 647, respectively. Two-photon confocal microscopy imaging of L3 was excited at 840 nm, while the emission signals were detected in the region of 610-650 nm. Quantization by line plots was accomplished by using the software Image J.

п	Probe	Molecular	2D proba	Detection	Detection	Other anions	Dia imaging
	name	model	2P probe	time	limit (nM)	response	BIO-IIIlagilig
1	BIFS	Α-π-Α	No	3 min	3.0	non	yes
2	1	D-π-A	No	1 min	97	HS-	no
3	DB1/DB2	D-π-A	Yes	/	160/570	non	yes
4	1	Α-π-Α	No	90 s	5.6	HS-	no
5	Probe 1	D-π-A	No	50 s	27.6	non	no
6	DCI	D-π-A	No	150 s	30000	non	yes
7	1	A-π-A (complex)	No	/	/	HS-	no
8	CZBI	D-π-A	No	40 s	10.0	non	yes
9	CY-SO ₂	D-π-A	No	90 s	2.6	non	yes
10	NBD-Id-S	D-π-A	No	20 s	3.6	non	yes
11	BCS-1	D-π-A	No	/	72	non	yes

Table S1. Summary of ratiometric fluorescence probes based on benzindole derivatives for detecting HSO_3^{-7}/SO_3^{-2-}

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Scheme S1. The synthetic routes for O1, O2, L1, L2, L3, and L4

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Compounds	L1	L2
CCDC no.	1523227	1523228
Empirical formula	$C_{18}H_{19}IN_2$	$C_{22}H_{23}I_2N_2O$
Formula weight	390.25	585.22
Temperature	298(2) K	298(2) K
Wavelength	0.71073 Å	0.71069 Å
Space group	$Cmc2_1$	$P2_1/c$
Crystal system	Orthorhombic	Monoclinic
a/Å	7.299(2)	12.632(5)
$b/{ m \AA}$	18.472(3)	6.968(5)
$c/{ m \AA}$	12.541(2)	24.753(5)
$\alpha(^{\circ})$	/	/

Table S2. Crystal data collection and structure refinement for L1-L2

β (°)	90	96.016(5)
γ(°)	/	/
Volume A ³	1690.9(5)	2167(2)
Ζ	4	4
$Dc/Mg m^{-3}$	1.533	1.794
μ/mm^{-1}	1.890	2.917
<i>F</i> (000)	776	1132
Final R indices	R1 = 0.0210	R1 = 0.0304
$[I > 2\sigma(I)]$	wR2 = 0.0430	wR2 = 0.0870
Goodness-of-fit on F2	1.061	1.047

Table S3. The selected bond length of L1 and L2 (Å)

L1		L2	2
C(5)-C(6)	1.478(6)	C(3)-C(10)	1.462(4)
C(6)-C(7)	1.335(12)	C(10)-C(11)	1.343(5)
C(7)-C(8)	1.437(11)	C(11)-C(12)	1.438(5)
C(8)-N(2)	1.303(5)	C(12)-N(2)	1.325(4)
N(2)-C(11)	1.427(8)	N(2)-C(15)	1.430(5)



Figure S1. The UV-vis absorption spectra of compounds L1-L4 in different solvents with concentration $10 \ \mu$ M.



Figure S2. The fluorescence emission spectra of compounds L1-L4 in different solvents with concentration $10 \ \mu$ M.

Compounds	Solvents	$\lambda_{\max}^{a}(\varepsilon_{\max}^{b})$	λ_{\max}^{c}	Δv ^d	${\pmb \Phi}_{ m f}^{ m e}\left(\% ight)$	τ/ns^{f}
	Benzene	355(1.43)	505	8364	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Dichloromethane	371(1.80)	499	6914	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Tetrahydrofuran	367(1.27)	504	7406	< 1.0	< 0.10
LI	Ethanol	358(1.29)	503	8052	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Ethyl acetate	354(2.34)	502	8367	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Acetonitrile	359(3.61)	504	8013	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Benzene	360(0.45)	520	8547	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Dichloromethane	362(0.80)	522	8467	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Tetrahydrofuran	364(0.83)	521	8278	< 1.0	< 0.10
L2	Ethanol	360(0.36)	521	8583	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Ethyl acetate	359(1.03)	521	8661	< 1.0	< 0.10
	Acetonitrile	353(1.12)	527	9353	< 1.0	< 0.10

Table S4. Photophysical data in different solvents

	Benzene	356(0.66)	578	10788	6.2	0.99
	Dichloromethane	413(0.64)	576	10263	16.4	2.37
1.2	Tetrahydrofuran	367(0.69)	578	9946	9.0	1.85
LS	Ethanol	354(0.54)	577	10917	12.6	1.31
	Ethyl acetate	359(1.56)	575	10463	3.8	1.55
	Acetonitrile	353(1.13)	573	10876	6.2	2.01
	Benzene	359(0.87)	584	10731	2.2	0.83
	Dichloromethane	362(0.92)	584	10501	5.4	0.85
.	Tetrahydrofuran	365(1.23)	582	10215	2.6	0.73
L4	Ethanol	371(0.88)	585	9860	4.2	0.81
	Ethyl acetate	359(1.47)	583	10702	2.4	0.90
	Acetonitrile	366(1.29)	583	10169	2.8	1.20

a Peak position of the largest absorption band in nm (1.0×10^{-5} mol/L). b Maximum molar absorbance in 10^4 L/mol \Box cm. c Peak position of SPEF, exited at the absorption maximum. d Stokes shift in cm⁻¹. e Quantum yields was the absolute quantum yields. f The fitted average fluorescence lifetime.



Figure S3. Frontier molecular orbitals of L1 (A), L2 (B), and L4 (C) (optimized geometry).

	Experiment	tal	Calculated data				
Compounds	$\lambda_{max}(nm) \qquad \lambda_{max}(nm)$		E(eV)	<i>f</i> (oscillator strengths)	Composition	Character	
T 1	367	364	3.402	0.0872	69-71 (H-1→L)	ICT	
LI	296	298	4.148	0.2586	66-71 (H-4→L)	π - π^* (indolium)	
	364	365	3.399	0.1045	80-84 (H-3→L)	ICT	
L2	294	290	4.278	0.2193	79-85 (H-4→L+1)	π - π^* (indolium)	
1.2	367	398	3.113	0.4882	82-84 (H-1→L)	ICT	
L3	300	295	4.198	0.0988	83-85 (H→L+1)	π - π^* _(benzoindolium)	
	365	395	3.135	0.2080	94-97 (H-2→L)	ICT	
L4	297	305	4.063	0.0788	96-98 (H→L+1)	π - π^* _(benzoindolium)	

Table S5. Calculated UV-vis absorption properties, including wavelength (nm), excitation energy (eV), oscillator strengths, and major contribution for L1, L2, L3, and L4.

Table S6. Calculated emission properties, including wavelength (nm), oscillator strengths, and major contribution for L1, L2, L3, and L4.

	Experimental		Calculated d	ata
Compounds	$\lambda_{max}(nm)$	$\lambda_{\text{max}}(nm)$	<i>f</i> (oscillator strengths)	Composition
L1	500	485	1.0070	LUMO→HOMO
L2	510	521	0.4280	LUMO→HOMO
L3	580	603	0.4675	LUMO→HOMO
L4	590	622	0.3814	LUMO→HOMO



Figure S4. Lippert -Mataga regressions of **L1**, **L2**, **L3**, and **L4** with transition dipole moments 0.46 D, 0.50 D, 0.18 D, and 0.64D, respectively.



Figure S5. The UV-vis absorption spectra of L1-L4 ($1 \times 10^{-5} \text{ mol/L}$) mixed with various anions, and biothiols: HNO, Hcy, Cys, GSH, S₂⁻, N₃⁻, SCN⁻, CH₃COO⁻, F⁻, Cl⁻, Br⁻, HSO₄⁻, CO₃²⁻, BF₄⁻, SO₄²⁻, NO₃⁻, NO₂⁻, H₂PO₄⁻, HPO₄²⁻, and HS⁻ (10 equiv).



Figure S6. The UV-vis spectra of L1, L2, L3, and L4 (1×10^{-5} mol/L) mixed with various anions: HSO₃⁻, SO₃²⁻, H₂PO₄⁻, N₃⁻, CH₃COO⁻, F⁻, Cl⁻, CO₂²⁻, Br⁻, HCO₃⁻, S²⁻, NO₃⁻, HS⁻, SCN⁻, NO₂⁻, H₂PO₄⁻, HSO4⁻, SO4²⁻, and BF4⁻ (1 equv.).



Figure S7. The UV-vis absorption spectra of the four compounds upon titration with increasing concentration of HSO_3^- (0-12 µmol/L) in PBS.



Figure S8. The emission spectra of L1 and L2 ($c = 10 \ \mu\text{M}$) mixed with different concentrations of HSO₃⁻ ($c = 0 - 20 \ \mu\text{M}$).



Figure S9. The emission spectra of L1-L4 (10 μ M) treated with various anions, and biothiols: HNO, Hcy, Cys, GSH, S₂⁻, N₃⁻, SCN⁻, CH₃COO⁻, F⁻, Cl⁻, Br⁻, HSO₄⁻, CO₃²⁻, BF₄⁻, SO₄²⁻, NO₃⁻, NO₂⁻, H₂PO₄⁻, HPO₄²⁻, and HS⁻ (100 μ M, 10 equiv).



Figure S10. The emission spectra of L3 (10 μ M) treated with different concentration of HS⁻ (0, 1, 5, 10 folds, after 3 h).



Figure S11. The fluorescence intensity ratios (I_{468}/I_{580}) of L3 (10 μ M) in PBS solutions upon addition of various anions (100 μ M) and biothoils.



Figure S12. The fluorescence intensity ratios (I_{480}/I_{591}) of L4 (10 μ M) in PBS solutions upon addition of various anions (100 μ M) and biothoils.



Figure S13. The fluorescence ratio micrograph of **L3** (A) and **L4** (B) in presence of HSO_3^- , SO_3^{2-} , S^{2-} , Hcy, GSH, HPO_4^{2-} , N_3^- , CH_3COO^- , F, CO_3^{2-} , NO_3^- , SCN^- , HSO_4^- , NO_2^- , BF_4^- , Br^- , Cl^- , l^- , and HS⁻ in PBS solutions. Black bar: **L3** and **L4** +various species. Red bar: **L3** and **L4** +various species + HSO_3^- .



Figure S14. The fluorescent emission spectra of L1 (A), L2 (B), L3 (C) and L4 (D) in different pH solution (concentration 10 μ M).



Figure S15. Two-photon excited fluorescence spectra of L1 (left) and L2 (right) in acetonitrile with concentration 500 μ M from 680-880 nm



Figure S16. Two-photon excited fluorescence spectra of L3 (left) and L4 (right) in acetonitrile with concentration 500 μ M from 680 nm to 920 nm



Figure S17. 2PEF spectra of **L3** (A) and **L4** (C) under different pumped powers, with $c=500 \mu M$ in acetonitrile; Output fluorescence (I_{out}) vs. the square of input laser power (I_{in}) for **L3** (B) and **L4** (D).



Figure S18. The job plots of L3 (left)/L4 (right) and HSO_3^- ($\lambda_{ex} = 365$ nm). The total concentration of L3/L4 and HSO_3^- were 10 μ M at room-temperature in PBS







Figure S19. The original ESI-MS spectra of L3, L3+HSO₃⁻, L4, and L4+HSO₃⁻.



Figure S20. The cell survival of HepG2 cells incubated with different concentration of L3 by MTT analysis (5-20 μ M)



Figure S21. The cell survival of HepG2 cells incubated with different concentration of NaHSO₃ by MTT analysis (0-40 μ M)



Figure S22. The solubility of L3 in PBS with various concentrations $(1 - 100 \mu M)$



Figure S23. Confocal fluorescence imaging of Hela cells incubated with **L3** for 10 min (A-E), HepG2 cells pre-treated with **L3** for 10 min and incubated with NaHSO₃ (20 μ M) for 10 min (F-J). A and D were the one-photon excited optical window with emission signal at 450-490 nm; B and E were the one-photon excited optical window with emission signal at 560-600 nm; C and F were two-photon excited optical window with emission signal at 610-650 nm; D and I were the bright field; D and H were the ratio image of **L3** obtained by Image J software.

0 min	0 min -bright	2 min	4 min
6 min	8 min	10 min	12 min

Figure S24. The confocal fluorescence imaging of HepG2 cells incubated with **L3** at different times (0 min, 2 min, 4 min, 6 min, 8 min, 10 min, 12 min)



Figure S25. The co-localization imaging microscopies of L3 with commercial dyes, NucRedTM Live 647 (A), Lysotracker®Red (B), Mitotracker®Red (C).



Figure S26. Confocal fluorescence imaging of HepG2 cells incubated with L4 for 10 min (A-E), HepG2 cells pre-treated with L4 for 10 min and incubated with NaHSO₃ (20 μ M) for 10 min (F-J). A and F were the one-photon excited optical window ($\lambda_{ex} = 405$ nm) with emission signal at 450-490 nm; B and G were the one-photon excited optical window with emission signal at 560-600 nm; C and H were two-photon excited optical window ($\lambda_{ex} = 840$ nm) with emission signal at 610-650 nm; D and I were the bright field; E and J were the ratio image of L4 obtained by Image J software.



Figure S27. The two-photon excited microscopy imaging for liver (A, with depth $z = 200 \ \mu m$, cultured with L3 for 30 min). The x-y plane of liver (B). One-photon (C), two-photon (D), and bright field (E) imaging of cells with 10 μ M L3 for 10 min.





Figure S28. The ¹H NMR spectra of L1-L4 in d_6 -DMSO







Figure S29. The ¹³C NMR spectra of L1-L4 in d_6 -DMSO







Figure S30. The ESI-MS spectra of L1-L4.