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Europium Doped TiO₂ Hollow Nanoshells: Two-Photon Imaging of Cell Binding

Sergio Sandoval^{a,b,c}, Jian Yang^{a,c,d}, Jesus G. Alfaro^e, Alexander Liberman^{a,e}, Milan Makale^c, Casey E. Chiang^f, Ivan K. Schuller^f, Andrew C. Kummel^{b,c,d}, and William C. Trogler^{b,c,d}

William C. Trogler: wtrogler@ucsd.edu

^aDepartment of Bioengineering, University of California, San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0358

^bCallT², Nanomedicine Laboratory, University of California, San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0358

^cMoore's Cancer Center, University of California, San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0358

^dDepartment of Chemistry & Biochemistry, University of California, San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0358

^eDepartment of NanoEngineering, Chemical Engineering, & Material Science, University of California, San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0358

^fDepartment of Physics, University of California, San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0358

Abstract

A simple scalable method to fabricate luminescent monodisperse 200 nm europium doped hollow TiO₂ nanoshell particles is reported. Fluorophore reporter, Eu³⁺ ions, are incorporated directly in the NS matrix, leaving the surface free for functionalization and the core free for payload encapsulation. Amine functionalized polystyrene beads were used as templates, and the porous walls of europium doped titania nanoshells were synthesized using titanium(IV) *t*-butoxide and europium(III) nitrate as reactants. X-ray diffraction analysis identified anatase as the predominant titania phase of the rigid nanoshell wall structure, and photoluminescence spectra showed that the Eu(III) doped TiO₂ nanoshells exhibited a red emission at 617 nm due to an atomic f-f transition. Nanoshell interactions with HeLa cervical cancer cells *in vitro* were visualized using two-photon microscopy of the Eu(III) emission, and studied using a luminescence ratio analysis to assess nanoshell adhesion and endocytosis.

Keywords

Two photon; microscopy; titania; nanoshells; europium(III); luminescence; anatase; HeLa; polyethyleneimine; SEM; TEM; DLS

Introduction

Titania nanomaterials and hybrid derivatives have attracted interest because of their broad range of industrial applications, such as in photovoltaic devices^{1,2}, chemical/gas sensors³, catalysis^{4,5}, waste water treatment^{6,7}, and in filtration and sorption media.⁸ Titania nanomaterials and their compound hybrid composites are also intriguing for medical applications⁹⁻¹⁵, and several studies of applications in anti-cancer research¹⁶⁻¹⁹ have appeared. When TiO₂ nanoparticles undergo photoexcitation with ultraviolet (UV) light, photo-induced electrons and holes are produced. These electrons and holes can react with hydroxyl ions or water to produce reactive hydroxyl radicals ·OH and perhydroxyl radicals HO₂·. These oxygen species are also highly reactive with cells and can cause DNA strand breaking through genotoxicity.^{16,20} This characteristic gives titania nanomaterials the potential to be used as photodynamic therapy agents in cancer treatments.^{21,22} Furthermore, the use of various titania and hybrid titania nanocomposites made up of gold²³, silver²⁴, copper²⁵, platinum^{17,26}, and iron cooperatives¹², as well as titania nanoparticles combined with specific antibodies²⁷, have been shown to have cancer therapeutic potential typically via photodynamic therapy or magnetic therapy (Fe composites).

Several methods have been described for the synthesis of TiO₂ nanospheres. Caruso and co-workers^{28,29} used a layer-by-layer (L-b-L) self-assembly technique to fabricate both SiO₂ and TiO₂ hollow spheres. For the TiO₂ spheres, a positively charged TiO₂ colloid was used to form a shell around polymer templates through the absorption of polyelectrolytes. Repeated absorption of polyelectrolytes and TiO₂ precursors increased the thickness and integrity of the shell wall. Xia, et al³⁰ prepared hollow TiO₂ spheres by using crystalline arrays of polystyrene beads as a template. Well-defined TiO₂ spheres could be fabricated from these methods, but multiple steps are needed, which makes these methods challenging for the large-scale fabrication needed in biomedical applications. Similar templating methods using activated carbon³¹ or polymers³²⁻³⁵ as cores have also been reported. Alternative methods, such as ultrasonic spray pyrolysis³⁶, diffusion flame synthesis³⁷, and supercritical fluid methods^{38,39} have been used as potentially scalable routes to create TiO₂ spheres. These processes tend to produce nanoparticles with a range of sizes and/or have fragile shell structures.

Another active research area has been the development of nanoparticles that incorporate rare-earth ions within their structures. Rare-earth materials have attractive properties that include increased photostability, reduced light scattering, narrow emission spectra, large emissive Stokes shifts, long luminescence lifetimes, and allow for simple functionalization strategies.^{40,41} Europium is particularly advantageous because europium(III) ions produce red photoluminescence with narrow atomic emission profiles when doped into inorganic lattices. Due to its high transparency to visible light and its robust thermal, chemical, and mechanical properties⁴²⁻⁴⁴, titania is an ideal host material for Eu³⁺, and several Eu³⁺ doped TiO₂ films, nanocrystals, and particles have been reported.^{42,43,45-52} Furthermore, europium provides an inexpensive, long lifetime, low cytotoxicity, and safe method for fluorescence imaging compared to organic fluorophores.^{40,53} The high efficiency of reactive oxygen production during near UV irradiation of TiO₂ leads to enhanced photobleaching of organic dyes⁵⁴ in aerobic environments.

This paper describes a simple method of synthesizing uniform monodisperse europium(III) doped hollow TiO₂ nanoshells (NS) that have rigid porous shell walls. The utility of this NS design is that the long lived fluorophore reporter, Eu³⁺ ions, are incorporated directly in the NS matrix, leaving the surface free for functionalization and the NS core free for payload encapsulation. Amine functionalized polystyrene (PS) beads were used as templates in the synthesis. Titanium(IV) *t*-butoxide was used as the precursor for titania deposition in order

to reduce the rate of hydrolysis and suppress nontemplated growth. The sol-gel hydrolysis of titanium(IV) *t*-butoxide was catalyzed on the surface of amine functionalized PS beads to form a thin porous titania coating. Doping was effected by using ethanol solvent containing 5% water and dissolved europium(III) nitrate. After removing the PS core by calcination, hollow nanoporous TiO₂ NS with red luminescence characteristic of doping by Eu³⁺ were isolated. This protocol provides a simple, inexpensive, and scalable method to prepare Eu³⁺ doped titania NS for imaging studies. These nanoshells were coated with a cationic polymer, poly(ethylenimine) (PEI), to alter the surface charge from negative to positive, which allowed the NS to adhere to HeLa cervical cancer cells. Cell to NS interactions were imaged using two-photon (2-P) microscopy and quantified using a previously reported luminescence ratio analysis.⁵⁵

Experimental Methods and Materials

Materials

Titanium(IV) *t*-butoxide, europium(III) nitrate hydrate, and poly(ethylenimine) (PEI - MW 750,000) were obtained from Aldrich-Sigma Ltd. The 200 nm amine functionalized polystyrene beads (2.5% w/w) were purchased from PolySciences Ltd. HeLa cervical cancer cells were purchased from ATCC (Manassas, Virginia); Dulbecco's Phosphate Buffer Saline solution (DPBS 1×), Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium (DMEM), and fetal bovine serum (FBS) were purchased from Mediatech, Inc. (Manassas, Virginia). Media supplements, chloromethylfluorescein diacetate (CMFDA) CellTracker™ Green intracellular stain, and Prolong Gold were obtained from Invitrogen (Carlsbad, California). Nunc Lab-Tek II 4-well chamber slides and paraformaldehyde (PFA) were purchased from ThermoFisher Scientific (Fair Lawn, New Jersey). All chemicals and reagents were used as received, or as described in manufacture protocols, unless otherwise stated.

Preparation of Europium Doped Hollow Titania Nanoshells

In a 2 mL Eppendorf tube, 0.25 mg of Eu(NO₃)₃ • 5H₂O was dissolved in 1.25 mL of absolute ethanol. A 50 uL portion of a 2.5% weight dispersion (in water) of 200 nm aminopolystyrene beads was added. Next 25 uL of 1 M titanium(IV) *t*-butoxide/ethanol solution was added and the mixture was stirred in a vortex mixer for 5 min at room temperature at a setting of 900 rpms. The suspended core-shell nanospheres were collected by centrifugation, washed with ethanol, and dried in vacuum for 48 h at room temperature to give 1.90 mg of core-shell spheres.

The aminopolystyrene bead core was removed by calcining the preceding nanospheres by heating in air at 5 °C per minute to 500 °C and maintaining this temperature for 24 h. About 0.85 mg of europium-doped hollow TiO₂ NS were recovered as a white-pink powder. Energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) showed the Eu content of this preparation was 0.84% (mole%).

Modification of Eu/TiO₂ Hollow Nanoshells with Poly(ethylenimine)

To increase the cell-adhering efficiency of Eu/TiO₂ nanoshells, the NS surface charge was changed from negative to positive using poly(ethylenimine) (PEI). This was accomplished by suspending 3 mg of Eu/TiO₂ NS in 1.5 mL of 0.1 mg/mL PEI in water. The suspension was stirred for 2 h; nanoshells were collected by centrifugation and washed with water. Subsequently, the PEI coated NS were suspended in 1.0 mL of DPBS for use in cell imaging experiments.

Characterization of Eu/TiO₂ Hollow Nanoshells

The scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and EDS measurements were conducted on a FEI/Philips XL30 FEG ESEM microscope with an accelerating voltage of 10 kV. The average diameter of the NS was determined from the SEM images. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images were obtained with the use of a JEOL-2000EX (200 kV) cryo-electron microscope with an accelerating voltage of 200 kV. A Perkin-Elmer LS 45 luminescence spectrometer was used to record luminescence emission and excitation spectra. A Zetasizer Nano ZS (Malvern Instruments) was used to measure the dynamic light scattering (DLS) size distribution, the polydispersity index (PDI), and zeta potential of NS when suspended in distilled water with gentle sonication and vortexing. X-ray powder-diffraction patterns were obtained using a Bruker Discover D8 X-ray diffractometer with a rotating anode Cu-K- α ($\lambda = 0.154$ nm) source.

Cell Culture

5×10^4 HeLa cervical cancer cells in Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium (DMEM) supplemented with 10% FBS, 1% antibiotics (penicillin, streptomycin, glutamine (PSG)), and 1% sodium pyruvate were plated per well on Nunc Lab-Tek II 4-well chamber slides at 37 °C in a humidified atmosphere of 5% CO₂. HeLa cells were allowed to grow to 60 to 80% well confluence before beginning cell adhesion/endocytosis experiments.

Cell Adhesion/Endocytosis Experiments

HeLa cells were incubated with 500 μ g/mL of europium-TiO₂ NS functionalized with PEI for 24 h in DMEM complete media at 37 °C in a humidified atmosphere of 5% CO₂. Cells were then washed 2x with DPBS and labeled with 2.5 μ M CMFDA CellTracker™ Green intracellular stain in DPBS for 30 min. Cells were washed 3x with DPBS to remove any surplus dye, fixed with 4% PFA in DPBS solution, washed 2x more with DPBS, and covered with Prolong Gold anti-fade reagent to prepare samples for visualization by two-photon microscopy.

Two-Photon (2-P) Microscopy of HeLa Cell interactions with Europium Doped Titania Nanoshells *in vitro*

2-P fluorescence dual color (red/green europium TiO₂ NS/CMFDA) images were obtained with a custom modified Nikon FN1 intravital microscope fitted with a 60x water immersion objective (Nikon, 1.2 NA). The instrument was driven by a Spectraphysics MaiTai Ti:Sa 3 Watt, 120 femtosecond pulsed laser tuned to 705 nm. The microscope operated in non-descanned mode. Emitted sample light was separated into red/green channels using a beam splitter and band pass filters (Chroma ET620/60 and ET510/50). Two side-on PMTS (Hamamatsu) captured the light, and the raster scan data was assembled and saved using Nikon EZ-1 display/analysis software. Full field images were initially acquired at 60x, with constant gain settings between samples, and regions of interest (ROIs) were magnified 3.56x by spatially compressing the raster scan. In order to confirm the location of the NS, image volumes composed of multiple 1 μ m XY slices were acquired serially along the sample z-axis. 2-P images were further processed for background level and SNR, using Image J (NIH, Bethesda, MD).

Results and Discussion

Synthesis of Eu³⁺ Doped Hollow Titania Nanoshells

Sol-gel reactions are often used to fabricate amorphous inorganic oxides.⁵⁶ While primary alkoxysilanes can be hydrolyzed in water slowly, the hydrolysis of primary alkoxylates of titanium(IV) in water is too rapid to use in templating reactions. Therefore, bulky *t*-butoxy

groups were employed in order to slow the rate of hydrolysis, and a solution of ethanol/5% water was used as the reaction medium to reduce the water concentration. These techniques yielded a hydrated titania sol gel coating on the amine functionalized PS beads (Figure 1A and 1B) due to either the negatively charged, partially hydrolyzed sol precursor derived from $\text{Ti}(\text{O}-t\text{-Bu})_4$ being absorbed by the cationic amino groups (partially protonated in water) on the surface of the PS beads or by the unprotonated basic surface amines catalyzing sol gel hydrolysis. An effort to use plain PS beads to template the TiO_2 sol-gel reaction was also attempted, but after the mixture was stirred for 48 h, it was found that no solid shell formed on the non-functionalized PS surface.

Different amounts of $\text{Ti}(\text{O}-t\text{-Bu})_4$ were added during the synthesis, and it was found that an excess did not increase the thickness of the titania shell but instead resulted in the formation of colloidal titania byproduct. The optimal ratio of titanium(IV) t-butoxide to PS beads was determined to be between 4:1 and 8:1 by weight. With a ratio less than 4:1, the titania coverage on the surface of PS beads was found to be non-uniform and produced many broken nanoshells after calcination. At a ratio above 8:1, extensive colloidal TiO_2 byproduct contaminated the core-shell nanospheres. This suggested that the growth of the titania shell stopped when the surface of PS beads was covered by a uniform layer of titania. Furthermore, it was observed after calcination that when excess colloidal titania byproduct was present that this lead to polydisperse batches according to DLS measurements.

The PS beads within each core-shell nanosphere were removed by calcining at 500 °C for 24 h. The isolated hollow shells (Figure 1C) were collected, resuspended in ethanol, and a droplet of this solution was used to analyze the NS with SEM and TEM. The SEM images show no distinguishable shape differences between the formed hollow TiO_2 shells doped with and without europium. After calcination there were very few broken undoped hollow TiO_2 spheres and some broken Eu^{3+} doped spheres can be spotted for doped shells in their respective image sets (Figure 1C and 1E). The wall thickness of the undoped titania NS was found to be as thin as 5-10 nm and the results suggest that the doping with Eu^{3+} leads to a more fragile TiO_2 shell wall, and therefore, some broken europium doped NS. The TEM image (Fig. 1F) reveals that small amounts of colloidal TiO_2 are fused onto the outer NS surfaces, which was a typical occurrence after the critical shell thickness forms around the aminopolystyrene template.

While preparing the europium-doped titania NS, different concentrations from .01% to 0.035% of $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ were dissolved in ethanol before adding the aminopolystyrene beads and $\text{Ti}(\text{O}-t\text{-Bu})_4$ in order to examine how the amount of $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ affects nanoshell synthesis. During the templating reaction, with increasing concentration of $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$, the amount of Eu^{3+} trapped in the titania lattice increased, but the NS yield decreased. The percentage doping of Eu^{3+} confirmed using EDS. Figure 1G shows a typical EDS spectrum of NS doped with europium(III). Furthermore, when more than 0.035% $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ was added during synthesis, it was discovered that templated core-shells were not produced even after 1 hour of vortex mixing. The ionic radius of Eu^{3+} (1.087 Å)⁵⁷ is significantly greater than that of Ti^{4+} (0.745 Å).⁵⁸ It is expected that during polycondensation Eu^{3+} is attracted to the growing anionic TiO_2 shell and at higher concentrations, the significantly larger Eu^{3+} hinders polycondensation, and blocks shell growth. Table 1 shows the yield of NS formation and the amount of europium(III) found doped within the different synthesized titania nanospheres batches with the various concentrations of $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ added during synthesis. Therefore, to maintain a high NS yield and hollow shell uniformity, it is necessary to limit the amount of $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ added during the sol-gel reaction.

Electron Microscopy and Dynamic Light Scattering Measurements

Using SEM images (Figure 1), it was found that the average diameter of hollow TiO₂ NS were slightly smaller than their 200 nm starting PS templates. The size of core-shell and hollow Eu³⁺ doped TiO₂ spheres (doped with 0.025% Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O in this set of results) were measured and compared (Table 2). The average diameters of core-shell spheres and hollow spheres were found to be 200±5 nm and 185±6 nm, respectively (n=30). After calcination, the TiO₂ shells shrunk by more than 10 nm. This result is consistent with previous measurements of silica nanoshells prepared by a similar template synthesis protocol.⁵⁹ This shrinkage likely arises from dehydration of the TiO₂ sol-gel and partial formation of the anatase mineral phase on heating. It is known that dehydration is a common occurrence during the sol-gel drying process.⁶⁰ Shrinkage is believed to be isotropic as the shells are uniform in size and shape in the SEM images.

After their dispersal in solution, solution sizes and zeta potentials of core-shell and hollow Eu³⁺ doped TiO₂ spheres were also determined using dynamic light scattering (DLS). The NS were suspended at a concentration of 1 mg/mL in distilled water (pH 6.5) and were dispersed using a Misonix ultrasonic liquid processor (XL-2000 series) operating at 5 W with a continuous setting for 60 sec at a temperature of 4 °C, before the scattering measurements were taken. The DLS showed average diameters of 305±80 nm (PDI: 0.27) and 310±60 nm (PDI: 0.24) for the doped core-shell and doped hollow NS, respectively. Their corresponding zeta potentials were 5 mV and -23 mV. Since the aminopolystyrene beads have a measured zeta potential of -33 mV these results suggest that Eu³⁺ accumulates on the surface or in the gel coating of the core-shell spheres, with the europium(III) ions eventually being incorporated into the titania lattice on calcination. Core-shell and hollow TiO₂ spheres without Eu³⁺ doping were also measured with DLS and their respective diameters using intensity weighted averaging were found to be 250±40 nm (PDI: 0.22) and 240±40 nm (PDI: 0.23), while their zeta potentials were more negative at -44 mV and -41 mV. The DLS measurements of the aqueous suspensions exhibit slightly increased average hydrodynamic sizes from those determined by SEM measurements, which suggests that the TiO₂ NS in solution disperse largely as monomers and a small fraction of aggregates; however, the nonideal optical properties of the nanoparticles (a uniform refractive index is assumed in fitting the correlation function) may also distort the measurements. The hollow Eu³⁺ doped TiO₂ NS were slightly larger than their non-doped TiO₂ NS counterparts. This may be attributed to the lower zeta potential value of the Eu³⁺ doped NS, since lower zeta potential values have been shown to correlate with a higher tendency of aggregation.⁶¹

DLS was used to analyze the PEI coated Eu/TiO₂ hollow NS; these particles had an average size of 355±75 nm (PDI: 0.24) with a zeta potential of +46 mV. This indicates that cationic PEI is strongly bound to the negative Eu/TiO₂ NS surface by electrostatic forces, consequently converting the surface charge from negative to positive. In addition, the high positive charge on the PEI coated NS suggests that the NS have good stability in aqueous solution⁶² and the low PDI value suggests that the NS are predominantly monodisperse and that colloidal debris contributes minimally to the sample population.⁶³ The increase of size from non-coated to PEI coated NS can be attributed to the polymer coating (750,000 MW) as the polyoxamer corona surrounding PEI in water has been observed to increase the apparent size when compared to direct measurements (e.g. AFM) of size.⁶⁴ A summary of the average diameters of core-shell and hollow NS measured by DLS analysis can be seen in Table 3.

X-Ray Diffraction Measurements

XRD spectra of undoped TiO₂ hollow spheres and various Eu-doped TiO₂ hollow NS are shown in Fig. 2. The diffraction pattern matches the International Center for Diffraction Data (ICDD) sample card 00-001-0562 (shown as vertical lines in Fig. 2), which identify anatase as the pre-dominant titania phase (comparison with ICDD data for the rutile and brookite phases show that the strongest peak in both is missing) within the NS wall structure. Unmarked peaks have been attributed to the sample holder and the diffuse background below 35° has been identified as background from the Petrol used to mount the powder. It is observed that the crystalline phase is disturbed by doping with Eu³⁺, as peak broadening is observed for the anatase phase with only small amounts of Eu³⁺. This is consistent with structural doping in the lattice by Eu(III) and disruption of the anatase crystal order, rather than merely Eu(III) coating the surface of titania NS, which would be expected to still show diffraction features of anatase for the underlying TiO₂.

Optical Properties

Figure 3 compares the photoluminescence spectra ($\lambda_{ex} = 413$ nm) of core-shell and hollow nanoshells made with the same amount of added Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O. The ⁵D₀ emission of Eu³⁺ has five characteristic peaks, which are assigned to the ⁵D₀-⁷F₀, ⁵D₀-⁷F₁, ⁵D₀-⁷F₂, ⁵D₀-⁷F₃, and ⁵D₀-⁷F₄ transitions. The emission of Eu³⁺ doped TiO₂ spheres was dominated by the red emission peak at 617 nm, which is associated with ⁵D₀-⁷F₂ atomic like f-f transition.⁶⁵ There were no other strong emission peaks in the photoluminescence spectra. The emission intensity at 617 nm from calcined hollow NS was much greater than that of the core-shell spheres having the same content of Eu³⁺. These results are in agreement with several reports^{50,66-68} showing similar emission intensity increases in rare earth doped TiO₂ nanoparticles after calcination at ~500 °C. This was attributed to the structure of TiO₂. After calcination at 500 °C, TiO₂ is primarily a mixture of anatase and amorphous phases. It has been suggested⁴⁴ that the semicrystalline TiO₂ structure is an excellent host for Eu³⁺. The TiO₂ nanocrystallite acts as an antenna and absorbed UV energy is transferred to Eu³⁺, which sensitizes its luminescence.^{44,69} Calcination at temperatures above 500 °C converts TiO₂ to the rutile phase, which causes the Eu³⁺ emission to disappear.^{69,70} Since europium doped TiO₂ nanoshells emit by a long-lived atomic f-f transition, this offers the possibility of detecting and visualizing their interactions with cells using two photon (2-P) microscopy, which is an attractive technique for *in vitro* and *in vivo* biological imaging since background 2-P bioluminescence is minimal.⁷¹⁻⁷³

Endocytosis Experiments

The outer cell surface contains sialic acids, which causes most mammalian cells to have a net anionic surface charge.^{74,75} Due to this phenomenon, surface functionalized or coated cationic groups on the surface of microbeads, macromolecules, or nanoparticles causes binding to cells via electrostatic interactions.⁷⁶⁻⁸² For this reason, Eu-TiO₂ NS were coated with PEI.

The adhesion and uptake of europium doped TiO₂ NS coated with PEI by HeLa cervical cancer cells under *in vitro* cell culture conditions was studied and visualized by 2-P microscopy. The cells were marked with a green fluorescent CMFDA intracellular 2-P stain. Hollow Eu-TiO₂ NS prepared with 0.025% Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O during the synthesis reaction (DLS measured average hydrodynamic diameter size of 342 nm and a zeta potential of +46 mV) were employed.

As shown in Fig. 4, cells incubated with Eu-TiO₂-PEI NS exhibit a high concentration of red luminescent material surrounding the HeLa cells, while samples incubated with non-

europium doped TiO_2 -PEI functionalized NS did not and resembled the control HeLa cells. Control samples incubated with non-europium doped TiO_2 -PEI NS probably have a similar amount of NS surrounding HeLa cells as the samples incubated with Eu- TiO_2 -PEI NS, but are not visible via 2-P microscopy because these control NS lack red luminescent Eu^{3+} . These imaging results confirm 2-P imaging of the doped nanoparticles and suggest that the red particulates observed around HeLa cells arises due to electrostatic interactions between the positive charged PEI functionalized Eu- TiO_2 NS and the negatively charged glycoproteins found on the cell surface.

In order to quantify and confirm that these red particle features were due to europium doped TiO_2 NS and not an optical artifact or bleed over effect from the green dye, the 2-P dual color captured images were split into their individual red, green, and blue channel components, and an image subtraction between each sample's red and green images was performed using Image J software. The intensity values of each pixel in the green fluorescence image were subtracted from each pixel in the red fluorescence image (setting any negative values to zero), leaving only intensity values above and beyond any green fluorescence in the resultant image. As shown Fig. 5, the resulting subtracted image for cells incubated with Eu- TiO_2 -PEI NS shows a distinct pattern of red luminescence outside of the HeLa cells. Conversely, the cells only and cells incubated with non-doped TiO_2 -PEI NS samples do not exhibit this red circumference. Being that all cell samples were prepared and captured using the same settings, these results establish that this effect is due to cell adhesion of red emitting PEI functionalized Eu- TiO_2 NS onto the HeLa cell surface. Furthermore, the red luminescence pattern exhibit variations in thickness, which suggests there are one or multiple NS layers on the cell surface. This is consistent with previous results showing a similar thick multilayered nanoparticle surface adhesion pattern under confocal microscopy^{83,84} or SEM analysis⁸⁵ when nanoparticle endocytosis isn't favored. Whether endocytosis occurs can depend on the cell type^{14,86-89}, nanoparticle size⁹⁰⁻⁹⁵, nanoparticle shape^{83,92,96-98}, and/or presence of ligands on the nanoparticle surface that facilitate cell surface receptor mediated pathways.⁹⁹⁻¹⁰³

A luminescence ratio analysis was performed on the outer and inner regions of the cell membrane in order to distinguish between the amount of PEI-NS attached to the outer part of the membrane and those internalized by cells. This use of the red to green luminescence ratio to establish NS adhesion/endocytosis has been described.⁵⁵ Briefly, the luminescence ratio analysis was performed using Image J to first create cytoplasmic cell outlines in order to determine the extent of NS internalization by cells or locationization in small rectangular regions just outside the green CMFDA stain cells to demonstrate NS cell adhesion (Fig. 6). The cell outlines were based on the individual green channel images and were applied to the same location/coordinates on their red channel counterparts by using the ROI manager in Image J. The Image J analyze/measure tools were used to determine the mean luminescence values inside the cell outlines or in rectangular regions just outline the cells for both the green and red channels, which in turn were used to calculate the red to green luminescence ratio either inside or just outside the cells.

The ratio analysis performed on the regions just outside of HeLa only samples showed a red/green luminescence ratio value of 1.42 ($\text{SE} \pm 0.03$), while the HeLa cell samples incubated with europium doped TiO_2 NS exhibited a ratio of 4.29 (± 0.15) (Table 4). Thus, the cells incubated with Eu- TiO_2 NS had a photoluminescence intensity ratio ~200% greater in areas just outside the cellular membrane than control HeLa cells. This suggests that a large number of Eu^{3+} doped hollow titania NS attached to the outer surface of HeLa cells through electrostatic interactions. Moreover, when the ratio analysis was performed on the interior areas of cells, the HeLa only samples had a ratio of 1.07 (± 0.02), whereas samples that saw Eu- TiO_2 NS had a value of 1.56 (± 0.11). Therefore, cells that were incubated with NS were

46% more luminescent, which is consistent with a small amount of Eu-TiO₂ NS being endocytosed by HeLa cells. These ratio analysis values are similar to those obtained for adhesion/endocytosis of Eu³⁺ doped hollow silica NS.⁵⁵ Emission from Eu³⁺ doped hollow titania NS is more intense than for corresponding silica NS because of the antenna effect of the UV absorbing titania.

Conclusion

Uniform-sized Eu³⁺ doped hollow titania NS were fabricated by a new method using Ti(O-t-Bu)₄ and Eu(NO₃)₃ with amine functionalized polystyrene beads serving as templates. Removal of the polystyrene core by calcining led to increased luminescence from Eu³⁺ doped hollow nanoshells as the hydrated titania sol gel partially transformed to the anatase doped crystalline phase. Up to 1.1% Eu³⁺ could be introduced before the nanoshells lost their structural integrity, and the doped NS exhibited a strong narrow red photoluminescence emission at 617 nm upon UV excitation of the titania. Europium doped hollow NS were functionalized with PEI, which changed the NS surface charge from negative to positive. The positively charged doped NS were shown by two-photon microscopy to bind to the outer surface of HeLa cervical cancer cells with minimal endocytosis. Since the Eu³⁺ luminescence does not photobleach, the UV absorbing titania acts as an antenna to enhance emission, and the luminescent state is also amenable to imaging by two-photon techniques. These NS may be especially useful in the field of biological imaging, diagnostics, and/or therapeutics.

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Figure 1. SEM and TEM Images of 200 nm Plain and Europium Doped Titania Nanoshells prepared using 0.025% $\text{Eu}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$

A: SEM images of amino polystyrene templates. **B:** Non-doped TiO_2 core-shells. **C:** Plain TiO_2 hollow NS. **D:** Eu^{3+} doped TiO_2 core-shells. **E:** Eu^{3+} doped TiO_2 hollow NS. Small amounts of broken shells in the europium doped image are identified by black arrows in 1E. **F:** TEM image of europium doped TiO_2 hollow NS showing the some colloidal TiO_2 fused on the surface. **G:** EDS spectrum analysis of Eu^{3+} doped TiO_2 hollow NS showing X-rays characteristic of both Ti and Eu.

Figure 2. X-ray Diffraction Patterns of Thin Films of Plain and Eu³⁺ Doped TiO₂ Hollow Nanoshells

The percentages shown are the mass percentage of Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O used during the sol-gel synthesis.

Figure 3. Photoluminescence Spectra of Eu³⁺ Doped Core-shell and Hollow Nanoshells
The percentages shown are the mass percentage of Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O used during the sol-gel synthesis.

Figure 4. Two-Photon Microscopy Images of Non-Doped and Eu Doped 200 nm TiO₂ Nanoshells Incubated with HeLa Cells

A: HeLa cells, stained with CMFDA (green) dye. **B:** HeLa cells incubated with 500 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of undoped TiO₂ PEI coated NS for 24 hr. **C:** HeLa cells incubated with 500 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of Eu-TiO₂-PEI NS (red) for 24 hr 0.025% Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O). Identical settings and gains were used across all microscopy images.

Figure 5. Imaging of 200 nm Eu Doped TiO₂ Nanoshells Adhering to HeLa Cells

Two-Photon dual color captured images of cell only samples (Panel 1a) and cell samples incubated with 500 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of undoped TiO₂-PEI NS (Panel 2a) or Eu-TiO₂-PEI NS (Panel 3a). The images were split into their individual green and red image components (1b/1c, 2b/2c, and 3b/3c) and a background subtraction between these images was performed (1d, 2d, 3d) using Image J software.

Figure 6. Luminescence Intensity Ratio Analysis of Nanoshell Cell Adhesion/Endocytosis from Figure 5

Panel 1: Green and red channel images of outlines of areas just outside (1b and 1c) or inside (1d and 1e) HeLa cells for a control sample; Panel 2: corresponding image outlines for cells incubated with 200 nm Eu-TiO₂-PEI NS. All outlines were based on the location of the green cytoplasmic cell stain images and then used to calculate the fluorescence ratios in Table 4.

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Table 1

Yields of Hollow TiO₂ Nanoshells and their Europium Content

Percentage of Eu(NO ₃) ₃ ·5H ₂ O (%) ¹	0	0.005	0.015	0.025	0.03	0.035
Yield % of hollow titania NS ²	100	93	82	65	31	~0
Theoretical mole percent of Eu(III) in NS ³	0	0.47	1.40	2.33	2.80	3.26
Mole percent of Eu(III) in NS from EDS	0	0.22	0.34	0.84	1.13	-

¹ Mass percentage of added Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O used in the synthesis in ethanol/5% water as wt % of the total solvent.

² Ratio of hollow europium-titania particles compared with the amount of titania particles obtained by synthesis without added europium (w/w). In this series of experiments the ratio of titanium(IV) t-butoxide versus PS beads is a constant 6.5:1 (w/w) as the added Eu³⁺ increases

³ Ratio of added Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O compared with added titanium(IV) t-butoxide in the sol-gel reaction.

Table 2Average Diameters of Eu³⁺ Doped Core-shell and Hollow Nanoshells from SEM Images.¹

Sample	Average Diameter (nm)	Standard Deviation (nm)
Eu ³⁺ Doped Core-Shells	200	5
Eu ³⁺ Doped Hollow NS	185	6

¹Eu doped particles were prepared using 0.025% Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O during synthesis. Average diameters were calculated by measuring 30 nanospheres in the SEM images.

Table 3Dynamic Light Scattering Measurements of Eu³⁺ Doped and Undoped Core-shell and Hollow Nanoshells.

Sample	Avg. Hydrodynamic Diameter (nm)	Standard Deviation (nm)	PDI (± SD)	Zeta Potential (mV)
Aminopolystyrene (PS) Beads	208	4	0.04 ± 0.01	-33
Non-Doped Core-Shells	250	40	0.22 ± 0.04	-44
Non-Doped Hollow NS	240	40	0.23 ± 0.07	-41
Eu ³⁺ Doped Core-Shells	305	80	0.27 ± 0.05	+5
Eu ³⁺ Doped Hollow NS	310	60	0.24 ± 0.05	-23
PEI Coated Eu ³⁺ Doped Hollow NS	355	75	0.24 ± 0.02	+46

Europium doped NS were prepared using 0.025% Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O during the synthesis. The average hydrodynamic diameter was based on DLS measurements of three different batches.

Table 4

Luminescence Intensity Ratio Analysis for 200 nm PEI Coated TiO₂ NS Made Using 0.025% Eu(NO₃)₃·5H₂O.

	<u>Red Mean Luminescence</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>
	<u>Green Mean Luminescence</u>	
Controls: Outside of Cell ¹ (n = 118)	1.42	0.03
NS Samples: Outside of Cell (n = 93)	4.29	0.15
Controls: Inside of Cell ² (n = 122)	1.07	0.02
NS Samples: Inside of Cell (n = 48)	1.56	0.11

¹Outside of Cell = red/green luminescence ratios calculated using small outline boxes surrounding a cell like those seen in Figure 6 (panels 1b,2b & 1d,2d)

²Inside of Cell = red/green luminescence ratios calculated using cytoplasmic cell outline like those seen in Figure 6 (panels 1c,2c & 1e,2e)

Note: Luminescence ratios inside and outside of cells for control samples are different because inner cell ratios were calculated in areas where the cell is stained (ratio most likely bleed through into red of green dye), while outer cell ratios were calculated in non-stained (i.e. black background) areas.