



## Colorimetry /SERS dual-sensor of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> constructed via TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@ AuNPs

Qixin Liu<sup>a,1</sup>, Ping Tang<sup>b,1</sup>, Xinyue Xing<sup>a</sup>, Wendai Cheng<sup>a</sup>, Shengde Liu<sup>a</sup>, Xiaoxu Lu<sup>a,\*\*</sup>, Liyun Zhong<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Nanophotonic Functional Materials and Devices, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, 510006, China

<sup>b</sup> Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Photonics Information Technology, Guangdong University of Technology, Guangzhou, 510006, China

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>  
Model enzyme  
Colorimetry  
SERS  
Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs

### ABSTRACT

Hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) detection with high sensitivity plays an important role in biomedical research and food engineering. By combining colorimetry and surface enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS), we synthesize a novel H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> dual-sensor constructed via TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs. In the presence of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, the peroxide model enzyme might catalyze the oxidation of 3,3',5,5'-tetramethylbenzidine (TMB) as blue charge transfer complex (CTC) for colorimetry, and then facilitate the sensitivity improvement of SERS detection. The achieved results show that in colorimetry, the linear range is from 40 μM to 5.5 mM with the detection limit of 11.1 μM; in SERS detection, the linear range is from 2 nM to 1 μM with the detection limit of 0.275 nM. Clearly, this mutual reference strategy improves both the detection limit of colorimetry and the sensitivity of SERS detection. Moreover, this colorimetry/SERS dual-sensor constructed via TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs is successfully applied to the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection in plasma and milk, indicating the excellent performance and flexibility.

### 1. Introduction

Hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>), a common oxidant and essential intermediate or final product in food, is widely used in biomedicine, pharmacy, industry, environment and enzymatic reaction [1–4]. Actually, if the intake concentration of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> is high or the intracellular H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration exceeds 700 nM, human health is in danger [5,6], so it is required that the limit of detection (LOD) of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> reaches nM level. To date, various H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection methods are proposed, including fluorescence [7], electrochemical method [8], high performance liquid chromatography [9] and colorimetry [10,11], etc. Among the above methods, H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> colorimetry, which reveals obvious advantages in low cost, simple operation, and good practicability, has been widely applied [12,13] while its LOD is only μM level [14–16]. Fluorescence-based H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection method has low LOD, but its result is usually affected by the autofluorescence background [17]. Compared with the fluorescence method, surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS) shows obvious advantages in photobleaching resistance, self-quenching, single molecule LOD [18–20] and multiplexing detection [21,22], so it is

becoming a fast and ultra-sensitive detection tool in food and biomedicine research [23–25].

3,3',5,5'-tetramethylbenzidine (TMB), a most common colorimetric indicator of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> [26,27], usually cause resonance Raman signal under the laser excitation of 632.8 nm [28]. When the reaction of TMB and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> is implemented, both the color variation and Raman signal variation will appear, which will provide a mutual reference strategy for H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection. Since the intensity of Raman bands is proportional to the amount of charge transfer complex (CTC) [29,30], by combining the advantages of colorimetry in simplicity and practicability and SERS technique in low LOD, a high sensitivity H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> nanosensor with two mutual reference strategy will be constructed.

As shown in Fig. 1, we renew previous method to prepare Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs [31]. By using bare Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> reserving the catalytic function of the simulated enzyme of nanoparticle, a “hot spot” of local electric field between AuNPs distributed on the surface of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> particles is generated to realize Raman signal enhancement. And by controlling the growth size of AuNPs, we might adjust the local surface plasmon resonance (LSPR) peak to the excitation wavelength, thus Raman signal

\* Corresponding author.

\*\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [hsgdzlxx@scnu.edu.cn](mailto:hsgdzlxx@scnu.edu.cn) (X. Lu), [zhongly@gdut.edu.cn](mailto:zhongly@gdut.edu.cn) (L. Zhong).

<sup>1</sup> These authors contributed equally to this work.

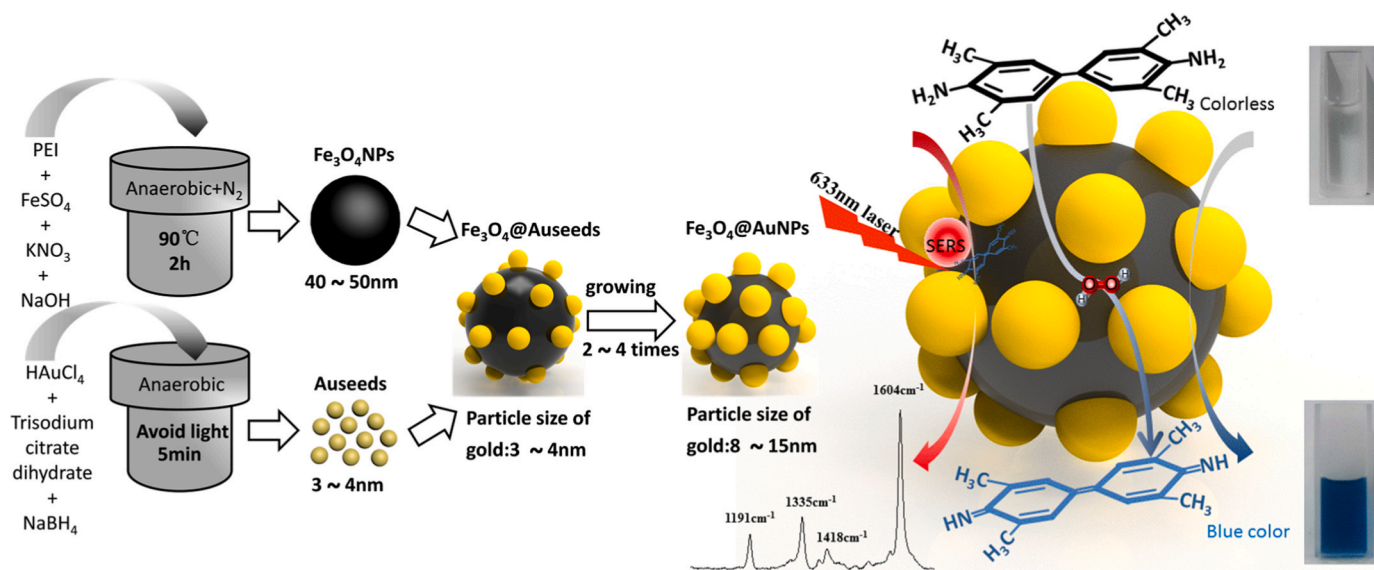


Fig. 1. Schematic illustration for the synthesis of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$  and principle of colorimetric/SERS dual-sensor of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  constructed via TMB- $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$ .

enhancement can be further improved [29]. Moreover, under the action of magnetic field,  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$  will be aggregated reversibly, and the coupling effect of LSPR will appear among the aggregated particles, the “hot spots” enhancement is further improved [32]. Collectively, by introducing  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$  magnetic beads, we hope to construct a novel  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  nanosensor with two mutual reference strategy, in which not only the remarkable catalytic performance of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  can be reserved, but also the distribution density of AuNPs on  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticle surface will be increased and then SERS enhancement factor is improved. Following, we will present the corresponding theoretical analysis and experimental result.

## 2. Experimental section

### 2.1. Materials and reagents

Ferrous sulfate heptahydrate ( $\text{FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), sodium borohydride ( $\text{NaBH}_4$ ), tetrachloroauric acid ( $\text{HAuCl}_4$ ), polyethyleneimine (PEI), nitric acid ( $\text{HNO}_3$ ), sodium citrate, cetyltrimethylammonium chloride (CTAC), potassium bromide (KBr) and L-ascorbic acid were purchased from Maclin (Shanghai, China); 3,3',5,5'-tetramethylbenzidine (TMB) was achieved from Dalian Meilun Biotechnology Co., Ltd.;  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  (relative mass fraction 30%) and sodium hydroxide ( $\text{NaOH}$ ) were purchased from Guangzhou Chemical Reagent Factory. All chemical reagents were analytically pure and might be directly used without further purification. The deionized water (with the resistivity of  $18.2 \text{ M}\Omega \cdot \text{cm}$ ) was chosen.

### 2.2. Preparation of $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$

**Preparation of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles.** First, 65 mL deionized water was heated to  $90^\circ\text{C}$  in oxygen-free environment filled with nitrogen. Second, 5 mL PEI solution (80 mg/mL), 10 mL  $\text{FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$  aqueous solution (containing  $1.280 \text{ g FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), 10 mL  $\text{KNO}_3$  (2.0 M), 10 mL  $\text{NaOH}$  (1.0 M) were added and reacted for 2 h. The magnet settled and washed with deionized water for 5 times. 80 mL deionized water was added to resuspending.

**Preparation of Aulseeds.** First, 1 mL 1%  $\text{HAuCl}_4$  was added to 90 mL deionized water, and after stirring for 1 min, 2 mL of sodium citrate solution (38.8 mM) and 1 mL solution containing  $\text{NaBH}_4$  (0.075%) and sodium citrate (38.8 mM) were added. After stirring for 5 min, the red Aulseeds solution was achieved and stored it at  $4^\circ\text{C}$  for keeping away

from light [31].

**Preparation  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$ .** First, 200  $\mu\text{L}$   $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  solution was added to 9 mL Aulseeds solution, and then the ultrasound treatment was intermittently implemented for 2 min at 8 min intervals for 2 h. Second, the deionized water was separated by magnet for 5 times, 9 mL was added to resuspending, then 1 mL Pei solution (80 mg/mL) was added, and the mixture was heated at  $60^\circ\text{C}$  in the water bath for 1 h. Third, 5 mL of CTAC (0.1 M) solution was added to the resuspension, and ultrasonic treatment was carried out for 2 min.

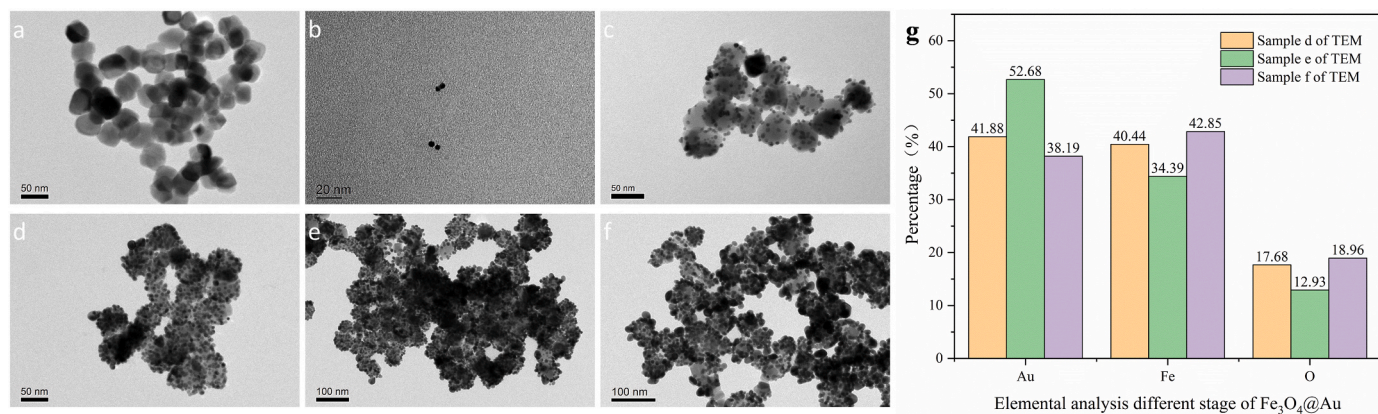
**Growth of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$ .** Referring to the core-shell growth solution in previous reports [31]: Aulseeds solution was added to  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$  solution, treated with ultrasonic wave for 3 min and then reacted for 10 min; 125  $\mu\text{L}$  of  $\text{HAuCl}_4$  (10 mM) and 50  $\mu\text{L}$  L-ascorbic acid (0.04 M) were added and treated with ultrasonic wave for 1 min and then reacted for 10 min. Repeated the above procedure for 2–5 times, the thickness of core-shell and the redshift of absorption peak of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$  could be controlled.

### 2.3. Simulation of electromagnetic field around $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$

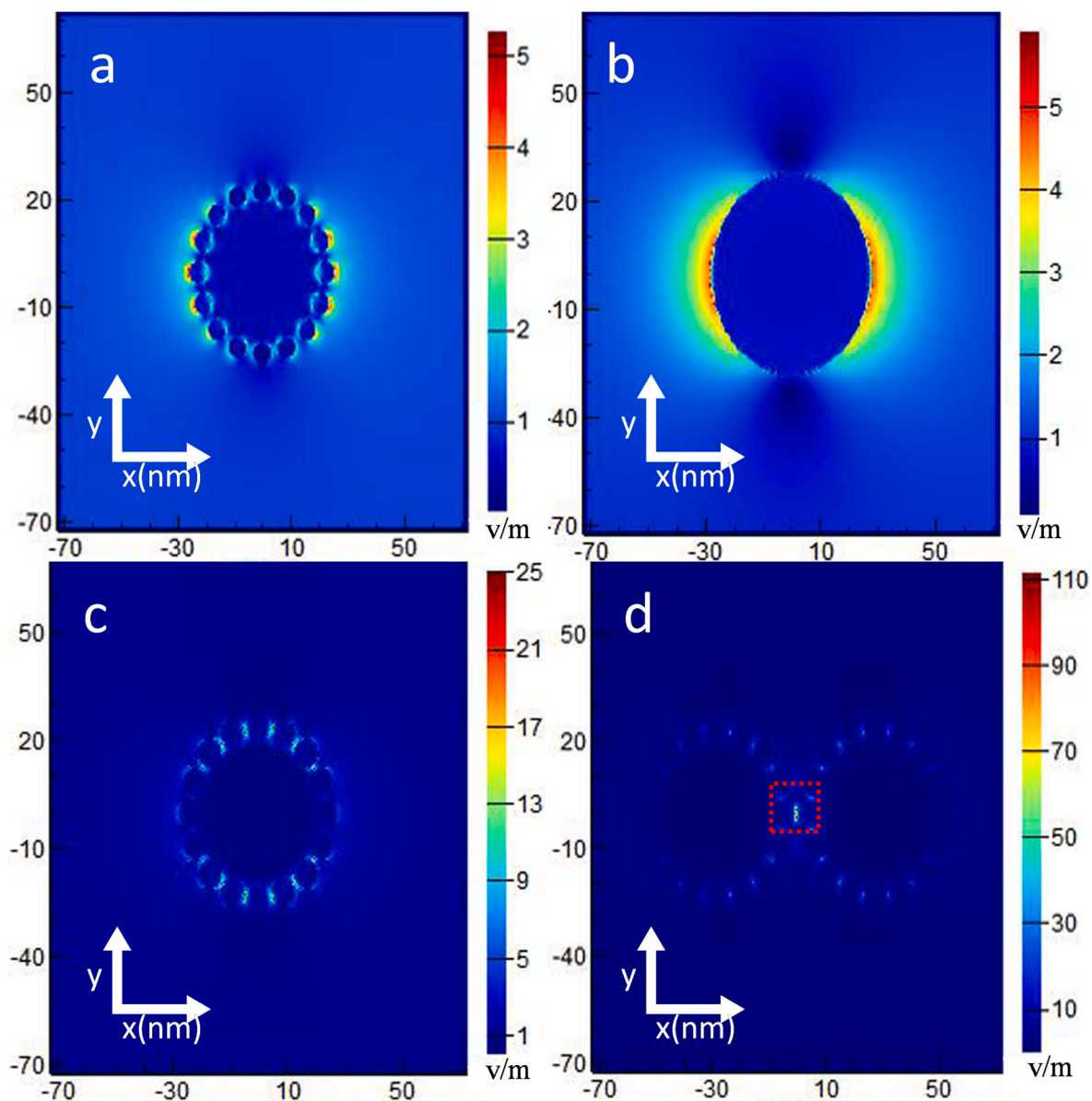
Finite difference time domain (FDTD) method (Lumericfdtd, version 8.16) was used to perform the electromagnetic field calculation. On the basis of the statistical average size of TEM imaging, the diameter of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  was set as 40 nm, the diameters of Aulseeds were respectively set as 6 nm and 8 nm, and Aulseeds were embedded in the surface of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  for 0.5 nm. The incident direction of excitation laser (633 nm) was set as Z-axis and the polarization direction was located in X-axis; the incident electric field was 1 V/m, the dielectric constant of the material referred to previous work [33,34], and the refractive index of the background was set as 1.3334 of water.

### 2.4. $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ detection

First, different concentrations  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  solutions were achieved with acetic acid buffer (pH = 5). Second, 1 mL  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  with different concentrations (0–10 mM in colorimetry; and 0–10  $\mu\text{M}$  in Raman method) were respectively placed into test tube, and then 0.5 mL  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{@AuNPs}$  and 1 mL TMB (10 mM) were added into the corresponding test tube. Third, each  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  solution was divided into two parts. One part was for the absorbance detection by the UV–Vis spectrophotometer and the other part was measured for Raman spectrum.



**Fig. 2.** The structure of the synthesized Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, Auseeds and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs: (a) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>; (b) Auseeds; (c) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs; (d) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs with first growth of Auseeds; (e) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs with second growth of Auseeds; (f) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs nanoparticles with third growth of Auseeds; (g) EDS of sample e/d/f. growth of Auseeds; (g) EDS of sample e/d/f.



**Fig. 3.** FDTD numerical simulation results of electromagnetic field intensity distribution: (a) single Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs (6 nm); (b) AuNPs(55 nm); (c) single Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs(8 nm); (d) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs (8 nm) dimer.



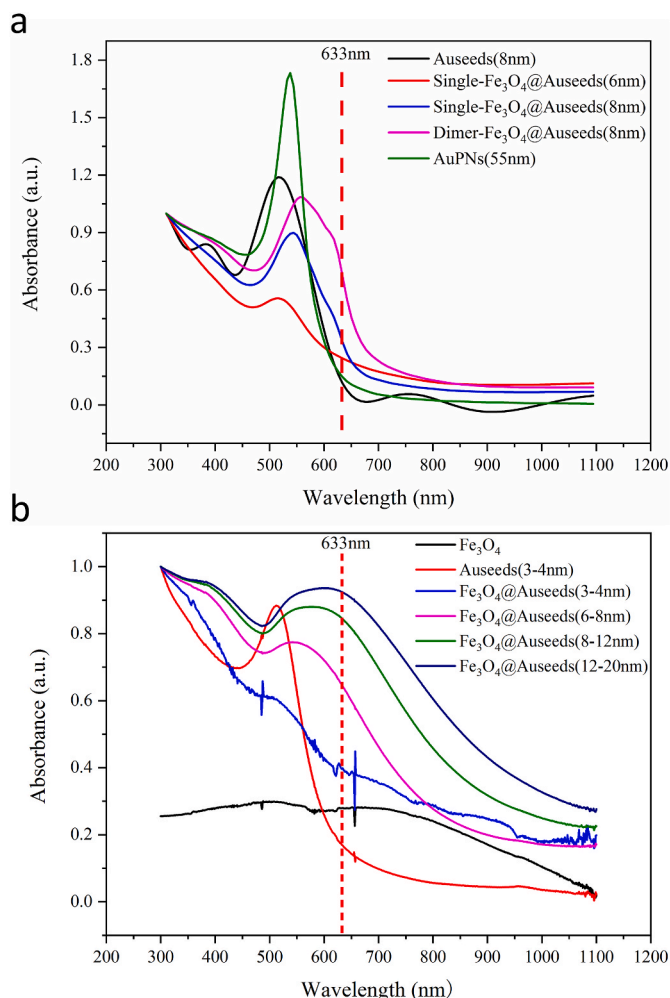


Fig. 4. (a)UV-vis spectrum of an 8 nm Auseed and above corresponding nanostructures; (b)The Auseeds and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs.

### 2.5. H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection in different samples

Referred to previous work [14] for milk pre-treatment steps. First, 5 mL of milk sample was added into a centrifuge tube (10 mL) and centrifuged at 10,000 rpm for 20min. Second, 2.5 mL supernatant and 2.5 mL deionized water were added to a 10 mL centrifuge tube, and centrifuged for 20min. Third, the supernatant was filtered through a 0.22 mm membrane. The pre-treatment of blood sample was similar to previous report [35]: Plasma was separated from blood at 10000 rpm for 20min.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Characterization of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs

As shown in Fig. 2, the synthesized Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were relatively uniform with the diameter of 40–50 nm. The initial particles of Auseeds were mostly in the size of 3–4 nm Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were conjugated with Auseeds modified by PEI to form Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@Auseeds. In the beginning, the size of Auseeds on the surface of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles was small and the distribution was relatively sparse. After the first growth, the size of Auseeds was about 6.3 nm, and the corresponding distribution became denser. After the second growth, the surface Auseeds were further dense, and the size of Auseeds was about 8.0 nm. After the third growth, the size of Auseeds became nonuniform while their sizes were increased with the maximum of 15 nm. As shown in

Fig. 2(g), the energy dispersive spectrum (EDS) was used to explain the variation of Auseeds content during the iterative growth. It was found that the Auseeds content after 3-time additions Auseeds was 41.88%, 52.68% and 38.19%, respectively. Compared with the first Auseeds addition, the ratio of Au to Fe particles in the second Auseeds addition was significantly increased. However, in the third Auseeds addition, the ratio of Au to Fe was reduced relative to the second Auseeds addition, even less than the first Auseeds addition. Actually, along with the increasing of Auseeds, the adsorption capacity of PEI on Auseeds was limited. Meanwhile, these large Auseeds ran against each other and fell from the surface of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>. As shown in Fig. 2(f), a lot of bare areas on the surface of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> were observed after the third Auseeds addition.

### 3.2. Simulation of electromagnetic field and UV-Vis spectrum of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs

In SERS, due to the proximity of molecules and surface plasmon matrix, free electrons on the surface of nano-metal structure collectively oscillated, thus the electromagnetic field enhancement appeared in local areas [36,37], and then Raman signal was improved [38]. To verify the electromagnetic enhancement effect of the synthesized Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs, we first calculated the corresponding enhancement factor (EF), as shown in Fig. 3. Fig. 4 presented both the experimental and simulated UV-Vis spectra, it indicated the simulated result was basically consistent with

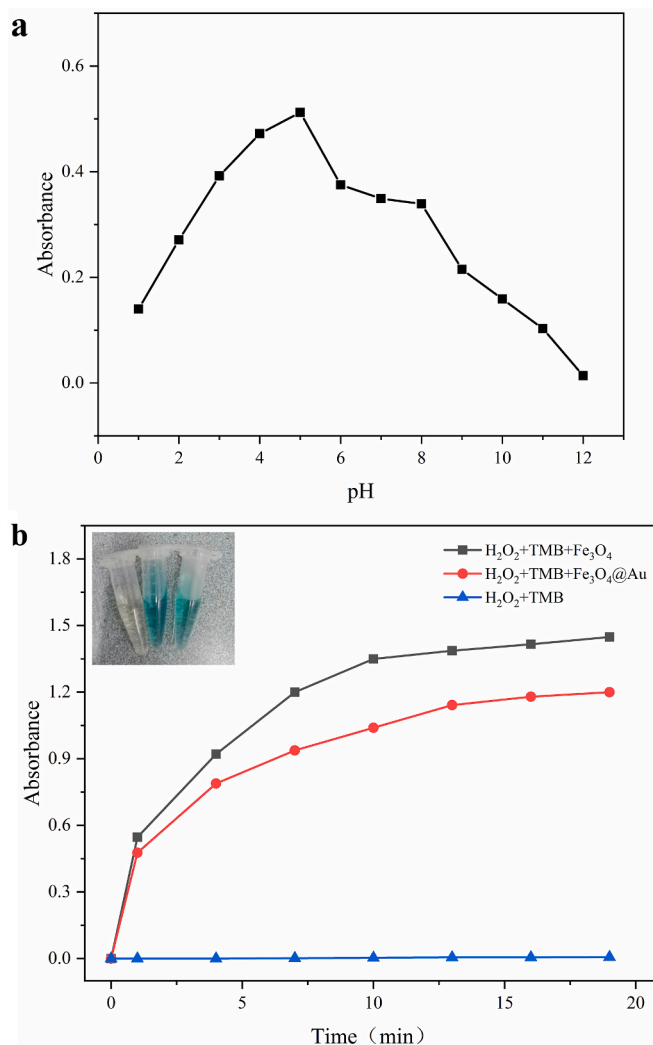
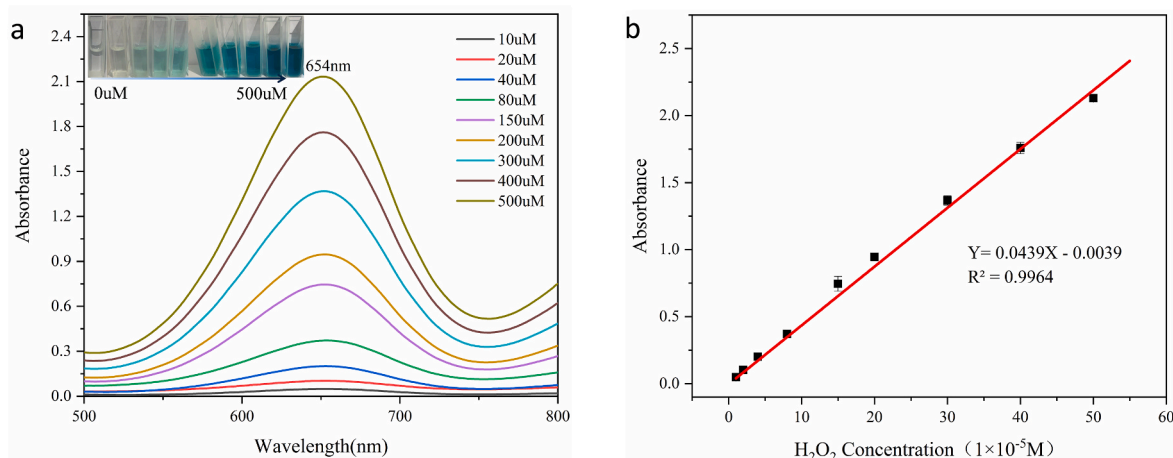


Fig. 5. (a)The relationship between enzyme activity and pH; (b)The relationship between time and reaction degree in different systems.



**Fig. 6.** (a) Corresponding UV-vis spectrum under different H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentrations; (b) The linear relationship between the absorption peak at 654 nm and the concentration of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>.

the experimental result.

To compare the influence of the growth diameter of Aulseeds on the surface of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> particles on the SERS enhancement factor (SERS-EF), two diameters of Aulseeds of 6 nm and 8 nm were set for simulation calculation. As shown in Fig. 3, when the diameter of Aulseeds on the surface of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> particles was varied from 8 nm to 6 nm, the intensity of local electric field between Aulseeds became weak from maximum electric field intensity (Emax) 25 V/m to 5.2 V/m. In contrast, the result of Au nanoparticle with diameter of 55 nm was shown in Fig. 3(b), in which the Emax was about 5.7 V/m that was less than the result generated by same size Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs. In Fig. 4(a), the peak position of simulated UV-Vis spectrum by single Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@Aulseeds (8 nm) appeared obvious redshift due to the coulomb force between adjacent Aulseeds particles, thus the plasma oscillations were coupled each other, and the oscillation mode of surface plasmon that was similar to the shell structure as a whole became stronger, so the redshift of surface plasmon resonance peak appeared.

As shown in Fig. 3(d), a “hot spot” was generated at the gap of a dimer, in which the intensity was about 114 times relative to original Emax and the EF ( $EF = |E_{loc}/E_0|^4$ ,  $E_{loc}$  is the local electric field and  $E_0$  is the incident electric field.) was about  $1.69 \times 10^8$  [39]. Like previous report [40], this result further demonstrated that the action of external magnetic field can facilitate nanoparticles aggregation, and then further improve SERS effect.

Actually, there was a positive correlation between SERS-EF and nanoparticle density [40]. To ensure the feasibility of the method, the

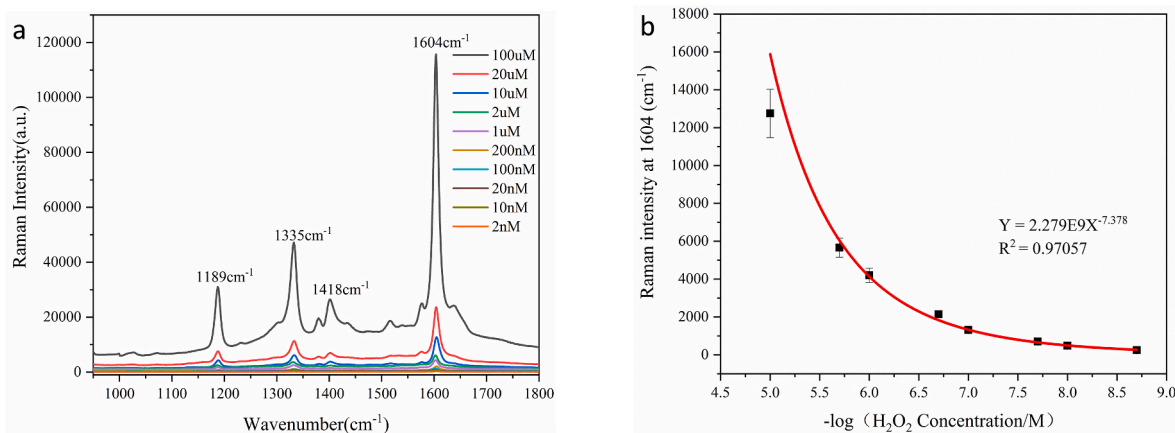
Au density in FDTD simulation was set based on the average density in TEM image. Considering when the particle size of Aulseeds was large, the catalytic effect of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> on H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB system was affected by various factors, such as the intensity of electromagnetic field and the UV-Vis spectrum in FDTD simulation, we selected Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Aulseeds nanoparticles grown twice for probe preparation.

### 3.3. Enzyme activity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs

As mentioned above, the structure of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs might affect the catalytic activity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>. Therefore, we compared the absorbance variation of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs during 20 min reaction. As shown in Fig. 5(a), it was found that the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB (10<sup>-4</sup> M) solution without catalyst was colorless, and no obvious difference between H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB (10<sup>-4</sup> M) with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB (10<sup>-4</sup> M) with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs was observed. In order to get the optimum reaction conditions, the effect of pH on the enzyme activity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> was examined in the range of pH 1–12 (Fig. 5(b)). We can see that the catalytic activity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> was improved with the increasing pH value until 5, then decreased with the increasing of pH value, and the reaction time with maximum catalytic activity was about 18 min.

### 3.4. Colorimetry and SERS detection of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>

**Colorimetry:** Based on the catalytic characteristics of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, we used Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs as the catalyst of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-TMB system to construct



**Fig. 7.** (a) Raman spectra corresponding to different H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentrations; (b) The linear relationship between the Raman peak at 1604 cm<sup>-1</sup> and the concentration of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>.

**Table 1**  
Comparative study of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection.

detection element	method	linear range	LOD	ref
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> @SiO <sub>2</sub> -NH <sub>2</sub> -Au@Pd0.30NPs	colorimetric	0.010–60	0.060 μM	[41]
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> @SiO <sub>2</sub> @Au nanocomposite	colorimetric	5–35 μM	3 μM	[42]
Fe/CuSn(OH) <sub>6</sub>	colorimetric	30–1000 μM	9.49 uM	[14]
Fe Pt–Au HNPs	colorimetric	20–700 μM	12.33 uM	[15]
Mn <sub>2</sub> CuO <sub>4</sub>	electrochemical	0.036–9300 μM	0.013 μM	[16]
Ag–Cu <sub>2</sub> O/Reduced Graphene Oxide Nanocomposites	SERS	10 <sup>-2</sup> –10 <sup>-8</sup> M	1.6*10 <sup>-8</sup> M	[30]
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> @AuNPs	colorimetric	4–550 μM	11.1 μM	This work
	SERS	2–10000 nM	0.275 nM	This work

colorimetry/SERS dual-sensors. Color variation of the catalytic system was shown in the inset of Fig. 6. We can see that along with the increasing of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration, the solution color was gradually changed from colorless to blue, and the absorbance of TMB containing H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> was measured by UV–Vis spectrophotometer. As shown in Fig. 6(b), along with the increasing of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> from 40 μM–5.5 mM, the intensity of absorption peak at 654 nm was significantly increased. Fig. 6(b) presents the absorbance variation with H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration, the detection limit reached 11.1 μM in the range of 40 μM–5.5 mM ( $R^2 = 0.996$ ).

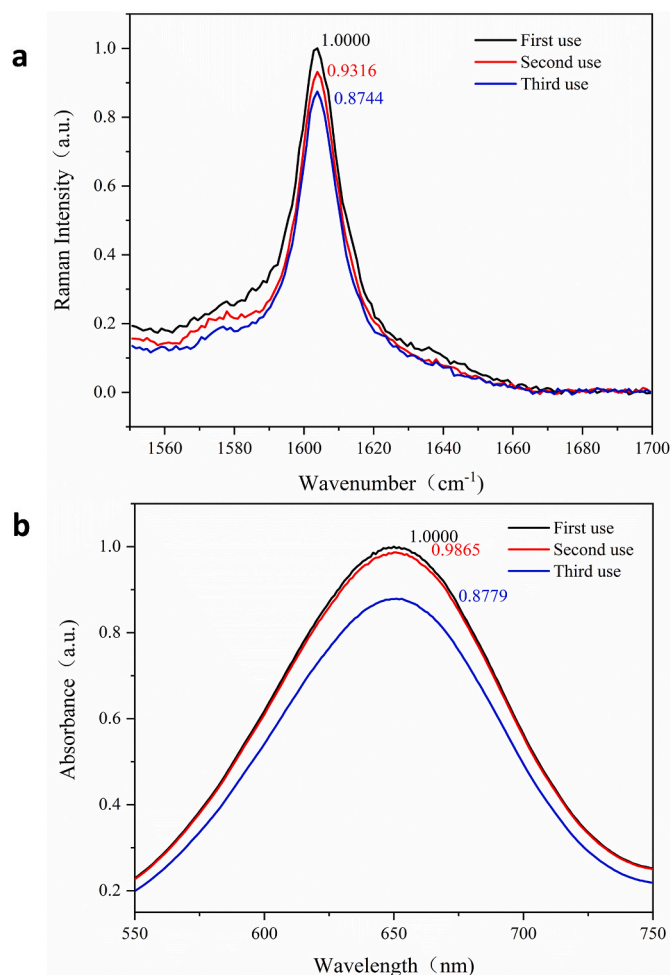
**SERS detection:** As shown in Fig. 7(a), a typical band at 1418 cm<sup>-1</sup> was observed in the Raman spectrum of oxidized TMB which was classified as unoxidized diamine [34]. And in the presence of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, the bands at 1189, 1335 and 1604 cm<sup>-1</sup> also appeared, assigned to CH<sub>3</sub> bending modes, inter-ring C–C stretching modes, ring stretching and C–H bending modes, respectively [28]. Thus, CTC can be characterized by three fingerprints peaks of 1189, 1135, 1604 cm<sup>-1</sup> [28]. Moreover, the typical band of TMB was still observed at 1418 cm<sup>-1</sup> under high H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration and TMB, indicating that a few TMB molecules were not oxidized.

Like colorimetry, Raman signal variation also can be used to monitor H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration. Along with the increasing of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration, Raman signal intensity of CTC become strong under 633 nm laser excitation (Fig. 7(a)). From Raman spectrum of CTC generated by the catalytic reaction of TMB under different concentrations H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (2 nM–1 μM), it was found that along with the increasing of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration, Raman peak at 1604 cm<sup>-1</sup> was gradually increased. Fig. 7(b) showed the relationship between the intensity of Raman peak at 1604 cm<sup>-1</sup> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration. A good linear relationship can be found in the range of 2 nM–1 μM ( $R^2 = 0.971$ ), and the corresponding detection limit reached 0.275 nM.

Compared with current H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection methods, the proposed Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs dual-sensor showed extremely low detection limit (0.275 nM) and large linear range (40 μM–5.5 mM and 2 nM–1 μM) (Table 1). In addition, since the magnetic property of nanoparticles can be used for effective separation and recovery, so we can simplify not only the procedure of centrifugal separation in colorimetry, but also realize reuse efficiently. Clearly, the excellent sensing performance in such colorimetry/SERS method was attributed to the high catalytic activity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs and the enhancement of Raman signal by a stable electromagnetic field generated between Aulseeds. In addition, this colorimetry/SERS could greatly reduce the error induced by the environmental variation and ensure the reliability of the measurement results by two mutual reference strategy.

### 3.5. Recoverability examination

As stated above, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs showed good catalytic stability and recoverability, and they might be aggregated and separated from the



**Fig. 8.** The relationship between usage times and spectral intensity: (a) Raman spectrum; (b) UV–vis spectrum.

system by external magnetic force. The recoverability was examined in the presence of 1 mL of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> ( $1 \times 10^{-3}$  M). Fig. 8(a) presented the Raman spectrum of the reaction between H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and TMB catalyzed by the recovered Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs. The intensity of the SERS signal was decreased with the used number. Fig. 8(b) showed the recovery process of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs, and the UV–Vis spectrum between H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and TMB reaction revealed good catalytic activity of probe, which reflected that Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs was indeed a good reusable catalyst and SERS substrate.

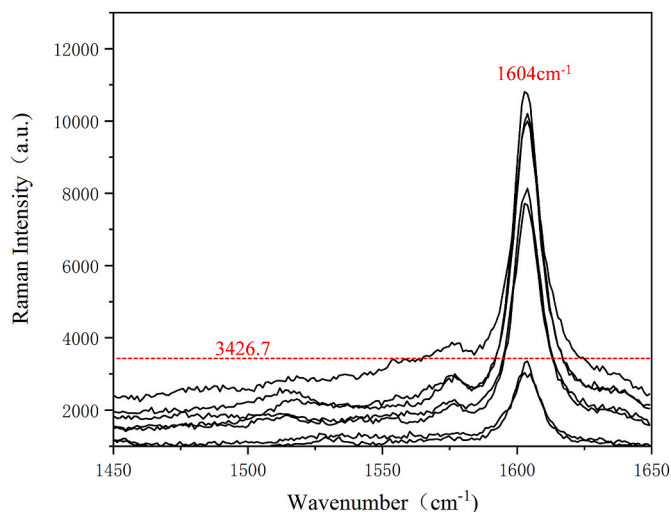
### 3.6. Real sample examination

To verify the flexibility of TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs, we examined H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentrations in plasma and milk samples. As shown in Table 1. All samples were analyzed by colorimetry. The recovery was in the range of 104.14 and 113.89%, and the relative standard deviation was varied from 2.87 to 9.18%. In contrast, the SERS method was utilized to examine H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentrations in plasma and milk samples, respectively. When the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> ( $1 \times 10^{-6}$  M and  $2 \times 10^{-7}$  M) were respectively added to the plasma and milk samples, the corresponding recoverability was 93.42 and 140.01%, and the relative standard deviations were varied from 2.16 to 23.58% (Table 2). These results demonstrated good performance of the dual colorimetry/SERS sensor constructed by TMB-Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs in H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> detection. Furthermore, such colorimetric/SERS sensor was also used to verify the difference between health and unhealth samples. As shown in Fig. 9, we set 700 nm as the reference line corresponding to Raman intensity of 3426.7 (a.u.) and the Raman intensity more than and less than 700 nm were respectively defined as

**Table 2**

Consequences of real sample analysis.

method	sample	added H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> (uM)	detected H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> (uM)			recovery (%)			relative standard deviation (RSD) (%)		
colorimetric	Milk 1, 2, 3	200.00	211.59	226.85	227.77	105.79	113.42	113.89	3.98	8.90	9.18
	Plasma 1, 2, 3	250.00	260.34	276.97	277.42	104.14	110.79	110.97	2.87	7.24	7.35
SERS	Milk a, b, c	0.20	0.21	0.27	0.28	103.11	134.95	140.01	2.16	21.04	23.58
	Plasma a, b, c	1.00	0.93	1.34	1.15	93.42	133.55	115.14	4.81	20.32	9.95

**Fig. 9.** Experiments to differentiate between health and unhealthy samples.

the unhealthy and healthy samples. Clearly, the experimental result was coincident with the state of the preset sample very well.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this work, using TMB and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>@AuNPs synthesized by a green and convenient water bath heating method, we construct a colorimetry/SERS dual-sensor of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>. The achieved result demonstrates that the high-density Au nano-assembly structure is very beneficial to improve Raman signal enhancement, in which the measuring range reaches 2 nM–1 uM for SERS and 40 uM–5.5 mM for colorimetry with the LOD of 0.275 nM, indicating obvious advantages of such colorimetry/SERS dual-sensor in sensitivity, catalytic activity, flexibility and recoverability. Importantly, this colorimetry/SERS dual-sensor will provide a mutual reference strategy in glucose and lactic acid detection, environmental monitoring and food engineering.

#### Credit author statement

I declare that this thesis and its research work were completed by the author of this article. The research materials used in the completion of this thesis are listed in the references; strictly abide by the relevant national confidentiality regulations, there is no phenomenon of multiple submissions. After publishing, I would bear my own responsibility.

#### 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.

#### Acknowledgments

This work is supported by the National Nature Science Foundation of China (grants: 61875059 and 61727814).

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