

# Permethylated- $\beta$ -Cyclodextrin Capped CdTe Quantum Dot and its Sensitive Fluorescence Analysis of Malachite Green

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**Abstract** In the present work, the CdTe quantum dots were covalently conjugated with permethylated- $\beta$ -cyclodextrin (OMe- $\beta$ -CD) using 1-ethyl-3-(3-dimethylaminopropyl) carbodiimide hydrochloride as cross-linking reagent. The obtained functional quantum dots (OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs) showed highly luminescent, water solubility and photostability as well as good inclusion ability to malachite green. A sensitive fluorescence method was developed for the analysis of malachite green in different samples. The good linearity was  $2.0 \times 10^{-7}$ – $1.0 \times 10^{-5}$  mol/L and the limit of detect was  $1.7 \times 10^{-8}$  mol/L. The recoveries for three environmental water samples were 92.0–108.2 % with relative standard deviation (RSD) of 0.24–1.87 %, while the recovery for the fish sample was 94.3 % with RSD of 1.04 %. The results showed that the present method was sensitive and convenient to determine malachite green in complex samples.

**Keyword** Permethylated- $\beta$ -cyclodextrin · Quantum dots · Malachite green · Fluorescence analysis · Water and fish samples

## Introduction

Quantum dots (QDs) as novel fluorescent nano-materials, have attracted considerable attentions owing to their excellent optical properties including broad absorption, narrow emission, tunable emission, photostability and large extinction coefficients [1–3]. They have been widely applied in fluorescence sensor [4], bio-imaging [5], quantum device [6] and molecular biological application [7] in recent years. Water solubility and molecular recognition structures were essential for the application of QDs. To exploit sensing system which is based on QDs using fluorescence changes induced by molecular recognition at the surface of QDs is a topic of current interest.

$\beta$ -Cyclodextrin ( $\beta$ -CD) is cyclic oligosaccharides made up of seven glucopyranose units through  $\alpha$ -1,4-glucosidic bond linkages, it has a special molecular structure, that is, lipophilic internal cavity and hydrophilic external surface, to form host-guest inclusion complexes with many organic molecules [8].  $\beta$ -CD-QDs emission properties were strongly modified by the non-covalent interactions between the surface anchored  $\beta$ -CD host and the molecular guest, providing a power molecular recognition system and had received much attention as fluorescence sensors [9]. Jia et al. [10] described a direct enzyme activity sensing nanobiosensor platform based on  $\beta$ -CD-functionalized CdTe QDs, and an alkaline phosphatase activity detection system was constructed based on the different quenching effect of the enzyme substrate and product on the modified QDs. Optical sensing and chiroselective sensing of different substrates were also reported using  $\beta$ -CD-functionalized CdSe/ZnS QDs based on a fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) or an energy transfer mechanism [11, 12].  $\beta$ -CD modified with 11-[(ethoxycarbonyl)thio] undecanoic acid was also used as a capping agent to prepare water-stable CdTe QDs and these modified QDs acted as

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nanoprobes for acetylsalicylic acid and its metabolites, the limit of detect (LOD) was low to  $8.5 \times 10^{-9}$  mol/L [13]. Compared with natural  $\beta$ -CD, CD-derivatives can improve their performance such as better aqueous solubility, selectivity, bio-availability and higher binding capacities for most of poorly soluble materials. Among them, full methylation causes remarkable distortion of the  $\beta$ -CD macrocycle, increasing the water solubility as well as adjusting the molecular inclusion effect. In our previous work, the molecular recognition of mono-(6-mercapto)- $\beta$ -cyclodextrin modified CdSe quantum dots with tyrosine enantiomers was investigated with theoretical calculation and fluorescence spectroscopy, and the functional  $\beta$ -CD/QDs showed better enantio-selectivity to *L*-tyrosine than that to *D*-tyrosine [14].

Malachite green (MG) has been extensively used as a topical fungicide and ectoparasiticide in fish farming, it is also used as a food coloring agent, a medical disinfectant and anthelmintic as well as a dye in silk, wool, leather, paper and acrylic industries [15]. Several studies [16, 17] had shown its hazardous and carcinogenic effects can cause irritation to the respiratory tract or gastrointestinal tract. The commercial use of MG is not permitted in the UE since 2002 and a minimum required performance limit (MRPL) at  $2 \mu\text{g} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1}$  has been established for the determination of MG residues in aquaculture products. The determination of residual MG in environmental water samples or fish had been carried out by liquid chromatography [18, 19] coupled to several detectors such as fluorescence detection and mass spectroscopy [20].

In the present work, permethylated- $\beta$ -cyclodextrin capped CdTe quantum dots (OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs) were synthesized, their fluorescence ability and inclusion effect were studied. A sensitive method was developed for the analysis of trace malachite green in environmental water and fish samples.

## Experimental

### Materials and Reagents

Tellurium (powder, 100 mesh, 99.99 %),  $\text{NaHB}_4$  (96 %), malachite green (MG), leuco-malachite green (LMG), cadmium chloride ( $\text{CdCl}_2 \cdot 2.5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , >99 %), ethanediamine 3-mercaptopropyl acid (MPA), 1-ethyl-3-(3-dimethylaminopropyl) carbodiimide hydrochloride (EDC) were purchased from Aladdin (Shanghai, China),  $\beta$ -cyclodextrin ( $\beta$ -CD) was purchased from Yongguang Industrial Corporation (Shanxi, China), it was recrystallized twice from water and dried under vacuum for 12 h at  $95^\circ\text{C}$  before use. All chemicals were of analytical grade and used as received, with no additional purification. Double-distilled water was used throughout the work.

The phosphate buffered saline (PBS buffer) was prepared with disodium hydrogen phosphate and potassium

dihydrogen phosphate, 1.0 mol/L NaOH was used to adjust the pH value.

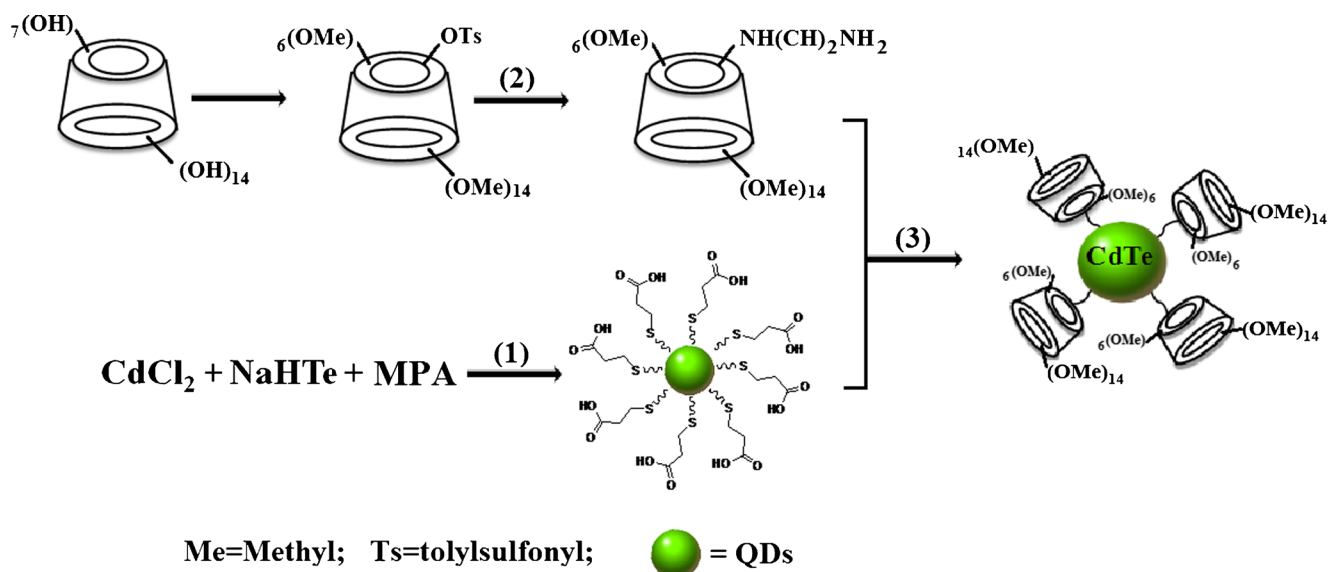
### Apparatus

UV-vis absorption spectra were recorded with a UV-vis 1700 spectrophotometer (Shimadzu, Japan). The fluorescence spectra were recorded on an F-2500 (Hitachi, Japan). The morphology of QDs was characterized by high resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) on a JEM-2100HR (JEOL, Japan). Fluorescence lifetime was recorded with FLS-920 (Edinburgh, UK), Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectra ( $4000\text{--}400 \text{ cm}^{-1}$  in KBr) were recorded on a PE Spectrum One FT-IR Spectrometer (CA, USA). The acidity was measured with a pH SJ-3 F pH meter (Leici, Shanghai, China).

### Preparation of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs

The scheme of preparation of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs is shown in Fig. 1, including the following steps:

- (1) Preparation of water-soluble MPA capped CdTe QDs  
The preparation of MPA-capped CdTe QDs was based on previous method with slight modification [21]. Briefly, 20.6 mg of  $\text{CdCl}_2 \cdot 2.5\text{H}_2\text{O}$  was dissolved in 100 mL of water and 18.8  $\mu\text{L}$  of MPA was added under stirring, followed by adjusting the pH to 9.0 by dropwise addition of 1.0 mol/L NaOH solution. Under vigorously stirring, 90  $\mu\text{L}$  of freshly prepared oxygen-free  $\text{NaHTe}$  solution was added into the above solution, the resulting mixture was then refluxed at  $96^\circ\text{C}$  for 2 h.
- (2) Preparation of mono-(6<sup>A</sup>-N-ethylenediamine-6<sup>A</sup>-deoxy)-permethylated  $\beta$ -CD [22]  
Mono (6-(p-tolylsulfonyl)) permethylated  $\beta$ -CD (500 mg, 0.32 mmol) was added to a nitrogen saturated ethylenediamine (3.2 mmol) aqueous solution under stirring. The mixture was refluxed at  $70^\circ\text{C}$  for 7 h, the resultant solution was cooled to room temperature and the excess ethylenediamine was removed under vacuum. Then water was added to the residue and the crude product was extracted using ethyl acetate, and then the extract was purified by silica gel using ethyl acetate-acetone (1:1, v/v) as eluent to afford white crystals. IR ( $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , KBr): 2928 ( $\text{sp}^3 \text{C-H}$ , s), 2831 ( $-\text{CH}_2-$ , m), 1142 (C-N, m), 1038 (C-O-C, s).
- (3) Preparation of CdTe QDs coated with OMe- $\beta$ -CD  
The preparation of CdTe QDs coated with  $\beta$ -CD was based on the approach for constructing an complex with CdTe QDs using the EDC reagent via the formation of amide between the carboxyl groups of QDs and the primary amine groups of OMe- $\beta$ -CD [23]. Typically, MPA-capped CdTe QDs (50 mL), EDC (160  $\mu\text{L}$ ,



**Fig. 1** The scheme of preparation of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs

0.1 mol/L), PBS buffer (pH 6.5, 0.01 mol/L, 120  $\mu$ L) were mixed and the mixture was incubated at room temperature for 10 min with gentle stirring to activate the QDs. Then, the OMe- $\beta$ -CD solution (10 mL, 2 mg/mL) was added and incubated for another 1.5 h at room temperature. Then the resultant solution was stored at 4  $^{\circ}$ C for overnight to allow the unreacted EDC to hydrolyze and lose its activity.

## Methods

### (1) Procedure for spectrum detection of MG

To a 10 mL calibrated test tube, 250  $\mu$ L of the synthesized OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs, 200  $\mu$ L of PBS (pH=10.0) and an appropriate amount of MG was added into the tube in turn, then diluted with deionized water to 10 mL and mixed thoroughly with gentle shaking. After incubation for 5 min, the fluorescence spectra of these solutions were examined.

### (2) Analysis of environmental water samples

The river water samples were collected from the Pearl River. The samples were filtered through Millipore membrane filter (0.2  $\mu$ m pore size) to remove large solids, then transferred into pre-cleaned glass bottles and stored in a refrigerator.

Fresh fish was purchased from a local supermarket and separated from the skin and bones. Then it was crushed and homogenized with a mortar. Approximately 5.0 g homogenized tissue was extracted with 10.0 mL deionized water for 30 min, the extract was then centrifuged at 4000 rpm for 5 min and the supernatant was obtained for the further analysis.

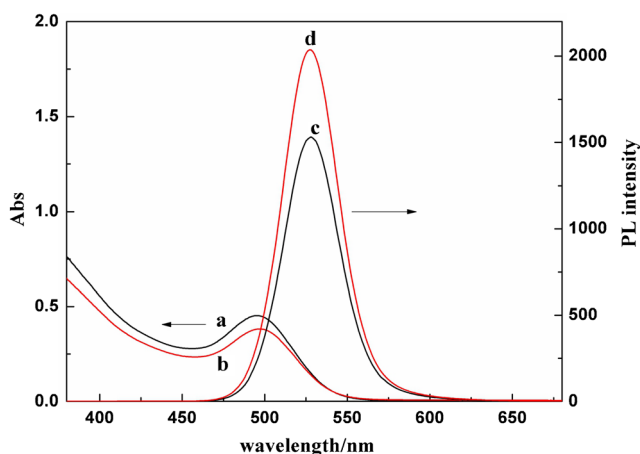
## Results and Discussion

### Characterizations of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs

Figure 2 shows the UV-vis absorption (a, b) and photoluminescence (PL) (c, d) spectra of CdTe QDs before and after conjugated with OMe- $\beta$ -CD in aqueous solution, respectively. The UV absorption of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs decreased slightly after conjugated with  $\beta$ -CD while the fluorescence emission intensity (FL) was remarkable increased. The maybe reason due to the fact that the interaction of QDs with OMe- $\beta$ -CD passivated the surface of QDs and inhibits the radiationless recombination at the surface vacancies [24]. Furthermore, no clear shift in emission wavelength and the spectral width of the OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs was almost the same as that of native CdTe QDs, which suggested that the OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs in water retained the optical properties of the original QDs.

The shape and size of QDs were determined by HRTEM. The HRTEM images in Fig. 3 demonstrate that the CdTe QDs and OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs were well monodispersed and spherical morphology, their average diameters were about 3.4 and 4.1 nm, respectively.

A common problem encountered in using water soluble, ligand protected QDs for practical applications was their low quantum yields (QYs). The QYs of the CdTe QDs and OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs in aqueous solution were determined by comparison with that of Rhodamine B (QY=96 %, EtOH) at room temperature. After conjugated with OMe- $\beta$ -CD, the defects on the surface of QDs were reduced and the QYs were enlarged from 64 to 74 %. Moreover, it was reported that the PL peak will shift to blue side with time under ultraviolet light irradiation due to photo-oxidation reaction [25]. In the present work, the photo-irradiation experiments of the QDs were performed



**Fig. 2** UV-vis absorption and PL intensity of CdTe QDs (a, c) and OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs (b, d)

under ambient condition and irradiation from a 365 nm ultra-violet lamp at certain time intervals. The modified OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs showed good stability against light illumination, more than 80 % of the fluorescence response was obtained after the modified QDs were irradiated for more than 1 h.

### Effects on the Fluorescence Intensity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs

To study the specific fluorescence intensity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs, malachite green (MG) was selected as the analyte and its concentration was kept at  $1.0 \times 10^{-6}$  mol/L, the effects of pH solution, ionic strength and concentration ratio of QDs to analyte were considered.

#### (1) Effect of pH

It is known that QDs are pH-sensitive. In this study, the effect of pH on the luminescent of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs was investigated in the range of 5.0–11.0. PBS solution was used to control the acidity of analytical system and  $\Delta F$  (defined as  $F_0 - F$ , where  $F_0$  and  $F$  were the PL intensities of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs in the absence and presence of MG) was chosen as the response factor. The OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs were not stable in acidic solution and a small  $\Delta F$  occurred. On the other hand, the interaction between the MG and QDs can be enlarged in basic solution and the

maximum value of  $\Delta F$  was obtained when the pH value was 10.0. The MG had only a slight fluorescence quenching effect on QDs when the pH was higher than 10.0, so the optimum pH value of 10.0 was chose.

#### (2) Effect of ionic strength

The effect of ionic strength on the fluorescence intensity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs was investigated by keeping the pH, the concentration of MG and OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs while changing the volume of PBS. The value of  $\Delta F$  enlarged with the increase of the volume of PBS before 200  $\mu$ L, but it was greatly dropped down when the volume of PBS was larger than 300  $\mu$ L. It is probably due to the fact that the solubility of MG in the high ionic strength PBS solution was reduced, resulting in the reduction of complexation effect between the MG and  $\beta$ -CD. Then, 200  $\mu$ L PBS was selected in the following experiments.

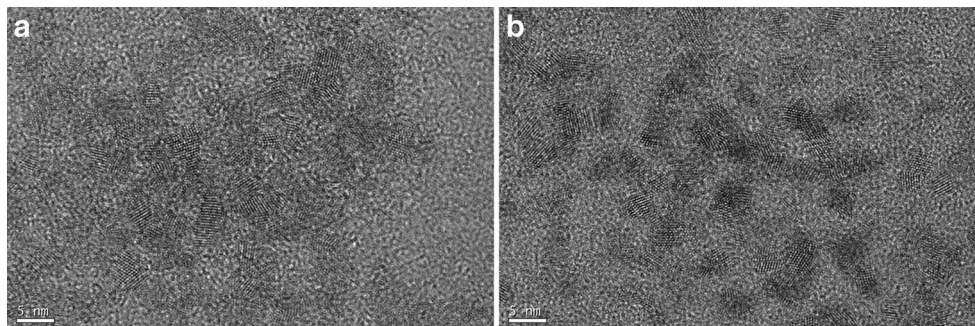
#### (3) Effect of concentration ratio of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs to the analyte

The effect of concentration ratio of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs to MG was studied by keeping MG concentration at  $1.0 \times 10^{-6}$  mol/L and the pH 10.0. The results showed that the optimum concentration ratio was almost 1:1. When the added amounts of QDs were higher than this concentration, the value of  $\Delta F$  began to decrease. From the reported experimental data with HNMR and theoretical calculation results [26, 27], one crystal violet molecule, which has very similar chemical structure to MG, was introduced into one  $\beta$ -CD molecule through its wide opening and one complete phenyl group was accommodated within its interior, the stoichiometry of the complex is 1:1. Our study in the present work also confirmed that the stoichiometry of the complex  $\beta$ -CD-MG is 1:1.

### Fluorescence Quenching and Inclusion Mechanism

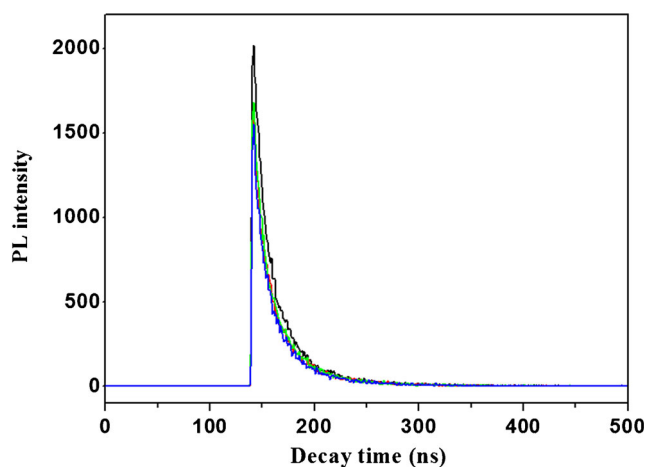
Fluorescence quenching mechanism is usually classified as either dynamic quenching or static quenching. The lifetime of fluorescence molecule on excited state has no change in the presence of quencher when static quenching takes place. Reversely, the fluorescence lifetime would be shorter if

**Fig. 3** HRTEM images of CdTe QDs (a) and OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs (b)



dynamic quenching occurs [28]. As seen in Fig. 4, the fluorescence lifetime of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs has little difference, that is from 17.56 to 17.81 ns, with the increase of the amount of MG, suggesting the fluorescence quenching occurs by a static mechanism. Because of its inherent molecular structure,  $\beta$ -CD can form an inclusion complex with various guest molecules via non-covalent interaction. In this study, the added MG molecule was interacted with OMe- $\beta$ -CD and a inclusion complex was formed between OMe- $\beta$ -CD and MG. Then charge-transfer-induced photobleaching of QDs was occurred, which induces the fluorescence quenching of QDs. Similar results can also be observed in QDs system with amine groups, Ru-polypyridine complexes and azobenzene compounds [29].

Moreover, persubstitution of CDs may lead to structural modifications, associated with alteration of the physical properties such as the inclusion effect and selectivity. MG can be easily hydrolyzed in the body of animal and leuco-malachite green (LMG) is the primary metabolite of malachite green, they have highly similar chemical structures except MG has extended pi-delocalization. So, the selectivity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs to MG and LMG was studied. Under the same experimental conditions, the PL intensity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs to MG was three times than that to LMG, indicating the better selectivity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs. The selectivity of the method for malachite green (MG) compared to its leuco-form was due to their different chemical structures and their interaction with the modified  $\beta$ -CD and the QDs. Compared to its neutral form, the cationic MG has two equivalent resonance structures, leading this cationic form have extended pi-delocalization with the methylated  $\beta$ -CD except the inclusion complexation [30], there also was an extra columbic interaction between the cationic MG with the residue anionic QD stabilized with MPA [31]. Moreover, the full methylation increased the hydrophilicity of  $\beta$ -CD, which was benefit for the hydrophilic MG than the hydrophobic LMG to form the inclusion complexes.



**Fig. 4** Fluorescence decay curves ( $\lambda_{ex}$ =365 nm, measured at the maximum of the fluorescence) of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs in the absence and presence of malachite green using a mono-exponential function

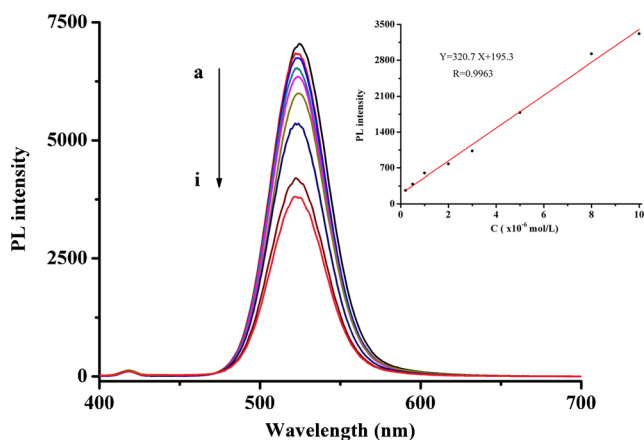
## Application to MG Analysis in Water and Fish Samples

The quenching effect of MG on the PL intensity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs can be used to develop a method for the analysis of MG in a concentration dependence. A good linear relationship (Fig. 5) was observed up to the MG concentration as the following equation:  $F_0 - F = 320.7 [C] + 195.3$  ( $C$ : mol/L), where  $F_0$  and  $F$  were the fluorescence intensities of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs in the absence and presence of MG, respectively.  $C$  was the concentration of MG. The linear range was from  $2.0 \times 10^{-7}$  to  $1.0 \times 10^{-5}$  mol L $^{-1}$  with a correlation coefficient of 0.9963. The limit of detect (LOD) was  $1.7 \times 10^{-8}$  mol L $^{-1}$  and the relative standard deviation established at six replicate was lower than 2.0 %.

To validate the new established method in real samples with complex matrix, environmental water and fish samples were selected for the analysis. The spiked MG could be accurately analyzed and the recoveries for MG in water samples ranged from 92 to 108 % with RSD of 0.24–1.87 %, the recovery of MG in fish was 94.3 % and its RSD was 1.04 %. In comparison with the reported chromatography method, for example, a graphene based solid phase extraction couple with ultra-performance liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry for the determination of MG with LOD of 0.63  $\mu$ g/kg and RSD lower than 5.0 % [18], the present work showed lower limit of detections and better precision, suggesting good potential of the present sensitive and simple method.

## Conclusions

In summary, permethylated- $\beta$ -cyclodextrin capped CdTe quantum dots (OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs) were synthesized, it combined the fluorescence ability of QDs and the inclusion ability of  $\beta$ -CD. As a result of the remarkable changes of the fluorescent intensity for MG, it is possible for OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs to



**Fig. 5** PL spectra of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs with the addition of different MG concentrations. The MG concentrations added for spectrum (a) to (i) were 0, 0.2, 0.5, 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 5.0, 8.0,  $10.0 \times 10^{-6}$  mol/L, respectively

selectively and sensitively detect MG. Under the optimum conditions, the relative PL intensity of OMe- $\beta$ -CD/QDs was decreased with increasing MG concentration in range of  $2.0 \times 10^{-7}$ – $1.0 \times 10^{-5}$  mol/L, and the limit of detect was  $1.7 \times 10^{-8}$  mol/L. The proposed method was successfully applied to the determination of MG in real water samples and fish and satisfied results were obtained.

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