INTRODUCTION

Diabetes, a chronic disease caused by genetic and environmental factors, threatens the health of millions of people, which has become a global challenge1. Therefore, much earlier intervention is required to prevent diabetes, type-2 diabetes particularly. Previous study revealed that glucagon-like peptide-1 is an intestine-derived insulinotropic hormone that stimulated glucose dependent insulin production and secretion from pancreatic β-cells. Glucagon-like peptide-1 also exerted cytoprotective and antiapoptotic effects on β-cells and decreased postprandial blood glucose via complicated mechanisms2,3. However, glucagon-like peptide-1 was rapidly degraded and inactivated in vivo by the serine protease dipeptidyl peptidase-4, which limited their ability to normalize blood glucose levels. Therefore, dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitors could decrease the high levels of blood glucose in type 2 diabetes patients4,5.

In recent years, we have focused on synthesizing and evaluating the biological activities of novel xanthone compounds6-8. Compound 9, a small xanthone derivative, was identified to show good dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitory activity from high throughput screening (HTS) through varieties of xanthone derivatives and IC50 value against dipeptidyl peptidase-4 is 7.3 µg/mL (Fig. 1). Molecular docking study showed compound 9 could bind with the target enzyme and a pocket existed between the 7-substituted group and the target enzyme, which revealed that an adequate modification to compound 9 could improve the bind between receptor and ligands and enhanced the inhibition of the xanthone derivatives against dipeptidyl peptidase-4. As shown in Fig. 2, when a hydrophobic group was linked to the xanthone framework at 7-position, the compound could bind with the target enzyme better. Herein, we report our efforts to optimize the inhibitory effects of this compound by analyzing structure-activity relationships.
was washed with water, the residue was crystallized from MeOH to afford the compound 5 (12.0 g, 79 %). 1H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d6, TMS): δ 9.14 (1 H, s, Ar), 8.47 (1 H, d, Ar), 7.50 (1 H, d, Ar), 6.55 (1 H, s, Ar), 6.42 (1 H, s, Ar), 4.01 (3 H, s, OCH3), 3.95 (3 H, s, OCH3). ESI-MS, m/z: [M + H]+, 302.90.

1,3-Dimethoxy-7-amino-9H-xanthen-9-one (6): A solution of 1,3-dimethoxy-7-nitro-9H-xanthen-9-one (3.01 g, 0.01 mol), 0.5 g of Raney-nickel and methanol 20 mL was stirred at room temperature, then hydrazine was added dropwise into the reaction slowly and stirred for another 4 h at room temperature. After filtration, the filtrate was evaporated under reduced pressure. The residue was crystallized from MeOH to afford compound 6 (1.9 g, 69 %). 1H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d6, TMS): δ 7.52 (1 H, s, Ar), 7.22 (1 H, d, Ar), 7.00 (1 H, d, Ar), 6.47 (1 H, s, Ar), 6.32 (1 H, s, Ar), 3.98 (3 H, s, OCH3), 3.91 (3 H, s, OCH3), 3.77 (2 H, br, NH). ESI-MS, m/z: [2M + Na]+, 565.19.

2-Chloro-N-(6,8-dimethoxy-9-oxo-9H-xanthen-2-yl)-acetamide (7): A solution of 7-amino-1,3-dimethoxy-9H-xanthen-9-one (2.71 g, 0.01 mol), chloroacetyl chloride (1.68 g, 0.015 mol) and toluene 50 mL was stirred under reflux for about 2 h. The reaction was complete, removed the excess toluene under reduced pressure. Water was added to the residue, which was then extracted with ethyl acetate. The extract was washed with saturated NaCl solution, dried over anhydrous Na2SO4 and evaporated. Silica gel column chromatography of the residue afforded the compound 7 (3.1 g, 90 %).

3-Chloro-N-(6,8-dimethoxy-9-oxo-9H-xanthen-2-yl)propanamide (8): The reaction was run similarly to that used to synthesize the compound 8.

N-(6,8-Dimethoxy-9-oxo-9H-xanthen-2-yl)-2-(dimethylamino)acetamide (6a): A solution of 2-chloro-N-(6,8-dimethoxy-9-oxo-9H-xanthen-2-yl)acetamide (694 mg, 2 mmol), K2CO3 (276 mg, 2 mmol), dimethylamine (180 mL, 4 mmol) and DMF 10 mL was stirred at room temperature for about 10 h. After filtration, the filtrate was extracted with ethyl acetate, washed with water and saturated NaCl solution 3 times, dried over anhydrous Na2SO4 and evaporated. Silica gel column chromatography of the residue afforded the compound 6a (626 mg, 88 %).

The target compounds 1b–i and 2a–h were synthesized by the same procedure as the compound 1a.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Title compounds required for the establishment of structure-activity relationship were prepared as shown in Scheme-I. starting material 2-hydroxy-4-nitrobenzoic acid (3). Reaction with 1,3,5-trimethoxybenzene (4) by using Eaton’s reagent afforded xanthone (5). Compound 5 were reduced by Raney-Ni to the gave compound 6 in high yield (85 %). Then, chloroacetyl chloride or 3-chloropropionyl chloride was added dropwise into the flask containing 6 under reflux to give key intermediate 7 or 8. Reaction of compound 7 or 8 with different secondary amines formed the final xanthone sulfonamides (1a–h) and (2a–f) in high yield (Fig. 3). The reactions were carried out in parallel. All new compounds were characterized by NMR and MS.

Evaluation of biological activities: To determine dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitory activities, all the compounds were measured in vitro according to the modified Ellman method with diprotin A as the positive control. Table-I showed that
most of the tested compounds demonstrated good inhibitory activities against dipeptidyl peptidase-4. Compounds 2a, 2c, 2d, 2f and 2g exhibited potent activities against dipeptidyl peptidase-4.

**Structure-activity relationship:** According to the results above, a preliminary structure-activity relationships could be concluded: Series compound 2a-g exhibited better inhibitory activities against dipeptidyl peptidase-4 than series compound 1a-1i, which demonstrated that length of 7'-substituted ethylamine group could fit with the pocket of the target enzyme. In addition, alkyl group substituted compounds exhibited better inhibitory activities against dipeptidyl peptidase-4.

**Conclusion**

In summary, two series of new xanthone derivatives (1a-i) and (2a-g) as potential dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitors were synthesized in high yields. The biological screening of these compounds resulted in the identification of several potent dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitors and compounds 2a, 2c, 2d, 2f and 2g exhibited potent activities against dipeptidyl peptidase-4 compared with the positive control diprotin A. This observation was fitted to a molecular model resulting from the computational docking simulation, which showed that compound 1i could fit into the hydrophobic pocket of dipeptidyl peptidase-4.

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**REFERENCES**

13. Representative Analytical Data for Compound 2a. Yield 72 %, 1H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d$_6$, TMS): δ 10.41 (1 H, br, NH), 8.25 (1 H, s, Ar), 7.96 (1 H, br, Ar), 7.48 (1 H, d, Ar), 6.66 (1 H, s, Ar), 6.49 (1 H, s, Ar), 3.88 (3 H, s, OCH$_3$), 3.83 (3 H, m, OCH$_3$), 3.83 (2 H, br, CH$_2$), 2.88-2.32 (6 H, m, CH$_2$), 1.51-1.37 (6 H, m, CH$_3$). ESI-MS: m/z: Calcd. 410.2, found, 411.1 [M + H].