

# Nanoceria as an Electron Reservoir: Spontaneous Deposition of Metal Nanoparticles on Oxides and Their Anti-inflammatory Activities

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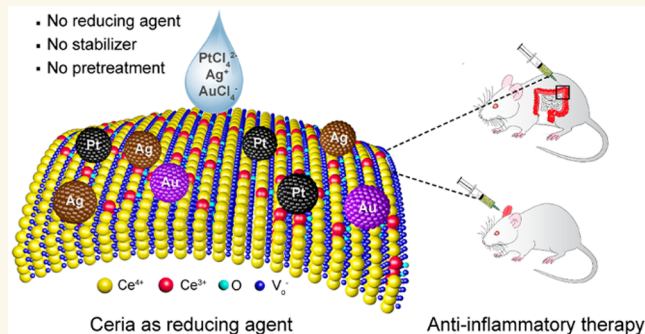
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**ABSTRACT:** Designing metal–metal oxide heteronanostructures with synergistic and superior activities (unattainable in the case of a single entity) is of great interest for a wide range of technological applications. Traditional synthetic strategies typically require reducing agents, stabilizing ligands, or high temperature reductive treatment to produce oxide-supported metals. Herein, a facile noble metal deposition strategy is developed to produce silver, gold, and platinum nanocrystals on the surface of hollow mesoporous cerium oxide nanospheres without any pretreatment. Unlike the galvanic replacement reaction, the developed protocol employs the innate reductive potential of CeO<sub>2</sub> to produce a high density of ultrafine noble metal nanocrystals homogeneously immobilized onto the surface of CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres. The multienzyme-like activities (i.e., superoxide dismutase-like and catalase-like) of CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanostructures, originating from CeO<sub>2</sub> and metal nanoparticles, were effectively utilized for anti-inflammatory therapies in two *in vivo* models. This oxygen vacancy-mediated reduction strategy can be generalized to produce diverse metal–metal oxide nanostructures for a wide range of applications.



**KEYWORDS:** Noble Metal Catalyst, Nanozyme, Nanoceria, Oxygen Vacancy, Reactive Oxygen Species, Anti-inflammatory Therapy

## INTRODUCTION

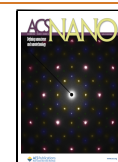
Noble metal nanostructures exhibit fascinating catalytic properties for a wide range of reactions important in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, but the downside is that during the synthesis or under catalytic operating conditions, sintering or coalescence invariably deteriorates the quality of metal nanoparticles (NPs) because of the thermodynamically unstable nature.<sup>1–5</sup> Deposition of noble metal catalysts onto metal oxide supports has been proven to be one of the most effective strategies to stabilize the NPs. Supported NPs display improved activities compared to their unsupported counterparts due to the synergetic effects originated at the metal–metal oxide heterojunction via altered electronic structures.<sup>6–14</sup> A range of precious metal catalysts have been so far loaded on different transition or nontransition metals oxides with the purpose of improving stability and attaining enhanced activity.<sup>15–21</sup> The incipient impregnation, chemical vapor deposition, laser ablation, and electrochemical

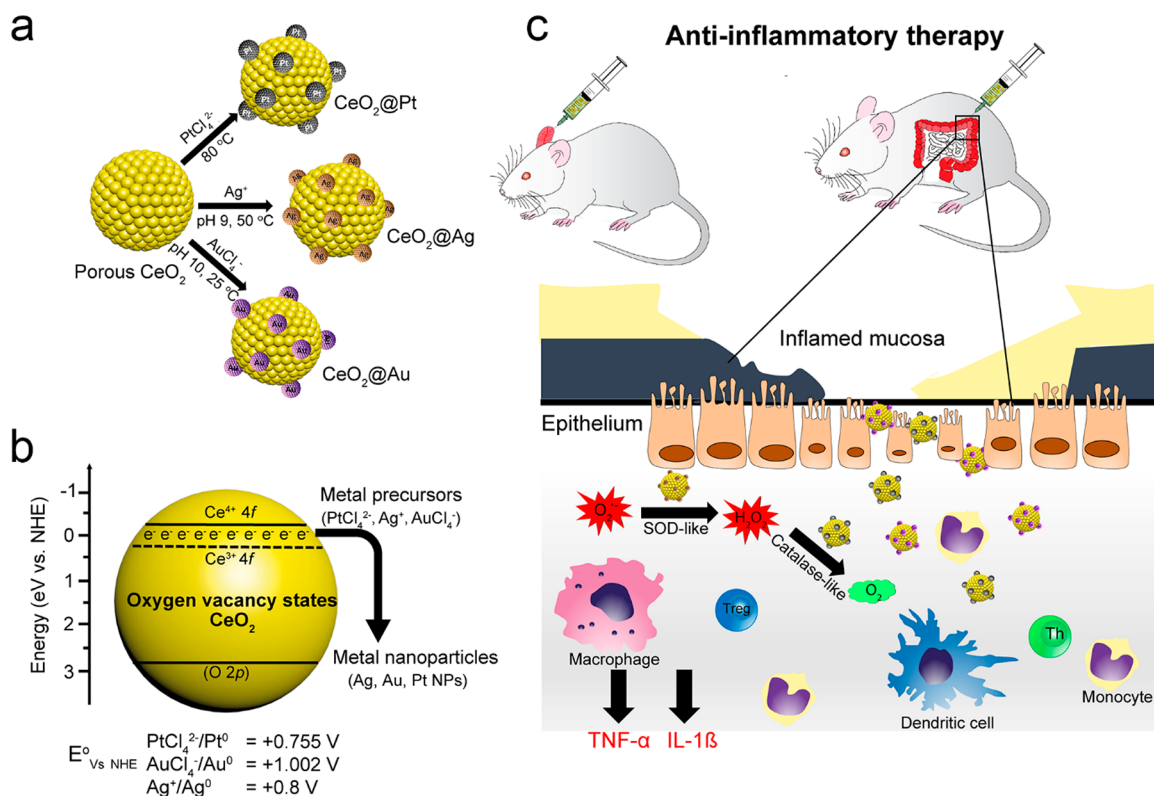
deposition approaches have been adopted for deposition of metal NPs.<sup>22–27</sup> Alternatively, high-quality monodispersed metal NPs with a narrow particle size distribution are synthesized under the protection of stabilizers (i.e., polymer or surfactant) prior to loading on supports, but the presence of the stabilizers at the interface between the metal NPs and the support minimizes the direct contact or electronic communication between metals and supports.<sup>28–31</sup> Naked NPs with maximum active surface areas are mostly the desired product; there have been few reports where bare metal NPs were *in situ* grown outside or inside metal oxides structures.<sup>32–34</sup> For

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**Figure 1.** Synthesis of  $\text{CeO}_2$ @metal nanozymes and their application for inflammatory disease treatments. (a) Schematic diagram representing the synthetic protocol to spontaneously grow noble metal NPs onto the surface of hollow ceria nanospheres. (b) Scheme illustrating the oxygen vacancy-mediated appearance of energy states in mixed-valent nanoceria and the subsequent reduction of metal salts into metal NPs. (c) Schematic diagram showing the multiple enzyme-like activities of  $\text{CeO}_2$ @metal in treating IBD and ear inflammation.

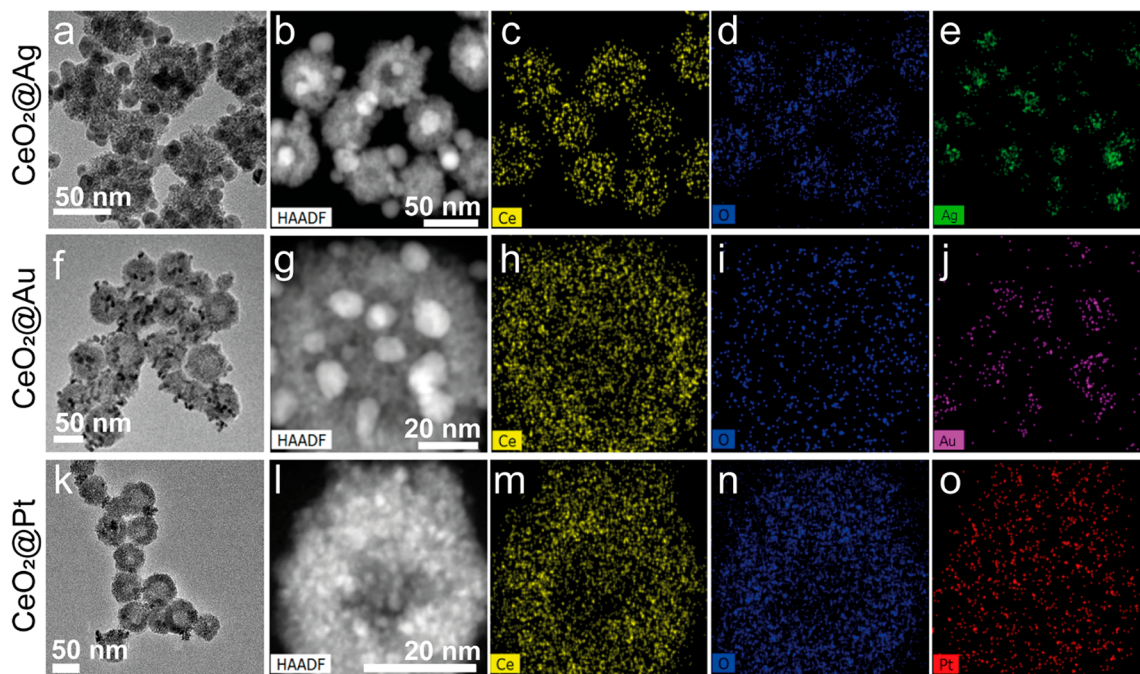
instance, MnO nanocrystals were used as a reactive template to electrolessly deposit platinum NPs onto the surface via the galvanic replacement reaction.<sup>35,36</sup> In other reports, noble metal NPs were deposited on  $\text{WO}_2$  nanowires and  $\text{TiO}_2$  NPs.<sup>37–39</sup> There have been reports wherein metal core cerium oxide shelled based nanostructures were produced using wet chemical reaction systems.<sup>40–43</sup> In this study, we report as-synthesized hollow  $\text{CeO}_2$  nanospheres as an electron reservoir to reduce the metal salts into metal NPs under optimized synthetic conditions, in contrast to previous reports wherein  $\text{CeO}_2$  shells were formed on metal NPs. In this study, metal NPs were spontaneously deposited onto the surface of well-defined hollow  $\text{CeO}_2$  nanospheres without using any additional pretreatments, reducing agents, or surfactants.

Functional nanomaterials with enzyme-like activities, called nanozymes, have recently received great attention, both nanoceria and noble metal NPs have individually demonstrated promising enzymatic activities.<sup>44–51</sup> Their enzyme-like activities have also been explored for treating reactive oxygen species (ROS)-linked ailments.<sup>52–56</sup> Keeping in view the therapeutic potential, we exploited the innate antioxidant characteristics of our  $\text{CeO}_2$ @metal nanostructures in inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and ear inflammation models, our findings revealed an enhanced ROS scavenging capacities of  $\text{CeO}_2$ @metal nanozymes which subsequently halted the progression of inflammation via downregulation of the pro-inflammatory cytokines: interleukin-1 beta ( $\text{IL-1}\beta$ ) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha ( $\text{TNF-}\alpha$ ). Among the three nanozymes,  $\text{CeO}_2$ @Ag displayed superior therapeutic activity, which was ascribed to its excellent superoxide dismutase (SOD)- and catalase (CAT)-like activities. The  $\text{CeO}_2$ @Ag with a

concentration as low as 0.5 mg/kg body weight appreciably halted the inflammation process in both IBD and ear inflammation models.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nanoceria contains an appreciable amount of trivalent cerium ( $\text{Ce}^{3+}$ ) and oxygen vacancies (OVs); the presence of such crystal structure with mixed oxidation states and defects motivated us to use nanoceria as a reducing agent for the spontaneous growth of noble metals. For a proof-of-concept study, we selected three kinds of  $\text{CeO}_2$ : ultrasmall NPs, self-assembled hollow nanospheres with higher concentrations of  $\text{Ce}^{3+}$  (33–35%), and nanorods (NRs) having lower  $\text{Ce}^{3+}$  content (19.34%). Considering the distinct standards redox potentials and physicochemical properties, the synthetic conditions were first optimized via changing the pH and temperature of the reaction solutions. Initially, a known amount of metal salts ( $\text{HAuCl}_4$ ,  $\text{AgNO}_3$ , and  $\text{K}_2\text{PtCl}_4$ ) was merely mixed with an aqueous solution of  $\text{CeO}_2$  hollow nanospheres at room temperature without adjusting the pH and the reaction temperatures. No apparent change in the color of the solution was observed after 24 h, as shown in Figure S1a; however, tuning the pH resulted in a marked variation in the color of solutions, and spontaneous generation of metallic NPs on the  $\text{CeO}_2$  surface was apparently visualized with the formation of colored products in case of NPs and hollow nanospheres (Figure S1b). Unlike the growth of Ag and Au NPs, synthesis of Pt required a higher temperature by virtue of a relatively low standard redox potential and physicochemical properties of the precursor salt. An obvious



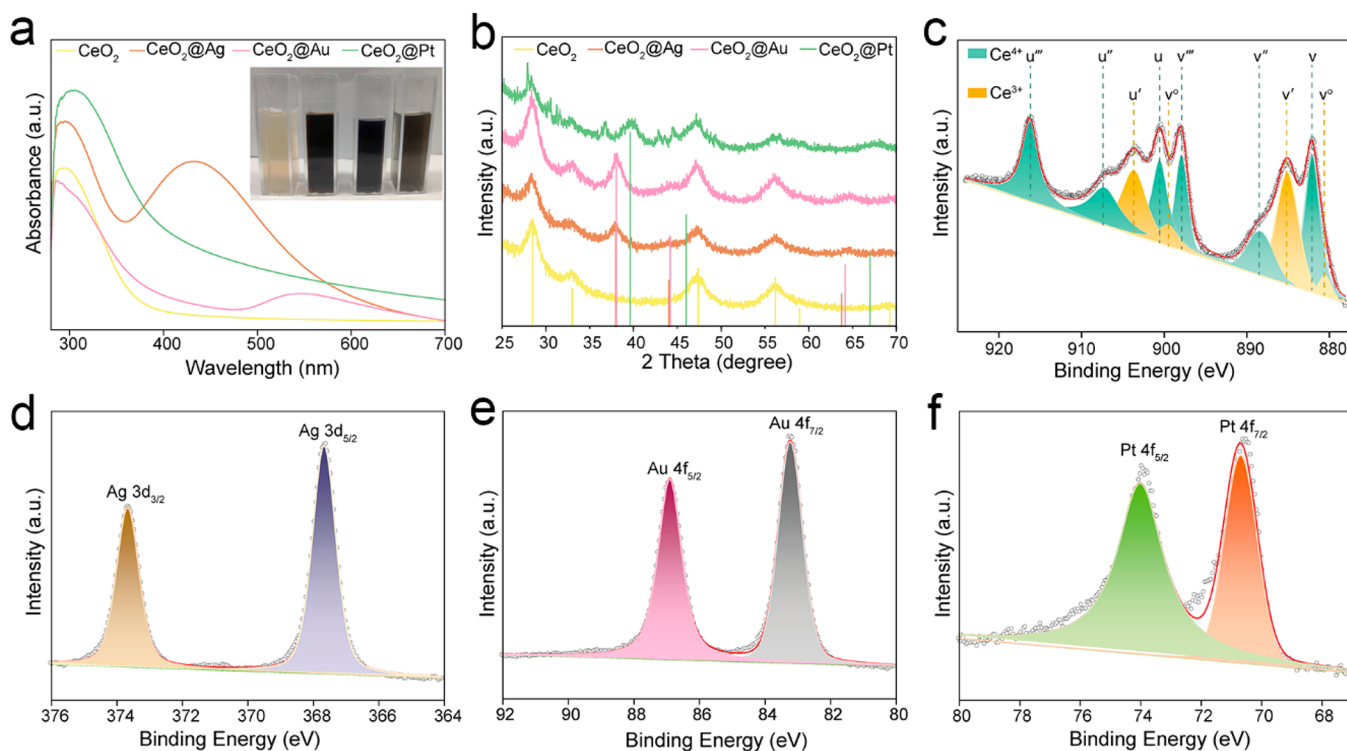
**Figure 2.** TEM images, HAADF-STEM images, and EDS elemental mappings indicate the growth of different noble metal NPs onto the surface of CeO<sub>2</sub> hollow nanospheres. (a–e) CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag, (f–j) CeO<sub>2</sub>@Au, and (k–o) CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt nanostructures.

color change (blackish product) was observed when the temperature was raised to 80 °C (Figure S1c). The generation of metallic NPs was observed in the case of both NPs and hollow nanospheres. However, no metal NPs growth was observed in the case of CeO<sub>2</sub> NR under similar synthetic conditions, as witnessed by the absence of apparent color changes in solutions. The lower content of Ce<sup>3+</sup> (OVs) in NRs implies the less availability of surface trapped electrons to reduce the metal precursors into metal NPs.

Mechanistically, the presence OVs causes the appearance of an intermediate energy level between the valence band (VB) and conduction band (CB) and electrons tend to accumulate around that defect-associated energy level.<sup>37</sup> If the reduction potential of the OVs is much lower than that of the metal salts, the relative potential differences drive the spontaneous electron transfer from the OVs to the metal ions, thus resulting in the generation of metallic NPs.<sup>57,58</sup> In our study, standard reduction potential values of metal precursors are positive: AuCl<sub>4</sub><sup>−</sup> ( $E^0$  vs NHS = +1.002 V) was readily reduced at room temperature, while the Ag<sup>+</sup> ( $E^0$  vs NHS = +0.8 V) reduction and NPs growth was observed at a moderately higher temperature. The transformation of PtCl<sub>4</sub><sup>2−</sup> ( $E^0$  vs NHS = +0.755 V) and the resulting NPs required further higher temperatures (Figure 1b). Ultrasmall ceria NPs and ceria nanorods were prepared using our previous reported method, while the hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres were synthesized via a polyol-mediated solvothermal approach in the presence of hydrochloric acid (HCl).<sup>59</sup> The size and morphology of different CeO<sub>2</sub> substrates and respective nanostructures were investigated by transmission electron microscopy (TEM). Figure S2a–e shows the ultrasmall CeO<sub>2</sub> and corresponding CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanostructures: Ag and Au NPs could be easily observed in the images, while due to their very small size, Pt NPs were analyzed via scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM). The morphology and composition of CeO<sub>2</sub> NRs is shown in Figure S3. Because of the inactive

nature of NRs to reduce metal precursors and the relatively aggregated nature of ultrasmall CeO<sub>2</sub> NPs@metal, we confined our further study to the monodispersed and uniform hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres. As can be seen in Figure S4, the size of hollow structured CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres is around 80 nm. High resolution (HR)TEM and STEM images reveal that the porous hollow nanospheres is actually composed of self-assembled smaller CeO<sub>2</sub> NPs (3–4 nm). Prior to redox reactions with metal precursors, the surface of CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres was smooth and clean, whereas distinct changes were observed following the metal precursors treatment, the obtained CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanostructures are shown in Figure 2.

TEM images of CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag unambiguously show Ag NPs (5–10 nm) decorated onto CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres, the high angle annular dark field (HAADF)-STEM images indicate the presence and distribution of Ag and Ce elements in the nanospheres (Figure 2a–e). In the case of gold deposition, the HAADF-STEM image shows electron-dense NPs studded CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres. Unlike gold and silver, platinum growth, however, required a relatively higher temperature and the NPs were also smaller in size in the form of clusters (as depicted in Figure 2k). The appearance of both platinum and cerium signals (as shown as yellow and red colors in Figure 2) in CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt revealed the electroless deposition of platinum NPs. Before the electron transfer for reduction reaction, the adsorption of cationic/anionic metal precursors onto the surface of CeO<sub>2</sub> is a precondition. In view of this, we determined the zeta potential of CeO<sub>2</sub> substrates in the 2–11 pH range. Figure S5 shows the zeta potentials of all the three CeO<sub>2</sub> nanostructures and the values were found to be positive up to pH 8, probably due to the presence of high Ce<sup>3+</sup> content and the naked surfaces of CeO<sub>2</sub> NPs and NRs, while the hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres were stabilized by a neutral polymer (PVP). The positively charged surfaces of different CeO<sub>2</sub> nanostructures electrostatically attract the negatively charged metal precursors (AuCl<sub>4</sub><sup>−</sup>, PtCl<sub>4</sub><sup>2−</sup>), while at pH 9 and above,



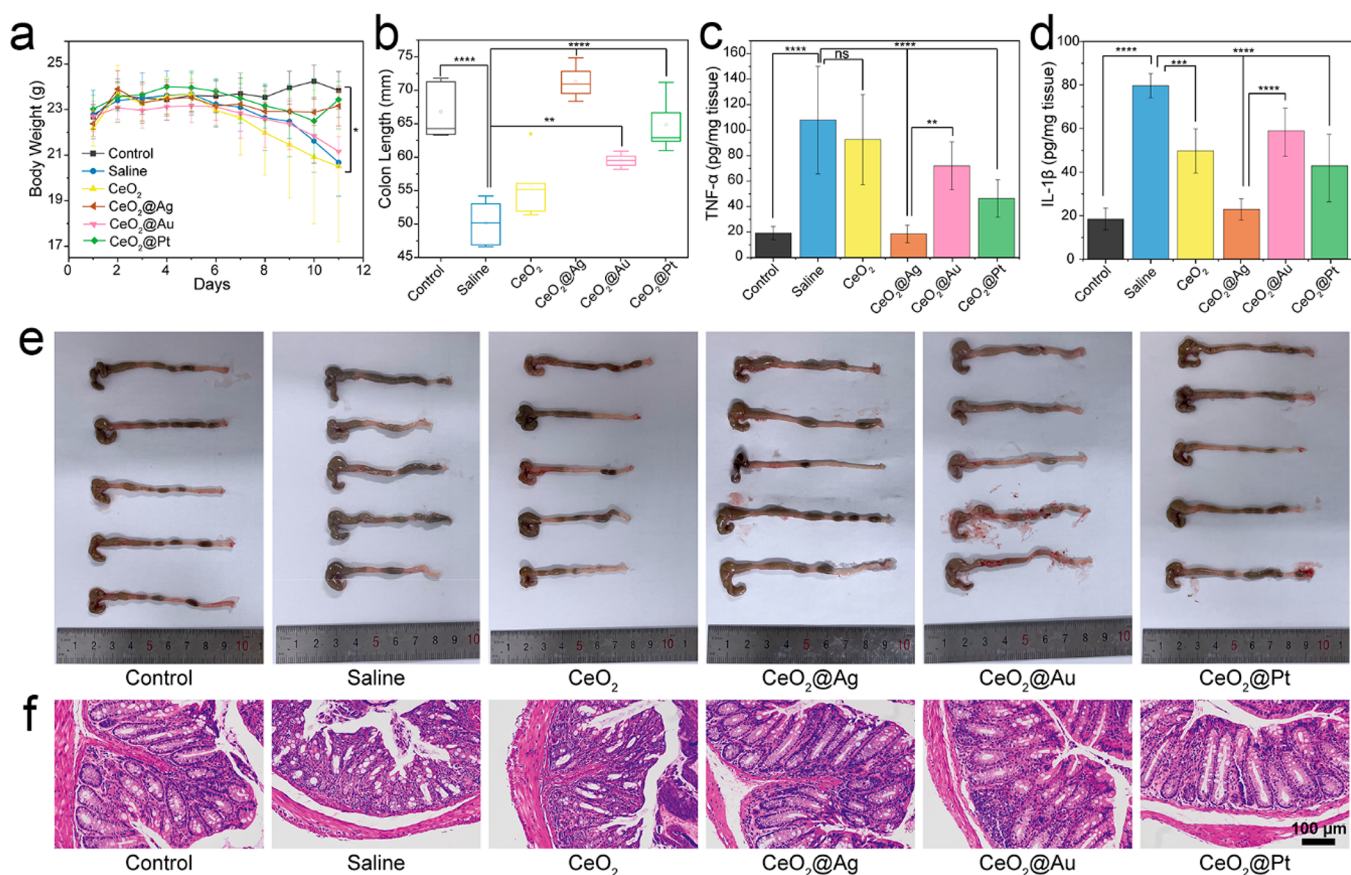
**Figure 3.** (a) Visible extinction spectra and corresponding digital images (inset, from left to right: CeO<sub>2</sub>, CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag, CeO<sub>2</sub>@Au, and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt). (b) XRD patterns of CeO<sub>2</sub>, CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag, CeO<sub>2</sub>@Au, and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt nanostructures. (c–f) X-ray photoelectron spectra (XPS) of different CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanostructures: (c) Ce 3d, (d) Ag 3d, (e) Au 4f, and (f) Pt 4f.

the zeta potential values were negative and thus the *in situ* formed positively charged diamine silver complex [Ag(NH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>]<sup>+</sup> could readily anchor onto CeO<sub>2</sub> surface. The variation in the zeta potential values and colors of the solution following metal precursors adsorption onto the surface CeO<sub>2</sub> nanostructures are shown in Figures S6–8. In addition to determining the zeta potentials following 1 min incubation of CeO<sub>2</sub> with metal precursors, the centrifuged and washed samples were also examined via STEM. Figure S9 verifies the fast adsorption of metal precursors and subsequent growth of well-defined Ag and Au NPs, the presence of very small Pt NPs and elemental mapping signals also corroborates the adsorption of PtCl<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> salt on positively charged CeO<sub>2</sub> surface.

Being an effective analytical technique to monitor the growth of plasmonic-active metal NPs, the absorption spectra indicated the appearance of plasmonic peaks in both Ag and Au nanostructures (Figure 3a). The absorption peak at 435 nm was detected in a dark brown colored CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag solution, while a broad and weak absorption peak centered at ~540 nm appeared in CeO<sub>2</sub>@Au product. In the case of a black CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt solution, no absorption peak was expected to be observed in the visible region because Pt absorbs in the UV region (~260 nm). Similarly, the optical properties of ultrasmall CeO<sub>2</sub> NPs based nanostructures also verified the growth of metal NPs (Figure S2f).

Powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns indicate the crystal structure of pure CeO<sub>2</sub> with a cubic fluorite structure (JCPDS file no. 34-0394). In addition to CeO<sub>2</sub> peaks, the appearance of two prominent peaks at 38.1° and 44.09° corresponded to the (111) and (200) planes of silver in CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag. Similarly, the existence and crystalline nature of gold was verified via the observation of peaks at 38.33° and 44.86° (JCPDS file no. 04-0784). The XRD pattern of CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt showed a distinct peak

at 39.90° indexed to the (111) plane, implying the presence of a face-centered cubic crystal lattice of platinum (JCPDS file no. 04-0802). Valence state and the composition of the nanostructures were characterized via X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). As shown in Figure S10, the peaks of Ce 3d, Ag 3d, Pt 4f, Au 4f, O 1s, and C 1s were observed in the survey spectra. The mixed oxidation states of nanoceria were revealed in the Ce 3d spectrum when resolved into 10 different peaks (*u*<sup>0</sup>, *u*, *u*<sup>′</sup>, *u*<sup>′′</sup>, and *u*<sup>′′′</sup> for 3d<sub>3/2</sub> and *v*<sup>0</sup>, *v*, *v*<sup>′</sup>, *v*<sup>′′</sup>, and *v*<sup>′′′</sup> for 3d<sub>5/2</sub>).<sup>60,61</sup> The content of trivalent state was found to be around 33.64% (Figure 3c), the existence of both Ce<sup>3+</sup> and Ce<sup>4+</sup> in CeO<sub>2</sub> and the resulting oxygen vacancy provides excess electrons (changes Ce<sup>4+</sup> to Ce<sup>3+</sup>) per vacancy, the availability of those excess electrons was exploited in this study to reduce metal precursors into a series of noble metal NPs. Following the reactions with metal salts, we quantified the changes in Ce<sup>3+</sup> content and a noticeable reduction in the peaks and quantities of Ce<sup>3+</sup> from 33.64% to ~25.5% was observed in the cases of CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Au nanostructures (Figure S11). No obvious variation in Ce<sup>3+</sup> content in CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt nanostructures might be due to electron transfer from metallic Pt into CeO<sub>2</sub> (a slight peak shift was also noticed). In the resolved spectrum of oxygen of CeO<sub>2</sub>, two Gaussian peaks associated with lattice oxygen and the surface-bound oxygen from the vacancies or –OH groups were observed (Figure S12). The deposition of metallic silver was revealed by the appearance of characteristic peaks at 368.0 and 374.0 eV in the Ag 3d spectrum corresponding to the binding energies (BEs) of Ag 3d<sub>5/2</sub> and Ag 3d<sub>3/2</sub> of metallic Ag<sup>0</sup>. Peaks at 84.0 and 88.0 eV were attributed to Au 4f<sub>7/2</sub> and Au 4f<sub>5/2</sub>, respectively; the doublet with distinct binding energies of 70.5 (Pt 4f<sub>7/2</sub>) and 73.9 eV (Pt 4f<sub>5/2</sub>) corresponded to metallic Pt<sup>0</sup>. We found CeO<sub>2</sub> NRs as an inactive substrate to produce metal NPs and

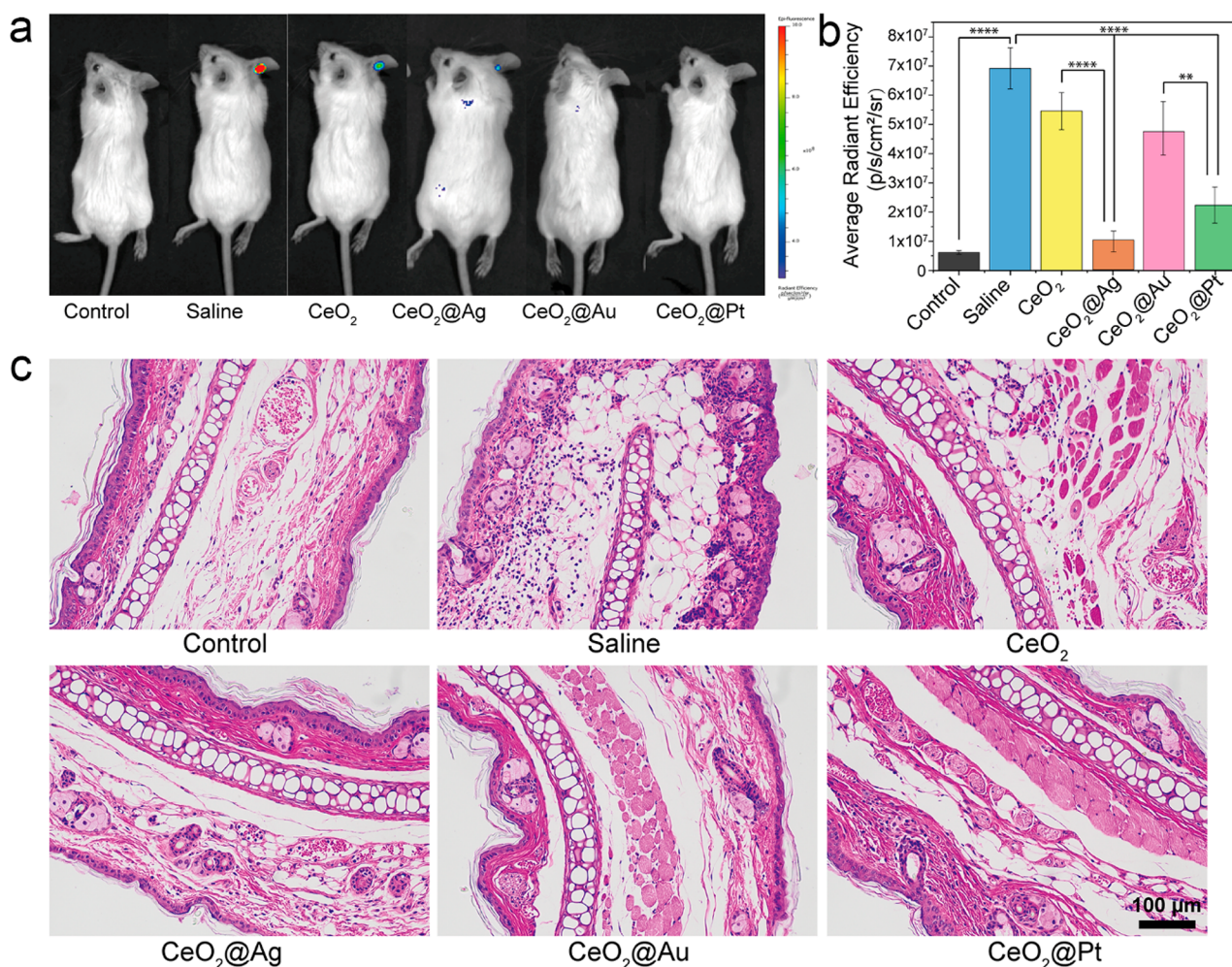


**Figure 4.** IBD therapy, tissue sections, and cytokine analysis. (a) Daily body weight recorded while undergoing treatments with different CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes. (b) Statistical length of colon taken on day 10. (c,d) IL-1β and TNF-α levels in colon homogenates after treatments. (e) Images of the colons taken on day 10. (f) H&E-stained images of colons following CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes treatment. The data are shown as means ± SD (*n* = 5). Analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA. Specific *P*-values are shown in the source data: \**P* ≤ 0.05, \*\**P* ≤ 0.01, \*\*\**P* ≤ 0.001, and \*\*\*\**P* ≤ 0.0001.

the XPS analysis corroborated this observation since a significant reduction in Ce<sup>3+</sup> content (19.34%) and oxygen vacancies related peak (531.2 eV) was noticed, relative to hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres (Figure S13). The exact content of different metals was determined by inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES), and the amounts of Ag, Au, and Pt were found to be around 105.0, 56.7, and 30.1 mg per gram of PVP capped hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres, respectively.

ROS scavenging nanozymes hold great significance for a wide range of therapeutic applications; the scavenging capacities of CeO<sub>2</sub> and CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal toward O<sub>2</sub><sup>•-</sup> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> were determined. The SOD-like activity to eliminate O<sub>2</sub><sup>•-</sup> was analyzed using a WST-1 kit. In the assay, the SOD-like activity of the different nanozymes was quantified by assessing the inhibition of formazan production (Figure S14a). CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag displayed the best SOD-like activity compared to the other two nanostructures (Figure S15). As catalase transforms lethal H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> into benign oxygen, the CAT-like activity of our nanostructures was determined by monitoring the decomposition of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> using a dissolved oxygen meter. As presented in Figure S14b, CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt exhibited a superior CAT-like activity relative to the other two nanostructures. The activity of CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag was also appreciable enough to be considered as a CAT-like nanozyme. When compared with CeO<sub>2</sub> alone, both the SOD- and CAT-like activities of CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanostructures were more superior and thus could be explored in

inflammatory models. The biocompatibility of the CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes was evaluated in murine macrophages (RAW 264.7), which are often present in inflamed tissues, using the Cell Counting Kit-8 (CCK-8) assay. All compositions were found to be highly biocompatible and safe up to 25 μg/mL after 1 day of cocultivation (Figure S14c). To evaluate the cellular ROS scavenging activity, different CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanostructures (10 μg/mL) were added to H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (100 μM)-stimulated RAW 264.7 cells, and the fluorescence of 2,7-dichlorodihydrofluorescein diacetate (DCFH-DA, a fluorescence dye for intracellular ROS) was detected at an excitation wavelength of 488 nm. As shown in Figure S14d, in the presence of CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes, the fluorescence signal decreased (*P* < 0.0003) in CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Au, signifying the efficient ROS scavenging activity of nanozymes. Hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> also partially attenuated the fluorescent signals. These results suggest that the CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal based nanozymes can scavenge ROS and protect cells from the ROS-induced oxidative damage. In an inflammatory condition, the expression of pro-inflammatory genes is markedly up-regulated in the macrophage cells, we performed qPCR analysis and expectedly found a significant upsurge (*P* < 0.0001) in IL-1β, TNF-α, and IL-6 mRNA expressions after inducing inflammation via LPS treatment in RAW 264.7 compared to control group (Figure S16). These elevated markers demonstrate the M1 polarization of macrophages. To evaluate the anti-inflammatory activities of our materials, RAW 264.7 cells



**Figure 5.** Anti-inflammatory activity in ear model. *In vivo* fluorescence imaging of mice with PMA-induced ear inflammation after treatment with different CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes. (b) Total radiant efficiency of the fluorescence images acquired in live mice. (c) H&E-stained images of ear tissues after treatments with different CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes. The data are shown as means  $\pm$  SD ( $n = 5$ ). Analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA. Specific  $P$ -values are shown in the source data: \* $P \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $P \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P \leq 0.001$ , and \*\*\*\* $P \leq 0.0001$ .

were coincubated with LPS and CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes, a noticeable down regulation in pro-inflammatory cytokines was noticed, particularly CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag exhibited superior *in vitro* anti-inflammation efficacy ( $P < 0.0001$ ) among the three CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes, showing the potential of these materials to be explored in animal models for effectively reducing the inflammation levels.

Encouraged by the biocompatibility, ROS scavenging capacities and anti-inflammatory characteristics, the *in vivo* therapeutic efficacy of CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes was investigated in a murine ulcerative colitis (UC) model.<sup>62,63</sup> To induce UC, dextran sulfate sodium (DSS) was first orally supplied (2 wt % aqueous solution) for six consecutive days (days 2 to 7) and subsequently a reduction in body weight ( $P < 0.048$ ) indicated the successful onset of UC (Figure 4a). Different CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal compositions were intraperitoneally injected as a therapy on three consecutive days (days 8, 9, and 10). The length of the colons in colitis-induced mice was found to be significantly shorter ( $50.19 \pm 3.3$  mm) than the length in normal mice ( $64.34 \pm 4.04$  mm). Therapeutic efficacy was then assessed by measuring the colon length variations and observing the pathological sections. CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag proved to be highly effective ( $P < 0.0001$ ) for the recovery of

colon parameters to normal levels at a concentration as low as 0.5 mg/kg, other CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes also displayed appreciable therapeutic activity ( $P < 0.005$ ), as displayed in Figure 4b. A marked improvement in the histological appearance was expectedly observed in CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Pt treated groups comparable to normal mice, whereas a severe collapse in the epithelium and colonic tissues was noted in the DSS-induced colitis group, as shown in hematoxylin and eosin (H&E) stained colon sections (Figure 4f). ELISA assay was used to evaluate the levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, the levels of both IL-1 $\beta$  and TNF- $\alpha$  were evidently increased in UC induced mice, whereas a significant downregulation was observed in CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal treated groups, as shown in Figure 4c,d. The silver NPs containing composition exerted the maximum anti-inflammatory activity ( $P < 0.0001$ ). Accumulation of nanozymes at the inflamed mucosa is a prerequisite for effective therapy against IBD, and at the same time the biodistribution of materials in other vital organs need to be taken into consideration to avoid acute toxicity. Therefore, we evaluated the biodistribution of CeO<sub>2</sub> and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag in terms of cerium content using ICP-OES analysis. Following the intraperitoneal administration of CeO<sub>2</sub> and CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag nanozymes, mice were sacrificed and

their blood, urine, feces, heart, liver, spleen, lung, kidney, and colon were collected at different time scale (12, 24, 48, and 72 h). The highest accumulation was observed in colon and liver, and data indicated that the nanozymes were not inclined to accumulate in other vital organs (heart, lung, spleen, and kidney) and neither to be excreted through urine, revealing the efficacy and biosafety of the tested materials. Figure S17 indicates that the nanozymes uptaken by liver were also excreted (most likely into feces) within 72 h.

Normal tissues contain adequate amounts of protective enzymatic (such as SOD, catalase, and GSH peroxidase) and nonenzymatic antioxidants (such as thiols, ascorbate, and  $\alpha$ -tocopherol) to scavenge damaging oxidizing agents (i.e., superoxide, hydrogen peroxide, hydroxyl radical, and hypochlorite). It is reported that a dysregulated immune system initiates the pathogenesis of IBD, and the resulting inflamed tissues produce an excessive amount of reactive oxygen and nitrogen species. Earlier reports demonstrated that high doses of antioxidants such as ascorbic acid and/or  $\alpha$ -tocopherol could ameliorate the acute flares of disease and attenuate the inflammation associated with UC. Hence, it can be reasonably inferred that the enhanced anti-inflammatory therapeutic activity of CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes could be linked to their excellent ROS scavenging properties. In addition to antioxidant properties, the superior therapeutic activity of CeO<sub>2</sub>@Ag can also be ascribed to the antibacterial activity of silver NPs. In previous reports, enhanced wound healing has been reported with topical application of Ag NPs.<sup>64–66</sup>

In addition to IBD therapy, the anti-inflammatory activity of CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes was also tested in an ear inflammation model, inflammation was induced by phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate (PMA), as indicated in Figure S18. Following the samples administration, the variation in the fluorescence intensity of DCFH-DA indicated the ROS scavenging property, a pronounced reduction in fluorescence intensity following the CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal treatment corroborates the *in vivo* ROS scavenging/anti-inflammatory activities (Figure 5a,b). Expectedly, both silver and platinum based nanozymes exhibited the best ROS scavenging activities ( $P < 0.0001$ ), as was shown in the IBD model. Histopathological evaluation also verified that the groups with CeO<sub>2</sub>@metal nanozymes had the lowest level of inflammation, while an obvious lymphocyte infiltration was observed in hematoxylin and eosin (H&E) stained images of PMA induced inflammatory model, as shown in Figure 5c. The *in vivo* toxicity of CeO<sub>2</sub> compositions to the main organs (heart, lungs, liver, spleen, and kidney) was assessed through histopathological observations, none of the experimental groups revealed noticeable toxicity (Figure S19). Taken together, our results reveal that CeO<sub>2</sub> based nanozymes possess superior ROS scavenging activities in inflammatory diseases.

## CONCLUSION

In contrast to conventional approaches, we developed a straightforward method for the spontaneous deposition of multiple metallic NPs (Ag, Au, and Pt) onto the surface of redox active hollow CeO<sub>2</sub> nanospheres without using any pretreatment or additional reducing and stabilizing agents. Based on the composition of the resulting materials, we exploited their biocatalytic behavior in two *in vivo* inflammatory models. The multienzyme activities (SOD- and CAT-like) of the materials were translated well into *in vivo* models with successful treatment of UC and ear inflammation. The silver-

containing composition showed superior therapeutic performance at a dose of 0.5 mg/kg. As the oxide-supported metals have garnered continuous attention due to their multifunctional and greatly enhanced properties that are difficult or even impossible to achieve in single metal NPs; hence, our simple oxygen vacancy-mediated metal growth strategy provides a direction for future research efforts to produce identical oxide supported nanocomposites for wide-ranging technological applications.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acsnano.2c07306>.

Experimental section including materials synthesis, *in vitro* and *in vivo* procedures; effect of temperature, pH, and the presence of oxygen vacancies on metal NPs growth; HAADF-STEM images of CeO<sub>2</sub> substrates and their metal based compositions; XPS analysis of different CeO<sub>2</sub> substrates and respective metal based compositions; zeta potential measurement to demonstrate the adsorptions of metal precursors; ROS scavenging, *in vitro* anti-inflammatory, biodistribution, and biotoxicity data (PDF)

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## Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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