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ABSTRACT: Redox non-innocent ligands are a promising tool to moderate electron transfer processes within base-metal catalysts. This report introduces bis(imino)acenaphthene (BIAN) cobaltate complexes as hydrogenation catalysts. Sterically hindered tri-substituted alkenes, imines, and quinolines underwent clean hydrogenation under mild conditions (2-10 bar, 20-80°C) by use of the stable catalyst precursor $[(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoBr}_2]$ and the co-catalyst LiEt_3BH . Mechanistic studies support a homogeneous catalysis pathway involving alkene and hydrido cobaltates as active catalyst species. Furthermore, considerable reaction acceleration by alkali cations and Lewis acids was observed. The dinuclear hydridocobaltate anion with bridging hydride ligands was isolated and fully characterized.

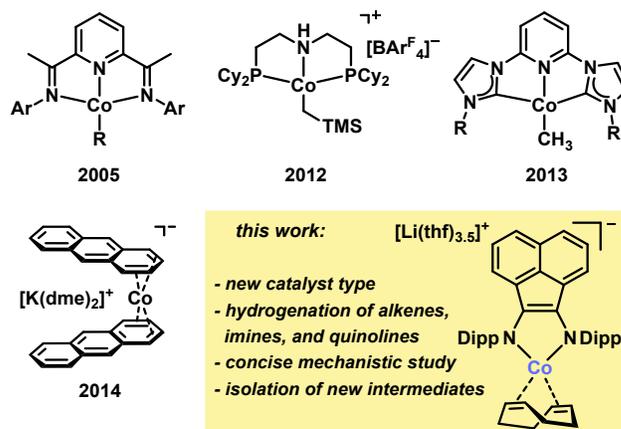
KEYWORDS: hydrogenation, cobalt, hydrides, metalloradicals, reaction mechanism, redox-active ligands

Introduction

Metal-catalyzed hydrogenations of alkenes constitute one of the key chemical transformations with numerous applications to lab-scale syntheses and industrial manufacture.⁽¹⁾ The elucidation of the underlying catalytic mechanisms by Eisenberg, Halpern, Tolman, and others were major scientific milestones toward the understanding of catalytic elemental steps and the rational design of more active and selective catalysts.^{(1),(2)} Very recently, the dominance of hydrogenation catalysts based on the noble metals Rh, Ru, Ir, Pd, and Pt has been challenged by the development of highly active 3d transition metals.⁽³⁾ While the use of more abundant, cheaper, and often less toxic base metals constitutes an important contribution to a more sustainable chemistry, their distinct reactivity and selectivity was often plagued by undesirable destructive side reactions.⁽⁴⁾ Recently, elaborate ligand design enabled the development of highly active cobalt catalysts by the groups of Beller, Budzelaar, Chirik, Hanson, Elsevier, de Bruin, and others (Figure 1).^{(5),(6),(7),(8)} In the most recent literature, the implementation of pincer ligands (e.g. *NNN*; *PNP*; *CNC*) proved pivotal to the control of high activity and selectivity.⁽⁹⁾ Following our previous work on metalates with redox non-innocent arene ligands,^{(10),(11)} we believed that an efficient 3d metal catalyst for hydrogenation reactions would fulfill the following criteria: *i*) facilitation of redox steps at the metal by a redox-active ligand; *ii*) modular ligand design that allows for convenient synthesis and easy catalyst tuning; *iii*) stabilization

of reduced forms of the catalyst by the ligand, and *iv*) broad scope of hydrogenations of unsaturated C=C and C=X.

Figure 1. Homogeneous cobalt catalysts for hydrogenations.^{(8)a,b,c,(10)} (Dipp = 2,6-diisopropylphenyl)



Imine-based ligand architectures constitute a privileged class of ligands as evidenced by the numerous applications to catalytic reactions.⁽⁷⁾ Simple α -diimine catalysts were first introduced by *tom Dieck* and co-workers in 1977.⁽¹²⁾ Pincer-type motifs such as pyridinediimines⁽¹³⁾ (PDI) have recently received great attention. Bis(imino)acenaphthenes^{(14),(15)} (BIANs) are another class of ligands that fulfill the aforementioned criteria: BIANs

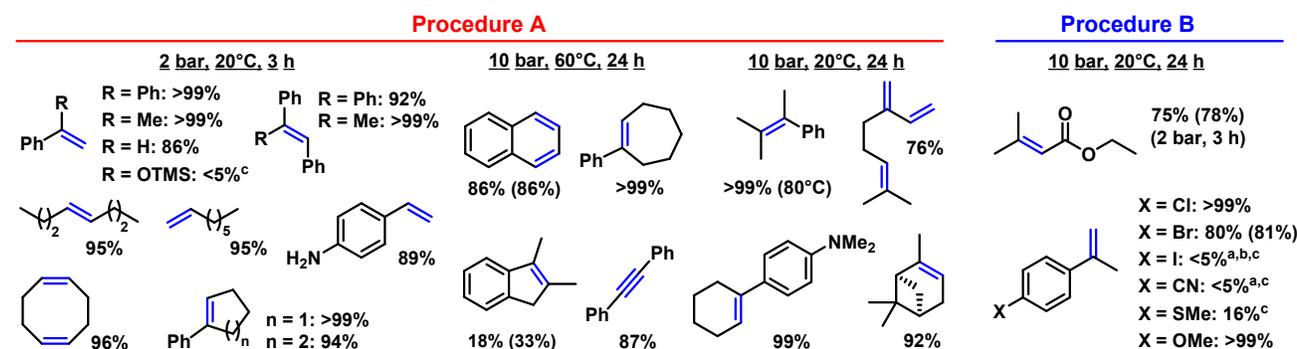
can be rapidly assembled from commercial precursors on multi-gram scales and are highly redox-active as they can harbor up to four electrons.^(14b) There are eight reports of BIAN cobalt complexes with five applications to catalysis.⁽¹⁶⁾ On this basis, we investigated combinations of BIAN ligands and cobalt salts toward their ability to form active hydrogenation catalysts. Documented herein are the benefits of using this simple catalytic system that presents tangible advances over the current state-of-the-art that could not have been predicted: Clean hydrogenations of challenging alkenes (e.g. tetra-substituted), imines, and heteroarenes proceed under mild conditions. Mechanistic insight was gained from the isolation of structurally novel olefin and hydride complexes as potential catalyst intermediates that are distinct from those of the traditional noble metal catalysts (Figure 1, bottom).

Results and Discussion

Optimization and Alkene Hydrogenation

Initially, we probed the ability of $(\text{D}^{\text{ipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{Co}^{\text{II}}\text{Br}_2$ to act as pre-catalyst for the hydrogenation of the model substrate triphenylethylene under very mild conditions (Dipp = 2,6-diisopropylphenyl). High conversion was observed with lithium superhydride (LiEt_3BH) as co-catalyst at 2 bar H_2 and room temperature with only 3 mol% $(\text{D}^{\text{ipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$ (Table 1, procedure A). The presence of olefins during the reduction proved beneficial for the high catalyst activity, possibly due to transient olefin coordination and stabilization of the low-valent catalyst.^{(6d),(17),(18)} The significantly lower activity of NaEt_3BH suggests a considerable alkali-cation effect (entry 5).[†] Mono-, di- and tri-substituted alkenes were cleanly hydrogenated under 2-10 bar H_2 pressure at room temperature (Scheme 1).⁽²⁰⁾ The high efficacy of the developed protocol was demonstrated in the hydrogenation of challenging tri- and tetra-substituted alkenes such as myrcene, α -pinene, and α,β,β -trimethylstyrene under mild conditions (Scheme 2). Under standard conditions, the hydrogenation of α -methylstyrene exhibited a turnover frequency (TOF) of 780 h^{-1} (Supporting Information). To the best of our knowledge, this protocol involves one of the most active homogeneous Co catalysts for alkene hydrogenations.⁽⁸⁾ Reduction-sensitive functional groups in the alkenes required a different protocol involving addition of the hydride co-catalyst prior to the alkene (protocol B, see Table 1, entry 2 and Scheme 2, right). This alternative protocol B was tolerant to chloride, bromide, ether, and ester functions.

Scheme 1. Substrate scope of cobalt-catalyzed hydrogenation of alkenes. Bonds in blue indicate the site of complete π -bond hydrogenation. Standard conditions: 0.2 mmol alkene/alkyne (1 M, THF), 3 mol% $(\text{D}^{\text{ipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$, 9 mol% LiEt_3BH (1 M, THF). Yields were determined by quantitative GC-FID vs. *n*-pentadecane. Conversions are given in parentheses if <90%. **Procedure A:** Catalyst reduction in the presence of substrate. **Procedure B:** Catalyst reduction in the absence of substrate. ^a Traces of α -methylstyrene formed. ^b Traces of cumene formed. ^c Conversion <20%.



In the absence of H_2 , 1-octene rapidly isomerized to a mixture of octene regioisomers and stereoisomers. With phenylacetylene, slow cyclotrimerization to triphenylbenzene was observed in low yield (see Supporting Information).⁽²¹⁾

Table 1. Selected optimization experiments.

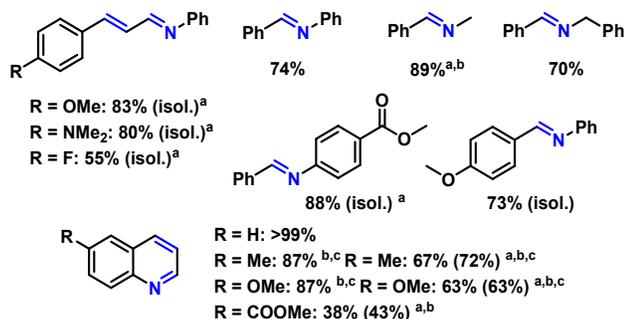
Entry	Deviation from standard conditions	Yield (%) ^a
1	A: reduction in presence of the substrate	92 (93)
2	B: substrate addition after reductant	41 (50)
3	A: 6 mol% LiEt_3BH	75 (75)
4	A: 6 mol% NaEt_3BH	23 (33)
5	A: 9 mol% NaEt_3BH	64 (65)
6	A: 9 mol% HBpin + 9 mol% KOtBu	1 (12)
7	A: $(\text{D}^{\text{ipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoCl}_2$	72 (72)
8	A: CoCl_2 + 2 $\text{D}^{\text{ipp}}\text{BIAN}$	25 (35)
9	A: w/o reductant	<1 (9)

Conditions: 0.2 mmol alkene (1 M, THF), 9 mol% LiEt_3BH (1 M, THF), 3 mol% $(\text{D}^{\text{ipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$, 2 bar H_2 ; ^a Yields determined by quantitative GC-FID vs. internal *n*-pentadecane; conversions in parentheses.

Methodology Extension: Hydrogenation of Imines

The homogeneous Co-catalyzed hydrogenation of imines^{(8b),(10)} and quinolines^(8f,h) is still in its infancy, despite being an atom-economic route to bioactive amines.⁽²²⁾ Very good conversions were observed with the same cobalt catalyst in hydrogenations of selected electron-deficient and electron-rich imines and quinolines (10 bar H_2 , 60°C, Scheme 2). Ester functions were tolerated. Similarly mild conditions were recently reported with related homogeneous Co catalysts.^{(8b,f,h),(10)}

Scheme 2. Hydrogenation of imines and quinolines. Blue bonds indicate the sites of double bond hydrogenation. Conditions: Procedure A, 0.2 mmol substrate (1 M, THF), 3 mol% (^{Dipp}BIAN)CoBr₂, 9 mol% LiEt₃BH (1 M, THF); 10 bar H₂, 60 °C, 24 h. GC-FID yields vs. internal *n*-pentadecane; conversions in parentheses if <90%. ^a Procedure B. ^b 80 °C. ^c traces of the 5,6,7,8-tetrahydroquinoline derivative.



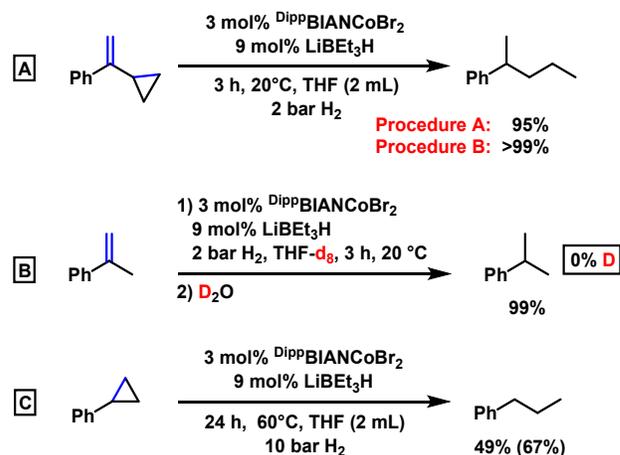
Mechanism

The advent of 3d transition metal catalysts has gone hand in hand with the utilization of ligands that profoundly influence the electronic properties at the metal ions and enable redox reactivity patterns that are distinct from those of noble metals catalysts.⁽⁹⁾ The reaction mechanisms of catalytic alkene hydrogenations with 2nd and 3rd row transition metals (Rh, Ru, Ir, Pd, Pt) are very well understood. For the classical Rh-catalyzed hydrogenation, alkene and hydride complexes have been determined as key catalyst intermediates and the elemental reaction steps to involve two electron redox events at the metal.^{(1),(2),(7),(8)} There is much less insight into the hydrogenation mechanisms of first row transition metals; the nature of the key catalyst intermediates are still largely unexplored. Chirik and coworkers reported on a bis(aryl-imidazol-2-ylidene)pyridine cobalt hydride complex and a radical pathway that operates in cobalt-catalyzed alkene hydrogenations.^{(8)^c} In this work, we aimed at a concise mechanistic study of Co-BIAN catalysts in alkene hydrogenations that would address the following questions: Is the BIAN ligand redox-active under the reaction conditions?⁽⁹⁾ Are radical pathways operating?⁽⁷⁾ To what extent are heterogeneous catalyst species involved?⁽²³⁾ Do alkene and hydride intermediates play a similarly important role as with 4d and 5d metal catalysts?

We commenced our mechanistic studies with a set of key experiments that addressed the operation of radical mechanisms and the topicity of the active catalysts species. Initially, radical probes were evaluated. α -Cyclopropyl styrene underwent dual alkene hydrogenation and hydrogenative ring-opening to give 2-phenylpentane in excellent yields following protocol A or B, respectively (Scheme 3, A). This might be indicative of a mechanism involving hydrogen atom transfer (HAT).⁽²⁴⁾ Furthermore, this is in full accord with our observations that non-styrenic olefins (i.e. alkenes without aryl substituents that could stabilize potential radical intermediates in benzyl positions) constitute more difficult substrates under the standard conditions. Hydrogen atom transfer from the solvent is rather unlikely as no deuterium incorporation could be determined from reactions in THF-d₈ (Scheme 3, B). The high activity of the catalyst was further demonstrated by the hydrogenation of a C-C- σ -bond in cyclopropylbenzene (Scheme 3, C).

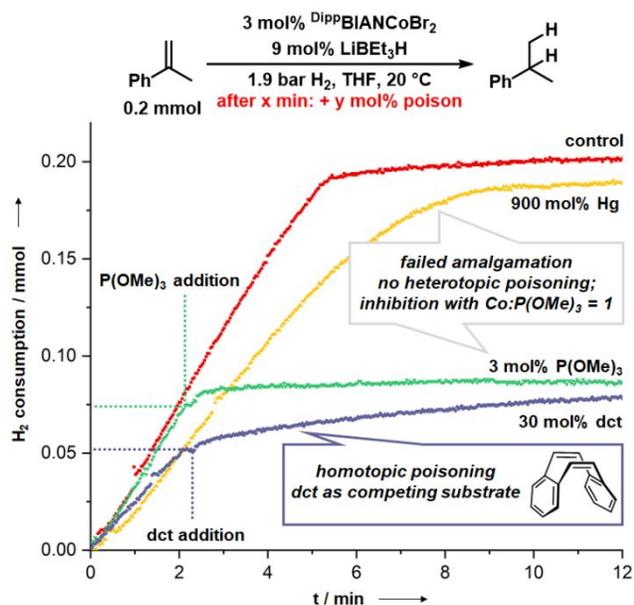
The clear distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous catalyst species is intricate,⁽²³⁾ yet our observations are consistent with a homogeneous mechanism. Reaction progress analyses documented an immediate onset of catalytic activity and steady conversion, which indicates a zero order for the substrate in the rate law (Scheme 4, red curve). Thus, the rate-determining step presumably does not include olefin coordination. A plot of the initial rates versus catalyst concentrations showed a first order rate in cobalt.[†] The absence of any sigmoidal curvature argues clearly against initial pre-catalyst nucleation and particle formation.⁽⁶⁾ However, an induction period might be not visible due to the experimental setup (Procedure B, substrate conversion determined by gas-uptake; H₂ consumption was recorded after pre-catalyst formation and substrate addition).[†] Kinetic poisoning studies are a competent tool to ascertain the topicity of the operating catalyst species.⁽²³⁾ The attempted amalgamation of the catalyst with 300 equiv. Hg had only a minimal effect on the reaction rate. Upon addition of sub-catalytic amounts of trimethylphosphite (P(OMe)₃, 0.3 mol%), partial catalyst inhibition was recorded. Complete inhibition was achieved at a catalyst/poison ratio of 1:1 which is consistent with a homotopic catalyst (Scheme 4, green curve). The selective homotopic catalyst poison dibenzo[*a,e*]cyclooctatetraene⁽²⁵⁾ (dct, 10 equiv. per Co) resulted in catalyst inhibition which was slightly diminished by the concomitant hydrogenation of dct as a competing substrate (Scheme 4, violet curve, 31% conversion of dct).[†] The lower efficacy of dct as poison is presumably a consequence of the lower stability of 3d olefin complexes vs. their heavier congeners.⁽¹⁸⁾

Scheme 3. Key mechanistic experiments.



Scheme 4. Catalyst poisoning studies with P(OMe)₃, Hg, and

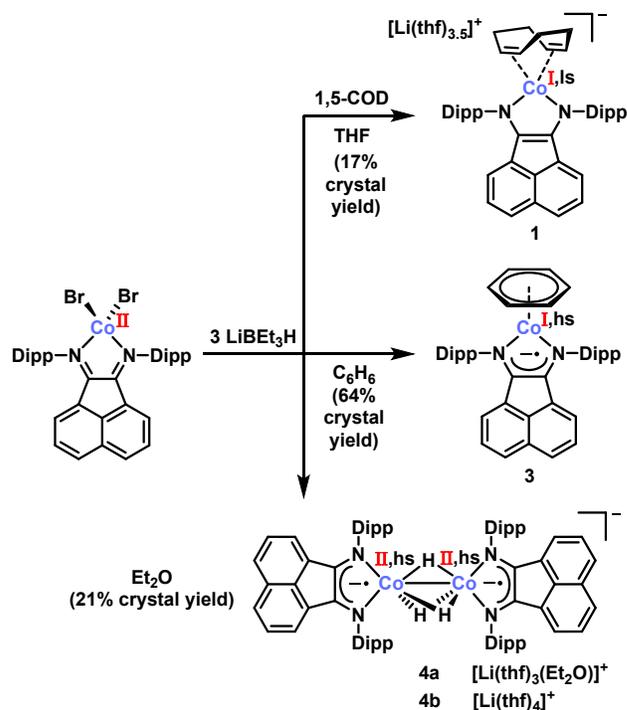
dct. Procedure B. Substrate conversion determined by gas-uptake and quantitative GC-FID vs. *n*-pentadecane.



Complexes and Catalyst Intermediates

Based on the initial mechanistic experiments, we postulate a homotopic mechanism by molecular cobalt catalysts. The distinct electronic properties of 3d transition metals vs. their heavier congeners might also entail the participation of catalyst structures that are different from the Rh(I) catalysts of hydrogenation reactions. While the operation of alkene and hydride pathways has been intensively studied in rhodium-catalyzed hydrogenations, the knowledge of related catalyst intermediates with cobalt is still rather in its infancy. In an effort to identify potential catalyst species, we investigated reactions of $(\text{DippBIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$ with 3 equiv. LiEt_3BH in THF solution (Scheme 5). LIFDI-MS (liquid injection field desorption mass spectrometry) analyses of the crude catalyst mixture displayed the formation of the low-valent dimer $[(\text{DippBIAN})\text{Co}]_2$ which is structurally related to a complex with two direct cobalt-arene bonding interactions prepared by Yang and coworkers using a different diimine.⁽²⁶⁾ We surmised that the low-valent monomeric unit $(\text{DippBIAN})\text{Co}$ might exhibit catalytic activity and thus employed several arenes/olefins as labile coordination placeholders during the reductive dehalogenation of DippBIANCoBr_2 . Reduction of DippBIANCoBr_2 in THF with 3 equiv. LiEt_3BH and excess amounts of 1,5-cyclooctadiene (cod) led to the formation of $[\text{Li}(\text{thf})_{3.5}\{(\text{DippBIAN})\text{Co}(\text{cod})\}]$ (**1**) which was isolated after recrystallization in 17% yield.^{(27),(16)c} This complex is the corresponding Li salt to our previously described potassium cobaltate (**2**) and shows similar ^1H and ^{13}C spectra.^{(16)c} Based on literature precedents, the oxidation level of BIAN in **1** can be assigned as 2– from the crystallographic bond distances (C-C: 1.389(4) Å; C-N: 1.383(3) Å; Figure 2).^{(28),(29)} In comparison, DippBIANCoBr_2 consists of a neutral BIAN (C-C: 1.513(7) and 1.521(6) Å; C-N: 1.277(7)–1.286(8) Å).^{(16)b,(28),(29)}

Scheme 5. Cobalt complexes **1**, **3** and **4** that were isolated from reactions of $(\text{DippBIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$ and LiEt_3BH .



The analogous reduction of $(\text{DippBIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$ with 3 equiv. LiEt_3BH in benzene furnished the neutral complex $[(\text{DippBIAN})\text{Co}(\eta^6\text{-C}_6\text{H}_6)]$ (**3**) as dark red single crystals in 64 % yield. (**3** is also formed from the same reaction in a mixture of 1,5-cod and benzene).⁽³⁰⁾ Single crystal structure analysis suggests a radical anion state of the BIAN ligand (C-C: 1.433(2) Å; C-N: 1.3246(19) Å and 1.3224(19) Å, Figure 2), which was further investigated by EPR.^{(28),(29)} The X-band spectrum of **3** in toluene glass at 20 K (Figure 3) shows a rhombic symmetry and was simulated in accordance with an unpaired electron coupled to a spin 7/2 nucleus. We attribute this signal to a cobalt-centered radical.† Inclusion of the Euler angles $[-2.0, +90.0, 0]$ proved to be necessary to align the g and A_{Co} tensors and provided a more satisfactory simulation of the measured spectrum. Some linear and quadratic A -strain parameters have been included to simulate the final line shape.† Some remaining slight deviations in the line shapes between simulation and experiment can be attributed to non-perfect glass formation. The provided simulation allowed for accurate determination of the g and A_{Co} tensors (MHz): [2.013, 2.145, 2.134] and [+185.0, +406.0, 198.4], respectively. These results are in agreement with an effective magnetic moment μ_{eff} of 1.9 μ_{B} (Evans method, C_6D_6), which is only slightly higher than the spin-only value for an $S = 1/2$ system ($\mu_{\text{eff}} = 1.7 \mu_{\text{B}}$).

Figure 2. Molecular structures of 1, 3 and 4b. Thermal ellipsoids at the 50% probability level; minor disordered parts, non-coordinated solvents, selected H atoms and the $[\text{Li}(\text{thf})_4]^+$ cation of **4b** were omitted for clarity.

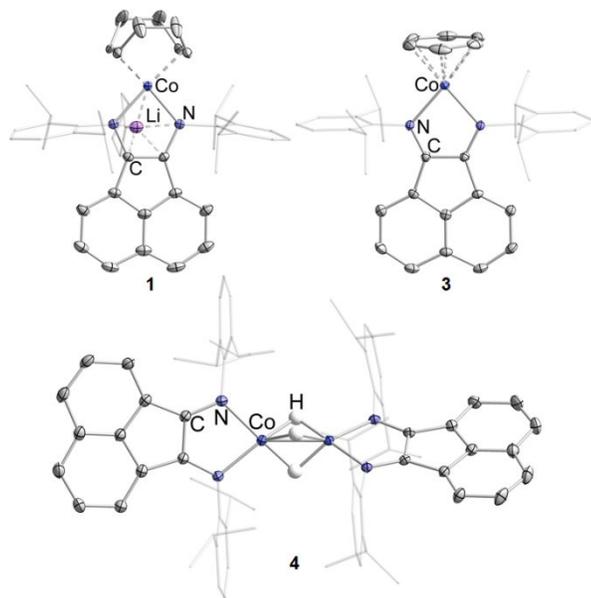
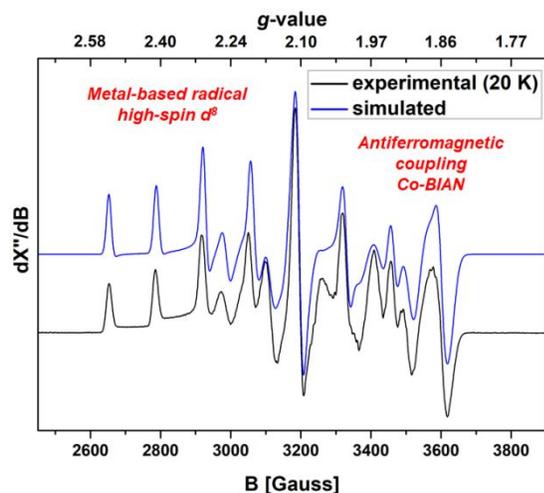


Figure 3. Simulated (blue) and experimental (black) X-band EPR spectrum of 3. In toluene glass at 20 K. $\nu = 9.389494$ GHz, microwave power = 1.002 mW, mod. amp. = 1.000 G.



Further analysis of **3** included elemental analysis, LIFDI-MS ($m/z = 637.2781$), cyclic voltammetry (CV, one reversible reduction, $E = -2.3$ V vs. Fc/Fc^+) and UV-VIS (C_6H_6 , $\lambda_{\text{max}} = 481$ nm, $\epsilon_{\text{max}} = 14300$ mol $^{-1}$ cm $^{-1}$ L). The combined data point to a highly unusual electronic structure of complex **3** which is described as a $[(\text{BIAN}^-)\text{Co}^{\text{I}}(\eta^6\text{-C}_6\text{H}_6)]$ complex that contains a very rare high-spin Co(I) center.⁽³¹⁾ The BIAN radical anion is (strongly) antiferromagnetically coupled to the $S = 1$ Co(I) ion, thus resulting in an effective $S = 1/2$ system with the unpaired electron being primarily located at Co (as detected by EPR). The cobalt-arene coordination in **3** is not only relevant for the catalysis protocol, as it is structurally related to $[(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{Co}]_2$. Moreover, substrates may coordinate in a similar way, as most substrates involve a phenyl ring. **3** also co-

crystallized in a benzene-free synthesis of **1**, which might be a consequence of a solvent impurity.

Transition metal hydrides are key intermediates in many synthetic⁽³²⁾ and biological⁽³³⁾ processes. The largest industrial catalytic processes are hydrogenation reactions that operate via metal hydride species. Since the landmark studies of homogeneous Rh-catalyzed hydrogenations,⁽²⁾ extensive knowledge of hydridorhodium complexes has been collected whereas very little is known about the nature and catalytic role of related intermediates in Co-catalyzed reactions. From a reaction of $(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoBr}_2$ with 3 equiv. LiEt_3BH in Et_2O in a closed reaction vessel, we isolated a structurally unusual cobalt hydride complex.^{†(34)} Effervescence was observed during the reduction, presumably by formation of H_2 . Extraction with *n*-heptane and Et_2O afforded the anionic hydridocobaltate $[\text{Li}(\text{thf})_3(\text{Et}_2\text{O})\{(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{Co}\}_2(\mu\text{-H})_3]$ (**4a**) as dark green microcrystals in 23% yield.⁽³⁵⁾ The closely related $[\text{Li}(\text{thf})_4]^+$ (**4b**) solvate can be isolated in an analogous fashion by crystallization from THF/*n*-hexane (Figure 2).[†] X-ray diffraction analysis revealed that **4a** and **4b** show very similar solid-state molecular structures, thus only the structural parameters of **4a** are given below. The anion of **4a** shows three hydride ligands (located in the electron density Fourier map) that bridge two $(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{Co}$ units (Figure 2). The $[\text{Li}(\text{thf})_3(\text{Et}_2\text{O})]^+$ counterion is solvent-separated.^(14b) A very short Co-Co distance presumably is observed due to the presence of three bridging hydrides: 2.2640(5) Å and 2.2426(3) for **4a** and **4b**, respectively. To the best of our knowledge, the latter is the shortest $\text{Co}(\mu\text{-H})_n\text{Co}$ motif known to date (2nd shortest: 2.249(1) Å).^(35b) The Co-H bond distances are between 1.51(2) and 1.63(5) Å. The twist angle between the two CoN_2 planes is 54.94(7)°. The NCCN bond lengths of BIAN are slightly shorter than in **3** (Figure 1; C-N: 1.333(3)–1.349(3) Å, C-C: 1.412(3)–1.419(3) Å), yet are in good agreement with the monoanionic BIAN in the complex $[(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})_2\text{Fe}]$ (C-N: 1.3367(15) and 1.3393(15) Å, C-C: 1.4234(18) Å) which contains a high-spin Fe^{2+} that is antiferromagnetically coupled to BIAN.⁽³⁶⁾ Accordingly, the observed bond lengths of the BIAN ligands in **4** suggest a radical anion state of BIAN which is supported by theoretical studies (*vide infra*).^{(28),(29),(37)} The sum formula of **4a** was further verified by negative-ion mode ESI mass spectrometry (Figure 4, $m/z = 1121.4$). The compound proved highly sensitive as unsealed THF solutions decomposed in an argon-filled glovebox within several hours to a red-brown paramagnetic mixture presumably by formation of H_2 . Direct evidence of such decomposition came from the gas-phase fragmentation of the mass-selected anionic component of **4a** in ESI-MS. Apart from dissociation into its monomeric subunit $[(^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN})\text{CoH}_2]^-$, the dinuclear cobaltate readily underwent dehydrogenation (Figures S25 and S26). Remarkably, multiple dehydrogenation steps were operative (≥ 7). Most likely, the released H-atoms originated from the bridging hydrides and from the isopropyl groups of the $^{\text{Dipp}}\text{BIAN}$ s. The $^1\text{H-NMR}$ spectrum of **4a** displayed a characteristic, broad singlet resonance for the three bridging hydrides at -75.2 ppm (see the Supporting Information for 2D NMR analyses). This remarkable high-field shift may indicate an open-shell structure which was further investigated by temperature-dependent $^1\text{H-NMR}$ studies.⁽³⁸⁾ Remarkably, the chemical shift of this resonance is temperature-dependent and shows a strong upfield shift upon decreasing temperature (Figure 5). A similar behavior is observed for the remaining ^1H NMR resonances.

Additional analyses of the cobaltate **4a** include elemental analysis (EA), UV-VIS spectroscopy (C_6H_6 , $I_{max}=474$ nm, $\epsilon_{max}=1200$ mol⁻¹cm⁻¹L), and cyclic voltammetry (THF/[*n*Bu₄N]PF₆; one reversible reduction was observed $E = -2.4$ V vs. Fc/Fc⁺). The combined data are strongly indicative of a highly unusual electronic structure of the trihydridocobaltate anion of **4a,b**, which is best described as $\{[(^{Dipp}BIAN^-)Co^{II}]_2(\mu-H)_3\}^-$, assuming that ^{Dipp}BIAN and each bridging hydride atom are singly negatively charged, respectively. DFT calculations suggest a charge of -0.33 for each of the hydrides and of 0.85 for each of the cobalt centres (Figure 7). Since charge distributions are typically less polarized than formal oxidation numbers suggest, this is compatible with a Co^{II} assignment, even though it does not exclude Co^I. Importantly, DFT confirms the singlet ground state, this state being both lowest in energy and showing the best agreement with the X-ray crystallographic structure.⁽³⁷⁾

Hydrogenation Activities of Complexes 1-4 and Mechanistic Proposal

We evaluated the catalytic activities of the isolated cobalt complexes **1-4** and various pre-catalyst mixtures in a hydrogenation model reaction (Table 2). The cobaltate complex $[Li(thf)_{3.5}\{^{Dipp}BIAN\}Co(cod)]$ (**1**) was found to be active for the hydrogenation of 1,5-cyclooctadiene (cod), albeit exhibiting slightly lower activity than the *in situ* formed catalyst (entry 2). Interestingly, **1** could be further activated by addition of 3 equiv. Et₃B (entry 5), which may indicate Lewis acid-assisted catalysis.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The borane could facilitate the cleavage of H₂ as demonstrated by Peters and coworkers with a borylcobalt complex.^{(40)a} The catalytic inactivity of the corresponding potassium derivative $[K(thf)\{^{Dipp}BIAN\}Co(cod)]$ (**2**, Table 2, entry 6) manifested the observed alkali cation effect during our preliminary optimization experiments (Table 1, entries 1 and 5).^{†(19)} One possible explanation for this effect is an attractive non-covalent cation- π interaction. As mainly electrostatic interaction, the association free enthalpy (ΔH°) for the alkali metals with benzene follows the trend: Li⁺ > Na⁺ > K⁺. Hence, the alkali cation can stabilize transition states or bind substrates (i.e. alkenes, arenes) in proximity to the catalyst.⁽¹⁹⁾ Moreover, alkali metals are able to tune the redox activity of the ligand. Mazzanti and coworkers reported on ligand- or metal-based reduction of cobalt salophen complexes dependent on the alkali metal.^{(19)f} The group of Holland reported reduced iron dimers with redox-active formazanate ligands. The dimer, which is stabilized by cation- π interactions, rearranged in THF solution to form a five-membered metallacycle with a reactivity order of Na⁺ > K⁺ < Rb⁺ < Cs⁺.^{(19)h}

The neutral (benzene)cobalt complex $[(^{Dipp}BIAN)Co(\eta^6-C_6H_6)]$ **3** was only active after additional reduction with LiEt₃BH (Table 2, entry 16). Notably, the related 17 valence electron (VE) complex $[(dpepe)Co(cod)]$ (*dpepe* = 1,2-diphenylphosphinoethane) bearing a redox-innocent ligand is indeed an active pre-catalyst for hydrogenations.^{(7)d} The hydridocobaltate $[Li(thf)_3(Et_2O)\{^{Dipp}BIAN\}Co_2(\mu-H)_3]$ (**4a**) showed moderate hydrogenation activity which was significantly enhanced by further reduction with 0.5 equiv. of LiEt₃BH (entries 12 and 14). It may be speculated that the hydridocobaltate anion present in **4a,b** (or related derivatives) act as catalyst reservoirs for mononuclear hydrides as indicated by *in situ* NMR studies.[†] A catalytic mechanism via multinuclear metal complexes can likely be ruled out (1st order in

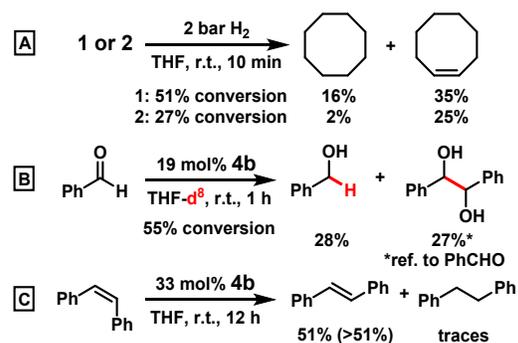
[Co], poisoning studies).^{†(41)} Based on the collected synthetic, spectroscopic, and theoretical data, we propose a homotopic reaction mechanism that involves cobaltate complexes as active catalyst species. Rate acceleration by Lewis acids and an alkali-cation effect were observed.

Table 2. Hydrogenations with isolated complexes and pre-catalyst mixtures.

Entry	Catalyst mixture	Yield [%] ^a	
		cyclo-octane	cyclo-octene
1 ^b	(^{Dipp} BIAN)CoBr ₂ + 9 mol% LiBEt ₃ H	96	1
2	[Li(thf) _{3.5} { ^{Dipp} BIAN}Co(cod)] 1	5	61
3	1 + 3.5 mol% 12-crown-4	4	44
4	1 + 3 mol% [Fc]PF ₆	2	17
5	1 + 9 mol% BEt ₃	66	33
6	[K(thf){(^{Dipp} BIAN)Co(cod)}] 2	-	1
7	2 + 3 mol% [Fc]PF ₆	1	-
8	2 + 30 mol% LiBr + [2.2.2]Cryptand	-	2
9	2 + 30 mol% LiCl + 3 mol% 18-crown-6	-	1
10	2 + 9 mol% BEt ₃	1	1
11	2 + 9 mol% BEt ₃ + 30 mol% LiBr	3	38
12 ^b	[Li(thf) ₃ (Et ₂ O){(^{Dipp} BIAN)Co} ₂ (μ ² -H) ₃] 4a	6	7
13 ^b	4a + 3 mol% Et ₃ B	22	22
14 ^b	4a + 1.5 mol% LiEt ₃ BH	57	43
15	[(^{Dipp} BIAN)Co(η ⁶ -C ₆ H ₆)] 3	-	-
16 ^c	3 + 9 mol% LiBEt ₃ H	4	29

Conditions: 0.2 mmol alkene, 0.1 M in THF, 3 mol% cat., 2 bar H₂. ^a Yields determined by quantitative GC-FID vs. internal *n*-pentadecane; ane = cyclooctane, ene = cyclooctene; ^b 1.5 mol% **4a**; ^c Reduction in presence of the substrate.

Scheme 6. Related reactivity of **1**, **2** and **4b**.



The observed alkali cation effect was also evident in the more effective stoichiometric hydrogenation of **1** vs. **2** (Scheme 6, A). Preliminary explorations of the reactivity of relevant hydrides were performed with **4b** as model compound: Protolysis occurred with the strong Brønsted acid HCl in dioxane to give H₂ evolution (2.3 ± 0.1 eq. H₂). In the presence of benzaldehyde, **4b** reacted to give 28% benzyl alcohol and 27% pinacol coupling product (Scheme 6, B). This may indicate the

competing operation of hydride transfer and single-electron transfer processes from **4b**. In the absence of dihydrogen, incomplete isomerization of (*Z*)-stilbene to (*E*)-stilbene was observed (51%, Scheme 6, C). **4a** represents a conceivable intermediate in our recently published (BIAN)Co-catalyzed amine-borane dehydrogenation reaction as it affords the same reaction products (borazine, cyclotriaminoborane, cyclodiaminoborane, H₃BNH₂-cyclo-B₃N₃H₁₁, polyborazine and polyaminoborane).^{(16)†}

Conclusion

In summary, this report has established reduced cobalt complexes as competent catalysts in a user-friendly hydrogenation protocol for challenging alkenes under mild conditions. The obtained reactivity suggests bidentate BIANs as interesting alternatives to well-established pincer-type motifs possessing comparably high activities in cobalt-catalyzed alkene and imine hydrogenations. Mechanistic studies revealed considerable alkali cation and Lewis-acid effects. Synthetic, kinetic, and spectroscopic experiments indicate a mechanism involving homotopic cobaltate catalysts. Catalytically relevant cobalt complexes were isolated that document the redox non-innocence of the BIAN ligand. Especially, the isolation of trihydridocobaltates **4a,b** represents a tangible advance over the current state-of-the-art of transition metal hydrides. Their molecular structures show the first reported anionic cobalt complex with bridging hydride ligands. In contrast to the vast majority of reported transition metal hydrides bearing multidentate phosphines, cyclopentadienyl, or carbonyl ligands,

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the high electron density in this complex is stabilized by the redox non-innocent BIAN. It is reasonable to assume that the anion in **4a,b** constitutes a catalytically competent off-cycle intermediate of (BIAN)Co-catalyzed (de)hydrogenation reactions.^{(16)e}

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

† Supporting Information.

The Supporting Information (experimental procedures, analytical and crystal data of compounds, mechanistic studies, spectra) is available free of charge via the Internet on the [ACS Publication website](#) at DOI:

Crystal data for (D^{ipp}BIAN)CoBr₂, **1**, **3**, **4a**, **4b** with CCDC 1909828, 1909827, 1909829, 1909830, 1909831, respectively. (CIF).

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Table of Contents (TOC)

