

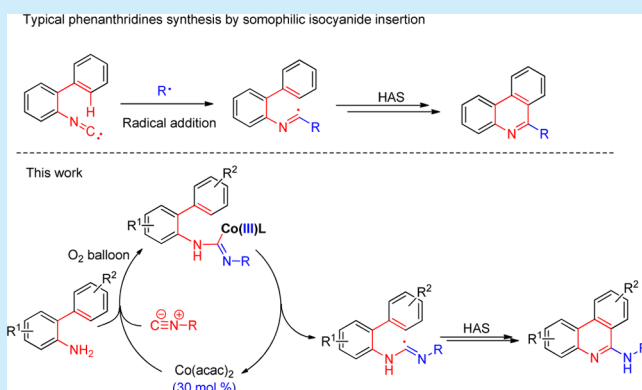
Co(acac)₂/O₂-Mediated Oxidative Isocyanide Insertion with 2-Aryl Anilines: Efficient Synthesis of 6-Amino Phenanthridine Derivatives

Tong-Hao Zhu, Shun-Yi Wang,* Yang-Qing Tao, Tian-Qi Wei, and Shun-Jun Ji*

Key Laboratory of Organic Synthesis of Jiangsu Province, College of Chemistry, Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, Soochow University, Suzhou 215123, China

S Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: A novel and efficient protocol for the creation of 6-amino phenanthridine derivatives by Co(acac)₂-catalyzed isocyanide insertion with 2-aryl anilines under an O₂ atmosphere via homolytic aromatic substitution (HAS) type C–H functionalization has been developed. This reaction not only proceeds smoothly utilizing O₂ as the oxidant but also provides a new approach to construct phenanthridine derivatives utilizing readily available 2-aryl anilines with isocyanides instead of 2-isocyanobiaryls with different radical precursors.



Phenanthridines have attracted much attention, because they show versatile biological activities such as antibacterial, antitumoral, cytotoxic, and DNA intercalator (Figure 1).^{1,2} Therefore, it is important to develop new methods for the

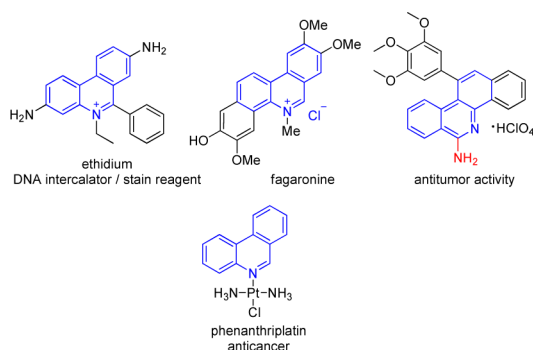


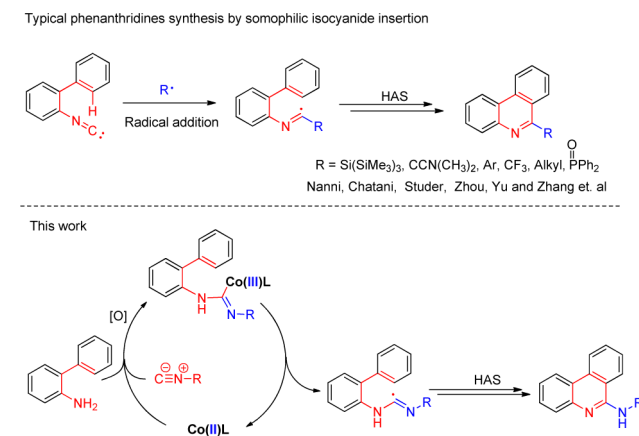
Figure 1. Biologically active phenanthridines.

synthesis of these compounds.^{3,4} Transition-metal-catalyzed isocyanide insertion reactions⁵ and somophilic isocyanide insertion reactions^{3,6} have been well developed for the construction of heterocycles via cascade reactions.⁷ Recently, a series of 6-substituted phenanthridines were easily prepared by radical addition to 2-isocyanobiaryls followed by a homolytic aromatic substitution (HAS) process.^{3,8} However, there has been no report on the construction of 6-amino phenanthridines utilizing a similar strategy. There are also no reactions of 2-aryl anilines with isocyanides to construct 6-amino phenanthridines. More recently, we have developed a cobalt-catalyzed isocyanide insertion reaction of aromatic amine derivatives to synthesize 2-

aminobenzimidazoles, 2-aminobenzothiazoles, and 2-aminobenzoxazoles.⁹

As a continuation of our work on isocyanide insertion reactions,^{9,10} herein, we plan to investigate the reaction of isocyanides with 2-aryl anilines catalyzed by a cobalt salt under oxidative conditions, which would concisely synthesize 6-amino phenanthridine derivatives via the formation of an imidoyl radical intermediate followed by HAS type C–H functionalization (Scheme 1). This reaction utilizes readily available 2-aryl anilines with isocyanides instead of 2-isocyanobiaryls with

Scheme 1. Phenanthridines Synthesis by Isocyanide Insertion

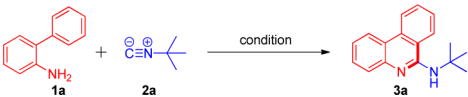


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different radical precursors catalyzed by an inexpensive and low toxicity cobalt salt under oxidation conditions.

Our initial studies focused on developing a more efficient catalytic system by investigating the reaction of aniline **1a** and *tert*-butyl isocyanide **2a** as a model system. When the reaction of **1a** and **2a** was carried out in toluene at 100 °C without a catalyst under sealed tube conditions, no desired product was observed (Table 1, entry 1). To our surprise, the desired *N*-

Table 1. Optimization of Isocyanide Insertion with 2-Aryl Anilines^a



entry	catalyst (mol %)	temp (°C)	solvent	yield (%) ^b
1	—	100	toluene	0
2	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	toluene	53
3	Co(OAc) ₂ (20)	100	toluene	trace
4	CoCl ₂ ·6H ₂ O (20)	100	toluene	trace
5	Co(NO ₃) ₂ ·9H ₂ O (20)	100	toluene	trace
6	CoSO ₄ ·7H ₂ O (20)	100	toluene	trace
7	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	benzene	39
8	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	DMSO ^c	trace
9	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	anisole	56
10	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	1,4-dioxane	58
11	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	DCE ^f	41
12	Co(acac) ₂ (20)	100	DME ^g	53
13	Co(acac) ₂ (10)	100	1,4-dioxane	24
14	Co(acac) ₂ (30)	100	1,4-dioxane	63
15	Co(acac) ₂ (30)	110	1,4-dioxane	44
16	Co(acac) ₂ (30)	130	1,4-dioxane	43
17 ^c	Co(acac) ₂ (30)	100	1,4-dioxane	trace
18 ^d	Co(acac) ₂ (30)	100	1,4-dioxane	66

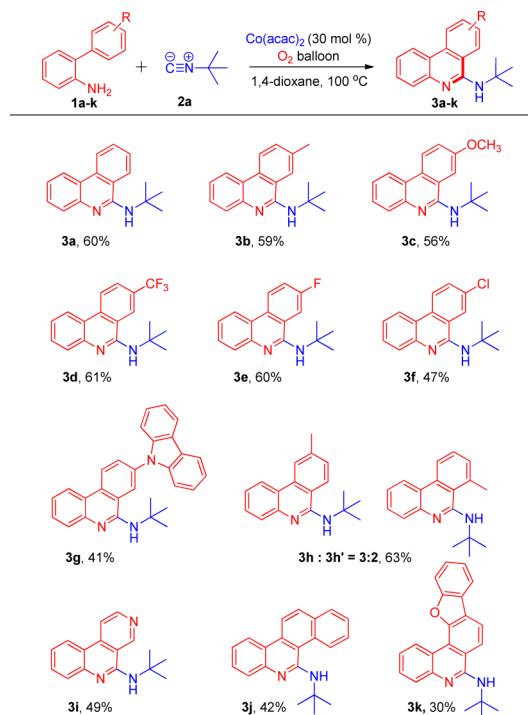
^aReaction conditions: biphenyl-2-amine **1a** (0.5 mol), *tert*-butyl isocyanide **2a** (0.6 mol, 1.2 equiv), cobalt catalyst, and solvent (3 mL) mixed in a 25 mL sealed tube with a magnetic stirrer for 12 h.

^bYields were determined by GC analysis with biphenyl as the internal standard. ^cThe atmosphere was argon. ^dThe O₂ balloon was used, and a Schlenk tube was used instead of a sealed tube. ^eDMSO = dimethyl sulfoxide. ^fDCE = 1,2-dichloroethane. ^gDME = ethyleneglycol dimethyl ether.

(*tert*-butyl)phenanthridin-6-amine **3a** could be obtained in 53% GC-yield by the reaction of **1a** and **2a** catalyzed by 20 mol % Co(acac)₂ in toluene at 100 °C under sealed tube conditions (Table 1, entry 2). However, other cobalt salts such as Co(OAc)₂, CoCl₂·6H₂O, Co(NO₃)₂·9H₂O, and CoSO₄·7H₂O could not promote this reaction (Table 1, entries 3–6). The results of screening for solvent, catalyst loading, and reaction temperature conditions indicated that 1,4-dioxane, 30 mol % Co(acac)₂, and 100 °C were optimal for this reaction (Table 1, entries 7–16). When the reaction was carried out under an argon atmosphere, it was found that almost no desired product was formed (Table 1, entry 17). This result indicated that O₂ was critical for this reaction. To our delight, the reaction of **1a** and **2a** catalyzed by 30 mol % Co(acac)₂ in 1,4-dioxane at 100 °C could react smoothly under 1 atm of O₂ atmosphere (O₂ balloon) to afford the desired product **3a** in 66% GC-yield (60% isolated yield) (Table 1, entry 18).

With the optimized conditions in hand, the reaction scope of the 2-aryl anilines was investigated. The results are summarized in Schemes 2 and 3. The substituted 2-aryl anilines (**1a–k**)

Scheme 2. Cobalt-Catalyzed Insertion Reactions of *tert*-Butyl Isocyanides **2a with Substituted 2-Phenyl Aniline **1a–k**^{a,b}**

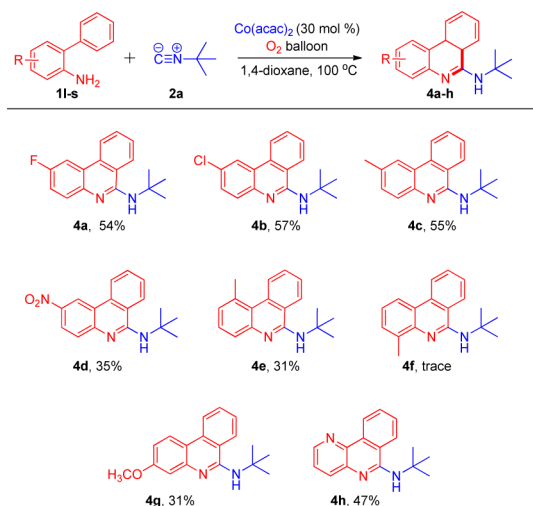


^aReaction conditions: substituted 2-phenyl aniline **1a–k** (0.5 mol), *tert*-butyl isocyanide **2a** (0.6 mol, 1.2 equiv), Co(acac)₂ (30 mol %), and 1,4-dioxane (3 mL) mixed in a Schlenk tube at 100 °C under O₂ balloon conditions. ^b Isolated yields.

reacted well with *tert*-butyl isocyanide **2a** (Scheme 2), giving the desired products **3a–k** in moderate yields. It is noteworthy that not only the 2-aryl group bearing electron-donating groups could offer the desired products in moderate yields but also the 2-aryl group bearing electron-withdrawing groups could afford the desired products in moderate yields (30%–63%). When 3'-methylbiphenyl-2-amine **1h** was applied to the reaction, a mixture of the two isomers *N*-*tert*-butyl-9-methylphenanthridin-6-amine **3h** and *N*-*tert*-butyl-7-methylphenanthridin-6-amine **3h'** in the ratio 3:2 was obtained. 2-(Pyridin-4-yl)aniline could also react well and lead to the desired product **3i** in 49% yield. It should be noted that **3j** could also be observed in 42% yield with excellent regioselectivity, determined by NMR.

Then, we investigated the substituent effects on the aniline aromatic ring. The results are listed in Scheme 3. The 2-aryl substituted anilines (**1l–s**) reacted well with *tert*-butyl isocyanide **2a**, furnishing the desired products **4a–h** in moderate yields. It is worth noting that the reaction of aniline bearing electron-donating groups (Me, OMe) could lead to the desired products in 31%–55% yields. When an aniline bearing an electron-withdrawing group such as NO₂ was applied to the reaction, the desired product **4d** could also be obtained in 35% yield. The reactions of halo-substituted anilines **1l** and **1m** afforded the products **4a** and **4b** in 54% and 57% yields, respectively. Furthermore, relatively bulky substrate **1p** could also undergo the transformation, generating the desired product **4e** in 31% yield. Unfortunately, when 3-methylbiphenyl-2-amine **1q** reacted with **2a**, only a trace of product was formed. To our delight, *N*-(*tert*-butyl)benzo[*c*][1,5]naphthyridin-6-amine **4h** could also be observed in 47% yield by the

Scheme 3. Cobalt-Catalyzed Insertion Reactions of *tert*-Butyl Isocyanides 2a with Substituted 2-Phenyl Aniline 1l–s^{a,b}

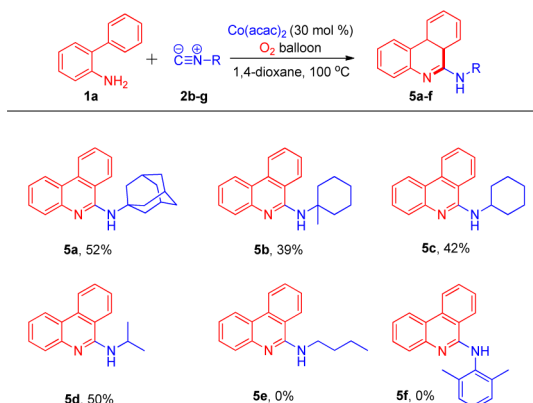


^aReaction conditions: substituted 2-phenyl aniline **1l–s** (0.5 mol), *tert*-butyl isocyanide **2a** (0.6 mol, 1.2 equiv), $\text{Co}(\text{acac})_2$ (30 mol %), and 1,4-dioxane (3 mL) mixed in a Schlenk tube at 100 °C under O_2 balloon conditions. ^b Isolated yields.

reaction of 2-phenylpyridin-3-amine **1k** with **2a** under the optimal conditions.

We further studied the reaction of several isocyanides with **1a** under identical conditions. When other secondary or tertiary aliphatic isocyanides **2b–e** were employed, the reactions also proceeded smoothly to give the desired products in moderate yields (39%–52%) (Scheme 4). However, the reactions of primary aliphatic isocyanide *n*-butyl isocyanide **2f** and aromatic isocyanide **2g** failed to give the desired products.

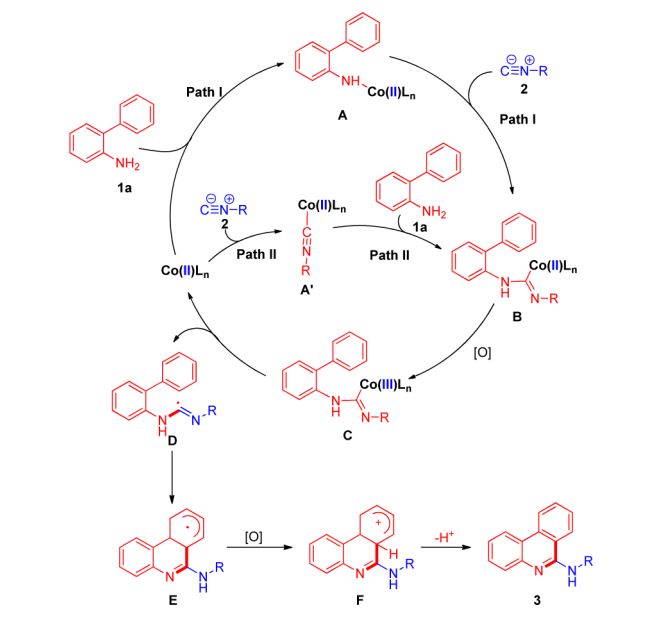
Scheme 4. Cobalt-Catalyzed Insertion Reactions of Substituted Isocyanides 2b–g with Biphenyl-2-amine 1a^{a,b}



^aReaction conditions: substituted biphenyl-2-amine **1a** (0.5 mol), isocyanide **2b–g** (0.6 mol, 1.2 equiv), $\text{Co}(\text{acac})_2$ (30 mol %), and 1,4-dioxane (3 mL) mixed in a Schlenk tube at 100 °C under O_2 balloon conditions. ^b Isolated yields.

Based on the literature reports^{11–16} and the above results, we proposed a plausible mechanism via two possible pathways as shown in Scheme 5. Path I consists of a Co(II) salt reacting with **1a** to give cobalt(II) complex **A**.¹¹ **A** undergoes addition with **2**¹² to provide cobalt(II) carbene complex **B**¹³ (Scheme 5, path I). The other possible pathway involves the Co(II) salt

Scheme 5. Proposed Mechanism



reacting with isocyanide **2** to furnish complex **A'**.^{14,15} Then, **1a** adds to **A'** to give cobalt(II) carbene complex **B** (Scheme 5, path II). After the oxidation of **B**,¹⁶ cobalt(III) complex **C** is formed, which may be cleaved homolytically to afford the active imidoyl radical **D** and the Co(II) catalyst. After the intramolecular cyclization of **D**, further oxidation, and subsequently deprotonation, the desired phenanthridine is formed.

In conclusion, we have developed a new, simple, and efficient $\text{Co}(\text{acac})_2$ -catalyzed cascade isocyanides insertion with 2-aryl anilines under an O_2 atmosphere to construct 6-amino phenanthridine derivatives in moderate to good yields via homolytic aromatic substitution (HAS) type C–H functionalization. In view of the important biological properties of phenanthridines, 6-amino substituted phenanthridines have potential biological properties. The mechanism of this reaction is different from the mechanisms of the Pd-catalyzed isocyanide insertion reaction and radical isocyanide insertion reaction, and further mechanism studies are underway in our laboratory.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

Experimental procedures and full spectroscopic data for all new compounds. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

■ AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Authors

*E-mail: shunyi@suda.edu.cn.

*E-mail: shunjun@suda.edu.cn.

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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