## **Rhodium(III)-Catalyzed Redox-Neutral Coupling of** *N*-Phenoxyacetamides and Alkynes with Tunable Selectivity\*\*

Guixia Liu,\* Yangyang Shen, Zhi Zhou, and Xiyan Lu\*

Transition-metal-catalyzed functionalization of arene C–H bonds has been developed as a powerful and straightforward synthetic approach for complex molecules from less-function-alized substrates.<sup>[1]</sup> Directing groups and stoichiometric amounst of oxidants are often required to achieve chemoselectivity and catalytic turnover. To meet the demand of green chemistry, a C–H functionalization should: 1) minimize the cost and waste associated with stoichiometric additives, and 2) avoid harsh reaction conditions which may be incompatible with sensitive functionalities. The development of innovative directing groups, which enable novel transformations to deliver valuable structures under mild and simple reaction conditions, are highly desirable.

Recently, rhodium(III) was used as an efficient catalyst for direct arene C–H functionalization under mild reaction conditions.<sup>[1c,d,i,2]</sup> In particular, rhodium(III)-catalyzed oxidative couplings of various aromatic substrates with alkynes by C–H and X–H (X=N or O) double activation has been widely investigated (Scheme1).<sup>[2,3]</sup> This kind of reaction typically uses heteroatoms to direct cyclometalation at the *ortho* C–H bond. After alkyne insertion and subsequent C–X bond reductive elimination, the desired heterocycles are produced along with a rhodium(I) species. Thus stoichiometric amounts of external oxidants are necessary to regenerate the catalyst. To address this drawback, an attractive redoxneutral strategy employing an oxidizing directing group,<sup>[4–8]</sup> which acts as a directing group and internal oxidant, has been used in the elegant works from many groups.<sup>[6]</sup>

Oxidizing directing groups reported in the transitionmetal-catalyzed C–H functionalization typically contain an N–O bond, such as an *N*-oxide, *N*-acyloxy, and *N*-methoxy group.<sup>[4-8]</sup> Normally, the oxidation of a low-valent metal by these internal oxidants will result in cleavage of an N–O bond accompanied by the departure of the oxygen-atom-containing unit. We envisioned that the rational design of an oxidizing directing group may enable all atoms in the starting material to be transformed into the product, and thus realize a highly atom-economical process. Herein, we disclose the develop-

 [\*] Prof. G. Liu, Y. Shen, Z. Zhou, Prof. X. Lu State Key Laboratory of Organometallic Chemistry, Shanghai Institute of Organic chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences 345 Lingling Road, Shanghai 200032 (China) E-mail: guixia@sioc.ac.cn xylu@sioc.ac.cn

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Oxidative coupling<sup>[2,3]</sup>



Redox-neutral Strategy<sup>[4,6]</sup>



This work:



**Scheme 1.** The formation of C-C/C-X (X = N or O) bonds through rhodium(III)-catalyzed direct coupling of aromatic substrates with alkynes.

ment of a mild rhodium(III)-catalyzed redox-neutral C–H functionalization of *N*-phenoxyacetamides with alkynes for the synthesis of *ortho*-hydroxyphenyl-substituted enamides,<sup>[9]</sup> a highly atom-economical process (Scheme 1). Furthermore, an unexpected synthesis of valuable benzofuran derivatives through C-C/C–O bond formation was accomplished by simply switching the reaction conditions.

In preliminary experiments, N-phenoxyacetamide  $(1a)^{[10]}$ was treated with [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>]<sub>2</sub>] (2.5 mol%), CsOAc (25 mol%), and diphenylacetylene (2a, 1.2 equiv) in MeOH (0.4 M) at room temperature for 16 hours, and the desired product 3a was obtained in 82% yield (Table 1, entry 1). The structure of 3a was confirmed by NMR spectroscopy, as well as IR, HRMS, and X-ray crystallography.<sup>[11]</sup> The reaction was not sensitive to air or moisture and the addition of water did not affect the yield (Table 1, entry 2). No product formation was observed in the absence of the rhodium catalyst or CsOAc additive (Table 1, entries 3 and 4). Some other acetate additives<sup>[1g]</sup> were tested. Slightly lower yields were obtained with AgOAc and NaOAc (Table 1, entries 5 and 6). Other alcoholic solvents such as EtOH were not as good as MeOH (Table 1, entry 7). Employing [Cp\*Rh(OAc)<sub>2</sub>] as the catalyst gave a result similar to that obtained with the [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>}<sub>2</sub>]/ CsOAc system (Table 1, entry 8).

With the optimized reaction conditions in hand, we first explored the reaction scope for the synthesis of *ortho*-hydroxyphenyl-substituted enamides (**3**; Scheme 2). Several functional groups, such as hydroxy (**3** f), ester (**3g**, **3h**, **3i**), and

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[a] Reaction conditions: **1a** (0.2 mmol), **2a** (0.24 mmol), [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>}] (2.5 mol%), and additives in solvent (0.5 mL) at room temperature for 16 h under air. [b] Yields of isolated products. [c] Reaction was run under  $N_2$ . [d] Reaction was conducted in the absence of [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>}<sub>2</sub>]. [e]  $[Cp*Rh(OAc)_2]$  (2.5 mol%) was used as the catalyst.  $Cp*=C_5Me_5$ , n.r. = no reaction.



Scheme 2. Reaction scope for the synthesis of the ortho-hydroxyphenylsubstituted enamides 3 under reaction conditions A: 1 (0.2 mmol), 2 (0.24 mmol), [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>}<sub>2</sub>] (2.5 mol%), and CsOAc (0.25 equiv) in MeOH (0.5 mL) at room temperature for 16 h under air. Yields for isolated products are given. [a] Amberlite IRA-400 (OH) (40 mg) was added. [b] Contained an inseparable mixture of isomers; the ratio was determined by <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectroscopy.

ketone (3i) groups, were well tolerated in this reaction. As shown in Scheme 2, a range of internal alkynes are viable in this reaction. Symmetrical diaryl acetylenes bearing various substituents reacted smoothly, thus affording the corresponding product 3 in moderate to good yields (3a-3d). Insertion of aryl-alkyl disubstituted alkynes resulted in high regioselectivity with the aryl-substituted carbon center being installed on the acetamido group (3e, 3f). It is worth mentioning that both electron-deficient alkynes and ynamides participated well in this reaction yielding single regioisomers (3g-3j). When electron-deficient alkynes were employed, an anionexchange resin (Amberlite IRA-400) was added to obtain a decent yield of the enamides (3g-3i). Of note, dialkyl alkynes provided low yields of the desired product and no reaction occurred using terminal alkynes. Different substituted N-phenoxyacetamides were also tested and the reaction provided the desired product regardless of the electronic properties of the substituents (3k-3o). When N-(m-tolyloxy)acetamide was used, the arene rhodation occurred at the less-hindered site (31). In contrast, 3-trifluoromethyl-substituted N-phenoxyacetamide gave a mixture of two regioisomers.

During the scope studies for the synthesis of orthohydroxyphenyl-substituted enamides, we found that additives were vital to the reaction outcome when using the estersubstituted alkynes 2g-2i as substrates. For example, when 2g was subjected to reaction conditions A, only a low yield of 3g was detected and the predominant product was the benzofuran 4g (Table 2, entry 1). While addition of base such as

<b>Table 2:</b> Reaction optimization for benzoturan synthesis. <sup>1-1</sup>							
la	ONHAG	$\begin{array}{c c} R^{1} \\ \hline \\ R^{2} \\ R^{2} \\ R^{2} \\ R^{2} \\ R^{3} \\ R^{2} \\ R$	$\begin{array}{c} \text{OH} \\ \text{AC}\left(0.25 \text{ equiv}\right) \\ \text{ent, RT, 16 h} \\ \text{Ph} \\ \text{R}^2 = \text{CO}_2\text{Me} \end{array} $		$\mathbf{A}^{\mathbf{O}} \mathbf{R}^{\mathbf{A}}$		
Entry	2	Solvent	Additives (equiv) <sup>[b]</sup>	Yield   3	[%] <sup>[c]</sup>		
1	2 g	MeOH	-	6	84		
2	2 g	MeOH	Amberlite IRA-400 (OH) <sup>[d]</sup>	69	11		
3	2 g	$CH_2Cl_2$	_	trace	94		
4	2 a	$CH_2Cl_2$	_	trace	79		
5 <sup>[e]</sup>	2 a	$CH_2CI_2$	HOAc (1.2)	trace	88		
6 <sup>[e]</sup>	2 g	$CH_2CI_2$	HOAc (1.2)	trace	90		

[a] Reaction conditions: 1a (0.2 mmol), 2 (0.24 mmol), [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>}] (2.5 mol%), CsOAc (0.25 equiv), and other additives in solvent (0.5 mL) at room temperature for 16 h under air. [b] Additives besides CsOAc. [c] Yields of isolated products. [d] Amberlite IRA-400 (OH) (40 mg) were added. [e] 1a/2=1.2:1.

NaOH, Cs<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, pyridine, or DMAP suppressed the reaction, anion-exchange resin (Amberlite IRA-400) was effective for improving the yield of 3g (Table 1, entry 2). To our delight, simply changing the solvent from methanol to CH2Cl2 significantly increased the yield of 4g (Table 1, entry 3). Since the benzofuran moiety is abundant in biologically active molecules, these results prompted us to reinvestigate the reaction conditions for other internal alkynes to produce the benzofuran selectively. Finally, reaction conditions B,

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r r These are not the final page numbers! employing  $CH_2Cl_2$  as solvent and acetic acid (1.2 equiv) as an additive, were found to be general for benzofuran synthesis, thus affording **4a** and **4g** in good yields (Table 1, entries 5 and 6).

The scope for the synthesis of benzofurans was next assessed with various internal alkynes and different substituted *N*-phenoxyacetamides (Scheme 3). The reaction pro-



**Scheme 3.** Reaction scope for the synthesis of the benzofurans 4 under reaction conditions B: 1 (0.24 mmol), **2** (0.2 mmol),  $[{Cp*RhCl_2}_2]$  (2.5 mol%), CsOAc (0.25 equiv), and HOAc(1.2 equiv) in CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (0.5 mL) at room temperature for 12–48 h, under air. Yields of isolated products are given. [a] Contained an inseparable mixture of isomers; the ratio was determined by <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectroscopy.

ceeded smoothly under reaction conditions B, thus leading to the corresponding benzofurans in moderate to good yields from symmetrical diaryl acetylenes, aryl–alkyl disubstituted alkynes, electron-deficient alkynes and ynamide reacting with *N*-phenoxyacetamide. In the case of 3-phenyl-2-propyn-1-ol, a mixture of regioisomers (**4f** and **4f**') was observed. In contrast, a single product (**3f**) was formed with the same substrates under reaction conditions A. The difference in regioselectivity might be explained by a more pronounced coordinating effect of the hydroxy group with rhodium in  $CH_2Cl_2$  compared to that in MeOH. Substituted *N*-phenoxyacetamides such as methyl-, 4-fluoro-, and 3-trifluoromethylsubstituted *N*-phenoxyacetamide, can also be efficiently converted into the corresponding benzofurans.

To gain a better mechanistic understanding (Scheme 4),  $^{[3g,6b-d]}$ **1a** was treated with a catalytic amount of [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>}<sub>2</sub>] and



**Scheme 4.** Deuteration experiments and the study of the kinetic isotope effects.

CsOAc in deuterated methanol. After stirring at room temperature for 3 hours, deuterium was incorporated exclusively at the *ortho* position to the directing group. In contrast, no deuterium incorporation was found in the absence of CsOAc. These experiments indicated that the first step of the reaction may be a facile cyclometalation, and the acetate anion is crucial to this step.<sup>[1g]</sup> When the reaction was conducted in deuterated methanol for **1a** and **2f** under reaction conditions A for 3 hours, deuterium incorporation was not observed in the unreacted **1a** and product **3f**. The KIE was determined to be 1.4 and 1.5 under the reactions conditions A and B, respectively, thus indicating that the C–H bond-cleavage process is not involved in the rate-determining step.

Experiments were conducted to test whether the benzofuran product **4** could be obtained from the enamide product **3**. Under the reaction conditions A and B, neither **3a** nor **3g** could be converted into benzofuran products. Furthermore, no trace of **4a** was observed when **3a** was treated with 2 equivalents of triflic acid, acetic acid, or TFA in  $CH_2Cl_2$ .<sup>[12]</sup> From these experiments, we believe that the products **3** and **4** are produced through different pathways, the selectivities of which are influenced by the solvents and additives.

The unexpected selectivity prompted us to further investigate the solvent and additive effects. Experiments (Table 3) showed that the selectivity was controlled mainly by the solvent. No reaction occurred in strongly coordinating solvents, such as DMSO and DMF. While methanol and ethylene glycol gave the enamide **3e** in high yield, sterically hindered alcohols (*i*PrOH, *t*BuOH, *t*AmOH) and noncoordinating solvents (CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, toluene) gave the benzofuran **4e** as the major product. A mixed solvent (MeOH/CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>=1:1) afforded **3e** in good selectivity (Table 3, entry 8), thus suggesting that the presence of a weakly coordinating solvent favored the formation of the enamide product. Acetic acid

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PhOHAc 1a	Me :+    [{Cp*RhCl <sub>2</sub> } <sub>2</sub> ] (2. CsOAc (0.25 e Solvent, RT, <b>2e</b>	5 mol%) iquiv) 16 h Me Ph 3e	Ac	Me 4e
Entry	Solvent	Additives (equiv) <sup>[b]</sup>	Yield [%] <sup>[b]</sup>	
			3 e	4e
1	MeOH	-	84	7
2	ethylene glycol	-	72	25
3	iPrOH	-	31	53
4	<i>t</i> BuOH	-	10	79
5	<i>t</i> AmOH	-	10	76
6	$CH_2CI_2$	-	11	67
7	toluene	-	12	65
8	MeOH/CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub> (1:1)	-	75	14
9	MeOH	HOAc (1.2)	84	16
10	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	HOAc (1.2)	trace	83 <sup>[c]</sup>

[a] Reaction conditions: **1a** (0.2 mmol), **2e** (0.24 mmol),  $[{Cp*RhCl_2}_2]$ (2.5 mol%), CsOAc (0.25 equiv), in solvent (0.5 mL) at room temperature for 16 h under air. [b] Determined by <sup>1</sup>H NMR analysis of the crude reaction mixture using trimethoxybenzene as the internal standard. [c] Yields of the isolated products.

can enhance the yield of 4e in  $CH_2Cl_2$  but is not crucial for the selectivity (Table 3, entries 9 and 10).

Compared with the [{Cp\*RhCl<sub>2</sub>]/CsOAc system, similar results were gained with [Cp\*Rh(OAc)<sub>2</sub>] as the catalyst, thus indicating that [Cp\*Rh(OAc)<sub>2</sub>] might be the active catalyst. On the basis of deuteration experiments, we proposed<sup>[13]</sup> the first step to be facile arene rhodation (**A**), which is followed by alkyne insertion, thus affording the seven-membered rhodacycle intermediate **B** (Scheme 5).<sup>[3n,14]</sup> The structure of the products **3g–3i**, **4g–4i** demonstrated that the alkyne was inserted into the Rh–C bond rather than the Rh–N bond of **A**. The dramatic solvent effect on the selectivity can be explained by the coordinating ability of the solvent. Weakly coordinating solvents, such as methanol, might stabilize **B** by forming an 18-electron species, which could undergo reductive elimination/oxidative addition (pathway a) to deliver the enamide product **3**.<sup>[15]</sup> Since d<sup>6</sup> rhodium(III) species can



undergo reductive elimination readily<sup>[3n,16]</sup> and the N–O bond could be reduced by rhodium(I),<sup>[17]</sup> we envisioned the Rh<sup>III</sup>/Rh<sup>I</sup>/Rh<sup>III</sup> cycle to be feasible. Otherwise, in noncoordinating or bulky solvents, the N–Rh bond in **B** might be protonated more easily, thus affording the intermediate **E**. Since *N*-phenoxyacetamide is a known precursor of the phenoxemium ion in the presence of acid,<sup>[18]</sup> an intramolecular substitution<sup>[6i]</sup> might occur to form the C–O bond and

break the N–O bond with the aid of acetic acid.<sup>[19]</sup> In contrast with diaryl acetylenes and aryl-alkyl alkynes, ester-substituted alkynes afforded benzofurans predominantly, even in methanol (Table 2, entry 1). We reasoned that the vinyl–rhodium bond in **B** (Scheme 5), starting from ester-substituted alkynes, is more nucleophilic and is beneficial for the substitution pathway b. For the reaction of estersubstituted alkynes, an anion-exchange resin was necessary to get high selectivity of enamide product (Table 2, entry 2). These results indicated that neutralizing the acetic acid produced in the reaction disfavored the formation of the benzofuran, and is in accord with our proposed mechanism.

In conclusion, employment of a novel oxidizing directing group, a mild rhodium(III)catalyzed C–H functionalization for the synthesis of *ortho*-hydroxyphenyl-substituted enamides or benzofurans with high selectivity was developed. Considering the valuable structure of the products and good functionality tolerance, these reactions should have potential synthetic utility. Additional mechanism studies on the unexpected chemoselectivity and more transformations starting from N-phenoxyacetamides are being carried out in our laboratory.

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Scheme 5. Proposed mechanism.

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## Communications



G. Liu,\* Y. Shen, Z. Zhou, X. Lu\* \_\_\_\_\_

Rhodium(III)-Catalyzed Redox-Neutral Coupling of *N*-Phenoxyacetamides and Alkynes with Tunable Selectivity



**Give it a tweak**: A novel oxidizing directing group was developed for a rhodium-(III)-catalyzed C-H functionalization of *N*-phenoxyacetamides with alkynes. A small change in the reaction conditions leads to either *ortho*-hydroxyphenyl-substituted enamides or cyclization to deliver benzofurans with high selectivity (see scheme;  $Cp^* = C_5Me_5$ ).

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