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Asymmetric Total Synthesis of (+)-Ovafolinins A and B

Xianhe Fang,[a] Lei Shen, [a] Xiangdong Hu* [a]

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(+)-Ovafolinins A and B are two homologous lignans containing unique polycyclic skeletons. Benefiting from a high diastereoselective alkylation of (S)-Taniguchi lactone, a double Friedel-Crafts reaction, a global debenzylation and a $Cu(OAc)_2$-enabled benzylic oxidative cyclization, we present herein an efficient synthetic approach to (+)-ovafolinins A and B.

Lignans are a large family of natural products widely existing in plants and our food sources, such as wheat, soybeans, broccoli and strawberry.[1] Many important biological properties including anticancer,[2] antiviral,[3] antioxidant activities[4] and alleviating menopausal symptoms, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease[5] have been disclosed from biological evaluations of this family. In 2010, ovafolinin A, ovafolinin B and other three lignans were discovered during Yun and coworkers' explorations on Lyonia ovalifolia var. elliptica, a deciduous tree growing in China and Japan.[6] Ovafolinin B was also found in Sinocalamus affinis (Rendle) McClure (Poaceae),[7] a widely cultivated traditional Chinese medicine named "Ci Zhu Li" and applied in treatments for various diseases including cough and phlegm in China.[8] Structurally, ovafolinin A has a particular polycyclic skeleton containing an aryl tetralin unit with a tetrahydrofuran motif and a seven-membered benzoxepin bridged-ring. Ovafolinin B possesses very similar framework except the opening of the tetrahydrofuran ring. The first asymmetric synthesis of (+)-ovafolinins A and B was achieved by Barker and co-workers[9] employing an acyl-Claisen rearrangement developed in their laboratory.[10] The unique polycyclic skeleton was achieved through an interesting cascade cyclization enabled by a bulky protecting group. As the pioneering work, Barker and coworkers' synthesis demonstrated an expedient pathway to the unique skeleton of (+)-ovafolinins A and B. Furthermore, based on optical rotation comparisons between the synthetic compounds (+154.8 (c = 0.16, MeOH) for (+)-ovafolinin A, +150.0 (c = 0.26, MeOH) for (+)-ovafolinin B) [9] and the natural samples (-37.3 (c = 0.36, MeOH) for ovafolinin A, +52.0 (c = 0.26, MeOH) [6] and +43.3 (c = 0.12, MeOH)[7] for ovafolinin B), the exploration convincingly suggested that natural ovafolinins A and B were both isolated in scalemic mixtures. Attracted by their architectural complexity, we started our synthesis with the purpose to devise a new, efficient, and asymmetric route to these lignans.

Based on our retrosynthetic analysis (Figure 1), (+)-ovafolinin A (**1**) and (+)-ovafolinin B (**2**) could be constructed from three building blocks: phenol **5**, bromide **8** and (S)-Taniguchi lactone (**9**). The diastereoselective alkylation between **9** and **8** will be a feasible strategy to set up initially two stereogenic centers of **1** and **2**. For introduction of the top-right aromatic ring and formation of the central six-membered ring, a double Friedel-Crafts reaction process between **5** and **6** was originally proposed. An intramolecular Friedel-Crafts hydroxyalkylation of **6** could furnish the central six-membered ring first. Subsequently, intermediate **4** could be formed from a diastereoselectively intermolecular Friedel-Crafts alkylation with **5**. As a related precedent, Takayama and coworkers reported a gentle construction of complex bridged ring frames through a double Friedel-Crafts reaction between acetal and two different aromatic rings.[11] Regarding the construction of the seven-membered benzoxepin bridged-ring unit, we imagined that a dehydration cyclization in **4** could be a reasonable solution. Three benzyl protecting groups were designed in **3** for the convenience of synthesis. In light of the close structural relationship of **1** and **2** and their simultaneous generation in synthesis of Barker and coworkers, we envisaged that **1** could be reached through a benzylic oxidative cyclization of **2**.

Our synthesis started with the preparation of bromide **8** (Scheme 1). The starting material was the commercially available syringaldehyde (**10**). After the benzyl protection, reduction and bromination, **8** can be obtained in 66% overall yield. The diastereoselective alkylation of (S)-Taniguchi lactone (**9**) is a reliable strategy to introduce two adjacent stereogenic centers with defined absolute and relative configurations in synthesis of natural products.[12] According to Kieseritzky's approach,[13] **9** can be prepared in enantiomerically pure form over three steps. The alkylation process between **8** and **9** successfully afforded **7** in excellent stereoselectivity. The treatment of **7** with excess amount of benzyl bromide under basic conditions opened the lactone unit smoothly,[14]

[a] Key Laboratory of Synthetic and Natural Functional Molecule Chemistry of Ministry of Education, College of Chemistry & Materials Science, Northwest University, Xi'an 710127, China. Xiangdonghu@nwu.edu.cn

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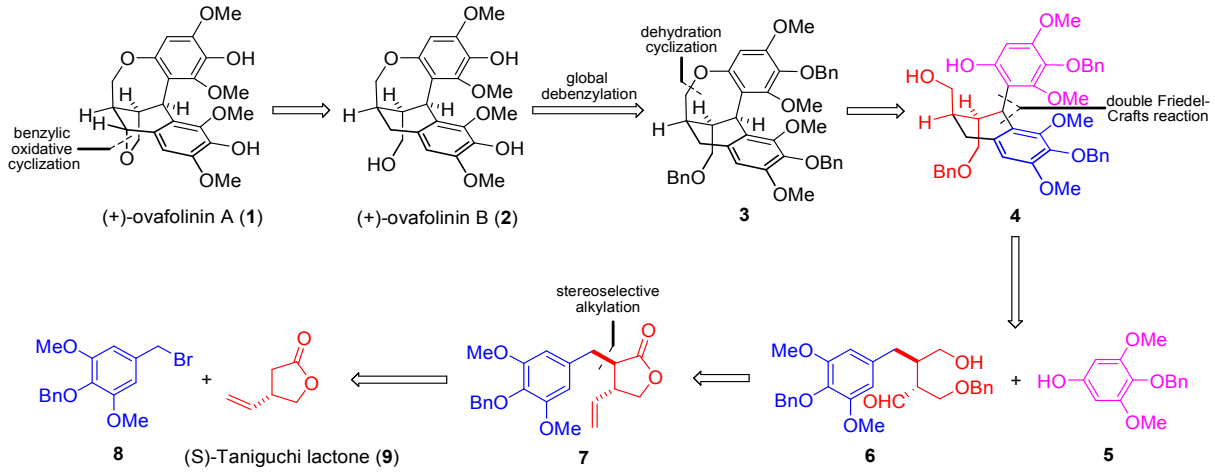
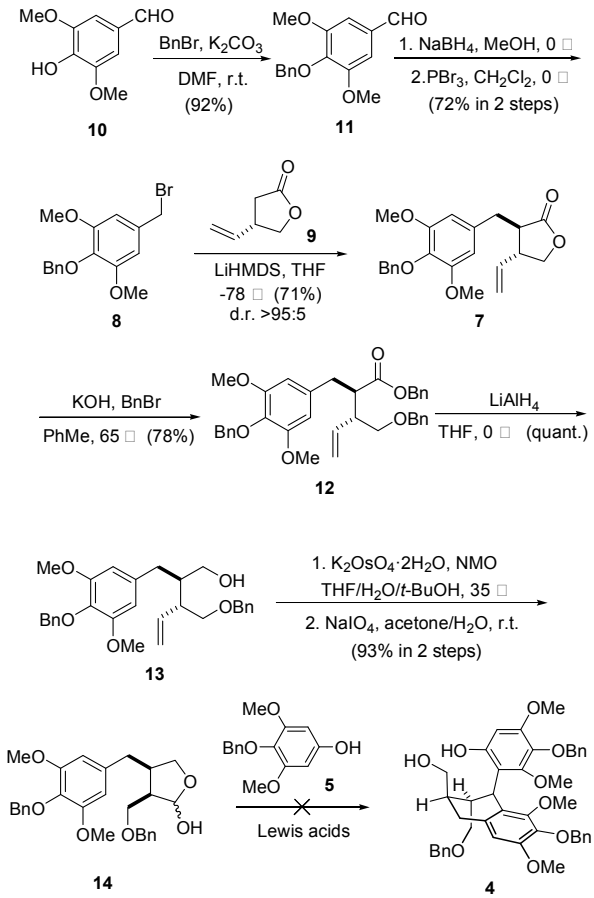
Figure 1. Our original retrosynthetic analysis of (+)-ovafolinins A and B



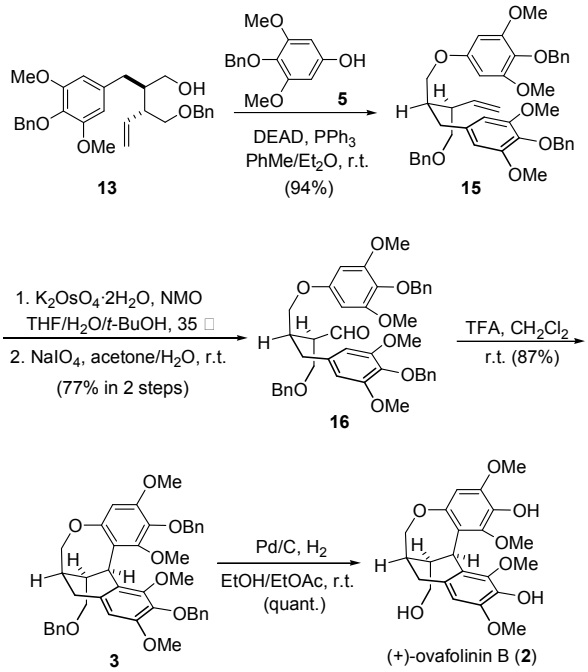
generating ester **12** in 78% yield. After the subsequent reduction, product **13** was subjected to the vinyl oxidation. The product was hemiacetal **14** generated from the addition of hydroxy to the aldehyde group. The originally proposed double Friedel-Crafts reaction between **5**[15] and **14** was then examined with various Lewis acids. However, no consumption of **5** was observed in all cases.[16] As a result, intermolecular Friedel-Crafts reaction seems not a feasible method to couple the fragment **5** with **14**.

Therefore, we moved our attention to introduce motif **5** into the molecule before the construction of the carbon skeleton. Starting again from **13**, motif **5** was readily connected with **13** through a Mitsunobu transformation (Scheme 2). Following vinyl oxidation treatments established the aldehyde group in **16**. Notably, during the construction of the unique polycyclic skeletons of **1** and **2**, Barker and coworkers explored cascade cyclization of compounds similar to **16**. The bulky tert-butyldiphenylsiyl protecting group on the bottom-left hydroxy was found pivotal to enable the expected cyclization. However, methoxymethyl protection will lead to

Scheme 1. Attempt on synthesis of **4**



Scheme 2. Total synthesis of (+)-ovafolinin B (**2**)



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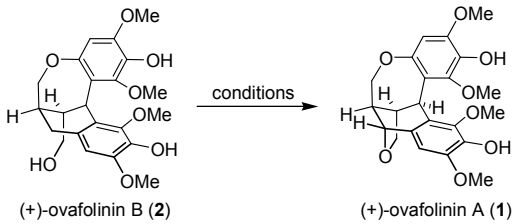
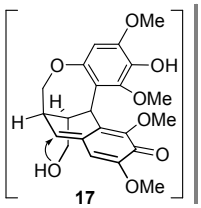
Scheme 3. Synthesis of (+)-ovafolinin A





conditions	yields of **1**
$PhI(OAc)_2$, DCM, r.t.	28%
Ag_2O, DCM, r.t.	55%
DDQ, 1,4-dioxane, r.t.	76%
$Cu(OAc)_2$, MeCN, 65 □	91%
TBAF, air, THF, r.t.	52%
air, neat, r.t.	< 5%

decomposition products.[9] In our case, protections of three hydroxy groups in **16** are all benzyl groups. To our delight, treatment of **16** with trifluoroacetic acid established successfully the expected polycyclic skeleton through basically a double Friedel-Crafts reaction process, affording **3** in 87% yield. The subsequent hydrogenation removed all three benzyl protections and gave (+)-ovafolinin B (**2**) in quantitative yield. Noteworthy, the final de-protection process in Barker's synthesis led to formation of not only **2** but also **1**, both in poor yields. In our synthesis, there was no formation of **1** observed during the debenzylation process of **2**.

With the successful development of an asymmetric route to **2**, we focused on the synthesis of **1**. We envisaged that the benzylic oxidation cyclization of **2** could lead to the formation of *p*-benzoquinone methide intermediate **17**. And the following conjugated addition from the vicinal hydroxy group will furnish **1** in the end. Therefore, **2** was submitted to various conditions reported for formation of benzoquinone methide intermediates. The employment of $PhI(OAc)_2$[17] resulted in the generation of **1** but in poor yield. The oxidation with Ag_2O[18] and DDQ[19] could significantly improve the formation of **1**, respectively. The best result was obtained from the treatment with $Cu(OAc)_2$,[20] affording **1** in 91% yield. Barker's condition was also checked, which lead to the formation of **1** in moderate yield after the complete consumption of **2**. Due to our curiosity, the aerial oxidation of **2** was checked under neat condition. Only trace amount of **1** can be formed after three days.

After the synthesis of **1** and **2** completed, the optical rotation properties of our synthetic (+)-ovafolinins A and B were checked. The data (+159.5, (*c* = 0.36, MeOH) for **1** and +166.0 (*c* = 0.16, MeOH) for **2**) are close to those observed by Baker and coworkers, which supports Barker's conclusion that natural ovafolinins A and B were both isolated in scalemic mixtures.

Conclusions

In summary, an asymmetric synthetic approach to (+)-ovafolinins A and B has been developed. The entire synthetic route features with a high stereoselective alkylation of (S)-Taniguchi lactone, a double Friedel-Crafts reaction process, a global debenzylation and a $Cu(OAc)_2$-enabled benzylic oxidative cyclization. As the result, the synthesis (+)-ovafolinin B has been completed in 11 linear steps and 23% total yield. And the synthesis of (+)-ovafolinin A has been achieved in 12 linear steps and 21% total yield.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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