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Photoinduced transition-metal and external photosensitizer free cross-coupling of aryl triflates with trialkyl phosphites†

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Photoinduced phosphonation of aryl triflates with trialkyl phosphites via a tandem single-electron-transfer, C–O bond cleavage and Arbuzov rearrangement process in the absence of transition-metal and external photosensitizer is reported herein. The protocol features good functional group compatibility and mild reaction conditions, providing various aryl phosphates in good to high yields. Furthermore, this strategy allows the late-stage phosphonation of complex and biologically active compounds.

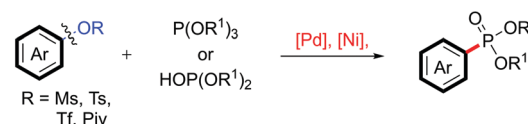
Phenols, widely existing in renewable biomasses such as lignin on Earth, are abundant aromatic feedstocks and important fine chemicals.¹ The chemical transformation of phenols has become a hot topic in the field of organic synthesis.² However, due to a highly reactive hydroxyl group and a very inert C–O bond with high bond dissociation energy (BDE), it is still a challenge to directly convert phenols *via* C–O bond cleavage. For this reason, pre-activation of phenols into phenol derivatives (*e.g.*, sulfonates, esters, carbamates, ethers and metal salts) fully eliminates the acidity of the hydroxyl group and effectively weakens the C–O bond with transition-metal. Consequently, catalytic C–O bond cleavage has emerged as the powerful strategy for the transformation of pre-activated phenols to high value-added products.³

Arylphosphonates, as an important class of organophosphorus compounds, have extensive applications in medicine,⁴ material science⁵ and organic synthesis.⁶ Transition-metal-catalyzed cross-coupling of aryl halides with simple phosphorus reagents including dialkyl phosphites and trialkyl phosphites has been well developed to access arylphosphonates.⁷ Phenol derivatives, being

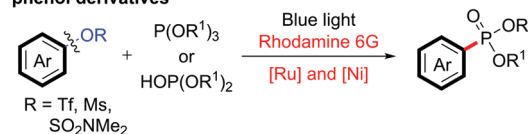
a class of aromatic electrophiles, have served as efficient and sustainable alternatives to aryl halides in the transition-metal-catalyzed phosphonation *via* C–O bond cleavage (Scheme 1A).⁸ Successively, photoinduced external photosensitizers-catalyzed cross-couplings of phenolic sulfonates with phosphorus reagents *via* SET process have been realized by König's⁹ and Yu's groups,¹⁰ respectively (Scheme 1B).

On the other hand, in terms of greenness, operational simplicity and product purification, photoinduced transition-metal and external photosensitizer free cross-coupling reactions provide a more attractive strategy for carbon–carbon and carbon–heteroatom bond cross-couplings.¹¹ Recently, our group reported light-enabled borylation and iodination of aryl triflates *via* direct C–O bond cleavage in absence of catalyst.¹² Herein, as a part of our ongoing research on transformation of phenol derivatives *via* C–O bond activation,¹³ photo-induced transition-metal and external photosensitizer free phosphonation of aryl triflates is reported (Scheme 1C).

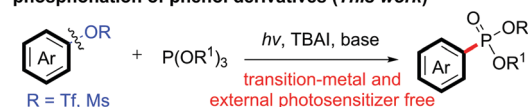
A. Transition-metal-catalyzed phosphonation of phenol derivatives



B. Photoinduced external photosensitizer catalyzed phosphonation of phenol derivatives



C. Photoinduced transition-metal and external photocatalyst free phosphonation of phenol derivatives (This work)



Scheme 1 Methods for phosphonation of phenol derivatives *via* C–O bond cleavage.

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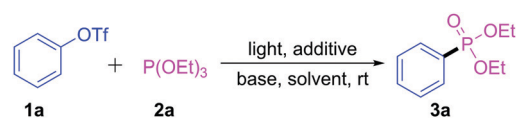
To investigate the conceived phosphonation of aryl triflates *via* photo-induced C–O bond cleavage, phenyl triflate (**1a**) and triethyl phosphate (**2a**) were selected as standard substrates. Our preliminary attempt with a mixture of 0.1 mmol **1a**, 0.4 mmol **2a** and NaI (0.5 equiv.) in acetonitrile (1.0 mL) under argon, which was irradiated by 254 nm light, gave the desired product **3a** in 16% yield (Table 1, entry 1). Encouraged by this result, various bases were tested. When organic bases, such as Et₃N, DIPEA and DBU were used, the yield of **3a** was enhanced to 30% (entries 2–4). Compared to organic bases, inorganic bases provided superior yields of **3a**, up to 63% yield when K₂CO₃ was used (entries 5–8). Conducting the reaction without NaI caused a significant inhibition on the product formation, which indicated that iodide salt was crucial for this reaction (entry 9). Thus, other iodide salts, such as KI, LiI and TBAI, were explored (entries 10–12), increasing the yield to 67% with TBAI (entry 12). Then, other solvents including DMF, EtOAc and THF were examined, and all showed lower efficiency than CH₃CN (entries 13–15). Increasing or reducing the amount of TBAI did not improve the formation of **3a** (entries 16 and 17). Adjusting the loading of K₂CO₃ resulted in a slightly lower yield (entries 18 and 19). When the reaction of **1a** (0.1 mmol) and **2a**

(0.3 mmol) was performed in CH₃CN (0.5 mL), the C–P bond formation product **3a** was obtained in 71% NMR yield and 66% isolated yield (entry 20). No product was detected when the reaction mixture was either irradiated by blue LED or run in the dark, suggesting that the light (254 nm) is indispensable in this phosphonation process (entries 21 and 22). Notably, when 5.0 μ L H₂O was added into the reaction system, we obtained 68% yield indicating that this reaction is not sensitive to water (entry 23). However, the yield was reduced to 52% when the reaction was performed under air atmosphere (entry 24).

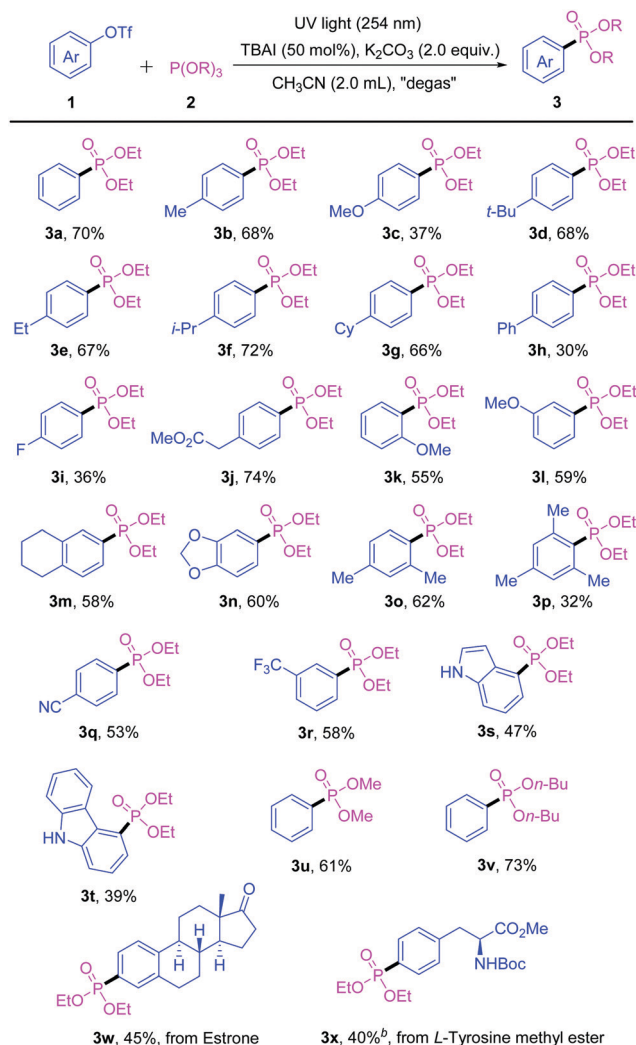
With the optimized reaction conditions established, the scope of this phosphonation was explored with 0.2 mmol scale of aryl triflates **1** and 3.0 equiv. of trialkyl phosphites under argon using 2.0 equiv. of K₂CO₃ as base and 0.5 equiv. of TBAI as additive in CH₃CN (1.0 mL), irradiated by light (254 nm). The phosphonation product **3a** was obtained in 70% isolated yield. A variety of aryl triflates equipped with different substituents on the aryl ring realized the phosphonation smoothly. The substrates bearing electron-donating groups including methyl, methoxyl, *tert*-butyl, ethyl, isopropyl and cyclohexyl were efficiently converted to the desired products **3b–3g** in moderate to high yields. Notably, π -extended aryl triflate **1h** was also found to successfully engage in this photoinduced phosphonation, affording the corresponding product **3h** with moderate yield. Besides halogen group such as F, the ester group was also tolerated, and the desired products **3i–3j** were formed in 36% and 74% yields, respectively. The phosphonation proceeded with similar efficiency when methoxyl substituted at *ortho*- or *meta*-position of aromatic ring, and the desired products **3k–3l** were generated in good yields. Tetrahydronaphthol derivative, as well as sesamol derivative, could be phosphonated under standard conditions, providing the corresponding products **3m–3n** in good yields. The reaction showed marked steric effect when 2,4-dimethyl and 2,4,6-trimethyl substituted substrates were investigated, generating the phosphonated product **3o** in good yield for the former but only moderate yield for the latter (**3p**). Aryl triflates bearing strong electron-withdrawing groups (CF₃ or CN) also gave the corresponding products **3q** and **3r** with moderate to good yields. Hetero-aromatic triflates, such as indole or carbazole triflate derivatives, could also be cross-coupled with triethyl phosphite, giving the phosphonated products **3s–3t** in moderate yields. For trialkyl phosphites, trimethyl phosphite and tributyl phosphite also reacted well, generating the desired aryl phosphates **3u–3v** in good yields under standard conditions. Furthermore, we further explored this transition-metal and external photocatalyst free process on the late-stage modification of biologically active phenolic compounds to avoid trace metal residues. Aryl triflate **1w** derived from estrone was efficiently converted into phosphonated product **3w** with 45% yield under standard conditions. The *L*-tyrosinate derivative, bearing an ester group and an amino group, also successfully generated the desired product **3x** in a moderate yield when 4.0 equiv. of K₂CO₃ was used (Table 2).

In addition, the reactivity of other aryl electrophiles was also investigated under standard conditions (Table 3). Aryl mesylates (**4a–4c**, **4i**) have similar reactivity to aryl triflates, and

Table 1 Optimization of the reaction conditions^a

				
Entry	Base	Solvent	Additive	Yield ^b (%)
1	—	CH ₃ CN	NaI	16
2	Et ₃ N	CH ₃ CN	NaI	19
3	DIPEA	CH ₃ CN	NaI	29
4	DBU	CH ₃ CN	NaI	30
5	KF	CH ₃ CN	NaI	37
6	CsF	CH ₃ CN	NaI	48
7	Cs ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	NaI	57
8	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	NaI	63
9	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	—	7
10	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	KI	63
11	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	LiI	60
12	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	67
13	K ₂ CO ₃	DMF	TBAI	35
14	K ₂ CO ₃	EtOAc	TBAI	16
15	K ₂ CO ₃	THF	TBAI	37
16 ^c	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	54
17 ^d	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	60
18 ^e	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	61
19 ^f	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	63
20 ^g	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	71(66)
21 ^{gh}	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	n.r.
22 ^{gi}	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	n.r.
23 ^{gj}	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	68
24 ^{gk}	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	TBAI	52

^a General conditions: **1a** (0.1 mmol), **2a** (0.4 mmol), base (2.0 equiv.), additive (0.5 equiv.), and solvent (1.0 mL) were irradiated by UV light (254 nm) for 24 h under argon atmosphere. ^b Yields were determined by ³¹P NMR using trimethyl phosphate as an internal standard; isolated yield was shown in parentheses. ^c TBAI (0.25 equiv.). ^d TBAI (1.0 equiv.). ^e K₂CO₃ (1.5 equiv.). ^f K₂CO₃ (3.0 equiv.). ^g **2a** (0.3 mmol), CH₃CN (0.5 mL). ^h Blue LED. ⁱ In the dark. ^j 5.0 μ L H₂O was added. ^k Under air atmosphere.

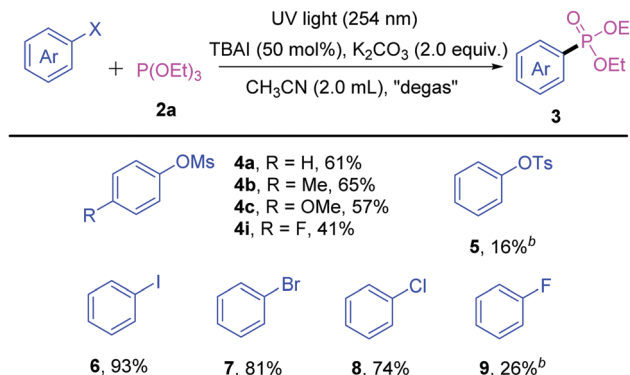
Table 2 Photo-induced Arbuzov-type reaction of aryl triflates with trialkyl phosphites^a

^a General conditions: 1 (0.2 mmol), 2 (0.6 mmol), K₂CO₃ (2.0 equiv.), TBAI (0.5 equiv.), and CH₃CN (1.0 mL) were irradiated by UV light (254 nm) for 24 h under argon atmosphere; isolated yields were given.
^b K₂CO₃ (4.0 equiv.).

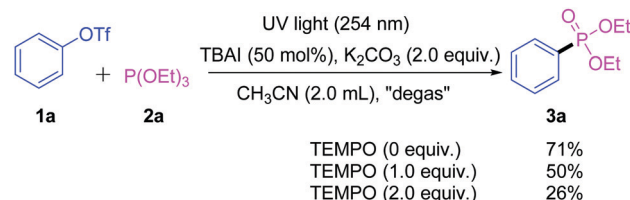
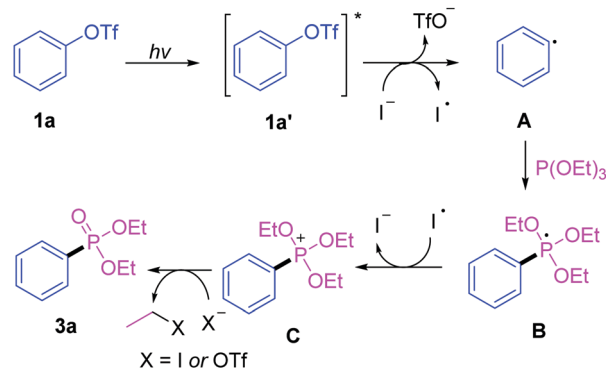
could also be phosphonated *via* C–O bond activation by this photoinduced strategy. When phenyl tosylate (5) was applied as aryl electrophile, it gave the product 3a. It is interesting to note that aryl halides, such as iodobenzene (6), bromobenzene (7) and chlorobenzene (8), showed excellent reactivity, affording the product 3a up to 93% yield. Despite high bond dissociation energy of unactivated C(sp²)–F, fluorobenzene (9) was also phosphonated with 26% yield *via* C–F bond cleavage.^{11r}

To gain insight into the reaction mechanism, radical trapping experiments were carried out with 2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidin-1-oxyl (TEMPO) as radical quencher under standard conditions (Scheme 2). The yield of phosphonated product 3a was gradually decreased with increasing the amount of TEMPO.

Based on the above results of radical trapping experiments and reported work,¹² a plausible mechanism was proposed in

Table 3 Photo-induced Arbuzov-type reaction of various aryl electrophiles with triethyl phosphite^a

^a General conditions: aryl electrophile (0.2 mmol), 2a (0.6 mmol), K₂CO₃ (2.0 equiv.), TBAI (0.5 equiv.), and CH₃CN (1.0 mL) were irradiated by UV light (254 nm) for 24 h under argon atmosphere; isolated yields were given. ^b Yields were determined by ³¹P NMR using trimethyl phosphite as an internal standard.

**Scheme 2** Radical trapping experiments.**Scheme 3** Tentative mechanism.

Scheme 3. The phenyl triflate 1a is irradiated by light to form excited-state 1a', which undergoes SET process with iodine anion to form phenyl radical A and iodine free radical. The radical A is captured by triethyl phosphite, providing an unstable P-centered radical B, followed by further oxidation by iodine free radical to form phosphorous cation C. The cation C undergoes Arbuzov-type rearrangement¹⁵ to generate the desired product 3a and ethyl iodide or ethyl trifluoromethane-sulfonate.

In conclusion, we have developed a photoinduced catalyst-free transformation of pre-activated phenols into arylphosphonate *via*

C–O cleavage. This aromatic Arbuzov-type reaction proceeded at room temperature with broad substrate scope in moderate to good yields in the absence of transition-metal and external photosensitizer. In addition, the method has been successfully employed in the late-stage phosphonation of biologically active phenolic compounds. The mechanistic investigations show that the reaction involves SET process, radical formation and Arbuzov-type rearrangement. This method provides a promising pathway for green synthesis of arylphosphorous compounds without external transition-metal catalysts or photosensitizer under mild conditions. The chemical transformations of other aryl electrophiles are underway in our laboratory.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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