Homogeneous Gold Catalysis

International Edition: DOI: 10.1002/anie.201502256
German Edition: DOI: 10.1002/ange.201502256

Gold-Catalyzed Cascade Cyclization of 2-Alkynyl-*N*-Propargylanilines by Rearrangement of a Propargyl Group**

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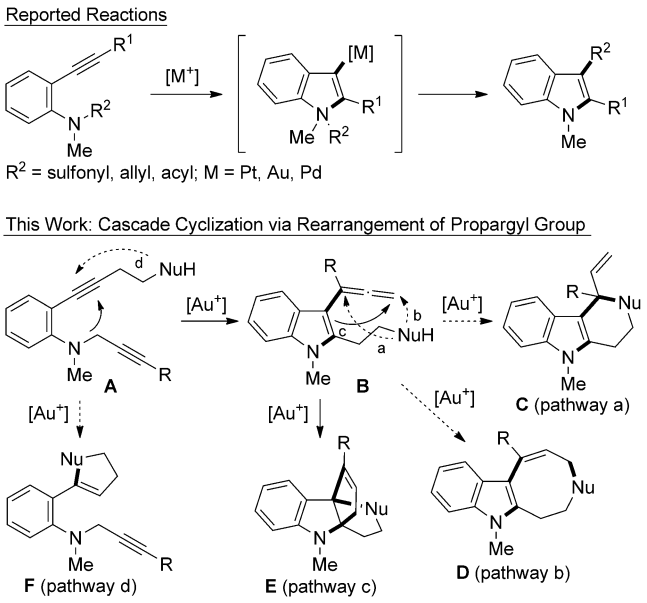
Abstract: *Gold catalysis enables direct construction of tetracyclic fused indolines through the migration of a propargyl substituent from an aniline nitrogen atom to the C3-position of an indole from 2-alkynyl-N-propargylanilines. This reaction provides rapid access to fused three-dimensional indolines in a single operation with the formation of four bonds and three rings.*

Homogeneous gold catalysts have emerged as a powerful tool for the syntheses of natural products and complex molecules.[1] Their π-acidity enables the activation of C–C multiple bonds, which undergo various kinds of transformations.[2] Among the compounds involved in these transformations, allenes are well known as useful building blocks for the construction of cyclic compounds.[2a,c,h,k,m] Despite a variety of efficient reactions, including hydroalkoxylation,[3] hydroamination,[3c,4] and hydroarylation,[3c,5] having so far been developed, the cyclization reactions of allenes bearing two nucleophilic sites[6] are still limited because of chemoselectivity issues. We propose that indole formation and a rearrangement cascade of *N*-propargylanilines is a promising strategy for the in situ preparation of this class of allenes.

The transition-metal-catalyzed cyclization of *o*-alkynylanilines is an efficient method for the construction of indoles.[7] Recently, several research groups have reported that certain substituents on the aniline nitrogen atom, including sulfonyl,[8] allyl,[9] and acyl groups,[10] can migrate to the C3-position of the indole via indolylmetal intermediates (Scheme 1).[11] Although these reactions are valuable for the preparation of synthetically useful 2,3-disubstituted indole derivatives, there have been no reports in which this type of migration reaction has been applied to cascade cyclizations. As part of our ongoing research on the development of gold-catalyzed cascade reactions for the direct construction of polycyclic heterocycles,[12] we envisaged that the migration of a propargyl group would generate an allene, which could undergo further cyclization reactions. Specifically, we postulated that the use of 2-alkynyl-*N*-propargylaniline **A** as a substrate would lead to the formation of an indole **B** bearing an allenyl group, and the subsequent hydroalkoxylation/amination with an internal nucleophile (pathways a and b) or hydroarylation with indole (pathway c) would produce the corresponding fused indoles **C** or **D**, or indoline **E** in a one-pot manner. The challenge of this strategy is favoring indole formation and migration over cyclization from an internal nucleophile (pathway d). Herein, we describe the gold-catalyzed cascade cyclization of 2-alkynyl-*N*-propargylanilines **A**, in which migration of the propargyl group and hydroarylation of an allene take place to give tetracyclic indolines of type **E**. To the best of our knowledge, this study represents the first example of the migration of a propargyl substituent from the aniline nitrogen atom.



Scheme 1. Transition-metal-catalyzed indole formation and rearrangement of *N* substituents.

Work to examine the feasibility of this strategy initially focused on the cyclization of *N*-propargylaniline **1a** (Table 1). The reaction of **1a** with 5 mol% $[PPh_3AuCl]/AgSbF_6$ in THF at 60 °C gave cyclization product **2a** in 13% yield (entry 1). Among the gold catalysts examined for this reaction, $[IPrAuCl]/AgSbF_6$ and $[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$ showed the highest activities, with compound **2a** being isolated in 74% yield in both cases (entries 3 and 4). Several other solvents were tested for the reaction, including toluene, 1,2-dichloroethane (DCE), CH_3NO_2, CH_3CN, and dioxane, but all these solvents led to a decrease in the yield of **2a** (entries 5–9). In contrast, the use of 2-propanol (*i*PrOH) led

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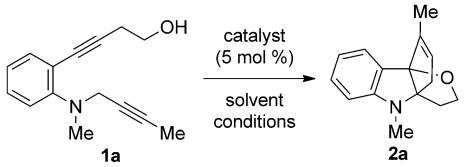
[**] This work was supported by a Grant-in-Aid for the Encouragement of Young Scientists (A) and Platform for Drug Design, Discovery, and Development from the MEXT (Japan). Y.T. is grateful for Research Fellowships from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) for Young Scientists.

Supporting information for this article is available on the WWW under http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/anie.201502256.

Table 1: Optimization of reaction conditions.



Entry	Catalyst	Solvent	Conditions	Yield [%][a]
1	$[PPh_3AuCl]/AgSbF_6$	THF	60 °C, 5 h	13
2	$[BrettPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	THF	60 °C, 1 h	49
3	$[IPrAuCl]/AgSbF_6$	THF	60 °C, 1 h	74
4	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	THF	60 °C, 1 h	74
5	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	toluene	60 °C, 2 h	41
6	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	DCE	60 °C, 1 h	16
7	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	CH_3NO_2	60 °C, 2 h	13
8	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	CH_3CN	60 °C, 2 h	58
9	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	dioxane	60 °C, 4 h	58
10	$[JohnPhosAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	*i*PrOH	60 °C, 2 h	81
11	$[IPrAuCl]/AgSbF_6$	*i*PrOH	60 °C, 1 h	81
12	$[IPrAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$	*i*PrOH	60 °C, 1 h	89
13	$AgSbF_6$	*i*PrOH	RT, 2 h	decomp[b]

[a] Yields of isolated products. [b] Complete consumption of starting material was observed.

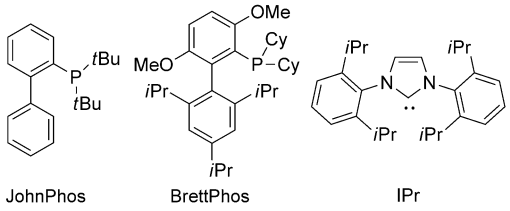
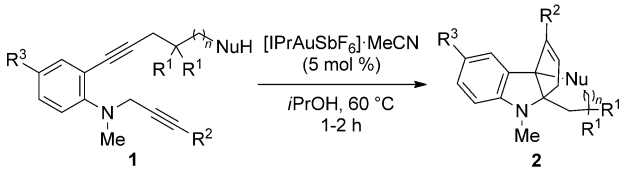
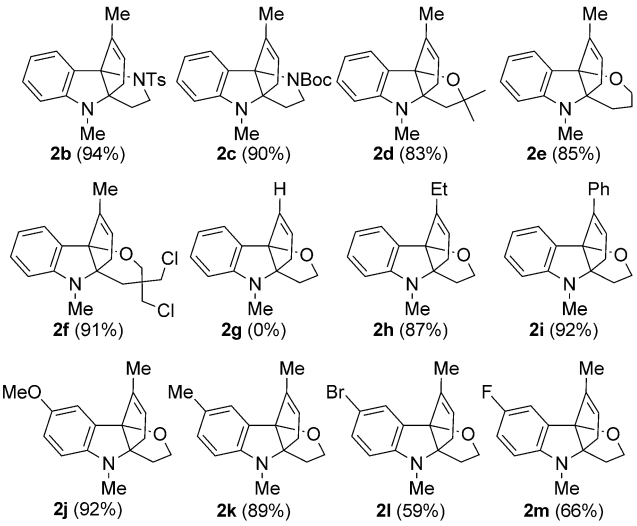


Table 2: Gold-catalyzed cyclization of 2-alkynyl-*N*-propargylanilines.[a]



	R^1	R^2	R^3	Nu	*n*		R^1	R^2	R^3	Nu	*n*
b	H	Me	H	NTs	0	**h**	H	Et	H	O	0
c	H	Me	H	NBoc	0	**i**	H	Ph	H	O	0
d	Me	Me	H	O	0	**j**	H	Me	OMe	O	0
e	H	Me	H	O	1	**k**	H	Me	Me	O	0
f	CH_2Cl	Me	H	O	1	**l**	H	Me	Br	O	0
g	H	H	H	O	0	**m**	H	Me	F	O	0

[a] Yields of isolated products.

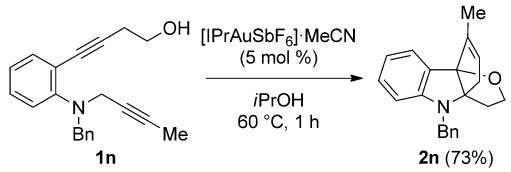


to an improvement in the yield to 81% (entry 10). The results of an extensive period of screening revealed that the advanced preparation of the gold catalyst ($[IPrAuSbF_6]\cdot MeCN$) led to a further improvement in the yield of the desired reaction to 89% (entry 12 versus entry 11). This increase was attributed to avoiding the detrimental effect of the remaining $AgSbF_6$ present in the reaction mixture. Actually, the treatment of **1a** with $AgSbF_6$ led to decomposition of aniline **1a** (entry 13).

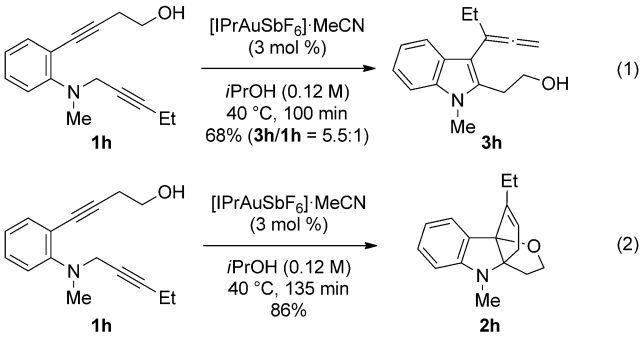
With the optimized conditions in hand (Table 1, entry 12), we investigated the scope of the reaction using a variety of different substrates (Table 2). Changing the internal nucleophile from an alcohol to a tosylamide or *tert*-butylcarbamate (NuH = NHTs or NHBoc; Ts = 4-toluenesulfonyl, Boc = *tert*-butoxycarbonyl) led to the formation of the pyrrolidine-fused indolines **2b** and **2c** in excellent yields (94% and 90%, respectively). The structure of indoline **2b** was confirmed by X-ray crystallography.[13] Aniline **1d** (R^1 = Me) bearing a sterically hindered alcohol also reacted efficiently to give **2d** (83%). Furthermore, anilines **1e** and **1f** bearing a longer carbon tether ($n = 1$) were smoothly converted into the corresponding indolines with a fused tetrahydropyran ring (**2e** and **2f**, 85% and 91%, respectively). Although aniline **1g** (R^2 = H) bearing a terminal alkyne decomposed under these conditions, anilines **1h** (R^2 = Et) and **1i** (R^2 = Ph) bearing an internal alkyne reacted to give indolines **2h** (87%) and **2i** (92%). Electron-donating and -withdrawing functional groups, including synthetically useful halogen substituents, were tolerated in the *para* position of the aniline moiety. Methoxy- or methyl-substituted anilines **1j** and **1k** provided indolines **2j** and **2k** in excellent yields (92% and 89%, respectively), while bromo- and fluoro-substituted anilines **1l** and **1m** gave the indolines **2l** and **2m** in slightly lower yields (59% and 66%, respectively). The decrease in the yields of **2l** and **2m** can be rationalized by the relatively low nucleophilicity of the indoles.[14]

Benzyl groups have been reported to migrate in some transition-metal-catalyzed cyclization reactions.[10b,11a] To determine the migratory aptitude of different functional groups towards the C3-position of the indole, aniline **1n** bearing propargyl and benzyl groups was subjected to the optimized conditions (Scheme 2). In this case, the propargyl group exhibited a greater migratory aptitude than the benzyl group, to give indoline **2n** as the major product in 73% yield. This result revealed that benzyl-type substituents can be used as nitrogen protecting groups for the current indoline formation.

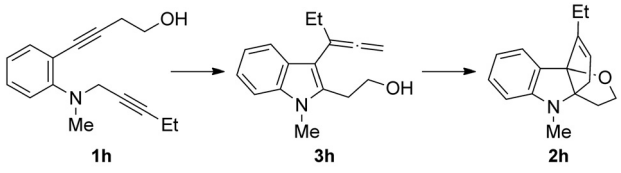
Several experiments were subsequently conducted to develop a deeper understanding of the mechanism of this reaction. In the first of these, the reaction of **1h** at 40 °C with 3 mol% of the catalyst was quenched after 100 min to give



Scheme 2. Gold-catalyzed cyclization of *N*-benzylaniline **1n**.



Scheme 3. Gold-catalyzed cyclization of *N*-propargylaniline **1h**.



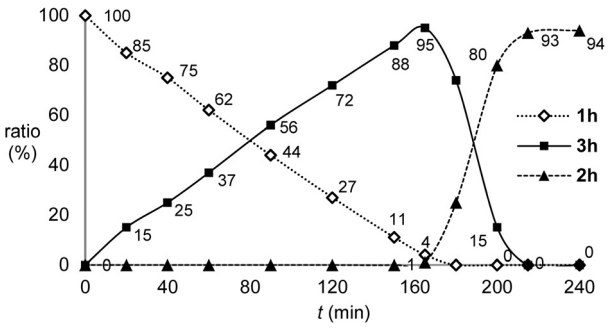
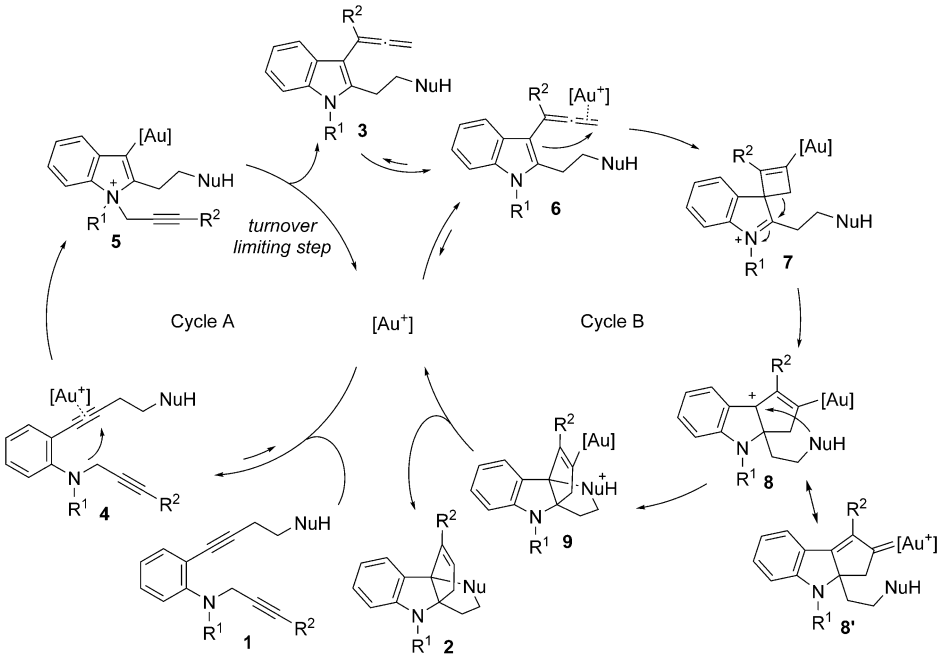


Figure 1. NMR spectroscopic monitoring of the reaction of **1h**. Reaction conditions: $[IPrAuSbF_6]$·MeCN (3 mol%), CD_3OD (0.01 M), $CHCl_2CHCl_2$ (internal standard), 40 °C.

allene **3h** as a mixture containing a small amount of the starting material [Scheme 3, Eq. (1); **3h**/**1h** = 5.5:1, 68% combined yield]. The low yield of isolated **3h** was attributed to the instability of the allene, which gradually decomposed during purification by column chromatography. When the reaction time was extended to 135 min, indoline **2h** was obtained in 86% yield [Eq. (2)]. The reaction of **1h** with 3 mol% $[IPrAuSbF_6]$·MeCN in CD_3OD at 40 °C was then monitored by ^1H NMR spectroscopy, using $CHCl_2CHCl_2$ as an internal standard (Figure 1). During the first period of the reaction, the conversion of aniline **1h** into allene **3h** proceeded at a constant rate. After 165 min, only 4% of the original amount of aniline **1h** remained in the reaction mixture, and **3h** was produced in 95% yield. Interestingly, the formation of indoline **2h** was only observed after almost complete consumption of **1h**, with a substantial amount of **2h** having been generated at 200 min. This result clearly demonstrates that the formation of indoline **2h** does not proceed without the gold catalyst. Furthermore, the gold catalyst selectively promotes the allene formation during the first part of the reaction.

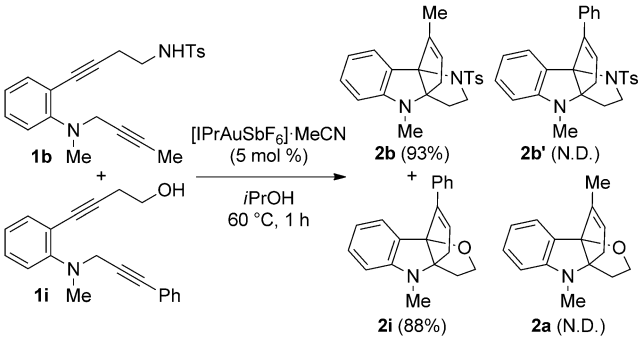
A reaction mechanism was proposed based on the results of these experiments (Scheme 4). The reaction begins with the coordination of a cationic gold catalyst to *o*-alkynylaniline **1** to give complex **4**, which undergoes a nucleophilic cyclization from the aniline nitrogen atom to give indole **5**. The subsequent 1,3-migration of the propargyl group from the nitrogen atom of indolylgold intermediate **5** to the C3-position of the indole gives allene **3**, which is activated by the gold catalyst to give complex **6**. Cyclization of the activated allene, followed by ring expansion of the resulting vinylgold intermediate **7** gives cationic intermediate **8**, which can be stabilized by the vinylgold moiety, as shown in **8′**. The reaction is then terminated by intramolecular nucleophilic addition and subsequent protodeauration of **9** to produce the fused indoline **2**.



Scheme 4. Postulated reaction mechanism.

The result of the NMR experiment can be rationalized as follows: cycle A is much slower than cycle B,[15] because of the slow nature of the propargyl migration step (Scheme 4), even though the indole formation step (i.e. **4** to **5**) is relatively fast. In other words, the presence of the relatively stable intermediate **5** in cycle A traps the gold catalyst, which therefore prevents cycle B from progressing prior to the completion of cycle A. It was hypothesized that the turnover-limiting step of this reaction would be the 1,3-migration of the propargyl group (i.e. **5** to **3**), and this result was supported in part by the fact that a related *N*,*N*-dimethylindolylgold intermediate has been isolated.[16,17]

A cross-over reaction was also conducted to provide further insights into the reaction mechanism (Scheme 5). Exposure of a mixture of anilines **1b** and **1i** to the optimized conditions gave the corresponding indolines **2b** and **2i**, respectively. Notably, the corresponding cross-over products **2b′** and **2a** were not detected in the reaction mixture. This result suggests that the migration of the propargyl group occurs in an intramolecular fashion.[18,19]



Scheme 5. Cross-over experiment.

In conclusion, we have developed a novel gold-catalyzed cascade cyclization reaction of 2-alkynyl-*N*-propargylanilines. The migration of the propargyl group leads to the formation of an indole bearing an allene moiety at the C3-position, which undergoes an intramolecular cyclization reaction with a pendant nucleophile to give a fused indoline. This reaction provides rapid access to fused indolines with three-dimensional shapes from starting materials having one-dimensional alkyne structures in a single operation that involves the formation of four bonds and three rings. NMR spectroscopic analysis revealed that the formation of the fused indoline only begins after the consumption of the 2-alkynyl-*N*-propargylaniline starting material. This approach could be used in combination with the versatile reactivity of allenes to allow the synthesis of fused indolines and indoles in a one-pot manner.

Keywords: allenes · gold · homogeneous catalysis · indolines · rearrangement

How to cite: *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2015**, *54*, 7862–7866
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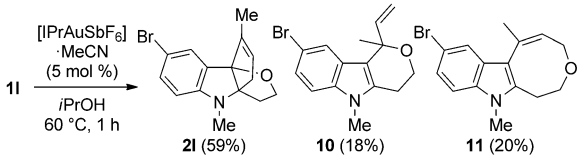
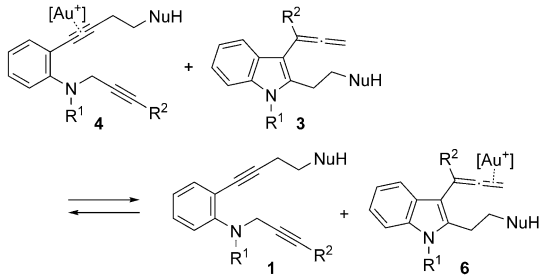
[13] See the Supporting Information for the X-ray crystal structure of indoline **2b**.

[14] In the reaction of **1l**, **10** (18%) and **11** (20%) were obtained as side products, through pathways a and b, respectively (see Scheme 1).



[15] The coordination of a cationic gold catalyst to a simple allene has been reported to be slightly favored over a simple alkyne. This allene preference was contrary to the result observed in the current study, where cycle B only started after the completion of cycle A. A plausible explanation for this observation is ligand exchange, which allows an equilibrium between intermediates **4** and **6** in the reaction, combined with the cyclobutene formation (i.e. **6** to **7**) being slower than that of the indole (i.e. **4** to **5**). For



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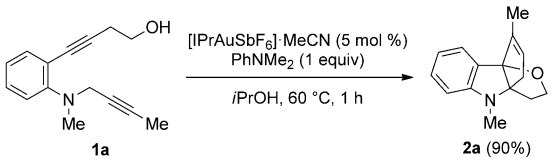
[16] For the isolation of a related vinylgold complex, see Z. Zeng, R. Kinjo, B. Donnadieu, G. Bertrand, *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2010**, *49*, 942; *Angew. Chem.* **2010**, *122*, 954.

[17] Another rationalization for the results of the NMR experiment would be that cycle B is hindered by the substrate **1** bearing a basic aniline moiety. However, this possibility is less likely considering the result of the following experiment: the reaction of **1a** in the presence of *N*,*N*-dimethylaniline (1 equiv) under the standard conditions gave the corresponding indoline **2a** in 90% yield, which is essentially the same result as the reaction in the absence of dimethylaniline (89%; Table 1, entry 12).



[18] For intramolecular migrations, see Refs. [10c, 11d,g,i,m].

[19] For intermolecular migrations, see Refs. [8, 11c,h,k].

Received: March 11, 2015
Published online: May 26, 2015

