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ARTICLE TYPE

Synthesis of Unsymmetric Tertiary Amines via Alcohol Amination

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⁵ The first one-pot selective-synthesis of unsymmetric tertiary amine is reported by the amination of two types of alcohols with primary amine via the development of a simple CuAlOx-HT catalyst and enables the synthesis of unsymmetric amines in a wide variety of primary amines and alcohols.

¹⁰ The development of alcohol amination reaction that allow the fast and environmentally compatible generation of secondary amine or tertiary amine as products directly from simple and readily available starting materials is at the forefront of fine chemical synthesis, and it entails a strong potential for industrial 15 developments. In this context, great progress has been made in the search for efficient catalytic processes for the reactions of various amines with primary and even secondary alcohols in the past decade, with state-of-the-art systems reported by the research groups of Williams, Beller, Fujita, Kempe, Crabtree, Peris, 20 Martín-Matute, andothers.^[1-8] Among these methods, the amination of alcohols by the use of borrowing hydrogen methodology^[9] (also known asthe hydrogen auto transfer process) has long been recognized as a highly atom economical and green method for the production of amines. In the above reports, widely 25 researches and attentions have been focused on the direct synthesis of tertiary aminefrom alcohols via a hydrogen borrowing mechanism. However, the tertiary amines are often derived from one alcohol, and therefore, the amine substituents are with the same structure (Scheme 1, A).^[10] The direct 30 transformation of primary amine into unsymmetric tertiary amine

is still a challenging reaction (Scheme 1, B).



Scheme 1. Symmetric (A) and unsymmetric tertiary amine (B) synthesis.

Generally, the benzylic alcohols are more easily to be activated ³⁵ comparing with aliphatic alcohols.^[9] These results inspire us a catalyst for unsymmetric amine synthesis might be developed if it can catalyze the amination of benzylic alcohol in short time, and following further reaction occurred with aliphatic alcohol. In our former report, we had found that the combination of nickel and ⁴⁰ copper can generate an active catalyst for the amination reaction of both aromatic and aliphatic alcohols.^[11] It was less active for the amination reaction of aliphatic alcohol but active enough for

aromatic alcohol amination. Therefore, it might a suitable catalyst

for the one-pot synthesis of unsymmetric amine with primary ⁴⁵ amine, and an aromatic and an aliphatic alcohol.

Based on our continuing study in alcohol amination reactions through borrowing-hydrogen methodology,^[11,12] here we present our new results of selective synthesis of unsymmetric tertiary amine via the development of a simple CuAlOx-HT catalyst for 50 the one-pot synthsis of unsymmetric tertiary amines (Fig. 1).

Unsymmetric tertiary amines with versatile structures can be synthesized with up to 98% yields.



Figure 1. An illustration of the CuAlOx-HT catalyst and the alcohol ⁵⁵ amination reaction for unsymmetric tertiary amine synthesis

The CuAlOx-HT catalysts were prepared by a modified hydrothermal method using Al(NO₃)₃and Cu(NO₃)₂ as precursors, and urea as precipitant. After being hydrothermal treated at 120 °C for 24 h, the solid sample was washed by deionized water, dried at 60 100°C in air and reduced under hydrogen flow at 370 °C. A series of CuAlOx-HT catalysts were obtained and denoted as Cu_mAl_nOx -HT (m : n = the molar ratios between Cu and Al). As a catalyst for control reaction, Cu2Al3Ox-CP was prepared with co-precipitation method. Further on, the CuAlOx-HT catalysts 65 were characterized by XPS, BET, XRD and TEM to explore their structures. The Cu_{2p} spectra suggested that metallic copper formed on all the catalyst surfaces (Table 1 and Fig. S2). In addition, the copper species were entrapped inside the AlOx. The surface Cu : Al ratio of Cu₂Al₃Ox-HT was 1 : 16 while the Cu : 70 Al ratio in the bulk catalyst was 1.82 : 3. XRD characterization confirmed the formation of metallic copper but small amount of Cu₂O was observable in catalysts Cu₂Al₃Ox-HT and Cu₁Al₂Ox-HT (Fig. S3). Nitrogen adsorption-desorption analysis suggested that the addition of AlOx into CuOx results in higher BET 75 surface area (Table 1 and Fig. S4). The BET surface area of CuOx was 7 m^2/g while it reached 226 m^2/g when the Cu : Alratio was 1 : 5 (Cu1Al5Ox-HT). Next, the CuAlOx-HT catalysts were characterized using TEM (Fig. 2). The TEM images and line-scan EDS analysis of different catalysts indicated ⁸⁰ that the copper species were well mixed with the AlOx phase.

Table 1. Results of catalyst screening.[a]

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NH2 PhCH2OH/h-HexyHOH							3
Entry	Catalyst	A ^[b]	B ^[c]	$C^{[d]}$	Con./% [e]	Y. /% ^[f]	-
1	AlOx-HT			231	<1		-
2	Cu1Al5Ox-HT	0.54:5	1:18	226	84	47	4
3	Cu1Al3Ox-HT	0.71:1	1:25	192	90	63	
4	Cu ₁ Al ₂ Ox-HT	0.94:2	1:24	148	94	80	
5	Cu ₂ Al ₃ Ox-HT	1.82:3	1:16	120	99/96 ^[g]	88/82 ^[g]	
6	Cu ₂ Al ₁ Ox-HT	1.44:1	1:20	78	69	23	
7	Cu ₅ Al ₁ Ox-HT	3.35:1	1:18	37	27		
8	CuOx-HT			7	<1		4
9	Cu ₂ Al ₃ Ox-CP	1.8:3	1:6	145	99	20	
10	NiCuFeOx			124	89	34	

[a] aniline (0.5 mmol), benzyl alcohol (0.55 mmol), 1-hexanol (0.55 mmol), toluene (1 mL), catalyst (35 mg), 160 °C (reaction temperature),
5 24h, Ar. [b] the ratios of copper and aluminium in the bulk catalyst determined by ICP-AES. [c] the ratios copper and aluminium on the catalyst surface determined by XPS. [d] BET surface area (m²/g). [e] conversion of aniline determined by GC-MS. [f] isolated yield of N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline. [g] the catalyst was reused at the 2ndrun.



Figure 2. TEM (a), HR-TEM (b), HAADF (d) and line-scan EDS analysis (d) images of catalyst Cu_2Al_3Ox -HT.

Then, the amination reaction of aniline in the presence of benzyl alcohol and 1-hexanol was chosen as the model reaction to ¹⁵ explore the reactivity of the CuAlOx-HT catalysts. Clearly, no reaction was observed if AlOx was used as catalyst directly without the addition of copper species (Table 1, entry 1). With the increasing of Cu : Al ratios in the catalysts, the catalytic performance and also the selectivity to N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline ²⁰ were improved and 99% conversion of aniline was achieved when Cu₂Al₃Ox-HT was used as the catalyst, which resulted in 88% isolated yield of N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline (Table 1, Entries 2-5). However, both the conversion of aniline and the selectivity of N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline were decreased if the Cu :Al ratio

- ²⁵ were further increased. The conversion was only 27% and no Nbenzyl-N-hexyl aniline was generated if Cu₃Al₁Ox-HT or CuOx-HT was employed (Table 1, Entries 6-8). In addition, Cu₂Al₃Ox-CP was used as the catalyst under the same reaction conditions and 99% aniline conversion was observed while the selectivity to ³⁰ N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline was only 20% (Entry 9). In
- consideration of the characterization results, it can be imagined that the co-presence of copper and aluminium is important to gain high activity. The suitable Cu : Al ratio to gain high activity may

be close to 2 : 3. In addition, the structure of the catalyst, i.e., the 5 Cu : Al ratio of the catalyst and the catalyst activity, decides the product distribution. Higher selectivity to the unsymmetric tertiary amines can be achieved if the AlOx were enriched on the surface of the active CuAlOx-HT catalysts. As a control reaction, a NiCuAlOx catalyst was prepared with the same procedure as the former report^[11] and its activity in the one-pot synthesis of unsymmetric amine synthesis was tested. However, the yield to N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline was only 34% although 89% aniline conversion was obtained (Entry 10). The major products were secondary amines and symmetric tertiary amines. Thus, Thus, the s specific structure of the CuAlOx-HT catalyst is essential to gain the good catalytic performance, if taking the results using CuAlOx-CP as catalyst together, it can be concluded that the catalytic performance of the CuAlOx-HT catalyst is unique in the one-pot synthesis of unsymmetric amines.

Following, the catalytic performance of the CuAlOx-HT catalyst in the alcohol amination reactions with respect to amine and alcohol derivatives was explored. First, the amination reactions of aniline with different aromatic and aliphatic alcohols were tested (Scheme2). Various structurally diverse benzyl ⁵⁵ alcohol derivatives, and aliphatic alcohols were reacted with aniline to yield the corresponding tertiary amines in excellent yields (**3a-3p**). Commonly the yields to the desired products were ~80%. The substituents at different positions on the benzyl alcohol did not significantly affect the reaction rate. Also, ⁶⁰ aliphatic alcohols with different carbon numbers produced high yields of the tertiary amines, demonstrating the high versatility of the current methodology.







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Scheme 3. Results of N,N-dialkylation of aniline derivatives with 10 aryl/aliphatic alcohols. All the numbers are isolated yields. [a] The catalyst was reused at the 2ndrun. For the reaction conditions, see Table 1, entry 5.

The reaction also proceeded successfully with other structurally and electronically diverse aniline derivatives (Scheme 15 3, 3a'-3r'). Clearly, excellent results were obtained and the yields to the unsymmetric tertiary amines reached 96%. It should be mentioned that the substituent at the ortho-position had a substantial effect on the reaction.



Scheme 4. Results of N,N-dialkylation of aniline derivatives with aliphatic/aliphatic alcohols. All the numbers are isolated yields. For the reaction conditions, see Table 1, entry 5. [a] Determined by GC-MS.

- The applying of aliphatic amines as starting material should be 35 more challenging due to the potential reaction of self-coupling. Nevertheless, the results suggest that CuAlOx-HT is also an excellent catalyst for the N-alkylation of aliphatic amines with two different kinds of alcohols (Scheme 4). Up to 97% yields of
- 40 the unsymmetric tertiary amines can be obtained (3a"-3n"). The

reaction is influenced remarkably by the substituent, too. The vield of **31**" was only 21% when 1,3-dimethylpentylamine, 1octanol and cumylalcohol were used as the starting materials. It needs to be mentioned that the reaction can not progress well if 45 two aromatic or two aliphatic alcohols were used as the alkylation reagents. Also, if aromatic amines contain electron-poor groups, i.e., F or Cl, were used as the starting materials, almost no desired unsymmetric amines were detectable. Even though, this work offers a synthetically powerful method for the construction of 50 unsymmetrical tertiaryamine.

Meanwhile, in order to show the generality of the current methodology, typical reactions for symmetric or unsymmetric amine synthesis were performed (Scheme 5). Clearly, excellent results can be obtained if secondary amines with different 55 structures were used as the staring materials and up to 96% isolated yields to unsymmetric amines were obtained. Also, symmetric tertiary amines with 70-96% isolated yields can be achieved if primary amine and alcohol were used. These results suggested that the current catalyst is active for the alcohol 60 amination reactions to synthesize versatile tertiary amines with different structures using different amines and alcohols.

R2 N R3 OF R2 NH2 Cu2Al3Ox+HT

2a.f.q

R₁OH +

2s-w

1c,e,i,j

R₃ R₁^Ń.R₂

_N._R1

3f""-k"

Rá



Scheme 5. Results of symmetric or unsymmetric tertiary amine synthesis with primary and secondary amines as starting materials. All the numbers 75 are isolated yields. For the reaction conditions, see Table 1, entry 5.

In order to clarify the reaction pathway for the unsymmetric tertiary amine synthesis, the reaction of aniline with benzyl alcohol and 1-hexanol was traced by GC-MS with Cu₂Al₃Ox-HT as catalyst (Fig. 3). As imagined, N-benzylideneaniline was 80 formed at the initial stage. 71% N-benzyl aniline and 13% Nhexyl aniline was produced in 3 h. At this moment, there is no tertiary amine was generated. Following, the desired product, i.e., N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline was observable and its selectivity was 18% at 5 h. With the increasing of the reaction time, more N-85 benzyl-N-hexyl aniline was formed and the amount of N-benzyl aniline decreased simutaneously. Finally nearly 90% N-benzyl-N-hexyl aniline was produced in 24 h.

Based on the above discussions, this catalytic should be sensitive to the structure of the starting materials. In another word, 90 the steric effect should be remarkable. So a series of control reactions were performed to prove it. First, in the reaction of aniline with 1-amyl alcohol and benzyl alcohol derivatives, it can be seen that the size and position of the substituents influenced the yields of the desired products significantly. The yield of al

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was 81% while only 14% a4 was obtained. Similar rule was observed if the position of methyl group on aniline was changed. For example, the yields of **b1**, **c1** and **d1** were 82-83% but only 32-50% yields of b2, c2 and d2 were obtained.



Figure 3. Reaction of aniline with benzylalcohol and 1-hexanol vs time



Scheme 5. Results of steric effect exploration. [a] Values are yields of the desired products determined by GC-MS.

- In conclusion, a simple CuAlOx-HT catalyst was successfully 10 developed for the selective synthesis of unsymmetric tertiary amines by finely controlling its activity and structure with hydrothermal method. This novel catalyst enables the synthesis of unsymmetric amines in a wide variety of primary amines and
- 15 alcohols. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first example for the efficient one-pot synthesis of unsymmetric tertiary amines. It offers a clean and economic route for unsymmetric tertiary amine synthesis and it may promote the development of amine chemistry.
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Notes and references

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