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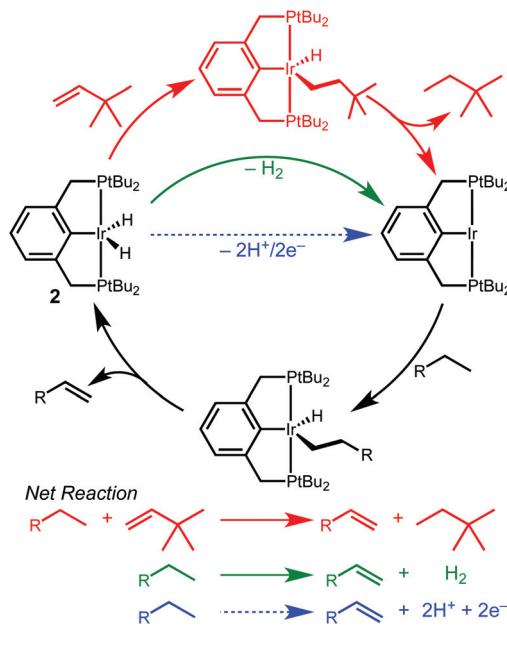
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With a view towards replacing sacrificial hydrogen acceptors in alkane dehydrogenation catalysis, electrochemical methods for oxidative activation of a pincer-ligated iridium hydride intermediate were explored. A $1\text{H}^+/\text{2e}^-$ oxidation process was observed in THF solvent, with net hydride loss leading to a reactive cationic intermediate that can be trapped by chloride. Analogous reactivity was observed with the concerted hydride transfer reagent Ph_3C^+ , connecting chemical and electrochemical hydride loss pathways.

Iridium complexes supported by tridentate ${}^{\text{R}}\text{PCP}$ (${}^{\text{R}}\text{PCP} = \kappa^3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_3\text{-2,6-(CH}_2\text{PR}_2\text{)}_2$) pincer ligands are prolific dehydrogenation catalysts, enabling landmark transformations such as the dehydrogenation,^{1,2} metathesis,³ coupling^{4,5} and dehydroaromatization⁶ of alkanes.⁷ Efficient dehydrogenation reactions require a sacrificial hydrogen acceptor, typically an olefin. The hydrogen acceptor alters the overall reaction thermodynamics and activates the iridium dihydride species.⁷⁻⁹ In transfer dehydrogenation, catalyst activation occurs by insertion of the sacrificial olefin into one Ir-H bond, followed by C-H bond-forming reductive elimination with the other Ir-H bond, generating a highly reactive 14e^- intermediate capable of alkane C-H bond activation (Scheme 1).

The requirement of an added stoichiometric reagent represents a significant limitation in dehydrogenation reactions.^{8,10} In considering new strategies to promote dehydrogenation reactions, we were drawn to electrochemical methods that could *decouple* the catalyst activating and hydrogen accepting steps.^{11,12} We envisioned electrochemical oxidation of $({}^{\text{R}}\text{PCP})\text{Ir}(\text{H})_2$ at an anode, generating a catalytic intermediate while releasing $2\text{H}^+/\text{2e}^-$ (Scheme 1) that could be used to drive any range of reactions at the cathode.



Scheme 1

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Electrochemical dehydrogenation relies on (sometimes coupled) electron transfer and proton transfer steps,^{13,14} while chemical dehydrogenation often involves concerted hydride transfer.^{7,15,16} Recent reports have started to draw connections between chemical and electrochemical processes, however. For example, inspired by a report of $({}^{\text{R}}\text{PCP})\text{Ir}$ -catalyzed hydrogenation of CO_2 to formate,¹⁷ Brookhart and Meyer developed an analogous electrochemical reduction of CO_2 to formate catalyzed by $({}^{\text{tBu}}\text{POCOP})\text{Ir}$ complexes (${}^{\text{tBu}}\text{POCOP} = \kappa^3\text{-C}_6\text{H}_3\text{-2,6-(OP}^{\text{tBu}}\text{)}_2$).¹⁸⁻²⁰ A striking oxidative example involves two different catalysts for the same alcohol oxidation reaction that operate by two different mechanisms, either a concerted H_2 loss mechanism or an outer-sphere electron transfer mechanism in which a chemical oxidant (not an electrode) and a base facilitate $2\text{H}^+/\text{2e}^-$ loss.²¹



Studies of electrochemical reactions that parallel well-known organometallic oxidations can help bridge the divide between chemical and electrochemical methods. This report focuses on the oxidation of a pincer-ligated iridium dihydride. Net loss of hydride ($H^+/2e^-$) is promoted by either electrochemical or chemical methods to produce an iridium monohydride species.

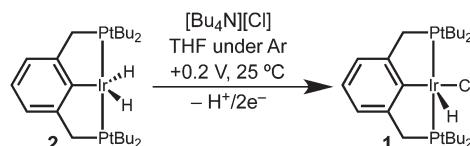
The dihydride complex was prepared according to previously reported procedures by dehydrohalogenation of (tBu_4PCP)Ir(H)(Cl) (**1**) under an H_2 atmosphere.^{1,22} This procedure affords a mixture of the five-coordinate dihydride (tBu_4PCP)Ir(H)₂ (**2**) and (tBu_4PCP)Ir(H)₄ (**3**).²³ Samples could be stirred in pentane, filtered, and dried under vacuum to remove the dihydrogen ligand and provide pure **2**.[‡]

The oxidation of dihydride **2** was initially explored using cyclic voltammetry (CV). When a solution of **2** in argon-saturated THF containing $[Bu_4N][PF_6]$ supporting electrolyte was assessed by a CV sweep to oxidative potentials, a single irreversible feature was observed at -0.08 V vs. Cp_2Fe^{+0} (Fig. 1). No return reduction process was apparent, even as the scan rate was increased to 1 V s⁻¹.

An irreversible electrochemical oxidation is consistent with a rapid chemical reaction following electron transfer from **2** to the electrode. The dihydride **2** is more easily oxidized than the hydridochloride complex **1**, which exhibited a quasi-reversible oxidation around 0.5 V vs. Cp_2Fe^{+0} in CH_2Cl_2 at fast scan rates in a prior study.²⁴

To identify the product formed at positive potentials under argon, a controlled potential electrolysis experiment was carried out. A high-surface-area reticulated vitreous carbon working electrode was submersed in a THF solution of dihydride **2** and polarized to 0.2 V vs. Cp_2Fe^{+0} . The flow of current diminished as a gradual color change from pale orange to pale yellow was observed. The oxidation passed 239 mC of charge, corresponding to 1.9 e⁻ per Ir, but an aliquot analyzed by $^{31}P\{^1H\}$ NMR spectroscopy revealed a mixture of species.

Considering the possibility that oxidation of **2** would produce a reactive cationic species,²⁵ the oxidative electrochemistry was also carried out in the presence of a chloride ion source as a trapping agent. In the presence of LiCl (and



Scheme 2

with conditions otherwise similar to those described above), the CV response of **2** was essentially unchanged relative to chloride-free conditions, suggesting that chloride does not influence the initial oxidation process.

Controlled potential electrolysis of a THF solution containing **2** and excess LiCl or $[Bu_4N][Cl]$ was conducted at 0.2 V vs. Cp_2Fe^{+0} (Scheme 2). In the presence of chloride, the solution color changed from pale orange to a much brighter orange, and the 283 mC of charge passed corresponds to a $2e^-$ oxidation (2.3 e⁻ per Ir). Analysis by $^{31}P\{^1H\}$ NMR spectroscopy now revealed a single phosphorous-containing species (δ 69). The product was isolated from the electrolyte by removal of the THF under vacuum and extraction with pentane. Full NMR spectroscopic analysis in $THF-d_8$ showed a triplet hydride resonance far upfield (δ -42.9) in the 1H NMR spectrum that is diagnostic of (tBu_4PCP)Ir(H)(Cl) (**1**). All of the ^{31}P and 1H NMR signals closely matched the previously reported values.²²

The electrochemical conversion of dihydride **2** to hydrido-chloride **1** represents a net hydride abstraction *via* the loss of $2e^-$ to the anode and loss of H^+ (to solution or perhaps to a surface site on the electrode), followed by chloride binding. This two-step electrochemical-chemical (EC) transformation is consistent with the irreversible CV response (prior studies of (pincer)Ir(H)(Cl) also implicated an EC mechanism, but did not identify a product).²⁴ The stability of the product, hydrido-chloride **1**, towards further oxidation at the potentials applied during electrolysis is critical to the success of the reaction.²⁴

Analogous electrochemical hydride loss *via* a two-electron/one-proton oxidative process has been reported for a series of Group 6 complexes of the type $CpM(CO)_3H$ ($M = Cr, M, W$),²⁶ which may involve a concerted proton-coupled electron transfer event in the tungsten case.²⁷ In contrast, the Rh analogue (tBu_4PCP)Rh(H₂), which is best described as a Rh(i) dihydrogen complex,²⁸ does not undergo oxidative hydride loss: reversible $1e^-$ oxidation is observed in CH_2Cl_2 , and H_2 loss is observed in coordinating solvents.²⁹

To further probe the hydride transfer reactivity, chemical methods that could effect an analogous hydride loss were explored. When dihydride **2** is allowed to react with the hydride abstractor $[Ph_3C][B(C_6F_5)_4]$ in $THF-d_8$, the solution changes color from pale orange to pale yellow. NMR spectroscopic monitoring revealed a mixture of products analogous to those observed in the initial electrolysis.

Hydride abstraction was next attempted in the presence of a chloride source. Treatment of dihydride **2** with 1 equiv. $[Ph_3C][B(C_6F_5)_4]$ and 5 equiv. $[Bu_4N][Cl]$ led to a color change from pale orange to a much brighter orange, coinciding with

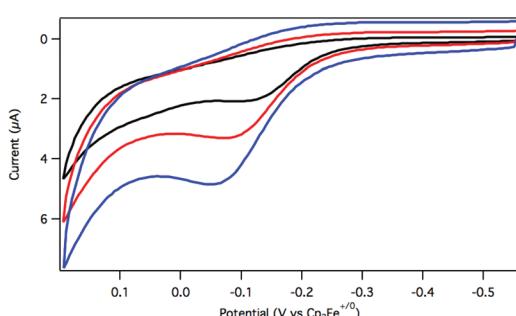
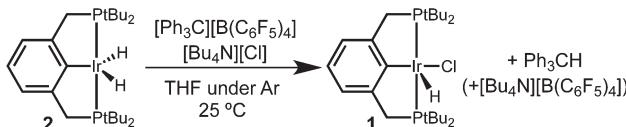
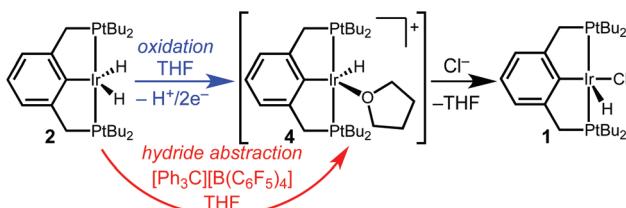


Fig. 1 Cyclic voltammetry of **2** at 25 mV s⁻¹ (black), 100 mV s⁻¹ (red), and 250 mV s⁻¹ (blue) in THF solution with 0.1 M $[Bu_4N][PF_6]$ electrolyte. Glassy carbon working electrode, platinum counter electrode, Ag wire pseudo-reference electrode, 298 K.





Scheme 3



Scheme 4

the appearance of the characteristic signals of hydridochloride complex **1** by $^{31}\text{P}\{^1\text{H}\}$ and ^1H NMR spectroscopy (Scheme 3). Triphenylmethane is also observed by ^1H NMR spectroscopy, clearly identifying the fate of the hydride.

We suggest that the electrochemical and chemical hydride abstractions proceed *via* a shared intermediate, given the similar product distributions under various reaction conditions. As shown in Scheme 4, we hypothesize that oxidation of dihydride **2** occurs as a net $1\text{H}^+/\text{2e}^-$ process (*via* one of the pathways described above) to generate a reactive monohydride cation, $[(^{t\text{Bu}_4}\text{PCP})\text{Ir}(\text{H})]^{+}$ (**4**). Chemical hydride transfer from **2** to $[\text{Ph}_3\text{C}][\text{B}(\text{C}_6\text{F}_5)_4]$ would also afford **4**. We are not aware of any prior reported isolation of cation **4**. An analogous $[(^{t\text{Bu}_4}\text{POCOP})\text{Ir}(\text{H})]^{+}$ species, isolated as an acetone or dichloromethane adduct, is an active hydrosilylation catalyst.^{30,31}

From this shared intermediate cation **4**, trapping with chloride ion can generate the hydridochloride **1**. In the absence of chloride, we suspect that cation **4** decomposes through reactions with itself and/or the solvent, the details of which are currently under investigation. The observation of identical products under electrochemical and chemical reaction conditions suggests that future electrochemical oxidations (even in non-polar solvents)^{32–34} can be modeled after existing hydride abstraction reactions.

By implicating a key monohydride cation intermediate and building an analogy between well-defined organometallic hydride abstraction reactions and electrochemical oxidation processes, these joint chemical/electrochemical studies provide a foundation for future development of electrochemical dehydrogenation processes.

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Notes and references

‡Solutions containing hydrides **2** and **3** are stable under Ar or H_2 , but decompose under N_2 or air to a mixture of products with distinct electrochemical responses.³⁵

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