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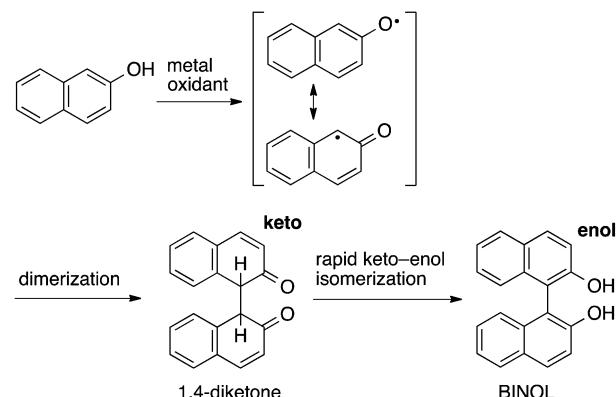
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Oxidation of 2-hydroxy-9,10-dialkynylanthracenes resulted in highly regioselective dimerization to furnish metastable dearomatized 1,4-diketones rather than stable aromatic diols. The 1,4-diketones were converted to oxahelicenes, which exhibited strong fluorescence both in solution and solid state as well as chiroptical properties.

2,2'-Dihydroxy-1,1'-binaphthyl (BINOL) is one of the most versatile chiral scaffolds in asymmetric synthesis, which is frequently employed to create a variety of metal and non-metal chiral catalysts. Oxidative coupling of 2-naphthol and other derivatives has been a useful methodology to provide BINOL and other axially chiral aromatic diols. The mechanism of oxidative coupling has been considered in the following three processes: (i) homolytic coupling of two radicals ($A^\bullet + A^\bullet$), (ii) heterolytic coupling ($A^+ + A^-$) and (iii) radical-anion coupling ($A^\bullet + A^-$).^{1–3} In the radical–radical coupling process, formation of a diketone intermediate is expected through dimerization of a carbon-centred radical contributor of the 2-naphthoxy radical (Scheme 1). However, such a dearomatized 1,4-diketone has been an elusive intermediate due to its instability. The 1,4-diketone rapidly undergoes tautomerization to the more stable enol form to yield BINOL.

During the course of our study on oxidation of aromatic alcohols,⁴ we unexpectedly isolated such metastable 1,4-diketone intermediates **2** by oxidation of 2-hydroxyanthracenes **1**. Although oxidative dimerization of 2-hydroxyanthracenes to BINOL-like axially chiral diols has been reported, dearomatized 1,4-diketone species have never been isolated.⁵ We have also demonstrated the synthesis of oxahelicenes **6** from 1,4-diketones **2**, which exhibit



Scheme 1 Plausible reaction mechanism of BINOL formation via the radical–radical coupling process.

bright fluorescence both in solution and solid state as well as chiroptical properties.

We found that oxidation of 2-hydroxy-9,10-bis(triethylsilyl)ethynyl)anthracene **1a** with MnO_2 in dichloromethane at room temperature afforded dimeric diketone **2a** in 63% yield without formation of diol **4** (Scheme 2). The structure of **2a** was assigned on the basis of NMR and MS analyses. The 1H NMR spectrum of **1a** exhibited olefinic signals at 8.17 and 6.35 ppm as well as a methine proton signal at 4.35 ppm. The presence of carbonyl groups was confirmed by the peak at 200.9 ppm, as shown in its ^{13}C NMR spectrum. Triisopropylsilyl (TIPS) substituted diketone **2b** was similarly prepared in 50% yield. In this case, *ortho*-quinone **3b** was obtained as a byproduct. The dimerization also proceeded with less bulky *tert*-butyl substituent **1c** to provide **2c** in 84% yield. The improvement of the yield is probably due to steric reason. Diketones **2** were relatively stable but treatment with KO^Bu resulted in tautomerization to afford the more stable enol-form **4** in 59% yield (Scheme 2).

The structures of **2b** and **4** were unambiguously elucidated by X-ray diffraction analysis (Fig. 1). In the case of **2b**, two anthracene rings overlap in a face-to-face fashion. Notably, the bond length of the bridging carbon–carbon linkage is 1.62 Å,

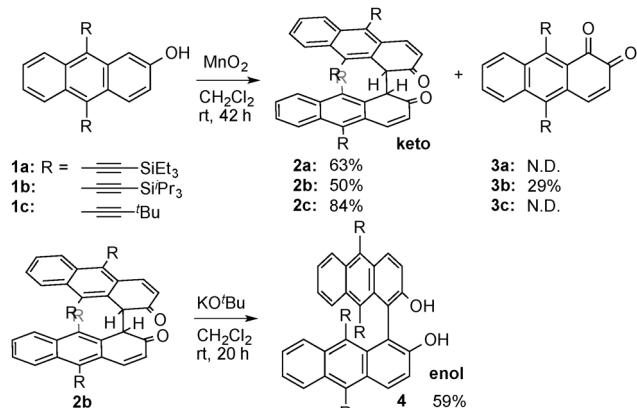
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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental procedures, spectral data for all new compounds, photophysical data and crystallographic data of **2b**, **4**, **5b**, **6b** and **6-(P)**. CCDC 1041270–1041274. For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: 10.1039/c5cc00764j





Scheme 2 Oxidation of 2-hydroxyanthracenes 1.

which is considerably longer than that of the standard $C_{sp^3}-C_{sp^3}$ bond (1.54 Å). This elongation is caused by columbic repulsion between two anthracene rings. This could be a reason for facile bond cleavage of **2b** to **1b** during silica-gel column chromatography. In the case of **4**, two anthracene units cross each other at an angle of 102.7°, which is larger than that of BINOL.⁶ The alkynyl groups are substantially bent due to the steric repulsion with anthracene moieties.

The isolation of the keto-form **2** was intriguing because BINOL derivatives usually exhibit no keto-enol tautomerism due to the instability of keto-forms.⁷ The distorted structure of **4** should be a clue for the relative stabilization of the keto-form **2** because no keto-enol tautomerization could be observed for

the corresponding monomer **1**. The large displacement of conformations between **2b** and **4** should increase the conversion barrier from **2b** to **4**, which is one of the key factors for the stability of **2b**. Moreover, the calculated LUMO of **2b** spread over the entire molecule, indicating effective delocalization of π -electrons (Fig. S32, ESI†). This is also suggested by optical analysis. In comparison to 1,1-dimethoxy-2-oxoanthracene, a slight but obvious red-shift of the lowest energy band was observed for **2b** (Fig. S28, ESI†), indicating the presence of electronic communication between two anthracene units in **2b**. This interaction between anthracene would also contribute to the stabilization of the keto-form **2b**.

We then attempted construction of the fused furan ring to obtain oxahelicenes **6**.⁸ Helical-shaped π -conjugated molecules have attracted tremendous interest as promising candidates for new-age functional materials.^{9,10} Their rigid and twisted π -condensed ring systems induce chiroptical properties such as enhanced CD signals and circularly polarized luminescence (CPL).¹¹ They, however, commonly have low emission efficiency due to their *ortho*-condensed structures, which result in rapid intersystem crossing from an excited singlet state to a triplet state.¹²

We found that treatment of **2a** with $TsOH \cdot H_2O$ and methyl orthoformate in methanol yielded 57% of diacetal **5a**. Methoxy groups were readily eliminated by treatment with CF_3SO_3H to furnish oxahelicene **6a** in 16% yield (Scheme 3). In the case of TIPS derivative **2b**, the yield of **6b** was improved to 47% due to the higher stability of the alkyne group under acidic conditions. Unfortunately, the corresponding cyclic diacetal **5** was not obtained from **2c**.

The structures of **5b** and **6b** were confirmed by X-ray diffraction analysis (Fig. 2). The X-ray crystal structure revealed a distorted helical conformation of **6b**. As shown, two anthracene units and two ethynyl groups are bent due to severe steric repulsion. The dihedral angle between the two naphthalene rings is 40.9°.

Fig. 3 displays UV/vis absorption spectra of **1b**, **4**, **6a** and **6b** and fluorescence spectra of **6a** and **6b** in dichloromethane solutions. The dimer **4** exhibited a bathochromic shift compared to **1b** as commonly seen in perpendicularly linked acene dimers.¹³ A larger shift was observed for **6b**, indicating effective π -conjugation over two anthracene units. No significant difference between **6a** and **6b** was observed. On the other hand, emission spectra exhibited clear differences. The emission of **6a** appeared at 558 nm with $\Phi_f = 0.45$. Slight blue-shifted and enhanced emission ($\Phi_f = 0.66$)

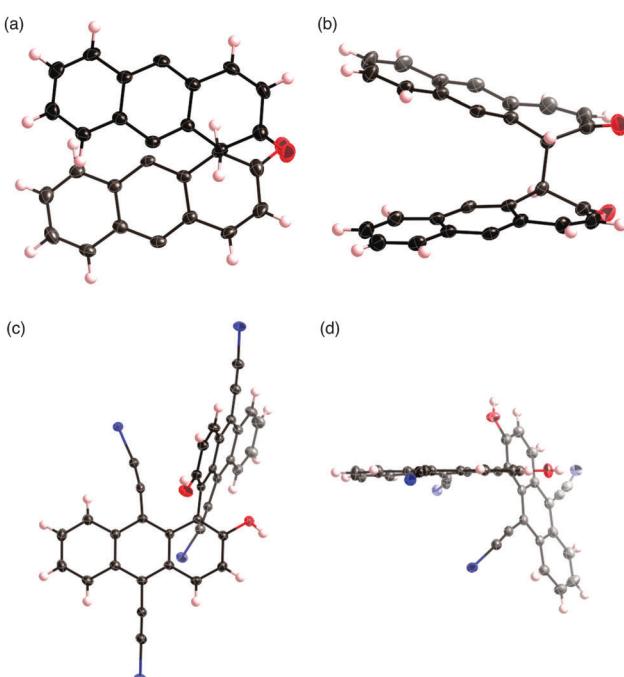
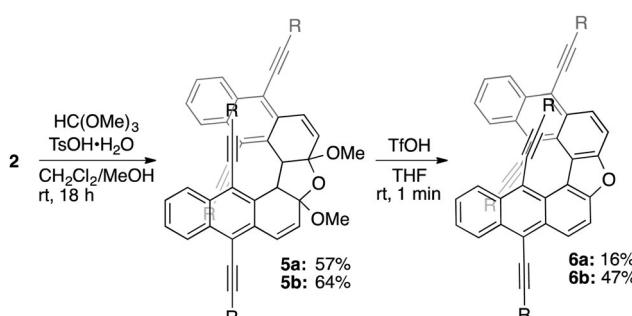


Fig. 1 X-ray crystal structures of **2b** and **4**. (a) Top view and (b) side view of **2b** and (c) side view and (d) front view of **4**. The ethynyl groups are omitted in (a) and (b), and iPr groups are omitted in (c) and (d) for clarity. The thermal ellipsoids are scaled at the 50% probability level.

Scheme 3 Conversion of **2** to oxahelicenes **6**.

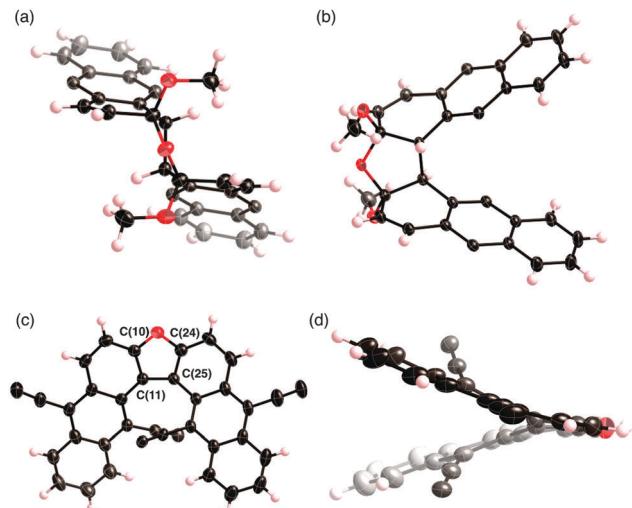


Fig. 2 X-ray crystal structures of **5b** and **6b**: (a) top view and (b) side view of **5b**; (c) top view and (d) side view of **6b**. The silylethynyl groups in (a) and (b) and triisopropylsilyl groups in (c) and (d) are omitted for clarity. The thermal ellipsoids are scaled at the 50% probability level.

was observed for **6b**. This difference can be accounted for by the higher flexibility of **6a**, enhancing non-radiative decay, judging from the larger Stokes shift of **6a** ($\Delta\nu = 1803\text{ cm}^{-1}$). These results indicate that the substituent can control the emission feature of helicene derivatives.

The chiroptical properties of **6b** were also investigated. Optical resolution was accomplished by HPLC using a CHIRALPAK® IF column. Both enantiomers were stable enough and underwent no racemization at room temperature. The CD spectrum of the first eluted fraction exhibited a (+) Cotton effect and that of the other isomer exhibited a (−) Cotton effect as the mirror image (Fig. 4). The absolute structure of the latter enantiomer was proven to be a (*P*)-helix on the basis of X-ray diffraction analysis (Fig. S30, ESI[†]) and TD-DFT calculations. Furthermore, both enantiomers exhibited CPL with $g_{\text{Lum}} = 1.2 \times 10^{-3}$. This value is consistent with heterohelicenes and relatively high for small organic molecules.

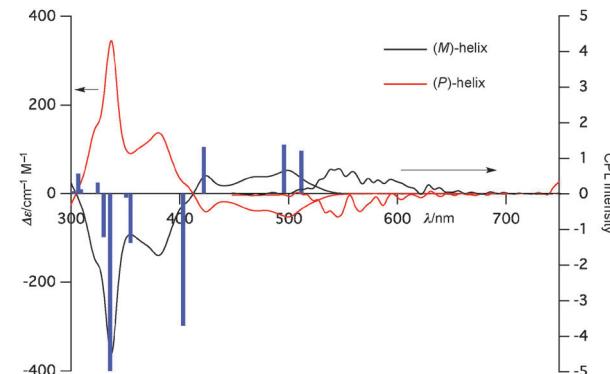


Fig. 4 CD and CPL spectra of **6b**. Blue bars represent oscillator strengths for the (*M*)-helix enantiomer estimated by the TD-DFT method. All spectra were recorded in dichloromethane solution ($c = 1.0 \times 10^{-5}\text{ M}$).

Interestingly, oxahelicene **6b** exhibited intense emission in the solid state (Fig. 5). A racemic microcrystalline sample of **6b** showed strong fluorescence ($\Phi_f = 0.41$). This fluorescence quantum yield in the solid state is the highest among helicene derivatives reported previously.¹⁴ The emission was reduced for enantiomerically pure crystals of **6-(P)** ($\Phi_f = 0.14$). Reduction in the quantum yield was due to differences in the crystal packing between racemic **6b** and its (*P*)-isomer **6-(P)**, suggested by the red-shifted spectrum of **6-(P)** ($\lambda_{\text{em}} = 581\text{ nm}$) as compared with **6b** ($\lambda_{\text{em}} = 574\text{ nm}$). In the crystal packing of **6b**, a pair of (*P*)- and (*M*)-enantiomers are placed in a face-to-face fashion to form a coplanar dimer (Fig. S31, ESI[†]). In contrast, molecules in **6-(P)** are aligned in a herringbone fashion.

In summary, we have discovered that oxidation of 2-hydroxy-anthracenes furnished dearomatized diketones **2** as metastable intermediates. Treatment of **2b** with a base or heating induced tautomerization into bianthranyl diol **4**. We have also achieved synthesis of oxahelicenes **6** from **2** in two steps under mild conditions. Oxahelicene **6b** exhibited strong emission and CPL activity. This work demonstrates that oxidation of hydroxylated oligoacenes offers an easy access to distorted π -conjugated molecules with fascinating structures and optical characteristics.

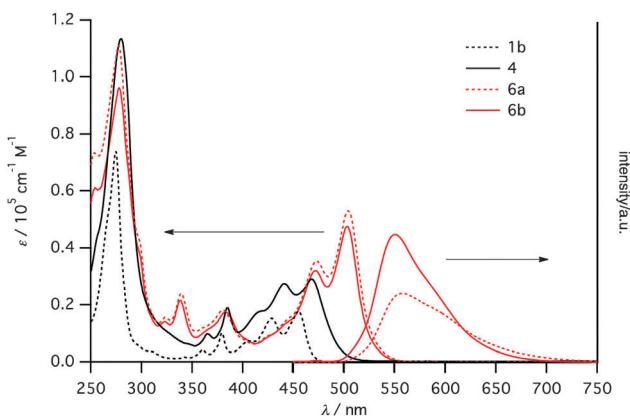


Fig. 3 UV/vis absorption spectra of **1b** (black, dotted), **4** (black, solid), **6a** (red dotted) and **6b** (red, solid), and emission spectra of **6a** (red, dotted) and **6b** (red, solid). All spectra were recorded in dichloromethane.

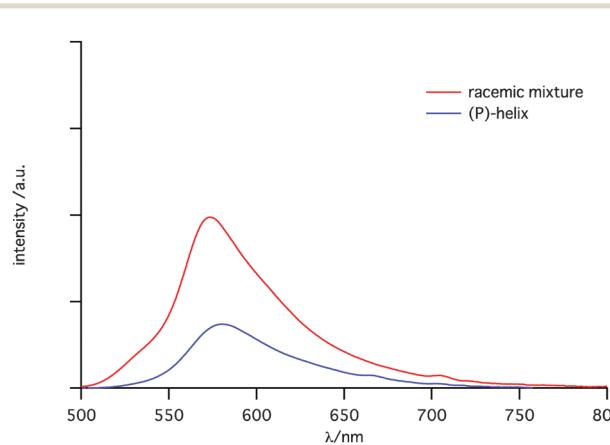


Fig. 5 Emission spectra of a racemic mixture (red) and a (*P*)-enantiomer (blue) of **6b** in the solid state (microcrystals).

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