Asymmetric synthesis of allylic amines via hydroamination of allenes with benzophenone imine†

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Rhodium-catalyzed highly regio- and enantioselective hydroamination of allenes is reported. Exclusive branched selectivities and excellent enantioselectivities were achieved applying a rhodium(I)/Josiphos catalyst. This method permits the practical synthesis of valuable α-chiral allylic amines using benzophenone imine as ammonia carrier.

α-Chiral amines are of wide interest in organic synthesis† due to their broad application in pharmaceutical research,1–9 catalysis10–13 and natural product synthesis14 (Scheme 1). Among them, the synthesis of α-chiral allylic amines is particularly important because of the versatility of the allylic moiety for further structural elaboration.2 In the past few decades, significant efforts have advanced the efficiency towards their synthesis. Many elegant approaches including allylic substitution,2 Overman rearrangements,4 allylic C–H amination2 and imine vinylation5 have been reported. However, these methods need pre-installation of a leaving group or stoichiometric amounts of an oxidant/metal-containing reagent. In this regard, efficient synthetic methods for the synthesis of α-chiral allylic amines are highly desirable.

The catalytic and enantioselective addition of simple ammonia (NH₃) to allenes would represent one of the most atom-economic transformation towards the synthesis of α-chiral allylic amines.7,8 However, initial experiments revealed this transformation to be very challenging, presumably due to the following reasons: (1) the volatility and toxicity of gaseous NH₃ makes it less interesting in terms of practicality; (2) the catalytic systems were inactive in the presence of ammonia, possibly due to the high basicity of sp³ hybridized nitrogen atom, and its difficulty to undergo oxidative addition to a transition metal center.13

To address these issues, we assumed that the easy-to-use and N-sp³-hybridized benzophenone imine11 could serve as an ammonia carrier: (1) benzophenone imine is commercially available and can be easily prepared via condensation of benzophenone with ammonia;12 (2) the sp³ hybridized imine nitrogen is more reactive towards allenes in the presence of a suitable transition metal catalyst; (3) the final α-chiral primary allylic amines can be obtained via simple hydrolysis, and the benzophenone can be recycled (Scheme 2).

The initial assessment was performed by coupling cyclohexyllallene and benzophenone imine using [{Rh(COD)Cl}]₂ (2.5 mol%) and racemic ligand 1,4-bis(diphenylphosphino)butane (L₁, 10 mol%) in 1,2-dichloroethane (DCE) at 80 °C (Table 1, entry 1). The reaction afforded the desired product with 10% NMR yield. We wondered whether addition of acid would facilitate the reaction by promoting the catalytic cycle. Indeed, both trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) and pyridinium p-toluenesulfonate (PPTS) could significantly improve the yield, while the addition of p-toluenesulfonic acid (PTSA) had no effect (Table 1, entry 2–4). These promising results encouraged us to

Scheme 1 Applications of α-chiral amines.

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Scheme 2 Proposed synthesis of α-chiral allylic amines using benzophenone imine as ammonia carrier.
To test the feasibility of its asymmetric variant. The (S)-Segphos ligand (L2) only led to 10% of the desired product. The (R,R)-DIOP (L3) gave 76% of the isolated amide product 1a, while only moderate ee was obtained. Further screening led to the discovery of Josiphos (L4), which afforded 1a with 72% yield and 92% ee.\(^{33}\)

With the optimized conditions in hand, we then investigated the feasibility of various allene substrates (Scheme 3, 1a–i). Interestingly, in basically all cases perfect regioselectivities and excellent enantioselectivities were observed. Allenes containing alkyl substituents as well as ether, thio ether, phthalimide and sulfone functional groups were well tolerated.

Direct synthesis of branched allylic amides using simple amides and allenes was difficult. However, a one-pot synthesis of branched allylic amides or carbamate can be achieved easily upon acylation or sulfonylation of the crude allylic amine with the corresponding acyl/sulfonyl chlorides or anhydride, respectively (Scheme 3, 2a–d).

Hydroamination with bioactive moieties containing substrates using the scope conditions resulted in the desired branched allylic amines with high yields and excellent enantioselectivities (Scheme 3, 3a–c).

To test the practicality of this method for primary amine synthesis, chiral allylic amine HCl salt 4 was synthesized under scope conditions in a 1.1 gram scale with 86% yield and 95% ee. The released ammonia carrier (benzophenone) can be recycled after hydrolysis with 96% yield (Scheme 4).

To exemplify the utility of chiral allylic amines, derivatization of compound 2a was performed (Scheme 5). Ozonolysis of 2a followed by treatment with triphenylphosphine and NaBH\(_4\) gave \(\beta\)-amino alcohol 5a and \(\alpha\)-amino aldehyde 5b, respectively. Direct oxidation of 2a could afford \(\alpha\)-amino acid 5c. Hydroboration of 2a using 9-borabicyclo(3.3.1)nonane (9-BBN), then oxidation with H\(_2\)O\(_2\) led to the formation of \(\gamma\)-amino alcohol 5d, which could be further oxidized to the corresponding \(\beta\)-amino aldehyde 5e and \(\beta\)-amino acid 5f.

Isotopic labeling experiments using deuterated benzophenone imine (Pht\(_2\)C = ND) and deuterated PPTS (D-PPTS) were conducted under scope conditions.\(^{33}\) Deuterium incorporation was only observed at the internal position of the allylic double bond. Hence, we suggest that the mechanism follows a similar
pathway as for previously reported coupling reactions. Oxidative addition of the benzophenone imine N–H bond to Rh(i) generates Rh[n] complex. Hydrometalation of the less substituted double bond could generate σ-allyl-Rh complex, which is in equilibrium with the π-allyl-Rh complex. Reductive elimination of the allyl-Rh complexes generates the branched N-allyl amine.

To conclude, we have developed this highly regio- and enantioselective hydroamination of allenes using benzophenone imine as an ammonia carrier via a rhodium/Josiphos catalyst system. The reaction gave valuable α-chiral primary allylic amines and α-chiral allylic amides in a practical manner. Recycle of the ammonia carrier with high yield maximized the atom-economy of this protocol. Applications of this method in target oriented synthesis and using more challenging terminal alkyne as the coupling partner for the enantioselective synthesis of branched allylic amines are currently under way in our laboratories and will be reported in due course.

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Notes and references


9 Selected examples on the asymmetric synthesis N-allylic amines via intermolecular hydroamination of allenes: (a) N. Nishina and Y. Yamamoto, Angew. Chem., Int. Ed., 2006,

10 (a) Oxidative addition of N–H to Rhodium: O. V. Ozerov, C. Guo, V. A. Papkov and B. M. Foxman, J. Am. Chem. Soc., 2004, 126, 4792–4793; (b) Although it is beyond the scope of this article, other catalytic systems might work for the coupling of allenes with ammonia. For example the copper catalyzed hydroaminations: M. T. Pirnot, Y. Wang and S. L. Buchwald, Angew. Chem., Int. Ed., 2016, 55, 48–57.


13 See ESI† for details.