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# Facile synthesis of dibenzothiophene S-oxides from sulfinate esters†

Yukiko Kumagai,<sup>a</sup> Akihiro Kobayashi,<sup>ab</sup> Keisuke Nakamura<sup>a</sup> and Suguru Yoshida<sup>ib</sup> \*<sup>a</sup>

An efficient method to prepare dibenzothiophene S-oxides is disclosed. Suzuki–Miyaura cross-coupling of 2-bromoaryl sulfinate esters with arylboronic acids selectively at the bromo group followed by electrophilic cyclization of the resulting sulfinate ester moiety provides diverse dibenzothiophene S-oxides. Further transformations including Pummerer-type C–H propargylation and aryne reactions realize to synthesize highly functionalized dibenzothiophene derivatives.

Dibenzothiophenes and their derivatives having S-oxide or S,S-dioxide moieties are of great significance in broad research fields such as pharmaceutical sciences, materials chemistry, and chemical biology (Fig. 1A).<sup>1–3</sup> Particularly, dibenzothiophene S-oxides are gaining attention as precursors to generate atomic oxygen triggered by UV irradiation, which can facilitate DNA cleavage, oxidation of adenosine-S'-phosphosulfate kinase, and so on.<sup>1</sup> In addition, recent advances in synthetic methods through the activation of S–O bond have allowed us to prepare diverse functionalized dibenzothiophenes from dibenzothiophene S-oxides (Fig. 1B).<sup>4</sup> Despite the importance of dibenzothiophene S-oxides, it is not always easy to synthesize highly functionalized dibenzothiophene S-oxides in a conventional manner, which involves thiophene ring formation of biaryls using S<sub>8</sub> and subsequent S-oxidation with oxidants such as *m*CPBA (Fig. 1C).<sup>5,6</sup> Herein, we disclose a novel method to prepare dibenzothiophene S-oxides from 2-bromoaryl-substituted sulfinate esters by Br-selective Suzuki–Miyaura coupling followed by intramolecular electrophilic sulfonylation (Fig. 1D). Since we recently found that sulfinate esters can be activated easily by triflic anhydride (Tf<sub>2</sub>O)

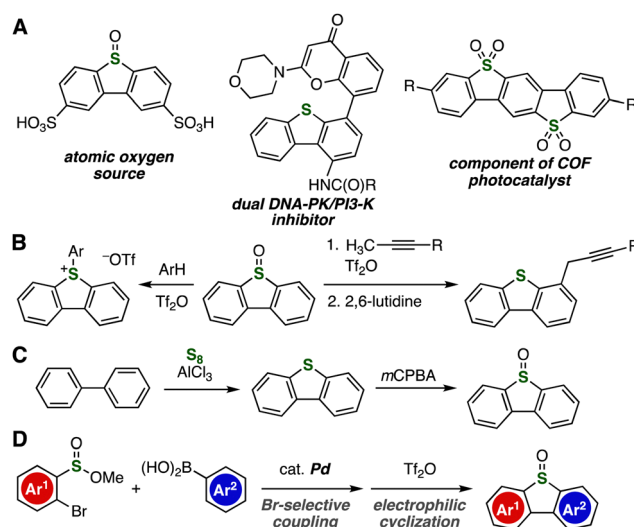


Fig. 1 (A) Significant dibenzothiophene derivatives. (B) Transformations of dibenzothiophene S-oxide. (C) Representative synthesis of dibenzothiophene S-oxide. (D) This work.

realizing S-allylation with allylsilanes, we conceived the synthesis of dibenzothiophene S-oxides from 2-biarylyl sulfinate ester through the electrophilic activation.<sup>7,8</sup>

We succeeded in the synthesis of dibenzothiophene S-oxide **4a** through Br-selective coupling and subsequent cyclization by electrophilic activation (Table 1). Treatment of 2-bromobenzenesulfinic acid methyl ester (**1a**)<sup>9</sup> with 4-tolylboronic acid (**2a**) in the presence of potassium phosphate and a catalytic amount of (amphos)<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>2</sub> afforded 2-(4-tolyl)benzenesulfinic acid methyl ester (**3a**) in an excellent yield. Of note, the coupling proceeded selectively at the bromo group, where palladium-catalyzed sulfoxide formation was not observed.<sup>10</sup> Then, reaction conditions were screened for the cyclization of methyl 2-(4-tolyl)benzenesulfinate (**3a**) by electrophilic activation using acid anhydrides. As a result, we successfully synthesized dibenzothiophene S-oxide **4a** in high yield from **3a** with Tf<sub>2</sub>O. Indeed, treatment of **3a** with Tf<sub>2</sub>O in dichloromethane at room temperature followed by the addition of aqueous sodium

<sup>a</sup> Department of Biological Science and Technology, Faculty of Advanced Engineering, Tokyo University of Science, 6-3-1 Nijuku, Katsushika-ku, Tokyo 125-8585, Japan. E-mail: s-yoshida@rs.tus.ac.jp

<sup>b</sup> Laboratory of Chemical Bioscience, Institute of Biomaterials and Bioengineering, Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU), 2-3-10 Kanda-Surugadai, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-0062, Japan

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Table 1 Optimization of the reaction conditions

Reaction scheme showing the synthesis of fluorene derivative **4a** from **1a** and **2a**.

**1a** (4-bromo-2-methoxybenzene) reacts with  $(\text{amphos})_2\text{PdCl}_2$  (1.0 mol %),  $\text{K}_3\text{PO}_4$  (2.0 equiv) in 1,4-dioxane/ $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (v/v = 10/1) at 100 °C to yield intermediate **3a** (4-methoxy-2-(4-methylphenyl)benzene) in 94% yield.

Intermediate **3a** reacts with an activator (2.0 equiv) in solvent at room temperature for 1 h to yield product **4a** (2-methoxy-9-methylfluorene).

Entry	Activator	Solv.	Temp.	Yield (%) <sup>a</sup>	
1	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	rt	90	
2	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	2,6-( <i>t</i> -Bu) <sub>2</sub> py <sup>b</sup>	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	rt	88
3	(CF <sub>3</sub> CO) <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	rt	0	
4	(CH <sub>3</sub> CO) <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	rt	0	
5	TfOH	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	rt	51	
6	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	0 °C	97	
7 <sup>c</sup>	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	0 °C	83	
8	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	-40 °C	0	
9	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	Toluene	rt	3	
10	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>3</sub> CN	rt	0	
11	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	CH <sub>3</sub> NO <sub>2</sub>	rt	0	
12	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	Et <sub>2</sub> O	rt	97	
13	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	Et <sub>2</sub> O	0 °C	Quant.	
14	Tf <sub>2</sub> O	2,6-( <i>t</i> -Bu) <sub>2</sub> py <sup>b</sup>	Et <sub>2</sub> O	0 °C	88

<sup>a</sup> Isolated yields. <sup>b</sup> The reaction was conducted using 2,6-di(*tert*-butyl)pyridine (4.0 equiv.) with Tf<sub>2</sub>O (2.0 equiv.). <sup>c</sup> Gram-scale synthesis. See details in the ESI.

bicarbonate provided the desired dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4a** in high yield, where side-products from further Pummerer-type reactions were not observed (entry 1). The reaction also took place smoothly when using Tf<sub>2</sub>O with 2,6-di(*tert*-butyl)pyridine as a base (entry 2). In contrast, trifluoroacetic anhydride (TFAA) or acetic anhydride did not activate sulfinate ester **3a** (entries 3 and 4). Dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4a** was also obtained in moderate yield using triflic acid (TfOH) (entry 5). The yield was slightly improved when the reaction was conducted at 0 °C to realize the synthesis of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4a** in an excellent yield (entry 6). We accomplished the gram-scale synthesis of **4a** in good yield (entry 7). No reaction took place at -40 °C (entry 8). While the efficient synthesis of cyclized product **4a** failed when the reaction was conducted in toluene, acetonitrile, or nitromethane (entries 9–11), we also succeeded in the facile synthesis of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide in diethyl ether at room temperature or 0 °C (entries 12 and 13). The synthesis of **4a** in the presence of 2,6-di(*tert*-butyl)pyridine was achieved also in diethyl ether (entry 14). We also prepared dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4a** from **1a** in high yield through a single silica-gel column chromatography, obviously indicating good practicality of the benzothiophene *S*-oxide synthesis from sulfinate esters (Fig. 2A).

A wide range of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides having diverse functional groups were prepared from sulfinate ester **1a** and various arylboronic acids **2** (Fig. 2B and C). Due to the good solubility of dichloromethane for broad aromatic compounds, we chose the conditions using dichloromethane for synthesizing various dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides. For example, we succeeded in the synthesis of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides **4b** and **4c** in good yields by the 2-step protocol without damaging fluoro and chloro groups. In the case of synthesis of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4d** from **1a**

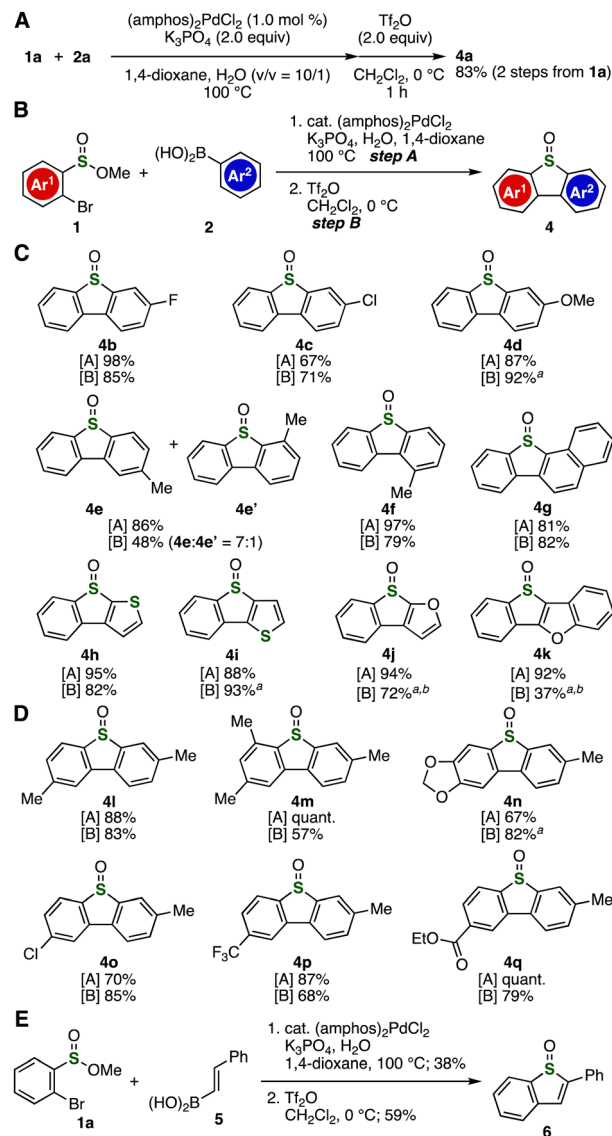


Fig. 2 (A) Synthesis of **4a** with a single silica-gel column chromatography purification. (B) General scheme for synthesizing various dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides. (C) Results using various sulfinate esters **1** with **2a**. (D) Results using various sulfinate esters **1** with **2a**. (E) Synthesis of benzothiophene *S*-oxide **6**. <sup>a</sup> Et<sub>2</sub>O was used as a solvent instead of CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>. <sup>b</sup> The reaction was conducted in the presence of 2,6-di(*tert*-butyl)pyridine (4.0 equiv.). See details in the ESI.† amphos = di(*tert*-butyl)(4-(dimethylamino)phenyl)phosphine.

and 4-methoxyphenylboronic acid, the electrophilic cyclization of methyl 2-(4-methoxyphenyl)benzenesulfinate bearing an electron-rich aryl group took place efficiently when using diethyl ether as a solvent.<sup>11</sup> We succeeded in the preparation of 2-methyldibenzothiophene *S*-oxide (**4e**) along with minor isomer **4e'** from 3-methylboronic acid by efficient Suzuki-Miyaura coupling and following intramolecular arylation, in which cyclization at sterically unhindered site predominantly proceeded. The 2-step protocol using sulfinate ester **1a** and bulky 2-methylphenyl boronic acid allowed us to synthesize dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4f** in high yields. We successfully synthesized  $\pi$ -extended dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4g**, which was reported as a promising dibenzothiophene



S-oxide derivative having an extended chromophore to red-shift the absorption spectra for atomic oxygen precursors,<sup>12</sup> from 2-naphthylboronic acid through regioselective cyclization, where the regioisomer was not detected. It is worth noting that a variety of heteroarylboronic acids participated in the coupling-cyclization protocol to furnish heteroaromatic ring-fused dibenzothiophene S-oxides **4h–4k**. When using 3-thienyl- or 3-furylboronic acid, intramolecular S-arylation proceeded at 2-position selectively to afford dibenzothiophene S-oxide analog **4h** or **4j**, respectively. The synthesis of furan- or benzo[b]furan-fused benzo[b]thiophene **4j** or **4k** was realized by the addition of 2,6-di(*tert*-butyl)pyridine as a base. We also succeeded in the preparation of benzo[b]thiophene S-oxide **6** from sulfinate ester **1a** and 2-styrylboronic acid (**5**) through the intramolecular S-alkenylation (Fig. 2E).

Various sulfinate esters served in synthesizing dibenzothiophene S-oxides having various electron-donating or electron-withdrawing functional groups (Fig. 2B and D). Indeed, 2,7-dimethyl- and 2,4,7-trimethyl-substituted unsymmetric dibenzothiophene S-oxides **4l** and **4m** were prepared efficiently from 4-methyl- and 4,6-dimethyl-substituted 2-bromobenzenesulfonic acid esters, respectively. The synthesis of dibenzothiophene S-oxide **4n** bearing a methylenedioxy moiety was achieved efficiently through cross-coupling and cyclization in diethyl ether. We also accomplished the preparation of dibenzothiophene S-oxides **4o–4q** leaving electron-withdrawing chloro, trifluoromethyl, and ethoxycarbonyl groups untouched. These results obviously indicated that Br-selective coupling and following cyclization were not affected by a broad range of electron-donating or -withdrawing functional groups.

To gain insight into the reaction mechanism of the electrophilic cyclization of sulfinate esters, we then isolated sulfuran intermediate **7** by changing the protocol (Fig. 3A). Indeed, after treatment of sulfinate ester **3a** with Tf<sub>2</sub>O, the resulting mixture was quenched with solid sodium bicarbonate instead of aqueous sodium bicarbonate. Then, filtrating the mixture to remove

sodium bicarbonate and washing the resulting filtrate with *n*-hexane furnished sulfuran **7** quantitatively. We achieved the synthesis of dibenzothiophene S-oxide **4a** with the hydrolysis of sulfuran **7** with aqueous sodium bicarbonate. Based on this result, we proposed a plausible reaction mechanism for the dibenzothiophene S-oxide synthesis (Fig. 3B). First, Tf<sub>2</sub>O activates S=O moiety to form sulfuran intermediate **I**. Second, electrophilic aromatic substitution at the electrophilic sulfur provides sulfuran **7**. Finally, hydrolysis of sulfuran **7** with aqueous sodium bicarbonate furnishes dibenzothiophene S-oxide **4a** via the nucleophilic attack of water or bicarbonate anion to the sulfur atom. When sulfoxide **8** was treated with Tf<sub>2</sub>O followed by the addition of sodium bicarbonate, dibenzothiophene **9a** was obtained in good yield through the demethylative hydrolysis of sulfonium intermediate **III**, where sulfoxide **4a** was not obtained (Fig. 3C).<sup>13</sup> This result shows that the difference between sulfinate esters and sulfoxides in the electrophilic cyclization lies in the reaction sites in the hydrolysis.

Good transformability of dibenzothiophene S-oxide enabled us to synthesize a wide variety of dibenzothiophene derivatives (Fig. 4A). For instance, S-oxidation of **4a** with *m*CPBA afforded dibenzothiophene S,S-dioxide **10a** in high yield.<sup>14</sup> Rhodium-catalyzed imidation of **4a** with trifluoroacetamide took place efficiently in the presence of iodobenzene diacetate and magnesium oxide to provide sulfoximine **11**.<sup>15</sup> Reduction of sulfoxide **4a** with TFAA and sodium iodide proceeded smoothly to furnish dibenzothiophene **9a** in high yield.<sup>16</sup> We also accomplished the preparation of thiophene- and furan-fused benzothiophenes **9b** and **9c** by the reduction of sulfoxides **4i** and **4j**. To our surprise, we found that the decomposition of furan-fused benzothiophene **9c** took place gradually in CDCl<sub>3</sub> at room temperature.<sup>17</sup>

We clarified that it is not easy to achieve the efficient synthesis of sulfoxides **4i** and **4j** by the conventional oxidation with *m*CPBA (Fig. 4B and C).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the oxidation of thienobenzothiophene **9b** with *m*CPBA (0.7 or 1.4 equiv.) afforded a

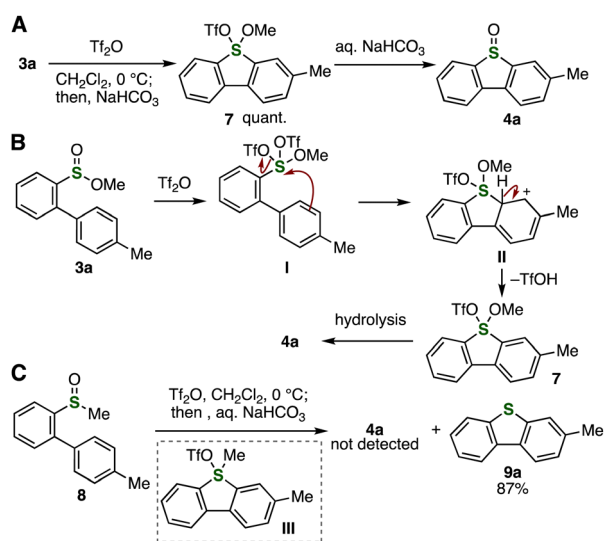


Fig. 3 (A) Stepwise synthesis of **4a** via isolation of **7**. (B) Plausible mechanism for the synthesis of **4a** from **3a**. (C) Electrophilic cyclization of sulfoxide **8**.

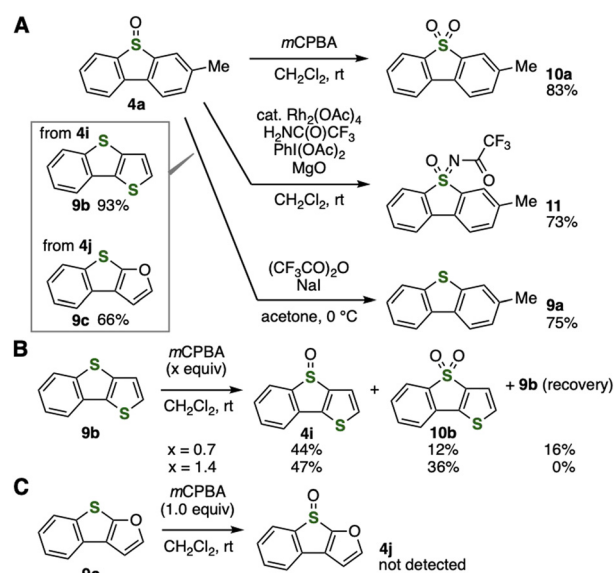


Fig. 4 (A) Transformations of **4a**, **4i**, and **4j**. (B) Oxidation of **9b**. (C) Oxidation of **9c**.



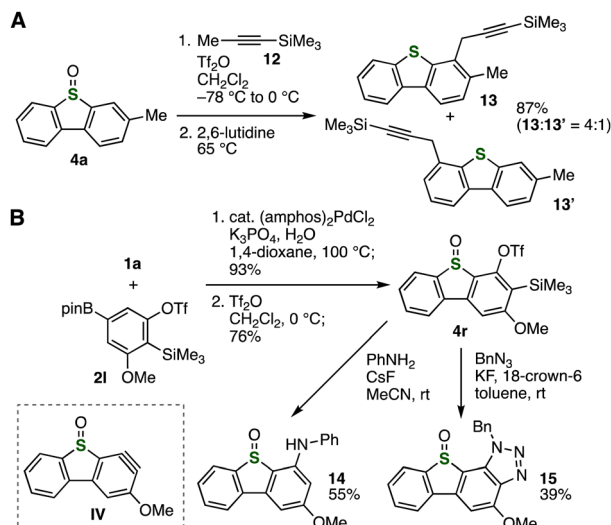


Fig. 5 (A) C–H propargylation using **4a**. (B) Synthesis and transformations of *o*-silylaryl triflate **4r**.

mixture of sulfoxide **4i** and sulfone **10b**, clearly showing the problematic reactivity of sulfoxides under the oxidation conditions leading to sulfones (Fig. 4B). Furthermore, *m*CPBA oxidation of furanobenzothiophene **4j** provided a complex mixture of products (Fig. 4C). These results obviously indicate an advantage of the newly developed method to synthesize dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides.

Further transformations of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides realized a wide variety of highly functionalized dibenzothiophene derivatives (Fig. 5). An extended Pummerer-type propargylation of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **4a** with silane **12** took place efficiently to provide **13** and **13'** in high combined yield, where C–C formation at the electron-rich but bulky site occurred smoothly to furnish **13** as a major product (Fig. 5A).<sup>4a</sup> It is worth noting that the good functional group tolerance allowed us to prepare *o*-silylaryl triflate **4r** efficiently by the coupling–cyclization approach without damaging reactive silyl and triflyloxy groups (Fig. 5B). This result shows a clear advantage over other dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide synthesis with nucleophilic carbanions or heating under basic conditions.<sup>6</sup> Then, regioselective *N*-arylation of aniline with aryne **IV** took place smoothly to afford adduct **14** in moderate yield without forming the regioisomer, in which the sulfoxide moiety remained unreacted.<sup>18–20</sup> Moreover, we accomplished the synthesis of triazole-fused dibenzothiophene *S*-oxide **15** by regioselective cycloaddition of aryne **IV** with benzyl azide. Since *o*-silylaryl triflate moiety serves to synthesize highly substituted arenes through aryne intermediates by a wide variety of transformations, a broad range of dibenzothiophene derivatives will be prepared by diverse aryne reactions.

In summary, we have developed an efficient method to prepare dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides from 2-bromoaryl sulfinate esters and arylboronic acids in 2 steps. Diverse dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides having various functionalities were synthesized by Br-selective cross-coupling and subsequent cyclization with Tf<sub>2</sub>O without side reactions through the activation of sulfoxides. The good transformability

of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides allowed us to access novel heterocyclic molecules such as highly ring-fused thiophenes. Further studies including applications for the construction of new organo-sulfur skeletons by transformations of dibenzothiophene *S*-oxides are ongoing in our laboratory.

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## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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