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Design and synthesis of a novel series of *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives as potent and selective PI3K γ inhibitors

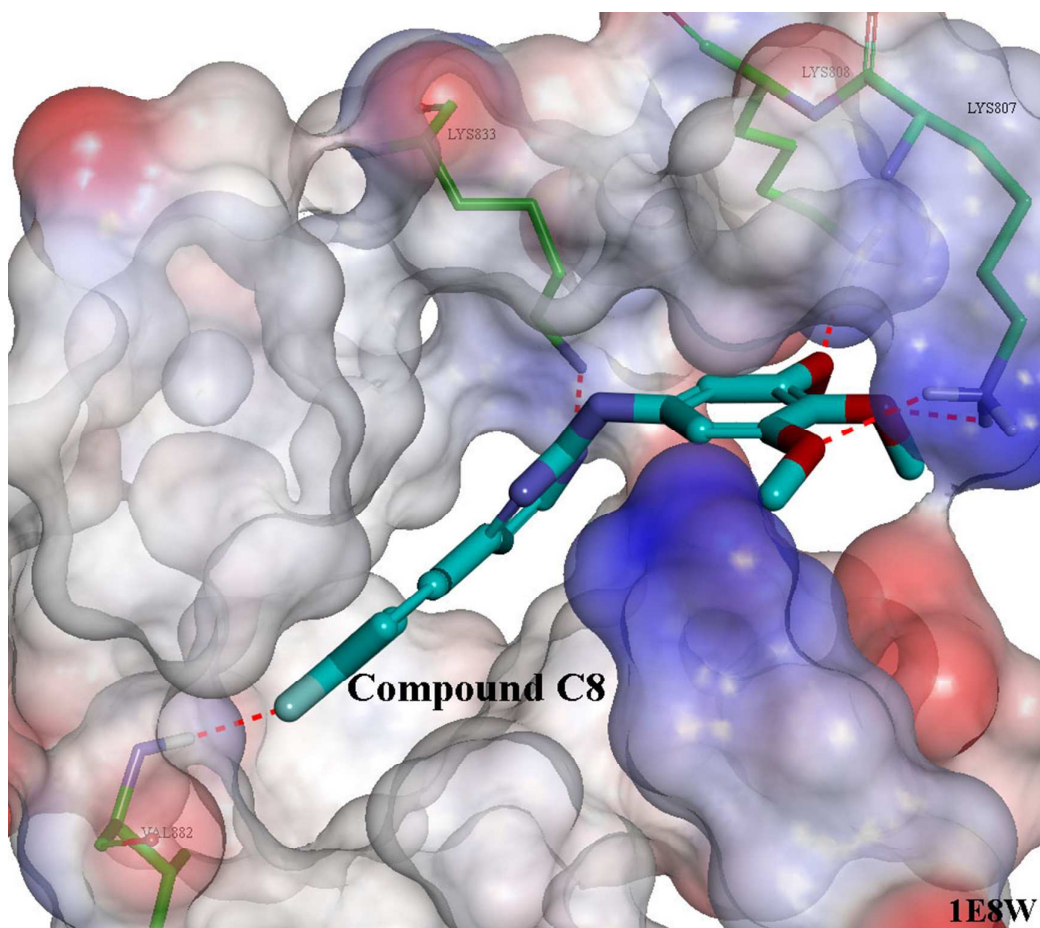
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Abstract: Due to the increasing evidence linking the PI3K γ pathway to various disease states, PI3K γ is becoming an important target for cancer treatment. Herein we designed and synthesized a novel series of *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives with low CDOCKER_INTERACTION_ENERGY and then evaluated for their PI3K γ *in vitro* inhibitory activities and *in vitro* antiproliferation assays against four human cancer cells. Among these obtained anticancer agents, compound **C8** (IC₅₀ = 65 nM) demonstrated the most potent inhibitory activity against PI3K γ kinase as well as cellular level, compared to the control drug **TG100713** (IC₅₀ = 127nM). Moreover, molecular docking analysis was also performed to determine possible binding modes between PI3K γ and the target compounds.

Keywords: *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives; molecular docking; PI3K γ enzyme; antitumor activity; structure–activity relationship; FACS; 3D-QSAR.

Phosphoinositide 3-kinases (PI3Ks), the family of evolutionarily conserved lipid kinases, are categorized into class I, II, and III based on their subunit structure, regulation and substrate selectivity [1-2]. They all could catalyze phosphorylation of the 3-hydroxyl position of phosphatidylinositol 4, 5-diphosphate (PIP₂) to generate phosphatidylinositol 3, 4, 5-triphosphate (PIP₃). PIP₃ is known as a significant second intracellular message in the control of a diverse set of cellular processes, including cell growth, proliferation, differentiation, survival, intracellular trafficking and membrane ruffling [2-6]. The class IA (PI3K α , PI3K β and PI3K δ), as most extensively studied of the three PI3K classes, is predominately activated by receptor tyrosine kinases and class IB (PI3K γ) is activated by G-protein coupled receptors [6-7]. There is a regulatory subunit (p85) and an isoform-specific catalytic subunit (p110 α , p110 β and p110 δ) to build up class IA, whereas PI3K γ , the sole representative of class IB, consists of only one member: a p110 γ catalytic subunit and a p101 regulatory subunit [7-10]. Three different subtypes of class IA PI3Ks (PI3K α , PI3K β and PI3K δ) are encoded by PIK3CA, PIK3CB and PIK3CD, respectively [11].

In recent years, it is widely reported that the deregulation of class I PI3Ks is responsible for cancer, inflammation, immune disorders, and cardiovascular diseases [12]. Moreover, PI3K α and PI3K β , ubiquitously expressed in mammalian tissues, are involved in regulating tumor growth and proliferation, whereas PI3K γ (mainly present in leukocytes) could be a viable approach for the treatment of a variety of inflammatory and cancer diseases [13-14]. As different subtypes of PI3Ks, the efforts to develop PI3K-targeted therapeutics have led to two paradigms: namely simultaneously inhibit all PI3K isoforms (pan inhibition) and only one (isozyme selective) [9]. Thus far efforts, there are a considerable number of compounds as antitumor agents now in clinic practice (Figure 1). **LY294002** [15], as the first PI3K inhibitor, is a pan inhibitor of PI3K kinase that binds reversibly to ATP site and is also a common referenced compound in PI3K inhibition studies. **PIK-75**, **TGX221** [7] and **TG100713** [31], are isoform selective inhibitors, which exhibit potent, efficacious, antiangiogenic activity of PI3K α , PI3K β and PI3K γ , respectively [16]. Compared with isoform selective inhibitors, the pan inhibitors may cause some unexpected

toxicities [9], such as platelet aggregation and inhibition of immune responses. Based on these considerations, selective inhibition of PI3Ks has been considered as a comparative fashion for cancer treatment.

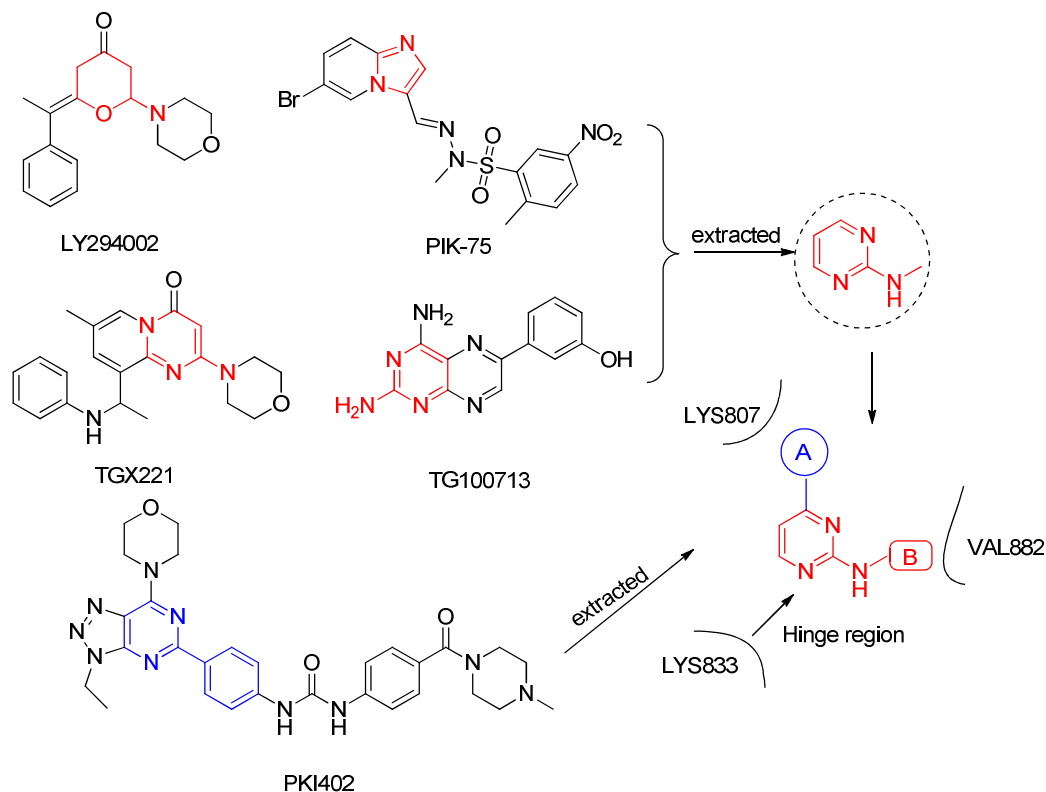


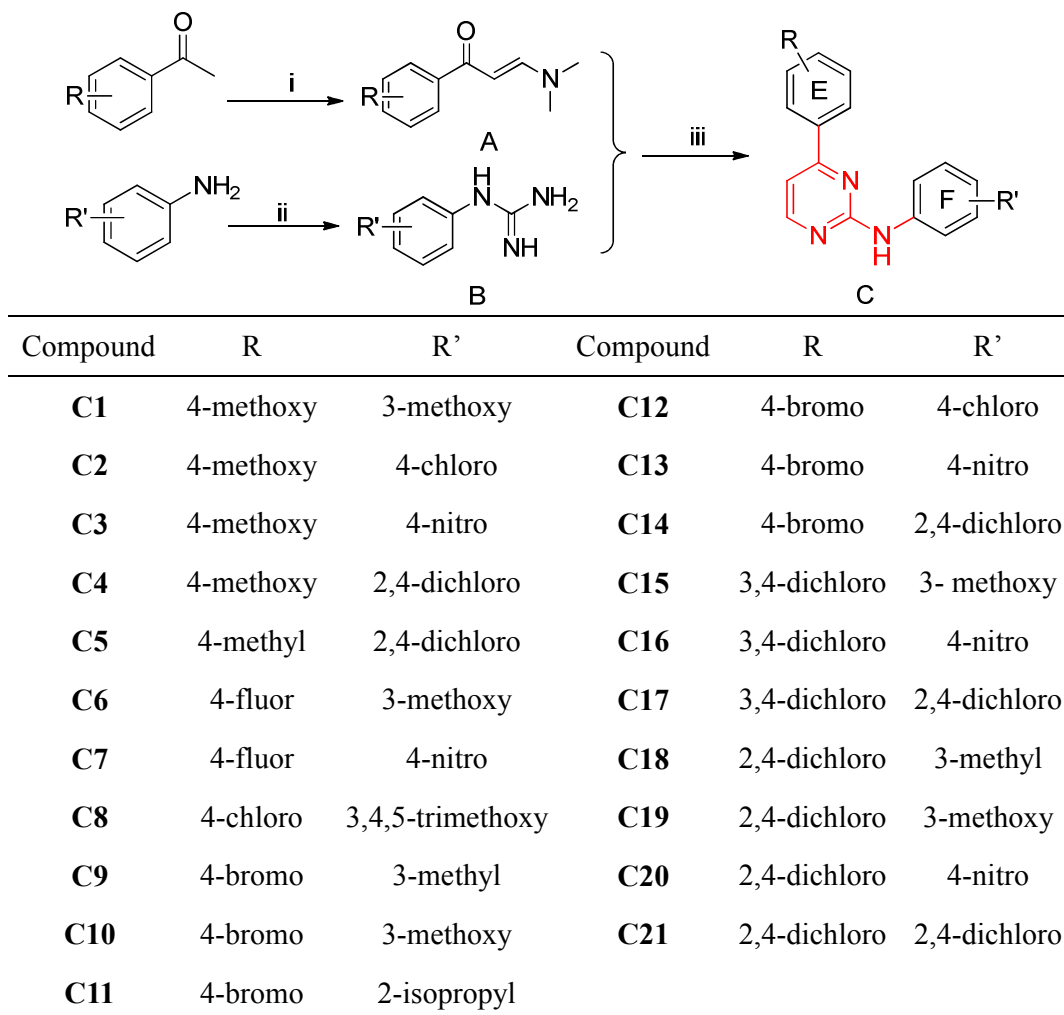
Figure 1 Some known PI3K kinase inhibitors and design solution of novel N,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives.

Given linking the PI3K pathway to various disease states, the class IA PI3Ks has been studied extensively as targets for the treatment of cancers and metabolic disorders [13-14]. However, there are only a handful of reports of PI3K γ as the target for the treatment of inflammatory disorders and cancers in the previous literature, especially tumors. Recently, some papers linking the transforming functions of PI3K γ to disruption of intercellular adhesion and promotion of cancer cell invasion have been published [17-19]. For example, PI3K γ mediates kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus GPCR-induced sarcomagenesis [20] and PI3K γ activated by CXCL12 regulates tumor cell adhesion and invasion [21]. Therefore, based on these convincing evidences delineating a strong rationale in this promising therapeutic area, it was decided to pursue PI3K γ as a drug discovery target for cancer.

Pyrimidines were extensively explored and often used as central core structure [22] for the inhibitors of a wide range of kinases, such as Axl kinase [23], phosphoinositide-3-kinase [24], fibroblast growth factor receptor [25-26] and Janus tyrosine kinase [27]. Therefore, in order to develop more potent selective PI3K γ inhibitors as anti-tumor agents, we attempted to use the pyrimidine core as the basic scaffold for designing the novel PI3K γ inhibitors. As reported in previous studies, the exocyclic NH along with the pyrimidine core could form the classical bi-dentate hydrogen bond donor-acceptor interaction with the hinge region of the kinase [28-29], and the pendant phenyl ring was identified as a suitable region for initial modification of the molecules [16]. Thus, the replacement of aniline fragment at 2-position of the pyrimidine ring would lead to alteration of these targets (Figure 1). Moreover, pyrimidine, as a bioisostere of quinoxaline ring moiety, shows some similarity in structure with our referenced compound **TG100713** (from Selleck). Based on this, a series of novel *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives had been designed as the selective PI3K γ inhibitors (Table 1) and the medicinal chemistry program was initiated to explore the SAR. Subsequently, in order to validate whether these small molecules could work on PI3K γ and to verify the authenticity of selected study only in PI3K γ inhibitory activity at the same time, we have performed two groups of molecular dockings between these designed compounds and three protein-ligand complexes (as for PI3K α , PDB code: **3HHM**; as for PI3K β , PDB code: **4G11**; as for PI3K γ , PDB code: **1E8W**) retrieved from the RCSB Protein Data Bank (<http://www.rcsb.org/pdb/home/home.do>), by the means of the CDOCKER protocol [30] in the Accelrys Discovery Studio 3.5 suite.

After virtual screening, twenty-one *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives were synthesized for the study of anti-tumor activity. A general synthetic approach was developed to prepare these 2-aniline-pyrimidines that could be easily obtained by three steps in Scheme 1. These candidate compounds with *para* substituents on E ring displayed low binding energy compared with the reference compound (**TG100713**), indicating that these compounds would be potential PI3K γ inhibitors. To further evaluate the selectivity for PI3K γ , these candidates were also docked with PI3K α

(PDB ID: **3HHM**) and PI3K β (PDB ID: **4G11**), respectively. For better displaying and comparing each other, these obtained results were plotted as a line-scatter graph presented in [Figure 2](#). It was composed of three trend lines: the black solid line represented PI3K γ ; the blue solid line represented PI3K α ; and the red solid line represented PI3K β . Insight into the [Figure 2](#), the general trends of the corresponding CDOCKER_INTERACTION_ENERGY were similar against three enzymes. For instance, the top compounds (**C9**, **C12**) and the bottom ones (**C3**, **C8**) were the same. However, the corresponding CDOCKER_INTERACTION_ENERGY of these compounds binding into PI3K γ were obviously lower than that binding to PI3K α and PI3K β . It was concluded that these candidates were promising to synthesize and evaluate as selective PI3K γ inhibitors.



Scheme 1: Synthesis of compounds **C1-C21**

Reagents and conditions: (i) DMF-DMA/ 120 °C/ 16 h.; (ii) Ar₂/ EtOH/ 70% HNO₃/

50% Cyanamide/ 100 °C/ 16-18 h; (iii) Ar2/ NaOH/ 2-methoxyethanol/ 125 °C/ 22 h.

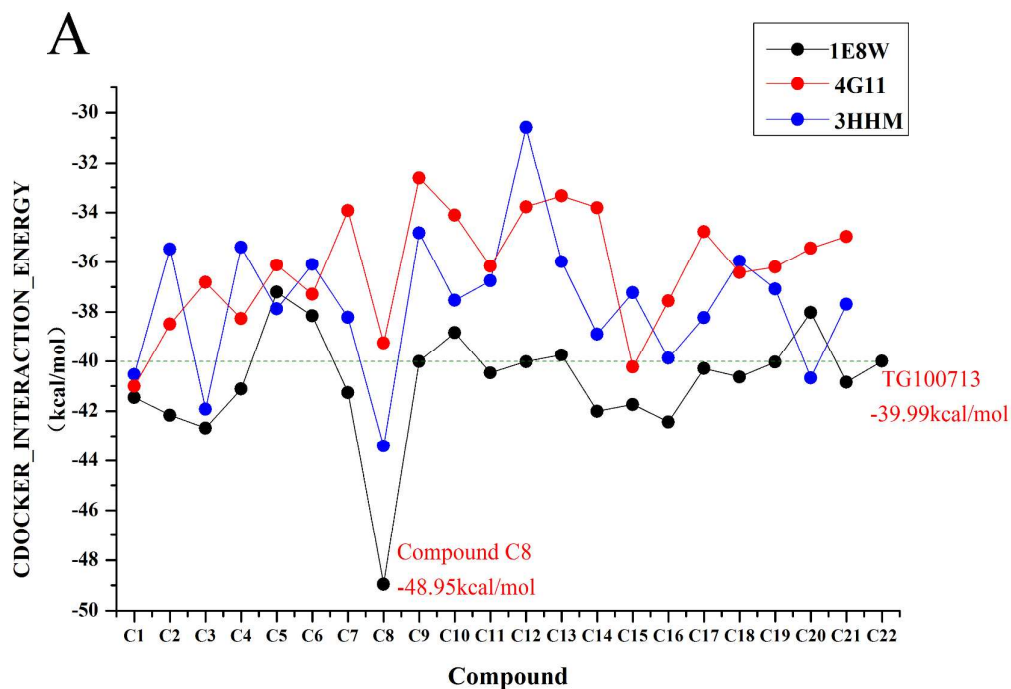
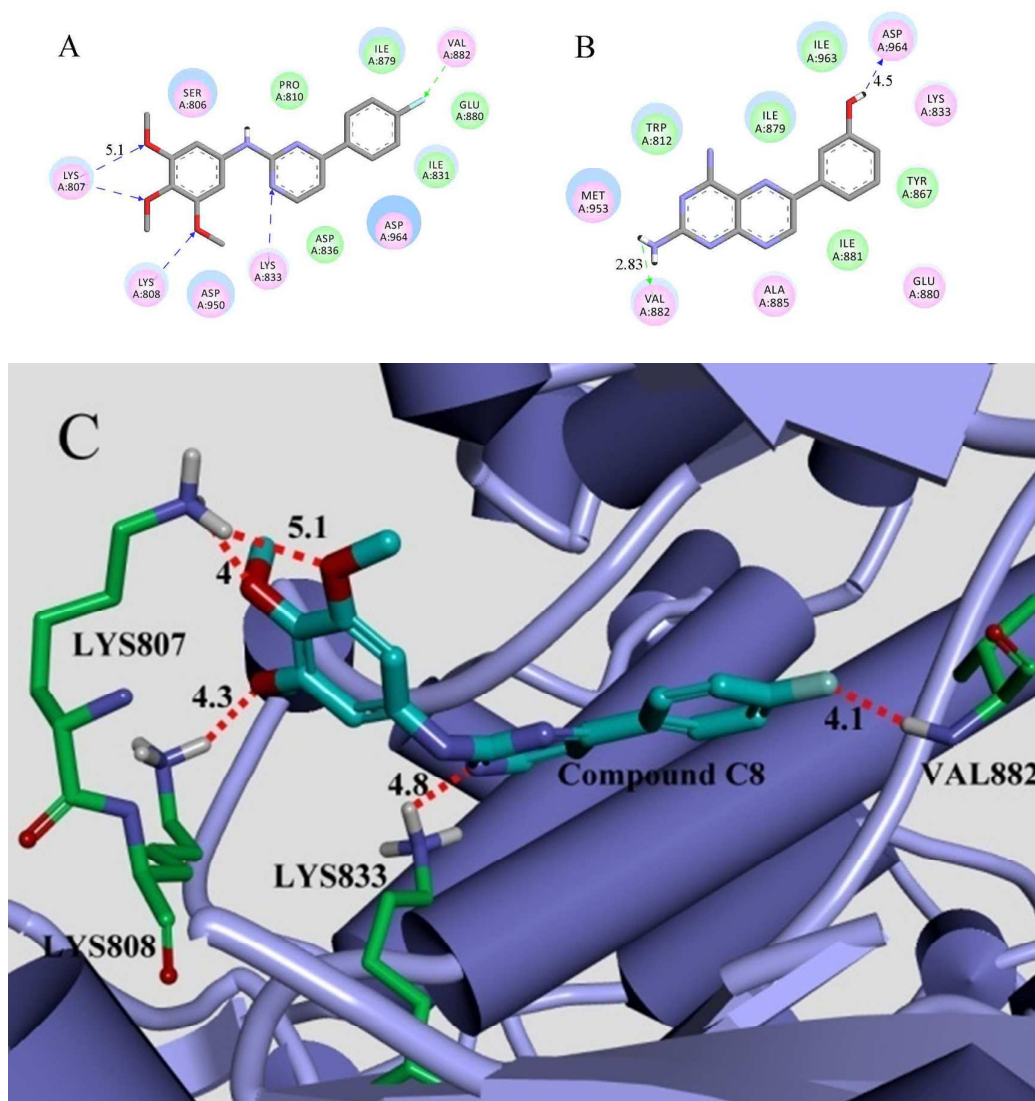


Figure 2 The CDOCKER_INTERACTION_ENERGY (kcal/mol) obtained from the docking study of the targeted compounds by the CDOCKER protocol (Discovery Studio 3.5, Accelrys, Co. Ltd).

To take more directly insight into the binding mode of *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives and PI3K γ , the binding model of 4-(4-chlorophenyl)-*N*-(3,4,5-trimethoxyphenyl)pyrimidin-2-amine (compound **C8**) with target protein structure(**1E8W**) was shown in **Figure 3**. Visual inspection of the pose of compound **C8** into PI3K γ binding site revealed that this candidate PI3K γ inhibitor was tightly embedded into the ATP binding pocket. The model also depicted that extensive hydrophobic interactions were formed between compound **C8** and residues **Ser 806**, **Lys 808**, **Pro 810**, **Ile 831**, **Asp 836**, **Ile 879**, **Glu 880**, **Asp 950** and **Asp 964** of the ATP-binding pocket of PI3K γ kinase (**Figure 3A**). From **Figure 3C** and **3D**, there were only two H-bonds formed between the reference compound **TG100713** and **1E8W**, whereas five H-bonds were formed between compound **C8** and **1E8W**, inferring that the candidate was more tightly embedded into the ATP binding pocket than **TG100713**. Insight into **Figure 3C**, three H-bonds were formed

between three *methoxyl* groups of F ring and **Lys807**, **Lys808**, with their lengths 4 Å, 4.3 Å and 5.1 Å, respectively; another one, with its length 4.1 Å, was formed between *p*-Cl of E ring and **Val 882**; the lengths 4 Å of H-bond was formed between N1 of pyrimidine core and **Lys 883**, which was significant to bind ATP-binding pocket of PI3K γ kinase for all designed compounds. Based on these considerations, these results could provide a molecular level foundation for compound **C8** as the most potent PI3K γ inhibitor.



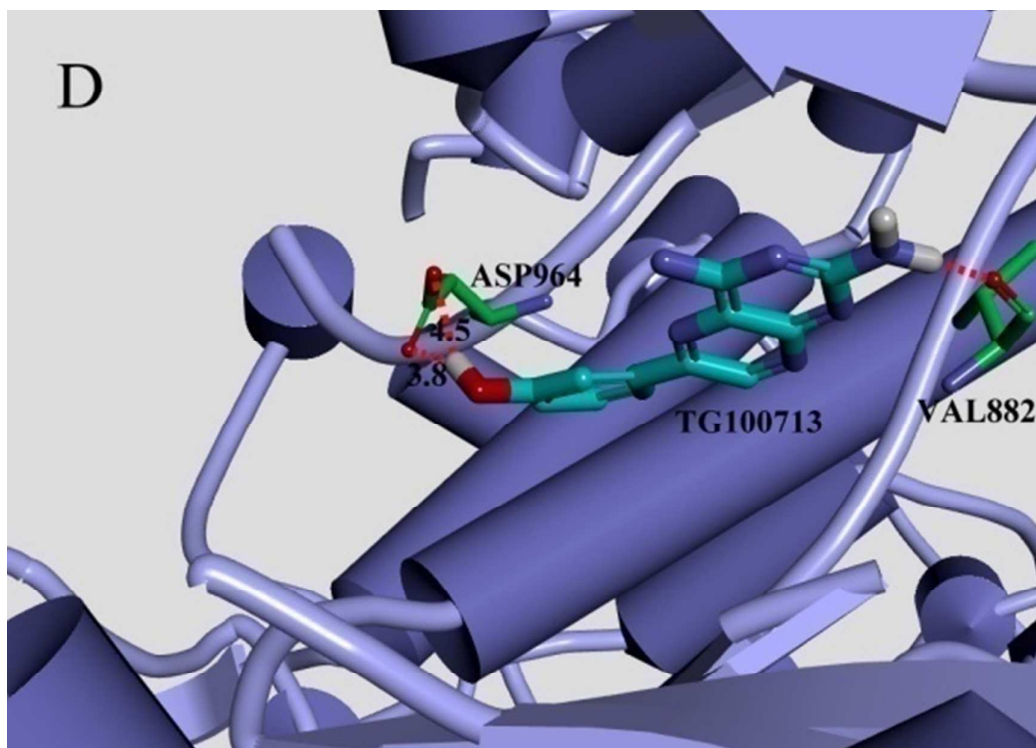


Figure 3 The two kinds of binding modes between the active conformation of compound **C8**, **TG100713** (the reference drug) and the target protein PI3K γ (PDB code: **1E8W**) provided by the CDOCKER protocol (Ligplus and Discovery Studio 3.5, Accelrys, Co. Ltd). A) 2D molecular docking model of compound **C8** with **1E8W**. B) 2D molecular docking model of **TG100713** with **1E8W**. C) The 3D interaction map between compound **C8** and the PI3K γ protein. D) The 3D interaction map between **TG100713** and the PI3K γ protein.

Based on the docking results, herein we only focused on the replacement of substituents at 2-aniline and benzene ring at 4- of pyrimidine skeleton. The synthesis of series **A** ((*E*)-3-(dimethylamino)-1-phenylprop-2-en-1-one) was started from different substituted acetophenones by dissolved in DMF-DMA. Under Ar₂, substituted anilines were reacted with 50% cyanamide in EtOH to prepare the corresponding phenylguanidine derivatives **B**. Subsequently, a mixture of series **A**, series **B**, and NaOH in 2-methoxyethanol was heated at reflux to yield the target products **C** (Scheme 1).

Subsequently, all the synthesized compounds were evaluated for their inhibitory activities toward PI3K γ , PI3K α , and PI3K β , and the encouraging results were depicted as concentrations of IC₅₀ in Table 1. As expected, most of the synthesized

N,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives showed moderate to potent inhibitory activities for these three target protein kinases, and the tendency of inhibition was roughly similar to our energy prediction. Moreover, most of these molecules also showed high selectivity over PI3K α and PI3K β , compared with their IC₅₀ in three target kinases from the Table 1. Based on the obtained result, it was concluded that these synthesized compounds may have potential for further development as selective PI3K γ inhibitors. In particular, compound **C8** of which IC₅₀ value could reach up to 65 nM, displayed more potent as PI3K γ inhibitor than the referenced compound **TG100713** (IC₅₀ = 127nM), indicating that compound **C8** had a great opportunity as the new PI3K γ selective inhibitor for cancer therapy.

Table 1. Enzyme activities (IC₅₀, nM) of compounds **C1-C21** against human PI3K γ , PI3K α , PI3K β kinases, respectively

Compound	PI3K γ IC ₅₀ (nM)	PI3K α IC ₅₀ (nM)	PI3K β IC ₅₀ (nM)
C1	195	615	729
C2	167	552	603
C3	143	527	537
C4	235	738	839
C5	371	>1000	>1000
C6	334	880	>1000
C7	247	679	863
C8	65	341	373
C9	342	894	>1000
C10	357	>1000	977
C11	313	792	874
C12	302	914	946
C13	265	946	961
C14	231	591	673
C15	217	625	741
C16	154	503	573
C17	250	836	926
C18	274	813	851
C19	278	851	893
C20	386	953	938
C21	268	772	799
TG100713	127	165	215

According to the data as shown in Table 1, it could be concluded that molecules

with bulky substituents of pyrimidine core could more easily bound to the active domain of PI3K γ kinase. The inhibitory activity of compounds (**C1- C14**) with different *para* substituents on **E** ring increased in the following order: 4-F < 4-Br < 4-methy < 4-methoxy, inferring that those compounds with strong electron-donating group performed better than those with electron-withdrawing substitutes. In addition, comparing all these potential inhibitors (especially among **C10**, **C15**, **C19**), the disubstituteds on the **E** ring were likely to be superior to monosubstitutions inhibitors. In the light of steric and electronic factors, it could be noted that compounds with the same substituent on phenyl **E** ring exhibited distinct kinase inhibitory activity due to different substituents which introduced into phenyl **F** ring. A comparison of the *para* substitution on **F** ring demonstrated that a *para* electron-withdrawing group (compound **C2**, **3**, **7**, **12**, **13**) may have more slightly improved inhibitory activity than a *methoxy* or *methy* group (compound **C1**, **6**, **9**, **10**), and it showed the most potent inhibitory activity when the *para* position was substituted by -NO₂ (compound **C3**, IC₅₀ = 143 nM and compound **C13**, IC₅₀ = 265 nM). Besides, the nitrogen at position 1 and 3 of pyrimidine ring could enhance the binding potency as PI3K γ inhibitors. Based on above results, these compounds in this series deserved further investigation.

These target compounds were also chosen to evaluate *in vitro* antiproliferation assays against four different human cancer cells (A549, MCF-7, HepG-2 and HeLa) to control for non-specific cytotoxicity. Interestingly, from the obtained results as listed in [Table 2](#), compounds **C1-C21** almost showed moderate potent inhibitory activities against four cancer cells. And the representative compound **C8** exhibited the best inhibition activity with the IC₅₀ value of 0.09 μ M, 0.29 μ M, 0.36 μ M, 3.15 μ M, much better than the positive drug **TG100713** in some cell lines (HEPG2 and A549). In accordance with the PI3K γ kinase assay, it was concluded that compound **C8**, **C3**, **C16**, **C4**, with the level of IC₅₀ values in the low micromolar range, might be good candidates for further optimization. In short, these synthesized compounds played a role in inhibiting many tumor cell lines.

[Table 2](#). In vitro anticancer activities (IC₅₀, μ M) against four human tumor cell lines

Compound	IC ₅₀ (μ M) ^a
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	HEPG2 ^b	HeLa ^b	A549 ^b	MCF-7 ^b
C1	13.88	0.55	6.53	3.45
C2	4.50	0.31	20.89	0.81
C3	1.04	0.98	2.73	0.77
C4	0.19	23.03	7.33	4.17
C5	344.10	91.52	164.37	>1000
C6	127.64	145.01	35.91	412.45
C7	7.95	3.51	83.95	0.40
C8	0.09	0.29	0.36	3.15
C9	74.57	71.04	63.19	209.65
C10	148.05	152.71	82.66	278.17
C11	7.03	11.53	3.71	111.06
C12	47.48	36.68	6.11	4.18
C13	42.98	25.70	75.99	680.73
C14	0.72	1.08	3.78	2.49
C15	3.37	4.97	6	21.01
C16	0.5	1.84	0.72	3.51
C17	28.45	23.03	25.96	45.64
C18	13.15	7.66	18.45	248.63
C19	96.9	76.39	32.16	192.03
C20	99.33	167.93	119.38	192.45
C21	8.08	1.56	11.59	3.18
TG100713	0.82	0.15	0.49	1.03

^aAntiproliferation activity was measured using the MTT assay. Values were determined from replicates of 6 wells from three independent experiments.

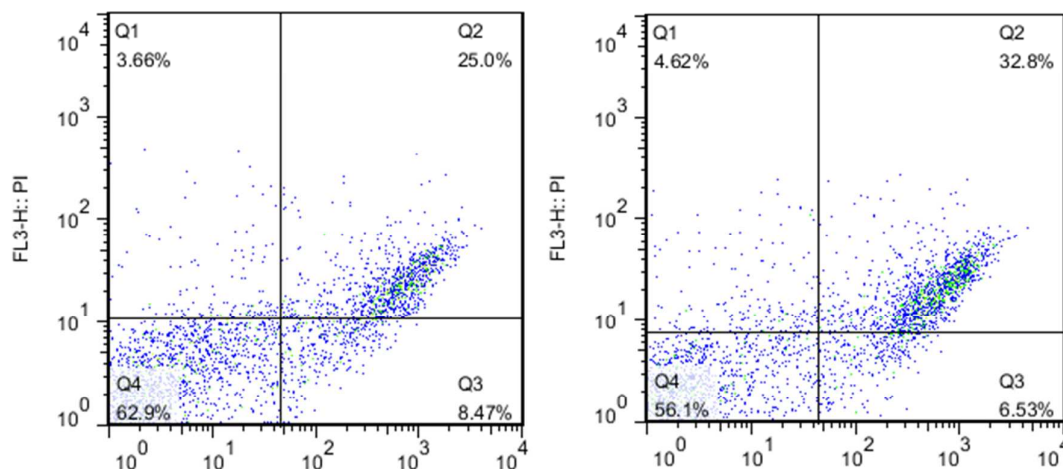
^bCancer cells kindly supplied by State Key Laboratory of Pharmaceutical Biotechnology, Nanjing University; HepG-2 (hepatocellular liver carcinoma cell line), MCF-7 (breast cancer), Hela (immortal cell line), A549 (carcinomic human alveolar basal epithelial cell).

The kinase selectivity profile of this series was assessed, using compound **C8** as a representative. The obtained results (Table 3), presented their activity data depicted as IC₅₀ values. Interestingly, compound **C8** showed moderate inhibitory activities for the majority of these target protein kinases, which belong to tyrosine and serine/threonine kinase. In addition, compound **C8** performed better as PI3K γ inhibitors than against another kinases. These results could provide sufficient evidence compound **C8** could be selected as potential PI3K γ inhibitors and antitumor agents for further optimization.

Table 3. IC₅₀ datas for compound **C8** against several -related kinases screened.

Kinase	IC ₅₀ (μ M)	fold selectivity
PI3Kγ	0.065	-
EGFR	2.145	33
CDK2	18.782	289
PTK2	10.143	156
JAK2	21.513	331

For the further sake of assessing the inhibition of the target kinase by the synthesized compounds, an apoptosis experiment of compound **C8** was performed in A549 cell line using Annexin-V and propidium iodide (PI) double staining by flow cytometry. The uptake of Annexin V-PE was notably increased, and the uptake of normal cells was significantly decreased in a time-dependent manner. Finally the percentage of apoptotic cells from $5.47 \pm 0.43\%$ to $13.50 \pm 0.79\%$ was markedly elevated in a density-dependent manner at 48 h (Figure 4). This is consistent with its good binding affinity to PI3K γ and its potent activity in the inhibition of cell growth.



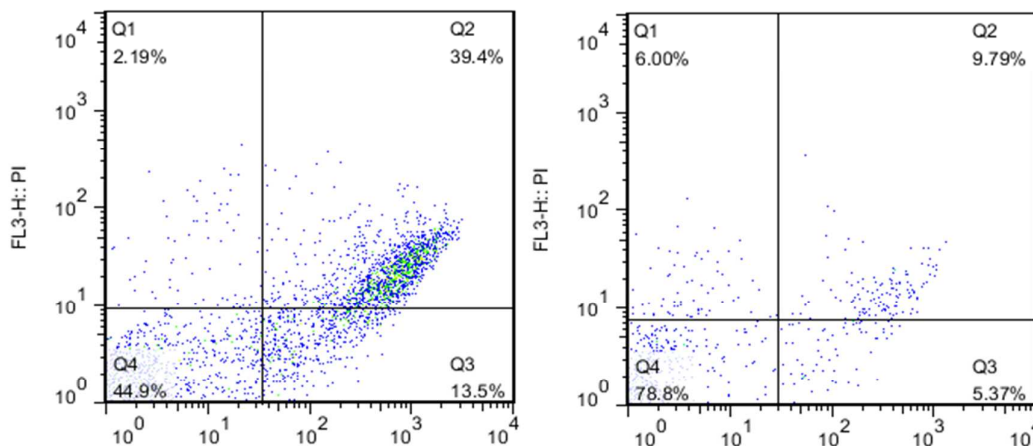


Figure 4 Analysis of apoptosis induced by compound C8 in the A549 cell line. Data represents the percentage of apoptotic cells. Treat cells by 1.0, 4.0, 16.0 μM with compound C8

For further validation of the binding mode and the structural framework of the structure-activity relationship of these compounds, 3D-QSAR model was performed based on the docking results. 3D-QSAR model was built by using the corresponding pIC_{50} values which were converted from the obtained IC_{50} (nM) values of PI3K γ kinase inhibitor and performed by built-in QSAR software of DS 3.5 (Discovery Studio 3.5, Accelrys, Co. Ltd). The way of this transformation was derived from an online calculator developed from an Indian medicinal chemistry lab (<http://www.sanjeevslab.org/tools-IC50.html>). The training and test set were divided by the random diverse molecules method of DS 3.5, in which the test set accounts for 80% while the training set was set to 20%. 17 compounds were selected into training sets and the rest were in relative test sets. The results were presented in Table 4. During the developing 3D-QSAR modeling, one of the important steps was the determination of active conformation and alignment of molecules. The efficient solution of this model depended on docking study and the reliability of previous study about activity data. The alignment conformation of each molecule was the one with lowest energy in the docked results of CDOCKER.

Table 4. Experimental, predicted inhibitory activity of compounds C1-C21

Compound	PI3K γ kinase inhibition		Residual error
	Actual pIC_{50}^b	Predicted pIC_{50}	

C1	6.7100	6.7163	-0.0063
C2	6.7773	6.7808	-0.0035
C3	6.8447	6.8345	0.0102
C4	6.6289	6.6376	-0.0087
C5 ^a	6.4306	6.6673	-0.2367
C6	6.4763	6.4712	0.0051
C7	6.6073	6.5979	0.0094
C8 ^a	7.1871	7.1629	0.0242
C9	6.4660	6.4677	-0.0217
C10 ^a	6.4473	6.5926	-0.1453
C11	6.5045	6.4923	0.0122
C12	6.5200	6.5557	-0.0357
C13	6.5768	6.6008	-0.0240
C14	6.6364	6.6233	0.0131
C15 ^a	6.6635	6.5826	0.0809
C16	6.8125	6.8140	-0.0015
C17	6.6021	6.5951	0.0070
C18	6.5622	6.5371	0.0251
C19	6.5560	6.5531	0.0029
C20	6.4134	6.4014	0.0120
C21	6.5719	6.5675	0.0044

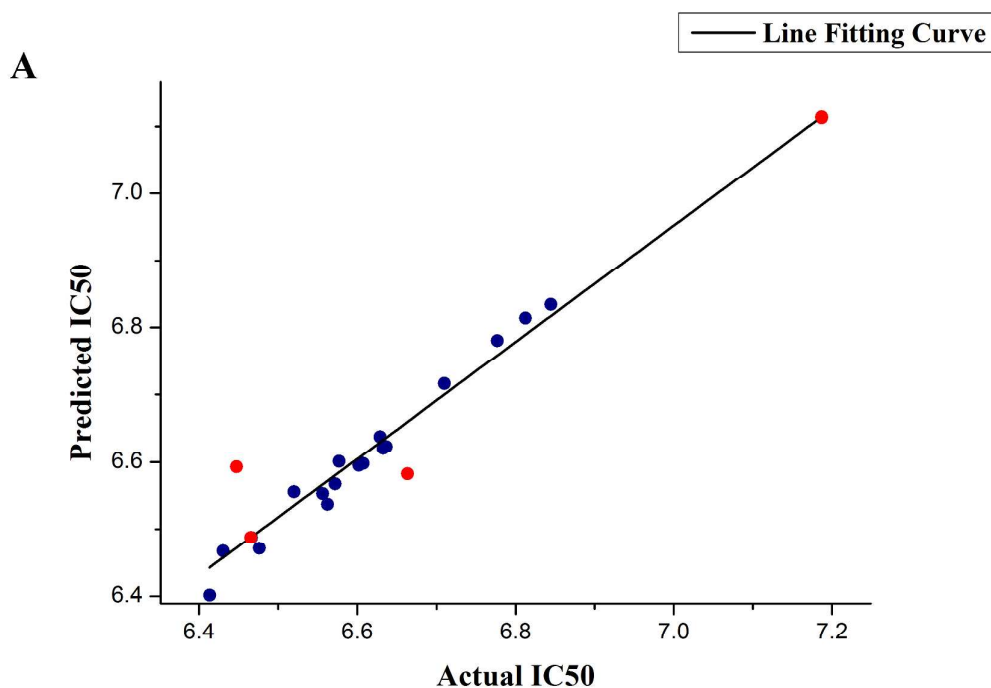
^a Compounds were selected as the test sets while the rest ones were in the training sets

^b The IC₅₀ values of the compounds against PI3K γ (Table 1) were converted into pIC₅₀ values by using the online calculator.([http://www.sanjeevslab.org/tools-IC₅₀.html](http://www.sanjeevslab.org/tools-IC50.html)).

The 3D-QSAR model, generated from DS 3.5, defined the critical regions (steric or electrostatic) affecting the binding affinity, which was a PLS model built on 400 independent variables (conventional $r^2 = 0.94124$). The observed and predicted values and their residual values for the training set and test set molecules in 3D-QSAR model are given in Table 4 and their graphical relationship was illustrated in Figure 5, respectively. The plot of the observed IC₅₀ vs. the predicted results showed that this model has a good predictive power which could be used in prediction of activity for new *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives as PI3K γ inhibitors.

Also the molecules aligned with the iso-surfaces of the 3D-QSAR model coefficients on the electrostatic field region favorable (in blue) or unfavorable (red) and on the energy grids corresponding to the favorable (in green) or unfavorable (in yellow) steric effects for the PI3K γ affinity were shown in Figure 5B and Figure 5C,

respectively. It was widely acceptable that a better inhibitor based on the 3D-QSAR model should have strong Vander Waals attraction in the green areas and a polar group in the blue electrostatic potential areas (which were dominant close to the skeleton). Several key features of the 3D-QSAR contour map are predicted to increase PI3K γ inhibitors affinity: (1) A more positive environment all around the *para* position of the ring **E** and the *meta* position of the ring **F** (electronic study); (2) A more negative environment around the *para* position of ring **F** (electronic study); (3) Less bulk p- substituent of group of ring **E** and the ring **F** (steric study); (4) More bulk group substituted in the meta position of ring **F** (steric study).



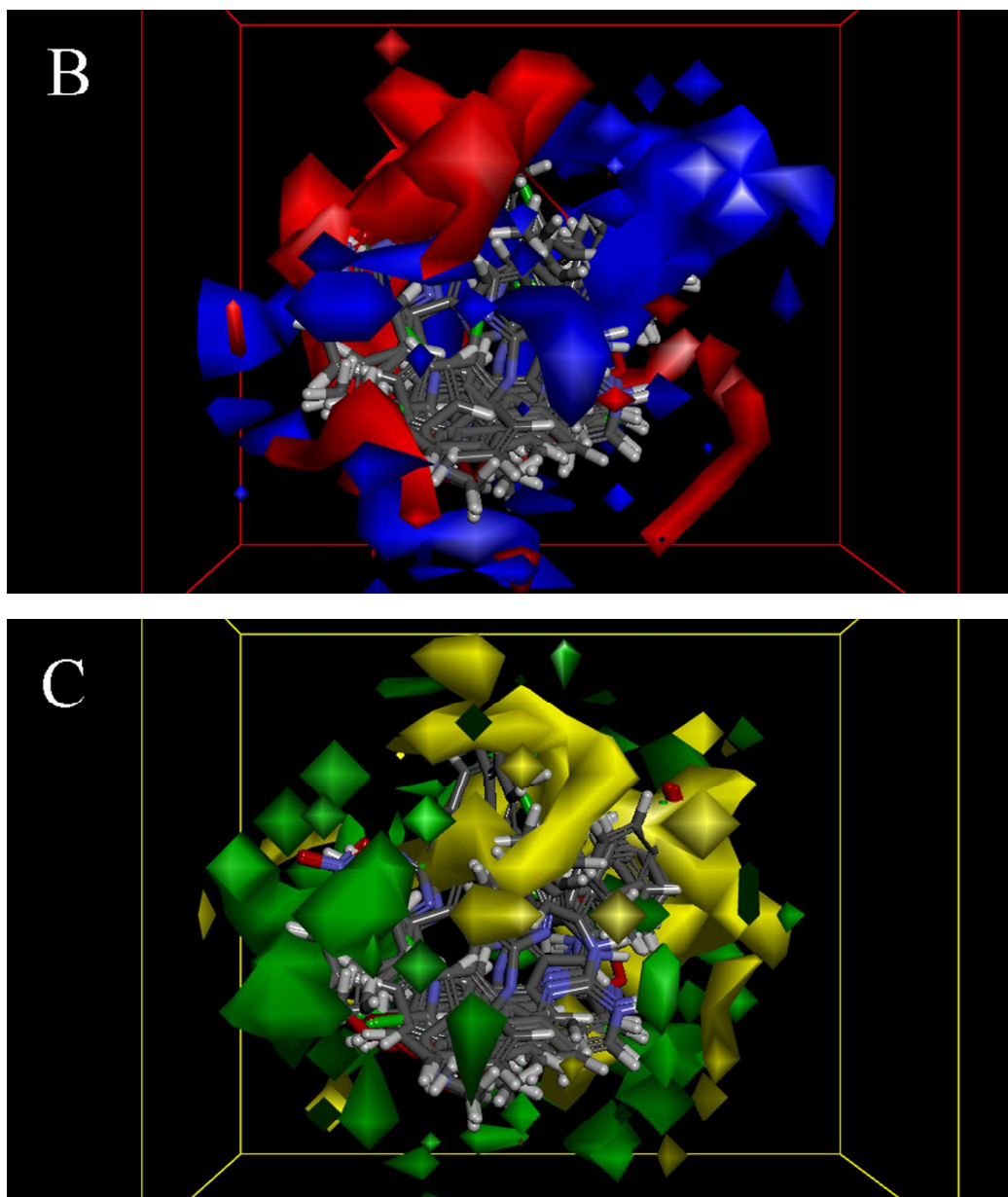


Figure 5 A): The predicted versus experimental pIC_{50} values for the inhibition of PI3K γ (PDB: **1E8W**). B): isosurface of the 3D-QSAR model coefficients on electrostatic potential grids. The blue triangle mesh represents positive electrostatic potential and the red area represents negative electrostatic potential; C): isosurface of the 3D-QSAR model on the steric effects. The green triangle mesh representation indicates the larger volume is favorable; the yellow triangle mesh indicates the smaller one.

In summary, a series of *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine analogues have been synthesized based on the results of the virtual screening. These compounds showed modest potency and selectivity against PI3K γ , with IC_{50} values up to nanomolar.

Among these small molecules, the docking results indicated that compound **C8** could bind well inside the active site of PI3K γ with the lowest CDOCKER_INTERACTION_ENERGY. Also, compound **C8** displayed the most potent anticancer activity against PI3K γ (IC_{50} = 65 nM), being comparable with the positive control **TG100713** (IC_{50} = 127 nM). Moreover, the apoptotic cells with agent treatment accounted for 13.50%, as compared to 5.47% of apoptotic cells in the untreated control. This is consistent with its good binding affinity to PI3K γ and its potent activity in the inhibition of cell growth. These results, along with the SAR analysis, were significant evidence to demonstrate that the compound **C8** could be optimized as a potential selective PI3K γ inhibitor in the further study.

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Design and synthesis of a novel series of *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives as potent and selective PI3K γ inhibitors

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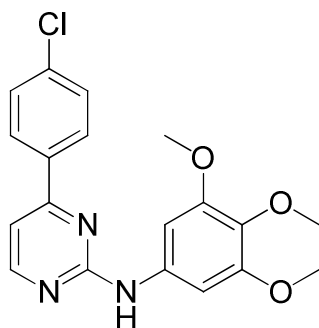
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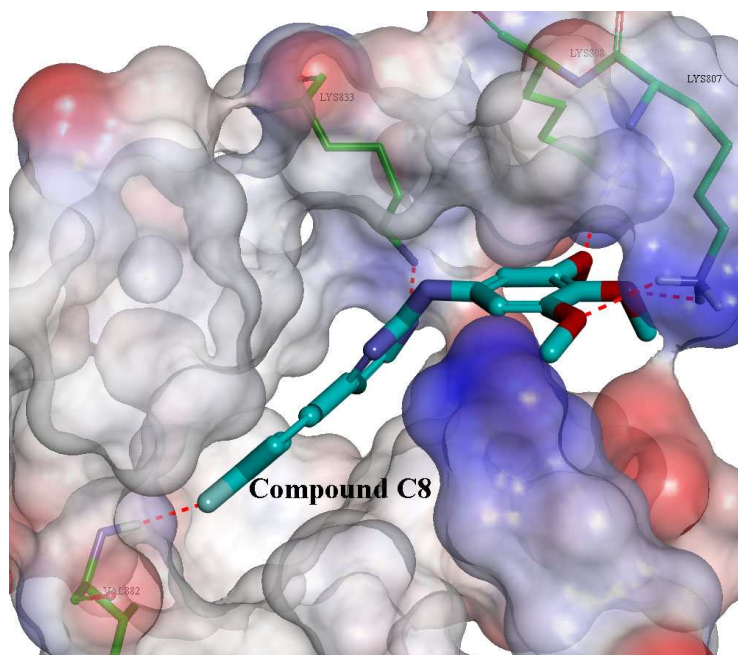


Compound C8

PI3K γ :IC₅₀=65 nM

PI3K α :IC₅₀=341 nM

PI3K β :IC₅₀=373 nM



Twenty-one novel *N*,4-diphenylpyrimidin-2-amine derivatives have been synthesized as PI3K γ selective inhibitors and compound C8 demonstrated the most potent inhibitory activity against PI3K γ kinase.