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# Palladium-catalyzed regioselective C–H alkylation of indoles with haloalkynes: access to functionalized 7-alkynylindoles†

Songjia Fang,<sup>b</sup> Guangbin Jiang,<sup>b</sup> Meng Li,<sup>b</sup> Zhenying Liu,<sup>b</sup> Huanfeng Jiang<sup>b</sup> and Wanqing Wu<sup>id</sup> \*<sup>ab</sup>

A palladium-catalyzed uniquely regioselective C–H alkylation of indoles has been described. In this protocol, simple and readily available haloalkynes are employed as efficient alkylation reagents, affording a series of functionalized 7-alkynylindoles in moderate to good yields. Moreover, further transformations of 7-alkynylated products were performed, which demonstrated the potential application of this method in organic synthesis.

Indole skeletons are core motifs in medicinal chemistry, organic synthesis and materials science due to their individual biological activity.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the development of synthetic methods for functionalized indole derivatives has become one of the research hotspots.<sup>2,3</sup> Among which, most of the studies focus on the synthesis of high-value alkylation indoles due to the significant chemical properties of the alkyne moiety.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, regioselective direct C–H alkylation has been regarded as an efficient and powerful approach to construct alkylation indoles.<sup>4–6</sup> Generally, for indole skeletons, there are multiple C–H bonds including pyrrole rings (C2–C3 positions) and benzenoid rings (C4–C7 positions) that can be alkylation. However, the direct C–H alkylation of indoles is mainly at the C3 position<sup>5</sup> owing to the abundant electron effects and C2 position<sup>6</sup> near the nitrogen atom due to the intrinsic reactivity<sup>7</sup> of the indole ring (Scheme 1a, eqn (1) and (2)). Moreover, utilizing a carbonyl directing group (DG) at the C3 position results in the C4-selective alkylation (Scheme 1a, eqn (3)).<sup>8</sup> Despite considerable progress made with indole alkylation, the selective C7 alkylation of indoles is rarely reported owing to the following issues: (i) the C–H bond at this electron-deficient position is difficult to activate due to



Scheme 1 Regioselective C–H alkylation of indoles.

the inherently poor reactivity; (ii) the high selectivity is interfered by the reactivity of C2 and C3 positions.<sup>9</sup> Recently, Miura *et al.* developed an iridium-catalyzed and sulfur-directed C4/C7–H alkylation between indoles and ethynylbenziodoxole.<sup>10</sup> In view of the importance of alkynes, novel and convenient methods for the selective installation of alkynyl groups at the C7 position of indoles is still desirable and challenging.






Over the past few years, haloalkynes as valuable building blocks, featuring synthetic convenience and high practicability, have exhibited versatile reactivities in organic chemistry.<sup>11</sup> In particular, in cross-coupling reactions, haloalkynes can be used as simple and effective alkylation reagents to obtain the desired alkynyl products.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, we have investigated a series of cross-coupling reactions involving haloalkynes, including palladium-catalyzed bromoalkynylation of norbornenes,<sup>13</sup> directed alkylation of biaryl compounds<sup>14</sup> and C2-selective alkylation of indoles.<sup>15</sup> Based on our continuous interest in haloalkyne chemistry, herein, we disclose a novel palladium-catalyzed C7-selective alkylation of indoles with di-*tert*-butylphosphinoyl as an effective directing group<sup>16</sup> and simple haloalkynes as alkylation reagents (Scheme 1b). It is noteworthy that this protocol shows specific regioselectivity to form 7-alkynylated indoles. In addition,

<sup>a</sup> State Key Laboratory of Luminescent Materials and Devices, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510640, China. E-mail: cewuq@scut.edu.cn; Fax: +86 20-87112906

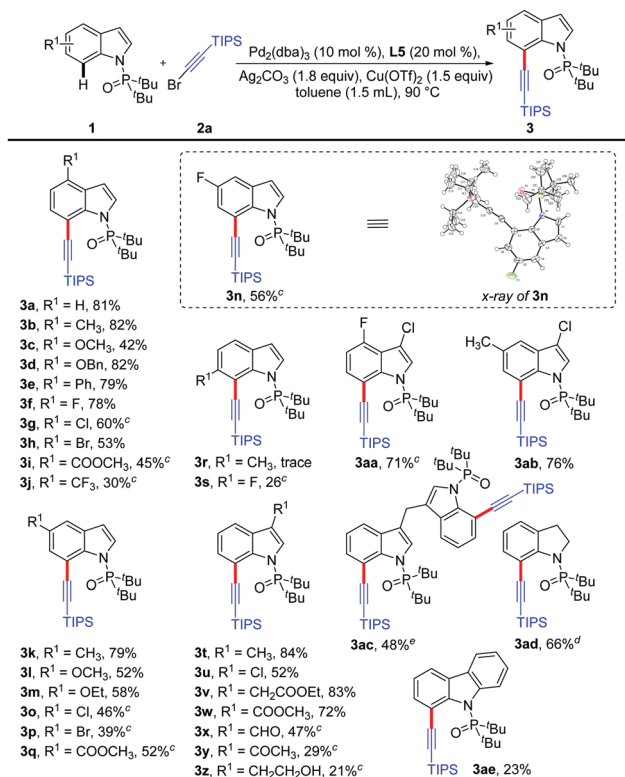
<sup>b</sup> Key Laboratory of Functional Molecular Engineering of Guangdong Province, School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510640, China

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CC1=CC=C2C(=C1)N=C(C=C2)COP(=O)(C(C)(C)C)C(C)(C)C (1a) + BrCC#C[Si](C)(C)C (2a)  $\xrightarrow[\text{oxidant, ligand, toluene}]{[Pd]}$  CC1=CC=C2C(=C1)N=C(C=C2)C#CCOP(=O)(C(C)(C)C)C(C)(C)C (3a)

**L1**                      **L2**                      **L3**                      **L4**                      **L5**

Table 2 Substrate scope of indoles<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Conditions: unless otherwise noted, all reactions were performed with **1** (0.1 mmol), **2a** (0.18 mmol), Pd<sub>2</sub>(dba)<sub>3</sub> (10 mol%), Ag<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (1.8 equiv.), Cu(OTf)<sub>2</sub> (1.5 equiv.), and L5 (20 mol%) in toluene (1.5 mL) under air at 90 °C for 12 h. <sup>b</sup> Isolated yield. <sup>c</sup> **L4** (20 mol%). <sup>d</sup> 2 h. <sup>e</sup> **2a** (0.36 mmol), Pd<sub>2</sub>(dba)<sub>3</sub> (15 mol%), **L5** (30 mol%), Ag<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (3.6 equiv.), Cu(OTf)<sub>2</sub> (3.0 equiv.), and toluene (2.0 mL).

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Table 3 Examination of haloalkynes<sup>a</sup>

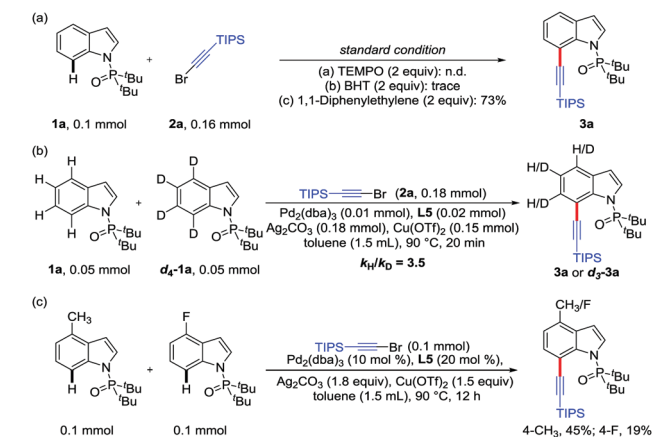
Entry	Haloalkyne 2	Product 3	Yield of 3 <sup>b</sup> (%)
1	X = I, R <sup>2</sup> = TIPS	<b>3a</b>	44
2	X = Cl, R <sup>2</sup> = TIPS	<b>3a</b>	n.d.
3	X = Br, R <sup>2</sup> = TBDMS	<b>3af</b>	67
4	X = Br, R <sup>2</sup> = TES	<b>3ag</b>	Trace
5	X = Br, R <sup>2</sup> = TMS	<b>3ah</b>	n.d.

<sup>a</sup> Conditions: unless otherwise noted, all reactions were performed with **1a** (0.1 mmol), **2** (0.18 mmol), Pd<sub>2</sub>(dba)<sub>3</sub> (10 mol %), Ag<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (1.8 equiv.), Cu(OTf)<sub>2</sub> (1.5 equiv.), and L5 (20 mol %) in toluene (1.5 mL), under air at 90 °C for 12 h. <sup>b</sup> Isolated yield.

could also be transformed to the monoalkynylation product **3ae**, albeit in a low yield.

After evaluating the scope of indole derivatives **1**, we further investigated the effects of various haloalkynes **2** (Table 3). Ethynyltriisopropylsilanes with different halogen atoms were first examined. Pleasingly, the desired product **3a** could be obtained in 44% yield when using (iodoethynyl)triisopropylsilane as the alkynylating reagent (Table 3, entry 1). However, no reaction occurred with (chloroethynyl)triisopropylsilane as the substrate (Table 3, entry 2). Moreover, the effects of substituents at silane were also examined. (Bromoethynyl)(*tert*-butyl)dimethylsilane was compatible with this catalytic system and the corresponding product **3af** could be obtained in 67% yield, while replacing the isopropyl group to triethyl or trimethyl just showed poor reactivity (**3ag–3ah**), which might be caused by the coordination between low sterically hindered bromoalkynes and palladium catalyst *via*  $\pi$  bonding.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, ethyl 3-bromopropiolate and (bromoethynyl)benzene were found to be not suitable for the C7 alkylation.

Furthermore, the potential applications of C7-alkynylated products as useful synthetic blocks are illustrated (Scheme 2). With appropriate reaction temperature and time, both the triisopropylsilyl group and the directing group could be easily removed upon treatment with TBAF to deliver the desilylation



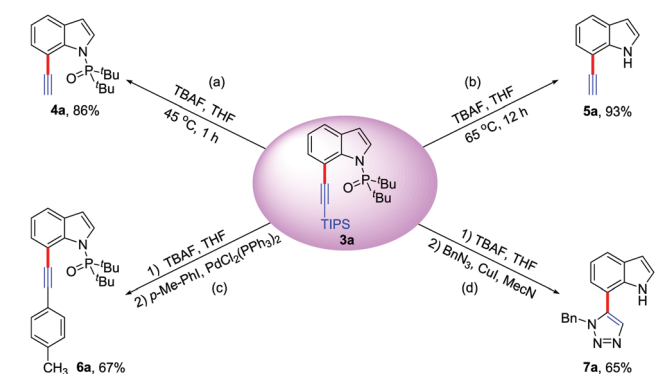
Scheme 3 Mechanistic studies.

product **4a** or 7-ethynyl-1H-indole **5a**. The Sonogashira coupling reaction of **4a** offered the phenylacetylene product **6a** in 67% yield. Additionally, in the presence of CuI, **5a** could react with BnN<sub>3</sub> to give triazole indole **7a** in 65% yield *via* a Click reaction, which might be used for medicinal chemistry and materials science.<sup>18</sup>

Several control experiments were then carried out to shed light on the reaction mechanism (Scheme 3). When this C7 alkylation was respectively carried out in the presence of TEMPO (2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-1-piperidinyloxy) or BHT (2,6-di-*tert*-butyl-*p*-cresol), the yields of alkylation product **3a** dramatically dropped. However, **3a** could be obtained in 73% yield when 1,1-diphenylethylene was added in this reaction under the optimized conditions (Scheme 3a), indicating that the oxidation system was important and specific for this transformation, and the radical pathway should not be involved in this process. Then, an intermolecular KIE of  $k_H/k_D = 3.5$  suggested that the rate-determining step plausibly was the cleavage of the C7–H bond of substrate **1a** in this alkylation reaction (Scheme 3b). In addition, the competition experiment indicated that electron-rich indole substrates reacted preferentially (Scheme 3c).

On the basis of the experimental results and related studies,<sup>14,19</sup> a plausible catalytic cycle is proposed for this C7-selective alkylation (Scheme 4). First, the Pd(II) species is formed by the oxidation of Pd<sub>2</sub>(dba)<sub>3</sub> in the presence of Ag<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> and Cu(OTf)<sub>2</sub>. Then the intermediate **Int-1** is generated by complexation between the Pd(II) species and **1a**. Subsequently, as the rate-determining step, the palladacycle **Int-2** is obtained by the intramolecular selective C–H activation of **Int-1**. After **2a** is activated by Ag(I) and Cu(II), the **Int-2** can further undergo oxidative addition to form the Pd(IV) complex **Int-3**. Finally, the AgBr precipitate will promote the reductive elimination of **Int-3**, which leads to the formation of the alkylation product, along with the regeneration of the Pd(II) catalyst to complete this catalytic cycle.

In conclusion, we have developed a Pd-catalyzed di-*tert*-butylphosphinoyl directed C7-selective activation/alkynylation between indoles and haloalkynes, affording a series of highly functionalized 7-alkynylindole derivatives in good yields. The remarkable regioselectivity and good substrate compatibility

Scheme 2 Derivatizations of alkylation product **3a** (conditions: see the ESI† for details).



Scheme 4 Proposed mechanism.

have been highlighted in this reaction. In addition, the easy availability of starting materials and the functionalization of the newly formed alkyne products show the synthetic practicality of this protocol. Further investigations of this method in pharmacology are currently underway in our laboratory.

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## Conflicts of interest

We have a patent (CN Pat., 109867694A, 2019) relevant to this work.

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