Facile approaches toward the synthesis of 6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones via palladium-catalyzed carbonylation with carbon monoxide

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

Received in revised form

Accepted

Available online

ABSTRACT

Two facile methods for the preparation of 6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones were developed. In the first protocol, 6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones were prepared from 2-(2-iodophenyl)-1*H*-indoles via palladium-catalyzed intramolecular aminocarbonylation. The second involves intermolecular carbonylation of indoles with iodobenzenes followed by intramolecular cross-dehydrogenative-coupling.

Keywords:

6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-one
Palladium-catalyzed
carbonylation
carbon monoxide

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Introduction

Development of synthetic methods for 6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones (**2a**) is an important research work in organic synthesis, as such types of compounds are not only applied as versatile intermediates in diverse organic synthesis (Scheme 1A),¹ but also exhibit various important biological activities (Scheme 1B and C).² A number of synthetic methods have been established in recent years.^{3–9} For example, a two-step strategy starting from *o*-nitrobenzaldehydes through Wittig reaction and tandem reductive cyclization-lactamization was established by Tilve et al (Scheme 2, route 1).⁴ The synthesis of **2a** can also be carried out via an intramolecular Wittig reaction from *o*-phthalimidobenzyl bromide (Scheme 2, route 2).⁵ Griffiths et al. reported a convenient route to **2a** from 2-(*N*-phthaloyl)benzoic acid via β -ketophosphonates (Scheme 2, route 3).⁶ Kim et al. have developed the synthesis of **2a** by intramolecular Heck reaction from methylenephthalimidine (Scheme 2, route 4).⁷ More recently, transition-metal-catalyzed intramolecular C–H coupling from *N*-benzoylindole derivatives has become a powerful method for the preparation of **2a** (Scheme 2, route 5).⁸ Furthermore, a Pd-catalyzed intramolecular cyclization via tert-butyl isocyanide insertion from 2-(2-bromophenyl)-1*H*-indoles was also issued by Zhu et al (Scheme 2, route 6).⁹ However, these methods often suffer from tedious experimental procedures, harsh reaction conditions, expensive starting materials, and unsatisfactory yields. Since seminal work by Heck and co-workers,¹⁰ carbonylation of aryl halides with carbon monoxide (CO) is an effective approach for introducing a carbonyl group

Scheme 1. Examples of important 6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones

Scheme 2. Strategies toward the synthesis of 6H-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones

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into organic molecules.¹¹ In view of recent advances in carbonylation, we envisage that **2a** could be readily constructed starting from 2-(2-iodophenyl)-1*H*-indoles (**1a**) via intramolecular carbonylation by using CO as a C1 building block.

Results and discussion

The intramolecular carbonylation of 2-(2-iodophenyl)-1*H*-indole (**1a**) was initially chosen as a model reaction to establish the optimum reaction conditions as summarized in Table 1. Among the palladium catalysts examined, Pd(OAc)₂ was superior to PdCl₂ and Pd(PPh₃)Cl₂ (Table 1, entries 1-3). The addition of PPh₃ led to a much greater increase of the yield, affording **2a** in 75% yield (Table 1, entry 4). Notably, bases played a crucial role in the reaction. The employment of DBU brought about a much decrease of product **2a** (40%; Table 1, entry 5); and the best result was obtained by addition of K₂CO₃ (86%; Table 1, entry 6). In order to further enhance the formation of **2a**, various solvents, such as DMSO, EtOH, THF, CH₃CN, xylene and toluene were also tested (Table 1, entries 7-12) and toluene was found to be the most effective solvent, thus giving **2a** in 95% yield (Table 1, entry 12). A change of the carbon monoxide pressure to 10 atm (85%; Table 1, entry 14) or 30 atm (88%; Table 1, entry 13) decreased the yield slightly. However, only 6% yield of **2a** was formed under atmospheric pressure of CO (Table 1, entry 15). If taken together, these results indicated the following as the

Table 1. Optimization of reaction conditions^a

Entry	Pd Cat.	Ligand	Base	Solvent	Yield(%) ^b
1	PdCl ₂		Et ₃ N	DMF	NR
2	Pd(PPh ₃) ₂ Cl ₂		Et ₃ N	DMF	trace
3	Pd(OAc) ₂		Et ₃ N	DMF	16
4	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	Et ₃ N	DMF	75
5	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	DBU	DMF	40
6	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	DMF	86
7	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	DMSO	73
8	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	EtOH	78
9	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	THF	38
10	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	CH ₃ CN	76
11	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	Xylene	87
12	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	Toluene	95(90)
13 ^c	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	Toluene	88
14 ^d	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	Toluene	85
15 ^e	Pd(OAc) ₂	PPh ₃	K ₂ CO ₃	Toluene	6

^a Reaction conditions: **1a** (0.2 mmol), Pd cat. (5 mol%), Ligand (10 mol%), base (1 equiv.) solvent (1 mL), CO (20 atm), 100 °C, 24h; ^b Yield according to GC analysis on the basis of the amount of **1a** used, Number in parenthesis is isolated yield, NR=No reaction; ^c CO (10 atm); ^d CO (30 atm), ^e CO (1 atm).

Table 2. Synthesis of 6*H*-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones via palladium-catalyzed intramolecular carbonylation^a

^a Reaction conditions: **1** (0.2 mmol), Pd(OAc)₂ (5 mol%), PPh₃ (10 mol%), K₂CO₃ (1 equiv.), toluene (1 mL), CO (20 atm), 100 °C, 24h; Isolated yields

optimal reaction conditions: Pd(OAc)₂ (5 mol%), PPh₃ (10 mol%), K₂CO₃ (1 equiv.) in toluene under CO (20 atm) at 100 °C.

A number of substituted 6*H*-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones could be synthesized by the present catalytic procedure. The carbonylation of 2-(2-iodophenyl)-5-methyl-1*H*-indole, 2-(2-iodophenyl)-7-methyl-1*H*-indole and 2-(2-iodophenyl)-5,6-dimethyl-1*H*-indole gave desired product in 97%, 83% and 85% yield, respectively (Table 2, **2b-d**). However, upon employing 2-(2-iodophenyl)-4-methyl-1*H*-indole and 2-(2-iodophenyl)-4,5-dimethyl-1*H*-indole, lower yields of carbonylation products were obtained (**2k** and **2l**). The same is true for chloro-substituted 2-(2-iodophenyl)-1*H*-indole. The substrates with chloro group at the 5-, 6-, or 7-position of the indole ring underwent carbonylation successfully, affording 6*H*-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones **2e**, **2g** and **2h** in 83-88% yield. However, upon employing 2-(2-iodophenyl)-4,5-dichloro-1*H*-indole, only trace amount of product **2m** was detected. These results suggest that a substituent at the 4-position in the indole ring has deleterious effect in delivering 6*H*-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-one. It is found that the electronic properties of the substituents on the indole ring or (iodo)phenyl ring have no effect on the observed reactivity. 2-(2-iodophenyl)-1*H*-indoles with electron-donating or electron-withdrawing groups, such as alkyl, methoxy, chloro, bromo, and fluoro were good substrates and afforded the desired products in excellent yields (80-97% yield, **2b-j**). It is worthy of noting that this catalytic system can tolerate halogen. Halogen-substituted 6*H*-isoindolo[2,1-*a*]indol-6-ones could provide opportunities for further functionalization.

During the course of our current investigations, we also found that this catalytic system could be extended to the intermolecular carbonylation. Under the optimized reaction conditions as indicated in entry 12 of Table 1, the intermolecular carbonylation between indoles and iodobenzenes proceeded smoothly to give the corresponding *N*-benzoylindoles in moderate to good yields (48-93%, **3a**, **3i** and **3n-r**). After intermolecular

carbonylation, intramolecular dehydrogenation of *N*-benzoylindoles (under a slight modification of the procedure **Table 3**. Synthesis of 6H-isindolo[2,1- α]indol-6-ones via palladium-catalyzed intermolecular carbonylation and subsequent cross-dehydrogenative-coupling^{a,b}

entry	product 3	yield (%)	product 2	yield (%)
1		88		77
2		92		73
3		90		50
4		88		52
5		93		60
6		48		77
7		51		79

^aReaction conditions for intermolecular carbonylation: **1'** (0.2 mmol), **1''** (0.3 mmol), Pd(OAc)₂ (5 mol%), PPh₃ (10 mol%), K₂CO₃ (1 equiv.), toluene (1 mL), CO (20 atm), 100 °C, 24h; Isolated yields.

^bReaction conditions for intramolecular dehydrogenation: **3** (0.2 mmol), Pd(OAc)₂ (5 mol%), K₂CO₃ (10 mol%), AgOAc (1 equiv.), PivOH (0.2 mL), 120 °C, 24 h; Isolated yields.

reported by Fagnou et al.^{8c}) conveniently generated the 6H-isindolo[2,1- α]indol-6-ones (**2a–2i** and **2n–r**) in 50–79% yield. Remarkably, the synthesis of aldehyde or ester substituted 6H-isindolo[2,1- α]indol-6-ones (compound **2n** and **2q**) can also be accomplished.

Conclusion

In summary, the palladium-catalyzed intramolecular C-I aminocarbonylation of 2-(2-iodophenyl)-1*H*-indoles to form 6H-isindolo[2,1- α]indol-6-ones was developed. Pd(OAc)₂ as catalyst, PPh₃ as ligand and K₂CO₃ as base gave the best results

under 20 atm pressure of CO. This catalytic system and optimal reaction conditions could be extended to the intermolecular carbonylation of indoles with iodobenzenes affording *N*-benzoylindoles, and subsequent palladium-catalyzed dehydrogenation of *N*-benzoylindoles also provided the 6H-isindolo[2,1- α]indol-6-ones in good yields. These methods offer far greater generality than previous methods for the synthesis of 6H-isindolo[2,1- α]indol-6-ones.

Acknowledgments

Financial support from NSFC (Grant No. 21103022 and 61520106015), Foundation of Fujian Educational Committee (Grant No. JK2014010) is gratefully acknowledged.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material (experimental details, characterization data, and copies of NMR spectra) associated with this article can be found in the online version at <http://dx.doi.org/>

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Two methods • CO as buliding block • One catalytic system, two discrete reactions