

# Palladium-Catalyzed Carbonylation of Indoles for Synthesis of Indol-3-yl Aryl Ketones

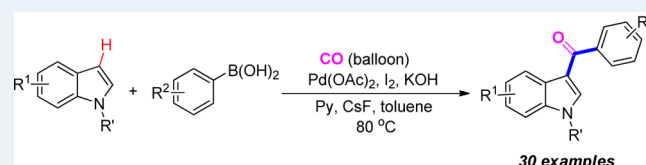
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## Supporting Information

**ABSTRACT:** A novel palladium-catalyzed carbonylation of indoles with CO and aromatic boronic acids for the synthesis of indol-3-yl aryl ketones was developed. The reaction tolerates a wide range of functional groups and gives a variety of valuable indol-3-yl aryl ketones in high yields under mild conditions.

**KEYWORDS:** palladium-catalyzed, carbonylation, indoles, arylboronic acids, indol-3-yl aryl ketones



Transition-metal-catalyzed carbonylation with CO is one of the fundamental reactions in both scientific research and chemical industries.<sup>1</sup> Especially, transition-metal-catalyzed carbonylation of C–H bonds has been developed as promising protocols for the construction of carbonyl compounds. The pioneering work of Pd-catalyzed oxidative carbonylation of aryl C–H bonds for synthesis of aromatic carboxylic acids,<sup>2</sup> Ru- or Rh-catalyzed reductive carbonylation of aryl C–H bonds for synthesis of aryl ethyl ketones has been developed in the past decades.<sup>3</sup> Recently, Pd, Ru, or Rh-catalyzed oxidative carbonylation of C–H bonds for the construction of esters,<sup>4</sup> lactones,<sup>5</sup> lactams,<sup>6</sup> and anhydrides<sup>7</sup> have been developed by several groups including ours.<sup>4g,5a,7</sup> However, most of these reactions employ water, alcohols, or amines as the coupling partners.<sup>8</sup> Transition-metal-catalyzed carbonylation of aromatic C–H bonds with CO and organic boronic acids for direct synthesis of diaryl ketones has not yet been realized.

Aromatic boronic acids are commercially available reagents and have been widely used in Suzuki–Miyaura coupling reactions.<sup>9</sup> Carbonylation of aromatic C–H bonds with CO and aromatic boronic acids would not only open a straightforward route to versatile unsymmetric diaryl ketones but also extend the scope of transition-metal-catalyzed C–H bonds carbonylations. Indoles which are capable of binding to many receptors with high affinity have been recognized as “privileged structures” in drug discovery.<sup>10</sup> Particularly, indol-3-yl aryl ketones have been found to exhibit good biological and pharmaceutical activities, such as anticancer, antiemetic, analgesic, and anti-HIV-1.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, we describe the development of a novel Pd-catalyzed carbonylation of indoles with CO and aromatic boronic acids for the synthesis of indol-3-yl aryl ketones under mild conditions.

We began our study with the Pd-catalyzed carbonylation of *N*-methylindole **1a** with CO and phenylboronic acid **2a**. In an initial attempt, a set of experiments were carried out using Cu(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, PhI(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, or K<sub>2</sub>S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>8</sub> as the oxidant in the presence of Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> catalyst. However, no reaction was

observed. Recently, tandem C–H bond iodination/cross-coupling reaction has been developed as an efficient strategy for the C–H bond transformations.<sup>12</sup> Inspired by these elegant works, iodine was employed as the oxidant in our carbonylation reaction. Gratifyingly, the target product **3aa** was obtained in 28% yield when 1.2 equiv of iodine was added in the reaction (Table 1, entry 1). Then, much effort, such as screening different solvents and bases, and optimizing the palladium precursors, has been devoted to improving the reaction efficiency (Table 1, entries 2–11). However, only slightly improved yield (45%) was obtained when KOH was employed as the base (Table 1, entry 8).

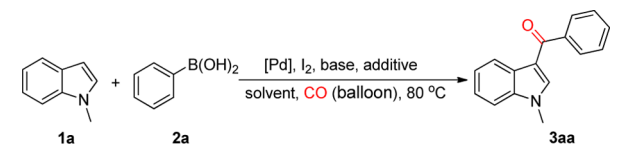
To develop a reliable method for Pd-catalyzed carbonylation of indoles with CO and aromatic boronic acids, we then turned our attention to screening of various additives (Table 1, entries 12–14). Pyridine was found to be an effective additive in the reaction (Table 1, entry 14).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, fluoride salts which could activate the boronic acid to accelerate the transmetalation step in Suzuki couplings were also screened (Table 1, entries 15–17).<sup>9</sup> It was found that the significantly improved reaction yield (78%) was obtained by using pyridine and CsF as the additives (Table 1, entry 17). However, only a trace amount of the product **3aa** was observed when potassium phenyltrifluoroborate instead of phenyl boronic acid **2a** was used in the reaction. In addition, 17% yield of **3aa** was obtained when phenylboronic acid pinacol ester was used as the substrate.

With the optimized reaction conditions established, a series of aromatic boronic acids were investigated for extending the substrate scope (Table 2). This new carbonylation reaction displayed high functional-group tolerance and proved to be a general method for the preparation of indol-3-yl aryl ketones. Aromatic boronic acids bearing electron-donating groups, such

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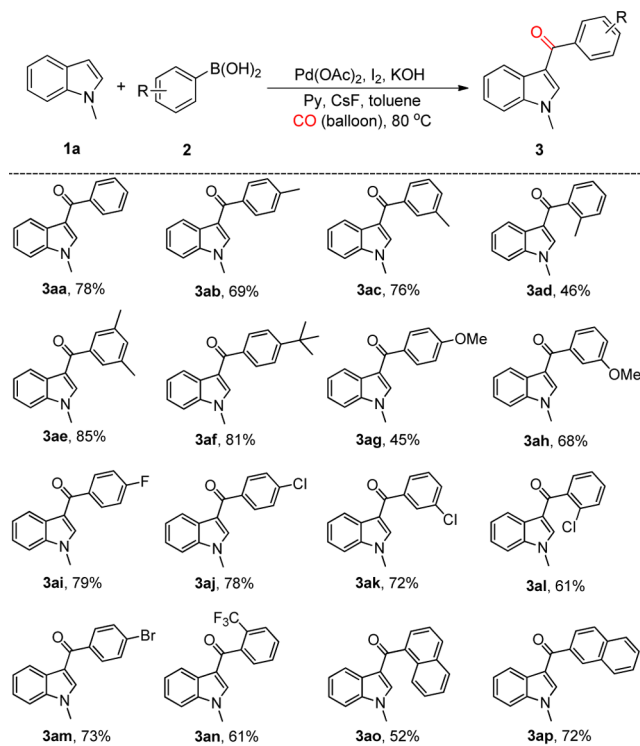
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Table 1. Optimization of the Reaction Conditions<sup>a</sup>


entry	catalyst	base	additive	solvent	yield (%)
1	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>		toluene	28
2	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>		MeCN	0
3	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>		DMF	15
4	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>		DMSO	10
5	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	K <sub>3</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>		toluene	15
6	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	Cs <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>		toluene	30
7	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	<i>t</i> -BuOK		toluene	24
8	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH		toluene	45
9	PdCl <sub>2</sub>	KOH		toluene	30
10	Pd(PPh <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> Cl <sub>2</sub>	KOH		toluene	25
11	Pd(dba) <sub>2</sub>	KOH		toluene	32
12	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH	TMEDA	toluene	12
13	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH	NEt <sub>3</sub>	toluene	20
14 <sup>b</sup>	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH	Py	toluene	60
15 <sup>b,c</sup>	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH	Py, KF	toluene	62
16 <sup>b,c</sup>	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH	Py, AgF	toluene	64
17 <sup>b,c</sup>	Pd(OAc) <sub>2</sub>	KOH	Py, CsF	toluene	78

<sup>a</sup>Reaction condition: **1a** (0.2 mmol), **2a** (0.24 mmol), Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> (5 mol %), I<sub>2</sub> (1.2 equiv), base (3 equiv), solvent (3 mL); isolated yields.

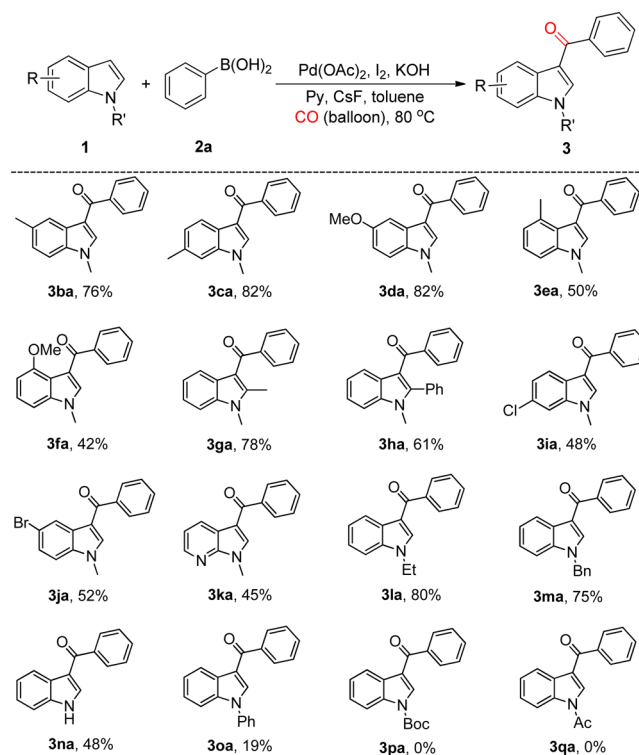
<sup>b</sup>1.0 equiv of pyridine was added. <sup>c</sup>1.5 equiv of MF was added.

Table 2. Palladium-Catalyzed Carbonylation of *N*-Methylindole **1a** with Arylboronic Acids<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Reaction conditions: **1a** (0.2 mmol), **2** (1.2 equiv), Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> (5 mol %), iodine (1.2 equiv), KOH (3.0 equiv), pyridine (1.0 equiv), and CsF (1.5 equiv) in toluene (3 mL) under CO (balloon) at 80 °C; isolated yields.

as methyl, dimethyl, *tert*-butyl, and methoxyl, proceeded smoothly in the reaction to give the corresponding indol-3-yl aryl ketones **3aa–3ah** in good yields. Because the carbonylations are generally sensitive to steric features of the substrates,<sup>4f,5a,7,14</sup> *o*-tolylboronic acid **2d** resulted in moderate conversion and 46% yield of the product **3ad**. But the reason for the low yield of **3ag** was the side homocarbonylation of (4-methoxyphenyl)boronic acid **2g** and CO (30% of bis(4-methoxyphenyl)methanone was isolated).<sup>15</sup> Electron-withdrawing-group-substituted aromatic boronic acids, such as **2i–2n**, were also well tolerated in the reaction to afford the corresponding indol-3-yl aryl ketones **3ai–3an** in 61–79% yields. These results indicate that the electronic nature of the aromatic boronic acids has little influence on the carbonylation reaction. Notably, indol-3-yl naphthyl ketones (cannabimimetic indoles) are high affinity binding to the cannabinoid CB1 and CB2 receptors. Our carbonylation reaction allowed the synthesis of cannabimimetic indole (JWH-070) **3ao** in 52% yield directly.<sup>11d</sup> However, only a trace of the desired product was obtained when phenethylboronic acid,  $\beta$ -styreneboronic acid, or 2-thienylboronic acid was used as the substrate.

Next, various indoles were investigated for further extending the substrate scope (Table 3). *N*-Methylindoles bearing electron-donating groups, such as methyl and methoxyl, proceeded smoothly in the reaction to give the desired substituted indol-3-yl phenyl ketones **3ba–3da** in high yields. 2-Methyl or 2-phenyl-substituted indoles **1g–1h** produced the corresponding indol-3-yl phenyl ketones **3ga–3ha** in good yields. However, 4-methyl- or 4-methoxyl-substituted *N*-

Table 3. Palladium-Catalyzed Carbonylation of Phenylboronic Acid **2a** with Indoles<sup>a</sup>

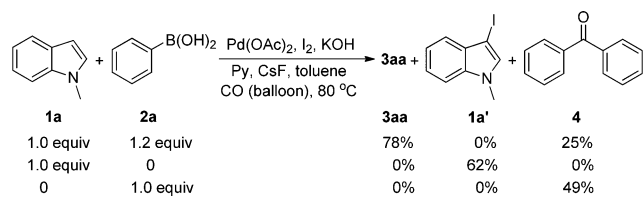
<sup>a</sup>Reaction conditions: **1** (0.2 mmol), **2a** (1.2 equiv), Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> (5 mol %), iodine (1.2 equiv), KOH (3.0 equiv), pyridine (1.0 equiv), and CsF (1.5 equiv) in toluene (3 mL) under CO (balloon) at 80 °C; isolated yields.

methylindoles **1e–1f** gave the desired indol-3-yl phenyl ketones **3ea–3fa** in only moderate yields. These results reveal that the steric features of the 4-position (other than 2-position) of the indoles plays a role in the carbonylation reaction.<sup>4f,5a,7,14</sup>

Electron-withdrawing-group-substituted indoles, such as **1i–1j** and 7-azaindole **1k**, were less reactive in the reaction (*moderate conversions*).<sup>4f</sup> Therefore, the desired indol-3-yl phenyl ketones **3ia–3ka** were obtained in 45–52% yields. Furthermore, indoles with a different substituent on the nitrogen atom were investigated. *N*-Ethylindole **1l** and *N*-benzylindole **1m** were well tolerated in the carbonylation. Free NH-indole **1n** could also be used as a substrate to produce 3-benzoyl indole **3na** in 48% yield. However, *N*-phenyl 3-benzoyl indole **3oa** was obtained in only 19% yield, with 52% recovery of the *N*-phenyl indole **1o**. Furthermore, no reaction occurred when *N*-Boc-indole **1p** or *N*-acetyl-indole **1q** was employed as the substrate.

To gain insight into the mechanism of the reaction, experiments were carried out under the standard conditions (Scheme 1). The 3-iodo-1-methyl-indole **1a'** was obtained in

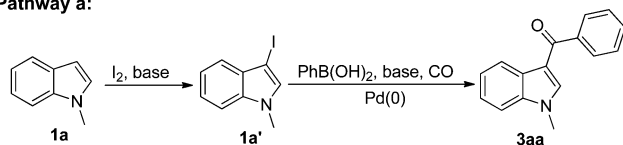
### Scheme 1. Control Experiments



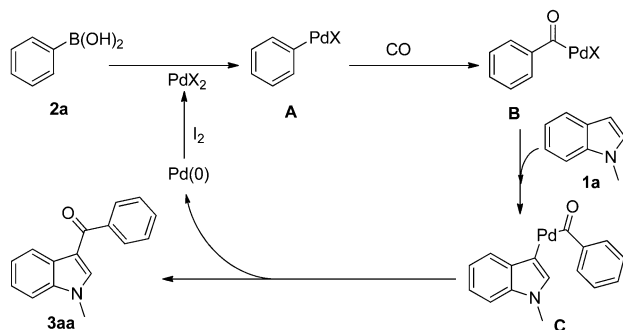
62% yield when the reaction was performed in the absence of phenylboronic acid **2a**. However, in the absence of indole **1a**, the benzophenone **4** was formed in 49% yield. These results indicate that two pathways were possible for this carbonylation. In one case, iodination of indole sequential with Pd(0)-catalyzed carbonylation of 3-iodo-indole **1a'** and phenylboronic acid **2a** in the presence of CO gives the final indol-3-yl phenyl ketone **3aa** (Scheme 2, pathway a).<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, transmetalation of phenylboronic acid **2a** with Pd(II) followed by CO insertion generates a benzoylpalladium intermediate **B**.<sup>15</sup> Then, palladation of C–H bond of indole **1a** sequential with

### Scheme 2. Proposed Mechanisms

#### Pathway a:



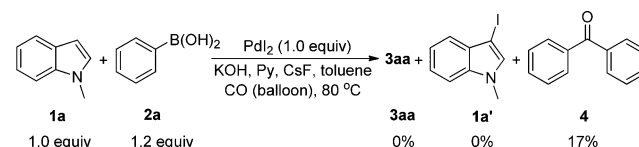
#### Pathway b:



reductive elimination of intermediate **C** produces the indol-3-yl phenyl ketone **3aa** (Scheme 2, pathway b).

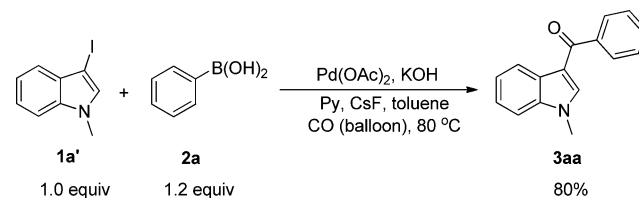
In the pathway b, iodine should act as an oxidant to regenerate the Pd(II) catalyst. If the reaction is proceeded through pathway b, the indol-3-yl phenyl ketone **3aa** should be observed when stoichiometric PdI<sub>2</sub> (or PdI<sub>2</sub>(MeCN)<sub>2</sub>) instead of catalytic Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> and stoichiometric iodine. However, the indol-3-yl phenyl ketone **3aa** was not observed either in the presence of stoichiometric PdI<sub>2</sub> or PdI<sub>2</sub>(MeCN)<sub>2</sub> (Scheme 3). This observation indicates that the pathway b is less likely.

### Scheme 3. Reaction Using Stoichiometric PdI<sub>2</sub> as the Catalyst



To further confirm the pathway a, 3-iodo-1-methyl-indole **1a'** was reacted with phenylboronic acid **2a** under the standard conditions (Scheme 4). The desired indol-3-yl phenyl ketone **3aa** was obtained in 80% yield. This result indicates that the pathway a is more likely for this carbonylation.

### Scheme 4. Carbonylation of 3-Iodo-1-methyl-indole



In summary, a novel palladium-catalyzed carbonylation of indoles with CO and aromatic boronic acids for the synthesis of indol-3-yl aryl ketones has been developed. The reaction employs readily available indoles and aromatic boronic acids as the substrates and tolerates a wide range of functional groups. A series of valuable indol-3-yl aryl ketones were easily synthesized in high yields under mild conditions. Further scope of the reaction is underway.

## EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

**General Procedure for Carbonylation of Indoles with Arylboronic Acids.** Indoles **1** (0.2 mmol), arylboronic acids **2** (0.24 mmol), Pd(OAc)<sub>2</sub> (5 mol %, 2.2 mg), I<sub>2</sub> (2.4 mmol, 60 mg), KOH (0.6 mmol, 33.6 mg), pyridine (0.2 mmol, 15.8 mg), CsF (0.3 mmol, 45 mg), and toluene (3 mL) was charged in a 10 mL round-bottom flask. Then, the flask was evacuated and backfilled with CO (3 times, balloon) and stirred under CO (balloon) at 80 °C for 12 h. When the reaction was completed (detected by TLC), the mixture was cooled to room temperature and carefully vented to discharge the excess CO. The reaction was quenched with H<sub>2</sub>O (10 mL) and extracted with EtOAc (3 × 10 mL). The combined organic layers were dried over anhydrous Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> and then evaporated in vacuo. The residue was purified by column chromatography on silica gel to afford the corresponding indol-3-yl aryl ketones **3** with hexanes/ethyl acetate (5:1 to 3:1) as the eluent.

## ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

## S Supporting Information

The following file is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/cs5019106.

Detailed experimental procedures, characterization data, and copies of NMR spectra for all product ([PDF](#))

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## Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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