Reactivity Insight into Reductive Coupling and Aldol Cyclization of Chalcones by Visible Light Photocatalysis

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S Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: The reductive coupling and cyclization of chalcones to generate cyclopentanol derivatives in up to 84% yield by visible light photoredox catalysis is described. This reaction involves radical anion homocoupling, monoprotonation, and intramolecular cyclization cascade.



halcones are widely distributed in plants and have been associated with various of pharmacological activities.¹Moreover, they have attracted widespread research interests from organic chemists to investigate their chemical reactivities in a variety of reactions, e.g., classical Claisen-Schmidt condensation,² Suzuki coupling,³ and Heck reaction.⁴ Due to the unique structure feature, chalcones have also emerged as a reliable class of reactants and important precursors in synthetic chemisry.⁵ Among them, reductive dimerization of chalcones is an available approach for establishing C-C bonds by means of a single-electron-transfer process. In general, the initial step is the single-electron reduction of enone to the corresponding radical anion, which is achieved by electrochemical reduction⁶ or a single-electrontransfer reagent such as "Bu₃SnH,⁷ SmI₂,⁸ Yb,⁹ Sm,¹⁰ Zn,¹¹ etc. In such cases, however, specialized equipment or strong stoichiometric reductant is generally required.

Recently, an intriguing and promising strategy for the application of photoredox catalyst to initiate a single-electron-transfer process has been developed in the realm of organic chemistry¹² and well demonstrated by some valuble work that explored the reactions of aryl enone and its derivatives, such as intra- and intermolecular [2 + 2] cycloaddition,¹³ intra-molecular reductive cyclization,¹⁴ hetero-Diels–Alder reaction,¹⁵ [3 + 2] cycloaddition of aryl cyclopropyl ketone,¹⁶ reduction, as well as reductive allylation of epoxide and aziridine.¹⁷

In particular, Yoon and co-workers disclosed an elegant strategy access to cyclobutane skeleton under visible light photoredox catalysis.^{13a} The mechanism of reaction involved the generation of radical anion from the corresponding enone, subsequent addition to Michael acceptor, and then cyclization to afford [2 + 2] adduct (Scheme 1). However, variation of the

substituent at the β -position of enone is limited to the alkyl groups, and the extension of this strategy to chalcones still remains unexploited.



Because of our continuous interest in photochemical reactions,¹⁸ we endeavored to investigate the chemical behavior of chalcones through the application of visible light photocatalysis and found that it preferentially undergoes a reductive dimerization reaction rather than the typical [2 + 2] cycloaddition. Based upon a series of control experiments, the reaction process was suggested to involve both electron and proton transfers, and the intermolecular C–C bond formation was generated from a biradical coupling reaction instead of radical Michael addition, which was comparatively different from an overall redox-neutral [2 + 2] cycloaddition. In this paper, we present a unique and efficient approach to prepare polysubstituted cyclopentanol derivatives by visible-light photoredox catalysis.

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Our initial investigation focused on the reaction of chalcone **1a** with 5 mol % of Ru(bpy)₃(PF₆)₂, LiBF₄ (1 equiv), and ^{*i*}Pr₂NEt (5 equiv) in MeCN without deoxygenization (Scheme 2).¹⁹ After irradiation for 2 h with a blue LED (1 W, $\lambda_{max} = 470$

Scheme 2. Preliminary Reaction Result



nm) as a light source,²⁰ complete consumption of **1a** was observed by TLC analysis, and a complex mixture of reductive dimer was afforded, including linear dimer, cyclic dimer, and pinacol coupling products instead of the [2 + 2] cycloadduct. After recrystallization, cyclic dimer **2a** was obtained in 24% isolated yield as the preliminary result.

To our knowledge, chalcones can produce radical anion **A** in a single-electron-transfer process (Scheme 3), however, a



detailed reaction pathway for the formation of 2a still remains ambiguous and impedes our efforts to optimize the reaction conditions. Therefore, a series of control experiments needed to be performed before we started to optimize the reaction conditions. Initially, we envisioned that the generated reactive radical anion **A** from chalcone could be intercepted by the better Michael acceptor, methyl vinyl ketone (MVK), leading to the cross coupling product. Nevertheless, treatment of **1a** with 10 equiv of MVK under the same photocatalytic conditions preferentially formed the homocoupling products from **1a**. Such a result shows the likelihood of generation of linear dianion species **B** from two radical anions coupling rather than a radical anion addition to Michael acceptor.

It is well-known that ${}^{i}Pr_{2}NEt$ is a competent electron and hydrogen atom donor, which has been demonstrated in previous work.²¹ Given the observed reactivity, we speculated that the reaction pathway for the conversion of **1a** to **2a** was dominated by the proton transfer from tertiary amine,²² and consequently, cyclic dimer **2a** resulted from the monoprotonation of dianion **B** followed by the intramolecular Aldol cyclization of **C**. To add credence to our hypothesis, a control experiment was conducted by preparation and sequential treatment of **3a** under the same photocatalytic conditions for 24 h. As expected, no formation of **2a** was observed. Such a result is in good agreement with the designed experiment in which **1a** was subjected to the photocatalytic conditions except LiBF₄ was replaced by CH_3CO_2H leading to **3a** as the major product (Table 1, entry 2). These experiments indicate the critical role of the proton transfer.

Table 1. Investigation of Lewis Acid Additives^a Ru(bpy)₃(PF₆)₂ (5 mol%) Ph ⁱPr₂NEt (5 equiv) OH additive 'Ph MeCN, blue LED 2a 1a time^b (h) yield^c (%) additive (equiv) entry $LiBF_4(1)$ 1 2.0 24 2 $CH_3CO_2H(3)$ 0.5 0^d 3 1.0 7 None 4 $La(OTf)_3(1)$ 53 3.5 5 $Mg(ClO_4)_2(1)$ 2.0 19 $Sm(OTf)_3(1)$ 6 3.0 62

^{*a*}Reaction conditions: **1a** (1 mmol), $\text{Ru}(\text{bpy})_3(\text{PF}_6)_2$ (0.05 mmol), ^{*i*}Pr₂NEt (5 mmol) in CH₃CN (10 mL), irradiation with a blue LED (1 W). ^{*b*}Complete consumption for substrate **1a**. ^{*c*}Isolated yield. ^{*d*}The mixture of linear dimer **3a** and pinacol products were obtained in 94% yield.

4.0

45

 $Yb(OTf)_3(1)$

It should be pointed out that Lewis acid or Brønsted acid was not necessary for activating the chalcones toward one-electron reduction in this process (Table 1, entry 3), but the presence of LiBF₄ undoubtedly resulted in a higher yield of **2a**. Therefore, several Lewis acid additives were subjected to the reaction, including La(OTf)₃, Mg(ClO₄)₂, Sm(OTf)₃, and Yb(OTf)₃, and the results are listed in Table 1 (entries 4–7). As can be seen, the best yield was obtained by using Sm(OTf)₃ as an additive (Table 1, entry 6). Therefore, we reasoned that the presence of Sm(OTf)₃ was in coordination with the carbonyl and enol groups in a stable transition state responsible for the high yield and chemical selectivity (eq 1).



Having developed conditions for this unique reaction, our next work focused on the investigation of structure-reactivity relationships. Thus, a variety of chalcones were synthesized and subjected to the reaction conditions. As shown in Table 2, the reactions led to the desired products in moderate to high yields. The substituent group had significant effect on the reaction efficiency and reactivity of aldol cyclization. For example, the carbonyl substituent R₁ bearing electron-withdrawing groups on aromatic rings led to the products in good yields (entries 2 and 4). In contrast, substituent R1 bearing electron-donating groups resulted in the relatively lower yields (entries 3, 5, 6, and 9). When the alkene substituent R_2 bearing a electron-donating group, it took longer reaction time and gave rise to the cyclization product in moderate yields (entry 7). The stereochemistry of 2a-i was assigned based upon the previous work²³ as well as NMR spectra. However, the reaction is

 Table 2. Investigation of Structure–Reactivity

 Relationships^a



^{*a*}Reaction conditions: substrate (1 mmol), $Ru(bpy)_3(PF_6)_2$ (0.05 mmol), iPr_2NEt (5 mmol), $Sm(OTf)_3$ (1 mmol) in CH_3CN (10 mL), irradiation with a blue LED (1 W). ^{*b*}Isolated yield.

sensitive to steric bulk. No reaction was observed when the chalcones bear methyl substituent at α or β position. In addition, the substituent on *ortho* position of R₁ led to γ -hydroxyl phenyl ketone **3***j* instead of the desired cyclopentanol compound (eq 2). The structure and stereochemistry of **3***j*



were determined by NMR spectra and X-ray crystal analysis.²⁴ However, such a result adds more credence to the intermediate **A** and the radical coupling process (Scheme 3).

The benzylacetones 1k and 1l were also investigated under the same photocatalytic conditions (eq 3). The reactions



proceeded smoothly, but the linear dimer products, not the desired cyclopentanol derivatives, were obtained. These results indicated the critical role of the aromatic groups in formation of cyclization products which might stabilize the reactive radical anion formed in the reaction.

Based upon the above investigations and previous work,²⁵ we propose the reaction mechanism that is outlined in Scheme 4. The reactive radical anion is generated from the corresponding chalcone in the photocatalytic conditions. An initial C–C bond formation process based on two-radical-anion coupling

Scheme 4. Proposed Mechanism



provides a dianion species. Sequential monoprotonation and intramolecular aldol cyclization gave access to polysubstituted cyclopentanol derivatives. An appropriate Lewis acid additive, $Sm(OTf)_{3}$, is beneficial for the aldol cyclization.

In summary, we have developed a photocatalytic system for the reductive cyclization of chalcones under visible light irradiation. This work indicates an available reactivity of radical anion, which should be helpful to extend the scope of reaction by visible light photocatalysis. Further work to realize this goal is underway in our laboratory.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

General Methods. All reagents were purchased from commercial sources unless otherwise noted. Solvents were dried according to standard procedures prior to use. Chemical shifts in ¹H NMR (400 MHz) and ¹³C NMR (100 MHz) spectra are reported in parts per million from tetramethylsilane (TMS) or solvent resonance (e.g., CDCl₃) as the internal standard. HR-MS spectra were recorded on an LC mass spectrometer using electrospray ionization (ESI, TOF).

General Procedure for the Synthesis of Cyclopentanols 2. To a solution of chalcone 1 (1 mmol) in dried CH_3CN (10 mL) were added *i*-Pr₂NEt (5 mmol), $Sm(OTf)_3$ (1 mmol), and $Ru(bpy)_3(PF_6)_2$ (0.05 mmol), respectively. The mixtrure was stirred at room temperature under irradiation with a blue LED (1 W) as the light source. Upon consumption of starting material, the solvent was concentrated in vacuo. The residue was purified by flash chromatography and recrystallization to afford the desired product 2. Spectroscopic data were in accord with those previously published for the known compounds.

Compound 2a: 129 mg; yield 62%; white solid; mp 194–195 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.60 (d, *J* = 7.2 Hz, 2H), 7.43 (d, *J* = 7.2 Hz, 4H), 7.37–7.06 (m, 14H), 5.25 (s, 1H), 4.56 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 4.13 (dd, *J* = 11.6, 10.4 Hz, 1H), 3.81 (m,1H), 3.03 (dd, *J* = 14.4, 12.0 Hz, 1H), 2.61 (dd, *J* = 14.4, 6.0 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 205.0, 145.3, 144.0, 139.9, 137.6, 133.3, 128.5, 128.4, 128.3, 128.2, 128.1, 128.0, 127.6, 127.0, 126.9, 126.4, 124.9, 84.3, 63.6, 59.6, 51.4; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m*/*z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₀H₂₆O₂Na 441.1830, found 441.1819.

Compound 2b: 204 mg; yield 84%; white solid; mp 175–176 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.49 (d, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 7.39–7.07 (m, 16H), 5.27 (s, 1H), 4.39 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz), 4.06 (dd, *J* = 11.6, 10.4 Hz, 1H), 3.78 (m, 1H), 2.91 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 12.8 Hz, 1H), 2.56 (dd, *J* = 14.4, 6.0 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 203.6, 143.8, 143.7, 140.2, 140.0, 135.7, 133.0, 129.5, 128.7, 128.6, 128.5, 128.5, 127.8, 127.6, 127.2, 126.5, 126.3, 84.0, 63.5, 60.0, 51.3, 51.1; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m/z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₀H₂₄Cl₂O₂Na 509.1051, found 509.1057.

Compound 2c: 112 mg; yield 47%; white solid; mp 146–147 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.51–7.48 (m, 4H), 7.43 (d, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2H), 7.27–7.07 (m, 8H), 6.84 (d, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 6.66 (d, *J* = 8.8

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Hz, 2H), 5.50 (s, 1H), 4.47 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 4.10 (dd, *J* = 12.0, 10.0 Hz, 1H), 3.78 (s, 6H), 2.97 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 12.0 Hz, 1H), 2.57 (dd, *J* = 14.4, 5.6 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 203.1, 163.8, 158.4, 144.3, 140.2, 137.6, 130.7, 130.6, 128.4, 128.4, 127.9, 127.6, 126.8, 126.3, 126.1, 113.6, 113.4, 84.1, 62.7, 59.6, 55.4, 55.2, 51.3, 51.3; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m*/*z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for $C_{32}H_{30}O_4Na$, 501.2042, found 501.2037.

Compound 2d: 204 mg; yield 78%; white solid; mp 192–193 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.47 (d, J = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 7.36 (d, J = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 7.34–7.26 (m, 4H), 7.18 (d, J = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 7.12–7.08 (m, 2H), 6.94 (t, J = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 6.84 (t, J = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 5.19 (s, 1H), 4.35 (d, J = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 3.98 (dd, J = 11.6, 10.4 Hz, 1H), 3.66 (m, 1H), 2.90 (dd, J = 14.0, 12.8 Hz, 1H), 2.49 (dd, J = 14.8, 6.0 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 203.3, 143.4, 140.5, 135.5, 133.1, 129.4, 129.3, 129.2, 129.0, 128.9, 128.8, 128.6, 126.3, 115.7, 115.5, 115.4, 115.2, 83.9, 63.2, 59.2, 51.2, 50.9; HRMS-ESI (TOF, m/z) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₀H₂₂Cl₂F₂O₂Na 545.0863, found 545.0871.

Compound 2e: 131 mg; yield 51%; white solid; mp 174–175 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.46 (t, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 4H), 7.34 (dd, *J* = 8.8, 5.6 Hz, 2H), 7.09 (dd, *J* = 8.8, 5.6 Hz, 2H), 6.93 (t, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 6.84–6.79 (m, 4H), 6.66 (d, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 5.43 (s, 1H), 4.39 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 3.98 (dd, *J* = 11.6, 10.4 Hz, 1H), 3.77 (s, 3H), 3.75 (s, 3H), 3.64 (m, 1H), 2.91 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 12.0 Hz, 1H), 2.47 (dd, *J* = 14.4, 6.0 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 202.8, 164.0, 158.5, 139.8, 137.2, 135.7, 135.7, 130.7, 130.4, 129.4, 129.3, 129.0, 129.0, 126.0, 115.5, 115.3, 115.1, 113.7, 113.6, 84.0, 62.4, 59.2, 55.4, 55.3, 51.1, 51.0; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m*/*z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₂H₂₈F₂O₄Na 537.1853, found 537.1880.

Compound 2f: 108 mg; yield 40%; white solid; mp 139–140 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.47 (dd, *J* = 8.8, 6.4 Hz, 4H), 7.30 (d, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 7.06 (d, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 6.80 (d, *J* = 8.4, 2H), 6.78 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 2H), 6.65 (d, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 4H), 5.42 (s, 1H), 4.38 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 3.97 (dd, *J* = 11.6, 10.4 Hz, 1H), 3.76 (s, 6H), 3.74 (s, 3H), 3.67 (s, 3H), 3.65 (m, 1H), 2.89 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 12.0 Hz, 1H), 2.48 (dd, *J* = 14.8, 6.0 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 203.3, 163.8, 158.4,158.3, 158.0, 157.8, 136.4, 132.3, 130.7, 128.9, 128.6, 126.1, 113.8, 113.7, 113.6, 113.5, 83.9, 62.8, 59.1, 55.4, 55.2, 55.1, 51.4, 50.7; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m*/*z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₄H₃₄O₆Na 561.2253, found 561.2262.

Compound **2g**: 129 mg; yield 54%; white solid; mp 191–192 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.55 (d, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 7.41 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 2H), 7.34–7.15 (m, 8H), 7.06 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 2H), 6.79 (d, *J* = 8.8 Hz, 2H), 6.64 (d, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 5.17 (s, 1H), 4.48 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 4.00 (dd, *J* = 11.2, 10.8 Hz, 1H), 3.75 (s, 3H), 3.65 (s, 3H), 3.64 (m, 1H), 2.95 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 11.2 Hz, 1H), 2.52 (dd, *J* = 14.8, 6.4 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 205.2, 158.4, 158.1, 145.5, 137.7, 136.2, 133.2, 132.0, 128.9, 128.6, 128.3, 128.2, 128.1, 127.0, 124.9, 113.9, 113.8, 84.1, 63.7, 59.0, 55.2, 55.1, 51.5, 50.8; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m*/*z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₂H₃₀O₄Na 501.2042, found 501.2053.

Compound 2h: 134 mg; yield 59%; white solid; mp 175–176 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.56 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 2H), 7.42 (d, *J* = 7.2 Hz, 2H), 7.37–7.09 (m, 10H), 6.94 (t, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 6.81 (t, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 5.19 (s, 1H), 4.49 (dd, *J* = 12.4, 3.2 Hz, 1H), 4.02 (td, *J* = 12.0, 3.2 Hz, 1H), 3.68 (m, 1H), 2.98 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 12.0 Hz, 1H), 2.52 (m, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 204.7, 163.0, 162.9, 160.5, 160.4, 144.9, 139.5, 139.5, 137.5, 135.4, 135.4, 129.4, 129.3, 129.1, 129.0, 128.4, 128.3, 128.1, 127.2, 124.8, 115.5, 115.3, 115.1, 84.2, 63.3, 59.2, 51.2, 51.1; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m/z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₀H₂₄F₂O₂Na 477.1642, found 477.1646.

Compound 2i: 175 mg; yield 65%; white solid; mp 157–159 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.54 (d, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2H), 7.45 (d, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2H), 7.36 (t, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 1H), 7.28 (t, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2H), 7.19– 7.15 (m, 3H), 6.63 (d, *J* = 2.4 Hz, 2H), 6.30–6.28 (m, 3H), 6.13 (t, *J* = 2.0 Hz, 1H), 5.10 (s, 1H), 4.46 (d, *J* = 12.0 Hz, 1H), 4.06 (t, *J* = 10.0 Hz, 1H), 3.76 (s, 6H), 3.69–3.64 (m, 1H), 3.60 (s, 6H), 2.95 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 11.6 Hz, 1H), 2.54 (dd, *J* = 14.0, 6.0 Hz, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃): 205.0, 160.9, 160.8, 146.7, 145.3, 142.6, 137.8, 133.4, 128.5, 128.3, 128.2, 127.2, 125.0, 106.2, 106.0, 99.0, 98.5, 84.2, 63.4 59.3, 55.4, 55.3, 51.3, 51.2; HRMS-ESI (TOF, m/z) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₄H₃₄O₆Na 561.2248, found 561.2248.

Compound 3j: 138 mg; yield 57%; white solid; mp 163–164 °C; ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.74 (d, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2H), 7.69 (d, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2H), 7.54–7.09 (m, 14H), 6.66 (d, *J* = 16.0 Hz, 1H), 6.49 (d, *J* = 16.0 Hz, 1H), 4.79 (dd, *J* = 10.4, 3.2 Hz, 1H), 3.74 (m, 1H), 3.09 (dd, *J* = 17.6, 3.2 Hz, 1H), 2.36 (s, 1H); ¹³C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) 198.5, 144.5, 138.0, 137.9, 137.0, 136.0, 135.1, 133.2, 133.0, 129.7, 129.5, 128.9, 128.8, 128.6, 128.5, 128.2, 128.1, 127.4, 127.2, 127.0, 126.7, 125.5, 124.7, 79.7, 46.2, 39.2; HRMS-ESI (TOF, *m*/*z*) [M + Na]⁺ calcd for C₃₀H₂₄Cl₂O₃Na 509.1046, found 509.1044.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

S Supporting Information

¹H and ¹³C NMR spectra for all new compounds. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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