Multimetallic catalysed radical oxidative C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–H/C(sp)–H cross-coupling between unactivated alkanes and terminal alkynes

Shan Tang<sup>1</sup>, Pan Wang<sup>1</sup>, Haoran Li<sup>1</sup> & Aiwen Lei<sup>1,2</sup>

Radical involved transformations are now considered as extremely important processes in modern organic synthetic chemistry. According to the demand by atom-economic and sustainable chemistry, direct C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–H functionalization through radical oxidative coupling represents an appealing strategy for C–C bond formations. However, the selectivity control of reactive radical intermediates is still a great challenge in these transformations. Here we show a selective radical oxidative C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–H/C(sp)–H cross-coupling of unactivated alkanes with terminal alkynes by using a combined Cu/Ni/Ag catalytic system. It provides a new way to access substituted alkynes from readily available materials. Preliminary mechanistic studies suggest that this reaction proceeds through a radical process and the C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–H bond cleavage is the rate-limiting step. This study may have significant implications for controlling selective C–C bond formation of reactive radical intermediates by using multimetallic catalytic systems.
S ubstituted alkenes are fundamental structural motifs in numerous natural products, bioactive molecules and functional materials. They also serve as versatile intermediates in many chemical transformations. Continuous efforts have been devoted to their synthesis throughout the history of organic chemistry. During the last decades, the transition-metal-catalysed Sonogashira coupling has been proven to be one of the most popular and efficient approach for the synthesis of substituted alkenes. While early studies focused on C(sp^3)–C(sp) coupling of terminal alkenes with vinyl/aryl electrophiles, recent attention has been paid to the C(sp^3)–C(sp) coupling of terminal alkenes with unactivated alkyl halides. In 2003, Eckhardt and Fu pioneered the cross-coupling of terminal alkenes with unactivated primary bromides and iodides by using Pd/Cu synergistic catalysis with N–heterocyclic carbene ligands. Later on, this reaction protocol was extended to unactivated secondary bromides and iodides by Altenhoff et al. In 2009, Vechorkin et al. applied a combined Ni/Cu catalytic system to achieve the coupling of terminal alkenes with unactivated primary halides. Similarly, a modified Ni/Cu co-catalysed system was developed by Yi et al. to deal with the coupling with secondary bromides and iodides. More recently, Chen et al. developed a photo-promoted, transition-metal-free protocol to couple terminal alkenes with all types of unactivated alkyl iodides. As an alternative process for achieving the direct alkylation of terminal alkenes, our group demonstrated a Pd-catalysed oxidative cross-coupling between terminal alkenes and alkylzinc reagents for the synthesis of substituted alkenes. Echoing the pursuit of atom-economic and sustainable chemistry, direct utilization of unactivated alkenes to replace unactivated alkyl halides and alkylzinc reagents in the synthesis of substituted alkenes has great significance in terms of both concept innovation and practical application.

Direct C(sp^3)–H functionalization is a highly attractive approach for converting alkenes into functionalized organic compounds. However, the development of direct and selective methods for alkane functionalization is still in its infancy due to the low reactivity of C(sp^3)–H bonds. With the rapid development of C–H functionalization, direct C–H alkylation with terminal alkenes has recently emerged as one of the most attractive approaches to access substituted alkenes. This transformation has been considered to be challenging because of the facile homo-coupling and polymerization of terminal alkenes under oxidative conditions. Methods for the oxidative C(sp^3)–H alkylation of tertiary amines or benzylic ethers have been developed through normal cross-dehydrogenative coupling pathway, but direct oxidative C(sp^3)–H alkylation of unactivated alkanes with terminal alkenes to form substituted alkenes is still a great challenge and remains undeveloped.

Herein, we report a Cu/Ni/Ag co-catalysed oxidative C(sp^3)–H alkylation of unactivated alkanes with terminal alkenes. This protocol provides a new approach for the synthesis of substituted alkenes from readily available materials. Various alkanes and terminal alkenes are suitable in this transformation, affording the C(sp^3)–C(sp) coupling product in good to high yields.

**Results**

**Designing strategy.** Radicals have been widely utilized in a large range of processes such as organic synthesis, biological processes and polymerization. Generally, radicals with a single electron have a strong tendency to form chemical bonds. However, selective bond formation from radical intermediates was less developed compared with the ionic intermediates. Recent achievements showed that radical cross-coupling can provide a new opportunity for the formation of C–C bonds. Considering that unactivated alkanes can be converted into corresponding alkyl radicals in the presence of oxidants, we envisioned that a radical oxidative cross-coupling pathway might provide a solution for the C(sp^3)–H/C(sp)–H cross-coupling between unactivated alkanes and terminal alkenes. Nevertheless, the direct coupling of an alkyl radical with terminal alkanes usually ends up with reductive addition or difunctionalization to afford internal alkenes. It was difficult to control the selectivity toward direct alkylation rather than simple addition to alkene. To deal with this challenging transformation, we wish to report a selective radical oxidative C(sp^3)–H/C(sp)–H cross-coupling of unactivated alkanes with terminal alkenes by using a multimetallocatalysis system.

**Optimization of reaction conditions.** We started our research by examining the model reaction between cyclohexane (1a) and p-tolylacetylene (2a) under various conditions. After considerable efforts, we found that the combination of Cu(OTf)₂, Ni(acac)₂ and AgOAc as catalysts, 1,4-bis(diphenylphosphino)butane (dpbb) as ligand, and di-tert-butyl peroxide (DTBP) as oxidant in chlorobenzene at 130 °C gave the best result (see Supplementary Tables 1–5 for detailed condition optimization). A 75% GC yield...
could be obtained within 3 h (Table 1, entry 1). The effect of each reaction parameter was examined and listed in Table 1. Both copper and nickel catalysts were crucial for this C(sp³)–C(sp) coupling reaction. Only 6% yield of the desired product was obtained in the absence of Ni(acac)₂ (Table 1, entry 2). No desired products could be observed in the absence of Cu(OTf)₂ (Table 1, entry 3). Instead, direct addition product 4a was obtained in 13% yield (Fig. 2a). Moreover, CuOTf failed to furnish the coupling product (Table 1, entry 4). Ligand was not indispensable for this oxidative cross-coupling reaction. A moderate yield could be obtained in the absence of ligand (Table 1, entry 5). Addition of bipyridine did not improve the reaction yield (Table 1, entry 6). PPh₃ was less effective than dppb in this transformation (Table 1, entry 7). Control experiments regarding the role of silver were also performed (Table 1, entries 8–9). In the absence of AgOAc, a good but slightly decreased yield could still be obtained (Table 1, entry 8). When CsOAc was used instead of AgOAc, the reaction resulted in a poor yield (Table 1, entry 9). Silver likely plays a role in the C(sp)–H activation step since it could coordinate with the alkynyl group⁴⁶–⁴⁸. Solvent effects were also investigated in this transformation. Without additional solvent, the reaction yield decreased significantly (Table 1, entry 10). Benzene gave a similar result with chlorobenzene (Table 1, entry 11). Different oxidants were also applied in this transformation. Dicumyl peroxide could furnish the desired product in a lower yield (Table 1, entry 12). Benzoyl peroxide was not suitable in this transformation (Table 1, entry 13). In addition, the influence of temperature was also explored. Both decreased and increased temperatures gave decreased yields (Table 1, entries 14–15). It is worthy of note that oligomerization of 2a was the major side reaction pathway in all the above conditions.

Scope of unactivated alkanes. To further demonstrate the applicability of this transformation, the reaction system was applied to other unactivated alkanes for the synthesis of substituted alkynes (Fig. 3). Both cyclohexane and

Table 1 | Effects of reaction parameters.*

| Entry | Variation from the standard conditions | Yield |
|-------|----------------------------------------|-------|
| 1     | None                                   | 75    |
| 2     | Without Ni(acac)₂                      | 6     |
| 3     | Without Cu(OTf)₂                       | ND    |
| 4     | CuOTf instead of Cu(OTf)₂              | ND    |
| 5     | Without dppb                           | 54    |
| 6     | bipy instead of dppb                   | 51    |
| 7*    | PPh₃ instead of dppb                   | 64    |
| 8     | Without AgOAc                          | 63    |
| 9     | CsOAc instead of AgOAc                 | 4     |
| 10    | Without PhCl                           | 34    |
| 11    | PhH instead of PhCl                    | 74    |
| 12    | DCP instead of DTBP                    | 52    |
| 13    | BPO instead of DTBP                    | Trace |
| 14    | 120 °C instead of 130 °C               | 72    |
| 15    | 140 °C instead of 130 °C               | 66    |

*BPO, benzoyl peroxide; DCP, dicumyl peroxide; dppb, 1,4-bis(diphenylphosphino)butane; DTBP, di-tert-butyl peroxide; ND, not detected.
*Standard conditions: 1a (4.0 ml), 2a (0.50 mmol), Cu(OTf)₂ (7.5 mol%), Ni(acac)₂ (7.5 mol%), dppb (7.5 mol%), AgOAc (10 mol%) and DTBP (1.5 mmol), PhCl (3.0 ml), 130 °C, 3 h.
Yields were determined by GC analysis with biphenyl as the internal standard.
*15 mol% PPh₃ was added.

Figure 2 | Control experiments. (a) Addition to terminal alkyne in the absence of copper catalyst. (b) Direct methylation of terminal alkyne in the absence of alkane substrates.
methylcyclohexane showed a good reaction efficiency toward alkylnylation (3aa and 3ba). Other cycloalkanes were applied as substrates in this transformation. The ring size had evident effect on the yield of the corresponding alkylnylation products. For example, cyclopentane and cycloheptane did furnish the desired products but with decreased reaction efficiency (3ca and 3da). Unactivated acyclic alkanes including linear alkanes and branched alkanes were tested in this oxidative C(sp3)–H alkylnylation reaction. The reaction of 2a with linear alkanes including n-pentane, n-hexane and n-heptane proceeded smoothly but afforded a mixture of regioisomers (3ea–3ga). The reaction result of a branched alkane was also presented. Neohexane was also able to couple with 2a and afforded the desired product as two regioisomers (3ha and 3ka). The reaction result of neohexane was also presented. Neohexane was also able to couple with 2a and afforded the desired product as two regioisomers (3ha and 3ka). Oxidative C(sp3)–H alkylnylation of norbornane proceeded with single-site selectivity and gave 3ia in 49% yield. Despite simple alkanes, toluene derivatives were also suitable in this transformation. Direct oxidative benzylic C(sp3)–H alkylnylation of toluene derivatives could be obtained in good yields under similar conditions (3ja–3la). Since tert-butoxyl radical can undergo β–Me scission to generate a methyl radical\(^{10–52}\), direct methylation of terminal alkyne was observed as a competing side reaction in the above cases. Importantly, efficient methylation of terminal alkynyl could be achieved in the absence of alkane substrates (Fig. 2b).

**Scope of terminal alkynes.** Different terminal alkynes were applied as substrates to react with cyclohexane (Fig. 4). The reactions of simple phenylacetylene, meta- and ortho-methyl substituted phenylacetylene all proceeded well and afforded the corresponding aliphatic internal alkynes in good yields (3ab and 3ad). 4-Ethynyl-1,1′-biphenyl also gave the desired products in good yields (3ae). To our delight, electron-rich phenylacetylenes were more reactive, furnishing the desired products in higher yields (3af and 3ag). At the same time, strongly electron-deficient phenylacetylenes were also suitable but with slightly decreased efficiency in this reaction system (3ah and 3ai). It is noteworthy that silver had evident effect on the reaction yield of electron-deficient phenylacetylenes. For example, the yield of 3ah decreased markedly (14%) in the absence of AgOAc. Notably, halide substituents such as F, Cl and Br were all tolerated in this transformation, which provides the possibility for further functionalization (3aj–3am). Other aromatic alkynes were also applied in this transformation. 2-ethynylnapthalene and 2-ethynylthiophene both furnished the desired products in good yields (3an and 3ao). Delightfully, aliphatic alkynyl such as 1-heptyne and cyclohexylacetylene were also suitable in the oxidative C(sp3)–H/C(sp) cross-coupling and afforded the desired product in good to excellent yields (3ap and 3aq). Late-stage modification of a bioactive molecule is highly important for medical chemistry studies. Delightfully, 3-ethynylestrone containing carbonyl group and four continuous chiral centres furnished the desired coupling product in 70% yield under the standard conditions (3ar).

**Discussion**

Since the method had been established, we then tried to gain some insights into the catalytic pathway. To confirm the existence of radical intermediates, a radical trapping experiment was carried out by using 1 equiv of (2, 2, 6, 6-tetramethylpiperidin-1-yloxy) (TEMPO). No cross-coupling product 3aa was obtained in
this reaction (Fig. 5). Instead, the GC–MS and $^1$H NMR analysis of the reaction mixture showed the existence of cyclohexyl radical trapped by TEMPO (Supplementary Figs 66, 67).

Next, kinetic isotopic effect studies with separate kinetic experiments were performed to gain insights into the rate-determining step for this C–H/C–H cross-coupling reaction. Both the C(sp$^3$)–H bond cleavage of 1a and the C(sp)–H bond cleavage of 2a were studied. A primary kinetic isotopic effect was observed for C(sp$^3$)–H bond cleavage (Fig. 6a, $k_{H}/k_{D} = 2.2$) while no obvious kinetic isotopic effect was observed for the C(sp)–H cleavage (Fig. 6b, $k_{H}/k_{D} = 0.9$), suggesting that C(sp$^3$)–H bond cleavage was probably the rate-determining step in this transformation (for details, see Supplementary Fig. 68)$^{53}$.

In the next step, the reactions with alkynyl metal species were performed to get some insights into the radical cross-coupling step. (Phenylethynyl)copper (2d–[Cu]) and (phenylethynyl)silver (2d–[Ag]) were prepared and used as substrates to react with 1a under the standard conditions (Fig. 7). However, neither of them could furnish the cross-coupling product. Thus, both alkynyl Cu(I) complex and alkynyl Ag(I) complex are not likely to be involved in the C(sp$^3$)–C(sp) cross-coupling process. An alkynyl Cu(II) complex is more possibly to be generated in this transformation.

On the basis of the experimental results and previous reports$^{50,51}$, a plausible reaction mechanism is presented in Fig. 8. Copper and silver work synergistically in the C(sp)–H...
The oxidation of alkane to generate an alkyl radical, silver-assisted copper(II)-acetylide formation, transmetalation with nickel, and finally C(sp3)–C(sp) bond formation. Various substituted alkynes were synthesized in good to high yields with a good functional group tolerance. Preliminary mechanistic studies suggest that the reaction proceeds through a transition-metal-catalysed radical reaction pathway and that the C(sp3)–H bond cleavage of unactivated alkanes is the rate-limiting step.

In conclusion, we have developed a combined Cu/Ni/Ag catalytic system to achieve the challenging oxidative C(sp3)–H/C(sp)–H cross-coupling of unactivated alkanes with terminal alkynes. The utilization of multimetallic catalysis was the key for controlling the reaction selectivity toward C(sp3)–C(sp) bond formation. Various substituted alkynes were synthesized in good to high yields with a good functional group tolerance. The application of the radical alkylation strategy in the synthesis of other substituted alkynes is underway in our laboratory.

**Methods**

**General procedure (3aa).** In an oven-dried Teflon septum screw-capped tube equipped with a stir bar, Cu(OTf)2 (13.6 mg, 0.038 mmol), Ni(acac)2 (9.6 mg, 0.038 mmol), AgOAc (8.3 mg, 0.050 mmol) were combined and sealed. The tube was then charged with nitrogen. Then cyclohexane (4.0 ml) and PhCl (3.0 ml) were injected into the tube by syringe. After stirring for 5 min, DTBP (135 mg, 1.5 mmol) and p-tolylacetylene (58.0 mg, 0.50 mmol) were subsequently injected into the reaction tube. The reaction was then heated to 130 °C. After stirring for 3 h, the reaction was cooled down to room temperature and quenched with saturated Na2S2O3 solution. After extraction with ethyl acetate (10 ml), the organic layers were combined and dried over anhydrous Na2SO4. The pure product was obtained by flash column chromatography on silica gel (petroleum-ethyl ether = 10:1). Colourless oil was obtained in 73% isolated yield. 1H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl3) δ 7.28 (d, J = 8.1 Hz, 2H), 7.06 (d, J = 7.9 Hz, 2H), 2.56 (t, J = 9.0, 3.6 Hz, 1H), 2.31 (s, 3H), 1.92–1.82 (m, 2H), 1.80–1.69 (m, 2H), 1.59–1.46 (m, 3H), 1.40–1.28 (m, 3H), 1.3C NMR (101 MHz, CDCl3) δ 137.26, 131.38, 128.84, 120.99, 93.58, 80.47, 32.75, 29.65, 25.92, 24.90, 21.34. For 1H NMR, 13C NMR, and GC–MS (if applicable) spectra of compounds 3aa–3la, see Supplementary Methods.
Data availability. The authors declare that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its Supplementary Information files.

References

1. Stang, P. J. Diederich Fo. Modern acetylene chemistry (VCH, 1995).
2. Negishi, E.-I. & Anastasia, L. Palladium-catalysed alkynylation. Chem. Rev. 103, 1979–2008 (2013).
3. Liu, J., Lam, J. W. Y. & Tang, B. Z. Acetylenic polymers: syntheses, structures, and functions. Chem. Rev. 109, 5799–5867 (2009).
4. Chinchilla, R. & Nájera, C. The sonogashira reaction: a booming methodology in synthetic organic chemistry. Chem. Rev. 107, 874–922 (2007).
5. Eckhardt, M. & Fu, G. C. The first applications of carbene ligands in C–H bond activation: Ligand and solvent free iron-catalysed oxidative C–H bond activation of terminal alkenes. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 136, 11590–11593 (2014).
6. Liu, Y.-H., Liu, Y.-J., Yuan, S.-Y. & Shi, B.-F. Ni(II)-catalysed dehydrogenative coupling of propargylic amines and terminal alkenes for synthesis of N- and terminal alkynes. J. Org. Chem. 73, 6360–6363 (2012).
7. Liu, Y.-J., Liu, Y.-H., Xin, Y.-S., Gu, W.-J. & Shi, B.-F. Copper-Silver-mediated direct ortho-ethynylation of activated (hetero)aryl C-H bonds with oxygen: a user-friendly approach. Chem. Commun. 51, 11650–11653 (2015).
8. Liu, Y.-J., Liu, Y.-H., Xin, Y.-S., Gu, W.-J. & Shi, B.-F. Copper-Silver-mediated direct ethynylation of unactivated (hetero)aryl C-H bonds with terminal alkene. Chem. Eur. J. 21, 205–209 (2015).
9. Liu, Y.-J. & Li, C.-J. Ni(II)-catalysed efficient alkynylation of sp3 C–H bonds adjacent to a nitrogen atom. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 126, 11810–11811 (2004).
10. Volla, C. M. R., Vogel, P. & Chemoselective – C H bond activation: Ligand and solvent free iron-catalysed oxidative C–H bond activation of terminal alkenes. Reaction scope and mechanism. Org. Lett. 11, 1701–1704 (2009).
11. Xu, X. & Li, X. Copper/diethyl azodicarboxylate mediated regioselective allylic alkylation of unactivated aliphatic tertiary methylene with terminal alkene. Org. Lett. 11, 1027–1029 (2009).
12. Sugihara, T. & Nakamura, H. Zinc(II)-catalysed redox-dehydrogenative coupling of propargylic amines and terminal alkenes for synthesis of N- and terminal alkynes. J. Org. Chem. 73, 2504–2507 (2012).
13. Rezaei, C. A. & Li, C. Silver-catalysed oxidative coupling of terminal alkenes with benzyl ethers. Heterocycles 82, 553–562 (2010).
14. Xiang, S.-K., Zhang, B., Zhang, L.-H., Cui, Y. & Jiao, N. Iron-mediated cross-dehydrogenative coupling (CDC) of terminal alkynes with benzyl ethers and alkenes. Sci. China Chem. 55, 50–54 (2012).
15. Li, C.-J. Cross-dehydrogenative Coupling (CDC): exploring C–C bond formations beyond functional group transformations. Acc. Chem. Res. 48, 335–344 (2015).
16. Togó, H. Advanced free radical reactions for organic synthesis 1st edn (Elsevier, 2004).
17. Jepson, C. P., Curran, D. P. & Feigl, T. L. Radical reactions in natural product synthesis. Chem. Rev. 91, 1257–1286 (1991).
18. Riley, P. A. Free radicals in biology: oxidative stress and the effects of ionizing radiation. Int. J. Radiat. Biol. 65, 27–34 (1999).
19. Carrer, C. E. Introduction to polymer chemistry 2nd edn (CRC Press, 2010).
20. Liu, Q., Jackstell, R. & Beller, M. Oxidative catalytic coupling reactions: selective formation of C-C and C-X bonds using radical processes. Angew Chem. Int. Ed. 52, 13871–13873 (2013).
21. Wei, Y., Zhao, H., Kan, J., Su, W. & Hong, M. Copper-catalysed direct arylation of arenes. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 137, 25310–25317 (2015).
22. Haro, T. d. & Nevado, C. Gold-catalysed ethynylation of arenes. J. Org. Chem. 76, 12504–12507 (2011).
23. Zieba, A., Lisowska, J., Ptaszek, M. & Blasiak, P. Recent advances in transition-metal catalysed cross-couplings. Acc. Chem. Res. 47, 3459–3470 (2014).
24. Studer, A. & Curran, D. P. Catalysis of radical reactions: a radical chemistry perspective. Angew Chem. Int. Ed. 55, 58–102 (2016).
25. Ichinose, Y., Matsuura, S.-I., Fugami, K., Oshima, K. & Umitomo, T. Triethylborond-induced radical adiabution of alkyl iodides to acetylenes. Tetrahedron Lett. 50, 1315–1318 (2019).
26. Liu, Z.-Q. et al. Free-radical-initiated coupling reaction of alcohols and alkenes: Not C-O but C-C bond formation. Org. Lett. 11, 1437–1439 (2009).
27. Cheung, C. W., Zhurkin, F. E. & Hu, X. Z-Selective olefin synthesis via iron-catalysed reductive coupling of alkyl halides with terminal Arylalkynes. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 137, 4932–4935 (2015).
28. Li, J., Zhang, J., Tan, H. & Wang, D. Z. Visible-light-promoted vinylation of tetrahydrofuran with alkynes through direct C-C bond functionalization. Org. Lett. 17, 2522–2525 (2015).
29. Ackerman, L. K. G., Lovell, M. M. & Weix, D. J. Multimetallic catalysed cross-coupling of aryl bromides with aryl triflates. Nature 524, 454–457 (2015).
30. Lėnoïtis–Halbes, U., Pale, P. & Berger, S. Ag NMR as a tool for mechanistic studies of Ag-catalysed reactions: Evidence for in situ formation of alkyne-1-yl silver from alkynes and silver salts. J. Org. Chem. 70, 9185–9190 (2005).
31. Halbes-Lėnoïtis, U., Weibel, J.-M. & Pale, P. The organic chemistry of silver acetyldieles. Chem. Rev. 36, 759–769 (2007).
32. Viterisi, A., Orsini, A., Weibel, J.-M. & Pale, P. A mild access to silver acetyldies from trimethylsilyl acetylenes. Tetrahedron Lett. 47, 2779–2781 (2006).
33. Walling, C. Free radicals in solution (Wiley, 1957).
34. Tran, B. L., Driess, M. & Hartwig, J. F. Copper-catalysed oxidative dehydrogenative carboxylation of unactivated alkynes to allicy esters via alkenes. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 136, 17292–17301 (2014).
35. Tran, B. L., Driess, M. & Hartwig, J. F. Copper-catalysed intermolecular amimation andimidation of unactivated alkynes. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 136, 2555–2563 (2014).
36. Bunescu, A., Wang, Q. & Zhu, J. Synthesis of functionalized epoxides by copper-catalysed alkylation oxidation of allylic alcohols with alkyl nitriles. Org. Lett. 17, 1890–1893 (2015).
37. Simmons, E. M. & Hartwig, J. F. On the interpretation of deuterium kinetic isotope effects in C-H bond functionalizations by transition-metal complexes. Acc. Chem. Res. 51, 3072–3077 (2018).
38. Jones, G. D. et al. Ligand redox effects in the synthesis, electronic structure, and reactivity of an alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling catalyst. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 128, 13175–13183 (2006).
39. Lin, X. & Phillips, D. L. Density functional theory studies of negishi alkyl-alkyl cross-coupling reactions catalysed by a methyliyperdridyl-Ni(II) complex. J. Org. Chem. 73, 6366–6368 (2008).
40. Lin, X., Sun, J., Xi, Y. & Lin, D. How racemic secondary alkyl electrophiles proceed to enantioselective products in Negishi cross-coupling reactions. Organometallics 30, 3284–3292 (2011).
41. Buswas, S. & Weix, D. J. Mechanism and selectivity in nickel-catalysed cross-electrophile coupling of aryl halides with alkyl halides. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 131, 16192–16197 (2013).
42. Breitenfeld, J., Ruiz, J., Wodrich, M. D. & Hu, X. Bimetallic oxidative addition involving radical intermediates in nickel-catalysed alkyl-alkyl Kumada coupling reactions. J. Am. Chem. Soc. 135, 12004–12012 (2013).
Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the 973 Program (2012CB725302), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (21390400, 21520102003, 21272180 and 21302148), the Hubei Province Natural Science Foundation of China (2013CFA081), the Research Fund for the Doctoral Program of Higher Education of China (20120141130002), and the Ministry of Science and Technology of China (2012YQ120060). The Program of Introducing Talents of Discipline to Universities of China (111 Program) is also appreciated.

Author contributions

A.L. and S.T. contributed to the conception and design of the experiments. S.T., P.W. and H.L. performed the experiments. A.L. and S.T. wrote the manuscript and all authors contributed to data analysis and scientific discussion.