ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds

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Article citation details
R. Soc. open sci. 5: 181389.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.181389

Review timeline
Original submission: 27 June 2018
1st revised submission: 31 August 2018
2nd revised submission: 11 October 2018
Final acceptance: 16 October 2018

Note: Reports are unedited and appear as submitted by the referee. The review history appears in chronological order.
Have you any concerns about statistical analyses in this paper?
No

Recommendation?
Reject

Comments to the Author(s)
This review is basically a list of cyclization reactions brought about by treating various heteroatom-substituted compounds with MeOSO3CF3 in the presence of compounds containing triple or double bonds.

The quality of the English is poor and I am sending as an attachment a scan of a partially corrected copy (Appendix A).

My overall impression is that the presentation lacks much intellectual content--it is simply a list illustrated by exemplary equations. I think the work is more appropriate for a journal that specializes in heterocycles; the readers of such journals would have the motivation to examine the document. As far as I can make out from the on-line information about the journal the present type of review is outside the scope of the Royal Society Open Science Journal.

Review form: Reviewer 2

Is the manuscript scientifically sound in its present form?
No

Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the results?
No

Is the language acceptable?
No

Is it clear how to access all supporting data?
Not Applicable

Do you have any ethical concerns with this paper?
No

Have you any concerns about statistical analyses in this paper?
No

Recommendation?
Reject

Comments to the Author(s)
The manuscript is a brief review of the triflate (ROTf)-induced reactions of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates to afford cyclic compounds.

In general, it is poorly written and the standard of English is disappointing. There is no original science in the paper, since it is a review - was it an invited review?

The literature coverage is not sufficiently comprehensive to be a full review. Taking all these factors into account, I cannot recommend acceptance.
Review form: Reviewer 3

Is the manuscript scientifically sound in its present form?  
Yes

Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the results?  
Yes

Is the language acceptable?  
No

Is it clear how to access all supporting data?  
Not Applicable

Do you have any ethical concerns with this paper?  
No

Have you any concerns about statistical analyses in this paper?  
No

Recommendation?  
Reject

Comments to the Author(s)
This review manuscript from Zou et al. gives an overview of the use of alkyltriflates for activation of cationic pathways to promote a number of cascade processes. This mini-review covers a number of transformations, which usually result in the formation of cyclic products, discussing aspects of the substrate scope, giving examples and highlighting probable mechanistic pathways.

Unfortunately, the manuscript is lacking somewhat in the introductory content; the background and prior art is not discussed in any great detail and the topic of the review is not surmised particularly well. There are also numerous errors in the schemes as well as the text. The work discussed within the review itself, albeit interesting, is also very niche. There are only a few examples presented and only 11 papers cited, the vast majority of which are from the authors own group. Hence, I do not find this work of sufficient value for publication in Royal Society Open Science.

Decision letter (RSOS-181005.R0)

03-Aug-2018

Dear Professor Xi:

Manuscript ID: RSOS-181005  
Title: "ROTI-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds"
Thank you for submitting the above manuscript to Royal Society Open Science. Your paper was sent to reviewers and their comments are included at the bottom of this letter.

In view of the concerns raised by the reviewers, the manuscript has been rejected in its current form. However, a new manuscript may be submitted which takes into consideration these comments.

Please note that resubmitting your manuscript does not guarantee eventual acceptance, and that your resubmission will be subject to peer review before a decision is made.

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Once you have revised your manuscript, go to https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rsos and login to your Author Center. Click on "Manuscripts with Decisions," and then click on "Create a Resubmission" located next to the manuscript number. Then, follow the steps for resubmitting your manuscript.

Your resubmitted manuscript should be submitted by 31-Jan-2019. If you are unable to submit by this date please contact the Editorial Office.

We look forward to receiving your resubmission.

Yours sincerely,
Thomas Foley
Publishing Editor, Journals

Royal Society of Chemistry
Thomas Graham House
Science Park, Milton Road
Cambridge, CB4 0WF
Tel: +44 (0)1223 432516
Royal Society Open Science - Chemistry Editorial Office

On behalf of the Subject Editor Professor Anthony Stace and the Associate Editor Dr Andrew Harned

*******************************************************************************

REVIEWER(S) REPORTS:

Associate Editor Comments to Author:

RSC Associate Editor: 1

Comments to the Author:

It is clear from the referee reports that the authors' presentation in this invited review has missed the mark. I agree with the referees that the language should be improved. However, I do disagree with the manner in which some of the criticisms were presented (particularly Referee 1). Nevertheless, the overall criticisms are valid.
As this was an invited review I would welcome a resubmission of a substantially revised manuscript that takes into account the criticisms raised by all three referees. Also, I strongly suggest modifying the text in such a way that it is more than just a list of what has been done. Are there obvious deficiencies in the literature that could be addressed by future researchers? Are there cases where these methods are dramatically better than alternatives? Where will we see the next advances in this area?

Reviewers' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Comments to the Author(s)

This review is basically a list of cyclization reactions brought about by treating various heteroatom-substituted compounds with MeOSO3CF3 in the presence of compounds containing triple or double bonds.

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My overall impression is that the presentation lacks much intellectual content—it is simply a list illustrated by exemplary equations. I think the work is more appropriate for a journal that specializes in heterocycles; the readers of such journals would have the motivation to examine the document. As far as I can make out from the on-line information about the journal the present type of review is outside the scope of the Royal Society Open Science Journal.

Reviewer: 2

Comments to the Author(s)

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Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author(s)

This review manuscript from Zou et al. gives an overview of the use of alkyltriflates for activation of cationic pathways to promote a number of cascade processes. This mini-review covers a number of transformations, which usually result in the formation of cyclic products, discussing aspects of the substrate scope, giving examples and highlighting probable mechanistic pathways.

Unfortunately, the manuscript is lacking somewhat in the introductory content; the background and prior art is not discussed in any great detail and the topic of the review is not surmised particularly well. There are also numerous errors in the schemes as well as the text. The work discussed within the review itself, albeit interesting, is also very niche. There are only a few examples presented and only 11 papers cited, the vast majority of which are from the authors
own group. Hence, I do not find this work of sufficient value for publication in Royal Society Open Science.

Author’s Response to Decision Letter for (RSOS-181005.R0)

See Appendices B & C.

RSOS-181389.R0

Review form: Reviewer 3

Is the manuscript scientifically sound in its present form?  Yes

Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the results?  Yes

Is the language acceptable?  Yes

Is it clear how to access all supporting data?  Not Applicable

Do you have any ethical concerns with this paper?  No

Have you any concerns about statistical analyses in this paper?  No

Recommendation?
Accept with minor revision (please list in comments)

Comments to the Author(s)
This resubmitted manuscript is significantly improved from it's previous form and the authors have addressed the majority of the issues risen by the reviewers on the initial submission. I do think that the document is somewhat lacking in the conclusions section, it would be better to see more of a comparative summary which highlights the benefits of these methodologies over the current state-of-the-art. Why is this approach better? What unique reactivities are there? Does the methodology provide access to unique architectures? Where will these methodologies lead in the future?

As this is an invited review I am inclined to accept this minireview with the caveat that the authors expand somewhat upon their closing remarks.
Review form: Reviewer 4

Is the manuscript scientifically sound in its present form?
Yes

Are the interpretations and conclusions justified by the results?
Yes

Is the language acceptable?
Yes

Is it clear how to access all supporting data?
Yes

Do you have any ethical concerns with this paper?
No

Have you any concerns about statistical analyses in this paper?
No

Recommendation?
Accept as is

Comments to the Author(s)
This review manuscript entitled "ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds" by Xi and coworkers gives an overview of the use of alkyltriflates for the synthesis of various cyclic compounds. Three reviewers have put forward some suggestions about the original manuscript. The authors have corrected the whole manuscript carefully. This reviewer recommend acceptance of this revised review as it.

Decision letter (RSOS-181389.R0)

09-Oct-2018

Dear Professor Xi:

Title: ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds
Manuscript ID: RSOS-181389

Thank you for submitting the above manuscript to Royal Society Open Science. On behalf of the Editors and the Royal Society of Chemistry, I am pleased to inform you that your manuscript will be accepted for publication in Royal Society Open Science subject to minor revision in accordance with the referee suggestions. Please find the reviewers' comments at the end of this email.

The reviewers and handling editors have recommended publication, but also suggest some minor revisions to your manuscript. Therefore, I invite you to respond to the comments and revise your manuscript.
Please also include the following statements alongside the other end statements. As we cannot publish your manuscript without these end statements included, if you feel that a given heading is not relevant to your paper, please nevertheless include the heading and explicitly state that it is not relevant to your work. We have included a screenshot example of the end statements for reference.

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Please clarify whether you received ethical approval from a local ethics committee to carry out your study. If so please include details of this, including the name of the committee that gave consent in a Research Ethics section after your main text. Please also clarify whether you received informed consent for the participants to participate in the study and state this in your Research Ethics section.

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Please clarify whether you obtained the necessary licences and approvals from your institutional animal ethics committee before conducting your research. Please provide details of these licences and approvals in an Animal Ethics section after your main text.

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When submitting your revised manuscript, you will be able to respond to the comments made by the referees and upload a file "Response to Referees" in "Section 6 - File Upload". You can use this to document any changes you make to the original manuscript. In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the referees.

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5) All supplementary materials accompanying an accepted article will be treated as in their final form. Note that the Royal Society will neither edit nor typeset supplementary material and it will
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Supplementary files will be published alongside the paper on the journal website and posted on the online figshare repository (https://figshare.com). The heading and legend provided for each supplementary file during the submission process will be used to create the figshare page, so please ensure these are accurate and informative so that your files can be found in searches. Files on figshare will be made available approximately one week before the accompanying article so that the supplementary material can be attributed a unique DOI.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Royal Society Open Science. The chemistry content of Royal Society Open Science is published in collaboration with the Royal Society of Chemistry. I look forward to receiving your revision. If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes,

Laura Smith, MRSC
Publishing Editor, Journals
Royal Society of Chemistry,
Thomas Graham House,
Science Park, Milton Road,
Cambridge, CB4 0WF, UK

Royal Society Open Science - Chemistry Editorial Office

On behalf of the Subject Editor Professor Anthony Stace and the Associate Editor Dr Andrew Harned.

*******************************************************************************

RSC Associate Editor
Comments to the Author:
I agree with the reviewers that the revised manuscript is much improved over the previous version. At the same time, I agree with the suggestion that the conclusion and outlook could be expanded and improved upon.

*******************************************************************************

Reviewer comments to Author:
Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author(s)
This resubmitted manuscript is significantly improved from its previous form and the authors have addressed the majority of the issues risen by the reviewers on the initial submission. I do think that the document is somewhat lacking in the conclusions section, it would be better to see more of a comparative summary which highlights the benefits of these methodologies over the current state-of-the-art. Why is this approach better? What unique reactivities are there? Does the methodology provide access to unique architectures? Where will these methodologies lead in the future?

As this is an invited review I am inclined to accept this minireview with the caveat that the authors expand somewhat upon their closing remarks.
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Comments to the Author(s)
This review manuscript entitled "ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds" by Xi and coworkers gives an overview of the use of alkyltriflates for the synthesis of various cyclic compounds. Three reviewers have put forward some suggestions about the original manuscript. The authors have corrected the whole manuscript carefully. This reviewer recommend acceptance of this revised review as it.

Author's Response to Decision Letter for (RSOS-181389.R0)

See Appendix D.

Decision letter (RSOS-181389.R1)

16-Oct-2018

Dear Professor Xi:

Title: ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds
Manuscript ID: RSOS-181389.R1

It is a pleasure to accept your manuscript in its current form for publication in Royal Society Open Science. The chemistry content of Royal Society Open Science is published in collaboration with the Royal Society of Chemistry.

The comments of the reviewer(s) who reviewed your manuscript are included at the end of this email.

Thank you for your fine contribution. On behalf of the Editors of Royal Society Open Science and the Royal Society of Chemistry, I look forward to your continued contributions to the Journal.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Laura Smith
Publishing Editor, Journals

Royal Society of Chemistry
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Science Park, Milton Road
Cambridge, CB4 0WF
Royal Society Open Science - Chemistry Editorial Office

On behalf of the Subject Editor Professor Anthony Stace and the Associate Editor Dr Andrew Harned.
RSC Associate Editor
Comments to the Author:
(There are no comments.)

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:
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ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates
leading to cyclic compounds

Song Zou*, Sheng Wang*, Chanjuan Xi*

MOE Key Laboratory of Bioorganic Phosphorus Chemistry & Chemical Biology, Department of Chemistry, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China

Keywords: trifluoromethanesulfonates; heteroatom reagents; annulation; cyclic compounds

1. Summary

The development of metal-free organic reactions is one of the hotspots in the synthesis of cyclic compounds. ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates), due to their good electrophilicity are powerful alkylating reagents to unsaturated heteroatom reagents leading to carbon cation, which could subsequently reacted with appropriate substrates to produce cyclic compounds. In this review, we mainly focus on the ROTf-induced annulation of unsaturated heteroatom reagents such as nitriles, carbodiimides, azobenzenes, isothiocyanates, aldehydes, isocyanates, and phosphaalkene with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds.
2. Introduction

ROTF (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates) are powerful alkylation reagents and frequently utilized in alkylation of nucleophiles [1]. Benefit from fluorine in OTf to stabilize the negative charge and possessing excellent leaving ability, which make the ROTf much more reactive as alkylation reagents than alkyl iodide or (MeO)2SO2. As results of extensive application in organic synthesis, a lot of methods have been developed to prepare ROTf, such as reaction of orthoformates and triflic anhydrides under solvent-free condition [2]. The ROTf were often used as alkylation reagents for diverse substrates containing heteroatom such as P [3], O [4], N [5-7], S [8,9], Te [10], Ge [11], Bi [12], Si [13], and Se [14,15], which straightforwardly afforded the corresponding alkylated products with aid of base or stable triflates irreversibly that even could be applied as ionic liquids [16,17]. Moreover, the resulted triflates could be further transformed to other products by substitution [18] (Scheme 1, a). On the other hand, unsaturated heteroatom reagents, such as nitriles, aldehydes, isocyanates, and isothiocyanates, were captured by ROTf to generate electrophiles bearing carbon cation [19], which could be subsequently reacted with appropriate unsaturated substrates to produce cyclic compounds (Scheme 1, b). ROTf-induced cyclization featuring metal-free, easy to handle, and good regioselectivity provided a feasible approach to diverse cyclic compounds. In this review, we mainly focus on the ROTf-induced annulation of unsaturated heteroatom reagents such as nitriles, carbodiimides, azobenzenes, isothiocyanates, aldehydes, isocyanates, and phosphaalkene with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds.

a. ROTf-mediated substitution:

\[ R'-X + ROTf \rightarrow [R'-X-R]^+ OTf \rightarrow R-Nu \]

b. ROTf-mediated cyclization:

\[ R^1=\text{N, S, O, P} \quad Y=\text{C, N, P} \]

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3. ROTf-induced annulation of nitrogen-containing substrates with unsaturated compounds

3.1 ROTf-induced annulation of nitriles with alkynes

Nitriles as unsaturated heteroatom reagents could react with ROTf to form N-alkylated nitriliums, which were well investigated by Booth [7] in 1980. However, electrophilicity of N-alkylated nitriliums has not been utilized in further reaction until recently. In 2014, our group [20] reported MeOTf-induced carboannulation of arylnitriles and aromatic alkynes to construct indenones 1 (Scheme 2). Triflate 3 was isolated when dec-5-yne was used indicating 1-1 might be an intermediate in this reaction. A range of functionalized indenone products were obtained. When ortho-substituted arylnitriles were utilized, indenone imine 1-1 would further cyclize with another molecular of nitriliums to give indeno [1,2-c]-isoquinolines 2 with construction of one carbocycle and one heterocycle.
Scheme 2. MeOTf-induced cyclization of arylnitriles and alkynes.

Arylnitriles and alkynes could be induced by MeOTf to afford indenones via intermediate I-5. We envisioned the utilization of alkynitriles, which lack an aryl group for the ring closure, might lead to a different ring formation process. To our delight, reaction of alkynitriles, alkynes, and MeOTf indeed afforded tetrasubstituted NH-pyrroles 4 in high regioselectivity, which includes one carbon from ROTf to join the final products [21] (Scheme 3). It is noteworthy that the cyclized pyrrole captures another nitrilium leading to highly substituted NH-pyrroles after hydrolysis. When EtOTf was utilized instead of MeOTf, the product 5 was obtained.
**Scheme 3.** MeOTf-induced cyclization of alkynitriles and alkynes.

Furthermore, when 1,2-diphenylethylenes and 1,2-di-p-tolylethylenes were employed at 130 °C, the isoquinolines 6 were obtained in good yields. The representative results are summarized in Scheme 4.
Scheme 4. MeOTf-induced cyclization of alkynitriles and diarylalkynes

3.2 ROTf-induced annihilation of carbodiimides

More recently, ROTf-induced electrophilic cyclization was extended to carbodiimides. Our group demonstrated a ROTf-triggered intermolecular cyclization of carbodiimides to afford a range of 2-amino-4-imino-quinazolines 9, 2,4-diaminoquinazolines 7 and 2-aminoquinazolinones 8 efficiently, which are important motifs in pharmaceuticals [22]. When \(N,N'-\)diarylcarbodiimides were employed, the reaction proceeded smoothly to afford the corresponding 2-amino-4-imino-quinazolines 9, which could be hydrolyzed to generate the corresponding 2-aminoquinazolinones 8. The representative results are shown in Scheme 5.
Scheme 5. MeOTf-induced cyclization of diarylcarbodiimides

To further extend the substrate scope, a combination of two different carbodiimides has been achieved. A range of diarylcarbodiimides and dialkyldiacylcarbodiimides were investigated under the optimized the reaction condition. The representative results are shown in Scheme 6. A plausible mechanism was proposed. First, carbodiimide is methylated by MeOTf and subsequently attacked by another molecular carbodiimide to give intermediate I-11. Then, intramolecular nucleophilic attack takes place to afford four-membered intermediate I-12, which
generates carbenium 7 after ring opening via C-N bond cleavage. Finally, intramolecular Friedel-Crafts annulation occurs to form the corresponding quinazolinone imine, which could give 2, 4-diamino-quinazoline 9 (R = alkyl group) and 2-amino-quinazolinone 8 (R = aryl group) after hydrolysis.

\[
\begin{align*}
R^1 & \text{N} & \text{C\textsubscript{2}N} & \text{R^1} \\
+ & \text{R^3} & \text{N} & \text{C\textsubscript{2}N} & \text{R^3} \\
\text{1}) & R^2\text{OTf, DCE, 140 °C} \\
\text{2}) & \text{MeOH-5%HCl (aq.), reflux, 3 h} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{9a 93%(76%)} \quad \text{9b 87%(72%)} \quad \text{9c 85%(69%)} \quad \text{9d 92%(75%)} \\
\text{9e 80%(64%)} \quad \text{9f 78%(63%)} \quad \text{9g 65%(48%)} \quad \text{9h 85%(67%)}
\]

Scheme 6. ROTf-induced cyclization of diarylcarbodiimides and dialkylcarbodiimides.

3.3 ROTf-induced annulation of azobenzenes

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Apart from nitriles and carbodiimides, azobenzenes are also significant nitrogen-containing compounds, which possess Lewis basity. In 2014, our group demonstrated MeOTf-induced cyclization of azobenzenes by N=N bond cleavage with aid of TCQ (tetrachloro-1,4-benzoquinone) as oxidant to afford N-arylbenzimidazoles 10 [23] (Scheme 7). When unsymmetrical azobenzenes were used, cyclization tends to occur in electron-rich anisolyl ring. EtOTf could facilitate N=N bond cleavage as well to generate 2-methylbenzimidazole 10d. Plausible mechanism is shown in Scheme 7.

Scheme 7. MeOTf-induced cyclization of azobenzenes.

4. ROTf-induced annulation of sulfur-containing substrates

4.1 ROTf-induced annulation of arylisothiocyanates with alkynes

Isothiocyanates are widely used as reagents in organic synthesis possessing functional group N=C=S, in which sulfur as heteroatom is strong nucleophilic.

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Recently, we reported MeOTf as an electrophile [24] to react with arylisothiocyanates and alkynes leading to diverse highly substituted quinolones (Scheme 8). Tandem electrophilic cyclization via intermediate I-18 is believed to be a possible process. This reaction demonstrated superiority on substrate scope. Unsymmetrical alkynes such as terminal alkynes, (bromoethynyl) benzenes, even alkynes containing ester group could be applied in this reaction. Furthermore, alkyltriflates bearing C-C triple bond gave polycyclic quinolines 11d via bicyclization process. Great effort has been paid in transformation of thioalkoxy group such as oxidation, reduction, and cross-coupling reaction, which make this method more powerful in organic synthesis.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ph} & \quad \text{Br} & \quad \text{COOEt} & \quad \text{Cl} \\
11a & 57\% & 11b & 60\% & 11c & 52\% & 11d & 48\% \\
11e & 75\% & 11f & 65\% & 11g & 69\% & 11h & 72\%
\end{align*}
\]

Scheme 8. ROTf-induced cyclization of arylisothiocyanates and arylalkynes.

4.2 ROTf-induced annulation of alkylisothiocyanates

Substitution of arylisothiocyanates with alkylisothiocyanate gives a new reaction mode [25] with formation of indenones (Scheme 9). A four-membered ring I-21 was included in the reaction pathway. Moreover, transformation of thioalkoxy group at the 3-position of the indenone to phenyl, methylsulfonyl, amino, and ethoxy groups was explored as well, exhibiting potential utilization in preparation of highly substituted indenones.

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Scheme 9. ROTf-induced annulation of alkylisothiocyanates and arylalkynes.

More recently, Li and co-workers [26] reported MeOTf-induced intramolecular cyclization of isothiocyanates to afford thioisoquinolines 13 (Scheme 10).

Scheme 10. MeOTf-induced intramolecular cyclization of isothiocyanates.
Apart from S and N which could react with ROTf straightforwardly, O also demonstrated good affinity with ROTf. As a part of ongoing projects on the alkyltriflate-triggered annulation, our group [27] investigated a reaction of MeOTf, aldehydes, and arylalkynes (Scheme 11). A variety of 2,3-disubstituted 1-indanones were obtained. It is noteworthy that catalytic amount of MeOTf was employed and the reaction proceeded in satisfactory yield. We believe that MeOTf catalyzed the annulation of aldehydes and arylalkynes to afford 2,3-disubstituted indanones 14 by [2 + 2] cycloaddition and Nazarov cyclization in sequence as shown in Scheme 11.

![Scheme 11. MeOTf-induced cyclization of aldehyde with arylalkynes.]

5.2 ROTf-induced annulation of arylisocyanates

Isocyanate is the functional group with the formula R-N=C=O, in which N and O both may alkylated by ROTf. On the basis of our former research works on alkyltriflate-triggered annulation reactions, our group [28] investigated a reaction of MeOTf, arylisocyanates, and arylalkynes (Scheme 12). Notably, a range of 4-methoxyl-2,3-diarylquinolines was obtained in good yields. A plausible reaction pathway is shown in Scheme 12, and a tandem [2 + 2] and intramolecular Friedel–Crafts reaction is included.
Scheme 12. MeOTf-induced cyclization of arylisocyanates and arylalkynes.

Phenanthridinones are extensively found in natural products and bioactive molecules. We envisioned that MeOTf-induced intramolecular annulation of 2-phenyl arylisocyanates would provide a pathway for the synthesis of phenanthridinones. During the course of our study on the CO₂ chemistry, we found a one-pot method for the synthesis of phenanthridinones [29] based on the MeOTf- and TBD-mediated carbonylation of ortho-arylanilines with CO₂. The representative results and reaction pathway are shown in Scheme 13.
Scheme 13. MeOTf-induced cyclization with \( \alpha \)-arylanilines and CO\(_2\).

6. ROTf-induced annulation of phosphorus-containing substrates

In 2006, Gates and co-workers [30] utilized strong electrophilicity of MeOTf in the synthesis of highly strained four-membered phosphorus heterocycles with phosphaalkenes as precursor (Scheme 14). The unprecedented structure of the diphosphetanium salt 17 was identified by single crystal X-ray diffraction.

Scheme 14. MeOTf-induced cyclization with phosphaalkenes.

7. Conclusion and future outlook

ROTf has been a powerful reagent in organic synthesis featuring efficient, metal-free, and easy-handled handle. A range of heteroatom-containing unsaturated reagents such as nitriles, carbodiimides, azobenzenes, isothiocyanates, aldehydes, isocyanates, and phosphaalkene could be alkylated by the ROTf to generate reactive intermediates.

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which are capable of capturing other substrates to afford cyclic compounds with rational design. The synthetic methodology to various carbocyclic and heterocyclic compounds has been widely developed. Although the ROTf has exhibited great value for the synthesis of cyclic compounds, further exploration is required for the utilization of functionalized ROTf reagents and other heteroatom reagents such as organoselenium, organophosphorus. Furthermore, four-member ring intermediates proposed to elucidate surprising rearrangement is still lack of firm evidence. We anticipate that ROTf can be extended to more organic reactions in organic synthesis.

Data accessibility

As a review article, there is no original data included.

Acknowledgements

We thank all the cited authors for providing the research results for our reference.

Funding

This work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (nos. 21472106 and 91645120).

Competing Interests

We declare we have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

S. Zou and S. Wang participated in the design of the study and drafted the manuscript; "S. Zou and S. Wang contributed equally; C. Xi conceived the study, coordinated the study and helped draft the manuscript. All authors gave final approval for publication.

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Appendix B

Respond to Editor and Referees

Respond to the RSC Associate Editor 1
Comments to the Author:

It is clear from the referee reports that the authors' presentation in this invited review has missed the mark. I agree with the referees that the language should be improved. However, I do disagree with the manner in which some of the criticisms were presented (particularly Referee 1). Nevertheless, the overall criticisms are valid.

As this was an invited review I would welcome a resubmission of a substantially revised manuscript that takes into account the criticisms raised by all three referees. Also, I strongly suggest modifying the text in such a way that it is more than just a list of what has been done. Are there obvious deficiencies in the literature that could be addressed by future researchers? Are there cases where these methods are dramatically better than alternatives? Where will we see the next advances in this area?

Answer:

1. We reorganized the manuscript and addressed ROTf-induced annulation as metal-free methods for synthesis of heterocycles.

In addition, a variety of relative literatures has been discussed and reaction pathways have been described.

2. Transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are some of the most attractive methodologies for synthesizing heterocycles, since a transition-metal-catalyzed reaction can directly construct complicated molecules from readily accessible starting materials under mild conditions. Nevertheless, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are still limited in applications and confront challenges to some extent, since transition-metals are expensive, toxic, inconvenient for operation, and environment damage. In this regard, ROTf-induced cyclization featuring metal-free,
easy to handle, and good selectivity provided a feasible approach to diverse cyclic compounds. We mentioned them in the introduction part.

3. Although ROTf-induced annulation as metal-free methods for synthesis of heterocycles has been summarized, further exploration is required for the utilization of functionalized ROTf reagents and other heteroatom reagents such as organoselenium, organophosphorus substrates for synthesis of functionalized compounds. Furthermore, four-member ring intermediates proposed to elucidate surprising rearrangements still needs firm evidence. We mentioned them in the conclusion and outlook’s part.

Respond to the Reviewer 1
Comments to the Author(s)

This review is basically a list of cyclization reactions brought about by treating various heteroatom-substituted compounds with MeOSO3CF3 in the presence of compounds containing triple or double bonds.

The quality of the English is poor and I am sending as an attachment a scan of a partially corrected copy.

My overall impression is that the presentation lacks much intellectual content-it is simply a list illustrated by exemplary equations. I think the work is more appropriate for a journal that specializes in heterocycles; the readers of such journals would have the motivation to examine the document. As far as I can make out from the on-line information about the journal the present type of review is outside the scope of the Royal Society Open Science Journal.

Answer:

1. We reorganized the manuscript and addressed ROTf-induced annulation as metal-free methods for synthesis of heterocycles. ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates) are powerful
alkylating reagents for diverse substrates containing heteroatoms. The resulting triflates could be further transformed to other products by substitution/addition/cyclization. In this review, we mainly classified the typical ROTf-induced annulation of N-reagents, S-reagents, O-reagents and P-reagents with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds as well as summarized their recent advances from different aspects.

2. Thank Reviewer 1 to correct language, we reorganized the manuscript and all the grammatical errors and typographical errors were corrected according to the reviewer’s suggestions.

**Respond to the Reviewer 2**

Comments to the Author(s)
The manuscript is a brief review of the triflate (ROTf)-induced reactions of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates to afford cyclic compounds. In general, it is poorly written and the standard of English is disappointing.

There is no original science in the paper, since it is a review - was it an invited review?
The literature coverage is not sufficiently comprehensive to be a full review.

Taking all these factors into account, I cannot recommend acceptance.

**Answer:**

1. We reorganized the manuscript and the English proof reading was carefully done with the assistance of a native English speaker.

2. Heterocycles are ubiquitous in natural products, pharmaceuticals, organic materials, and numerous functional molecules. Therefore, organic chemists have been making extensive efforts to produce these heterocyclic compounds by
developing new and efficient synthetic transformations. Recently, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are one of the attractive methodologies for synthesizing heterocycles, however, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are still limited in applications and confront challenges to some extent, since transition-metals are expensive, toxic, inconvenient for operation, and environment damage. In this regard, a transition metal-free methodology for the construction of an important heterocyclic compounds in drug discovery and material science has attracted attention. ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates) are powerful alkylating reagents for diverse substrates containing heteroatoms. The resulting triflates could be further transformed to other products by substitution/addition/cyclization. In this review, we mainly classified the typical ROTf-induced annulation of N-reagents, S-reagents, O-reagents and P-reagents with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds as well as summarized their recent advances from different aspects.

3. We carefully checked the literature and more references were added appropriately.

Respond to the Reviewer 3

Comments to the Author(s)
This review manuscript from Zou et al. gives an overview of the use of alkyltriflates for activation of cationic pathways to promote a number of cascade processes. This mini-review covers a number of transformations, which usually result in the formation
of cyclic products, discussing aspects of the substrate scope, giving examples and highlighting probable mechanistic pathways. Unfortunately, the manuscript is lacking somewhat in the introductory content; the background and prior art is not discussed in any great detail and the topic of the review is not surmised particularly well. There are also numerous errors in the schemes as well as the text. The work discussed within the review itself, albeit interesting, is also very niche. There are only a few examples presented and only 11 papers cited, the vast majority of which are from the authors own group. Hence, I do not find this work of sufficient value for publication in Royal Society Open Science.

Answer:

1. Heterocycles are ubiquitous in natural products, pharmaceuticals, organic materials, and numerous functional molecules. Therefore, organic chemists have been making extensive efforts to produce these heterocyclic compounds by developing new and efficient synthetic transformations. Recently, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are one of the attractive methodologies for synthesizing heterocycles, however, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are still limited in applications and confront challenges to some extent, since transition-metals are expensive, toxic, inconvenient for operation, and environment damage. In this regard, a transition metal-free methodology for the construction of an important heterocyclic compounds in drug discovery and material science has attracted attention. ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates) are powerful alkylating reagents for diverse substrates containing heteroatoms. The resulting triflates could be further transformed to other products by
substitution/addition/cyclization. In this review, we mainly classified the typical ROTf-induced annulation of N-reagents, S-reagents, O-reagents and P-reagents with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds as well as summarized their recent advances from different aspects. As suggested by Reviewers, we have made appropriate changes to the text and the mechanism in all schemes as shown in revision.

2. As questioned by Reviewer 3, we have made correction for Schemes and the text.

3. We carefully checked the literature and more references were added appropriately in the revised manuscript.
Appendix C

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doi:10.1098/not yet assigned

ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents and unsaturated substrates leading to cyclic compounds

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Keywords: trifluoromethanesulfonates; heteroatom reagents; annulation; cyclic compounds
1. Summary

The development of metal-free organic reactions is one of the hotspots in the synthesis of cyclic compounds. ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates), due to their good electrophilicity are powerful alkylating reagents at heteroatom such as nitrogen, oxygen, sulfur, and phosphorus to induce an electrophilic center for carbon-carbon or carbon-heteroatom bond formation. Inspired by this chemistry, a variety of researches concentrating on heterocycles synthesis has been carried out. In this review, we mainly summarize the ROTf-induced annulation of heteroatom reagents such as nitriles, carbodiimides, azobenzenes, isothiocyanates, aldehydes, isocyanates, and phosphaalkene with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds.
2. Introduction

Heterocycles are ubiquitous in natural products, pharmaceuticals, organic materials, and numerous functional molecules. Therefore, organic chemists have been making extensive efforts to produce these heterocyclic compounds by developing new and efficient synthetic transformations. Transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are some of the most attractive methodologies for synthesizing heterocycles, since a transition-metal-catalyzed reaction can directly construct complicated molecules from readily accessible starting materials under mild conditions. Nevertheless, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are still limited in applications and confront challenges to some extent, since transition-metals are expensive, toxic, inconvenient for operation, and environment damage. In this regard, a transition metal-free methodology for the construction of an important heterocyclic compounds in drug discovery and material science has attracted attention.

ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates) are powerful alkylating reagents, which are frequently utilized in alkylation of nucleophiles. Benefit from fluorine in OTf to stabilize the negative charge, OTf possess excellent leaving ability, which make the ROTf much more reactive as alkylation reagents than alkyl iodide and (MeO)2SO2. As useful and versatile precursors in a variety of organic transformations, many methods have been developed to prepare ROTf, such as reaction of orthoformates and triflic anhydrides under solvent-free condition.
The intrinsic electrophilicity of ROTf is often used as alkylation reagents for diverse substrates containing heteroatoms such as P [5], O [6], N [7-9], S [10,11], Te [12], Ge [13], Bi [14], Si [15], and Se [16,17], which straightforwardly afforded the corresponding alkylated products with aid of base or stable triflates irreversibly that even could be applied as ionic liquids [18,19]. Moreover, the resulting triflates could be further transformed to other products by substitution [20] (Scheme 1, a). On the other hand, unsaturated heteroatom-containing reagents, such as nitriles, aldehydes, isocyanates, and isothiocyanates, could be captured by ROTf to generate electrophiles bearing carbon cations [7,9,21], which could be subsequently reacted with appropriate unsaturated substrates to produce cyclic compounds by tandem electrophilic reactions/cyclization (Scheme 1, b). ROTf-induced cyclization featuring metal-free, easy to handle, and good selectivity provided a feasible approach to diverse cyclic compounds. In this review, we mainly focus on the ROTf-induced annulation of unsaturated heteroatom reagents such as nitriles, carbodiimides, azobenzenes, isothiocyanates, aldehydes, isocyanates, and phosphaalkene with themselves or alkynes to afford cyclic compounds.
Scheme 1. ROTf-mediated reactions.

3. ROTf-induced annulation of nitrogen-containing substrates with unsaturated compounds

3.1 ROTf-induced annulation of nitriles

Nitriles as unsaturated heteroatom reagents could react with ROTf to form $N$-alkylated nitriliums, which were well investigated by Booth [9] in 1980. However, electrophilicity of $N$-alkylated nitriliums has rarely been utilized in further reactions until recently. In 2014, our group [22] reported MeOTf-induced carboannulation of arylnitriles and aromatic alkynes to construct indenones 1 (Scheme 2). Triflate 3 was isolated when 5-decyne was used indicating I-1 might be an intermediate in this reaction. A range of functionalized indenone derivatives was obtained. When ortho-substituted arylnitriles were utilized, indenone imine I-2 would further cyclize with another molecule of nitriliums to give indeno[1,2-c]-isoquinolines 2 with construction of one carbocycle and
one heterocycle. Although transition-metal-catalyzed annulation of benzimide or arylcarbonyl and arylnitrile with alkynes to formation of indenones has been reported [23], this reaction reveals a simple reaction process for the synthesis of indenones under metal-free.

\[ \text{MeOTf (3.0 equiv)} \quad \text{DCE, 150 °C} \]

Scheme 2. MeOTf-induced cyclization of arylnitriles and alkynes.
Arylnitriles and alkynes could be induced by MeOTf to afford indenones via intermediate I-5. We envisioned the utilization of alkynitriles, which lack an aryl group for the ring closure, might lead to a different way for ring formation. To our delight, reaction of alkynitriles, alkynes, and MeOTf indeed afforded tetrasubstituted NH-pyrroles 4 with high regioselectivity. The structure includes one carbon from ROTf to join the pyrroles [24] (Scheme 3). It is noteworthy that the cyclized pyrrole captures another nitrilium leading to substituted 2-acyl-NH-pyrroles after hydrolysis. When EtOTf was utilized instead of MeOTf, the product 5 was obtained. This reaction provides a practical and convenient method for the synthesis of multiply substituted 2-acylpyrroles from readily available starting materials in a one-pot reaction.
Scheme 3. ROTf-induced cyclization of alkynitriles and alkynes.

Furthermore, when 1,2-diphenylethylene and 1,2-di-\textit{p}-tolylethylene were employed to react with MeOTf and alkynitriles at 130 °C, the isoquinolines 6 were obtained in good yields via intermediate 1-9. The representative results are summarized in Scheme 4. In the cases, the Friede-Crafts reaction is favour to give 6-membered products.
Scheme 4. MeOTf-induced cyclization of alkynitriles and diarylalkynes

3.2 ROTf-induced annulation of carbodiimides

More recently, ROTf-induced electrophilic cyclization was extended to carbodiimides. Our group demonstrated an efficient ROTf-triggered intermolecular cyclization of carbodiimides to afford a range of 2-amino-4-imino-quinazolines 7, 2-aminoquinazolinones 8, and 2,4-diaminoquinazolines 9, respectively, which are important motifs in pharmaceuticals [25]. When N,N'-diarylcarbodiimides were employed, the reaction proceeded smoothly to afford the corresponding 2-amino-4-imino-quinazolines 7, which could be hydrolyzed to generate the
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corresponding 2-aminoquinazolinones 8. The representative results are shown in Scheme 5.

![Scheme 5](image)

**Scheme 5.** R’OTf-induced cyclization of diarylcarbodiimides

To further extend the substrate scope, a combination of two different carbodiimides has been achieved. A range of diarylcarbodiimides and dialkylcarbodiimides was investigated under the optimized reaction condition. The representative results are shown in Scheme 6. A plausible mechanism was proposed. First, the carbodiimide is methylated by MeOTf and subsequently attacked by another molecule of carbodiimide to give intermediate I-11. Then,
intramolecular nucleophilic attack takes place to afford the four-membered intermediate $\text{I-12}$, which generates carbenium $\text{I-13}$ after ring opening via C-N bond cleavage. Finally, intramolecular Friedel-Crafts annulation occurs to form the corresponding quinazolinone imine $\text{7}$, which could give 2,4-diamino-quinazoline $\text{9}$ (R = alkyl group) and 2-amino-quinazolinone $\text{8}$ (R = aryl group) after hydrolysis. This annulation reaction appears a general entry to the synthesis of 2-amino-quinazolinones and 2,4-diamino-quinazolines in one-pot under metal-free.
1) R^2OTf, DCE, 140 °C
2) MeOH-5%HCl (aq.), reflux, 3 h
**Scheme 6.** ROTf-induced cyclization of diarylcarbodiimides and dialkylcarbodiimides.

3.3 ROTf-induced annulation of azobenzenes

Apart from nitriles and carbodiimides, azobenzenes are also significant nitrogen-containing compounds, which possess Lewis alkalinity. In 2014, we demonstrated MeOTf-induced cyclization of azobenzenes by N=N bond cleavage with aid of TCQ (tetrachloro-1,4-benzoquinone) as oxidant to afford N-arylbenzimidazoles 10 [26] (Scheme 7). When unsymmetrical azobenzenes were used, cyclization tends to occur on the electron-rich anisolyl ring (10e-10g). EtOTf could facilitate N=N bond cleavage as well to generate 2-methylbenzimidazole 10h. Although the reaction mechanism is not clear, a plausible mechanism is shown in Scheme 7. The carbon atom from MeOTf inserts into the N=N bond and then cyclization to form N-arylbenzimidazole. This is the first example of N=N bond cleavage by a light main group element.
Scheme 7. ROTf-induced cyclization of azobenzenes.

4. ROTf-induced annulation of sulfur-containing substrates with alkynes

4.1 ROTf-induced annihilation of arylisothiocyanates
The isothiocyanates possess the chemical group –N=C=S, which represents versatile reactivity in the synthesis of nitrogen- or sulfur-containing heterocycles. Comparatively speaking, the sulfur atom is strongly nucleophilic. Recently, we reported MeOTf as an electrophile [27] to react with aryisothiocyanates and alkynes leading to diverse highly substituted quinolones. The representative results are shown in Scheme 8. A tandem electrophilic activation/cyclization via intermediate I-18 is believed to be a possible process. This reaction demonstrated superiority on substrate scope for isothiocyanates. Furthermore, unsymmetrical alkynes such as terminal alkynes, (bromoethynyl) benzenes, even alkynes containing ester group could be applied in this reaction. In addition, alkyltriflates bearing C-C triple bond gave polycyclic quinolines 11d via sequent cyclization process. Great effort has been paid in transformation of thioalkoxyl group such as oxidation, reduction, and cross-coupling reaction, which make this method more powerful in organic synthesis [27]. This reaction represents a concise, metal-free, and one-pot method for synthesis of functionalized quinolines.
Scheme 8. ROTf-induced cyclization of arylisothiocyanates and arylalkynes.

4.2 ROTf-induced annulation of alkylisothiocyanates

Substitution of arylisothiocyanates with alkylisothiocyanates that lack an aryl group for the ring closure, might lead to a new reaction mode. To our delight, the reaction proceeded well to afford indenone 12 after hydrolysis [28]. A range of arylalkynes could be employed in this reaction. The representative results are summarized in Scheme 9. A plausible mechanism is also described in Scheme 9. MeOTf as an electrophile reacts with isothiocyanate to form methylthio-substituted carbenium ion I-19, which followed the reaction with arylalkyne to form intermediate I-20. Utilization of the arylisothiocyanate affords...
quinoline 11. Without aryl group in the alkylisothiocyanate, the nucleophilicity-strong sulfur atom attacks carbenium of I-20 to form four-membered thiete I-21, which could be followed by ring opening with the C-S bond cleavage to form carbenium I-23 via intermediate I-22. Finally, intramolecular Friedel-Crafts reaction of I-23 affords indenone imine I-24, which undergoes hydrolysis to form indenone 12. This reaction represents the first example of cleavage C-S bond in the isothiocyanate for construction of the carbocyclic compound under metal-free.
Scheme 9. ROTf-induced annulation of thiocarbonyls and arylalkynes.
More recently, Li and co-workers [29] reported MeOTf-induced intramolecular cyclization of isothiocyanates to afford 1-(methylthio)-3,4-dihydroisoquinolines 13 (Scheme 10). The reaction may process by a tandem electrophilic activation and intramolecular Friedel-Crafts reaction.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{R}^1\text{N}=\text{C} & \xrightarrow{\text{MeOTf (1.5 equiv.)}} \text{DCE, 80 °C, 2 h} \text{Me-S} \\
\begin{array}{c}
\text{R}^1 \text{N}^\equiv \text{C} \equiv \text{S} \\
\end{array} & \Rightarrow \\
\begin{array}{c}
\text{R}^1 \\
\end{array} \text{Me} \\
\text{N} \\
\text{S} \\
\end{align*}
\]

**Scheme 10.** MeOTf-induced intramolecular cyclization of isothiocyanates.

5. **ROTf-induced annulation of oxygen-containing substrates**

5.1 ROTf-induced annulation of aldehydes

Apart from S- and N-reagents that could react with ROTf straightforwardly, O-reagents also demonstrated good affinity with ROTf. As a part of ongoing projects on the alkyltriflate-triggered annulation, a reaction of MeOTf, aldehydes, and arylalkynes was investigated [30] and a variety of 2,3-disubstituted 1-indanones was obtained. The representative results are shown in Scheme 11. It is noteworthy that a catalytic amount of MeOTf was employed and the reaction proceeded in satisfactory yield. Although the reaction
mechanism is not clean, a plausible mechanism is shown in the bottom of Scheme 11. First, MeOTf as an electrophile reacts with aldehyde to afford the oxonium I-25, which couples with alkyne to form the highly active oxetenium intermediate I-26 via [2+2] cycloaddition. Then, the intermediate I-26 undergoes spontaneous isomerization to form the 4π-Nazarov intermediate I-27, followed by Nazarov cyclization to give 1-indanone 14 and regeneration of MeOTf. This reaction provides a practical and convenient method for the synthesis of 2,3-disubstituted 1-indanones from readily available starting materials via MeOTf-induced catalysis.
Scheme 11. MeOTf-induced cyclization of aldehyde with arylalkynes.

5.2 ROTf-induced annulation of arylisocyanates

Isocyanate is the functional group with the formula R-N=C=O, in which N and O may both be alkylated by ROTf. We investigated a

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reaction of MeOTf, arylisocyanates, and arylalkynes [31]. Notably, a range of 4-methoxyl-2,3-diarylquinolines 15 was obtained in good yields and the representative results are shown in Scheme 12. Based on the results, a tandem [2+2] cycloaddition and intramolecular Friedel-Crafts reaction may be included in the reaction pathway. It is noteworthy that this reaction has limitations with only diarylalkynes and MeOTf for the construction of 4-methoxyl-2,3-diarylquinolines 15.

Scheme 12. MeOTf-induced cyclization of arylisocyanates and arylalkynes.
Phenanthridinones are extensively found in natural products and bioactive molecules. We envisioned that MeOTf-induced intramolecular annulation of 2-phenyl aryllisocyanates would provide a pathway for the synthesis of phenanthridinones. During the course of our study on the CO$_2$ chemistry [32], we found a one-pot method for the synthesis of phenanthridinones [33] based on the MeOTf- and TBD-mediated carbonylation of ortho-arylanilines with CO$_2$. The representative results and reaction pathway are shown in Scheme 13. This reaction shows MeOTf-induced carbonylation reaction of o-arylanilines applying CO$_2$ as the ideal carbonyl source to synthesize phenanthridinones containing a free (NH)-lactam motif under metal-free conditions.
Scheme 13. MeOTf-induced cyclization with \( \sigma \)-arylanilines and CO\(_2\).

6. ROTf-induced annulation of phosphorus-containing substrates

In 2006, Gates and co-workers [34] utilized the strong electrophilicity of MeOTf in the synthesis of highly strained four-membered phosphorus heterocycles with phosphaalkenes as precursor (Scheme 14). The structure of the unprecedented diphosphetanium salt 17 was identified by single crystal X-ray diffraction. Although the reaction mechanism is not clean, this reaction demonstrated a convenient method for synthesis of highly strained phosphorus
heterocycles, which may be used as a propagating species in the cationic polymerization of phosphaalkenes.

![Scheme 14. MeOTf-induced cyclization with phosphaalkenes.](image)

7. Conclusion and future outlook

ROTf has been a powerful reagent in organic synthesis featuring efficient, metal-free, and easy of handling. A range of heteroatom-containing unsaturated reagents such as nitriles, carbodiimides, azobenzenes, isothiocyanates, aldehydes, isocyanates, and phosphaalkene could be alkylated by the ROTf to generate reactive intermediates, which are capable of capturing other electrophilic substrates to afford cyclic compounds with a rational design. The synthetic methodology to various carbocyclic and heterocyclic compounds has been widely developed. Although ROTf has exhibited great value for the synthesis of cyclic compounds, further exploration is required for the utilization of functionalized ROTf reagents and other heteroatom reagents such as organoselenium, organophosphorus substrates for synthesis of functionalized compounds. Furthermore, four-member ring intermediates proposed to elucidate surprising rearrangements still needs firm evidence. We anticipate that ROTf can be extended to more organic reactions in organic synthesis.

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Data accessibility

As a review article, there is no original data included.

Acknowledgements

We thank all the cited authors for providing the research results for our reference.

Funding

This work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (nos. 21472106 and 91645120).

Competing Interests

We declare we have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

S. Zou and S. Wang participated in the design of the study and drafted the manuscript; #S. Zou and S. Wang contributed equally; C. Xi conceived the study, coordinated the study and helped draft the manuscript. All authors gave final approval for publication.
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Appendix D

Respond to Editor and Referees

Respond to the Editor
Ethics statement: our work is not relevant to the point of ethics statement

Respond to the Reviewer 3
Comments to the Author(s)
This resubmitted manuscript is significantly improved from it's previous form and the authors have addressed the majority of the issues risen by the reviewers on the initial submission. I do think that the document is somewhat lacking in the conclusions section, it would be better to see more of a comparative summary which highlights the benefits of these methodologies over the current state-of-the-art. Why is this approach better? What unique reactivities are there? Does the methodology provide access to unique architectures? Where will these methodologies lead in the future?
As this is an invited review I am inclined to accept this minireview with the caveat that the authors expand somewhat upon their closing remarks.
Why is this approach better?

Answer:

Heterocycles are ubiquitous in natural products, pharmaceuticals, organic materials, and numerous functional molecules. Therefore, organic chemists have been making extensive efforts to produce these heterocyclic compounds by developing new and efficient synthetic transformations. Recently, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are one of the attractive methodologies for synthesizing heterocycles, however, transition-metal-catalyzed reactions are still limited in applications and confront challenges to some extent, since transition-metals are expensive, toxic, inconvenient for operation, and environment damage. In this regard, a transition metal-free methodology for the construction of an important heterocyclic compounds in drug discovery and material science has attracted attention. ROTf (alkyl trifluoromethanesulfonates) are powerful alkylating reagents for diverse substrates containing heteroatoms. The resulting triflates could be further transformed to other products by substitution/addition/cyclization. In addition, construction of heterocycles using ROTf is featuring efficient, metal-free, and easy of handing. These points are mentioned in the introduction and conclusion parts of revision.

What unique reactivities are there?

Answer:

ROTf-induced cyclization featuring metal-free, easy to handle, and good selectivity provided a feasible approach to diverse cyclic compounds. These points are mentioned in the end of introduction part.
Does the methodology provide access to unique architectures?

Answer:

ROTf-induced annulation could provide various 5- and 6-membered heterocycles, most of them are important ubiquitous in natural products, pharmaceuticals, organic materials. For example, ROTf-triggered intermolecular cyclization of carbodiimides to provide 2-aminoquinazolinones and 2,4-diaminoquinazolines, which possess vital pharmacological activity. One more example is that MeOTf-induced direct cleavage of the N=N bond of azobenzenes leading to N-arylbenzimidazoles. In this reaction, the methyl carbon atom inserts into the N=N bond to form N-arylbenzimidazoles via cleavage of the N=N bond and two sp3 C–H bonds as well as one sp2 C–H bond and meanwhile formation of three C–N bonds without the assistance of any metals or metalloids. The examples are mentioned in the text.

Where will these methodologies lead in the future?

Answer:

ROTf has been a powerful reagent in organic synthesis featuring efficient, metal-free, and easy of handing.

Although ROTf has exhibited great value for the synthesis of cyclic compounds, further exploration is required for the utilization of functionalized ROTf reagents and other heteroatom reagents such as organoselenium, organophosphorus substrates for synthesis of functionalized compounds.

Among the utilization of carboncations, ROTf induced unsaturated heteroatom-containing reagents to generate electrophiles bearing
carboncations, which could be involved new approaches in the synthesis of heterocycles under mild and metal-free conditions.

ROTF-induced [2+2] cycloaddition to afford four-member ring intermediates proposed to elucidate surprising rearrangements still needs firm evidence.

These points are mentioned in the conclusion and future outlook part.