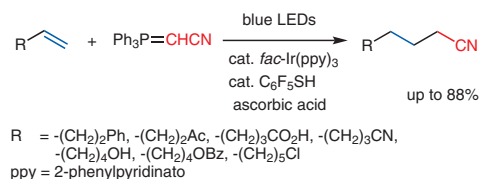


# Photoinduced 1,2-Hydro(cyanomethylation) of Alkenes with a Cyanomethylphosphonium Ylide

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Published as part of the 30 Years SYNLETT – Pearl Anniversary Issue



Received: 22.12.2018  
 Accepted after revision: 23.01.2019  
 Published online: 13.02.2019  
 DOI: 10.1055/s-0037-1612230; Art ID: st-2018-b0826-l

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**Abstract** An efficient method has been developed for the 1,2-hydro(cyanomethylation) of alkenes, in which a cyanomethyl radical species is generated from a cyanomethylphosphonium ylide by irradiation with visible light in the presence of an iridium complex, a thiol, and ascorbic acid. The cyanomethyl radical species then adds across the C=C double bond of an alkene to form an elongated alkyl radical species that accepts a hydrogen atom from the thiol to produce an elongated aliphatic nitrile. The ascorbic acid acts as the reductant to complete the catalytic cycle.

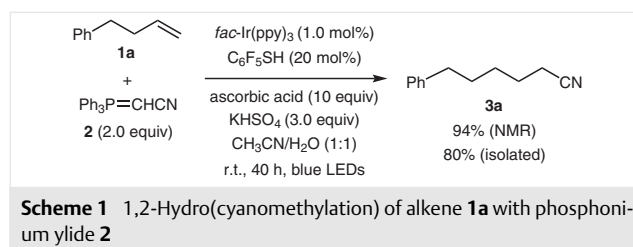
**Key words** alkenes, nitriles, photocatalysis, radicals, phosphonium ylides, hydro(cyanomethylation)

Radical chemistry has undergone a renaissance since the introduction of photoredox catalysis,<sup>1</sup> and a wide variety of reagents are now available as competent precursors to radical species. We recently reported that an ester-stabilized phosphonium ylide<sup>2</sup> can act as a precursor to an (alkoxycarbonyl)methyl radical species<sup>3</sup> when irradiated with visible light in the presence of an iridium catalyst, a thiol, and ascorbic acid.<sup>4</sup> The radical species, substituted by an electron-withdrawing alkoxycarbonyl group, adds across the C=C double bond of an alkene to generate an elongated alkyl radical. Subsequently, the thiol delivers a hydrogen atom to the radical,<sup>5</sup> producing an elongated aliphatic ester.<sup>6</sup>

We also examined the use of a cyanomethylphosphonium ylide instead of an ester-stabilized phosphonium ylide. The former act as the precursor of a cyanomethyl radical species<sup>7–10</sup> that, due to the electron-withdrawing nature of the cyano group, is sufficiently electrophilic to attach to a C=C double bond of an alkene, as in the case of an (alkoxycarbonyl)methyl radical.<sup>3,4,6</sup> The appended alkyl radical

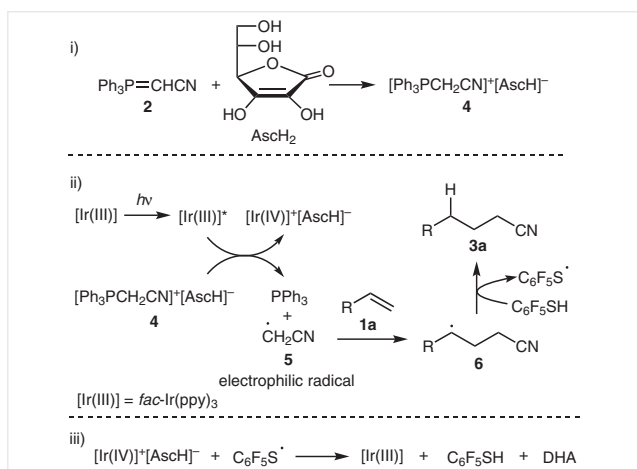
species is not as electrophilic as the original cyanomethyl radical, and can therefore abstract a hydrogen atom from a sulfanyl group<sup>5</sup> to form an elongated aliphatic nitrile.

Initially, we applied the conditions optimized for the reaction of an ester-stabilized phosphonium ylide<sup>4</sup> to the reaction of the cyanomethylphosphonium ylide **2** with 4-phenylbut-1-ene (**1a**), and we obtained 6-phenylhexanenitrile (**3a**) as expected. The yield, however, was moderate (43% by NMR), which led us to adapt the reaction conditions slightly to fit the ylide **2**. The elongated nitrile **3a** was produced in 94% NMR yield and 80% isolated yield when **1a** (0.50 mmol) was treated with **2** (1.0 mmol, 2.0 equiv) in 1:1 CH<sub>3</sub>CN/H<sub>2</sub>O (0.1 M) under irradiation by blue light-emitting diodes (LEDs; 470 nm, 23 W) in the presence of *fac*-Ir(ppy)<sub>3</sub> (1.0 mol%), ascorbic acid (10 equiv), and KHSO<sub>4</sub> (3.0 equiv) at room temperature for 40 hours (Scheme 1). No product resulting from 1,2-addition in the opposite direction was observable within the detection limits of <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz). A larger-scale experiment using 925 mg (7.0 mmol) of **1a** also gave a comparable yield of **3a** (83% isolated yield), indicating the scalability of the present reaction.



The formation of the product **3a** can be reasonably explained by assuming the radical mechanism depicted in Scheme 2, which is similar to that proposed in the case of ester-stabilized phosphonium ylides.<sup>4</sup> First, an acid/base

reaction of **2** ( $pK_{aH} = 6.9$ )<sup>11</sup> with ascorbic acid ( $AscH_2$ ;  $pK_a = 4.0$ )<sup>12</sup> generates the phosphonium ascorbate  $[Ph_3PCH_2CN]^+[AscH]^-$  (**4**). This has an energetically low-lying  $\sigma^*$  orbital for the C–P linkage. The Ir catalyst  $[fac-Ir(ppy)_3]$   $[Ir(III)]$  is photoexcited by visible light to form the excited species  $[Ir(III)]^*$ . This then transfers a single electron to the  $\sigma^*$  orbital of the phosphonium ascorbate **4**, giving rise to the cyanomethyl radical species **5**, along with  $PPh_3$  and  $[Ir(IV)]^+[AscH]^-$ . Electrophilic addition of **5** to the C=C double bond of alkene **1a** affords the elongated secondary alkyl radical species **6**, which is less electrophilic than **5**. Hydrogen-atom transfer from  $C_6F_5SH$  to **6** produces **3a** and a thiyl radical ( $C_6F_5S^\cdot$ ).<sup>5</sup> The  $[Ir(IV)]^+$  species and  $C_6F_5S^\cdot$  are reduced back to the  $[Ir(III)]$  species and  $C_6F_5SH$ , respectively, by the action of the ascorbate anion  $[AscH]^-$ ,<sup>13,14</sup> which ultimately becomes dehydroascorbic acid (DHA).<sup>15</sup> The additive  $KHSO_4$  might act by suppressing undesirable formation of a thiolate anion ( $C_6F_5S^-$ ) from  $C_6F_5SH$ .



**Scheme 2** Plausible mechanism for the formation of **3a** from alkene **1a** and phosphonium ylide **2**

Various alkenes **1** were subjected to the 1,2-hydro(cyanomethylation) reaction with **2** (Table 1). A wide range of functional groups were tolerated to afford the corresponding elongated aliphatic nitriles **3b–g** in yields ranging from 74 to 88% (Table 1, entries 1–6). Not only monosubstituted alkenes, but also polysubstituted alkenes, participated in the reaction. Geminally disubstituted alkenes **1h** and **1i** were suitable substrates (entries 7 and 8). Cyclic disubstituted alkenes **1j** and **1k** afforded the corresponding products **3j** and **3k** in yields of 59 and 79%, respectively (entries 9 and 10). The reaction of the acyclic vicinally disubstituted alkenes (*Z*)- and (*E*)-**1l** was sluggish, and the reason for the low yield of product **3l** is unclear (entries 11 and 12). In the case of trisubstituted alkene **1m**, a mixture of diastereomers of **3m** was formed through nonstereoselective transfer of a hydrogen atom to an intermediate tertiary radical

species (entry 13). Even the tetrasubstituted alkene **1n** underwent the reaction (entry 14). The 1,2-adduct **3o** was obtained in 18% NMR yield from styrene (**1o**), and the final reaction mixture contained various products, probably as a result of the high reactivity of the benzylic radical intermediates (entry 15).<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1** 1,2-Hydro(cyanomethylation) of Various Alkenes **1** with Phosphorus Ylide **2**<sup>a</sup>

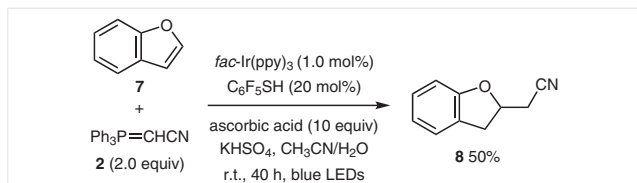
Entry	Alkene <b>1</b>	Product <b>3</b>	Yield <sup>b</sup> (%)
1			76
2			82
3			74
4			88
5			77
6			88
7			73
8			77 dr = 10:1
9			59
10			79
11			28
12			29 <sup>c</sup>
13			45 dr = 7:3
14			56 <sup>c</sup>
15			18 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: **1** (0.50 mmol), **2** (1.0 mmol),  $fac-Ir(ppy)_3$  (1.0 mol%),  $C_6F_5SH$  (20 mol%), ascorbic acid (5.0 mmol),  $KHSO_4$  (1.5 mmol), 1:1  $CH_3CN/H_2O$  (5.0 mL), r.t., 40 h, blue LEDs (470 nm, 23 W).

<sup>b</sup> Isolated yield.

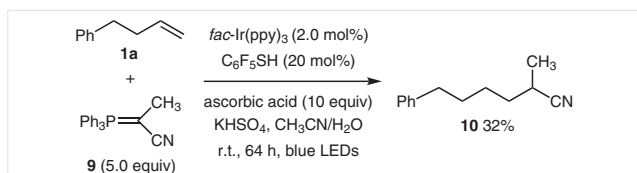
<sup>c</sup> NMR yield with 1,1,2,2-tetrachloroethane as internal standard.

In the case of 1-benzofuran (**7**), the cyanomethyl radical species added regioselectively to form a benzylic radical species, giving the 2-substituted 2,3-dihydro-1-benzofuran **8** (Scheme 3).



**Scheme 3** The addition reaction to 1-benzofuran (**7**)

Notably, even a branched  $\alpha$ -cyanoethyl group was attached to the C=C double bond of **1a** when  $\alpha$ -cyanoethylphosphorus ylide **9** was employed (Scheme 4).



**Scheme 4** The reaction with the  $\alpha$ -cyanoethylphosphonium ylide **9**

A similar reaction to form elongated aliphatic nitriles from alkenes has been reported,<sup>8</sup> in which a cyanomethyl radical species is generated from CH<sub>3</sub>CN by using an excess of dicumyl peroxide at a high temperature; these potentially hazardous conditions significantly limit the synthetic value of the method. The present reaction uses cyanomethylphosphonium ylide, which is stable and easily accessible, as the radical source, thereby providing a convenient method for synthesizing elongated aliphatic nitriles from alkenes.<sup>17</sup>

## Funding Information

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI [Scientific Research (S) (15H05756) and (C) (16K05694)]

## Acknowledgment

We thank Mr. H. Nikishima (Kyoto University) for his experimental contribution at a preliminary stage.

## Supporting Information

Supporting information for this article is available online at <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0037-1612230>.

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- (16) The reactions of terminal alkynes such as 4-phenylbut-1-yne gave complex mixtures of products, in which the corresponding 1,2-hydro(cyanomethylation) product (a  $\beta,\gamma$ -unsaturated nitrile) was present in ~10% yield as a 1:1 mixture of *E*- and *Z*-isomers.
- (17) **6-Phenylhexanenitrile (3a); Typical Procedure**  
A vial (2–5 mL; Biotage, Fisher Scientific) equipped with a stirrer bar was charged with the phosphorus ylide **2** (302 mg, 1.00 mmol), *fac*-Ir(ppy)<sub>3</sub> (3.30 mg, 0.005 mmol, 1.0 mol%), ascorbic acid (882 mg, 5.00 mmol), and KHSO<sub>4</sub> (207 mg, 1.52 mmol). The vial was then flushed with argon gas and quickly

capped with a Teflon septum. 4-Phenylbut-1-ene (**1a**, 67.6 mg, 0.51 mmol), C<sub>6</sub>F<sub>5</sub>SH (20.0 mg, 0.100 mmol, 20 mol%), distilled CH<sub>3</sub>CN (2.5 mL), and H<sub>2</sub>O (2.5 mL; degassed with argon gas for 30 min) were added from a syringe, and the mixture was stirred vigorously for 40 h under blue LED lights (470 nm, 23 W) while the vial was cooled with a fan. The mixture was then diluted with brine (25 mL) and extracted with CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub> (3 × 25 mL). The organic phase was dried (Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>), filtered, and concentrated under reduced pressure to give a residue that was purified by column chromatography [silica gel, hexane/EtOAc (9:1)] to give a colorless oil; yield: 70.7 mg (0.41 mmol, 80%).

IR (ATR): 2936, 2245, 1454 cm<sup>-1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  = 1.45–1.53 (m, 2 H), 1.63–1.73 (m, 4 H), 2.33 (t, *J* = 7.2 Hz, 2 H), 2.63 (t, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 2 H), 7.16–7.21 (m, 3 H), 7.26–7.31 (m, 2 H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>):  $\delta$  = 17.1, 25.3, 28.3, 30.5, 35.5, 119.7, 125.8, 128.3, 141.9. HRMS (EI<sup>+</sup>): *m/z* [M]<sup>+</sup> calcd for C<sub>12</sub>H<sub>15</sub>N: 173.1204; found: 173.1205.