Catalysis by Metal Complexes

Metal Catalysed Reactions in Ionic Liquids

Paul J. Dyson and Tilmann J. Geldbach

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METAL CATALYSED REACTIONS IN IONIC LIQUIDS

Catalysis by Metal Complexes

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FOREWORD

Sceptics were predicting that the field of ionic liquids would slow down or even reverse – but such a situation could not be further from the truth. In fact, in the last year or so, more and more researchers and technologists in increasingly diverse areas have become interested in ionic liquids. While this is great for the subject, it presents somewhat of a nightmare to anyone foolish enough to contemplate writing a book on the subject, even a book restricted to metal catalysed reactions facilitated by ionic liquids.

At the time we started writing on this book, we were still optimistic that we could give a comprehensive overview on metal-catalysed reactions in ionic liquids. Yet, a literature search with the term "ionic liquid" gives some 3,100 references up to the end of 2004, of which more than 1,000 stem from 2004 alone. Thus, at some point we were forced to concede defeat and it is likely that some important contributions have been overlooked. This is probably particularly true for those papers, which are less easily accessible and for which no translated versions exist. We tried to include papers that appeared during the writing for as long as possible, but it could be that some of the most recent publications do not get the detailed description they should deserve.

Nevertheless, we hope to have succeeded in providing a useful overview of what has been done in the field of metal catalysed reactions in ionic liquids, covering most of the literature until early 2005. Not all reactions described on the following pages are strictly within the theme of this series – "Catalysis with Metal Complexes" – as reactions catalysed by simple metal salts are also described.

There are now several nomenclatures for ionic liquids in use and we hope that the system we settled on is sufficiently easy to comprehend.

Finally, we would like to thank those to help us spotting the most obvious errors in various chapters, notably Dr. Andre Ohlin, Dr. Zhaofu Fei, Adrian Chaplin and Prof. Paul Pregosin.

Lausanne, May 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

1.1 A Brief History of Biphasic Catalysis 1
1.2 The Importance of Biphasic Catalysis 3
1.3 The Alternatives to Aqueous-Organic Biphasic Processes 5
1.4 Key Developments in the Chemistry of Ionic Liquids 6
1.5 General Properties of Ionic Liquids that Lend Themselves to Catalysis 9
1.6 References 11

2 Ionic Liquids – Properties and Preparation

2.1 Introduction 15
2.2 Composition and Physical Properties of Ionic Liquids 16
2.3 Synthesis of Ionic Liquids 24
2.4 Functionalised Ionic Liquids 29
2.5 Toxicological and Environmental Concerns 36
2.6 References 37

3 Hydrogenation

3.1 Introduction 41
3.2 Hydrogen Solubility in Ionic Liquids 43
3.3 Ionic Liquids in Hydrogenation Reactions 44
3.4 Homogeneous Catalysts 45
3.4.1 Monomolecular Catalysts 45
3.4.2 Cluster-Catalysed Hydrogenation Reactions 57
3.4.3 Transfer-Hydrogenation 58
3.5 Nanoparticle Catalysts 62
3.6 Supported Ionic Liquid Catalysis 65
3.7 Outlook 67
3.8 References 68

4 Hydroformylation

4.1 Introduction 71
4.2 Gas and Substrate Solubility in Ionic Liquids 73
4.3 Hydroformylation in Ionic Liquids 74
4.4 Ligand Design 79
4.5 Influence of the Solvent 81
4.6 Special Processes 83
4.7 Outlook 85
4.8 References 86

5 Oxidation Reactions

5.1 Oxidants 90
5.2 Ionic Liquids for Oxidation Reactions 91
5.3 Oxidation of Alkenes 92
5.3.1 Racemic Epoxidation 92
5.3.2 Enantioselective Epoxidation, Ring-Opening and Kinetic Resolution of Epoxides 96
5.3.3 Dihydroxylation 102
5.3.4 Formation of Ketones 108
5.4 Oxidation of Alcohols and Thiols 108
5.5 Other Oxidation Reactions 110
5.5.1 Oxidation of Aldehydes and Ketones 110
5.5.2 Oxidation of Alkanes 111
5.5.3 Oxidation of Arenes 112
5.6 Conclusion 113
5.7 References 113

6 Carbon-Carbon Coupling Reactions

6.1 Introduction 117
6.2 Catalyst Stability in Ionic Liquid Mediated C-C Coupling Reactions 118
6.3 Heck Coupling Reactions 121
6.3.1 General Considerations 121
6.3.2 Heck Reactions with Homogeneous Catalysts 128
6.3.3 Microwave and Ultrasound Accelerated Reactions 133
6.3.4 Heck Reactions with Heterogeneous Catalysts 133
6.4 Other Palladium Catalysed Cross-Coupling Reactions 135
6.4.1 Suzuki Coupling Reactions 136
6.4.2 Stille Coupling Reactions 142
6.4.3 Negishi Coupling Reactions 145
6.4.4 Sonogashira Coupling Reactions 146
6.4.5 Homocoupling Reactions 147

6.5 Allylic Alkylation 147
6.6 References 150

7 Olefin Metathesis
7.1 Introduction 155
7.2 General Considerations 156
7.3 Task-Specific Catalysts 162
7.4 Ring-Opening Polymerisation 163
7.5 Concluding Remarks 164
7.6 References 164

8 Dimerisation – Polymerisation
8.1 Dimerisation and Oligomerisation 167
8.1.1 Introduction 167
8.1.2 Nickel-Catalysed Reactions 168
8.1.3 Palladium-Catalysed Reactions 172
8.1.4 Dimerisation Reactions with other Metal-Catalysts 175
8.2 Polymerisation 177
8.2.1 Introduction 177
8.2.2 Atom Transfer Radical Polymerisation (ATRP) 177
8.2.3 Non-Radical Polymersiation Reactions 181
8.3 References 184

9 Miscellaneous Reactions
9.1 Halogenation and De-Halogenation 187
9.2 Addition to Carbon-Hetero Multiple Bonds 190
9.2.1 Aldol- and Mannich-Type Reactions 190
9.2.2 Carbonylation Reactions 193
9.2.3 Reactions Employing CO_2 as Substrate 197
9.2.4 Synthesis of Bis(indoyl)methanes 198
9.2.5 Prins-Cyclisation 199
9.2.6 Synthesis of Cyanohydrines 200
9.2.7 Acetylation and Thioacetylation 201
9.3 Aromatic Substitution Reactions 202
9.3.1 Friedel-Crafts-Type Reactions 202
9.4 Cycloadditions 205
9.4.1 Diels-Alder-Reactions 205
9.4.2 Cylcopropanation 209
9.4.3 Other [2+2]-Cycloadditions 212
9.5 Isomerisation and Rearrangements 213

9.6 Additions Across Carbon-Carbon Multiple Bonds 215
9.6.1 Hydroamination 215
9.6.2 Hydroboration and Hydrosilylation 217
9.6.3 Hydrovinylation and Hydroarylation 219
9.6.4 Silylstannation 220
9.6.5 Sakurai-Reaction 221
9.6.6 Ferrier-Rearrangement 221
9.7 Concluding Remarks 222
9.8 References 222

Index 229

Abbreviations 243

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Changing the way chemists think and work

1.1 A Brief History of Biphasic Catalysis

Like the first paper dealing with ionic liquids – their history will be described later on – the origin of the concept of biphasic catalysis is not entirely clear. In the book edited by Cornils and Herrmann entitled 'Aqueous-Phase Organometallic Catalysis', Cornils and Kuntz credit the field to Manassen at the Weizmann Institute in Israel.[1] Due to the popularity of this book with those working in the field, many authors have subsequently cited the seminal work of Manassen, published in 1973, as representing the first paper on biphasic catalysis.[2] Yet, at the same time, Joó at the University of Debrecen in Hungary was also working on the concept of aqueous-organic biphasic catalysis.[3] In a recent publication, Cornils (one of the pioneers of the field), acknowledges the seminal contribution by Joó: "He [Joó] has always been recognised as the earliest pioneer in this field, but I was not previously aware that his first publications on the subject in 1973 (which were somewhat hidden away in Hungarian journals) appeared at the same time as those of Manassen's group, and that therefore the two developed the ideas independently."[4]

However, in 1972, one year before Manassen's and Joó's first publications, Parshall working at Dupont in Delaware reported that the hydrogenation and alkoxycarbonylation of alkenes could be catalysed by $PtCl_2$ when dissolved in tetraalkylammonium chloride/tin dichloride at temperatures of less than 100°C.[5] It was even noted that the product could be separated by decantation or distillation. Parshall recognised the separation problem associated with homogeneous catalysis and in this paper states, 'An approach that seems under utilised is the use of molten salts as stable, non-volatile solvents from which organic products are readily separated by distillation ... or decantation'. An even earlier report by a group working for the U.S.

Industrial Chemicals Co. on biphasic catalysis can be found in a 1962 edition of the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* describing hydrogenations with $[Co(CN)_5H]^{3-}$ under aqueous-organic conditions.[6] Although we are not yet aware of any publication prior to that, it is highly likely that biphasic catalysis has a longer history than thought until recently. Yet, it was the systematic studies of Joó and Manassen that really laid the foundations to the field.

On an industrial scale, biphasic catalysis was first employed in the Shell Higher-Olefin Process (SHOP), which involves the use of two immiscible organic solvents, one containing the catalyst and substrates, the other being the formed product, which is immiscible with the reaction phase. The process consists of the nickel-catalysed oligomerisation of ethylene to give the majority of the worlds linear α-olefins, which are used in various applications, most importantly as detergents.[7] Subsequently, it did not take long for the first aqueous-organic biphasic processes to be implemented on an industrial scale (see below).

In the past decades, a number of alternatives to common organic solvents and water for use in biphasic catalysis have emerged. These include fluorous solvents, supercritical fluids and ionic liquids. The concept of fluorous biphasic catalysis originated from the work of Horváth and Rábai who were searching for a novel approach to selectively oxidise methane to methanol, and noticed that the solubility of methanol in fluorous solvents is low while the solubility of oxygen is extremely high.[8] When they realised that the miscibility of perfluoroalkanes, perfluorodialkyl ethers and perfluorotrialkylamines is low with many common organic solvents they demonstrated the utility of the technique, and elegantly showed that at low temperature the fluorous and organic solvents formed two phases, which on warming gave a single phase.[8,9] By careful design the reaction can be carried out homogeneously with the added advantage of a biphasic separation of catalyst and products after the reaction. This technique is particularly applicable to those reactions where non-polar compounds are converted to products with a higher polarity since the solubility of compounds in the fluorous phase decreases with increasing polarity. Apart from oxidation, many different reactions have been studied in fluorous phases including hydroformylation,[10] hydrogenation,[11] Diels-Alder,[12] C-C cross coupling reactions [13] and polymerisations,[14] to name but a few.

Supercritical fluids, another class of alternative reaction medium, have been used as solvents in catalysis for many years. Ipatiev reported the isomerisation of cyclohexane to methylcyclopentane under supercritical conditions using Al_2O_3 as the catalyst[15] and shortly afterwards communicated the oligomerisation of supercritical ethylene catalysed by $AlCl_3$.[16] However, it took another 60 years before supercritical fluids were used as solvents for

homogeneous catalysts, which was reported by Kramer and Leder working at Exxon. In their patent, the isomerisation of hexane to methylpentane or dimethylbutane in a supercritical hexane/CO_2 mixture employing $AlBr_3$ as the catalyst is described ($AlCl_3$ is only poorly soluble under the conditions used).[17] To date, many homogeneously and heterogeneously catalysed reactions in supercritical fluids are known, and those employing gaseous substrates, such as hydrogenation and oxidation reactions, are particularly well characterised.[18] The use of supercritical CO_2 in industrial processes such as decaffeination of coffee[19] and polymerisation of ethylene[20] has been known for many years. Recently the first continuous flow supercritical fluid plant, with a capacity of up to 1,000 tons per year, has been developed by Thomas Swan & Co with the intention of conducting small-scale custom synthesis of high value products.[21]

Ionic liquids continue to receive increasing interest as alternative solvents for catalysis and the historical developments in the field are described in Section 1.4.

1.2 The Importance of Biphasic Catalysis

In a relatively short time biphasic catalysis, and notably aqueous-organic biphasic catalysis, has had an enormous impact on the way many chemists work. The study of alternative solvents is clearly of considerable academic interest, but it is perhaps the demand for cleaner chemical processes that has led to the explosion of research activity in this area. A major challenge for chemists today, when developing new products or more economic routes to existing products, is to do so with a consideration of minimising the impact that the synthesis of the product may have on the environment. Critical issues include the amount of materials and energy used in manufacture, the dispersion of chemicals in the environment, the use of resources and the durability and recyclability of the products. There are numerous approaches by which the above criteria can be achieved. These include the development of new synthetic pathways that require fewer steps and/or are more selective, alternative reaction conditions and improved solvents or methods for higher selectivity and energy minimisation. One of the most effective methods that influences all of the above criteria is to reduce or remove volatile organic compounds, i.e. solvents. Solvents are among the most ubiquitous classes of chemicals throughout society and the chemical industry because their applications are so broad and varied. In particular, solvents are used on a huge scale in manufacturing as a reaction medium for chemical transformations.

An ideal system would not require any solvent at all. However, solvents are extremely helpful for a number of reasons. They allow reactants to come together in a homogeneous fashion improving selectivity and yields. They also have an important role as a heat transfer medium, dissipating heat liberated by an exothermic reaction or supplying the thermal energy required to initiate an endothermic one. As such, elimination of solvents from many manufacturing processes is highly unlikely, especially for processes involving reactants and products that are solids under ambient conditions, and biphasic catalysis represents one of the best ways of improving the environmental efficiency of a chemical process. Apart from reducing the amount of volatile organic solvents, there are numerous other benefits obtained by using biphasic catalytic processes, of which preventing the loss of the catalyst, which tends to be both expensive and potentially toxic, is the most obvious.

The effectiveness of biphasic catalysis can be illustrated with reference to the synthesis of aldehydes *via* hydroformylation of alkenes in an aqueous-organic process pioneered by Kuntz. While the majority of aldehydes prepared from alkene hydroformylation were done so in organic solvents, in 1975 research showed that rhodium complexes bearing sulfonated phosphine ligands can be immobilised in water and are able to catalyse the hydroformylation of propene with virtually complete retention of rhodium in the aqueous phase.[22] Catalyst loss is always a major problem in the production of bulk chemicals of this nature and accordingly, Rhône-Poulenc filed a series of patent applications in order to protect the discovery. The hydroformylation reaction showed considerable promise and after a few years of development, Rhône-Poulenc joined forces with Ruhrchemie to develop a continuous biphasic hydroformylation process.[23] While many benefits were envisaged, virtually everything to do with the technology was unknown. But in less than two years a completely new process that had no precedent was developed, tested and, using a scale-up factor of 1:24,000, went into operation. The beauty of the process is that the substrates, propene, H_2 and CO, are gases at room temperature and dissolve in the water, whereas the product, which contains over 96% *n*-butyraldehyde, is a liquid under the process conditions and forms a second phase which is easily removed and is virtually free from rhodium contamination. During the production of the first 2,000,000 tonnes of *n*-butyraldehyde only 2 kg of rhodium were lost, which in the parts-per-billion range.

Ever since the plant went online, a great deal of fundamental research has been conducted, the process has been scaled-up further and new plants have come into operation. The economic and environmental benefits of the Ruhrchemie-Rhône-Poulenc process have been closely scrutinised. Overall the cost of the production is reduced, but it is the benefits to the environment

that are the greatest.[24] These include the replacement of toxic organic solvents by water, the conservation of energy resources as the process operates under milder conditions compared to conventional methods, a higher selectivity towards the desired *n*-butyraldehyde product and the low loss of the toxic rhodium catalyst. Overall, the efficiency is extremely impressive and the environmental emissions are almost zero. Rhône-Poulenc is now also using aqueous-organic biphasic processes to conduct C-C coupling reactions for the small-scale production of vitamin precursors.[25]

1.3 The Alternatives to Aqueous-Organic Biphasic Processes

Not surprisingly, the most well developed biphasic system is that using water and organic solvents, despite the first industrial biphasic process involving only organic solvents. Obviously, water is the solvent of choice as it is abundant, cheap, non-flammable, non-toxic and has many other desirable properties such as being polar (and therefore relatively easy to separate from apolar compounds), high thermal conductivity, heat capacity and heat of evaporation. Nevertheless, alternative solvents to water for applications in biphasic catalysis are needed for several reasons:

- Many catalysts do not dissolve in water and thus their ligands must be modified with hydrophilic groups that can be expensive, especially for chiral ligands. Furthermore, some catalysts are unstable in water and decompose.
- The solubility of organic compounds in water is often poor. While this may be an advantage for product separation, lower reaction rates and yields are frequently observed. This problem may be overcome by increasing the stirrer rate or the temperature of the aqueous-organic biphasic system. Other protocols have also been developed to overcome solubility problems including the addition of phase transfer reagents, co-solvents, detergents and surfactants as well as the use of ultrasound and microwave dielectric heating.
- The high specific heat capacity of water means that distillation requires high energy, and reaction mixtures are difficult to heat or cool rapidly.[26]
- Other, more general problems faced when using water in catalysis include, for example, viscosity and pH effects.

Reaction media such as ionic liquids, fluorous solvents and supercritical fluids may offer a solution in avoiding some of the above mentioned problems. In addition to the physicochemical properties of solvents that are crucial when selecting a solvent for a particular task, within the context of producing cleaner chemical processes, other criteria are also important.

These include toxicity, flammability, explosivity, stratospheric ozone depletion, atmospheric ozone production and global warming potential.[27] Bearing all these criteria in mind, the alternative solvents mentioned above provide an excellent range of properties with considerable potential.

Various combinations of solvents that lead to biphasic and multiphasic systems have been evaluated in catalysis. For practical purposes, it is essential that the catalyst and product phase effectively separate after the reaction, and in this respect the most important solvent combinations used in multiphasic chemistry include aqueous-organic and fluorous-organic (see above), ionic liquid-organic,[28] ionic liquid-aqueous[29] and ionic liquid-supercritical (or dense phase) CO_2 (the CO_2 does not necessarily have to be supercritical).[30] Other biphasic systems have also been demonstrated such as ionic liquids incorporating fluorous groups which exhibit high miscibility with apolar compounds such as alkenes and resemble fluorous solvents in their phase behaviour with organic solvents[31] and phase vanishing systems.[32] Here an organic solvent containing one reagent with the same organic solvent containing another reagent is separated by a different solvent phase of higher density. The organic phase at the bottom diffuses through the central phase into the organic phase at the top. The reagent also slowly diffuses and reacts in a controlled manner with the substrate in the upper phase and only two phases remain once the reaction is complete. Triphasic processes employing three immiscible solvents have also been reported, for example, fluorous-organic-aqueous[33] and ionic liquid-water-organic systems.[34] Fluorous catalysis has even been reported without the need of a fluorous solvent[35] and ionic liquids may even be heterogenised on fixed-beds giving what has been termed supported ionic liquid catalysis.[36] In principle, however, there is no reason why not even more than three phases could be employed in a multiphasic process. One could envisage different phases supporting different catalysts, which transform a substrate to a product in a number of steps in a sequential fashion.

1.4 Key Developments in the Chemistry of Ionic Liquids

Ionic liquids are sometimes, especially in the older literature, also referred to as *molten salts*, *non-aqueous ionic liquids* or *room temperature molten salts*. While all of these names are entirely valid, their meaning has somewhat changed over the years. The term molten salt is now used less frequently in the field of ionic liquids and generally refers to salts with melting points greater than 100°C. The expression non-aqueous ionic liquid was originally coined to differentiate synthetic ionic liquids from water, since

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