

# Perspective

# Transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective C–P coupling reactions for the construction of P-stereogenic centers

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# SUMMARY

The transition metal-catalyzed C–P coupling reaction represents an effective strategy for the construction of P-stereogenic centers. These reactions involve different stereochemical mechanistic details depending on the phosphorus starting materials employed. The stereospecific transition metal-catalyzed C–P coupling of enantioenriched P-stereogenic compounds was mainly investigated in the early days. With the development of asymmetric catalysis, corresponding efficient kinetic resolution and dynamic kinetic asymmetric C–P coupling of racemic P-stereogenic starting compounds have recently been disclosed. This perspective discusses the impressive advances and provides an outlook on the directions of further developments.

## INTRODUCTION

P-stereogenic centers are key structure motifs in many natural products,<sup>1</sup> pharmaceuticals,<sup>2</sup> and chiral ligands (Figure 1).<sup>3,4</sup> Traditionally, the construction of P-stereogenic centers has been considered to be challenging, and classical methods toward these compounds mainly rely on resolutions with stoichiometric chiral reagents or using chiral auxiliaries attached to the starting materials.<sup>5-7</sup> Over the past 2 decades, many powerful strategies have been developed for the catalytic enantioselective synthesis of P-stereogenic compounds,<sup>8</sup> including the desymmetrization of prochiral phosphorus substrates,<sup>9-17</sup> the hydrophosphination of alkenes or alkynes, <sup>9,18-26</sup> the C-P coupling reactions, <sup>27,28</sup> and other miscellaneous reactions.<sup>4,29-35</sup> Most of these existing methods have relied on asymmetric transition metal catalysis, while a relatively small yet significant portion of them are metalfree strategies.<sup>13,14,17,24,30,31,33-35</sup> In this context, transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective C-P coupling reactions represent straightforward methods for the expedient construction of P-stereogenic centers, and significant progress has been made in the recent few years. This perspective aims to provide a concise overview and the major advances in the aspect with particular emphasis on mechanistic insights concerning stereochemical control. The current challenges as well as an outlook of future trends are also presented.

In principle, the development of transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective C–P coupling is closely associated with the intrinsically unique structural and stereochemical features of various phosphorus functionalities, particularly in the presence of transition metals. For example, the typical inversion barrier of a tertiary phosphine is more than 30 kcal/mol at room temperature (Figure 2A),<sup>36</sup> which means a very low pyramidal inversion rate. However, metal-phosphido species are known to be configurationally labile<sup>37</sup> and undergo rapid pyramidal inversion (the inversion

# THE BIGGER PICTURE

Challenges and opportunities:

- The replacement of precious metals (platinum, palladium, ruthenium, etc.) with earthabundant first-row transition metals, such as copper, nickel, and cobalt, as catalysts for developing enantioselective C– P coupling is an appealing future direction.
- Extraordinary efforts are still required to expand the scopes of both phosphorus starting materials as well as electrophiles.
- Enantioselective C–P crosscoupling reactions that embody dynamic kinetic resolution or DyKAT of racemic phosphorus starting materials are greatly appealing in terms of both reaction efficiency and practicality.

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Figure 1. Representative chiral P-stereogenic molecules

barriers for some certain Pd and Pt phosphides are around 15 kcal/mol) (Figure 2B).<sup>38</sup> In addition, phosphine oxides are generally more configurationally stable than trivalent phosphines. Yet transition metals have been reported to facilitate the configurational equilibration of phosphinous acids, thus indirectly promoting the racemization of corresponding phosphine oxides through tautomerization (Figure 2C).<sup>39,40</sup> These tactics have been successfully exploited in developing transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective C–P coupling reactions. In this perspective, these reactions are classified into three categories according to the different starting phosphorus compounds.

## **ENANTIOENRICHED P-STEREOGENIC COMPOUNDS**

Historically, the transition metal-catalyzed stereospecific C-P cross-coupling of enantioenriched secondary phosphine derivatives was developed to obtain P-stereogenic molecules in the early days. This strategy relies on the maintenance of the stereochemical integrity at the phosphorus center during both the transmetalation step for the metal-P bond formation and the reductive elimination step for the C-P bond formation. Thus, the stereospecific transformation is undoubtedly an effective method to access P-stereogenic compounds. This is particularly true if the enantioenriched starting materials are readily available. Early explorations by Xu and coworkers revealed that enantiopure phosphinate esters underwent Pd-catalyzed stereospecific P-arylation<sup>41,42</sup> and alkenylation<sup>43</sup> with complete retention of configuration at the phosphorus centers (Figure 3A). By assuming a stereoretentive reductive elimination, the authors deduced a front-sided attack of Pd by the lone pair of the trivalent phosphonite tautomer for the Pd-P bond formation.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the Pd-catalyzed stereospecific P-arylation of enantioenriched secondary phosphine oxides (SPOs) with aryl halides was also reported for the synthesis of P-stereogenic tertiary phosphine oxides with retention of stereochemistry.<sup>44–46</sup> Besides Pd catalysts, a chiral Ni catalyst (1) was disclosed by Yang and coworkers<sup>47</sup> for the stereoretentive P-arylation of an enantioenriched secondary phosphine oxide with 2-naphthonitrile (the absolute configuration of the product should be revised to  $S_P$  instead of the originally assigned  $R_P$  on the basis of reported optical rotation data<sup>48</sup>) (Figure 3B). Although only a single substrate was demonstrated, this coupling reaction exhibited intriguing dependence on the catalyst stereochemistry: an achiral Ni catalyst led to a racemic product, and the enantiomer of Ni catalyst 1 did not work at all.

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Figure 2. Configurational stability of phosphorus compounds
(A) The pyramidal inversion of common tertiary phosphines is slow.
(B) The metal-phosphido species are generally configurationally labile.
(C) Transition metals can promote the racemization of phosphine oxides by facilitating the configurational equilibration of their phosphinous acid tautomers.

It is noteworthy that the P-configuration can be affected by reaction conditions. In this respect, Imamoto and coworkers observed that the stereochemistry in Pd-catalyzed arylation of enantioenriched secondary phosphinite-boranes with aryl iodides was largely dependent on the solvent used.<sup>49,50</sup> Acetonitrile led to complete retention of the P-configuration, whereas tetrahydrofuran gave rise to nearly complete inversion (Figure 3C). The authors proposed that the ready phosphinite deprotonation in polar acetonitrile favored the front-sided Pd-P bond formation, resulting in configurational retention. By contrast, in the less polar solvent tetrahydrofuran, concerted phosphinite deprotonation and Pd-P bond formation likely occurred from the two sides of the P–H bond, respectively, causing configurational inversion. Besides, in a similar reaction, Livinghouse and coworkers showed that a catalytic amount of copper iodide could effectively suppress the base-mediated racemization of enantioenriched secondary phosphine-boranes via a configurationally stable Cu phosphide-borane intermediate (Figure 3D).<sup>51</sup> Thus, the corresponding P-stereogenic tertiary phosphine-boranes were obtained in high enantioselectivity with retention of the P-configuration. Recently, the Pd-catalyzed stereoretentive P-arylation of enantioenriched secondary dialkyl phosphines-boranes with aryl halides has also been developed.<sup>52</sup>

# **RACEMIC SECONDARY PHOSPHINES AND SURROGATES**

Racemic P-stereogenic compounds are no doubt much more readily accessible than enantioenriched ones, so they are more ideal starting materials for preparing enantioenriched P-stereogenic molecules. Thus, transition metal-catalyzed enantio-selective C–P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines has been intensively investigated. A noteworthy feature of these reactions involves the configurational equilibration of the *in situ* generated diastereomeric metal-phosphido complexes, which interconvert rapidly via the pyramidal inversion of the phosphorus centers. Accordingly, dynamic kinetic asymmetric transformations (DyKATs)<sup>53</sup> are achieved when the subsequent C–P bond formation from one diastereoisomeric complex is significantly faster than that from the other (Figures 4A and 5A). We will discuss the enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P and C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling reactions separately in the following subsections.

#### Enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)-P coupling

Palladium-catalyzed enantioselective cross-coupling reactions of racemic secondary phosphines with aryl halides are a powerful strategy for the construction of P-stereogenic centers. The enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P bond formation is generally proposed to proceed via the oxidative addition of a chiral Pd catalyst with an aryl halide followed by transmetalation of the racemic phosphine to form diastereomeric

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**Figure 3. Stereoselective functionalization of enantioenriched P-stereogenic compounds** (A) Pd-catalyzed stereoretentive P-arylation and -alkenylation of enantioenriched phosphinate esters.

(B) Ni-catalyzed stereoretentive P-arylation of an enantioenriched phosphine oxide.
 (C) The solvent effect on the stereochemistry of Pd-catalyzed P-arylation of enantioenriched secondary phosphinite-boranes.

(D) The suppression of base-mediated racemization of enantioenriched secondary phosphineboranes by Cul.

Pd-phosphido intermediates in the presence of a base, one of which then selectively undergoes reductive elimination to afford the enantioenriched product (Figure 4A).

In this aspect, Glueck and coworkers pioneered the enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P coupling of racemic secondary aryl phosphines with aryl halides using chiral Pd catalyst 2 (Figures 4B and 4E).<sup>54</sup> Mechanistic studies suggested that the inversion rates of the P-stereogenic centers in the diastereomeric Pd-phosphido intermediates were much faster than those of the ensuing reductive elimination processes, which signified Curtin-Hammett kinetics leading to the DyKAT of racemic secondary phosphines.<sup>55</sup> However, ligand substitution at the Pd center by the chiral phosphine products might occur in the reaction, rendering the reaction mechanism much more complicated than expected.<sup>56</sup> A similar enantioselective C–P cross-coupling of racemic diaryl phosphines with aryl iodides was also achieved by Helmchen and his coworker.<sup>57</sup> With chiral Pd complex 3 (Figures 4C and 4E) as the catalyst and lithium halides as an additive, the reaction delivered enantioenriched P-stereogenic triaryl phosphines in high enantioselectivity.

Although successes have been made in enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines, their direct use is often troubled with two common problems: (1) the displacement of chiral ligands by racemic secondary phosphines<sup>56,58</sup> resulting in unsatisfactory enantioselectivity, and (2) the tendency toward undesired oxidation by oxygen, especially of those alkyl-substituted secondary phosphines.<sup>59</sup> In this vein, Toste, Bergman, and coworkers uncovered a Stille-type cross-coupling of racemic tertiary silylphosphines with 2-iodobenzamide catalyzed by chiral Pd catalyst 4 (Figures 4D and 4E), yielding P-stereogenic tertiary phosphines in good yield with excellent enantioselectivity.<sup>60</sup> Key to good enantiocontrol

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Figure 4. Enantioselective  $C(sp^2)$ -P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines and surrogates (A) A general scheme for Pd-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^2)$ -P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines and surrogates.

(B and C) Pd-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines. (D) Pd-catalyzed enantioselective Stille-type C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P cross-coupling of racemic tertiary silylphosphines.

(E) Representative chiral Pd catalysts.

is the use of bulky tertiary silylphosphines as secondary phosphine surrogates and the introduction of *ortho*-amide directing groups to coordinate with Pd in the reaction.

# Enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling

In addition to the abovementioned ligand displacement by either the starting secondary phosphines or the tertiary phosphine products, the C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling with alkyl electrophiles may also suffer from their relatively high innate nucleophilicity that likely brings about nonstereoselective background alkylation reactions and/or overalkylation side reactions. Nonetheless, compared with neutral secondary phosphines, the corresponding metal-phosphido complexes generally possess enhanced nucleophilicity and diminished pyramidal inversion barriers, thus rendering the development of transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling very promising (Figure 5A).<sup>27,28</sup> In this regard, Glueck and coworkers pioneered the use of chiral Pt catalysts to achieve enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling. Perspective

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#### Figure 5. Enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines

(A) A general scheme for transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^3)$ -P coupling of racemic secondary phosphines.

(B) Pt-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of racemic bulky secondary methylarylphosphines.

(C) Ru-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)-P coupling of racemic methylphenylphosphines.

(D) Cu-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^3)$ -P coupling of bulky aryl-substituted racemic secondary phosphines.

(E) Representative chiral transition metal catalysts.

Particularly, they discovered Pt complex **5** (Figures 5B and 5E) as an effective catalyst for the reaction of racemic bulky secondary methylarylphosphines with benzylic halides.<sup>61</sup> Mechanistic investigations revealed the formation of the major product enantiomer from the major Pt-phosphido intermediate diastereomer, possibly indicating that the enantioselective reaction was thermodynamically enantiocontrolled.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, Toste, Bergman, and coworkers independently reported chiral Ru catalyst **6** (Figures 5C and 5E) for the enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of racemic methylphosphines with benzyl chlorides.<sup>63</sup> Later, they developed second-generation chiral mixed ligand Ru catalysts **7** and **8** (Figures 5C and 5E) to



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Figure 6. Enantioselective C-P coupling of racemic SPOs and H-phosphinates

achieve the enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling at ambient conditions and to accommodate less activated alkyl halides.<sup>58</sup>

Regarding other transition metal catalysts, Duan, Xu, and coworkers developed a Pd-catalyzed C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of racemic methylphenylphosphines with benzyl chlorides and alkyl bromides, albeit with low to moderate enantioselectivity.<sup>64</sup> Very recently, Yin and coworkers achieved enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of bulky aryl-substituted racemic secondary phosphines with a wide variety of alkyl halides using chiral Cu catalyst **9** (Figures 5D and 5E).<sup>65</sup> Mechanistic studies indicated the weak and uncompetitive coordinating ability of the starting bulky secondary phosphine, thus emphasizing the importance of chiral catalyst **9** in enantiocontrol.

# **RACEMIC SPOs AND H-PHOSPHINATES**

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SPOs as well as the structurally analogous pentavalent *H*-phosphinates are much more resistant to oxidation in air and much less toxic than secondary phosphines. In addition, these pentavalent tetracoordinate organophosphorus compounds and their trivalent tricoordinate counterparts can be readily interconverted to each other through facile redox processes. Thus, these two types of compounds, especially SPOs, constitute excellent starting compounds for developing enantiose-lective C–P coupling methodologies and have recently received increasing interest (Figures 7A and 8A). SPOs usually exhibit very high configurational stability,<sup>66</sup> and thus, chirality retention is commonly observed in transition metal-catalyzed C–P coupling reactions where kinetic resolution of SPOs is achieved. Nonetheless, fast epimerization of corresponding phosphinous acid tautomers catalyzed by transition metals has been occasionally observed, which may lead to the establishment of dynamic kinetic asymmetric C–P coupling reactions in some circumstances (Figure 6).

## Enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)-P coupling

In 2016, Guant and coworkers reported the enantioselective  $C(sp^2)$ –P coupling of alkylarylphosphine oxides with diaryliodonium salts (DAISs) catalyzed by Cu catalyst **10** (Figures 7B and 7F).<sup>67</sup> Two equivalents of SPOs were typically employed, and the recovered SPOs were found to be of low enantiopurity or racemic. They ascribed the racemization of SPOs to the generation of acidic phosphorus compounds by side oxidation reactions. Nevertheless, in this work, they finally failed to achieve the dynamic kinetic resolution (DKR) of SPOs. Interestingly, Yang and coworkers recently achieved the dynamic kinetic asymmetric  $C(sp^2)$ –P coupling of *H*-phosphinates using chiral Cu catalyst **11** (Figures 7C and 7F).<sup>40</sup> Intramolecular aryl iodides were employed as the arylation reagents, and thus, the reaction gave rise to a panel of P-stereogenic phosphorus heterocycles. Their mechanistic results clearly suggested the racemization of the starting *H*-phosphinates was promoted by chiral copper catalysts, lending support for the DyKAT nature.

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As for Pd catalysis, Cai and coworkers developed kinetic resolution of racemic diaryl SPOs with aryl iodides using chiral Pd catalyst **12** in 2016 (Figures 7D and 7F).<sup>68</sup> A bulky protected *ortho*-amino group in the aryl iodides was found to be essential for obtaining good yet still nonideal enantioselectivity. Later, Zhang and coworkers accomplished highly enantioselective kinetic resolution of alkylarylphosphine oxides with (hetero)aryl bromides using chiral Pd catalyst **13** (Figures 7E and 7F).<sup>69</sup> Subsequent control experiments demonstrated standard kinetic resolution of *ortho*-substituted aryl SPOs, while the reactions of simple aryl SPOs were complicated by the minor racemization of the starting materials. The nature of this racemization process as to whether it involved transition metal catalysis or not remained unknown.

### Enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)-P coupling

In 2021, Zhang, Liu, and their coworker also realized the enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of alkylaryl SPOs with benzyl phosphates using chiral Pd catalyst 13 or 14 (Figures 7F, 8B, and 8G).<sup>70</sup> In contrast to their previous enantioselective C(sp<sup>2</sup>)–P coupling, the racemization of simple aryl SPOs was not observed, and thus, excellent kinetic resolution of these SPOs was achieved. At the same time, Duan, Zhang, and coworkers achieved the enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of phenylpyridyl SPOs with (hetero)benzyl bromides as well as methyl iodides using chiral Co catalyst 15 (Figures 8C and 8G).<sup>71</sup> The pyridine motifs in the substates were demonstrated to be indispensable for achieving high enantioselectivity and were proposed to coordinate to the Co catalyst, assisting the enantiodiscrimination. In addition, the outstanding kinetic resolution of the starting SPOs was once again experimentally validated.

Concerning DyKATs, Zhang and coworkers disclosed an enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of alkylaryl SPOs with racemic allylic acetates using chiral Ni catalyst **16** (Figures 8D and 8G).<sup>39</sup> The use of potassium acetate as the base additive proved to be essential for the Ni-catalyzed racemization of starting SPOs. Accordingly, switching the base to potassium phosphate resulted in the standard kinetic resolution of the starting SPOs under the otherwise identical reaction conditions. Although interesting, the additive effect seemed to be limited to this particular reaction since excessive amounts of *H*-phosphinates<sup>72</sup> and alkylaryl SPOs<sup>73</sup> were employed in their following enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling works with chiral Ni catalysts **17** and **18** (Figures 8E–8G), respectively. In particular, the authors observed significant kinetic resolution of the starting SPOs in the enantioselective benzylation reaction.

## SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

Great progress has been made in transition metal-catalyzed C–P coupling reactions for constructing P-stereogenic centers in the past 2 decades, providing a straightforward and powerful strategy for synthesizing enantioenriched P-stereogenic molecules. This perspective summarizes both the early developments and the recent achievements in this field, in which sporadic efforts have been devoted to the synthesis of P-stereogenic chiral ligands for synthetic applications. Despite the significant advances achieved in these aspects, several remaining challenges and opportunities as detailed below are still to be addressed in future developments.

First, the replacement of precious metals (platinum, palladium, ruthenium, etc.) with earth-abundant first-row transition metals, such as copper,<sup>74</sup> nickel,<sup>75</sup> and cobalt,<sup>76</sup> as catalysts<sup>77</sup> for developing enantioselective C–P coupling is an appealing future



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(A) A general scheme for transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^2)$ -P coupling of racemic SPOs and H-phosphinates.

(B) Cu-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^2)$ –P coupling of racemic SPOs with DAISs.

(C) Cu-catalyzed enantioselective intramolecular C(sp $^2$ )–P coupling of racemic SPOs with aryl iodides.

(D and E) Pd-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^2)$ –P coupling of SPOs with aryl iodides or (hetero)aryl bromides.

(F) Representative chiral transition metal catalysts.

direction. The benefits are obviously not limited to cost or availability since Glueck and coworkers have demonstrated copper catalysts with weaker metal-ligand bonds and faster substitution processes, resulting in more active catalysts.<sup>78</sup> Rational catalyst designs as well as mechanistic studies are essential to reach this target, which remain largely underdeveloped at the present stage. Perspective

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Figure 8. Enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)-P coupling of racemic SPOs and H-phosphinates

(A) A general scheme for transition metal-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)-P coupling of racemic SPOs and H-phosphinates.

(B) Pd-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of racemic SPOs with benzyl phosphonates.

(C) Co-catalyzed enantioselective C(sp<sup>3</sup>)–P coupling of racemic pyridyl-substituted SPOs with benzyl bromides.

(D-F) Ni-catalyzed enantioselective  $C(sp^3)-P$  coupling of racemic SPOs or *H*-phosphinates with allylic acetates or (hetero)benzyl chlorides. (G) Representative chiral transition metal catalysts.

Second, extraordinary efforts are still required to expand the scopes of phosphorus starting materials and electrophiles. Although a number of synthetic methods have been established, most of them deal with diaryl- or alkylaryl-substituted secondary phosphines or corresponding oxides. Particularly, some of these known methods require very bulky aryl<sup>54,61,65</sup> or coordinating pyridyl<sup>71</sup> substituents for attaining high enantioselectivity. With regard to the electrophiles, limitations may include particular directing groups on aryl halides<sup>57,60</sup> or the accommodation of only primary electrophiles. Therefore, breakthroughs toward more efficient catalytic systems, particularly the ones invoking distinct mechanistic pathways, for the enantioselective synthesis of structurally diverse P-stereogenic compounds are expected to render the C–P cross-coupling strategy more general and powerful.

Third, enantioselective C–P cross-coupling reactions that embody DKR or DyKAT of racemic phosphorus starting materials are greatly appealing in terms of both reaction efficiency and practicality.<sup>53</sup> The enhanced epimerization of metal-phosphido intermediates provides a generally applicable strategy for developing enantioconvergent C–P cross-coupling of secondary phosphines. However, this mechanism does not apply to SPOs or *H*-phosphinates. Although transition metal-catalyzed epimerization of phosphinous acid tautomers has been reported,<sup>39,40</sup> the underlying



exact mechanism as well as how to deliberately and efficiently recruit it for developing transition metal-catalyzed enantioconvergent C–P cross-coupling reaction has so far remained unclear, and thus, it merits additional efforts in this aspect.

Arguably, the surge in interest in P-stereogenic compounds has largely been fueled by the recent advances in transition metal-catalyzed C–P coupling reactions. With the subsequent intensive studies in catalytic methods for the enantioselective synthesis of P-stereogenic compounds, it is expected that increasing attention will be drawn to their wide applications in related areas.

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#### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Conceptualization, Q.-S.G. and X.-Y.L.; writing – original draft, C.L., C.-J.Y., and L.L.; writing – review & editing, Q.-S.G. and X.-Y.L.; supervision, Q.-S.G. and X.-Y.L.

### **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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