

## Chapter

# Late Transition Metal (LTM)-NHC Catalyzed Transformations of Renewable Chemicals to Fine Chemicals, Fuels, and Intermediates

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## Abstract

This title of the book chapter deals with the late transition metal-NHC (N-heterocyclic carbene) catalyzed transformations of renewable chemicals, i.e., bio-mass resources (carbohydrates/vegetable oils/natural products) into useful chemicals *via* oxidation, hydrogenation, dehydration, polymerization, hydrolysis, etc. along with brief introductory notes on late transition metals, carbenes, and renewable chemicals for better understanding to the reader.

**Keywords:** late transition metals, NHC, renewable chemicals, fine chemicals, fuels, intermediates

## 1. Introduction

Organocatalysis plays a pivotal role in the field of synthetic organic chemistry as well as the pharmaceutical industry through diversifying activation strategies owing to meeting the principles of green chemistry [1–4] in terms of cost-effectiveness, longevity, and less toxic compared to conventional transition metal catalysis [5–8]. In this regard, N-heterocyclic carbene (NHC) plays a major role in diversified organic transformations [9–11].

### 1.1 Renewable chemicals

Renewable chemicals or “bio-based chemicals” are chemicals obtained from renewable sources, such as agricultural feedstock, agricultural waste, organic waste products, biomass, and microorganisms [12]. In general, in chemical industries, processes include the utilization of fossil resources. As the need for energy consumption and population increasing, limited availability of fossil resources has become a risky task in the low or underdeveloped nations to perform trade. Henceforth, alternative renewable resources such as lignin, hemicellulose, cellulose, starch, and protein have become more focus of utility.

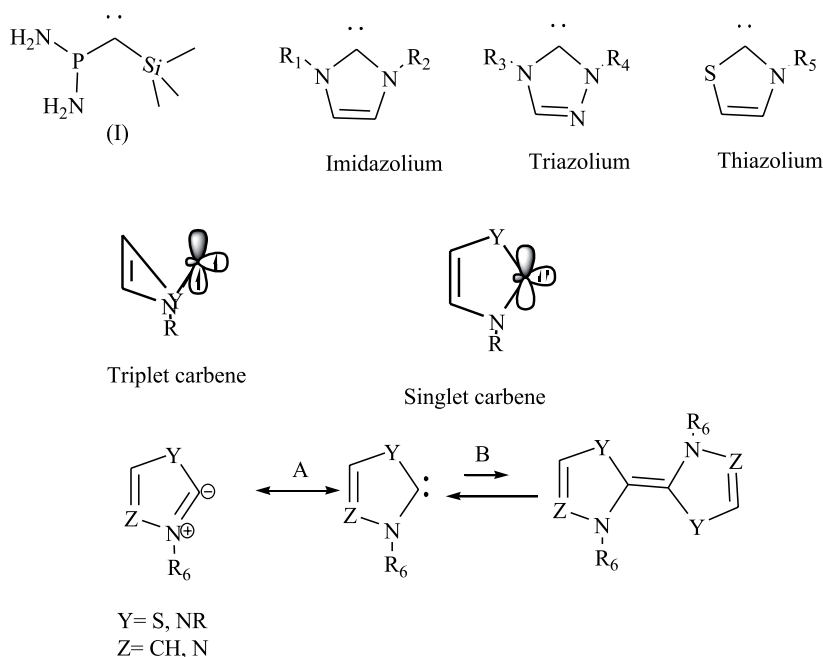
## 1.2 Carbene

The term “Carbene” refers to the presence of neutral bivalent carbon with six valence electrons in N-heterocyclic compounds (**Figure 1**). The first reported carbene (I) was by Bartrand et al. in 1988 [13], as resonance stabilized ylide form. After a few years, the first stable NHC was reported by Arduengo et al. as an imidazolium ring [14]. In NHC, the singlet state of carbene is more thermodynamically favorable than triplet carbene. Because nitrogen is present near to carbon of carbene, it lowers the energy of the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) while it increases the energy of the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital's. The nucleophilicity of carbene also increases (**A**) not only above energy character but also presence of inductive effect, mesomeric and lone pair to vacant p-orbital favors singlet carbene. Most NHCs are based on imidazolium, triazolium, or thiazolium ring-containing molecules. NHCs dimerize reversible in the form of the Wanzlick equilibrium (**B**) [15–16].

Since the discovery of metal carbenes in 1964 by Fisher et al. [17], fascinating applications in both catalysis and synthesis are being observed [18].

## 1.3 Late transition metals

Late transition metals are on the right side of the d-block, from group 8 to 11 (and 12 if it is counted as transition metals) as shown in **Figure 2**.



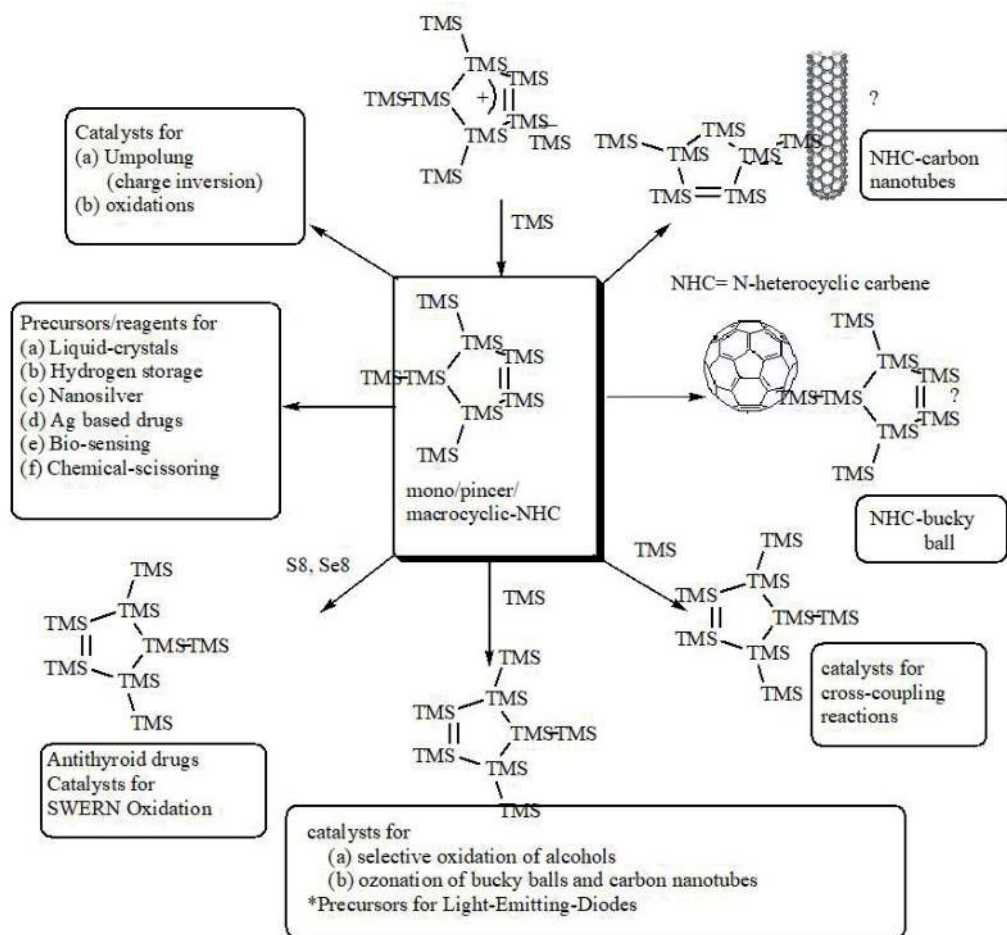
**Figure 1.**

The structure and stabilization of the first persistent carbene and NHC's.

Rb	Y	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>2</sup> Zr 4d <sup>4</sup>	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>3</sup> Nb 4d <sup>5</sup>	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>3</sup> Mo 4d <sup>6</sup>	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>5</sup> Tc 4d <sup>7</sup>	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>6</sup> Ru 4d <sup>8</sup>	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>7</sup> Rh 4d <sup>9</sup>	5s <sup>2</sup> 4d <sup>10</sup> Pd 4d <sup>10</sup>	Ag	Cd	In	Xe
Cs	L a	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>2</sup> Hf 5d <sup>4</sup>	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>3</sup> Ta 5d <sup>5</sup>	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>4</sup> W 5d <sup>6</sup>	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>5</sup> Re 5d <sup>7</sup>	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>6</sup> Os 5d <sup>8</sup>	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>7</sup> Ir 5d <sup>9</sup>	6s <sup>2</sup> 5d <sup>8</sup> Pt 5d <sup>10</sup>	Au	Hg	Tl	Rn
EARLY				LATE								

**Figure 2.**

Late transition metals.



**Figure 3.**  
 Transmetalation route for the synthesis of carbenes.

### 1.4 Free carbene route

The general synthesis of carbene complexes involves the utilization of strong bases and harsh reaction conditions which involves high cost and more time.

### 1.5 Transmetalation route

It involves the transfer of the carbene fragment from a suitable metal center [generally Ag(I) or Cu(I)] to a precursor of the metal center of interest [19–22] as shown in **Figure 3**.

Even though, transmetalation method has operational simplicity but lacks atom economy. Hence, it is applied, in general, in scalable industrial processes.

## 2. Applications of late transition metal NHC's

### 2.1 CO<sub>2</sub> as building blocks

The exploitation of carbon dioxide as a renewable green source of carbon in organic synthesis is of continued interest. In this regard, late transition metal NHCs play a major role for the specified purpose.

### 2.1.1 Formylation of amines

The use of CO<sub>2</sub> for procuring C<sub>1</sub>-containing molecules is an evolved methodology exploiting N-heterocyclic carbenes (NHCs) as efficient catalysts [23, 24]. NHCs promoted the formylation of a wide scope of N-H bonds, with CO<sub>2</sub> and hydrosilanes (**Figure 4**) [25].

### 2.1.2 Carboxylation of terminal alkynes

Yu and Zhang [26] developed a Cu-NHC catalyzed conversion of CO<sub>2</sub> to carboxylic acids in good to excellent yields under ambient conditions with wide substrate/functional group tolerance (**Figure 5**).

### 2.1.3 Methylation of amines

Olivier et al. have designed using CO<sub>2</sub> as a C<sub>1</sub><sup>-</sup> building block for the catalytic methylation of amines using simple zinc salts and ligands (**Figure 6**) [27].

### 2.1.4 Insertion of CO<sub>2</sub> into terminal alkynes via copper bis-NHC

Silver bis-NHC has exhibited better performance than Copper bis-NHC towards the carboxylation of terminal alkynes using Cs<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> as an additive (**Figure 7**) [28].

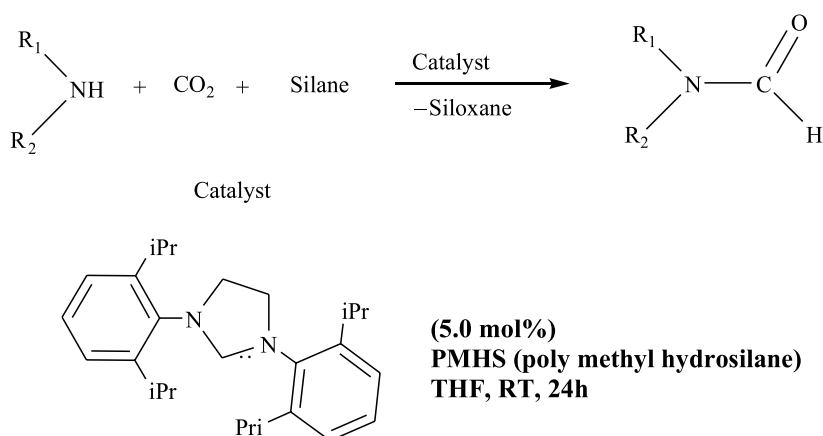
### 2.1.5 Carboxylative cyclization of propargylamine

Tahani et al. synthesized dinuclear gold (I) complexes and investigated the carboxylative cyclization of propargylamine (PPA) (**Figure 8**) [29].

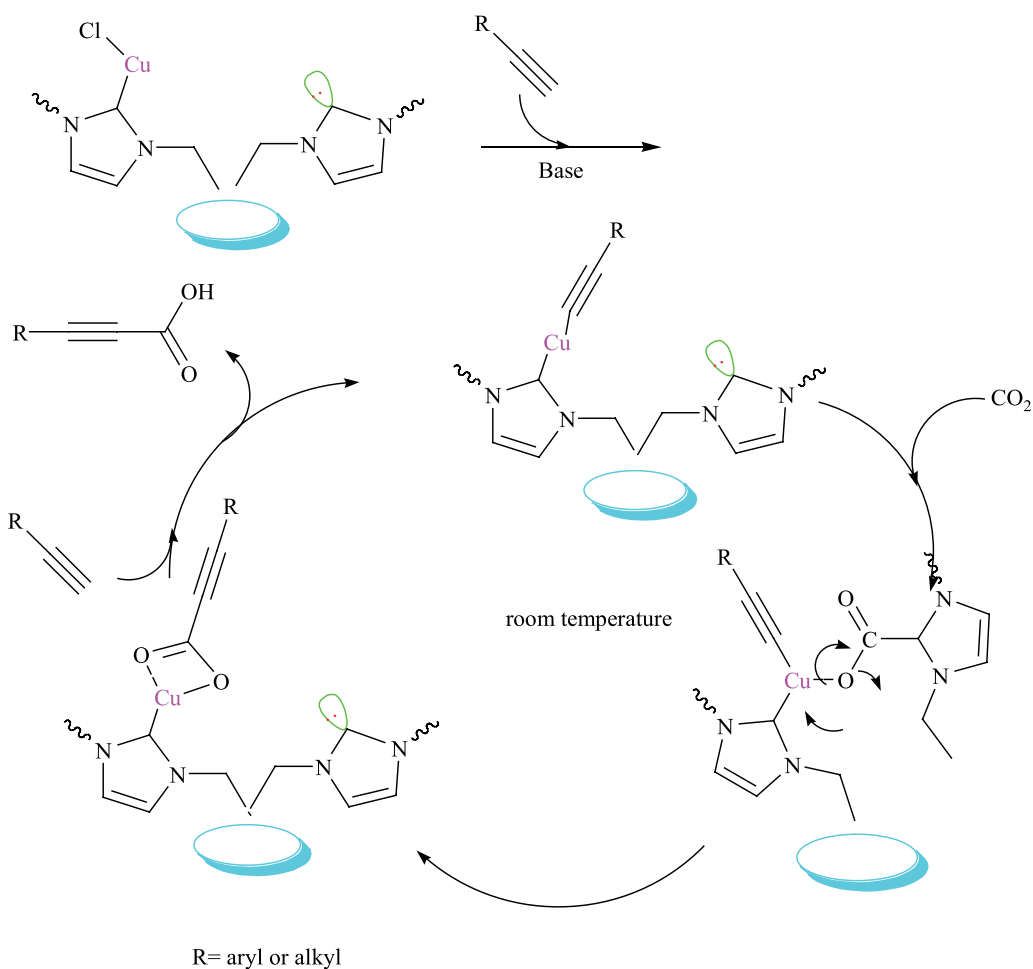
## 2.2 Oxidation

### 2.2.1 Dehydrogenative oxidation of alcohols

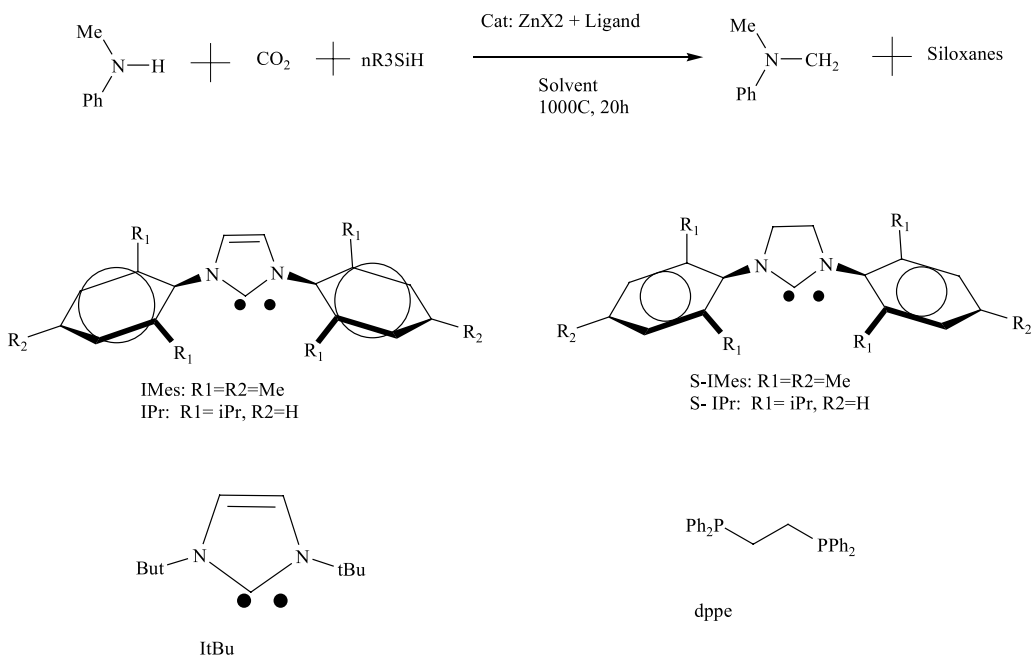
Ir-NHC complexes were synthesized in aqueous media for the oxidation of secondary alcohols to ketones. In addition, primary alcohols were transformed to carboxylic acids in the absence of a base [30].



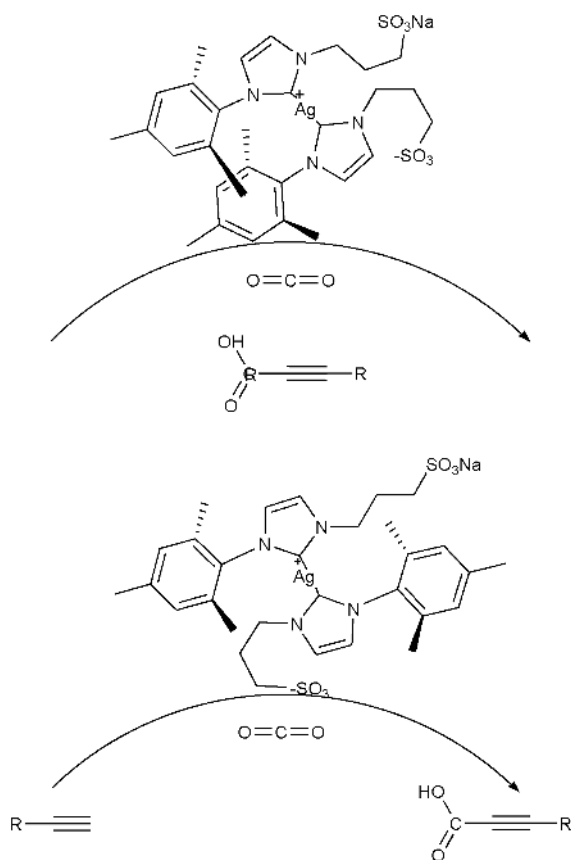
**Figure 4.**  
Formylation of amines with CO<sub>2</sub> and hydrosilanes.



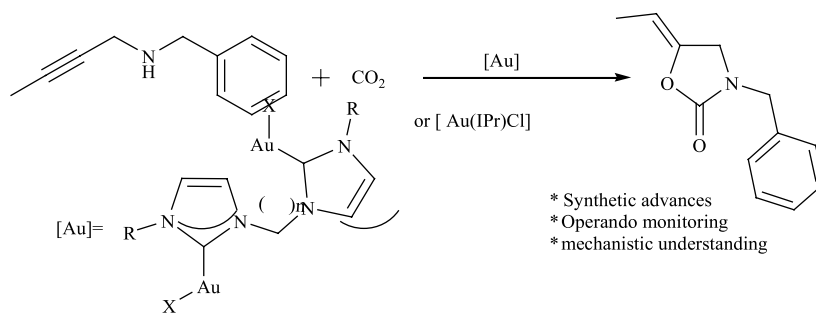
**Figure 5.**  
 Mechanistic approach for carboxylation of terminal alkynes.



**Figure 6.**  
 N-methylation of amines.



**Figure 7.**  
Carboxylation of terminal alkynes.



**Figure 8.**  
Carboxylative cyclization of propargylamine.

### 2.2.2 Oxidation of bio-polyols to lactic acid

Lactic acid has prominent applications in bio-plastics manufacturing. A recyclable NHC-iridium coordination polymer with a porous structure can oxidize a wide range of bio-polyols such as sorbitol to prepare lactic acid with superior selectivity and reactivity [31].

### 2.2.3 Dehydrogenative catalysis using alcohols

Huang et al. reported LTM-NHCs for the conversion of alcohols into aldehydes or ketones through acceptor alcohol dehydrogenation (AAD). In addition, they

successfully demonstrated oxidative coupling of alcohols to form C-O, C-C, and C-N/C=N bond formations (**Figure 9**) [32].

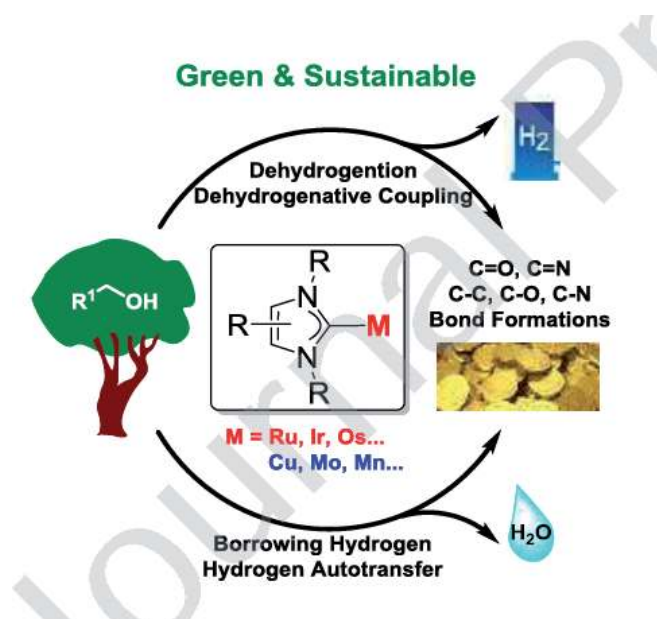
#### 2.2.4 Dehydrogenation of sugar alcohols

Manas and Campos et al. [33] reported Ir-NHC catalyzed oxidative protocol for the selective conversion of sorbitol, xylitol, and other polyols into lactic acid (**Figure 10**).

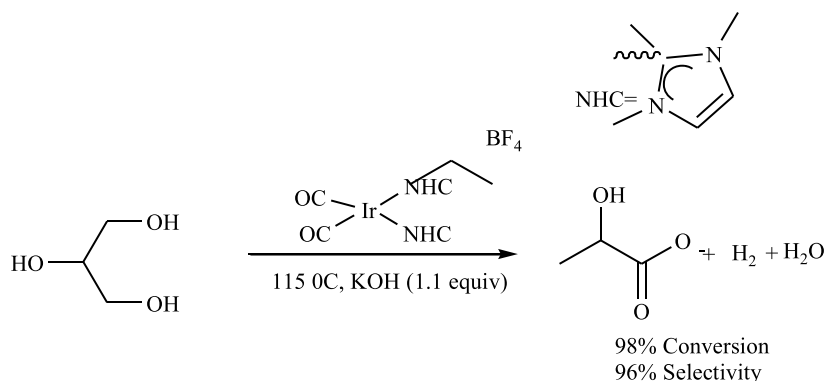
### 2.3 Dehydration

#### 2.3.1 $Cp^*IrCl_2(NHC)$ in hydrogen transfer initiated dehydration (HTID)

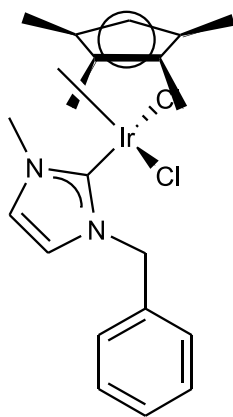
A recyclable  $Cp^*IrCl_2(NHC)$  ( $Cp^*$  = pentamethylcyclopentadienyl) complex in ionic liquid could convert glycerol into 1,3-propanediol and subsequently to propionaldehyde by hydrogen transfer initiated dehydration (HTID) in excellent yields in the presence of air (**Figure 11**) [34, 35].



**Figure 9.**  
*Dehydrogenative catalysis using alcohols.*



**Figure 10.**  
*Oxidation of sugar alcohols to lactic acid.*



**Figure 11.**  
*Cp\*IrCl<sub>2</sub>(NHC) in hydrogen transfer initiated dehydration (HTID).*

### 2.3.2 Fructose to 5-hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF)

A new heterogeneous and recyclable Fe-NHCs immobilized on mesoporous expanded starch and Starbon™ 350 could be utilized successfully for the effective dehydration of fructose to HMF [36].

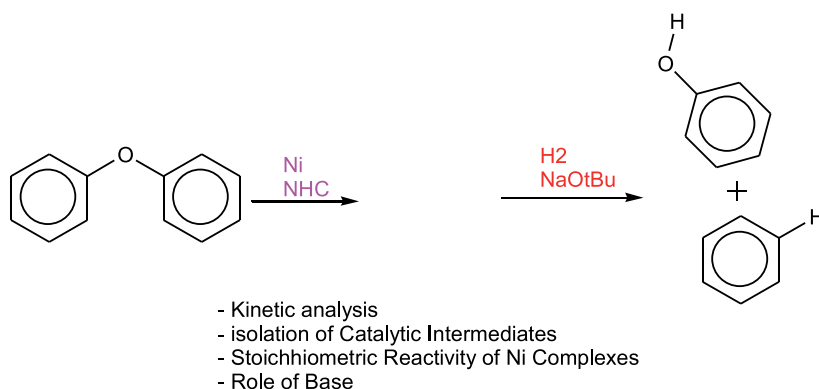
## 2.4 Reduction/hydrogenation

### 2.4.1 Hydrogenolysis of aryl ethers using Ni-NHC

Ni-NHC complex in the presence of a suitable base (NaO<sup>t</sup>Bu) could effectively convert C-O bonds in lignin to various useful scaffolds useful in biomass conversion [37]. Hartwig et al. mechanically investigated the reduction of diaryl ethers to corresponding phenols (**Figure 12**) [38].

### 2.4.2 Transfer hydrogenation using Ir-NHC

Using water soluble Ir-NHCs proved that glycerol can be exploited as a hydrogen donor to convert a biomass-derived phytochemical, levulinic acid, to selectively produce  $\gamma$ -hydroxyvaleric acid (GHV) and lactic acid (LA) [39].

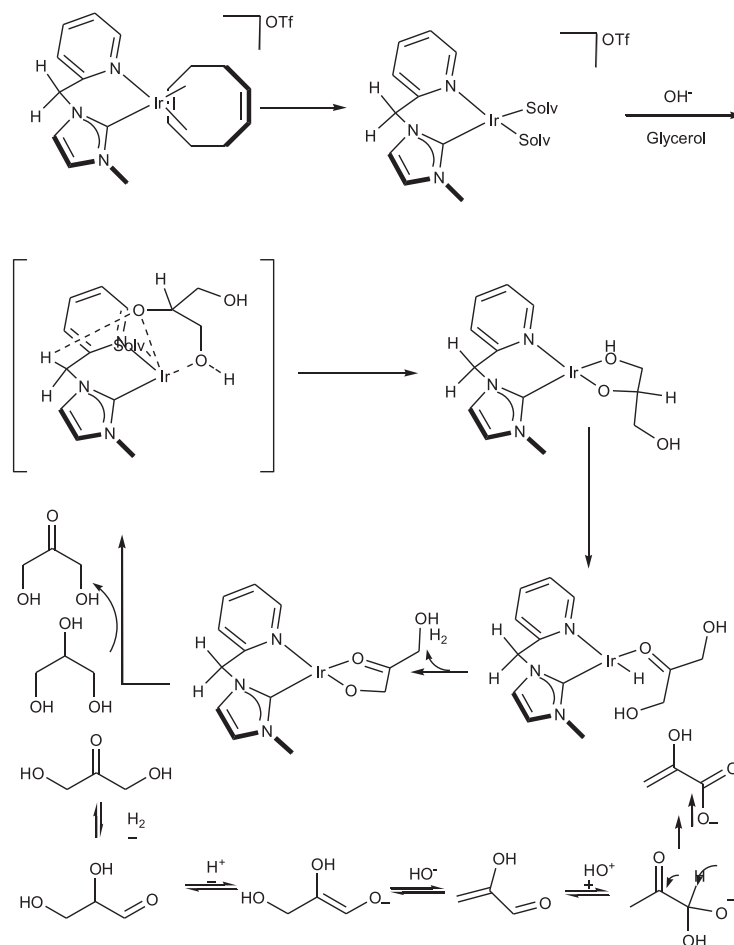


**Figure 12.**  
*Hydrogenolysis of diaryl ethers.*

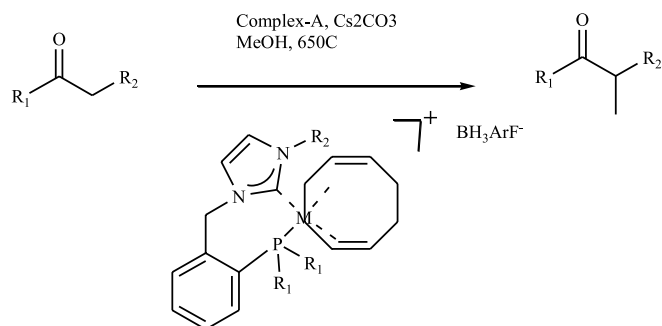


### 2.4.3 Iridium-based hydride transfer catalysts

Lu et al. reported homogeneous Ir-NHC catalysts, which can be utilized for the storage of H<sub>2</sub> and fine chemicals through hydride transfer catalysis [40] (Figure 13).



**Figure 13.**  
 Iridium-based hydride transfer catalysts.



**Figure 14.**  
 Conversion of sugars into heterocycles.

## 2.5 Miscellaneous organic transformations

### 2.5.1 Sugars to heterocycles

Zhang and Yong developed a synthetic protocol employing Cr-NHC along with ionic liquid for the selective production of 5-hydroxymethylfurfural from glucose and fructose (**Figure 14**) [41].

## 3. Conclusion

In this book chapter, authors tried to emphasize the applications of “Late Transition Metal” (LTM)-NHC catalyzed organic transformations as given in a nutshell below:

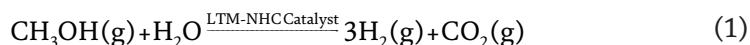
*Oxidation of carbohydrates:* To develop carbohydrate oxidation products as a useful alternative to those derived from petrochemical sources.

*Hydrogenation of carbohydrates/fatty acids:* This objective concerns the development of LTM-NHC catalysts for the hydrogenation of carbohydrates and unsaturated vegetable oils.

*Dehydration/hydrolysis of carbohydrates/fatty acids:* Development of dehydration/hydrolysis of carbohydrates/fatty acids with LTM-NHC catalysts to obtain fine chemicals and fuel intermediates.

*Polymerization with renewable resources:* This objective deals with the application of LTM-NHC catalysts in the polymerization of natural monomers of renewable chemicals or monomers derived from renewable resources to synthetic polymers (polymerization of lactic acid, glucose, glycerol, terpenes, etc.).

The present research is directed towards the conversion of methanol to H<sub>2</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub> using LTM-NHC catalysis.



We do hope this compilation on very important LTM-NHC applications would help wide readers among synthetic organic chemists.

## Acknowledgements

Dr. RV is thankful to Dr. Ch.V. Rajasekhar, Scrips Pharma, and Dr. P.G. Kiran, Swastha BioSciences for their continued support.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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