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INDEX

A

Absolute	16, 18, 19, 129, 321, 322
Alkaloid.....	6
Alkylation	7, 10, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 128,
.....	129, 313, 314, 315, 319, 320, 321, 322,
.....	327, 328, 329, 331
Asymmetric	9, 14, 16, 120, 122, 123, 176, 314, 321
.....	327, 328, 331
<i>o</i> -Azaxylxylene.....	122, 129

B

Base.....	4, 122, 123, 127
Biological activity.....	6, 13

C

Carbocyclic	1, 6, 10, 14
Catalysis	120, 319, 320, 332
Communesin	9, 10
Copper.....	9, 10, 123, 130, 154
Cortistatin	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19

D

Decarboxylative	313, 314, 315, 319, 320, 321, 323
.....	327, 328, 329, 331
Diastereoselective	3, 329, 330
Disubstituted	7, 9, 10, 120, 121

E

Enantioselective.....	120, 122, 123, 124, 125, 128, 130, 313,
.....	314, 319, 322, 328
Enantiovergent.....	320, 331
Enyne-ene.....	14, 16, 17, 18, 19

F

Felkin-Anh 17

H

Halooxindoles 120, 123, 130

Heck 7

I

Indole 7, 133, 135, 137, 139

Iodide 4, 14, 15, 17

K β -Ketoester 313, 314, 319, 320, 321, 323, 326,
..... 327, 330**L**

Lewis-acid 7, 122, 123

MMalonate 9, 10, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126,
..... 127, 128, 129, 130, 155, 167, 173

Mannich 8

Mechanism 7, 16, 313, 315

Metal 124

N

Nitrile 14, 16

Nonlinear 313, 314

Nucleophile 121

OOxindole 7, 121, 124, 127, 129, 133, 134, 135,
..... 137, 140, 142, 143, 144, 146, 168, 169

P

Palladium-catalyzed.....	313, 315, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323
Pentacyclic.....	1, 5, 14
Pyrrolidinoindoline.....	7, 8, 9, 10, 129
Pyrrolidinylspirooxindole.....	8, 9, 127

Q

Quaternary.....	120, 121, 128, 129, 130, 176, 319
-----------------	-----------------------------------

R

Relative.....	16, 18, 19, 20, 131, 321, 322, 323,
.....	324, 325, 326, 327, 330, 331, 333, 343
Resolution.....	20, 131, 319, 333
Retrosynthetic analysis.....	14
Ring.....	2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 15, 16, 17, 19

S

S _N 2.....	16, 19
Spirocyclic.....	8, 128, 129, 168, 171, 172, 308, 309,
.....	311, 312
Stereoablative.....	122, 130, 319, 320, 331
Steroid.....	1, 2

T

Total synthesis.....	14
----------------------	----

X

X-ray.....	16, 18, 128, 321
------------	------------------

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Sandy Ma was born on June 17th, 1982 in San Diego, California. She was the first child and only daughter of Wai Sit and Mei Ling Ma. Sandy spent the next 18 years of her life growing up in San Diego and graduated from Grossmont High School in 2000.

Sandy then moved up to Northern California to start her undergraduate studies at Stanford University. During her time at Stanford, Sandy pursued her undergraduate research in the laboratories of Prof. Robert Waymouth, where she had the opportunity to study organometallic and polymer chemistry. Sandy graduated in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science degree in both chemistry and biology.

She then moved to Pasadena, California to start her Ph.D. studies at the California Institute of Technology under the direction of Prof. Brian Stoltz. She received her degree for her work on the progress toward the cortistatin A carbocyclic core and on the development of a catalytic enantioselective copper-catalyzed malonate addition of 3-haloindoles. Sandy will be returning to San Diego to pursue her postdoctoral studies at The Scripps Research Institute in the laboratories of Prof. Jin-Quan Yu, where she will be studying C–H activation reactions.