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# Room temperature chemoselective hydrogenation of C=C, C=O and C=N bonds by using a well-defined mixed donor Mn(I) pincer catalyst†

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Chemoselective hydrogenation of C=C, C=O and C=N bonds in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones, aldehydes and imines is accomplished at room temperature (27 °C) using a well-defined Mn(I) catalyst and 5.0 bar H<sub>2</sub>. Amongst the three mixed-donor Mn(I) complexes developed,  $\kappa^3\text{-(R}^2\text{PN}^3\text{N}^{\text{Py}2})\text{Mn(CO)}_2\text{Br}$  (R = Ph, <sup>i</sup>Pr, <sup>t</sup>Bu); the <sup>t</sup>Bu-substituted complex (<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>PN<sup>3</sup>N<sup>Py2</sup>)Mn(CO)<sub>2</sub>Br shows exceptional chemoselective catalytic reduction of unsaturated bonds. This hydrogenation protocol tolerates a range of highly susceptible functionalities, such as halides (–F, –Cl, –Br, and –I), alkoxy and hydroxy, including hydrogen-sensitive moieties like acetyl, nitrile, nitro, epoxide, and unconjugated alkenyl and alkynyl groups. Additionally, the disclosed method applies to indole, pyrrole, furan, thiophene, and pyridine-containing unsaturated ketones leading to the corresponding saturated ketones. The C=C bond is chemoselectively hydrogenated in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones, while the aldehyde's C=O bond and imine's C=N bond are preferentially reduced over the C=C bond. A detailed mechanistic study highlighted the non-innocent behavior of the ligand in the (<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>PN<sup>3</sup>N<sup>Py2</sup>)Mn(I) complex and indicated a metal–ligand cooperative catalytic pathway. The molecular hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>) acts as a hydride source, whereas MeOH provides a proton for hydrogenation. DFT energy calculations supported the facile progress of most catalytic steps, involving a crucial turnover-limiting H<sub>2</sub> activation.

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## Introduction

Chemoselective hydrogenation of unsaturated organic compounds is extremely important in academia and industry, as it plays a crucial role in the preparation of pharmaceutical intermediates, fragrances, fine chemicals and various bulk products. Particularly, the catalytic reductions using molecular hydrogen under ambient conditions represent one of the economical, atom-efficient and environmentally benign transformations.<sup>1</sup> In this context, numerous heterogeneous catalysts are developed and demonstrated for the hydrogenation of various functional groups, which often require high reaction temperatures and/or pressures and result in poor selectivity.<sup>2</sup> Over time, many well-defined, active and highly efficient

homogeneous catalysts,<sup>3</sup> derived from precious and non-precious transition metals, have been established for hydrogenation.<sup>4</sup> In general, noble metal catalysis has dominated the field and accomplished very high catalytic turnovers and desired selectivity. However, the limited availability of noble metals in the earth's crust, and their expensiveness and underlying toxicity could limit their wide applications in hydrogenation in the future.

One of the fundamental research objectives in modern science is environmental benignity and sustainable development. Accordingly, the hydrogenations by catalysts based on low-toxic, earth-abundant and inexpensive non-precious metals have been given significant consideration.<sup>5</sup> Particularly, the hydrogenations employing iron,<sup>6</sup> cobalt<sup>7</sup> and nickel<sup>6c</sup> are substantially explored and disclosed as active and highly efficient for reducing carbonyls, imines and nitriles.<sup>8</sup> Being a less toxic, cheap and the third most abundant transition metal, manganese is elegantly demonstrated as a catalyst for the hydrogenation of aldehydes/ketones by Beller,<sup>9</sup> Kempe,<sup>10</sup> Sortais,<sup>11</sup> Kirchner<sup>12</sup> and others (Scheme 1a).<sup>13,14</sup> Similarly, the hydrogenation of imines (or C=N bond) using bidentate or pincer-ligated manganese catalysts was established.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the independent development of chiral pincer-manganese catalysts by Clarke,<sup>16</sup> Beller,<sup>17</sup> Han/Ding<sup>18</sup> and others<sup>19</sup> led to the asymmetric hydrogenation of ketones. In

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† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Full experimental procedures and characterization data, including <sup>1</sup>H and <sup>13</sup>C NMR of all compounds, CIF and DFT (.xyz) file]. CCDC 2194541 (for comp. Mn-2). For ESI and crystallographic data in CIF or other electronic format see DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1039/d2sc05274a>



Scheme 1 Manganese-catalyzed hydrogenation of unsaturated bonds: (a) carbonyls and imines, (b) C=C bond, and (c) chemoselective hydrogenation of C=C, C=O, and C=N bonds.

a significant advancement, Liu has shown the asymmetric hydrogenation of the C=N bond in heteroaromatics using a chiral Mn-catalyst.<sup>20</sup> Despite all developments on the Mn-catalyzed hydrogenations of multiple polar bonds, the chemoselective hydrogenation of C=C bonds is highly challenging and extremely rare due to the associated high bond enthalpies. The group of Kirchner and Khusnutdinova independently used bidentate PP- and PN-ligated Mn(I) catalysts for the hydrogenation of alkenes using 50 bar and 30 bar H<sub>2</sub> pressures, respectively, at elevated temperatures (Scheme 1b).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Topf has demonstrated C=C hydrogenation in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated carboxylic derivatives using 30–50 bar H<sub>2</sub> at 100–120 °C; however, this protocol failed to provide chemoselective hydrogenation in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones.<sup>13c</sup> Though manganese-based catalysts promoted the hydrogenations of many C=O and C=N bonds and certain C=C bonds,<sup>11b,13c,21</sup> most of the reactions proceed at a high H<sub>2</sub> pressure and at elevated temperatures, which is a significant drawback for practical applications. Additionally, most Mn-catalyzed hydrogenations require a large amount of a strong base (KO<sup>t</sup>Bu) as an additive. As yet, a chemoselective hydrogenation protocol for reducing one unsaturated functional moiety in the presence of the other using a beneficial Mn-catalyst at ambient H<sub>2</sub> pressure and temperature is unknown.<sup>22</sup>

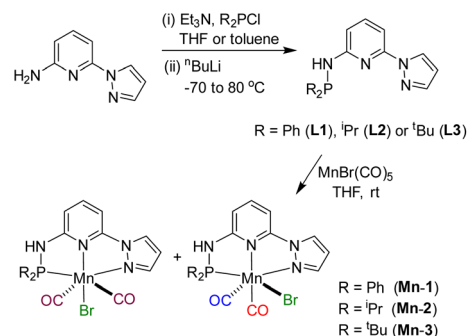
To achieve more sustainability, efficiency and selectivity in Mn-catalysis, in this work, we developed the mixed-donor (PN<sup>3</sup>N)Mn(I) complexes and disclosed the chemoselective hydrogenation of C=C, C=O and C=N bonds using 5 bar H<sub>2</sub> and a mild base K<sub>3</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> at room temperature (Scheme 1c). The notable features of the present protocol are (i) use of the 3rd most abundant transition metal as a catalyst, (ii) excellent

chemoselectivity in the reduction of C=C, C=O and C=N bonds, (iii) hydrogenation using 5 bar H<sub>2</sub> and at room temperature (27 °C), (iv) use of a mild base and atom-efficient H<sub>2</sub> source, and (v) broad substrates scope with excellent tolerance of hydrogen-sensitive functionalities.

## Results and discussion

### Synthesis of Mn(I) complexes

Based on our expertise in developing pincer-ligated complexes, we became interested in synthesizing mixed-donor PN<sup>3</sup>N ligands and pincer manganese complexes. We envisioned that a mixed-donor ligand with different electronic features of the donating center could suitably administer the electronic requirement at the metal center and can stabilize the active catalytic species. Moreover, the presence of NH on the side-arm could facilitate the non-innocent behavior of the ligand *via* an aromatization/dearomatization approach leading to the heterolytic activation of molecules. With this in mind, the isopropyl-tagged PN<sup>3</sup>N ligand **L2** was synthesized in a few steps starting from 2,6-dibromopyridine, following a protocol similar to that for the synthesis of phenyl or *tert*-butyl PN<sup>3</sup>N ligands **L1** and **L3**.<sup>23</sup> Treatment of pincer ligands **L1**–**L3** with Mn(CO)<sub>5</sub>Br in THF at room temperature afforded dicarbonyl Mn(I) complexes, (R<sup>2</sup>PN<sup>3</sup>N<sup>Py2</sup>)Mn(CO)<sub>2</sub>Br; **Mn-1** (R = Ph), **Mn-2** (R = <sup>i</sup>Pr) and **Mn-3** (R = <sup>t</sup>Bu), respectively, in good yields (Scheme 2). These complexes were extensively characterized by multinuclear NMR spectroscopy, FT-IR, ESI-MS and elemental analysis. The <sup>31</sup>P {<sup>1</sup>H}-NMR spectra of complexes **Mn-1**, **Mn-2** and **Mn-3** show peaks at 134.5, 136.9; 158.4, 159.8 and 175.3, 178.5 ppm, respectively. Two peaks for each complex at very similar chemical shift values indicate the formation of two geometrical isomers for each complex. Interestingly, all complexes displayed three IR peaks for carbonyls ranging between 1857 and 2053 cm<sup>-1</sup>. Similarly, a closer look at the <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H}-NMR spectra of complexes indicates the three carbonyl signals. Moreover, the <sup>1</sup>H and <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H}-NMR spectra of all complexes display two sets of peaks. All these observations support the formation of two geometrical isomeric species in each complex **Mn-1**, **Mn-2** and **Mn-3**. Considering the presence of three signals for carbonyls in each complex, we assume that one isomer of the Mn-complex would have two carbonyls that are *trans* to -Br and -N<sub>py</sub> ligands accounting for two peaks (as indicated in the X-ray



Scheme 2 Synthesis of (R<sup>2</sup>PN<sup>3</sup>N<sup>Py2</sup>) manganese pincer complexes.





Fig. 1 ORTEP of compound **Mn-2** showing the atom-numbering scheme. Displacement ellipsoids are drawn at the 50% probability level. Selected bond length (Å): Br1–Mn1, 2.5916(7); Mn1–C9, 1.773(4); Mn1–C10, 1.797(4); Mn1–N3, 2.011(3); Mn1–N1, 2.012(3); Mn1–P1, 2.2462(12). Selected bond angles (°): N3–Mn1–P1, 160.49(11); C10–Mn1–N1, 175.88(16); C9–Mn1–Br1, 175.54(14); C9–Mn1–C10, 87.40(19); C9–Mn1–N1, 96.23(16); N1–Mn1–Br1, 84.57(9).

structure), whereas the other isomer would have two carbonyls *trans* to each other and display a single carbonyl peak (Scheme 2). Even though the assumed isomers are highly convincing, the probability of the mixture of a neutral (with –Br coordination) and a cationic (with Br as an anion) manganese species cannot be completely ruled out.<sup>11a,13b,16,17a</sup> All the complexes are further characterized by ESI-MS that show two prominent isotopic

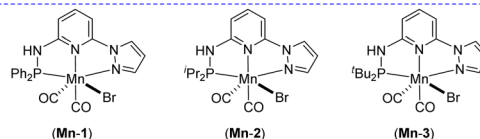
masses for <sup>79</sup>Br and <sup>81</sup>Br containing complexes. The molecular structure of **Mn-2** was confirmed by a single crystal X-ray study (Fig. 1). As expected, the coordination geometry around the manganese is distorted octahedral with –Br and one –CO unit *trans* to each other, making the C9–Mn1–Br angle almost linear (175.54(15)°). The Mn1–C10 bond length (1.797(4) Å) is slightly longer than the Mn1–C9 bond length (1.773(4) Å), which might be due to the greater *trans* influence of –N<sub>py</sub> than the –Br. Although each synthesized manganese complex contains two isomeric species, the generated active catalyst in the presence of a base is expected to be a single isomer (proved and discussed *vide infra*).

### Optimization for catalytic hydrogenation

After synthesizing the sterically and electronically distinct mixed-donor (PN<sup>3</sup>N) manganese complexes, we have investigated their catalytic behavior for the chemoselective hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones using molecular hydrogen. We first screened the activity of (PN<sup>3</sup>N)Mn(I) complexes **Mn-1**, **Mn-2**, and **Mn-3** for C=C bond hydrogenation in (*E*)-3-phenyl-1-(phenyl)prop-2-en-1-one (**4a**) using a catalytic amount of KO<sup>t</sup>Bu and 30 bar hydrogen pressure in methanol at 50 °C (see, Tables 1 and S1 in the ESI†). The use of **Mn-1** as a catalyst led to 75% conversion of **4a**, wherein chemoselective C=C hydrogenated product **4** was obtained in 65% yield, and completely

Table 1 Optimization of reaction conditions<sup>a</sup>

Entry	[Mn]	Base	<i>T</i> (°C)/ <i>t</i> (h)	Conv. <sup>b</sup> (%)	<b>4</b> <sup>b</sup> (%)	<b>4'</b> <sup>b</sup> (%)
1	<b>Mn-1</b>	KO <sup>t</sup> Bu	50/20	75	65	10
2 <sup>c</sup>	<b>Mn-2</b>	KO <sup>t</sup> Bu	50/20	100	—	80
3	<b>Mn-3</b>	KO <sup>t</sup> Bu	50/20	100	63 (60)	37
4	<b>Mn-3</b>	KO <sup>t</sup> Bu	27/20	100	81 (79)	19
5	<b>Mn-3</b>	KO <sup>t</sup> Bu	27/20	100	91 (88)	9
6	<b>Mn-3</b>	NaO <sup>t</sup> Bu	27/20	40	39	Trace
7	<b>Mn-3</b>	LiO <sup>t</sup> Bu	27/20	74	73	Trace
8	<b>Mn-3</b>	K <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>	27/20	100	74	26
9	<b>Mn-3</b>	KOAc	27/20	20	19	Trace
10	<b>Mn-3</b>	K <sub>3</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	27/20	100	88	12
11	<b>Mn-3</b>	K <sub>3</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	27/1	100	98 (96)	2
12	Mn(CO) <sub>5</sub> Br/L3	K <sub>3</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	27/1	39	39	—
13	MnBr <sub>2</sub> /L3	K <sub>3</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	27/1	—	—	—
14	MnCl <sub>2</sub> /L3	K <sub>3</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	27/1	—	—	—



<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: **4a** (0.042 g, 0.20 mmol), base (0.02 mmol), [Mn] catalyst (0.01 mmol, 5 mol%), solvent (1.0 mL). Entries 1–4: 30 bar H<sub>2</sub>; entries 5–10: 10 bar H<sub>2</sub>; entries 11–14: 5 bar H<sub>2</sub>. <sup>b</sup> GC conversion, isolated yields are given in parentheses. <sup>c</sup> 20% allylic alcohol was observed. All the catalysts **Mn-1**, **Mn-2** and **Mn-3** contain a mixture of two geometrical isomers.







**Scheme 3** Scope of Mn-catalyzed C=C bond hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones. Reaction conditions: substrate,  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketone (0.20 mmol), Mn-3 (0.005 g, 0.01 mmol, 5 mol%),  $K_3PO_4$  (0.0043 g, 0.02 mmol), MeOH (1.0 mL),  $H_2$  (5 bar). Yields are of isolated compounds. <sup>a</sup>Reaction in 0.5 g scale. <sup>b</sup>Reaction at 50  $^\circ\text{C}$ . <sup>c</sup>Mixture of MeOH : DCM (4 : 1) used. <sup>d</sup>Reaction at 10 bar  $H_2$  and 50  $^\circ\text{C}$ .

3-en-2-one gave a mixture of highly unselective hydrogenated products.

After exploring the scope and limitations of selective C=C bond hydrogenation in unsaturated ketones, we were eager to know the reactivity of the synthesized manganese complex on the hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated aldehydes and imines (Scheme 4). Surprisingly, under the standard reaction conditions, selective C=O bond hydrogenation of cinnamaldehyde derivatives was observed, leading to the 3-phenylprop-2-en-1-ols (42–44) in excellent yields. Aliphatic and acyclic conjugated

aldehydes also participated in the selective hydrogenation to unsaturated alcohols without harming the alkenyl groups, thus leading to the products 45 and 46 in 77% and 73% yields, respectively. The aromatic aldehydes containing benzyloxy, nitro, -OH, and pyrrolyl groups were also smoothly hydrogenated to the corresponding alcohols at room temperature (48–52). The tolerance of free -OH and -NH groups is highly impressive. Similarly, an  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imine was chemoselectively hydrogenated to unsaturated amine (53) in good yield. Even a simple unconjugated *N*-aryl imine could be



**Scheme 4** Scope of Mn-catalyzed hydrogenation of aldehydes and imines. <sup>a</sup>Reaction conditions: substrate (0.20 mmol), **Mn-3** (0.005 g, 0.01 mmol, 5 mol%),  $K_3PO_4$  (0.0043 g, 0.02 mmol),  $H_2$  (5 bar), MeOH (1.0 mL). Yields are of isolated compounds. <sup>a</sup>Obtained as a mixture of *E* and *Z* isomers as the starting compound was also a mixture of both. <sup>b</sup>Reaction performed at 50 °C.

hydrogenated to amine in high yield (**54**). However, the attempted hydrogenations of ketone-derived imine analogues, such as (2*E*,3*E*)-*N*,4-diphenylbut-3-en-2-imine and (*E*)-*N*,1-diphenylethan-1-imine, failed under the optimized conditions and the unreacted starting compounds were quantitatively recovered (Scheme 4). We assume that the steric hindrance around the keto-derived imine inhibited its approach towards the manganese center, leading to an unsuccessful reaction. The chemoselective hydrogenations of the C=C bond over the ketone carbonyl and that of the aldehyde's C=O and imine's C=N over the C=C by using the newly developed catalyst are notable. Particularly, mild reaction conditions and the use of the catalytic  $K_3PO_4$  base are significant. This catalyst can further be applied to novel catalytic approaches considering its advantage over other similar catalysts. Though, an excellent chemoselectivity was observed in the hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones, a trace formation of both C=C and C=O reductions was unavoidable in some cases.

### Mechanistic aspects

We have performed a few controlled experiments to understand the operating mode of the manganese catalyst. First, the *N*-methyl substituted ligand (**L3-Me**) and corresponding manganese complex, (<sup>*t*</sup>BuPN(Me)*N*Pyz)Mn(CO)<sub>3</sub>Br (**Mn-3<sup>Me</sup>**) were



**Scheme 5** Synthesis of **Mn-3<sup>Me</sup>** and controlled mechanistic experiments.

synthesized and fully characterized by various analytical techniques (Scheme 5a). An attempted hydrogenation of **4a** employing complex **Mn-3<sup>Me</sup>** as the catalyst under the standard hydrogenation conditions did not provide the hydrogenated product (Scheme 5b), and the starting compound (**4a**) was quantitatively recovered. This finding supports the crucial role of the N-H proton in the complex (<sup>*t*</sup>BuPN<sup>3</sup>(H)*N*Pyz)Mn(CO)<sub>2</sub>Br (**Mn-3**) during hydrogenation. Furthermore, the treatment of **Mn-3** with stoichiometric KO<sup>*t*</sup>Bu produced dearomatized active intermediate **A** (Fig. 2). The <sup>31</sup>P{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR spectrum of **A** showed a single peak (against two isomeric peaks for **Mn-3**), and two CO signals were observed in IR as well as <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR spectra of **A** (against three peaks for CO in **Mn-3**). Interestingly, the employment of species **A** as a catalyst in hydrogenation without the use of an additional base provided a quantitative yield of **4**. All these results suggest that the species **A** acts as an active catalyst and the catalytic reaction proceeds through the metal-ligand cooperation (dearomatization/aromatization) pathway.

A hydrogenation reaction was performed using CD<sub>3</sub>OD as a solvent to thoroughly understand the hydrogenation process (Scheme 5c). The isolated hydrogenated product **4**-[D] shows 92% deuterium incorporation at the alpha-methylene position (see <sup>1</sup>H, <sup>13</sup>C and deuterium NMR spectra in the ESI†). Moreover, the hydrogenation reaction did not occur in the presence of aprotic solvent (THF, dioxane or CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>). These observations indicate the necessity of a protic solvent as a proton source and



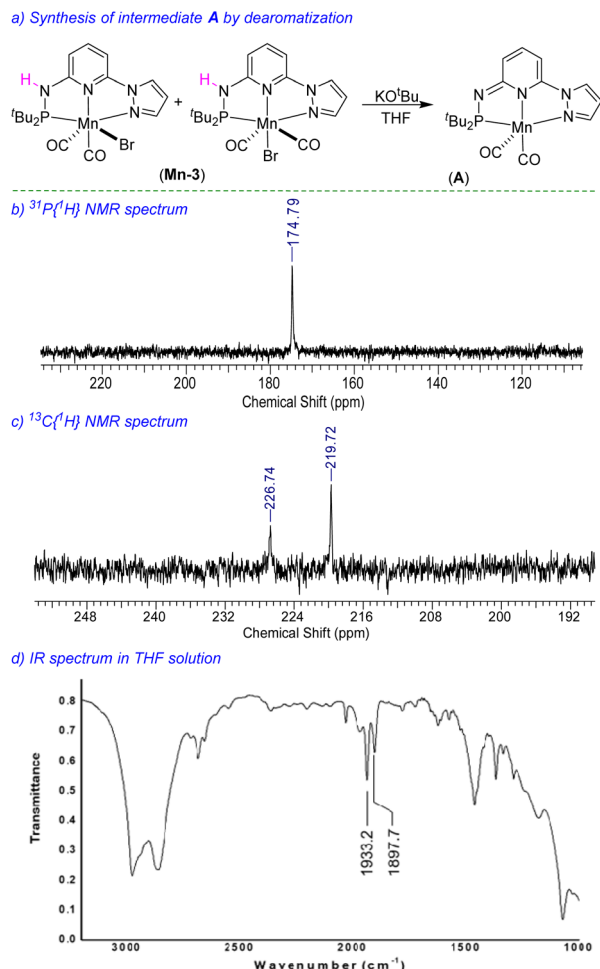


Fig. 2 Synthesis of active intermediate **A** and characterization spectra.

tentatively support a Mn-enolate intermediate. All these findings are consistent with the low energy barrier observed for the protonation step (discussed *vide infra*). An attempted hydrogenation of allylic alcohol under the standard reaction conditions failed to give a hydrogenated product (Scheme 5d). This finding highlights that the hydrogenation of (*E*)-chalcone (**4a**) does not proceed *via* 1,2-hydrogen addition, instead a 1,4-addition of hydrogen occurs. The observed chemoselectivity and controlled studies allowed us to propose the following: (i) the **Mn-3** catalyst prefers 1,2-hydrogen addition to C=O or C=N when steric hindrance on carbonyl's/imine's carbon is low (aldehyde's C=O and imine's C=N preferred over the C=C), whereas (ii) the **Mn-3** catalyst allowed 1,4-hydrogen addition when carbonyl's carbon is doubly substituted (*i.e.* in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones) due to more steric constraint. Mn-H might fail to approach the carbonyl's carbon in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones due to steric hindrance; instead it can access the  $\beta$ -carbon *via* 1,4-hydrogen addition. Notably, the **Mn-2** catalyst, which is less bulky than the **Mn-3** catalyst, allowed 1,2-hydrogen addition even in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketone to form allylic alcohol. These findings are noteworthy in the consideration of catalyst developments for chemoselective functionalization.

## DFT based calculations

We have investigated the reaction mechanism of **Mn-3** catalyzed hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated carbonyl compound **4a** using density functional theory (DFT) calculations (Fig. 3). Initially, the generation of the active catalyst **A** would occur when the pre-catalyst **Mn-3** reacts with  $\text{K}_3\text{PO}_4$  (Fig. 3(I)). In this step, the Mn-Br and N-H bonds break, forming the catalyst **A**,  $\text{K}_2\text{HPO}_4$  and KBr. This step is thermodynamically favorable ( $\Delta G = -19.9 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ). Next, the  $\text{H}_2$  molecule adds to catalyst **A**, forming the intermediate **B** *via* a barrier of  $14.7 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$  (**TS-1**). Then, the reaction proceeds through **TS-2** with a barrier of  $21.7 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ , in which the H-H bond breaks, and the Mn-H and N-H bonds form, generating the intermediate **C**. The overall barrier for the  $\text{H}_2$  activation ( $31.3 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ) seems reasonable, considering that a minimum of 5 bar  $\text{H}_2$  pressure is essential for the reaction. In the next step, the reaction crosses the barrier of  $9.1 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$  (**TS-3**), wherein **4a** reacts with **C** to form the intermediate **D** by hydride ( $\text{H}^-$ ) migration from Mn-H to **4a**. In the next step, the intermediate **D** rearranges and forms a new intermediate **E**. This step is found to be thermodynamically favorable ( $\Delta G = -5.2 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ).

Starting with the intermediate **E**, two approaches are considered for protonation (Fig. 3(II)). In the first possibility, the methanol protonates the substrate step-wise, as shown in Fig. 3(II). Thus, MeOH can provide a proton to the substrate and coordinates with Mn concurrently. In this process, the Mn-O bond breaks and a different Mn-O bond forms *via* the transition state **TS-4** with a barrier of  $10.7 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ , leading to the formation of the intermediate **F**. The reaction crosses a barrier of  $1.1 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$  (**TS-5**) in the following step, leading to product **4** and intermediate **G**. Then, the reaction could proceed in two different ways: with the assistance of solvent (MeOH) **TS-6** and without the assistance of solvent **TS-6'**, which has barriers of  $6.8 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$  and  $14.6 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ , respectively. The energy values indicate that the reaction will proceed through the transition state **TS-6** with the assistance of a solvent (MeOH), leading to the formation of intermediate **H**. In the next step, intermediate **H** is converted into **A** after releasing methanol. This step is thermodynamically favorable ( $\Delta G = -4.4 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ). The overall low barrier for the protonation process tentatively supports the experimental observation, wherein a reversible protonation was assumed.

In the second possibility of protonation, the solvent MeOH directly shuttles the protons between Mn-O and N-H through a transition state **TS-7** with a barrier of  $11.0 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ , leading to the formation of intermediate **I** (Fig. 3(II)). In the next step, intermediate **I** is converted into the active species **A** and product **4**. This step is thermodynamically favorable ( $\Delta G = -18.5 \text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$ ). A perusal of the two pathways based on turnover frequency (TOF) analysis indicates that the TOF would be the same for both approaches (Fig. 3(II)), because the main intermediate (TDI) (**A**) along the pathways and the main transition state (TDTS) (**TS-2**) are present in the early part of the cycles, which are common to both the proposed protonation pathways (for more information on the TOF analysis, see the ESI†). The calculated energy barrier values indicated a maximum barrier for  $\text{H}_2$  activation, which would be feasible at room temperature considering the reaction's 5.0 bar  $\text{H}_2$





Fig. 3 Free energy profile for  $(t\text{BuPNN}^{\text{Py}2}) \text{Mn(I)}$ -catalyzed hydrogenation: (I)  $\text{Mn-3}$  to intermediate E, (II) intermediate E to regeneration of active catalyst A. The free energy values are given in kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>.

pressure requirement. Therefore,  $\text{H}_2$  activation could be proposed as a probable turnover-limiting step. Notably, the protonation of the final compound by MeOH is very facile, which corroborates the experimental findings.

### Catalytic cycle

Based on the experimental findings, DFT calculations and literature precedents,<sup>12a,15c,21b</sup> we proposed a tentative catalytic cycle for the Mn-catalyzed chemoselective hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones (Fig. 4). Initially, the complex **Mn-3** would transform into the active catalyst **A** by dearomatization in the presence of  $\text{K}_3\text{PO}_4$ . We have identified the species **A** by NMR and IR analyses. The similar conversion of a metal complex into dearomatized species is well documented.<sup>12a,21b,24</sup> Moreover, the

species **A** as an active catalyst was verified. The  $\text{H}_2$  molecule will coordinate to Mn(I) species, followed by metal–ligand (M–L) cooperative activation of  $\text{H}_2$  leading to species **C** through transition state **TS-2**. Next, the reaction of substrate **4a** with **C** leads to 1,4-hydride migration resulting in intermediate **D** (or **E**). The protonation of the semi-hydrogenated species in intermediate **D** (or **E**) by methanol provides the hydrogenated product **4**. Finally, the resulting intermediate **G** would lead to the regeneration of active catalyst **A**. The DFT energy calculations supported all these elementary catalytic steps.  $\text{H}_2$  activation by the Mn(I) species has a high barrier and is a pivotal step in the hydrogenation process. Therefore,  $\text{H}_2$  activation by Mn(I)–ligand cooperation can be assumed to be the turnover-limiting step.



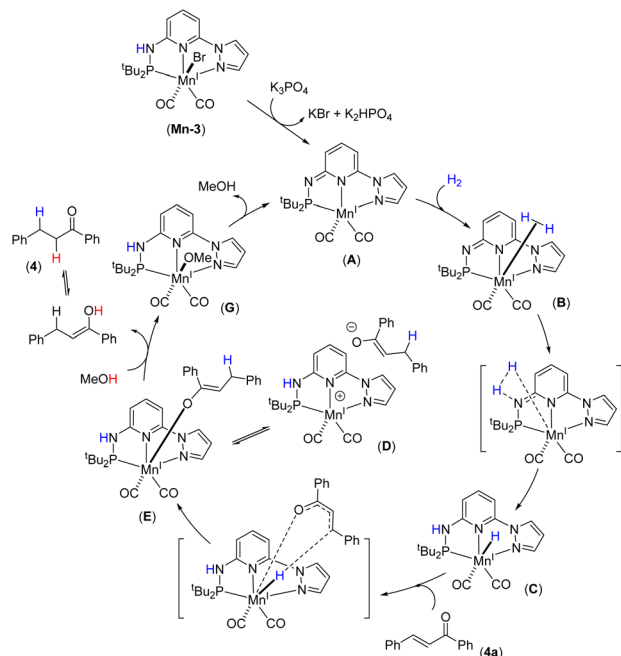


Fig. 4 Plausible catalytic cycle.

## Conclusions

In summary, we have developed an efficient protocol for the chemoselective hydrogenation of C=C, C=O and C=N bonds in  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones, aldehydes and imines catalyzed by the well-defined pincer-ligated Mn(I) complex. The employment of a mild base, moderate H<sub>2</sub> pressure and room temperature (27 °C) in Mn-catalyzed hydrogenation are highly advantageous to the commonly employed KO<sup>t</sup>Bu base and extreme reaction conditions. The mixed donor Mn(I) complexes,  $\kappa^3\text{-(R}^2\text{PN}^3\text{R}^{\text{Pyz}}\text{)Mn(CO)}_2\text{Br}$  (R = Ph, <sup>i</sup>Pr, <sup>t</sup>Bu) were synthesized and meticulously characterized by various techniques. Though both the <sup>i</sup>Pr and <sup>t</sup>Bu-substituted Mn(I) complexes are efficient for the hydrogenation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones, the (<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>PNN<sup>Pyz</sup>)Mn(CO)<sub>2</sub>Br complex as a catalyst provided exceptional chemoselectivity for the reduction of the C=C bond (1,4-hydrogen addition). Thus, using the beneficial molecular hydrogen and a mild K<sub>3</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> base, the (<sup>t</sup>Bu<sub>2</sub>PNN<sup>Pyz</sup>)Mn(I) catalyst could hydrogenate diverse unsaturated ketones to saturated ketones at room temperature with the compatibility of sensitive functionalities, such as halides (-F, -Cl, -Br, and -I), alkoxy, hydroxy, epoxide, acetyl, nitrile, nitro, and unconjugated alkenyl and alkynyl groups. The C=O bond in aldehydes and the C=N bond in imines were preferentially hydrogenated (1,2-hydrogen addition) over the C=C bond using the **Mn-3** catalyst. A comprehensive mechanistic investigation by controlled studies endorsed the non-innocent behavior of the ligand in the Mn catalyst and supported a metal-ligand cooperation pathway. The DFT energy calculations highlighted a probable turnover-limiting H<sub>2</sub> activation with the facile progress of other elementary steps. Particularly, H<sub>2</sub> provided a hydride source, and solvent MeOH acts as a proton source for hydrogenation. The DFT energy

calculations unanimously supported the proposed mechanistic cycle.

## Data availability

Crystallographic data for compound **Mn-2** has been deposited at The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre (CCDC) under deposition number 2194541.†

## Author contributions

A. B. S. and D. M. S. designed and performed the catalyst synthesis. A. B. S. carried out all catalytic and mechanistic experiments. A. B. S. and B. P. conceived the project, interpreted the results and co-wrote the original draft. R. G. G. performed XRD and analysed the data. P. B. performed DFT calculations under the supervision of K. V. All authors contributed to the analysis of the results and preparation of the manuscript.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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