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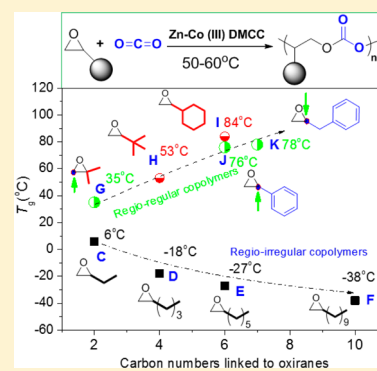
# Carbon Dioxide/Epoxide Copolymerization via a Nanosized Zinc–Cobalt(III) Double Metal Cyanide Complex: Substituent Effects of Epoxides on Polycarbonate Selectivity, Regioselectivity and Glass Transition Temperatures

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## S Supporting Information

**ABSTRACT:** In this study, we describe the substituent effect of epoxides on CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization catalyzed by a nanosized zinc–cobalt(III) double metal cyanide complex [Zn–Co(III) DMCC]. The Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalyzed the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with 11 epoxides with alkyl or aryl groups at 50–60 °C within 15 h. The reaction afforded various CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with high epoxide conversion efficiencies up to 100%. The alternating degree ( $F_{\text{CO}_2}$ ) of the resulting copolymer was solely decided by the steric hindrance of the substituents of the epoxides regardless of their electron-donating or withdrawing properties. Substituents with large steric hindrances (2, 2-dimethyl, *tert*-butyl, cyclohexyl, decyl, and benzyl) led to highly alternating degrees (up to 100%). The regioselective CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization was dominated by the electron induction effect of the substituent. The electron-withdrawing substituent such as phenyl and benzyl induced regioselective ring-opening at the methine site of the epoxide. For CO<sub>2</sub>/isobutene oxide copolymerization, the regioselective reaction occurred at the methylene site of the isobutene oxide because of the strong electron-donating ability and steric hindrance of the two methyls of the isobutene oxide. The linear alkyl groups of the epoxides could not induce the regioselective reaction during copolymerization. The glass transition temperatures ( $T_g$ s) of the CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with linear alkyl substituent groups decreased from +6 to –38 °C with increasing alkyl length, but increased from 6 to 84 °C with increasing steric hindrance of the epoxide substituents. Thus, various CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with a wide  $T_g$  range from –38 to +84 °C were provided and could be applied as elastomers or plastics.



## INTRODUCTION

Transforming carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into polymeric materials by alternating copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides is incredibly promising. Since the pioneering work of CO<sub>2</sub>/propylene oxide (PO) copolymerization catalyzed by ZnEt<sub>2</sub>/H<sub>2</sub>O system reported by Inoue et al. in 1969,<sup>1</sup> tremendous advances have been made in this field.<sup>2–6</sup> Indeed, CO<sub>2</sub>/PO copolymer has been commercialized and shows a bright future for CO<sub>2</sub>-based polymeric materials,<sup>7,8</sup> which encouraged us to expand the application of CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers into the area of plastics or elastomers. Thus, it is a necessity to design and synthesize CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with various glass transition temperatures ( $T_g$ s) across a wide temperature range. Epoxides with different substituents offer many opportunities to synthesize CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with various  $T_g$ s; however, the substituent effects of the epoxide on CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization (polycarbonate selectivity, regioselectivity and glass transition temperatures) have not yet been systematically investigated.

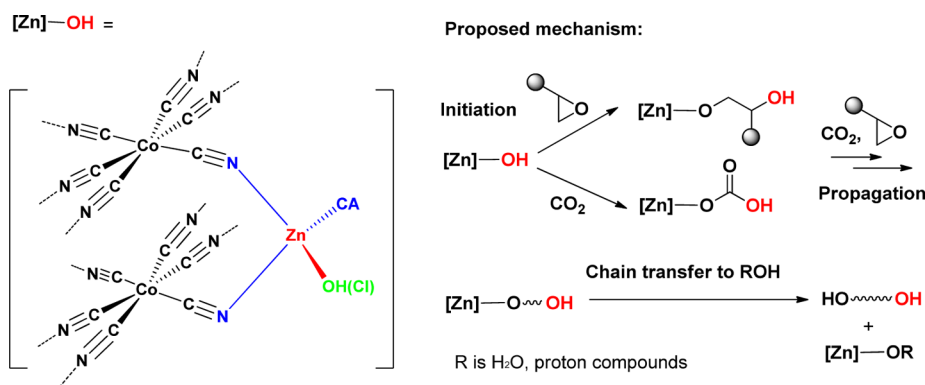
The copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with the epoxides containing long linear alkyl groups could create copolymers with  $T_g$ s below room temperature.<sup>9–11</sup> Such CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with low

$T_g$  could serve as biodegradable elastomers—a new application of CO<sub>2</sub>-based polymers.<sup>8a,c</sup> However, the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides containing long linear alkyl groups have rarely been reported likely because of the relatively low reactivity of these epoxides. Coates and co-workers reported CO<sub>2</sub>/1,2-butene oxide copolymerization using a zinc  $\beta$ -diiminate complex catalyst at 25 °C and 300 psi CO<sub>2</sub>. This produced 15% cyclic carbonate.<sup>9</sup> The turnover frequency (TOF) of this copolymerization had <50% the activity of CO<sub>2</sub>/PO copolymerization with the same catalyst. The alternating copolymerization of 1, 2-butene oxide, 1,2-hexene oxide and 1,2-octene oxide with CO<sub>2</sub> were reported by the Lu group using a (Salen)Co(III) complex with (PPN)Cl, [bis(triphenylphosphine)iminium] chloride, at 25–40 °C for 3–4 h. This gave copolymers with polycarbonate selectivity of 97–99%,<sup>10</sup> while the TOFs of these copolymerizations also decreased dramatically versus the CO<sub>2</sub>/PO copolymerization with the same catalyst.

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**Figure 1.** Possible ground-state structure of the active site of Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalyst (left) and mechanism for CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization (right). Herein, two CN<sup>−</sup> groups are shared by Zn<sup>2+</sup> and Co<sup>3+</sup> ions. They contain one negative charge in one tetrahedral Zn<sup>2+</sup> structure. Thus, the structure meets the electroneutrality principle because of the existence of OH<sup>−</sup> (and Cl<sup>−</sup>) based on the elemental results, FT-IR spectrum and characterization of the polymer end groups.<sup>28</sup> CA is the complexing agent (generally H<sub>2</sub>O and *t*-BuOH).

Nozaki et al. reported the copolymerization of 1,2-hexene oxide with CO<sub>2</sub> using a Co(III) complex with a piperidinium end-capping arm at 25 °C within 48 h. This afforded a copolymer with 98% polycarbonate selectivity.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides with long linear alkyl chain is still a big challenge. Moreover, the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> and epoxides with bulky branched alkyl groups such as isobutene oxide<sup>12</sup> and 2-*tert*-butyloxirane has not yet been reported. A recent attempt to copolymerize of isobutene oxide with CO<sub>2</sub> via a (Salen)Cr(III) complex with PPN azide as the catalyst promoter led to an exclusive cyclic carbonate.<sup>12</sup> The copolymers from CO<sub>2</sub> and the epoxides with branched alkyl groups produce copolymers with high *T<sub>g</sub>*s, and thus this is also an attractive topic in the field.

On the other hand, the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides with anchoring aryl groups is equally rare,<sup>13–17</sup> although the resulting copolymers from CO<sub>2</sub> and these epoxides had a relatively high *T<sub>g</sub>*s and strong intermolecular interactions that could improve the mechanical properties of the materials. Lu and Daresnbourget al.<sup>13</sup> reported a perfect alternating CO<sub>2</sub>/styrene oxide (SO) copolymerization using a (Salen)Co(III) complex anchoring 1,5,7-triabiabicyclo[4,4,0]dec-5-ene and (Salen)Cr(III)/(PPN)Cl at 25 °C, which afforded a fully alternating poly(styrene carbonate) (PSC). Recently, our group reported an alternating and regioregular PSC with an alternating degree of 99.4% and 96% head-to-tail (HT) connectivity using nanosized zinc–cobalt(III) double metal cyanide complex [Zn–Co(III)DMCC] catalysts without introducing any cocatalysts or catalyst promoters.<sup>14</sup> Such PSC presented a *T<sub>g</sub>* of 82 °C, which was higher than that of CO<sub>2</sub>/PO copolymer (ca. 35–42 °C) and could be used as a plastic with good thermal properties.

Thus, far, a considerable number of catalyst systems<sup>2,3,5,6,18</sup> have been developed to synthesize CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers, but few of these can catalyze the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with many kinds of epoxides with different substituents. This is likely due to limitations in structural matching of the catalysts and epoxides with respect to their steric/electronic effects. To date, two kinds of catalyst systems could catalyze the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with many kinds of epoxides with good efficiency. One is the (Salen)M(III) (M = Co, Cr) complex/catalyst promoter systems<sup>6</sup> including both bifunctional<sup>19–21</sup> and two component<sup>22–26</sup> systems. These are highly active due to the perfectly alternating copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with many epoxides. The CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization could be precisely tuned by

subtle design of the organic backbone of the catalyst. However, these syntheses are complex with multistep operations. In most cases, low temperature polymerizations are required to avoid cyclic carbonate generation.

The other catalyst is nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC,<sup>27</sup> which is a highly efficient catalyst for CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization without any cocatalyst or catalyst promoters.<sup>14,16,28,29</sup> Recently, a nanolamellar Zn–Co(III) DMCC was observed to effectively catalyze the alternating copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides with long side alkyl groups.<sup>30</sup> These results led us to systematically study the substituent effects of the epoxides on the alternating copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide using this catalyst. We obtained CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with various *T<sub>g</sub>*s across a wide range of temperatures. A regioselective CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization style induced by bulky and electron-donating substituents via Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis was also proposed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Brief Introduction of Zn–Co(III) DMCC Catalyst.** Zn–Co(III) DMCC was early discovered to be an efficient catalyst for ring-opening polymerization of epoxides, especially PO.<sup>31,32</sup> It is still industrially used to produce poly(propylene oxide) polyols with moderate and high molecular weights, which are widely used for making soft polyurethanes. In 1985, Kruper et al. applied Zn–Co(III) DMCC to CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization for the first time.<sup>33</sup> Many research groups subsequently studied its preparation and application for synthesizing CO<sub>2</sub>-based copolymers.<sup>34–38</sup> The traditional preparation of Zn–Co(III) DMCC involves room temperature schemes via a precipitation reaction with excess ZnCl<sub>2</sub> and K<sub>3</sub>Co(CN)<sub>6</sub> in water/*tert*-butanol (*t*-BuOH) solution.<sup>39</sup> The resulting catalyst presents irregular lumps with several to dozens of micrometers and showed moderate productivity and low polycarbonate selectivity toward CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization. The empirical formula of this catalyst is Zn<sub>3</sub>[Co(CN)<sub>6</sub>]<sub>2</sub>·*x*ZnCl<sub>2</sub>·*y*CA·*z*H<sub>2</sub>O (CA is the complexing agent). It is nonstoichiometric because *x*, *y*, and *z* varied with the methods and batches of the preparation. The basic bulk structure of this catalyst shows that the cyanide bridges link zinc and cobalt atoms, but the catalytic center has not yet been disclosed. Changes in either the cobalt ion or zinc ion, e.g., Zn[Ni(CN)<sub>4</sub>]<sup>40</sup> and Co[Ni(CN)<sub>4</sub>],<sup>41</sup> and substitution of one of the cyanide ions results in a dramatic change in the catalytic activity and polycarbonate selectivity.<sup>40</sup> The Zn–Co(III)

DMCC prepared using *t*-BuOH as a CA remains the best for epoxide-involved polymerizations.<sup>42</sup>

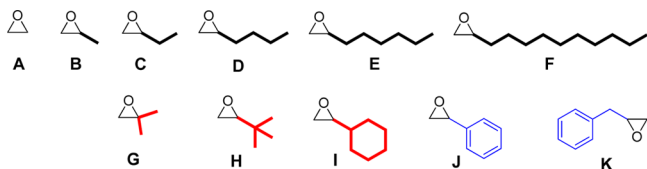
We proposed a hydrothermal method to synthesize Zn–Co(III) DMCC for highly active and selective CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization.<sup>27</sup> The resulting catalyst was thermally stable, air and moisture insensitive and had unique nanolamellar and nanoporous structures with high a BET surface area of >500 m<sup>2</sup>/g. Such nanosized structure could accommodate more catalytic sites on the surface of the catalyst and thus improved the catalytic activity toward CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization.<sup>27</sup>

The Zn/Co molar ratio of the initial Zn–Co(III) DMCC varied depending on the preparation conditions, while the Zn/Co molar ratio of the nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC via hydrothermal process was ca. 2.0 and was constant across different conditions.<sup>14,27,29</sup> Therefore, the molar ratio of Zn<sup>2+</sup>:Co<sup>3+</sup>:CN<sup>−</sup> was 2:1:6 based on the perfect coordination reaction of Zn<sup>2+</sup> with Co(CN)<sub>6</sub><sup>3−</sup> via K<sub>3</sub>Co(CN)<sub>6</sub>. The Zn<sub>2</sub>[Co(CN)<sub>6</sub>](OH)<sub>a</sub>Cl<sub>b</sub>·*y*CA·*z*H<sub>2</sub>O (*a* + *b* = 1) structure of Zn–Co(III) DMCC meets the electroneutrality principle because Cl<sup>−</sup> was observed by elemental analysis and OH<sup>−</sup> was confirmed by FT-IR spectrum (samples with CA and water removed by heat).<sup>28</sup> The catalytic center of this species was a zinc–hydroxyl bond (Zn–OH) based on the fact that the resulting polymers had two terminal –OH groups. In structure, the Zn–OH bond could be regarded as a Lewis acid (Zn<sup>2+</sup>)-base (OH<sup>−</sup>) center, which could activate the epoxide and CO<sub>2</sub> collaboratively.<sup>28</sup> The proposed mechanism for the chain initiation, propagation and transfer reaction for Zn–Co(III) DMCC-catalyzed CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization is shown in Figure 1.<sup>28</sup> Note that the complexes, Zn<sub>2</sub>[Co(CN)<sub>6</sub>](OH)<sub>4</sub><sup>43</sup> and Zn<sub>2</sub>[Co(CN)<sub>6</sub>]Cl had no any catalytic activity toward CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization. This demonstrates that the activity of this catalyst might be originated from Zn<sub>2</sub>[Co(CN)<sub>6</sub>](OH)<sub>a</sub>Cl<sub>b</sub>, although its real structure still needs ongoing investigation. Herein, we present our continued investigation concerning the CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization via nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysts for improved understanding of the substituent effects of epoxides.

#### Copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with Selected Epoxides.

Eleven epoxides (Scheme 1) with various substituents were successfully copolymerized with CO<sub>2</sub> using nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC. Thereof, the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides A, C–E and G–I were reported for the first time with our Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalyst. Species B, C, D, E and F were the epoxides with pendant linear alkyl groups with carbon numbers of 1, 2, 4, 6 and 10, respectively. J and K were epoxides

**Scheme 1.** Selected Epoxides with Alkyl and Aryl Groups for the Copolymerization with CO<sub>2</sub> with Nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC Catalysts<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup>Key: A, ethylene oxide, B, propylene oxide, C, 2-ethyloxirane (1,2-butene oxide), D, 2-butyloxirane (1,2-hexene oxide), E, 2-hexyloxirane (1,2-octene oxide), F, 2-decyloxirane (1,2-epoxydodecane), G, isobutene oxide, H, 2-(*tert*-butyl)oxirane, I, 2-cyclohexyloxirane, J, styrene oxide; K, 2-benzyloxirane. The syntheses of I and K are given in the Supporting Information part (see Figures S1 and S2).

with the pendant electron-withdrawing aryl groups.<sup>14</sup> G, H, and I were the epoxides with branched alkyl groups with carbon numbers of 2, 4 and 6, respectively.

The copolymerization data for the above-mentioned epoxides and CO<sub>2</sub> catalyzed by Zn–Co(III) DMCC are summarized in Table 1. The minimum reaction temperature was 50 °C for activating the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with most of the selected epoxides. However, the minimum temperature for activating the copolymerization of the epoxides H, I, and K with CO<sub>2</sub> within 15 h was 60 °C (Table 1, entries 8–9 and 11). Moreover, relatively more amounts of the catalyst (10.0 mg for 3.0 mL epoxide) was loaded for each polymerization to ensure activation of all the epoxides.

In a typical polymerization process, 3.0 mL epoxide was nearly completely converted to products (including the cyclic carbonate) with 10.0 mg Zn–Co(III) DMCC at 50 °C and 4.0 MPa CO<sub>2</sub> pressure within 15 h as indicated by the <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra of the crude products (Figures S3–S5). This indicated the highly effective catalytic activity of Zn–Co(III) DMCC for these CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerizations. The productivities for CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides C, D, E, and F were 1328, 1070, 1120, and 1184 g polymer/g Zn, respectively—values closer to that of CO<sub>2</sub>/B (i.e., PO) copolymerization. A previously reported Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalyst prepared with poly(tetramethylene ether glycol) as a complexing agent presented no activity to CO<sub>2</sub>/D copolymerization at 50 °C within 24 h.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC presented higher catalytic ability toward the copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with epoxides containing long linear alkyl groups than those with reported analogues.

The productivities of CO<sub>2</sub>/G and CO<sub>2</sub>/H copolymers were lower than that of CO<sub>2</sub>/B copolymer because of the production of relatively more amounts of cyclic carbonate (entries 7 and 8 in Table 1). Moreover, the productivity of CO<sub>2</sub>/J copolymer was 752 g of polymer/g of Zn—much less than that of CO<sub>2</sub>/B copolymer because of the low reactivity of J under Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis.<sup>14</sup> Long linear alkyl groups could lead to a CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymer with high number-average molecular weight (*M<sub>n</sub>*) because the long linear alkyl group could suppress the chain transfer reaction to trace water in the system along as well as backbiting reactions that decrease *M<sub>n</sub>*. We found that the branched alkyl groups and aryl groups of the epoxides also resulted in CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with relatively low *M<sub>n</sub>*s (Table 1) and relatively more amounts of cyclic carbonates.

The alternating degree (*F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub>) of the resulting CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers and the weight percentage of the cyclic carbonate in the total products (*W*<sub>CC</sub>) were then used to evaluate the polycarbonate selectivity of the catalyst. Moreover, the selective ring-opening reaction of the epoxide produced a regioregular copolymer. Such regioselectivity could be evaluated by the content of the head-to-tail (HT) connectivity of the resulting copolymer based on the <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectrum.<sup>45</sup> Herein, the substituent effects of the epoxides on CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization were illustrated with the above parameters.

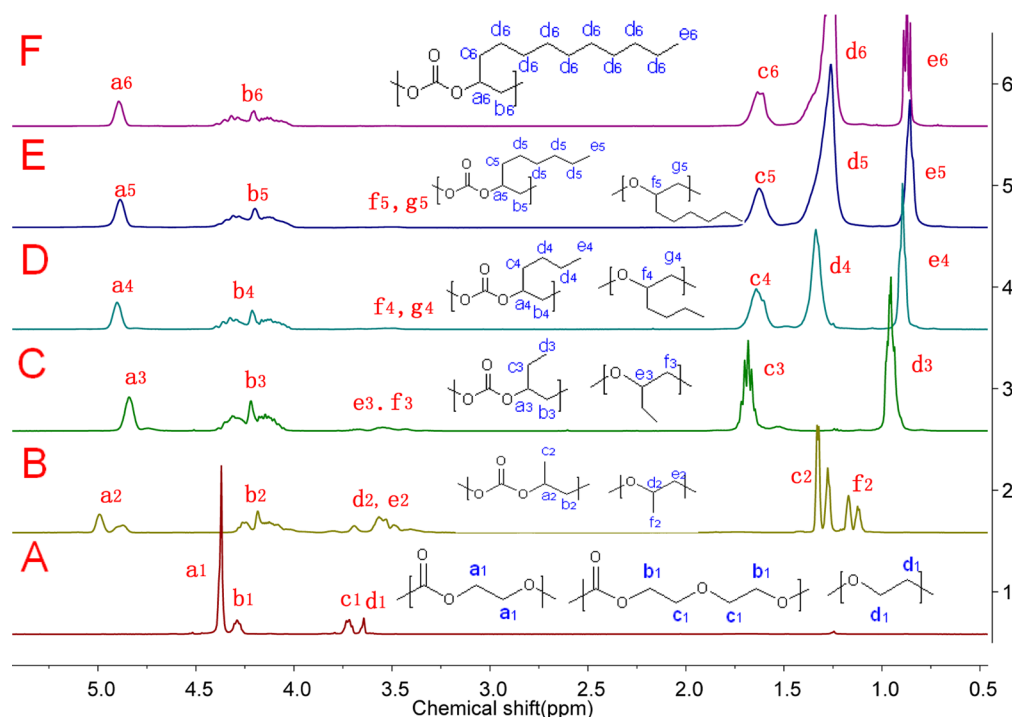
**Alternating Degree (*F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub>).** The increase in the length of the pendant linear alkyl group of the epoxide led to a high *F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> of the resulting copolymers. As shown in Figure 2, the longer the pendent alkyl groups, the higher *F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> was achieved. Ethylene oxide (A)/CO<sub>2</sub> copolymer showed an *F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> of 55.3% (entry 1 in Table 1, spectrum 1 in Figure 2). For the copolymer of CO<sub>2</sub>/B with a side methyl group, the *F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> increased to 73.2% under the same experimental conditions (entry 2 in Table 1). The *F*<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub>



**Table 1.** Copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with Various Mono-Substituted Epoxides Using Zn–Co(III) DMCC Catalyst (R Represents the Substituent of the Epoxide)<sup>a</sup>

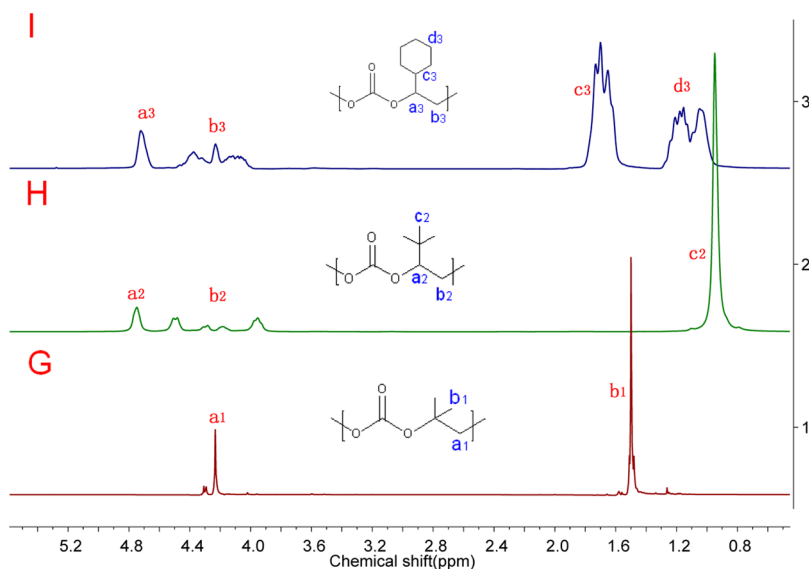
entry	epoxides	temp (°C)	$F_{\text{CO}_2}$ (%) <sup>b</sup>	$W_{\text{CC}}$ (wt %) <sup>b</sup>	$M_n$ (kg/mol) <sup>c</sup>	PDI <sup>c</sup>	productivity <sup>d</sup> (g polymer/g Zn)	convn (%) <sup>e</sup>	$T_g$ (°C)
1	A	50	55.3	14.2	0.9	2.3	925	98	−1
2	B	50	73.2	5.7	21.2	2.4	1215	88	14
3	C	50	91.5	4.8	24.6	4.6	1328	100	6
4	D	50	95.6	2.7	19.2	5.0	1070	100	−18
5	E	50	98.6	2.0	48.7	4.0	1120	100	−27
6	F	50	>99.0	1.1	93.2	4.5	1184	100	−38
7	G	50	>99.0	20.0	6.6	2.0	993	100	35
8	H	60	>99.0	13.0	44.6	2.5	750	86.5	53
9	I	60	>99.0	1.5	20.0	2.9	1210	100	84
10	J	50	94.2	3.0	12.7	3.0	752	80.6	76
11	K	60	99.0	1.8	16.1	3.9	1094	100	78

<sup>a</sup>Reaction conditions: Zn–Co(III) DMCC, 10.0 mg; epoxide, 3.0 mL; CO<sub>2</sub>, 4.0 MPa; 50 °C; 15 h. <sup>b</sup>Calculated from <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectroscopy,  $F_{\text{CO}_2} = (A_{\text{carbonate linkage}}) / [(A_{\text{carbonate linkage}} + A_{\text{ether linkage}})]$ ,  $W_{\text{CC}} = A_{\text{cyclic carbonate}} M_{\text{cyclic carbonate}} / [M_{\text{cyclic carbonate}} (A_{\text{cyclic carbonate}} + A_{\text{carbonate linkage}}) + M_{\text{ether unit}} A_{\text{ether linkages}}]$ . Term A represents the integral area, and M represents the molecular weight. <sup>c</sup>Determined by gel permeation chromatography (GPC) calibrated with monodisperse polystyrene standards in THF at 40 °C. <sup>d</sup>The productivity was defined as g polymer/g Zn. <sup>e</sup>Including the copolymer and cyclic carbonates, EO conversion from <sup>1</sup>H NMR determination might be on the high side due to its low boiling point of 10.4 °C.

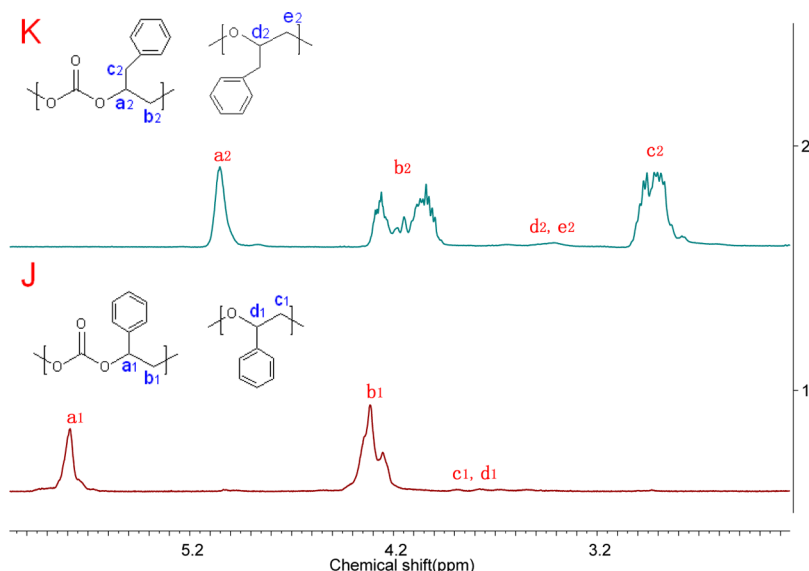
**Figure 2.** <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra (500 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>) of the purified CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers from A–E via Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis at 50 °C, 4.0 MPa CO<sub>2</sub> pressure and 15 h.

values of CO<sub>2</sub>/C, CO<sub>2</sub>/D, CO<sub>2</sub>/E and CO<sub>2</sub>/F copolymers were 91.5%, 95.6%, 98.6%, and >99%, respectively (entries 3–6 in Table 1). They increased with increasing number of carbons on the pendant alkyl group. This result could be explained by intramolecular steric repulsion effects through the formation of two neighboring CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide carbonate units. When the CO<sub>2</sub> copolymerized with epoxides containing long alkyl groups, the resulting polymer chain had a “crowded” side alkyl group,<sup>30,46</sup> and thus it increased the steric hindrance, which hampered the continuous epoxide insertion.<sup>46</sup>

When the number of carbons on the epoxide pendant groups was the same, the branched pendant groups led to a clear improvement in  $F_{\text{CO}_2}$ . The CO<sub>2</sub>/H copolymer has a  $F_{\text{CO}_2}$  of >99% (H in Figure 3), which was higher than that of CO<sub>2</sub>/D copolymer, i.e. 95.6% (D in Figure 2). Similar data was observed when comparing  $F_{\text{CO}_2}$  of CO<sub>2</sub>/E copolymer (98.6%) with that of CO<sub>2</sub>/I copolymer (>99%). Clearly, both H and I with branched alkyl groups presented more significant steric repulsion effects than D and E with linear alkyl groups. Species G with two substituted methyls provided strong steric hindrance on the



**Figure 3.**  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra (500 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ ) of the purified copolymers from **G**, **H** and **I** via Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis at 60 °C (for **G**, 50 °C), 4.0 MPa  $\text{CO}_2$  pressure and 15 h.



**Figure 4.**  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra (500 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ ) of the purified copolymers from  $\text{CO}_2$  with epoxides **J** and **K** with side electron-withdrawing groups.

copolymerization and led to the production of a  $\text{CO}_2/\text{G}$  copolymer with an  $F_{\text{CO}_2}$  of >99% (**G** in Figure 3). This was higher than that of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{C}$  copolymer with a side ethyl group (91.5%).

The steric hindrance of the electron-withdrawing substituents of the epoxides also favored to improve of the alternating degrees of the resulting copolymers. As shown in Figure 4, the  $F_{\text{CO}_2}$  of the resulting copolymers from the copolymerization of  $\text{CO}_2$  with epoxides **J** and **K** followed the sequence order of the steric hindrance of **J** (94.2%, 50 °C) < **K** (99.0%, 60 °C), which was consistent with our previous report at different reaction temperatures.<sup>14</sup>

The above results indicated that Zn–Co(III) DMCC was an effective catalyst for the copolymerization of  $\text{CO}_2$  with various epoxides containing long pendant linear and branched alkyl groups. It afforded alternating  $\text{CO}_2$ /epoxide copolymers. The alternating degree of the  $\text{CO}_2$ /epoxide copolymer via Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis was determined by the steric hindrance

of the pendant groups of the monosubstituted epoxides regardless of whether such pendant groups had electron-donating or withdrawing properties.

**Production of Cyclic Carbonate ( $W_{\text{CC}}$ ).** The formation of the cyclic carbonate during  $\text{CO}_2$ /epoxide copolymerization mainly resulted from the backbiting reaction of the end carbonate anions.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the production of cyclic carbonate was closely correlated to the properties of the pendant group of the epoxides under Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis.

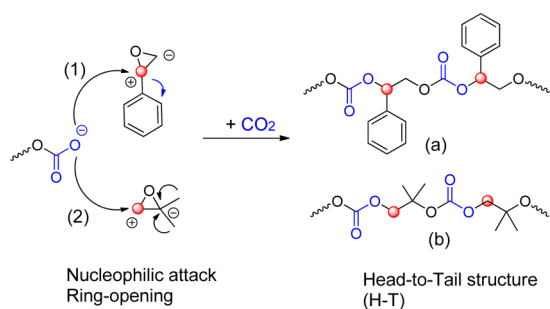
For the epoxides with linear alkyl groups shown in Table 1 (Figure S3,  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra of the crude products), the content of the cyclic carbonate  $W_{\text{CC}}$  decreased from 14.2 to 1.1 wt % with increasing carbon numbers from 0 to 10 for epoxides **A**, **B**, **C**, **D**, **E**, and **F** (entries 1–6, Table 1). That is, increasing the length of the pendant alkyl group inhibited the production of cyclic carbonates. This result could be attributed to the intramolecular steric repulsion effects of the long side alkyl group of the copolymer,<sup>30,46</sup> which hampered the backbiting reaction.

Surprisingly, the copolymerization of epoxides **G** and **H** with CO<sub>2</sub> resulted in the production of considerable amounts of cyclic carbonates of 20 and 13 wt % (Figure S4, <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra of the crude products), respectively. These values were clearly higher than those achieved with epoxides **C** and **D** that contain side groups with the same number of carbons. This result indicated that the stronger steric hindrance and electron-donating ability of the dimethyl and tertiary butyl groups favored the backbiting reaction and formed cyclic carbonate.

Interestingly, for epoxides **I** and **J** in which cyclohexyl and phenyl had the same carbon numbers, the CO<sub>2</sub>/**J** copolymerization gave relatively higher amounts of the cyclic carbonate in the product (4.9 wt %), which indicates that the substituents with more electron-withdrawing groups favored the production of the cyclic carbonate. The copolymerization of CO<sub>2</sub> with **K**, which has a less electron-withdrawing benzyl group, also gave a lower *W*<sub>CC</sub> (1.8 wt %, 60 °C) than that of CO<sub>2</sub>/**J** copolymer (4.9 wt %, 60 °C, Figure S5) containing a phenyl group. These results indicated that Zn–Co(III) DMCC was excellent for the CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization because relatively small amounts of cyclic carbonates were produced at 50–60 °C for the most of epoxides in Table 1. In contrast, most of the reported catalysts required low reaction temperatures to avoid production of cyclic carbonates.

**Regioselectivity.** It is of great interest to investigate the regiochemistry of the CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization because regioregular CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers should expand the range of the thermal and mechanical properties of the resulting copolymers versus their regioirregular counterparts.<sup>10,13,15,45,48</sup> Here, CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with highly alternating degrees (94.2%–>99%, entries 4–11 in Table 1) were selected for further analysis of regiochemistry because the carbonate anion (–OOCO<sup>–</sup>) was the main nucleophilic species attacking the methylene (CH<sub>2</sub>) or methine (CH) sites to open the epoxide ring (Scheme 2).

**Scheme 2. Proposed Mechanism for Regioselective CO<sub>2</sub>/**J** and CO<sub>2</sub>/**G** Copolymerization via Zn–Co (III) DMCC Catalysis<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup>The red dot in the backbone represents the site proposed for attack by the carbonate anion.

CO<sub>2</sub>/**J** copolymerization was highly regioselective under Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis<sup>14</sup> and afforded a CO<sub>2</sub>/**J** copolymer with 90% HT connectivity (50 °C). In this instance, the electron-withdrawing phenyl group made the CH site more positive than the CH<sub>2</sub> site, and thus the carbonate anion predominantly attacked the CH site of **J** (route 1 in Scheme 2) although the CH site had significant steric hindrance due to the phenyl group. This result highlights that the counteracting effect of steric hindrance on regioselectivity could be minimized. When the phenyl group

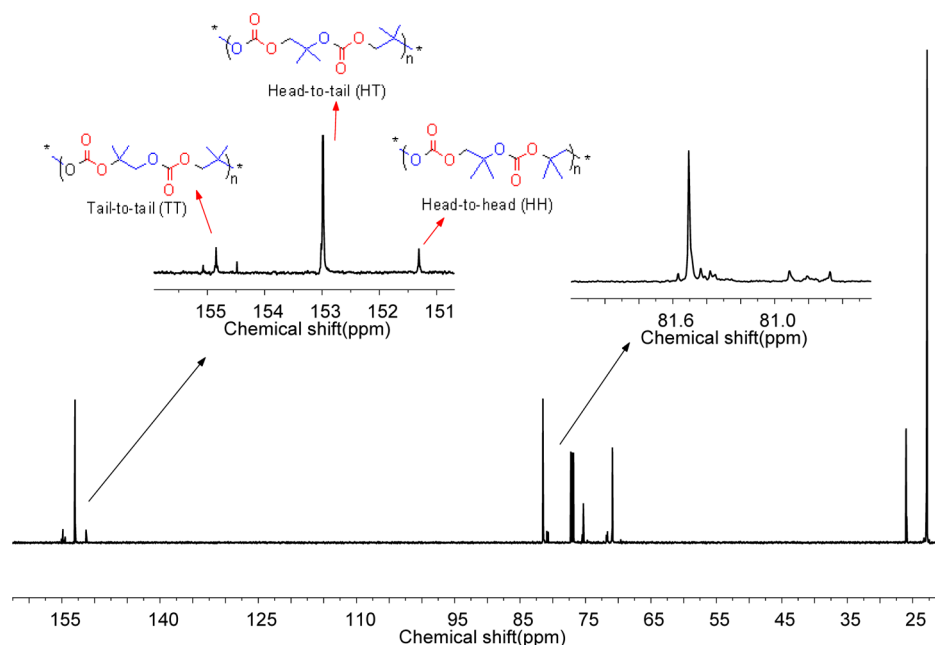
was substituted by a benzyl group (**K**) with less electron-withdrawing ability, the resulting CO<sub>2</sub>/**K** copolymer only had a 77% HT connectivity (60 °C).

Because the electron-withdrawing phenyl group of **J** predominantly induced nucleophilic attack on the carbonate anion to CH site, we wondered whether the strong electron-donating ability and steric hindrance of the branched alkyl group linked to the epoxide (**G**, **H** and **I**) would lead a ring-opening event at the less substituted CH<sub>2</sub> site (e.g., route 2 in Scheme 2). Indeed, the CH<sub>2</sub> sites of **G**, **H** and **I** had more positive charges than the substituted carbon, and thus favored nucleophilic attack of the carbonate anion.

The epoxide **G** is special in structure because it has two substituted methyls at the quaternary carbon making it achiral. Therefore, the microstructure of the resulting poly(isobutene carbonate) would be simpler than those with chiral carbons. The <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectrum of poly(isobutene carbonate) in the carbonyl region exhibits one sharp peak at  $\delta_C$  153.0 ppm and two small peaks at  $\delta_C$  154.9 and 151.3 ppm (Figure 5). The three peaks at  $\delta_C$  154.9, 153.0, and 151.3 ppm could be ascribed to HH, HT and TT connectivity of the poly(isobutene carbonate), respectively. The proposed HH, HT and TT connectivity of poly(isobutene carbonate) could also be qualified by a random copolymer model using ethylene oxide (EO), cyclohexene oxide (CHO) and CO<sub>2</sub>. In this model, the three carbonyl regions of EO–CO<sub>2</sub>–EO (154.9 ppm), EO–CO<sub>2</sub>–CHO (154.2 ppm) and CHO–CO<sub>2</sub>–CHO (153.2–153.7 ppm) caused by random terpolymerization were similar to the chemical environments with TT, HT and HH connectivity of the poly(isobutene carbonate), respectively.<sup>49,50</sup>

Moreover, the <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectrum for the other quaternary carbons of poly(isobutene carbonate) only showed a single sharp peak at  $\delta_C$  81.5 ppm (Figure 5), which is also indicative of the oversimplified chemical environment around this quaternary carbon. Therefore, poly(isobutene oxide) is proposed to be a regioregular copolymer with high HT connectivity, which was calculated to be 83% based on the integral area ratio of these peaks. The strong and direct electron-donating ability of the two methyls toward the quaternary carbon of **G** induced the carbonate anion to attack the CH<sub>2</sub> site with a more positive charge (Scheme 2). Moreover, the steric hindrance of the two methyls could hinder and repel attack of the carbonate anion to the quaternary carbon of **G**.

The CO<sub>2</sub>/**H** copolymer with a side tertiary butyl group was also expected to have a regioregular structure to some extent because the tertiary butyl group has strong electron-donating ability and steric hindrance. However, it was difficult to determine the regioregular structure of CO<sub>2</sub>/**H** copolymer based only on the peak splitting data for the carbonyl region in the <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectrum (Figure S7). We did observe two asymmetric neighboring peaks at  $\delta_C$  155.0 ppm. Because **H** has a chiral CH site, we attempted to probe the regioregular structure of the CO<sub>2</sub>/**H** copolymer by determining the optical properties of the hydrolyzed CO<sub>2</sub>/(*S*)-**H** copolymer via Zn–Co(III) DMCC from an optically active epoxide (*S*)-**H**. This was because the (*S*)-configuration of the carbonate unit of the CO<sub>2</sub>/(*S*)-**H** copolymer would be retained after hydrolysis if the (*S*)-**H** copolymerized with CO<sub>2</sub> through a regioselective attack on the CH<sub>2</sub> site of (*S*)-**H**. However, we failed to resolve the racemic mixture of **H** needed to obtain pure (*S*)-**H** via an (*R*)-(Salen)Co complex (see Supporting Information part). Indeed, the bulky tertiary butyl group of **H** hampered the resolution.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the microstructure of the CO<sub>2</sub>/**I** copolymer (Figure S8) was also difficult to determine.

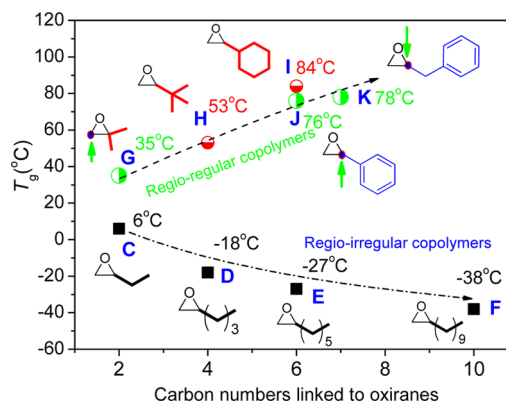


**Figure 5.**  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR spectrum (125 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ ) of poly(isobutene oxide) from  $\text{CO}_2/\text{G}$  copolymerization with Zn–Co(III) DMCC. Key: TT = tail-to-tail; HT = head-to-head; HH = head-to-head.

In contrast to the regioregular  $\text{CO}_2/\text{J}$  copolymer, the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{G}$  copolymer presented a relatively low content for the HT connectivity (90% vs 83%) suggesting that the ability of the bulky electron-donating alkyl groups to induce a regioselective ring-opening reaction at the CH (or C) site of the epoxide was weaker than that of the aryl group for a regioselective ring-opening reaction at the  $\text{CH}_2$  site. This was further proved by the fact that the copolymerization of  $\text{CO}_2$  and **B**—with one methyl group and thus less electron-donating behavior—leads to a complete regioirregular copolymer. Even increasing the length of the pendant linear alkyl groups (i.e., keeping the electron-donating ability but enhancing the steric hindrance) gave no regioselective copolymerization. The  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR spectra of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{D}$ ,  $\text{CO}_2/\text{E}$ , and  $\text{CO}_2/\text{F}$  copolymers in the carbonate region show several overlapping peaks, which were similar to that of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{B}$  copolymers (Figure S6). The contents of HT connectivity of these copolymers were roughly estimated to be 52%. This implied no stereoselectivity in the epoxide ring-opening step.

As discussed above, the regioselective  $\text{CO}_2/\text{epoxide}$  copolymerization via Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis was mainly determined by the electron induction effect of the epoxide rather than the steric hindrance of the substituents. Indeed, it is a meaningful topic in the field of  $\text{CO}_2$  copolymerization that the regioselective ring-opening reaction happens at  $\text{CH}_2$  site of the epoxides with alkyl group (e.g., **B**) during copolymerization with  $\text{CO}_2$ . The Lu group has reported an elegant work on regioselective  $\text{CO}_2/\text{B}$  copolymerization through subtle design of bifunctional (Salen)Co(III) complexes.<sup>10</sup> In the present work, Zn–Co(III) DMCC is active for many epoxides to copolymerize with  $\text{CO}_2$ , which provides a chance to look into the substituent effects of the epoxide on the regioselectivity of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{epoxide}$  copolymerization.

**Glass Transition Temperatures ( $T_g$ s).** The epoxide substituents had a strong impact on the  $T_g$ s of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{epoxide}$  copolymers (Figure 6). The  $T_g$ s of the copolymers ranged from  $-38$  to  $+84$  °C, depending on the substituent groups of the epoxide. The  $T_g$ s of the copolymers with side linear groups



**Figure 6.** Substituent effect of the epoxides on the glass transition temperatures ( $T_g$ s) of the resulting  $\text{CO}_2/\text{epoxide}$  copolymers ( $F_{\text{CO}_2} = 91.5\text{--}99\%$ ;  $M_n = 6.6\text{--}93.2$  kg/mol).

decreased from  $+6$  to  $-38$  °C with increasing lengths of the side chain from C2 to C10 because the longer side linear alkyl group caused stronger plasticizing effects and regioirregular microstructures. Herein, the  $T_g$  of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{C}$  copolymer was  $6$  °C, which was lower than that of fully alternating  $\text{CO}_2/\text{C}$  copolymer (i.e.,  $9$  °C).<sup>12</sup> Importantly, it is also possible to regulate  $T_g$  of the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{epoxide}$  copolymer via Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalysis by tuning the reaction temperature and  $\text{CO}_2$  pressure.<sup>29,52</sup>

For copolymers with side branched alkyl and aryl groups, the  $T_g$ s increased from  $35$  to  $84$  °C with increasing steric hindrance (i.e., carbon numbers C2, C4, and C6 to C7) of the substituent groups. This could effectively inhibit the free rotation of the backbone. Moreover, the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{K}$  and  $\text{CO}_2/\text{J}$  copolymers with regioregular microstructures improved the  $T_g$ s.<sup>14</sup> The copolymers with branched side groups had higher  $T_g$ s than their linear counterparts. This is seen when comparing the  $\text{CO}_2/\text{C}$  copolymer ( $6$  °C) with  $\text{CO}_2/\text{G}$  copolymer ( $35$  °C),  $\text{CO}_2/\text{D}$  copolymer ( $-18$  °C) with  $\text{CO}_2/\text{H}$  copolymer ( $53$  °C) and  $\text{CO}_2/\text{E}$  copolymer ( $-27$  °C) with  $\text{CO}_2/\text{I}$  ( $84$  °C) copolymer.



Therefore, various CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with wide  $T_g$  ranges from  $-38$  to  $84$  °C could be obtained with the Zn–Co(III) DMCC catalyst. These could potentially be used as elastomers or plastics.<sup>29,52,53</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The substituent effect of the epoxides on CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization with nanosized Zn–Co(III) DMCC was systematically investigated. The  $F_{CO_2}$  of the resulting CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers was determined by the steric effect of the substituents of the epoxides, while the regioselective CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymerization was dominated by the electron induction effect of the substituents. The electron-withdrawing group could effectively induce the regioselective copolymerization. A new regioselective reaction at the CH<sub>2</sub> site of CO<sub>2</sub>/isobutene oxide copolymerization was observed and attributed to the strong electron-donating ability of the two methyls of isobutene oxide. The correlation of  $T_g$  with the substituents of the CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers was discussed. Various CO<sub>2</sub>/epoxide copolymers with a wide range of the  $T_g$  values ( $-38$  to  $+84$  °C) were obtained.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

Text and figures giving general experimental procedures and characterization data. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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