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## Selective oxidation of benzyl alcohols to benzoic acid catalyzed by eco-friendly cobalt thioporphyrazine catalyst supported on silica-coated magnetic nanospheres

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#### ABSTRACT

A novel magnetically recoverable thioporphyrazine catalyst (CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub>@Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>) 16 was prepared by immobilization of the cobalt octkis(butylthio) porphyrazine complex 17  $(CoPz(S-Bu)_8)$  on silica-coated magnetic nanospheres  $(SiO_2@Fe_3O_4)$ . The composite 18  $CoPz(S-Bu)_8/SiO_2@Fe_3O_4$  appeared to be an active catalyst in the oxidation of benzyl alcohol 19 in aqueous solution using hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) as oxidant under Xe-lamp irradiation, 20 with 36.4% conversion of benzyl alcohol, about 99% selectivity for benzoic acid and turnover 21 number (TON) of 61.7 at ambient temperature. The biomimetic catalyst CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> was 22 supported on the magnetic carrier SiO2@Fe3O4 so as to suspend it in aqueous solution to 23 react with substrates, utilizing its lipophilicity. Meanwhile the CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> can use its 24 unique advantages to control the selectivity of photocatalytic oxidation without the 25 substrate being subjected to deep oxidation. The influence of various reaction parameters 26 on the conversion rate of benzyl alcohol and selectivity of benzoic acid was investigated in 27 detail. Moreover, photocatalytic oxidation of substituted benzyl alcohols was obtained with 28 high conversion and excellent selectivity, specifically conversion close to 70%, selectivity 29 close to 100% and TON of 113.6 for para-position electron-donating groups. The selectivity 30 and eco-friendliness of the biomimetic photocatalyst give it great potential for practical 31 applications. 32

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#### 48 Introduction

49 Selective oxidation of primary and secondary alcohols to the 50 corresponding carboxylic acids (or aldehydes) and ketones, 51 respectively, are pivotal reactions in organic synthesis. 52 Oxidation catalysis plays an essential role in both energy 53 production and energy conservation, as over 90% of all 54 chemical processes are catalytic processes. However, oxida-53 tion is among the most problematic processes (R. Zhang et al., 54 chemical processes (R. Zhang et al., 55 chemical processes). 2013; X.-B. Zhang et al., 2013; Z. Zhang et al., 2013). Many 56 stoichiometric oxidants with heavy metals are expensive and 57 toxic, and thus economically and environmentally unsustain-58 able. As the demand for "greener" processing increases, the 59 ideal system for catalytic oxidation is the use of molecular 60 oxygen or hydrogen peroxide as the primary oxygen source 61 together with recyclable catalysts in nontoxic solvents (Noyori 62 et al., 2003; Punniyamurthy et al., 2005). However, because of 63 the potential explosion hazards associated with the use of 64

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molecular oxygen or hydrogen peroxide as oxidants, one of the ways to alleviate the hazards is the use of water as an inert, non-inflammable solvent. In this context, water has several advantages: it is abundantly available, inexpensive, odorless, non-toxic and non-flammable (Sheldon, 2015).

Many transition metal catalysts have been used to mimic 70 71 the predominant oxidation catalysts in nature, namely the cytochrome P450 enzymes (Montellano, 2005). Most biological 72 73 oxidation processes mediated by P450 enzymes are highly and 74 often completely stereoselective and ecologically sustainable. However, biological oxidation processes involve sophisticated 75electron and proton transfer steps in the activation of O2 or 76 H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and are currently difficult to implement with a synthetic 77 catalyst (Denisov et al., 2005). Metalloporphyrins, known as 78 the best models for cytochrome P450 monooxygenase, have 79 80 been widely used as catalysts for organic molecular oxidation (Xu et al., 2015; Santosda et al., 2014). Metalloporphyrazines 81 (MPz) are especially interesting because their chemical prop-82 erties are similar to metalloporphyrins and their stability and 83 accessibility are similar to metallophthalocyanines (Sorokin, 84 2013). 85

Photochemical reaction is intrinsically advantageous be-86 cause activation is obtained by absorbing a photon, whereas 87 88 most chemical methods involve the use of toxic/polluting reagents (Maldotti et al., 2002). To this end, we aim to use 89 90 visible light (sunlight) to induce reversible redox processes at 91 the metal center, avoiding all the disadvantages derived from 92the use of chemical reagents. In previous work, we found that metallothioporphyrazines with alkylthio substituents exhib-93 ited excellent photocatalytic activity in degradation of organic 9495pollutants (Su et al., 2009; R. Zhang et al., 2013; X.-B. Zhang et al., 2013; Z. Zhang et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2016). Meanwhile, 96 magnetic nanoparticles (MNPs) can be used as a new kind 97 of catalyst support due to their good stability and facile 98 separation by magnetic forces (Wang et al., 2013; Liu et al., 99 2017). Their unique magnetic separation capability makes 05 MNPs much more effective than conventional filtration or 101 centrifugation because it can prevent the loss of the catalyst. 102When the biomimetic catalyst is combined with SiO<sub>2</sub>-coated 103 Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (SiO<sub>2</sub>@Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>) MNPs, the separation and recycling of the 104 catalyst are facilitated, and operating cost and properties 105 106 can be optimized (Wang et al., 2013). Herein, we report the 107 loading of cobalt octakis(butylthio) porphyrazine (CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub>) onto SiO<sub>2</sub>@Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> MNPs to form a composite catalyst and its 108 application in photocatalytic oxidation of benzyl alcohol. 109

#### 110 1. Experimental procedures

#### 112 **1.1. Materials and methods**

113 All of the reagents used for catalyst synthesis and characterization were purchased from Aladdin Industrial Corporation. 114 Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectra were recorded on a 115FT-IR spectrometer (NEXUS-6700, Nicolet, USA). The Xe lamp 116 (XD350W-1, Changzhou Siyu Environmental Sci-Tech Co., Ltd., 117 China) was used as the light source to perform the photo-118 catalytic experiment. The morphologies of magnetic nanopar-119 ticles were observed by transmission electron microscopy 120 (TEM, Tecnai G220s-Twin, FEI, USA). Diffuse reflectance 121

spectra (DRS) were measured using an ultraviolet–visible 122 (UV–Vis) spectrophotometer (UV-2600, Shimazu, Japan). Anal- 123 ysis of the oxidation products of benzyl alcohol was carried 124 out by a high-performance liquid chromatography system 125 (Ultimate 3000, Dionex, USA). The radical was measured by 126 electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectroscopy, which 127 was carried out on a Bruker EMX spectrometer (EPR-A200, 128 Bruker, Switzerland) with a Quanta-Ray Nd:YAG laser. 129

#### 1.2. Synthesis of cobalt octakis(butylthio) porphyrazine

Firstly, magnesium chips (0.056 g) and iodine crystals as an 131 initiator were added into n-butanol (100 mL). The mixture was 132 stirred under reflux for 24 hr until the magnesium chips 133 disappeared, indicating that magnesium butoxide had suc- 134 cessfully formed. Then 2,3-bis(butylthio)maleonitrile (Zhou 135 et al., 2016) (2 g, 0.0078 mol) was added to the above mixture, 136 which was heated under reflux for 24 hr. The mixture was 137 cooled to room temperature and then dried by rotary 138 evaporation. The residue was purified by column chromatog- 139 raphy on silica gel using ethyl acetate/petroleum ether as 140 eluent (1:5, V/V), giving MgPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> (1.49 g, yield 73.5%). 141 MgPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> (1.041 g) was added to CF<sub>3</sub>COOH (3 mL) in 142 the dark and stirred for 5 hr. The resulting purple solution 143 was added to ice-water to promote precipitation. The precip- 144 itate was filtered, then washed with water until the filtrate 145 was colorless, and dried under vacuum. The residue was 146 purified by column chromatography on silica gel using 147 dichloroethane/petroleum ether as eluent (1:1, V/V), giving 148 H<sub>2</sub>Pz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> (0.666 g, yield 65.4%). CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> was synthesized 149 by the reaction of Co(OAc)2·4H2O with a certain amount of 150 H<sub>2</sub>Pz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> in 40 mL dimethylformamide (DMF) for 12 hr at 151 70°C under nitrogen atmosphere. After reaction, the mixture 152 was added to ice-water (200 mL) and stirred until precipita- 153 tion was complete. After cooling to room temperature, the 154 precipitate consisting of the crude product and excess metal 155 salts was filtered and then washed with water until the 156 filtrate was colorless. The residue was dried under vacuum 157 and then purified by column chromatography on silica gel 158 using dichloromethane/methanol as eluent (10:1, V/V), giving 159 the final product with a yield of 73.5%. For the characteriza- 160 tion of H<sub>2</sub>Pz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub> and CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub>, see Zhou et al. (2016).

#### 1.3. Preparation of composite catalyst CoPz(S-Bu)<sub>8</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub>@Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> 162

Magnetite  $Fe_3O_4$  nano-spheres were prepared by a one-pot 163 hydrothermal method (R. Zhang et al., 2013; X.-B. Zhang et al., 164 2013; Z. Zhang et al., 2013). Typically, 10 g FeCl<sub>3</sub>·6H<sub>2</sub>O and 3.6 g 165 trisodium citrate dihydrate were first dissolved in 300 mL 166 ethylene glycol under vigorous stirring for 1 hr. Then 15 g 167 sodium acetate was added with stirring for 30 min, and the 168 mixture was sealed in a Teflon-lined stainless-steel autoclave 169 and heated at 200°C for 10 hr. After that, the autoclave was 170 cooled to room temperature. The as-prepared black product 171 was thoroughly washed with deionized water and ethanol 172 several times, and finally dried at 60°C for 6 hr. 173

The as-synthesized  $Fe_3O_4$  was suspended in 35 mL ethanol 174 and 6 mL deionized water and sonicated for 15 min. 1.5 mL of 175 tetraethyl orthosilicate (TEOS) was added slowly to the 176 mixture, which was then sonicated for 10 min. Aqueous 177

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