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Formation of a unusually short hydrogen bond in photoactive yellow protein

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Running Title: Short H bonds in photoactive yellow protein

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\textbf{Abbreviations:}

\(\delta_H\), \(^1\text{H}\) NMR chemical shift (\(\delta_H\));

FTIR spectroscopy, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy;

LBHB, low-barrier hydrogen bond;

pCA, \(p\)-coumaric acid;

PYP, Photoactive yellow protein;

QM/MM, quantum mechanical/molecular mechanical;
ABSTRACT

The photoactive chromophore of photoactive yellow protein (PYP) is \( p \)-coumaric acid (\( p \)CA). In the ground state, the \( p \)CA chromophore exists as a phenolate anion, which is H-bonded by protonated Glu46 (\( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} = \sim 2.6 \text{ Å} \)) and protonated Tyr42. On the other hand, the \( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} \) H-bond was unusually short (\( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} = 2.47 \text{ Å} \)) in the intermediate \( pR_{CW} \) state observed in time-resolved Laue diffraction studies. To understand how the existence of the unusually short H-bond is energetically possible, we analyzed the H-bond energetics adopting a quantum mechanical/molecular mechanical (QM/MM) approach based on the atomic coordinates of the PYP crystal structures. In QM/MM calculations, the \( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} \) bond is 2.60 Å in the ground state, where Tyr42 donates a H-bond to \( p \)CA. In contrast, when the hydroxyl group of Tyr42 is flipped away from \( p \)CA, the H-bond was significantly shortened to 2.49 Å in the ground state. The same H-bond pattern reproduced the unusually short H-bond in the \( pR_{CW} \) structure (\( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} = 2.49 \text{ Å} \)). Intriguingly, the potential-energy profile resembles that of a single-well H-bond, suggesting that the \( pK_a \) values of the donor (Glu46) and acceptor (\( p \)CA) moieties are nearly equal. The present results indicate that the “equal \( pK_a \)” requirement for formation of single-well or low-barrier H-bond (LBHB) is satisfied only when Tyr42 does not donate a H-bond to \( p \)CA, and argue against the possibility that the \( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} \) bond is an LBHB in the ground state, where Tyr42 donates a H-bond to \( p \)CA.

**Keywords:** low-barrier hydrogen bond, proton transfer, photoactive yellow protein, Laue diffraction crystallography, \( ^1 \)H-NMR
1. INTRODUCTION

Photoactive yellow protein (PYP) serves as a bacterial photoreceptor, in particular, as a sensor for negative phototaxis to blue light [1]. The photoactive chromophore of PYP is \( p \)-coumaric acid (\( p \)CA), which is covalently attached to Cys69 [2]. In the PYP ground state, the \( p \)CA chromophore exists as a phenolate anion [3-5]. The PYP crystal structure revealed that \( p \)CA is H-bonded by protonated Tyr42 and protonated Glu46 (Figure 1). Tyr42 is further H-bonded by Thr50. Structural analysis suggested that Glu46 is protonated and \( p \)CA is ionized in the PYP ground state, \( p \)G [6, 7]. H atom positions of PYP were assigned in neutron diffraction analysis [8]. According to neutron diffraction analysis, in the case of the Glu46–\( p \)CA pair, an H atom was at a distance of 1.21 Å from Glu46 and 1.37 Å from \( p \)CA, almost at the midpoint of the \( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} \) bond (2.57 Å) (Figure 1). From this unusual H atom position, the H bond between Glu46 and \( p \)CA was interpreted as a low-barrier H bond [8].

An low-barrier hydrogen bond (LBHB) is a non-standard H bond, which was originally proposed to possess covalent bond-like characteristics, thus significantly stabilizing the transition state and facilitating enzymatic reactions [9, 10]. In original reports by Frey et al. [10] and Cleland and Kreevoy [9], it was stated that an LBHB (including a single-well H-bond) can form when the \( pK_a \) difference between donor and acceptor moieties is nearly zero (Figure 1). If this is the case, the identification of an LBHB with a single minimum potential can be valid only if the minimum is at the center of the \( O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}} \) bond (i.e., the \( pK_a \) values of the two moieties are nearly equal) as suggested by Schutz and Warshel [11]. It has been suggested that a stronger H bond results in a more downfield \(^1\text{H NMR} \) chemical shift. According to the classification of H bonds by Jeffrey [12] and Frey [13], “single-well H bonds” are very short, typically with O–O distances of 2.4 to 2.5 Å, and display \(^1\text{H NMR} \) chemical shifts (\( \delta_H \)) of 20 to 22 ppm [13]. “LBHBs” are longer, 2.5 to 2.6 Å, with a \( \delta_H \) of 17 to 19 ppm [13]. “Weak H-bonds” are even longer, with a \( \delta_H \) of 10 to 12 ppm [13].

Upon exposure to blue light, PYP undergoes the following photocycle; \( p \)G (ground state) → \( \text{P}^* \) – (\( \text{trans-cis} \) isomerization) → \( \text{I}_0 \) → \( \text{I}_0^+ \) → \( p\text{R} \) –(proton transfer and large conformational change) → \( p\text{B} \) → \( p\text{G} \) [14-16]. The \( p\text{R} \) to \( p\text{B} \) transition has been suggested to involve protonation of \( p\)CA (i.e., proton
transfer) and a large structural change of the protein [14, 15]. Although time-resolved Laue diffraction studies proposed structural models of the intermediates [17], the relevance of the proposed pB structure (PDB: 1TS0) as an intermediate of the photocycle is a matter of debate. In Laue diffraction studies, the pB intermediate has a H-bond between Arg52 and pCA [17], whereas solution structures of the pB state argue a high degree of disorder in residues 42-56 [18] (discussed in Ref. [19]).

On the other hand, time-resolved Laue diffraction studies identified the pR\textsubscript{CW} intermediate [17]. The pR\textsubscript{CW} intermediate structure [17] was proposed to correspond to the pR species [14-16] observed in spectroscopic studies. The pR state decays to the pB state as a result of PT from Glu46 to pCA with the rate coefficient of 250 \(\mu\)s [14, 15], which is consistent with that of 333 \(\mu\)s for the pR\textsubscript{CW} decay [17]. To our best knowledge solution structures of the pR state have not been reported.

Interestingly, the O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond is unusually short, 2.47 Å in the pR\textsubscript{CW} structure (1.60-Å resolution) [17], which may argue against the presence of an LBHB in the ground state proposed in Ref. [8]. In general, a H-bond donor-acceptor distance can be the shortest when the p\(K_a\) difference between donor and acceptor moieties is nearly zero. This is why LBHB and single-well H-bonds are shorter than standard (asymmetric double-well) H-bonds (Figure 1) [11, 20-22]. If the presence of the shorter O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond in the pR\textsubscript{CW} state relative to the ground state is plausible, this will suggest that “matching p\(K_a\)” between the H-bond donor and acceptor moieties is not satisfied in the ground state (at least, less likely than in the pR\textsubscript{CW} state).

To understand energetics of the unusually short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond in the pR\textsubscript{CW} structure, the influence of Tyr42 (i.e, another H-bond partner of pCA) on the O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} H-bond is to be clarified. The LBHB O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond was originally proposed to stabilize “the isolated negative charge” originating from ionized pCA in the protein inner core [8]. However, the presence of the polar residue Tyr42 that donates an H bond to pCA (O\textsubscript{Tyr42}–O\textsubscript{pCA} = 2.50 Å [23] to 2.52 Å [8]) in the ground state appeared to play a role in stabilizing the ionized chromophore (Figure 1) and is possibly an implication that the O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond does not necessarily require characteristics of an LBHB to exist in the protein environment.
On the other hand, in the pR state the presence of the $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ H bond has been confirmed in spectroscopic studies (e.g., the $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ H bond is stronger in pR relative to pG [4]), while the presence of the $\text{O}_{\text{Tyr42}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ is unclear. If the $\text{O}_{\text{Tyr42}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ H-bond is absent in the pR$_{\text{CW}}$ state, $pK_a(\text{pCA})$ relative to $pK_a(\text{Glu46})$ is expected to be significantly different from that in the ground state, which can affect the $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ bond length. Indeed, the $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ bond is significantly short (2.51 Å) in the Y42F crystal structure [24] relative to the native PYP (2.57 Å [8, 23]). Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopic studies also have suggested that the $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ bond is stronger in the Y42F mutant than in the native PYP [25].

To evaluate how formation of a unusually short H-bond is energetically possible in PYP, we analyzed the H-bond energetics adopting a quantum mechanical/molecular mechanical (QM/MM) approach based on the atomic coordinates of the PYP crystal structures including the pR$_{\text{CW}}$ [17] and Y42F [24] structures.

2. COMPUTATIONAL PROCEDURES

QM/MM calculations. The atomic coordinates were taken from the X-ray structures of the native (PDB ID codes 1OT9 or 1OTB) [23] and Y42F (1F9I) [24], PYP proteins and the Laue crystal structure of the pR$_{\text{CW}}$ (1TS7) intermediate [17]. To gain better understanding of the electronic structure of the chromophore $\text{pCA}$, and the residues in the H-bond network, namely Tyr42, Glu46, Thr50, and Cys69, we performed large-scale QM/MM calculations for the entire PYP protein. Note that the calculated $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}} - \text{O}_{\text{pCA}}$ H-bond length remained unchanged even when Cys69 was involved in the MM region. We employed the so-called electrostatic embedding QM/MM scheme [26] and used the Qsite [27] program code as performed in previous studies [28]. The detailed geometry of QM region was optimized under the influence of MM electrostatic/steric field (see PYP_SI.pdb in SI for geometry). We employed the restricted DFT method with the B3LYP functional and LACVP**+ basis sets. For the QM/MM calculations, we added additional counter ions to neutralize the whole system.
**H-bond potential-energy.** For following the proton transfer (PT) pathways, we employed an iterative (constrained) QM/MM geometry optimizations with fixing the selected reaction coordinate. First, we prepared for the QM/MM optimized geometry without constraints, and we used the resulting geometry as the initial geometry. Next, the reaction coordinate was defined as a linear combination of two PT distances (O\textsubscript{donor}–H and H–O\textsubscript{acceptor}). Then, we moved the H atom from the H-bond donor atom (O\textsubscript{donor}) to the acceptor atom (O\textsubscript{acceptor}) by 0.05 Å, optimized the geometry by constraining the O\textsubscript{donor}–H and H–O\textsubscript{acceptor} distances such that the sum of the two distances remained constant in order to really follow the proton motion, and calculated the energy of the resulting geometry at each PT coordinate. This procedure was repeated until the H atom reached the O\textsubscript{acceptor} atom. Except for the atoms directly involved in the PT reaction coordinate (i.e., O\textsubscript{donor}, a transferring H, and O\textsubscript{acceptor} atoms), all of the atomic coordinates in the QM region were fully relaxed (i.e., not fixed) in the generation of the scans.

**\(^1\)H-NMR chemical shift.** The NMR chemical shift was calculated by using the GIAOs method [29] implemented in the Qsite [27] and JAGUAR [30] programs. The absolute shielding constant of \(^1\)H of tetramethylsilane (TMS) was calculated to be 31.6 ppm on the basis of the atomic coordinates in Ref. [31] and used as the TMS reference for \(\delta_H\). We evaluated the accuracy of the quantumchemically calculated \(\delta_H\) [32]. First, we calculated \(\delta_H\) for malaete and compounds which are also supposed to contain a strong H bond or an LBHB [33]. The calculated \(\delta_H\) values are considerably close to the experimentally measured values, with discrepancies of ~1 ppm or less [32]. The discrepancy between the measured values (solution) and the calculated values (solid state) is mainly due to inadequate accounting for the multiconfiguration of the molecular geometry, the proton dynamics, and the ro-vibrational corrections to the nuclear shielding in the calculations. This indicates, however, that the contributions of these features to the values are obviously negligible, which does not practically affect any conclusions from the present study. Hence, the calculated \(\delta_H\) values should be considered at this level of accuracy [32].

**\(^1\)H-NMR chemical shift validation.** The calculated OHO-bond geometries and the NMR chemical shifts can also be evaluated by the correlation proposed by Limbach et al. [34].
correlation of the $O_{\text{acceptor}} \cdot \cdot \cdot H - O_{\text{donor}}$ bond between the acceptor···hydrogen ($O_{\text{acceptor}} \cdot \cdot \cdot H$) distance $r_1$ and the donor···hydrogen ($O_{\text{donor}} \cdot H$) distance $r_2$ can be obtained by
\[
q_2 = 2r^0 + 2q_1 + 2b \ln[1 + \exp(-2q_1/b)],
\]
\[
b = \frac{[2q_{2\text{min}} - 2r_0]}{2 \ln2},
\]
\[
q_1 = (r_1 - r_2)/2,
\]
\[
q_2 = r_1 + r_2, \quad \text{(eq. 1)}
\]
where $q_{2\text{min}}$ represents a minimum value corresponding to the minimum $O_{\text{acceptor}} \cdot \cdot \cdot O_{\text{donor}}$ distance in the case of a linear H bond, and $r^0$ is the equilibrium distance in the fictive free diatomic unit OH [34]. The correlation between the OHO···bond geometry and the $^1H$ NMR chemical shift $\delta_H$ can be obtained by
\[
\delta_H = \delta_{OH}^0 + \Delta_H (4p_1p_2)^m,
\]
\[
p_1 = \exp[-(q_1 + q_2/2 - r^0)/b],
\]
\[
p_2 = \exp[-(-q_1 + q_2/2 - r^0)/b], \quad \text{(eq. 2)}
\]
where $\delta_{OH}^0$ and $\Delta_H$ represent the limiting chemical shifts of the separate fictive groups OH and the excess chemical shift of the quasi-symmetric complex, respectively, and $m$ is an empirical parameter. $q_2$ is given in eq. 1. Using eqs. (1) and (2), the $\delta_H$ can also be obtained, regarding $q_2$ as the donor···acceptor ($O_{\text{donor}} \cdot O_{\text{acceptor}}$) distance. We used the same parameters as used in Ref. [34], i.e., $r^0 = 0.93$, $q_{2\text{min}} = 2.36$, $\delta_{OH}^0 = 7.9$, $\Delta_H = 13$, and $m = 1.1$, as done in a previous study [32].

3. RESULTS

**Influence of Tyr42 on the $O_{\text{Glu46}} - O_{\rho\text{CA}}$ bond properties.** In the QM/MM geometry, the $O_{\text{Glu46}} - O_{\rho\text{CA}}$ bond of 2.51 Å in the Y42F mutant is shorter than the bond of 2.57 Å in the native PYP, in agreement with the crystal structure [24] (Table 2). The calculated $\delta_H$ value for the $O_{\text{Glu46}} - O_{\rho\text{CA}}$ bond in the Y42F mutant was 16.8 ppm (Table 2), in agreement with a $\delta_H$ of 16.7 ppm measured in solution NMR studies [35]. Using the correlation proposed by Limbach et al. [34], an O–O distance of 2.51 Å also predicts a
$\delta_H$ of 16.4 ppm, suggesting that the larger $\delta_H$ in the Y42F mutant is predominantly due to the decreased $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ length.

The decrease in the $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ length upon mutation of Y42F can also be understood from the decrease in the energy near the $pCA$ moiety relative to the Glu46 moiety in the potential energy profile (Figure 3), which corresponds to the decrease in the $pK_a$ difference between Glu46 and $pCA$. Thus, the shorter $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ length in the Y42F mutant with respect to the native PYP is due to pronounced “matching $pK_a$” between the H-bond donor and acceptor moieties, i.e. the H-bond potential energy shape becomes more symmetric. Similar relationship between the $pK_a$ differences and the H-bond donor-acceptor distances has also been demonstrated for H-bonds in other proteins (e.g., counter ions in bacteriorhodopsin and Anabaena sensory rhodopsin [36] and redox active tyrosine D1-Tyr161 in photosystem II [37]).

Such a decrease in the $pK_a$ difference leads to a more symmetrical H bond characteristic of the $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ bond. According to Frey [13], an essential requirement for a symmetrical H bond is that the proton lies inline with the donor and acceptor atoms; this feature is pronounced in the essentially linear H bond of $O_{\text{Glu46}}-H-O_{\text{pCA}}$ in the Y42F mutant ($172.0^\circ$) relative to the that in the native PYP ($168.2^\circ$) (Table 2). All these features are consistent with previous proposals by Frey et al. [10, 13], Cleland and Kreevoy [9], Schutz and Warshel [11], and Limbach et al. [34]. Note that the resulting properties of the potential-energy curve and $\delta_H$ calculated for the present crystal structure of the native PYP (PDB ID code 1OT9, 110 K) are consistent with those previously reported for the other crystal structure (PDB ID code 2ZOH, 295 K) [28, 32].

In summarizing the results, the H-bond donation of Tyr42 to $pCA$ contributes to the increase in the $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ length of the native PYP (2.57 Å) relative to the Y42F mutant (2.51 Å). It should also be noted that the longer $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ bond in the native PYP does not suggest that the native PYP is energetically unstable relative to the Y42F mutant.

**Influence of Tyr42 on the $O_{\text{Glu46}}-O_{\text{pCA}}$ length in the native PYP.** In contrast to the Y42F mutant, it is obvious that Tyr42 donates an H-bond to $pCA$ in the ground state of the native PYP [8, 28, 32]. To
investigate the influence of Tyr42 as an H-bond donor to pCA on the H-bond network, we performed QM/MM calculations by flipping the hydroxyl group of Tyr42 (i.e., without removing Tyr42). Note that Thr50 is at a H-bond distance with Tyr42 (2.85 Å) in the crystal structure [23] (Table 1).

We found that, if Tyr42 provides an H bond to Thr50, not to pCA, the H-bond geometry resulted in an unusually short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond of 2.46 Å ([short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] bond pattern, Figure 2) with a $\delta_H$ of 18.9 ppm, typical values for symmetrical H bonds [13] (Table 1). The potential-energy curve of [short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] resembles that of a single-well H bond as shown in Ref. [20] (Figure 4). The number of H bonds in the chromophore of the [short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] geometry is identical to the [standard] H-bond geometry where Tyr42 provides an H bond to pCA (Figure 2). These results demonstrate that Tyr42 in the native PYP is the residue that prevent Glu46 and pCA from possessing equal $pK_a$. A symmetrical H bond is unlikely to form between Glu46 and pCA as long as Tyr42 provides an H bond to pCA.

Notably, the neutron diffraction geometry (in the ground state) confirmed the presence of an H bond donation from Tyr42 to pCA [8], which strongly suggests that in the ground state, O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} is chemically impossible to form a symmetrical H bond due to the obvious $pK_a$ difference between Glu46 and pCA induced by Tyr42. If formation of an LBHB were strongly advantageous, then the hydrogen bond pattern would rearrange to allow formation of an LBHB in the ground state. Hence, to flip the Tyr42 H bond and to form a single-well H bond, a large energy is required (Figure 4), which may be possible only upon photo excitation (discussed later).

**Energetics of a single-well H bond.** One might consider that the [short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] bond of 2.46 Å with a $\delta_H$ of 18.9 ppm is a strong H bond. However, the potential-energy curve of the [short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] bond (QM/MM energy, corresponding to represent not only the energy of the QM region but also contain that of the remaining protein environment) was significantly, energetically high relative to that of the [standard O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] bond geometry (Figure 4). The observed chromophore destabilization was mainly due to the loss of O\textsubscript{Tyr42}–O\textsubscript{pCA} H bond. The short O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA} bond of 2.46 Å is $\sim$4 kcal/ mol more stabilized than the [standard O\textsubscript{Glu46}–O\textsubscript{pCA}] bond of 2.57 Å. However, complete loss of the O\textsubscript{Tyr42}–O\textsubscript{pCA} H bond is much more energetically disadvantageous. In addition, it also induces repulsion between
$O_{\text{Ytr42}}$ and $O_{\text{pCA}}$ ($\sim$6 kcal/mol), destabilizing the chromophore region. (Note; that the corresponding repulsion is absent in the Y42F mutant due to the absence of $O_{\text{Ytr42}}$. Thus, $pK_a(p\text{CA})$ is slightly lower than $pK_a(\text{Glu46})$ in the Y42F mutant (Figure 3) in contrast to the [short $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$] geometry (Figure 4) or the $p\text{R}_{\text{CW}}$ structure (Figure 5).)

One advantage of the catalytic site of the protein over bulk water is the availability of the preorganized dipoles in the protein environment to stabilize the transition state electrostatically [11, 21]. For enzymes to utilize the protein dipoles effectively in stabilizing the transition state, a larger polarity between the transition state and the protein is energetically advantageous. In the case of PYP, Tyr42 obviously plays a role in providing the corresponding large polarity to the stability of the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ bond, which energetically suppresses formation of an LBHB in $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$. Hence, formation of a short H bond does not necessarily lower the total energy of the protein, as previously reported in other studies [11, 21, 22].

Influence of the H-bond between the carbonyl group of $p\text{CA}$ and the backbone amide of Cys69 on the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ length. The [short $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$] geometry and the $p\text{R}_{\text{CW}}$ structure have the same the H-bond patterns of Glu46, $p\text{CA}$, and Tyr42, where the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ and $O_{\text{Ytr42}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ H-bonds are present and absent, respectively (discussed later).

On the other hand, the H-bond between the carbonyl group of $p\text{CA}$ and the amide group of Cys69, which is present in the the [short $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$] geometry but absent in the $p\text{R}_{\text{CW}}$ structure [17]. Irrespective of the difference in the H-bond pattern of Cys69, the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ bond lengths are similarly, unusually short in the two structures (Tables 1 and 3). Hence, the presence/absence of the H-bond of Cys69 on the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ length appears to be much less crucial to the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ bond length than that of Tyr42.

4. DISCUSSION

Presence of a single-well H bond in the $p\text{R}_{\text{CW}}$ intermediate structure in time-resolved Laue crystallography. The $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\text{pCA}}$ bond is unusually short, 2.47 Å in the $p\text{R}_{\text{CW}}$ structure (Table 3).
However, the H atom positions and thus far H-bond pattern are yet not known from the crystal structure. The QM/MM calculations reproduced the unusually short H-bond distance (2.49 Å) on the basis of the pR_{CW} structure only when the [short O_Glu46–O_{pCA}] H-bond geometry (Figure 2) was assumed (Table 3). The standard O_Glu46–O_{pCA} H-bond geometry (i.e., Tyr42 donates an H bond to pCA) yielded the bond length of 2.60 Å even in QM/MM calculations of the pR_{CW} structure. These results confirm that the actual H-bond pattern in the pR_{CW} crystal structure is the [short O_Glu46–O_{pCA}] H-bond geometry, where Tyr42 is flipped away from pCA, rather than the [standard O_Glu46–O_{pCA}] H-bond geometry, where Tyr donates an H bond to pCA.

The existence of the unusually short H-bond appears to be plausible not only in the pR_{CW} structure [17], but also in the pR species [14-16] observed in spectroscopic studies. FTIR studies have suggested that the H bond between Glu46 and pCA becomes stronger in pR relative to pG as suggested by the downshift in the C=O stretching frequency of protonated Glu46 [4]. Because shortening a H-bond donor and acceptor distance leads to migration of the H atom toward the acceptor moiety (e.g., Ref. [32, 36]), the observed downshift in the C=O stretching frequency of Glu46 is consistent with the presence of the unusually short O_Glu46–O_{pCA} bond in the pR_{CW} structure. Significance of the H-bond pattern of Tyr42 and pCA in the O_Glu46–O_{pCA} length can also be seen in studies of the Y42F mutant; (i) the Y42F crystal structure [24] has a shorter O_Glu46–O_{pCA} bond than the native PYP (Table 2) and (ii) the C=O stretching frequency of protonated Glu46 in the Y42F mutant is downshifted relative to the wild type PYP in FTIR studies [25].

Interestingly, the potential-energy curve of the O_Glu46–O_{pCA} bond (2.49 Å) in the pR_{CW} crystal structure resembles that of a typical single-well H bond; the barrierless potential for the PT is an indication of the pR_{CW} intermediate being ready for the PT (Figure 5). In FTIR studies, the C=O stretching frequency for protonated Glu46 is downshifted to 1732 cm$^{-1}$ in pR relative to 1740 cm$^{-1}$ in pG, suggesting that the H atom in the O_Glu46–O_{pCA} bond (i) remains in the Glu46 moiety (i.e. can interact with Glu46) but simultaneously (ii) significantly migrated toward the pCA moiety [4]; this is exactly the case for a single-well H bond. Indeed, in FTIR studies the existence of a single-well H-bond
has been already proposed [4]; a stronger H-bond in pR relative to pG lowers the energy barrier for proton transfer from Glu46 to pCA (see also Figure 4 in Ref. [4]). The present study confirms this, by demonstrating that the unusually short H-bond in the pR CW crystal structure [17] is reproducible on the basis of quantum chemistry. Note that the O$_{\text{Glu46}}$–O$_{\text{pCA}}$ H bond is absent in the pB state [4] and solution structures of the pB state [18].

If the short O$_{\text{Glu46}}$–O$_{\text{pCA}}$ H bond could be a very strong bond, the pR CW intermediate would be very stable and the proceeding pB state would never form in such a time scale. It should also be noted that a lifetime of hundreds $\mu$s for the pR CW state is due to the large structural change rather than the PT from Glu46 to pCA. In addition, in a single-well H-bond, movement of a proton between the donor and acceptor moieties is not directly associated with breakage of the H-bond. (note, the potential energy profile of a single-well H-bond only suggests that movement of a proton is easier than in a standard H-bond due to the absence of the energy barrier.) Breakage of the short O$_{\text{Glu46}}$–O$_{\text{pCA}}$ H bond can occur as a result of the large structural change, which is driven by the photon energy stored in the system [38]. Hence, the pR intermediate can lower the energy to proceed the pB state by abolishing the unusually short O$_{\text{Glu46}}$–O$_{\text{pCA}}$ H bond of <2.5 Å.

Here, one may also rediscover the so-called “principle of frustration”, where in the folding process, proteins (may not completely eliminate but at least) need to minimize frustration [39]. In terms of the “local” H-bond network of pCA, formation of the unusually short H-bond is energetically allowed (or favored) at the stage of the pR intermediate. However, this is not the energetically lowest state of the “entire” protein, which can also be understood by pR being followed by pB.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The presence of the shorter O$_{\text{Glu46}}$–O$_{\text{pCA}}$ bond (2.47 Å) in the pR CW crystal structure [17] relative to the ground state structure (2.57 Å) indicates that the “equal pK$_a$” requirement for formation of a single-well H-bond is satisfied in the pR CW intermediate, but not in the ground state. If matching pK$_a$ were satisfied in the ground state, the O$_{\text{Glu46}}$–O$_{\text{pCA}}$ bond (~2.6 Å [8, 23]) could neither be further shorten to
~2.5 Å in the pR$_{CW}$ structure [17] nor become stronger in pR as observed in FTIR studies [4]. An LBHB or a single-well H-bond is less likely to form between Glu46 and pCA as long as Tyr42 provides an H bond to pCA in the native PYP.

The present case clearly shows that the formation of a short symmetrical H bond does not necessarily help to decrease the total energy of the active site. Comparison of the energetics of the two possible H-bond patterns in the same protein unambiguously enabled us to realize that merely focusing on a short H bond might lead to neglect of the total energy.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by the JST PRESTO program (K.S. and H.I), Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan (22740276 to K.S.), Special Coordination Fund for Promoting Science and Technology of MEXT (H.I), Takeda Science Foundation (H.I.), Kyoto University Step-up Grant-in-Aid for young scientists (H.I.), and Grant for Basic Science Research Projects from The Sumitomo Foundation (H.I.).

7. REFERENCES


QSite, version 5.8, Schrödinger, LLC, New York, NY, 2012.


**FIGURE CAPTIONS**

**Figure 1.** (a) Overview of typical potential-energy profiles: (top) standard H-bonds (asymmetric double-well), typically with an $O_{\text{donor}}$–$O_{\text{acceptor}}$ distance $>\sim 2.6 \, \text{Å}$; (middle) low barrier H-bond (LBHB), typically with an $O_{\text{donor}}$–$O_{\text{acceptor}}$ distance of 2.5–2.6 Å; (bottom) single-well (ionic) H-bonds, typically with an $O_{\text{donor}}$–$O_{\text{acceptor}}$ distance of $<\sim 2.5 \, \text{Å}$ [20].

(b) H atom positions of the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\beta\text{CA}}$ bond (left) in the neutron diffraction analysis (green sphere, PDB ID code 2ZOI) [8]. (right) QM/MM optimized structure based on the X-ray crystal structure (cyan sphere, PDB ID code 1OT9) [23].

**Figure 2.** Possible H-bond patterns in the native PYP. QM/MM optimized geometries of (left) the [standard] and (right) [short $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\beta\text{CA}}$] H-bond patterns.

**Figure 3.** Energy profiles along the proton transfer coordinate for the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\beta\text{CA}}$ bond in the native PYP (black curve) and the Y42F mutant (red curve). Changes of the properties induced by the Y42F mutation are indicated by open arrows. For comparison, the energy minimum was set to zero for both the native PYP and the Y42F mutant. Although $pK_a$ should refer to free energy rather than energy, it can be practically assumed to result in the same tendency [40], in particular for the case with short H bonds where the proton motion is considerably restricted due to the presence of the donor and acceptor moieties in the protein environment. Note that $pK_a$ is not for a proton release from the $O_{\text{donor}}$–H...$O_{\text{acceptor}}$ bond (i.e., $pK_a([O_{\text{donor}}\cdots H\cdots O_{\text{acceptor}}]/{[O_{\text{donor}}\cdots O_{\text{acceptor}}]}$), but $pK_a([O_{\text{donor}}\cdots H]/[O_{\text{donor}}]$) and $pK_a([O_{\text{acceptor}}\cdots H]/[O_{\text{acceptor}}]$) for each diabatic potential curve of the donor/acceptor moiety [41].

**Figure 4.** Energy profiles along the proton transfer coordinate for the $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\beta\text{CA}}$ bond in the [standard] H-bond geometry (black curve) and the short $O_{\text{Glu46}}$–$O_{\beta\text{CA}}$ bond geometry (blue) in the native PYP. The two H-bond patterns differ predominantly at the H atom (red) orientation of Tyr42. The open arrows indicate a reorientation of the hydroxyl H atom of Tyr42, which separates the two H-bond geometries energetically. Note that the atomic coordinates of Tyr42 were fully relaxed (not fixed) in each QM/MM calculation. The energy minimum of the [standard] H-bond geometry was set to zero.
The two energy profiles describe the total QM/MM energy of the entire system, including both QM and MM regions.

**Figure 5.** Energy profiles along the proton transfer coordinate for the $\text{O}_{\text{Glu46}}$–$\text{O}_\text{pCA}$ bond in the pRcw intermediate (PDB ID code 1TS7).
Figure 1.
Figure 2.
Figure 3.
Figure 4.
Figure 5.
Table 1. (i) Experimental and calculated geometries (in angstrom for distance and degree for angle) and (ii) δ_H (in ppm) of the native PYP. For the complete atomic coordinates of the QM/MM geometries, see PYP_SI.pdb in SI. n.d.; not determined. The error in O–O distance in the crystal was estimated to be 0.01–0.02 Å [23].

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^a See Ref. [35].

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Table 2. (i) Experimental and calculated geometries (in angstrom for distance and degree for angle) and (ii) $\delta_H$ (in ppm) of the mutant PYP proteins. Values for the native PYP with the [standard] H-bond pattern are also shown for comparison. For the complete atomic coordinates of the QM/MM geometries, see PYP_SI.pdb in SI. n.d.; not determined.

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*a* See Ref. [35].
Table 3. Experimental and calculated geometries (in angstrom for distance and degree for angle) of the pRCW intermediate identified in time-resolved Laue crystallography [17]. Values for the native PYP with the [standard] H-bond pattern are also shown for comparison. For the complete atomic coordinates of the QM/MM geometries, see PYP_SI.pdb in SI. n.d.; not determined.

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\(^a\) See Ref. [35].
SUPPORTING INFORMATION FOR:
FORMATION OF A UNUSUALLY SHORT HYDROGEN BOND IN PHOTOACTIVE YELLOW PROTEIN
K. SAITO, H. ISHIKITA

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REMARK GEOMETRIES OF QM REGION IN TABLE 2 (MODEL 3)

REMARK GEOMETRIES OF QM REGION IN TABLE 3 (MODEL 4–6)

REMARK

REMARK

MODEL

1

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ATOM 4 CD2 TYR A 42 13.084 –18.171 5.562 1.00 5.86 ACHN C
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HETATM  36  C1  PCA  169   3.535 -11.795   7.344  1.00  6.48      COFA C
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HETATM  38  C2P  PCA  169   4.730 -11.965   6.558  1.00  6.31      COFA C
HETATM  39  C3P  PCA  169   5.912 -12.233   7.151  1.00  6.56      COFA C
HETATM  40  C1P  PCA  169    7.048 -12.891   6.503  1.00  5.76      COFA C
HETATM  41  C2P  PCA  169    8.219 -13.238   7.222  1.00  6.08      COFA C
HETATM  42  C3P  PCA  169    9.277 -13.900   6.630  1.00  6.45      COFA C
HETATM  43  C4P  PCA  169    9.223 -14.269   5.243  1.00  5.49      COFA C
HETATM  44  C5P  PCA  169    8.021 -13.948   4.537  1.00  5.80      COFA C
HETATM  45  C6P  PCA  169    6.983 -13.298   5.147  1.00  5.89      COFA C
HETATM  46  O4P  PCA  169   10.188 -14.876   4.648  1.00  5.95      COFA O1-
HETATM  47  H2   PCA  169    4.622 -11.954   5.483  1.00  0.00      COFA H
ATOM     67  HN  THR A  70  1.127 -14.952  7.254  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
HETATM  68      THR A  70
HETATM   69  C1  PCA   126       3.519 -11.964   7.312  1.00  9.67      COFA C
HETATM   70  O1  PCA   126       3.397 -12.198   8.520  1.00 10.80      COFA O
HETATM   71  C2  PCA   126       4.746 -12.162   7.312  1.00 10.62      COFA C
HETATM   72  C3  PCA   126       5.912 -12.488   7.197  1.00  9.76      COFA C
HETATM   73  C1P PCA   126       7.091 -13.030   6.584  1.00  9.21      COFA C
HETATM   74  C2P PCA   126       8.238 -13.321   8.520  1.00 10.80      COFA O
HETATM   75  C3P PCA   126       9.348 -13.934   6.802  1.00 10.75      COFA C
HETATM   76  C4P PCA   126       9.363 -14.300   5.425  1.00  9.39      COFA C
HETATM   77  C5P PCA   126       8.192 -14.041   4.662  1.00  9.61      COFA C
HETATM   78  C6P PCA   126       7.100 -13.429   5.227  1.00  9.49      COFA C
HETATM   79  O4P PCA   126      10.404 -14.849   4.858  1.00 11.14      COFA O1-
HETATM   80  H2  PCA   126       4.670 -12.167   5.491  1.00  0.00      COFA H
HETATM   81  H3  PCA   126       5.928 -12.407   8.283  1.00  0.00      COFA H
HETATM   82  H2P PCA   126       8.228 -13.078   8.414  1.00  0.00      COFA H
HETATM   83  H3P PCA   126      10.222 -14.158   7.407  1.00  0.00      COFA H
HETATM   84  H5P PCA   126       8.186 -14.348   3.622  1.00  0.00      COFA H
HETATM   85  H6P PCA   126       6.217 -13.275   4.621  1.00  0.00      COFA H
ENDMDL

MODEL        5
ATOM      1  CB  TYR A  42  15.260 -19.581   5.240  1.00 10.05      ACHN C
ATOM      2  CG  TYR A  42  14.569 -18.245   5.381  1.00 10.58      ACHN C
ATOM      3  CD1 TYR A  42  15.281 -17.048   5.526  1.00 11.49      ACHN C
ATOM      4  CD2 TYR A  42  13.173 -18.195   5.517  1.00 10.50      ACHN C
ATOM      5  CE1 TYR A  42  14.638 -15.852   5.851  1.00  8.34      ACHN C
ATOM      6  CE2 TYR A  42  12.510 -17.010   5.815  1.00  9.92      ACHN C
ATOM      7  CZ  TYR A  42  13.249 -15.840   6.006  1.00  8.85      ACHN C
ATOM      8  OH  TYR A  42  12.540 -14.732   6.370  1.00 14.96      ACHN O
ATOM     10 1HB  TYR A  42  16.121 -19.639   5.915  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     11 2HB  TYR A  42  14.559 -20.357   5.556  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     12  HD1 TYR A  42  16.359 -17.056   5.406  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     13  HD2 TYR A  42  12.600 -19.112   5.434  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     14  HE1 TYR A  42  15.220 -14.951   6.017  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     15  HE2 TYR A  42  11.432 -16.957   5.899  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     16  HH  TYR A  42  13.017 -13.894   6.262  1.00  0.00      ACHN H
ATOM     17  C   ALA A  45  16.650 -12.566   0.502  1.00 10.39      ACHN C
ATOM     18  O   ALA A  45  16.112 -11.465   0.655  1.00 13.81      ACHN O
ATOM     19  N   GLU A  46  16.037 -13.706   0.936  1.00 10.16      ACHN N
ATOM     20  CA  GLU A  46  14.783 -13.637   1.683  1.00 11.15      ACHN C
ATOM     21  C   ILE A  49  12.843  -8.477   3.748  1.00 14.28      ACHN C
ATOM     22  O   ILE A  49  12.183  -7.464   3.962  1.00 20.93      ACHN O
ATOM     23  N   THR A  50  12.983  -9.513   4.596  1.00 11.91      ACHN N
ATOM     24  CA  THR A  50  12.085  -9.692   5.710  1.00 11.47      ACHN C
ATOM     25  C   THR A  50  12.653  -9.186   7.033  1.00 13.16      ACHN C
ATOM     26  O   THR A  50  11.901  -8.918   7.980  1.00 10.61      ACHN O
ATOM     27  CB  THR A  50  11.709 -11.192   5.769  1.00 10.53      ACHN C

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