Article

Prediction of Protein Function from Tertiary Structure of the Active Site in Heme Proteins by Convolutional Neural Network

Hiroko X. Kondo [1,2,3,*], Hiroyuki Iizuka [4], Gen Masumoto [5], Yuichi Kabaya [1], Yusuke Kanematsu [2,6] and Yu Takano [2,*]

[1] Faculty of Engineering, Kitami Institute of Technology, 165 Koen-cho, Kitami 090-8507, Japan; h_kondo@mail.kitami-it.ac.jp, kabaya@mail.kitami-it.ac.jp
[2] Graduate School of Information Sciences, Hiroshima City University, 3-4-1 Ozukahigashi Asaminamiku, Hiroshima 731-3194, Japan; ytakano@hiroshima-cu.ac.jp
[3] Laboratory for Computational Molecular Design, RIKEN Center for Biosystems Dynamics Research, 6-2-3 Furuedai, Suita 565-0874, Japan
[4] Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, Kita 14, Nishi 9, Kitaku, Sapporo 060-0814, Japan; iizuka@ist.hokudai.ac.jp
[5] Information Systems Division, RIKEN Information R&D and Strategy Headquarters, 2-1 Hirosawa, Wako 351-0198, Japan; masumoto@riken.jp
[6] Graduate School of Advanced Science and Engineering, Hiroshima University, 1-4-1 Kagamiyama, Higashi-Hiroshima 739-8527, Japan; ykanem@hiroshima-u.ac.jp
* Correspondence: h_kondo@mail.kitami-it.ac.jp (H.X.K.); ytakano@hiroshima-cu.ac.jp (Y.T.); Tel.: +81-157-26-9401 (H.X.K.); +81-82-830-1825 (Y.T.)

Abstract: Structure–function relationships in proteins have been one of the crucial scientific topics. Heme proteins have diverse and pivotal biological functions. Therefore, clarifying their structure–function correlation is significant to understand their functional mechanism and is informative for various fields of science. In this study, we constructed convolutional neural network models for predicting protein functions from the tertiary structures of heme-binding sites (active sites) of heme proteins to examine the structure–function correlation. As a result, we succeeded in the classification of oxygen-binding protein (OB), oxidoreductase (OR), proteins with both functions (OB–OR), and electron transport protein (ET) with high accuracy. Although the misclassification rate for OR and ET was high, the rates between OB and ET and between OB and OR were almost zero, indicating that the prediction model works well between protein groups with quite different functions. However, predicting the function of proteins modified with amino acid mutation(s) remains a challenge. Our findings indicate a structure–function correlation in the active site of heme proteins. This study is expected to be applied to the prediction of more detailed protein functions such as catalytic reactions.

Keywords: structure–function correlation; active site conformation; convolutional neural network; machine learning

1. Introduction

Proteins with metal cofactors and ions are called metal proteins, where a metal ion and its environment work as a catalytic active center. Because metal proteins enable biochemical reactions not possible with ordinary proteins, many researchers pay attention to them[1–5]. Heme proteins are the largest class of metal proteins and serve pivotal biological functions. Heme, a Fe–porphyrin complex, is an active center of heme proteins and expresses diverse functions such as electron transport[6,7], a catalyst for various kinds of reactions[8,9], and an oxygen carrier[10,11]. Besides being an active center, it plays a role in the regulation of protein functions as a ligand[12,13] and in a source of Fe ions [14]. Some proteins bind to heme for transport or storage, which are referred to as

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hemophores[15]. The mechanism of heme protein functions has been a crucial scientific issue. The structural information of heme proteins is increasing yearly[16], indicating a high level of scientific interest. However, few studies have comprehensively investigated heme proteins.

The key factors regulating the heme function are considered the axial ligand of heme, the side-chain orientation of the heme propionate, the types of heme, and the porphyrin distortion of heme. Because distal and proximal amino acids and chemical structures of heme are important factors in determining protein functions, their roles have been investigated[17–19]. However, these factors alone do not determine protein functions[20].

Both experimental and computational studies have shown a correlation between heme distortion and its chemical properties[21–24]. Our group discovered a heme distortion classified into oxygen-binding proteins and oxidoreductases by a combined analysis of machine learning and quantum chemical calculations[25]. Therefore, we focused on the contribution of heme distortion to the functional regulation of heme proteins. Heme complexed with its host protein exhibits a distorted conformation from its isolated structure[20], suggesting the regulation of the heme porphyrin structure by the protein environment around heme. From a simulation study for two oxygen carrier proteins, hemoglobin and myoglobin, it was suggested that the host protein environment affects heme distortion and controls heme's chemical properties relevant to the protein function[26]. As a first step in elucidating such regulation of heme distortion, we elucidated the correlations between the heme distortion and protein environment around heme, including proximal and distal amino acids using a machine learning method[27] and a convolutional neural network (CNN)[28]. Furthermore, our group has successfully constructed a predictor of protein function with heme distortion and axial ligand(s) as input (in preparation). Considering these results, we can expect to predict protein functions from the tertiary structures of heme-binding sites, including axial ligand(s).

In experimental studies, researchers are actively working on modifying the function of proteins by introducing amino acid mutations. Especially for myoglobin, which is an oxygen carrier, engineered proteins exhibit enzymatic activity such as peroxidase[29–33]. These mutated sites are primarily located in heme-binding pockets (active sites) other than axial ligands. Thus, changes in the protein environment of a heme-binding site significantly affect protein functions.

In this study, we constructed a CNN model for predicting protein functions from the tertiary structures of the heme-binding sites of heme proteins, including proximal and distal amino acids. A CNN is a deep learning method that has led to breakthroughs in various computer vision tasks, such as image classification[34,35], it has also been applied to the classification of protein cavity structures[36]. We succeeded in predicting protein functions from the pocket structures of three functional groups of heme proteins. The prediction with our CNN model worked well between the groups with quite different functions. Analysis of the similarity of cavity shape among proteins with the same function suggests that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a protein function and a pocket structure. This study is expected to be applied to the prediction of more detailed protein functions such as catalytic reactions. This is the first step toward understanding structure–function relationships in the active sites of heme proteins.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data Collection of Heme and Its Host Proteins

To collate the structural and functional information of heme proteins, we searched PDB entries containing the compound IDs (_chem_comp.id) of HEM, HEA, HEB, HEC, or HEO with a resolution of 2.0 Å or less using SQL in the PDBj Mine relational database[37] (https://pdbj.org/rdb/search, accessed on October 6, 2022). The PDBx/mmCIF files were downloaded from the Protein Data Bank Japan (PDBj)[38]. Structural information was extracted from the atom_site category of the PDBx/mmCIF file. We collected

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only one model for each PDB entry. When the occupancy value is < 1.0 and pdbx_PDB_model_num is 1, the atom with the largest occupancy was selected from the atoms with the same auth_seq_id and label_asym_id in the atom_site category. When the occupancy was 0.5, we chose the atoms with the label_alt_id of A. This selection was applied even to atoms with different auth_seq_id values in the atom_site category. After collecting the atomic coordinates, we excluded heme molecules missing one or more of the 25 heavy atoms forming the Fe–porphyrin skeleton (Figure 1). Consequently, 6,866 heme molecules from 3,206 unique PDB entries were obtained. The Bio.PDB package[39] for BioPython version 1.78[40] was used to parse the mmCIF files.

As a first step in elucidating the correlation between the tertiary structure of an active site and protein function, we used only the structures in which amino acids or water molecules are axially coordinated to heme. Here, 5,185 samples were obtained. Axial ligands were defined as amino acid residues or other molecules, including one or more atoms within 3.1 Å of the heme iron atom. MDTraj library version 1.9.5[41] was used to analyze the structural data. To reduce the redundancy of amino acid sequences, we excluded protein chains with sequence similarity higher than 99.99% using the PISCES server[42]. Finally, the samples in which the coverage of heme is less than 0.6 were excluded because the biological and asymmetric units are likely to differ. This dataset was referred to as a non-redundant dataset and was composed of 1,234 samples.

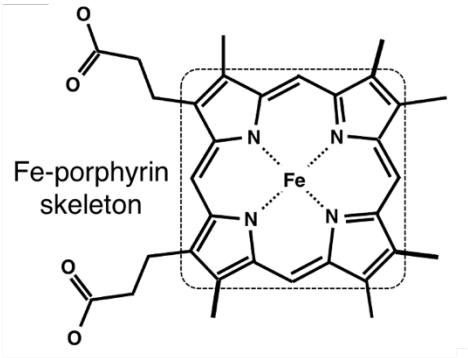

Figure 1. Chemical structure of heme. Fe–porphyrin skeleton is enclosed by a square-dotted line.

2.2. Assignment of Protein Function to Each Heme Sample

Information about protein function was assigned by the enzyme commission (EC) number and gene ontology (GO) associated with each entity in each PDB entry as well as keywords and descriptions stored in each PDB entry. The EC number, GO, keywords, and description were collected by a SQL search from EC_number of sifts.pdb_chain_enzyme table, GOID of gene_ontology_pdbmlplus table, keywords of brief_summary table, and pdbx_description of entity table in PDBj Mine relational database (accessed on October 6, 2022), respectively. First, we assigned function(s) to each sample of the non-redundant dataset as follows:

1) If the protein chain(s), including the axial ligand(s), had an EC number(s), the first digit of the EC number(s) was assigned.
2) If case 1 did not apply and the protein chain(s) had GO associated with “oxygen-binding,” “oxidoreductase activity,” “electron transfer activity,” “transcription,” or “heme transport” as the molecular function or biological process, one function was assigned in order from these functions.
3) If cases 1 and 2 did not apply and the PDB entry had keywords associated with “hemophore,” “electron transfer activity,” “oxygen-binding,” “oxidoreductase activity,” “heme extraction,” “signaling protein,” “nitrophorin (NO transport),” or “heme transport,” one function was assigned in order from these functions.

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4) If cases 1–3 did not apply and the PDB entry had a description of cytochrome p460, "oxidoreductase" was assigned.
5) If cases 1–4 did not apply or there was no axial ligand, "unclassified" was assigned.

At this stage, 16 types of function labels, including multi-function combinations, were assigned. Next, we manually modified the function of dehaloperoxidase and myoglobin with oxidoreductase activity to "oxygen-binding and oxidoreductase" (dual-function). In this study, we only used the samples assigned "oxygen-binding," "oxidoreductase," "electron transfer," or "oxygen-binding and oxidoreductase" as protein functions. These protein functions are listed in SI (pdbid_function_list.csv).

2.3. CNN Model

Here, we constructed a CNN model whose input and output are the tertiary structure of the heme-binding pocket and the protein function, respectively. To use the non-uniform protein structural data as input for the CNN model, we should convert the data into uniform dimensional data. Then, we used voxel sets included in a cube-shaped inclusion region on the heme-binding pocket as an input (Figure 2). For voxelization, we divided the space included in the inclusion region into the small cubic region (voxel) with an edge length of 1 Å. Using atomic coordinates of protein without heme and molecules other than proteins, we assigned 1 (occupied) or 0 (unoccupied) to each voxel depending on whether it was occupied by any atom or not, respectively. The input voxels were prepared for each atom (C, N, O, and S) and used as an input with four channels. For the detailed procedures for determining the inclusion region and voxelization, please refer to our previous study[28].

The output of the CNN model is a class label of the protein function. Class labels are two- or three-dimensional, allowing multiple functions to be assigned to a single sample. The loss was calculated as binary cross-entropy between the observed (assigned function) and predicted class labels.

We constructed and trained all CNN models using PyTorch version 1.11.0[43]. The layers and parameters of the CNN model used in this study are shown in Table 1. For training, the stochastic gradient descent optimizer with a learning rate of 0.01 was used, and the batch size was set to 32. To verify the generalization performance of the model, five-fold cross-validation was performed. We did not separate the test and cross-validation datasets because of limited data. The detailed procedure of the cross-validation has been described in our previous study[28].

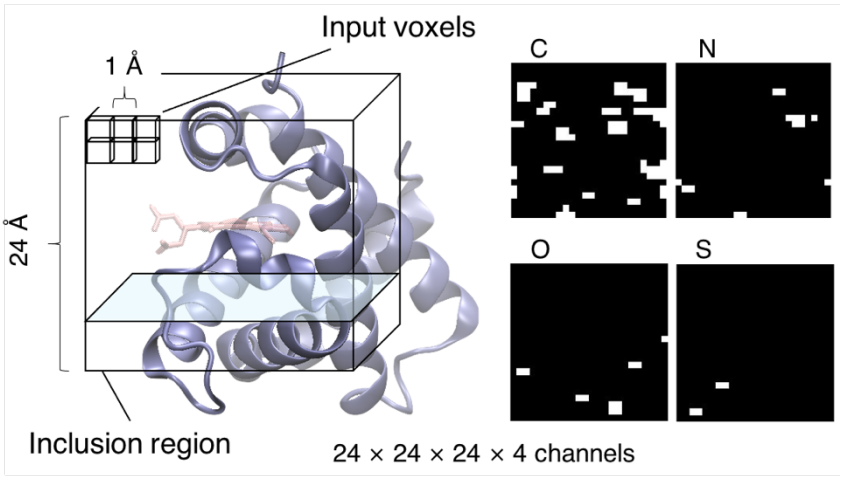

Figure 2. Schematic of the input of the CNN model in this study. The protein backbone and heme molecule are represented as a blue cartoon and a licorice model colored in salmon, respectively. The

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input voxels were prepared for each atom (C, N, O, or S), as illustrated in the right panel. The coordinates of heme and molecules other than protein were not used in the voxel calculation.

Table 1. Layers and parameters of the CNN model constructed in this study.

Layer	Function	Filter (kernel)	Output dimension (channel × depth × width × height)
1	Conv3d	2 × 2 × 2 with 0-padding	64 × 21 × 21 × 21
2	Conv3d	2 × 2 × 2 with 0-padding	128 × 22 × 22 × 22
3	BatchNorm3d	-	128 × 22 × 22 × 22
4	Conv3d	2 × 2 × 2 without padding	128 × 21 × 21 × 21
5	ReLU	-	128 × 21 × 21 × 21
6	BatchNorm3d	-	128 × 21 × 21 × 21
7	MaxPool3d	2 × 2 × 2 stride: 2 × 2 × 2	128 × 10 × 10 × 10
8	Full connection	-	128,000
9	Linear	-	128
10	ReLU	-	128
11	Dropout	0.4	128
12	Linear	-	64
13	BatchNorm1d	-	64
14	ReLU	-	64
15	Linear	-	2 or 3
16	Sigmoid	-	2 or 3

2.4. Analyses of Cavity of Heme-binding Site

We computed the cavity shapes of heme-binding sites using POVME 3.0[44]. With POVME, the cavity shape of a ligand-binding pocket can be represented as a bit vector, each element of which represents whether or not the respective grid is located in a ligand-binding cavity. We refer to this bit vector as a "cavity vector" in the following. To compare the cavity shapes of various proteins, the region to be analyzed was limited to the vicinity of the heme molecule: the center and radius of the inclusion sphere (parameters for POVME) were set to the coordinates of the heme iron atom and 8.5 Å, respectively. The detailed procedure for preparing the input protein coordinates has been described in our previous work[28].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Prediction of Protein Function from the Tertiary Structure of the Heme-Binding Pocket Using a CNN Model: two-label classification

We constructed a CNN model to predict the function of proteins classified into the following three classes, namely, oxygen-binding protein (OB), oxidoreductase (OR), and proteins with both functions (OB–OR), from the tertiary structures of heme-binding pockets. The output of the CNN model is two-dimensional, with each label indicating whether each function (oxygen-binding or oxidoreductase) is retained, namely, (0, 1), (1, 0), and (1, 1) represent the OB, OR, and OB–OR classes, respectively. Only when the values of the two labels matched between the observed and predicted ones were the results considered true positives (TP). The obtained models were evaluated in terms of the score, S_{acc}, calculated as follows:

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$$S_{\mathrm{acc}} = \frac{\sum_{c \in L} N_c^{\mathrm{TP}}}{\sum_{c \in L} N_c}, \quad (1)$$

where L, N_c, and N_c^{TP} represent the labels of function, the number of samples belonging to class c, and the number of samples in class c that are TP as a result of prediction, respectively. In this analysis, L = {OB, OR, OB–OR}. N_{OB}, N_{OR}, and $N_{\mathrm{OB-OR}}$ for the test sets of five-fold cross-validation runs were 190, 312, and 35, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the S_{acc} scores obtained from five-fold cross-validation was 0.959 ± 0.021, indicating high prediction accuracy.

We also calculated the confusion matrix **M** using the scikit-learn Python library[45] version 0.24.2 (Table 2). The non-diagonal element of a confusion matrix, $\mathbf{M}_{ij}$, represents the ratio of the actual number of observations in class i but are predicted to be in class j. Each element of the confusion matrix has a mean value over five cross-validation runs. Although in two-label classification, the predicted value can also be (0, 0), which means that the sample is neither OB nor OR, there was no sample with a predicted value of (0, 0) in this analysis. Therefore, such a sample is omitted in Table 2. The protein function could be predicted with very high accuracy for the single-function proteins (OB and OR). However, protein function prediction was difficult for the dual-function proteins (OB–OR). The dual-function proteins contain two types of proteins: dehaloperoxidase and myoglobin mutants. The ratios of TP in the samples included in the test sets of five cross-validation runs were 1.0 (9/9) for dehaloperoxidase and 0.423 (11/26) for myoglobin mutants with a dual-function (DF-Myoglobin). The low TP rate in the OB–OR class was due to the inaccuracy of the prediction of the function of DF-Myoglobins. Considering that the non-redundant dataset includes 116 samples with the description of "myoglobin" in PDB, 32 of which have dual functions, it is likely that the prediction was influenced by samples with similar pocket structures but a different function.

Table 2. Confusion matrix resulted from the two-label classification. The mean values over five cross-validation runs are listed.

		Predicted Value		
		OB	**OR**	**OB–OR**
Observed Value	**OB (191)**	0.985	0.010	0.005
	OR (312)	0.010	0.990	0.000
	OB–OR (35)	0.436	0.000	0.564

Next, we examined in detail the samples with inaccurate function prediction. 15 of the 21 samples with inaccurate predictions were DF-Myoglobins, most of which were predicted to belong to the OB class. The samples other than DF-Myoglobins classified as OB are listed in Table 3. PDB ID of 3QZX[46] is protoglobin, which has highly distorted heme, suggesting that the pocket structure is different from those of other oxygen-binding proteins. For PDB IDs of 3QZX, 4XDI[47], and 6O0A[48], there was no sample with a similar amino acid sequence (similarity ≥ 0.7). The lack of sufficient training data may be the cause of prediction failure. For two cases (PDB ID of 2BK9[49] and 3MVC[50]), the protein function assignment may be wrong, and the predicted results were correct (misassignment of protein function). Although the former is hexacoordinate hemoglobin, which is expected to function as oxidoreductase, it is unclear whether this protein exhibits enzymatic activity. The latter exhibits oxidoreductase activity and no affinity to the oxygen molecules, but OB was assigned as the protein function. There was a sample with OB as the class label (observed value) and OB–OR as the predicted value (PDB ID: 7CEZ). PDB ID of 7CEZ is myoglobin G5K/Q8K/A19K/V21K mutant. Its functional property is unknown because the paper is unpublished. This mutant may exhibit oxidoreductase activity, as we predicted. Considering these results, protein function assignment is one of the significant challenges in this type of research.

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Table 3. List of the samples that failed to predict other than those classified as OB and DF-Myoglobins.

PDB ID	Protein Name	Observed Value	Predicted Value	Remark
2BK9[49]	hemoglobin	OR	OB	misassignment
3MVC[50]	GLB-6	OB	OR	misassignment
3QZX[46]	protoglobin	OB	OR	-
4XDI[47]	THB1 (truncated hemoglobin)	OR	OB	-
6O0A[48]	flavohemoglobin	OR	OB	-
7CEZ	myoglobin (G5K/Q8K/A19K/V21K)	OB	OB–OR	detailed function unknown

3.2. Specification of Regions in Input Data important for Prediction

To specify a region important for predicting protein function, we examined the change in prediction scores when information about a specific region of input voxels was discarded. The model described in section 3.1 was used for this analysis. Information was discarded in two ways, namely, "outside discarding" and "inside discarding," which remove information from the outside (Figure 3a) and inside (center) (Figure 3b), respectively. First, we defined two cubes: the "outer cube" and the "inner cube." The vertex coordinates of the outer cube are (±12, ±12, ±12), being equivalent to the input voxels of the CNN model. Let the vertex coordinates of the inner cube be (±(12–r), ±(12–r), ±(12–r)) on the "outside discarding" and be (±r, ±r, ±r) on "inside discarding." Then, the sets of voxels in the outer and inner cubes are denoted as V_{outer} and V_{inner}, respectively. The elements in V_{outer} but not in V_{inner} were replaced with 0 for "outside discarding" ($0 \le r < 12$, Figure 3a), and those of V_{inner} were replaced with 0 for "inside discarding" ($0 \le r < 12$, Figure 3b). Information is intact (not discarded) when $r = 0$ in both cases.

S_{acc} for "outside discarding" and "inside discarding" averaged over the test sets in the five cross-validation runs are shown in the left panels of Figures 2a and 2b, respectively. Because the amount of information loss on the r value was not linear and differed between "outside discarding" and "inside discarding," S_{acc} scores were also plotted against the volume of the region, where the information was not discarded (Figure 3c). Considering that the change in S_{acc} scores between the volumes of 3,000 and 6,000 Å^3 differed for "outside discarding" and "inside discarding," the score would depend on the region used for prediction. Whereas the scores dropped sharply when the value of r exceeds 3 Å, where the edge length of the inner cube is 18 Å and reached almost 0.5 r = 9 Å in "outside discarding", it did not significantly change between the values of r from 0 to 10 Å, where the edge length of the inner cube is 0–20 Å in "inside discarding." These results suggest that the prediction was performed using the information near the surface of the outer cube (input voxels). Examples of A_l (l = 18 and 24), which is a set of atoms included in the cube with edge lengths of l, are illustrated in Figure 3d using a PDB entry of 1A00. This may be one of the reasons why it was difficult to distinguish amino acid mutations in the heme-binding pocket of DF-Myoglobin. We also constructed a CNN model using smaller input voxels (edge length = 17 Å) as an input. However, almost the same result was obtained (the mean and standard deviation of S_{acc} score over five-fold cross-validation was 0.959 ± 0.024). The confusion matrix is shown in Table S1. The modification of inputs may be required to incorporate information about the pocket surface into the prediction.

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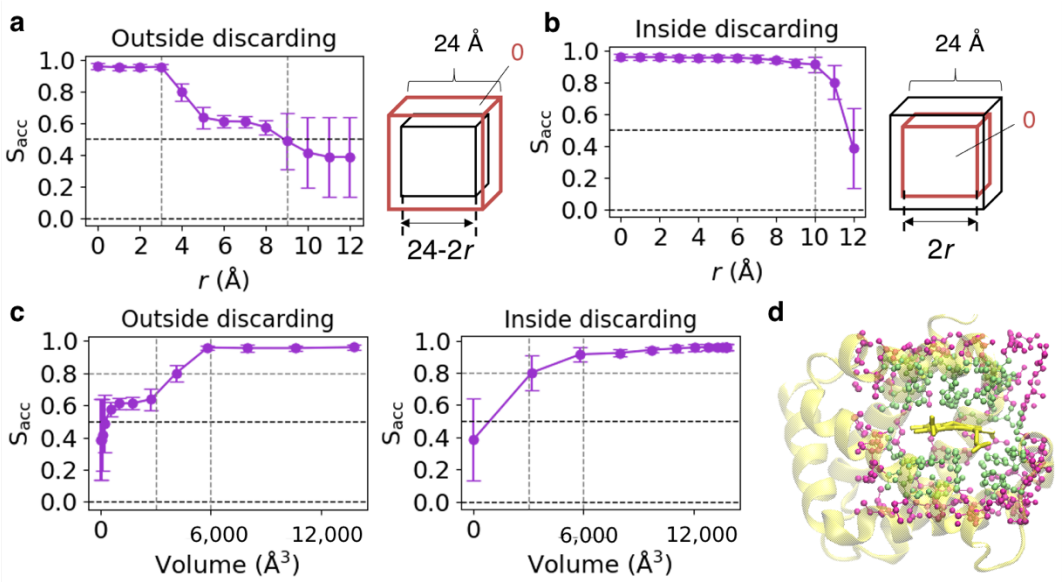

Figure 3. (**a**) Mean S_{acc} scores versus r, which is the distance between the faces of the outer (red) and inner (black) cubes illustrated in the right panel for "outside discarding." The error bar shows the standard deviation. The centers of the outer and inner cubes are identical, and their edges are parallel. (**b**) Mean S_{acc} scores versus r for "inside discarding." (**c**) S_{acc} scores versus the volume of the region with the original information. (**d**) Atoms included in cube-shaped regions with an edge length of l are illustrated using the PDB entry of 1A00 as an example. The lime spheres and the combination of lime and magenta spheres represent l = 18 and 24, respectively. The backbone of the host protein is represented as a yellow cartoon, and heme as a yellow licorice model.

3.3. Prediction of Protein Function from the Tertiary Structure of the Heme-Binding Pocket Using a CNN Model: three-label classification

We constructed a CNN model with three-dimensional output to predict the functions of proteins classified into the following four classes: OB, OR, OB–OR, and electron transport protein (ET). Other classes were not assigned in this study. The output is three-dimensional, with each label indicating whether or not each function (oxygen-binding, oxidoreductase, or electron transfer) is retained, namely, (0, 1, 0), (1, 0, 0), (1, 1, 0), and (0, 0, 1) represent the OB, OR, OB–OR, and ET classes, respectively. Only when the values of the three labels matched between the observed and predicted ones were the results considered TP.

The number of samples belonging to OB, OR, OB–OR, and ET for the test sets of five-fold cross-validation were 193, 297, 36, and 371 respectively. The prediction accuracy was also reasonably high in the three-label classification, and the mean and standard deviation of the S_{acc} for L = {OB, OR, OB–OR, ET} in Equation (1) obtained from the five-fold cross-validation were 0.895 ± 0.031. As shown in the confusion matrix shown in Table 4, while the recall for the OB class was as high as that in the two-label classification, that for OR became lower and was nearly the same as that for ET. This may be because of the functional similarity between OR and ET. Some of the samples that were erroneously predicted as ET despite being OR had a keyword associated with "electron transfer" in PDB. Notably, the low false recognition rates between OB and ET and between OB and OR, suggest a clear difference in the tertiary structures of their active sites. This indicates the structure–function relationships in the active sites of heme proteins. We expect the application of this method to the classification of a wider variety of protein functions in the future.

Table 4. Confusion matrix resulted from the three-label classification. The mean values over five cross-validation runs are listed.

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		Predicted Value				
		OB	**OR**	**OB–OR**	**ET**	**Others†**
Observed Value	**OB (193)**	0.973	0.016	0.006	0.000	0.005
	OR (297)	0.006	0.907	0.000	0.084	0.004
	OB–OR (36)	0.570	0.000	0.430	0.000	0.000
	ET (371)	0.000	0.110	0.000	0.890	0.000

† "Others" represents the predicted value of (0, 0, 0).

3.4. Similarity of the Structures of Heme-Binding Pockets between Proteins with the Same Function

To estimate the similarity of cavity shapes of the heme-binding sites in proteins with the same function, we analyzed the variability of cavity shapes for each protein group using cavity vectors computed by POVME software. Let I be a set of samples of cavity shapes in a protein group. To estimate the dispersion of cavity shapes, the mean distance from the barycenter for cavity vector v_i was calculated for each protein group following the same procedure as our previous work[28] as follows:

$$N_I = |I| \text{ (the number of samples of } I\text{)}, \tag{2}$$

$$\boldsymbol{\mu}_I = \frac{1}{N_I}\sum_{i\in I}\boldsymbol{v}_i, \tag{3}$$

$$\bar{d}_I = \frac{1}{N_I}\sum_{i\in I}\|\boldsymbol{v}_i - \boldsymbol{\mu}_I\|, \tag{4}$$

where $\|\cdot\|$ represents the L^2 norm.

The protein group identifier, number of samples, and $\bar{d}_I$ for each protein group are shown in Table 5. Results for the combined group of OB, OR, and OB–OR (referred to as "Combined" in the following), dehaloperoxidase, DF-Myoglobin, and myoglobin (OB) are also listed for comparison. For smaller $\bar{d}_I$ values, higher cavity shape similarity was expected in a protein group.

As shown in Table 5, while $\bar{d}_I$ was slightly small in the OB and OB–OR classes, it is as high as that in the "Combined" group, including four protein groups for the OR and ET classes. For homologous protein groups, dehaloperoxidase and myoglobin, $\bar{d}_I$ was significantly smaller than that of the "Combined" group. The $\bar{d}_I$ of DF-Myoglobin was slightly larger than that of myoglobin, suggesting the mutations in the active site change the cavity structures. These imply that the structure of an active site is not similar among proteins with the same function but varies significantly among protein groups. Considering the results of section 3.1, the trained CNN model may individually recognize the tertiary structures of samples with a similar pocket structure.

Table 5. Protein groups, sample numbers, and $\bar{d}_I$. The shaded row represents the protein group combined OB, OR, OB–OR, and ET.

Protein group	Sample Number	$\bar{d}_I$
OB	241	12.70
OR	388	16.88
OB–OR	42	12.44
ET	450	16.52
Combined	1121	16.80
Dehaloperoxidase	10	9.95
DF-Myoglobin	32	11.20
Myoglobin (OB)	82	9.99

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4. Conclusions

In this study, we constructed a CNN model to predict protein functions from the tertiary structures of the active sites of heme proteins to examine the structure–function relationship. High S_{acc} scores (> 0.95) were obtained by the CNN model for two-label classification for classifying OB, OR, and OB–OR. There were a few cases of false positives due to the misassignment of protein function, i.e., the predicted results were correct, resulting in the issue of improving the method of function assignment. In addition, the prediction of the function of engineered myoglobin (functionally modified mutants) remained a challenge. Because myoglobin is mostly an oxygen carrier, the difficulty in predicting the function of functionally modified mutants may be due to the lack of sufficient data. The analysis results of the similarity of cavity shape among proteins with the same function suggest that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the protein function and pocket structure, suggesting that the CNN model may individually recognize the tertiary structure of samples with a similar pocket structure. Predicting the modified function of proteins with a single amino acid mutation may require some ingenuity.

We also constructed a CNN model for three-label classification to classify OB, OR, OB–OR, and ET. Although the overall accuracy was slightly lower than that of the two-label classification, the recall for OB was maintained at the same level as that for the two-label classification. The misclassification between OB and ET and between OB and OR is almost zero, indicating that the prediction works well between the groups with different functions. The application of this study to classification tasks with more labels is expected.

Overall, this study demonstrated the structure–function correlation in the active sites of heme proteins. In the future, we will attempt to construct a model to predict more detailed protein functions, such as catalytic reactions. To improve the accuracy and robustness of the CNN model, we will attempt to increase the amount of structural data, improve the function assignment method, modify the input information, and so on. Our previous study showed that AlphaFold2[51], which is a deep learning algorithm for predicting the tertiary structure of proteins from the amino acid sequence, can accurately predict the structure of the heme-binding site in heme proteins[52]. If the challenge of predicting heme-binding sites from their amino acid sequences could be overcome, protein functions would be predicted using their amino acid sequences for heme proteins.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: www.mdpi.com/xxx/s1, Table S1: Confusion matrix resulted from the two-label classification with the edge length of inclusion region of 8.5 Å.

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