The negatively charged amino acids in the lumenal loop influence the pigment binding and conformation of the major light-harvesting chlorophyll a/b complex of photosystem II

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Abbreviations: CD, Circular dichroism; Chl, chlorophyll; DM, n-dodecyl-β-D-maltoside; LD, linear dichroism; LHCIIb, the major Chl a/b complexes of photosystem II; Lut, lutein; MD, molecular dynamics; Neo, neoxanthin; OG, n-octyl-β-D-glucopyranoside; PAGE, Partially denaturing polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis; PG, phosphatidylglycerol; PS, photosystem; qE, non-photochemical fluorescence quenching; RMS, root-mean-square; RMSD, RMS deviations; RMSF, RMS fluctuations; SDS, sodium dodecyl-sulphate; TM, transmembrane α-helices; WT, wild type

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1. Introduction

The major light-harvesting chlorophyll (Chl) a/b complex of photosystem (PS) II (LHCIIb) contains more than half of the Chls in granal chloroplasts. LHCIIb collects excitation energy and transfers it to the reaction centers, primarily to PSII. It maintains the lateral sorting of the protein complexes between the stromal and granal regions of the thylakoids and mediates grana stacking [1–4]. It regulates the energy distribution between PSII and PSI via LHCIIb phosphorylation that triggers state transition [5,6]. It also plays a key role in protecting the photosynthetic apparatus from photodamage by dissipating excessive excitation energy into heat mainly via the energy-dependent non-photochemical fluorescence quenching (qE) [4,7,8]. It has been proposed that LHCIIb can switch between light harvesting and energy dissipation under the continuously changing environmental conditions. Although the exact roles of the various protein components of qE are still unresolved, it is clear that carotenoids as quenchers and conformational changes in light-harvesting antenna proteins of PSII play key roles in this ΔpH-dependent regulatory process [4–8,11].

LHCIIb is found to be in a trimeric form both in vitro and in vivo [12,13]. These complexes are found in two large domains: extended ordered arrays of LHCII–PSII supercomplexes and LHCII-only macromdomains [3,14]. The LHCII-containing chirally ordered macromdomains appear to be capable of undergoing reversible structural changes under illumination [15]. Under certain conditions (e.g. high temperature or excessive light) LHCIIb can undergo trimer–monomer transition [16,17]. Monomerization of LHCIIb may be of physiological significance for its proteolytic degradation under physiological conditions [18].

LHCIIb binds 14 Chls (8 Chl a, 6 Chl b) and 4 carotenoid molecules. The complex also contains at least 2 lipids. It is organized in three transmembrane (TM) α-helices (helices A, B, C), an amphphilic α-helix...
of helix D) and a short 3α-helix (helix E) at the luminal side. Between helix E and the TM helix C, there is a peptide folding into two anti-parallel strands which are stabilized by an inter-strand ionic pair (D111–H120) and H-bonds [19]. Mutagenesis analysis showed that the anti-parallel strands play important roles in the structural and functional relationship of LHCIIb [20]. The structure between the TM helices B/C is very important for regulating the tertiary structure of LHCIIb, because, as proposed by the two-stage folding mechanism of Popot and Engelund [21], the links between the TM α-helices contribute to the formation of the tertiary structure. Mutagenesis analysis has shown that the folding state of the luminal loop influences the thermal stability of the reconstituted monomer [22].

Due to the build-up and decay of the pH gradient during photosynthesis, the luminal loop of LHCIIb is exposed to broadly variable pH environments. Hence, the negatively charged amino acids in the luminal loop might play important roles in adjusting the structure and functions of LHCIIb. Further, one of the key regulatory mechanisms of the light-harvesting antenna functions and of LHCIIb in particular, the energy-dependent non-photochemical quenching is dependent on the acidification of the thylakoid lumen. In LHCIIb, there are three negatively charged amino acids (E94, E107 and D111) in the luminal loop between TM helices B/C, two of which (E94, D111) form ion pairs (E94–Q103, D111–H120) which, according to the crystal structure, are very important for keeping the secondary structure of the lumen-exposed region between the TM helices B/C [19]. However, less is known about how these negatively charged amino acids affect the organization of the pigment molecules and the structural stability of the complexes in neutral and low pH environments.

In order to study the roles of the negatively charged amino acids in the luminal loop, we have investigated the structural characteristics in detergent environment of three different mutant versions of LHCIIb. E94G, E107V, and D111V, each with one negatively charged amino acid being exchanged to a non-charged one. We found that the negatively charged amino acids in the luminal loop play important roles not only in pigment binding but also in the structural response to low pH conditions.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Lhcb1 mutants

Mutants of lhcb1–2 (E94G, E107V, D111V) were obtained by random mutagenesis [23] of a fragment (coding for the luminal loop domain) of an expression plasmid expressing the mature pea Chl a/b protein gene Lhcb1–2 (“ABB80”) [24,25]. In order to add a C-terminal hexahistidyl tag (His6-tag) to these proteins, the 447 bp EcoRI–BstEII fragments of their coding sequences, containing the mutations, were substituted for the corresponding segment in the plasmid C3.2 h [26] coding for the His6-tagged wild type (WT) LHCIIb. The plasmids were transformed into E. coli JM 101 and the proteins were overexpressed as described in [25].

2.2. In vitro reconstitution

Monomeric LHCIIb was reconstituted by the detergent-exchange method [27]. 1 mg Lhcb1 protein dissolved in 2 mL solubilizing buffer containing 100 mM TRIS–HCl (pH 9.0), 5 mM 6-aminocaproic acid, 1 mM benzamidine, 12.5% (w/v) sucrose, 2% sodium dodecylsulfate (SDS) and 20 mM β-mercaptoethanol, was mixed with vortex with thylakoid pigments, containing 1.5 mg Chl, dissolved in 200 μL ethanol [25]. Then 10% (w/v) n-octyl-β-D-glucopyranoside (OG) (Chematic Biotechnik, Gailberg, Germany) was added to a final concentration of 1%. After 5 min incubation at room temperature, 1 M KCl was added to a final concentration of 0.2 M; the mixture was incubated on ice for 5 min and then SDS was pelleted by 2 min centrifugation at 23,000 g at 4 °C. The supernatant was collected and incubated on ice for 15 min and the mixture was centrifuged again (23,000 g, 5 min, 4 °C). The supernatant was applied to a Ni2+-chelating Sepharose fast-flow column (chelating Sepharose fast flow: Amersham Biosciences, Uppsala Sweden; column: 0.8 cm × 4 cm, Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, U.S.A.) equilibrated with OG buffer, containing 1% (w/v) OG, 100 mM TRIS–HCl (pH 9.0), and 12.5% (w/v) sucrose, then incubated in dark for 30 min at 4 °C. The column was washed with 1 mL OG buffer and 2 mL TX buffer (0.05% (w/v) Triton X-100 (Roche, Basel, Switzerland), 0.1 mg/mL phosphatidylglycerol (PG) and 100 mM TRIS–HCl (pH 7.5)). Complexes were eluted with elution buffer (0.05% Triton X-100, 0.1 mg/mL PG, 10 mM TRIS–HCl (pH 7.5) and 300 mM imidazol). The material eluted from the Ni2+-chelating column was further purified by sucrose-density-gradient ultracentrifugation (∼0.1–1 M sucrose, 0.1% (w/v) n-dodecyl-β-D-maltoside (DM), 5 mM TRIS–HCl, pH 7.5) at 450,000 g (SW-41 rotor, Beckman, Palo Alto, CA) for 17 h at 4 °C. The bands corresponding to LHCIIb trimers and monomers were collected. In order to investigate the possible role of Mg2+ on the structural stability of different LHCIIb mutants, reconstitution was carried out in the presence of Mg2+2. In that case, 2 mM MgCl2 was added to all buffers throughout the whole reconstitution and isolation procedures.

2.3. Pigment analysis

Sucrose-density-gradient bands containing trimeric LHCIIb were analyzed for their pigment contents by HPLC. The pigments were extracted with 2-butanol according to the method described in [28]. 10 μL 2-butanol extract was mixed with 20 μL 80% (w/v) aceton, applied to an RP-18 HPLC column (Chromolith SpeedROD, Merck, Darmstadt, Germany) in a HPLC and eluted by a gradient from 70%–100% (w/v) aceton. Flow rate 1.5 mL/min. The pigments were quantified as described in [25]. For comparison of mutant with WT, the pigment composition was calculated based on pigment per 2 lutein (Lut) level, assuming that each protein binds approximately 2 Lut molecules.

2.4. Partially denaturing polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (PAGE)

10% polyacrylamide gels were run in a running buffer containing 12 mM TRIS, 0.15% (w/v) Deriphat (Henkel, Amerla, PA, USA) and 48 mM glycine.

2.5. Circular (CD) and linear dichroism (LD) measurements

CD and LD spectra were recorded with a modified CD dichrograph (Jobin-Yvon, France) that contained an additional modulator board optimized for LD measurements. The spectra were plotted normalized to the maximal amplitude in the red region. For LD measurements the samples were embedded in polyacrylamide gel, containing 5% acrylamide:bis-acrylamide (30:1), polymerized with 0.2% ammonium persulfate and 0.2% N,N,N’,N’-tetramethylethylenediamine, and aligned by two-dimensional squeezing [29]. For CD measurements, the optical path length was 1 cm and the Chl content was adjusted to 10 μg/mL.

2.6. Absorption spectra

Absorption spectra were measured with a UV-1601 spectrophotometer (Shimadzu, Japan) at room temperature.

2.7. pH treatment

In order to check how the conformations of the WT LHCIIb and its different mutants change in media with different pHs, the CD spectra of WT and mutant LHCIIb species measured at low pH (pH 5.4) were compared with those at neutral pH (pH 7.5). For this purpose, the eluates of the Ni2+-chelating sepharose column were loaded onto a sucrose density gradient (∼0.1–1 M sucrose, 0.1% (w/v) DM, and 20 mM phosphate buffer (pH 5.4 or 7.5, respectively)). The complexes were centrifuged at 485,000 g (SW-60 rotor, Beckman, Palo Alto, CA) for 17 h
at 4 °C. The bands corresponding to LHCIIb trimers were collected and pigment stoichiometries and the CD spectra were measured.

2.8. Heat treatment

The sucrose-density-gradient solution containing trimeric LHCIIb, either in presence or in the absence of MgCl₂, was incubated for 30 min at different temperatures (40, 50, 55 and 60 °C) and then used for PAGE and CD measurements.

2.9. Molecular dynamics simulations

The molecular dynamics (MD) simulations were performed using the GROMACS package version 3.2.1 [30,31] with the GROMOS96 force field [32,33]. The original structure of luminal loop (A86–I124) in LHCIIb was extracted from the crystal structure (PDB code, 1RWT). MD simulations were performed on two models, the luminal loop of the WT LHCIIb and its E94G mutant. Both models were protonized before MD simulation to reflect the acidic environment. Afterwards, the models were solvated with the simple point charge water model [34]. To maintain the systems at a constant temperature of 300 K, the Berendsen thermostat [35] was applied using a coupling time of 0.1 ps. The pressure was maintained by coupling to a reference pressure of 1 bar. A coupling time of 1.0 ps was used for the simulations in bulk water. The values of the isothermal compressibility were set to 4.5 × 10⁻⁵ bar⁻¹ for water simulations. All bond lengths including hydrogen atoms were constrained by the LINCS algorithm [36]. Electrostatic interactions between charge groups at a distance less than 9 Å were calculated explicitly; long-range electrostatic interactions were calculated using the particle-mesh Ewald method [37] with a grid width of 1.2 Å and a fourth-order spline interpolation. A cutoff distance of 10 Å was applied for the Van der Waals interactions. The simulation cell in both systems was a rectangular periodic box; the minimum distance between the protein and the box walls was set to more than 20 Å so that the protein does not directly interact with its own periodic image given the cutoff in every system. Numerical integration of the equations of motion used a time step of 2 fs with atomic coordinates saved every 10 ps for analysis. Four water molecules were replaced by four Cl⁻ ions to neutralize the simulation systems. The position restraints on two terminals of the simulated systems (A86 and I124) were used to approximate the movement of the terminal residues. Finally, two 9.7-ns MD simulations were performed on the two models.

3. Results

For LHCIIIs, the substitution of any one of the three negatively charged amino acids, E94, E107 and D111, with non-charged amino acids, G, V and V, respectively, did not significantly influence the ability of the proteins to fold into functional monomeric or trimeric complexes, and like the WT proteins, all the mutants were capable of binding pigments in vitro.

3.1. Pigment stoichiometries of LHCIIb mutant

As shown in Table 1, the WT LHCIIb bound, on average, 6.8 Chl a, 5.6 Chl b and nearly one Neo per 2 Luts. Since it is difficult to separate the reconstituted LHCII complexes from the non-pigmented apoprotein, we estimated the pigment stoichiometries based on the assumption that each LHCIIb monomer binds 2 Luts [19], which are obligatory for maintaining a stable complex. In this way, the pigment stoichiometries could be compared between WT and the mutated LHCIIb complexes. It has been demonstrated via detailed spectroscopic and biochemical analyses that the properties of recombinant LHCIIb, including the orientation of pigments, the excitonic interaction between chromophores, organization and folding of the reconstituted complexes are all similar to “native” LHCIIb although the recombinant complexes may contain fewer Chls [38].

Interestingly, pigment binding and stoichiometry were noticeably affected by the mutations of negatively charged amino acids in the luminal loop, although the pigment binding sites are distant from the mutated positions. In particular, the mutations not only influenced the Neo binding, but also altered the Chl stoichiometries of LHCIIb. E107V contained only half of the Neo found in the WT LHCIIb and E94G about three fourths. D111V bound almost as much Neo as the WT. Notably, in comparison to the reconstituted WT, the mutations in D111 and E107 caused the complexes to bind more Chls: the former bound nearly two more Chls (1 Chl b and 1 Chl a), and the latter nearly one more Chl a. The apparent increase in Chl binding in the mutants, discussed further below, is not likely to be caused by some loss of Lut because no corresponding increase was observed (not shown) of other carotenoids that can replace Lut [39]. We can only measure about 0.1 violaxanthin in each monomer, because it is a loosely bound pigment in LHCIIb, which can be removed by very mild detergents [40]. No significant difference in violaxanthin binding was detected, either between the WT and the mutants, or under different pH conditions.

3.2. Absorption spectra

The absorption spectra of the different LHCIIb mutant complexes, normalized to the Chl a absorption maxima in the Qy region, are presented in Fig. 1. The main absorption maximum of the
reconstituted WT LHCIIb in the red region was found at 674 nm (Chl $a$ absorption) with a shoulder at 651 nm (Chl $b$ absorption). The Chl $b$ absorption at 651 nm in E107V was decreased, relative to the principal absorbance band at 674 nm (Fig. 1, dashed line), which is in accordance with the alterations in the Chl $a/b$ ratio (Table 1). Of note, the absorption spectrum of E107V in the red region resembled that of Neo-deficient LHCII [41,42].

The mutations more significantly influenced the absorption of the complexes in the Soret region (440–520 nm). The absorption bands of the mutant LHCIIbs were narrower than those in the WT complexes. The difference spectrum (Fig. 1B) shows a decrease in the absorption at 488 nm of E107V, which presumably is due to the loss of Neo [41,42].

### 3.3. Linear dichroism spectra

In order to investigate how the mutations influence the orientation of the absorption transition dipole moments of the pigment molecules, we measured LD spectra of different LHCIIb mutants and compared it with the WT. The LD spectra of the WT and the E107V mutant, normalized to the LD maximum in the red, are presented in Fig. 2. The LD spectrum of WT in the red region is characterized by a positive peak at 679 nm and a small shoulder at 647 nm. The main characteristics of the LD spectrum of the WT LHCIIb are in good agreement with earlier reports [43] and, similarly to those data, can be correlated with the crystal structure [19]. It can be seen that the mutations did not affect the overall shape of the LD spectrum. Nevertheless, they induced minor but well discernible alterations in the spectra. In comparison to the WT complexes, the LD spectra of the mutants exhibited an increased amplitude of the 647 nm band. This effect was observed in all three mutants but to a lesser extent in E94G and D111V (not shown). The LD spectra of the mutant proteins compared with WT LHCIIb were different in the Soret region as well. E107V showed clear increase at 498 nm and a decrease at 484 nm compared to the WT LHCIIb, along with the decrease of some minor bands between 440 and 470 nm (Fig. 2B). In agreement with the data of Croce et al. [43], the decrease in the LD amplitude around 484 nm can be accounted for by the partial loss of Neo in E107V. Neo-deficiency, via changes in the orientation and/or absorbance of the respective dipoles, has also been shown to induce changes in the Chl $b$
region due to losses in Neo−Chl b interactions [41]. Hence, these changes in the red and additional variations between about 440 and 470 nm and around 495 nm indicate conformational changes in the Neo-domain in E107V, which at least in part can be accounted for by a partial loss of Neo.

3.4. Circular dichroism spectra

In order to investigate the influence of the negatively charged amino acids in the lumenal region on the structural organization of LHClb and the pigment–pigment interactions in LHClb, CD spectra of the mutants were compared with the WT LHClb, and also to LHClb reconstituted without Neo [44]. Fig. 3 shows the CD spectra of WT and mutant LHClb monomers (Fig. 3A, B) and trimers (Fig. 3C, D), normalized to the (~)679 nm band. The CD spectrum of the WT LHClb monomers exhibits negative bands at 491, 650 and 679 nm and a weak band at 473 nm. The CD spectrum of the trimers was similar to the monomer spectrum except for the larger amplitude of the (~)473 nm band, which is specific for trimeric complexes [45]. A shoulder at 640 nm also appeared, though it was not always clearly visible. The CD spectra of all three mutants were markedly different from that of the WT, especially in the Soret region. The ratio of the amplitudes of the negative CD bands at (~)473 nm and (~)493 nm (CD473/CD493 signal) increased to different extents in different mutants, both in the monomers and the trimers. Hobe et al [44] have shown that the CD473/CD493 signal is negatively correlated with the amount of bound Neo in the complexes. In our experiment, this ratio in different mutants presented an order of E107V > E94G > D111V. In agreement with the finding of Hobe et al., the mutant with the lowest Neo content (E107V) had the highest CD473/CD493 signal (CD473/CD493 = 2.2). However, the ratio was substantially higher in D111V than in the WT (CD473/CD493 = 1.56 in D111V vs 0.75 in WT), although the content of Neo in D111V was not reduced compared with the WT (Table 1). This result is similar to observation of Liu et al [20].

Besides the changes in the amplitude of the (~)473 nm band, the trimmer specific negative band at 640 nm [45] became more dominant in the Chl b region in the mutants, eminently in E107V and D111V. In E107V, the (~)493 nm band was shifted to 498 nm both in the trimers and the monomers while in D111V a new band appeared at 498 nm.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of LHClb</th>
<th>Neo a</th>
<th>Chl a</th>
<th>Chl b</th>
<th>Chl a/Chl b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WT</td>
<td>0.92±0.02 b</td>
<td>7.39±0.19</td>
<td>6.13±0.23</td>
<td>1.21±0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E94G</td>
<td>0.79±0.01</td>
<td>7.21±0.12</td>
<td>6.20±0.18</td>
<td>1.16±0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E107V</td>
<td>0.37±0.02</td>
<td>7.41±0.41</td>
<td>5.80±0.34</td>
<td>1.28±0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D111V</td>
<td>0.82±0.01</td>
<td>7.38±0.01</td>
<td>6.19±0.02</td>
<td>1.19±0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a mol pigments per 2 mol Lut.
b Mean±SD from 4–6 independent experiments.

The same phenomenon appeared also in the Neo-deficient LHClb observed by Hobe et al. [44].

3.5. pH-dependent conformational changes

Since negatively charged amino acids in the lumenal loop are potential targets for protonation during lumen acidification, it is of special interest to study the conformation of different LHC IIb mutants at neutral and acidic pH. Different recombinant LHClb species were ultracentrifuged overnight in near-neutral (pH 7.5) and acidic (pH 5.4) media. From the partially denaturing PAGE results, we can see that none of the LHClb mutants showed significant dissociation after the ultracentrifugation at low pH (Fig. 4). Pigment stoichiometries and CD spectra were also measured using the sucrose gradient band corresponding to trimers. Table 2 presents the pigment stoichiometries after the low pH treatment. From a comparison of these data with Table 1, we can see that there are no significant changes in pigment compositions upon lowering the pH.

Fig. 5 presents the CD spectra of WT and different LHC IIb mutations at neutral and acidic pH. The CD spectra of WT, D111V and E107V showed only minor changes after the low pH treatment. In contrast, E94G exhibited a strong increase in the amplitude of the (~)473 nm CD band, despite the fact that there was not major loss in Neo (Table 2). Hence, it appears that the E94 residue is important in maintaining the conformation for LHClb at different pHs.

4. Discussion

4.1. Stability of LHClb trimers is not affected by the mutations of negatively charged amino acids in the lumenal loop

It has been shown earlier that exchanging one of the negatively charged amino acids in the lumen loop did not hamper the ability of the apoproteins to bind pigments and be reconstituted to functionally active complexes [22]. We also found that the thermal stability of the
trimmers, monitored by CD in the visible range, was not at all affected by the mutations of the negatively charged amino acids of the lumenal loop, neither in the presence nor in the absence of MgCl₂ (not shown), showing that these residues and Mg²⁺ ions which might be bound at these sites do not play stabilizing role in trimers. Earlier observations showed that the monomeric pigment–protein complexes of the same mutant proteins exhibited a lower thermal stability than the WT [22].

4.2. The negatively charged amino acids in the lumenal loop are important for pigment binding and conformation

We found that exchanging any of the negatively charged amino acids in the lumenal loop altered the pigment stoichiometry of the reconstituted complexes (Table 1), despite the fact that these residues are distant from the pigment ligands [19]. One evident effect is that two mutants (D111V and E107V) bound more Chls (Table 1) than the WT. This is not likely to be due to a partial loss of Lut, because we have not observed the corresponding increase of other carotenoids that can replace Lut [39]. It should also be noted that the recombinant LHClIb studied here was isolated under sufficiently stringent conditions that less than the full complement of Chl molecules was bound per 2 Lut, presumably some of the less tightly bound Chls were dissociated during the isolation procedure. Consequently, the increased Chl/Lut ratio in the mutants may be due to slightly higher affinities of one or several more labile Chl binding sites.

Spectroscopic data in this study revealed that the orientation and dipole–dipole interactions of the transition moments of some pigments in the mutants were changed as well. Since the lumenal loop connects helices B and C, it seems plausible that pigments localized within the scaffold created by these two helices are primarily affected. According to the crystal structure of LHClIb, this domain contains five of the six Chl b molecules, one Chl a and the carotenoid Neo (Fig. 6). Changes in the conformation of the lumenal loop may affect those pigments that form direct interactions with the amino acids inside the loop, e.g. the Neo, Chl a604, and Chl a605, which form hydrogen bonds with Y112, L113 and V119, respectively.

The most striking effect on pigment binding is the loss of Neo, especially by the mutant E107V, in which the amount of Neo was reduced by half. It is surprising that the mutation in E107V influenced the Neo binding and Chl conformation so strongly despite the fact that it is the outermost of the three negatively charged amino acids (Fig. 6) and does not have any direct interaction with any pigment, according to the high resolution crystal structures [4,19]. E107 is located in the loop between helix E and the anti-parallel strands upstream of helix C. Because of its negative charge and the hydrophilic character, E107, together with the neighbouring amino acids (SEGG), forms a hydrophilic loop which extrudes with its carboxylic acid group into the lumen. Exchanging E107 to V not only eliminates one negative charge but also changes the hydrophilic character in the region. This may influence the orientation of Y112 which interacts with Neo via a hydrogen bond and then, in turn, alter the Neo conformation in the complexes and weaken the Neo binding.

The loss of Neo led to drastic changes in the Soret region of the CD spectra, particularly, the increase of the amplitude of the negative CD band at 473 nm, as reported by Hobe et al. for a reconstituted WT LHClIb lacking Neo [44]. However, the changes of the (~473 nm) CD band are not strictly correlated with the Neo content in our mutants (Fig. 3 and Table 1). Consequently, changes other than loss of Neo contribute to the altered CD signal in the Soret region. Indeed, based on theoretical analyses by Georgakopoulou et al. [46], it was concluded that the absence of Neo could be satisfactorily mimicked by omitting the Neo-related bands. In other terms, the removal of this xanthophyll per se caused no significant conformational changes in the protein. Further, according to the model of Georgakopoulou et al., not only the dipole–dipole interactions of the transition moment of Lut or Neo with Chls contribute to the CD signals in the Soret region but Chls b are also involved and interactions among the pigments in different monomeric subunits play a key role in the CD~473/CD~403 signal. Based on these data, it is plausible to propose that the mutation in the lumenal loop caused changes in the conformation of the Neo-domain. It could also be seen that the conformational changes already occurred in the monomeric complexes, as revealed by changes in the CD spectra, especially at (~473 nm) of the different monomeric LHClIb mutants (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Representation of the helices B/C domain of LHClIb and the connecting lumenal loop based on the crystal structure of Liu et al. [19]. The Chls are represented only with their porphyrin (in green) and labelled according to the nomenclature of Liu et al. [19]. The negatively charged residues in the lumenal loop (E94, E107, D111) are shown in red, and their ion-pair counterparts (Q103, H120) are shown in blue. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

![Image of the helices B/C domain of LHClIb and the connecting lumenal loop](image-url)

Fig. 7. The comparison of the conformation at the 0 ns and 9 ns in the MD simulation of the lumenal loop in WT LHClIb and its E94G mutant.
The negatively charged amino acid E94 plays an important role in maintaining the secondary structure of the luminal loop at low pH

The importance of residue E94 in maintaining the structure of the luminal loop could be addressed by MD simulations on the WT luminal loop of LHCIIb and its E94G mutant. The comparison of root-mean-square deviations (RMSD) of the Cα atoms versus simulation time between the WT and E94G demonstrated that the conformations experienced dramatical change when residue E94 is mutated to G, as shown in Supplementary Fig. 1. The RMSD of hydrogen bonds with the residues S102, Q103, and S106 in the 310 helix, as shown in Supplementary Figs. 2A–D, would show that these residues will be more flexible after E94 was mutated into G. Consequently, the two loops on either side of the α-helix approach and interact with each other (Fig. 7 and Supplementary Fig. 3B), while in the WT, the 310 helix remained stable (Supplementary Fig. 3A), demonstrating the importance of this residue in keeping the secondary structure of the luminal loop.

Based on these data, we propose that the negatively charged amino acids in the luminal loop of LHCIIb play important structural roles in pigment binding and also in keeping a stable LHCIIb conformation under low pH conditions.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Marie Curie grant (MRTN-CT-2003-505069, to G. C.), the Hungarian Fund for Basic Research (OTKA K63252, to G. C.); the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Pa 324/5-3, to H.P.); the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 30470149, to C.Y.), and EMBO Short-term Fellowships (ASTF 190-04, to A.Z.K.). We wish to thank Drs. Huiliang Jiang for his support and advice in molecular dynamics simulations and for his critical reading of the manuscript; Drs. Roberta Croce and Jacques Breton for helpful discussion on LD spectra and Dr. Stephen Hobe for the helpful discussion on CD spectra.


