Structure of human DPPA3 bound to the UHRF1 PHD finger reveals its functional and structural differences from mouse DPPA3

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Abstract

DNA methylation maintenance is essential for cell fate inheritance. In differentiated cells, this involves the orchestrated actions of DNMT1 and UHRF1. In mice, high-affinity binding of DPPA3 to the UHRF1 PHD finger regulates UHRF1 chromatin dissociation and cytosolic localization, which is required for oocyte maturation and early embryo development. However, the human DPPA3 ortholog functions during these stages remain unclear. Here, we report the structural basis for human DPPA3 binding to the UHRF1 PHD finger. The conserved human DPPA3 ^{85}VRT^{87} motif binds to the acidic surface of UHRF1 PHD finger, whereas mouse DPPA3 binding additionally utilizes two unique α-helices. The binding affinity of human DPPA3 for the UHRF1 PHD finger was weaker than that of mouse DPPA3. Consequently, human DPPA3, unlike mouse DPPA3, failed to inhibit UHRF1 chromatin binding and DNA remethylation in *Xenopus egg* extracts effectively. Our data provide novel insights into the distinct function and structure of human DPPA3.

Introduction

DNA methylation, a cytosine methylation at the 5th carbon atom in a CpG sequence, is a major epigenetic mark that regulates diverse biological processes, including cell-type-specific gene expression, retrotransposon silencing, X-chromosome inactivation, genome imprinting, and carcinogenesis[1,2]. Once DNA methylation patterns are established during cell differentiation, they are faithfully inherited after each replication, to maintain cell identity[3,4]. DNMT1, a maintenance DNA methyltransferase, and UHRF1 (ubiquitin-like PHD and RING finger domain-containing protein 1, also known as Np95/ICBP90), a ubiquitin E3-ligase and recruiter of DNMT1, play pivotal roles in maintaining DNA methylation[5–8]. During this process, the UHRF1 SET- and RING-associated (SRA) domain specifically binds to hemi-methylated DNA[9–11], and UHRF1 ubiquitinates histone H3 or PAF15 (PCNA-associated factor 15) using a plant homeodomain (PHD) finger for recognition, and ubiquitin-like (UBL) and really interesting new gene (RING) domains for multiple mono-ubiquitination[12–17]. The ubiquitinated histone H3 and PAF15 recruit DNMT1 to the late- and early replicating domains, respectively[17–19], and stimulate the methyltransferase activity of DNMT1[14,20].

In addition to its well-established role in DNA methylation maintenance, UHRF1 has emerged as a factor in oocyte and preimplantation embryo development[21–23]. A maternal factor, developmental pluripotency-associated 3, (DPPA3) also known as Stella/PGC7 has been identified in mice as a strict inhibitor of chromatin binding of UHRF1 and regulation of its cytosolic localization, in cooperation with exportin-1[24–26]. Expression of mouse DPPA3 (mDPPA3), an intrinsically disordered protein, is restricted to primordial germ cells, oocytes, and preimplantation embryos[24,27,28]. mDPPA3 plays an important role in the formation of oocyte-specific DNA methylation patterns by preventing excessive *de novo* DNA methylation mediated by UHRF1[24]. Using nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) solution structural analysis of mouse the UHRF1 PHD finger (mPHD) bound to mDPPA3, we recently revealed that the C-terminal region of mDPPA3 binds to mPHD utilizing a VRT motif at residues 88–90: ^{88}VRT^{90},

which is conserved in the motifs of other binding partners, histone H3 ^{1}ART^{3} and PAF15 ^{1}VRT^{3} with two subsequent α-helices unique to mDPPA3 (Figure 2b)[29]. Owing to this multifaceted interaction, the binding affinity of mDPPA3 to mPHD (K_D of 0.0277 μM) is significant stronger than those of histone H3 and PAF15 (K_D of 1.59 μM and 3.52 μM, respectively), indicating that the mechanism by which mDPPA3 inhibits chromatin-binding of UHRF1 involves the competitive binding of between mDPPA3 and histone H3/PAF15 to UHRF1[29].

The biological functions of mDPPA3 as a demethylation factor and UHRF1-inihibitor in oocyte and preimplantation embryos have been extensively studied in mouse models. A recent report has shown that UHRF1 is enriched in the cytoplasmic lattices of human oocytes[30]. However, it is unclear if the biological function of mDPPA3 is conserved in human DPPA3 (hDPPA3), and its role in human oocytes and preimplantation embryos is unknown. Two α-helices in mDPPA3 which are induced upon binding to mPHD has been shown to be required for the interaction with mUHRF1[29]. However, the amino acid sequences corresponding to these helices are poorly conserved between human and mouse DPPA3 (Figure 1b), which raises a question of whether hDPPA3 also binds to hUHRF1 PHD finger in a manner similar to their mouse counterparts, and whether hDPPA3 can inhibit chromatin binding of UHRF1.

In this study, we determined the crystal structure of the human UHRF1 PHD finger complexed with the C-terminal hDPPA3 fragment. The structure clearly showed that the binding mode of hDPPA3 to the human UHRF1 PHD finger differs markedly from that of the mouse proteins and explains why hDPPA3 binds to the human UHRF1 PHD finger with low binding affinity, comparable to the binding of histone H3 and PAF15. Biochemical assays using *Xenopus* egg extracts demonstrated that the inhibitory effect of hDPPA3 on chromatin-binding of UHRF1 is relatively modest as compared to the strong inhibition by mouse DPPA3. Our findings shed light on the unexpected role of hDPPA3 in epigenetic regulation during early embryonic development, which differs from the evidence in mice.

RESULTS

Interaction between hDPPA3 and hUHRF1 PHD finger

Our previous NMR structural analysis of mDPPA3 complexed with mUHRF1 PHD (mPHD) revealed that residues 85–118 of mDPPA3 are essential for its interaction with mPHD (Figure 1b and 2b)[29]. Thus, we identified the corresponding region of hDPPA3 by sequence alignment (residues 81-118 [$hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$] (Figure 1a and 1b), and evaluated whether this region binds to the human UHRF1 PHD finger, residues 299–366 (hPHD). Isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC) demonstrated that $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ could bind to hPHD with a K_d of 0.868 μM (Figure 1c), which is approximately 30-fold weaker than the binding affinity between mDPPA3 and mPHD (K_d = 0.0277 μM)[29]. The binding affinity of hDPPA3 to $hPHD_{81\text{-}118}$ is comparable with the previously reported binding affinity between hPHD and the histone H3 N-terminal tail (residues 1–15; K_D = 1.7 μM) or PAF15 (residues 1–10; K_D = 2.2 μM)[17,31]. To investigate the interactions further at an atomic resolution, we performed NMR titration experiments. We successfully assigned ^{1}H-^{15}N heteronuclear single quantum coherence (HSQC) spectra to [^{15}N]-hPHD in the free and complex states with non-labeled $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ (Supplementary Figure 1a). The ^{1}H-^{15}N HSQC spectra of [^{15}N]-hPHD titrated with non-labeled $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ showed that the HSQC signals shifted in the intermediate exchange regime on a chemical shift timescale, supporting the modestly weak interaction between $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ and hPHD (Figure 1d). These data indicated that the binding of hDPPA3 to hPHD was not significantly stronger than that of the other binding partners, histone H3 and PAF15. Chemical shift differences (CSD) between the free and complexed states showed relatively large values for Asp330, Met332, Asp337, Glu355, and Asp356, suggesting the contribution of the main chain of these amino acid residues to the hPHD–hDPPA3 interaction (Supplementary Figure 1b).

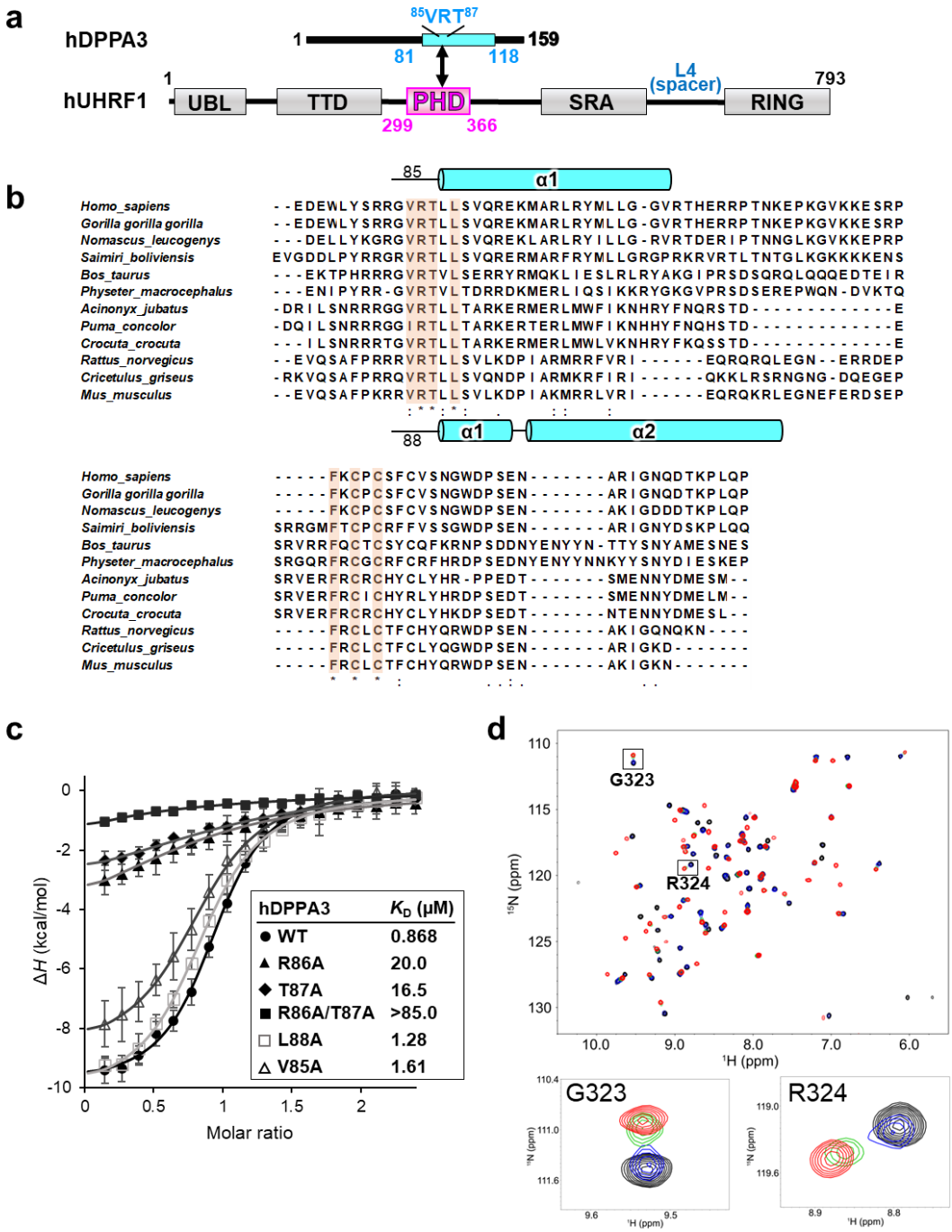


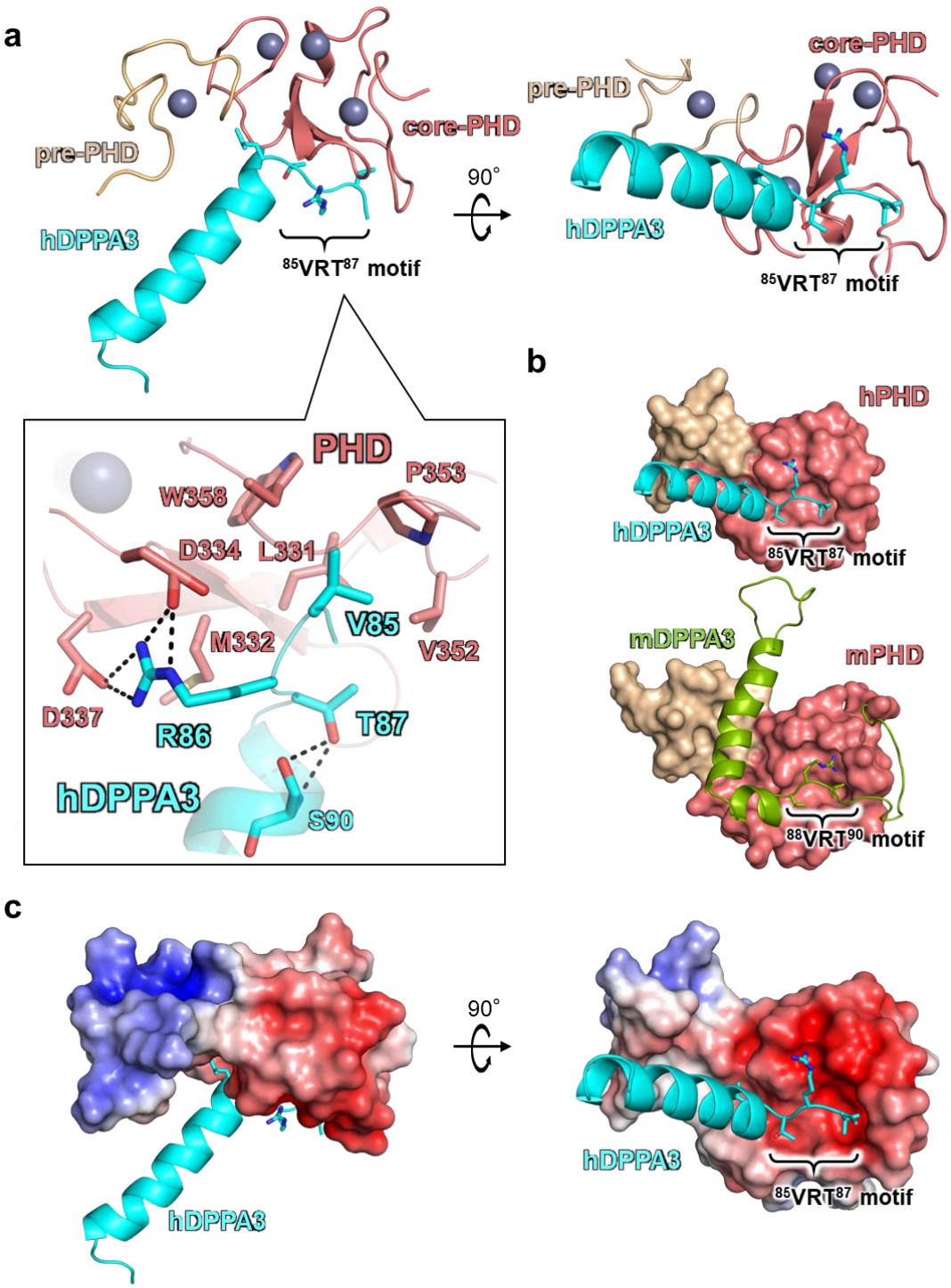
Figure 1: Characterization of the interaction between mUHRF1 and mDPPA3. **(a)** Schematic of the domain composition of human UHRF1 and DPPA3. **(b)** Amino acid sequence alignment of C-terminal part of DPPA3. Secondary structures of mouse and human DPPA3 are indicated based on PDB:7XGA and analysis of this study, respectively. **(c)** Isothermal titration calorimetry measurements for hPHD and wild-type (WT)/mutants of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$. Superimposition of enthalpy change plots with standard deviations. Data were presented as mean values for n = 3. **(d)** Overlay of ^{1}H-^{15}N heteronuclear single quantum coherence (HSQC) spectra of 30 μM mPHD showing chemical shift changes upon titration with hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ of 0 μM (black), 15 μM (blue), 30 μM (green), and 60 μM (red). Square regions inside the HSQC spectra were expanded (lower panels).

Crystal structure of hDPPA3 bound to hPHD

To reveal the molecular basis for the mode of binding of hDPPA3 to hPHD, we determined the crystal structure of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ in complex with hPHD at a 2.4 Å resolution (Table 1). The asymmetric unit contained one hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex, and a $2|F_o|-|F_c|$ map corresponding to residues 299–363 of hPHD and residues 84–107 of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ was unambiguously observed (Supplementary Figure 2a). hPHD consists of pre- and core-PHD domains that include three zinc finger motifs (Figure 2a)[31]. The structure of the hPHD moiety in the complex with hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ was well-superimposed on apo-hPHD (PDB:3SOX, root mean square deviation [RMSD] of Cα atoms with 0.848 Å) and those in the complex with histone H3 (PDB:3ASL, RMSD: 0.795 Å) and PAF15 (PDB:6IIW, RMSD: 0.397 Å), implying that the binding of hDPPA3 does not undergo conformational changes in hPHD (Supplementary Figure 2b).

In contrast to the hPHD moiety, the binding mode of hDPPA3 shares both similarities and dissimilarities with that of mDPPA3 (Figure 2a, 2b). The conserved VRT motif at residues 85–87 of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ is accommodated in the acidic surface of the hPHD, the binding site for ^{1}ART^{3} of histone H3, and ^{1}VRT^{3} of PAF15, in a manner concordant with the motif in mDPPA3 (^{88}VRT^{90}) (Figure 2b). The side chain of Val85–hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ forms a hydrophobic interaction with Leu331, Val352, Pro353, and Trp358 in hPHD (Figure 2a). The positively charged guanidino group in Arg86 of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ forms hydrogen bonds with the side chains of Asp334 and Asp337 of hPHD (Figure 2a and 2c). The side chain methyl and hydroxyl groups of Thr87 in hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ forms hydrophobic interactions with Leu331 and Val352 of hPHD and hydrogen bonds with the main chain amide of Ser90 of hDPPA3 (Figure 2a). The latter interaction potentially functions as a helical cap for the N-terminus of the following α-helix (Figure 2a). Leu88 of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ is surrounded by the side chains of Ala317, Gln330, Met332, and Ala339 in hPHD, in which the side chain of Met332 functions as a separation between the side chains of Arg86 and Leu88 of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ (Figure 2a).

When mPHD binds to mDPPA3, two α-helices following the VRT motif of mDPPA3 form an L-like shape, in which the long α-helix binds to the shallow groove between the pre- and core-PHD fingers (Figure 2b). However, the C-terminus of the ^{85}VRT^{87} motif of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ forms a unique conformation that differed from that of mDPPA3. Residues 88–101 of hDPPA3 forms a four-turn single α-helix, which is not kinked and markedly differs from mDPPA3 complexed with mPHD (Figure 2a and 2b). The contact area between hPHD and hDPPA3 (ca. 449 Å^2) was smaller than that of the mouse protein (ca. 1360 Å^2)[32], which was concordant with the weaker dissociation constant of the human proteins.



155 **Figure 2: Crystal structure of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ in complex with hPHD**

156 **(a)** Overall structure of hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex. Pre-PHD, core-PHD and hDPPA3 are
157 depicted as gold, salmon, and cyan cartoon models, respectively. The conserved VRT motif in
158 hDPPA3 is displayed as a stick model. Inset shows the interaction between the VRT motif of
159 hDPPA3 and hPHD. The black dotted line represents a hydrogen bond. **(b)** Structural
160 comparison of mPHD:mDPPA3 (PDB: 7XGA) and hPHD:hDPPA3 complex. Two α-helices
161 in mDPPA3 are shown as a green cartoon model. **(c)** Electrostatic surface potential of hPHD

calculated with program APBS[33]. The red and blue surface colors represent negative and positive charges, respectively. hPPA3 is depicted as a cyan cartoon.

Table 1. Data collection and refinement statistics

	hPHD:hDPPA3 (PDB:8WMS)
Data collection	
Space group	*I*4$_1$22
Cell dimensions	
a, *b*, *c* (Å)	77.80 77.80 140.67
Resolution (Å)	43.33-2.40 (2.49-2.40) *
R_{meas} (%)	7.0 (53.7) *
R_{pim} (%)	2.6 (21.0) *
Mean ($I/\sigma(I)$)	12.5 (2.5) *
$CC_{1/2}$	99.9 (89.6) *
Completeness (%)	99.7 (99.6) *
Redundancy	5.4 (5.7) *
Total reflections	47,813 (5,172) *
Unique reflections	8,775 (903) *
Refinement	
Resolution (Å)	43.33-2.40
No. reflections	8,693
R_{work} / R_{free} (%)	23.3 / 26.6
No. atoms	
hPHD	514
hDPPA3	190
zinc	4
B factors (Å^2)	
hPHD	79.9
hDPPA3	83.5
zinc	67.6
R.m.s. deviations	
Bond lengths (Å)	0.004
Bond angles (°)	0.803

* ( ) Values in parentheses are for the highest-resolution shell.

Structural feature of hPHD:hDPPA3 in solution

Intriguingly, the α-helix of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ has no contact with the hPHD moiety in the crystal (Figure 2a and 2c). Instead, the α-helix interacts with the corresponding part of a symmetry molecule related with a crystallographic two-fold axis (Supplementary Figure 2c). This interaction in the crystal gives rise to two possibilities: the helical structure formation of hDPPA3 is an artifact of crystal packing, or the hPHD:hDPPA3 complex forms a dimer structure via the interaction mediating the α-helix of hDPPA3.

Next, we examined the structure of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ in solution by using circular dichroism (CD) and size-exclusion chromatography in line with small angle X-ray scattering (SEC-SAXS) (Supplementary Figure 3a–c, Supplementary Table 1). The CD spectrum exhibited that hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ alone showed a typical random-coil spectrum (Figure 3a). The CD spectrum of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ mixed with hPHD showed a negative peak at 222 nm, which was lower than the sum of the spectra of hPHD and hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ alone (Figure 3a), indicating that the binding of hDPPA3 to hPHD involves a coupled folding and binding mechanism. The SEC-SAXS data also supported the coupled folding and binding mode of hDPPA3. The dimensionless Kratky plot showed the unfolding state of sole hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$, whereas the hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex took on a globular state (Figure 3b).

SEC-SAXS experiments also revealed that the molecular mass of the measured proteins estimated by the empirical volume of correlation Vc[34], resulting in a 13.0 kDa hPHD:hDDPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex, which was highly similar to the molecular weight calculated from the amino acid sequence of the hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex with a 1:1 stoichiometry (12.2 kDa) (Supplementary Table 1). An *ab initio* model of the measured proteins showed clearer results. The overall shape of the bead model was well superimposed on the crystal structure of the hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex in the asymmetric unit (Figure 3c, 3d). These data indicated that hDPPA3 binds to hPHD at a 1:1 stoichiometry with induction of a four-turn single α-helix.

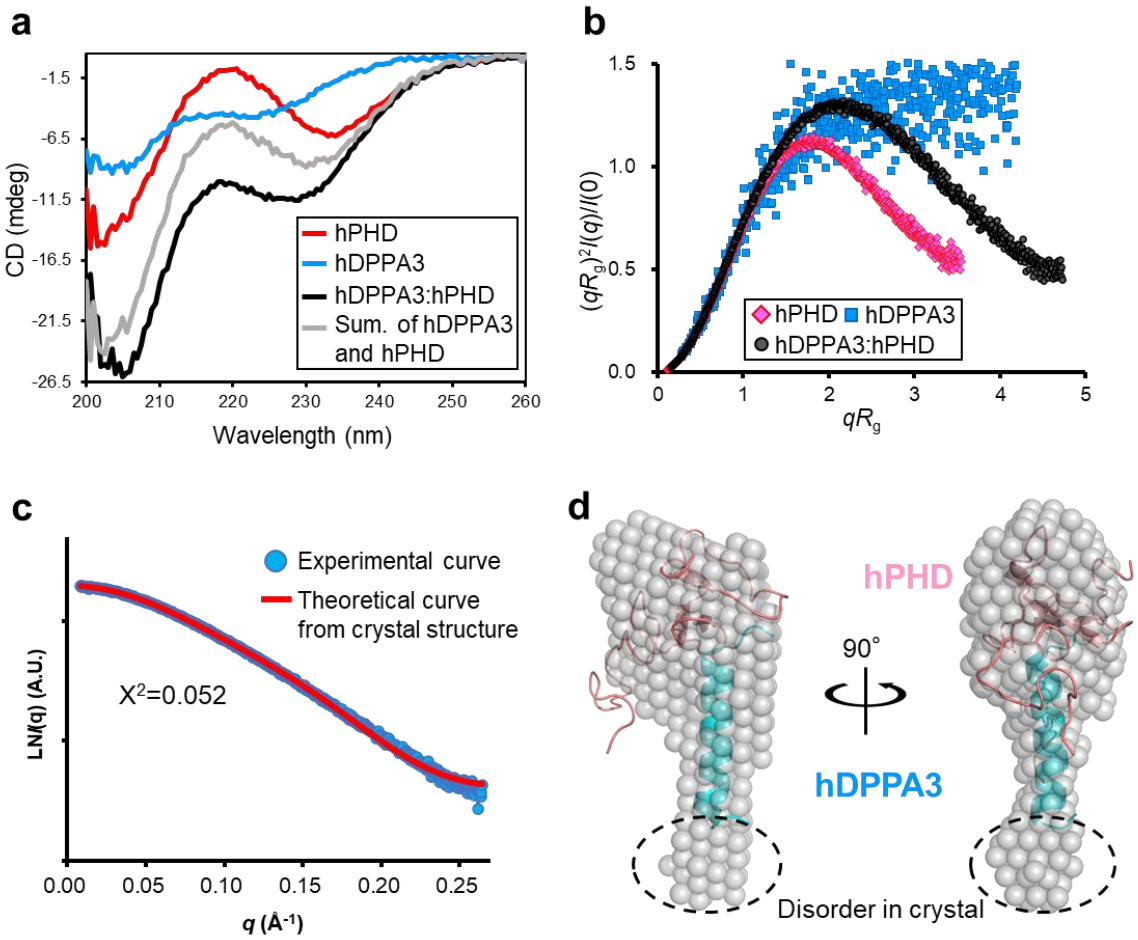


Figure 3: Solution structure of hDPPA3

(a) CD spectra of hPHD alone (red), hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ alone (blue), and the hPHD in complex with hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ (black). The sum of CD spectra of hPHD alone and hPDDA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ alone is shown as gray. **(b)** Dimensionless Kratky plots of hPHD alone (red diamond), hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ alone (blue square), and hPHD in complex with hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ (black circle) derived from small-angle X-ray scattering (SAXS) data. **(c)** Structural comparison of solution and crystal structures of the hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex. Left shows the comparison of scattering curves derived from experimental data and the crystal structure of the hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex. Right shows the *ab initio* bead model of the hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ complex derived from the SAXS scattering data. A low-resolution bead model (transparent gray sphere) is superimposed on the crystal structure (cartoon).

Validation of the structural data by mutational analysis

To validate our structural data and confirm the contributions of individual residues to complex formation, ITC experiments were conducted using hPHD and hDPPA3 harboring mutations in the VRT sequence. The mutations with the deleterious effects on the interaction were R86A and T87A of hDPPA3, which reduced the dissociation constant to 20.0 and 16.5 μM, respectively, and the double mutation (R86A/T87A), which resulted in a more severe reduction in the interaction, with a K_D exceeding 85.0 μM (Figure 1c). In contrast, alanine mutations at Val85 and Leu88 of hDPPA3 had less marked effects on the hPHD:hDPPA3 interaction (Figure 1c).

Next, mutations were introduced into hPHD. Concordant with the hDPPA3 mutants, D334A/D337A mutations in hPHD, which form an ionic-pair with Arg86 of hDPPA3, had a severe effect, reducing the binding affinity to a K_D exceeding 115 μM. The M332A hPHD mutation showed a decreased binding affinity, with a K_D of 8.07 μM (Supplementary Figure 4a). ITC data based on mutant proteins indicated that the VRT motif of hDPPA3 is important for its interaction with the UHRF1 hPHD finger.

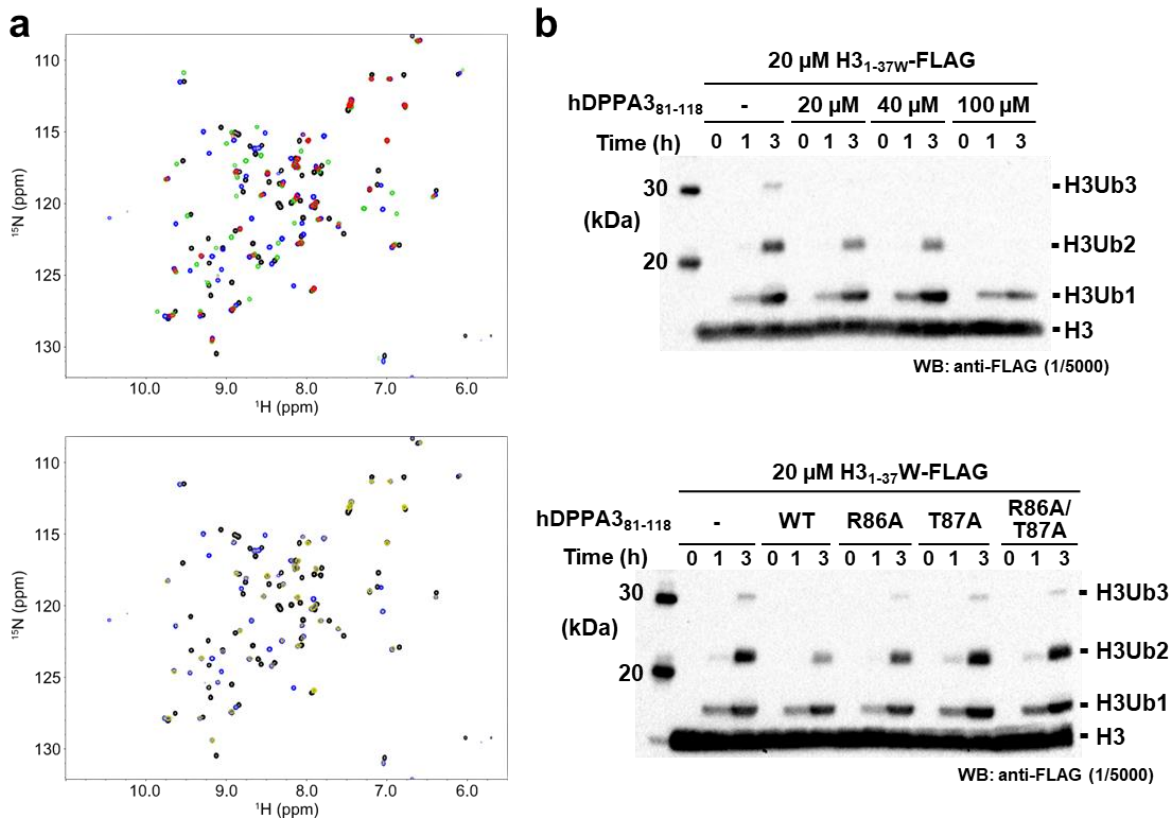


Figure 4: Competitive assay between hDPPA3 and the histone H3 tail.

(a) Overlay of ^{1}H-^{15}N HSQC spectra of ^{15}N-labeled hPHD in the presence of hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ and/or the H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide at a molar ratio of 1:0:0 (black), 1:2:0 (green), 1:0:2 (blue), and 1:2:2 (red) of hPHD:hDPPA3:H3 (upper), and of 1:0:0 (black), 1:0:2 (blue), and 1:2:8 (yellow) of hPHD:hDPPA3:H3 (lower). **(b)** *In vitro* ubiquitination assay. C-terminal FLAG tagged-H3$_{1–37W}$ was ubiquitinated using in-house purified E1, E2, and human UHRF1 (E3). The ubiquitinated H3 was detected using anti-FLAG antibody. Upper panel shows that 20, 40, and 100 μM hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ was added to the reaction solution including 20 μM of H3$_{1–37W}$. The lower panel presents results of an in vitro ubiquitination assay using mutants of hDPPA3$_{81-118}$. The gel image is representative of n = 3 independent experiments.

Effect of hDPPA3 on UHRF1 function

Next, to analyze whether hDPPA3 affects the biological functions of UHRF1, ubiquitination of histone H3, and chromatin binding, we performed NMR titration assays and *in vitro* biochemical experiments using recombinant proteins and *Xenopus* egg extracts. First, we examined the competitive binding of hDPPA3 and histone H3 to hPHD because both hDPPA3 and histone H3 mainly bind to the acidic surface of hPHD via the ^{85}VRT^{87} and ^{1}ART^{3} motifs, respectively. We conducted NMR titration experiments using ^{1}H-^{15}N labeled hPHD and non-labeled hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ and/or histone H3 peptides (residues 1–37W; the H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide). The HSQC spectrum of hPHD mixed with hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ and the H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide (hPHD:hDPPA3:H3 = 1:2:2) showed most of signals, with weakened or no intensity by the broadening due to chemical exchange, suggesting that, as expected, hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ and the H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide competitively bound to the acidic surface of hPHD as the shared binding site (Figure 4a, upper). In the presence of excess H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide (hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81-118}$:H3 = 1:2:8), hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ could not bind to hPHD (Figure 4a, lower). This differed from the situation with mDPPA3, which bound to mPHD even in the presence of excess H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide (mPHD:mDPPA3:H3 = 1:2:8)[29]. An *in vitro* ubiquitination assay of C-terminal FLAG-tagged H3$_{1-37W}$ with human full-length UHRF1 also supported the weak inhibitory effect of hDPPA3. hDPPA3 did not effectively inhibit ubiquitination of the histone H3 tail, whereas mDPPA3 showed a markedly negative effect on ubiquitination (Supplementary Figure 4b). The addition of hDPPA3 to a 1–2 equimolar excess of histone H3 only slightly inhibited histone H3 ubiquitination (Figure 4b). Mutant forms of hDPPA3, which exhibited decreased binding to hPHD, failed to inhibit the ubiquitination of histone H3 (Figure 4b). These findings indicate that the binding of hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ to UHRF1 inhibits the ubiquitination activity of UHRF1 on histone H3; however, the inhibitory effect was moderately weak due to the low binding affinity between hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ and UHRF1.

Finally, we tested the ability of hDPPA3 to inhibit UHRF1 chromatin binding in *Xenopus* egg

extracts (Figure 5a). As we previously reported, the addition of 0.5 μM recombinant mDPPA3 to interphase extracts was sufficient to block UHRF1 chromatin loading, UHRF1-dependent PAF15 ubiquitylation, and DNMT1 recruitment (Figure 5b). In contrast, hDPPA3 did not inhibit chromatin binding of UHRF1 and DNMT1 recruitment, even at 1.0 μM (Figure 5b). Consistently, hDPPA3 did not show significant inhibitory activity on DNA methylation in *Xenopus* egg extracts as compared to mDPPA3 (Figure 5c).

Taken together, the binding of hDPPA3 to hUHRF1 PHD competes with that of histone H3. However, it is noteworthy that the inhibitory effect exerted by hDPPA3 was relatively modest, implying that hDPPA3 does not appear to function as a strong inhibitor of UHRF1 chromatin binding, unlike mouse DPPA3.

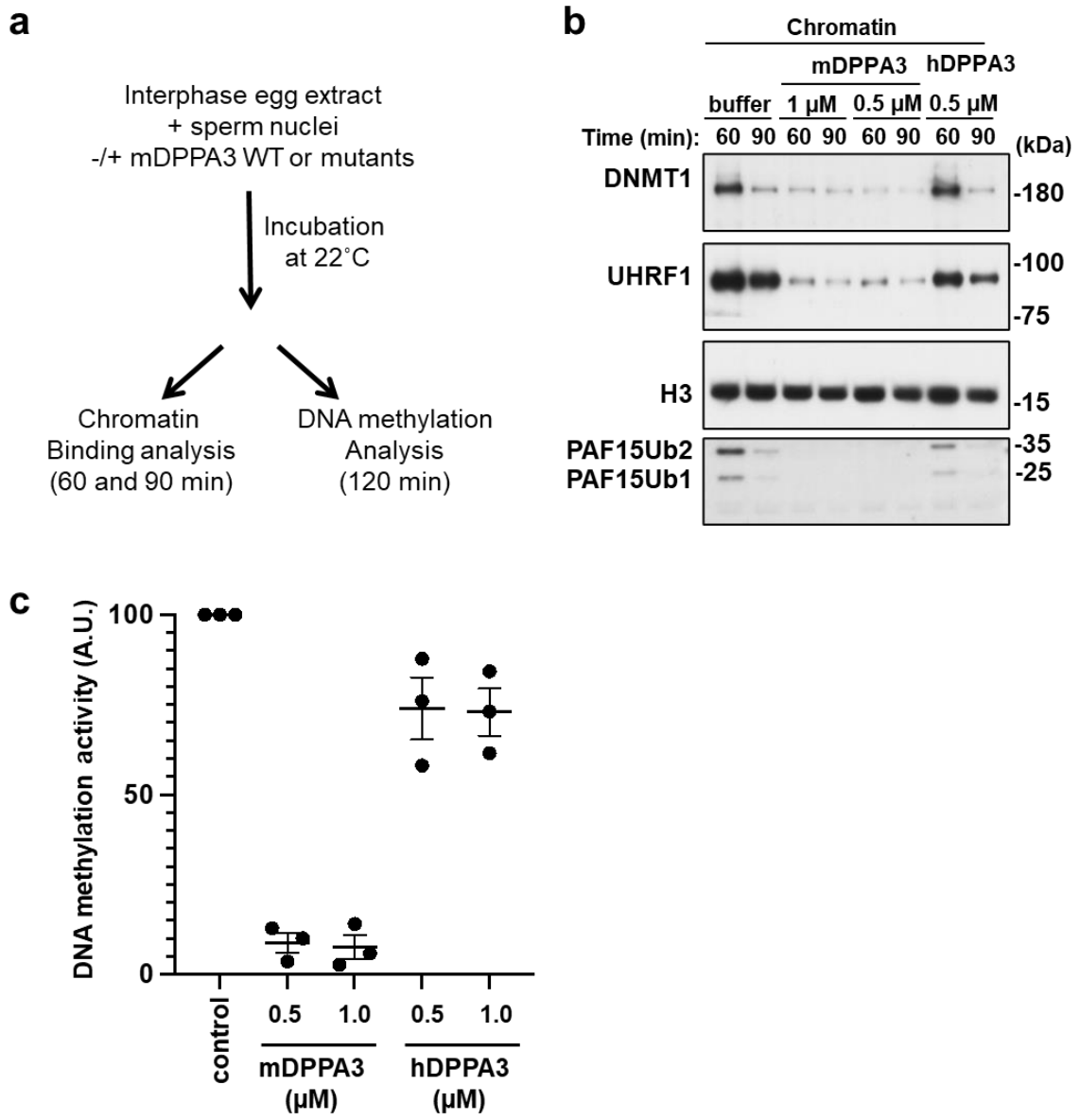


Figure 5: Functional assay of DPPA3 using *Xenopus* egg extracts.

(a) Experimental design for functional analysis of DPPA3 using *Xenopus* egg extracts. **(b)** Sperm chromatin was incubated with interphase *Xenopus* egg extracts supplemented with buffer (+buffer), FLAG-mDPPA3, or FLAG-hDPPA3. Chromatin fractions were isolated and immunoblotted using the indicated antibodies. The gel image is representative of n = 3 independent experiments. **(C)** Sperm chromatin was added to interphase egg extracts supplemented with radiolabeled S-[methyl-3H]-adenosyl-L-methionine and WT-GST-mDPPA3 or the respective mDPPA3 mutants. The efficiency of DNA methylation maintenance was assessed by the incorporation of radio-labeled methyl groups from S-[methyl-3H]-adenosyl-L-methionine (3H-SAM) into DNA purified from the egg extracts. Data were presented as mean values ± SD for n = 3

DISCUSSION

Our structural analysis revealed that human DPPA3 binds to hPHD solely through a conserved VRT sequence motif. This finding is consistent with the biochemical data showing that the binding affinity of hDPPA3 to hPHD was in the sub-micro order range of K_D, with an approximately 30-fold decrease in the binding affinity of its mouse protein counterpart. The weak binding affinity of hDPPA3 was insufficient to inhibit the chromatin binding of UHRF1 in *Xenopus* egg extracts. Our data suggested that the inhibitory effect of hDPPA3 differed from that of mDPPA3 under similar conditions. This raises the question of whether hDPPA3 can act as an inhibitor of UHRF1 function in human oocytes and early embryogenesis. There are several possibilities for consideration. The level of hDPPA3 protein expression in human oocytes and zygotes is key to the inhibition of UHRF1 chromatin binding. Our data indicated that the binding affinity of hDPPA3 to hPHD is approximately 1.7-fold stronger than that of histone H3, suggesting that a locally high concentration of hDPPA3 contributes to its preferential binding to hUHRF1 to inhibit chromatin binding. Another possibility involves post-translational modifications of histone H3. Given that the methylation of Arg2 and phosphorylation of Thr3 in histone H3 greatly impair its binding to the UHRF1 PHD finger[31], hDPPA3 might bind to UHRF1 even at low protein concentrations. Recently, NLRP14 (Nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain, leucine-rich Repeat and Pyrin domain containing) has emerged as a factor related to reproduction. It interacts with UHRF1 in the zygote and two-cell stages in the cytosol[21,35]. If the cytoplasmic localization of UHRF1 is not mediated by hDPPA3, it may be important for UHRF1 to interact with NLRP14 immediately after its translation in the cytoplasm. Interestingly, the cytosolic localization of the mRNA of a guanine nucleotide exchange factor, NET1, has been reported to regulate protein–protein interactions after translation, ultimately determining protein localization[36].

The VRT motif in DPPA3, which binds to the acidic surface of the UHRF1 PHD finger, is well conserved across various species (Figure 1b). Conversely, the amino acid sequence

corresponding to the α-helix following the VRT motif shows significant diversity. Interestingly, AlphaFold2 (AF2) structural prediction indicated that mDPPA3 has both short and long α-helices following the VRT motif, forming an L-like shape, consistent with our NMR structure prediction of the mPHD:mDPPA3 complex (Supplementary Figure 5)[37]. In contrast, human DPPA3 exhibits a single long α-helix at the same position. AF2 predictions also suggest that *Homo sapience* (UniProt ID: Q6W0C5), *Bos taurus* (A9Q1J7), *Gorilla gorilla gorilla* (G3RB81), *Saimiri boliviensis* (A0A2K6SNG1), *Puma concolor* (A0A6P6HCW6), *Nomascus leucogenys* (A0A2I3H008), *Crocuta crocuta* (A0A6G1B388), *Physeter macrocephalus* (A0A2Y9EH83), and *Acinonyx jubatus* (A0A6I9ZFC3) possess a single α-helix, while *Mus musculus* (Q8QZY3), *Rattus norvegicus* (Q6IMK0), and *Cricetulus griseus* (A0A3L7H856) have two α-helices, consisting of both short and long α-helices, as far as we could find in the database (Supplementary Figure 5). These observations suggest the potential limitation of the two α-helices to Rodentia and underscore the utility of AF2 structural prediction for the classification of the DPPA3 function based on the helical content.

The distinctive α-helical arrangement in hDPPA3 revealed in our structural analysis shed light on the function of this protein in oocytes and preimplantation embryo development distinct from the mouse DPPA3. Our results encourage further investigations into the functional implications of hDPPA3, potentially paving the way for novel discoveries in this context.

Methods

Peptides and Primers

The human DPPA3 peptide, residues 81-118 (NH^{2}-^{81}SRRGVRTLLSVQREKMARLRYMLLGGVRTHERRPTNKE^{118}-COOH) was purchased from Toray Research Center (Tokyo, Japan) for crystallography. Primers for site-directed mutagenesis of hDPPA3 are listed as follows:

V85A (Forward: 5′-GAGAGGAGCAAGAACATTGCTGTCTGTGCA-3′, Reverse: 5′-ATGTTCTTGCTCCTCTCCTGCTCCCACCTC-3′),

R86A (Forward: 5′- AGGAGTAGCAACATTGCTGTCTGTGCAGAG-3′, Reverse: 5′-GCAATGTTGCTACTCCTCTCCTGCTCCCAC-3′),

T87A (Forward: 5′- AGTAAGAGCATTGCTGTCTGTGCAGAGAGA-3′, Reverse: 5′-ACAGCAATGCTCTTACTCCTCTCCTGCTCC-3′),

L88A (Forward: 5′- AAGAACAGCGCTGTCTGTGCAGAGAGAAAA-3′, Reverse: 5′-CAGACAGCGCTGTTCTTACTCCTCTCCTGC-3′)

R86A/T87A (Forward: 5′- AGGAGTAGCAGCATTGCTGTCTGTGCAGAG-3′, Reverse: 5′-ACAGCAATGCTGCTACTCCTCTCCTGCTCC-3′).

Protein expression and purification

Human UHRF1 PHD finger (residues 299-366) for crystallography, SAXS, NMR, CD, and ITC experiments were expressed in *Escherichia coli* (*E.coli*) and purified according to previous paper[31]. Briefly, hPHD was expressed as GST-fusion protein and purified using glutathione Sepharose 4B (GS4B), anion exchange (HiTrap Q) and 26/600 Supedex 75 chromatography (Cytiva). hDPPA3, residues 81–118, for SAXS, NMR, CD, ITC and ubiquitination experiments was expressed as a six histidine-tagged ubiquitin (His-Ub) fusion protein. The protein was expressed in *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) in Luria–Bertani medium (LB) containing 12.5 μg/ml kanamycin. When the optical density at 660 nm (O.D.660) of the cells reached 0.7, 0.4 mM

isopropyl β-d-thiogalactoside (IPTG) was added to the medium and the cells were further harvested for 6 h at 30 °C. The cells were suspended in lysis buffer (40 mM Tris-HCl [pH7.5], 400 mM NaCl and 30 mM imidazole). After cell lysis by sonication and removal of cell debris by centrifugation, the supernatant was loaded to histidine-tag affinity column Ni Sepharose 6 Fast Flow (Cytiva), and the sample was eluted from the column using an elution buffer containing 500 mM imidazole. Next, the His-Ub tag was removed by Saccharomyces cerevisiae ubiquitin carboxyl-terminal hydrolase YUH1. The sample was further purified using HiTrap SP HP cation-exchange chromatography (Cytiva) and finally purified by HiLoad 26/600 Superdex 75 size-exclusion chromatography equilibrated with 1 × ITC buffer (10 mM HEPES (pH7.5), 150 mM NaCl, 0.25 mM tris (2-carboxyethyl)phosphine (TCEP)). H3 peptide (residues 1–36 with an additional tryptophan residue at their C-terminus, hereafter $H3_{1\text{-}37W}$), mouse DPPA3, full-length mouse UHRF1, full-length human UHRF1, mouse UBA1 and human UBE2D3 for *in vitro* ubiquitination assay were purified according to previous reports[17,29].

For preparation of ^{15}N-labeled or ^{13}C,^{15}N-double labeled hPHD, M9 minimal media containing 0.5 g/l $^{15}NH_4Cl$ or 0.5 g/l $^{15}NH_4Cl$ and 1 g/l ^{13}C-glucose was used instead of LB media. Site-directed mutagenesis of hPHD and $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ were performed by designing two primers containing the mutations. The mutants of $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ and uniform radio isotope labeled hPHD were purified by the same protocol. The mutants of $hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ and the labeled hPHD were purified by the same protocol.

Crystallography of hPHD in complex with hDPPA3 peptide

The hPHD:$hDPPA3_{81\text{-}118}$ complex was prepared by adding a equi-molar excess of the hDPPA3 peptide to the hPHD prior to crystallization. The crystal was obtained using an 8 mg/ml concentration of the complex at 4°C and the hanging drop vapor diffusion method with a reservoir solution containing 100 mM Tris-HCl (pH 8.5), 2 M Ammonium sulfate. The crystal

383 was directly frozen in liquid nitrogen using a cryoprotectant containing 25% (v/v) ethylene
384 glycol. The X-ray diffraction data were collected at a wavelength of 0.98000 Å on a Pilatus3
385 6M detector in beam line BL-17A at Photon Factory (Tsukuba, Japan) and scaled at 2.40 Å
386 resolution with the program XDS package[38] and Aimless[39]. After molecular replacement by
387 PHASER[40] using human PHD finger (PDB: 3ASL) as a search model and several cycle of
388 model refinement by PHENIX[41], the final model converged at 2.40 Å resolution with a
389 crystallographic *R*-factor of 23.3% and a free *R*-factor of 26.6%.
390 The crystallographic data and refinement statistics are given in Table 1. The figures were
391 generated using Pymol (http://www.pymol.org).
392
393 **NMR**
394 All NMR experiments were performed using a Bruker BioSpin Avance III HD spectrometers
395 with TCI triple-resonance cryogenic probe-heads and basic ^{1}H resonance frequency of 600.03
396 and 800.23 MHz. Three-dimensional (3D) spectra for backbone signal assignments, including
397 HNCACB, CACB(CO)NH, HNCA, HN(CO)CA, HNCO, and HN(CA)CO, were acquired at
398 293 K for 520 μM [^{13}C, ^{15}N]-hPHD dissolved in PBS buffer (pH 7.0) containing 1 mM DTT
399 and 5% D_2O. For the complex state, 260 μM [^{13}C, ^{15}N]-hPHD with hDPPA3$_{811-118}$ at molar
400 ratio of 1:2 was used in the buffer same as the free state. The spectral widths (number of total
401 data points) of each spectrum were 18 ppm (2048) for the ^{1}H dimension and 24 ppm (192) for
402 the ^{15}N dimension. All 3D spectra were acquired using non-uniform sampling (NUS) to
403 randomly reduce t_1 and t_2 time-domain data points typically by 25%. The uniformly sampled
404 data were reconstructed from the raw NMR data using various techniques such as IST or
405 SMILE[42,43]. All NMR spectra were processed using the NMRPipe[44]. For the NMR analysis, an
406 integrated package of NMR tools named MagRO-NMRViewJ, version 2.01.41[45], on NMRView
407 was used[46].
408 For the competition experiments, ^{1}H-^{15}N HSQC spectra were measured at 293K for 60 μM

[^{15}N]-hPHD in the presence of hDPPA$_{81-118}$ and/or the H3$_{1-37W}$ peptide at molar ratios (hPHD:hPDDA3:H3) of 1:0:0, 1:2:0, 1:0:2, 1:2:2 and 1:2:8.

ITC measurements

Microcal PEAQ-ITC (Malvern) was used for the ITC measurements. Wild-type and mutants of hPHD and hDPPA3 were dissolved in ITC buffer (10 mM HEPES [pH 7.5] buffer containing 150 mM NaCl and 0.25 mM TCEP). All measurements were carried out at 293 K. The data were analyzed with Microcal PEAQ-ITC analysis software using a one-site model. For each interaction, at least three independent titration experiments were performed to show the dissociation constants with the mean standard deviations.

CD

Far-UV circular dichroism (CD) spectra were obtained using a JASCO J-1100 model spectrometer. All samples were prepared to a concentration of 20 μM, dissolved in 10 mM HEPES [pH7.5] buffer containing 150 mM NaCl, 0.25 mM TCEP. Measurements were performed at 293 K with a path length of 1 mm.

SEC-SAXS

SAXS data were collected on Photon Factory BL-10C using an HPLC Nexera/Prominence-I (Shimazu) integrated SAXS set-up[47]. 50 μL of 12 mg/mL of the hPHD and hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ complex and 20 mg/ml hDPPA3$_{81-118}$ loaded onto a Superdex® 200 Increase 5/150 GL (Cytiva) pre-equilibrated with 20 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 150 mM NaCl, 2 mM DTT, 10 μM Zinc acetate and 5% glycerol at a flow rate of 0.25 mL/min at 20 °C. The flow rate was reduced to 0.025 mL/min at an elution volume of 1.9−2.8 mL. X-ray scattering was collected every 20 s on a PILATUS3 2 M detector over an angular range of q_{min} = 0.00690 Å^{-1} to q_{max} = 0.27815 Å^{-1}. UV spectra at a range of 200 to 450 nm were recorded every 10 s. Circular averaging and buffer

subtraction were carried out using the program SAngler[48] to obtain one-dimensional scattering data $I(q)$ as a function of q ($q = 4\pi\sin\theta/\lambda$, where 2θ is the scattering angle and λ is the X-ray wavelength 1.5 Å). The scattering intensity was normalized on an absolute scale using the scattering intensity of water[39]. The multiple concentrations of the scattering data around the peak at A280, namely ascending and descending parts of the chromatography peak, and $I(0)$ were extrapolated to zero-concentration by MOLASS[49]. The molecular mass of the measured proteins was estimated by the empirical volume of correlation, V_c, showing no aggregation of the measured sample[34]. The radius of gyration R_g and the forward scattering intensity $I(0)$ were estimated from the Guinier plot of $I(q)$ in the smaller angle region of $qR_g < 1.3$. The distance distribution function $P(r)$ was calculated using the program GNOM[50]. The maximum particle dimension D_{max} was estimated from the $P(r)$ function as the distance r for which $P(r) = 0$. The scattering profile of the crystal structure of hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ was computed with CRYSOL[51]. Ab initio model of hPHD:hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ was created using GASBOR and DAMAVER[52,53]

***In vitro* ubiquitination assay**

Protein expression in *E. coli* and purification of mouse UBA1 (E1), human UBE2D3 (E2), human UHRF1 (E3), C-terminal FLAG tagged-H3$_{1\text{-}37W}$ and ubiquitin were performed according to the methodology in previous reports[17]. Ubiquitination reaction mixtures contained 100 μM ubiquitin, 200 nM E1, 8 μM E2, 3 μM E3, 5 mM ATP, and 20 μM C-terminal FLAG tagged-H3$_{1\text{-}37W}$ in the presence and absence of hDPPA3$_{81\text{-}118}$ in ubiquitination reaction buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl [pH 8.0], 50 mM NaCl, 5 mM $MgCl_2$, 0.1% Triton X-100, 2 mM DTT). The mixture was incubated at 30°C for 3 h, and the reaction was stopped by adding 3×SDS loading buffer. The reaction was analyzed by SDS-PAGE, followed by Western blotting using 1/5,000 diluted anti-FLAG antibody (Cell Signaling Technology, #2368).

460 ***Xenopus* interphase egg extracts and purification of chromatin**

461 *Xenopus laevis* was purchased from Kato-S Kagaku and handled according to the animal care
462 regulations at the University of Tokyo. Interphase egg extracts were prepared as described
463 previously[12]. Unfertilized *Xenopus* eggs were dejellied in 2.5% thioglycolic acid-NaOH (pH
464 8.2) and were washed three times in 0.2×MMR buffer (5 mM HEPES-KOH [pH 7.6], 100 mM
465 NaCl, 2 mM KCl, 0.1 mM EDTA, 1 mM $MgCl_2$, 2 mM $CaCl_2$). After activation in 1×MMR
466 supplemented with 0.3 μg/mL calcium ionophore, eggs were washed four times with EB buffer
467 (10 mM HEPES-KOH [pH 7.7], 100 mM KCl, 0.1 mM $CaCl_2$, 1 mM $MgCl_2$, 50 mM sucrose).
468 Packed eggs were crushed by centrifugation (BECKMAN, Avanti J-E, JS13.1 swinging rotor)
469 for 20 min at 18,973×g. Egg extracts were supplemented with 50 μg/mL cycloheximide, 20
470 μg/mL cytochalasin B, 1 mM DTT, 2 μg/mL aprotinin, and 50 μg/mL leupeptin and clarified
471 for 20 min at 48,400×g (Hitachi, CP100NX, P55ST2 swinging rotor). The cytoplasmic extracts
472 were aliquoted and stored at -80°C. Chromatin purification after incubation in egg extracts was
473 performed as previously described with modifications. Sperm nuclei were incubated in egg
474 extracts supplemented with an ATP regeneration system (20 mM phosphocreatine, 4 mM ATP,
475 5 μg/mL creatine phosphokinase) at 3000–4000 nuclei/μL at 22°C. Aliquots (15 μL) were
476 diluted with 150-200 μL chromatin purification buffer (CPB; 50 mM KCl, 5 mM $MgCl_2$, 20
477 mM HEPES-KOH [pH 7.7]) containing 0.1% NP-40, 2% sucrose and 2 mM NEM. After
478 incubating on ice for 5 min, extracts were layered over 1.5 mL of CPB containing 30% sucrose
479 and centrifuged at 15,000×g for 10 min at 4°C. Chromatin pellets were resuspended in
480 1×Laemmli sample buffer, heated for 5 min and analyzed by SDS-PAGE. Recombinant Flag-
481 tagged mDPPA3 and hDPPA3 were added to egg extracts at 0.5-1.0 μM.

Data Availability

Coordinate of atomic model of human UHRF1 PHD finger in complex with human DPPA3 was deposited in the Protein Data Bank with accession code 8WMS.

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Author Contributions

K.A. conceived the study and experimental design, analyzed experiments and wrote the manuscript. N.S. and K.A. performed protein purification, X-ray crystallography, SAXS measurements and ITC experiments. N.S. perform CD experiment and *in vitro* ubiquitination assay. S.H. and T. K. performed NMR experiments and analyzed data. Y.C. IM. H. M.N and A.N. performed biochemical assay using *Xenopus* egg extracts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests.