Periodic Graph Transformers for Crystal Material Property Prediction

Abstract

We consider representation learning on periodic graphs encoding crystal materials. Different from regular graphs, periodic graphs consist of a minimum unit cell repeating itself on a regular lattice in 3D space. How to effectively encode these periodic structures poses unique challenges not present in regular graph representation learning. In addition to being E(3) invariant, periodic graph representations need to be periodic invariant. That is, the learned representations should be invariant to shifts of cell boundaries as they are artificially imposed. Furthermore, the periodic repeating patterns need to be captured explicitly as lattices of different sizes and orientations may correspond to different materials. In this work, we propose a transformer architecture, known as Matformer, for periodic graph representation learning. Our Matformer is designed to be invariant to periodicity and can capture repeating patterns explicitly. In particular, Matformer encodes periodic patterns by efficient use of geometric distances between the same atoms in neighboring cells. Experimental results on multiple common benchmark datasets show that our Matformer outperforms baseline methods consistently. In addition, our results demonstrate the importance of periodic invariance and explicit repeating pattern encoding for crystal representation learning.

1 Introduction

Crystal material property prediction is important for the discovery of new materials with desirable properties [35, 32–34, 45, 47, 38, 3, 31, 4]. Different from molecules and proteins [13, 46, 39, 7, 44, 24, 41], which are commonly represented as graphs [42, 27, 10, 11, 23, 25], crystals consist of a minimum unit cell repeating itself on a regular lattice in 3D space. Thus, crystals are naturally represented as periodic graphs. A key challenge of crystal material property prediction lies in how to effectively encode periodic structures that are not present in regular molecular graph representations [8, 1, 18, 38, 21, 20, 29, 22, 36, 15]. Specifically, periodic graphs of crystals require unique periodic invariance. Periodic invariance has two facets; those are, the learned representations should be invariant to both the scaling up of the minimum repeatable unit cells and shifts of periodic boundaries. Although the former has been considered in Xie et al. [47, 48], the later is rarely identified explicitly and sometimes not considered by previous studies [47, 3, 43, 38, 4, 48, 31, 49]. Furthermore, the repeating patterns of periodic graphs should be captured explicitly. Given a fixed minimum unit cell structure, lattices of different sizes and orientations may correspond to different materials. Without such periodic patterns, the infinite structures of crystals may not be represented accurately. However, the explicit encoding of periodic patterns is not explored in previous studies [47, 3, 38, 4, 31].

In this work, we propose to tackle periodic graph representation learning by incorporating both periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding. We propose a periodic graph transformer, known as Matformer, that is periodic invariant and can capture periodic repeating patterns explicitly for crystal

Figure 1: Illustrations of periodic patterns and the multi-edge graph construction method. Green lines are artificial boundaries to form one possible unit cell that repeats in infinite space for the given crystal. (a). An illustration of periodic patterns in 2D space. We use blue and red arrows to show how the blue atom repeats itself along ℓ_1 and ℓ_2. We show a general case in nature that ℓ_1 and ℓ_2 are not orthogonal. In this specific example, θ is less than $\frac{\pi}{2}$. (b) and (c). Illustrations of the multi-edge graph construction method and the constructed graph. The green circle shows atom i's neighborhood $\mathcal{N}_i$, and black arrows are edges from atom i's neighbors to itself. As atom j repeats twice within i's neighborhood in this example, the multi-edge graph construction method builds two edges from atom j to atom i. The crystals are 3D structures in practice, and we use illustrations in 2D for simplicity.

representation learning. Matformer achieves periodic invariance through two uniquely designed graph construction methods. It further encodes periodic patterns by efficient use of geometric distances between the same atoms in neighboring cells, thereby capturing the lattice size and orientation of a given crystal. We conduct experiments on two commonly used material benchmark datasets, including the Materials Project [14] and Jarvis [6]. Results show that Matformer outperforms baseline methods consistently on various tasks. In addition, our results demonstrate the importance of both periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding for crystal representation learning.

2 Background

Crystal property prediction. Given a crystal represented as $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P}, \mathbf{L})$, crystal property prediction aims to predict a target property value y, which is either real as $y \in \mathbb{R}$ or categorical as $y \in \mathbb{N}$ for regression or classification task. Specifically, a crystal is represented as a unit cell with periodic patterns. A unit cell is a minimum repeatable structure for the given crystal, and it can be described by matrices $\mathbf{A}$ and $\mathbf{P}$. $\mathbf{A} = [\boldsymbol{a}_1, \boldsymbol{a}_2, \cdots, \boldsymbol{a}_n]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times d_a}$ is the atom feature matrix, where $\boldsymbol{a}_i \in \mathbb{R}^{d_a}$ is the d_a-dimensional feature vector for atom i in the unit cell. $\mathbf{P} = [\boldsymbol{p}_1, \boldsymbol{p}_2, \cdots, \boldsymbol{p}_n]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times 3}$ is the position matrix, where $\boldsymbol{p}_i \in \mathbb{R}^3$ contains the Cartesian coordinates for atom i in 3D space. To further encode periodic patterns, an additional lattice matrix $\mathbf{L} = [\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2, \boldsymbol{\ell}_3]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3}$ is used to describe how a unit cell repeats itself in three directions, including $\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2,$ and $\boldsymbol{\ell}_3$. We show a 2D case of periodic patterns for easy illustration in Fig. 1 (a). Note that crystals usually possess irregular shapes in practice. Hence, $\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2,$ and $\boldsymbol{\ell}_3$ are not always orthogonal in 3D space. Formally, given a crystal representation $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P}, \mathbf{L})$, the infinite crystal structure can be represented as

$$
\begin{aligned}
\hat{\mathbf{P}} &= \{\hat{\boldsymbol{p}}_i | \hat{\boldsymbol{p}}_i = \boldsymbol{p}_i + k_1 \boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + k_2 \boldsymbol{\ell}_2 + k_3 \boldsymbol{\ell}_3, \ k_1, k_2, k_3 \in \mathbb{Z}, i \in \mathbb{Z}, 1 \le i \le n\}, \\
\hat{\mathbf{A}} &= \{\hat{\boldsymbol{a}}_i | \hat{\boldsymbol{a}}_i = \boldsymbol{a}_i, i \in \mathbb{Z}, 1 \le i \le n\}.
\end{aligned}
\tag{1}
$$

Here, set $\hat{\mathbf{P}}$ contains all possible positions for each atom i, and set $\hat{\mathbf{A}}$ contains the corresponding atom feature vector for each atom i.

Multi-edge graph construction for crystals. The multi-edge graph construction proposed by Xie and Grossman [47] aims to capture atom interactions across cell boundaries, which are imposed artificially. In a regular molecular graph, a node corresponds to a single atom. In contrast, in a multi-edge graph, node i represents atom i and all its duplicates in the infinite 3D space. Apparently, node i contains the atom features vector $\boldsymbol{a}_i$ and all positions in the set $\{\hat{\boldsymbol{p}}_i | \hat{\boldsymbol{p}}_i = \boldsymbol{p}_i + k_1 \boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + k_2 \boldsymbol{\ell}_2 + k_3 \boldsymbol{\ell}_3, \ k_1, k_2, k_3 \in \mathbb{Z}\}$, which is a subset of the infinite set $\hat{\mathbf{P}}$ defined in Eq. 1. Formally, the multi-edge graph construction method builds edges between nodes as follows. Given a prefixed radius $r \in \mathbb{R}$, if there exists any 3-tuple (k_1', k_2', k_3'), where $k_1', k_2', k_3' \in \mathbb{R}$, such that the Euclidean distance $d_{ji}' \in \mathbb{R}$ satisfies

Figure 2: Illustration of periodic invariance. Green lines are artificial boundaries to form possible unit cells that repeat in infinite space. Purple lines are the edges between nodes inside a unit cell. Red points are the corner points of the unit cells. For example, p_1 and p_2 are for unit cells in (a) and (b), respectively. (a) and (b) show different unit cells describing the same crystal, caused by shifting the period boundaries along x axis from p_1 to p_2. By comparing (a) and (b), we show a graph construction method based on pairwise distances within the unit cell that breaks periodic invariance.

$d'_{ji} = ||\boldsymbol{p}_j + k'_1 \boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + k'_2 \boldsymbol{\ell}_2 + k'_3 \boldsymbol{\ell}_3 - \boldsymbol{p}_i||_2 \leq r$, an edge is built from j to i with the initial edge feature d'_{ji}. An example of the edge construction is shown in Fig. 1 (b). Intuitively, if there exist m positions of node j within the radius of the center node i, this method builds m edges from node j to node i. By considering all possible positions of every node within a predefined radius in 3D space, the multi-edge graph construction method can in essence capture atom interactions across cell boundaries. This graph construction method has been widely used in many following up studies [37, 31, 3, 38, 4].

3 The proposed Matformer

Different from molecular graphs, crystal graphs consist of a minimum unit cell repeating itself on a regular lattice in 3D space. When encoding such periodic structures, unique challenges lie in periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding. In this section, we first propose to formally define periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding. We then provide analyses to reveal the importance of these two considerations for the representation learning of periodic graphs encoding crystal materials. Finally, we present Matformer, a transformer architecture for periodic graph representation learning. It can be seen Matformer is invariant to periodicity and can capture repeating patterns explicitly.

3.1 Periodic invariance for crystals

Periodic invariance is proposed based on E(3) invariance for a unit cell. Hence, we first provide the formal definition of unit cell E(3) invariance as below.

Definition 1 (Unit Cell E(3) Invariance). *A function* $f : (\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P}, \mathbf{L}) \to \mathcal{X}$ *is unit cell E(3) invariant such that for all* $Q \in \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3}, |Q| = \pm 1$ *and* $b \in \mathbb{R}^3$ *, we have* $f(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P}, \mathbf{L}) = f(\mathbf{A}, Q\mathbf{P} + b, Q\mathbf{L})$, *where Q is rotation and reflection transformations, and b is translation transformations in 3D space.*

Intuitively, unit cell E(3) invariance shows that the structure of a cell remains the same when either applying rotations and reflections to position matrix $\mathbf{P}$ and lattice matrix $\mathbf{L}$ together, or applying translations to $\mathbf{P}$ only.

In addition to unit cell E(3) invariance, periodic invariance is also shown necessary for generating valid crystal representations. Specifically, when the lattice matrix $\mathbf{L} = [\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2, \boldsymbol{\ell}_3]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3}$ is fixed for a crystal, we can still obtain different position matrices $\mathbf{P} \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times 3}$ and different unit cell structures by shifting the period boundaries. As shown in Fig. 2 (a) and (b), the formed unit cell structures are different for the same crystal by shifting period boundaries. To this end, we further introduce periodic invariance, which shows that when the periodic boundaries are shifted or scaled up, the periodic invariant representation should remain the same. Formally, based on Sec. 2, we further define a function $\Phi : (\hat{\mathbf{A}}, \hat{\mathbf{P}}, \mathbf{L}, p) \to (\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P})$ simulating how to form different unit cells from a given infinite crystal structure. For an infinite crystal structure represented as $(\hat{\mathbf{A}}, \hat{\mathbf{P}})$, Φ uses a corner point p and shape matrix $\mathbf{L}$ to form a unit cell represented as $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P})$. In addition, we use $\boldsymbol{\alpha} \in \mathbb{N}_+^3$ to indicate

100 the scaling up of a repeating unit cell formed by periodic boundaries. Then the formal definition of
101 periodic invariance is provided as below.

102 **Definition 2** (Periodic Invariance). *A unit cell E(3) invariant function* $f : (\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P}, \mathbf{L}) \rightarrow \mathcal{X}$ *is periodic*
103 *invariant if* $f(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P}, \mathbf{L}) = f(\Phi(\hat{\mathbf{A}}, \hat{\mathbf{P}}, \boldsymbol{\alpha}\mathbf{L}, \mathrm{p}), \boldsymbol{\alpha}\mathbf{L})$ *holds for all* $\mathrm{p} \in \mathbb{R}^3$ *and* $\boldsymbol{\alpha} \in \mathbb{N}_+^3$.

104 **Significance of periodic invariance.** Breaking periodic invariance will result in different crystal
105 graphs for the same crystal. In Fig. 2 (a) and (b), we show a graph construction method that
106 breaks periodic invariance. This method is employed by a transformer-based model, known as
107 Graphormer [49], for learning from adsorbates and catalyst surface systems [2]. In particular,
108 Graphormer first uses radius to include all the atoms of interest in nearby cells and then builds a fully
109 connected graph. A detailed illustration is shown in Fig. 5 in Appendix. A.1. Based on the formal
110 definition of periodic invariance, in this study, we aim to integrate such an important component
111 in our Matformer. By doing this, our model is able to construct a distinct crystal graph for a given
112 crystal structure, resulting in a more informative and discriminative crystal learning scheme.

3.2 Periodic pattern encoding

114 As introduced in Sec. 2, $\mathbf{L} = [\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2, \boldsymbol{\ell}_3]^T \in$
115 $\mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3}$ containing periodic patterns is another key
116 component to describe crystal structures. Essen-
117 tially, periodic patterns show how the minimum
118 repeatable structure $(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{P})$ expands itself in in-
119 finite 3D space. Without such periodic pattern
120 encoding in $\mathbf{L}$, crystal structures are treated as
121 finite structures similar to molecules. As shown
122 in Fig. 3, the widely used multi-edge graph con-
123 struction method [47, 3, 38, 37, 4] only captures
124 local interactions among atoms but ignores the
125 important periodic patterns. However, such pe-
126 riodic repeating patterns need to be captured
127 explicitly, as lattices of different sizes and ori-
128 entations may correspond to different materials.
129 Hence, To better represent the infinite structures
130 of crystals, we argue that the periodic patterns
131 $\mathbf{L} \in \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3}$ should be explicitly taken into con-
132 sideration in crystal learning.

(a)   (b)

Figure 3: Illustration that periodic patterns are not
encoded in a multi-edge graph. The green circles
denote the prefixed radius, and the grey lines are
the captured topology information by the multi-
edge graph construction. We use three radius cir-
cles because there are three atoms in a unit cell.
(a). Illustration of the multi-edge graph construc-
tion. (b). Illustration that the multi-edge graph
method only captures local geometric information
but ignores periodic patterns for the infinite crystal
structure.

3.3 The proposed graph construction methods

134 In this section, we introduce the proposed graph construction methods for Matformer. Our methods
135 effectively integrate the above two components for accurate crystal representation learning.

136 **Invariant crystal graph construction**. We consider two crystal graph construction methods, includ-
137 ing radius-based graph construction and fully connected graph construction. Both of them satisfy
138 periodic invariance, and mathematical proofs can be found in Appendix. A.2. In Fig. 2, we show by
139 example that treating atoms as single nodes breaks periodic invariance. Instead, in our methods, we
140 follow the fashion introduced in Sec. 2 to treat node i in a constructed graph as atom i and all its
141 repeated duplicates in infinite 3D space.

142 We use the multi-edge graph construction [47] introduced in Sec. 2 as an alternative crystal graph
143 construction method. Note that although the multi-edge graph construction satisfies periodic invari-
144 ance as in Fig. 4 (a), several existing works [47, 31] do not follow the settings exactly thus breaking
145 periodic invariance. Within the given radius shown in Fig. 4 (a), these studies form the neighborhood
146 of node i by selecting t nearest neighbors ranked by geometric distances. If there exist several
147 different atoms with the same distance to node i, there is no deterministic way to select from them, as
148 shown in Fig. 6 in Appendix. A.1. As a result, periodic invariance cannot be guaranteed.

149 Given the fully-connected fashion employed in Graphormer has achieved impressive performance on
150 molecular learning, we further propose another graph construction method for Matformer, known as
151 the fully connected graph construction. This method uses a different strategy to determine neighbors

(a)   (b)   (c)

Figure 4: Illustrations of the used radius-based graph construction method and the proposed periodic pattern encoding for Matformer. Each green circle shows neighborhood of node i with a prefixed radius. Black arrows are the formed edges by radius-based graph construction and brown arrows are self-connecting edges. (a). Illustration that the used radius-based graph construction satisfies periodic invariance. (b). Illustration of periodic pattern encoding using self-connecting edges. On the left, we show the designed self-connecting edges to encode the lattice matrix $\mathbf{L} = [\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2, \boldsymbol{\ell}_3]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{3\times3}$ in 3D space. We design six self-connecting edges $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_2 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2$. The geometric shape of $\mathbf{L}$ can be determined by these six edges. On the right, we show the added self-connecting edges in 2D space for easy illustration. We use $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2$, and $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2$ to encode periodic patterns in this 2D case. (c). Illustration of the constructed graph with periodic pattern encoding for the above 2D case.

for each center node. Specifically, for node i and j, it builds edges for the entries corresponding to the t smallest distances in $\{d_{ij} | d_{ij} = ||\boldsymbol{p}_i - \boldsymbol{p}_j + k_1' \boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + k_2' \boldsymbol{\ell}_2 + k_3' \boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2, \; k_1', k_2', k_3' \in \mathbb{Z}\}$. It can be seen every pair i and j is connected in the constructed graph and there are t edges between them.

Overall, the used multi-edge graph construction and proposed fully-connected graph construction both satisfy the important periodic invariance. Particularly, they possess great flexibility to be used in future studies for crystal learning. In this study, we employ both methods as part of our proposed Matformer, and in main experiments, the radius-based method is used due to better empirical performance.

Periodic pattern encoding with self-connecting edges. In this study, we propose to encode the important $\mathbf{L} = [\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2, \boldsymbol{\ell}_3]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{3\times3}$ into crystal graphs by adding self-connecting edges. As mentioned in Sec. 3.2, periodic patterns describe sizes and orientations of lattices of a crystal structure, eventually determining the properties of this crystal. A natural step for encoding such repeating periodic patterns is to consider the relative positions between an atom and its nearby repeated duplicates. Formally, given an atom i with position $\boldsymbol{p}_i$ and $\mathbf{L} = [\boldsymbol{\ell}_1, \boldsymbol{\ell}_2, \boldsymbol{\ell}_3]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{3\times3}$, we need to encode the atom's three nearby duplicates with positions $\boldsymbol{p}_i + \boldsymbol{\ell_1}, \boldsymbol{p}_i + \boldsymbol{\ell_2}$, and $\boldsymbol{p}_i + \boldsymbol{\ell_3}$. It is widely known that a direction vector $\boldsymbol{\ell}_i$ is determined by both its length $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_i||_2$ and orientation. Essentially, $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_i||_2$ indicates the geometric distance between atom i and its corresponding duplicate. However, the computing of orientation information, such as angles, usually induces high complexity. Hence, it is not practical to encode such orientation information into transformer architectures. To this end, we propose to use geometric distances solely to implicitly consider the orientation information.

Specifically, we use additional distances to determine angles between any two direction vectors in $\mathbf{L}$. For example, the angle between $\boldsymbol{\ell}_1$ and $\boldsymbol{\ell}_2$ can be easily computed by $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2$, and an additional distance $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2$. Hence, based on these three distances, we can determine lengths of $\boldsymbol{\ell}_1$ and $\boldsymbol{\ell}_2$, and the relative orientation between them. Extensively, we use six geometric distances, including $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_2||_2, ||\boldsymbol{\ell}_2 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2$, and $||\boldsymbol{\ell}_1 + \boldsymbol{\ell}_3||_2$ in our study, as shown in Fig. 4 (b). By doing this, the length of each direction vector and the angle between any two direction vectors can all be determined. As a result, the shape formed by lattice matrix $\mathbf{L}$ is then fixed. Overall, we build the aforementioned six geometric distances as six self-connecting edges for node i. By doing this, our model is capable of encoding periodic patterns in $\mathbf{L}$ completely, resulting in a more accurate crystal representation learning scheme. Importantly, our approach also guarantees periodic invariance. This is because the pairwise distances do not change when the periodic boundaries are shifted.

Overall, the graph construction for Matformer consists of two necessary stages, including invariant graph construction and periodic pattern encoding. For the first stage, we rigorously prove that the multi-edge graph construction satisfies periodic invariance and show that several previous works [47, 31] break periodic invariance using a different neighbor selection strategy. Additionally, we propose a fully-connected crystal graph construction method satisfying periodic invariance, and the method could be used in future studies for crystal representation learning. For the second stage, we naturally encode periodic patterns into constructed graphs by adding self-connecting edges without breaking periodic invariance. A constructed graph in 2D case is shown in Fig. 4 (c).

3.4 Message passing scheme

Building on constructed graphs introduced in Sec. 3.3, we propose our message passing scheme for Matformer. Formally, we denote a constructed crystal graph as $G = (\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{E})$. Here, each $\boldsymbol{a}_i \in \mathbf{A}$ is the d_a-dimensional feature vector for atom i, as introduced in Sec. 2. Particularly, $\boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^h \in \mathbf{E}$ is d_e-dimensional feature vector for the h-th edge between nodes i and j. We follow the regular attention mechanism that computes query, key, and value [28, 26]. Our proposed message passing scheme is composed of three steps; those are, edge-wise attention coefficients computing, edge-wise value message computing, and node updating. Formally, we let $\boldsymbol{f}_i^\star$ denote the input feature vector of node i for the ℓ-th layer of Matformer. The message passing scheme of the ℓ-th layer is described as below.

In the first step, $\boldsymbol{q}_{ij}^h$, $\boldsymbol{k}_{ij}^h$ and $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{ij}^h$ for the h-th edge between i and j are computed as

$$\boldsymbol{q}_i = \text{LN}_Q(\boldsymbol{f}_i^\star), \ \boldsymbol{k}_i = \text{LN}_K(\boldsymbol{f}_i^\star), \ \boldsymbol{k}_j = \text{LN}_K(\boldsymbol{f}_j^\star), \ \boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^{h'} = \text{LN}_E(\boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^h),$$

$$\boldsymbol{q}_{ij}^h = (\boldsymbol{q}_i | \boldsymbol{q}_i | \boldsymbol{q}_i), \ \boldsymbol{k}_{ij}^h = (\boldsymbol{k}_i | \boldsymbol{k}_j | \boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^{h'}), \ \boldsymbol{\alpha}_{ij}^h = \frac{\boldsymbol{q}_{ij}^h \circ \boldsymbol{k}_{ij}^h}{\sqrt{d_{\boldsymbol{k}_{ij}^h}}}, \tag{2}$$

where LN_Q, LN_K, and LN_E denote the linear transformations to compute query, key, and edge embedding in ℓ-th layer, respectively. $\boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^{h'}$ is the intermediate output for $\boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^h$. We use $\circ$ and $|$ to denote Hadamard Product and concatenation. Particularly, we omit the softmax to enhance the model's capability to distinguish nodes with different degrees, and to make the whole network more efficient.

After obtaining the attention coefficients $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{ij}^h$, in the second step, we compute $\boldsymbol{m}_{ij}^h$ that is the message of edge $\boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^h$ as

$$\boldsymbol{v}_i = \text{LN}_V(\boldsymbol{f}_i^\star), \ \boldsymbol{v}_j = \text{LN}_V(\boldsymbol{f}_j^\star), \boldsymbol{m}_{ij}^h = \text{sigmoid}(\text{LNorm}(\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{ij}^h)) \circ \text{LN}_{\text{update}}(\boldsymbol{v}_i | \boldsymbol{v}_j | \boldsymbol{e}_{ij}^{h'}), \tag{3}$$

where LN_V and $\text{LN}_{\text{update}}$ are the linear transformations to compute value and the updated message, and LNorm denotes the layer normalization operation. In particular, we apply sigmoid and Layer normalization to $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{ij}^h$ to stabilize the training.

Finally, in the third step, we compute node i's feature vector $\boldsymbol{f}_i$. Specifically, we first obtain message $\boldsymbol{m}_i$ by aggregating information from node i's neighborhood over multiple edges, then achieve $\boldsymbol{f}_i$ as

$$\boldsymbol{m}_i = \sum_{j \in \mathcal{N}_i} \sum_h \text{LNorm}(\text{LN}_{\text{msg}}(\boldsymbol{m}_{ij}^h)), \ \boldsymbol{f}_i = \text{LN}_{\text{fea}}(\boldsymbol{f}_i^\star) + \sigma(\text{BN}(\boldsymbol{m}_i)), \tag{4}$$

where σ is the used activation function, and BN indicates batch normalization. In addition, LN_{msg} and LN_{fea} are linear transformations to update the messages on edges and the old atom features.

Graphormer represents an effective transformer variant for molecular graph learning. The differences between Graphormer and the proposed Matformer lie in both graph construction and message passing scheme. Firstly, Graphormer treats every atom as a single node. Also, as there is only one geometric distance between node i and j in 3D space, a single edge will be built between them. Apparently, Graphormer breaks periodic invariance, as mentioned in Sec. 3.1. However, our proposed Matformer satisfies periodic invariance by employing the crystal graph construction methods described in Sec. 3.3. For the message passing, Graphormer uses the node-wise attention and encodes pairwise distances as attention bias. It cannot work properly on multi-edge graphs for crystals. While Matformer is specifically designed for multi-edge crystal graphs by performing edge-wise attention and encoding geometric information into edge-wise messages, as described above. The detailed architecture of our Matformer is shown in Fig. 7 in Appendix.

4 Related work

Crystal property prediction. Several existing methods [43, 16, 17, 12] model crystals as chemical formulas and employ sequence models to process such sequential formulas. Other studies [47, 37, 31, 3, 38, 4] consider 3D structures of crystals and formulate crystals as 3D graphs, then apply GNNs to learn from crystal graphs. As crystals are essentially periodically repeated structures, the graph construction needs to consider periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding. There are limited efforts to identify these two unique components. As an early work, CGCNN [47] proposes to capture atom interactions across artificial cell boundaries by using multi-edge graphs described in Sec. 2. The multi-edge graph satisfies periodic invariance as described in Sec. 3.1, but fails to consider the important periodic patterns, as described in Sec. 3.2. The multi-edge graph construction method is widely used in the following studies [37, 31, 3, 38, 4]. Based on the constructed crystal graphs, many GNN variants have been proposed for effective crystal representation learning [47, 37, 31, 3, 38, 4]. Recently, ALIGNN [4] achieves the state-of-the-art performance on two major material datasets. It uses angle information in the message passing procedure to generate more informative and discriminative representations. However, the use of angles introduces excessive time complexity.

Geometric GNNs and graph transformer. Many efforts have been made to incorporate 3D geometric information in molecular learning. Exemplary studies include SchNet [38], DimeNet [21, 20], SphereNet [29], GemNet [22], etc. However, these methods are designed for molecules without periodic patterns. Recently, graph transformers [49, 9] using geometric information, e.g., Graphormer [49], have shown great potential on real-world graph data. However, Graphormer considers neither periodic invariance no periodic pattern encoding.

Differences with our method. To the best of our knowledge, periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding described in Sec. 3 are rarely identified and explored in existing works for crystal property prediction. CGCNN [47] breaks periodic invariance on some corner cases because it uses twelve nearest neighbors determined only by distances as described in Sec. 3.3. In addition, previous methods including CGCNN [47], SchNet [38], MEGNET [3], CYATT [37], GATGNN [31], and ALIGNN [4], all fail to consider the important periodic pattern encoding as introduced in Sec. 3.2. For Graphormer [49], although it achieved remarkable success on the Open Catalyst Challenge [2], the employed graph construction method breaks periodic invariance when applied to crystals. Compared with Graphormer, Matformer is specifically designed for crystals considering both periodic invariance and periodic patterns. In addition, different from the node-wise attention used in Graphormer, our Matformer employs edge-wise attention and aggregates information from edges as in Sec. 3.4.

5 Experimental studies

5.1 Experimental setup

We conduct experiments on two material benchmark datasets, including The Materials Project [14] and JARVIS [6]. Baseline methods include CFID [5], CGCNN [47], SchNet [38], MEGNET [3], GATGNN [31], and ALIGNN [4]. Unless otherwise specified, for all the baseline methods, we

Table 1: Comparison between Matformer and other baselines in terms of test MAE on The Materials Project 2018.6.1 dataset. We show the results both from our retrained models and from referred papers to make the comparison clear and fair. Specifically, we retrain corresponding models by using exactly the same training, validation, and test sets as our Matformer for these four tasks. Results from original papers are shown in parentheses () on the right. '-' denotes no results are reported in referred papers. The best results are shown in **bold** and the second best results are shown with underlines.

Method	Formation Energy eV/atom	Band Gap eV	Bulk Moduli log(GPa)	Shear Moduli log(GPa)
CGCNN [47]	0.031 (0.039)	0.292 (0.388)	0.047 (0.054)	0.077 (0.087)
SchNet [38]	0.033 (0.035)	0.345 (-)	0.066 (-)	0.099 (-)
MEGNET [3]	0.030 (0.028)	0.307 (0.33)	0.060 (0.050)	0.099 (0.079)
GATGNN [31]	0.033 (0.048)	0.280 (0.31)	0.045	0.075
ALIGNN [4]	0.022	0.218	0.051 (-)	0.078 (-)
Matformer	**0.021**	**0.211**	**0.043**	**0.073**

report the results taken from the referred papers or provided by original authors. All Matformer models are trained using the Adam optimizer [19] with weight decay [30] and one cycle learning rate scheduler [40]. We only slightly adjust learning rates from 0.001 and training epochs from 500 for different tasks. Detailed Matformer configurations for different tasks are provided in Appendix. A.3.

5.2 The Materials Project dataset

We first use The Materials Project-2018.6.1 dataset [3], which contains 69239 crystals, to evaluate Matformer. We notice that previous works [47, 38, 3, 31, 4] compare with each other either using datasets of different sizes, or using datasets with the same size but splitting the datasets with different random seeds. To make the comparison clear and fair, we retrain all corresponding models using exactly the same training, validation and test sets across all methods and report the results in Table. 1. To avoid confusion, we still put original results from referred papers in Table. 1 inside parentheses. In particular, for tasks of formation energy and band gap, we directly follow ALIGNN [4] and use the same training, validation, and test set, including 60000, 5000, and 4239 crystals, respectively. For tasks of Bulk Moduli and Shear Moduli, we follow GATGNN [31], the recent state-of-the-art method for these two tasks, and use the same training, validation, and test sets, including 4664, 393, and 393 crystals. In Shear Moduli, one validation sample is removed because of the negative GPa value. We either directly use the publicly available codes from the authors, or re-implement models based on their official codes and configurations to produce the results. Detailed configurations of these retrained models are provided in Appendix. A.4. The used metric is test MAE following previous studies [47, 38, 3, 31, 4].

It can be seen from Table. 1 that Matformer achieves the best performance on all tasks consistently by significant margins. Specifically, it reduces the formation energy by 4.5% of the second best model, which is a significant margin. Furthermore, for Bulk Moduli and Shear Moduli tasks with only 4664 training samples, Matformer achieves the best performances, indicating Matformer's adaptive ability to tasks of small training scales. The overall excellent performances for different tasks on The Materials Project reveal the effectiveness of our proposed crystal graph representations in Matformer.

5.3 JARVIS dataset

JARVIS is a newly released database proposed by Choudhary et al. [6]. For JARVIS dataset, we follow ALIGNN [4] and use the same training, validation, and test set. We evaluate our Matformer on five important crystal property tasks, including formation energy, bandgap(OPT), bandgap(MBJ), total energy, and Ehull. The training, validation, and test set contains 44578, 5572, and 5572 crystals for tasks of formation energy, total energy, and bandgap(OPT). The numbers are 44296, 5537, 5537 for Ehull, and 14537, 1817, 1817 for bandgap(MBJ). The used metric is test MAE. The results for all baselines are taken from ALIGNN [4].

The quantitative results for Jarvis are shown in Table. 3. Matformer outperforms the baseline methods significantly on all of these five tasks. Compared with ALIGNN, Matformer has stronger discriminative ability due to explicit encoding of periodic patterns. Specifically, Matformer reduces Jarvis Ehull by 0.012, which is 15.8% of ALIGNN. Furthermore, Matformer

Table 2: Efficiency comparison with ALIGNN on Jarvis formation energy. We show the training time per epoch, total training time and inference time.

Models	Time/epoch	Total	Inference
ALIGNN	327 s	27.3 h	156 s
Matformer	64 s	8.9 h	59 s

achieves the best performances for Bulk Moduli and Shear Moduli in the Mateirals Project with 4664 training samples, and Bandgap(MBJ) in JARVIS with 14537 training samples, indicating its adaptive ability to tasks of various data scales. Overall, the superior performances of our Matformer on various tasks of two common material benchmarks show effectiveness of periodic pattern encoding and great potential of our Matformer message passing layer for crystal graphs. In addition, compared with ALIGNN, the previous state-of-the-art method for crystal property prediction, our Matformer is more efficient. We evaluate the efficiency of Matformer by comparing with ALIGNN using JARVIS formation energy dataset. The mean time of ten runs for training and inference time, using corresponding best model configurations of ALIGNN and Matformer, is reported. And the total time is computed by Time/epoch × corresponding training epoch number, which is 300 for ALIGNN and 500 for Matformer. In Table. 2, we show that Matformer is three times faster than ALIGNN in total training time and near three times faster in inference time, for the whole test set.

Table 3: Comparison between Matformer and other baselines in terms of test MAE on JARVIS dataset. The best results are shown in **bold** and the second best results are shown with underlines.

Method	Formation Energy eV/atom	Bandgap(OPT) eV	Total Energy eV/atom	Ehull eV	Bandgap(MBJ) eV
CFID [5]	0.14	0.30	0.24	0.22	0.53
CGCNN [47]	0.063	0.20	0.078	0.17	0.41
ALIGNN [4]	0.0331	0.142	0.037	0.076	0.31
Matformer	**0.0325**	**0.137**	**0.035**	**0.064**	**0.30**

5.4 Ablation study

In this section, we demonstrate the importance of periodic invariance and explicit repeating pattern encoding for crystal representation learning by ablation studies. We also evaluate the building blocks particularly designed for our Matformer. Specifically, we conduct experiments on JARVIS formation energy, and the test MAE is used as the quantitative evaluation metric.

Periodic invariant graph construction. We demonstrate the importance of periodic invariant graph construction by comparing radius multi-edge graph, denoted as Radius, with the graph construction method proposed by Graphormer, denoted as OCgraph. Note that the constructed crystal graphs by OCgraph are super large, containing more than n^2 edges, where n is the atom number in a cell. We adjust the Matformer configurations to

Table 4: Ablation studies about periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding. We use OCgraph to denote graph construction method of Graphormer. PI denotes periodic invariance and PE denotes periodic encoding.

Graph	PI	PE	layer	head	batch	Test MAE
OCgraph	✗	✗	3	1	32	0.0530
Radius w/o PE	✓	✗	3	1	32	0.0348
Radius w/o PE	✓	✗	5	4	64	0.0337
T-fully w PE	✓	✓	5	4	64	0.0402
Radius w PE	✓	✓	5	4	64	**0.0325**

train these large graphs on a single RTX A6000 GPU. We use same model and training configurations for these two graph construction methods. It can be seen from Table. 4 that when using OCgraph to our Matformer, the test MAE drops dramatically of 53% because of breaking periodic invariance, compared with radius-based multi-edge graphs used in Matformer.

Encoding of repeating patterns. We denote periodic pattern encoding as PE. In Table. 4, we show that omitting the periodic pattern encoding results in a significant drop of test MAE from 0.0325 to 0.0337, revealing the importance of periodic patterns for crystal representation learning.

Building blocks of Matformer. Firstly, in Table. 4, we compare two periodic invariant graph construction methods described in Sec. 3.3. We deonte fully connected graph with t smallest pairwise distances as T-fully, and we use $t = 3$. Results show that although both methods satisfy periodic invariance, Radius is better than T-fully. In addition, we evaluate the operation of sigmoid and normalization instead of softmax in

Table 5: Operation ablation study.

Operation	Test MAE
Softmax-scalar	0.0376
Softmax-vector	0.0347
Sigmoid and Norm	**0.0325**

our message passing, which is designed to capture the node degree information in multi-edge crystal graphs, described in Sec. 3.4. Compared with using softmax with scalar attention coefficient, denoted as Softmax-scalar, or softmax with vector attention coefficient, denoted as Softmax-vector, using sigmoid and normalization leading to significant performance improvement in terms of test MAE, justifying the effectiveness of this operation in Matformer message passing design, shown in Table. 5.

6 Conclusion

In this work, we first propose to formally define periodic invariance and periodic pattern encoding for periodic graph learning. We then propose Matformer for periodic graph representation learning, which is invariant to periodicity and can capture repeating patterns explicitly. Experimental results on common benchmark datasets show that our Matformer outperforms baseline methods consistently. In addition, our results demonstrate the importance of periodic invariance and explicit periodic pattern encoding for crystal representation learning.

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