

Solve the $3x+1$ problem by the multiplication and division of binary numbers

Jishe Feng

School of Mathematics and Statistic, Longdong University, Qingyang, Gansu, 745000, China E-mail: gsfjs6567@126.com.

Abstract

The $3x + 1$ problem asks the following: Suppose we start with a positive integer, and if it is odd then multiply it by 3 and add 1, and if it is even, divide it by 2. Then repeat this process as long as you can. Do you eventually reach the integer 1, no matter what you started with? Collatz conjecture (or $3n + 1$ problem) has been explored for about 85 years. In this paper, we convert an integer number from decimal to binary number, and convert the Collatz function to binary function, which is multiplication and division of two binary numbers. Finally the iteration of the Collatz function, eventually reach the integer number 1, thus we solve the $3x + 1$ problem completely.

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1 Introduction

The $3x + 1$ problem is one of the unsolved problems in mathematics. It is also known as the Collatz conjecture, $3x + 1$ mapping, Ulam conjecture, Kakutani's problem, Thwaites conjecture, Hasse's algorithm, or Syracuse problem [1]. Paul Erdos (1913-1996) commented on the intractability of problem $3n + 1$ [2]: "Mathematics is not ready for those problems yet".

The $2x + 1$ problem is that, take any positive integer x , If x is even, divide x by 2. If x is odd, multiply x by 3 and add 1. Repeat this process continuously. The conjecture states that no matter which number you start with, you will always reach 1 eventually.

2 Terminology and notations

We will use the notations as in [4,7]. we describe a Collatz function as

$$T(n) = \begin{cases} 3n + 1, & \text{if } n \text{ is odd number,} \\ \frac{n}{2} & \text{if } n \text{ is even number.} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Let N denote the set of positive integers. For $n \in N$, and $k = 0, 1, 2, 3, \dots$, $T^0(n)$ and $T^{k+1}(n)$ denote n and $T(T^k(n))$, respectively. The $3x + 1$ problem concerns the behavior of the iterates of the Collatz function, for any integer n , there must exist an integer r , so that

$$T^r(n) = 1.$$

2.1 The modified Sarkovskii ordering and integer lattice

We remove the last row number to the first column, get an integer lattice[6] of the modified Sarkovskii ordering as

$$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} 1, & 3, & 5, & 7, & 9, & 11, & 13, & 15, & 17, & 19, & \dots \\ 2, & 2 \cdot 3, & 2 \cdot 5, & 2 \cdot 7, & 2 \cdot 9, & 2 \cdot 11, & 2 \cdot 13, & 2 \cdot 15, & 2 \cdot 17, & 2 \cdot 19, & \dots \\ 2^2, & 2^2 \cdot 3, & 2^2 \cdot 5, & 2^2 \cdot 7, & 2^2 \cdot 9, & 2^2 \cdot 11, & 2^2 \cdot 13, & 2^2 \cdot 15, & 2^2 \cdot 17, & 2^2 \cdot 19, & \dots \\ 2^3, & 2^3 \cdot 3, & 2^3 \cdot 5, & 2^3 \cdot 7, & 2^3 \cdot 9, & 2^3 \cdot 11, & 2^3 \cdot 13, & 2^3 \cdot 15, & 2^3 \cdot 17, & 2^3 \cdot 19, & \dots \\ 2^4, & 2^4 \cdot 3, & 2^4 \cdot 5, & 2^4 \cdot 7, & 2^4 \cdot 9, & 2^4 \cdot 11, & 2^4 \cdot 13, & 2^4 \cdot 15, & 2^4 \cdot 17, & 2^4 \cdot 19, & \dots \\ \dots & \dots \end{array}$$

In the first row, its are odd number from left to right, that are $1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, \dots$, from the second row, each number is multiplying each number in its previous row by 2, and so on.

2.2 The algebraic formula and Collatz graph

If we draw a line segment of arrow between two digits in the lattice of integer in the modified Sarkovskii ordering, those are the original value x , and its value of Collatz function $T(x)$, and connect $T(x)$ to $T^2(x)$, and so on $T^2(x)$ to $T^3(x), \dots$, thus we get a graph, which can be called as *Collatz graph*. For different integer m, n , besides 1, 4, 2, there is not other common vertices in

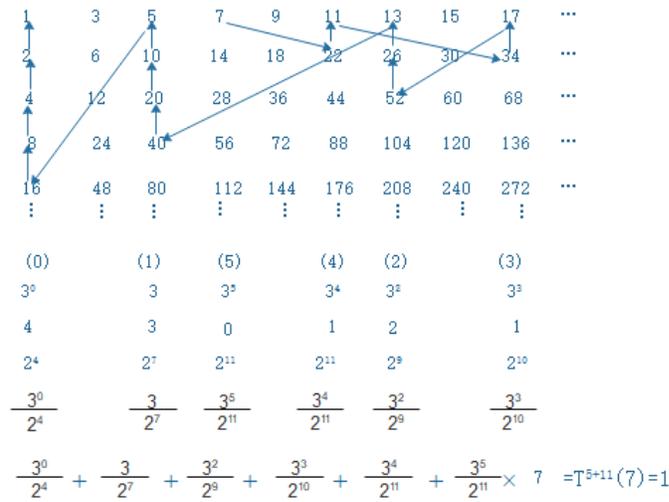


Fig. 1. The Collatz graph of $T^{16}(7) = T(5, 11, 7) = 1$ in the lattice of integers in the modified Sarkovskii ordering and the algebraic formula.

their Collatz graphs. Using the Collatz function $T(x)$, We obtain an algebraic formula of $\frac{1}{2^4}, \frac{3}{2^7}, \frac{3^2}{2^9}, \dots, \frac{3^m}{2^r} \cdot x$. Here r is the number of perpendicular segments, m is the oblique segments in the Collatz graph,

$$T^{m+r}(n) = T(m, r, n) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^7} + \frac{3^2}{2^9} + \dots + \frac{3^m}{2^r} \cdot x = 1,$$

For example, $n = 7, 7 \rightarrow 22 \rightarrow 11 \rightarrow 34 \rightarrow 17 \rightarrow 52 \rightarrow 26 \rightarrow 13 \rightarrow 40 \rightarrow 20 \rightarrow 10 \rightarrow 5 \rightarrow 16 \rightarrow 8 \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow 2 \rightarrow 1 \rightarrow \dots$, the algebraic formula is

$$T^{16}(7) = T(5, 11, 7) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^7} + \frac{3^2}{2^9} + \frac{3^3}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^5}{2^{11}} \cdot 7 = 1,$$

and the Collatz graph is Fig. 1.

And $n = 36$, the algebraic formula is

$$T^{21}(36) = T(6, 15, 36) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^7} + \frac{3^2}{2^9} + \frac{3^3}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^5}{2^{13}} + \frac{3^6}{2^{15}} \cdot 36 = 1$$

and the Collatz graph is Fig. 2.

3 Numerical example

We propose the following algebraic formulas,

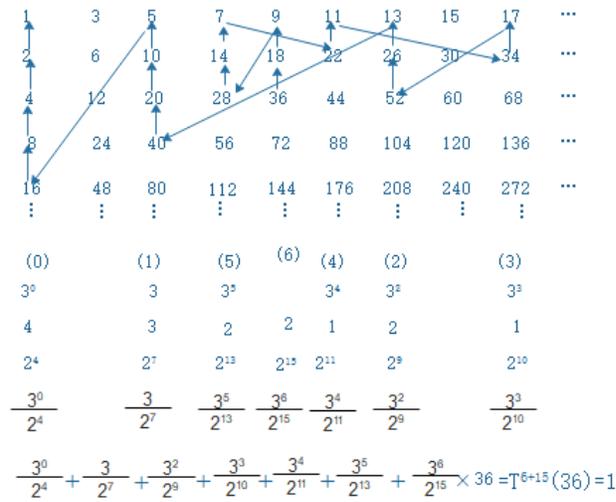


Fig. 2. The Collatz graph of $T^{21}(36) = T(6, 15, 36) = 1$ in the lattice of integers in the modified Sarkovskii ordering and the algebraic formula.

$$T^{20}(18) = T(6, 14, 18) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^7} + \frac{3^2}{2^9} + \frac{3^3}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^5}{2^{13}} + \frac{3^6}{2^{14}} \cdot 18 = 1,$$

$$T^{15}(23) = T(4, 11, 23) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^9} + \frac{3^2}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^3}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{11}} \cdot 23 = 1,$$

$$T^{17}(15) = T(5, 12, 15) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^9} + \frac{3^2}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^3}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{12}} + \frac{3^5}{2^{12}} \cdot 15 = 1,$$

$$T^{12}(17) = T(3, 9, 17) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^7} + \frac{3^2}{2^9} + \frac{3^3}{2^9} \cdot 17 = 1,$$

$$T^{19}(61) = T(5, 14, 61) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^9} + \frac{3^2}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^3}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{14}} + \frac{3^5}{2^{14}} \cdot 61 = 1.$$

$$T^{16}(397) = T(5, 11, 397) = \frac{1}{2^4} + \frac{3}{2^7} + \frac{3^2}{2^9} + \frac{3^3}{2^{10}} + \frac{3^4}{2^{11}} + \frac{3^5}{2^{17}} + \frac{3^6}{2^{20}} + \frac{3^7}{2^{20}} \cdot 397 = 1,$$

4 Convert the integer number from decimal to binary

Be inspired by the above, we use binary to describe the Collatz function (1) as follows. We denote binary number which is a string of 0s and 1s, $n = (1 \cdots \times)_2$, \times is 1 or 0, $3 = (11)_2$,

$$T(n) = T((1 \cdots \times)_2) = \begin{cases} (11)_2 \cdot (1 \cdots 1)_2 + 1, & \text{if } n \text{ is odd number,} \\ \frac{(1 \cdots 0)_2}{(10)_2}, & \text{if } n \text{ is even number.} \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \times \quad 1100001 \\
 \quad \quad 11 \\
 \hline
 1100001 \\
 1100001 \\
 \hline
 10100011
 \end{array}
 \qquad
 \begin{array}{r}
 + \quad 10100011 \\
 \quad \quad 1 \\
 \hline
 10100100 \\
 10100100/100=101001
 \end{array}$$

Fig. 3. For the Collatz function $T(97)$ in binary, the first step is the multiplication in left, the second step is division in right bottom.

$$T(n) = T((1 \cdots \times)_2) = \begin{cases} (1 \times \times \times 0 \cdots 0)_2, & \text{if } n \text{ is odd number,} \\ (1 \times \times \times 1)_2, & \text{if } n \text{ is even number.} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

Namely, when n is odd number, we multiple it with $(11)_2$ and add 1 to the end of the binary number, we give an example, $T(97) = T(1100001)$ in Fig. 3 in the follows. When n is even number, the division is equal to delete zeros at the end in binary number. We give the iteration of the Collatz function for 7, 97 in binary as the following two tables.

Example 1 For positive integer 1, we manipulate the iteration of the Collatz function in decimal and binary numbers,

<i>ith</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>decimal</i>	1	4	2	1
<i>binary</i>	1	100	10	1

Example 2 For $7=(111)_2$, we manipulate the iteration of the Collatz function in decimal and binary numbers,

<i>ith</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>decimal</i>	7	22	11	34	17	52	13	40	5	16	1
<i>binary</i>	111	10110	1011	100010	10001	110100	1101	101000	101	10000	1

Example 3 For $97=(100100)_2$, we manipulate the iteration of the Collatz

function in binary as the following table,

0	1100001	30	11001110	60	110101001	90	1101100010
1	100100100	31	1100111	61	10011111100	91	110110001
2	10010010	32	100110110	62	1001111110	92	10100010100
3	1001001	33	10011011	63	100111111	93	1010001010
4	11011100	34	111010010	64	1110111110	94	101000101
5	1101110	35	11101001	65	111011111	95	1111010000
6	110111	36	1010111100	66	10110011110	96	111101000
7	11111010	37	101011110	67	1011001111	97	11110100
8	1111101	38	10101111	68	100001101110	98	1111010
9	10100110	39	1000001110	69	10000110111	99	111101
10	1010011	40	100000111	70	110010100110	100	10111000
11	11111010	41	11000010110	71	11001010011	101	1011100
12	1111101	42	1100001011	72	1001011111010	102	101110
13	101111000	43	10010100010	73	100101111101	103	10111
14	10111100	44	1001010001	74	1110001111000	104	1000110
15	1011110	45	11011110100	75	111000111100	105	100011
16	101111	46	1101111010	76	11100011110	106	1101010
17	10001110	47	110111101	77	1110001111	107	110101
18	1101011	48	10100111000	78	101010101110	108	10100000
19	101000010	49	1010011100	79	10101010111	109	1010000
20	10100001	50	101001110	80	1000000000110	110	101000
21	111100100	51	10100111	81	100000000011	111	10100
22	11110010	52	111110110	82	1100000001010	112	1010
23	1111001	53	11111011	83	110000000101	113	101
24	101101100	54	1011110010	84	10010000010000	114	10000
25	10110110	55	101111001	85	1001000001000	115	1000
26	1011011	56	10001101100	86	100100000100	116	100
27	100010010	57	1000110110	87	10010000010	117	10
28	10001001	58	100011011	88	1001000001	118	1
29	110011100	59	1101010010	89	11011000100		

We can rewrite the Collatz conjecture in binary as the follows, it becomes an easy problem.

Fact 4 *For any positive integer, under the Collatz function, the sequence of integer number in binary eventually must reach the integer 1.*

PROOF. *For an binary number of odd integer, when we add 1 to the end, and add the shifted binary number one place to the left, finally, the result number must with at least one zero at the end, we delete this zeros. Thus repeat this process as long as we can, eventually we must reach 1.*

Remark 5 *We can say that $3x + 1$ problem is an converse proposition of period three implies chaos [4] and an example.*

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