

Article

Not peer-reviewed version

A Proof of Collatz Conjecture Using Pyramid Fractions

[Mehdi Khoshakhlagh Varnosfaderani](#)*

Posted Date: 19 January 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints202401.1488.v1

Keywords: Collatz conjecture; $3x+1$ problem; Syracuse problem; pyramid fraction; Ulam's conjecture; Kakutani's problem



Preprints.org is a free multidiscipline platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Article

A Proof of Collatz Conjecture Using Pyramid Fractions

Mehdi Khoshakhlagh Varnosfaderani

Bachelor Student; Azad University of Khominishahr; Email: mehdi.khoshakhlagh@iaukhsh.ac.ir

Abstract: In this paper, I introduce a new concept of representing numbers in base $\frac{1}{3}$; in other words, I have found new series for any number similar to series that could be written according to the collatz sequence which is called $z_i(n)$ in this article. These series need to end with 1. Then, we use two sets of rules to make a diagram which then proves the existence of such series for any number. In this diagram, by branching numbers into different branches in accordance to the modularity of 4 and continuing branching to the point that their numbers have enough common terms in their collatz series, we could reduce $z_i(n)$ to $z_i(k)$ so that $k < n$ in any branch by Rule Number One. This diagram shows that $z_i(n)$ exists for every number, in other words, this proves the theorem (A) or z_i -existence theorem. The proof of z_i -existence theorem leads to a proof of the collatz conjecture because the collatz series could be written as a linear combination of such series that all of them end with 1, so the collatz series for any number ends with 1. Also $z_i(n)$ of any number could be written as a pyramid

$$\text{fraction } n = \frac{\begin{array}{c} 2^{\alpha_1} - 2^{\alpha_2} - 2^{\alpha_3} - \dots - 2^{\alpha_{i-1}} - 1 \\ \hline 3 \end{array}}{3}$$

Keywords: collatz conjecture; $3x+1$ problem; Syracuse problem; base $\frac{1}{3}$; pyramid fraction; Ulam's conjecture; Kakutani's problem

Part 1

Introduction

Choose a natural number. If the current number is even, divide it by 2, and if it is odd, multiply it by three and add one. The Collatz conjecture says when you proceed with these two rules again and again, you reach 1; no matter which positive number has been chosen to start the sequence. It is named after the mathematician Lothar Collatz, who introduced the idea in 1937, two years after receiving his doctorate [1]. Lagarias provided a useful survey of the subject [2]. collatz conjecture is a very famous problem in mathematics, and has not yet been completely solved. This conjecture is also known as Kakutani's problem, the $3x+1$ problem, the Ulam conjecture, the Thwaites conjecture, Hasse's algorithm, and the Syracuse problem [3,4]. The Collatz conjecture has been checked up to 2^{68} for all positive numbers by 2020 [5]. The nearest proof of conjecture has been posted by Dr. Terence Tao who shows that conjecture is "almost" true for "almost" all numbers [6]. This paper presents a simple, complete elementary proof for collatz conjecture. I use a new method and some new symbols in this article which will be explained later. This proof is based on a diagram that is the result of two rules and will be present in second part.

Discussion

1. Base $\frac{1}{3}$ and definition of symbols

1.1. Definition of base $\frac{1}{3}$

We say that a natural number is converted into **base $\frac{1}{3}$** when there are powers of 2, so that the following relationship exists between n and them:

$$n \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^0 + 2^0 \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^1 + 2^{\alpha_1} \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^2 + 2^{\alpha_2} \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^3 + \dots + 2^{\alpha_i} \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^r = 2^\alpha \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^r$$

The base is $\frac{1}{3}$ and its digits are powers of 2. Here, we actually express n to powers of 2 and 3. Same as above, we say that n is converted into *base* $\frac{1}{5}$ if there are powers of 2 and 3, so that we have:

$$n + \frac{1}{5} + 2^{\alpha_1} 3^{\beta_1} \left(\frac{1}{5}\right) + 2^{\alpha_2} 3^{\beta_2} \left(\frac{1}{5}\right)^2 + \dots + 2^{\alpha_i} 3^{\beta_i} \left(\frac{1}{5}\right)^q = 2^\alpha 3^\beta \left(\frac{1}{5}\right)^q$$

And so on. Here, $\frac{1}{5}$ is the base, and the digits are the product of powers of 2 and 3. We have similar definitions for other bases. For *base* $\frac{1}{p}$, the digits are the product of powers of primes smaller than n.

1.2. different ways of writing n when it is converted into *base* $\frac{1}{p}$.

When n is converted into *base* $\frac{1}{3}$. We show it in 3 ways:

1.2.a. As bracket:

$$[(n)(1)(2^{\alpha_1})(2^{\alpha_2}) \dots \dots (2^{\alpha_i})] = 2^\alpha$$

For example:

$$[(n)(1)(2^{\alpha_1})(2^{\alpha_2}) \dots (2^{\alpha_{i-1}})(2^{\alpha_i})] = 2^\alpha$$

$$(1) \left(\frac{1}{3}\right) \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^2 \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^3 \dots \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^{j-1} \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^j \left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^j$$

1.2.b. As a pyramid fraction: such as pyramid fraction in the beginning of this article.

1.2.c. As a finite series, we called $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ or $\tilde{z}_i(n)$.

$$\tilde{z}_i(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} = \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i}$$

We can continue $\tilde{z}_i(n)$:

$$\tilde{z}_i(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^{i+1}} + \frac{4 * 2^\alpha}{3^{i+2}} + \frac{16 * 2^\alpha}{3^{i+3}} + \dots$$

When we continue $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ after some terms, each term becomes a quadruple the previous term. These terms of $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ are called calm terms or calm zone. The first terms of $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ that aren't regular are called hailstone terms or hailstone zone of $\tilde{z}_i(n)$. For example:

$$\tilde{z}_i(n) \Rightarrow \underbrace{n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^4} + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^5}}_{\text{hailstone zone}} + \underbrace{\frac{4 * 2^\alpha}{3^7} + \frac{16 * 2^\alpha}{3^8} + \dots}_{\text{calm zone}}$$

1.3. $\tilde{c}\tilde{o}(n)$

The series has been written according to the collatz sequence called $\tilde{c}\tilde{o}(n)$.

$\tilde{c}\tilde{o}(n)$ is a special case of $\tilde{z}_i(n)$. This type of $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ is important for us.

$\tilde{c}\tilde{o}(n)$ is unique for every number and we can consider it as main $\tilde{z}_i(n)$.

But With a few algebraic changes in $\tilde{c}\tilde{o}(n)$ or $\tilde{z}_i(n)$, so that numerators of terms remain powers of 2 we can obtain different $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ for a natural number.

We can write $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ or $\tilde{c}\tilde{o}(n)$ as an equation between powers of 2, 3, and n :

For $\tilde{z}_i(n)$ if:

$$\tilde{z}_i(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} = \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i}$$

Then

$$n * 3^i + 3^{i-1} + 2^{\alpha_1} * 3^{i-2} + 2^{\alpha_2} * 3^{i-3} + \dots + 2^{\alpha_i} = 2^\alpha$$

1.4

1.4.a. definition of $n\tilde{z}i(n)$ and $n\tilde{c}o(n)$

The set of powers of 2 that are numerators of terms in $\tilde{z}i(n)$ and $\tilde{c}o(n)$, is called numbers of $\tilde{z}i(n)$ and $\tilde{c}o(n)$, and we indicate it with $n\tilde{z}i(n)$ and $n\tilde{c}o(n)$.

For example:

$$\tilde{z}i(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^{i+1}} + \frac{4 * 2^\alpha}{3^{i+2}} + \frac{16 * 2^\alpha}{3^{i+3}} + \dots$$

$$n\tilde{z}i(n) = \{1, 2^{\alpha_1}, 2^{\alpha_2}, \dots, 2^{\alpha_i}, 2^\alpha, 4 * 2^\alpha, 16 * 2^\alpha \dots\}$$

1.4.b. Definition of $jn\tilde{z}i(n)$ and $jn\tilde{c}o(n)$

The set of powers of 2 obtain from dividing each numerator of any term by the numerator of the previous term is called jump numbers of $\tilde{z}i(n)$ and $\tilde{c}o(n)$, and we show them with $jn\tilde{z}i(n)$ or $jn\tilde{c}o(n)$,

$$\tilde{z}i(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^{i+1}} + \frac{4 * 2^\alpha}{3^{i+2}} + \frac{16 * 2^\alpha}{3^{i+3}} + \dots$$

$$jn\tilde{z}i(n) = \{2^{\alpha_1}, 2^{\alpha_2 - \alpha_1}, \dots, 2^{\alpha - \alpha_i}, 4, 4, \dots\}$$

In the calm zone, all of jump numbers are 4. $jn\tilde{z}i(n)$ contains 2^0 and the negative powers of 2, but $jn\tilde{c}o(n)$ only has positive powers of 2, and the smallest jump number in $jn\tilde{c}o(n)$ is 2.

Here is the difference between $z_i(n)$ and $\tilde{z}i(n)$:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \tilde{z}i(n) \text{ or } \tilde{c}o(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots \dots \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i} + \dots \\ z_i(n) \text{ or } co(n) \Rightarrow \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots \dots \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i} + \dots \end{array} \right.$$

Therefore: $\tilde{z}i(n) \text{ or } \tilde{c}o(n) = n + z_i(n)$

2. Rule 1(algebraic rule):

Reducing $z_i(n)$ to $z_i(k)$ so that $k < n$ using algebraic rule of obtaining $z_i(n)$ from $z_i(\frac{n-1}{2})$

Initial terms of $\tilde{c}o(\frac{n-1}{2})$ are important for obtaining $\tilde{z}i(n)$ from them. In some numbers, with a few algebraic changes, we can obtain $z_i(m)$ from $\tilde{c}o(\frac{m-1}{2})$.

In some numbers that we couldn't obtain $\tilde{z}i(n)$ from $\tilde{c}o(\frac{m-1}{2})$ directly, we need to continue n according to collatz sequence to reach a right number such as m with suitable initial terms in $\tilde{c}o(\frac{m-1}{2})$ so that we can obtain $\tilde{z}i(m)$ from it; however, for reducing n last terms of $\tilde{c}o(\frac{m-1}{2})$ after initial terms must end with a smaller number than n .

In general, there is a path for each n to reducing $z_i(n)$. This path contains

1. continuing according to Collatz sequence. (horizontal movement)
2. converting some numbers during the path such as m to $\frac{m-1}{2}$. (vertical movement)

For reducing n , we have to choose the correct path so that the last line of the path after the initial terms ends with a number smaller than n , and the initial terms of each line during the path have to be suitable for obtaining $z_i(m)$ from $z_i(\frac{m-1}{2})$ of that line.

In general, with basic algebraic rules for these series, we can obtain $z_i(n)$ from $z_i(\frac{n-1}{4})$ or $z_i(\frac{n-5}{8})$ or $z_i(\frac{n-21}{64})$, or even sometimes from $z_i(k)$ if $k < n$ which depends on n . From all the basic algebraic rules of such series, we only use obtaining $z_i(n)$ from $z_i(\frac{n-1}{2})$ in the Zi_3 -diagram and consider it as Rule Number 1.

3. Rule 2(arithmetic rule)

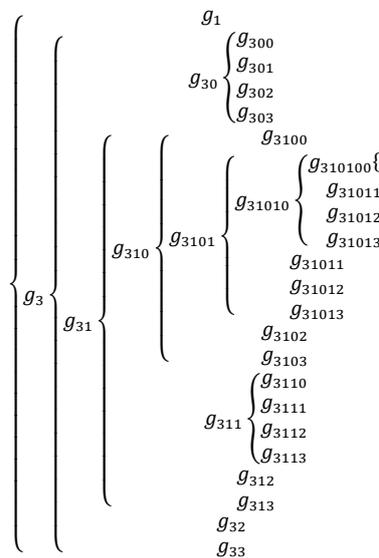
Every natural number can be converted into base-4, and we write it as;

In the z_{i3} -diagram, according to rule 2, we categorize natural numbers into different branches by the modularity of 4. The more we proceed with branching, the more numbers in branches become similar to their own $co(n)$, so we continue to reach suitable branches whose numbers have enough common terms in their $co(n)$, and then, with the help of rule 1, we reduce $z_i(n)$ to $z_i(k)$ so that $k < n$ in each branch. In other words, we continue categorize numbers according to the modularity 4 until we reach the branches whose numbers have the same path to reducing z_i of them to z_i of a smaller number. The path includes horizontal and vertical movements, and the path for each branch in this diagram isn't unique. Number of branches in this diagram is finite. We use this diagram to prove z_i -existence theorem or theorem A and also collatz conjecture. This diagram will be presented in second part of article.

When we categorize numbers according to the modularity of four numbers that have the same path placed in the same branch, we can find a path for each branch to reduce $z_i(n)$'s.

However, you can make the z_i -diagram shorter if you accept 0 and 1 in numerators of $z_i(n)$ and accept all algebraic rules of such series as Rule Number 1.

Here is the first page of branching numbers at the beginning of the z_i -diagram below. Aftermath it will continued to reach branches that have a suitable path for reducing $z_i(n)$ to $z_i(k)$ such that $k < n$. The branches are finite in this tree-diagram.



In some branches, when we continue n according to collatz sequence, we reach k , where $k < n$. for example $g_1, g_{3300}, g_{3302}, g_{32101211}, \dots$

In some branches, we can obtain $z_i(n)$ from $z_i(\frac{n-1}{2})$ directly, such as: $g_{3321}, g_{3323}, g_{3301}, \dots$

But in some branches, we need to choose a complicated path, include horizontal and vertical movements to reach the right number such as k , so that $\frac{k_j-1}{2}$ has two conditions:

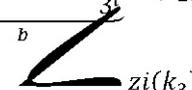
a. We should be able to obtain $z_i(k_j)$ from $z_i(\frac{k_j-1}{2})$ with algebraic changes in the initial terms of $z_i(\frac{k_j-1}{2})$.

b. $z_i(\frac{k_j-1}{2})$ after these initial terms reaches a number smaller than n .

Furthermore, we must be able to obtain $z_i(k_i)$ from $z_i(\frac{k_i-1}{2})$ by a few algebraic changes in initial terms of $z_i(\frac{k_i-1}{2})$ during the path in any line.

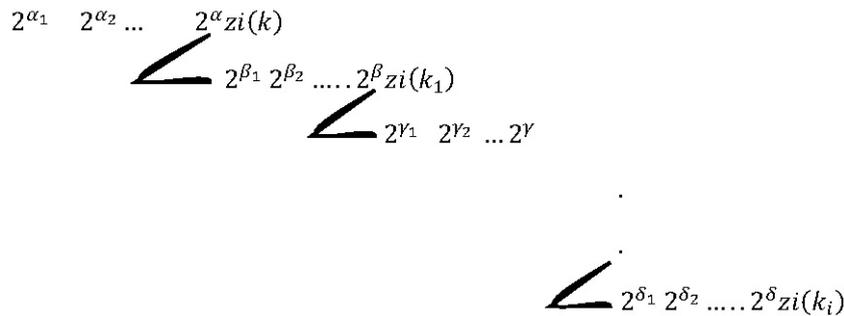
In general, we have such path:

$$z_i(n) \Rightarrow \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i} z_i(k)$$

$$zi(k_1) \Rightarrow \underbrace{\frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\beta_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\beta_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^\beta}{3^i}}_b zi(k_2)$$


$$.zi(k_i) \Rightarrow \underbrace{\frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\delta_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\delta_2}}{3^3} + \dots + \frac{2^\delta}{3^i}}_e zi(k_j) \quad k_j < n$$

We can indicate this path according to jump numbers:



The story of branch $g_{33\dots 3}$ is different, which I will explain in second part of the article. The second part of the article contains zi_3 -diagram. In the zi_3 -diagram, we will show the path of every branch and the numbers in any branch will be reduced to a smaller number.

5. Theorem(A)

Zi₃-existence-theorem, which is a weak form of collatz theorem:

There is $zi(n)$ for every natural number; in other words, all natural numbers can be converted into base $\frac{1}{3}$.

Proof:

In the zi_3 -diagram, we have categorized numbers into different branches according to modularity of 4, and we continue branching until we reach branches whose numbers are enough similar in base-4, then we have reduced $zi(n)$ to $zi(k)$ by a path so that $k < n$ in each branch. With the zi_3 -diagram, we can obtain $zi(n)$ for every n . First, we should determine n belongs to which branch of diagram, and in that branch, we reduce $zi(n)$ to $zi(k)$ so that $k < n$. Now k belongs to another branch in the zi_3 -diagram, and we can reduce k to a smaller number. By continuing this process again and again, we reach 1, and we find $zi(n)$ for all the natural numbers. This proves theorem A.

6. Converting zi's of n to each other

According to the theorem (A), for every n , we have:

$$\tilde{zi}(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots \dots \dots \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} = \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i}$$

We close $zi(n)$, in the second term:

$$\tilde{zi}(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} zi(k)$$

Therefore:

$$\tilde{zi}(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1} * 2^r}{3^2} \frac{zi(k)}{2^r} = n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1+r}}{3^2} zi\left(\frac{k}{2^r}\right)$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 zi\left(\frac{k}{2^r}\right) &\Rightarrow \frac{1}{3} + \frac{zi\left(\frac{3k}{2^r} * 2^r + 2^r\right)}{3^2 * 2^r} = \frac{1}{3} + \frac{zi(3k + 2^r)}{3^2 * 2^r} \\
 \tilde{zi}(n) &\Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1+r}}{3} \left[\frac{1}{3} + \frac{zi(3k + 2^r)}{3^2 * 2^r} \right] \\
 \tilde{zi} &\Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{r+\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}zi(3k + 2^r)}{3^3} \\
 \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2}zi(k) &= \frac{2^{r+\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}zi(3k + 2^r)}{3^3}
 \end{aligned}$$

We can obtain $zi(3k + 2^r)$ from the zi -diagram. In this series, with desire r , we change the second term and consequently other terms aftermath, and we have a different zi for n . Here we choose and close the second term in the original zi . We can close the other terms and obtain a different zi of n . In general, for term i :

$$\frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^i}zi(k) = \frac{2^{r+\alpha_1}}{3^i} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}zi(3k + 2^r)}{3^{i+1}} \quad (v)$$

In fact, with different r , the path of $zi(n)$ changes, and we can obtain different zi for n .

7. Collatz theorem proof

In the zi -diagram for every n we have:

$$\tilde{zi}(n) \Rightarrow n + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{2^{\alpha_1}}{3^2} + \frac{2^{\alpha_2}}{3^3} + \dots \dots \frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^i} = \frac{2^\alpha}{3^i} * 1$$

With equation (v), we can write every zi of n [especially $co(n)$], such as:

$$n + \frac{1}{3} + \sum \left[\frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^{\gamma_t}} \right] + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^{\gamma_t+1}}zi(q)$$

That $zi(q) \in zi$ -diagram.

Actually, you can use the branches in the zi -diagram as elements to make any zi , even $co(n)$, from them.

According to theorem A, we know *all* $zi(n) \in zi$ -diagram $\longrightarrow zi(1)$, therefore:

$$co(n) = n + \frac{1}{3} + \sum_t^i \left[\frac{2^{\alpha_i}}{3^{\gamma_t}} \right] + \frac{2^\alpha}{3^{\gamma_t+1}}zi(q) \longrightarrow zi(1)$$

If $co(n)$ don't end with $co(1)$ then there is a $zi(m)$ in the zi -diagram don't end with 1 and theorem(A) must be false.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we proved collatz conjecture only with two simple rules. We actually used a relationship between $co(n)$ and modularity of 4.

With two rules, we make the zi_3 -diagram that it shows all natural numbers can be converted into *base* $-\frac{1}{3}$. In part 2, we will represent the zi_3 -diagram. This led to a proof of collatz conjecture.

This method can be used for:

1. other bases such as: $1/5, 1/7, \dots$
2. other forms of collatz problem's generalizations. We can even, arrange a similar diagram for negative integer.

You can write the zi_5 -diagram which could be easier than zi_3 -diagram, or the zi -diagrams for other bases: zi_7, zi_{11}, \dots

But writing the z_n -diagram is time-consuming.

Acknowledgement: I dedicate my research to my parents. I would like to thank my nephew Mehrdad Ghassabi, who introduced me to this problem several years ago. I am also very grateful to Dr. Mehdi Nasri, the Research Deputy of Azad University of Khomeinishahr, who helped me to publish this article.

References

1. O'connor,J.J. ;Robertson,E.F.(2006)."Lothar Collatz".St Andrews University School of Mathematics and Statistics,Scotland.
2. Lagarias,Jeffrey C. (1985). "The $3x+1$ problem and its generalizations". The American Mathematical Monthly. 92 (1): 323.
3. Maddux,Cleborne D.Johnson,D.Lamont(1997).Logo:A Retrospective.New York:Haworth Press.P.160.ISBN 0-7890-0374-0.
4. According to Lagarias(1985),p.4,the name "Syracuse problem" was proposed by Hasse in the 1950s,during a visit to Syracuse University.
5. Barina, David (2020)." Convergence verification of the Collatz problem." The Journal of Supercomputing. 77 (3): 26812688
6. Terence Tao. Almost all orbits of the collatz map attain almost bounded values. 2019. URL <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1909.03562.pdf>. Published directly to arXiv with arXiv ID 1909.03562.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.