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ON THE GLOBAL ASYMPTOTIC STABILITY OF THE DIFFERENCE EQUATION $x_{n+1} = \dfrac{x_{n-1}x_{n-3} + x_{n-1}^2 + a}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}$

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ABSTRACT. We investigate the dynamical behavior of the following fourth-order rational difference equation

$$x_{n+1} = \frac{x_{n-1}x_{n-3} + x_{n-1}^2 + a}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}, \; n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

where $a \in [0, \infty)$ and the initial values $x_{-3}, x_{-2}, x_{-1}, x_0 \in (0, \infty)$. We find that the successive lengths of positive and negative semicycles of nontrivial solutions of the above equation occur periodically. We also show that the positive equilibrium of the equation is globally asymptotically stable.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARIES

Recently there has been a great interest in studying the qualitative properties of rational difference equations. For the systematical studies of rational and nonrational difference equations, one can refer to the monographs [1-18] and references therein.

The study of rational difference equations of order greater than one is quite challenging and rewarding because some prototypes for the development of the basic theory of the global behavior of nonlinear difference equations of order greater than one come from the results for rational difference equations. However, there have not been any effective general methods to deal with the global behavior of rational difference equations of order greater than one so far. Therefore, the study of rational difference equations of order greater than one is worth further consideration.

G. Ladas [4] proposed to study the rational difference equation

$$x_{n+1} = \frac{x_n + x_{n-1}x_{n-2} + a}{x_n x_{n-1} + x_{n-2} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots \qquad ()$$

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From then on, rational difference equations with the unique positive equilibrium $\bar{x} = 1$ have received considerable attention, one can refer to [3-5, 7, 14-16, 18, 20] and the references cited therein.

Recently, Li [20] investigated the global behavior of the following fourth-order rational difference equation

$$x_{n+1} = \frac{x_n x_{n-1} x_{n-3} + x_n + x_{n-1} + x_{n-3} + a}{x_n x_{n-1} + x_n x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} x_{n-3} + 1 + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \dots \qquad ()$$

where $a \in [0, \infty)$ and initial values $x_{-3}, x_{-2}, x_{-1}, x_0 \in (0, \infty)$.

In this note, we employ the method in Li [20, 21] to consider the following fourth-order rational difference equation

$$x_{n+1} = \frac{x_{n-1} x_{n-3} + x_{n-1}^2 + a}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \dots \qquad ()$$

where $a, \in [0, \infty)$ and initial values $x_{-3}, x_{-2}, x_{-1}, x_0 \in (0, \infty)$.
It is easy to see that the positive equilibrium $\bar{x}$ of Eq. (3) satisfies

$$\bar{x} = \frac{2\bar{x}^2 + a}{\bar{x}^3 + \bar{x} + a} \qquad ()$$

from which one can see that Eq. (4) has a unique positive equilibrium $\bar{x} = 1$.

In the following, we state some main definitions used in this paper.

Definition 1.1. A positive semicycle of a solution $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ consists of a "string" of terms $\{x_l, x_{l+1}, \dots, x_m\}$, all greater than or equal to the equilibrium $\overline{x}$, with $l \geq -3$ and $m \leq \infty$ and such that

$$\text{either } \; l = -3, \text{ or } \; l > -3 \text{ and } \; x_{l-1} < \overline{x}.$$

and

$$\text{either } \; m = \infty, \text{ or } \; m < \infty \text{ and } \; x_{m+1} < \overline{x}.$$

A negative semicycle of a solution (x_n) consists of a "string" of terms $\{x_l, x_{l+1}, \dots, x_m\}$, all less than to $\overline{x}$, with $l \geq -3$ and $m \leq \infty$ and such that

$$\text{either } \; l = -3 \text{ or } \; l > -3 \text{ and } \; x_{l-1} \geq \overline{x}.$$

and

$$\text{either } \; m = \infty \text{ or } \; m < \infty \text{ and } \; x_{m+1} \geq \overline{x}.$$

The length of a semicycle is the number of the total terms contained in it.

Definition 1.2. A solution $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ of Eq. (3) is said to be enventually trivial if x_n or x_{2n} or x_{2n+1} are eventually equal to $\bar{x} = 1$; otherwise, the solution is said to be nontrivial.

2. **TWO LEMMAS**

Before to draw a qualitatively clear picture for the positive solutions of Eq. (3), we first establish two basic lemmas which will play a key role in the proof of our main results.

Lemma 2.1. *A positive solution* $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ *of Eq.* (3) *is eventually trivial if and only if*

$$(x_{-3}-1)(x_{-2}-1)(x_{-1}-1)(x_0-1)=0 \qquad ()$$

Proof. Assume the (5) holds. Then according to Eq. (3), it is easy to see that the following conclusions hold:

(i) if $(x_{-3}-1)(x_{-1}-1)(x_1-1)=0$, then $x_{2n+1}=1$ for $n\geq 1$.

(ii) if $(x_{-2}-1)(x_0-1)=0$, then $x_{2n}=1$ for $n\geq 1$. Conversely, assume that

$$(x_{-3}-1)(x_{-1}-1)(x_1-1)\neq 0 \qquad ()$$

Then one can show that $x_n\neq 1$ for any $n>1$. Assume the contrary that for some $N>1$,

$$x_N=1 \text{ and that } x_n\neq 1 \text{ for } -3\leq n\leq N-1 \qquad ()$$

It is easy to see that

$$1=x_N=\frac{x_{N-2}x_{N-4}+x_{N-2}^2+a}{x_{N-2}^2x_{N-4}+x_{N-2}+a},$$

which implies $(x_{N-4}-1)(x_{N-2}-1)=0$. Obviously, this contradicts (7). □

Remark 2.2. If the initial conditions do not satisfy Eq. (5), then, for any solution $\{x_n\}$ of Eq. (3), $x_n\neq 1$ for $n\geq -3$. Here, the solution is a nontrivial one. In this paper we only consider the behavior of nontrivial solutions of Eq. (3).

Lemma 2.3. *Let* $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ *be a nontrivial positive solution of Eq.* (3). *Then the following conclusions are true for* $n\geq 0$.

(a) $(x_{n+1}-1)(x_{n-1}-1)(x_{n-3}-1)<0$

(b) $(x_{n+1}-x_{n-1})(x_{n-1}-1)<0$.

(c) $(x_{n+1}-x_{n-3})(x_{n-3}-1)<0$.

(d) $(x_{n+1}-\frac{1}{x_{n-1}})(x_{n-1}-1)>0$.

(e) $(x_{n+1}-\frac{1}{x_{n-3}})(x_{n-3}-1)>0$.

Proof. It follows in light of Eq. (3) that

$$x_{n+1}-1=\frac{x_{n-1}(1-x_{n-1})(x_{n-3}-1)}{x_{n-1}^2x_{n-3}+x_{n-1}+a}, \quad n=0,1,2,\ldots$$

and

$$x_{n+1} - x_{n-1} = \frac{(1 - x_{n-1})[x_{n-1}x_{n-3}(1 + x_{n-1}) + a]}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

and

$$x_{n+1} - x_{n-3} = \frac{(1 - x_{n-3})[x_{n-1}^2(1 + x_{n-3}) + a]}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

and

$$x_{n+1} - \frac{1}{x_{n-1}} = \frac{(x_{n-1} - 1)[x_{n-1}(x_{n-1} + 1) + a]}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

and

$$x_{n+1} - \frac{1}{x_{n-3}} = \frac{(x_{n-3} - 1)[x_{n-3}(x_{n-3} + 1) + a]}{x_{n-1}^2 x_{n-3} + x_{n-1} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

□

3. MAIN RESULTS

First we analyze the structure of the semicycles of nontrivial solutions of Eq. (3). Here we confine us to consider the situation of the strictly oscillatory solution of Eq. (3).

Theorem 3.1. *Let* $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ *be a strictly oscillatory solution of Eq.* (3). *Then the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles of this solution to successively occur is*

or , $\ldots, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, \ldots$
or , $\ldots, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^-, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^- \ldots$
or , $\ldots, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^- \ldots$

Proof. Based on the strictly oscillatory character of the solution, we see that, for some integer $p \geq 0$, one of the following four cases must occur:

Case 1: $x_{p-3} > 1,\ x_{p-2} < 1,\ x_{p-1} > 1$ and $x_p > 1$.
Case 2: $x_{p-3} > 1,\ x_{p-2} < 1,\ x_{p-1} > 1$ and $x_p < 1$.
Case 3: $x_{p-3} > 1,\ x_{p-2} < 1,\ x_{p-1} < 1$ and $x_p > 1$.
Case 4: $x_{p-3} > 1,\ x_{p-2} < 1,\ x_{p-1} < 1$ and $x_p < 1$.

If case 1 occurs, it follows from Lemma 2.2 (a) that
$x_{p+1} < 1,\ x_{p+2} > 1,\ x_{p+3} > 1,\ x_{p+4} < 1,\ x_{p+5} > 1,\ x_{p+6} > 1,\ x_{p+7} < 1,$ $x_{p+8} > 1, x_{p+9} > 1,\ x_{p+10} < 1,\ x_{p+11} > 1,\ x_{p+12} > 1, \ldots$
It means that the rule for the length of positive and negative semicycles of the solution of Eq. (3) to occur successively is $\ldots, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, \ldots$
If the case 2 and case 3 occurs, it follows from Lemma 2.2 (a) implies that
$x_{p+1} < 1,\ x_{p+2} < 1,\ x_{p+3} > 1,\ x_{p+4} < 1,\ x_{p+5} > 1,\ x_{p+6} < 1,\ x_{p+7} < 1,\ x_{p+8} < 1,$ $x_{p+9} > 1,\ x_{p+10} < 1,\ x_{p+11} > 1,\ x_{p+12} < 1,\ x_{p+13} < 1,\ x_{p+14} < 1,\ x_{p+15} > 1,$ $x_{p+16} < 1,\ x_{p+17} > 1,\ x_{p+18} < 1, \ldots$
This shows the rule for the numbers of terms of positive and negative semicycles of the

solution of Eq. (3) to successively occur is $\ldots, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^-, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^-, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^-, \ldots$
If the case 4 happen, it follows from Lemma 2.2 (a) implies that
$x_{p+1} > 1,\ x_{p+2} > 1,\ x_{p+3} > 1,\ x_{p+4} < 1,\ x_{p+5} < 1,\ x_{p+6} > 1,\ x_{p+7} > 1,\ x_{p+8} > 1,$ $x_{p+9} > 1,\ x_{p+10} < 1,\ x_{p+11} < 1,\ x_{p+12} > 1,\ x_{p+13} > 1,\ x_{p+14} > 1,\ x_{p+15} > 1,$ $x_{p+16} < 1,\ x_{p+17} < 1,\ x_{p+18} > 1, \ldots$
It means that the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles of the solution of Eq. (3) to occur successively is $\ldots, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, \ldots$
Therefore, the proof is complete. □

Next, we state the second main result in this note.

Theorem 3.2. *Assume that $a \in [0, \infty)$. Then the positive equilibrium of Eq.* (3) *is globally asymptotically stable.*

Proof. We must prove that the positive equilibrium point $\bar{x}$ of Eq. (3) is both locally asymptotically stable and globally attractive. The linearized equation of Eq. (3) about the positive equilibrium $\bar{x} = 1$ is

$$y_{n+1} = 0.y_n + 0.y_{n-1} + 0.y_{n-2} + 0.y_{n-3}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

By virtue of ([2], Remark 1.3.7), $\bar{x}$ is locally asymptotically stable. It remains to verify that every positive solution $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ of Eq. (3) converges to $\bar{x} = 1$ as $n \to \infty$. Namely, we want to prove

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_n = \bar{x} = 1 \qquad ()$$

If the initial values of the solution satisfy (5), then Lemma 2.1 says the solution is eventually trivial and we do not consider it. Therefore, we assume in the following that the initial values of the solution do not satisfy (5). Then, Remark 2.1 we know, for any solution $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ of Eq. (3), $x_n \neq 1$ for $n \geq -3$.

If the solution $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ of Eq. (3) is nonoscillatory about the positive equilibrium point $\bar{x} = 1$, then we know from Lemma 2.2 (b) that the solution is monotic and bounded. So, the limits $\lim\limits_{n\to\infty} x_{2n} = M$ and $\lim\limits_{n\to\infty} x_{2n+1} = L$ exist and are finite.
Take the limits on both sides of Eq. (3), we obtain

$$L = \frac{2L^2 + a}{L^3 + L + a} \Rightarrow L = 1$$

or

$$M = \frac{2M^2 + a}{M^3 + M + a} \Rightarrow M = 1$$

Thus, we have (8). It suffices to prove that (8) holds for the solution to be the strictly oscillatory.

Assume now $\{x_n\}_{n=-3}^{\infty}$ is strictly oscillatory about the possitive equilibrium point $\bar{x}$ of Eq. (3). By virtue of Thoerem 3.1, one understands that the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles which occur successively is

or, $\ldots, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, \ldots$
or , $\ldots, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^-, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^- \ldots$
or , $\ldots, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^- \ldots$

First, we investigate the case where the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles which occur successively is $\ldots, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, 1^-, 2^+, \ldots$ For simplicity, we denote by $\{x_{p+6n}\}^-$ the term of a negative semicycle of length one, followed by $\{x_{p+6n+1},\ x_{p+6n+2}\}^+$ the terms of a positive semicycles of length two. Namely, the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles to occur successively can be periodically expressed as follows:

$$\{x_{p+6n}\}^-, \{x_{p+6n+1}, x_{p+6n+2}\}^+, \{x_{p+6n+3}\}^-, \{x_{p+6n+4}, x_{p+6n+5}\}^+, \ldots, n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

According to Lemma 2.2 (c), we can get:

$$1 < x_{p+6n+5} < x_{p+6n+1} = x_{p+6(n-1)+7} < x_{p+6(n-1)+5}$$

So $\{x_{p+6n+5}\}$ is decreasing and bounded with lower bound 1, we have $\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+5} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+1} = L$. Similarly, we obtain:

$$x_{p+6n+4} < x_{p+6n+2} = x_{p+6(n-1)+8} < x_{p+6(n-1)+4}$$

and we also have: $\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+4} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+2} = M$.

Noting that

$$x_{p+6n+6} = \frac{x_{p+6n+4}x_{p+6n+2} + x_{p+6n+4}^2 + a}{x_{p+6n+4}^2 x_{p+6n+2} + x_{p+6n+4} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

Taking the limit on both sides of this equation, we have that the limit $\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+6}$ is finite and exists:

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+6} = \frac{2M^2 + a}{M^3 + M + a} = H.$$

From the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+4} = \frac{x_{p+6n+2}x_{p+6n} + x_{p+6n+2}^2 + a}{x_{p+6n+2}^2 x_{p+6n} + x_{p+6n+2} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

Taking the limit on both sides, we get:

$$M = \frac{M.H + M^2 + a}{M^2.H + M + a} \Rightarrow M = 1$$

and $H = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n} = 1$. From the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+3} = \frac{x_{p+6n+1}x_{p+6n-1} + x_{p+6n+1}^2 + a}{x_{p+6n+1}^2 x_{p+6n-1} + x_{p+6n+1} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

we have:

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+3} = \frac{2L^2 + a}{L^3 + L + a} = K$$

From the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+5} = \frac{x_{p+6n+3}x_{p+6n+1} + x_{p+6n+3}^2 + a}{x_{p+6n+3}^2 x_{p+6n+1} + x_{p+6n+3} + a}, \; n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

we have:

$$L = \frac{L.K + K^2 + a}{L.K^2 + K + a} \Rightarrow L = 1 = K$$

Up to now, we have shown

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+k} = 1; \quad k = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.$$

So,

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_n = 1$$

Next, we investigate the case where the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles which occur successively is: $\ldots, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^-, 1^+, 1^-, 1^+, 3^- \ldots$

For the convenience of the statement, we denote the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles to occur successively as following:

$$\ldots, \{x_{p+6n}\}^+, \{x_{p+6n+1}\}^-, \{x_{p+6n+2}\}^+, \{x_{p+6n+3}, x_{p+6n+4}, x_{p+6n+5}\}^-, \ldots$$

From Lemma 2.2 (b) we have:

$$x_{p+6n+1} < x_{p+6n+3} < x_{p+6n+5} < x_{p+6n+7}$$

By the above similar method we have:

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+1} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+3} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+5} = M$$

We also have:

$$x_{p+6n+2} < x_{p+6n} < x_{p+6(n-1)+2}$$

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+2} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n} = L$$

Noting that:

$$x_{p+6n+5} = \frac{x_{p+6n+3}x_{p+6n+1} + x_{p+6n+3}^2 + a}{x_{p+6n+3}^2 x_{p+6n+1} + x_{p+6n+3} + a}, \; n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

Taking the limits on both sides, we have:

$$M = \frac{2M^2 + a}{M^3 + M + a} \Rightarrow M = 1$$

and from the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+4} = \frac{x_{p+6n+2}x_{p+6n} + x_{p+6n+2}^2 + a}{x_{p+6n+2}^2 x_{p+6n} + x_{p+6n+2} + a}, \; n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

we obtain:

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+4} = \frac{2L^2 + a}{L^3 + L + a} = H$$

From the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+6} = \frac{x_{p+6n+4}x_{p+6n+2} + x^2_{p+6n+4} + a}{x^2_{p+6n+4}x_{p+6n+2} + x_{p+6n+4} + a},\ n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

we also obtain:

$$L = \frac{H.L + H^2 + a}{H^2.L + H + a} \Rightarrow L = 1 = H$$

we complete this case. We investigate the last case $\dots, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^-, 4^+, 2^- \dots$

We consider the rule for the lengths of positive and negative semicycles to occur successively as following:

$$\dots, \{x_{p+6n}, x_{p+6n+1}, x_{p+6n+2}, x_{p+6n+3}\}^+, \{x_{p+6n+4}, x_{p+6n+5}\}^-, \dots$$

It is easy to see that:

$$x_{p+6n+2} < x_{p+6n} < x_{p+6(n-1)+2},$$

$$x_{p+6n+3} < x_{p+6n+1} < x_{p+6(n-1)+3},$$

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+2} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n} = L,$$

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+3} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+1} = M,$$

From the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+4} = \frac{x_{p+6n+2}x_{p+6n} + x^2_{p+6n+2} + a}{x^2_{p+6n+2}x_{p+6n} + x_{p+6n+2} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

we obtain:

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+4} = \frac{2L^2 + a}{L^3 + L + a} = K$$

From the equation:

$$x_{p+6n+6} = \frac{x_{p+6n+4}x_{p+6n+2} + x^2_{p+6n+4} + a}{x^2_{p+6n+4}x_{p+6n+2} + x_{p+6n+4} + a}, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

we also obtain:

$$L = \frac{K.L + K^2 + a}{K^2.L + K + a} \Rightarrow L = 1$$

By the similar method we also get:

$$\lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+5} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+3} = \lim_{n\to\infty} x_{p+6n+1} = 1$$

The proof is complete. □

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