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关于单位分数的 Lazar 问题

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摘要: 设 n 为任意正整数. Erdős-Straus 猜想是指当 $n \geq 2$ 时, Diophantine 方程 $\frac{4}{n} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$ 总有正整数解 (x, y, z) . 设 $p \geq 5$ 为任意素数. 最近, Lazar 证明 Diophantine 方程 $\frac{4}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$ 在区域 $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ 内没有 x 与 y 互素的正整数解 (x, y, z) . 同时, Lazar 提出问题: 在上述方程中以 $5/p$ 替换 $4/p$, 是否有类似结果? 这也是 Sierpinski 提出的一个猜想. 本文证明 Diophantine 方程 $\frac{a}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$ 没有满足 x, y 互素且 $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ 的正整数解 (x, y, z) , 其中 a 为满足 $a < 7 \leq p$ 的正整数. 这回答了上述 Lazar 问题, 推广了 Lazar 的结果. 证明方法和工具主要是利用有理数 $\frac{a}{p}$ 的连分数表示.

关键词: Diophantine 方程; 连分数; 渐近分数; Erdős-Straus 猜想

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On a problem of Lazar on unit fractions

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Abstract: Let n be a positive integer. The well-known Erdős-Straus conjecture asserts that the positive integral solution of the Diophantine equation $\frac{4}{n} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$ always exists when $n \geq 2$. Recently, Lazar investigated some properties of the solutions to the above Diophantine equation in the special case that n is a prime number. Let $p \geq 5$ be a prime number. Lazar showed that there are no triple of positive integers (x, y, z) which is solution of the Diophantine equation $\frac{4}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$ in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ and $(x, y) = 1$. Meanwhile, Lazar pointed out that it would be interesting to find an analog of this result for $5/p$ instead of $4/p$, which is also a conjecture due to Sierpinski. In this paper, we answer Lazar's question affirmatively and also extended Lazar's result by showing that the Diophantine equation $\frac{a}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$

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$\frac{1}{z}$ does not have any integer solution (x, y, z) such that x and y are coprime and $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$, where a is a positive integer such that $a < 7 \leq p$. Our proof mainly uses the continued fraction expansion of $\frac{a}{p}$.

Keywords: Diophantine equation; Continued fraction; Convergent; Erdős-Straus conjecture (2010 MSC 11L05)

1 Introduction

The Rhind papyrus is amongst the oldest written mathematics that has come down to us, which concerns the representation of rational number as the sum of unit fractions:

$$\frac{m}{n} = \frac{1}{x_1} + \frac{1}{x_2} + \dots + \frac{1}{x_k}.$$

This has suggested numerous problems, many of which are unsolved, and continues to suggest new problems. One of these problems is the Erdős-Straus conjecture^[1-17], which concerns the following Diophantine equation

$$\frac{4}{n} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z} \tag{1}$$

Let \mathbf{N} denote the set of all the positive integers. For any positive integer n , let $f(n)$ denote the number of positive integral solutions $(x, y, z) \in \mathbf{N}^3$ to the Diophantine equation (1), that is,

$$f(n) := \#\{(x, y, z) : \frac{4}{n} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}, (x, y, z) \in \mathbf{N}^3\}.$$

Then one has

$$f(1) = 0, f(2) = 3, f(3) = 12, f(4) = 10, f(5) = 12, \dots$$

The Erdős-Straus conjecture asserts that $f(n) > 0$ for all $n \geq 2$ (see, for example, [3, 5]). Some related results are provided in Refs. [1, 4, 6-7, 9-11, 13].

In 2015, Elsholtz and Tao^[2] obtained a number of upper and lower bounds of $f(n)$ or $f(p)$ for typical values of natural number n and prime p . Recently, Lazar^[12] assumed that n is an odd prime number p and showed that $\frac{4}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z}$ cannot have integral solution such that x and y are coprime with $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$. At the end of Ref. [12], Lazar pointed out that it would be interest-

ing to find an analog of the main result for $\frac{a}{p}$ with $a > 4$ instead of $\frac{4}{p}$. So, in this paper, we present an analog of this result for the case $a < 7$. That is, we have the following main result of this paper.

Theorem 1.1 Let $p \geq 7$ be an arbitrary prime number and a be an integer with $1 \leq a \leq 6$. Then there are no triple (x, y, z) of positive integers which is a solution of the Diophantine equation

$$\frac{a}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z} \tag{2}$$

in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ with $\gcd(x, y) = 1$.

Evidently, Theorem 1.1 gives an affirmative answer to Lazar's question^[12].

2 Several lemmas

For any positive integer n , let a_0, a_1, \dots, a_n be real numbers with $a_i > 0$ for $i = 1, \dots, n$. We define the finite simple continued fraction, denoted by $[a_0; a_1, \dots, a_n]$, as follows:

$$[a_0; a_1, \dots, a_n] := a_0 + \frac{1}{a_1 + \frac{1}{a_2 + \frac{1}{\ddots + \frac{1}{a_{n-1} + \frac{1}{a_n}}}}}$$

The k -th convergents of the continued fraction $[a_0; a_1, \dots, a_n]$ is defined by $[a_0; a_1, \dots, a_k]$, where k is a non-negative integer with $k \leq n$.

Before giving the proof of Theorem 1.1, we need the following classical result of the theory of continued fraction which can be found in Ref. [8].

Lemma 2.1^[8] Let m, n, r and s be positive integers with $\gcd(r, s) = 1$. If

$$\left| \frac{m}{n} - \frac{r}{s} \right| < \frac{1}{2s^2},$$

then $\frac{r}{s}$ is one of the convergents of $\frac{m}{n}$.

In the rest of this paper, we always let $p \geq 7$ be a prime number. The following results are about the continued fraction expansions of $\frac{3}{p}$, $\frac{5}{p}$ and $\frac{6}{p}$.

Lemma 2.2 Let $p \geq 7$ be a prime number. Then each of the following is true:

(a) If $p \equiv 1 \pmod{3}$, then $\frac{3}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{3}, 3]$

and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{3}{p-1}, \frac{3}{p}\}$;

(b) If $p \equiv 2 \pmod{3}$, then $\frac{3}{p} = [0; \frac{p-2}{3}, 1, 2]$ and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{3}{p-2}, \frac{3}{p+1}, \frac{3}{p}\}$.

Proof The continued fraction of $\frac{3}{p}$ is entirely determined by the Euclidean algorithm between 3 and p .

(a) Let $p \equiv 1 \pmod{3}$. Then by the Euclidean algorithm, we obtain that

$$3 = p \times 0 + 3, \quad p = 3 \times \frac{p-1}{3} + 1, \quad 3 = 1 \times 3 + 0.$$

Thus $\frac{3}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{3}, 3]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, \quad c_1 = [0; \frac{p-1}{3}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-1}{3}} = \frac{3}{p-1},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-1}{3}, 3] = \frac{3}{p}.$$

So the convergents are $\{0, \frac{3}{p-1}, \frac{3}{p}\}$.

(b) Let $p \equiv 2 \pmod{3}$. Then we deduce that

$$3 = p \times 0 + 3, \quad p = 3 \times \frac{p-2}{3} + 2, \quad 3 = 2 \times 1 + 1,$$

$$2 = 1 \times 2 + 0.$$

It follows that $\frac{3}{p} = [0; \frac{p-2}{3}, 1, 2]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, \quad c_1 = [0; \frac{p-2}{3}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-2}{3}} = \frac{3}{p-2},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-2}{3}, 1] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-2}{3} + 1} = \frac{3}{p+1}$$

and

$$c_3 = [0; \frac{p-2}{3}, 1, 2] = \frac{3}{p}.$$

So the convergents are $\{0, \frac{3}{p-2}, \frac{3}{p+1}, \frac{3}{p}\}$ as expected. This completes the proof of Lemma 2.2.

Similarly, we can get the continued fraction expansion of $\frac{5}{p}$ as follows.

Lemma 2.3 Let $p \geq 7$ be a prime number. Then each of the following is true:

(a) If $p \equiv 1 \pmod{5}$, then $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{5}, 5]$

and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$;

(b) If $p \equiv 2 \pmod{5}$, then $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-2}{5}, 2, 2]$ and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-2}, \frac{10}{2p+1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$;

(c) If $p \equiv 3 \pmod{5}$, then $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-3}{5}, 1, 1, 2]$ and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-3}, \frac{5}{p+2}, \frac{10}{2p-1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$;

(d) If $p \equiv 4 \pmod{5}$, then $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-4}{5}, 1, 4]$ and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-4}, \frac{5}{p+1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$.

Proof The continued fraction of $\frac{5}{p}$ is entirely determined by the Euclidean algorithm between 5 and p .

(a) If $p \equiv 1 \pmod{5}$, then the Euclidean algorithm give us that

$$5 = p \times 0 + 5, \quad p = 5 \times \frac{p-1}{5} + 1, \quad 5 = 1 \times 5 + 0.$$

Hence one derives that $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{5}, 5]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, \quad c_1 = [0; \frac{p-1}{5}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-1}{5}} = \frac{5}{p-1},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-1}{5}, 5] = \frac{5}{p}.$$

So the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$.

(b) If $p \equiv 2 \pmod{5}$, then we obtain that

$$5 = p \times 0 + 5, p = 5 \times \frac{p-2}{5} + 2, 5 = 2 \times 2 + 1, \\ 2 = 1 \times 2 + 0.$$

This infers that $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-2}{5}, 2, 2]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, c_1 = [0; \frac{p-2}{5}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-2}{5}} = \frac{5}{p-2},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-2}{5}, 2] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-2}{5} + \frac{1}{2}} = \frac{10}{2p+1}$$

and

$$c_3 = [0; \frac{p-2}{5}, 2, 2] = \frac{5}{p}.$$

Hence the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-2}, \frac{10}{2p+1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$.

(c) If $p \equiv 3 \pmod{5}$, then one gets that

$$5 = p \times 0 + 5, p = 5 \times \frac{p-3}{5} + 3, 5 = 3 \times 1 + 2, \\ 3 = 2 \times 1 + 1, 2 = 1 \times 2 + 0.$$

It follows that $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-3}{5}, 1, 1, 2]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, c_1 = [0; \frac{p-3}{5}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-3}{5}} = \frac{5}{p-3},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-3}{5}, 1] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-3}{5} + 1} = \frac{5}{p+2},$$

$$c_3 = [0; \frac{p-3}{5}, 1, 1] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-3}{5} + \frac{1}{1+1}} = \frac{10}{2p-1}$$

and

$$c_4 = [0; \frac{p-3}{5}, 1, 1, 2] = \frac{5}{p}.$$

Thus the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-3}, \frac{5}{p+2}, \frac{10}{2p-1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$.

(d) If $p \equiv 4 \pmod{5}$, then we deduce that

$$5 = p \times 0 + 5, p = 5 \times \frac{p-4}{5} + 4, 5 = 4 \times 1 + 1, \\ 4 = 1 \times 4 + 0.$$

Hence $\frac{5}{p} = [0; \frac{p-4}{5}, 1, 4]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, c_1 = [0; \frac{p-4}{5}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-4}{5}} = \frac{5}{p-4},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-4}{5}, 1] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-4}{5} + 1} = \frac{5}{p+1}$$

and

$$c_3 = [0; \frac{p-4}{5}, 1, 4] = \frac{5}{p}.$$

It implies that the convergents are $\{0, \frac{5}{p-4}, \frac{5}{p+1}, \frac{5}{p}\}$. This completes the proof of Lemma 2.3.

Finally, we present the continued fraction expansion of $\frac{6}{p}$.

Lemma 2.4 Let $p \geq 7$ be a prime number.

Then each of the following is true:

(a) If $p \equiv 1 \pmod{6}$, then $\frac{6}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{6}, 6]$

and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{6}{p-1}, \frac{6}{p}\}$;

(b) If $p \equiv 5 \pmod{6}$, then $\frac{6}{p} = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}, 1,$

$5]$ and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{6}{p-5}, \frac{6}{p+1}, \frac{6}{p}\}$.

Proof The continued fraction of $\frac{6}{p}$ is entirely determined by the Euclidean algorithm between 6 and p .

(a) If $p \equiv 1 \pmod{6}$, then by the Euclidean algorithm one obtains that

$$6 = p \times 0 + 6, p = 6 \times \frac{p-1}{6} + 1, 6 = 1 \times 6 + 0.$$

Thus we get that $\frac{6}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{6}, 6]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, c_1 = [0; \frac{p-1}{6}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-1}{6}} = \frac{6}{p-1},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-1}{6}, 6] = \frac{6}{p}.$$

Hence the convergents are $\{0, \frac{6}{p-1}, \frac{6}{p}\}$.

(b) If $p \equiv 5 \pmod{6}$, then one derives that

$$6 = p \times 0 + 6, p = 6 \times \frac{p-5}{6} + 5, 6 = 5 \times 1 + 1,$$

$$5 = 1 \times 5 + 0.$$

It follows that $\frac{6}{p} = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}, 1, 5]$. The successive convergents are given by

$$c_0 = 0, c_1 = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-5}{6}} = \frac{6}{p-5},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}, 1] = \frac{6}{p+1},$$

$$c_3 = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}, 1, 5] = \frac{6}{p}.$$

$$c_0 = 0, c_1 = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-5}{6}} = \frac{6}{p-5},$$

$$c_2 = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}, 1] = \frac{1}{\frac{p-5}{6} + 1} = \frac{6}{p+1}$$

and

$$c_3 = [0; \frac{p-5}{6}, 1, 5] = \frac{6}{p}.$$

So the convergents are $\{0, \frac{6}{p-5}, \frac{6}{p+1}, \frac{6}{p}\}$. Thus

Lemma 2.4 is proved.

3 The proof of Theorem 1.1

According to Lazar's result^[12], Theorem 1.1 is true when $a=4$. So we just need to prove Theorem 1.1 for the remaining cases $a \in \{1, 2, 3, 5, 6\}$. This will be done in what follows.

In the following we let $a \in \{1, 2, 3, 5, 6\}$. Fix an arbitrarily large integer $z_0 > 0$ in the range $xy < \sqrt{z_0/2}$. Then we can rewrite equation (2) as

$$\frac{a}{p} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y} + \frac{1}{z_0},$$

which is equivalent to the following Diophantine equation

$$\left| \frac{a}{p} - \frac{x+y}{xy} \right| = \frac{1}{z_0}.$$

In what follows, we will try to solve above Diophantine equation with $(x, y) \in \mathbf{N}^2$. Since $xy < \sqrt{z_0/2}$, we derive the following inequality

$$\left| \frac{a}{p} - \frac{x+y}{xy} \right| < \frac{1}{2x^2y^2} \tag{3}$$

By Lemma 2.1 and (3), we can obtain that the rational number $\frac{x+y}{xy}$ must be one of the convergents of $\frac{a}{p}$.

Assume that the continued fraction expansion of $\frac{a}{p}$ is $\frac{a}{p} = [a_0; a_1, \dots, a_l]$. Then there exists some integer k with $1 \leq k \leq l$ such that

$$\frac{x+y}{xy} = [a_0; a_1, \dots, a_k] = \frac{p_k}{q_k}.$$

Since x and y are coprime, $x+y$ and xy are also coprime. Our fractions are reduced by deducing that $x+y = p_k$ and $xy = q_k$. The fact that such x and y may exist relies on the solvability in \mathbf{N} of the following quadratic equation

$$X^2 - p_k X + q_k = 0.$$

That means, if equation (2) has integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$, then we must have $D_k = p_k^2 - 4q_k \geq 0$. Since $z_0 \neq 0$, one gets that $\frac{p_k}{q_k} \neq \frac{a}{p}$.

Then the original question turns into finding q_k and p_k . Since $a \in \{1, 2, 3, 5, 6\}$, we can divide the proof into the following five cases.

Case 1 $a=1$. Then the continued fraction of $\frac{1}{p}$ is itself, i. e., $\frac{1}{p} = [0; p]$, and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{1}{p}\}$. Then $\frac{p_k}{q_k} = 0$ or $\frac{p_k}{q_k} = \frac{1}{p}$. But $\frac{p_k}{q_k} \neq 0$ and $\frac{p_k}{q_k} \neq \frac{a}{p} = \frac{1}{p}$. Hence the equation (2) has

no integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ when $a=1$. So Theorem 1.1 is true in this case.

Case 2 $a=2$. Since p is a prime with $p \geq 7$, we have $p \equiv 1 \pmod{2}$. By Euclidean algorithm, one deduces that

$$2 = p \times 0 + 2, p = 2 \times \frac{p-1}{2} + 1, 2 = 1 \times 2 + 0.$$

It follows that $\frac{2}{p} = [0; \frac{p-1}{2}, 2]$, and the convergents are $\{0, \frac{2}{p-1}, \frac{2}{p}\}$.

Since $\frac{p_k}{q_k} \neq 0$ and $\frac{p_k}{q_k} \neq \frac{a}{p}$, we derive that $\frac{p_k}{q_k} = \frac{2}{p-1} = \frac{1}{(p-1)/2}$. This implies that $p_k = 1, q_k = \frac{p-1}{2}$ and $D_k = p_k^2 - 4q_k = 1 - 2(p-1) < 0$.

Hence equation (2) has no integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ when $a=2$. Thus Theorem 1.1 is proved in this case.

Case 3 $a=3$. After reducing all the fractions in Lemma 2.2, we obtain that

$$\frac{p_k}{q_k} = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{(p-1)/3}, & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{3}; \\ \frac{1}{(p-2)/3} \text{ or } \frac{1}{(p+1)/3}, & \text{if } p \equiv 2 \pmod{3}. \end{cases}$$

Note that the numerator of all cases is 1. Therefore $p_k = 1$ and $D_k = 1 - 4q_k < 0$. Hence equation (2) has no integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ in this case. So Theorem 1.1 is true when $a=3$.

Case 4 $a=5$. By using Lemma 2.3, after reduced all the fractions, we deduce that

$$\frac{p_k}{q_k} = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{(p-1)/5}, & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{5}; \\ \frac{1}{(p-2)/5} \text{ or } \frac{2}{(2p+1)/5}, & \text{if } p \equiv 2 \pmod{5}; \\ \frac{1}{(p-3)/5} \text{ or } \frac{1}{(p+2)/5} \text{ or } \frac{2}{(2p-1)/5}, & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{5}; \\ \frac{1}{(p-4)/5} \text{ or } \frac{1}{(p+1)/5}, & \text{if } p \equiv 4 \pmod{5}. \end{cases}$$

It infers that the numerator of all the cases is 1 or 2. Therefore $p_k = 1$ or $p_k = 2$ and $D_k = 1 - 4q_k$ or $D_k = 4 - 4q_k$. Since p_k and q_k are positive integers, one derives that $D_k \leq 0$. If $D_k < 0$, then it follows immediately that the equation (2) has no integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$. If $D_k = 0$, then we must have $p_k = 2$ and $q_k = 1$, from which one deduces that $x = y = 1$. But $x = y = 1$ cannot be a solution of equation (2) since $a < 7 \leq p$ and $z \geq 1$. Thus the equation (2) has no integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ when $a = 5$. Hence Theorem 1. 1 is proved in this case.

Case 5 $a = 6$. From Lemma 2. 4, after reduced all the fractions, we obtain that

$$\frac{p_k}{q_k} = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{(p-1)/6}, & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{6}; \\ \frac{1}{(p-5)/6} \text{ or } \frac{1}{(p+1)/6}, & \text{if } p \equiv 5 \pmod{6}. \end{cases}$$

Thus the numerator of all the cases is 1. This implies that $p_k = 1$ and $D_k = 1 - 4q_k$. Since p_k and q_k are positive integers, one gets that $D_k < 0$. Hence the equation (2) has no integral solutions in the range $xy < \sqrt{z/2}$ when $a = 6$. So Theorem 1. 1 is proved in this case. This finishes the proof of Theorem 1. 1.

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