Research on Sturm–Liouville boundary value problems of fractional $p$-Laplacian equation

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Abstract

In this work we investigate the following fractional $p$-Laplacian differential equation with Sturm–Liouville boundary value conditions:

$$\begin{align*}
\frac{1}{\phi_p(h(t))} & \phi_p\left(\frac{1}{\phi_p(u)}\right) + a(t)\phi_p(u) = \lambda f(t,u), \quad \text{a.e. } t \in [0, T], \\
\alpha_1 \phi_p(u(0)) & - \alpha_2 tD^{\alpha_1-1}_T (\phi_p(\phi C_D^{\alpha_1} u(0))) = 0, \\
\beta_1 \phi_p(u(T)) & + \beta_2 tD^{\beta_1-1}_T (\phi_p(\phi C_D^{\beta_1} u(T))) = 0,
\end{align*}$$

where $\phi_p$, $D^\alpha_T$, $D^\beta_T$ are the left Caputo and right Riemann–Liouville fractional derivatives of order $\alpha \in (\frac{1}{2}; 1]$, respectively. By using variational methods and critical point theory, some new results on the multiplicity of solutions are obtained.

MSC: 34A08; 34B15

Keywords: Fractional $p$-Laplacian equation; Sturm–Liouville boundary value conditions; Multiplicity of solutions; Variational methods; Critical point theory

1 Introduction

Fractional differential equations have been extensively applied in mathematical modeling. Many scholars have developed a strong interest in this kind of problem and achieved some excellent results [1–8]. Especially, in the last several years, the investigations on the equations including both left and right fractional differential operators have got increasing attention. Left and right fractional differential operators are widely used in the physical phenomena of anomalous diffusion, such as fractional convection diffusion equation [9, 10]. In [11], Ervin and Roop first proposed a class of steady-state fractional convection-diffusion equations with variational structure

$$\begin{align*}
-a(D_0^\beta D_1^\beta + q_1 D_1^\beta)Dn + b(t)Du + c(t)u = f, \\
u(0) = u(T) = 0,
\end{align*}$$

where $0 \leq \beta < 1$, $D$ is the classical first derivative, $D_0^\beta$, $D_1^\beta$ are the left and right Riemann–Liouville fractional derivatives. The authors constructed a suitable fractional derivative space. The main research method is the Lax–Milgram theorem.
Jiao and Zhou [12] considered the Dirichlet problems

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} + \frac{1}{2} D_T^\beta (u(t)) \right) + \nabla F(t, u(t)) = 0, \quad \text{a.e. } t \in [0, T], \quad 0 \leq \beta < 1, \\
u(0) = u(T) = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

The authors gave the variational structure of the problem. Under the Ambrosetti–Rabinowitz condition, the existence results were obtained by employing the mountain pass theorem and the minimization principle. The following year, the authors [13] further studied the following problems:

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} + \frac{1}{2} D_T^\beta (u(t)) \right) + \nabla F(t, u(t)) = 0, \quad \text{a.e. } t \in [0, T], \quad \frac{1}{2} < \alpha \leq 1, \\
u(0) = u(T) = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

Under the Ambrosetti–Rabinowitz condition, the existence of weak solution was obtained by using the mountain pass theorem. In addition, the authors also discussed the regularity of weak solution.

Bonanno et al. [14] and Rodríguez-López and Tersian [15] considered the Dirichlet problems

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} + a(t) u(t) \right) = \lambda f(t, u(t)), \quad \text{a.e. } t \in [0, T], \\
\Delta (\frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t_j)) = \mu I_j(u(t_j)), \quad j = 1, 2, \ldots, n, \\
u(0) = u(T) = 0,
\end{align*}
\]

where \( \alpha \in (\frac{1}{2}, 1) \), \( \lambda, \mu \in (0, +\infty) \), \( f \in C([0, T] \times \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R}) \), \( I_j \in C(\mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R}) \), \( j = 1, 2, \ldots, n \). \( a \in C([0, T]) \), and there exist \( a_1, a_2 \) such that \( 0 < a_1 \leq a(t) \leq a_2 \). In addition,

\[
\begin{align*}
\Delta (\frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t_j)) = \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t_j^+) - \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t_j^-), \\
\Delta \left( \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t_j^+) \right) = \lim_{t \to t_j^+} \left( \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t) \right), \\
\Delta \left( \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t_j^-) \right) = \lim_{t \to t_j^-} \left( \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} \right) (t) \right).
\end{align*}
\]

By employing variational methods and three critical points theorem, the existence results of solution were obtained.

Tian and Nieto [16] studied the Sturm–Liouville boundary value problems

\[
\begin{align*}
- \frac{d}{dt} \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{D_\alpha^r (u^r(t))}{\beta} + \frac{1}{2} D_T^\beta (u(t)) \right) = \lambda f(u(t)), \quad \text{a.e. } t \in [0, T], \\
au(0) - b \frac{1}{2} D_\alpha^r (u^r(0)) + \frac{1}{2} D_T^\beta (u'(0)) = 0, \\
cu(T) + d \frac{1}{2} D_\alpha^r (u^r(T)) + \frac{1}{2} D_T^\beta (u'(T)) = 0,
\end{align*}
\]

where \( 0 \leq \beta < 1, a, c > 0, b, d \geq 0, \lambda > 0 \). The variational structure of the problem was established and the existence result of the unbounded sequence of the solution was obtained by employing the critical point theory. Subsequently, Nyamoradi Nemat and Tersian Stepan
[17] further considered the Sturm–Liouville problems with \( p \)-Laplacian operators

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{1}{\alpha}D_t^\alpha \left( (\frac{1}{\alpha}D_t^\alpha \phi_p(u(t))) + a(t)\phi_p(u(t)) \right) = \lambda f(t, u(t)), & \quad \text{a.e. } t \in [0, T], \\
\alpha_1 \phi_p(u(0)) - \alpha_2 D_t^{\alpha - 1}(\phi_p(a_0 D_t^\alpha u(0))) = 0, \\
\beta_1 \phi_p(u(T)) + \beta_2 D_t^{\alpha - 1}(\phi_p(a_1 D_t^\alpha u(T))) = 0,
\end{align*}
\]

where \( \alpha \in (\frac{1}{2}, 1) \), \( \int_0^T \) is the left Caputo fractional derivative, \( D_t^\alpha \) is the right Riemann–Liouville fractional derivative. \( \alpha_1, \alpha_2, \beta_1, \beta_2 > 0 \), \( h(t) \in L^\infty([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \) with \( h_0 = \text{ess inf}_{[0, T]} h(t) > 0 \), \( a \in C([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \) with \( a_0 = \text{ess inf}_{[0, T]} a(t) > 0 \), there exist \( a_1, a_2 \) such that \( 0 < a_1 \leq a(t) \leq a_2 \), \( \lambda > 0 \), \( f \in C([0, T] \times \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R}), \phi_p(x) = |x|^{p-2}x \), \( \phi_p(0) = 0 \), \( p > 1 \). To illustrate the main results of [17], we first introduce the following hypothesis about \( f \):

(F1) There exists \( \mu > p \) such that

\[
0 < \mu F(t, \tau) \leq \tau f(t, \tau), \quad \forall \tau, t \in [0, T],
\]

where \( F(t, \tau) = \int_0^\tau f(t, s) \, ds \);

(F2) \( c_{\text{ext}} := \inf_{t \in [0, 1]} F(t, t) > 0 \);

(F3) There exist \( c_u, \nu > p - 1 \) such that

\[
|f(t, u)| \leq c_u |u|^{\nu}, \quad \forall (t, u) \in [0, T] \times \mathbb{R};
\]

(F4) \( F(t, u) = o(|u|^p) \) as \( |u| \to 0 \) uniformly with respect to \( \forall t \in [0, T] \).

**Theorem 1.0** (see [17]) Assume that (F1)–(F4) hold. Then (1.1) with \( \lambda = 1 \) has at least a solution.

Based on the above work, this article further studies problem (1.1) with the concave-convex nonlinearity. In order to compare the results of this paper with Theorem 1.0, the main assumptions and conclusions of this paper are given below. In this paper, we study the case that the nonlinearity \( f \in C([0, T] \times \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R}) \) involves a combination of \( p \)-superlinear and \( p \)-sublinear terms. That is,

\[
f(t, u) = f_1(t, u) + f_2(t, u), \quad (1.2)
\]

where \( f_1(t, u) \) is \( p \)-superlinear as \( |u| \to \infty \) and \( f_2(t, u) \) is \( p \)-sublinear growth at infinity. Here we give some reasonable assumptions on \( f_1 \) and \( f_2 \) as follows:

(FH1) \( f_1(t, x) = o(|x|^{p-1}) \) as \( (|x| \to 0) \) uniformly with respect to \( \forall t \in [0, T] \);

(FH2) There exist \( d_1 > 0, d_{\infty} > 0, \theta > p \) such that

\[
x f_1(t, x) - \theta F_1(t, x) \geq -d_1 |x|^p, \quad \forall t \in [0, T], |x| \geq d_\infty,
\]

where \( F_1(t, x) = \int_0^x f_1(t, s) \, ds \);

(FH3) \( \lim_{|x| \to \infty} \frac{F_1(t, x)}{|x|^p} = \infty \) uniformly with respect to \( \forall t \in [0, T] \);

(FH4) There exist \( 1 < r < p, b \in C([0, T], \mathbb{R}^\star), \mathbb{R}^\star = (0, \infty) \) such that

\[
F_2(t, x) \geq b(t) |x|^{r}, \quad \forall (t, x) \in [0, T] \times \mathbb{R},
\]

where \( F_2(t, x) = \int_0^x f_2(t, s) \, ds \);
(H₃) There exist \( b₁ \in L¹([0, T], \mathbb{R}^⁺) \) such that

\[
|f₂(t, x)| \leq b₁(t)|x|^{r-1}, \quad \forall (t, x) \in [0, T] \times \mathbb{R}.
\]

**Theorem 1.1** Assume that (H₁)–(H₃) hold. Then problem (1.1) with \( λ = 1 \) has at least two nontrivial weak solutions.

**Remark 1.1** Clearly, conditions (H₂) and (H₃) are weaker than condition (F₁) of Theorem 1.0. In addition, the nonlinear function \( f \) studied in this paper is more general, it contains both \( p⁺ \)-superlinear and \( p⁻ \)-sublinear terms. Consequently, our conclusion generalizes Theorem 1.0 in [17].

Moreover, we also consider that the nonlinear function \( f \) satisfies \( p⁻ \)-sublinear growth.

The specific assumptions are as follows:

(H₄) There exist \( L > 0, 0 < β ≤ p \) such that

\[
F(t, x) ≤ L(1 + |x|^β), \quad \forall (t, x) \in [0, T] \times \mathbb{R},
\]

where \( F(t, x) = \int₀ᵗ f(t, s) \, ds \).

(H₅) There exist \( 1 < r₁ < p, b \in L¹([0, T], \mathbb{R}^⁺) \) such that

\[
|f(t, x)| \leq r₁ b(t)|x|^{r-1}, \quad \forall (t, x) \in [0, T] \times \mathbb{R}.
\]

(H₆) There exist an open interval \( Π \subset [0, T] \) and constants \( η, δ > 0, 1 < r₂ < p \) such that

\[
F(t, x) ≥ η|x|^{r₂}, \quad \forall (t, x) \in Π \times [–δ, δ].
\]

**Theorem 1.2** Suppose that assumption (H₆) holds. Additionally, we assume also that (H₆) there exist \( r > 0, \omega \in L^{p⁺} \) such that

\[
\|\omega\|_{p⁺}^r + \frac{β₁ h(T)}{β₂} |ω(T)|^p + \frac{α₁ h(0)}{α₂} |ω(0)|^p > pr, \quad \int₀^T F(t, ω(t)) \, dt > 0
\]

and

\[
\frac{1}{A_r} \geq \frac{1}{A_i} \max_{t \in [0, T]} \frac{F(t, x)}{r} \quad \text{such that}
\]

\[
\frac{1}{A_r} := \frac{1}{A_i} \frac{\int₀^T \max_{|x| \leq M(r;p⁺;Λ)}}{r} F(t, x) \, dt}{F(t, ω(t)) \, dt}
\]

\[
= \frac{p}{\|\omega\|_{p⁺}^r + \frac{β₁ h(T)}{β₂} |ω(T)|^p + \frac{α₁ h(0)}{α₂} |ω(0)|^p}
\]

hold, where \( Λ = \min\{a₀, h₀\} \),

\[ M := \left( \max \left\{ \frac{T^{α⁻¹}}{Γ(α)(αq + 1)} \right\} \right)^{1 \over p} \bigg[ \frac{2^{p⁻¹}}{T} \max \left\{ 1, \left( \frac{T^α}{Γ(α + 1)} \right)^p \right\} \bigg]^{1 \over p} \left( \int₀^T \max_{|x| \leq M(r;p⁺;Λ)}}{r} F(t, x) \, dt \right)^{1 \over p} \]

\[ \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{q} = 1. \]

Then, for every \( λ \) in \( Λ_r = (A_i, A_r) \), problem (1.1) has at least three weak solutions.
Remark 1.2 Assumption \((H_9)\) studies both \(0 < \beta < p\) and \(\beta = p\). Obviously, when \(p = 2\), assumption \((H_9)\) contains the condition \(0 < \beta < 2\) in \([14, 15]\). Thus, our conclusion extends the existing results.

Theorem 1.3 Suppose that assumptions \((H_7)-(H_9)\) hold. Assume also that
\((H_{10})\) \(f(t,x) = -f(t,-x), \forall (t,x) \in [0,T] \times \mathbb{R}\).

Then problem (1.1) with \(\lambda = 1\) has infinitely many nontrivial weak solutions.

2 Preliminaries
For the convenience of readers, this section firstly introduces some basic definitions and lemmas of fractional calculus theory.

Definition 2.1 (Left and right Riemann–Liouville fractional derivatives, [18]) Let \(u\) be a function defined on \([a, b]\). The left and right Riemann–Liouville fractional derivatives of order \(0 \leq \gamma < 1\) for function \(u\) denoted by \(aD^\gamma_t u(t)\) and \(bD^\gamma_t u(t)\), respectively, are defined by
\[
aD^\gamma_t u(t) = \frac{d}{dt} aD^{\gamma-1}_t u(t) = \frac{1}{\Gamma(1-\gamma)} \frac{d}{dt} \left( \int_a^t (t-s)^{-\gamma} u(s) \, ds \right),
\]
\[
bD^\gamma_t u(t) = -\frac{d}{dt} bD^{\gamma-1}_t u(t) = -\frac{1}{\Gamma(1-\gamma)} \frac{d}{dt} \left( \int_t^b (s-t)^{-\gamma} u(s) \, ds \right),
\]
where \(t \in [a, b]\).

Let \(AC([a, b])\) be the space of absolutely continuous functions within \([a, b]\) (see [16]).

Definition 2.2 (Left and right Caputo fractional derivatives, [18]) Let \(0 < \gamma < 1\) and \(u \in AC([a, b])\), then the left and right Caputo fractional derivatives of order \(\gamma\) for function \(u\) denoted by \(\gamma^CD^\gamma_t u(t)\) and \(\gamma^CD^\gamma_t u(t)\), respectively, exist almost everywhere on \([a, b]\), \(\gamma^CD^\gamma_t u(t)\) and \(\gamma^CD^\gamma_t u(t)\) are represented by
\[
\gamma^CD^\gamma_t u(t) = \gamma^CD^{\gamma-1}_t u(t) = \frac{1}{\Gamma(1-\gamma)} \int_a^t (t-s)^{-\gamma} u'(s) \, ds,
\]
\[
\gamma^CD^\gamma_t u(t) = -\gamma^CD^{\gamma-1}_t u(t) = -\frac{1}{\Gamma(1-\gamma)} \int_t^b (s-t)^{-\gamma} u'(s) \, ds,
\]
where \(t \in [a, b]\).

Let us recall that, for any fixed \(t \in [0, T]\) and \(1 \leq r < \infty\),
\[
\|u\|_{L^r([0,T])} = \left( \int_0^T |u(t)|^r \, dt \right)^{1/r}, \quad \|u\|_{L^r} = \left( \int_0^T |u(t)|^r \, dt \right)^{1/r},
\]
\[
\|u\|_{L^\infty} = \max_{t \in [0,T]} |u(t)|.
\]

Definition 2.3 ([16]) Let \(\alpha \in (\frac{1}{2}, 1], p \in [1, \infty)\). The fractional derivative space
\[
E^{\alpha,p} = \{ u | u \in AC([0,T], \mathbb{R}) \} \gamma^CD^\gamma_t u \in L^p([0,T], \mathbb{R}) \}
\]
is defined by closure of \( C^\infty([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \) with respect to the norm

\[
\| u \|_{\alpha,p} = \left( \int_0^T \left[ |u(t)|^p + |C_0 D_t^\alpha u(t)|^p \right] dt \right)^{\frac{1}{p}}.
\]  

(2.1)

**Lemma 2.1** ([12]) Let \( 0 < \alpha \leq 1, 1 \leq p < \infty \). For \( \forall f \in l^p([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \), one has

\[
\| D_x^\alpha f \|_{l^p([0, \xi])} \leq \frac{\xi^\alpha}{\Gamma(\alpha + 1)} \| f \|_{l^p([0, t])}, \quad \forall \xi \in [0, t), t \in [0, T].
\]

**Lemma 2.2** ([16]) Let \( 0 < \alpha \leq 1, 1 \leq p < \infty \). For \( \forall f \in l^p([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \), one has

\[
\| D_t^\alpha f \|_{l^p([t, T])} \leq \frac{(T - t)^\alpha}{\Gamma(\alpha + 1)} \| f \|_{l^p([t, T])}, \quad \forall t \in [0, T].
\]

**Lemma 2.3** ([18]) Let \( n \in \mathbb{N}, n - 1 < \alpha \leq n \). If \( f \in AC^n([a, b], \mathbb{R}) \) or \( f \in C^n([a, b], \mathbb{R}) \), then

\[
a_D^\alpha (C_a D_b f(t)) = f(t) - \sum_{j=0}^{n-1} \frac{f^{(j)}(a)}{j!} (t - a)^j, \quad \forall t \in [a, b],
\]

\[
b_D^\alpha (C_a D_b f(t)) = f(t) - \sum_{j=0}^{n-1} \frac{f^{(j)}(b)}{j!} (b - t)^j, \quad \forall t \in [a, b].
\]

In particular, if \( 0 < \alpha < 1, f \in AC([a, b], \mathbb{R}) \) or \( f \in C^1([a, b], \mathbb{R}) \), then

\[
a_D^\alpha (C_a D_b f(t)) = f(t) - f(a), \quad b_D^\alpha (C_a D_b f(t)) = f(t) - f(b).
\]

**Lemma 2.4** ([17]) Let \( \frac{1}{2} < \alpha \leq 1, 1 \leq p < \infty \). If \( u \in E^{\alpha,p} \), then

\[
\| u \|_\infty \leq M \| u \|_{\alpha,p},
\]

where

\[
M : = \left( \max \left\{ \frac{T^{\alpha - \frac{1}{p}}}{\Gamma(\alpha)(aq - q + 1)^{\frac{1}{q}}} , 1 \right\} + \left[ \frac{2^{p-1}}{T} \max \left\{ 1, \left( \frac{T^\alpha}{\Gamma(\alpha + 1)} \right)^p \right\} \right]^{\frac{1}{p}} , \quad \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{q} = 1.
\]

**Lemma 2.5** ([17]) Let \( 1/p < \alpha < 1, 1 < p < \infty \), if \( a \in C([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \) and \( 0 < a_1 \leq a(t) \leq a_2, h(t) \in L^\infty([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \), then by Lemma 2.4 one has

\[
\| u \|_\infty \leq \frac{M}{(\min\{a_0, h_0\})^{\frac{1}{p}}} \left( \int_0^T a(t)|u(t)|^p dt + \int_0^T h(t)|C_0 D_t^\alpha u(t)|^p dt \right)^{\frac{1}{p}},
\]

where \( h_0 = \text{ess inf}_{[0, T]} h(t) > 0, a_0 = \text{ess inf}_{[0, T]} a(t) > 0 \).

**Remark 2.1** It is also easy to check that, if \( a \in C([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \) and \( 0 < a_1 \leq a(t) \leq a_2, h(t) \in L^\infty([0, T], \mathbb{R}) \) with \( h_0 = \text{ess inf}_{[0, T]} h(t) > 0 \), then an equivalent norm in \( E^{\alpha,p} \) is the following:

\[
\| u \|_a := \left( \int_0^T a(t)|u(t)|^p dt + \int_0^T h(t)|C_0 D_t^\alpha u(t)|^p dt \right)^{\frac{1}{p}}.
\]  

(2.2)
By combining Lemma 2.5, we can see that, for $\forall u \in E^{\alpha,p}$, if $1/p < \alpha \leq 1$, then

$$
\| u \|_\infty \leq \frac{M}{\Lambda^{1/p}} \| u \|_a,
$$

where $\Lambda = \min\{a_0, h_0\}$.

Lemma 2.6 ([16]) Let $0 < \alpha \leq 1, 1 < p < \infty$. The fractional derivative space $E^{\alpha,p}$ is a reflexive and separable Banach space.

Lemma 2.7 ([16]) Let $1/p < \alpha \leq 1, 1 < p < \infty$. Assume that the sequence $\{u_k\}$ converges weakly to $u$ in $E^{\alpha,p}$, i.e., $u_k \rightharpoonup u$ in $E([0,T],\mathbb{R})$, i.e.,

$$
\| u_k - u \|_\infty \rightarrow 0, \quad k \rightarrow \infty.
$$

Lemma 2.8 ([17]) Assume that $1/p < \alpha \leq 1, 1 < p < \infty$, then $E^{\alpha,p}$ is compactly embedded in $C([0,T],\mathbb{R})$.

Lemma 2.9 ([18]) Let $\alpha > 0, p \geq 1, q \geq 1, 1/p + 1/q < 1 + \alpha$ or $p \neq 1, q \neq 1, 1/p + 1/q = 1 + \alpha$. If $u \in L^p([a,b],\mathbb{R}), v \in L^q([a,b],\mathbb{R})$, then

$$
\int_a^b [tD_0^\alpha u(t)] v(t) \, dt = \int_a^b u(t) [tD_0^\alpha v(t)] \, dt.
$$

By multiplying the equation in problem (1.1) by any $v \in E^{\alpha,p}$ and integrating on $[0,T]$, one has

$$
\int_0^T tD_T^\alpha \left( \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p(h(t)D_T^\alpha u(t)) \right) \cdot v(t) \, dt + \int_0^T a(t)\phi_p(u(t))v(t) \, dt = \lambda \int_0^T f(t, u(t))v(t) \, dt.
$$

From Definitions 2.1, 2.2 and Lemma 2.9, we can get

$$
\begin{align*}
\int_0^T tD_T^\alpha \left( \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} &\phi_p(h(t)D_T^\alpha u(t)) \right) \cdot v(t) \, dt \\
&= - \int_0^T \frac{d}{dt} \left[ tD_T^{\alpha-1} \left( \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p(h(t)D_T^\alpha u(t)) \right) \right] \cdot v(t) \, dt \\
&= \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \phi_p(u(T))v(T) + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \phi_p(u(0))v(0) \\
&\quad + \int_0^T \left[ tD_T^{\alpha-1} \left( \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p(h(t)D_T^\alpha u(t)) \right) \right] \cdot v'(t) \, dt \\
&= \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \phi_p(u(T))v(T) + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \phi_p(u(0))v(0) \\
&\quad + \int_0^T \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p(h(t)D_T^\alpha u(t))D_T^{\alpha-1}v'(t) \, dt \\
&= \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \phi_p(u(T))v(T) + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \phi_p(u(0))v(0) \\
&\quad + \int_0^T \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p(h(t)D_T^\alpha u(t))D_T^{\alpha-1}v(t) \, dt.
\end{align*}
$$
Getting the similar result for the second part of equation (1.1), we can give the definition of weak solution for problem (1.1).

**Definition 2.4** The function \( u \in E^{\alpha,p} \) is a weak solution of problem (1.1) if the identity

\[
\frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \phi_p(u(T))v(T) + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \phi_p(u(0))v(0)
+ \int_0^T \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p( h(t)_0^T D_t^p u(t) )\int_0^T D_t^p v(t) dt
+ \int_0^T a(t)\phi_p(u(t))v(t) dt = \lambda \int_0^T f(t,u(t))v(t) dt,
\]

holds for any \( v \in E^{\alpha,p} \).

Define the functional \( I : E^{\alpha,p} \to \mathbb{R} \) as follows:

\[
I(u) = \frac{1}{p} \int_0^T h(t) \left| D_t^p u(t) \right|^p dt + \frac{1}{p} \int_0^T a(t) \left| u(t) \right|^p dt
+ \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p\beta_2} \left| u(T) \right|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p\alpha_2} \left| u(0) \right|^p - \lambda \int_0^T F(t,u(t)) dt \tag{2.7}
\]

According to the continuity of \( f \), it is easy to prove \( I \in C^1(E^{\alpha,p},\mathbb{R}) \). For \( \forall v \in E^{\alpha,p} \), one has

\[
\langle I'(u), v \rangle = \int_0^T \frac{1}{(h(t))^{p-2}} \phi_p( h(t)_0^T D_t^p u(t) )\int_0^T D_t^p v(t) dt
\]

\[
+ \int_0^T a(t) \left| u(t) \right|^{p-2} u(t)v(t) dt + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \phi_p(u(T))v(T)
+ \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \phi_p(u(0))v(0) - \lambda \int_0^T f(t,u(t))v(t) dt. \tag{2.8}
\]

Then

\[
\langle I'(u), u \rangle = \left\| u \right\|^p_p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \left| u(T) \right|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \left| u(0) \right|^p - \lambda \int_0^T f(t,u(t))u(t) dt. \tag{2.9}
\]

Therefore, the critical point of functional \( I \) corresponds to the weak solution of problem (1.1).

To prove our main results, we introduce the following tools.

**Definition 2.5** ([19]) Let \( X \) be a real Banach space, \( I \in C^1(X,\mathbb{R}) \). \( I(u) \) satisfies the (PS) condition if a sequence \( \{u_n\}_{n \in \mathbb{N}} \subset X \) which satisfies the conditions \( I(u_n) \) is bounded and \( I(u_n) \to 0 \) as \( n \to \infty \) has a convergent subsequence.

**Lemma 2.10** ([19]) Let \( X \) be a real Banach space and \( I \in C^1(X,\mathbb{R}) \) satisfying the (PS) condition. Suppose that \( I(0) = 0 \) and

(i) there exist constants \( \rho, \eta > 0 \) such that \( I|_{B_\rho} \geq \eta \);

(ii) there exists \( \varepsilon \in X \setminus B_\rho \) such that \( I(\varepsilon) \leq 0 \).
Then I possesses a critical value $c \geq \eta$. Moreover, $c$ can be characterized as

$$c = \inf_{g \in \Gamma} \max_{s \in [0,1]} I(g(s)),$$

where

$$\Gamma = \{ g \in C([0,1],X) : g(0) = 0, g(1) = 1 \}.$$

**Definition 2.6** ([19]) Let $X$ be a real Banach space. Let

$$\Sigma = \{ A \subseteq X - \{0\} | A \text{ is closed in } X \text{ and symmetric with respect to } 0 \}.$$ 

Let $A \in \Sigma$, if there is an odd mapping $G \in C(A, \mathbb{R}^n \setminus \{0\})$ and $n$ is the smallest integer with this property, then we say that the deficit of $A$ is $n$, and $\gamma(A) = n$.

**Lemma 2.11** ([19]) Let $I \in C^1(X, \mathbb{R})$ be an even functional on $X$ and $I$ satisfy the $(PS)$ condition. For any $n \in \mathbb{N}$, let

$$\Sigma_n = \{ A \in \Sigma | \gamma(A) \geq n \}, \quad c_n = \inf_{\lambda \in \Sigma_n} \sup_{u \in A} I(u), \quad K_c = \{ u \in X | I(u) = c, I'(u) = 0 \}.$$ 

1. If $\Sigma_n \neq \emptyset$ and $c_n \in \mathbb{R}$, then $c_n$ is the critical value of $I$.

2. If there exists a constant $l \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $c_n = c_{n+1} = \cdots = c_{n+l} = c \in \mathbb{R}$, and $c \neq I(0)$, then $\gamma(K_c) \geq l + 1$.

**Remark 2.2** According to Remark 7.3 in [19], if $K_c \in \Sigma$ and $\gamma(K_c) > 1$, then $K_c$ contains an infinite number of different points. That is, $I$ has an infinite number of different critical points on $X$.

**Lemma 2.12** ([20]) Let $X$ be a reflexive real Banach space, $\Phi : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a sequentially weakly lower semicontinuous, coercive, and continuously Gâteaux differentiable functional whose Gâteaux derivative admits a continuous inverse on $X^*$, $\Psi : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ be a continuously Gâteaux differentiable functional whose Gâteaux derivative is compact such that

$$\inf_{x \in X} \Phi(x) = \Phi(0) = \Psi(0) = 0.$$

Assume that there exist $r > 0, x \in X$ with $r < \Phi(x)$ such that

(i) $\sup \{ \Psi(x) : \Phi(x) \leq r \} < r \frac{\Phi(r)}{\Psi(r)}$,

(ii) for each

$$\lambda \in \Lambda_r = \left( \frac{\Phi(x)}{\Psi(x)} \right),$$

the functional $\Phi - \lambda \Psi$ is coercive.

Then, for each $\lambda \in \Lambda_r$, the functional $\Phi - \lambda \Psi$ has at least three distinct critical points in $X$. 

3 Main results

In order to prove the theorems, the following lemma plays an essential role.

**Lemma 3.1** Under the assumption given in Theorem 1.1, I satisfies the (PS) condition.

**Proof** Assuming that \( \{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \subset E^{\alpha,p} \) is a sequence such that \( \{I(u_k)\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \) is bounded and \( I'(u_k) \to 0 \) as \( k \to \infty \), then there exists \( D > 0 \) such that

\[
|I(u_k)| \leq D, \quad \|I'(u_k)\|_{E^{\alpha,p}^*} \leq D
\]

for \( k \in \mathbb{N} \), where \( (E^{\alpha,p})^* \) is the conjugate space of \( E^{\alpha,p} \).

The first step, we prove that \( \{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \) is bounded in \( E^{\alpha,p} \). If not, we assume that \( \|u_k\|_a \to +\infty \) as \( k \to \infty \). Let \( z_k = \frac{u_k}{\|u_k\|_a} \), then \( \|z_k\|_a = 1 \). Since \( E^{\alpha,p} \) is a reflexive Banach space, there exists a subsequence of \( \{z_k\} \) (still denoted as \( \{z_k\} \)) such that \( z_k \to z_0 \) \( (k \to \infty) \) in \( E^{\alpha,p} \), then \( z_k \to z_0 \) in \( C([0,T],\mathbb{R}) \). By \( (H_4) \) and \( (H_5) \), one has

\[
|f_2(t,u)\cdot u| \leq b_1(t)|u|^r, \quad |F_2(t,u)| \leq \frac{1}{r} b_1(t)|u|^r. \quad (3.2)
\]

The following two cases are discussed.

**Case 1:** \( z_0 \neq 0 \). Let \( \Omega = \{t \in [0,T] | |z_0(t)| > 0\} \), then \( \text{meas}(\Omega) > 0 \). Because \( \|u_k\|_a \to +\infty \) \( (k \to \infty) \) and \( |u_k(t)| = |z_0(t)| \cdot \|u_k\|_a \), so for \( t \in \Omega \), one has \( |u_k(t)| \to +\infty \) \( (k \to \infty) \). On the one hand, by \((2.3), (2.7), (3.1), (3.2)\), we have

\[
\int_0^T F_1(t,u_k) \, dt = \frac{1}{p^p} \|u_k\|_a^p + \left[ \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} |u_k(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} |u_k(0)|^p \right] - \int_0^T F_2(t,u_k) \, dt - I(u_k)
\]

\[
\leq \frac{1}{p} \|u_k\|_a^p + \frac{1}{p} \left[ \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} |u_k(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} |u_k(0)|^p \right] \|u_k\|_a^p + \frac{1}{r} \int_0^T b_1(t)|u|^r \, dt + D
\]

\[
\leq \frac{1}{p} \|u_k\|_a^p \left[ 1 + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \left( \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right) \frac{M^p}{\Lambda} \right] + \frac{1}{r} \int_0^T b_1(t)|u|^r \, dt + D
\]

\[
\leq \frac{1}{p} \|u_k\|_a^p \left[ 1 + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} \left( \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right) \frac{M^p}{r\Lambda \nu_p} \right] \|u_k\|_a^r + D.
\]

Since \( \theta > p > r > 1 \), so

\[
\int_0^T F_1(t,u_k) \, dt \leq o(1), \quad k \to \infty. \quad (3.3)
\]

On the other hand, according to Fatou’s lemma, the properties of \( \Omega \) and \( (H_3) \), one has

\[
\lim_{k \to \infty} \int_0^T F_1(t,u_k) \, dt \geq \int_\Omega \lim_{k \to \infty} F_1(t,u_k) \, dt = \int_\Omega \lim_{k \to \infty} F_1(t,u_k) \, dt = +\infty.
\]

This is a contradiction to \((3.3)\).

**Case 2:** \( z_0 \equiv 0 \). According to the continuity of \( f \), there exists \( d_0 > 0 \) such that

\[
|uf_1(t,u) - \theta F_1(t,u)| \leq d_0, \quad \forall u \leq d_\infty, t \in [0,T].
\]
Combined with condition \((H_2)\), we get

\[
uf(t,u) - \theta F_1(t,u) \geq -d_1|u|^p - d_0, \quad \forall |u| \in \mathbb{R}, t \in [0,T].
\]

(3.4)

According to (1.2), (2.3), (2.7), (2.9), (3.1), (3.2), (3.4) and Hölder’s inequality, we have

\[
o(1) = \frac{\theta D + D \|u_k\|_a^p}{\|u_k\|_{a}^p} \geq \frac{\theta I(u_k) - \langle I'(u_k), u_k \rangle}{\|u_k\|_{a}^p}
\]

\[
\geq \left( \frac{\theta}{p} - 1 \right) + \frac{1}{\|u_k\|_{a}^p} \int_0^T \left[ u_{f_1}(t,u_k) - \theta F_1(t,u_k) \right] dt
\]

\[
+ \frac{1}{\|u_k\|_{a}^p} \int_0^T \left[ u_{f_2}(t,u_k) - \theta F_2(t,u_k) \right] dt
\]

\[
\geq \left( \frac{\theta}{p} - 1 \right) - d_1 \int_0^T \|u_k\|_{a}^p dt - \frac{T d_0}{\|u_k\|_{a}^p} \left( \frac{\theta}{r} + 1 \right) \|b_1(t)|u_k|^r dt
\]

\[
\geq \left( \frac{\theta}{p} - 1 \right) - d_1 \int_0^T \|u_k\|_{a}^p dt - \frac{T d_0}{\|u_k\|_{a}^p} \left( \frac{\theta}{r} + 1 \right) \|b_1(t)|u_k|^r dt
\]

\[
\geq \left( \frac{\theta}{p} - 1 \right), \quad k \to \infty.
\]

It is a contradiction. Therefore, \(\{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}\) is bounded in \(E_\alpha^p\). Suppose that the sequence \(\{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}\) has a subsequence, still denoted as \(\{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}\), there exists \(u \in E_\alpha^p\) such that \(u_k \rightharpoonup u\) in \(E_\alpha^p\), then \(u_k \to u\) in \(C([0,T],\mathbb{R})\). So

\[
\begin{cases}
\langle I'(u_k) - I'(u), u_k - u \rangle \to 0, \quad k \to \infty,
|u_k(T) - u(T)|^p \to 0, \quad k \to \infty,
|u_k(0) - u(0)|^p \to 0, \quad k \to \infty.
\end{cases}
\]

Since

\[
\|u_k - u\|_a^p = \|I'(u_k) - I'(u), u_k - u\| + \int_0^T |f(t,u_k(t)) - f(t,u(t))|u_k(t) - u(t)| dt
\]

\[
- \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} |u_k(T) - u(T)|^p - \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} |u_k(0) - u(0)|^p,
\]

so \(\|u_k - u\|_a \to 0 (k \to \infty)\).

The proof process of Theorem 1.1 is given below, which is structured into four steps.

**Proof of Theorem 1.1**

**Step 1.** Obviously, \(I(0) = 0\). According to Lemma 3.1, \(I \in C^1(E_\alpha^p, \mathbb{R})\) satisfies the \((PS)\) condition.

**Step 2.** We will prove that condition (i) in Lemma 2.10 holds. By \((H_1)\), for \(\forall \varepsilon > 0\), there exists a constant \(\delta > 0\) such that

\[
F_1(t,u) \leq \varepsilon |u|^p, \quad \forall t \in [0,T], |u| \leq \delta.
\]

(3.5)
For $\forall u \in E^{\nu,p}$, by (2.2), (2.3), (2.7), (3.2), (3.5), one has

\[
I(u) \geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_p^p - \int_0^T F(t,u(t)) \, dt \geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_p^p - \varepsilon \int_0^T \|u\|_p^p \, dt - \frac{1}{r} \int_0^T b_1(t) |u|^r \, dt
\]

\[
\geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_p^p - \varepsilon \cdot \frac{1}{a_0} \int_0^T a(t) |u|^p \, dt - \frac{1}{r} \|b_1\|_{L^1} \|u\|_r^r
\]

\[
\geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_p^p - \varepsilon \|u\|_p^p - \frac{M_p}{r A_{\nu,p}} \|b_1\|_{L^1} \|u\|_r^r
\]

\[
= \left( \frac{1}{p} - \varepsilon \right) \frac{1}{a_0} - \frac{M_p}{r A_{\nu,p}} \|b_1\|_{L^1} \|u\|_r^{r-p} \|u\|_p^p.
\]

Choose $\varepsilon = \frac{a_0}{2p}$, we obtain

\[
I(u) \geq \left[ \frac{1}{2p} - \frac{M_p}{r A_{\nu,p}} \|b_1\|_{L^1} \|u\|_r^{r-p} \right] \|u\|_p^p.
\]

Let $\rho = \left( \frac{r A_{\nu,p}}{M_p \|b_1\|_{L^1}} \right)^{\frac{1}{p-r}}, \eta = \frac{1}{4p} \rho^p$, then for $u \in \partial B_{\rho}$ one has $I(u) \geq \eta > 0$.

**Step 3.** We will prove that there exist $e \in E^{\nu,p}$ and $\|e\|_a > \rho$ such that $I(e) < 0$, where $\rho$ is defined in Step 2. According to $(H_3)$, there exist two constants $d_2, d_3 > 0$ such that

\[
F_1(t,u) \geq d_2|u|^\theta - d_3, \quad \forall t \in [0,T], u \in \mathbb{R}.
\]

(3.7)

So, for $\forall u \in E^{\nu,p} \setminus \{0\}, \xi \in \mathbb{R}^+$, by (2.3), (2.7), (3.7) and Hölder’s inequality, we get

\[
I(\xi u) \leq \frac{\xi^p}{p} \|u\|_p^p + \frac{\xi^p}{p} \|u\|_r^r \left( \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right) - d_2 \xi^0 \int_0^T |u|^\theta \, dt + d_3 T
\]

\[
\leq \frac{\xi^p}{p} \|u\|_p^p + \frac{\xi^p M_p}{p} \|u\|_a \left( \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right)
\]

\[
- d_2 \xi^0 \left( T \frac{\xi^p}{\rho^p} \int_0^T |u(t)|^\theta \, dt \right)^{\frac{p}{\theta}} + d_3 T
\]

\[
\leq \frac{1}{p} \xi^p \left[ 1 + \frac{M_p}{A} \left( \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right) \right] \|u\|_p^p - d_2 \xi^0 T \frac{\xi^p}{\rho^p} \|u\|_a^r + d_3 T.
\]

Since $\theta > p$, the above formula implies that when $\xi_0$ is sufficiently large, $I(\xi_0 u) \to -\infty$. Let $e = \xi_0 u$, one has $I(e) < 0$, so condition (ii) in Lemma 2.10 holds. From Lemma 2.10, we know that $I$ has one critical value $c^{(1)} \geq \eta > 0$ as follows:

\[
c^{(1)} = \inf_{g \in \Gamma} \max_{s \in [0,1]} I(g(s)),
\]

where

\[
\Gamma = \{ g \in C([0,1], E^{\nu,p}) : g(0) = 0, g(1) = e \}.
\]

Therefore, there exists $0 \neq u^{(1)} \in E^{\nu,p}$ such that

\[
I(u^{(1)}) = c^{(1)} \geq \eta > 0, \quad I'(u^{(1)}) = 0.
\]

(3.8)

That is, the first nontrivial weak solution of (1.1) exists.
Step 4. It is known from (3.6) that $I$ is bounded below in $\overline{B}_p$. Choose $\varphi \in E^{x,p}$ such that $\varphi(t) \neq 0$ in $[0,T]$. For $\forall l \in (0, +\infty)$, by (2.7), (H3), and (H4), we have
\[
I(\varphi) \leq \frac{p}{p} \|\varphi\|_{p}^{\frac{p}{p}} \left[1 + \frac{M}{\alpha} \left(\frac{\beta h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\sigma_{1} h(0)}{\sigma_{2}}\right)\right] - \int_{0}^{T} F_{2}(t, l\varphi(t)) \, dt \\
\leq \frac{p}{p} \|\varphi\|_{p}^{\frac{p}{p}} \left[1 + \frac{M}{\alpha} \left(\frac{\beta h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\sigma_{1} h(0)}{\sigma_{2}}\right)\right] - l \int_{0}^{T} b(t) |\varphi(t)|^{p} \, dt.
\] (3.9)

Thus, from $1 < r < p$, we know that, for small enough $l_0$ satisfying $\|l_0\varphi\|_{a} \leq \rho$, one has $I(l_0\varphi) < 0$. Let $u = l_0\varphi$, one has
\[
c^{(2)} = \inf_{u \in E^{x,p}} I(u) < 0, \quad \|u\|_{a} \leq \rho,
\]
where $\rho$ is defined in Step 2. Then, according to the Ekeland variational principle, there exists a minimization sequence $\{v_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \subset B_p$ such that
\[
I(v_k) \to c^{(2)}, \quad I'(v_k) \to 0, \quad k \to \infty.
\]

That is, $\{v_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}$ is a $(PS)$ sequence. According to Lemma 3.1, $I$ satisfies the $(PS)$ condition. Therefore, $c^{(2)} < 0$ is another critical value of $I$. So there exists $0 \neq u^{(2)} \in E^{x,p}$ such that
\[
I(u^{(2)}) = c^{(2)} < 0, \quad \|u^{(2)}\|_{a} < \rho.
\]

The proof of Theorem 1.2 is given below.

**Proof of Theorem 1.2** The functionals $\Phi : E^{x,p} \to \mathbb{R}$ and $\Psi : E^{x,p} \to \mathbb{R}$ are defined as follows:
\[
\Phi(u) = \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_{a}^{p} + \frac{\beta_{1} h(T)}{p} |u(T)|^{p} + \frac{\sigma_{1} h(0)}{\sigma_{2}} |u(0)|^{p}, \quad \Psi(u) = \int_{0}^{T} F(t, u(t)) \, dt,
\]
then $I(u) = \Phi(u) - \lambda \Psi(u)$. Through simple calculation, we get
\[
\inf_{u \in E^{x,p}} \Phi(u) = \Phi(0) = 0, \quad \Psi(0) = \int_{0}^{T} F(t, 0) \, dt = 0.
\]

Furthermore, $\Phi$ and $\Psi$ are continuous Gâteaux differential and
\[
\langle \Phi'(u), v \rangle = \int_{0}^{T} h(t) \phi_{p}(u(t)) \int_{0}^{T} D_{t}^{p} u(t)) D_{t}^{p} v(t) \, dt + \int_{0}^{T} a(t) \phi_{p}(u(t)) v(t) \, dt \\
+ \frac{\beta_{1} h(T)}{\beta_2} \phi_{p}(u(T)) v(T) + \frac{\sigma_{1} h(0)}{\sigma_{2}} \phi_{p}(u(0)) v(0), \quad \forall u, v \in E^{x,p},
\]
(3.10)
\[
\langle \Psi'(u), v \rangle = \int_{0}^{T} f(t, u(t)) v(t) \, dt, \quad \forall u, v \in E^{x,p}.
\] (3.11)

In addition, $\Phi' : E^{x,p} \to (E^{x,p})^*$ is continuous. Next, we prove that $\Psi' : E^{x,p} \to (E^{x,p})^*$ is a continuous compact operator. Assuming that $\{u_n\} \subset E^{x,p}$, $u_n \to u$ ($n \to \infty$), then $\{u_n\}$ uniformly converges to $u$ on $C([0, T])$. Because $f \in C([0, T] \times \mathbb{R}, \mathbb{R})$, so $f(t, u_n) \to f(t, u)$
Thus \( \Psi'(u_n) \to \Psi'(u) \) as \( n \to \infty \). Then, \( \Psi' \) is strongly continuous. From Proposition 26.2 in [21], \( \Psi' \) is a compact operator. And then we show that \( \Phi \) is weakly semicontinuous. Assuming that \( \{u_n\} \subset E^{u,p}, \{u_n\} \to u \), then \( \{u_n\} \) uniformly converges to \( u \) on \( C([0, T]) \), and \( \liminf_{n \to \infty} \|u_n\|_a \geq \|u\|_a \). So,

\[
\liminf_{n \to \infty} \Phi(u_n) = \liminf_{n \to \infty} \left( \frac{1}{p} \|u_n\|_a^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p p_2} |u_n(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p \alpha_2} |u_n(0)|^p \right) \\
\geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_a^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p p_2} |u(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p \alpha_2} |u(0)|^p = \Phi(u).
\]

Thus \( \Phi \) is weakly semicontinuous. In addition, we will show that \( \Phi' \) is coercive and has a continuous inverse on \( (E^{u,p})^* \). For \( u \in E^{u,p} \setminus \{0\} \), by (3.10), one has

\[
\lim_{\|u\|_a \to +\infty} \frac{\langle \Phi'(u), u - v \rangle}{\|u\|_a} = \lim_{\|u\|_a \to +\infty} \frac{\|u\|_a^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p p_2} |u(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p \alpha_2} |u(0)|^p}{\|u\|_a} = +\infty,
\]

then \( \Phi' \) is coercive. For \( \forall u, v \in E^{u,p} \), by (3.10), we obtain

\[
\langle \Phi'(u) - \Phi'(v), u - v \rangle \\
= \int_0^T h(t) \left( \phi_p \left( \frac{\partial^+_0 D^p_t u(t)}{\partial^+_0 D^p_t v(t)} \right) \right) \left( \frac{\partial^+_0 D^p_t u(t)}{\partial^+_0 D^p_t v(t)} \right) dt \\
+ \int_0^T a(t) \left( \phi_p \left( u(t) \right) - \phi_p \left( v(t) \right) \right) \left( u(t) - v(t) \right) dt \\
+ \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p_2} \left( \phi_p \left( u(T) \right) - \phi_p \left( v(T) \right) \right) \left( u(T) - v(T) \right) \\
+ \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \left( \phi_p \left( u(0) \right) - \phi_p \left( v(0) \right) \right) \left( u(0) - v(0) \right) \\
\geq \int_0^T h(t) \left( \phi_p \left( \frac{\partial^+_0 D^p_t u(t)}{\partial^+_0 D^p_t v(t)} \right) \right) \left( \frac{\partial^+_0 D^p_t u(t)}{\partial^+_0 D^p_t v(t)} \right) dt \\
+ \int_0^T a(t) \left( \phi_p \left( u(t) \right) - \phi_p \left( v(t) \right) \right) \left( u(t) - v(t) \right) dt.
\]

From [22], we can see that there exist constants \( c_p, d_p > 0 \) such that

\[
\langle \Phi'(u) - \Phi'(v), u - v \rangle \\
\geq \begin{cases} 
 c_p \int_0^T h(t) \left( \frac{\partial^+_0 D^p_t u(t)}{\partial^+_0 D^p_t v(t)} \right) dt + a(t) |u(t) - v(t)|^p dt, & p \geq 2; \\
 d_p \int_0^T \frac{h(t) |\phi_p(u(t)) - \phi_p(v(t))|^2}{\left( \frac{\partial^+_0 D^p_t u(t)}{\partial^+_0 D^p_t v(t)} \right)^2} dt + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0) - \alpha_1 h(0)}{|u(0) - v(0)|^2} dt, & 1 < p < 2.
\end{cases}
\]

If \( p \geq 2 \), then

\[
\langle \Phi'(u) - \Phi'(v), u - v \rangle \geq c_p \|u - v\|_a^p.
\]
Consequently, $\Phi'$ is uniformly monotonous. If $1 < p < 2$, by Hölder’s inequality, one has

$$
\int_0^T \left| \frac{D_t u(t)}{D_t v(t)} \right|^p dt 
\leq c \left( \int_0^T \left( \frac{D_t u(t)}{D_t v(t)} \right)^2 dt \right)^{\frac{p}{2}} \left( \|u\|_a + \|v\|_a \right)^{\frac{p^2-2}{p}},
$$

so

$$
\int_0^T \left( \Phi_p \left( \frac{D_t u(t)}{D_t v(t)} \right) - \Phi_p \left( \frac{D_t u(t)}{D_t v(t)} \right) \right) dt 
\geq \frac{c}{(\|u\|_a + \|v\|_a)^{\frac{2}{p}}} \left( \int_0^T \left| \frac{D_t u(t)}{D_t v(t)} \right|^p dt \right)^{\frac{2}{p}}.
$$

Combined with (3.12) and (3.13), we obtain

$$
\langle \Phi'(u) - \Phi'(v), u - v \rangle \geq \frac{c \|u - v\|_a^2}{(\|u\|_a + \|v\|_a)^{\frac{2}{p}}}.\]

Thus, $\Phi'$ is strictly monotonous. From Theorem 26.A(d) in [21], $(\Phi')^{-1}$ exists and is continuous.

The second step is to verify that condition (i) in Lemma 2.12 holds. If $x \in E^{x,p}$ satisfies $\Phi(x) \leq r$, then by (2.3) one has

$$
\Phi(x) = \frac{1}{p} \|x\|^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p \beta_2} |x(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p \alpha_2} |x(0)|^p \geq \frac{1}{p} \|x\|_a^p \geq \frac{\Lambda}{p M^p} \|x\|_\infty^p
$$

and

$$
\{ x \in E^{x,p} : \Phi(x) \leq r \} \subseteq \left\{ x : \frac{\Lambda}{p M^p} \|x\|_\infty^p \leq r \right\} = \left\{ x : \|x\|_a^p \leq \frac{r p M^p}{\Lambda} \right\} = \left\{ x : \|x\|_\infty \leq M \left( \frac{r p}{\Lambda} \right)^{\frac{1}{p}} \right\}.
$$

Thus,

$$
\sup \left\{ \Psi(x) : \Phi(x) \leq r \right\} = \sup \left\{ \int_0^T F(t, x(t)) dt : \Phi(x) \leq r \right\} \leq \int_0^T \max_{|x| \leq M (\rho \Lambda)^{1/p}} F(t, x(t)) dt,
$$

combined with (1.5), we get

$$
\frac{\sup \left\{ \Psi(x) : \Phi(x) \leq r \right\}}{r} = \frac{\sup \left\{ \int_0^T F(t, x(t)) dt : \Phi(x) \leq r \right\}}{r} \leq \frac{\int_0^T \max_{|x| \leq M (\rho \Lambda)^{1/p}} F(t, x(t)) dt}{r} < \frac{p \int_0^T F(t, \omega(t)) dt}{\|\omega\|_a^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p \beta_2} \|\omega(T)\|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p \alpha_2} \|\omega(0)\|^p} = \frac{\Psi(\omega)}{\Phi(\omega)},
$$

which implies that condition (i) of Lemma 2.12 holds.
Choose Combining (2.3) and (2.7), we can get

\[ \int_0^T F(t,x(t)) \, dt \leq L \int_0^T \left( 1 + |x(t)|^\beta \right) \, dt \leq LT\|x\|_a^\beta \leq LT + \frac{LTM^\beta}{\lambda^\beta} \|x\|_a^\beta. \]  

(3.14)

For \( x \in E^{\alpha\beta}, \lambda \in \Lambda, \) by (3.14) we get

\[ \Phi(x) - \lambda \Psi(x) \geq \frac{1}{p} \|x\|_a^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p\beta_2} |x(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p\alpha_2} |x(0)|^p - \lambda \left( LT + \frac{LTM^\beta}{\lambda^\beta} \|x\|_a^\beta \right). \]

If \( 0 < \beta < p, \) for all \( \lambda > 0, \) one has

\[ \lim_{\|x\|_a \to +\infty} (\Phi(x) - \lambda \Psi(x)) = +\infty. \]

Obviously, the functional \( \Phi - \lambda \Psi \) is coercive. If \( \beta = p, \) we obtain

\[ \Phi(x) - \lambda \Psi(x) \geq \left( \frac{1}{p} - \frac{\lambda LTM^\beta}{\Lambda} \right) \|x\|_a^p - \lambda LT. \]

Choose

\[ L < \frac{\Lambda \int_0^T \max_{|x| \leq M(|p|^{1/p})} F(t,x) \, dt}{prTM^p}, \]

for \( \lambda < A, \) one has \( \frac{1}{p} - \frac{\lambda LTM^\beta}{\Lambda} > 0. \) Thus,

\[ \lim_{\|x\|_a \to +\infty} (\Phi(x) - \lambda \Psi(x)) = +\infty. \]

So \( \Phi - \lambda \Psi \) is coercive. Therefore, the conditions in Lemma 2.12 are all true. By Lemma 2.12, we get that, for each \( \lambda \in \Lambda, \) the functional \( I = \Phi - \lambda \Psi \) has at least three different critical points in \( E^{\alpha\beta}. \)

Finally, the proof process of Theorem 1.3 is given.

**Proof of Theorem 1.3** In the first step, \( I \in C^1(E^{\alpha\beta}, \mathbb{R}) \) is bounded below. By \( (H_7), \) one has

\[ |F(t,u)| \leq b(t)|u|^\gamma, \quad \forall (t,u) \in [0,T] \times \mathbb{R}. \]

Combining (2.3) and (2.7), we can get

\[ I(u) = \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_a^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p\beta_2} |u(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p\alpha_2} |u(0)|^p - \int_0^T F(t,u(t)) \, dt \]

\[ \geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_a^p - \int_0^T F(t,u(t)) \, dt \geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_a^p - \int_0^T b(t)|u|^\gamma \, dt \]

\[ \geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_a^p - \|b\|_{L^\gamma} \|u\|_a^\gamma \geq \frac{1}{p} \|u\|_a^p - \frac{M \gamma}{\Lambda^\gamma} \|b\|_{L^\gamma} \|u\|_a^\gamma. \]  

(3.15)
Since $1 < r_1 < p$, (3.15) indicates that $I(u) \to \infty$ as $\|u\|_{a} \to \infty$, so $I$ is bounded below.

In the second step, $I$ satisfies the (PS) condition on $E^{a,p}$. Assume that $\{u_k\} \subset E^{a,p}$ is a sequence such that

$$
|I(u_k)| \leq D, \quad I'(u_k) \to 0 \quad (k \to \infty),
$$

where $D > 0$ is a constant. Then (3.15) shows that $\{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}$ is bounded on $E^{a,p}$. Suppose that the sequence $\{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}$ has a subsequence, still recorded as $\{u_k\}_{k \in \mathbb{N}}$, there exists $u \in E^{a,p}$ such that $u_k \rightharpoonup u$ in $E^{a,p}$, then $u_k \to u$ in $C([0,T],\mathbb{R})$. So

$$
\begin{aligned}
&\langle I'(u_k) - I'(u), u_k - u \rangle \to 0, \quad k \to \infty, \\
&\int_{0}^{T} [f(t,u_k(t)) - f(t,u(t))]|u_k(t) - u(t)|\,dt \to 0, \quad k \to \infty, \\
&|u_k(T) - u(T)|^p \to 0, \quad k \to \infty, \\
&|u_k(0) - u(0)|^p \to 0, \quad k \to \infty.
\end{aligned}
$$

Since

$$
\|u_k - u\|^p = \|I'(u_k) - I'(u), u_k - u\| + \int_{0}^{T} \left[|f(t,u_k(t)) - f(t,u(t))|^p + \|C\|\int_{0}^{T} \left|\int_{0}^{t} h(s) \, ds \right|^p \right] \,dt
$$

and

$$
\int_{0}^{T} \left|\int_{0}^{t} h(s) \, ds \right|^p \,dt \to 0, \quad k \to \infty,
$$

so $\|u_k - u\|_{a} \to 0 (k \to \infty)$. This means that $u_k \rightharpoonup u$ in $E^{a,p}$. That is, $I$ satisfies the (PS) condition on $E^{a,p}$. In addition, (2.7) and (H10) indicate that $I$ is an even functional and $I(0) = 0$.

Fix $n \in \mathbb{N}$, then take $n$ disjoint open intervals $\Pi_i$ such that $\bigcup_{i=1}^{n} \Pi_i \subset \Pi$. Let $u_i \in (W^{1,2}((\Pi_i,\mathbb{R}) \cap E^{a,p}) \setminus \{0\}$ satisfy $\|u_i\| = 1$, and remember

$$
E_n = \langle u_1, u_2, \ldots, u_n \rangle, \quad S_n = \{u \in E_n | u \neq 1\}.
$$

Therefore, for $u \in E_n$, there exists $\lambda_i \in \mathbb{R}$ such that

$$
u = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i u_i, \quad \forall t \in [0,T],
$$

then

$$
\|u\|^p = \int_{0}^{T} \left[|a(t)|u(t)|^p + |h(t)|D_t^p u(t)|^p \right] \,dt
$$

and

$$
\int_{\Pi_i} \left[|a(t)|u_i(t)|^p + |h(t)|D_t^p u_i(t)|^p \right] \,dt
$$

so

$$
\sum_{i=1}^{n} |\lambda_i|^p \|u_i\|^p = \sum_{i=1}^{n} |\lambda_i|^p, \quad \forall u \in E_n.
$$

(3.16)
For \( u \in S_n \), by (2.2), (2.3), (3.16), and (H8), one has

\[
I(su) = \frac{1}{p} \|su\|_p^p + \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{p \beta_2} |su(T)|^p + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{p \alpha_2} |su(0)|^p - \int_0^T F(t, su(t)) \, dt \\
\leq \frac{|s|^p}{p} \|u\|_a^p + \frac{|s|^p}{p} \left( \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right) \|u\|_\infty^p - \sum_{i=1}^n \int_{\Pi_i} F(t, su_i, u) \, dt \\
\leq \frac{|s|^p}{p} \left[ 1 + \frac{Mp}{\Lambda} \left( \frac{\beta_1 h(T)}{\beta_2} + \frac{\alpha_1 h(0)}{\alpha_2} \right) \right] \\
- \eta |s|^{r_2} \sum_{i=1}^n |\lambda_i|^{r_2} \int_{\Pi_i} |u_i|^{r_2} \, dt, \quad 0 < s \leq \frac{\delta \Lambda^{1/p}}{M \lambda^*},
\]

where \( \lambda^* = \max_{i \in \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}} |\lambda_i| > 0 \) is a constant. Because \( 1 < r_2 < p \), (3.18) shows that there exist \( \epsilon, \sigma > 0 \) such that

\[
I(\sigma u) < -\epsilon, \quad \forall u \in S_n.
\]

(3.19)

Let

\[
S^*_\sigma = \{ \sigma u | u \in S_n \}, \quad \Delta = \left\{ (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \ldots, \lambda_n) \in \mathbb{R}^n \mid \sum_{i=1}^n |\lambda_i|^p < \sigma^p \right\},
\]

then by (3.19) we obtain

\[
I(u) < -\epsilon, \quad \forall u \in S^*_\sigma.
\]

Combining \( I \) is an even functional and \( I(0) = 0 \), we get

\[
S^*_\sigma \subset I^{-\epsilon} \in \Sigma.
\]

In addition, it can be seen from (3.17) that the mapping \( (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \ldots, \lambda_n) \to \sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i u_i \) from \( \partial \Delta \) to \( S^*_\sigma \) is odd and homeomorphic. Thus, according to some properties of the genus (Propositions 7.5 and 7.7 in [19]), one has

\[
\gamma(I^{-\epsilon}) \geq \gamma(S^*_\sigma) = n.
\]

Therefore \( I^{-\epsilon} \in \Sigma_n \), so \( \Sigma_n \neq \phi \). Let

\[
c_n = \inf_{A \in \Sigma_n} \sup_{u \in A} I(u).
\]

Then, since \( I \) is bounded below, we can get \(-\infty < c_n \leq -\epsilon < 0 \). That is, for \( \forall n \in \mathbb{N} \), \( c_n \) is a negative real number. Therefore, according to Lemma 2.11, \( I \) has infinitely many nontrivial critical points, that is, problem (1.1) has infinitely many nontrivial weak solutions. \( \square \)
4 Conclusions

This paper mainly explores the multiplicity of solutions for a fractional $p$-Laplacian differential equation with Sturm–Liouville boundary value conditions. By employing variational methods, the multiplicity results of weak solutions are obtained under the conditions of $p$-suplinear growth, $p$-sublinear growth, and the combination of $p$-suplinear growth and $p$-sublinear growth. Compared with the existing related work, the research results of this paper weaken the existing related conditions and improve and enrich the related results to a certain extent.

Acknowledgements

The authors sincerely thank the editors and anonymous referees for the careful reading of the original manuscript and valuable comments, which have improved the quality of our work.

Funding

This work is supported by Research Projects of Universities in Autonomous Region (XJEDU2021Y048) and Doctor Scientific Research Fund of Xinjiang Institute of Engineering (No.2020Dxjy012902).

Availability of data and materials

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors’ contributions

The authors contributed equally in this article. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received: 2 November 2020 Accepted: 9 March 2021 Published online: 20 March 2021

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