Three positive periodic solutions of second order nonlinear neutral functional differential equations with delayed derivative

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Abstract
This paper deals with the existence of three positive periodic solutions for a class of second order neutral functional differential equations involving the delayed derivative term in nonlinearity

\[(x(t) - cx(t - \delta))'' + a(t)g(x(t))x(t) = \lambda b(t)f(t, x(t), x(t - \tau_1(t)), x'(t - \tau_2(t))).\]

By utilizing the perturbation method of positive operator and Leggett–Williams fixed point theorem, a group of sufficient conditions are established.

MSC: 34B18; 34C25

Keywords: Neutral functional differential equation; Positive periodic solution; Delayed derivative; Cone; Leggett–Williams fixed point theorem

1 Introduction
In the present work, we study the existence of three positive periodic solutions for the second order neutral functional differential equation of the form

\[(x(t) - cx(t - \delta))'' + a(t)g(x(t))x(t) = \lambda b(t)f(t, x(t), x(t - \tau_1(t)), x'(t - \tau_2(t))),\] (1)

where \(\lambda > 0\) is a positive parameter, \(c, \delta\) are constants, and \(|c| < 1\). \(a(t), b(t)\) are nonnegative \(\omega\)-periodic continuous functions, \(\tau, \tau_2, i = 1, 2\), are continuous \(\omega\)-periodic functions, \(f: \mathbb{R} \times [0, +\infty)^2 \times \mathbb{R} \rightarrow [0, +\infty]\) is a continuous function, and \(f(t, u, v, w)\) is \(\omega\)-periodic with respect to \(t, g \in C([0, +\infty), [0, +\infty))\).

Neutral functional differential equations have a wide range of applications in the field of physics, biology, economics, and so on, see [1–14] for more details. In [15], the authors pointed out that the growth of single or multiple species was mainly affected by seasonal changes (especially cyclical changes) and time lags. So it is important to study the periodic solutions of such models. The issues of the existence of positive periodic solutions of neutral functional differential equations have received more attention in recent years, see [7–14]. The existence of positive periodic solutions for first order neutral functional differential equations has been studied by many authors, see [7–12] and the references therein. But the research results on the case of second order are more seldom.
In [13], the authors studied the existence, multiplicity, and nonexistence of positive periodic solutions of second order neutral functional differential equations of the form

\[(x(t) - cx(t - \delta))'' + a(t)x(t) = \lambda b(t)f(x(t - \tau(t))),\]

where \(\lambda > 0\) is a positive parameter, \(c, \delta\) are constants, and \(|c| < 1, a(t), b(t)\) are nonnegative \(\omega\)-periodic continuous functions. But the nonlinear term does not contain the derivative term.

Recently, Li [14] discussed the existence and nonexistence of positive \(\omega\)-periodic solutions of second order neutral functional differential equations with delayed derivative in nonlinear term by using the positive operator perturbation method and the fixed point index theory

\[(x(t) - cx(t - \delta))'' + a(t)x(t) = f(t, x(t), x(t - \tau(t)), x'(t - \gamma(t))),\]

where \(\delta > 0, |c| < 1, a \in C(\mathbb{R}, \mathbb{C})\) is an \(\omega\) period function, \(f : \mathbb{R} \times [0, \infty)^2 \times \mathbb{R} \to [0, \infty)\) is continuous, and \(f(t, u, v, w)\) is \(\omega\)-periodic with respect to \(t, \tau, \gamma \in C(\mathbb{R}, [0, \infty))\) are \(\omega\)-periodic functions. But he did not consider the multiplicity of the positive periodic solutions.

Motivated by the above mentioned results, in this work, by using a different method, we mainly study the existence and multiplicity of positive periodic solutions for a class of second order neutral nonlinear functional differential equations with delayed derivative of the form (1).

Let \(C_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) be the Banach space of all continuous \(\omega\)-periodic functions endowed with the norm \(\|x\|_C = \max_{t \in [0, \omega]} |x(t)|\). \(C^1_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) be the Banach space of all continuous differentiable \(\omega\)-periodic functions with the norm \(\|x\|_{C^1} = \|x\|_C + \|x'\|_C\). In general, for \(n \in \mathbb{N}\), \(C^n_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) represents the Banach space of all \(n\)th order continuous differentiable \(\omega\)-periodic functions. Let \(C^n_\omega(\mathbb{R}) = C^n_\omega([0, \infty))\) be a nonnegative function cone in \(C^n_\omega(\mathbb{R})\).

The main results of the present paper are summarized as follows:

(i) We establish the existence (and uniqueness) of \(\omega\)-periodic solutions for the corresponding linear second order neutral functional differential equation

\[\left(x(t) - cx(t - \delta)\right)'' + a(t)x(t) = \lambda h(t), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}.\]

See Lemma 5.

(ii) We provide the strong positive estimate and \(C^1\)-estimate of the periodic solution operator by using the positive operator perturbation method, see Lemma 6.

(iii) Let

\[K = \{x \in C^1_\omega(\mathbb{R}) : x(t) \geq \sigma \|x\|_C, |x'(\tau)| \leq C_0|x(t)|, \tau, t \in \mathbb{R}\},\]

where \(\sigma\) and \(C_0\) will be specified later. We define an operator \(Q_\lambda\) which maps \(K\) into itself and prove that the operator \(Q_\lambda\) has at least three positive fixed points by using Leggett–Williams fixed point theorem, see Theorem 1.

In this paper, we always assume that

\[(H1) \quad f \in C(\mathbb{R} \times [0, \infty)^2 \times \mathbb{R}, [0, \infty)), f(t, u, v, w) \text{ is nondecreasing with respect to } u, v, w \text{ and } \omega\text{-periodic in } t; g \in C([0, \infty), [0, \infty));\]
\[(H2)\]  \(a, b \in C^1_\omega(\mathbb{R}), B := \frac{1}{\omega} \int_0^\omega b(s) \, ds > 0,\) and \(\tau_i \in C_\omega(\mathbb{R}), i = 1, 2;\)

\[(H3)\]  there exist two positive constants \(d\) and \(D\) satisfying \(0 < d \leq a(t)g(x(t)) \leq D < \left(\frac{\pi}{\omega}\right)^2\) for any \(t \in [0, \omega], x \in C_\omega(\mathbb{R}).\)

2 Preliminaries

Firstly, let \(0 < M < \left(\frac{\pi}{\omega}\right)^2\). We consider the second order linear ordinary differential equation

\[x''(t) + Mx(t) = \lambda h(t), \quad h \in C_\omega(\mathbb{R}). \quad (2)\]

By Lemma 2.1 of [14], the following lemma is obtained.

**Lemma 1** For \(h \in C_\omega(\mathbb{R})\), linear equation (2) has a unique \(\omega\)-periodic solution \(x \in C^2_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) expressed by

\[x(t) = \lambda \int_{t-\omega}^t U(t-s)h(s) \, ds := T_\lambda(h)(t), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}, \quad (3)\]

where

\[U(t) = \frac{\cos \sqrt{M}(t - \frac{\omega}{2})}{2 \sqrt{M} \sin \frac{\omega \beta}{2}}, \quad 0 \leq t \leq \omega. \quad (4)\]

And the operator \(T_\lambda : C_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \to C^1_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) is a linear completely continuous operator.

For the sake of brevity, let \(\beta = \sqrt{M}\) and denote

\[L = \max_{t \in [0, \omega]} U(t) = \frac{1}{2 \beta \sin \frac{\omega \beta}{2}}, \quad l = \min_{t \in [0, \omega]} U(t) = \frac{\cos \frac{\omega \beta}{2}}{2 \beta \sin \frac{\omega \beta}{2}},\]

\[L_1 = \max_{t \in [0, \omega]} |U'(t)| = \max_{t \in [0, \omega]} \left|\frac{\sin (t - \frac{\omega}{2})}{2 \beta \sin \frac{\omega \beta}{2}}\right| = \frac{1}{2},\]

\[\sigma = \frac{l}{L} = \cos \frac{\beta \omega}{2}, \quad C_0 = \frac{L_1}{L} = \beta \tan \frac{\beta \omega}{2}.\]

Then

\[0 < \sigma < 1, \quad 0 < l \leq U(t) \leq L.\]

Clearly, if \(h \in C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}),\) the solution \(x \in C^2_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) of (2) is positive.

Define a cone \(K\) in \(C^1_\omega(\mathbb{R})\) by

\[K = \{ x \in C^1_\omega(\mathbb{R}) : x(t) \geq \sigma \|x\|_C, |x'(\tau)| \leq C_0 |x(t)|, \tau, t \in \mathbb{R}\}. \quad (5)\]

**Lemma 2** \(T_\lambda(C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R})) \subset K\) and \(\|T_\lambda\| \leq \frac{1}{M}\).

**Proof** Let \(h \in C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}).\) By (3) and (4), we have

\[x(t) = \lambda \int_{t-\omega}^t U(t-s)h(s) \, ds \leq \lambda L \int_{t-\omega}^t h(s) \, ds = \lambda L \int_0^\omega h(s) \, ds, \quad \forall t \in \mathbb{R}.\]
That is, \( \|x\|_C \leq \lambda L \int_0^\infty h(s)\, ds \). Hence we have

\[
x(t) \geq \lambda L \int_{t-\omega}^t h(s)\, ds = \lambda L \int_0^\infty h(s)\, ds \geq \sigma \|x\|_C, \quad \forall t \in \mathbb{R}.
\]

For \( \forall \tau \in \mathbb{R} \), noticing that \( x'(\tau) = \lambda \int_{\tau-\omega}^\tau U'(\tau - s)h(s)\, ds \), we have

\[
|x'(\tau)| \leq \lambda L \int_{\tau-\omega}^\tau |U'(\tau - s)|h(s)\, ds \\
\leq \lambda L_1 \int_{\tau-\omega}^\tau h(s)\, ds \\
= \lambda L_1 \int_0^\infty h(s)\, ds \\
\leq C_0 x(t).
\]

Consequently, by (5), \( T_\lambda(C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R})) \subset K \). In addition, for \( h \in C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \), the inequality

\[
|T_\lambda h(t)| \leq \lambda L \int_{t-\omega}^t |U(t - s)|h(s)\, ds\|h\|_C = \frac{\lambda}{M} \|h\|_C
\]

implies that \( \|T_\lambda\| \leq \frac{\lambda}{M} \) and the proof is complete. \( \square \)

In order to prove the existence of \( \omega \)-periodic solutions of equation (1), we consider the corresponding linear neutral functional differential equation

\[
(x(t) - cx(t - \delta))'' + a(t)g(x(t))x(t) = \lambda h(t), \quad h \in C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}). \tag{6}
\]

Define a linear operator \( A : C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \to C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \) by

\[
Ax(t) = x(t) - cx(t - \delta), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}, x \in C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}). \tag{7}
\]

Then \( A : C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \to C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \) is bounded.

**Lemma 3** ([11, 12, 14]) If \( |c| \neq 1 \), then the operator \( A \), defined by (7), has a linear bounded inverse operator \( A^{-1} \) on \( C^*_\omega(\mathbb{R}) \) given by

\[
(A^{-1}y)(t) = \begin{cases} 
\sum_{j \geq 0} c^j y(t - j\delta), & |c| < 1, \\
-\sum_{j \geq 1} c^{-j} y(t + j\delta), & |c| > 1,
\end{cases}
\]

and

\[
\|A^{-1}y\|_C \leq \frac{\|y\|_C}{|1 - |c||}.
\]

**Lemma 4** If \( |c| < \sigma \), then for any \( y \in K \), we have

\[
A^{-1}y(t) \geq \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} \|y\|_C, \quad \forall t \in \mathbb{R}.
\]
Proof For any \( y \in K \), by virtue of Lemma 3, we have
\[
A^{-1}y(t) = \sum_{j=0}^{n} c^{j} y(t - j\delta) = \sum_{j=0}^{n} |c|^{j} y(t - j\delta) - \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} |c|^{j-1} y(t - (j-1)\delta)
\]
\[
\geq \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} |c|^{2\sigma} \|y\|_{c} - \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} |c|^{j-1} \|y\|_{c}
\]
\[
\geq \left( \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^{2}} \right) \|y\|_{c}.
\]
Then the proof of Lemma 4 is complete. \( \square \)

Let \( y = Ax \). Then by (7), equation (6) can be rewritten as
\[
y'' + a(t)g\left((A^{-1}y)(t)\right)(A^{-1}y)(t) = \lambda h(t), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}.
\]
(8)

It is available from Lemma 3 that when \( y \in C^{1}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}), A^{-1}y \in C^{1}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}), \) and \( (A^{-1}y)^{'} = A^{-1}y^{'} \), when \( y \in C^{2}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}), A^{-1}y \in C^{2}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}), \) and \( (A^{-1}y)^{'} = A^{-1}y^{'} \). Therefore, \( x \in C^{2}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \) is an \( \omega \)-periodic solution of equation (6) if and only if \( y = Ax \in C^{2}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \) is an \( \omega \)-periodic solution of equation (8).

Lemma 5 If \( |c| < \frac{d}{D - a}, \) equation (8) has a unique \( \omega \)-periodic solution \( y \in C^{2}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \) for any \( h \in C_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \). When \( h \in C^{1}_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \) and \( |c| < \min\{\frac{d}{D - a}, \frac{\sigma(M - D)}{\sigma(M - D + \delta)}\} \), the \( \omega \)-periodic solution \( y \in K \).

Proof Define an operator \( B_{\lambda} : C_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \rightarrow C_{\infty}(\mathbb{R}) \) by
\[
B_{\lambda}y(t) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \left[ \left(M - a(t)g\left((A^{-1}y)(t)\right)\right)y(t) - G(y(t)) \right], \quad t \in \mathbb{R},
\]
(9)

where \( G(y(t)) = ca(t)g((A^{-1}y)(t))(A^{-1}y)(t - \delta) \). Then equation (8) can be rewritten as
\[
y''(t) + My(t) = \lambda B_{\lambda}y(t) + \lambda h(t), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}.
\]
(10)

By Lemma 1, we have
\[
(I - T_{\lambda}B_{\lambda})y(t) = T_{\lambda}h(t), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}.
\]
(11)

It follows from (9) that
\[
|B_{\lambda}y(t)| = \frac{1}{\lambda} \left| \left(M - a(t)g\left((A^{-1}y)(t)\right)\right)y(t) - ca(t)g\left((A^{-1}y)(t)\right)(A^{-1}y)(t - \delta) \right|
\]
\[
\leq \frac{1}{\lambda} \left[ (M - a)d \|y\|_{c} + |c|D \frac{\|y\|_{c}}{1 - |c|} \right]
\]
\[
= \frac{1}{\lambda} \left( M - d + \frac{|c|D}{1 - |c|} \right) \|y\|_{c}.
\]

Consequently,
\[
\|B_{\lambda}\| \leq \frac{1}{\lambda} \left( M - d + \frac{|c|D}{1 - |c|} \right).
\]
Combining this fact with $\| T_1 \| \leq \frac{2}{M}$, we have

$$\| T_1 B_1 \| \leq \frac{1}{M} \left( M - d + \frac{|c|D}{1 - |c|} \right).$$

Then $\| T_2 B_2 \| < 1$ because $|c| < \frac{d}{\sigma(M-D)}$. Hence the operator $I - T_2 B_2$ has a bounded inverse operator $(I - T_2 B_2)^{-1}$ which can be expressed by

$$(I - T_2 B_2)^{-1} = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (T_2 B_2)^n.$$

Therefore, operator equation (11) has a unique $\omega$-periodic solution $y \in C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$ expressed by

$$y = (I - T_2 B_2)^{-1} T_1 h = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (T_2 B_2)^n T_1 h. \tag{12}$$

Let $z = T_3 h$ for any $h \in C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$. By Lemma 2, we get $z \in K$. Then we have

$$B_3 z(t) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \left[ (M - a(t)g((A^{-1}z)(t))z(t) - ca(t)g((A^{-1}z)(t)) (A^{-1}z)(t - \delta) \right]
\geq \frac{1}{\lambda} \left[ (M - D)z(t) - |c|D \| A^{-1}z \|_C \right]
\geq \frac{1}{\lambda} \left[ (M - D)\sigma \| z \|_C - \frac{|c|D}{1 - |c|} \| z \|_C \right]
= \frac{1}{\lambda} \left[ (M - D)\sigma \| z \|_C \right].$$

Since $|c| < \frac{\sigma(M-D)}{\sigma(M-D)+D}$, it follows that

$$(M - D)\sigma - \frac{|c|D}{1 - |c|} > 0.$$

Hence $B_3 z(t) \geq 0$ for any $t \in \mathbb{R}$, that is, $B_3 z \in C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$. Then applying Lemma 2 again, $(T_3 B_3) = T_3 B_2 z \in K$. Consequently, $(T_3 B_3)^n z \in K$ for $\forall n \in \mathbb{N}$. By boundedness of the linear operator $T_3 : C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R}) \rightarrow C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$, $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (T_3 B_3)^n z$ is convergence in $C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$. Since the cone $K \subset C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$ is closed, then by (12), we have

$$y = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (T_3 B_3)^n T_1 h = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (T_3 B_3)^n z \in K. \tag{13}$$

This completes the proof of Lemma 5. \hfill \Box

**Lemma 6** Let $h \in C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$ and $|c| < \min\{\frac{d}{\sigma(M-D)}\}$. Then $h^\ast (\cdot) := \lambda h^\ast (\cdot)$ belongs to $C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$, and the operator $S_\lambda : C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R}) \rightarrow C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$ defined by

$$(S_\lambda h^\ast)(t) = \int_{t-s}^{t} U(t-s) \left[ (M - a(s)g((A^{-1}y)(s))y(s) - G(y(s)) + \lambda h^\ast(s) \right] ds$$

maps $C_{\omega}^1(\mathbb{R})$ to $K$ and it is completely continuous.
Proof. By Lemma 1, \( y = S_h = C_2(\mathbb{R}) \) is an \( \omega \)-periodic solution of equation (10) since equation (10) is equivalent to equation (8). By Lemma 5, equation (8) has a unique \( \omega \)-periodic solution \( y \in C_2(\mathbb{R}) \) expressed by

\[
y = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} (T_n B_n) T_n h^*.
\]

By (13), we know that \( y \in K \). Hence \( S_h : C_2(\mathbb{R}) \to K \) and it is completely continuous. This completes the proof of Lemma 6. \( \square \)

At the end of this section, we introduce a fixed point theorem, which will be used in the proof of our main result.

Let \((X, \| \cdot \|)\) be a real Banach space and \( K \) be a cone in \( X \). A map \( \rho \) is called a nonnegative continuous concave function on \( K \) if \( \rho : K \to [0, +\infty) \) is continuous and

\[
\rho(tx + (1 - t)y) \geq t\rho(x) + (1 - t)\rho(y)
\]

for all \( x, y \in K \) and \( t \in [0, 1] \).

Let \( 0 < r < R \) and \( \rho \) be a nonnegative continuous concave function on \( K \), set

\[
K_r = \{ x \in K : \| x \| < r \}, \quad \bar{K}_r = \{ x \in K : \| x \| \leq r \},
\]

\[
K(\rho, r, R) = \{ x \in K : r \leq \rho(x), \| x \| \leq R \}.
\]

Lemma 7 ([16, 17]) Let \( Q : \bar{K}_R \to \bar{K}_R \) be a completely continuous mapping and \( \rho \) be a nonnegative continuous concave function on \( K \) with \( \rho(x) \leq \| x \| \) for all \( x \in \bar{K}_R \). Suppose that there exist positive constants \( r, r_1, r_2, R \) with \( 0 < r < r_1 < r_2 < R \) such that

(a) \( \{ x \in K(\rho, r_1, r_2) : \rho(x) > r_1 \} \neq \emptyset \) and \( \rho(Qx) > r_1 \) for \( x \in K(\rho, r_1, r_2) \);

(b) \( \| Qx \| < r \) for \( x \in \bar{K}_r \);

(c) \( \rho(Qx) > r_1 \) for \( x \in K(\rho, r_1, R) \) with \( \| Qx \| > r_2 \).

Then \( Q \) has at least three fixed points \( x_1, x_2, x_3 \) satisfying

\[
x_1 \in K_r, x_2 \in \{ x \in K(\rho, r_1, R) : \rho(x) > r_1 \}, x_3 \in \bar{K}_R \setminus (K(\rho, r_1, R) \cup \bar{K}_r).
\]

3 Existence theorem

Theorem 1 Let assumptions (H1)–(H3) hold. In addition, we suppose that

(H4) \( |c| < \min\{d, \frac{\sigma(M-D)}{(M-D)(1-|c|)}\} \);

(H5) \( 1 - |c| > L\omega(M - d)(1 - |c|) + LD\omega|c| \);

(H6) there exist positive constants \( r, r_1, R \) with \( 0 < r < r_1 < R \) such that

\[
\sup_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0 r}{1-|c|}) < \sup_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0 R}{1-|c|}) \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\inf_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0 r_1}{1-|c|})}{\frac{r}{1-|c|}} < \frac{\inf_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0 r_1}{1-|c|})}{\frac{r}{1-|c|}} < \frac{\inf_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0 r_1}{1-|c|})}{\frac{r}{1-|c|}} \quad \text{(14)}
\]
where

\[ A_0 = 1 - |c| - L \omega (M - d)(1 - |c|) - LD \omega |c|, \]
\[ B_0 = 1 - |c| - L \sigma (M - D)(1 - |c|) + LD \omega |c|. \]

Then equation (1) associated with \( \lambda \in (\lambda_1, \lambda_2) \) has at least three positive \( \omega \)-periodic solutions, where

\[ \lambda_1 = \frac{A_0 R}{b_0 \inf_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} r_1, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} C_0 r_1, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} C_0 R)}, \]
\[ \lambda_2 = \frac{A_0 R}{b_0 \sup_{t \in [0, \omega]} f(t, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} r_1, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} C_0 r_1, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} C_0 R)}. \]

**Proof** By (H5), we obtain \( A_0 > 0 \) and

\[ B_0 > 1 - |c| - L \omega (M - D)(1 - |c|) - LD \omega |c| \]
\[ > 1 - |c| - L \omega (M - D)(1 - |c|) - LD \omega |c| \]
\[ > 1 - |c| - L \omega (M - D)(1 - |c|) - LD \omega |c| \]
\[ > 1 - |c| - L \omega (M - d)(1 - |c|) - LD \omega |c| \]
\[ > 0. \]

Furthermore, in view of (14), we get \( 0 < \lambda_1 < \lambda_2 \).

For each \( \lambda \in (\lambda_1, \lambda_2) \) and \( y \in K \), denote \( F \) by

\[ F(y)(t) = f(t, (A^{-1} y)(t), (A^{-1} y)(t - \tau_1(t)), (A^{-1} y)(t - \tau_2(t))), \]

then \( F : K \rightarrow C_0^+(\mathbb{R}) \) is continuous. We define a mapping \( Q_\lambda \) by

\[ Q_\lambda y = S_\lambda \circ F(y). \quad (15) \]

By Lemma 6, \( Q_\lambda : K \rightarrow K \) is completely continuous.

Define a function \( \rho : K \rightarrow [0, \infty) \) by

\[ \rho(y) = \min_{t \in [0, \omega]} y(t). \]

Then \( \rho \) is a nonnegative continuous concave function on \( K \) and

\[ \rho(y) \leq \|y\|_C, \quad \forall y \in K_R. \]
For any $y \in \mathbb{R}$ and $\lambda \in (\lambda_1, \lambda_2)$, by (4), (14), (15), Lemmas 4 and 5, we have

\[
(Q_{\lambda}y)(t) \leq \int_{t_0}^{t} U(t-s)\left[(M-a(s)g(A^{-1}y(s))y(s) + G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s))\right]ds
\]

\[
< L \left[(M-d)\int_{t_0}^{t} y(s) + G(y(s)) ds + \lambda_2 \bar{b} \sup_{\rho \in [0,\omega]} f \left( t, \frac{R}{1-|c|}, \frac{R}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0R}{1-|c|} \right) \right]
\]

\[
\leq L \left[(M-d)\int_{t_0}^{t} y(s) ds + \frac{D|c|}{1-|c|}\omega R + \lambda_2 \bar{b} \sup_{\rho \in [0,\omega]} f \left( t, \frac{R}{1-|c|}, \frac{R}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0R}{1-|c|} \right) \right]
\]

\[
= R.
\]

Hence $\|Q_{\lambda}y\|_{\infty} \leq R$ and $Q_{\lambda}$ is completely continuous on $\mathbb{R}$.

We now verify that condition (b) of Lemma 7 holds. Indeed, if $y \in \mathbb{R}$, we have

\[
(Q_{\lambda}y)(t) \leq L \int_{t_0}^{t} \left[(M-a(s)g((A^{-1}y(s)))y(s) + G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s))\right]ds
\]

\[
< L \left[(M-d)\int_{t_0}^{t} y(s) + \frac{D|c|}{1-|c|}\omega r + \lambda_2 \bar{b} \sup_{\rho \in [0,\omega]} f \left( t, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{r}{1-|c|}, \frac{C_0r}{1-|c|} \right) \right]
\]

\[
\leq L \left[(M-d)\omega r + \frac{D|c|}{1-|c|}\omega r + \frac{A_0r}{L(1-|c|)} \right]
\]

\[
= r.
\]

Hence, $\|Q_{\lambda}y\|_{\infty} < r$.

Choose a positive constant $r_2$ such that $0 < r_1 = \sigma r_2 < r_2 \leq R$. In the next discussion, we prove that condition (a) of Lemma 7 holds. Obviously, $\rho$ is a concave continuous function on $K$ with $\rho(y) \leq \|y\|_{\infty}$ for $y \in \mathbb{R}$. Noticing that if $y(t) = \frac{1}{2}r_1 + \frac{1}{2}r_2$ for any $t \in [0,\omega]$, then $y \in K(\rho, r_1, r_2)$ and $\rho(y) > r_1$, which means that $\{y \in K(\rho, r_1, r_2) : \rho(y) > r_1\} \neq \emptyset$. So, for any $y \in K(\rho, r_1, r_2)$, we have

\[
r_1 < \rho(y) = \min_{t \in [0,\omega]} y(t) \leq \|y\|_{\infty} \leq r_2.
\]

Hence, for any $y \in K(\rho, r_1, r_2)$, by Lemma 4, we have

\[
\rho(Q_{\lambda}y) = \min_{t \in [0,\omega]} \int_{t_0}^{t} U(t-s)\left[(M-a(s)g((A^{-1}y(s)))y(s) - G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s))\right]ds
\]

\[
\geq \min_{t \in [0,\omega]} \int_{t_0}^{t} \left[(M-a(s)g((A^{-1}y(s)))y(s) - G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s))\right]ds
\]

\[
> \int_{t_0}^{t} (M-D) y(s) ds - \frac{D_0|c|}{1-|c|} r_1
\]
\[ + \lambda_1 \tilde{D}_\omega \inf_{t \in [0, \omega]} \left( t, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} r_1, \frac{\sigma - |c|}{1 - c^2} r_1, -\frac{\sigma - |c|}{\sigma(1 - c^2)} C \right) \]
\[ \geq l \left( (M - D) \omega \sigma r_1 - \frac{D \omega |c|}{1 - |c|} r_1 + \frac{B_0 \rho r_1}{l(1 - |c|)} \right) = r_1. \]

Consequently, condition (a) of Lemma 7 holds.

In the end, we prove that condition (c) of Lemma 7 holds. Let \( y \in K(\rho, r_1, R) \) and \( \|Q Ka\| > r_2 \). We prove \( \rho(Q Ka) > r_1 \). It follows from (15) that
\[ \|Q Ka\| \leq L \int_{t_0}^{t} \left( (M - a(s)g((A^{-1}y(s))y(s) - G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s)) ds \right). \]

Therefore,
\[ \rho(Q Ka) = \min_{t_0} \int_{t_0}^{t} U(t - s) \left( (M - a(s)g((A^{-1}y(s))y(s) - G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s)) ds \right) \]
\[ \geq l \int_{t_0}^{t} \left( (M - a(s)g((A^{-1}y(s))y(s) - G(y(s)) + \lambda b(s)F(y(s)) ds \right) \]
\[ \geq l \cdot \frac{1}{l} \|Q Ka\| \]
\[ > \sigma r_2 \]
\[ = r_1. \]

Now, all the conditions of Lemma 7 are satisfied. By Lemma 7, \( Q K a \) has at least three positive fixed points \( y_1, y_2, \) and \( y_3 \) satisfying
\[ y_1 \in K_r, \quad y_2 \in \{ y \in K(\rho, r_1, R) : \rho(y) > r_1 \}, \quad y_3 \in K_R \setminus (K(\rho, r_1, R) \cap K). \]

Then equation (1) has at least three positive \( \omega \)-periodic solutions:
\[ x_1 = A^{-1}y_1, \quad x_2 = A^{-1}y_2, \quad x_3 = A^{-1}y_3. \]

This completes the proof. \( \square \)

**Example 1** We consider the positive \( 2\pi \)-periodic solutions for the second order neutral differential equation
\[ \left( x(t) - 0.35x(t - \frac{\pi}{2}) \right)^{\prime\prime} + \frac{1}{32} x(t) = \frac{\lambda}{4} F(t, x(t), x(t - \tau_1(t)), x'(t - \tau_2(t))), \quad t \in \mathbb{R}, \]
where \( \lambda > 0 \) is a constant. Corresponding to equation (1), we choose
\[ c = 0.35, \quad \delta = \frac{\pi}{2}, \quad a(t) \equiv \frac{1}{32}, \quad g(x(t)) \equiv 1, \quad b(t) \equiv \frac{1}{4}. \]
Let $M = \frac{1}{16}$. Then
\[ \beta = \frac{1}{4}, \quad L = \frac{4}{\sqrt{2}}, \quad L_1 = \frac{1}{2}, \quad \ell = 2, \]
\[ C_0 = \frac{1}{4}, \quad \sigma = \frac{\sqrt{2}}{2}, \quad \overline{b} = \frac{1}{4}, \quad D = d = \frac{1}{32}. \]

Therefore, it is easy to verify that conditions (H2)–(H5) are satisfied.

Let $F \in C(\mathbb{R} \times [0, \infty)^2 \times \mathbb{R}, [0, \infty))$, $F(t, u, v, w)$ is nondecreasing with respect to $u, v, w$ and $\omega$-periodic with respect to $t$. If there exist positive constants $r, r_1$, and $R$ with $0 < r < r_1 < R$ such that the function $F$ satisfies the following inequalities:
\[
\sup_{t \in [0, \omega]} F(t, R, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{C_R}{1+|c|}) < \frac{A_0 R}{L(1-|c|)} \sup_{t \in [0, \omega]} F(t, R, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{C_R}{1+|c|}) < \frac{B_0}{L(1-|c|)} \frac{R}{1+|c|} F(t, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{C_R}{1+|c|}, \sigma r_1),
\]

where $A_0 \approx 0.095$, $B_0 \approx 0.602$, then equation (16) has at least three positive $2\pi$-periodic solutions provided that
\[
\frac{B_0 R}{L(1-|c|)} F(t, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{C_R}{1+|c|}, \sigma r_1) < \lambda < \frac{A_0 R}{L(1-|c|)} \frac{B_0 R}{L(1-|c|)} F(t, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{R}{1+|c|}, \frac{C_R}{1+|c|}, \sigma r_1).
\]

Acknowledgements
The authors thank the referees and editors for their careful reading of the manuscript and valuable comments, which helped to improve the quality of the paper.

Funding
The research is supported by the National Natural Science Function of China (No. 11701457) and Gansu Science and Technology Plan (No. 17JRSRA071).

Availability of data and materials
Not applicable.

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests in this manuscript.

Authors’ contributions
The main idea of this paper was proposed by HY. HY and LZ prepared the manuscript initially and performed all the steps of the proofs in this research. 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: 27 January 2020   Accepted: 8 April 2020   Published online: 19 April 2020

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