ON RINGS OF INVARIANTS
WITH RATIONAL SINGULARITIES

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Abstract. Let \( S \) be a noetherian local \( k \)-algebra and \( G \) a finite group of \( k \)-automorphisms of \( S \). If \( \text{char } k = 0 \) and \( S \) has a rational singularity, then the invariant ring \( R = S^G \) does also. However, if \( \text{char } k \neq 0 \), this is rarely true. We examine conditions on wild group actions in dimension two which ensure that the singularity of \( R \) is rational. In particular, we develop a criterion in terms of the minimality of \( H^i(G, S) \).

Let \( k \) be an algebraically closed field and let \( S \) be a local noetherian normal \( k \)-algebra. The ring \( S \) is said to have a rational singularity if for any resolution \( f : X \to \text{Spec } S \), that is, for any proper, birational map \( f \) for which \( X \) is smooth, the cohomology groups \( H^i(X, \mathcal{O}_X) \) vanish for all \( i > 0 \). Suppose that \( G \) is a group of \( k \)-automorphisms of \( S \) such that the ring of invariants \( R = S^G \) is also noetherian. Then \( R \) is again a normal local ring and we wish to examine conditions on the group action which ensure that \( R \) has a rational singularity if \( S \) does.

Boutot (unpublished) has proved that this is always the case if \( S \) is finitely generated over a field of characteristic zero and \( G \) is a linearly reductive group. For finite group actions in characteristic zero, this had been established by Brieskorn [3, Satz 1.7] in dimension two and then generalized to arbitrary dimensions. However, when \( k \) has characteristic \( p \neq 0 \), even finite groups are not linearly reductive if \( p \) divides the order of \( G \), and, correspondingly, the ring \( R \) need not have a rational singularity. Our purpose in this paper is to determine an appropriate extension of Boutot's theorem to finite group actions in characteristic \( p \).

If the dimension of \( S \) is greater than two, one immediately encounters two difficulties: the proper definition of rational singularity is unclear due to the lack of a resolution theorem for singularities in positive characteristics, and also the invariant ring \( R \) need not be Cohen-Macaulay [6, §1], a necessary condition for rational singularities. Consequently, we confine our attention to the case that \( S \) is two-dimensional, where both of these difficulties vanish.

Now for linearly reductive actions in dimension two, Boutot's result is easily extended to characteristic \( p \). This is possible because of the generalization to arbitrary characteristic of the Grauert-Riemenschneider vanishing theorem [8, Theorem A], a key ingredient in Boutot's proof. The hypothesis of linear reductivity

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allows one to realize the invariant ring $R$ as a direct summand of $S$ by means of the Reynolds operator $\rho$ projecting $S$ onto $R$. For finite group actions, the Reynolds operator is given as the normalization $\rho = tr/|G|$ of the trace map $tr: S \rightarrow R$, where $|G|$ denotes the order of $G$. Recall that the trace map is defined by $tr(x) = \sum_{\sigma \in G} \sigma x$ for $x \in S$. If $p$ divides $|G|$ — the so-called "wild" actions — the trace map degenerates and linear reductivity is lost. The ring $S$ still maps to $R$ via trace, but the elements of $R$ are annihilated: if $r \in R$, then $tr(r) = |G| \cdot r = 0$.

For the remainder of the paper, we will examine only the "test case" for wild actions, namely the case that $G$ is a cyclic group of order $p^n$ for some $n > 0$. We further assume that the induced action of $G$ on Spec $S$ is free except at the closed point.

To measure the degree to which the trace map deviates from a true projection map we use the cohomology groups $H^i(G, S)$. For cyclic groups $G$ generated by an element $\sigma$, the groups $H^i(G, S)$ are 2-periodic for $i > 0$ and have a simple formulation in terms of $\sigma$ and $tr$ [7, p. 141]:

$$H^0(G, S) = R,$$
$$H^1(G, S) = \{\text{kernel of trace}\}/\{\text{image of } (\sigma - \text{id})\},$$
$$H^2(G, S) = R/\{\text{image of trace}\},$$
$$H^i(G, S) = H^{i-2}(G, S) \quad \text{for } i > 2.$$

Note that for linearly reductive groups $G$, all $H^i(G, S) = 0$ for $i > 0$ by the projection property of trace. For this case $S = R \oplus K$, where $R = S_G$ is the image of the trace and $K$ is the kernel of trace or, equivalently for linearly reductive groups, the image of $\sigma - \text{id}$. In contrast, for wild group actions we have the following:

**Lemma 1.** Let $G$ be a cyclic group of $k$-automorphisms of $S$ such that the action of $G$ on Spec $S$ is free off of the closed point. If $p$ divides $|G|$, the groups $H^i(G, S)$ are nontrivial finite-dimensional vector spaces over $k$ for $i > 0$.

**Proof.** The groups $H^i(G, S)$ are finite-dimensional $R$-modules. Since the action of $G$ is free off of the closed point of Spec $S$, the groups are supported at the closed point of Spec $R$, for $i > 0$, hence are actually $k$-vector spaces. Now the map $R \rightarrow S$ is totally ramified at the maximal ideal $m_x$ of $S$ and so $\sigma \equiv \text{id} \pmod{m_x}$. The images of $\sigma - \text{id}$ and of $tr$ are therefore contained in $m_x$. Consequently, the groups $H^i(G, S)$ all contain a copy of $k$: any element $c \in k$ is fixed by $\sigma$ and cannot lie in the image of $\sigma - \text{id}$ nor of $tr$. 

Now suppose that $f: X \rightarrow \text{Spec } R$ is a resolution of the singularity of $R$. We wish to determine when $H^1(X, \mathcal{O}_X) = 0$. Let $Y$ be the normalization of $X$ in the fraction field $K(S)$ of $S$ and let $g$ be the map $Y \rightarrow \text{Spec } S$ and $\pi$ the map $Y \rightarrow X$. We then have the diagram of spaces:

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\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Spec } S & \xrightarrow{k} & Y \\
\downarrow & & \downarrow \pi \\
\text{Spec } R & \xleftarrow{f} & X
\end{array}
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The space \( Y \) acquires a \( G \)-action from the action of \( G \) on \( K(S) \) and \( X \) is precisely the quotient of \( Y \) under this action. Although \( Y \) may not be a resolution of \( \text{Spec} \ S \), we have

**Lemma 2** [5, Proposition 1.2]. Let \( g: Y \to \text{Spec} \ S \) be a proper, birational map with \( Y \) normal. Then if \( S \) has a rational singularity, the groups \( H^i(Y, \mathcal{O}_Y) = 0 \) for all \( i > 0 \).

**Proof.** It is enough to check that \( H^1(Y, \mathcal{O}_Y) = 0 \) since the higher cohomology groups vanish by dimension considerations. There exists a normal surface \( Z \) and a proper birational map \( h: Z \to Y \) such that \( h \circ g: Z \to \text{Spec} \ S \) is a resolution of \( \text{Spec} \ S \). By the normality of the spaces \( h_*\mathcal{O}_Z = \mathcal{O}_Y \). Now \( H^1(Z, \mathcal{O}_Z) = 0 \) since \( S \) has a rational singularity, and so the canonical inclusion \( H^1(Y, h_*\mathcal{O}_Z) \to H^1(Z, \mathcal{O}_Z) \) implies that \( H^1(Y, \mathcal{O}_Y) \) is also zero. \( \square \)

Since \( H^i(Y, \mathcal{O}_Y) = 0 \) for all \( i > 0 \), there is a spectral sequence [4, Proposition 5.2.4] relating the group cohomology for \( S \) and \( \mathcal{O}_Y \):

\[
\forall \mathbb{H}^p(X, \mathcal{K}^q(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) ) \Rightarrow \mathbb{H}^\bullet(G, S)
\]

where \( \mathcal{K}^q(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) \) is the sheaf whose sections on any affine \( U \subset X \) are given by the \( \mathcal{O}_U \)-module \( H^q(G, \mathcal{O}_Y\big|_U) \). From the spectral sequence (3) we obtain a long exact sequence on low-degree terms beginning

\[
0 \to H^1(X, \mathcal{K}^0(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) ) \to H^1(G, S) \to H^0(X, \mathcal{K}^1(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) ) \to H^2(X, \mathcal{K}^0(G, \mathcal{O}_Y)) \to \ldots
\]

Note that \( \mathcal{K}^0(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) \) is equal to \( (\mathcal{O}_Y)^G = \mathcal{O}_X \) so that the last term in (4) is zero and hence the map \( \varphi \) is surjective.

**Proposition 5.** Suppose that \( S \) has a rational singularity. Then \( R \) has a rational singularity if and only if the map

\[
\varphi: H^1(G, S) \to H^0(X, \mathcal{K}^1(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) )
\]

is injective.

**Proof.** This is an immediate consequence of the sequence (4). The sheaf \( H^1(X, \mathcal{K}^0(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) ) \) is equal to \( H^1(X, \mathcal{O}_X) \), so the vanishing of \( H^1(X, \mathcal{O}_X) \) is equivalent to the injectivity of \( \varphi \). \( \square \)

We remark that for linearly reductive actions \( \varphi \) is trivially injective since \( H^1(G, S) \) and \( \mathcal{K}^1(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) \) are zero, as noted above. Hence \( R \) always has rational singularities. For wild actions, this is rarely true. However, there is one case in which the injectivity of \( \varphi \) is guaranteed.

**Theorem 6.** Let \( G \) be a cyclic group of order \( p^n \) which acts freely off of the closed point of \( \text{Spec} \ S \). If \( H^1(G, S) = k \) and \( S \) has a rational singularity, then \( R \) has a rational singularity.

**Proof.** The vector space \( H^1(G, S) \) contains the constants \( k \) as shown in Lemma 1 and so, by hypothesis, contains only the constants. In a similar fashion, we show that \( \mathcal{K}^1(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) \) also contains the constants as global sections. Let \( Z \subset Y \) denote the ramification locus of \( \pi: Y \to X \) and \( \pi(Z) \) its image in \( X \). Note that \( Z \) is nontrivial since \( X \) is smooth and that \( \pi(Z) \), the support of \( \mathcal{K}^1(G, \mathcal{O}_Y) \), is contained in the exceptional locus of \( X \). Now the image of \( \sigma - \text{id} \) lies in \( \mathcal{O}(Z) \), the ideal sheaf of \( Z \).
B. R. Peskin

since \( \pi \) is wildly ramified there, and so the constants, which are fixed by \( \sigma \), cannot lie in \( \text{im} (\sigma - \text{id}) \). They therefore determine nonzero classes in \( \mathbb{C}^1 (G, \mathcal{C}_1) \) and it is easy to check that \( \varphi \) maps the constants in \( H^1 (G, S) \) to the constants in \( H^0 (X, \mathbb{C}^1 (G, \mathcal{C}_1)) \), giving the desired injection. □

Consequently, if \( H^1 (G, S) \) is minimal for wild group actions, the singularity of \( R \) is rational.

Even though this criterion seems unnecessarily strong to guarantee that \( \varphi \) is injective, in many families of actions it is precisely when \( H^1 (G, S) = k \) that \( R \) has a rational singularity, as the following example illustrates.

**Example 7.** Let \( k \) be a field of characteristic 3 and let \( S = k [u, v] \). Suppose \( G = \mathbb{Z}/3 \) and \( \sigma \) is a generator of \( G \). The action of \( \sigma \) is defined by two power series, the images of \( u \) and \( v \) under \( \sigma \). If the linear terms for the action determine a transformation with a single Jordan block then coordinates for \( S \) can be chosen so that \( \sigma \) has the form

\[
\sigma u = u + y', \quad \sigma v = v + u
\]

where

(8) \( y = v \cdot \sigma v \cdot \sigma^2 v = v (v + u)(v + 2u + y') \)

for some \( i > 0 \) [6.4.12 and 5.15]. Note that \( y \) is invariant under \( \sigma \) and that equation (8) may be solved recursively for \( y \) in terms of \( u \) and \( v \) alone.

The invariant ring \( R \) is generated by \( y \) and the two additional elements

\[
x = u \cdot \sigma u \cdot \sigma^2 u, \quad z = u^2 + y'v + 2y'u,
\]

subject to the single relation

(9) \( z^3 + y'^2 z^2 = y^{3i+1} + x^2 \).

A straightforward calculation now confirms that \( H^1 (G, S) = k \) if and only if \( i = 1 \), the only case in which equation (9) defines a rational singularity. (The reader may consult Artin’s list of rational double points in characteristic \( p \) [2] to verify rationality. For \( i = 1 \), the singularity is a rational double point of type \( E_6 \).)

It is interesting to note that this is also the only case in which \( H^2 (G, S) = k \), that is, in which the image of trace covers the maximal ideal \( m_R \) of \( R \). In general the image of trace is given by the \( m_R \)-primary ideal \((x, y', z)\) and both \( H^1 (G, S) \) and \( H^2 (G, S) \) are generated by the elements \( y^j \) for \( 0 \leq j \leq i - 1 \).

Despite the abundance of examples like the one above, the next example shows that the condition \( H^1 (G, S) = k \) is indeed too strong.

**Example 10.** Let \( k \) be a field of characteristic 2 and consider the \( \mathbb{Z}/2 \)-action on \( S = k [u, v] \) generated by the automorphism

\[
\sigma u = u + y', \quad \sigma v = v + x
\]

where

(11) \( x = u \cdot \sigma u = u (u + y') \), \( y = v \cdot \sigma v = v (v + x) \).
Again $x$ and $y$ are invariant under $\sigma$ and the equations (11) can be solved recursively for $x$ and $y$ in terms of $u$ and $v$. The ring of invariants in this case is generated by the three elements $x$, $y$, and $z = xu + yv$, subject to the relation

$$z^2 + xy'z + x^3 + y^{2i+1} = 0$$

(see [1]).

If $i = 1$, then $H^1(G, S) = k$ and the resulting singularity is a rational double point of type $D_4$. However, the singularity is also a rational double point (of type $E_8$) if $i = 2$ and in this case $H^1(G, S)$ is 2-dimensional. For $i > 2$, the singularity is no longer rational. Note that for $\mathbb{Z}/2$-actions in characteristic 2, the operators trace and $\sigma - \text{id}$ are the same and so, as above, $H^1 = H^2$. The image of trace is again the $m_G$-primary ideal $(x, y', z)$ and $H^1(G, S)$ is generated by the $y'$ for $j < i$.

Of course the invariant ring need not define a hypersurface singularity. We now consider an action leading to a surface in 4-space.

**Example 13.** As in Example 7, let $k$ be a field of characteristic 3 and $S = k[u, v]$. Consider the following $\mathbb{Z}/3$-action with generator $\sigma$ having two Jordan blocks:

$$\sigma u = \frac{1}{1 - u} = u + u^2 + u^3 + \cdots,$$

$$\sigma v = \frac{1}{1 - v} = v + v^2 + v^3 + \cdots.$$

The invariant ring $R$ is generated by the four elements

$$x = u \cdot \sigma u \cdot \sigma^2 u,$$

$$y = v \cdot \sigma v \cdot \sigma^2 v,$$

$$z = yu(u + x) - xv(v + y),$$

$$w = y(u - x) + x(v - y) + uv(u + x)(v + y).$$

The relations among the generators are given by the $2 \times 2$-minors of the $2 \times 3$ matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix} w & xy & z \\ y - x & z & w + xy \end{pmatrix}.$$ 

A rather tedious calculation confirms that $H^1(G, S) = k$ and so the singularity is a rational triple point. Again we note that the invariants (14) all lie in the image of trace, hence $H^2(G, S)$ is also $k$.

Finally, we pose the following question: In all of the above examples $H^1(G, S) = H^2(G, S)$; is this generally the case for wild actions? This would be an extremely useful result, as the group $H^2(G, S)$ is often easier to compute than $H^1(G, S)$ and has a simpler interpretation in terms of the degeneracy of the trace map.

**References**


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