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# INFINITE CLASS FIELD TOWERS OF NUMBER FIELDS OF PRIME POWER DISCRIMINANT

by

Farshid Hajir, Christian Maire, Ravi Ramakrishna

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**Abstract.** — For every prime number  $p$ , we show the existence of a solvable number field  $L$  ramified only at  $\{p, \infty\}$  whose  $p$ -Hilbert Class field tower is infinite.

**Keywords:** *Hilbert class field tower, root discriminant*

For a number field  $L$  of degree  $n$  over  $\mathbb{Q}$ , the root discriminant is defined to be  $D_L^{1/n}$  where  $D_L$  is the absolute value of the discriminant of  $L$ . Given a finite set  $S$  of places of  $\mathbb{Q}$ , it is an old question as to whether there is an infinite sequence of number fields unramified outside  $S$  with bounded root discriminant. This question is related to the constants of Martinet [10] and Odlyzko's bounds [12]. Since the root discriminant is constant in unramified extensions, an approach to answering the previous question in the positive is to find a number field  $L$  (of finite degree) unramified outside  $S$  having an infinite class field tower. In the case of  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  quadratic, it is a classical result of Golod and Shafarevich that if  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  is ramified at at least 8 places, then  $K$  has an infinite 2-class field tower. On the other hand, if  $p$  is a prime, and  $S = \{p, \infty\}$ , this question becomes whether there exist number fields with  $p$ -power discriminant having an infinite unramified extension. Schmitals [13] and Schoof [14] produced a few isolated examples of this type. See also [3], [9], etc. For  $p \in \{2, 3, 5\}$ , Hoelscher [4] announced the existence of number fields unramified outside  $\{p, \infty\}$  and having an infinite Hilbert class field tower; see remark 2.2. Here we prove:

**Theorem.** — *For every prime number  $p$ , there exists a solvable extension  $L/\mathbb{Q}$ , ramified only at  $\{p, \infty\}$ , having an infinite Hilbert  $p$ -class field tower. Consequently, there exists an infinite nested sequence of number fields of  $p$ -power discriminant with bounded root discriminant.*

Our proof is based on the idea of "cutting" of wild towers introduced in [2]; in particular it does not involve the usual technique of genus theory. The strategy begins by choosing  $s$  such that  $\mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{p^s})$  has large class group (always possible). We then let  $K$  be the Hilbert class field of  $\mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{p^s})$ . Clearly  $K_S$ , the maximal pro- $p$  extension of  $K$  ramified only at  $S$ , the

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places of  $K$  above  $p$ , is infinite. For each positive integer  $k$ , we define a Galois extension  $K_S^{[k]}/K$  contained inside  $K_S/K$  such that all decomposition groups of  $\text{Gal}(K_S^{[k]}/K)$  are finite and abelian. We then show that for all large enough  $k$ ,  $K_S^{[k]}/K$  is of infinite degree, and that there exists a finite Galois extension  $L/K$  contained in  $K_S^{[k]}$ , with the property that the primes above  $p$  split completely from  $L$  to  $K_S^{[k]}$ , and in particular are unramified, leading to the desired result.

We do not know whether for every prime  $p$ , there is a *totally real* number field of  $p$ -power discriminant having an infinite Hilbert class field tower. In [14, Corollary 4.4] it is shown that  $\mathbb{Q}(\sqrt{39345017})$  (which is ramified only at the prime 39345017) has infinite Hilbert class field tower. In [15], Shanks studied primes of the form  $p = a^2 + 3a + 9$  and the corresponding totally real cubic subfields  $K \subset \mathbb{Q}(\mu_p)$  and showed the minimal polynomials of  $K$  are  $x^3 - ax^2 - (a + 3)x - 1$ . Taking  $a = 17279$  so  $p = 298615687$ , one can compute that the 2-part of the class group of  $K$  has rank 6. It is not hard to see, using the Golod-Shafarevich criterion, that  $K$  has infinite 2-Hilbert class field tower. Thus some examples exist in the totally real case.

Also in [5] Joshi and McLeman, using ideas and data of [15], showed that  $\mathbb{Q}(\zeta_p)$  has infinite Hilbert class field tower for sufficiently large primes  $p$  of the form  $a^2 + 3a + 9$ . Inasmuch as it specifies an explicit and easily constructed number field as base of the tower, this result is stronger than ours for the primes for which it applies.

## 1. The results we need

Let  $p$  be a prime number. Let  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  be a finite Galois extension. Assume  $\mu_p \subset K$  and moreover that  $K$  is totally imaginary when  $p = 2$ . For a prime  $\mathfrak{p}$  of  $K$  dividing  $p$  denote by  $e$  (resp.  $f$ ) the ramification index (resp. the residue degree) of  $\mathfrak{p}$  in  $K/\mathbb{Q}$ .

**1.1. On the group  $G_S$ .** — Denote by  $S$  the set of places of  $K$  above  $p$ , and consider  $K_S$  the maximal pro- $p$  extension of  $K$  unramified outside  $S$ ; put  $G_S = \text{Gal}(K_S/K)$ .

Theorem 1.1 below is well-known, see for example [11, Corollary 8.7.5 and Theorem 10.7.3].

**Theorem 1.1.** — *Let  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  be a totally imaginary Galois extension containing  $\mu_p$ . Let  $S = \{p, \infty\}$ . If  $p \nmid h_K$ , the class number of  $K$ , then*

$$\dim H^1(G_S, \mathbb{F}_p) = g \left( \frac{ef}{2} + 1 \right) \text{ and } \dim H^2(G_S, \mathbb{F}_p) = g - 1$$

where  $(p)$  has the usual  $efg$  decomposition in  $K/\mathbb{Q}$ .

## 1.2. The cutting towers strategy. —

**1.2.1. The Golod-Shafarevich Theorem.** — Let  $G$  be a finitely presented pro- $p$  group. Consider a minimal presentation  $1 \rightarrow R \rightarrow F \xrightarrow{\varphi} G$  of  $G$ , where  $F$  is a free pro- $p$  group on  $d = d(G)$  generators  $\sigma_1, \dots, \sigma_d$  and  $r$  relations  $\rho_1, \dots, \rho_r$  with normal closure  $R = \langle \rho_1, \dots, \rho_r \rangle^{\text{Norm}}$ . We note that  $d = \dim H^1(G, \mathbb{F}_p)$  and  $r = \dim H^2(G, \mathbb{F}_p)$ . We recall the depth function  $\omega$  on  $F$ . See [8, Appendice A.3] or [7] for more details. The augmentation ideal  $I$  of  $\mathbb{F}_p[[F]]$  is, by definition, generated by the set of elements  $\{g - 1\}_{g \in F}$ . Then for  $1 \neq g \in F$ , define  $\omega(g) = \max\{k \geq 1 \mid g - 1 \in I^k\}$ ; we put  $\omega(1) = \infty$ . It is not difficult to

see that  $\omega([g, g']) \geq 2$  and that  $\omega(g^{p^k}) \geq p^k$  for every  $g, g' \in F$  and  $k \in \mathbb{Z}_{>0}$ . Observe also that as the presentation  $\varphi$  is minimal,  $\omega(\rho_i) \geq 2$  for all the relations  $\rho_i$ .

The Golod-Shafarevich polynomial associated to the presentation  $\varphi$  of  $G$  is  $P_G(t) = 1 - dt + \sum_i t^{\omega(\rho_i)}$ .

**Theorem 1.2 (Golod-Shafarevich, Vinberg [16]).** — *If  $G$  is finite then  $P_G(t) > 0$  for all  $t \in ]0, 1[$ .*

Of course in generic situations, we have no information about the  $\rho_i$ 's other than their being elements of  $F$  of depth at least 2. With that in mind, let us note that if  $P_G(t) \leq P(t)$  for all  $t \in ]0, 1[$ , for some polynomial  $P(t)$  which takes on a non-negative value somewhere on the open unit interval, then  $G$  must be infinite. For example, for a pro- $p$  group of generator rank  $d$  and relation rank  $r$ , since all  $r$  relations have depth at least 2, we have  $P_G(t) \leq 1 - dt + rt^2$  for all  $t \in ]0, 1[$ . Theorem 1.2 then yields the usual Golod-Shafarevich criterion: if  $G$  is a non-trivial finite  $p$ -group of generator rank  $d$  and relation rank  $r$ , then  $r > d^2/4$ .

We can also define a depth function  $\omega_G$  on  $G$  associated to the augmentation ideal  $I_G$  of  $\mathbb{F}_p[[G]]$  by  $\omega_G(g) = \max\{k \geq 1 \mid g - 1 \in I_G^k\}$ , for  $1 \neq g \in G$ ; put  $\omega_G(1) = \infty$ . Then:

**Proposition 1.3.** — *For every  $g \in G$ , we have*

$$\omega_G(g) = \max\{\omega(y) \mid \varphi(y) = g\}.$$

*Proof.* — See [8, Appendix 3, Theorem 3.5]. □

We now study quotients  $\Gamma$  of  $G$  such that  $d(G) = d(\Gamma)$ . In this case, the initial minimal presentation of  $G$  induces a minimal presentation of  $\Gamma$

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} 1 & \longrightarrow & R & \longrightarrow & F & \xrightarrow{\varphi} & G \longrightarrow 1 \\ & & & & & \searrow & \downarrow \\ & & & & & & \Gamma \end{array}$$

Suppose that  $\Gamma = G/\langle x_1, \dots, x_m \rangle^{\text{Norm}}$ . Lift the  $x_i$ 's to  $y_i \in F$  such that  $\omega_G(x_i) = \omega(y_i)$  for each  $i$ . Hence,  $\Gamma = F/R'$ , where  $R' = R\langle y_1, \dots, y_m \rangle^{\text{Norm}}$ . In particular, if  $R = \langle \rho_1, \dots, \rho_r \rangle^{\text{Norm}}$ , then  $R' = \langle \rho_1, \dots, \rho_r, y_1, \dots, y_m \rangle^{\text{Norm}}$ . In this situation, we say that we have ‘cut’ the group  $G$  by the elements  $y_1, \dots, y_m$ . Even if we have no additional information about the  $\rho_i$ 's, the estimate  $P_\Gamma(t) \leq 1 - dt + rt^2 + \sum_i t^{\omega(y_i)}$  is valid on the open unit interval.

**1.2.2. Cutting of  $G_S$ .** — Fixing a prime  $p$  and a number field  $K$ , we let  $S$  be the set of primes of  $K$  above  $p$ . Recall that  $G_S$  is the Galois group over  $K$  of the maximal  $p$ -extension of  $K$  unramified outside  $S$ . We want to consider some special quotients  $\Gamma$  of  $G_S$  of the type that were introduced in [2]. In [2] tame ramification was allowed, and then a quotient was taken. Here  $G_S$  is wildly ramified and the quotient we take will have abelian decomposition groups with wild but finite image, and hence finite image of inertia. This quotient of course corresponds to a sub-extension so we will use the term ‘cut’ to apply both to Galois groups and the corresponding tower of fields.

Each place  $v \in S$  corresponds to (a conjugacy class of) a decomposition group and hence to some extension  $K_v/\mathbb{Q}_p$  of degree  $ef$  (in fact these fields are isomorphic as  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  is Galois). Then, as  $\mu_p \subset K_v$ , the  $\mathbb{F}_p$ -vector space  $K_v^\times/(K_v^\times)^p$  has dimension  $ef + 2$ , and

local class field theory implies the Galois group of the maximal pro- $p$  extension of  $K_v$  is generated by  $ef + 2$  elements. Thus the decomposition subgroup  $G_v$  of  $v$  in  $K_S/K$  is generated by at most  $ef + 2$  elements  $z_{i,v}$ . Consider now the commutators  $[z_{i,v}, z_{j,v}]$  of all these elements; they clearly yield at most  $\binom{ef+2}{2}$  distinct elements of  $G_S$ . Now we cut  $G_S$  by the closed normal subgroup

$$R_0 = \langle [z_{i,v}, z_{j,v}] \mid 1 \leq i, j \leq ef + 2; v \in S \rangle^{\text{Norm}}$$

these elements generate, and denote by  $\Gamma_0$  the corresponding quotient. As  $\omega_{G_S}([z_{i,v}, z_{j,v}]) \geq 2$ , we have the following estimate for the Golod-Shafarevich polynomial of  $\Gamma_0$ :

$$P_{\Gamma_0}(t) \leq 1 - dt + rt^2 + g \binom{ef+2}{2} t^2, \quad \forall t \in ]0, 1[.$$

Here  $d = \dim H^1(G_S, \mathbb{F}_p)$  and  $r = \dim H^2(G_S, \mathbb{F}_p)$ . We note that the kernel  $R_0$  of the surjection  $G_S \twoheadrightarrow \Gamma_0$  fixes the maximal sub-extension  $K_S^{\text{loc-ab}}/K$  of  $K_S/K$  with abelian decomposition groups everywhere. Observe that  $K_S^{\text{loc-ab}}/K$  contains the compositum of all  $\mathbb{Z}_p$ -extensions of  $K$ .

Next, we cut  $G_S$  a little bit further as follows. For each integer  $k \geq 1$ , define

$$R_k = R_0 \langle z_{i,v}^{p^k} \mid 1 \leq i \leq ef + 2, v \in S \rangle^{\text{Norm}}.$$

Let  $\Gamma_k$  be the corresponding quotient of  $G_S$  and denote the fixed field of  $R_k$  by  $K_S^{[k]}$ , so that  $\Gamma_k = \text{Gal}(K_S^{[k]}/K)$ . Since  $\omega_{\Gamma}(z_{i,v}^{p^k}) \geq p^k$  for all  $z_{i,v}$ , we observe that for  $k \geq 1$ ,

$$P_{\Gamma_k}(t) \leq P_{\Gamma_0}(t) + g(ef + 2)t^{p^k} \quad \forall t \in ]0, 1[.$$

Suppose that there exists some  $t_0 \in ]0, 1[$  such that  $P_{\Gamma_0}(t_0) < 0$ . Then, evidently for all sufficiently large  $k$ ,  $P_{\Gamma_0}(t_0) < 0 \implies P_{\Gamma_k}(t_0) < 0 \implies K_S^{[k]}/K$  is infinite.

We now show there exists a finite Galois extension  $L/K$  such that the infinite extension  $K_S^{[k]}/L$  is unramified everywhere. We need a lemma.

**Lemma 1.4.** — *With the notation as above, fix an integer  $k \geq 1$ , set  $K_{(0)} = K$  and for  $i \geq 1$ , define  $K_{(i+1)}$  to be the compositum of all  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ -extensions of  $K_{(i)}$  contained in  $K_S^{[k]}$ .*

*Set  $N_n = \text{Gal}(K_S^{[k]}/K_{(n)})$ . Then  $\bigcap_{n=0}^{\infty} N_n = \{1\}$ .*

*Proof.* — It suffices to show  $\bigcup_{n=0}^{\infty} K_{(n)} = K_S^{[k]}$ . Let  $\alpha \in K_S^{[k]}$ . The Galois closure  $M(\alpha)$  over  $K$  of  $K(\alpha)$  has Galois group a finite  $p$ -group. The solvability of finite  $p$ -groups implies that  $\alpha \in K_{(r)}$  for some  $r$ .  $\square$

**Proposition 1.5.** — *With the above notation, suppose  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  is Galois and  $K_S^{[k]}/K$  is infinite. Then there exists a finite subextension  $L/K$  of  $K_S^{[k]}/K$  which is Galois over  $\mathbb{Q}$ , has an infinite Hilbert  $p$ -class field tower, and has the property that all primes above  $p$  split completely from  $L$  to  $K_S^{[k]}$ .*

*Proof.* — Since  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  is Galois and  $S$  is  $\text{Gal}(K/\mathbb{Q})$ -invariant, the fields  $K_S$ ,  $K_S^{[k]}$  and  $K_{(n)}$  are all Galois over  $\mathbb{Q}$ .

Let  $D$  be a (finite!) decomposition group above  $v|p$  in  $\text{Gal}(K_S^{[k]}/K)$ . Suppose now that  $N_n \cap D$  is nontrivial for all  $n$ . As these intersections are finite and decreasing in  $n$ , if they are all nontrivial, they stabilize at a finite nontrivial group, in which case  $\bigcap_{n=0}^{\infty} N_n$  is nontrivial, contradicting Lemma 1.4. Thus there exists an  $m$  that  $N_m \cap D = \{1\}$ .

Since  $K_{(m)}/\mathbb{Q}$  is Galois,  $N_m$  intersects trivially with all  $\text{Gal}(K_S^{[k]}/\mathbb{Q})$ -conjugates of  $D$ . We can then take  $L = K_{(m)}$  and all decomposition groups above  $p$  in  $\text{Gal}(K_S^{[k]}/L)$  are trivial so primes above  $p$  split completely from  $L$  to  $K_S^{[k]}$ .  $\square$

## 2. Proof

In Proposition 2.1 below we give a general criterion for a number field  $L$  to exist satisfying the conclusion of the Theorem. We then prove the Theorem by giving a fairly explicit conditions under which the criterion of Proposition 2.1 holds.

**Proposition 2.1.** — *Let  $K/\mathbb{Q}$  be finite Galois and totally complex with  $\mu_p \subset K$ . Let  $S$  be the set of primes of  $K$  dividing  $p$ . Assume the cardinality of  $S$ , denoted  $g_K$ , is at least 8. Then there exists a finite extension  $L$  of  $K$  contained in  $K_S$  which is Galois over  $\mathbb{Q}$  and has infinite Hilbert  $p$ -class field tower.*

*Proof.* — Let  $H = K_{\emptyset}$  be the “top” of the  $p$ -Hilbert class field tower of  $K$ , i.e. the maximal unramified  $p$ -extension of  $K$ . If  $H/K$  is infinite, we are done, so suppose  $[H : K] < \infty$ . Recall  $H_S = K_S$ . Note that  $H$  has class number prime to  $p$  so by Theorem 1.1, working over  $H$ ,

$$\dim H^1(\text{Gal}(H_S/H), \mathbb{F}_p) = g_H \left( \frac{e_H f_H}{2} + 1 \right) \quad \text{and} \quad \dim H^2(\text{Gal}(H_S/H), \mathbb{F}_p) = g_H - 1.$$

As in §1.2.2, consider the quotient  $\Gamma_0$  of  $\text{Gal}(H_S/H)$  by the normal subgroup generated by the local commutators at each  $v \in S$  (all commutators of generators of the decomposition group at  $v$ ); one has  $\binom{e_H f_H + 2}{2}$  such commutators. We have

$$P_{\Gamma_0}(t) \leq 1 - \dim H^1(\Gamma_0, \mathbb{F}_p)t + \dim H^2(\Gamma_0, \mathbb{F}_p)t^2 \leq 1 - dt + rt^2 \quad \forall t \in ]0, 1[,$$

where  $d := g_H \left( \frac{e_H f_H}{2} + 1 \right)$ , and  $r := g_H - 1 + g_H \frac{(e_H f_H + 2)(e_H f_H + 1)}{2}$ . The first inequality we have seen simply comes from the fact that all relations have depth at least 2. For the second inequality, we note first that  $\Gamma_0$  and  $\text{Gal}(H_S/H)$  have the same generator rank, namely  $d$ ; moreover, since  $\Gamma_0$  is constructed using a presentation on  $d$  generators using at most  $r$  relations, we have  $\dim H^2(\Gamma_0, \mathbb{F}_p) \leq r$ .

Clearly  $d/2r < 1$ , and  $P_{\Gamma_0}(d/2r) \leq 1 - \frac{d^2}{4r}$ . If  $P_{\Gamma_0}(d/2r) < 0$ , then one has, as in §1.2.2, room to cut by some large  $p$ -power of the generators of the abelian decomposition group at  $v|p$  and obtain an infinite extension of  $K$  whose decomposition groups at  $p$  are finite. Proposition 1.5 would then give the result.

It thus suffices to check that  $4r < d^2$ , or equivalently

$$16(g_H - 1) + 8g_H(e_H f_H + 2)(e_H f_H + 1) \stackrel{?}{<} g_H^2(e_H f_H + 2)^2.$$

Replacing the  $16(g_H - 1)$  term on the left by  $16g_H$  and dividing by  $g_H$ , and setting  $x = e_H f_H$ , it now suffices to verify

$$16 + 8(x + 2)(x + 1) \stackrel{?}{<} g_H(x + 2)^2$$

for all  $x \geq 1$ . It is easy to see that this inequality holds as long as  $g_H \geq 8$ . Since  $g_H \geq g_K$ , we have therefore checked that  $P_{\Gamma_0}(d/2r) < 0$ . By Proposition 1.5 we conclude that  $K_S^{[k]}/K$  is infinite for all sufficiently large  $k$  and the field  $L$  with the desired properties exists.  $\square$

*Proof of Theorem :* Recall that the principal prime  $\mathfrak{p} = (1 - \zeta_{p^s})$  of  $\mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{p^s})$  is the unique prime dividing  $p$  and by class field theory  $\mathfrak{p}$  splits completely in the Hilbert class field  $H$  of  $\mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{p^s})$ . Thus if the class group has order at least 8, Proposition 2.1 applied to the solvable number field  $H$  gives the result.

In the proof of [17, Corollary 11.17], the class number of  $\mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{p^s})$  is shown to be at least  $10^9$  for  $\phi(p^s) = p^{s-1}(p - 1) > 220$ . Choosing  $s \geq 9$  for *any*  $p$  completes the proof of the Theorem.

A slightly more detailed analysis using Table §3 of [17] shows the fields below suffice:

$p$	$K$	$h_K (= g_K)$
$p > 23$	$K = \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_p)$	$\geq 8$
$7 \leq p \leq 23$	$K = \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{p^2})$	$\geq 43$
$p = 5$	$K = \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{125})$	57708445601
$p = 3$	$K = \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{81})$	2593
$p = 2$	$K = \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_{64})$	17

$\square$

**Remark 2.2.** — In [4] a proof of the Theorem for  $p = 2, 3$  and 5 was announced. There are two cases there: Case I, where the Hilbert class field tower is infinite; and Case II, where ramification is allowed at one prime above  $p$  in the Hilbert class field  $H$  and a  $\mathbb{Z}/p$ -extension of  $H$  ramified at exactly this prime is used. Gras has given a criterion for such an extension to exist: see [1, Chapter V, Corollary 2.4.4]. Gras' criterion is not verified in [4]. Given the size of the number fields  $H$ , it seems very difficult to do so. We therefore regard the results of [4] as incomplete. See [6] for a related description of the same error.

Our proof is partially modeled on the ideas of [4], namely considering the Hilbert class field of a cyclotomic field.

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