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School of Social &  
Political Sciences

**On defining certain leftism ideologies as punk**

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## **Introduction**

Although it seems that the relationship between music and politics is not tight, in fact, the relevance between them is quite close (Street, 2012). There are some evidence can prove that both of the two can interact and shape each other. A number of musicians expressed their political ideas in their own way that they were expert in (Currie, 2012). The desire to voice politically can be said that it runs through the entire human history, and it is not limited by time and geography (Bennett, 1993). As for Europe, people in ancient Greece used poetic songs to convey their praise for Polis and democracy. Beethoven, a world-famous musician, used classical music to express his political views. One of the most significant example is the Third Symphony (“Hero”)—he implied his dissatisfaction with Napoleon through this composition (Street, 2012). In terms of the Eastern world, ancient Chinese used folk songs to deliver the complex emotions of the replacement of the dynasty in feudal era (Lan, 2009); after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there was a large number of anthems that promoted their nationalist values (Clark, Pang and Tsai, 2016). In turn, music also has an impact on the formation and change of political ideas. From such perspectives, it is reasonable to believe that the two complement each other and give more meaning to each other.

After the end of World War II, punk is perhaps one of the most influential and political forms of music in contemporary period. Although the earliest punk was born in the United States, the first country which truly politicised it was the United Kingdom

(Strongman, 2008). After the emergence of British punk, the same type of music related to politics has appeared around the world (Laing, 2015). Therefore, in this dissertation, the politics-related punk is defined as the British punk. Correspondingly, the punk movement studied here also refers specifically to the British punk movement since 1976.

The punk movement, as its name implies, was a large-scale collective action that occurred in a specific period which was related to punk music. In this campaign, a large number of political ideas was put forward, some of which still have an impact on today (Thompson.2004). It can be said that although the punk movement lasted for a long time (generally considered to be in the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s), which unleashed a huge energy. Some scholars believe that punk movement made a certain contribution to the blossom of contemporary ideology (Worley, 2017). Then a topic is worthy to be questioned: how did punk actually affect contemporary ideology? Even further, did the punk movement itself develop a new ideology? In the political context, ideology can be mainly divided into two categories: left and right, and the former one will be focused in this dissertation. Putting together the points that has been mentioned above, the core question of this dissertation is: is there any leftism ideology can be defined as punk?

Exploring punk movement may not only find a new ideology, but also provide new ideas for analysing political affairs and issues. For example, from the perspective of punk ideology, the advantages and disadvantages of US President Donald Trump's trade protectionism perhaps can be found in a different way. Because of that this writing is about the exploration and analysis of ideology, this article will be an empirical

dissertation. In other words, in the process of writing, this article will choose to extract information and theory from other literatures to complete the research.

In the literature related to the history of punk, perhaps as a result of its peculiarity (the short duration, for instance), the vast majority of relevant history is written down unacademic ways. Among these texts are mainly the autobiography of musicians, biographies written by other authors for certain bands, the compilation of oral history of members from multiple bands, and the history of contemporary music written in more popular ways. Although it is difficult to find historical information from formal literature, it does not mean that the content in the informal literature cannot be used. For example, Sex Pistols' former vocal singer John Lydon (who used the name Johnny Rotten when he was in the band) and guitarist Steve Jones' autobiography provided a number of content about the band's development process and ideas, while this band is largely considered as one of the most important bands in the punk movement; Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's work "Please kill me: the uncensored oral history of punk" contributed a variety of oral reviews from the participants of the punk movement; "England's Dreaming, Revised Edition: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond", a book written by Jon Savage, completes the status and details of punk movement's development in the early stage.

Although few scholars have specifically recorded the rise and fall of the punk movement, there are still some researchers who study the cultural, social and political influence of punk. For example, Matthew Worley focuses on the political and cultural

aspect of punk in the book "No future: punk, politics and British youth culture, 1976-1984"; the Subcultures Network at the University of Manchester has compiled a book called "Fight back: punk, politics and resistance", which includes several scholars' research on punk in politics and sociology. However, it is a pity that most of these documents only regard punk as a social movement. Although they more or less mention the relationship between punk and political ideology, there is hardly a literature to find out whether punk created a new ideology. From this perspective, the core issues raised in this paper may have certain value because such a research is still a blank.

## **Chapter 1. The emergence of punk**

### *Section 1. The background of punk's emergence*

With the end of World War II, the world's politics, economy, and culture have undergone tremendous changes, especially the changes in ideology have become more prominent. In the United Kingdom, for example, the post-World War II Britain experienced a recession that led to an increase in unemployment. In terms of the culture, it was also in trouble (Shepherd, 2013).

In the 1970s, there was a huge cultural gap between the social democratisation and the conservative Thatcherism (Lin, 1993). Between 1976 and 1977, punk music emerged as a response to a particular social and political background in the UK. The sign of that was a number of influential British bands appear in the "100" club in Oxford Street, London, from September 20th to 21st 1976 (Strongman, 2008). These bands included Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Damned, Siouxsie and the Banshees and Buzzcock. This performance had a great impact. Since then, this kind of rock music has been officially named as "punk" (Laing, 2015).

In fact, punk was a simple rock music that was derived from the 1960s' garage rock and pre-punk rock (Savage, 2002). As the most primitive rock music, after a series of evolution, it eventually became an independent music. The ideological expression pursued by punk tended to emancipate the mind and opposed the mainstream sharply. This original intention was positively responded to in the UK in the specific historical



context of the 1970s, not only forming a punk movement, but also forming a leftist ideology of punk.

### *Section 2. Sex Pistols and the first wave of punk*

In general, Sex Pistols was considered to be the originator of British punk (Worley, 2017). In other words, the development of British punk was based on the formation of this band. What seems to be certain is that the punk surge emerged from the mid-1970s redefined pop culture in the UK (Pimlott, 2017). The entire punk movement not only attracted people's attention in London—where Sex Pistols was found—but also became a kind of national event at the time (Savage, 2002). It means that in that period, residents from various parts of the UK participated in the campaign. Perhaps it is reasonable to believe that punk was ground-breaking. It undermines the cultural structure of the past years and enabled young generations to abandon their ideas which learned from the mainstream of society. Just as Laing's opinion (2015), punk was not only a form of music but also a sort of culture.

According to Savage's description (2002), since 1976, this band led a unique youth culture. This culture not only challenged the original norms and concepts of the music industry, but also triggered a moral panic driven by the media, which resulted in a broader concern to the national well-being. On the surface, Sex Pistols seems to deny everything, just like they put forward the slogan "no feeling, no fun, no future" (Worley, 2017, p.4). From the perspective of the average person, this sort of emotion which

included anger, frustration and despair was undoubtedly negative (Parham, 2011). However, such attitude was also critical, and this kind of questioning and satire injected resistance into the popular culture of the time (Wilkinson, Worley and Street, 2017). Similarly, the atmosphere of Sex Pistols' live gigs was frequently intense and offensive (McNeil and McCain, 1997). The vocal singer Johnny Rotten often swayed the audience's opposing emotions during the performance and even caused confusion and fighting on the scene (Jones, 2017). As a result, the band was enveloped in a violent and unpredictable atmosphere. These seemingly deviant behaviours led to a polarised trend in the evaluation to this band. As for early interviews, most of the topics were focused on violent stories such as moments of vandalism, which made the members of the Pistols may be considered as dangerous criminals (Strongman, 2008).

Compared with their behaviours, however, the Sex Pistols' ideas seems to be more noteworthy. According to Johnny Rotten's words, in 1970s, the rock elites were full of conceit, which made these bands' music and lyrics was irrelevant to people's daily life (Lydon, 1995). Rotten claimed that he wished to provide life-related music in the period of social conflicts and economic recessions instead of meaningless sensible words and clichés (Robb, 2012). In an interview in November 1976, he even said 'everyone is sick of the old way. We are just one alternative. There should be several.' (Lydon, 1995, p.95). The Clash, a band appeared later and was widely considered as famous and significant as the Pistols, held a similar opinion. They believed that The Beatles and The Rolling Stones could not hear the anger of young people because who were out of

the grassroots life (Gelbart, 2011). These musicians were not worth to follow, and young generations needed to shout out with new voices and found agents who were close to their real life (Bindas, 1993).

As it has just mentioned before, in an interview in 1976, the vocalist of Sex Pistols called for more people to abandon the original rock voice and to change their lives. A number of people who saw these interviews were encouraged by Jonny Rotten and enthusiastically responded his call (Worley, 2012). Some musicians and artists who shared the same ambitions with Sex Pistols were quickly attracted by them, providing personnel for the later famous bands such as Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Damned and The Clash. In terms of the bands that were established earlier than Sex Pistols, including The Jam and Cock Sparrer, joined the punk team due to that they liked the noise just similar as the Pistols. In this way, punk was able to absorb some pre-existing effective strength and got more alternative elements. Others, such as TV Smith and Adam Ant, immediately decided to form their own band after seeing the performance of Sex Pistols, thus contributing to the punk movement (Strongman, 2008).

In addition to forming a band, people who responded to the call of Sex Pistols also offered help to punk's development in other ways. In London, a young bank clerk named Mark Perry pressed the Sniffin' Glue and other Rock 'N' Roll Habits, which was largely considered as the first punk fanzine in the UK (Triggs, 2006). The distribution of this fanzine helped to create the unique DIY spirit of punk. After that, a series of underground publications appeared across the UK (Webb, 2017). They provided

personalised reviews of punk bands, performances and influences. Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto, the members of Buzzcocks, also devoted to the complement of DIY activities (Liptrot, 2017). In 1977, they released and spread their own record named *Spiral Scratch* in Manchester independently, making people realised that the release of the album did not have to rely on record companies. Instead, such companies could be largely replaced by personal label. Prior to this, in 1976, they held two gigs of the Sex Pistols in Manchester to encourage punk to spread outside the capital (Laing, 2015).

Because of the explosive growth, perhaps it is not surprising that punk caught the attention of the mainstream music industry and media. In November 1976, the well-known record company EMI chose to sign with Sex Pistols; at the same time, a series of TV shows invited the band to participate in the interview (Savage, 2002). In the process, Sex Pistols got a substantial amount of opportunities to promote their first single “Anarchy in the UK”. This song was as inflammatory as Sex Pistols’ previous style (Worley, 2017). In this song, vocalist Johnny Rotten revealed the stale system of Britain in a chaotic language, slamming authorities such as the Parliament. Besides of that, the lyrics also mentioned taboos including antichrists and anarchism, which made this song more controversial. In addition, several terrorist organisations was referred such as the Irish Republican Army, which conveyed a sort of reality that the society had been plagued by terrorism (Pimlott, 2017). It is precisely because of these extreme but pioneering factors, “Anarchy in the UK” was deemed by many critics as one of the most important contemporary singles in Britain (Worley, 2012).

Nevertheless, only one month after the release of this song, a sudden change occurred with the Sex Pistols. In a TV show in December, Jonny Rotten and guitarist Steve Jones swore under the host's hint. The media began to censure and even attack the Pistols (Lydon, 1995). Few days later, EMI decided to replace them, then a series of tour was cancelled (Jones, 2017). Although Sex Pistols and the punk impulse led by them were widely controversial, but from this moment, this band really triggered the official anger (Gololobov, 2017). They were not only ethically condemned by critics with an official background, the municipality even issued a ban on it. As for the reason, Sex Pistols was accused as a group of disgusting, degenerate and dangerous criminals (Savage, 2002). However, because of these activities, the core and spirit of punk were featured. People were no longer just talking about music but also starting to focus on the deeper meaning of punk (Bennett, 1993).

Nevertheless, regardless of the criticism and restrictions, punk still maintains its unique potential to challenge and offend (Fryer, 1986). The most typical example of this may be the second single of Sex Pistols "No Future" (later renamed as "God Save the Queen"). The Pistols deliberately chose to release the record in the time of the 25th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. As expected, this song has once again caused an extensive dispute (Pimlott, 2017). It is worth noting that this song, similar as the previous single "Anarchy in the UK", exposed the illusion of British tradition and the staleness in the social structure (Worley, 2012). In comparison, the lyrics of "God Save the Queen" was more profound and more critical. In response, the

official continued to boycott Sex Pistols and their new work (Wilkinson, 2017). Members of the band and the cover designer of the single, Jamie Reid, were also attacked by furious royalists. But the Pistols still did not stop their shouts. Subsequently, although Sex Pistols was repeatedly released by several record companies, they successively composed “Pretty Vacant”, “Holidays in the Sun” and other tracks. In October 1977, the album “Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols” appeared in the public view (Strongman, 2008). Just the name of this album caught widespread attention, and the punk climax came again as predicted. For a time, this extended-playing record was thrust into the limelight and even successfully occupied the top spot in the sales list. It can be said that the punk culture created and led by Sex Pistols transcended the connotation of ordinary pop music and became a youth movement (Worley, 2017).

According to Worley’s argument (2017), Punk's transition from counterculture to popular culture revealed its contradiction and complexity. The reason that such kind of music could become popular was this sort of voice provided a catharsis window for people suffering from the UK's economic depression and social unrest, while its noise seems to be an experimental way to explore different types of creation and expression. On the cultural level, punk not only offered a means of expressing dissatisfaction to those who were deeply frustrated, but also challenged traditional cultural structures. In other words, punk was unprecedented both musically and culturally (Parham, 2011).

After the Sex Pistols, punk bands led by The Clash continued to write songs that were relevant to their daily life. According to Reddington (2016), in the first wave, punk can be roughly divided into two types. The first were type just like Sex Pistols. They cried out the slogan "no future", fully expressing the frustration, hopelessness and anger of young people. The second type was the bands with high political motivation such as The Clash, who embraced the left-wing concept including anti-fascism and communism. This point can be recognised from the first single of the two: the former's "Anarchy in the UK", as it has just been mentioned, was a shout of anger, while the latter's "White Riot" focused on the refutation of racism and capitalism (Bennett, 1993). In this song, they criticised the arrogance and ignorance of white people and firmly stood with the black people to support them in defending their rights. At the same time, they also pointed out that money and power were gathered in the hands of the rich, exposing the bourgeoisie's exploitation toward the proletariat (Bindas, 1993). This laid the foundation for the development direction of The Clash. Comparing with destruction Sex Pistols' destruction, The Clash determined to convey constructive political ideas on their own in order to guide the public to make a better society and life (Parham, 2011). At the end of 1980, they released the album "Sandinista!". The album's name referred to Nicaragua's new left-wing regime Sandinista National Liberation Front, who overthrew the country's far-right dictatorship a year ago. The Clash, as a well-known band, put this concept on the forehead of the record, which undoubtedly brought the left-wing revolution into popular culture (Gelbart, 2011).

### *Section 3. Crass and the second wave of punk*

When the time came from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, punk had a further development (Fryer, 1986). One of the most obvious improvements, perhaps, was that punk began to be classified more detailedly. With the further awakening of anarchism, anarcho-punk put itself into the punk force, which also suggested the rise of the second wave of punk (Webb, 2017)

The relationship between British punk and anarchy can be traced back to its origin: the birth of Sex Pistols (Thompson, 2004). In addition to expressing their dissatisfaction, "Anarchy in the UK" also represents Sex Pistols' first true intention: under all noise and confrontation, they called for a subversive undercurrent of ideology (Worley, 2017). This song mainly about shouted for personal freedom, as well as revealed the crisis and decline of Britain in past years.

However, for the Pistols, the use of the word "anarchy" was merely a reference to its literal meaning rather than its core content for political creeds (Worley, 2012). Malcolm McLaren, the organiser and agent of the Sex Pistols, claimed that in his view, anarchy was a response to the economic depression of the past few years, as well as a sense of independence, self-management and DIY spirit (Robb, 2012). As for the vocal singer Johnny Rotten, he believed that anarchy should be embodied instead of treated as a goal. In an interview in 1977, he said "you should write about what is happening",



while he also pointed out that “‘Anarchy in the UK’ was about musical anarchy. It was a way to overcome the boredom” (Worley, 2017, p.159).

Even so, for some time, anarchy had become a synonym with punk. For instance, before the 1980s, anarchy slogans and logos regularly appeared on DIY-designed clothing (Webb, 2017). In fact, for the bands such as Sex Pistols, these references of anarchy were simply used to express their aggressiveness and dissatisfaction, aiming to release a long-standing pressure (Worley, 2012). Hugh Cornwell from the band The Stranglers talks about the practical meaning of anarchy: this word indicated that punk was a primitive force, a means of releasing the nature that was suppressed or hidden by modern society. To sum up, anarchy conveys the punk's suggestion: “be yourself”, “think for yourself” and “do what you want to do” (Worley, 2017, p.159).

For others, raising an anarchic banner requires more serious intentions. Crass, which emerged in the late 1970s, combined the connotation of anarchy with punk and they were the first band to do so. Through their efforts, “anarcho-punk” was created and became one of the most important branches of punk in the 1980s (Cross, 2014).

Crass was formed in 1977, which grew up with Penny Rimbaud (Jeremy Ratter) and Steve Ignorant (Steve Williams) as the original core members. They were initially based in the Dial House in Epping Forest, the strip on the edge of London. In this place, Penny Rimbaud and other members refurbished an old farmhouse in the late 1960s (Strongman, 2008). It is worth noting that the members of this band had different ages, genders, classes and backgrounds (Webb, 2017). In addition, before 1977, most

members had tried to engage in the works with music and art, so they already had had several relevant experience when they formed the band. They devoted themselves to the work of counter-mainstream culture before the punk movement began, attempting to find and construct alternatives to the mainstream social structure of the time. This experience laid the foundation for Crass to be able to make a distinctive voice in the future (Liptrot, 2017).

Although Crass was founded in 1977, the band's self-positioning had been ambiguous for two years after their formation (Strongman, 2008). Initially, similar as other so-called anarchy bands, Crass used it as a lingual and symbolic weapon, aiming at debate and destruction. In order to show their rebellion, Crass used the Peace of Nuclear Disarmament peace sign, a cross, a swastika and a part of the British flag to draw a unique pattern when designing their team logo (Thompson, 2004).

In 1979, they released their first extend-playing record 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand' that they officially determined their style. As people saw after that year, Crass was actively seeking to change the words, images, and worldviews that punk had, so that anarchy could successfully stand the opposite side of existing politics and culture. In the band's a serious of extend-playing records, long-playing records and 7-inch singles, song content ranged from Christian ("Reality Asylum") to unequal social systems ("Big A Little A"); from the patriarchal system ("Penis Envy") to the fossilised concept of ultra-leftist ("Bloody Revolutions") (Lohman and Worley, 2018). Crass differed from the Sex Pistols for the reason that they focused on expressing

dissatisfaction with the existing social, economic, political, and cultural ways in a chaotic and inflammatory manner, while the former provided a summary of the ideal life and proposes a The slogan “there is no authority but yourself”(Webb, 2017, p.108). In other words, Crass’ attitude to punk may be more serious: they recognised the political and cultural rebellious potential of punk, so they treated it as a weapon, not only to fight against existing authoritarianism and injustice, but also to shape a new value through it in order to bring punk to a new level in turn. Because of that, the criticism of punk could be more powerful. Following the mobilisation led by Crass, a large number of bands and artists also participated in the wave of protests driven in the punk movement until Crass dissolved in 1984. These musical activists stood firmly under the anarchist flag established by Crass.

In terms of music, Penny Rimbaud once pointed out that Crass did not actually deny the original punk songs in aesthetics, including its main rhythm forms, chord collocations, and the use of musical instruments (Robb, 2012). He further commented that Crass did not have much impact on the music itself, and that their broader and deeper influence was reflected in social issues (McNeil and McCain, 1997). But this did not mean that the band had no requirements for aesthetics. Similar with the traditional punk, they also use electric guitar, drum kit and electric bass as the main instruments for play. Simultaneously, the band adopted punk’s simple chord style, and play skill of guitar and drum were also not difficult (Worley, 2017).

Although Crass adopted many of the punk's existing elements, they also made a number of changes in this form of music, which allowed Crass become a unique group compared to other punk bands (Laing, 2015). In their arrangement, these musicians added a special mix developed by the vocalist Rimbaud for the rhythm guitar, which sounded like a voice from the radio. Simultaneously, they invented a new way of mixing drums that are biased towards military style; composed guitar parts with fierce and fast riffs; and replaced the chorus with a sort of sharp background sound. Although the chord form was similar to the original punk, Crass matched them in a discordant way, making the melody almost disappear. As a result, the sound of instruments was harsh (Lohman and Worley, 2018). Penny Rimbaud, the vocal singer of the band, explained that the main reason for making these changes was to avoid the band's music being commercialised by the record companies (Robb, 2012)

Although the members of Crass wished their productions could stay away from the commercialisation, they found that the trend of the capitalist market penetrating into the punk field was unstoppable (Laing, 2015). The Crass' organiser Penny Rimbaud thought that the punk was bought by the capitalists and the revolutionaries were beaten by the money (Robb, 2012). Punk was originally a form of expression of consciousness and concept, but in fact it soon degenerated into a kind of fashion. In other words, those bands who claimed to destroy everything or provoke riots were now making a huge number of money for music brands—even the groups like The Clash could not be immune (Webb, 2017). Although they explained the reason they signed with Columbia

Record was to let more people hear their voices and aroused their awareness, but in Rimbaud's opinion, they still betrayed punk. In the first album, Crass used the song Punk is dead to voice their fears and anger (Lohman and Worley, 2018).

At the same time, as this punk music became more and more commercial, they positioned themselves as an option to follow the DIY tradition (Webb, 2017). In October 1977, Gee Vaucher, who worked with Crass, wrote the first edition of a so-called 'nihilism' newspaper International Anthem. The reason to found this newspaper was to help build a connection between countercultural publications and DIY punk fanzines (Triggs, 2006). The revolutionaries from Crass believed that if the first wave of punk fell because of the market, then the second wave of punk would be needed in order to keep the fight (Robb, 2012). In this case, the practice of composing songs and running newspapers was undoubtedly contributing to this second wave of punk movements.

Back to the Crass' songs, those political lyrics became the skeleton of the band, and each song would focus on a specific target. Authorities and institutions became the object of ridicule, and Crass never had the meaning of compromise. Indeed, the intent of Crass' songs was to incite people to oppose authority (Robb, 2012). Their early singles and albums were actively working to supply alternatives of the social and political structures and ideas of the time. After the outbreak of the Falkland War in 1982, the band took a more active response (Webb, 2017). They commented on the events that took place and tried to find the ideological systems in other dominant

analyses. This shows that Crass provided a space for punk and the popular music culture of the time, which could be used to express one's emotions and describe different thoughts and opinions. Crass' records were wrapped in black and white folding sleeves designed by Gee Vaucher, a visual artist who worked with the band, this kind of packaging also provided a visual complement to their creations. In addition to the records, there were also sheets with lyrics, essays and political views in these packages . It can be seen that Crass was not only serious about their music, but also attached great importance to the opinions that they desired to express. At the same time, posters, movies, prints and brochures accompanying bands and songs appeared into the public view continuously (Liptrot, 2017). As for the gigs of Crass, the band would interact with the audience during the performance, taking the opportunity to convey the ideas that they see to be progressive to the audience, while actively calling on those who see the performance to participate in the political commentary (Robb, 2012). Another significant feature of the band was their uniform. Every band member wore black clothes during the performance, which meant that to reject the value and ideas of pop stars (Thompson, 2005). In other words, through such dressing, Crass tried to pursue the personalisation that punk has continuously emphasised, which also helped Crass to expand its audience. Motivated by Crass, a number of groups decided to adopt the concept and value of anarcho-punk, including the Mob, Flux of Pink Indians and Conflict (Cross, 2014). As a result, in the early 1980s, massive of bands came to the stage. Because of the amount of these Crass-inspired band was considerable, these

groups even started competing with Crass itself for the position of the performance (Laing, 2015). From this fact, perhaps it is reasonable to believe that this form of punk indeed set off a surge in society at the time.

## **Chapter 2. Punk as a movement**

### *Section 1. Leftist march*

A number of these players and musicians recognised punk as a weapon to fight in the street. The melody was crude and aggressive, while the lyrics either drawing the angers and depressions of inner-city life or attacking the political, economic and social forces that restricted living opportunities. Social commentary still existed, but it was now under the pressure of Cold War or bound to the deep-rooted unemployment with Margaret Thatcher's monetarism policy (Worley, 2017)

Punk's earliest political purpose was to express resistance (Savage, 2002). This can be seen in the appearance, language, voice and attitude of Sex Pistols, because all of these conveyed dissatisfaction. These bands that vented negative emotions were regularly composed of teenagers who have never voted in the general election. They originally proposed a mixed concept when expressing their passion for politics. A number of politically antagonistic bands gathered to reveal a trend of thought: both political parties' and government's behaviour were irrelevant or even harmful to people's daily life (Wilkinson and Worley, 2017). Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones said that he did not know who the British prime minister was in 1977 (Jones, 2017), while vocalist Jonny Rotten believed that a variety of political claims were the losers' position (Lydon, 1995). Other punk musicians also expressed political views. The Clash attended the left-wing rally and made a clear-cut opposition to fascism; Siouxsie Sioux argued that people needed to save themselves rather than always tolerated of the



surroundings; and The Jam's member, Paul Weller, condemned labour union's power when the Conservatives won in 1979, and then he quickly turned to the left to become a staunch supporter of the campaign of nuclear disarmament and co-founder of the 1985 Red Wedge movement (Fryer, 1986).

After all, punk was born in the period governed by Labour Party, and had strong emotions of dissatisfaction and frustration with the economic, social, cultural and political situation at that time. Jonny Rotten of Sex Pistols sometimes described former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson as a liar, while The Clash's Joe Strummer called James Callaghan a robot that only followed instructions (Bindas, 1993). Both Wilson and Callaghan were prime ministers from the Labour Party in the 1970s, and their reasons for being accused were related to the Party's loss of financial and political turmoil during this period. However, the anger of punk was not always directed at those in power. In the social environment of the time, sexism, which had unfair treatment for women, and racism that caused racial opposition were in a tendency to flourish (Pimlott, 2017).

In this kind of instability, the punk movement gained increasing development momentum. Because the frustrations of the youth are entangled with the social democracy from the Labour and the flaws of the new Thatcherism, such divisions strengthened the dissatisfaction of these participants (Callaghan, 1987). Unemployment, anti-racism and anti-capitalism began to shape the political meaning of punk and the way it was understood and disseminated (Pimlott, 2017). Attitudes toward gender and

sexual orientation are also redefined through punk. More generally, perhaps the rebellion fought against cultural traditions and hierarchical political organisations that allowed punk's claim of self-rule could be voiced (Worley, 2012).

Punk's counterculture is well known, and this culture is largely rooted in the thinking of the far-left context. Although Sex Pistols was the first one to make the voice, punk's early ideas were also influenced by leftist writers, artists and philosophers (Savage, 2002). They conveyed political views through artistic ways such as literature and images, thus adding more connotations to the punk concept.

Therefore, to a certain extent, punk provided a medium for critique for those who have political views. Because of the internal culture of the leftist politics began to change direction, the emphasis changed from original collectivism to the combination of groups and individuals in order to protect both of the interests (Gelbart, 2011). Culture was an aspect of collective political struggle, completing by individual politics centred on race, gender and sexual orientation. Young political activists were actively involved in the development of punk. As a result, leftist organisations believed that music and youth culture were the forces of change. In other words, in the eyes of the left, punk was a kind of youth culture that sought political change.

Punk's negativity and its absorption of political views gave it a political explanation. For young activists, compared to traditional rock music, punk music vented people's growing dissatisfaction so that it added rebellious meaning to pop music. At least, punk bands were praised for introducing politics to thousands of young

people through their music, performances, and interviews with fanzine. In addition, between 1977 and 1978, punk bands regularly participated in a series of political performances under the regular invitation from leftist parties (Gelbart, 2011). After publishing an open letter to Sex Pistols, the Young Communist League held a political speech at its 1977 Red Festival, and the punk band Sham 69 provided live soundtracks. Because of the influence of this environment, some young revolutionaries began to form the band by themselves. Tony Friel from The Fall, and Green Gartside and Niall Jinks from Scritti Politti were members of the Young Communist League; Pauline Black from The Selecter joined Worker's Revolutionary Party; Tony Wakeford and Douglas Pearce who organised Crisis came from Socialist Workers Party and International Marxist Group; the members of The Redskins were also from Socialist Workers Party; Punk poets such as Attila the Stockbroker were also affiliated with Socialist Workers Party (Worley, 2017).

The 1970s was the most active period for the British left after World War II, and they launched a series of social movements. The left-wing organisations that were originally looking forward to the Labour Party and the Soviet Union which was considered as the leader of communist countries, quickly re-adjusted its own ideology and strategy when it discovered that its ideals were on the verge of collapse. This changed the style and essence of British leftist politics (Worley, 2012). The traditional commitment to classes and political parties began to give way to the value of the new left, which in turn combined with counter-culture experiments to form new ideas. Social

movements centred on race, gender identity and sexual orientation set new issues for struggle. Therefore, the relationship between the left and punk was more due to shared feelings and ideas rather than party loyalty. In other words, although punk stood on the left side at this time, it had a more open space to criticise, participated in cultural practice and social interaction. Therefore, with the support of the left, punk adopted a series of attempts to combine music and cultural politics (Worley, 2017). One of the most obvious examples was the Rock Against Racism Campaign which was led by bands such as The Clash (Goodyer, 2009).

### *Section 2. Rock Against Racism*

The initiative to launch Rock Against Racism was first published by Red Saunders and Roger Huddle in September 1976 on Socialist Worker. In this appealing article, the slogan of the sport 'to be part of the struggle to change the system' was particularly conspicuous. Soon they received letters sent from supporters, and a bar in eastern London agreed to serve as the venue for the first event (Parham, 2011). After that, the movement developed in an incredible speed. Hundreds of gigs under the name Rock Against Racism were held in London between 1977 and 1981. In 1979, there was a tour named 'Militant Entertainment', which was backed by the Anti-Nazi League, was held in the UK (Goodyer, 2009). It brought together a variety of punk and other types of bands, with the aim of holding a rallies and express a boycott before 303 National Front candidates participated in the general election. The first of these performances featuring

The Clash, which attracted about 80,000 people. In the spring of 1979, about 90 Rock Against Racism clubs were established nationwide and organised about 800 performances (Worley, 2017).

Punk and Rock Against Racism form a symbiotic relationship. Just as RAR quickly accepted and supported The Clash's anti-racism attitude, a large number of follow-up punk bands actively participated in Rock Against Racism performances (Goodyer, 2009). As a result, Rock Against Racism provided punk principles so that punk's rebellion separate itself from aimless protest (Pimlott, 2017). With the political foundation of this campaign as a support, the development of punk became more diverse since 1978. In addition to the anti-racism and anti-fascism as before, some bands reflected the broad view of the liberal left in their lyrics. Moreover, punk even allowed part of the Marxist ideas to be combined with songs and developed punk Marxism related to the reality of the 1970s. Some anti-sexist discrimination and support for homosexuals also received a number of opportunities at this time. Therefore, Rock Against Racism was not limited to anti-racism, it also received and integrated many progressive ideas (Parham, 2011)

Because Rock Against Racism was open to anyone who was committed to anti-racism, so even if participants come from different leftist camps (some of them run counter to others), they could still unite under the call of this movement. Because of this, punk had the opportunity to absorb the core values of various leftist groups during this period, which also helped punk to develop its own ideas. Rock Against Racism also

added political motivation and further channels for punk's rebellion, allowing each punk band to voice more actively on political issues (Worley, 2017). Especially after Rock Against Racism and Anti-Nazi League jointly held the carnival performance, the popularity of punk music reached a peak, resulting in young people from different races and classes became the audience of the performance. It can be said that because of this movement, punk developed from the initial form—working-class white youth as the main audience—to the target of all young generations in the UK. More particularly, in Rock Against Racism clubs, punk youth debated about gender, sexual orientation, unemployment, and Ireland issues, and then writes the results of the discussion in songs and fanzines (Pimlott, 2017).

Punk's wave of opposition gave young socialists some support and provided them with a collective experience in social movements. From experience, Rock Against Racism has become a precedent that has been imitated by some later social activities (Gelbart, 2011). One of the famous examples was the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which began in 1980 (Worley, 2017). This large-scale rally also expressed opinions through punk and other types of rock music, and its content was mainly related to anti-war. In addition, activities related to issues such as animal rights, disability protection, single-parent families, and amnesty were also combined with punk music. Thus, the punk-associated movement pioneered by Rock Against Racism provided the impetus for the rise of the punk movement and injected more political content into punk (Goodyer, 2009).

### *Section 3. DIY ethos and anarchist shout*

In 1977, Crass decided to adopt the self-determined production which was largely considered as one of the traditions of punk (Thompson, 2004). They tried to find opportunities to release albums independently in the environment where the music industry was dominated by large record companies. After released their first extend-playing record 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand' on an independent record label named Small Wonder Record, they set up 'Crass Records' which was their own record label. As for the price of records, they used a pricing way known as 'pay no more than...' which means they separated themselves from commercial bands. Meanwhile, Crass also provided opportunities for like-minded bands to release and spread their music. This punk vanguard claimed that no matter the creation was an album or just a single song, as long as someone wanted others to hear their original music, Crass Records could offer help with it. They even put forward a slogan 'anyone can do it'. As it has just mentioned, Crass was in accordance with DIY ethos, so they deliberately avoided mainstream music publications such as New Musical Express when promoting new songs, suggesting that punk fanzines was considered as the key way to communicate. At the same time, a number of inspiring young fans or musicians wrote to the band, some of them even visit Crass' members in their meeting place Dial House in person, chatting and discussing about punk and politics. Perhaps this could also indicate that they were firm DIY advocates.

At the time, Crass had already had a relatively widespread attack on British politics and society. However, Crass was not satisfied with expressing his own ideas only through the music. In addition to various singles and albums, they also collaborated with a band called Poison Girls to publish brochures, posters, bulletins, films and fanzines (Webb, 2017). Poison Girls, as one of the most important partners of Crass, was a punk band from Brighton with strong feminist and anarchist values. This was an extended article that intersected with the story of the death of Wally Hope (as known as Phil Russell), the organiser of the Windsor Free Festival, with the criticism of punk faction and the geopolitical oppression history in post-war period. Through this album, Crass fully expounded their points: the government, religion and state were harmful to the public's free expression of their ideas (Thompson, 2004). From their perspective, the authority organisations and country were tools to censor people, abusing power in order to defend the vested interests of politicians and capitalists. The police, army, and law provided the power to suppress most citizens, while the media played a role in instilling a single idea to governed people continuously. As for church and religion, they sheltered stereotypes and morality that violated human nature and induced fear in people's hearts. Besides of such ideas, Crass also raised questions about the family. They believed that this kind of social relationship would aggravate the solidification of gender roles and led to unequal discourse right because of the gap between generations (Lohman and Worley, 2018).



Through unremitting trying, anarchist bands led by Crass produced a series of albums and publications that preserved the continuation of the DIY spirit and criticized the various institutions and ideologies that maintain power in the UK (Webb, 2017). They not only treated anarchism as a provocative slogan, but also regarded it as the basis for transcending the existing state and socio-economic structure. In other words, anarcho-punk tried to pursue an alternative and unprecedented society.

According to their statements, it may be easy to see that for Crass, the absorption of anarchism was actually used to express the individual will and rebellion thoughts (Lohman and Worley, 2018). In addition to pay the necessary cost of living in Dial House, the band donated most of the proceeds to other punk-related campaigns in order to support them materially. These campaigns included demonstrations called “Stop the City” from 1983 to 1984, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, street graffiti, while they also helped to establish the London Autonomy Centre and perform free gigs for miners who participated in the strike (Thompson, 2004). In 1982, they produced two documentaries to condemn the issue of Falklands War because they believed the incident exposed serious problems in parliament. A year later, Crass questioned that the dialogue between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan talk about the military brinkmanship policy was a scam, then they started another round of attack on the government. More generally, Crass used their anarchism as a way to break the dualistic left-right politics of western tradition in order to find a way to end the Cold War (Worley, 2011). For the social positioning of class, race, gender and sexual orientation,

they basically adopt a refutation attitude. Crass' member Pete Wright firmly believed that if everyone was born and structured at birth, then the aim of Crass was to get people to question the matter, not just accept everything that happened (Webb, 2017).

Because of the above ideas, Crass soon became the subject of widespread discussion. The number of fanzine that focused on them soon exceeded the average level of British bands in history. And this band had been emphasising their rebellious and DIY ideas in the fanzine interview, defining themselves as 'anarchy in action'. Their conversations also covered multiple fields, even from the Nazi's Auschwitz concentration camp to Her Majesty's Prison Maze in Northern Ireland (Thompson, 2004). In terms of the motivation behind Crass' creation of music and lyrics, they believed that what they had to do was not to provide answers to people but to ask questions to let people explore their own answers.

In fact, Crass' anarchism was indeed the focus of debate in the early days. Some people questioned that everyone was surrounded by various systems—in this case, it was impossible to truly implement anarchism (Cross, 2014). The band members' responses were quite consistent when they were asked to explain their thoughts. They believed that anarchism was actually to help people return to personal in a responsible way and break the control of external forces. Gee Vaucher, the cover designer of the band, pointed out that they were anarchists in thought, and this sort of anarchism should not be associated with any existing theory or doctrine. Crass' guitarist also argued that the band actually desired to get rid of the classification on them because they only

wanted to be independent individuals rather than a part of the masses (Lohman and Worley, 2018).

In addition, there is another point which is worthy to be noticed that pacifism was another concept associated with Crass tightly. Although it was not as attractive as anarchism, pacifism was still a political position of Crass. One of the most intuitive manifestations, perhaps, was their slogan 'Anarchy, Peace and Freedom' (Cross, 2014). This concept was related to the earlier hippie movement, which placed it to a sort of counterculture (Webb, 2017). Penny Rimbaud was appreciative of this counterculture and clearly stated that pacifism did not mean passive but merely not using violence to solve problems. Meanwhile, they also actively participated in a series of anti-war campaigns such as Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, expressing dissatisfaction, frustration and anger over the intense Cold War situation (Worley, 2011).

Proof by facts, Crass' political philosophy was greatly influential. In the early 1980s, their ideas and methods were learned and imitated by a large number of bands in the UK, which set off a surge of anarcho-punk. This is the second wave of punk that has just been mentioned in the above.

In 1984, after the Falklands War and miners' strike, Crass raised a series of questions about 'the politics of depression' and discussed how to resist or counter the social and political changes caused by Thatcherism. The anarcho-punk culture they pioneered developed continuously. With the help of Poison Girls, the firm ally of Crass, feminism were discussed at a deeper level (Thompson, 2004). Besides of that, other

issues such as sexism, religion, nuclear weapons, education and Ireland terrorism were also argued heatedly. Along with these issues, various underground publications emerged. People proposed and exchanged their ideas through these mediums, building a unique network of punk culture gradually. This kind of expression and communication which stayed outside the mainstream also revealed that anti-tradition was one of the cores of punk. According to Lohman and Worley (2018), the anarcho-punk created by Crass helped the existing punk developed to a wider extent. As a result, the cultural and political influence of punk became greater.

Crass recognised a critical cultural process in the punk movement. Punk provided a new platform of expression for people with political views. It means that Crass had a strong political character, involving personal politics and collective politics. Meanwhile, this band was also proved that they were vigilant to political labels, avoiding their own ideology being classified to a certain category (Wilkinson and Worley, 2017). Their ideas and methods came from a range of influences, including the counterculture that emerged in the 1960s. Crass pushed cultural and political expression to a new level, realigning the radical left-wing politics of the twentieth century (Webb, 2017). The topics they covered including race, sexuality and sexual orientation, which was considered to be helpful for the emergence of the new left. In other words, since Crass, the leftism ideology was no longer just concerned about the issues between different classes. Although this change cannot be attributed entirely to Crass, perhaps it is reasonable to believe that the ideas conveyed with the music and lyrics composed by

the band played a facilitating role—at least, they had a certain influence among young generations at the time (Lohman and Worley, 2018).

## **Chapter 3. Punk ideology**

### *Section 1. The definition of ideology*

From McLellan's perspective (1986, p. 1), ideology is "the most elusive concept in the whole of social science", because ideology is complicated so that the definition work may be difficult. As a result, perhaps the question "what is ideology" cannot be answered in a brief sentence.

To define the core concept of ideology, scholars put forward a variety of summarisations. For Erikson and Tedin (2003), ideology can be seen as a kind of faith about the correct order of society and how it is achieved. Denzau & North (1994) have similar opinion, believing that ideology is a sort of shared framework of mental models that individual groups are able to keep it, providing both an explanation of the environment and a prescription on how to interpret the environment. If a person accepts that ideology is shared, then it would be helpful to explain the social world, and it regulates (or requires) the correct way to solve life problems. From this perspective, it seems to be easy to see how ideology reflects and strengthens psychologists. The need or motivation to be mentioned as a relationship, cognition and existence (Jost et al ,2009)

Specific ideologies embody and convey the views, values and widely shared faiths of classes, identifiable groups, communities or society (Freeden 2001). Ideology also strives to describe or interpret the world by making assertions or assumptions about humanity, historical events, current realities, and future possibilities – and envisioning the world it deserves, indicating acceptable means and political ideals for social

economics. To some extent, different ideologies represent a socially shared but competitive philosophy of life and how it should live (and how society should be governed). One thing seems can be confirmed is that different ideologies could trigger and express—at least to some extent—different degrees. Social, cognitive and motivational styles or tendencies of their followers (Knight 2006).

Social scientists and philosophers have long differed with whether to accept critical, even judging intonation, or follow a more value-neutral attitude while describing and analysing ideology. The former, a more critical tradition stems from the work of Marx and Engels (1846/2001), who recognise ideology as a possibly threatening form of delusion and mystification, which regularly used to hide and sustain exploitative collective relations. In these respects, Mannheim (1936) describes certain ideologies as more or less aware of the disguise of the true nature of the situation. Habermas (1989) also sees ideology as a form of systematically twisted communication, a feature that is still common in certain circles of social theorists. The derogatory sense of ideology exists to some extent in the social psychological theory of social domination and institutional defense (Jost et al ,2009).

Nevertheless, it appears that the most empirical studies in psychology, sociology and political science reflect the seemingly neutral concept of value. According to this concept, the word ‘ideology’ refers indiscriminately to any belief system, that is, any composition of thoughts and attitudes, in which elements are linked by some form of constraint or functional interdependence (Knight 2006). In this academic tradition,

ideology is classified as a comparatively benign organisational tool, emphasizing its cognitive role of building expertise and political knowledge (Freedman 2001).

Insights generated from critical and value neutrality surveys are often juxtaposed and assumed to be incompatible with each other, and scholars from both traditions seem to seldom communicate with each other. However, according to Jost et al (2009), these two methods are not mutually exclusive, because the same belief system can serve multiple functions simultaneously, including cognition, existence and relationship. In other words, these scholars suggest that a given ideology can reflect real understanding, explain and organise information about the political world, and conscious or unconscious trends to rationalise things, or the desire to be different (Jost, 2006).

One of the perpetual issues that are raised by political and social psychologists involves ideology's structure, in other words, the approach and scale to which cognitive attitudes are organised according to one or more dimensions of judgments or preferences (Erikson and Tedin, 2003). It seems that a number of researchers believe that ideology manifests itself in memory as a model of learning knowledge that consists of interconnected networks of opinions, values and beliefs.

The main question of this dissertation is relevant with leftism ideology, so it is necessary to find out the meaning of 'left'. Since the French Revolution, ideological views have been most often classified into a single left and right dimension (Jost et al 2009). This usage stems from the fact that the supporters of the status quo in the late eighteenth century sat on the right side of the French parliament, while their opponents



sat on the left. In the United States and other countries, it is becoming increasingly common to replace the words 'left' and 'right' with 'freedom' and 'conservative' respectively. This equation expresses of the long-term ideological divide about the preferences for change versus stability. Thus, many ideological conflicts between change and the status quo involve ancient controversies about the appropriate role of hierarchy, authority, and inequality (Knight 2006). However, in this dissertation, the words 'left' and 'right' will still be used. It appears that during the process of British punk movement, the ideological differences was still dominated by the division between left and right. However, it does not mean that the above theories are not relevant to this dissertation. On the contrary, they will be helpful.

This distinction between left and right and many other aspects contains two interrelated aspects: the first one is approving versus opposing social change, which has the same meaning as resisting tradition; the second one is refusing versus adopting inequality. This bilateral definition seems to be relatively uncontroversial and consistent with the two characteristics offered by political scientists (Bobbio 1996). As for the right, For the right, the concepts that are regularly involved include with such terms as "conservative," "system maintenance," "order," "individualism," "capitalism," "nationalism," "fascism," while in terms of the left, "progressive," "system change," "equality," "solidarity," "protest," "opposition," "radical," "socialism," and "communism" (Fuchs & Klingemann 1990, pp. 213–214). Since Western society has become more equal in terms of liberties and human rights, political power and

economic distribution, dispersal over the past centuries, the two core dimensions of the left and right dimensions are interrelated for historical reasons (Jost et al 2009). In some cases, economic and social equality rose gradually, while in other cases it happened in consequence of revolutionary incidents, which are frequently opposed by right-wingers.

Scholars generally agree with the historical and philosophical significance of the distinction between the two. It appears to be clear that the political elites of the government, political parties and activity organisations, media and academia use this dimension relatively easily and frequently in decision-making and political discourse. According to Converse's research (1964), however, whether ordinary citizens are able to actually use certain leftist or rightist ideological contents to indicate their political attitude may be worth questioning. For this question, Jost (2006) seems to give an answer. He emphasises that ordinary citizens are in an unconscious state of ideologies. But Jost also points out that though people are not good at understanding the concept of abstract ideology, most citizens are able to use at least a part of the core values or principles to recognise and justify various social and political affairs. In turn, some evidences can prove that ideology can affect citizens' political attitudes (Erikson & Tedin 2003). What is important for this claim is that most people involved in the punk movement were not political elites, so the relations between average people and ideology is noteworthy.

*Section 2. Ideologies conveyed by punk*

*Section 3. Punk as a unique leftism ideology*



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