

# WANTED: A PAKISTANI COMMUNITY OF ECONOMIC HETERODOXY

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I will begin this article with a declaration of interests and intent. I am an economist by profession and training and as such my personal and professional interests are furthered by a healthier and more prosperous economics profession in Pakistan. I am a heterodox economist who, as he looks around, barely sees any serious challenge to economic orthodoxy in the country's public sphere. There are exceptions of course, but economic orthodoxy looms large. This is not simply a matter of like or dislike, but something which is consequential for my work: I cannot do my work alone. I need a community of economic heterodoxy. Such a community will also be good for economics as a scientific enterprise and as a profession in the country: economics is done better if it is done in a variety of ways. In this essay, I will first outline two related objectives – scientific and political – which I think Pakistani heterodox economists need to pursue. The essay will conclude with a comment on the ideological character of economics.

## THE SCIENTIFIC TASK

The scientific task itself has two parts. First, following Kuhn (1962/2012) in the conviction that scientific work is social in character and is done in scientific communities, we need a deeper sociological understanding of the scientific communities which sustain and reproduce orthodox economic thinking in Pakistan. In addition, we need to figure out how these communities fit with global scientific communities. Haque and Khan (1998) and McCartney and Zaidi (2019) are good examples of the sort of work that will be helpful in this endeavour. For starters, it is possible to identify important scientific communities around particular universities and think tanks in the country; their private or public character should also be considered as it is meaningful and nontrivial in its impact on the research programme. The second part of the scientific task, following the methodology of scientific research programs (Lakatos 1978/1989), “which analysed science in terms of continual competition between research programmes”

(Backhouse, 1998, p. 353) concerns the prospect of a heterodox economics community in Pakistan. That is, what kind of community, with what kind of research program, could present theories and prescriptions which provide a healthy check on the dominance of prevailing ones?

## THE POLITICAL TASK

Then there is the political task. It is my view that we do not necessarily need an infiltration of new ideas. Studying the communities within which economics is done and cultivating new communities might have a more significant impact. In other words, the issue is not so much that Pakistan needs a scientific revolution in the Kuhnian sense. Rather than trying to force a paradigm shift, the energy of Pakistani heterodox economists might be better spent on nourishing a community which may compete with and challenge the established intellectual communities.

This community must have its own research program which must be pursued without hesitation.

To this end, it is important that heterodox economists have a forum of their own: a working group at the bare minimum to begin with, and then perhaps a society or an association, like heterodox economics associations in other parts of the world. The working group might have a newsletter and a summer school in the beginning and then move towards an annual conference and journal of its own. Most importantly, its work ought to be driven by clear convictions and aims. In the minds of its own members (of both the association and the broader community which may not necessarily be active in the association), the strength of conviction about the intrinsic value of heterodox economics and its superiority over economic orthodoxy will play a big role. There must especially not be any kind of insecurities or qualms about social status compared to the status of mainstream economists. With this firm intellectual and psychological foundation, the association can help

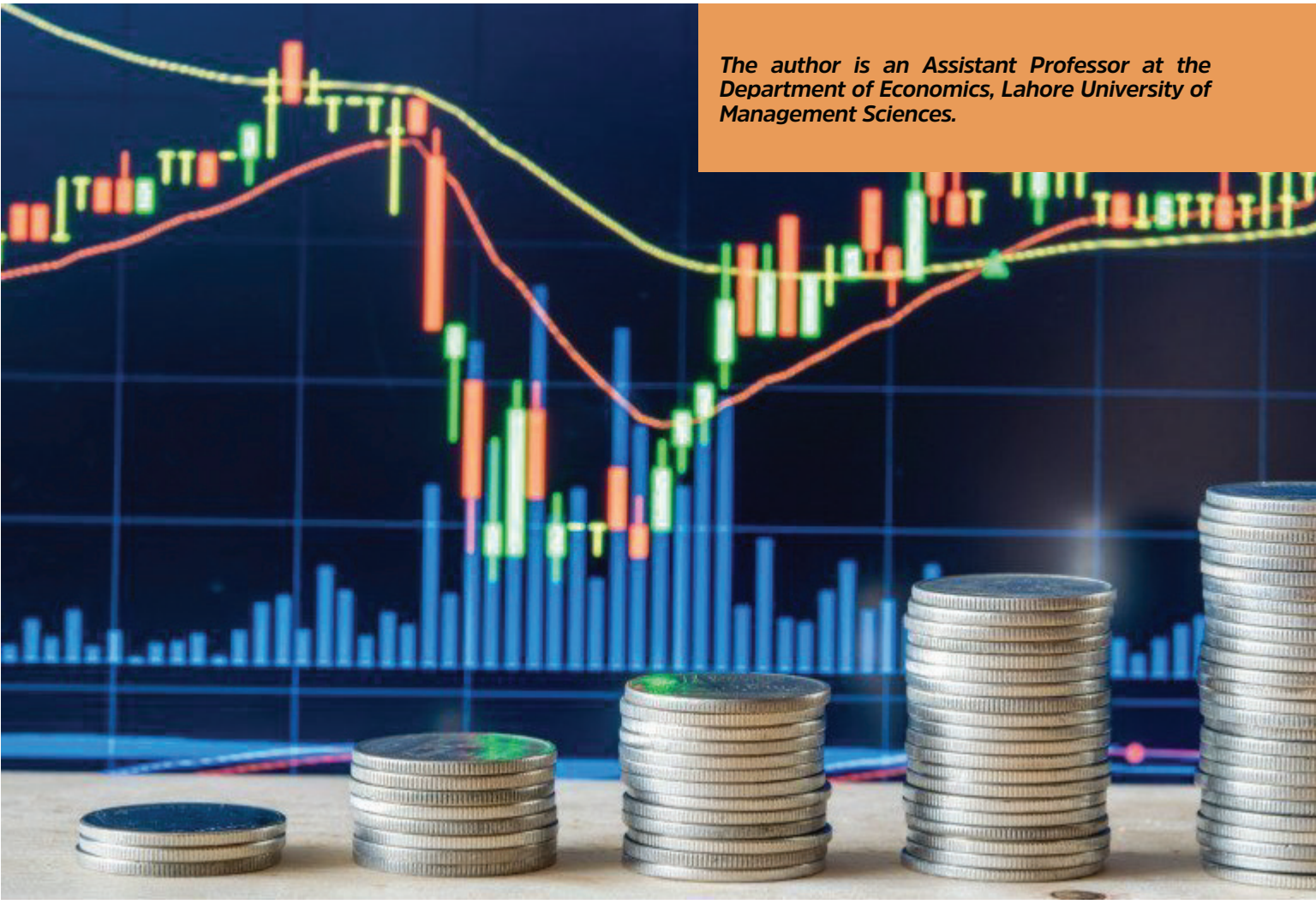
connect heterodox economists in Pakistan to global heterodox economics communities, and develop and propagate a heterodox understanding of the Pakistani political economy.

Another factor that is likely to help a broader range of economic ideas to thrive in Pakistan is for heterodox economists to consider other social scientists including historians, sociologists and political scientists to be members of their scientific community since their work also highlights the socio-political and historically contingent character of capitalist economies. For instance, one key indicator of how serious an economic department is about teaching economics broadly and deeply, is its ability and willingness to teach Marx, and to a lesser degree, the ability and willingness to teach Keynes and Veblen. In this sense, history and sociology departments are likely to do a better job of teaching ideas which matter for heterodox economic research more broadly and deeply than economics departments themselves. Therefore, social scientists generally should be welcomed into the community of Pakistani heterodox economists. The outlining of a research program to allow for that should not be too difficult. The Society for the Advancement of Socio-economics (SASE) would be a good example to follow.

## THE IDEOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF ECONOMICS

Economics is not a broad church, though it should be. Economics, a conservative profession, is tailor made for a conservative society like Pakistan. The ideological character of economics, lending legitimacy to the existing capitalist system and functioning as a means of deception was in Pakistan's case perhaps most nakedly and recently revealed in the much-hyped national security policy (Khan 2022b) and then the call for an economic security council (Khan 2022a). It would not entirely be wrong to compare economic orthodoxy with the Ruet e Hilal Committee: a priest-like group trying to keep the world covered in a veil of mystery in order to legitimise, control and maintain the world as it exists with all its injustices and problems. There is a lot of talk about crises, but very little about capitalism. That is because talking about capitalism would reach to the heart of the matter, and in so doing economic orthodoxy would undermine its role as the guardian of the ideological cornerstones which help sustain the system. So let this be a call to action and invitation for conversation and cooperation to all fellow proponents of economic heterodoxy. We are scattered on the intellectual battlefield, isolated and vulnerable when what we need to do is to stick together. Now is as good a time as ever to start.

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