
Abstract:
This paper, which is conceptually located at the intersection of trade–economics, resource politics, and environmental assessment, is a narrative-analytic review of Chinese economic expansionism in Africa especially its quest for the continent’s natural resources in the past 10 years. We seek to examine the environmental, ecological, and sociopolitical impacts of the current China–Africa engagement within the context of the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis. The EKC hypothesis posits that an inverted U-shape relationship exists between economic growth and environmental quality. This implies that the quality of a country’s environment will initially decrease due to its economic growth, but will soon start to improve when the country attains a certain threshold level of economic development/income per capita. We argue that by virtue of its ‘omission’ and/or ‘commission’ factors, the EKC hypothesis can be misleading if not dangerous. Using the case study of China’s engagement with Cameroon in the forest sector, the paper illustrates the high threshold level of economic development/income per capita that is required before the quality of the country’s environment can begin to improve. The paper ends with the environmental, ecological, and sociopolitical impacts of Chinese involvement in the Cameroonian forest sector and concludes that this engagement and the larger Chinese economic expansionism in Africa under current trading conditions is fairly detrimental to the welfare of African peoples and their environment.

Keywords: China; Africa; Economic expansionism; Cameroon; Forest resources; Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC)