

Research Article

Constructivist Approach Analysis on the Boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic

Kurnia Rafif Shanika¹

Department of International Relations
UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur
shanikarafif@gmail.com

Muhammad Indrawan Jatmika²

Department of International Relations
UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur
m.indrawan.hi@upnjatim.ac.id

Abstract

The 2022 Winter Olympics Beijing have drawn a lot of attention since a number of important nations have put a diplomatic boycott on the event. The United States, Britain, and Canada were among the nations that enacted a diplomatic embargo. Using a constructivism theory approach, this research will attempt to give an analytical study of the occurrence of this boycott. Instead of adopting traditional approaches like liberalism and realism, the author believes that this approach offers a fresh viewpoint on this phenomenon. From a constructivist perspective, the nation that imposed a diplomatic boycott on the Beijing 2022 Olympics was regarded as having constructive elements that encourage such behavior. Every nation has its own factors that will shift the way that nations make decisions. The main argument of this paper is that there are three main factors that construct the boycott behavior of these countries. The first is the construction of friend vs foe between the boycotting countries and China as the host country. Boycott countries that share ideological similarities construct a point of view that China is an enemy to them because of their differences. The second argument is the existence of China's construction as a country that perpetrates human rights violations. This prompted the boycotting countries to protest with the boycott. The third argument is the

existence of bilateral problems between countries. Some countries, such as Canada, have bilateral problems with China, which then encourage the construction of boycott behavior that occurs.

Keywords: 2022 Winter Olympics, Boycott, Constructivism, China, the United States, Canada, Britain

I. Introduction

The Olympics, one of the largest sports occasions in the world, are held about every four years. The following two schedules are set apart from the Olympics based on the desired season: the Summer Olympic Games (held in the summer) and the Winter Olympic Games. Greece's Athens hosted the first modern Olympic Games (also known as The Olympics) in 1896. Following the seventh Olympic Games in 1920, the first Olympic Winter Games were held in Chamonix, France, in 1924 where 292 athletes came from the 16 participating countries (Grasso, 2015). The Olympics then periodically evolved into a prominent event for all nations and were alternatively staged in different places throughout the globe.

The execution of the 2022 Winter Olympics may inspire euphoria among the global community, but it is also accompanied by a few contentious events that have garnered global attention, such as the diplomatic boycott by several nations. China would have the chance to host the Olympic Winter Games in 2022, with Beijing serving as the location. A few nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, have imposed a diplomatic boycott of the major competition due to China's role as the host of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games. All those nations sent athletes in this

¹ The author is an undergraduate student at the UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur.

² The author is an Assistant Professor at the UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur.

instance, but no ministers or officials were present (BBC, 2021)

Reporting from several international media such as CNN (2021), CNBC (2021), and BBC, the diplomatic boycott was carried out because of the issue of human rights violations related to the genocide that occurred to the Uighur Muslim ethnic minority in Xinjiang, China. The boycott countries condemned the violation of human rights which led to not sending their representatives to the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games. In this article, the author uses the constructivism theory of international relations to investigate the phenomenon of this diplomatic boycott. The author will use this approach to try to address the issue of why there was a diplomatic boycott of the Olympic event and why do specific countries participate in boycotts?

The purpose of this article is to explain the main causes of the boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic from the constructivist perspective. This perspective is important because it provides a comprehensive analysis than other approaches such as realism and neoliberalism. This article argues that from a constructivism perspective there are at least three social constructions behind the Beijing 2022 Olympic boycott. The first is the construction of Friends vs. Enemy, then the construction of China as a human rights violator, and the background of the bilateral conflict of the countries involved.

II. Theoretical Framework: Constructivist Approach on the Boycott of Beijing Winter Olympic 2022

An analysis of the diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing will be done using constructivism theory. The growth of the study of international relations has given rise to numerous methodologies, theories, and perspectives. Mainstream theories or

approaches, such as realism, liberalism, neorealism, neoliberalism, and other similar concepts, dominate the theories that are now available in the study of IR. With the occurrence of numerous significant global phenomena, such as the start of World War II and the abrupt end of the Cold War, the mainstream approach has often failed. Reflectivists, particularly constructivism scholars, appears to be a critique of the mainstream approach. Reflectivists try to provide an alternative approach to a case so that the analysis of international relations does not only focus on the old realist and liberalism approaches which sometimes fail to explain in depth the causes behind an international relations event.

When compared to liberalism or realism, constructivism theory or methodology is still relatively fresh. The viewpoint and emphasis provided are obviously different. Contrary to the mainstream, which tends to be materialist, the constructivist approach places greater attention on social components that were previously discounted and is more non-materialist in its emphasis (Bakry, 2017). This means, there are other variables outside the state or actors that can affect the international community, such as cultural background, ethnicity, language, and thought. Constructivists also have a causality style which emphasizes that an event must occur because of a clear cause. Causality is also an adaptation of the previous perspective, namely positivism which pays attention to the reasons why an event occurs. Constructivists are then criticized and then put more emphasis on the reasons why an event occurs which means it is more objective, rather than the reason an event occurs which of course is more subjective. With that variable, IR scholars are very enthusiastic because the new variables or other variables outside the state or actors can be used as an interrogation of the tendency in

IR studies to objectify the ideas, thoughts, and interests of the subject for development in research (Hadiwinata, 2017). As we know, constructivism came after the English School and the linguistic turn. These two occurrences also provide a style in constructivism which both provide the nuances or a middle ground approach in IR studies.

Famous experts and thinkers of constructivism also continue to emerge such as Friedrich Kratochwil, Nicholas Onuf, Alexander Wendt, and other experts. From these experts developed new ideas that can provide explanations of several phenomena that cannot be resolved by liberalism or realism theories. The focus on the state or actor is further expanded by considering what influences it. Actors in doing something can be influenced by the ideas (notations) they have, then interest (interest), and how the interpretation is done (Adler, 1997). In the construction of a phenomena, what actors or other entities go through in international relations is considered. This is because the process of socialization and cultural influences are used as a strategy in constructivism (Hadiwinata, 2017). With this constructivist methodology, the boycott of the Olympic Winter Games in Beijing in 2022 might be regarded from a different angle, let alone as having a social component.

III. Discussion: Three Factors Driving the Boycott Seen from the Constructivism Approach

Undoubtedly, the world community will pay great attention to how a sporting event as important as the Olympics is conducted. In addition, the Olympics are only frequently held every four years. The Olympic Winter Games in Beijing in 2022 will follow a similar pattern. However, numerous countries, including the United States, the United

Kingdom, and Canada, announced a diplomatic boycott against the competition's organizers toward the end of 2021, more specifically in December. We will try to look at this topic from a variety of angles using constructivism to examine how these nations conduct diplomatic boycotts.

We contend that the constructivist approach's analysis reveals three reasons for the diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Like the theoretical framework above, the influence of these is more based on social factors rather than only competition, as is the case with realism, or collaboration, as is the case with liberalism. In this post, we try to talk about three things that are relevant to the boycott. The creation of a friend vs. enemy classification is the first factor. In terms of philosophy and sociopolitical factors, China undoubtedly has unique traits. The ideological and socio-political backgrounds of the boycotting countries have some similarities so that the construction of a friend group is created, while China as the organizer of the Olympic has a different ideology and socio-political background, so that the construction of enemies in international relations is created.

The second cause is the alleged abuse of human rights by the nations that boycott China, particularly in the case of the Muslim Uyghur minority population in Xinjiang. These societal elements are said to have the power to shape how the global community behaves, particularly in boycotting nations that vigorously support liberalism and passionately support human rights. As a result, these nations have chosen to boycott the Beijing Olympics as a statement of attitude.

The presence of specific bilateral disputes between the nations that are boycotting is the third element. One of the example of this issue is illustrated by the case of Canada, where Canada and China have a legal dispute.

Perhaps authors are assuming that Canada is simply engaging in the boycott due to its philosophy rather than any socio-political factors, but this is not the case. This phenomenon led to the creation of the classification of "enemy" by Canada against China.

a. Friends' vs Enemy Perspective

A constructivist method depends on or advances the standards or principles chosen to guide the investigation. The construction of living together in international sphere is a learning process that can construct friends and foes through identity, interests, values, and intention (Kratochwil, 1989). According that statement, sharing similar values with others might inspire others to act in a similar way. This also holds true for nations and other international players. If two nations have the same ideologies or social political principles, they might act in the same way. In the issue of the boycott of the Beijing Olympics, there are two major ideologies that appear, namely between liberals and communist socialists.

Examining the states who boycotted the Beijing Olympics diplomatically, liberal-leaning nations are more prevalent. China is a communist socialist country that has a troubled history with liberal nations, especially America. The United States and other countries including the United Kingdom and Canada were among the first to announce a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics (BBC, 2021). These facts support Alexander Wendt's constructivism theory about the origins of rivalry and friendship. At least three primary characteristics or variables (master variables) are possible in this structure: dependency, shared destiny, and the same identity (homogeny) (Wendt, 1999). From these factors, it can be inferred that the nations that took part in the Beijing Olympics

boycott have their own ties, share liberal ideologies, and exhibit cooperation that results in interdependence, as evidenced by NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Area), in which the United States and Canada are both parties. Secondly, given America's current status as a superpower, it could influence other nations, particularly those who adhere to liberal social and political ideologies. Because other liberal nations feel they are on the same team as the big powers, they are indirectly encouraged by America's influence to support and participate in American policies. From this reality, the formation of allies or coalitions in this matter starts to emerge. Furthermore, according to some, there is also a connection between China and the United States, like in COP26. One of the factors cited by Alexander Wendt above that can lead to America and China being created as allies is that the two countries are interdependent on one another. Although there is collaboration between America and China, in practice it frequently causes conflict between the two. From these preferences, western nations, who also abstained from the Beijing Olympics, are being constructed as friends, and that China is being constructed as an adversary.

b. China's Human Right Issues

Liberal ideological and sociopolitical nations place a high value on humanitarian issues. Because it relates to human rights, liberals value humanity as a valuable quality. Every person has the right to be themselves and grow as they see fit. Liberals as we know them also have a favorable opinion of human nature and reason. Liberals believe that humans have the capacity to apply rational ideas, but they also acknowledge that people have the capacity to act selfishly. However, by using the rationality principle, people can cooperate and be open to working together to achieve their individual goals. Thus, liberals

categorically reject conflict, unfair competition, and even the need to undermine one another.

The background of the Beijing 2022 Olympics boycott is the instances of human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government. The fundamental issue in this case is the genocide (genocide) committed against the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang. The term "genocide" itself refers to the mass murder of an ethnic or racial group (Jones, 2016). It goes without saying that the presence of genocide and these crimes deeply incensed liberals. America and other liberal nations denounced China's conduct. In addition, there are values from societies that defend human rights and have liberal ideology and social politics.

The conflict between China and the Uighur Muslim minority group is not a recent issue. For instance, the 1997 Uighur conflict, which is alleged to have claimed the lives of nine people and injured close to 200 others. The conflict, however, is not regarded as a humanitarian crisis because China maintains that the separatist movement is to blame (Hyer, 2006). Naturally, seeing the subject of human rights in that light prompts liberal-minded nations to act. The existence of these humanitarian issues worries liberals a lot. This occurrence is thought to have undermined human dignity and to have violated the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Bakry, 2017). This is so because liberal ideals have been supported as they have evolved (Hadiwinata, 2017). The Beijing Olympics was to be boycotted since they were being hosted in China, the country where the conflict took place, and there was support for the human rights principle.

c. Bilateral Conflict

The bilateral connection between the two nations, in this case Canada and China, is the final element in our study. At first look, Canada's decision to boycott the Olympics in Beijing seems somewhat strange. The reason is because it does not appear like Canada has a specific justification for abstaining from the Olympics in Beijing other than its liberal sociopolitical background and potentially the issue of crimes against humanity committed in China. Canada appears to grasp the liberal ideology of the United States and to follow its decisions as a superpower.

The involvement of Canada in the diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics was announced after several other countries gave official statements. Indeed, the main reason for the boycott of the Beijing Olympics is related to human rights violations. However, it turns out that there are bilateral problems between China and Canada which are the reason for this decision. Reporting from CNBC on December 9, there was a conflict between Canada and China over the detention of the CFO (Chief Financial Officer) of the Huawei company and the arrest of two Canadian civilians. From this case, Canada's involvement is not only due to criticism of human rights violations, but there are other aspects of interest that motivate such involvement. This is in accordance with the assumptions of constructivist experts, where strategic culture refers to the world system related to which friends and foes are constructed by the government (Bakry, 2017). The government has the authority to build something within its borders. This is related to the earlier discussion of the concepts of friend and rival. As a result of ongoing bilateral disputes, the Canadian government has created rivals, in this case China, which ultimately served as one of the driving forces behind the decision to boycott the Beijing Olympics in 2022. There are

connections between nations, and the bilateral relationship with China cannot be disregarded because it influences how decisions are made.

The bilateral aspect that helped construct Canada's involvement in boycotting the Beijing Olympics was formed because of the inter-subjective interaction between Canada and China. In constructivism, this inter-subjective is important because it is used as the basis of the ontology (Hadiwinata, 2017). From here also later an issue can be studied through different perspectives because of other aspects or variables that construct a phenomenon. Reflectivists also believe that things do not just happen without a clear cause and reason. Like the relationship between Canada and China that gave rise to a conflict. This conflict for constructivists also underlies the decision to involve Canada in the boycott of the Beijing Olympics.

IV. Conclusion

Constructivism is one of the most relevant reflectivist theories to be applied in this increasingly complex era. The perspective provided by Constructivist theory provides a new picture regarding how to examine an issue in the study of International Relations. Things that may be difficult or even unexplained by mainstream theories such as Liberal and Realists can be answered by constructivist theories that provide a new perspective in assessing a problem. As with the above phenomenon related to the boycott of the Beijing Olympics carried out by several countries, it may be difficult if viewed from a liberal or realist perspective. This is because there is a separate impulse from the values held and there are special problems experienced by the organizers with the boycotting countries. Consideration of the impact of the norms and values adopted is an important matter that needs to be studied so

that the decision to boycott the Beijing Olympics becomes clear.

The diplomatic boycott of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games by several countries will certainly have a detrimental effect on the implementation of the competition. Moreover, those involved in the boycott are big countries like America. Of course, in addition to being detrimental to the organizers, the boycott carried out will have an impact on the sporting event itself. After analyzing it, it turns out that behind the boycott of the Beijing Olympics, there are several other factors that influence besides the criticism of human rights. The existence of the construction of rivals and friends, the principles adopted, and even bilateral relations between countries also influence the decision making of each country in carrying out a boycott.

From these aspects, it can be understood that in the international world, a phenomenon does not only focus on states or actors. Non-materialist factors that affect and are experienced by actors also have an impression on the construction of a phenomenon. Norms and values also have an important role in the international world that can determine the attitude or decision making of a country. The norms and values adopted can be a reason and cause for a country to take an action like what the countries boycotting the Beijing Olympics did. Moreover, with the development of science and technology that is increasingly rapidly, making the influencing variables also transform. So, aspects or non-material variables must be paid more attention to given the development of an increasingly complex world.

Works Cited

Adler, E., 1997. *Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.*

- European Journal of International Relations*, pp. 316-363.
- Bakry, U. S., 2017. *Dasar-Dasar Hubungan Internasional*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group.
- BBC, 2021. *UK and Canada join diplomatic boycott of China Winter Olympics*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-59582137>
- Grasso, J. M. B. & H. J., 2015. *Historical Dictionary of the Olympic Movement*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hadiwinata, B. S., 2017. *Studi dan Teori Hubungan Internasional: Arus Utama, Alternatif, dan Reflektivitas*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia..
- Hyer, E., 2006. China's policy towards Uighur nationalism. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, pp. 75-86.
- Jones, A., 2016. *Genocide: A comprehensive introduction*. s.l.:Routledge.
- Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2013. *Academic Collaboration between Thai and Foreign Institutions 2009-2010*, s.l.: Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy.
- Schultz, T. W., 1979. Investment in Human Capital. In: *In Power and Ideology in Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 313-324.
- Teixeira, L., 2017. China's Middle Class Anger at Its Education System Is Growing. *Foreign Policy*.
- The World Bank, 1993b. *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy (Summary)*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Welch, A. R. a. Z. Z., 2008. Higher Education and Global Talent Flows: Brain Drain, Overseas Chinese Intellectuals, and Diasporic Knowledge Networks. *Higher Education Policy*, pp. 519-537.
- Wendt, A., 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.