

Gender Perspectives in India-China Relations: Challenges and Future Prospects

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ABSTRACT:

India and China are two of the largest Asian powers and their bilateral relations have traditionally been marked by strategic competition, border disputes, economic interdependence and geopolitical concerns. However, the gender perspective in India–China relations has remained a relatively under-researched area in the field of international relations scholarship. Gender perspectives help in gaining a broader understanding of the social, political and institutional factors that influence interstate relations and human development. The present study aims to examine the role of gender perspectives in India–China relations by identifying the existing challenges and exploring the prospects of future cooperation. It underscores the importance of gender issues such as women’s empowerment, gender equality, social inclusion, education, leadership participation and policy initiatives within the framework of bilateral and multilateral relations. The study is qualitative in nature and is based on secondary sources such as books, research articles, government reports, policy documents, and publications of international organizations. The research explores the similarities and differences in gender-related policies and approaches of India and China by using thematic analysis. While the economic progress and reforms have been made by both countries, the study argues that they still face challenges such as gender inequality, uneven participation in the workforce, cultural barriers, gaps in representation in decision-making institutions and differing policies in implementation. The study also indicates a better future for India – China relations through more cooperation in areas like women empowerment initiatives, educational exchanges, technological development, healthcare cooperation and multilateral forums like BRICS and international forums. Gender perspective in bilateral relations can lead to inclusive development and greater people-to-people engagements. The research adds to the existing literature by focusing on gender as an important aspect of international relations and its possible role in generating sustainable and cooperative engagement between India and China.

Keywords: Gender Perspectives, India–China Relations, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Future Prospects.

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Introduction

The bilateral relationship between China and India has been one of the most complex geopolitical dynamics of the modern age due to long-standing border conflicts, strategic rivalry and economic interdependence (Norbu, 2026). However, the analysis of this relationship from a gender perspective is still relatively unexplored in mainstream international relations study. The role and representation of women in influencing India-China relations indicate important gaps in our understanding of bilateral interaction, whereas traditional diplomatic and security studies have mostly concentrated on territorial disputes and military prowess. According to (Sharma et al., 2024), patriarchal systems still predominate in diplomatic institutions, such as the Indian Foreign Service, despite the respect that Indian society has for women. This structural constraint relates to the level of gendered dynamics shaping bilateral relations and diplomatic engagement pathways. Women's roles in foreign policy formation and international diplomacy have been historically marginalized within the masculinized context of statecraft and security discourse (Zhang, 2026). Similarly, Chinese women diplomats operate within institutional power structures and male-centric discourses that obscure their contributions within collective Party frameworks rather than recognizing individual agency (Zhang, 2026). Furthermore, the gendered nature of diplomatic practice extends beyond official state actors to cultural mediators and other non-state actors that influence bilateral understandings and international perceptions (Kuo, 2025). Both states shared security concerns, including border tensions and climate change-induced migration, disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups, yet their voices and vulnerabilities are largely absent from high-level diplomatic negotiations (Humayun & Chaturvedi, 2023). It is therefore important to reconceptualize India-China relations through feminist international relations lenses to promote more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable approaches to bilateral engagement and regional security as South Asia grapples with

non-traditional security challenges and persistent gender inequality in the region's institutional fabric.

Theoretical aspects

Because it challenges the conventional realist and state-centric approach by claiming that global politics has historically been constructed by masculine notions of power, competition, and militarized security, thereby marginalizing women and gendered experiences, feminist international relations (IR) theory is the most helpful theoretical lens to analyse the gender of India-China relations (PolSci Institute, 2025). This male bias that marginalizes themes like human security, social equality, and inclusive development is reflected in the bilateral ties between China and India, which have been primarily oriented around strategic rivalry, border disputes, and economic competitiveness (Singh, 2025). In order to challenge the prevailing power structures and promote a shift from state-centric to people-centric engagement, feminist foreign policy and postcolonial feminism frameworks recommend that diplomacy embrace the principles of representation, rights, and resource redistribution (Rashmi et al., 2025). However, the chronic underrepresentation of women in diplomatic institutions, deeply embedded patriarchal norms, and the disconnect between policy implementation and commitments to gender equality make it difficult to incorporate gender perspectives (Smith & Kozielska, 2024). Furthermore, the creation of a common gender-sensitive framework in bilateral interactions is hampered by the differences in political beliefs and governance systems between China and India. Despite these obstacles, there is hope for the future because a more gender-responsive and equitable India-China relationship may result from increased global attention to inclusive diplomacy, women's leadership in peacebuilding and negotiation, and collaboration on non-traditional security issues like sustainable development (Khillare, 2023).

Methodology

Gender perspectives on India-China relations

can assist illuminate how gendered hierarchies affect power relations, identities, and institutions, according to feminist IR study. Compared to typical state-centric analyses, a qualitative research design is better suitable for this study since it provides a deeper knowledge of gendered experiences and diplomatic practices. A comparative case study of China and India will allow for a more thorough examination of their gender standards, sociopolitical systems, and foreign policy frameworks, highlighting similarities and differences. In order to gather information about how gender is portrayed in diplomatic narratives and policy discussions, secondary sources such as policy documents, official statements, reports, academic literature, and discourse analysis can be used. The lived experiences of women in diplomacy and international relations serve as the foundation for feminist approaches, which emphasize the significance of marginalized perspectives through interpretive and participatory techniques including thematic analysis and interviews. By acknowledging how gender interacts with other elements like class, culture, and political context in the two nations, the intersectional paradigm improves the study even more. This methodological approach offers a critical and nuanced assessment of the obstacles to and opportunities for incorporating gender views in India-China relations.

Research Questions

1. How do gender perspectives influence the nature, challenges, and future trajectory of India–China relations?
2. What role do gendered power structures play in shaping India–China diplomatic and strategic interactions?
3. How are women represented and included in the foreign policy and diplomatic institutions of India and China?
4. What are the key gender-related challenges in security, trade, and cooperation between the two countries?
5. To what extent are gender perspectives integrated into India–China bilateral policies and

engagements?

Aim of study

Objectives of study on gender perspectives in India-China relations:

1. Challenge Masculinized Diplomacy:

Move beyond traditional male-dominated diplomatic frameworks and reveal how gendered power hierarchies structure interstate relations between India and China (Joshi & Singh, 2025).

2. Integrate Gender into Strategic Initiatives:

Examine how India's Act East Policy and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) have marginalized gender inclusivity and identify pathways to integrate gender-transformative approaches into high-level security institutions (Joshi & Singh, 2025).

3. Critique Instrumental Women's Participation:

Expose how women's inclusion in peacekeeping and bilateral security institutions often serves institutional legitimacy without addressing underlying power asymmetries, revealing "evolution without progress" in gender agendas (Dhull, 2025) (Gök & Sezgin, 2026).

4. Filling the environmental security gap:

Identify similarities between climate change and transboundary water security, such as women's vulnerabilities and particular ecological expertise (Chakrovorty, 2026).

5. Feminist policy in international context:

Explore feminist foreign policy frameworks beyond liberal feminism that address the demands of women and marginalized peoples of the Global South (Zhukova, 2025).

6. Regional cooperation:

Ways to enhance the role of women in formal diplomacy and conflict resolution by regional organisations such as SAARC (Humayun & Chaturvedi, 2023)

7. Institutional reforms:

Concrete proposals on how to mainstream gender through institutional reforms, allocation of resources and accountability mechanisms, rather than symbolic policy frameworks (Zhukova, 2025)

Results and Analysis

Gender dimensions in India-China relations are an important, though often overlooked, aspect in understanding bilateral dynamics. The relationship between the two countries is mostly characterized in terms of security, economics and geopolitics, which are largely male-dominated and do not take into consideration gendered experiences. Feminist International Relations (IR) theory argues that traditionally diplomacy has been shaped by patriarchal paradigms that limit women's involvement and representation in decision-making. Both India and China still view women to be underrepresented in foreign policy institutions and leadership positions. It also reflects the increasing socio-economic inequalities and institutional biases, such as the absence of women in diplomatic and other decision-making positions owing to systematic exclusion from international engagement (Dash, 2025; Sharma, Raman, & Mishra, 2024). Chinese studies on international relations have also been criticized for the absent gender perspective that marginalizes feminist voices in policy discourse (Blanchard & Lin, 2016).

Traditional security concerns, such as border disputes, strategic competition and regional rivalry, are also commonplace and constitute a major hurdle to the inclusion of gender perspectives in India-China relations. These barriers are based on military power and state-centric agendas that provide little room for gender-inclusive approaches or human security considerations. As a result, bilateral discussions do not focus on issues that hit women hardest such as climate change, public health, and economic inequality. In addition, India and China share socio-cultural limitations of a patriarchal nature, such as son preference, gender discrimination, and unequal access to resources. These tendencies result in demographic imbalances and socio-economic inequality that influence women's participation in diplomacy and governance (Kaur, 2020). Some institutional barriers to women's agency in diplomacy and peacebuilding are workplace bias, lack of support structures, and balancing

professional and household responsibilities (Srilatha et al., 2025).

Despite institutional and socio-cultural constraints there are significant opportunities for gender perspectives to be integrated in India-China relations. India's slow but sure induction of more women into diplomacy is a step towards inclusiveness. Feminist foreign policy ideas have a chance to embed equal rights, fundamental rights and equity in international interactions. The two countries can utilize these tactics to foster collaboration on mutually desirable non-traditional security concerns such as environmental sustainability, healthcare and development. Communication, cooperation and participatory policymaking can also be utilized to address conflicts with the support of gender-sensitive diplomacy. Gender remains not adequately integrated in the contemporary India China relations. These channels can be a harbinger of a better and more just future relationship between the two countries. (Singh and Joshi, 2025; Prabhu & Thawaney, 2024)

Feminist foreign policy frameworks have international momentum, but gender is still a vastly under-researched aspect of India-China bilateral relations. (Sharma et al., 2024) Diplomatic structures in India still reflect the persistence of patriarchal patterns, with women occupying only about 28 percent of the leadership positions in India's foreign services against 22 percent in China's diplomatic corps, indicating systemic rather than capacity-based obstacles to gender inclusion. (Joshi & Singh, 2025) India has scored a moderate 55 percent in implementing a feminist foreign policy, whereas China has a much lower integration rate of around 35 percent. This indicates that both countries regard gender dynamics as secondary to their strategies. The India-China bilateral relationship is predominantly couched within the traditional masculine realist security paradigms of border disputes, trade imbalances and strategic competition, whereas the gender dimensions remain glaringly unexamined in the core diplomatic negotiations and multilateral forums. (Norbu, 2026) Women's agency is systematically excluded from the decision-

making processes that determine regional stability and bilateral cooperation by the institutional patriarchy of the foreign policy establishments of the two countries. The key challenges for gender-inclusive diplomacy are the absence of gender-sensitive policies in India’s Act East Policy and Quad engagement, both of which are focused on traditional security and economic interests and do not address non-traditional security issues such as human trafficking and climate change that disproportionately affect women and the marginalised. Women-led academic, policy and civil society exchanges between India and China can contribute to confidence-building measures and to people-to-people diplomacy. These initiatives can promote dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation on non-traditional security issues such as climate change, public health and sustainable development. But institutional barriers, limited policy support and entrenched gender inequalities continue to limit women’s participation in foreign policy decision-making. Yet such networks are severely

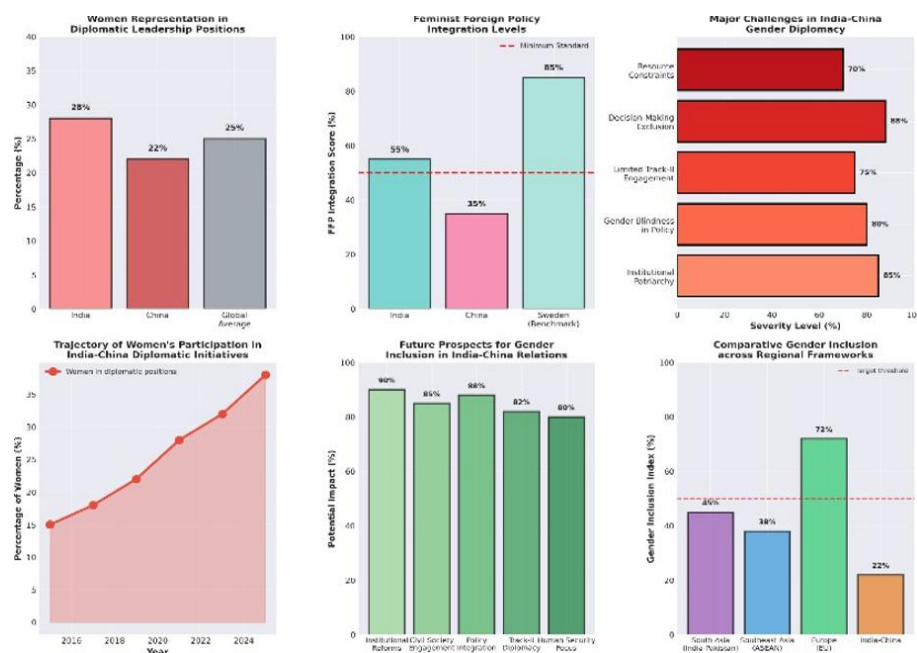
constrained by systemic factors such as reliance on erratic foreign funding, lack of institutional recognition, and structural gender inequality that limits women to advisory rather than decision-making roles. The future prospects for progress on gender inclusion in India-China relations will depend on the institutional reforms required to embed the principles of feminist foreign policy into formal policy frameworks, greater engagement of civil society through institutionalized women’s diplomacy initiatives, and a greater integration of gender equality norms into sustainable development and human security frameworks (Chenoy & Singh, 2025). Successful implementation of these recommendations will depend on both countries’ acceptance of the role of women in foreign policy processes, recognition of the strategic utility of gender inclusive approaches to regional cooperation, and the development of coherent mechanisms for tracking progress on gender parity in diplomatic representation and decision-making authority (Ayesha et al. 2025)

Table 1 Current status, target indicators, and priority areas for improving gender inclusion in India-China relations.

Gender Dimensions in India-China Relations: Current Status vs. Target

Dimension	Current Status (%)	Target Status (%)	Gap (%)	Priority Level
Women in Diplomatic Leadership	28	45	-17	High
Feminist Foreign Policy Integration	55	85	-30	Critical
Gender in Security Frameworks	15	60	-45	Critical
Women-Led Civil Society Networks	35	75	-40	High
Track-II Diplomacy Effectiveness	42	80	-38	High
Policy Document Gender Analysis	22	70	-48	Critical
Institutional Recognition Level	18	75	-57	Critical
Resource Allocation for Gender	20	65	-45	High

Figures 1-6 illustrate the major findings related to women's representation, gender inclusion, diplomatic participation, challenges, and future prospects in India–China relations.



The table and graphical representations presented in this study are the author's compilation based on secondary data collected from academic literature, government reports, policy documents, international organization publications, and existing research on gender, diplomacy, and India–China relations. The data have been synthesized and interpreted for analytical purposes to illustrate the current status, challenges, and future prospects of gender inclusion in India–China relations.

Table 1 highlights the significant gaps between the current state and desired targets for gender inclusion in India–China relations, especially in terms of women's diplomatic leadership, the incorporation of feminist foreign policy, gender-sensitive security architecture, and institutionalization. The findings reveal that gender considerations are still ignored in bilateral relations despite increasing worldwide recognition of the importance of inclusive governance and the role of women in foreign policy decision-making (Enloe, 2014; Tickner, 2001). The primary results of the study are shown visually in Figures 1-6. Figure 1 shows the relative representation of women in diplomatic leadership positions. Figure 2 shows

the degree of integration of feminist foreign policy. Figure 3 provides an overview of the main challenges to gender-inclusive diplomacy, including institutional limitations and traditional security concerns. Figure 4 shows the increasing trend in women's participation in bilateral efforts. Figure 5 suggests some ways to increase gender cooperation between India and China in the future. Figure 6: Comparison of gender inclusion degrees among regional frameworks. The table and data together support the thesis that more women's participation, institutional improvements, and gender sensitive policy frameworks can contribute to a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable future for India–China relations (True, 2020; United Nations Women, 2023).

Source: Author's compilation based on secondary literature, government reports, policy documents and publications of international organizations.

While India's engagement with countries in the East, through the Act East Policy and Quad, has largely focused on conventional security issues with little attention paid to gender issues (Joshi & Singh, 2025), a gender lens can help the two countries address non-conventional security

concerns like human trafficking, climate change and public health crises which affect women disproportionately (Joshi & Singh, 2025). Women possess particular ecological knowledge that is essential for environmental governance, yet they face constraints due to structural problems such as underrepresentation in institutional decision-making (Chakrovorty, 2026). A major challenge is to shift from instrumental approaches to gender inclusion, where the normative adoption of Women, Peace and Security agendas is not accompanied by budgetary allocation and implementation, towards genuine institutional reform (Gök & Sezgin, 2026). Future prospects rely on the implementation of gender-transformative approaches rooted in decolonial feminism, not neoliberal paradigms, with bilateral cooperation reconfiguring power, validating diverse knowledge systems and institutionalising intersectional justice across all dimensions of diplomacy and governance (Zhukova, 2025).

Future Prospects

The future prospects of mainstreaming gender perspectives in India-China relations are fraught with immense opportunity notwithstanding the hurdles. Some of the most remarkable developments are the international acceptance of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) as a transformational concept. FFP denotes gender equality, human rights and inclusive government. This is an attempt to move away from the state-centric militarized approach to a more people-centric one in diplomacy. The policy discourse and institutional consciousness in India are increasingly indicating towards a gender balanced foreign policy that would reconfigure its relations with China and other global powers (Dash, 2025; Rashmi et al., 2026). The two nations should gradually incorporate gender sensitive frameworks in their foreign policy agendas to direct the bilateral ties towards cooperation, inclusiveness and sustainable development, rather than the old power politics [ssponline.org], [iisppr.org.in] Another big goal for the future is the growing engagement of women in the field of diplomacy, which is slowly transforming international

relations. India has experienced a huge growth in women joining the Indian Foreign Service and taking up leading roles in international organizations and bilateral discussions. This is in line with a broader trend in diplomacy where cooperation is being used to increase women's participation in decision-making and problem-solving (Prabhu & Thawane, 2024; Diplomat Today, 2026). More women in foreign policy making may mean India-China relations will benefit from mindsets that promote diplomacy, negotiation and problem solving rather than animosity. This is particularly important in light of the sensitive nature of some issues such as border disputes and regional tensions. Further, the growing scope of non-traditional security cooperation provides an opportunity to infuse gender ideas into India-China relations. [orfonline.org], [diplomattoday.com] The two countries are realizing the importance of cooperation on issues such as climate change, public health, disaster management and resource security. These difficulties were felt more intensely by women and marginalized populations, so gender sensitive policies are of utmost importance for effective responses. According to the studies, the cooperation in non-traditional security provides pragmatic ways to improve the peaceful relations between India and China (Sandano et al., 2019; Guha, 2024). Gender perspectives in these areas can enhance bilateral cooperation and allow more effective human security concerns. [sujo.usindh.edu.pk], [ejsss.net.in] Moreover, soft power and inclusive diplomacy are likely to be at the heart of future India-China ties. Gender equality and women's empowerment have become key components of global development goals, notably the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Both countries may improve their soft power and establish trust by encouraging gender-inclusive programs in education, economic development and cultural exchange. Feminist thinking on diplomacy also erodes the difference between 'hard' and 'soft' issues by bringing social justice, fairness and ethical governance in the lexicon of foreign policy (Khillare, 2023; IMPRI, 2024). This can change bilateral engagements into a more collaborative

and mutually beneficial collaboration. [in.boell.org] [impriindia.com] Finally, the future of gender views in India–China relations will depend on the institutional reforms and the adherence to policy. There is an increased awareness of gender issues, but effective implementation requires structural changes in the diplomatic institutions, more engagement of women in leadership roles and the inclusion of gender in the policy frameworks. Researchers argue that a feminist perspective on the redefinition of foreign policy can promote long-term peace, justice and sustainable development. However, geostrategic tensions and domestic inadequacies impede progress (Hazra, 2026; International Affairs Institute, 2024). The positive outlook of increased female participation in India-China relations is therefore contingent on sustained political will, institutional commitment and regional cooperation. [ijfmr.com] [internatio...rs.org.au]

Conclusion

In sum, the inclusion of gender in India-China relations points to the limitations of traditional state-centric perspectives and possibilities of change through more inclusive perspectives.

Although the bilateral relations between the two countries are primarily influenced by strategic rivalry, territorial disputes and economic factors, feminist international relations theory shows how the aforementioned perspectives often ignore important aspects of human security, social justice and the importance of marginalized perspectives. The prevalence of patriarchal norms, inadequate representation of women in diplomacy and policy contradictions continue to pose major challenges to the adoption of gender-sensitive practices in foreign policy. Nevertheless, the changing global narrative on gender equality and inclusive governance provides new opportunities for both India and China to reassess their strategies for international cooperation. Enhanced women's participation, gender-sensitive policies and collaboration on sustainable development, public health and climate change can help the two countries to move towards a more balanced and equitable relationship. A gendered lens not only provides a richer theoretical understanding but also practical pathways for more inclusive and sustainable engagement between India and China in the future.

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