Patriotism and Policy-Making in China

29 APRIL 2026

Candela Manjon



Patriotism and Policy-Making in Contemporary China: Unity in a Fragmented World

In recent years, China has emerged as one of the most influential actors in global politics, particularly in the field of technology and innovation. At the same time, the international system has become increasingly fragmented, marked by strategic competition, especially between China and the United States. In this context, it can be argued that China's capacity to design and implement long-term policies is closely linked to a strong sense of national cohesion and patriotism. From my perspective as an interna-

tional student studying in China, this element is not only visible in political discourse, but also in everyday life. This paper contends that patriotism plays a significant role in supporting China's policy-making process, especially in its pursuit of technological self-reliance, although this dynamic also raises important questions.

National cohesion as a policy resource

One of the key features of the Chinese political system is its ability to mobilise society around shared national goals. Patriotism, in this sense, is not only an emotional attachment to the nation, but also a political resource. It is reinforced through education, media, and historical narratives that emphasise collective progress and national rejuvenation. This creates a context in which large-scale policies are more easily accepted by the population. Compared to more polarised societies, where public opinion can slow down or block policy implementation, China appears to benefit from a higher degree of social alignment. As a result, the government can pursue long-term strategies with a relatively high level of internal support.

Technological self-reliance in a competitive global context

This dynamic becomes particularly relevant in the field of foreign policy and, more specifically, in the technological competition with the United States. In recent years, China has placed increasing emphasis on achieving "technological self-reliance and self-strengthening" as a central national objective. This goal has gained urgency in response to external pressures, such as export controls and restrictions on advanced technologies. In this context, patriotism contributes to framing these challenges not simply as economic issues, but as part of a broader national effort to secure sovereignty and development.

A clear example of this can be found in China's latest Five-Year Plan, which prioritises innovation in key sectors such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and advanced manufacturing. These policies are not only state-driven, but also supported by what some analysts describe as a "whole-of-society" approach, where government, industry, and academia work together towards common objectives. In practice, this means that technological development is not perceived merely as an economic ambition, but as a shared national project. From what I have observed during my studies, many young Chinese students express a strong motivation to contribute to these goals, especially in fields related to science and technology.

Limitations and global implications

However, it would be simplistic to present this model as entirely unproblematic. While patriotism can facilitate policy implementation, it may also limit the space for critical debate. In any political system, diversity of perspectives can contribute to better decision-making, and an excessive

emphasis on unity might reduce this diversity. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that, regardless of these potential limitations, China continues to position itself as a country whose development model is increasingly observed and, in some cases, taken as a reference by other nations. In a context where many governments face internal divisions and difficulties in implementing long-term strategies, China's capacity for coordination and continuity appears, for some, as an alternative worth considering.

Conclusion

In conclusion, patriotism plays a complex but important role in China's foreign policy and policy-making processes. It contributes to social cohesion and facilitates the implementation of ambitious national strategies, particularly in the field of technological self-reliance. At the same time, it raises questions about flexibility, diversity of opinion, and international perception. Rather than judging this model in absolute terms, it may be more useful to understand it as an alternative approach to governance, one that offers both strengths and limitations in an increasingly divided world.

EPIS