



Collective Unconscious and the Hero Archetype: A Comparative Study of the Kyrgyz Epic of *Manas* and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*

Mohammad Kazem Shojaei^{1*} , Seyede Mohanna Seyed Aghaei Rezaei²

1. Corresponding Author, Department of Political Sciences, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran. Email: mkshojaee@ut.ac.ir
2. Department of Russian Language, Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran. Email: m.rezaie@umz.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article History:

Received 11 August 2026
Revised 05 September 2026
Accepted 02 October 2026
Published Online 02 October 2026

Keywords:

Archetype,
Collective Unconscious,
Hero,
Manas, *Shahnameh*.

ABSTRACT

For a long time, myths and epics have served as repositories of collective memory, safeguarding the beliefs, values, historical experiences, and cultural identities of human societies from one generation to the next. Although epic traditions reflect the distinctive features of particular civilizations, comparative studies show that geographically distant cultures can produce similar heroic narratives, symbolic structures, and mythological motifs. Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the collective unconscious provides a framework for understanding these recurring patterns. Jung argues that myths and epics express universal archetypes embedded in humanity's shared psychological inheritance. Therefore, heroic characters from different civilizations may perform similar symbolic roles even when they emerge in different historical and cultural contexts. Building on this theoretical foundation, the current study compares the Kyrgyz Epic of *Manas* with Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The main question of this research is how these two epic traditions represent the Hero archetype through similar narrative patterns while preserving their cultural differences. Using qualitative comparative textual analysis, this study examines shared archetypal motifs, including noble ancestry, prophetic dreams, miraculous birth, threatened childhood, heroic initiation, national unification, and the hero's death. Rather than proposing direct historical influence between the two traditions, the study argues that these parallels can be understood as expressions of universal heroic archetypes.

Cite this article: Shojaei, M. K., & Seyed Aghaei Rezaei, M. (2026). Collective Unconscious and the Hero Archetype: A Comparative Study of the Kyrgyz Epic of *Manas* and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. *Journal of Iran and Regional Studies*, 9 (1), 101-114. <http://doi.org/10.22059/jices.2026.420536.1120>



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Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jices.2026.420536.1120>

Introduction

Myths have long played a crucial role in keeping a society's historical memory, cultural values, and shared identity alive. Long before written literature appeared, mythic stories and heroic epics were the main way communities made sense of how the world began, explained natural events, and communicated their moral and political ideals (Amuzgar, 2016; Campbell, 1949; Eliade, 1963). Accordingly, studying epic literature can offer important insight into the intellectual and cultural history of different civilizations .

At the same time, many similarities between neighboring mythological traditions can be traced to cultural contact, trade, migration, and political exchange (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). Yet comparative mythology has also uncovered striking parallels between societies that had little or no lasting historical connection. These similarities raise questions for explanations based only on diffusion, and they point instead to the possibility of deeper shared psychological patterns across cultures (Segal, 2015:32) .

One of the most influential ways to account for these resemblances comes from Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. Jung suggested that all human beings inherit universal archetypes—recurring patterns that show up again and again in myths, religions, dreams, and heroic stories, regardless of direct historical transmission (Jung, 1968:43). In this view, figures such as heroes, wise elders, mothers, and other familiar symbolic characters reflect common psychological structures rather than being purely local cultural creations (Frye, 1957:99-134.)

Among Central Asia's most impressive epic traditions is the Epic of *Manas*, the national epic of the Kyrgyz people. (Adle et al.2005:183) For centuries, this extraordinary oral tradition has carried Kyrgyz historical memory, cultural values, and collective identity. Since independence of Kyrgyzstan in 1991, *Manas* has also taken on a new role as a major emblem of nation-building and national identity (Marat, 2008; Omelicheva, 2015; Laruelle, 2015).

One particularly striking aspect of *Manas* is its close resemblance to Ferdowsi's 11th-century epic, the *Shahnameh*. Despite the lack of evidence suggesting sustained literary or historical contact between Kyrgyz and Persian traditions, the two epics share remarkably similar narrative frameworks, symbolic motifs, and heroic archetypes. *Anas/Shahnameh*. Rather than treating these parallels as proof that one culture borrowed from the other, this study uses Jung's archetypal approach to argue that the similarities arise from universal symbolic patterns rooted in the collective unconscious (Jung, 1968:43).

Accordingly, this article first explains Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, and then briefly outlines the historical background of the Kyrgyz people and the cultural importance of the Epic of *Manas*. It then moves to a comparative analysis of the two epics, concentrating on the 'Hero; archetype and related motifs, including noble lineage, prophetic dreams, miraculous birth, a threatened childhood, heroic growth, national leadership, and death. Through this comparison, the study shows that both epics express similar archetypal structures, even though they come from very different historical and cultural settings.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Previous studies have examined epic traditions as sources of cultural memory, identity formation, and social values. Research on the Epic of *Manas* has emphasized its role in

preserving Kyrgyz historical memory and national identity, while studies of the *Shahnameh* have highlighted its importance in representing Persian cultural and historical consciousness. However, limited attention has been given to a systematic comparison of these two epics through the perspective of Jung's Hero archetype. This study attempts to address this gap by examining shared heroic structures and cultural differences without assuming direct historical borrowing between the two traditions.

Methodology

This research adopts qualitative comparative textual analysis (QCTA) to examine the structural and thematic resonances between the "Epic of *Manas*" and Ferdowsi's "*Shahnameh*". Through a qualitative comparative textual method, the study studies the two epics in a structured manner, giving close attention to recurring themes, narrative configurations, symbolic patterns, archetypal characters, and the historical and cultural environments in which these works were formed (Rodríguez & Bastidas, 2012). Rather than approaching textual features as variables suited to statistical measurement, the method depends on careful reading, thematic side-by-side comparison, and interpretations informed by context, so that both parallels and divergences can be addressed (Schreier, 2012:23.)

The comparative work is organized into several linked analytical areas. This structure allows the study to detect recurring patterns across the texts, without losing sight of the particular features that distinguish each epic tradition. The overall approach is qualitative and methodical: relevant parts of the texts are first grouped into categories that are useful for analysis, and are then interpreted with reference to the research questions (Schreier, 2012, pp. 3–8, 59).

To begin with, the analysis concentrates on key themes such as heroism, loyalty, conflict, sacrifice, leadership, destiny, family, and the protection of the community. These thematic groupings provide a way to identify shared concerns and to compare how those concerns are framed in the two epics. Second, the study examines narrative organization—particularly how heroic figures are shaped through their encounters with adversaries and supernatural powers, the tests they face, the changes that occur to them, and their contributions to the restoration or preservation of social order. Categorizing the material in this way makes it possible to assess both the recurrence of specific narrative patterns and the different interpretations they take on in their respective cultural settings (Schreier, 2012, pp. 59–70).

Third, the analysis turns to symbolic elements and archetypal figures in order to clarify how comparable psychological and storytelling patterns are expressed in different cultural contexts. Here, archetypal figures are not understood solely as repeat characters in the literary sense; instead, they are treated as symbolic expressions of broader patterns of human experience, in line with the theoretical perspective associated with Jung (1968), Campbell (1949), and Frye (1957). As a result, the comparative procedure combines systematic classification of the texts with interpretive analysis, enabling the study to distinguish between structural features that recur and the culturally specific ways in which those features are realized.

The study further accounts for the historical and cultural circumstances under which the two epics developed. This aspect matters because textual similarities cannot be interpreted in isolation from the societies that created, transmitted, and preserved these epics. Accordingly,

the study does not treat structural or thematic correspondences as evidence on their own of direct literary influence or historical contact. Instead, similarities may be understood as signs of broader tendencies in human imagination, while differences are taken as indications of how universal themes are shaped through particular cultural experiences and historical conditions.

Through this framework, QCTA makes it possible to compare the two epics without compressing their complexity into purely numerical groupings. It also supports movement between detailed textual observations and broader cultural implications, allowing the analysis to bring out both shared narrative structures and interpretations that are specific to each culture. Consequently, the comparison is not intended merely to catalogue similarities between "*Manas*" and the "*Shahnameh*", but to show how closely related heroic motifs can take on distinct meanings within two different epic traditions.

Theoretical Framework: Jung's Theory of the Collective Unconscious

The concept of the unconscious was first developed in a systematic way by Sigmund Freud. He described it as a kind of storehouse for repressed memories, wishes, and experiences—contents that continue to shape human behaviour even though people are not consciously aware of them (Freud, 1900/2010; Rabštejnek, 2011). In Freud's approach, dreams are the main channel through which these hidden psychological elements become visible. As a result, human actions and cultural expressions cannot always be explained only by conscious intentions, because deeper psychological forces may still guide thoughts, emotions, and patterns of behaviour. The unconscious, then, offers a way to understand how experiences and desires that individuals do not directly recognize can still surface in symbolic forms.

Building on Freud's ideas, Carl Gustav Jung introduced a key distinction between the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious involves forgotten or repressed individual experiences. By contrast, the collective unconscious points to a universal and inherited layer of the human psyche that all people share, no matter their culture or historical context (Jung, 1936). Jung argues that the contents of the collective unconscious are not created through personal experience; instead, they are passed down as part of humanity's shared psychological inheritance (Jung, 1936). This difference is especially important for studying myths and epic narratives, because it moves focus away from individual authorship or historical transmission and toward deeper, recurring patterns in human imagination. In this way, cultural stories may carry psychological structures that have been repeated and reshaped across generations.

At the centre of the collective unconscious are archetypes—universal symbolic patterns that repeatedly appearing in myths, religions, dreams, and literary traditions. Figures such as the hero, the wise old man, the mother, the king, and the trickster recur across civilizations because they reflect core aspects of human experience rather than being the outcome of cultural influence or borrowing (Jung, 1968). For this reason, myths and epics can be understood as symbolic expressions of archetypes, which helps explain why societies separated by great distances often produce remarkably similar heroic narratives (Campbell, 1949; Frye, 1957; Segal, 2015). These parallels show up not only in how heroes are portrayed, but also in familiar story structures. Such patterns include conflicts between order and chaos, journeys and trials,

death followed by renewal, the defence of the community, and the return of social or moral order. By repeating these elements, epic narratives can act as cultural portrayals of fundamental human concerns, while still preserving meanings that are uniquely local.

This theoretical approach forms the analytical basis of the current study. Instead of viewing the similarities between the "Epic of *Manas*" and the "*Shahnameh*" as proof of direct literary influence, the article treats them as expressions of shared heroic archetypes rooted in the collective unconscious. In line with this, the recurring motifs identified across the comparative analysis are interpreted as manifestations of universal psychological structures that move beyond historical and cultural boundaries. The comparison therefore does not seek to establish a direct line of transmission between the two epic traditions. Rather, it examines how different cultural communities may give distinct narrative and symbolic forms to comparable psychological patterns. From this perspective, the differences between "*Manas*" and the "*Shahnameh*" are as significant as their similarities, because they demonstrate how universal archetypal structures can be reshaped according to particular historical experiences, cultural values, social institutions, and collective memories. The theoretical framework consequently provides a basis for understanding both the common heroic patterns and the culturally specific ways in which they are expressed in the two epic traditions.

The Epic of *Manas*

The *Epic of Manas* stands as the preeminent monument of Kyrgyz oral literature and serves as the primary repository of the nation's historical memory and cultural identity. Transmitted through oral tradition for nearly a millennium, the epic comprises approximately 500,000 lines of poetry, making it the longest epic in world literature *Manas*(Köçümkülkizi, 2005). It is more than just a literary masterpiece: *Manas* also preserves the collective experiences, values, beliefs, and hopes of the Kyrgyz people. In doing so, it served a nomadic society in a way similar to how written chronicles functioned in many settled civilizations (Reichl, 2000: 1-18).

The epic is built as a trilogy that tells the story of *Manas*, his son Semetek, and his grandson Seytek. Together, these accounts follow the continuity of Kyrgyz leadership across three generations, while safeguarding memories of migration, warfare, political alliances, and the ongoing effort to preserve a shared communal identity. For centuries—long before written literary traditions took hold—the performances of the *Manaschis* (traditional epic reciters) ensured that this cultural heritage was passed from one generation to the next (Bakchiev, 2021: 7).

Like many major epic traditions, *Manas* developed over centuries. Its earliest layers still carry strong mythological elements, portraying heroes with supernatural strength and setting them against extraordinary beings. Over time, though, historical memory became more and more closely tied to mythical storytelling. Accounts of tribal conflict, migrations, and political struggles gradually added to older mythic themes, resulting in a narrative that brings together lived historical experience and symbolic imagination (Radloff, 1990, p. 81).

Most scholars place the epic's earliest formation around the eighth century among the Yenisei Kyrgyz in southern Siberia. Since these communities did not have a writing system, the story was

preserved entirely through oral performance. This allowed each new generation of storytellers to reshape the narrative while still keeping its central themes intact (Reichl, 2000).

While mentions of *Manas* can be found in sixteenth-century historical chronicles, serious scholarly work did not begin until the nineteenth century. Chokan Valikhanov recorded parts of the epic in 1856, and shortly after, Wilhelm Radloff produced an influential transcription and German translation that brought *Manas* to the attention of international scholarship (Reichl, 2000:25). In the Soviet era, major efforts were made to document performances by leading *Manaschis*, leading to more than thirty-five surviving versions. (Oinas, 1973: 52) Among these, Sayakbay Karalaev's monumental performance is still the fullest oral rendering of the epic that has come down to us.

After Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991, *Manas* took on renewed political and cultural importance. It became a powerful symbol of national identity and a vital part of state-supported nation-building (Straube, 2007, p. 132). Today, the *Manas* epic continues to occupy an important place in Kyrgyzstan's cultural and educational life. Its transmission through traditional storytelling helps younger generations engage with their history and culture, while its associated values emphasize tolerance, multiculturalism, and cultural continuity (Jacquesson, 2021; World Intellectual Property Organization, 2021). Its standing has also been reinforced internationally. UNESCO played a leading role in the international commemoration of the millennium of the Kyrgyz national epic *Manas* in 1995, an event that significantly enhanced the epic's international cultural visibility (United Nations General Assembly, 1995).

The Narrative Structure of the Epic of *Manas*

Unlike many classical epics that start with the creation of the world or the founding of a nation, the "Epic of *Manas*" begins shortly before its hero is born. This storytelling approach immediately draws attention to *Manas*'s arrival and makes him the clear focus of everything that follows. By comparison, Ferdowsi's "*Shahnameh*" offers a far wider historical sweep, opening with the creation of the world and the mythical early history of Iran before it introduces figures like Rostam. While the "*Shahnameh*" presents the story of a civilization through the successive reigns of kings and champions, "*Manas*" centers mainly on the life and enduring influence of a single heroic family (Reichl, 2000:12-13).

The epic traces *Manas* from his miraculous birth and unusual childhood to his rise as the leader of the Kyrgyz. It then follows his marriage to Kanikey, the uniting of the Kyrgyz tribes, his campaigns against foreign enemies, and ultimately his death. The tale does not stop there: it carries on through the deeds of his son Semetey and grandson Seytek, highlighting how heroic leadership continues from one generation to the next. In doing so, it reinforces the belief that a nation's survival relies on keeping its heroic values alive (Köçüm kulkızı, 2005).

Like many oral epics, "*Manas*" blends historical remembrance with mythic creativity. Conflicts with rival tribes are regularly paired with scenes that involve supernatural beings, legendary animals, and unusually skilled warriors. Instead of reducing the narrative's historical weight, these mythical elements broaden the Kyrgyz struggles into themes that speak to everyone—courage, sacrifice, and the survival of a community as a whole. (Abazov, 2004:181-182) This blending of history and mythology is one of the hallmarks of oral epic traditions, and

it appears just as clearly in works such as the "*Shahnameh*", the "*Mahābhārata*", and the "*Epic of Gilgamesh*" (Lord, 1960:124-140).

Across the various episodes, the story of *Manas*'s birth and early childhood stands out as the part with the most pronounced mythological character. His noble lineage, miraculous arrival, outstanding talents, and early indications of divine support strongly mirror the familiar narrative structures seen in heroic traditions across Eurasia. In particular, these themes match what Jung describes as the Hero archetype—where the future saviour is marked from birth by supernatural signs and set on an extraordinary course (Campbell, 1949; Jung, 1968).

The opening verses of *Manas* lay the ideological groundwork for the whole work: heroic leadership is shown as something passed down and also backed by divine approval. Long before *Manas* carries out his first heroic deed, the audience is guided to recognise him as the chosen guardian of the Kyrgyz nation. This method of framing the story not only strengthens the epic's overall coherence, but also reflects one of the most persistent conventions of heroic literature shared across cultures.

The Noble Lineage of *Manas*: An Archetypal Parallel with the *Shahnameh*

One of the earliest and most striking parallels between the Epic of *Manas* and Ferdowsi's "*Shahnameh*" is the way both place great importance on noble ancestry. In both epics, the hero's authority comes not only from personal accomplishments, but also from an inherited tradition of leadership and honour. Genealogy is used to justify the hero's role in advance, long before he ever steps onto the battlefield, so that he appears as the natural guardian of his people—not merely as an ordinary person who gains power by chance (Campbell, 1949; Jung, 1968).

This same pattern is especially clear in the "*Shahnameh*", where Rostam is part of the well-known House of Garshāsp. As the son of Zāl and grandson of Sām, he inherits far more than remarkable strength—he also gains the moral authority and political standing that come with one of Iran's most celebrated heroic families (Nahchiri, 2004:178). In this way, heroism is presented as something passed down through generations. The "*Epic of Manas*" follows a very similar approach. Before the story even introduces *Manas*, it takes time to describe the notable lineage of his ancestors and to present his father, Jakyp, as a respected tribal leader. As a result, heroic greatness is portrayed as the continuation of an established moral and political tradition, rather than as a single personal achievement.

The epic then turns to another motif familiar across world mythology: the childless patriarch. Even though Jakyp is wealthy and holds status, he has no heir, and he worries about what will happen to both his family and his people. This theme appears again and again in heroic literature, where the hero's delayed birth makes his eventual arrival feel even more significant (Campbell, 1949). Ferdowsi makes use of the same idea in the story of Sām before Zāl is born. In both epics, the longing for a son reflects more than private longing—it also represents the community's need for a future protector. Within Jung's archetypal model, the delayed birth signals the start of the Hero archetype. The saviour figure is brought into the world only after a stretch of waiting and uncertainty, which strengthens the symbolic meaning of his mission. Jakyp's deep desire for a son, then, sets the stage for the arrival of the hero who will ultimately unite the Kyrgyz and restore their political strength.

The Threatened Hero and the Rise of the Young Warrior

The motif of the threatened hero is developed to its fullest extent in the "Epic of *Manas*", where the child's enemies try to kill him before he can carry out the destiny foretold in prophecy. The story is closely related to one of the most famous episodes in Ferdowsi's "*Shahnameh*". Zakhāk dreams that a child named Fereydūn will overthrow his tyranny. Terrified by what the dream promises, he orders a wide-ranging search to find and eliminate the infant. To protect her son, Fereydūn's mother secretly gives him to a herdsman in the Alborz Mountains, where he is raised in safety until the right time comes (Campbell, 1949). A strikingly similar pattern also appears in "*Manas*". Esen Khan, warned by his diviners that a Kyrgyz child named *Manas* will one day destroy his kingdom, dispatches his agents across Kyrgyz lands to track down and kill the boy. For that reason, *Manas* is hidden among shepherds in the Ala-Too Mountains, where he grows up protected from political danger. Episodes like this are part of one of the most widely shared archetypal patterns in world mythology: the future saviour has to endure persecution in childhood before taking on his historical mission (Jung, 1968).

Even while living in exile, however, *Manas* cannot simply act like an ordinary child. He repeatedly shows extraordinary courage, leadership, and physical strength. Instead of quietly tending livestock, he takes charge in games, defeats older boys in wrestling, and behaves as though he is already meant to rule. His sudden, impulsive generosity repeatedly gets him into trouble, such as when he slaughters sheep from the flock to feed his companions. When Jakyp angrily criticizes him, *Manas*'s mother answers with a prophecy that uncovers the hero's real destiny:

"Do not grieve over your livestock...

If *Manas* lives, your people will be united again." (5950)

Here, the point is not simply individual greatness, but national unity. *Manas* is meant to bring together a people that have been divided, in the same way that heroes like Fereydūn and Kay Khosrow restore justice and political stability in the *Shahnameh*.

By the time he is twelve, *Manas* has already become a serious and formidable warrior. His first heroic act is when he defeats the giant Kanzhar, who has killed several of his companions. As with many initiation stories found in world mythology, this triumph signals his shift from an extraordinary child into a defender of the nation (Campbell, 1949). Not long after that, Esen Khan invades, claiming it is about a territorial dispute. As fear spreads across the Kyrgyz tribes, the young *Manas* gathers his companions and wipes out the invading army. Right before the fight, he declares:

"I shall leave not one of these infidels alive...

I shall pursue them all the way to Beijing." (6610)

This episode clearly presents *Manas* as the protector of his people. Just as in the *Shahnameh*, the hero's earliest victories represent more than just military achievement—they also reflect the victory of order over chaos. These structural parallels strengthen the claim that both epics are drawing on the same universal Hero archetype, rather than on any direct literary influence.

***Manas* as the Unifier of the Kyrgyz**

After his victory over the Kalmyks, *Manas* becomes more than just a famed warrior. He steps into the role of political leader—someone able to bring scattered tribes together and shape them into a single nation. In the epic, his campaigns are framed as struggles to ensure the survival of the Kyrgyz people. These efforts combine fights against well-known historical enemies with episodes that include mythic beings, such as one-eyed giants and famous legendary warriors. This way of mixing myth with history is typical of many oral heroic traditions (Reichl, 2000:12).

One of *Manas*'s most important achievements is the reunification of the Kyrgyz homeland. Alongside his well-known forty companions, he defeats rival khans and opens the way back to the Altai Mountains—remembered as the ancestral home of the Kyrgyz. In the same spirit as Fereydūn or Kay Khosrow in the "*Shahnameh*", *Manas* does not fight for his own fame. Instead, he struggles to restore unity, justice, and political stability. From a Jungian viewpoint, he embodies the archetype of the "restorer king," who overcomes chaos and rebuilds society (Jung, 1968). Marriage is another major turning point in the hero's life. *Manas* searches for a wife who is worthy of a national leader and eventually marries Kanikey, the daughter of Temir Khan. This episode keeps the traditional Kyrgyz marriage customs, including the ritual of bride kidnapping. At the same time, it underscores *Manas*'s noble family ties and the political legitimacy of his new alliance (Prior, 1995:56).

Like the "*Shahnameh*", the "*Epic of Manas*" is more than heroic storytelling—it also functions as a kind of encyclopedia of national culture. It preserves vivid descriptions of weddings, funerals, hospitality, public feasts, horse racing, wrestling, archery, mounted competitions, and many other traditional practices that helped shape Kyrgyz society. In both epics, cultural memory is carried forward through heroic narrative.

As *Manas*'s influence grows, jealousy begins to spread among some Kyrgyz tribal leaders. They try to undermine his authority and challenge his leadership. But instead of meeting them with violence, *Manas* urges them to put aside internal rivalries and unite against their shared enemy. This episode supports one of the epic's key political themes: national solidarity should always come before tribal ambition. The alliance that follows sets off the great campaign against Beijing. Led by *Manas* and his trusted companions Almambet and Syrgak, the Kyrgyz forces defeat both legendary monsters and the army of Esen Khan, before ultimately taking the city. The victory ensures the independence and dignity of the Kyrgyz people.

Just as importantly, warfare is never shown as an end in itself. After peace is restored, *Manas* rules as a wise leader. Like the greatest heroes in the "*Shahnameh*", he fights in order to establish justice and order, not simply to prove military strength. His power gains legitimacy because it serves the well-being of the community rather than personal ambition. This vision of heroic kingship reflects another major archetypal similarity shared by both epics.

The Death of *Manas* and the End of the Heroic Cycle

The last stage of the *Epic of Manas* brings the archetypal journey of the national hero to a close. After successfully fulfilling his mission of protecting and uniting the Kyrgyz people, *Manas* slowly realizes that the end of his earthly life is nearing. Unlike ordinary warriors, he meets

death with quiet acceptance and dignity—an attitude often linked to archetypal heroes who knowingly complete their life's purpose before leaving the world (Campbell, 1949). Staying loyal to Kyrgyz traditions throughout his life, *Manas* makes careful arrangements for his own burial. He commands that a hidden stone tomb be built in the mountains and brings his family, companions, and warriors together for a final farewell. In the epic, death is not portrayed as a painful disruption, but as the natural ending of a divinely appointed mission. His last instructions stress continuity, responsibility, and loyalty to the community he devoted his life to safeguarding.

The story heightens the significance of this moment through striking symbolic images. As *Manas* dies, even nature seems to mourn the passing of its greatest protector. The sun darkens, the earth shakes, animals grieve, and his faithful dog refuses food and water for several days. At last, the hero's soul leaves the world in the shape of a falcon that flies over the Ala-Too Mountains and then disappears into the heavens. This kind of imagery turns *Manas*'s death into a cosmic event, implying that the loss of the ideal ruler temporarily throws the natural order out of balance (Eliade, 1963; Jung, 1968).

His companions secretly inter him in a hidden grave in the mountains, keeping the burial place from being discovered by their enemies. This practice stands out sharply from Islamic funerary customs, and instead points to older nomadic beliefs that were shared across Inner Asia. Similar accounts of legendary rulers being secretly buried, including Genghis Khan, indicate that the epic preserves pre-Islamic Turkic ideas about sacred kingship while also absorbing later Islamic influences. (DeWeese, 1994:225) Importantly, *Manas*'s death does not bring the story to a close. Leadership passes first to his son Semetey and then to his grandson Seytek, so the heroic tradition can live on through successive generations. Unlike many Western epics, where the hero's death signals the end of the narrative, *Manas* frames heroism as an ongoing national inheritance rather than the accomplishment of a single individual.

Viewed comparatively, *Manas* brings together traits that are spread among several of the major heroes in the *Shahnameh*. Like Fereydūn, he frees his people from oppression and restores political order. Like Zāl, his birth is marked by extraordinary signs. Like Rostam, he has superhuman strength and defeats both human and supernatural foes. And like Esfandiyār, he shows steadfast devotion to duty and sacrifice. Rather than matching one specific Persian hero, *Manas* blends multiple archetypal heroic qualities into one all-encompassing national figure.

In the end, *Manas* becomes much more than a legendary warrior. He comes to embody the Kyrgyz people's collective memory, historical experience, and moral ideals. His life reflects the nation's struggles, victories, and hopes, while his death turns him into an enduring cultural ancestor, with his legacy continuing through the generations that follow. From the standpoint of Jungian psychology, *Manas* represents the Hero archetype in its fullest form: the divinely chosen protector who overcomes chaos, restores unity, and transcends mortality to become a lasting symbol of collective identity.

Aspect	Epic of <i>Manas</i>	<i>Shahnameh</i>
Heroic identity	<i>Manas</i> represents the protector and unifier of the Kyrgyz people.	Heroes such as Rostam represent defenders of Iran and moral order.

Ancestry	Heroic authority is connected with noble lineage and tribal leadership.	Heroic legitimacy is linked to noble families and inherited honour.
Main values	Unity, courage, loyalty, and protection of the community.	Justice, loyalty, wisdom, and defense of the Iranian realm.
Heroic mission	Restoration of Kyrgyz unity and political strength.	Protection of Iran and restoration of order.
Cultural function	Preservation of Kyrgyz collective memory and identity.	Preservation of Persian historical memory and cultural identity.

Source: Authors

Conclusion

This study explored the remarkable parallels between the Kyrgyz Epic of *Manas* and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* by applying Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the collective unconscious as an analytical framework. Even though the two epics developed in different linguistic, geographical, and historical contexts, they still reveal striking similarities that cannot be easily accounted for through direct historical contact alone. Rather, their shared narrative patterns suggest the presence of deeper psychological structures that go beyond individual cultures .

The comparative analysis shows that both epics shape their heroes through a similar sequence of archetypal motifs. The hero's noble ancestry is used to establish legitimacy even before birth. Prophetic dreams then foretell the arrival of an exceptional figure destined to alter the course of history. Miraculous birth stories set the hero apart from ordinary human life, while hostile rulers attempt to remove the child before he can carry out his fate. With protection from supernatural forces, the hero survives persecution, displays extraordinary bravery from an early age, unites a fractured people, defeats outside enemies, restores political stability, and ultimately dies in a way that raises him above ordinary human existence. In combination, these recurring patterns create a consistent heroic framework that appears in both *Manas* and the *Shahnameh* .

Jung's idea of archetypes provides a compelling explanation for these similarities. Instead of seeing myths only as results of historical borrowing or cultural spread, Jung maintains that they express universal symbolic patterns rooted in humanity's collective unconscious. As a result, the Hero archetype can emerge independently across different civilizations because it reflects basic psychological experiences shared by human societies. The wide range of parallels identified between the Kyrgyz and Persian epics strongly supports this view. At the same time, each epic preserves the distinctive historical identity of the society that produced it. While *Shahnameh* reflects the political ideals and historical memory of ancient Iran, *Manas* embodies the nomadic traditions, cultural values, and collective aspirations of the Kyrgyz people. Their similarities should therefore not obscure their cultural uniqueness. Instead, the two works illustrate how universal archetypal structures may be expressed through different historical experiences and literary traditions.

Given the enormous scale of both epics—approximately half a million poetic lines in *Manas* and around fifty thousand couplets in the *Shahnameh*—the present study necessarily focuses on a limited number of representative motifs. Many additional areas remain open for future research, including comparative analyses of kingship, sacred animals, female archetypes, concepts of justice, ritual practices, mythological geography, and symbolic representations of

power. Such studies would deepen our understanding of both epics while contributing more broadly to comparative mythology, folklore, literary studies, and cultural psychology.

More importantly, this research shifts the focus of comparison away from questions of historical influence and toward archetypal convergence. Rather than searching for direct lines of transmission between the Kyrgyz and Persian traditions, it demonstrates that Jung's theory provides a coherent framework for understanding why geographically distant cultures frequently generate remarkably similar heroic narratives. In doing so, the article contributes not only to scholarship on *Manas* and the *Shahnameh* but also to wider discussions concerning the universal dimensions of myth, epic literature, and human imagination.

Ultimately, both epics testify to the enduring power of heroic storytelling as a means of preserving cultural memory and expressing shared human values. Despite the geographical distance separating Central Asia from the Iranian plateau, the heroes of *Manas* and the *Shahnameh* embody remarkably similar ideals of courage, justice, leadership, sacrifice, and national unity. Their stories demonstrate that while cultures differ in language and historical experience, they often imagine their greatest heroes through the same symbolic patterns. It is this shared imaginative heritage that gives these two monumental epics their lasting significance and explains why they continue to resonate far beyond the societies in which they were first created. At the same time, every epic retains the unique historical character of the community that created it. While the *Shahnameh* captures the political ideals and collective historical memory of ancient Iran, the *Manas* reflects the nomadic traditions, cultural values, and shared goals of the Kyrgyz people. Because of this, their similarities should not be allowed to hide what makes each one culturally distinct. Rather, together they show how common archetypal patterns can take shape through different historical circumstances and literary traditions.

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