ABSTRACT

The Mahaparinirvana-sutra (《大般涅槃经》) is a very important scripture of the Mahayana Buddhism (大乘佛教). The scripture was composed as a Mahayana text in the late 3rd century AD and early 4th century AD in India. It was later translated into Chinese by Dharmaksema (昙无谶), a native of Central India who lived in China during the Bei Liang (北凉: 397-439) Dynasty. The scripture mainly discusses the Mahayanic theory of Buddha-nature (佛性论), which advocates that all human beings possess the "Tathagatagarbha" (如来藏) or the "Buddha-nature". With this as a foundation, it is then said that all human beings have the potential to attain Buddha-hood (nirvana, 涅槃).

The main objective of this academic exercise attempts to examine the Buddha-nature theory of Mahaparinirvana-sutra. Topics discussed in this academic exercise include (1) the definition of the "Tathagatagarbha" and (2) the logic behind the saying that nirvana is attainable to all human beings. The exercise will also examine the "issue" presented in the text, on the possibility of attainment of enlightenment by "icchantika" (non-believer of Buddha teachings, 一阐提).