Over the past several decades, observers of American Buddhism have created numerous typologies to describe different categories of Buddhists in the United States. These taxonomies use different criteria to categorize groups: style of practice, degree of institutional stability, mode of transmission to the U.S., ethnicity, etc. Each reveals some features of American Buddhism and obscures others. None accounts adequately for hybrids or for long-term changes within categories. Most include a divide between convert Buddhists, characterized as predominantly Caucasian, and “heritage” or “ethnic” Buddhists, characterized as Asian immigrants and refugees, as well as their descendants. This article examines several typologies, and considers two dynamics: the effects of white racism on the development of American Buddhist communities; and the effects of unconscious white privilege in scholarly discourse about these communities. It critiques “ethnic” categories and proposes other ways to conceptualize the diverse forms of Buddhism outside Asia.
The real Buddhist will believe that our Body and Mind are borrowed from the Earth. We don't own them. We also suffer from aging, sickness, death, and mental illnesses including greed, anger and ignorant of the true nature of reality. The so-called country, religion, race, sex, land, etc are all man-made. We temporary own this body, land, house and we will eventually give them back to the Earth. If we are all realized about this fact, there should not be any racism, fight or any unnecessary activities. Two of the Buddha's teachings on racism and classism are especially applicable today. The first is the point I just mentioned: There's nothing about birth or social status that makes a person good or bad. People are good or bad solely in terms of their actions, and so that's how they should be judged—not by the color of their skin. There's a nice passage in the Vasettha Sutta (3.9) where the Buddha notes that, with common animals, you know the animal by its coloring and markings, whereas the same standard doesn't apply to human beings: There's no physical mark that tells you whether a person i