

# WHEN "NICE" BECAME "STUPID"

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

Ngọc Nga's older brother, Sang (meaning "bright"), drove me around yesterday and told me that back in the way way way olden days, the phrase "Đại Ngu" was a common name. Today, *đại* means "extremely" and "*ngu*" means "stupid." So people were named "extremely stupid." BUT, he said, back in those days, *ngu* meant meek or nice. So when someone calls you "ngu", they're complimenting your temperament, not insulting your intelligence.

He couldn't understand why the definition had changed so drastically. But it makes sense to me, at least from my personal experience. Growing up, I was always seen as nice, meek, and shy. Because of this, people assumed I wasn't very intelligent and that I couldn't protect myself; hence, I was seen as less capable than a more outgoing person. Kids are a prime example of this. They mistake meekness for weakness and don't hesitate to bully "nice, meek, and shy" people.

So the connection between "nice" and "stupid" isn't that farfetched. The assumption is nice people are easy preys because they're passive, which makes it easier to forget that it's a matter of temperament and not intelligence.

But olden day Vietnamese people knew what's up.

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