

An Optimum Population for Thailand

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Quests for finding an optimum population or an appropriate size of the population have been made by philosophers and thinkers since the ancient times. Confucius (a Chinese philosopher and teacher, 551-478 B.C.?) and his school postulated an ideal proportion between population and land. Concept of optimum population with respect to the Greek city-state was discussed by Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). Beginning from early nineteenth century, there were writings of the classical school of economics discussing the effects of population size and growth on the specialization or division of labour leading to the increasing returns in industry on the one hand and the onset of diminishing returns in agriculture on the other. These writings were bases for evolution of the concept and theory of optimum population. In Thailand to date, the systematic analysis to determine an appropriate size of the population using economic, social, political and cultural criteria has not been attempted, let alone conducting a research on an optimum population. What have been made to date are analyses indicating that the rate of population growth at certain period tends to be too low or too high and thus leading to the policy to increase or reduce the rate of population growth. Difficulties in determining an optimum population due to the dynamic nature of population development and the fact that all other factors affecting the welfare of population are always changing, it is not cost effective to conduct research for determining an optimum population for the purpose of policy formulation.