Reducing Heat Loss in the Adiabatic Section of a Two-Phase Closed Thermosyphon (TPCT) Using Acrylic Tube

Namphon Pipatpaiboon* and Sanhawat Thongdang
Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Industry and Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus, Sakon Nakhon, Thailand

Sampan Rittidech
Heat-Pipe and Thermal Tools Design Research Unit (HTDR), Faculty of Engineering, Mahasarakham University, Mahasarakham, Thailand

* Corresponding author. E-mail: pipatpaiboon@hotmail.com DOI: 10.14416/j.ijast.2016.06.001
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Abstract
This study aims to present a method of reducing heat loss in a two-phase closed thermosyphon (TPCT) by replacing copper tubing with acrylic in the adiabatic section. The designs used included total lengths of \( L_T \) 150, 300 and 450 mm. The evaporator section \( L_E \), Adiabatic section \( L_A \) and Condenser section \( L_C \) lengths were all alike at 50, 100 and 150 mm. The copper and acrylic tubes were of 15 mm external diameter and 12 mm internally. The temperatures applied at the evaporator section \( T_E \) were 60ºC and 80ºC. The angles of inclination were 0º, 20º, 40º, 60º, 80º and 90º, and air velocity at the condenser section was 1 m/s. The working fluid used was plain water with a filling ratio of 50% of the evaporator section volume. The experiment showed that as \( T_E \) increased so did heat flux, however shorter \( L_T \) resulted in lower heat flux, and the maximum heat flux achieved was 5 kW/m² at \( T_E \) 80ºC, \( L_E \) 150 mm, with an angle of inclination at 80º to 90º using acrylic tube in the adiabatic section. When acrylic tube was installed instead of copper tube at \( L_A \) the resulting thermal resistance \( R_{tub} \) Cº/W decreased and heat flux increased. The maximum \( R_{tub} \) result was recorded at around 2.78Cº/W with the acrylic tube of \( L_E \) 150 mm. with a \( T_E \) of 80ºC.

Keywords: Reducing, TPCT and thermal resistance

1 Introduction

A two-phase closed thermosyphon or TPCT is a simple, yet highly effective, wickless heat transfer device, which has been used in many different applications [1]. A TPCT needs no wick structure to return the condensate from the condenser to the evaporator as it utilizes gravity [2]. Normally a TPCT is made from metal clusters, cylindrical geometry and a single tube. The thermosyphon consists of three sections, as shown in Figure 1. The evaporator section has heat input, creating a phase change from fluid to vapor which then moves through the adiabatic section, which in theory neither generates nor loses heat as it’s only function is to transfer the vapor. The condenser section releases the heat cause the working fluid to change phase back to liquid from vapor, and return to the evaporator through gravitational force. The history of TPCT’s began with A.M. Perkins who, through his work on boilers and heat distribution systems, developed a two-phase flow device or Perkins tube in 1827 [3]. Subsequently, TPCT’s continued to develop as part
of Materials science, with the working fluids evolving from water and alcohol, to refrigerants [4] and currently the incorporation of nanoparticles [5]. The theory of TPCT and previous studies on the adiabatic section without any heat input or output identified heat loss within the adiabatic section. These studies suggested that the heat loss in the adiabatic section was negligible. This assumption is not necessarily true as heat loss is constantly observed in the adiabatic section. Therefore there should be additional protections to prevent this heat loss, over and above the standard insulation. Insulating this section does reduce heat loss, however to eliminate heat loss in this method is costly. By constructing this section of the TPCT with a material of greater thermal protection, or thermal resistance (˚C/W), we can effectively reduce the loss of heat without the need for insulation. This research aims to study ways of reducing heat loss from the adiabatic section with an acrylic tube and using different properties of thermal conductivity (˚C/W). This article will confirm theories about heat loss of thermosyphons in the adiabatic section and present guidelines for thermosyphon development in the future. Such as the use of different materials in production of thermosyphons to reduce costs, prolong the product life cycle, increase heat transfer, and look to identify further applications for potential use.

2 Experimental Apparatus and Procedure

The experiment design adopted total lengths of (L<sub>T</sub>) 150, 300 and 450 mm. The evaporator section (L<sub>E</sub>), adiabatic section (L<sub>A</sub>) and condenser sections (L<sub>C</sub>) were each of equal lengths, of a third of L<sub>T</sub>, i.e. 50, 100 and 150 mm. The diameters of the copper and acrylic tubes were 15 mm externally and 12 mm internally. The temperatures applied at the evaporator section were 60ºC and 80ºC. The angle of inclination was 0º, 20º, 40º, 60º, 80º and 90º. The air velocity at the condenser section was 1 m/s with water as the working fluid at a filling ratio of 50% of the evaporator section volume. The temperatures applied at the evaporator section were 60ºC and 80ºC. The angle of inclination was 0º, 20º, 40º, 60º, 80º and 90º. The air velocity at the condenser section was 1 m/s with water as the working fluid at a filling ratio of 50% of the evaporator section volume.

The apparatus schematics are shown in Figure 2. The evaporator section of the TPCTs were made of copper and were covered with a cable heater. The adiabatic section of a set of the TPCTs was constructed from acrylic tube, to form a comparison between those and the TPCTs with copper tube running the entire length of the TPCT. This section was left uncovered.
to compare the resulting heat loss, which is the main purpose of this study. The condenser section includes a cooling jacket cover made from insulated metal sheet. The condenser section of the TCPTs were cooled with air flow controlled at 1 m/s. The temperature was measured with 6 type K thermocouples and data was logged for analysis.

The schematic diagram shown in Figure 2 diagram was designed to compare heat loss at the adiabatic section. Historically, research articles and theories in general suggest that heat is neither lost nor input at the adiabatic section, however the opposite was found to be true as heat loss was constantly observed, despite the presence of insulation. This study presents recommendations for reducing heat loss from the adiabatic section through the use of different materials, based on their thermal conductivity properties. This is explained by the mathematical models (1)–(9) and table 1.

3 Mathematical Model

Normally the amount of heat input at the evaporator section is equivalent to the amount of heat released at the condenser section with no consideration given to heat loss. Thus the performance of the TPCT in terms of temperature between the evaporator section ($T_E$) and the condenser section ($T_C$) can be described by the general heat flux equation [6].

$$Q = U_E A_E (T_E - T_C) \quad (1)$$

The condenser temperature ($T_C$) is calculated from the relationship between the air inlet ($T_I$) and air outlet ($T_O$) at the condenser section, as follows:

$$T_C = \frac{T_I - T_O}{2} \quad (2)$$

The heat released at the air outlet;

$$Q = mC_p(T_O - T_I) \quad (3)$$

and presented in the form of heat flux ($q$);

$$q = \frac{Q}{A} \quad (4)$$

The heat loss from the adiabatic section is explained in Figure 3.

Fourier’s law of heat conduction for heat transfer through a cylindrical layer [6], is as follows:

$$Q_{Cond,cyl} = -kA \frac{dT}{dr} \quad (5)$$

where $A = 2\pi r L_A$ with $L_A$ referring to the adiabatic section length. This then suggests the following:

$$Q_{Cond,cyl} = \int_{r_1}^{r_2} \frac{Q_{Cond,cyl} dr}{A} = -\int_{T_1}^{T_2} k dT \quad (6)$$

Furthermore, as $Q_{Cond,cyl} = constant$. The equation can be rearranged as follows;

$$Q_{Cond,cyl} = \frac{T_1 - T_2}{ln(r_2/r_1)} \quad (7)$$

$$R_{tube} = \frac{ln(r_2/r_1)}{2\pi r L_A K_A} \quad (9)$$

From Equation (9), the consideration of thermal conductivity of copper and acrylic at 25°C, were 0.2 and 401 W/m·°C respectively. This study investigated two materials used within the adiabatic section, copper tube $D_O = 15$ mm, $D_I = 12.5$ mm and acrylic tube.
D₀ = 15 mm, Dᵢᵢ = 12 mm. Thermal resistance was calculated using Equation (9) with copper and acrylic tube results shown in Table 1.

### Table 1: Thermal resistance at 25°C (Rᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢ)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adiabatic Section Length (mm)</th>
<th>Thermal Resistance at 25°C/W</th>
<th>Copper Tube</th>
<th>Acrylic Tube</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150 mm</td>
<td>0.0032</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 mm</td>
<td>0.0016</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>450 mm</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 1 we can see the thermal resistance of the tube at the adiabatic section Rᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢ. For the purpose of the study this demonstrates that a lower Rᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢ means higher heat loss, and alternatively, a higher Rᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢᵢ indicates lower heat loss. This suggests acrylic tubing can reduce heat loss from the adiabatic section of the TPCT and Lₐ directly affects heat loss from the adiabatic section of the TPCT. This paper presents the study results of the heat transfer in regards to this area.

### 4 Result and Discussions

All of the findings of the study are presented in order to confirm the concept of the study regarding the angle of inclination of the TPCT impacting on heat flux, as well as the comparison between an all copper TPCT, and one with the adiabatic section constructed from acrylic tube.

#### 4.1 Heat flux of TPCT (copper)

Figure 4 shows the heat flux of the copper tube with a temperature at the evaporator section (Tₑ) of 60°C and 80°C for TPCTs of lengths 150, 300 and 450 mm. The experimental results for the trend of heat flux shows that as the temperature increases so does the heat flux, which corresponds with the study by Paramatthanuwat [7]. The results indicate that the TPCT total length (Lₜ) has a direct impact on heat flux, as the surface area of each of the three sections Lₑₐₑ, Lₐ, and Lₐₑ are increased proportionately, providing a greater potential for the identified heat loss from the adiabatic section. With regard to the angle of inclination, the results show that a greater vertical angle allows the working fluid to fall quicker, resulting in increased heat flux. The maximum heat flux observed in this study was 4.5 kW/m² at a temperature of 80°C.

#### 4.2 Heat flux of TPCT (Acrylic tube at adiabatic section)

Figure 5 shows the corresponding heat flux of the TPCT when acrylic tube was used for the adiabatic section, with all other variables identical to the copper TPCT. The experiment also demonstrated that higher temperatures increase heat flux as heating at the evaporator section directly effects the temperature of the condenser section. Again the experiment showed that the greater angles of inclination provided greater heat flux. The maximum heat flux recorded was 4.8 kW/m² at an angle of inclination of 60°.
4.3 Heat flux comparisons

The aim of this study is to compare the heat flux results of TPCTs made from copper or acrylic tube. The general concept of a TPCT suggests the adiabatic section as part of the flow of working fluids neither receives nor releases heat, however in reality this section has demonstrated heat loss through heat convection and radiation from the surface area of TPCT within the adiabatic section. The experiment was done without insulation on the adiabatic section for comparison, the results of which are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 6 compares the heat flux between the TPCTs made with copper along the full length of the tube and those where the adiabatic section was made from acrylic tube. Overall, the experimental results showed that heat flux in the TPCTs made with all copper was lower than those where the adiabatic section was made from acrylic tube. This was due to heat loss from the adiabatic section being greater with copper tube than it was with acrylic tube.

The experiments with $T_E$ 80ºC show that longer $L_t$ decreases heat flux as a result of heat being transferred a longer distance, while increasing the angle of inclination (vertically) provides better heat transfer due to the effects of gravity. The maximum heat flux of 5 kW/m² was achieved with an $L_t$ of 150 mm, an angle of inclination of 90º with the TPCT made from acrylic tube in the adiabatic section. The minimum heat flux of 2 kW/m² was recorded with an $L_t$ of 450 mm, angle of inclination of 20º where the TPCT was made entirely from copper tube. The experimental results are consistent with K.S Ong et al. 2003 [4] who tested with the conditions of $L_t$ 780 mm $T_E$ 50ºC and 55ºC presented in Figure 6.

4.4 Thermal resistance ($R_{tube}$) of adiabatic section

The thermal resistance, $R_{tube}$ (Cº/W) was calculated using Equation (9). Figure 7 presents $R_{tube}$ at the adiabatic section of the TPCTs. Comparing the effects of increases to both $L_A$ and $T_E$ on thermal resistance at $L_A$, the results demonstrate a direct increase to heat loss from $L_A$ which is explained by the logic of thermal resistance $R_{tube}$.

The experiment demonstrated that greater $T_E$ reduced $R_{tube}$ causing increased heat loss. The results of the TPCT made entirely of copper tube with $L_A$ of 150 mm and $T_E$ of 60º and C 80ºC, showed $R_{tube}$ values of 0.5 and 0.65 Cº/W respectively. In contrast, when testing the $L_A$ made from acrylic tube under the same conditions, the $R_{tube}$ results produced were 2.57–2.78 Cº/W, suggesting a lower heat loss. The experiment results clearly show when an acrylic tube
is installed instead of copper at $L_A$ the $R_{\text{tube}}$ increases, and therefore heat loss at $L_A$ is decreased.

5 Conclusions

The final test results show that when the adiabatic section of a TPCT is made from acrylic tube it can reduce heat loss from that section and positively affect the heat flux of the overall TPCT. The experiment results can be summarized as follows:

- Increased $T_E$ increases heat flux.
- Increased $L_T$ decreases heat flux as a result of the heat needing to travel a longer distance.
- An adiabatic section made from copper results in lower $R_{\text{tube}}$ as per eq. (8), lower $Q_{\text{cond,cyl}}$, and higher heat loss, whereas the opposite is true when acrylic tube replaces the copper in the adiabatic section, i.e. higher $R_{\text{tube}}$, higher $Q_{\text{cond,cyl}}$, and lower heat loss.
- Higher thermal resistance $R_{\text{tube}}$ (°C/W) of the TPCT resulted in a reduction of heat loss, and conversely lower $R_{\text{tube}}$ resulted in increased heat loss. The results comply with the thermal resistance network and heat conduction in cylinder theory [6].

Nomenclature

A Total heat transfer area (m$^2$)
D Diameter (m)
$D_o$ Outside diameter (m)
$D_i$ Inside diameter (m)
$C_p$ Specific heat of the ambient air (kJ/kg·°C)
m Mass flow rate (kg/s)
Q Heat transfer (W)
q Heat flux (kW/m$^2$)
Z Thermal resistance (°C/W)
T Temperature (°C)
$\Delta T$ Temperature difference (°C)
c Condenser
h Evaporator
R Thermal resistance (°C/W)
K Thermal conductivity (W/m·°C)
L Length (m)

Subscripts

in Input
out Output
T Total
tube Tube
cond Conduction
cyl Cylindrical
A Adiabatic section
C Condenser section
E Evaporator section

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References