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# Air-side performance of embedded and welded spiral fin and tube heat exchangers



Parinya Kiatpachai <sup>a,b</sup>, Thawatchai Kaewkamrop <sup>b</sup>, Mehrdad Mesgarpour <sup>b</sup>, Ho Seon Ahn <sup>c</sup>, Ahmet Selim Dalkılıç <sup>d</sup>, Omid Mahian <sup>e,f</sup>, Somchai Wongwises <sup>b,g,\*</sup>

- <sup>a</sup> Department of Mechanical Engineering, Academic Division, Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, Nakhon, Nayok, 26001, Thailand
- <sup>b</sup> Fluid Mechanics, Thermal Engineering and Multiphase Flow Research Lab (FUTURE), Department of Mechanical Engineering, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangmod, Bangkok, 10140, Thailand
- <sup>c</sup> Department of Mechanical Engineering, Incheon National University, Incheon, Republic of Korea
- <sup>d</sup> Department of Mechanical Engineering, Yildiz Technical University, Yildiz, Besiktas, Istanbul, Turkey
- <sup>e</sup> School of Chemical Engineering and Technology, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China
- f Department of Mechanical Engineering, Center for Nanotechnology in Renewable Energies, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran
- g National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), Pathum Thani, 12120, Thailand

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper presents the air-side performance (ASP) of embedded and welded spiral fin and tube heat exchangers (SFTHXs). Six heat exchangers were tested to investigate the effects of fin-base connections and fin pitch. Test sections were fabricated from steel tubes, with two rows of tubing and a Z-shaped water flow arrangement, and an aluminum fin with various fin pitches. The experiment was done at a high Reynolds number of air flow (4000–18000). The results show that fin pitch had no effect on the ASP of embedded SFTHXs. In contrast, fin pitch influenced the ASP of the welded SFTHX. Moreover, the pressure drop decreased with increasing fin pitch, whereas the friction factor was lower for a smaller fin pitch. Due to better fin base connections, an embedded spiral fin generally provided a higher heat transfer rate than a welded spiral fin did. The pressure drop of the welded spiral fin was greater than that of the embedded spiral fin, possibly because the welded spiral fin had melted slag at the fin base.

# Nomenclature

 $A_{min}$  Minimum free flow area, m<sup>2</sup>

 $A_p$  Cross-sectional or profile area of fin, m<sup>2</sup>

 $c_p$  Specific heat at constant pressure, J/(kg.K)

k Thermal conductivity, W/(m.K)

Pr Prandtl number  $r_i$  Fin base radius, m  $r_o$  Fin tip radius, m R Radius function

E-mail address: somchai.won@kmutt.ac.th (S. Wongwises).

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<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author. Fluid Mechanics, Thermal Engineering and Multiphase Flow Research Lab (FUTURE), Department of Mechanical Engineering, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangmod, Bangkok, 10140, Thailand.

Greek symbols

Overall surface effectiveness

Density, kg/m<sup>3</sup>

Contraction ratio of cross-sectional area  $\sigma$ 

Combination of terms 4

Radius ratio W

Subscripts

1 Air inlet 2 Air outlet а

Air

Embedded spiral fin em

Tube-side Inlet in Mean value m Maximum max Tube t Water w

Welded spiral fin weld

#### 1. Introduction

Spiral fin and tube heat exchangers (SFTHXs) can be used for cooling and heating systems. Depending on the main objective, an application system is usually required. Pongsoi et al. [1] concentrated on and reviewed (until 2014) the air-side performance (ASP) of SFTHXs. They suggested that the SFTHX was a favored type of thermal equipment for energy saving and emission reduction policies in industrial applications. Furthermore, they analyzed the effect characteristics of inside tube diameter  $(d_i)$ , outside fin diameter  $(d_f)$ , fin thickness  $(f_D)$ , fin pitch  $(f_D)$ , number of tube rows  $(N_{row})$ , longitudinal tube pitch  $(P_L)$ , transverse tube pitch  $(P_T)$ , tube arrangement, fin material, fin pattern, fin alignment, operating conditions, and so forth on the ASP of SFTHXs. Furthermore, the SFTHX design has caused developments in fin and tube heat exchangers, as well as other heat exchangers.

During 2011–2020, the research group [2–14] presented evidence of ASPs for crimped, L-footed, conventional, serrated, wired, and multiple SFTHXs. For the crimped spiral fin [2–5] and L-footed spiral fin [6,7], they studied the effect of fin material,  $N_{row}$ ,  $f_D$ , and small  $d_i$  on the ASP of SFTHX. The experimental results showed that fin material,  $f_p$ , and  $N_{row}$  had significant effects on ASP. For the conventional spiral fin, Ramesh et al. [8] tested the conventional SFTHX for an air-cooled spiral radiator and reported the performance in terms of  $h_0$ , log mean temperature difference (LMTD), heat exchanger effectiveness ( $\varepsilon$ ), and Nusselt number (Nu). Moreover, Unger et al. [9] studied the free convection heat transfer for conventional SFTHXs at tilt angles of 0°, 20°, 30°, and 40° and found that the tilt angles had significant effects on the ASP of conventional SFTHXs. Pongsoi et al. [10] examined the effect of  $f_D$  on the ASP of SFTHXs and proposed a correlation of serrated SFTHX for designing the total surface area  $(A_0)$  of the heat exchanger (HX). In addition, Zhaou et al. [11] compared the ASPs obtained from twisted-serrated SFTHXs and serrated SFTHXs and confirmed that the twisted serrated SFTHX had better  $h_0$  than the serrated SFTHX did. Youssef et al. [12] developed the wired SFTHX for experiment and simulation, using CFD to predict the phase-change material process in latent heat storage applications. For multiple fins, Kumar et al. [13] studied the effect of fin patterns on the ASP of crimped and serrated SFTHXs and compared them with plain and circular FTHXs using 3D CFD simulations. They found that a spiral fin had a higher Colburn factor (j) and friction factor (f) than plain and circular fins did. In addition, the turbulent flow with vortices generation was analyzed to learn and understand the flow characteristics. Bosnjakovic et al. [14] compared a star-shaped SFTHX and a conventional SFTHX. The results showed that the Nusselt number, fin efficiency ( $\eta_f$ ), heat flux, and heat transfer rate (Q) of star-shaped SFTHXs were greater than those of conventional SFTHXs with an outside tube diameter  $(Re_{do})$  Reynolds number range from 2,000 to 13,000. The spiral-finned tube shape has also been applied to innovative shell and tube heat exchangers and spirally finned pin heat exchangers, as proposed in Naqvi et al. [15] and Chang et al. [16].

Over the years, studies about SFTHXs have concentrated on the ASPs of crimped, L-footed, conventional, serrated, star-shaped, and wired spiral fins. Embedded and welded SFTHXs are alternatives for practical applications due to the higher strength of the fin base connection when compared with other fin types. Despite its importance, the relationship between fin base connection and fin pitch with the ASP of SFTHXs remains unstudied. In the present study, the main concern is the effect of fin base connection and fin pitch on the heat transfer and pressure drop characteristics at high Reynolds numbers for SFTHXs. Moreover, correlations for the j factor

Geometrical details of the heat exchangers.

Spiral fin types	$d_i (mm)$	$d_o\left(mm\right)$	$d_f(mm)$	$P_L$ (mm)	$P_T (mm)$	$f_t$ (mm)	$n_t$	$N_{row}$	Fin materials	$f_p$ (mm)
Embedded	21.2	25.4	51.4	68.5	66	0.5	5	2	Al	2.5, 3.2, and 4.2
Welded	21.2	25.4	51.4	68.5	66	0.5	5	2	Al	2.5, 3.2, and 4.2

*Note*: Tube and fin materials are iron (Fe) and Aluminum (Al), respectively. The  $n_t$  represents the number of tubes in row.

(Colburn factor) and f factor (friction factor) are proposed for industrial applications.

#### 2. Data reduction

The present study used the apparatus described by Pongsoi et al. [2]. Table 1 shows the geometric details of embedded and welded SFTHXs. An aluminum fin and a steel tube were assembled for the test sections. Table 2 shows the experimental conditions. Fig. 1 illustrates the schematic diagrams for both SFTHXs and the water flow arrangement. The overall heat transfer coefficient (U) is calculated using

$$\frac{1}{UA} = \frac{1}{h_i A_i} + \frac{\ln(d_o/d_i)}{2\pi k_i L} + \frac{1}{\eta_o h_o A_o} \tag{1}$$

Based on the multipass parallel cross flow (MPC) and multipass counter cross flow (MCC), the heat exchanger effectiveness ( $\varepsilon$ ) and the number of transfer units (NTU) can be calculated from the following.

For MPC with  $N_{row} = 2$ :

$$\varepsilon_p = \left(1 - \frac{K}{2}\right) \left(1 - e^{-2K/C_A^*}\right), K = 1 - e^{-NTU_A\left(C_A^*/2\right)}$$
(2)

For MCC with  $N_{row} = 2$ :

$$\varepsilon_c = 1 - \left[ \frac{K}{2} + \left( 1 - \frac{K}{2} \right) e^{2K/C_A^*} \right]^{-1}, K = 1 - e^{-NTU_A(C_A^*/2)}$$
(3)

where  $C_c/C_h$  or  $C_h/C_c$  represents  $C^* = C_{\min}/C_{\max}$ , which is the heat capacity rate ratio obtained from cold fluid and hot fluid. The combination of both flow configurations is used to determine the average effectiveness.

$$\varepsilon_{pc} = \frac{\varepsilon_p + \varepsilon_c}{2} \text{ for } N_{row} = 2. \tag{4}$$

The radial fin efficiency, in terms of Gardner's [17] modified Bessel functions, is used for data reduction.

$$\eta_{f} = \frac{2\psi}{\varphi(1+\psi)} \frac{I_{1}(\varphi R_{o})K_{1}(\varphi R_{i}) - I_{1}(\varphi R_{i})K_{1}(\varphi R_{o})}{I_{0}(\varphi R_{i})K_{1}(\varphi R_{o}) + I_{1}(\varphi R_{o})K_{0}(\varphi R_{i})}$$
(5)

where

$$\varphi = (r_o - r_i)^{3/2} \left(\frac{2h_o}{k_f A_n}\right)^{1/2} \tag{6}$$

The air-side heat transfer performance is evaluated based on the *j* factor.

$$j = \frac{Nu}{\text{Re}_{do} \text{Pr}^{1/3}} = \frac{h_o}{\rho_a V_{\text{max}} c_P} (\text{Pr})^{2/3}$$
 (7)

The  $\Delta P$  across the HX is shown as friction factor [18].

$$f = \left(\frac{A_{\min}}{A_o}\right) \left(\frac{\rho_m}{\rho_1}\right) \left[\frac{2\Delta P \rho_1}{G_o^2} - (1 + \sigma^2) \left(\frac{\rho_1}{\rho_2} - 1\right)\right] \tag{8}$$

The ANSI/ASHRAE's 33 standards [19] (i.e.,  $|Q_a - Q_w|/Q_{ave} < 0.05$ ) are used to check the complete energy balance between both working fluids across the test sections. For the uncertainty analysis, the root mean sum square method was used for calculating the uncertainty. The j and f factors have maximum uncertainties of 5.37% and 6.61%, respectively. These maximum uncertainties were the values at the lowest Reynolds number. The uncertainties of the j and f factors increased as the Reynolds number decreased. These uncertainties were taken into account when investigating the ASP.

## 3. Results and discussion

This study focused on the effect of fin base connection and  $f_p$  on the ASPs of embedded and welded SFTHXs. The test sections with a  $f_p$  of 2.5–4.2 mm were investigated at high  $Re_{do}$ . The heat transfer rate between air and water under sensible heating was investigated. The tube-side hot water flow is a Z-shaped flow arrangement, that provides good distribution of fluid flow.

Table 2
Experimental conditions.

T <sub>a,in</sub> , °C	$31.5 \pm 0.5$
V <sub>fr</sub> , m/s	2-8 or $Re_{do}$ (4,000–18,000)
$T_{w,in}$ , ${}^{o}C$	55–65
$V_{fr}$ , $m/s$ $T_{w,in}$ $^{\circ}C$ $m_{w}$ , $kg/s$	0.167–0.233

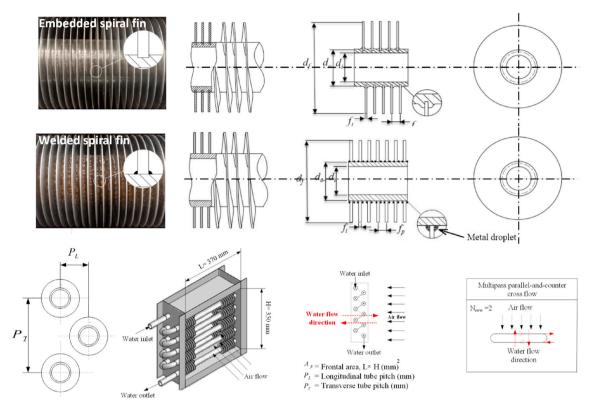


Fig. 1. Photos and schematic of the tested embedded and welded SFTHXs and flow arrangement.

Fig. 2 demonstrates the experimental data at  $T_{w,in}=60\,^{\circ}\mathrm{C}$  and  $m_{w,in}=0.2\,\mathrm{kg/s}$ . The air-side heat transfer coefficient ( $h_o$ ), pressure drop ( $\Delta P$ ), and average heat transfer rate ( $Q_{ave}$ ) are clarified for the ASP analysis. As shown,  $Q_{ave}$ ,  $h_o$ , and  $\Delta P$  increase with increasing frontal air velocity ( $V_{fr}$ ). Fig. 2(a) shows that the  $Q_{ave}$  increases as the  $f_p$  decreases for both fin types. For the embedded SFTHX, the  $f_p$  has a significant effect on  $Q_{ave}$  because of the increase in the  $A_o$  when  $f_p$  is reduced from 4.2 to 2.4 mm. However, for welded SFTHXs, the  $Q_{ave}$  trend at various  $f_p$  is slightly different. Furthermore, the  $Q_{ave}$  of embedded SFTHX is higher than that of the welded SFTHX for  $f_p$  of 2.5 and 3.2 mm; however, the  $Q_{ave}$  is reversed for a  $f_p$  of 4.2 mm. Fig. 2(b) presents the relationship between  $h_o$  and  $V_{fr}$ . For welded SFTHXs, the  $h_o$  increases with increasing  $f_p$ . When  $f_p$  increases from 2.5 mm to 4.2 mm,  $h_o$  increases by approximately 17–28% for  $f_p=4.2\,\mathrm{mm}$  and 7–10% for  $f_p=3.2\,\mathrm{mm}$ . For the welded SFTHX, the effect of  $f_p$  on  $h_o$  is negligible. Under the same experimental conditions, the  $h_o$  of the welded SFTHX is higher than that of the embedded SFTHX by up to 57%. The welded SFTHX had an additional characteristic at the fin base connection. The metal slags at the fin base lead to flow turbulence, which results in increased convective heat transfer. For Fig. 2(c), the  $\Delta P$  increases with decreasing  $f_p$  because, when  $f_p$  decreases, the blockage of the heat exchanger's flow area increases. At the same fin pitch and experimental conditions, the pressure drop of the welded SFTHX is higher than that of the embedded SFTHX by approximately 26–28%. The  $\Delta P$  for  $f_p=2.5\,\mathrm{mm}$  is higher than that for  $f_p=3.2\,\mathrm{mm}$  by approximately 8–12% for embedded SFTHX and 20–37% for welded SFTHX, as well as approximately 19–25% higher for embedded SFTHX and 37–57% higher for welded SFTHX when  $f_p=4.2\,\mathrm{mm}$ .

Fig. 3 illustrates the ASP in terms of j and f factors at various  $Re_{do}$ ,  $m_w$ , and  $T_{w,in}$ . The results demonstrate that the j and f factors decrease as  $Re_{do}$  increases. As seen in Fig. 3(a), (b), and 3(c), the variations of  $m_w$  (0.167–0.233 kg/s) and  $T_{w,in}$  (55–65 °C) have negligible effects on the j and f for embedded and welded SFTHXs. The effect of  $f_p$ , is clearly seen; the  $f_p$  has no significant effect on the j factor for the embedded SFTHX. Nevertheless, the j factor for the welded SFTHX increases with increasing fin pitch. When  $f_p$  increases from 2.5 to 3.2 and 4.2 mm, the j factor for the welded SFTHX increases by approximately 9–10% for  $f_p=3.2$  mm and 14–26% for  $f_p=4.2$  mm under the  $Re_{do}$  range of 4,000–16,000. Moreover,  $f_p$  has a significant effect on the f for both fin types. The results show that  $f_p$  increases as the f factor increases. The f factor for  $f_p=2.5$  mm is lower than that for  $f_p=3.2$  mm by approximately 11–18% for the embedded SFTHX and 16–26% for the welded SFTHX. In addition, for  $f_p=4.2$  mm, the f factor is lower by 35–47% for the embedded SFTHX and 30–35% for the welded SFTHX. These results can be easily explained by Eq. (8). The  $A_0$ ,  $A_{\min}$ , and  $G_c$  (i.e., the air mass flux calculated from the minimum free flow area), which relate to  $f_p$ , are included in this equation. As a result, those parameters have a significant influence upon the f factor, specifically when  $A_{\min}/A_0$  increases due to an increase in  $f_p$ , which leads to a higher f factor. For the effect of the fin base connection, the welded SFTHX has a higher f than the embedded SFTHX does at the same fin pitch. Both fin types exhibit similar f trends. In general, the difference range between the f factor for each fin pitch at various  $Re_{do}$  is 26–52%.

For implementation and future research, the dimensionless terms (i.e., j and f factors) modified from Pongsoi et al. [10] ( $j = aRe_{do}^b$ ) and  $f = aRe_{do}^b$ ) are proposed for the heat exchanger design and other applications. The fin pitch is included in the dimensionless terms

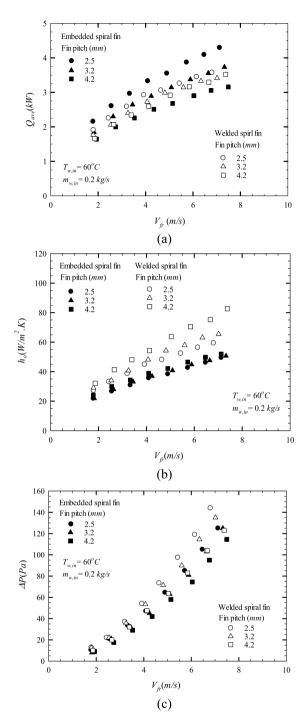


Fig. 2. Influence of fin base connection and fin pitch on the (a)  $Q_{ave}$ , (b)  $h_o$ , and (c)  $\Delta P$  of embedded SFTHXs and welded SFTHXs  $(f_p=2.5, 3.2, \text{ and } 4.2 \text{ mm})$ .

as the ratio of fin pitch and outside tube diameter  $(f_p/d_o)$ . The new correlations for j and f of embedded and welded SFTHXs are proposed as follows.

For embedded SFTHX,

$$j_{em} = 0.1569 Re_{do}^{-0.3952} (9)$$

$$f_{em} = 1.0402Re_{do}^{-0.1724} \left(\frac{f_p}{d_o}\right)^{0.7116} \tag{10}$$

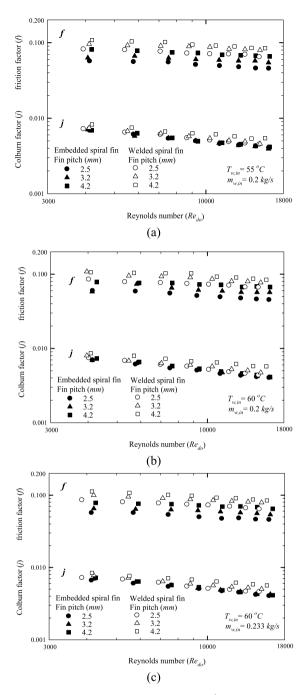


Fig. 3. Influence of the fin base and fin pitch on the j and f factors at (a)  $m_{w,in} = 0.2$  kg/s,  $T_{w,in} = 55$  °C, (b)  $m_{w,in} = 0.2$  kg/s,  $T_{w,in} = 60$  °C and (c)  $m_{w,in} = 0.233$  kg/s,  $T_{w,in} = 60$  °C.

For welded SFTHX,

$$j_{weld} = 0.3373Re_{do}^{-0.3646} \left(\frac{f_p}{d_o}\right)^{0.3467} \tag{11}$$

$$f_{weld} = 1.1338Re_{do}^{-0.1853} \left(\frac{f_p}{d_o}\right)^{0.4471}$$
(12)

Figs. 4 and 5 show that 100% of the measured data falls within  $\pm 10\%$  of the proposed correlations. The mean deviations of j and f

correlations are 2.7 and 1.9% for the embedded SFTHX, respectively, and 3.2 and 3.3% for the welded SFTHX, respectively.

As shown in Fig. 6, the experimental data for embedded and welded SFTHXs are compared with results obtained from correlations of several fin types: plain fin (Wang and Chang [20] and Wang et al. [21]), circular fin (Briggs and Young [22] and Robinson and Briggs [23]), crimped spiral fin (Pongsoi et al. [3]), L-footed spiral fin (Pongsoi et al. [7]), and serrated spiral fin (Pongsoi et al. [10]). The plots show comparisons between the present data points and previous correlations in terms of *j* and *f* factors. As shown in Fig. 6(a), the results show that the embedded and welded SFTHX data have similar trends and values, as obtained from the correlations of the plain

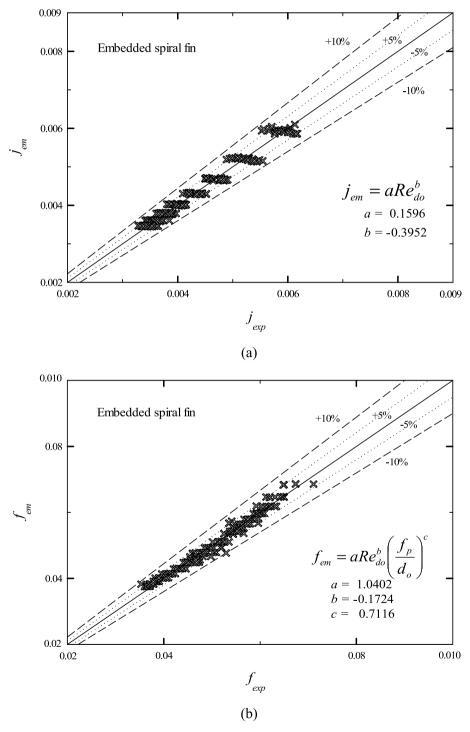


Fig. 4. The measured data vs. present correlations for the embedded SFTHX's (a) Colburn factor and (b) friction factor.

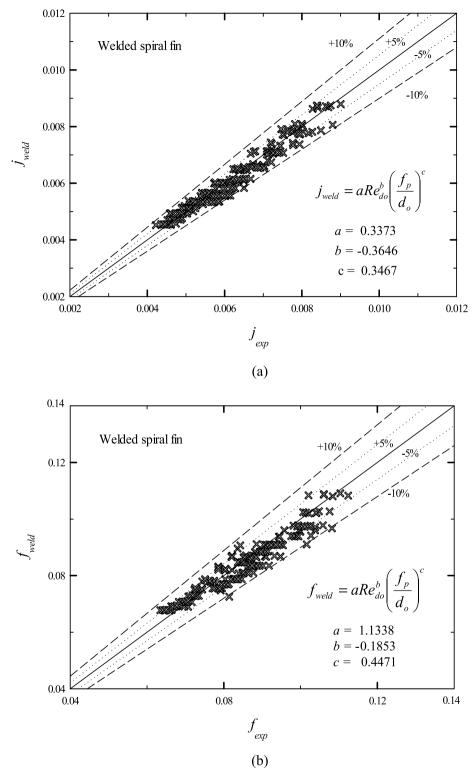


Fig. 5. The measured data vs. present correlations for the welded SFTHX's (a) Colburn factor and (b) friction factor.

fin, circular fin, and L-footed spiral fin. The embedded and welded SFTHXs have significantly different heat-transfer performances, when compared with the crimped spiral fin and the serrated spiral fin, due to the differences in fin patterns. For Fig. 6(b), the f factors of embedded and welded SFTHXs are higher than those for the circular fin, crimped spiral fin, and L-footed spiral fin are. In contrast,

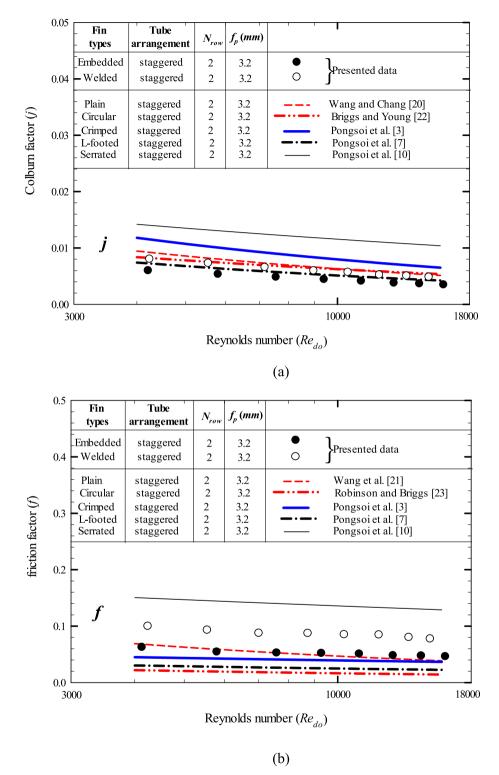


Fig. 6. The measured data vs. several correlations for (a) j factor and (b) f factor.

the f factor for the embedded and welded SFTHXs is lower than that for the serrated spiral fin.

#### 4. Conclusion

The effect of  $f_p$  and fin base connections on the ASPs of embedded and welded SFTHXs under sensible heating conditions at high  $Re_{do}$  were investigated. The  $f_p$  measurements were 2.5–4.2 mm, whereas the fin base connections included embedded and welded finned tubes. The experiment is summarized as follows:

- The  $f_p$  and fin base connection have important roles in the ASPs of embedded and welded SFTHXs at high  $Re_{do}$ .
- The  $Q_{ave}$  and  $\Delta P$  decreased with increasing  $f_D$  for embedded and welded SFTHXs.
- The  $h_o$  of the welded SFTHX increased when the  $f_p$  increased. However, the  $f_p$  had no significant effect on  $h_o$  for the embedded SFTHX
- The  $f_p$  increased as the f factor increased for embedded and welded SFTHXs, but the j factor of the embedded SFTHX decreased less when compared with the welded SFTHX.
- The *j* and *f* correlations are proposed for predicting the heat exchanger's ASP.

#### **CRediT** author statement

Parinya Kiatpachai: Investigation (experimental), Data curation, Writing-Original draft, Writing-reviewing and editing. Thawatchai Kaewkamrop: Investigation (experimental), Mehrdad Mesgarpour: Investigation (experimental), Data curation. Ho Seon Ahn, Ahmet Selim Dalkılıç, Omid Mahian: Investigation (experimental). Somchai Wongwises: Supervision, Writing-reviewing and editing.

# Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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