



(11)

EP 2 630 916 B1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION

(45) Date of publication and mention
of the grant of the patent:

23.01.2019 Bulletin 2019/04

(21) Application number: **11834358.1**

(22) Date of filing: **18.10.2011**

(51) Int Cl.:

A61B 8/00 (2006.01)

(86) International application number:

PCT/JP2011/073952

(87) International publication number:

WO 2012/053519 (26.04.2012 Gazette 2012/17)

(54) ULTRASOUND PROBE AND ULTRASOUND DIAGNOSTIC APPARATUS

ULTRASCHALLSONDE UND ULTRASCHALLDIAGNOSEVORRICHTUNG

SONDE ULTRASONORE ET APPAREIL DE DIAGNOSTIC PAR ULTRASONS

(84) Designated Contracting States:

**AL AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB
GR HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK MT NL NO
PL PT RO RS SE SI SK SM TR**

(30) Priority: **20.10.2010 JP 2010235809**

(43) Date of publication of application:

28.08.2013 Bulletin 2013/35

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Description

ULTRASOUND PROBE AND ULTRASOUND DIAGNOSIS APPARATUS

Field

[0001] The present invention relates to an ultrasound probe and an ultrasound diagnosis apparatus.

Background

[0002] Conventionally, an ultrasound diagnosis apparatus is on a smaller scale than other medical image diagnosis apparatuses such as an X-ray diagnosis apparatus, an X-ray computed tomography (CT) apparatus, and a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) apparatus. In addition, because it is an apparatus that can display in real time the movement of an examination target such as cardiac pulsation and fetal activity by a simple operation of placing an ultrasound probe on the surface of the body, the ultrasonic diagnosis apparatus plays an important role in the present medical practice. Moreover, ultrasound diagnosis apparatuses that are secure from radiation exposure include downsized ones so that they can be carried with one hand. Such ultrasound diagnosis apparatuses can be readily used in medical settings such as obstetrics and home healthcare.

[0003] The ultrasound diagnosis apparatus emits ultrasound waves from its ultrasound probe into the patient's body. Then, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus receives, with the ultrasound probe, reflection waves caused by acoustic impedance mismatching inside the body of the patient, and generates a reception signal. The ultrasound probe is provided with multiple piezoelectric vibrators in the scanning direction to transmit and receive such ultrasound waves. These piezoelectric vibrators are piezoelectrically polarized in the directions of the ultrasound wave transmission and reception, generating ultrasound waves based on a transmission signal and generating a reception signal upon receiving reflection waves.

Citation List

Patent Literature

[0004] Patent Literature 1: Japanese Patent Application Laid-open No. 10-094540. US 5 327 895 relates to an ultrasonic diagnosing system including a probe having an vibrator made of a plurality of spaced piezoelectric material elements arranged in a matrix. The piezoelectric material elements are spaced by spacer segments arranged between electrode rows and formed from a high molecular weight material with less acoustic impedance than the piezoelectric material, JP 2010 110366 relates to an ultrasonic probe including a piezoelectric element and a pulser for feeding driving pulses to the piezoelectric

element in transmission. JP 2003 230 194 relates to an ultrasonic probe where a take-out opening of a ground electrode formed on the ultrasonic wave radiating face side of the piezoelectric plate of an ultrasonic probe is provided at an exposed part of the end side face in the scanning direction and connected externally through a common ground line.

Summary

Technical Problem

[0005] With the conventional technology, however, depolarization caused in the piezoelectric vibrators tend to lower the performance of the ultrasound probe. Solution to Problem

[0006] The problem is solved via a probe according to independent claim 1. Preferred embodiments are defined in the dependent claims.

Brief Description of Drawings

[0007]

FIG. 1 is a diagram for explaining the entire structure of an ultrasound diagnosis apparatus according to an example useful for understanding the invention.

FIG. 2 is a diagram for explaining cables.

FIG. 3 is a diagram for explaining an ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit.

FIG. 4 is a diagram for explaining the structure of a connector of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus according to the example of figure 1.

FIG. 5A is a diagram for explaining switching of a short state and an open state by an open/short switching board and a short terminal.

FIG. 5B is a diagram for explaining the state of an electric circuit in the short state and the open state.

FIG. 6 is a diagram for explaining the timing of switching from the short state to the open state.

FIG. 7 is a diagram for explaining the timing of switching from the open state to the short state.

FIG. 8 is a diagram for explaining a conventional example of an electric circuit regarding an electrode of a piezoelectric vibrator.

FIG. 9 is a diagram for explaining the structure of a connector of an ultrasound diagnosis apparatus according to an embodiment.

FIG. 10 is a diagram for explaining the structure of a connector of an ultrasound diagnosis apparatus according to a further embodiment.

FIG. 11A is the first diagram for explaining a modified example of the further embodiment.

FIG. 11B is the second diagram for explaining a modified example of the further embodiment.

Description of Embodiments and Examples useful for understanding the invention

(Example useful for understanding the invention)

[0008] First, the entire structure of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus according to an example useful for understanding the invention is explained with reference to FIG. 1. FIG. 1 is a diagram for explaining the entire structure of an ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1. As illustrated in FIG. 1, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 includes an apparatus main body 2 and an ultrasound probe 3.

[0009] The apparatus main body 2 is an apparatus that supplies a transmission signal so that the ultrasound probe 3 can transmit ultrasonic waves, and also creates an ultrasonic image based on the received reflection waves. The apparatus main body 2 is connected to an input device, a monitor, and the like so that it can receive various commands from the operator of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 and display various types of information.

[0010] The input device includes, for example, a trackball, switches, buttons, a mouse, and a keyboard, and it receives various setting requests from the operator of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1, and transfers the various setting requests to the apparatus main body 2 (setting requests regarding the region of interest and image quality condition setting commands, for example).

[0011] The monitor is used to display a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for the operator of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 to input various setting requests by use of the input device and also to display ultrasonic images generated by the apparatus main body 2.

[0012] The ultrasound probe 3 includes a connection terminal 31, a connector 32, a connecting mechanism 33, a cable 34, and an ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35, as illustrated in FIG. 1. The connection terminal 31 is a terminal that connects the apparatus main body 2 and signal lines for transmitting transmission signals to the later-described ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35 and receiving reception signals from the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35. The connection terminal 31 has different shapes to correspond to different types of the apparatus main bodies 2.

[0013] The connector 32 houses the cable 34 and fixes the ultrasound probe 3 to the apparatus main body 2 to ensure electric connections. The connecting mechanism 33 establishes the electric connections between the ultrasound probe 3 and the apparatus main body 2 by fixing the connector 32 to the apparatus main body 2. The connecting mechanism 33 may be a handle or a knob. Then, the connecting mechanism 33 switches between a lock state in which the connector 32 is fixed to the apparatus main body 2 and an unlock state in which the connector 32 can be detached from the apparatus main body 2.

[0014] The cable 34 is a cable for transmitting and receiving signals between the later described ultrasound

transmitting and receiving unit 35 and the apparatus main body 2. FIG. 2 is a diagram for explaining the cable 34. As illustrated in FIG. 2, the cable 34 includes several signal lines 36. Then, as illustrated in FIG. 2, the signal lines 36 are connected to the apparatus main body 2 by way of the connection terminal 31. The number of signal lines 36 corresponds to the number of piezoelectric vibrators included in the later described ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35.

[0015] The ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35 generates ultrasound waves in accordance with the transmission signal supplied by the apparatus main body 2, and furthermore, it receives reflection waves from the patient and converts them to a reception signal. FIG. 3 is a diagram for explaining the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35.

[0016] As illustrated in FIG. 3, the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35 includes an acoustic lens 351, an acoustic matching layer 352, flexible printed circuits (FPC) 353, a piezoelectric vibrator 354, and a backside material (backing material) 355.

[0017] The acoustic lens 351 brings the ultrasound waves into convergence. The acoustic matching layer 352 reduces the mismatching of the acoustic impedances of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 and the patient. The FPC 353 transmits and receives electric signals to and from the piezoelectric vibrator 354. The FPC 353 is connected to the signal lines 36, although it is not shown.

[0018] The piezoelectric vibrator 354 generates ultrasound waves in accordance with the transmission signal supplied from the apparatus main body 2, receives reflection waves from the patient, and generates a reception signal. The piezoelectric vibrator 354 includes multiple piezoelectric vibrators, although they are not shown, and each of the piezoelectric vibrators generates ultrasound waves and generates a reception signal. The backside material 355 prevents the ultrasound waves from propagating from the piezoelectric vibrator 354 backward.

[0019] For example, when the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35 transmits ultrasound waves to the patient, the transmitted ultrasound waves are successively reflected on the body tissue of the patient where the acoustic impedances are discontinuous, and received by the multiple piezoelectric vibrators of the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35 as reflection wave signals. The amplitude of a received reflection wave signal depends on the difference between the acoustic impedances of the discontinuous surfaces on which the ultrasound waves are reflected. If the transmitted ultrasonic pulse is reflected in the flowing blood current or on the surface of the cardiac wall, the reflection signals have their frequencies shifted due to the Doppler effect, in accordance with the velocity component of the moving body with respect to the direction of the ultrasound wave transmission.

[0020] According to the example of figure 1, a one-dimensional ultrasound probe in which multiple piezoe-

lectric vibrators are arranged in a line may be adopted for the ultrasound probe 3, or an ultrasound probe 3 that mechanically shakes the multiple piezoelectric vibrators of the one-dimensional ultrasound probe or a two-dimensional ultrasound probe in which multiple piezoelectric vibrators are two-dimensionally arranged in a matrix form may be adopted.

[0021] In this manner, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the example of figure 1 creates a contrast image and a tissue image based on the reflection waves of the ultrasonic waves transmitted by the ultrasound probe 3. The ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the example of figure 1 avoids the depolarization of the piezoelectric vibrator 354, by use of the connector 32 that is explained in detail below, so that the performance of the ultrasound probe 3 can be prevented from lowering. More specifically, the connector 32 according to the example of figure 1 avoids the depolarization by passing pyroelectric charges, which are the main factor of the depolarization of the piezoelectric vibrator 354, to the ground (GND). As a result, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the example of figure 1 can prevent the performance of the ultrasound probe 3 from being degraded.

[0022] The structure of the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the example of figure 1 is now explained with reference to FIG. 4. FIG. 4 is a diagram for explaining the structure of the connector 32 in the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1. As illustrated in the top part of FIG. 4, the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 includes an open/short switching board 321, a short terminal 322, a core (iron core) 323, a solenoid 324, and actuator control lines 325.

[0023] The open/short switching board 321 switches at any timing between a short state in which the electrode of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 is connected to the GND and an open state in which this electrode is not connected to the GND, by establishing contact with, or separating from, the later described short terminal 322. More specifically, as illustrated in the top part of FIG. 4, the open/short switching board 321 is a board through which all the signal lines 36 included in the cable 34 run, and it switches between the short state in which all the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 are connected to the GND and the open state in which the electrodes are not connected to the GND, by establishing contact with or separating from the short terminal 322.

[0024] The short terminal 322 brings the electric circuit formed between the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 into the short state or the open state by making contact with the open/short switching board 321 or separating from it. More specifically, as illustrated at the top of FIG. 4, the short terminal 322 brings the electric circuit formed between the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 into the short state by making contact with the open/short switching board 321. Furthermore, as illustrated at the bottom of FIG. 4, the short terminal 322 brings the electric circuit formed between the electrodes

of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 into the open state by separating from the open/short switching board 321.

[0025] Here, the switching operation between the short state and the open state by the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 is explained with reference to FIGS. 5A and 5B. FIG. 5A is a diagram for explaining the switching operation between the short state and the open state by the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322. FIG. 5B is a diagram for explaining the electric circuit in the short state and the open state.

[0026] In FIG. 5A, the state of the signal lines where the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are separated from each other is illustrated on the left side of FIG. 5A. Moreover, in FIG. 5A, the state of the signal lines where the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are brought into contact with each other is illustrated on the right side of FIG. 5A. Moreover, regarding FIG. 5B, the state of the electric circuit where the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are separated from each other as indicated on the left side of FIG. 5A is illustrated on the left side of FIG. 5B. Further, in FIG. 5B, the state of the electric circuit in which the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are brought into contact with each other as indicated on the right side of FIG. 5A is illustrated on the right side of FIG. 5B.

[0027] As illustrated on the left side of FIG. 5A, the open/short switching board 321 includes the signal lines 36 that are connected to all the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354, and is provided with auxiliary signal lines 37 that extend externally from the signal lines toward the short terminal 322 and a GND terminal 38 one end of which extends externally toward the short terminal 322. In addition, as illustrated on the left side of FIG. 5A, the short terminal 322 includes a conductor 326 on the side of the open/short switching board 321.

[0028] Then, when the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are brought into contact with each other, the protruding portions of all the auxiliary signal lines 37 are connected to the protruding portion of the GND terminal 38 by way of the conductor 326, as illustrated on the right side of FIG. 5A. The conductor 326 may be an electric circuit board or a conductive rubber.

[0029] In other words, when the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are separated from each other, the electric circuit including the piezoelectric vibrator 354, a voltage application terminal 361, and the GND terminal 38 are brought into the open state, as illustrated on the left side of FIG. 5B. On the other hand, when the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are in contact with each other, the electric circuit including the piezoelectric vibrator 354, the voltage application terminal 361, and the GND terminal 38 is brought into a short state, as illustrated on the right side of FIG. 5B.

[0030] For example, in accordance with a temperature change or the like, pyroelectric charges are generated in

the piezoelectric vibrator 354. The pyroelectric charges generate a voltage in a direction opposite to the voltage direction of the piezoelectric polarization of the piezoelectric vibrator 354. Thus, if a significant amount of pyroelectric charges are generated, depolarization that weakens the piezoelectric polarization of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 is produced, which lowers the performance of the ultrasound probe 3.

[0031] The open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322, however, bring the electric circuit of the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 into the short state illustrated on the right side of FIG. 5B so that the pyroelectric charges produced in the piezoelectric vibrator 354 can flow into the GND terminal 38. In other words, with the electric circuit of the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 in the short state, even if a thermal load is applied onto the piezoelectric vibrator 354, no depolarization would occur, and the performance of the ultrasound probe 3 would be prevented from being degraded. In an ultrasound diagnosis with the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1, the electric circuit of the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 is put into the open state as illustrated on the right side of FIG. 5B, and thereby a voltage necessary to drive the ultrasound probe 3 can be applied.

[0032] In FIG. 4, the iron core 323 is a fixed iron core of the solenoid actuator mechanism that moves the short terminal 322. The solenoid 324 is a three-dimensional coil of the solenoid actuator mechanism. The actuator control lines 325 pass the current supplied from the apparatus main body 2 to the solenoid 324.

[0033] The operation of moving the short terminal 322 with the solenoid actuator mechanism is explained now. The short terminal 322 moves toward the iron core 323 when the current supplied from the apparatus main body 2 flows into the solenoid 324 by way of the actuator control lines 325. More specifically, the short terminal 322 is arranged at a position a certain distance away from the iron core 323 (i.e. a position in contact with the open/short switching board 321) by use of a spring or the like. Then, when a current flows into the solenoid 324, the short terminal 322 moves until it is tightly attached to the iron core 323 by suction that acts between the solenoid 324 and the iron core 323, owing to the a magnetic flux produced in the solenoid 324.

[0034] The short terminal 322 maintains the tight attachment with the iron core 323 during the supply of the current to the solenoid 324. Then, once a current supply to the solenoid 324 stops, the short terminal 322 returns to the original position (i.e., the position in contact with the open/short switching board 321) by the action of the spring or the like.

[0035] In other words, when no current is supplied to the solenoid 324, the short terminal 322 comes into contact with the open/short switching board 321, and brings the electric circuit formed between the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 into a short state. Then, when a current is supplied into the solenoid 324, the short ter-

terminal 322 is separated from the open/short switching board 321, and brings the electric circuit formed between the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 into an open state.

[0036] As mentioned above, the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 switch between the short state and the open state in accordance with the current supplied from the apparatus main body 2 by way of the actuator control lines 325. The timing of the current supplied from the apparatus main body 2 can be arbitrarily determined by the operator of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1. In other words, the operator can arbitrarily switch the short state and the open state. In the following explanation, an example of the timing of switching from the short state to the open state and an example of the timing of switching from the open state to the short state are discussed with reference to FIGS. 6 and 7.

[0037] FIG. 6 is a diagram for explaining an example of the timing of switching from the short state to the open state. As indicated in FIG. 6, between the connection of the ultrasound probe 3 to the apparatus main body 2 and the initiation of an ultrasound diagnosis, there are several timings at which switching from the short state to the open state may be performed.

[0038] For example, before the ultrasound diagnosis is started, first, the ultrasound probe 3 is attached to the apparatus main body 2. At this point, the ultrasound probe 3 is physically connected the apparatus main body 2 and is in a short state.

[0039] Then, when the ultrasound probe 3 is selected as a probe that is to be used for the ultrasound diagnosis (for example, when it is selected as a probe that is to be used for the ultrasound diagnosis from multiple ultrasound probes), the current is allowed to pass from the apparatus main body 2 to the ultrasound probe 3. Thus, the apparatus main body 2 can supply a current to the solenoid 324 by way of the actuator control lines 325. In other words, the operator can switch it from the short state to the open state at this timing.

[0040] If the switching to the open state is not performed here, the next possible timing of switching from the short state to the open state can be when the apparatus conditions are determined, as indicated in FIG. 6. In other words, the operator can perform switching from the short state to the open state at the same time as when various settings and the like for the ultrasound diagnosis are input.

[0041] Furthermore, if the switching to the open state is not performed at the timing of determining the apparatus conditions, the open state should be established at the timing of applying a voltage to the ultrasound probe 3, as illustrated in FIG. 6, and the switching may be performed immediately before the voltage application (i.e., immediately before releasing the freeze button). To avoid the depolarization of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 as much as possible, it is the most effective to perform the switching to the open state immediately before the voltage application.

[0042] FIG. 7 is a diagram for explaining an example of the timing of switching from the open state to the short state. As indicated in FIG. 7, between the termination of the ultrasound diagnosis and the detachment of the ultrasound probe 3 from the apparatus main body 2, there are several timings at which the switching from the open state to the short state can be conducted.

[0043] For example, as indicated in FIG. 7, the switching from the open state to the short state may be performed at the timing when the drive of the ultrasound probe 3 is stopped (i.e., when the voltage application is stopped). If the switching to the short state is not performed here, the next possible timing of switching from the open state to the short state is when the current from the apparatus main body 2 to the ultrasound probe 3 is stopped, as indicated in FIG. 7.

[0044] When the current from the apparatus main body 2 to the ultrasound probe 3 is stopped, the current supplied from the apparatus main body 2 to the solenoid 324 is also automatically stopped. Thus, by the time the ultrasound probe 3 is detached, the electric circuit of the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 is brought into the short state, as indicated in FIG. 7.

[0045] As discussed above, the switching between the short state and the open state can be conducted at any timing by the operator. The disclosed technology, however, is not limited to the above, and for example, it may be configured in such a manner that the switching is automatically performed in accordance with the conductivity between the apparatus main body 2 and the ultrasound probe 3.

[0046] As described above, according to the example of figure 1, the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 switch at any timing between the short state in which the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 in the ultrasound probe 3 are connected to the GND terminal 38 and the open state in which the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator 354 are not connected to the GND terminal 38. Thus, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 drains the pyroelectric charge, which is the main factor that causes the depolarization of the piezoelectric vibrator 354, to the ground (GND) to avoid the depolarization. As a result, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 can prevent the performance of the ultrasound probe 3 from being degraded.

[0047] For example, in the conventional technologies, an electric circuit has been known that dissipates pyroelectric charges produced in the piezoelectric vibrator to a resistor that is added to the electric circuit of the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator. FIG. 8 is a diagram for explaining an example of a conventional technology having an electric circuit of the electrodes of the piezoelectric vibrator. In the conventional electric circuit, a parallel resistance component 362 is added, as illustrated in FIG. 8, to the electric circuit having the voltage application terminal 361, the piezoelectric vibrator 354, and the GND terminal 38. In this manner, in the conventional electric circuit, pyroelectric charges generated in the pi-

ezoelectric vibrator 354 can be dissipated to the parallel resistance component 362.

[0048] The conventional method may suppress the depolarization to some extent if the pyroelectric charges are generated due to a temperature change or the like, but if a significant amount of pyroelectric charges are generated, the depolarization cannot be suppressed, which results in degradation in the performance of the ultrasound probe 3.

[0049] In the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1, because the pyroelectric charges generated in the piezoelectric vibrator 354 are drained to the GND terminal 38, depolarization does not occur in the piezoelectric vibrator 354 even if a significant amount of pyroelectric charges are generated. Thus, by use of the disclosed technology, a highly reliable ultrasound probe tolerant of a thermal load can be offered.

[0050] In addition, the apparatus main body 2 electrically controls the operation of switching between the short state and the open state performed by the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322, based on the condition of the connection between the apparatus main body 2 and the ultrasound probe 3.

[0051] Moreover, according to this example, the apparatus main body 2 switches between the short state and the open state by a solenoid actuator mechanism that uses electromagnetic force. Hence, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the this example can realize an accurately operating switching mechanism, with a simple structure.

[0052] According to the above example, the control of the contact between the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 and separation thereof by use of a solenoid actuator mechanism that uses a current supplied from the apparatus main body 2 has been explained. According to an embodiment, the control of the contact between the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 and separation thereof by interlocking the short terminal 322 and the connecting mechanism 33 is explained below.

[0053] FIG. 9 is a diagram for explaining the structure of the connector 32 in the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the embodiment. As illustrated at the top of FIG. 9, in the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the embodiment, the short terminal 322 is mechanically connected to the connecting mechanism 33. More specifically, the short terminal 322 is connected to the connecting mechanism 33 in such a manner that its position changes in accordance with the movement of the connecting mechanism 33.

[0054] For example, as illustrated at the top of FIG. 9, when the connecting mechanism 33 is unlocked, the short terminal 322 is connected to the connecting mechanism 33 in such a manner that it is brought into contact with the open/short switching board 321. Furthermore, when the connecting mechanism 33 is pushed toward the not-shown apparatus main body 2 and locked, the short terminal 322 is connected to the connecting mech-

anism 33 in such a manner that it is separated from the open/short switching board 321, as illustrated at the bottom of FIG. 9.

[0055] In other words, when the ultrasound probe 3 is connected and fixed to the apparatus main body 2, the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the embodiment is in the open state, and when the fixation is cancelled, it is brought into the short state. For example, if the connecting mechanism 33 is a handle, the short terminal 322 is brought into contact with the open/short switching board 321 or is separated from it, in accordance with the rotation of the handle that switches between the locked state and the unlocked state. The connecting mechanism 33 may also be a knob or a switch, and the short terminal 322 can be connected to the connecting mechanism 33 in such a manner as to interlock with it.

[0056] As described above, according to the embodiment, the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 switch between the short state and the open state based on a change of the arrangement position in accordance with the connection state of the apparatus and the ultrasound probe. Thus, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the embodiment can further readily switch between the short state and the open state.

[0057] In addition, according to the embodiment, the open/short switching board 321 and the short terminal 322 are interlocked with the mechanism that connects the apparatus to the ultrasound probe to switch between the short state and the open state. Hence, the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the embodiment can reliably switch between the short state and the open state at the timings of starting and terminating the ultrasound diagnosis.

(Further Embodiment)

[0058] Various modifications can be made to the described exemplary embodiments.

(1) Modification Example 1

[0059] According to the above embodiment, the operation of switching between the short state and the open state by interlocking the short terminal 322 with the connecting mechanism 33. The disclosed technology is not limited thereto, however. For example, the operation of switching between the short state and the open state may be realized by changing the position of the short terminal 322 by a mechanism included in the apparatus main body 2.

[0060] FIG. 10 is a diagram for explaining the structure of the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to a further embodiment, which does not fall within the scope of the claims. As illustrated at the top of FIG. 10, the apparatus main body 2 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the further embodiment is provided with a switching mechanism 21. Then,

in the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the further embodiment, the short terminal 322 is mechanically connected to the connecting mechanism 33 by way of a spring or the like. Here, the short terminal 322 is arranged at a position in contact with the open/short switching board 321, as illustrated at the top of FIG. 10.

[0061] Then, as illustrated at the bottom of FIG. 10, when the connector 32 is connected to the apparatus main body 2, the switching mechanism 21 pushes the short terminal 322 off. As a result, the short terminal 322 is moved to a position apart from the open/short switching board 321. When the connector 32 is detached from the apparatus main body 2, it returns to the original position by the action of the spring or the like.

[0062] In other words, in the connector 32 of the ultrasound diagnosis apparatus 1 according to the further embodiment, the open state is established when the connector 32 is connected to the apparatus main body 2, while the short state is established when the connector 32 is detached from the apparatus main body 2. In such a situation, even if the connector 32 is not locked, the ultrasound probe 3 can still be brought into the open state.

(2) Electrical Movement Control of Short Terminal

[0063] In the explanation of the example of figure 1, the short terminal 322 that is moved by use of the solenoid actuator mechanism has been dealt with. However, the disclosed technology is not limited thereto, and for example, the short terminal 322 may be moved by use of a switch circuit.

(3) Arrangement of Open/short Switching Board and Short Terminal

[0064] According to the example of figure 1, the open/short switching board and the short terminal are included in the connector 32. The disclosed technology, however, is not limited thereto. For example, the open/short switching board and the short terminal may be included in the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35.

[0065] In such a situation, for example, the structure of the ultrasound probe 3 should be changed in such a manner that the solenoid actuator mechanism is included in the ultrasound transmitting and receiving unit 35 and a current is supplied thereto from the apparatus main body 2 by way of the cable 34.

(1) Modification Example 2

[0066] In the explanation of the above examples and embodiments, the operation of switching between the short state and the open state that is performed based on the connection state of the ultrasound probe 3 and the apparatus main body 2 has been dealt with. However, the embodiment is not limited thereto, and, for example,

the ultrasound probe 3 may singly perform the operation of switching between the short state and the open state at any timing that the operator desires, regardless of the connection state between the ultrasound probe 3 and the apparatus main body 2. An example of the ultrasound probe 3 singly performing the operation of switching between the short state and the open state at any timing that the operator desires is explained below with reference to FIGS. 11A and 11B.

[0067] FIG. 11A is the first diagram of a modification example according to the further embodiment. Further, FIG. 11B is the second diagram of a modification example according to the further embodiment. For example, in the modification example according to the further embodiment, the ultrasound probe 3 includes a switch 327, as illustrated in FIG. 11A. Then, the operator presses the switch 327 down to switch between the short state and the open state at a timing that the operator desires.

[0068] As an example of the ultrasound probe 3 having the above switch 327, the short terminal 322 is mechanically connected to a support member that is interlocked with the switch, as illustrate at the top of FIG. 11B. Then, the ultrasound probe 3 switches between the short state and the open state by a spring 328 that stretches and contracts by the switch 327 that is pressed. For example, when the switch is pressed down in the situation illustrated at the top of FIG. 11B, the spring 328 contracts as illustrated at the bottom of FIG. 11B, which brings the short terminal 322 into contact with the open/short switching board 321 and establishes the short state. The switch 327 is provided with a holding member to hold the spring 328 in the contraction state.

[0069] Then, when the switch is pressed again in the situation illustrated at the bottom of FIG. 11B, the holding member is released, and the short terminal 322 and the open/short switching board 321 are separated from each other by the resilience of the spring 328, establishing the open state, as illustrated at the top of FIG. 11B. For the core of the spring 328, any material that can stretch and contract can be adopted.

[0070] In the explanation of the above examples, the switching between the short state and the open state is mechanically controlled, but the present embodiment is not limited thereto. For example, it may be electrically controlled. For example, a structure with a small battery in the connector may be adopted to perform electrical control.

[0071] As described above, the ultrasound probe according to the present embodiments can avoid the depolarization in the piezoelectric vibrators by switching between the short state and the open state of the piezoelectric vibrators. In addition to the above embodiments, a method of attaching a mass shorting board to the outside of the ultrasound probe may be considered for the switching between the open state and the short state of the piezoelectric vibrators.

[0072] However, with the method of attaching a mass shorting board to the outside of the ultrasound probe, two

components, the ultrasound probe and the mass shorting board, are required for the structure. In other words, there is some inconvenience that the operator needs to handle the two components. Furthermore, with the method of using a mass shorting board, the operator may forget to attach it, or may not properly attach it, and thus it is difficult to reliably stop the generation of depolarization in the piezoelectric vibrators.

[0073] In contrast, the ultrasound probe according to the present embodiment includes a switching unit that switches between the short state and the open state, and therefore it is free of the above inconvenience or attaching error. In other words, in the ultrasound probe according to the present embodiment, the depolarization in the piezoelectric vibrators can be reliably avoided, without requiring the operator's awareness of the switching between the short state and the open state.

[0074] As explained above, according to the embodiments, the present ultrasound probe can avoid the depolarization in the piezoelectric vibrators, and can prevent the performance of the ultrasound probe from being degraded.

[0075] While certain embodiments have been described, these embodiments have been presented by way of example only, and are not intended to limit the scope of the inventions. Indeed, the novel embodiments described herein may be embodied in a variety of other forms; furthermore, various omissions, substitutions and changes in the form of the embodiments described herein may be made as far as they fall into the scope of the appended claims.

Claims

1. An ultrasound probe (3) comprising:

a plurality of piezoelectric vibrators (354) configured to generate ultrasound waves, and receive reflection waves, and
generate a reception signal based on the received reflection waves for generating an ultrasonic image; and
a switching unit (321, 322) configured to switch between a short state in which an electrode of the plurality of piezoelectric vibrators (354) is connected to a ground terminal (GND) and an open state in which the electrode of the plurality of piezoelectric vibrators (354) is not connected to the ground terminal (GND), **characterised in that**, the ultrasound probe further comprises a connection terminal (31), a connector (32), a connecting mechanism (33), and a cable (34), for connecting the ultrasound probe to an apparatus main body (2), wherein the switching unit (321,322) is configured to switch all of the plurality of piezoelectric vibrators (354) to the open state when the connection be-

tween the ultrasound probe (3) and an apparatus main body (2) that generates the ultrasonic image based on the reception signal is in locked state, and is configured to switch all of the plurality of piezoelectric vibrators to the short state when the connection between the ultrasound probe (3) and the apparatus main body (2) is in unlocked state.

2. The ultrasound probe (3) according to claim 1, wherein the switching unit (321, 322) is configured to switch between the short state and the open state in accordance with a change of an arrangement position, based on a condition of connection between the ultrasound probe (3) and the apparatus main body (2).
3. The ultrasound probe (3) according to claim 2, wherein the switching unit (321, 322) is interlocked with a handle or a knob or a switch for connecting the ultrasound probe (3) to the apparatus main body (2).
4. An ultrasound diagnosis apparatus (1) comprising : the ultrasound probe (3) according to any one of claims 1 to 3, and an apparatus main body (2) that generates the ultrasonic image based on a reception signal generated by the ultrasound probe (2).

Patentansprüche

1. Ultraschallsonde (3), die Folgendes umfasst:

mehrere piezoelektrische Schwingungserzeuger (354), die dafür konfiguriert sind, Ultraschallwellen zu erzeugen und Reflexionswellen zu empfangen und auf Grundlage der empfangenen Reflexionswellen ein Empfangssignal zum Erzeugen eines Ultraschallbildes zu erzeugen, und eine Umschalteinheit (321, 322), die dafür konfiguriert ist, umzuschalten zwischen einem Kurzschlusszustand, in dem eine Elektrode der mehreren piezoelektrischen Schwingungserzeuger (354) mit einem Masseanschluss (GND) verbunden ist, und einem offenen Zustand, in dem die Elektrode der mehreren piezoelektrischen Schwingungserzeuger (354) nicht mit dem Masseanschluss (GND) verbunden ist, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Ultraschallsonde ferner einen Verbindungsanschluss (31), einen Verbinder (32), einen Verbindungsmechanismus (33) und ein Kabel (34), zum Verbinden der Ultraschallsonde mit einem Vorrichtungshauptkörper (2), umfasst, wobei die Umschalteinheit (321, 322) dafür konfiguriert ist, alle der mehreren piezoelektrischen Schwin-

gungserzeuger (354) zu dem offenen Zustand umzuschalten, wenn sich die Verbindung zwischen der Ultraschallsonde (3) und dem Vorrichtungshauptkörper (2), der auf Grundlage des Empfangssignals das Ultraschallbild erzeugt, in einem verriegelten Zustand befindet, und dafür konfiguriert ist, alle der mehreren piezoelektrischen Schwingungserzeuger zu dem Kurzschlusszustand umzuschalten, wenn sich die Verbindung zwischen der Ultraschallsonde (3) und dem Vorrichtungshauptkörper (2) in einem entriegelten Zustand befindet.

2. Ultraschallsonde (3) nach Anspruch 1, wobei die Umschalteinheit (321, 322) dafür konfiguriert ist, in Übereinstimmung mit einer Änderung einer Anordnungsstellung, auf Grundlage eines Zustands der Verbindung zwischen der Ultraschallsonde (3) und dem Vorrichtungshauptkörper (2), zwischen dem Kurzschlusszustand und dem offenen Zustand umzuschalten.
3. Ultraschallsonde (3) nach Anspruch 2, wobei die Umschalteinheit (321, 322) mit einem Griff oder einem Knopf oder einem Schalter zum Verbinden der Ultraschallsonde (3) mit dem Vorrichtungshauptkörper (2) verblockt ist.
4. Ultraschall-Diagnosevorrichtung (1), die Folgendes umfasst:

die Ultraschallsonde (3) nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3 und einen Vorrichtungshauptkörper (2), der auf Grundlage eines durch die Ultraschallsonde (3) erzeugten Empfangssignals das Ultraschallbild erzeugt.

Revendications

1. Sonde à ultrasons (3), comprenant :

plusieurs vibreurs piézoélectriques (354) configurés pour générer des ondes ultrasonores ; et recevoir des ondes de réflexion ; et générer un signal de réception sur la base des ondes de réflexion reçues pour générer une image ultrasonore ; et une unité de commutation (321, 322) configurée pour commuter entre un état de court-circuit, dans lequel une électrode des plusieurs vibreurs piézoélectriques (354) est connectée à une borne de terre (GND), et un état ouvert, dans lequel l'électrode des plusieurs vibreurs piézoélectriques (354) n'est pas connectée à la borne de terre (GND), **caractérisée en ce que** la sonde à ultrasons comprend en outre une borne de

connexion (31), un connecteur (32), un mécanisme de connexion (33) et un câble (34) pour connecter la sonde à ultrasons à un corps principal d'un appareil (2), dans laquelle :

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l'unité de commutation (321, 322) est configurée pour commuter l'ensemble des plusieurs vibreurs piézoélectriques (354) vers l'état ouvert, lorsque la connexion entre la sonde à ultrasons (3) et le corps principal d'un appareil (2) générant l'image ultrasonore sur la base du signal de réception se trouve dans l'état verrouillé, et est configurée pour commuter l'ensemble des plusieurs vibreurs piézoélectriques vers l'état de court-circuit, lorsque la connexion entre la zone à ultrasons (3) et le corps principal de l'appareil (2) se trouve dans un état non verrouillé.

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2. Sonde à ultrasons (3) selon la revendication 1, dans laquelle l'unité de commutation (321, 322) est configurée pour commuter entre l'état de court-circuit et l'état ouvert en fonction d'un changement d'une position d'agencement, sur la base d'un état de la connexion entre la sonde à ultrasons (3) et le corps principal de l'appareil (2).

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3. Sonde à ultrasons (3) selon la revendication 2, dans laquelle l'unité de commutation (321, 322) est interverrouillée avec une poignée, ou un bouton ou un commutateur pour connecter la sonde à ultrasons (3) au corps principal de l'appareil (2).

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4. Appareil de diagnostic à ultrasons (1), comprenant :

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la sonde à ultrasons (3) selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 3 ; et
un corps principal d'un appareil (2) générant une image ultrasonore sur la base d'un signal de réception généré par la sonde à ultrasons (2).

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FIG.1

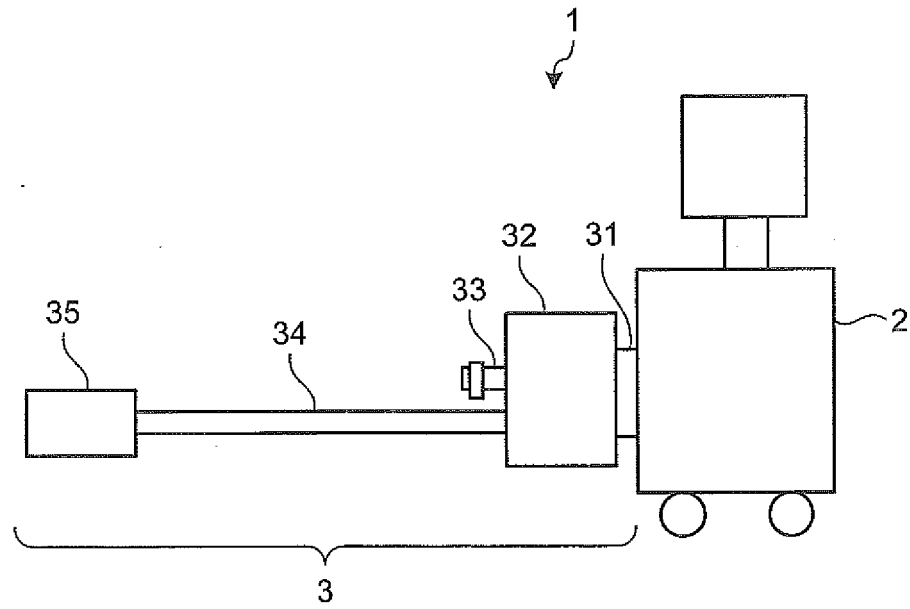


FIG.2

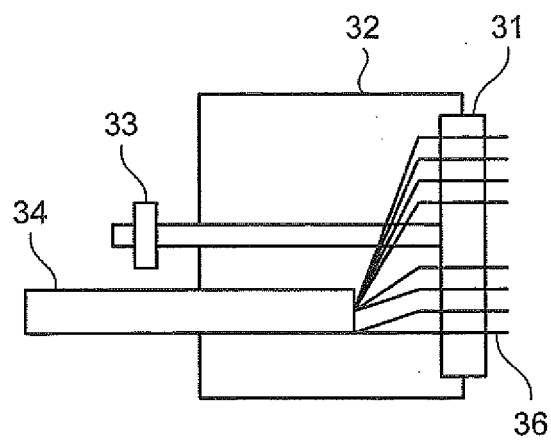


FIG.3

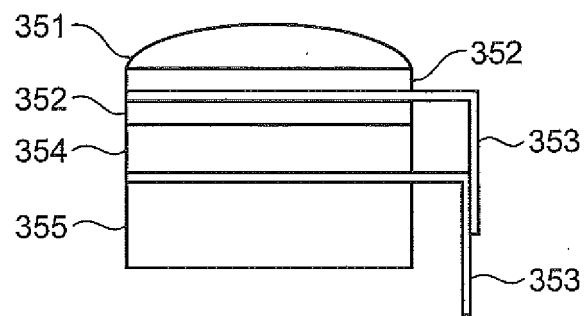


FIG.4

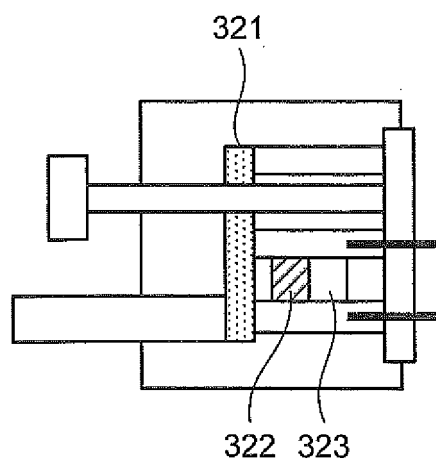
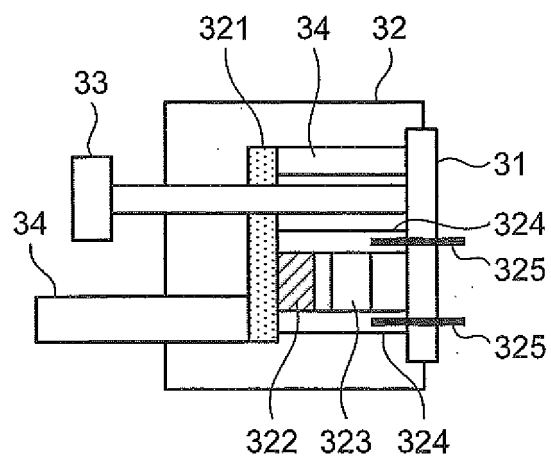


FIG.5A

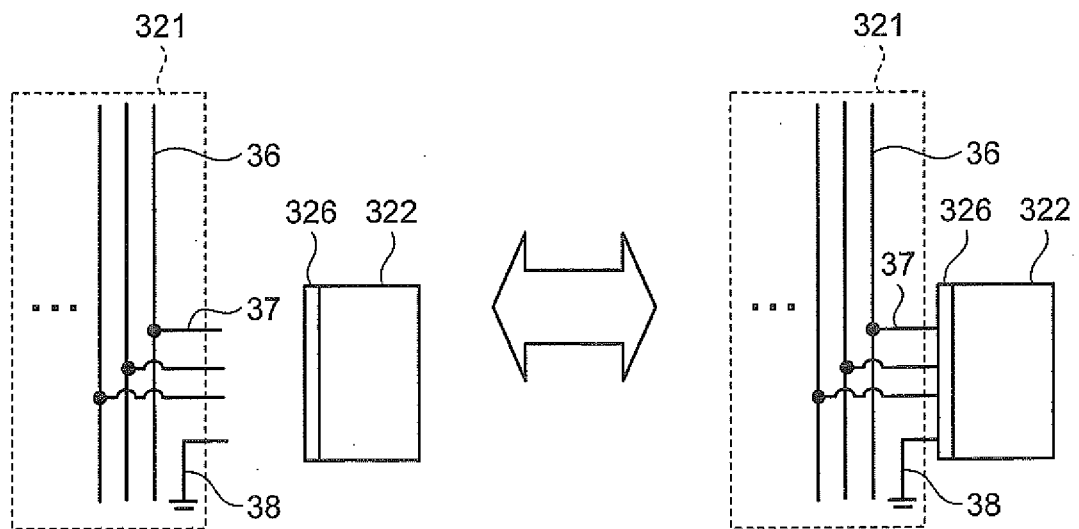


FIG.5B

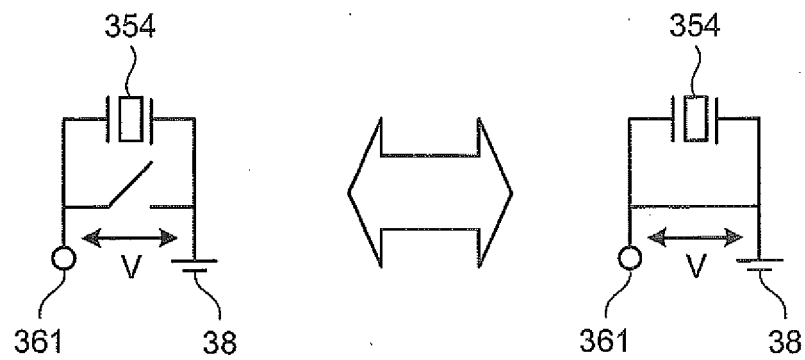


FIG.6

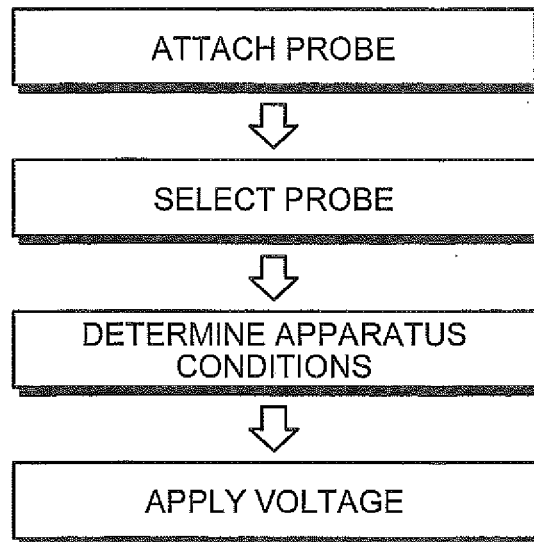


FIG.7

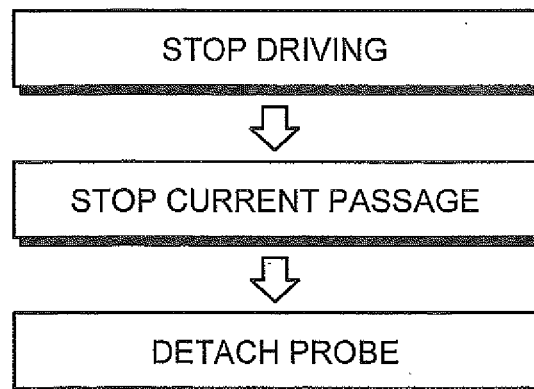


FIG.8

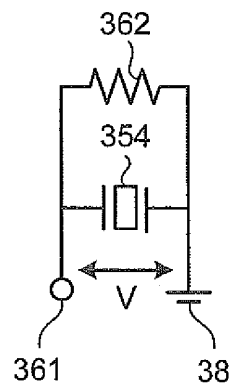


FIG.9

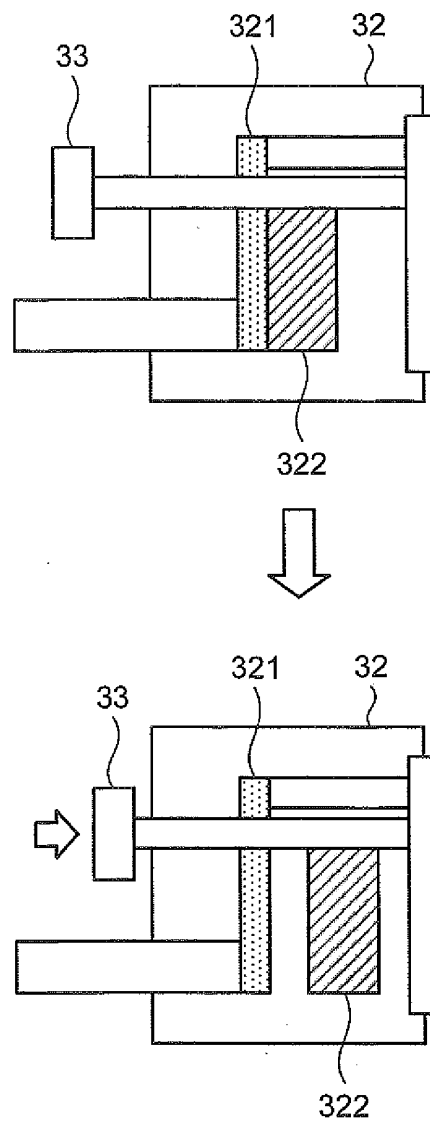


FIG.10

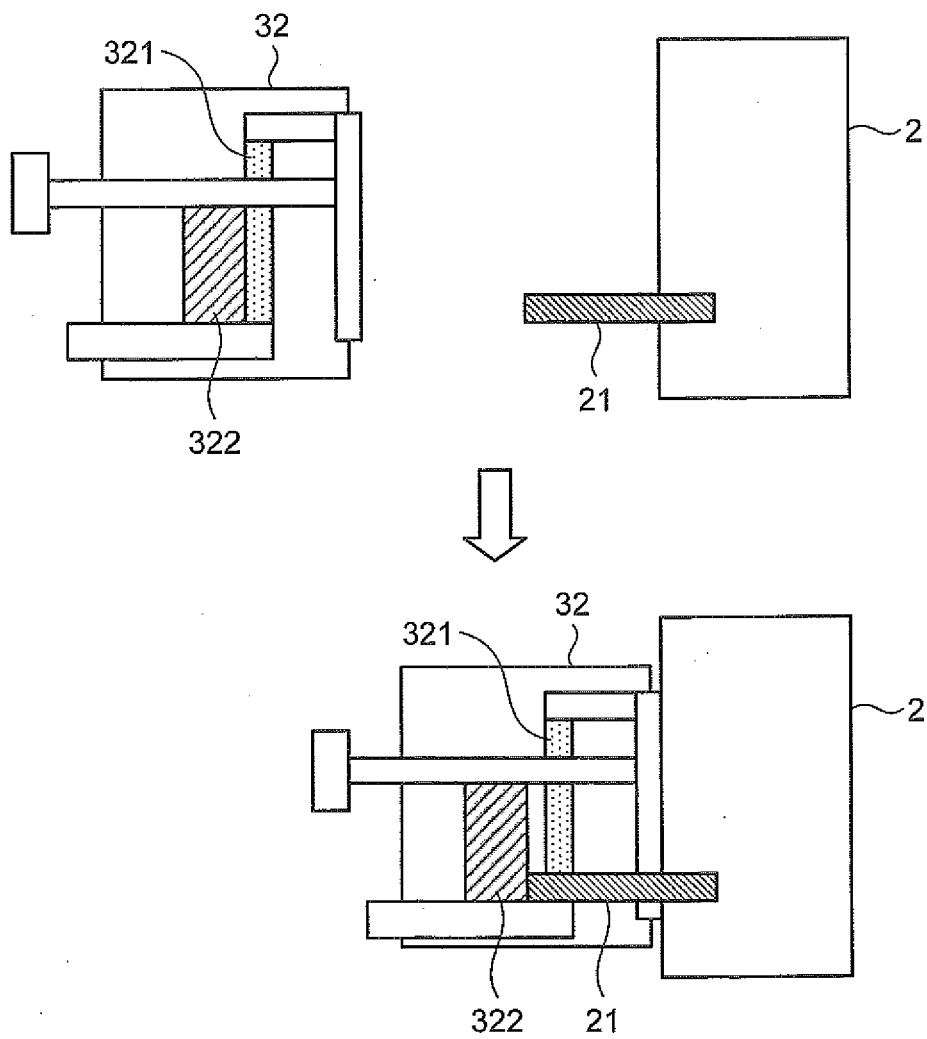


FIG.11A

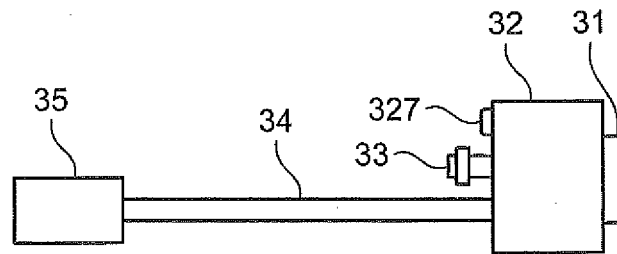
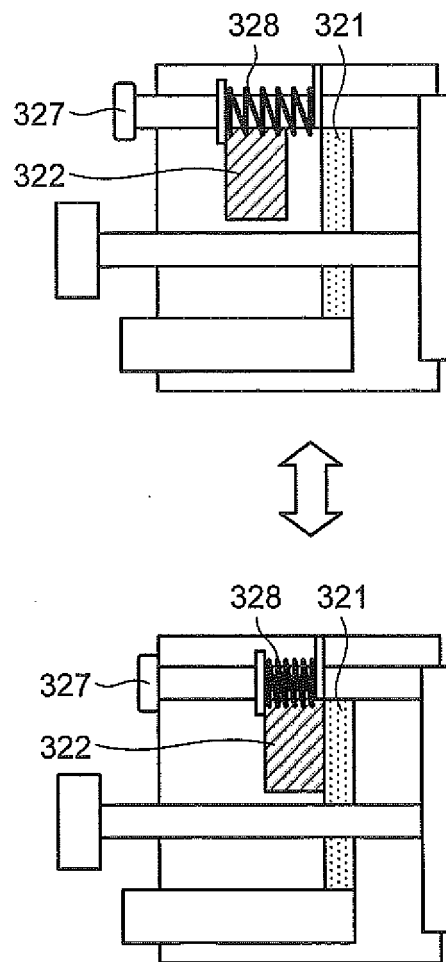


FIG.11B



REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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专利名称(译)	超声探头和超声诊断仪		
公开(公告)号	EP2630916B1	公开(公告)日	2019-01-23
申请号	EP2011834358	申请日	2011-10-18
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IPC分类号	A61B8/00		
CPC分类号	A61B8/4444 A61B8/4433 B06B1/06 G01S7/5208		
代理机构(译)	莫兰, DAVID		
优先权	2010235809 2010-10-20 JP		
其他公开文献	EP2630916A4 EP2630916A1		
外部链接	Espacenet		

摘要(译)

根据本实施例，超声波探头（3）包括压电振动器（354），开路/短路开关板（321），短路端子（322）和GND端子（38）。然后，开路/短路开关板（321）和短路端子（322）在压电振动器（354）的电极连接到GND端子（38）的短路状态和开路状态之间切换。压电振动器（354）的电极在任何时刻都不连接到GND端子（38）。

FIG. 1

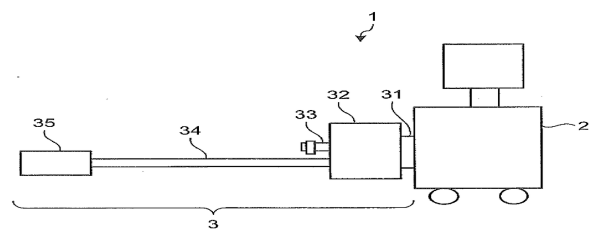


FIG. 2

