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(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication**
NAKAGAWA et al.(10) **Pub. No.: US 2016/0363657 A1**(43) **Pub. Date: Dec. 15, 2016**(54) **ULTRASOUND PROBE AND ULTRASOUND
IMAGING APPARATUS USING THE SAME**(52) **U.S. Cl.**CPC *G01S 7/52046* (2013.01); *G01S 15/8915*
(2013.01); *G01S 7/52025* (2013.01); *A61B*
8/145 (2013.01); *A61B 8/4444* (2013.01);
A61B 8/4494 (2013.01)(71) Applicant: **HITACHI, LTD.**, Tokyo (JP)(72) Inventors: **Tatsuo NAKAGAWA**, Tokyo (JP);
Hiroshi MASUZAWA, Tokyo (JP);
Shinya KAJIYAMA, Tokyo (JP)(57) **ABSTRACT**(21) Appl. No.: **15/121,418**(22) PCT Filed: **Feb. 26, 2014**(86) PCT No.: **PCT/JP2014/054756**

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(2) Date: **Aug. 25, 2016****Publication Classification**(51) **Int. Cl.***G01S 7/52* (2006.01)*A61B 8/14* (2006.01)*A61B 8/00* (2006.01)*G01S 15/89* (2006.01)

A compact delay circuit that can dynamically change delay time is configured. A probe includes an analog memory unit that accumulates electric charges corresponding to a reflected wave of an ultrasonic wave produced by a difference between the acoustic impedances on a plurality of capacitors **303** and in turn outputs the electric charges accumulated on the capacitors **303** to an analog memory unit **205**. In accumulating electric charges, when a control signal Ctl_s_1 that increases delay time of the reflected wave is inputted, the analog memory unit **205** accumulates the same electric charges on two or more of the capacitors **303** for a preset period, or in outputting electric charges, when a control signal Ctl_o_1 is inputted, the analog memory unit **205** outputs the electric charges accumulated on one of the capacitors **303** for a preset period.

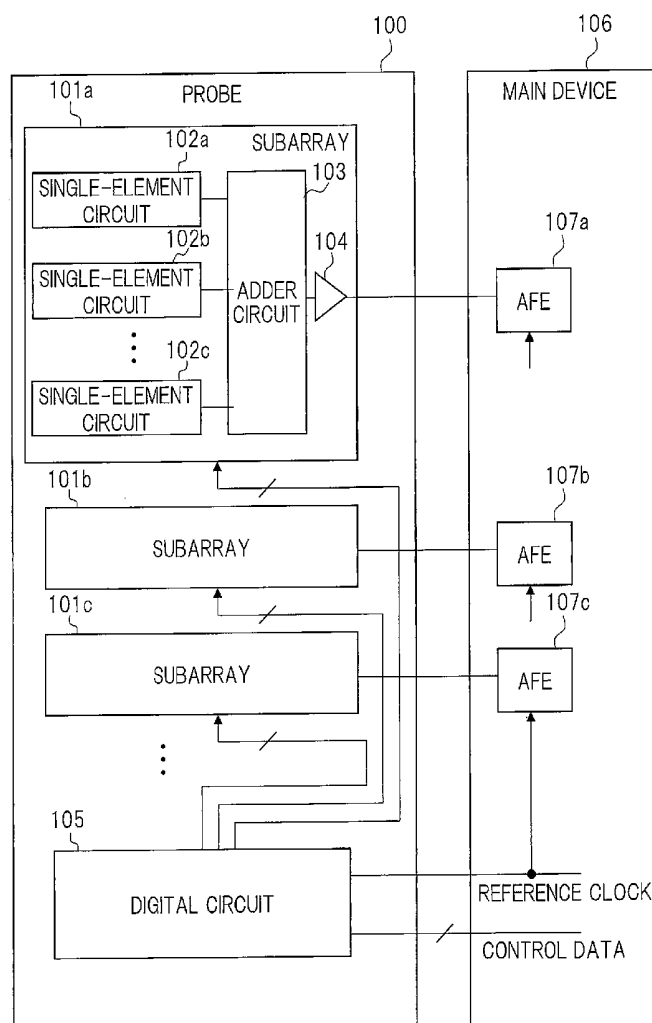


FIG. 1

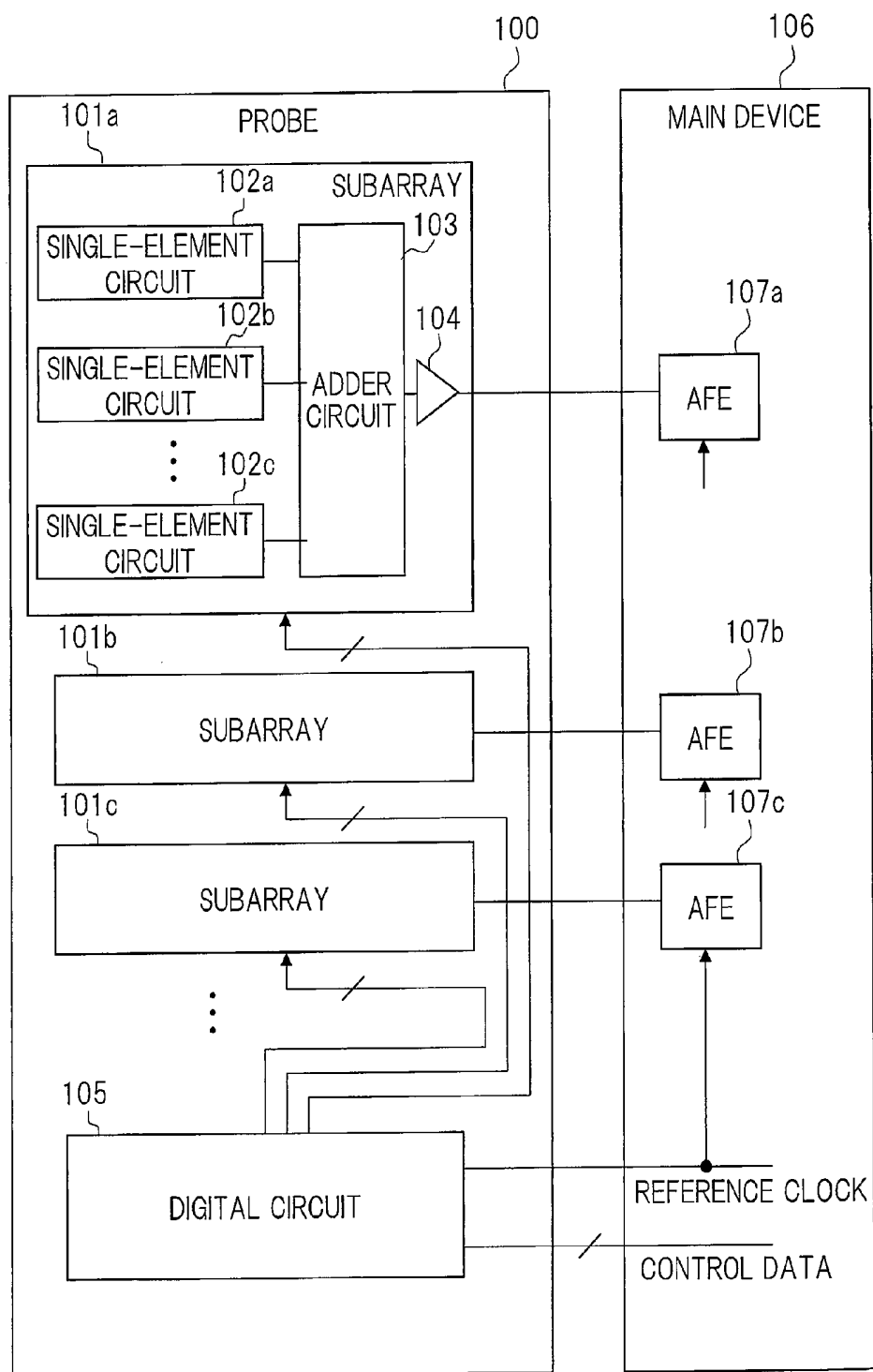


FIG. 2

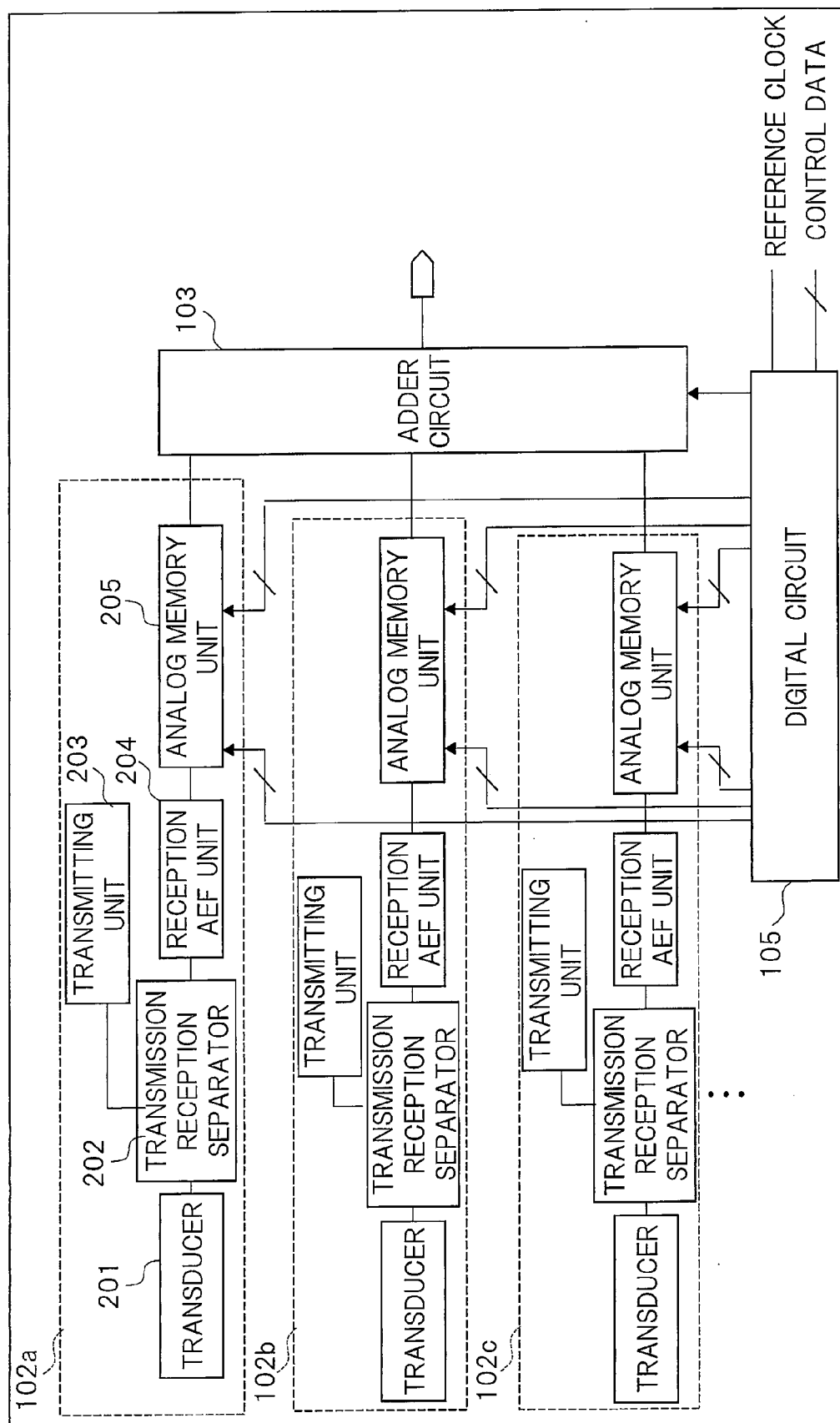


FIG. 3

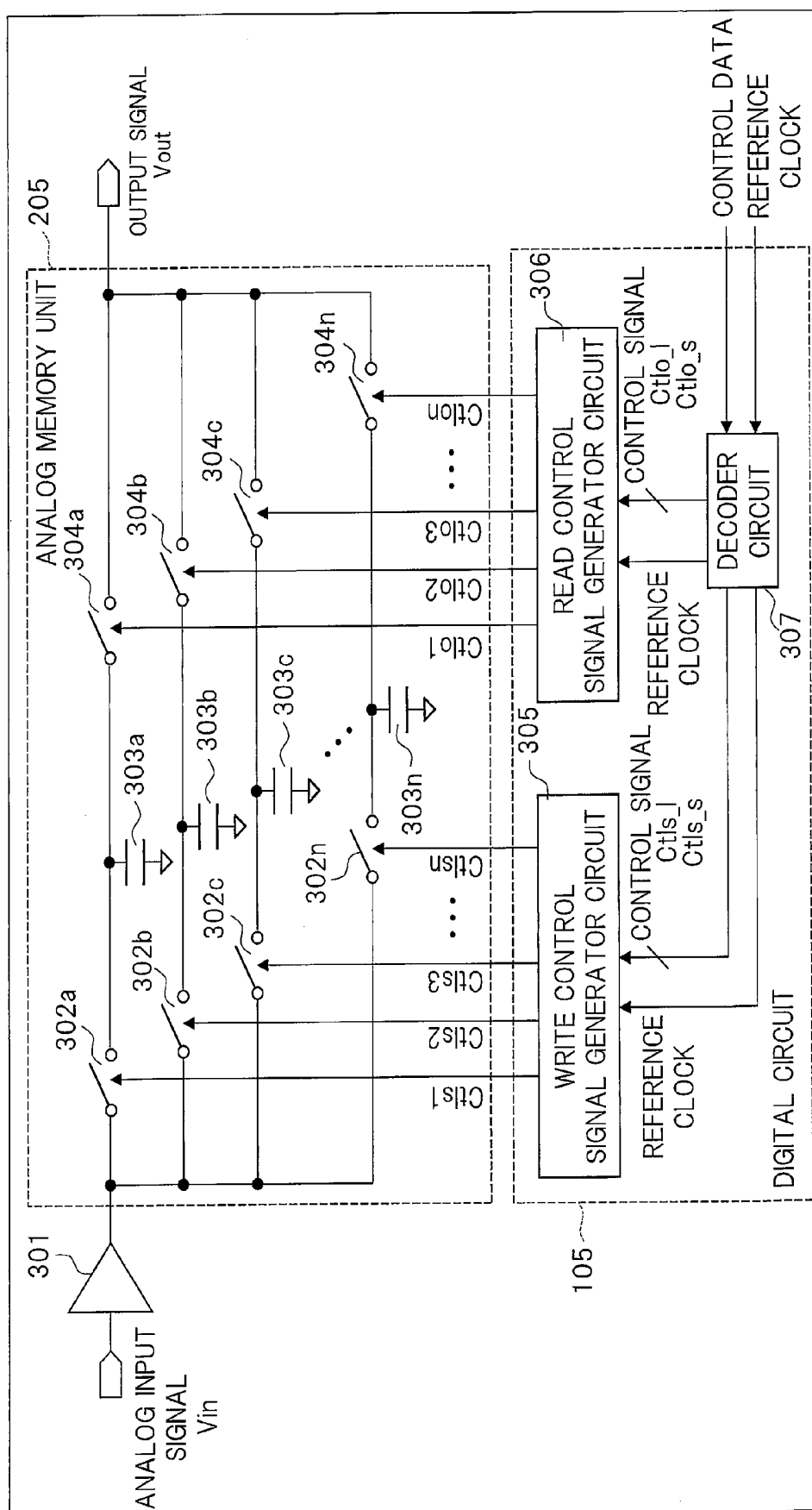


FIG. 4

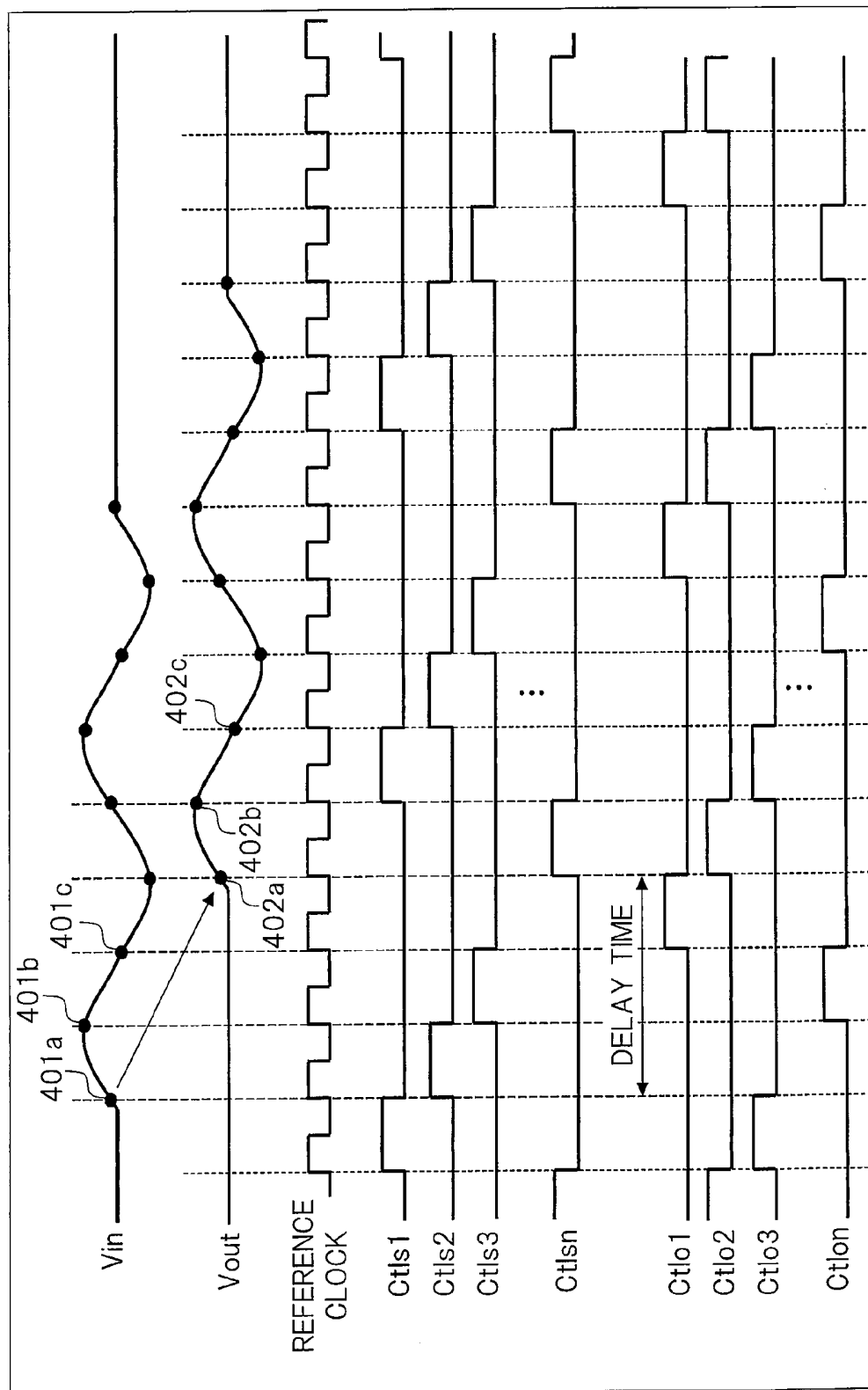


FIG. 5

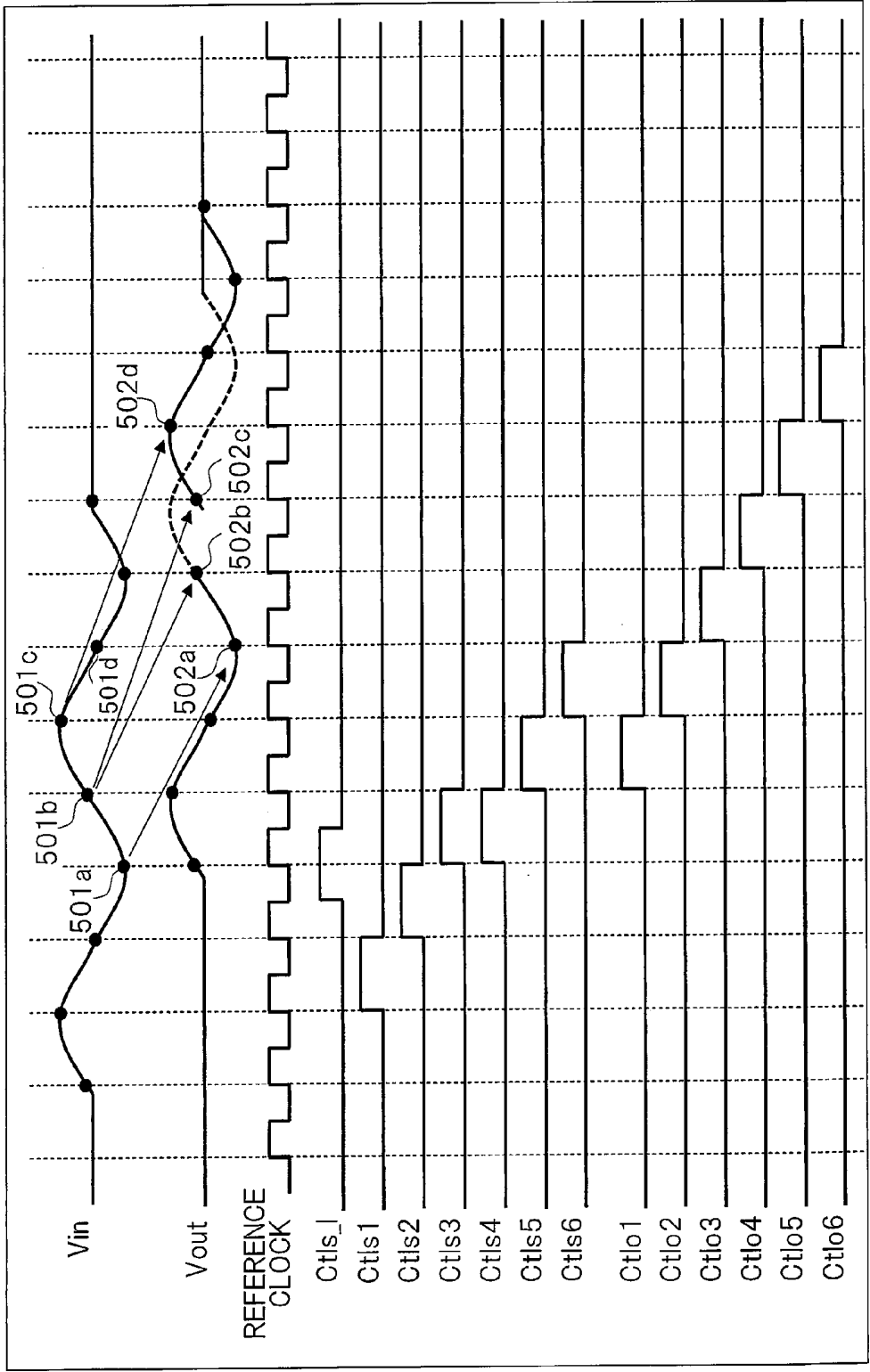


FIG. 6

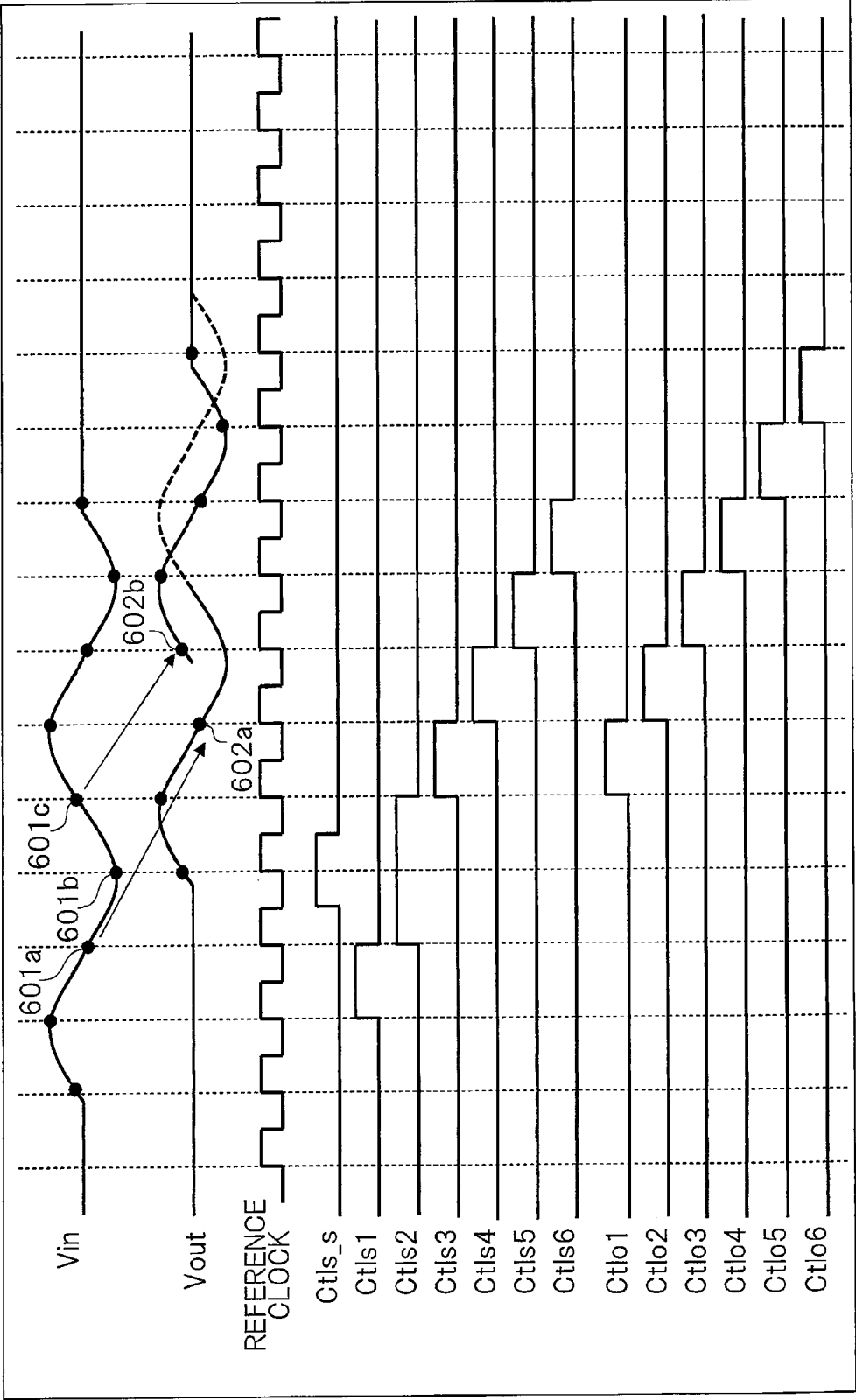


FIG. 7

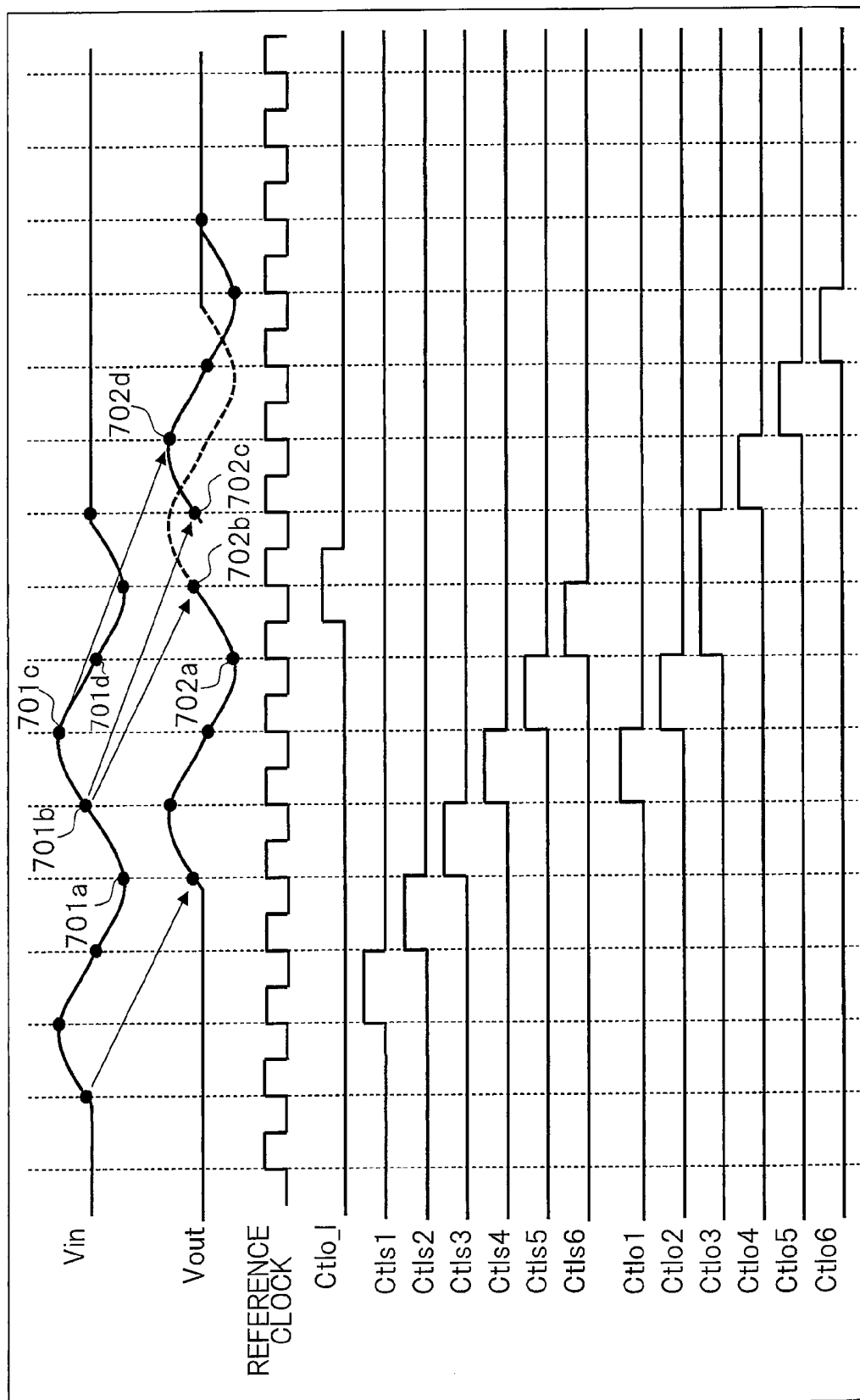


FIG. 8

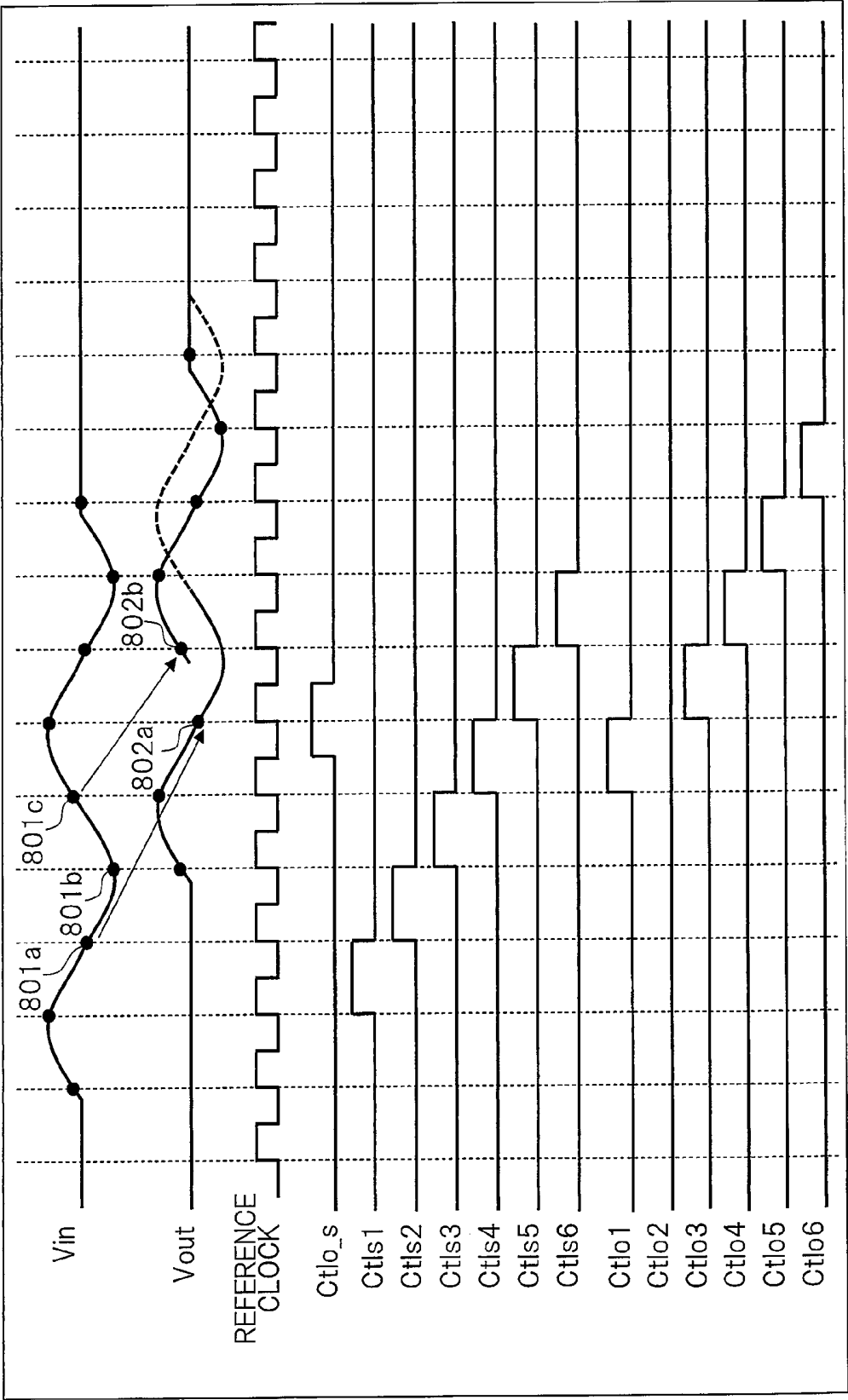


FIG. 9

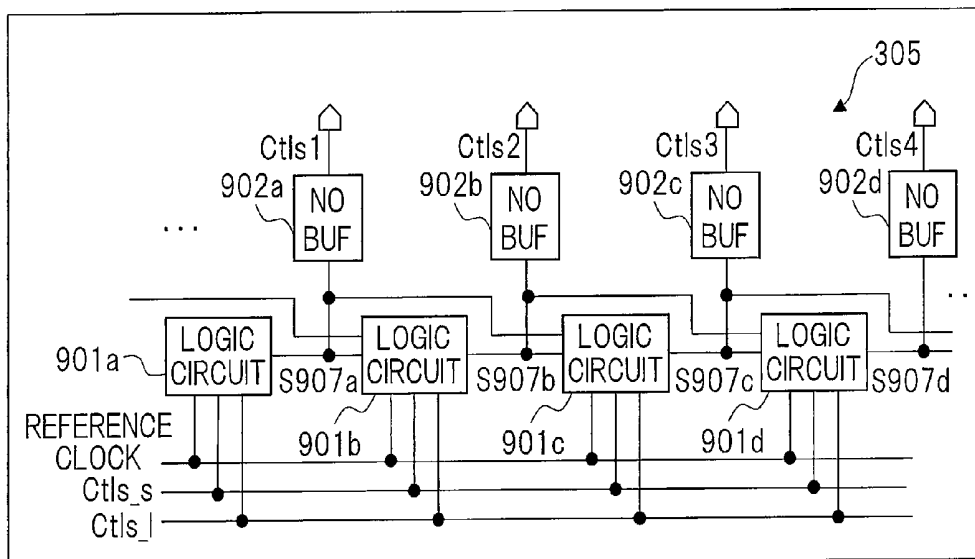


FIG. 10

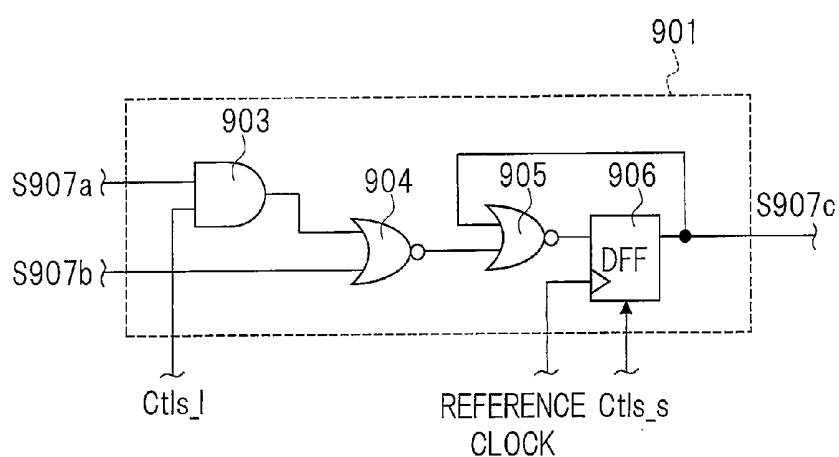


FIG. 11

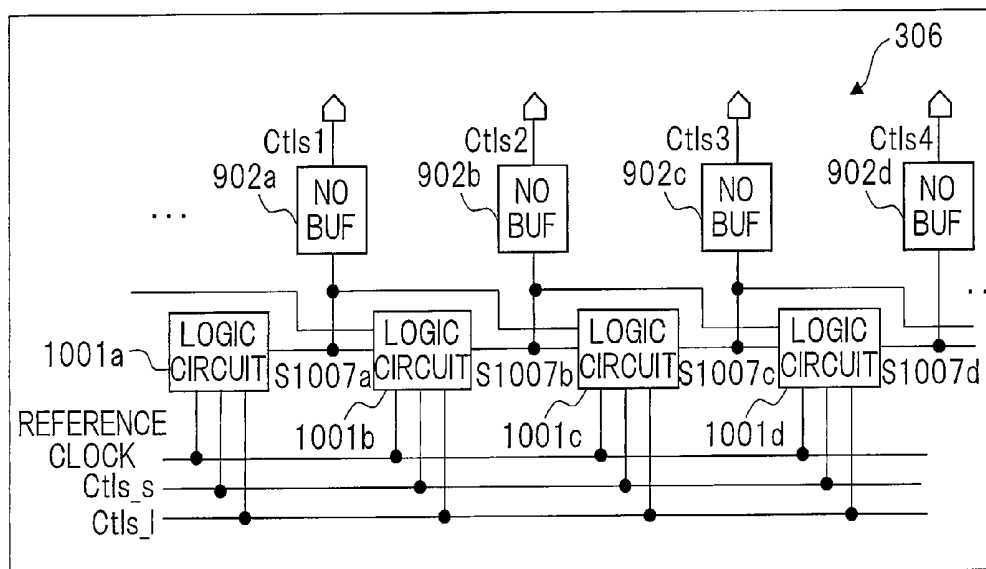


FIG. 12

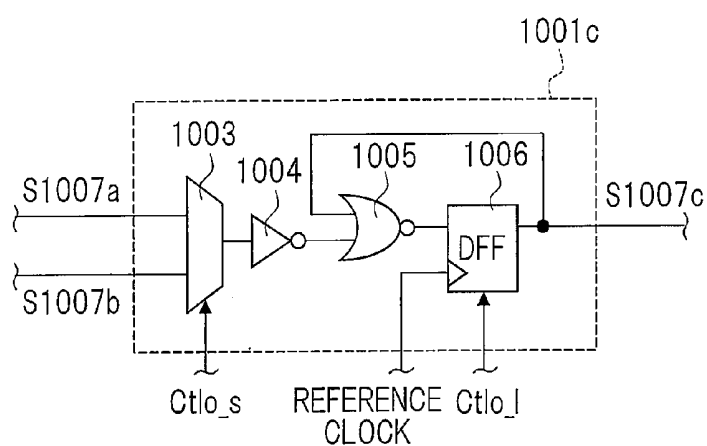


FIG. 13

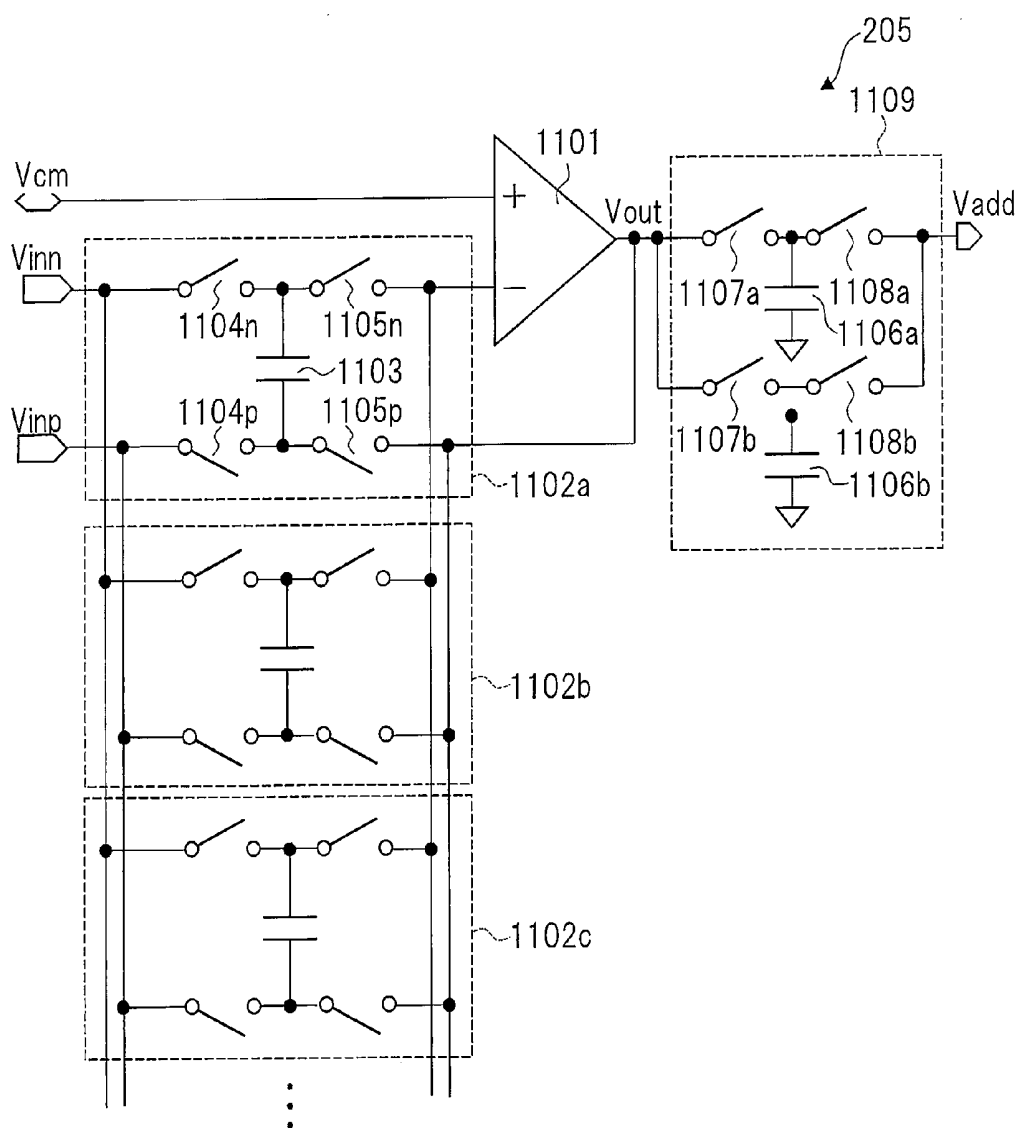


FIG. 14

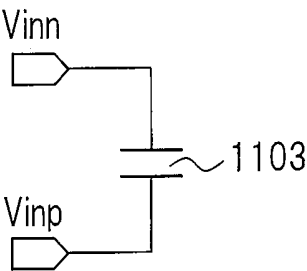


FIG. 15

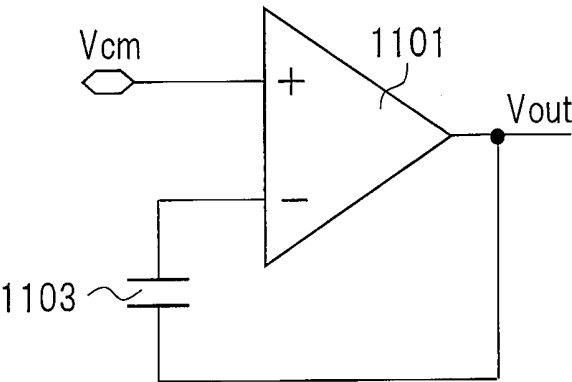


FIG. 16

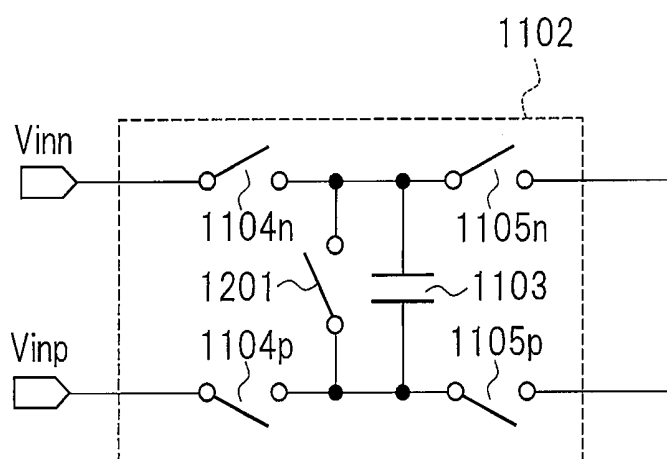


FIG. 17

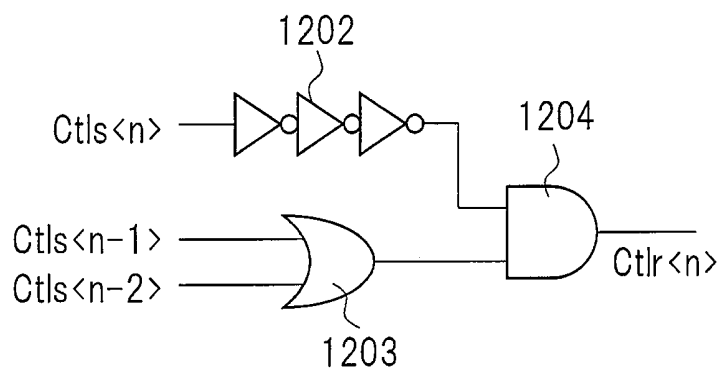


FIG. 18

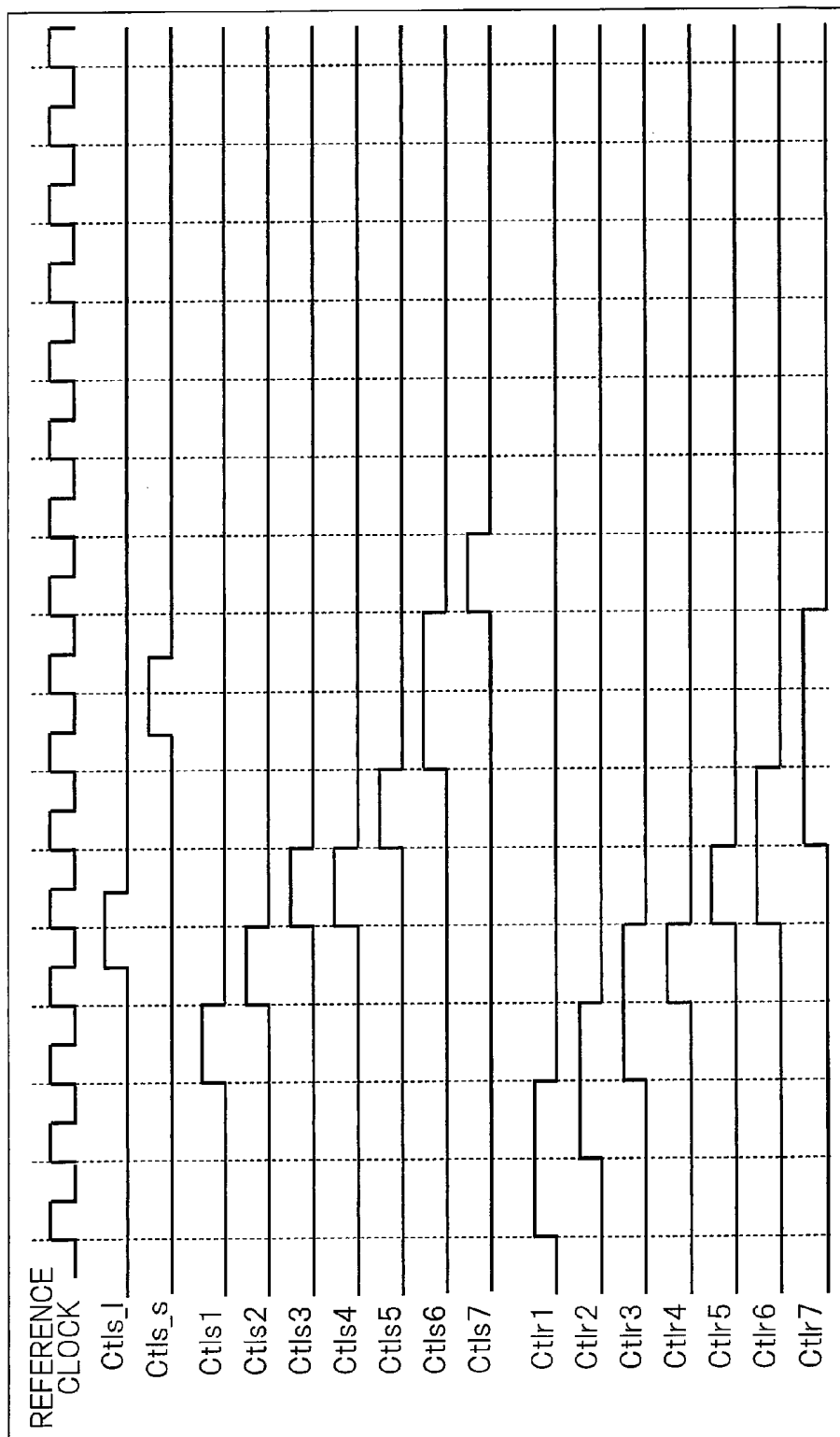


FIG. 19

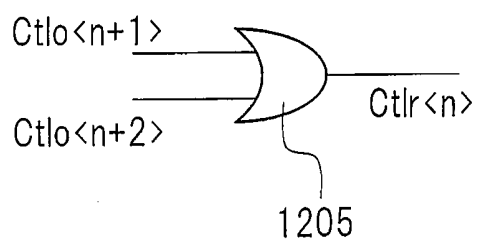


FIG. 20

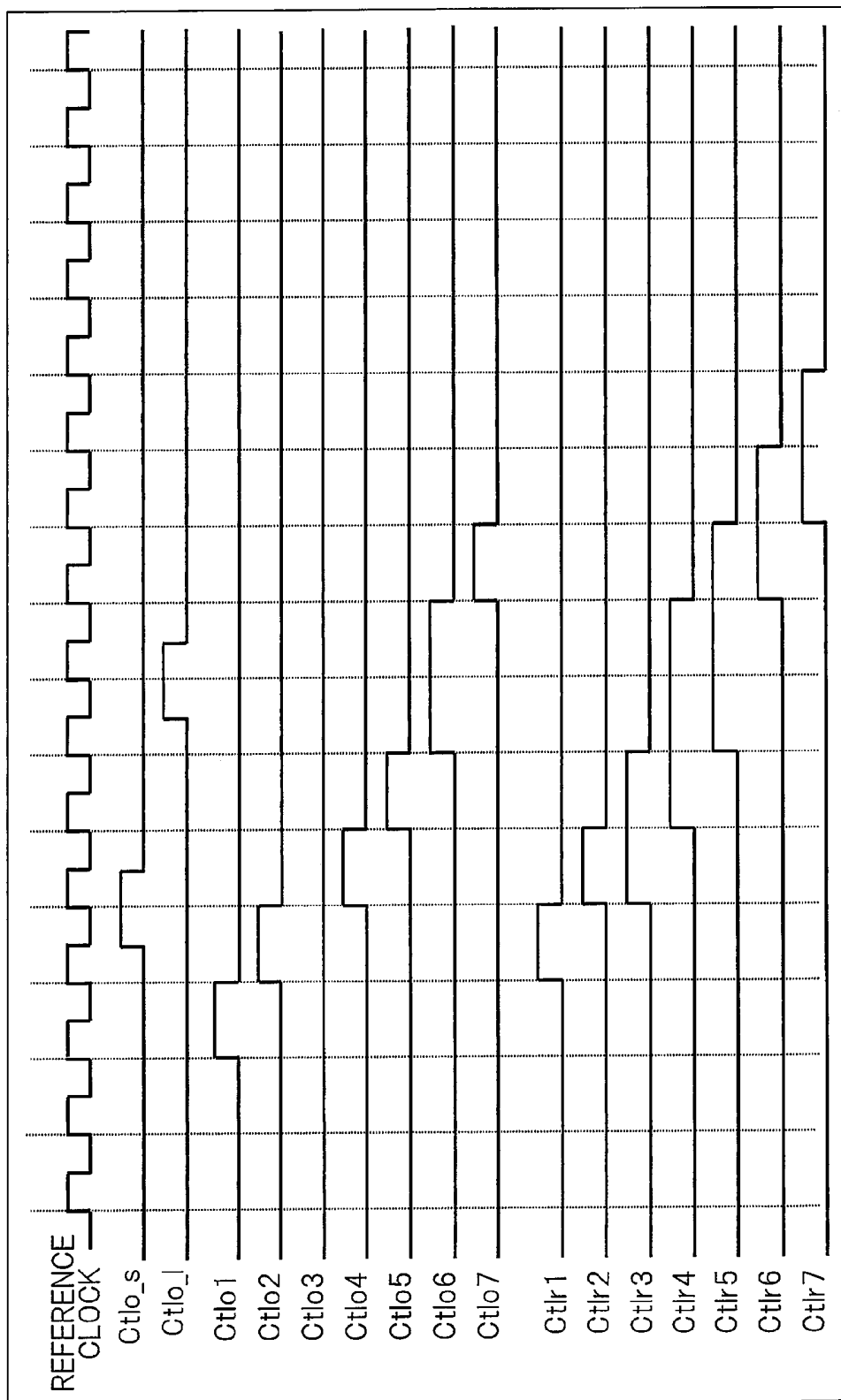


FIG. 21

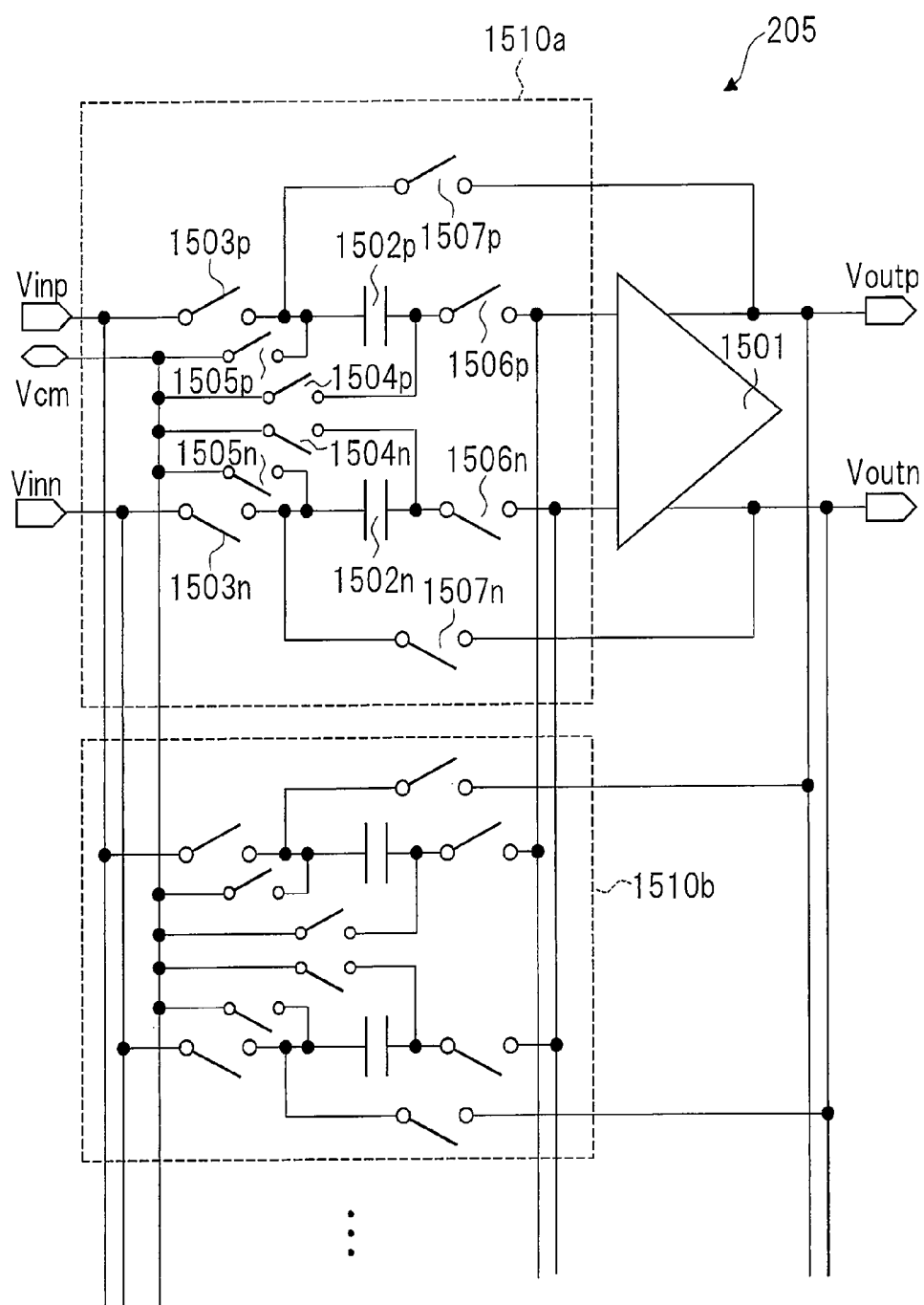


FIG. 22

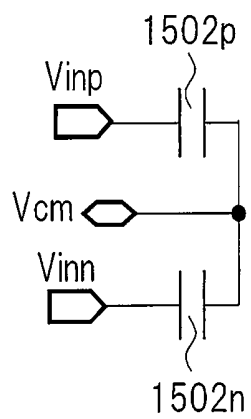


FIG. 23

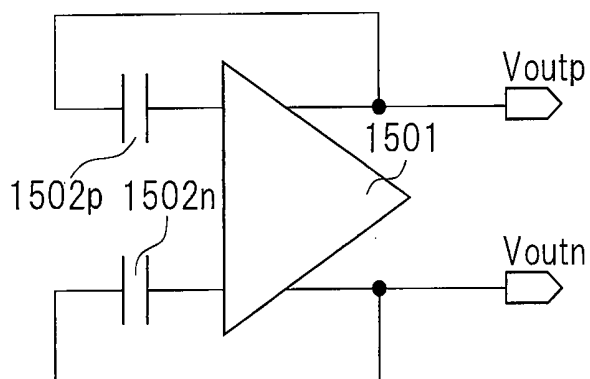
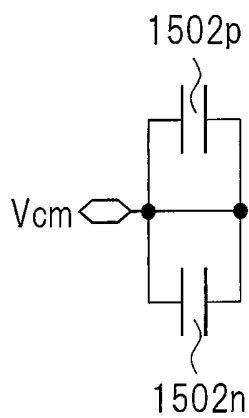


FIG. 24



ULTRASOUND PROBE AND ULTRASOUND IMAGING APPARATUS USING THE SAME

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to an ultrasound probe and an ultrasound imaging apparatus using the same, and more specifically to a technique effective for dynamically delaying ultrasound signals inputted to an ultrasound probe.

BACKGROUND ART

[0002] Compared with medical imaging diagnostic devices, such as an X-ray diagnostic device and an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) device, an ultrasound imaging apparatus is a compact device that can display the motion of an object to be tested, such as the pulsatory motion of a heart and the motion of a fetus, in real time with simple operations by putting an ultrasound probe on the body surface.

[0003] Specifically, in the ultrasound imaging apparatus, drive signals are supplied to each of a plurality of transducers built in the ultrasound probe, and ultrasonic waves are transmitted to the inside of an examinee. In the ultrasound imaging apparatus, the reflected waves of the ultrasonic waves produced by the difference between the acoustic impedances of biological tissues are received by the plurality of transducers, and an ultrasound image is generated based on the reflected waves received by the ultrasound probe.

[0004] Here, in order to improve the image quality of ultrasound images, the ultrasound imaging apparatus controls delay time over drive signals supplied to the plurality of transducers and over reflected wave signals obtained from each of the plurality of transducers.

[0005] Specifically, in the ultrasound imaging apparatus, the timing of drive signals supplied to the transducers is controlled based on delay time corresponding to the distance between a predetermined focal point in the inside of the examinee and each of the transducers, and a beam of ultrasonic waves is transmitted to the predetermined focal point in the inside of the examinee.

[0006] Based on the delay time corresponding to the distance between the predetermined focal point in the inside of the examinee and each of the transducers, the transducers receive signals from the predetermined focal point differently in terms of time, and the signals are added as their time is matched, i.e. the signals are phased and added. Thus, the ultrasound imaging apparatus generates a line of received signals in focus. As described above, an analog or digital delay circuit is necessary in order to match the signals from a predetermined focal point.

[0007] For example, Patent Literature 1 discloses a configuration, in which an echo signal current is accumulated on capacitor banks at a predetermined timing for providing delay time. Patent Literature 2 describes a technique, in which current signals are generated with suitable delay time based on a write pointer and a read pointer from sampled echo signals.

CITATION LIST

Patent Literature

[0008] Patent Literature 1: Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2013-106931

[0009] Patent Literature 2: Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication (Translation of PCT Application) No. 2009-528115

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

Technical Problem

[0010] In order to obtain a three-dimensional stereo image, not a two-dimensional tomographic image, a two-dimensional probe, which has transducers in a two-dimensional array, uses transducers in a few thousands to ten thousands channels.

[0011] In such a two-dimensional probe, connecting all the transducers to a main device is impractical because of the restriction on the number of cables, for example. A process is required, in which the number of channels is decreased in the inside of a probe head. Thus, an electronic circuit that delays and adds analog signals is needed.

[0012] Also in a linear probe, delaying and adding analog signals can decrease the number of cables and the number of analog to digital converters, allowing a reduction in cost and downsizing. To this end, an electronic circuit that delays and adds analog signals is demanded.

[0013] In the case where a circuit that delays analog signals is mounted in the inside of the probe head, it is necessary to configure the circuit in a small size. This is because circuits, which are connected to transducers in a few thousands to ten thousands channels, have to be mounted in the inside of a probe head. In order to highly accurately achieve the focal point of a reception beam by the transducers, it is required to change delay time given by each of the circuits in terms of time.

[0014] For a configuration of changing delay time, a configuration is designed, for example, in which a plurality of delay circuits are provided, the delay circuits are operated at different periods of delay time, and a delay circuit to be used is switched at certain timing.

[0015] In this configuration, while a circuit is operating, another delay time can be set to another circuit. In dynamically changing delay time, circuits connected to the output are switched for use. Thus, delay time can be changed.

[0016] However, in such a circuit, a plurality of similar delay circuits are required, resulting in the necessity of circuits that need a large area. This upsizes the ultrasound probe, causing a problem of a cost increase.

[0017] An object of the present invention is to provide a technique that can dynamically change delay time and can configure a compact delay circuit.

[0018] The foregoing object, other objects, and novel features of the present invention will be apparent from the description of the present specification and the accompanying drawings.

Solution to Problem

[0019] In the present application, a brief outline of representative aspects of the disclosure is as follows.

[0020] A representative ultrasound probe includes a delay unit. The delay unit accumulates electric charges corresponding to a reflected wave of an ultrasonic wave produced by a difference between acoustic impedances on a plurality of memory elements and in turn outputs the electric charges accumulated on the memory elements.

[0021] In accumulating the electric charges, when a first control signal that increases delay time of the reflected wave is inputted, the delay unit accumulates the same electric charges on two or more of the memory elements for a preset period. Alternatively, in outputting the electric charges, when the first control signal is inputted, the delay unit outputs electric charges accumulated on one of the memory elements for a preset period.

[0022] In accumulating the electric charges, when a second control signal that decreases delay time of the reflected wave is inputted, the delay unit of the representative ultrasound probe accumulates the same electric charges on one of the memory elements for a preset period. Alternatively, in outputting the electric charges, when the second control signal is inputted, the delay unit outputs no electric charges from the memory elements for a preset period.

[0023] The delay unit is also applied to an ultrasound imaging apparatus using the ultrasound probe.

Advantageous Effects of Invention

[0024] (1) It is possible to downsize the delay circuit that dynamically changes the delay time of ultrasound signals in the ultrasound probe.

[0025] (2) From the effect (1), the ultrasound probe can be downsized.

[0026] (3) From the effect (1), the costs of the ultrasound probe can be decreased.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0027] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary ultrasound imaging apparatus according to a first embodiment.

[0028] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an exemplary configuration of a single-element circuit of a probe in FIG. 1.

[0029] FIG. 3 is a block diagram of an exemplary analog memory unit and an exemplary digital circuit of the single-element circuit in FIG. 2.

[0030] FIG. 4 is a timing chart of an example of the operation of the analog memory unit in FIG. 3.

[0031] FIG. 5 is a timing chart of an example in dynamically changing delay time in the analog memory unit in FIG. 3.

[0032] FIG. 6 is a timing chart of an example in decreasing delay time using a write-side control signal in the analog memory unit in FIG. 3.

[0033] FIG. 7 is a timing chart of an example in increasing delay time using a read-side control signal in the analog memory unit in FIG. 3.

[0034] FIG. 8 is a timing chart of an example in decreasing delay time using a read-side control signal in the analog memory unit in FIG. 3.

[0035] FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an exemplary write control signal generator circuit in FIG. 3.

[0036] FIG. 10 is an illustration of an exemplary circuit configuration of a logic circuit in FIG. 9.

[0037] FIG. 11 is a block diagram of an exemplary read control signal generator circuit in FIG. 3.

[0038] FIG. 12 is an illustration of an exemplary circuit configuration of a logic circuit in FIG. 11.

[0039] FIG. 13 is an illustration of an exemplary circuit configuration of an analog memory unit and an adder circuit according to a second embodiment.

[0040] FIG. 14 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in sampling at a switch-capacitor unit of the analog memory unit in FIG. 13.

[0041] FIG. 15 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in holding at the switch-capacitor unit of the analog memory unit in FIG. 13.

[0042] FIG. 16 is an illustration of another exemplary configuration of the switch-capacitor unit of the analog memory unit in FIG. 13.

[0043] FIG. 17 is an illustration of an exemplary reset control signal generator circuit that generates a reset control signal to operate a reset switch of the switch-capacitor unit in FIG. 16.

[0044] FIG. 18 is a timing chart of exemplary signal timings for the components of the reset control signal generator circuit in FIG. 17.

[0045] FIG. 19 is an illustration of another exemplary reset control signal generator circuit in FIG. 17.

[0046] FIG. 20 is a timing chart of exemplary signal timings for the components of the reset control signal generator circuit FIG. 19.

[0047] FIG. 21 is an illustration of another exemplary circuit configuration of the analog memory unit in FIG. 13.

[0048] FIG. 22 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in sampling at a switch-capacitor unit of the analog memory unit in FIG. 21.

[0049] FIG. 23 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in holding at the switch-capacitor unit of the analog memory unit in FIG. 21.

[0050] FIG. 24 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in resetting the switch-capacitor unit in FIG. 21.

DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0051] In the embodiments below, the present invention will be described as separated into a plurality of sections or embodiments, as necessary for convenience. The sections or the embodiments have some relationship to each other unless otherwise specified. In the relationship, one is an exemplary modification, details, or supplementary explanation, for example, of a part or entirety of the other.

[0052] In the embodiments below, in terms of the figures of elements, including the numbers of elements, numeric values, quantities, and ranges, any figures can be used, which may be specific numbers or more or specific numbers or less, unless otherwise specified, or theoretically clearly limited to a specific figure.

[0053] In the embodiments below, it goes without saying that the components of the embodiments (including element steps and the like) are not necessarily required, unless otherwise specified and theoretically clearly required.

[0054] Similarly, in the embodiments below, in terms of the shapes of the components and the positional relationship between the components, for example, ones substantially analog or similar to the shapes and the positional relationship are included, unless otherwise specified, or theoretically clearly different. The same is applied to the numeric values and the ranges above.

[0055] In all the drawings for explaining the embodiments, the same members are designated the same reference numerals and signs in principle, and the overlapping description is omitted. Note that, for easy understanding of the drawings, even plan views are sometimes hatched.

[0056] In the following, the embodiments will be described in detail.

First Embodiment

[0057] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary ultrasound imaging apparatus according to a first embodiment.

[0058] As illustrated in FIG. 1, the ultrasound imaging apparatus includes a probe 100 and a main device 106. The probe 100 includes a plurality of subarrays 101a, 101b, . . . , and a digital circuit 105 that is a control signal generating unit.

[0059] The subarray 101 includes a plurality of single-element circuits 102a, 102b, . . . , an adder circuit 103, and a buffer 104. 128 subarrays 101 are provided, for example. The single-element circuits 102 are arrayed in a matrix configuration by approximately $8 \times 8 = 64$.

[0060] The main device 106 includes a plurality of analog front end circuits (written by AFE in FIG. 1) 107a, 107b, One analog front end circuit 107 is provided for one subarray 101. Note that, in the following, subscripts a, b, c, . . . express the same components, and are omitted unless otherwise specified.

[0061] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an exemplary configuration of the single-element circuit 102 of the probe 100 in FIG. 1.

[0062] As illustrated in the drawing, the single-element circuit 102, which is a transmitter-receiver unit, is configured of a transducer 201, a transmitting unit 203, a transmission reception separator 202, a reception analog front end unit (in FIG. 2, written by the reception AFE UNIT) 204, and an analog memory unit 205, which is a voltage storage output unit. The digital circuit 105 and the analog memory unit 205 configure a delay unit.

[0063] Signals outputted from the transmitting unit 203 are separated at the transmission reception separator 202, and sent to the transducer 201. The transducer 201 outputs ultrasound signals. The ultrasound signals outputted from the transducer 201 are reflected, and then received at the transducer 201.

[0064] The ultrasound signals received at the transducer 201 are separated at the transmission reception separator 202, and inputted to the reception analog front end unit 204. The reception analog front end unit 204 processes, e.g. amplifies and filters, the received signals.

[0065] The signals outputted from the reception analog front end unit 204 are inputted to the analog memory unit 205. Based on control signals outputted from the digital circuit 105, the analog memory unit 205 samples analog input signals and accumulates the signals on its memory, and outputs the signals after a lapse of delay time.

[0066] The control signal that sets delay time is set at the digital circuit 105 based on a reference clock and control data from the main device 106. The signals outputted from the analog memory unit 205 are outputted from the single-element circuit 102 to the adder circuit 103, and added at the adder circuit 103.

[0067] The signals added at the adder circuit 103 are sent to the analog front end circuit 107 of the main device 106 through the buffer 104 in FIG. 1.

[0068] FIG. 3 is a block diagram of examples of the analog memory unit 205 of the single-element circuit 102 in FIG. 2 and the digital circuit 105.

[0069] As illustrated in the drawing, the analog memory unit 205 includes capacitors 303a, 303b, 303c, . . . , which are memory elements, switches 302a, 302b, 302c, . . . , which are first switches, switches 304a, 304b, 304c, . . . , which are second switches, and a buffer 301. The digital

circuit 105 includes a write control signal generator circuit 305, a read control signal generator circuit 306, and a decoder circuit 307.

[0070] To the output part of the buffer 301, one end of the switch 302 is in common connection. To the other end of the switch 302, one end of the switch 304 and one connecting part of the capacitor 303 are connected.

[0071] To the other connecting part of the capacitor 303, a reference potential VSS is connected. The other end of the switch 304 is in common connection. The common connecting part is the output part of the analog memory unit 205.

[0072] The control terminal of the switch 302 is connected to the write control signal generator circuit 305 in such a manner that write control signals Ctlsl to Ctlsn outputted from the circuit 305 are inputted respectively. The write control signal generator circuit 305 generates the write control signals Ctlsl to Ctlsn based on the reference clock outputted from the main device 106.

[0073] The control terminal of the switch 304 is connected to the read control signal generator circuit 306 in such a manner that read control signals Ctlo1 to Ctlon outputted from the circuit 306 are inputted respectively. The read control signal generator circuit 306 generates the read control signals Ctlo1 to Ctlon based on the reference clock outputted from the main device 106. An analog input signal Vin outputted from the reception analog front end unit 204 is amplified or its impedance is converted at the buffer 301, and then inputted to the capacitor 303 through the switch 302. Thus, electric charges corresponding to the analog input signal Vin are accumulated.

[0074] The electric charges accumulated on the capacitor 303 are outputted as an output signal Vout from the output part of the analog memory unit 205 through the switch 304.

[0075] The analog memory unit 205 is a delay generator circuit. In the analog memory unit 205, the capacitors 303 are connected in parallel with each other, the analog input signal Vin is sampled and in turn stored, and the stored signals are in turn outputted after a lapse of a predetermined period of time. Note that, the buffer 301 may also serve as the circuit of the reception analog front end unit 204 in the previous stage.

[0076] The timing of charging signals on the capacitor 303 is controlled by the switch 302, and the timing of outputting signals from the capacitor 303 is controlled by the switch 304. The write control signals Ctlsl to Ctlsn that control the operation of the switch 302 are generated by the write control signal generator circuit 305 of the digital circuit 105. The read control signals Ctlo1 to Ctlon that control the operation of the switch 304 are generated by the read control signal generator circuit 306 of the digital circuit 105.

[0077] The decoder circuit 307 decodes control data outputted from the main device 106, and outputs the decoded result as control signals to the write control signal generator circuit 305 and the read control signal generator circuit 306.

[0078] The control signals outputted from the decoder circuit 307 include control signal Ctlsl, control signal Ctlss, control signal Ctlo1, and control signal Ctlo_s. The control signal Ctlsl, control signal Ctlss, control signal Ctlo1, and control signal Ctlo_s are delay time control signals. The control signals Ctlsl and Ctlo1 are first control signals. The control signals Ctlss and Ctlo_s are second control signals.

[0079] The control signals Ctls_l and Ctls_s are outputted to the write control signal generator circuit 305. The control signals Ctlo_l and Ctlo_s are outputted to the read control signal generator circuit 306.

[0080] The control signal Ctls_l is a signal that increases write-side delay time at the analog memory unit 205. The control signal Ctls_s is a signal that decreases write-side delay time at the analog memory unit 205.

[0081] The control signal Ctlo_l is a signal that increases read-side delay time at the analog memory unit 205. The control signal Ctlo_s is a signal that decreases read-side delay time at the analog memory unit 205.

[0082] The write control signal generator circuit 305 and the read control signal generator circuit 306 generate the write control signals Ctls₁ to Ctls_n and the read control signals Ctlo₁ to Ctlo_n based on the control signals outputted from the decoder circuit 307.

[0083] FIG. 4 is a timing chart of an example of the operation of the analog memory unit 205 in FIG. 3.

[0084] From the upper side to the lower side, FIG. 4 shows signal timings for the analog input signal Vin inputted to the analog memory unit 205, the output signal Vout outputted from the analog memory unit 205, the reference clock inputted to the write control signal generator circuit 305 and the read control signal generator circuit 306, the write control signals Ctls₁ to Ctls_n, and the read control signals Ctlo₁ to Ctlo_n.

[0085] As illustrated in FIG. 3, the write control signal Ctls₁ controls the switch 302a. Here, in FIG. 3, the switch 302a is turned on in the case where the write control signal Ctls₁ is at high level, although any polarity is possible.

[0086] When the switch 302a is turned on, electric charges corresponding to the analog input signal Vin are accumulated on the capacitor 303a. The value of the analog input signal at the timing, at which the switch 302a is changed from on to off, is stored on the capacitor 303a (401a in FIG. 4).

[0087] The electric charges accumulated on the capacitor 303a are outputted to the output signal Vout in the state in which the switch 304a is turned on (402a in FIG. 4). The control signal Ctlo₁ controls the timing of turning on/off the switch 304a. In other words, the signal sampled on the capacitor 303a at the timing of the write control signal Ctls₁ is outputted as the output signal Vout at the timing at which the control signal Ctlo₁ is turned on.

[0088] Similarly to the capacitor 303a, electric charges corresponding to the analog input signal Vin are accumulated on the capacitors 303b, 303c, . . . , which are arrayed in parallel with each other, at the timings of the write control signals Ctls₂ and Ctls₃, . . . , and signals corresponding to the electric charges accumulated at the timings of turning on the control signal Ctlo₂, Ctlo₃, . . . are outputted as the output signal Vout.

[0089] As described above, the signals sampled at the timing of the write control signal Ctls are outputted at the timing of the control signal Ctlo. Thus, compared with the analog input signal Vin, the output signal Vout is outputted, which is delayed with the delay time of the write control signal Ctls and the delay time of the read control signal Ctlo.

[0090] As described above, the write control signal Ctls and the read control signal Ctlo are generated at the write control signal generator circuit 305 and the read control signal generator circuit 306, respectively. For delay time, for example, a clock cycle Tclk for the reference clock is defined

as a unit, and an integral multiple of the clock cycle Tclk is set as delay time. In other words, delay time Tdc=M·Tclk, based on the clock, is generated, where M is an integer.

[0091] In receiving ultrasound signals, in order to highly accurately receive ultrasound signals, which have been reflected in the inside of a living body and returned, it is necessary to receive the ultrasound signals as the position of the focal point is moved in terms of time. In order to dynamically change the focal point in the circuits in the inside of the probe 100, it is necessary to dynamically change delay time while receiving ultrasound signals. Specifically, it is necessary to increase or decrease delay time by comparing the delay time with set time.

[0092] Referring to FIGS. 5 to 8, the operation in dynamically changing delay time will be described.

[0093] FIG. 5 is a timing chart of an example in dynamically changing delay time in the analog memory unit 205 in FIG. 3.

[0094] From the upper side to the lower side, FIG. 5 shows signal timings for the analog input signal Vin inputted to the analog memory unit 205, the output signal Vout outputted from the analog memory unit 205, the reference clock, the control signal Ctls_l outputted from the decoder circuit 307, the write control signals Ctls₁ to Ctls₆, and the read control signals Ctlo₁ to Ctlo₆.

[0095] First, a signal 501a sampled at the timing of the write control signal Ctls₂ in FIG. 5 is outputted at the timing of the control signal Ctlo₂ after a lapse of a predetermined period of delay time (502a in FIG. 5).

[0096] Here, in the case where the write control signals Ctls are controlled to increase delay time, the same input signal Vin is written to the capacitors 303. In the case where the control signal Ctls_l that increases delay time is outputted from the decoder circuit 307, the write control signals Ctls are turned to high level at the same time, and the switches 302 are turned on at the same time.

[0097] In this case, an example is shown in which the control signal Ctls_l is outputted for turning the control signals Ctls₃ and Ctls₄ to high level at the same time. Thus, the input signal Vin (501b in FIG. 5) is sampled on two capacitors 303c and 303d.

[0098] Data stored on the capacitor 303c is outputted at the timing at which the read control signal Ctlo₃ is turned on (502b in FIG. 5).

[0099] Data stored on the capacitor 303d is outputted at the timing at which the read control signal Ctlo₄ is turned on (502c in FIG. 5). The signals accumulated on the capacitors 303c and 303d are signals at the same timing (501b in FIG. 5). Thus, the same signals are outputted at different timings.

[0100] A signal 501c in FIG. 5 sampled at the timing of the write control signal Ctls₅ is outputted at the timing of the read control signal Ctlo₅ (502d in FIG. 5). Compared with the state before the control signal Ctls_l that increases delay time is outputted, the signal at the same timing is outputted for two samples. Thus, delay time can be increased.

[0101] In the case where the write control signal is controlled, the signals are controlled to be written to the capacitors so as not to read capacitors with no written data, even in the case of changing delay time. Signals are outputted also when delay time is changed. Thus, the influence of noise is small in switching delay time.

[0102] Note that, in the first embodiment, the description is made in which signals are sampled on two capacitors at the same time. However, the number of capacitors on which

signals are sampled is not limited to two. Signals may be sampled on three or more capacitors at the same time.

[0103] FIG. 6 is a timing chart of an example in decreasing delay time using the write control signals Ctl_s in the analog memory unit 205 in FIG. 3.

[0104] From the upper side to the lower side, FIG. 6 shows signal timings for the analog input signal Vin inputted to the analog memory unit 205, the output signal Vout outputted from the analog memory unit 205, the reference clock, the control signal Ctl_s outputted from the decoder circuit 307, the write control signals Ctl_s1 to Ctl_s6, and the read control signals Ctl_o1 to Ctl_o6.

[0105] As described above, in the case of decreasing delay time, delay time is controlled based on the control signal Ctl_s. First, the input signal Vin is sampled on the capacitor 303a at the timing of the write control signal Ctl_s1 (601a in FIG. 6). After a lapse of a predetermined period of delay time, the sampled signal is outputted at the timing of the read control signal Ctl_o1 (602a in FIG. 6).

[0106] In the case where the control signal Ctl_s is inputted, the control signal Ctl_s is controlled to decrease delay time. In other words, in the case where the control signal Ctl_s is inputted, the write control signal Ctl_s is controlled to increase its pulse duration.

[0107] Specifically, for example, the pulse duration of the write control signal Ctl_s2 is increased to the pulse duration twice the pulse duration of the reference clock. In this case, sampling is controlled at the timing of the write control signal Ctl_s2. A signal immediately before the falling edge of the write control signal Ctl_s2 (601c in FIG. 6) is accumulated on the capacitor 303b. The signal accumulated on the capacitor 303b is outputted at the timing of the read control signal Ctl_o2 (602b in FIG. 6).

[0108] The signal sampled on the capacitor 303c at the timing of the read control signal Ctl_s3 is outputted at the timing of the read control signal Ctl_o3. An increase in the pulse duration of the write control signal Ctl_s2 based on the control signal Ctl_s allows a decrease in delay time after that, compared with delay time before then. The output of the buffer 301 to be charged on the capacitor 303 is turned to a voltage output. This can prevent the increased pulse duration from affecting the characteristics.

[0109] FIG. 7 is a timing chart of an example in increasing delay time using the read control signals Ctl_o in the analog memory unit 205 in FIG. 3.

[0110] From the upper side to the lower side, FIG. 7 shows signal timings for the analog input signal Vin inputted to the analog memory unit 205, the output signal Vout outputted from the analog memory unit 205, the reference clock, the control signal Ctl_o1 outputted from the decoder circuit 307, the write control signals Ctl_s1 to Ctl_s6, and the read control signals Ctl_o1 to Ctl_o6.

[0111] In the case where the read control signals Ctl_o are changed to increase delay time, delay time is controlled based on the control signal Ctl_o1. The input signal Vin is sampled on the capacitor 303b at the timing of the write control signal Ctl_s2 (701a in FIG. 7).

[0112] After a lapse of a predetermined period of delay time, the sampled signal is outputted at the timing of the control signal Ctl_o2 (702a in FIG. 7). The input signal Vin is sampled on the capacitor 303c at the timing of the write control signal Ctl_s3 (701b in FIG. 7).

[0113] In the case where the control signal Ctl_o1 is inputted, the control signal Ctl_o is controlled to increase

delay time. In other words, in the case where the control signal Ctl_o1 is inputted to the read control signal generator circuit 306, the control signal Ctl_o is controlled to increase its pulse duration.

[0114] Specifically, for example, the pulse duration of the read control signal Ctl_o3 is increased to the pulse duration about twice the pulse duration of the reference clock. In this case, the signal accumulated on the capacitor 303c is outputted at the timing of the read control signal Ctl_o3. However, the output time of the accumulated signal is time that is two reference clocks (702b and 702c in FIG. 7).

[0115] Thus, the same data can be outputted for a plurality of samples. The circuit in the subsequent stage is formed in a circuit that receives signals at high impedance and samples signals for a plurality of times in synchronization with the reference clock. Consequently, signals for a plurality of samples can be outputted.

[0116] As described above, the pulse duration of the read control signal Ctl_o3 is increased based on the control signal Ctl_o1. Thus, delay time after that, compared with delay time before then.

[0117] FIG. 8 is a timing chart of an example in decreasing delay time using the read control signals Ctl_o in the analog memory unit 205 in FIG. 3. The signals in FIG. 8 are similar to the ones in FIG. 7, omitting the description.

[0118] In the case where the read control signals Ctl_o are changed to decrease the delay time, delay time is controlled based on the control signal Ctl_os. The input signal Vin is sampled on the capacitor 303a at the timing of the write control signal Ctl_s1 (801a in FIG. 8).

[0119] After a lapse of a predetermined period of delay time, the sampled signal is outputted at the timing of the read control signal Ctl_o1 (802a in FIG. 8). At the timings of the write control signals Ctl_s2 and Ctl_s3, the input signal Vin is sampled on the capacitors 303b and 303c (801b and 801c in FIG. 8).

[0120] In the case where the control signal Ctl_o1 is inputted to the read control signal generator circuit 306, delay time is controlled to decrease. In other words, in the case where the control signal Ctl_o1 is inputted to the read control signal generator circuit 306, one output of the read control signal Ctl_o is skipped, and then the subsequent read control signal is turned on.

[0121] Specifically, the read control signal generator circuit 306 outputs the read control signal Ctl_o3 without outputting the read control signal Ctl_o2. In this case, the signal accumulated on the capacitor 303b is not outputted as an output signal. At the timing of the read control signal Ctl_o2, the signal accumulated on the capacitor 303c is outputted.

[0122] Thus, sampled data is outputted as one item of the sampled data is skipped. In the case where the read control signal Ctl_o is controlled, simultaneous reading of signals out of the capacitors 303 at the same time causes outputs to overlap with each other, resulting in unexpected data. Thus, even in the case where delay time is changed, the read control signal Ctl_o is controlled so as not to simultaneously read data stored on the capacitors 303.

[0123] FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an example of the write control signal generator circuit 305 in FIG. 3.

[0124] As illustrated in FIG. 9, the write control signal generator circuit 305 is configured of logic circuits 901a, 901b, 901c, . . . , and non-overlapping buffers (in FIG. 9, written in NOBUF) 902a, 902b, 902c,

[0125] The logic circuits **901a**, **901b**, **901c**, . . . each receive the reference clock and the control signals **Ctls_s** and **Ctls_l**, and output the read control signals **Ctls1**, **Ctls2**, **Ctls3**, . . . , respectively, based on them.

[0126] FIG. **10** is an illustration of an exemplary circuit configuration of the logic circuit **901c** in FIG. **9**.

[0127] Note that, FIG. **10** shows the circuit configuration of the logic circuit **901c**, which is a representative one. The configurations are similar in the other logic circuit **901**.

[0128] The logic circuit **901c** includes an AND circuit **903**, which is an AND circuit, NOR circuits **904** and **905**, which are NOR circuits, and a flip-flop **906**.

[0129] In the basic operation of the logic circuit **901**, the flip-flop **906** outputs the inputted signal with a delay of one clock.

[0130] In the case where delay time is not dynamically changed, control signals with high-level output are moved in the order of the write control signals **Ctls1**, **Ctls2**, **Ctls3**, In the case where the control signal **Ctls_l** at high level is inputted, the NOR of the outputs of the logic circuit in the previous stage and the logic circuit in the second previous stage is found, and reflected on the input of the flip-flop **906**.

[0131] As described above, high level signals are outputted at the same time from two successive logic circuits **901**. In the case where the control signal **Ctls_s** at high level is inputted, the output of the flip-flop **906** is held. This increases the pulse duration for which the write control signal **Ctls** is outputted.

[0132] The output of the logic circuit **901** is outputted as the write control signal **Ctls** through the NOBUF **902**. The NOBUF **902** is a circuit that provides a non-overlapping period in order to prevent the switches **302** from being turned on at the same time when the write control signal **Ctls** is switched in sampling the signal on the capacitor **303**. The NOBUF **902** controls the switch **302** using signals with no overlapping periods.

[0133] The use of the write control signal generator circuit **305** in this configuration can generate the write control signal **Ctls** that dynamically changes delay time.

[0134] FIG. **11** is a block diagram of an example of the read control signal generator circuit **306** in FIG. **3**.

[0135] As illustrated in the drawing, the read control signal generator circuit **306** is configured of logic circuits **1001a**, **1001b**, **1001c**, . . . , and non-overlapping buffers (in FIG. **11**, referred to as NOBUF) **1002a**, **1002b**, **1002c**.

[0136] The logic circuits **1001**, each receive the reference clock and the control signals **Ctlo_s** and **Ctlo_l**, and output the read control signals **Ctlo1**, **Ctlo2**, **Ctlo3**, . . . , respectively.

[0137] FIG. **12** is an illustration of an exemplary circuit configuration of the logic circuit **1001c** in FIG. **11**.

[0138] Note that, FIG. **12** also shows the circuit configuration of the logic circuit **1001c**, which is a representative one. However, the configuration is similar in the other logic circuits **1001**.

[0139] As illustrated in the drawing, the logic circuit **1001c** includes a selector **1003**, an inverter **1004**, a NOR circuit **1005**, which is a NOR circuit, and a flip-flop **1006**.

[0140] In the basic operation of the logic circuit **1001**, the flip-flop **1006** outputs the inputted signal with a delay of one clock.

[0141] In the case where delay time is not dynamically changed, control signals at high level output are moved in the order of the read control signals **Ctlo1**, **Ctlo2**, **Ctlo3**, . . .

. . . Based on the voltage level of the control signal **Ctlo_s** or the polarity, the output of the logic circuit in the previous stage **1001**, which is inputted to the selector **1003**, or the output of the logic circuit **1001** in the second previous stage is selected.

[0142] In the case where delay time is decreased, the control signal **Ctlo_s** at high level is inputted, and the output of the logic circuit **1001** in the second previous stage is selected. The output of the read control signal **Ctlo** is an output that one read control signal is skipped.

[0143] In the case where the control signal **Ctlo_l** at high level is inputted, the output of the flip-flop **1006** is held to increase the pulse duration for which the read control signal **Ctlo** is outputted.

[0144] The output of the logic circuit **1001** is outputted as the read control signal **Ctlo** through the NOBUF **1002**.

[0145] The use of the read control signal generator circuit **306** in this configuration can generate the read control signal **Ctlo** that dynamically changes delay time.

[0146] As described above, control data for changing delay time is sent from the main device **106** in FIG. **1** to the digital circuit **105** of the probe **100**, processed, e.g. decoded, at the decoder circuit **307** of the digital circuit **105** in FIG. **3**, as necessary, and then delivered to the write control signal generator circuit **305** and the read control signal generator circuit **306** in FIG. **3**.

[0147] As described above, delay time can be increased by writing the same data on the capacitors **303** or by increasing the read time of a part of the capacitors **303**. Alternatively, delay time can be decreased by increasing the write time of some of the capacitors **303** or by skipping reading data out of some of the capacitors **303**.

[0148] As described above, delay time is switched among the capacitors on the same line by controlling data write and data read. Thus, delay time can be switched using only the analog memory unit **205**. Consequently, delay time can be dynamically changed using a circuit whose area is small.

[0149] The output of the delay circuit configured of the analog memory unit **205** is added at the adder circuit **103** in FIG. **2**, and sent to the main device **106** through a buffer, for example, not shown. In the main device **106**, signals from the probe **100** are received at the analog front end circuit **107** in FIG. **1**.

[0150] The analog front end circuit **107** is configured of a low-noise amplifier, a programmable gain amplifier, an antialiasing filter, an Analog to Digital Converter (ADC), and other components, not shown. The analog front end circuit **107** amplifies, filters, and converts signals from the probe **100** into digital signals.

[0151] Clocks used for sampling signals at the analog to digital converter are clocks generated from the same oscillator source for the reference clock sent from the main device **106** to the probe **100**, for example.

[0152] The output of the delay circuit of the single-element circuits **102** of the subarray **101** is outputted in synchronization with the reference clock. Thus, also in the analog to digital converter, signals are converted into digital signals in synchronization with the reference clock.

[0153] Note that, a clock that the reference clock is multiplied or divided may be used as necessary. Taking into account of delay time on cables, phases for analog to digital conversion may be shifted.

[0154] In the analog memory unit **205** of the probe **100**, signals are outputted in synchronization with the reference

clock. This causes spike noise at the leading edge and trailing edge of the reference clock.

[0155] Signals are sampled at the analog to digital converter of the main device **106** in synchronization with the reference clock. Thus, signals can be digitized as noise on the edges of the clock is avoided. The signals digitized at the analog to digital converter are subjected to signal processing, e.g. digital phasing, and then ultrasound images are displayed.

[0156] Note that, in the first embodiment, the configuration is described in which a capacitor is used for an element that stores analog signals, and electric charges accumulated on the capacitor are used to store the analog signal, although any configuration is possible.

[0157] For example, a transistor such as a MOS (Metal Oxide Semiconductor) may be used to store analog signals as electric currents. In the case where analog signals are stored as electric currents, power consumption is increased, on one hand, whereas a merit is a reduction in its occupied area, on the other hand, compared with the case of the capacitor.

[0158] Note that, in the adder circuit **103** in FIG. 2, it is unnecessary to add all the outputs of the single-element circuits **102**. Alternatively, a configuration may be possible in which the adder circuit **103** is split into a plurality of blocks and signals are added at each block. For example, in the case where 192 channels are provided, i.e. 192 single-element circuits **102** are provided, a configuration may be possible in which signals are added for four channels each and 48 outputs are obtained after added. Alternatively, for example, a configuration may be possible in which for the signals of the single-element circuits **102** in 8,192 channels, 64 channels of signals in an 8×8 array are each added and 128 outputs are obtained. These signals are coupled from the probe **100** to the main device **106** via cables for transmission.

[0159] A configuration may be possible in which a low-pass filter is provided for the output signal of each of the analog memory units **205**. For example, in the case where this filter is a filter that can remove the noise of the clock cycle, the noise of the clock cycle can be reduced. A similar low-pass filter may be provided for the output of the adder circuit **103**. A capacitor for controlling bandwidths may be connected to the output of the reception analog front end unit **204**.

[0160] As described above, signals in a plurality of channels are delayed and added, allowing a decrease in the number of output signals for the number of the elements of the transducers. Thus, the number of cables can be decreased, and the number of the analog to digital converters for converting analog signals into digital signals can be decreased, allowing a cost reduction.

[0161] In the two-dimensional transducer array, coupling signals in all the channels from the probe to the main body is impractical. However, as in the embodiment, signals are highly accurately delayed and added, allowing connection from the probe to the apparatus main body with a practical number of cables. Dynamically changing delay time can provide received data more in focus.

[0162] This allows the implementation of a compact ultrasound imaging apparatus. Consequently, the costs of the ultrasound imaging apparatus can be decreased.

[0163] The write control signal Ctl_w and the read control signal Ctl_r are generated at the digital circuit **105**, and

coupled to the single-element circuits **102a**, **102b**, The control signals may be coupled to the single-element circuits **102** through separate interconnections, or may be coupled in common connections.

[0164] Specifically, for example, delay time is given by the difference between the write control signal Ctl_w and the read control signal Ctl_r. Thus, the write or read control signal may be shared among all the single-element circuits. In the case where the read control signal Ctl_r is shared among the single-element circuits, the write control signal Ctl_w is changed in each of the single-element circuits, and the single-element circuits generate different periods of delay time. The shared control signal can reduce the number of interconnections, and the area of the circuit can be made small.

[0165] Alternatively, a configuration may be possible in which for the single-element circuits two-dimensionally disposed, the write control signal Ctl_w is shared in the direction of the long side, for example, and the read control signal is shared in the direction of the short side. In this case, the number of interconnections to be connected to the single-element circuits can be decreased, and the area of the circuit can be made small.

[0166] In the embodiment, the use of any of the write control signal and the read control signal can increase or decrease delay time. Thus, even in the case where the interconnections are shared as described above, selecting any one of the write control signal and the read control signal can dynamically change delay time.

[0167] Note that, in the first embodiment, the configuration is described in which the analog memory unit **205** that is the delay circuit is provided on the reception-side circuit. However, the delay circuit may be used on the transmission-side circuit. Alternatively, a configuration may be possible in which the delay circuit is shared between the transmission-side circuit and the reception-side circuit, and the delay circuit is switched between in transmission and in reception.

Second Embodiment

[0168] As illustrated in FIG. 3, in the first embodiment, the circuit configuration is described in which in the analog memory unit **205**, analog signals are accumulated on the capacitor **303** connected to the ground (the reference potential VSS). However, for the configuration of the analog memory unit **205**, any configuration is possible.

[0169] Therefore, in a second embodiment, another configuration of the analog memory unit **205** will be described.

[0170] For another configuration of the analog memory unit **205**, many circuit configurations can be designed, including, for example, circuit configurations in which analog signals are charged on the capacitor connected to the artificial ground of an operational amplifier, not to the ground, in which a differential circuit is used, not a single-ended circuit, and in which a reset period is provided.

[0171] A closed loop circuit is formed, not an open loop circuit. This allows the improvement of the accuracy of the output voltage.

[0172] FIG. 13 is an illustration of an exemplary circuit configuration of the analog memory unit **205** and the adder circuit **103** according to the second embodiment.

[0173] As illustrated in FIG. 13, the analog memory unit **205** is configured of an operational amplifier **1101** and switch-capacitor units **1102a**, **1102b**, The adder circuit **103** is configured of a plurality of electric charge adding

units **1109**. The switch-capacitor unit **1102** is configured of a capacitor **1103**, and switches **1104_p**, **1104_n**, **1105_p**, and **1105_n**.

[0174] Here, subscripts *p* and *n* of the switches express the positive side and negative side of the differential circuit, and are sometimes omitted unless otherwise specified. The electric charge adding unit **1109** is configured of capacitors **1106_a** and **1106_b**, and switches **1107_a**, **1107_b**, **1108_a**, and **1108_b**.

[0175] The analog memory unit **205** is a circuit, in which the switch-capacitor units are connected in parallel with each other and signals are sampled and accumulated, and then outputted after a lapse of a predetermined period of delay time. Here, the differential signals *V_{in}p* and *V_{in}n* are signals outputted from the reception analog front end unit **204**. A voltage *V_{cm}* inputted to the positive (+) input part of the operational amplifier **1101** is a reference voltage.

[0176] FIG. 14 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in sampling signals at the switch-capacitor unit **1102** of the analog memory unit **205** in FIG. 13. FIG. 15 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in holding signals at the switch-capacitor unit **1102** of the analog memory in FIG. 13.

[0177] In sampling signals, the switch **1104** is turned on, and the switch **1105** is turned off. Thus, the capacitor **1103** is connected across the inputted differential signals, and electric charges corresponding to the inputted differential signals are accumulated on the capacitor **1103**.

[0178] After a lapse of a predetermined period of delay time and then outputting accumulated data, the switch **1105** is turned on. The capacitor **1103** and the operational amplifier **1101** configure a feed-back circuit. In sampling signals, a signal corresponding to the electric charges accumulated on the capacitor **1103** is outputted as the output signal *V_{out}*.

[0179] The output signal *V_{out}*, which is delayed and then outputted, is accumulated as electric charges at the electric charge adding unit **1109** of the adder circuit **103**. The electric charge adding unit **1109** is operated at a clock in a period twice the period of the reference clock, for example. In the first phase, the switch **1107_a** is turned on, the switch **1108_a** is turned off, and a signal corresponding to the output signal *V_{out}* is accumulated as electric charges on the capacitor **1106_a**. At the same time, the switch **1107_b** is turned off, the switch **1108_b** is turned on, and the electric charges accumulated on the capacitor **1106_b** are outputted to a terminal *V_{add}* connected to the input part of the buffer **104** in FIG. 1.

[0180] In the second phase, the switch **1107_a** is turned off, the switch **1108_a** is turned on, and the electric charges accumulated on the capacitor **1106_a** are outputted to the terminal *V_{add}* connected to the input part of the buffer **104** in FIG. 1.

[0181] At the same time, the switch **1107_b** is turned on, the switch **1108_b** is turned off, and a signal corresponding to the output signal *V_{out}* is accumulated as electric charges on the capacitor **1106_b**. As described above, the operation is repeatedly performed in which the signal *V_{out}* delayed in two phases is accumulated as electric charges and then outputted.

[0182] A signal is outputted as electric charges as described above. Thus, in the adder circuit **103**, in adding the output signals of the single-element circuits **102**, only the direct connection of the interconnections to each other averages electric charges and adds signals. Only the connection of the interconnections allows signals to be added

with no use of a special adder circuit. Consequently, the area of the circuit can be made small.

[0183] The control signal that operates the switches of the electric charge adding unit **1109** causes the sampling of signals immediately before the switch **1105**, which outputs a delayed signal, is changed from on to off. The provision of such timing allows the elimination of noise produced in switching and the accurate sampling of signals.

[0184] Delay time is determined based on the time difference between the control signal of the switch **1104** that determines the timing of sampling signals on the capacitor and the control signal of the switch **1105** that determines the timing of outputting signals from the capacitor.

[0185] For the control signal of the switch **1104**, the write control signals *C_{tl}s1*, *C_{tl}s2*, . . . , which are described in the first embodiment, are used. For the control signal of the switch **1105**, the read control signals *C_{tl}o1*, *C_{tl}o2*, . . . are used. In dynamically changing delay time, delay time is increased or decreased by changing the control signals *C_{tl}s* and *C_{tl}o*.

[0186] As in the embodiment, the input signal is sampled as the differential signal on the capacitor. Thus, the analog signal can be highly accurately sampled and delayed. Specifically, forming the differential circuit can reduce distortion. The configuration of a closed loop circuit with the operational amplifier for holding sampled signals allows highly accurate signals to be obtained.

[0187] Delay time is provided for the control signal that controls the switches. Thus, the analog signal can be delayed. The control signal is dynamically changed. Thus, delay time can be dynamically changed.

[0188] Electric charges are repeatedly accumulated and outputted in the unit of the reference clock at the electric charge adding unit **1109**. Thus, even in the case where the pulse duration of the read control signal is increased, output in synchronization with the reference clock can be obtained.

[0189] FIG. 16 is an illustration of another exemplary configuration of the switch-capacitor unit **1102** of the analog memory unit **205** in FIG. 13.

[0190] As illustrated in FIG. 16, in this case, the switch-capacitor unit **1102** is configured of the capacitor **1103**, the switches **1104_p**, **1104_n**, **1105_p**, and **1105_n**, and a switch **1201**. Compared with the configuration illustrated in FIG. 13, the switch **1201** is newly added. The switch **1201** is used as a reset switch.

[0191] The write control signal *C_{tl}s* is inputted to the control terminals of the switches **1104_p** and **1104_n**. The read control signal *C_{tl}o* is inputted to the control terminals of the switches **1105_p** and **1105_n**. A reset control signal *C_{tl}r* is inputted to the control terminal of the switch **1201**.

[0192] Thus, the write control signal *C_{tl}s* controls the turning on/off of the switches **1104_p** and **1104_n**. The read control signal *C_{tl}o* controls the turning on/off of the switches **1105_p** and **1105_n**. The reset control signal *C_{tl}r* controls the turning on/off of the switch **1201**.

[0193] In accumulating data on the capacitor **1103**, electric charges to be accumulated are changed depending on the initial state. Thus, desirably, the capacitor is reset before accumulating data or after outputting data.

[0194] In the case where delay time is not dynamically changed, the timing of sampling signals and the timing of outputting signals are fixed and periodic. Thus, the capacitor only has to be periodically reset.

[0195] Specifically, conditions are given that the write control signal and the read control signal for the n th capacitor are a write control signal $Ctl_s<n>$ and a read control signal $Ctl_o<n>$, respectively, and a signal to operate the switch **1201** is a reset control signal $Ctl_r<n>$.

[0196] In this case, for the reset control signal $Ctl_r<n>$, a write control signal $Ctl_s<n-1>$ for the previous capacitor only has to be used. Alternatively, a read control signal $Ctl_o<n+1>$ for the next capacitor only has to be used.

[0197] As in the first embodiment described above, in the case where delay time is dynamically changed, the write control signal or the read control signal is not allowed to be used for the reset control signal as they are. Therefore, a technique for generating the reset control signal will be described in the case where delay time is dynamically changed.

[0198] FIG. 17 is an illustration of an exemplary reset control signal generator circuit that generates a reset control signal to operate the reset switch **1201** of the switch-capacitor unit **1102** in FIG. 16.

[0199] The reset control signal generator circuit is a circuit that generates reset control signals using the write control signal. For example, the reset control signal generator circuit is provided on the analog memory unit **205**. As illustrated in FIG. 17, the reset control signal generator circuit is configured of an inverter delay unit **1202**, an OR circuit **1203**, which is an OR circuit, and an AND circuit **1204**, which is an AND circuit.

[0200] The inverter delay unit **1202** is configured of a plurality of inverters in series connection. The write control signal $Ctl_s<n>$ is inputted to the input part of the inverter delay unit **1202**. One input part of the AND circuit **1204** is connected to the output part of the inverter delay unit **1202**.

[0201] One input part of the OR circuit **1203** is connected to receive the previous write control signal $Ctl_s<n-2>$. The other input part of the OR circuit **1203** is connected to receive a second previous write control signal $Ctl_s<n-1>$.

[0202] The other input part of the AND circuit **1204** is connected to the output part of the OR circuit **1203**. From the output of the AND circuit **1204**, the reset control signal $Ctl_r<n>$ is outputted.

[0203] FIG. 18 is a timing chart of exemplary signal timings for the components of the reset control signal generator circuit in FIG. 17.

[0204] From the upper side to the lower side, FIG. 18 shows signal timings for the reference clock, the control signals Ctl_s_l and Ctl_s_s , write control signals Ctl_s1 to Ctl_s7 , and read control signals Ctl_r1 to Ctl_r7 . First, in order to reset data before signals are sample on the capacitor, the control signal $Ctl_s<n-1>$ in the previous stage and the control signal $Ctl_s<n-2>$ in the second previous stage are ORed.

[0205] In dynamically changing delay time, the control signals $Ctl_s<n>$ and $Ctl_s<n-1>$ are sometimes simultaneously turned to high level. Thus, the control signal $Ctl_s<n>$ is inverted at the inverter delay unit **1202**, and ANDed with the output of the OR circuit **1203** for generating the reset control signal $Ctl_r<n>$. This is because in the state in which the control signal $Ctl_s<n>$ is at high level, the input signal V_{in} has to be sampled, and thus the reset switch **1201** must not be turned on.

[0206] In order to guarantee that the reset switch **1201** is not turned on after the switch **1104** is controlled to sample

signals, the control signal $Ctl_s<n>$ is delayed at the inverter delay unit **1202**. This can prevent glitches, and can hold sampled electric charges.

[0207] FIG. 19 is an illustration of another exemplary reset control signal generator circuit in FIG. 17.

[0208] In this case, the reset control signal generator circuit generates the reset control signal using the read control signal. As illustrated in FIG. 19, the reset control signal generator circuit is configured of an OR circuit **1205**.

[0209] FIG. 20 is a timing chart of an example of signal timings for the components of the reset control signal generator circuit in FIG. 19.

[0210] From the upper side to the lower side, FIG. 20 shows signal timings for the reference clock, the control signals Ctl_o_l and Ctl_o_s , the write control signals Ctl_s1 to Ctl_s7 , and the read control signals Ctl_r1 to Ctl_r7 .

[0211] In this case, the reset control signal generator circuit in FIG. 20 resets data stored on the capacitor after data sampled on the capacitor is outputted. Specifically, the reset control signal generator circuit ORs a read control signal $Ctl_o<n+1>$ in the next stage and a read control signal $Ctl_o<n+2>$ in the second next stage, and generates the reset control signal $Ctl_r<n>$.

[0212] In the case where delay time is dynamically changed, the read control signal $Ctl_o<n+1>$ is sometimes not outputted. Thus, it is guaranteed that these two control signals are ORed to reset data as described above.

[0213] A simple circuit configuration with merits is a circuit that generates the reset control signal using the read control signals in FIG. 19. On the other hand, in the case where data is reset immediately after sampled data is read, it takes time to again sample signals after resetting. Taking into account of electric charges possibly to be noise accumulated by capacitor coupling, for example, until signals are again sampled, it is desirable to reset data immediately before sampled data is read. In this case, the reset control signal is generated using the write control signals in FIG. 17, which is a merit.

Third Embodiment

[0214] In a third embodiment, another configuration of the analog memory unit **205** in FIG. 13 according to the second embodiment will be described.

[0215] FIG. 21 is an illustration of another exemplary circuit configuration of the analog memory unit **205** in FIG. 13.

[0216] As illustrated in FIG. 21, the analog memory unit **205** is configured of an operational amplifier **1501** and switch-capacitor units **1510a**, **1510b**, The switch-capacitor unit **1510** is configured of capacitors **1502p** and **1502n**, and switches **1503p**, **1503n**, **1504p**, **1504n**, **1505p**, **1505n**, **1506p**, **1506n**, **1507p**, and **1507n**.

[0217] Here, subscripts p and n of the switches express the positive side and negative side of the differential circuit, and are sometimes omitted unless otherwise specified. Compared with the circuit according to the second embodiment, the circuit configuration is one that is a fully differential circuit, and the characteristics are strongly resistant to noise in common mode. The differential signals V_{inp} and V_{inn} are input signals of differential signals. The common voltage V_{cm} is a reference voltage.

[0218] In the connection of the switch-capacitor unit **1510a**, the common voltage V_{cm} is supplied to one ends of the switches **1504n**, **1504p**, **1505p**, and **1505n**, the differen-

tial signal V_{inp} is inputted to one end of the switch **1503_p**, and the differential signal V_{inn} is inputted to one end of the switch **1503_n**.

[0219] To the other end of the switch **1503_p**, one end of the switch **1507_p**, the other end of the switch **1505_p**, and one end of the capacitor **1502_p** are connected. To the other end of the capacitor **1502_p**, one end of the switch **1506_p** and the other end of the switch **1504_p** are connected. To the other end of the switch **1505_n**, the other end of the switch **1503_n**, one end of the switch **1507_n**, and one end of the capacitor **1502_n** are connected. To the other end of the capacitor **1502_n**, the other end of the switch **1504_n** and one end of the switch **1506_n** are connected.

[0220] The other end of the switch **1506_p** is connected to one input part of the operational amplifier **1501**. The other end of the switch **1506_n** is connected to the other input part of the operational amplifier **1501**. The other end of the switch **1507_p** is connected to one output part of the operational amplifier **1501**. The other end of the switch **1507_n** is connected to the other output part of the operational amplifier.

[0221] The one output part of the operational amplifier **1501** is an output terminal to output a differential output signal V_{outp} . The other output part of the operational amplifier **1501** is an output terminal to output a differential output signal V_{outn} .

[0222] Note that, the connection relationship of the switch-capacitor unit **1510_a** is described here. The connection relationship of the other switch-capacitor units **1510** is similar.

[0223] FIG. 22 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in sampling signals at the switch-capacitor unit **1510** of the analog memory unit **205** in FIG. 21. FIG. 23 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in holding signals at the switch-capacitor unit **1510** of the analog memory in FIG. 21. FIG. 24 is an illustration of an exemplary equivalent circuit in resetting data in the switch-capacitor unit **1510** in FIG. 21.

[0224] In sampling signals at the switch-capacitor unit **1510**, the switches **1503** and **1504** are turned on, and the switches **1505**, **1506**, and **1507** are turned off. Thus, the capacitor **1502** is connected across the differential signals V_{inp} and V_{inn} and the common voltage V_{cm} .

[0225] In sampling signals, electric charges corresponding to the differential signals V_{inp} and V_{inn} are accumulated on the capacitor **1502**. In holding signals, the switches **1503**, **1504**, and **1505** are turned off, and the switches **1506** and **1507** are turned on.

[0226] The capacitor **1502** and the operational amplifier **1501** configure a feed-back circuit. In sampling signals, signals corresponding to the electric charges accumulated on the capacitor **1502** are outputted as the differential output signals V_{outp} and V_{outn} . In resetting the signals accumulated on the capacitor, the switches **1504** and **1505** are turned on.

[0227] Delay time is determined by the time difference between the write control signal for the switch **1504**, which determines the timing of sampling signals on the capacitor, and the read control signals for the switch **1506** and the switch **1507**, which determine the timing of outputting signals from the capacitor.

[0228] For the control signals for the operations of the switch **1503** and the switch **1504**, the write control signals Ctl_{s1} , Ctl_{s2} , . . . , for example, are used, which are shown

in the first embodiment. For the control signals for the operations of the switch **1506** and the switch **1507**, the read control signals Ctl_{o1} , Ctl_{o2} , . . . are used, which are similarly shown in the first embodiment.

[0229] The write control signals Ctl_{s1} , Ctl_{s2} , . . . , and the read control signals Ctl_{o1} , Ctl_{o2} , . . . are generated at the write control signal generator circuit **305** and the read control signal generator circuit **306**, respectively, in FIG. 3.

[0230] Similarly to the first embodiment, in dynamically changing delay time, delay time is increased or decreased by changing the control signals Ctl_{s_l} , Ctl_{s_s} , Ctl_{o_l} and Ctl_{o_s} inputted to the write control signal generator circuit **305** and the read control signal generator circuit **306**.

[0231] As described above, the switch-capacitor unit **1510** is formed as a circuit for differential input and differential output. Thus, analog input signals can be highly accurately sampled and delayed, and a circuit strongly resistant to noise in common mode can be provided.

[0232] As described above, some aspects of the inventions made by the present inventors are described specifically based on the embodiments. It goes without saying that the present invention is not limited to the embodiments and can be variously modified and altered in the scope not deviating from the gist of the present invention.

[0233] Note that, the present invention is not limited to the foregoing embodiments, and includes various exemplary modifications. For example, the foregoing embodiments are described in detail for easy understanding of the present invention. The present invention is not necessarily limited to ones including all the described configurations.

[0234] A part of the configuration of an embodiment can be replaced by the configuration of another embodiment. The configuration of an embodiment can be added with the configuration of another embodiment. Some of the configurations of the embodiments can be added with, removed from, or replaced by the other configurations.

LIST OF REFERENCE SIGNS

[0235]	100: probe
[0236]	101: subarray
[0237]	102: single-element circuit
[0238]	103: adder circuit
[0239]	104: buffer
[0240]	105: digital circuit
[0241]	106: main device
[0242]	107: analog front end circuit
[0243]	201: transducer
[0244]	202: transmission reception separator
[0245]	203: transmitting unit
[0246]	204: reception analog front end unit
[0247]	205: analog memory unit
[0248]	301: buffer
[0249]	302: switch
[0250]	303: capacitor
[0251]	304: switch
[0252]	305: control signal generator circuit
[0253]	306: control signal generator circuit
[0254]	307: decoder circuit
[0255]	901: logic circuit
[0256]	902: non-overlapping buffer
[0257]	903: AND circuit
[0258]	904: NOR circuit
[0259]	906: flip-flop
[0260]	1001: logic circuit

[0261] 1002: non-overlapping buffer
 [0262] 1003: selector
 [0263] 1004: inverter
 [0264] 1005: NOR circuit
 [0265] 1006: flip-flop
 [0266] 1101: operational amplifier
 [0267] 1102: switch-capacitor unit
 [0268] 1103: capacitor
 [0269] 1104: switch
 [0270] 1105: switch
 [0271] 1106: capacitor
 [0272] 1107: switch
 [0273] 1108: switch
 [0274] 1109: electric charge adding unit
 [0275] 1201: switch
 [0276] 1202: inverter delay unit
 [0277] 1203: OR circuit
 [0278] 1204: AND circuit
 [0279] 1205: OR circuit
 [0280] 1501: operational amplifier
 [0281] 1510: switch-capacitor unit
 [0282] 1502: capacitor
 [0283] 1503: switch
 [0284] 1504: switch
 [0285] 1505: switch
 [0286] 1506: switch
 [0287] 1507: switch

1. An ultrasound probe comprising a delay unit that accumulates electric charges corresponding to a reflected wave of an ultrasonic wave produced by a difference between acoustic impedances on a plurality of memory elements and in turn outputs the electric charges accumulated on the memory elements,

wherein in accumulating the electric charges, when a first control signal that increases delay time of the reflected wave is inputted, the delay unit accumulates same electric charges on two or more of the memory elements for a preset period, or in outputting the electric charges, when the first control signal is inputted, the delay unit outputs electric charges accumulated on one of the memory elements for a preset period.

2. The ultrasound probe according to claim 1,

wherein in accumulating the electric charges, when a second control signal that decreases delay time of the reflected wave is inputted, the delay unit accumulates the electric charges that are the same on one of the memory elements for a preset period, or in outputting the electric charges, when the second control signal is inputted, the delay unit outputs no electric charges from the memory elements for a preset period.

3. An ultrasound probe comprising:

a plurality of transmitter-receiver unit that transmit an ultrasonic wave and receives a reflected wave of the ultrasonic wave produced by a difference between acoustic impedances,

wherein the transmitter-receiver unit includes a delay unit that accumulates a voltage level corresponding to the reflected wave and in turn outputs the accumulated voltage level;

the delay unit includes:

a voltage storage output unit that accumulates a voltage level corresponding to the reflected wave based on a write control signal and outputs the accumulated voltage level based on a read control signal; and

a control signal generating unit that generates the write control signal and the read control signal; and

when a delay time control signal that varies delay time is inputted, the control signal generating unit varies an output period of the write control signal or the read control signal depending on the delay time control signal and varies delay time that delays the reflected wave.

4. The ultrasound probe according to claim 3,

wherein the voltage storage output unit includes:

a plurality of memory elements that accumulate a voltage level corresponding to the reflected wave;

a plurality of first switches that accumulate the voltage level on the memory elements based on the write control signal; and

a plurality of second switches that output the voltage level accumulated on the memory elements based on the read control signal.

5. The ultrasound probe according to claim 4,

wherein the delay time control signal inputted to the control signal generating unit has a first delay time control signal that increases delay time of the reflected wave; and

when the first delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the write control signal that controls the first switch to accumulate a same voltage level on two or more of the memory elements depending on an input period of the first delay time control signal.

6. The ultrasound probe according to claim 4,

wherein the delay time control signal inputted to the control signal generating unit has a first delay time control signal that increases delay time of the reflected wave; and

when the first delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the read control signal that controls the second switch to increase an output period of the voltage level outputted from one of the memory elements depending on an input period of the first delay time control signal.

7. The ultrasound probe according to claim 4,

wherein the delay time control signal inputted to the control signal generating unit has a second delay time control signal that decreases delay time of the reflected wave; and

when the second delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the write control signal that controls the first switch to increase a period in which one of the memory elements accumulates the voltage level depending on an input period of the second delay time control signal.

8. The ultrasound probe according to claim 4,

wherein the delay time control signal inputted to the control signal generating unit has a second delay time control signal that decreases delay time of the reflected wave; and

when the second delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the read control signal that controls the second switch not to output the voltage level from one or more of the memory elements depending on an input period of the second delay time control signal.

9. The ultrasound probe according to claim 3, wherein the reflected wave inputted to the voltage storage output unit is a differential input signal; and the voltage storage output unit includes:

- a plurality of memory elements that accumulate a voltage level of the differential input signal,
- a plurality of first switch units that accumulate a voltage level of the differential input signal on the memory elements based on the write control signal,
- a second switch unit that outputs the voltage level accumulated on the memory element based on the read control signal, and
- an operational amplifier that outputs a signal corresponding to the voltage level outputted from the second switch unit.

10. The ultrasound probe according to claim 9, wherein the delay time control signal inputted to the control signal generating unit has a first delay time control signal that increases delay time of the reflected wave; and

when the first delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the read control signal that controls the first switch unit to accumulate a same voltage level on two or more of the memory elements depending on an input period of the first delay time control signal, or when the first delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the read control signal that controls the

second switch unit to increase an output period of the voltage level outputted from one of the memory elements depending on an input period of the first delay time control signal.

11. The ultrasound probe according to claim 9, wherein the delay time control signal inputted to the control signal generating unit has a second delay time control signal that decreases delay time of the reflected wave; and

when the second delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the write control signal that controls the first switch unit to increase a period in which one of the memory elements accumulates the voltage level depending on an input period of the second delay time control signal, or when the second delay time control signal is inputted, the control signal generating unit generates the read control signal that controls the second switch unit not to output the voltage level from one or more of the memory elements depending on an input period of the second delay time control signal.

12. The ultrasound probe according to claim 9, wherein the voltage storage output unit further includes a reset switch that resets the memory element before the voltage level is accumulated on the memory element.

13. An ultrasound imaging apparatus comprising the ultrasound probe according to claim 1.

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摘要(译)

配置了可以动态改变延迟时间的紧凑型延迟电路。探针包括模拟存储单元，该模拟存储单元累积对应于由多个电容器上的声阻抗之间的差产生的超声波的反射波的电荷 303，并且依次输出累积的电荷。电容器 303 到模拟存储器单元 205。在累积电荷时，当输入增加反射波的延迟时间的控制信号CtIs_I时，模拟存储单元 205 在两个或更多个电容器上累积相同的电荷 303 对于预设时段或输出电荷，当输入控制信号CtIo_I时，模拟存储器单元 205 输出累积在电容器之一上的电荷 303 预设期间。

