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Ko et al.

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(54) **ULTRASONIC TRANSDUCER, ULTRASONIC PROBE, AND ULTRASOUND IMAGE DIAGNOSIS APPARATUS**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC A61B 8/4494; A61B 8/14; A61B 8/4444;
A61B 8/5207; H01L 41/0474; H01L 41/25
See application file for complete search history.

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 395 days.

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A61B 8/14	(2006.01)
A61B 8/08	(2006.01)
H01L 41/25	(2013.01)
B06B 1/06	(2006.01)

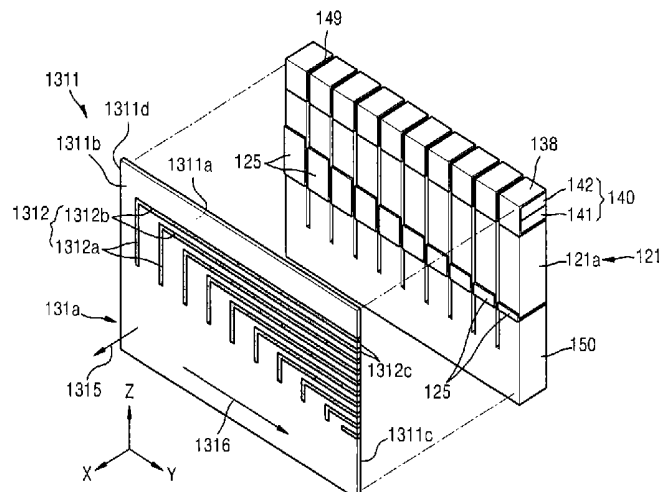
(57) **ABSTRACT**

An ultrasonic transducer, an ultrasonic probe, and an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus include a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column; individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements; side electrodes extending toward one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements from the individual electrodes; and a side electrode substrate including wiring lines that are bonded to the one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements and are electrically connected to the side electrodes, respectively.

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **A61B 8/4494** (2013.01); **A61B 8/14** (2013.01); **A61B 8/4444** (2013.01); **A61B 8/5207** (2013.01); **B06B 1/0629** (2013.01); **H01L 41/0474** (2013.01); **H01L 41/25** (2013.01); **Y10T 29/42** (2015.01)

23 Claims, 24 Drawing Sheets



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FIG. 1

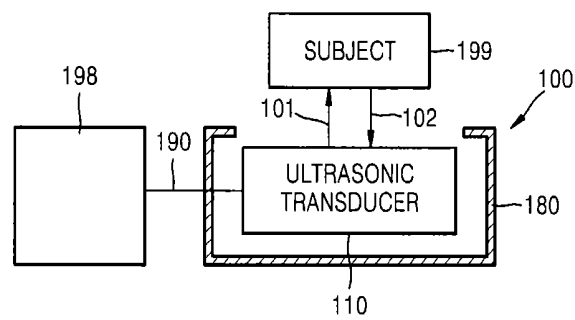


FIG. 2

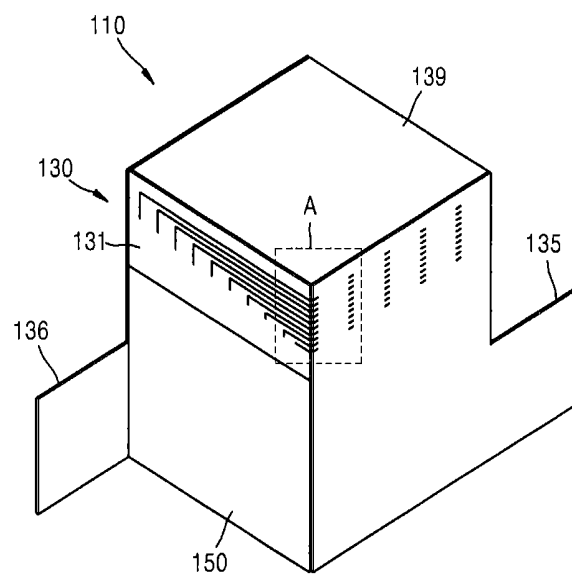


FIG. 3

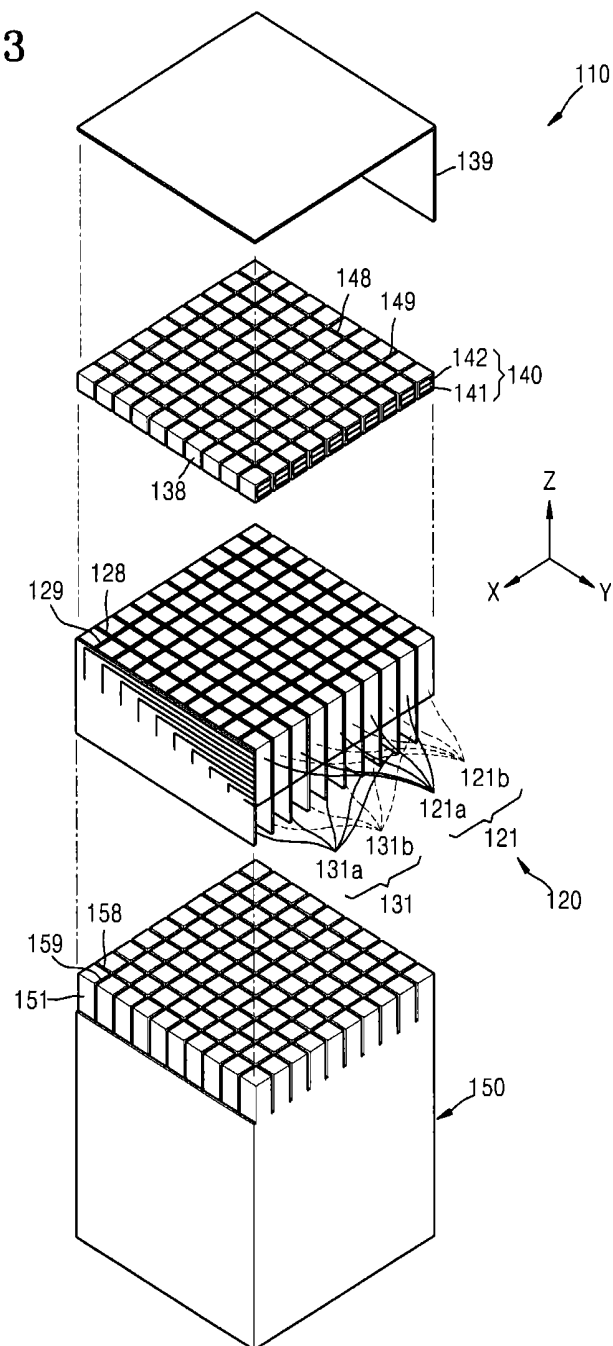


FIG. 4

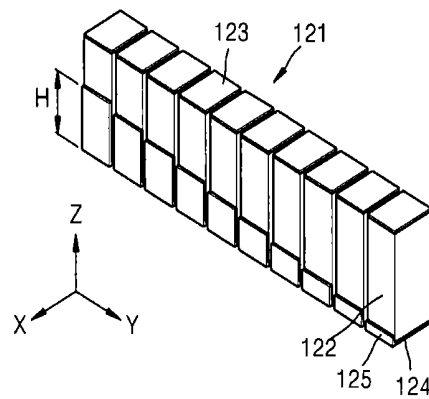


FIG. 5

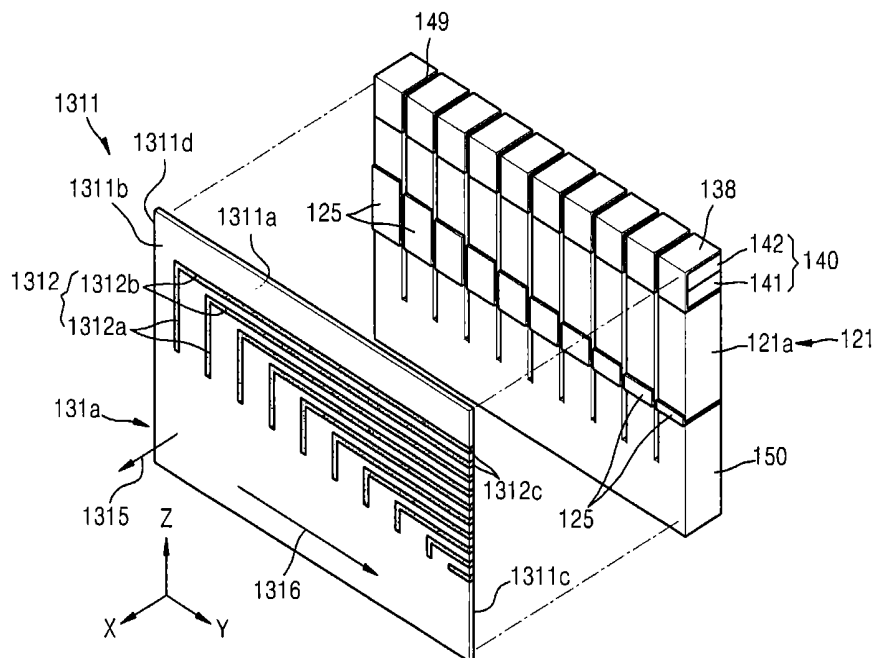


FIG. 6

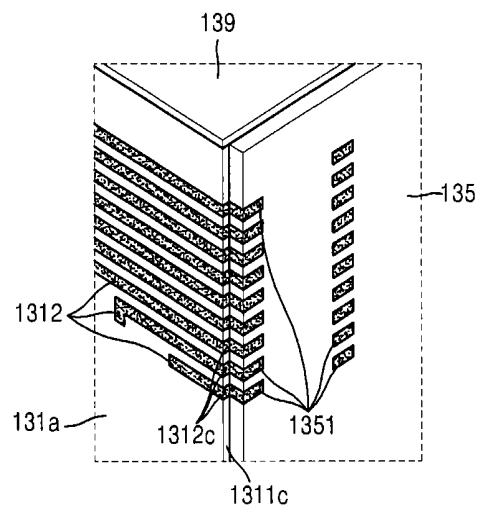


FIG. 7

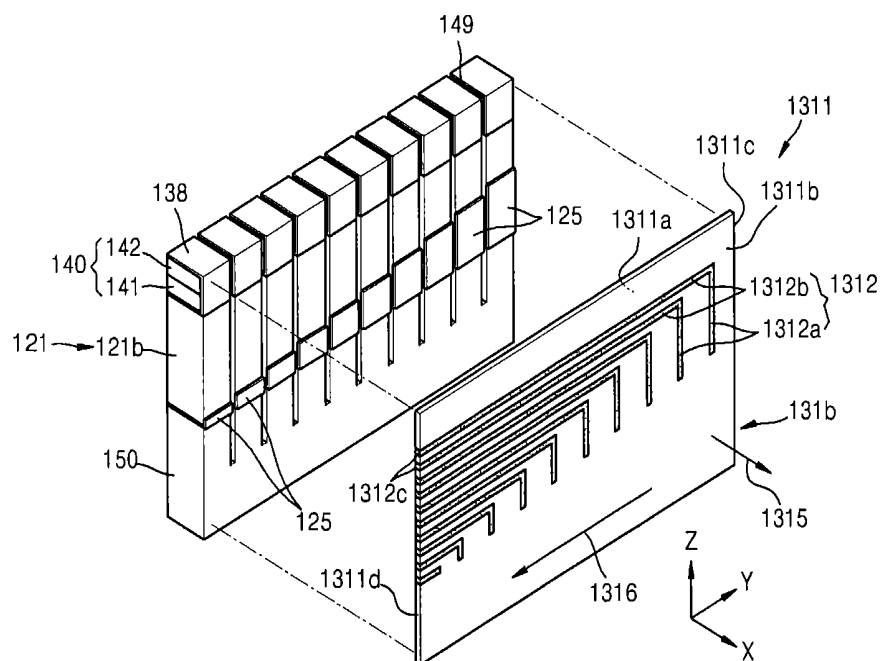


FIG. 8

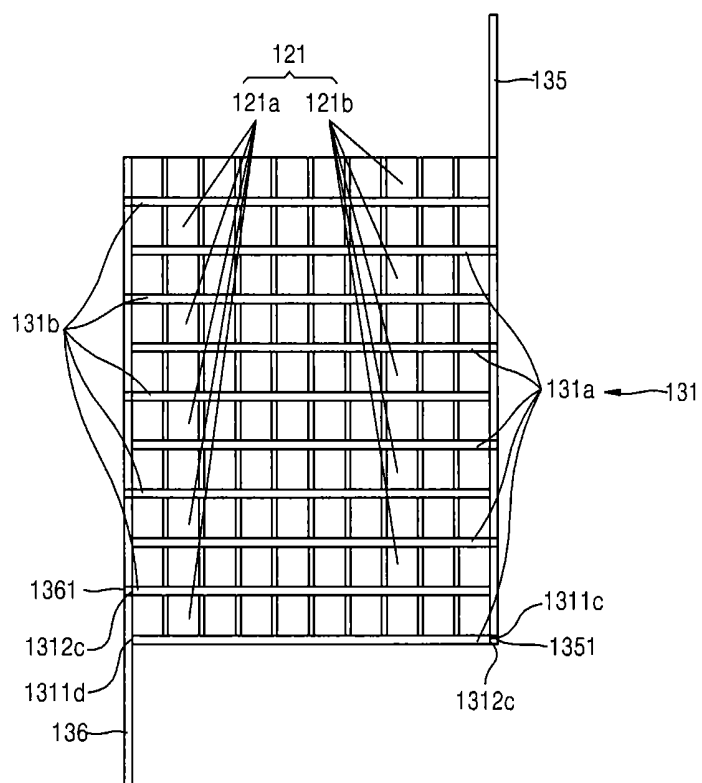


FIG. 9

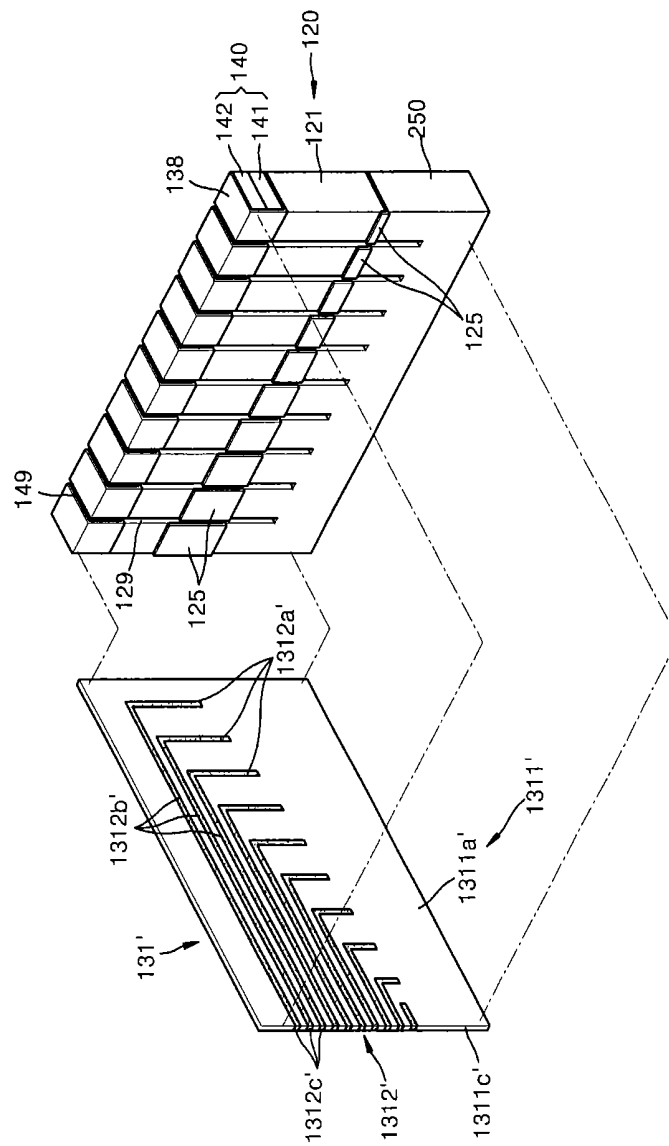


FIG. 10

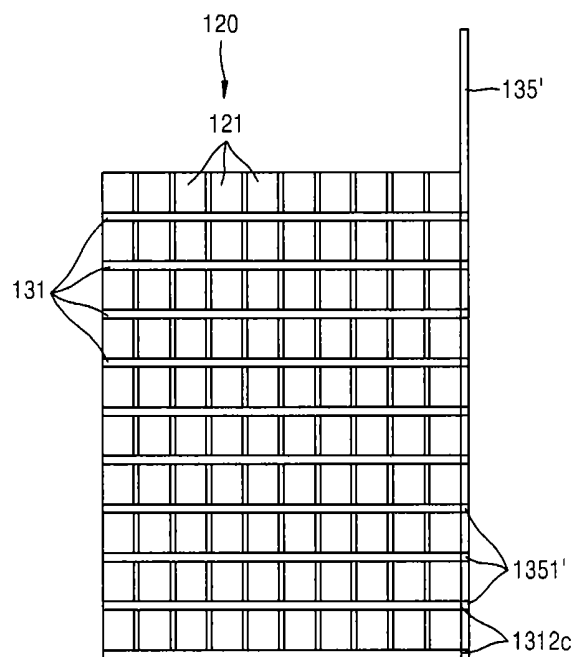


FIG. 11

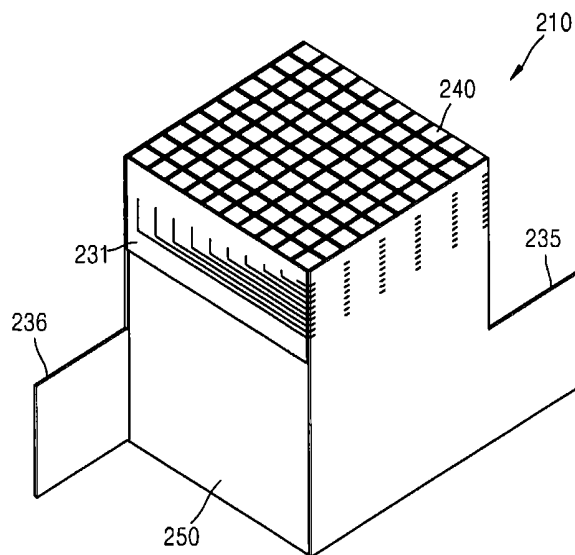


FIG. 12

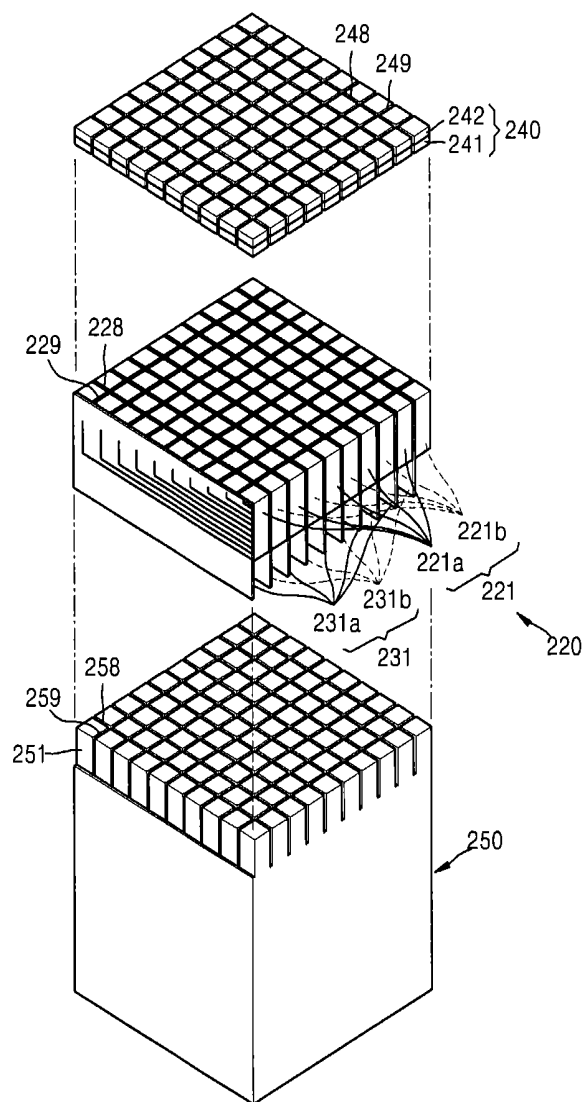


FIG. 13

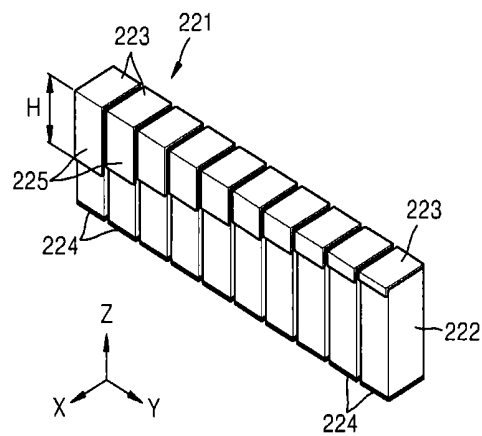


FIG. 14

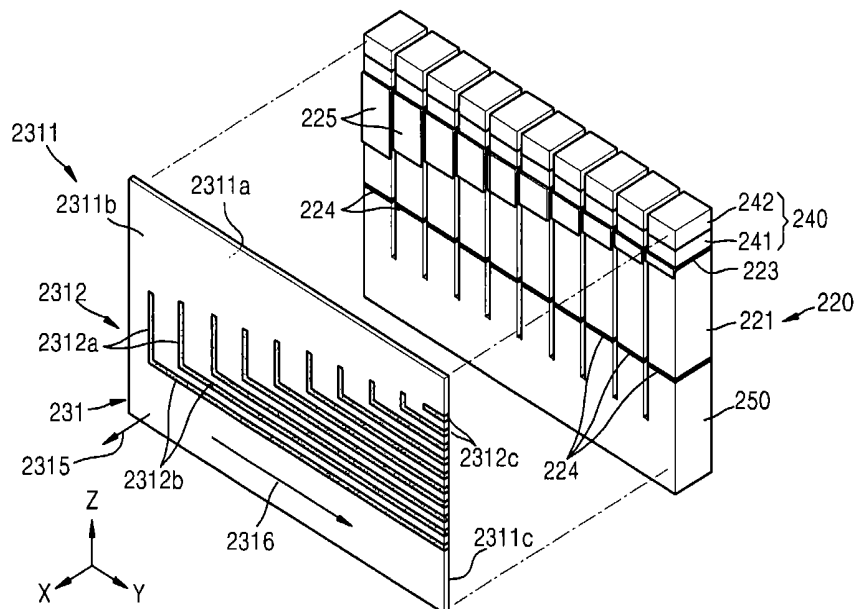


FIG. 16

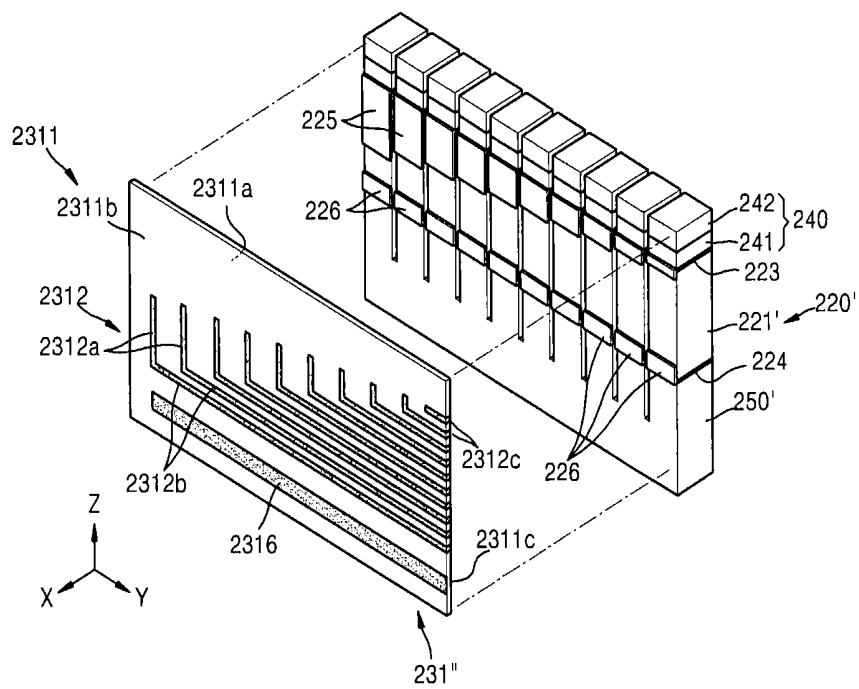


FIG. 17A

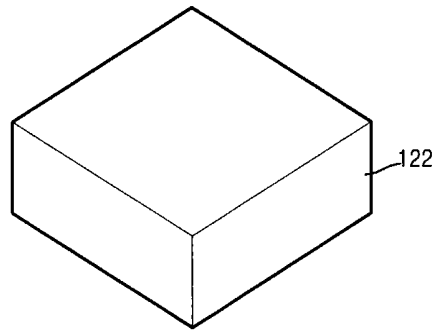


FIG. 17B

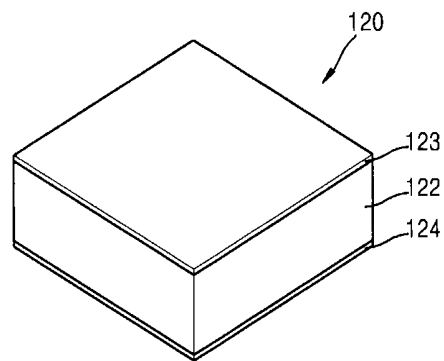


FIG. 17C

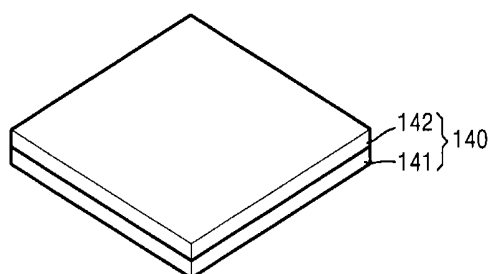


FIG. 17D

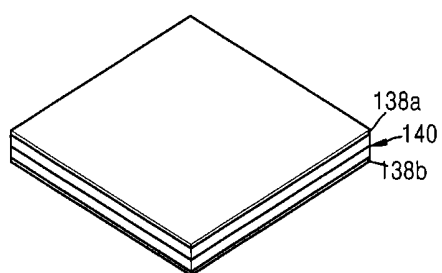


FIG. 17E

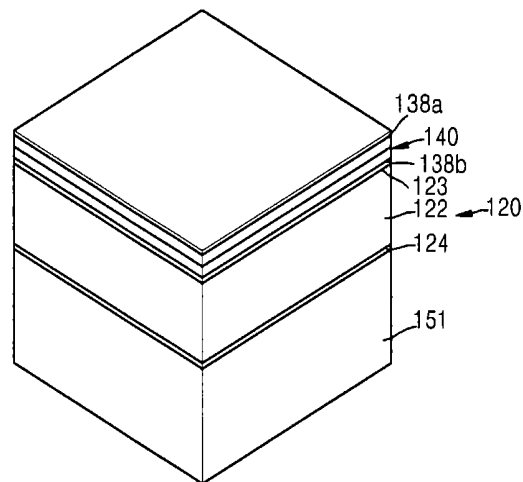


FIG. 17F

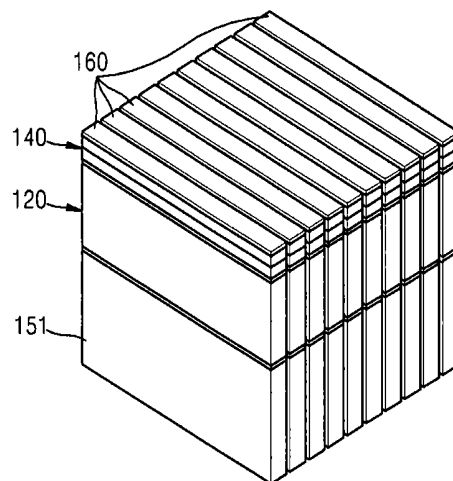


FIG. 17G

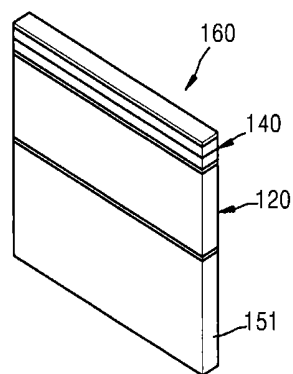


FIG. 17H

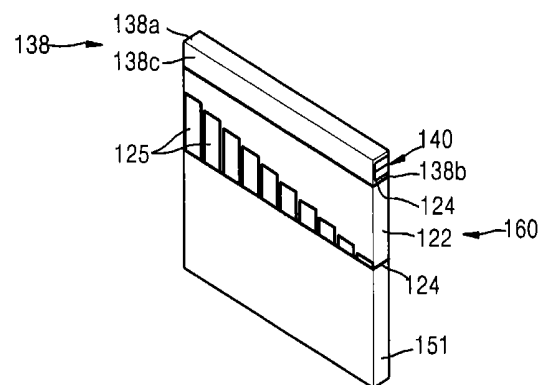


FIG. 17I

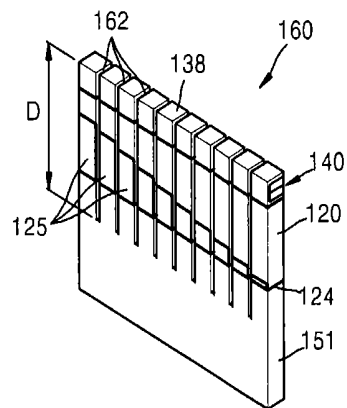


FIG. 17J

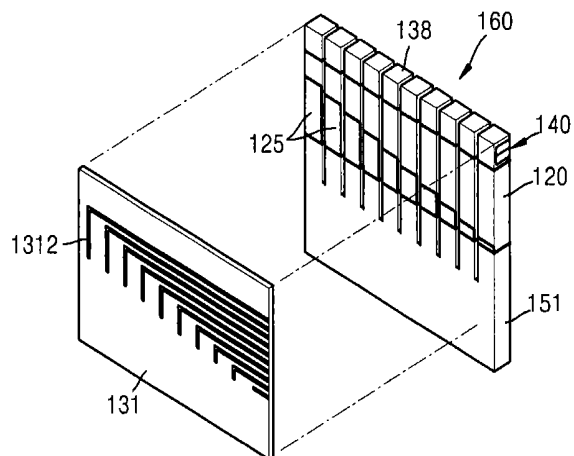


FIG. 17K

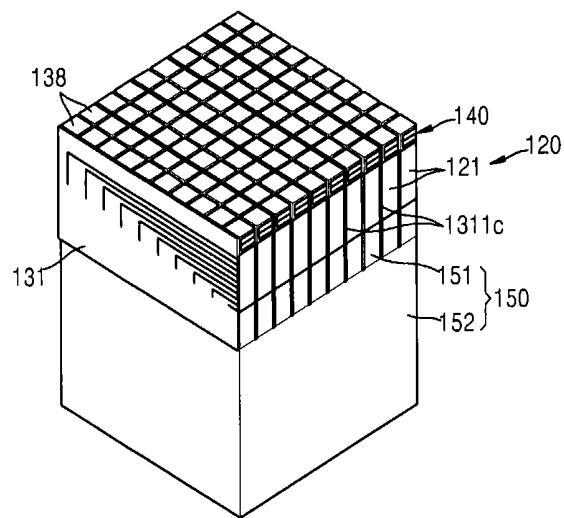


FIG. 18A

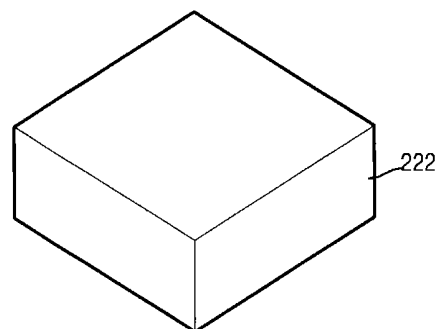


FIG. 18B

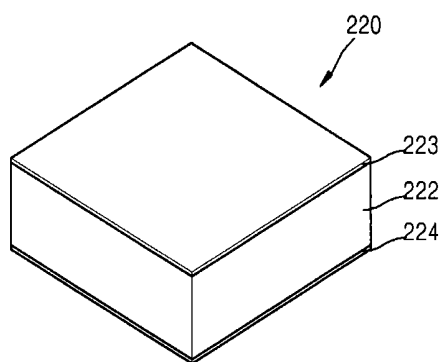


FIG. 18C

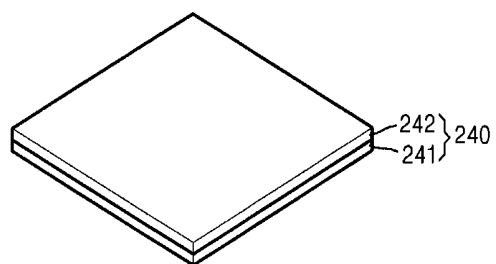


FIG. 18D

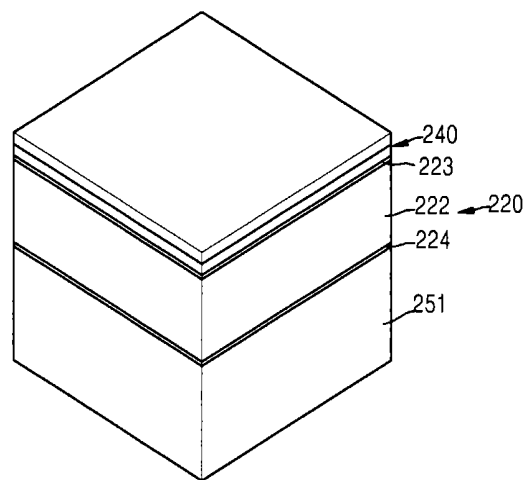


FIG. 18E

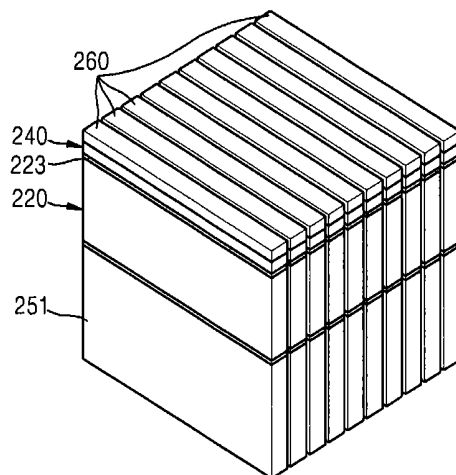


FIG. 18F

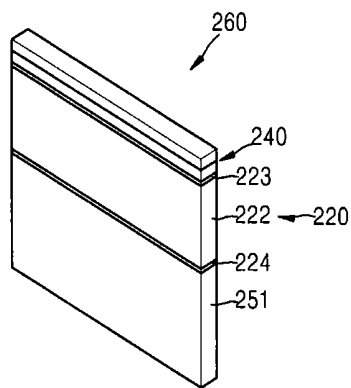


FIG. 18G

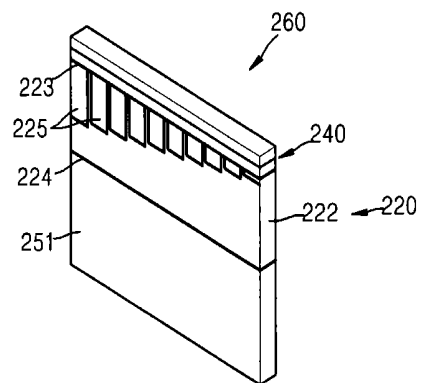


FIG. 18H

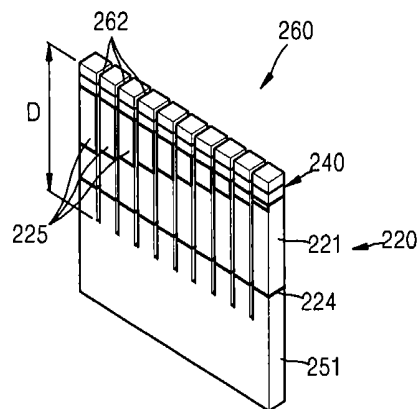


FIG. 18I

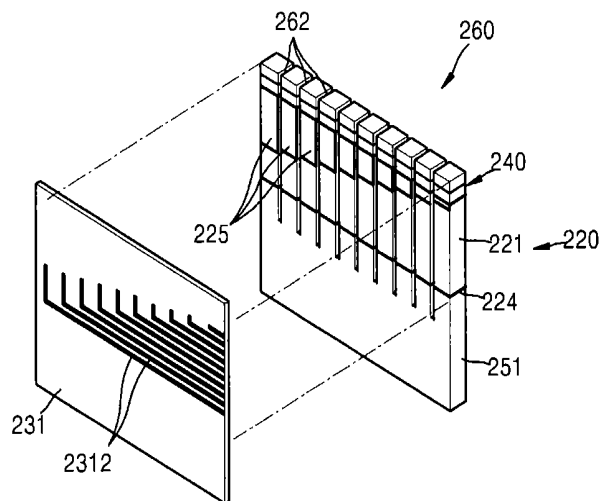
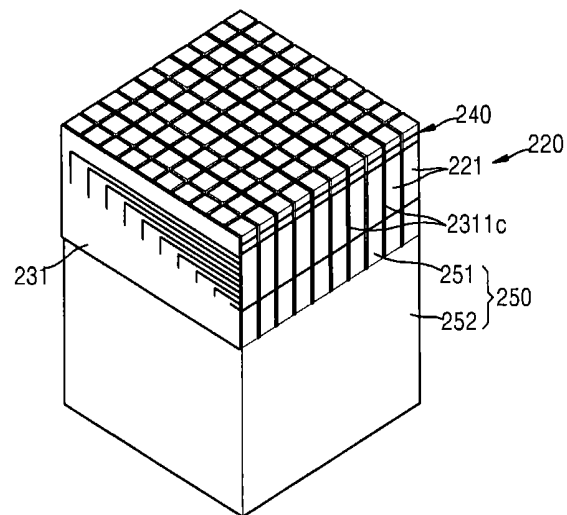


FIG. 18J



ULTRASONIC TRANSDUCER, ULTRASONIC PROBE, AND ULTRASOUND IMAGE DIAGNOSIS APPARATUS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of Korean Patent Application No. 10-2012-0042179, filed on Apr. 23, 2012, in the Korean Intellectual Property Office, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference.

BACKGROUND

1. Field

One or more embodiments relate to an ultrasonic transducer, an ultrasonic probe, and an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus, and more particularly, to an ultrasonic transducer having an improved electrode connection structure, an ultrasonic probe, and an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus.

2. Description of the Related Art

An ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus is an apparatus that radiates an ultrasonic wave signal to a desired inner site of a body via a body surface of a subject and uses information about a reflected ultrasonic wave signal (ultrasonic wave echo signal) to obtain an image about a fault of soft tissues or blood flow in a noninvasive manner. Compared to other image diagnosis apparatuses, such as an X-ray diagnosis apparatus, a computerized tomography (CT) scanner, a magnetic resonance image (MRI) apparatus, or a nuclear medicine diagnosis apparatus, the ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus is small and inexpensive, displays an image in real time, and has high stability due to no radiation of, for example, X-rays. Due to these advantages, the ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus is widely used for heart, abdomen, urinary system, and obstetrics diagnoses.

The ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus may include, for example, an ultrasonic probe that transmits an ultrasonic wave signal to a subject and receives an ultrasonic wave echo signal reflected from the subject to obtain an ultrasonic image of the subject. The ultrasonic probe may include, for example a transducer, a case having an open top end, and a cover that is coupled to the top end of the case and directly contacts a surface of a subject. In this regard, the transducer may include, for example, a piezoelectric layer that includes a piezoelectric material for reversibly converting an electric signal and an acoustic signal during vibration, an acoustic matching layer that may reduce an acoustic impedance difference between the piezoelectric layer and the subject so as to allow an ultrasonic wave produced by the piezoelectric layer to be transmitted to the subject as much as possible, an acoustic lens layer that may allow an ultrasonic wave progressing forward from the piezoelectric layer to be focused on a particular point, and a sound wave absorption layer that may prevent an ultrasonic wave from progressing backward from the piezoelectric layer to prevent image distortion. In the piezoelectric layer of the transducer, a plurality of piezoelectric elements to which electrical signals are independently applied may be arranged. Electrical wiring lines with respect to the piezoelectric elements may be factors in determining the characteristics, shape, manufacturing process, and costs of the transducer.

SUMMARY

Additional aspects and/or advantages will be set forth in part in the description which follows and, in part, will be apparent from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention.

One or more embodiments may provide an ultrasonic transducer having an improved electrode connection structure for electrical connection of a piezoelectric layer, an ultrasonic probe, and an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus.

According to an aspect of one or more embodiments, there may be provided an ultrasonic transducer which may include: a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column; individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements; side electrodes extending toward one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements from the individual electrodes; and/or a side electrode substrate including wiring lines that are bonded to the one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements and are electrically connected to the side electrodes, respectively.

The side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements located in one column may have different heights.

The heights of the side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements located in one column may be gradually decreased or increased in a lengthwise direction of the column.

The wiring lines of the side electrode substrate may include, for example, first parts respectively facing the side electrodes, second parts extending toward one side ends of the side electrode substrate, and third parts exposed by the one side ends of the side electrode substrate.

A substrate body of the side electrode substrate may be formed of an anisotropic electroconductive material having an electroconductive property in a thickness direction and having an insulating property in a surface direction, and the wiring lines of the side electrode substrate may be provided in a surface opposite to the surface where the substrate meets the side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements.

The substrate body of the side electrode substrate may be formed of an electric insulating material, and the wiring lines of the side electrode substrate may be provided in the surface where the substrate meets the side electrodes.

The piezoelectric elements may be arranged in a two-dimensional array to be spaced apart from one another in columns and lines, and a plurality of the side electrode substrates may be inserted into gaps between the columns of the piezoelectric elements.

Heights of the side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a first column may be gradually decreased in a lengthwise direction of the column, and heights of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a second column adjacent to the first column may be gradually increased in the lengthwise direction of the column.

The wiring lines of the side electrode substrates may include, for example, first parts respectively facing the side electrodes, second parts extending toward side ends of the side electrode substrates, and third parts exposed by the side ends of the side electrode substrates, and the side ends by which the third parts are exposed of a first side electrode substrate bonded to the piezoelectric elements of the first column may be opposite to the side ends by which the third parts are exposed of a second side electrode substrate bonded to the piezoelectric elements of the second column.

The ultrasonic transducer may further include a first connection substrate electrically connected to the exposed third parts of the first side electrode substrate and a second connection substrate electrically connected to the exposed third parts of the second side electrode substrate.

Heights of the side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of all columns may be gradually decreased or increased in the same direction.

The wiring lines of the side electrode substrates may include, for example, first parts respectively facing the side

electrodes, second parts extending toward one side ends of the side electrode substrate, and third parts exposed by the one side ends of the side electrode substrate, wherein the side ends by which the third parts may be exposed of the side electrode substrates may be arranged in the same direction.

The ultrasonic transducer may further include one connection substrate electrically connected to the exposed third parts of the side electrode substrates.

A substrate body of the side electrode substrate may be formed of a sound absorbing material.

A substrate body of the side electrode substrate may be formed of a flexible material.

The individual electrodes may be signal electrodes respectively provided under the piezoelectric elements, and common electrodes may be respectively provided on the piezoelectric elements.

The common electrodes further may include upper electrodes respectively provided on top surfaces of the piezoelectric elements and an upper electrode plate that may be provided on top surfaces of the upper electrodes and that is commonly and electrically connected to the upper electrodes.

The ultrasonic transducer may further include an acoustic matching layer provided between the upper electrodes and an upper electrode layer, and the acoustic matching layer may be formed of a conductive material, or at least a part of an outer surface of the acoustic matching layer is coated with a conductive material.

The individual electrodes may be signal electrodes respectively provided on the piezoelectric elements, and a common electrode may be provided under the piezoelectric elements.

The ultrasonic transducer may further include a rear surface supporting unit provided under the piezoelectric elements to support the piezoelectric elements, wherein the rear surface supporting unit may be formed of a conductive material and may be electrically connected to the common electrode.

A plurality of kerfs may be formed in portions of the rear surface supporting unit contacting the piezoelectric elements to correspond to gaps between the piezoelectric elements.

At least a portion of the rear surface supporting unit contacting the piezoelectric elements may be formed of a sound absorbing material.

According to another aspect of one or more embodiments, there may be provided an ultrasonic probe which may include, for example: an ultrasonic transducer; and a housing accommodating the ultrasonic transducer, wherein the ultrasonic transducer may include, for example: a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column; individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements; side electrodes extending toward one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements from the individual electrodes; and/or a side electrode substrate including wiring lines that are bonded to the one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements and are electrically connected to the side electrodes, respectively.

According to another aspect of one or more embodiments, there is provided an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus which may include, for example: an ultrasonic probe including an ultrasonic transducer and a housing accommodating the ultrasonic transducer; and a signal processor for generating an ultrasonic wave image based on an ultrasonic wave echo signal detected by the ultrasonic probe, wherein the ultrasonic transducer may include, for example: a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column; individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements; side electrodes extending toward one side surfaces of the piezo-

electric elements from the individual electrodes; and a side electrode substrate which may include wiring lines that may be bonded to the one side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements and may be electrically connected to the side electrodes, respectively.

According to another aspect of one or more embodiments, there is provided a method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer, the method may include, for example: providing a piezoelectric layer; forming an electrode layer on at least one surface of the piezoelectric layer; forming one block by bonding a support structure to a bottom surface of the piezoelectric layer; providing a plurality of sub-blocks by cutting a block including the support structure and the piezoelectric layer in a vertical direction at equal intervals; forming a side electrode electrically connected to an electrode layer of the piezoelectric layer in one side surface of the block including the support structure and the piezoelectric layer; forming a plurality of kerfs at equal intervals from uppermost portions of the sub-blocks to a predetermined position of the support structure; providing a side electrode substrate having wiring patterns corresponding to side electrodes of the sub-blocks; bonding the side electrode substrate to the sub-blocks in which the kerfs are formed; bonding the sub-blocks to which the side electrode substrate is bonded to a supporting block in a width direction; and/or bonding a connection substrate to a side surface of the supporting block to which the sub-blocks are bonded.

The method may further include an operation of detecting and selecting a piezoelectric property for each sub-block to which the side electrode substrate is bonded before the sub-blocks to which the side electrode substrate is bonded are bonded to the supporting block in the width direction.

The ultrasonic transducer, the ultrasonic probe, and the ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus according to the above-described embodiments of the present invention may have the following effects.

Firstly, electrical signals may be respectively applied to a plurality of piezoelectric elements via a side electrode, and thus an electric connecting structure via the side electrode may be easily applied to a two-dimensional arrayed ultrasonic transducer, and further to a stacked structured ultrasonic transducer.

Secondly, when a single ultrasonic transducer is manufactured, a plurality of piezoelectric elements may be assembled in units of columns, and thus the piezoelectric elements may be tested in units of columns to decrease dispersion of piezoelectric characteristics, thereby possibly reducing a fluctuation in performance of the ultrasonic transducer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other features and advantages of one or more embodiments will become more apparent by describing in detail exemplary embodiments with reference to the attached drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view of an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 4 is a view illustrating piezoelectric elements of an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 5 is a view illustrating a first side electrode substrate attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements of odd numbered columns in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 6 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate and a connection substrate bonded together in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 7 is a view illustrating a second side electrode substrate attached to piezoelectric elements arranged in even numbered columns in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 8 is a view illustrating two connection substrates bonded to a side electrode substrate in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 9 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 10 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate and a connection substrate bonded together in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 12 is an exploded perspective view of an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 13 is a view illustrating piezoelectric elements of an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 14 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 15 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIG. 16 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate and a connection substrate bonded together in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments;

FIGS. 17A to 17K are views illustrating a method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments; and

FIGS. 18A to 18J are views illustrating a method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference will now be made in detail to one or more embodiments, illustrated in the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like elements throughout. In this regard, embodiments of the present invention may be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as being limited to embodiments set forth herein, as various changes, modifications, and equivalents of the systems, apparatuses and/or methods described herein will be understood to be included in the invention by those of ordinary skill in the art after embodiments discussed herein are understood. Accordingly, embodiments are merely described below, by referring to the figures, to explain aspects of the present invention. In the drawings, the thicknesses of layers and regions are exaggerated for clarity. Expressions such as "at least one of," when preceding a list of elements, modify the entire list of elements and do not modify the individual elements of the list.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus according to one or more embodiments.

Referring to FIG. 1, the ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus of the current embodiment may include an ultrasonic probe 100 and a signal processor 198. The ultrasonic probe 100 may include an ultrasonic transducer 110 that may transmit an ultrasonic wave 101 to a subject 199, for example, a human body, and may receive an ultrasonic wave 102 reflected from the subject 199, and a housing 180 for accommodating the ultrasonic transducer 110. The ultrasonic probe

100 may be electrically connected to the signal processor 198 via a cable 190. The signal processor 198 may control the ultrasonic probe 100 and may generate an image of the subject 199 based on an echo signal detected by the ultrasonic probe 100.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the ultrasonic transducer 110 accommodated in the ultrasonic probe 100 according to one or more embodiments. FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view of the ultrasonic transducer 110 according to one or more embodiments. For convenience of description, first and second connection substrates 135 and 136 are omitted in FIG. 3. Also, in FIG. 3, although it is shown as if upper ends of a plurality of side electrode substrates 131 correspond with top surfaces of piezoelectric elements 121, the upper ends of the side electrode substrates 131 may extend to correspond with top surfaces of a plurality of acoustic matching layers 140.

Referring to FIGS. 2 and 3, the ultrasonic transducer 110 according to one or more embodiments may include a piezoelectric layer 120, an electrode connecting unit 130 for electrical connection of the piezoelectric layer 120, acoustic matching layers 140 disposed on the piezoelectric layer 120, and a rear surface supporting unit 150 disposed under the piezoelectric layer 120.

The piezoelectric layer 120 may include a plurality of piezoelectric elements 121. The piezoelectric elements 121 may be individually operated and may be arranged spaced apart from one another on a two-dimensional plane in m lines and n columns to possibly avoid reciprocal interference. In this regard, m and n are natural numbers and may be the same or different. The piezoelectric elements 121 may include a plurality of piezoelectric elements 121a of odd numbered columns and a plurality of piezoelectric elements 121b of even numbered columns. Patterns of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements 121a of the odd numbered columns may be different from patterns of side electrodes of the piezoelectric element 121b of the even numbered columns, which will be described later.

The electrode connecting unit 130 may include a plurality of side electrode substrates 131 electrically connected to lower electrodes 124 (see FIG. 4) of the piezoelectric elements 121, first and second connection substrates 135 and 136 electrically connected to the side electrode substrates 131, and a common electrode plate 139 electrically connected to upper electrodes 123 (see FIG. 4) of the piezoelectric elements 121 via the top surfaces of the acoustic matching layers 140.

The side electrode substrates 131 may be attached to side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements 121. As described above, as the piezoelectric elements 121 may be arranged spaced apart from one another in lines and columns, horizontal gaps 128 and vertical gaps 129 may be formed between the piezoelectric elements 121. Accordingly, a first side electrode substrate 131 may be attached to outer surfaces of a first column of the piezoelectric elements 121, and the rest of side electrode substrates 131 may be inserted into the horizontal gaps 128 of the piezoelectric elements 121. The number of side electrode substrates 131 may be the same as the number of columns of the piezoelectric elements 121. The side electrode substrates 131 may be formed of a sound absorbing material so as to suppress interference due to adjacent piezoelectric elements 121 when the piezoelectric elements 121 send and receive an ultrasonic wave. From among the gaps between the piezoelectric elements 121, a sound absorbing material may be filled in the vertical gaps 129 into which the side electrode substrates 131 are not inserted, thereby suppressing interference due to adjacent piezoelectric elements 121.

The patterns of the side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns may be different from the patterns of the side electrodes of the piezoelectric element **121b** of the even numbered columns. Correspondingly, wiring patterns of first side electrode substrates **131a** of the odd numbered columns may be different from wiring patterns of second side electrode substrates **131b** of the even numbered columns, which will be described later.

The first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** may be substrates for integrating wiring lines of the side electrode substrates **131**. The first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** may be attached to outer surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121**. The first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** may be flexible printed circuit boards or hard printed circuit boards. At least one of the first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** may further include a circuit for processing electric signals input to the piezoelectric elements **121** and electric signals output from the piezoelectric elements **121**. The wiring lines integrated by the first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** may be electrically connected to the signal processor **198** via the cable **190** (see FIG. 1).

The acoustic matching layers **140** may be provided on the piezoelectric layer **120**. The acoustic matching layers **140** may be respectively provided on the piezoelectric elements **121** to be arranged spaced apart from one another. In other words, horizontal gaps **148** and vertical gaps **149** corresponding to the horizontal gaps **128** and vertical gaps **129** between the piezoelectric elements **121** may be extended to the acoustic matching layers **140**. The acoustic matching layers **140** properly match acoustic impedance of the piezoelectric layer **120** and acoustic impedance of the subject **199** (see FIG. 1) to possibly reduce a loss of an ultrasonic wave transmitted to the subject **199** or an ultrasonic wave transmitted from the subject **199**. The acoustic matching layers **140** may promote matching of acoustic impedance between the subject **199** and the piezoelectric layer **120** by, for example, adjusting a physical parameter such as a thickness or acoustic impedance. For example, the acoustic matching layers **140** may include two layers **141** and **142** having different acoustic impedances. In other cases, the acoustic matching layers **140** may consist of a single layer or three or more layers. An acoustic lens (not shown) for focusing an ultrasonic wave traveling forward on a specific point may further be provided on the acoustic matching layers **140**.

An intermediate electrode layer **138** for electrically connecting the upper electrodes **123** of the piezoelectric elements **121** and the common electrode plate **139** may be formed on outer surfaces of the acoustic matching layers **140**. The acoustic matching layers **140** may be formed of a conductive material, and in this case, the intermediate electrode layer **138** may be omitted. Furthermore, when the acoustic matching layers **140** are formed of a conductive material, the upper electrodes **123** respectively provided on the piezoelectric elements **121** may also be omitted.

In one or more embodiments, the acoustic matching layers **140** may be respectively provided on the piezoelectric elements **121** to be arranged spaced apart from one another. However, the present invention is not limited thereto. For example, the acoustic matching layers **140** may be formed as an integrated single layer to be attached to the top surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121**.

The rear surface supporting unit **150** is a block for supporting the piezoelectric layer **120**. An upper portion **151** of the rear surface supporting unit **150** may consist of unit blocks that are spaced apart from one another to correspond to the piezoelectric elements **121**. In other words, grooves may be

formed in the upper portion **151** of the rear surface supporting unit **150** to form horizontal gaps **158** and vertical gaps **159** respectively extending from the vertical gaps **128** and the horizontal gaps **129** between the piezoelectric elements **121**. The rear surface supporting unit **150** may be entirely formed of an insulating material, or at least the upper portion **151** of the rear surface supporting unit **150** may be formed of an insulating material. Also, the upper portion **151** of the rear surface supporting unit **150** may be formed as a rear sound wave absorption layer so as to possibly properly control reflection of an ultrasonic wave generated from the piezoelectric layer **120**, thereby possibly preventing image distortion by preventing an ultrasonic wave from traveling rearward of the piezoelectric layer **120**.

FIG. 4 is a view illustrating the piezoelectric elements **121** arranged in any one column from among the piezoelectric elements **121** arranged in lines and columns in the ultrasonic transducer **110** according to one or more embodiments. Referring to FIG. 4, each of the piezoelectric elements **121** may include a piezoelectric body **122** and the upper and lower electrodes **123** and **124** respectively provided on top and bottom surfaces of the piezoelectric body **122**. The piezoelectric bodies **122** may be formed of a piezoelectric material in which an electrical signal may be converted to a sound signal and vice versa. For example, the piezoelectric bodies **122** may be formed of a lead zirconate titanate (PZT) ceramic, a PZNT single crystal including a solid solution of zinc lead niobate and lead titanate, a PZMT single crystal including a solid solution of magnesium lead niobate and lead titanate, or the like. The piezoelectric bodies **122** may be formed to have a pillar shape having at least one side surface. For example, the piezoelectric bodies **122** may be formed to have a rectangular parallelepiped shape. The shape of the piezoelectric bodies **122** may vary according to various designs. The upper electrodes **123** may be provided on the top surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **122**. The upper electrodes **123** may be a common electrode (or a ground electrode) of the piezoelectric elements **121**. The upper electrodes **123** of the piezoelectric elements **121** may be electrically connected to the common electrode plate **139** via an intermediate electrode layer **138** which may be provided on the outer surfaces of the acoustic matching layers **140**.

The lower electrodes **124** may be provided on the bottom surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **122**. The lower electrodes **124** may be individual electrodes provided in the piezoelectric elements **121** and may be signal electrodes to which individual signals are applied. The lower electrodes **124** may extend to one side surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **122** to form side electrodes **125**. The side electrodes **125** may be disposed on the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121** arranged in a line in the same direction. Heights **H** of the side electrodes **125** may be formed to be different from one another. As shown in FIG. 4, the heights **H** of the side electrodes **125** may be formed to be gradually decreased in a column-wise direction (**Y** direction). As shown in FIG. 7, the heights **H** of the side electrodes **125** may be formed to be gradually increased in the column-wise direction (**Y** direction). In other cases, the heights **H** of the side electrodes **125** may be formed to be equal to one another.

FIG. 5 is a view illustrating the first side electrode substrates **131a** attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns from among the piezoelectric elements **121**.

Referring to FIG. 5, the piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns may include the side electrodes **125** formed to be decreased in height in the column-wise direction (**Y** direction).

Each of the first side electrode substrates **131a** may include a substrate body **1311** and a plurality of wiring lines **1312**. The substrate body **1311** of the current embodiment may be formed of an anisotropic electroconductive material. In other words, the substrate body **1311** may have an electroconductive property in a thickness direction **1315** but may have an insulating property in a surface direction **1316**. A conductive rubber sheet, an insulating resin sheet containing electroconductive particles, and the like that may be used for the substrate body **1311** having an anisotropic electroconductive property are well known. In addition, the substrate body **1311** may be formed of a sound absorbing material to suppress interference between adjacent piezoelectric elements **121**. A top end of the substrate body **1311** may correspond with top ends of the acoustic matching layers **140**. A bottom end of the substrate body **1311** may cover at least a part of the rear surface supporting unit **150**. First and second side ends **1311c** and **1311d** of the substrate body **1311** correspond with two side ends of the piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns in the column-wise direction.

One surface **1311a** of the substrate body **1311** may contact the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns on which the side electrodes **125** may be provided. The wiring lines **1312** corresponding to the side electrodes **125** may be provided on another surface **1311b** of the substrate body **1311**. The wiring lines **1312** may include first parts **1312a** that may at least partially overlap with positions of the side electrodes **125**, second parts **1312b** that may extend toward the first side end **1311c** of the substrate body **1311**, and third parts **1312c** that may be exposed at the first side end **1311c** of the substrate body **1311**. The first parts **1312a** of the wiring lines **1312** may at least partially overlap with the side electrodes **125** by interposing the substrate body **1311** therebetween. The substrate body **1311** may have an electroconductive property in the thickness direction **1315**, and thus the side electrodes **125** and the first parts **1312a** may be electrically connected to each other. The substrate body **1311** may have an insulating property in the surface direction **1316**, and thus an electric insulating property may be maintained between adjacent wiring lines **1312**. The second parts **1312b** of the wiring lines **1312** may be arranged in parallel in a vertical direction (that is, a Z direction), and thus the heights H of the side electrodes **125** may be designed to be gradually decreased in the column-wise direction (Y direction) as described above, thereby possibly securing a space where the second parts **1312b** of the wiring lines **1312** may be disposed.

FIG. 6 is an enlarged view of a part A of FIG. 2 in which the first side electrode substrates **131a** and the first connection substrate **135** may be bonded together. Referring to FIG. 6, the first connection substrate **135** may be directly attached to the first side end **1311c** of the first side electrode substrates **131a**. A plurality of connection terminals **1351** may be provided in the first connection substrate **135** to face the first side end **1311c** of the first side electrode substrates **131a** of the odd numbered columns. Accordingly, the third parts **1312c** of the wiring lines **1312** exposed by the first side end **1311c** of the first side electrode substrates **131a** may directly contact the connection terminals **1351** of the first connection substrate **135** to be electrically connected to each other.

FIG. 7 is a view illustrating the second side electrode substrates **131b** attached to side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121b** of the even numbered columns from among the piezoelectric elements **121**. Referring to FIG. 7, the piezoelectric elements **121b** of the even numbered columns may be substantially the same as the above-described piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns except that heights of the side electrodes **125** may be formed to be gradually increased in the column-wise direction (Y direction).

Meanwhile, the second side electrode substrates **131b** may be substantially the same as the first side electrode substrates **131a** except for the patterns of the wiring lines **1312**. The wiring lines **1312** of the second side electrode substrates **131b** may include the first parts **1312a**, which may at least partially overlap with positions of the side electrodes **125** of the piezoelectric elements **121b** of the even numbered columns, the second parts **1312b** may extend toward the second side end **1311d** of the substrate body **1311**, and the third parts **1312c** may be exposed by the second side end **1311d** of the substrate body **1311**. In this regard, the second side end **1311d** of the substrate body **1311** may be opposite to the first side end **1311c** in the column-wise direction (Y direction).

FIG. 8 is a view illustrating electrical connection between the first and second side electrode substrates **131a** and **131b** and the first and second connection substrates **135** and **136**. Referring to FIG. 8, the side electrode substrates **131** may include the first side electrode substrates **131a** and the second side electrode substrates **131b**. The first side electrode substrates **131a** may be attached to the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns, and the second side electrode substrates **131b** may be attached to the side surfaces of the piezoelectric element **121b** of the even numbered columns. The wiring lines **1312** of the first side electrode substrates **131a** may extend toward the first side end **1311c** as shown in FIG. 5, and thus the third parts **1312c** may be exposed by the first side end **1311c** of the substrate body **1311** as shown in FIG. 5. The wiring lines **1312** of the second side electrode substrates **131b** may extend toward the second side end **1311d** as shown in FIG. 7, and thus the third parts **1312c** may be exposed by the second side end **1311d**. The first connection substrate **135** may be attached to the first side end **1311c** of the first side electrode substrates **131a**, and the connection terminals **1351** of the first connection substrate **135** may be electrically connected to the third parts **1312c** of the wiring lines **1312** exposed by the first side end **1311c** of the first side electrode substrates **131a**. Similarly, the second connection substrate **136** may be attached to the second side end **1311d** of the second side electrode substrates **131b**, and a plurality of connection terminals **1361** of the second connection substrate **136** may be electrically connected to the third parts **1312c** of the wiring lines **1312** exposed by the second side end **1311d** of the second side electrode substrates **131b**. As such, the first and second side electrode substrates **131a** and **131b** may be alternately and electrically connected to the first and second connection substrates **135** and **136**, respectively, and sufficient intervals between the connection terminals **1351** of the first connection substrate **135** may be secured and also sufficient intervals between the connection terminals **1361** of the second connection substrate **136** may be secured, and thus tolerance may be secured in attaching the first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** to side ends of the first and second side electrode substrates **131a** and **131b**, respectively.

In one or more embodiments, all the first side electrode substrates **131a** may be electrically connected to the first connection substrate **135**, and all the second side electrode substrates **131b** may be electrically connected to the second connection substrate **136**, but the present invention is not limited thereto. For example, in FIG. 5, some of the wiring lines **1312** of the first side electrode substrates **131a** may extend toward the first side end **1311c** and the rest of the wiring lines **1312** may extend toward the second side end **1311d**. In this case, some of the wiring lines **1312** of the first side electrode substrates **131a** may be electrically connected to the first connection substrate **135**, and the rest of the wiring

lines **1312** of the first side electrode substrates **131a** may be electrically connected to the second connection substrate **136**. Similarly, in FIG. 7, some of the wiring lines **1312** of the second side electrode substrates **131b** may extend toward the first side ends **1311c**, and the rest of the wiring lines **1312** may extend toward the second side ends **1311d**. In this case, some of the wiring lines **1312** of the second side electrode substrates **131b** may be electrically connected to the first connection substrate **135**, and the rest of the wiring lines **1312** of the second side electrode substrates **131b** may be electrically connected to the second connection substrate **136**.

FIG. 9 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments. Referring to FIG. 9, components of the ultrasonic transducer of the current embodiment may be the same as those of the ultrasonic transducer of the previous embodiment except for a side electrode substrate **131'**. The side electrode substrate **131'** may include a substrate body **1311'** and a plurality of wiring lines **1312'** provided on one surface **1311a'** of the substrate body **1311'**. The substrate body **1311'** may be formed of an electric insulating material. In addition, the substrate body **1311'** may be formed of a sound absorbing material such as a high molecular material, for example, an epoxy resin. The one surface **1311a'** of the substrate body **1311'** may be attached to the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **121** on which the side electrodes **125** may be provided. The substrate body **1311'** of the current embodiment may have an insulating property, and thus the side electrode substrate **131'** may be substantially the same as the side electrode substrates **131** described with reference to FIGS. 5 and 7 except for a location where the wiring lines **1312'** may be formed. In other words, the wiring lines **1312'** of the current embodiment may be formed in the one surface **1311a'** where the substrate body **1311'** may meet the piezoelectric elements **121**. The wiring lines **1312'** may include first parts **1312a'** that may directly contact the side electrodes **125** of the piezoelectric elements **121**, second parts **1312b'** that may extend toward a first side end **1311c'** of the substrate body **1311'**, and third parts **1312c'** that may be exposed to the first side end **1311c'** of the substrate body **1311'**. Wiring patterns of the side electrode substrates **131'** may vary according to the patterns of the side electrodes **125** of the piezoelectric elements **121**.

FIG. 10 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate and a connection substrate bonded together in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments. Referring to FIG. 10, the third parts **1312c** of the wiring lines **1312** exposed in the side electrode substrates **131** may be located in the same direction, and thus the current embodiment is different from the above-described embodiment in that only one connection substrate **135'** is used in the current embodiment. For example, the side electrode substrates **131** may have the same wiring patterns as those of the first side electrode substrates **131a** as described with reference to FIG. 5. Accordingly, all the third parts **1312c** of the wiring lines **1312** of the side electrode substrates **131** may be located in the same direction. Also, in correspondence to the wiring patterns of the side electrode substrates **131**, the piezoelectric elements **121** of all columns may have patterns in which the heights **H** of the side electrodes **125** are decreased in the column-wise direction (**Y** direction) similar to the piezoelectric elements **121a** of the odd numbered columns described with reference to FIG. 5. The connection substrate **135'** may include a plurality of connection terminals **1351'** provided to contact the third parts **1312c** of the side electrode substrates **131**. Thus, the lower electrodes **124** of all the piezoelectric elements **121** may be electrically connected to the outside via the side

electrodes **125** extending from the lower electrodes **124**, the side electrode substrates **131**, and the one connection substrate **135'**.

In the above-described embodiments, the side electrode substrates **131** and **131'** are formed in such a way that side ends of the side electrode substrates **131** and **131'** may correspond to an outer side surface of an assembly of the piezoelectric elements **121** arranged in a rectangular shape, and thus the wiring lines **1312** and **1312'** of the side electrode substrates **131** and **131'** may be drawn to the outside by using the connection substrates **135**, **136**, and **135'**. In other cases, the connection substrates **135**, **136**, and **135'** may be omitted. For example, the one side ends of the side electrode substrates **131** and **131'** may extend out of the outer side surface of the assembly of the piezoelectric elements **121** arranged in a rectangular shape to be directly connected to an outer cable.

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of an ultrasonic transducer **210** according to one or more embodiments. FIG. 12 is an exploded perspective view of the ultrasonic transducer **210** according to one or more embodiments. For convenience of description, in FIG. 12, first and second connection substrates **235** and **236** are omitted. Also, although top ends of side electrode substrates **231** correspond to top surfaces of piezoelectric elements **221** in FIG. 12, the top ends of the side electrode substrates **231** may extend to correspond to top surfaces of acoustic matching layers **240**.

Referring to FIGS. 11 and 12, the ultrasonic transducer **210** of one or more embodiments may include, for example a piezoelectric layer **220**, an electrode connecting unit **230** for electrical connection of the piezoelectric layer **220**, the acoustic matching layers **240** disposed on a top surface of the piezoelectric layer **220**, and/or a rear surface supporting unit **250** disposed on a bottom surface of the piezoelectric layer **220**.

The piezoelectric layer **220** may include a plurality of piezoelectric elements **221**. The piezoelectric elements **221** may be arranged spaced apart from one another on a two-dimensional plane in lines and columns. The piezoelectric elements **221** may be distinguished in units of columns, and thus patterns of electrodes of piezoelectric elements **221a** of odd numbered columns may be different from patterns of electrodes of piezoelectric elements **221b** of even numbered columns.

The electrode connecting unit **230** may include the side electrode substrates **231** electrically connected to upper electrodes **223** (see FIG. 13) of the piezoelectric elements **221** and first and second connection substrates **235** and **236** that may be electrically connected to the side electrode substrates **231**.

The side electrode substrates **231** may be attached to side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221**. The patterns of the electrodes of the piezoelectric elements **221a** of the odd numbered columns may be different from the patterns of the electrodes of the piezoelectric elements **221b** of the even numbered columns, and thus wiring patterns of the odd-numbered side electrode substrates **231a** may be different from those of the even-numbered side electrode substrates **231b**.

The first and second connection substrates **235** and **236** may be substrates for integrating the wiring lines of the side electrode substrates **231** and may be attached to outer surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221**. The first connection substrate **235** may be electrically connected to the odd-numbered side electrode substrates **231a**, and the second connection substrate **236** may be electrically connected to the even-numbered side electrode substrates **231b**.

The acoustic matching layers **240** may be provided on the top surface of the piezoelectric layer **220**. The acoustic

matching layers **240** may be respectively provided on the top surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221** to be spaced apart from one another. The acoustic matching layers **240** each may include two layers **241** and **242** having different acoustic impedances. In other cases, the acoustic matching layers **240** may consist of a single layer or three or more layers. An acoustic lens (not shown) for focusing an ultrasonic wave traveling forward on a specific point may further be provided on the acoustic matching layers **240**.

The rear surface supporting unit **250** is a block for supporting the piezoelectric layer **220**. An upper portion **251** of the rear surface supporting unit **250** may include a plurality of unit blocks spaced apart from one another to correspond to the piezoelectric elements **221**. In other words, horizontal gaps **258** and vertical gaps **259** may be formed in the upper portion **251** of the rear surface supporting unit **250** to correspond to vertical gaps **259** and horizontal gaps **229** between the piezoelectric elements **221**. The rear surface supporting unit **250** may be entirely formed of a conductive material, or at least the upper portion **251** of the rear surface supporting unit **250** may be formed of a conductive material. When the piezoelectric layer **220** is supported by the rear surface supporting unit **250**, lower electrodes **224** (see FIG. 14) of the piezoelectric elements **221** may be electrically connected to the rear surface supporting unit **250**, and thus the entire rear surface supporting unit **250** may serve as a common electrode or at least the upper portion **251** of the rear surface supporting unit **250** may serve as a common electrode. The lower electrodes **224** of the piezoelectric elements **221** may be omitted, and thus the rear surface supporting unit **250** may directly serve as a lower electrode.

FIG. 13 is a view illustrating the piezoelectric elements **221** arranged in any one column from among the piezoelectric elements **221** arranged in lines and columns in the ultrasonic transducer **210** of FIG. 12. Referring to FIG. 13, the piezoelectric elements **221** may include piezoelectric bodies **222** and upper and lower electrodes **223** and **224** respectively provided on top and bottom surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **222**. The upper electrodes **223** may be individual electrodes respectively provided in the piezoelectric elements **221** and may be signal electrodes to which signals are independently applied. The lower electrodes **224** may be common electrodes of the piezoelectric elements **221**. The upper electrodes **223** may extend to one side surfaces of the piezoelectric materials **222** to from side electrodes **225**. The side electrodes **225** may be located on the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221** arranged in a line in the same direction. Also, heights **H** of the side electrodes **225** may be formed to be different from one another. As shown in FIG. 13, the heights **H** of the side electrodes **225** may be formed to be gradually decreased or increased in the column-wise direction (**Y** direction). If necessary, the heights **H** of the side electrodes **225** may be formed to be equal to one another.

FIG. 14 is a view illustrating the side electrode substrates **231** attached to the side surfaces of piezoelectric elements **221** according to one or more embodiments. Referring to FIG. 14, the side electrode substrates **231** may be attached to the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221** on which the side electrodes **225** are provided.

In one or more embodiments, the side electrode substrates **231** each may include a substrate body **2311** and wiring lines **2312** provided in the substrate body **2311**. The substrate body **2311** may be formed of an anisotropic electroconductive material having an electroconductive property in a thickness direction **2315** and having an insulating property in a surface direction **2316**. One surface **2311a** of the substrate body **2311** may be attached to the side surfaces of the piezoelectric

elements **221** on which the side electrodes **225** may be provided. The wiring lines **2312** may be provided in a surface **2311b** opposite to the one surface **2311a** of the substrate body **2311**. The wiring lines **2312** may include first parts **2312a** of which at least a part may overlap with the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221** by interposing the substrate body **2311** therebetween, second parts **2312b** which may extend toward a first side end **2311c** of the substrate body **2311**, and third parts **2312c** which may be exposed by the first side end **2311c** of the substrate body **2311**. Since the substrate body **2311** may have an electroconductive property in the thickness direction **2315**, the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221** and the first parts **2312a** may be electrically connected to each other. The substrate body **2311** may have an insulating property in the surface direction **2316**, and thus an electric insulating property may be maintained between adjacent wiring lines **2312**. Accordingly, the upper electrodes **223** of the piezoelectric elements **221** may be connected to the outside via the side electrode substrates **231**. Meanwhile, the lower electrodes **224** of the piezoelectric elements **221** may be connected to the outside via the rear surface supporting unit **250** having a conductive property.

Patterns of the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221a** of the odd numbered columns and wiring patterns of the odd-numbered side electrode substrates **231a**, and patterns of the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221b** of the even numbered columns and wiring patterns of the even-numbered side electrode substrates **231b** may vary substantially in the same way as the example described with reference to FIG. 7. In other words, the piezoelectric elements **221a** (see FIG. 12) of the odd numbered columns may be exposed by the third parts **2312c** of the substrate body **2311** to be electrically connected to the first connection substrate **235**, and the wiring lines **2312** of the piezoelectric elements **221b** of the even numbered columns may be exposed to a side end opposite to the third parts **2312c** of the substrate body **2311** to be electrically connected to the second connection substrate **236**.

In the ultrasonic transducer **210** of one or more embodiments, the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221** may be formed to extend from the upper electrodes **223**, and thus the ultrasonic transducer **210** may be substantially the same as the ultrasonic transducer **110** of one or more embodiments described with reference to FIGS. 1 to 8 except that the wiring patterns of the side electrode substrates **231** and locations of the common electrodes of the current embodiment may be changed from those of one or more previous described embodiments.

FIG. 15 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate attached to side surfaces of piezoelectric elements in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments. Referring to FIG. 15, components of the ultrasonic transducer of the current embodiment may be the same as those of the ultrasonic transducer of one or more embodiments described with reference to FIGS. 11 to 14 except for a side electrode substrate **231'**. The side electrode substrate **231'** may include a substrate body **2311'** and wiring lines **2312'** provided on one surface **2311a'** of the substrate body **2311'**. The substrate body **2311'** may be formed of an electric insulating material. The one surface **2311a'** of the substrate body **2311'** may be attached to the side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221** on which the side electrodes **225** may be provided. The substrate body **2311'** of the current embodiment may be substantially the same as the side electrode substrates **231** described with respect to FIG. 14 except for the fact that locations where the wiring lines **2312'** may be formed are different from those where the wiring lines **2312** may be formed. In other words,

the wiring lines **2312'** of one or more embodiments may be formed in the one surface **2311a'** where the substrate body **2311'** meets the piezoelectric elements **221**. The wiring lines **2312'** may include first parts **2312a'** of which at least some directly contact the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221**, second parts **2312b'** which may extend toward a first side end **2311c'** of the substrate body **2311'**, and third parts **2312c'** which may be exposed by the first side end **2311c'** of the substrate body **2311'**. As described above with reference to FIG. 14, wiring patterns of the side electrode substrates **231'** may vary according to the patterns of the side electrodes **225** of the piezoelectric elements **221**.

FIG. 16 is a view illustrating a side electrode substrate and a connection substrate bonded together in an ultrasonic transducer according to one or more embodiments.

Referring to FIG. 16, components of the ultrasonic transducer of the current embodiment may be the same as those of the ultrasonic transducer of one or more embodiments described with reference to FIGS. 12 to 14 except for an electrical connection structure of the lower electrodes **224** of a plurality of piezoelectric elements **221'**. In the current embodiment, the rear surface supporting unit **250** may be formed of an insulating material. Thus, the rear surface supporting unit **250** may not be used as a common electrode of the piezoelectric elements **221'**. Accordingly, in the current embodiment, the lower electrodes **224** may be individually provided on bottom surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221'**, and the lower electrodes **224** may extend toward side surfaces of the piezoelectric elements **221'** to form lower side electrodes **226**. Also, a second wiring line **2316** commonly corresponding to the lower side electrodes **226** of the piezoelectric elements **221'** may be provided in the one surface **2311a** of a side electrode substrate **231'**. In other words, the second wiring line **2316** may face the lower side electrodes **226** of the piezoelectric elements **221'** by interposing the substrate body **2311** of the side electrode substrate **231'** therebetween, and may be simultaneously and electrically connected to the lower side electrodes **226** by electric anisotropy of the substrate body **2311**. An end of the second wiring line **2316** may be exposed by the first side end **2311c** of the side electrode substrate **231'** similar to the third parts **2312c** of the wiring lines **2312**. Accordingly, the lower electrodes **224** of the piezoelectric elements **221'** may be electrically connected to the outside or grounded via the side electrode substrate **231'** and the first and second connection substrates **235** and **236** (see FIG. 11).

Next, a method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer according to an embodiment of the present invention will be described.

FIGS. 17A to 17K illustrate a method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer according to one embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in FIG. 17A, the piezoelectric bodies **122** having a flat plate shape may be prepared. As shown in FIG. 17B, the upper and lower electrodes **123** and **124** may be respectively provided on the top and bottom surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **122** to form the piezoelectric layer **120**.

Similarly, as shown in FIG. 17C, the acoustic matching layers **140** having a flat plate shape may be prepared. The acoustic matching layers **140** may include the two layers **141** and **142** having different acoustic impedances. As shown in FIG. 17D, upper and lower electrodes **138a** and **138b** may be formed on the top surfaces and bottom surfaces of the acoustic matching layers **140**. Any one of the upper electrode **123** of the piezoelectric layer **120** and the lower electrode **138b** of the acoustic matching layers **140** may be omitted.

As shown in FIG. 17E, the piezoelectric layer **120** may be bonded to the support structure **151**, and the acoustic matching layers **140** may be bonded to a top surface of the piezoelectric layer **120**. The upper electrode **123** of the piezoelectric layer **120** and the lower electrode **138b** of the acoustic matching layers **140** may be bonded together.

As shown in FIG. 17F, a block including the piezoelectric layer **120** and the acoustic matching layers **140** having flat plate shapes may be cut in a vertical direction at equal intervals to form a plurality of sub-blocks **160**. FIG. 17G illustrates the divided single sub-block **160**. The sub-block **160** may have a rectangular parallelepiped shape that is relatively long in one direction.

As shown in FIG. 17H, electrode patterns may be formed on a side surface of the sub-block **160**. In other words, the side electrodes **125** electrically connected to the lower electrodes **124** of the piezoelectric bodies **122** may be formed on the side surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **122**, and a side electrode **138c** for electrically connecting the upper electrode **138a** and the lower electrode **138b** formed on the top and bottom surfaces of the acoustic matching layers **140** may be formed on side surfaces of the acoustic matching layers **140**. The upper electrode **138a**, the lower electrode **138b**, and the side electrode **138c** formed in the acoustic matching layer **140** together may form the intermediate electrode layer **138**. The heights of the side electrodes **125** formed on the side surfaces of the piezoelectric body **122** may be formed to be gradually decreased or increased in a lengthwise direction of the sub-block **160** as described above.

As shown in FIG. 17I, a plurality of kerfs **162** may be formed in the sub-block **160** in a depth direction at equal intervals. The kerfs **162** may be formed in such a way that heights of the kerfs **162** reach a predetermined position of the support structure **151**. In the sub-block **160**, the piezoelectric elements **121** may correspond to the piezoelectric elements **121** arranged in the column-wise direction in one or more embodiments described with reference to FIG. 4.

As shown in FIG. 17J, the side electrode substrates **131** in which the wiring lines **1312** are provided may be bonded to a surface of the sub-block **160** in which the side electrodes **125** may be formed.

As shown in FIG. 17K, the sub-blocks **160** to which the side electrode substrates **131** may be bonded may be arranged to be tightly adhered to a top surface of a supporting block **152**. The support structure **151** and the supporting block **152** may be formed of the same material or different materials. The common electrode plate **139** (see FIG. 2) may be bonded to the top surfaces of the acoustic matching layers **140**, and the first and second connection substrates **135** and **136** (see FIG. 2) may be bonded to the side ends of the side electrode substrates **131**, thereby completing the manufacture of the ultrasonic transducer **110** as shown in FIG. 2.

Before the sub-blocks **160** to which the side electrode substrates **131** are bonded are bonded to the supporting block **152**, a process for detecting a piezoelectric property by applying voltages individually to the sub-blocks **160** may be additionally performed. In a conventional method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer, a piezoelectric layer is formed by using one piezoelectric material, but it is not easy to uniformly provide a piezoelectric characteristic over the entire piezoelectric material in terms of a characteristic of the piezoelectric material. As a result, in a conventional ultrasonic transducer, a piezoelectric characteristic may be not uniformly provided over an entire area of a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in a two-dimensional array. Meanwhile, according to the method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer of the present invention, when the single

ultrasonic transducer **110** is manufactured, since the piezoelectric layer **120** is formed by coupling the sub-blocks **160** in units of columns, each sub-block **160** is tested before coupling the sub-blocks **160** and the sub-blocks **160** not having a uniform piezoelectric characteristic equal to or greater than a reference value are discarded, and thus dispersion of the piezoelectric characteristics of the piezoelectric elements **121** is decreased, thereby reducing a fluctuation in performance of the ultrasonic transducer **110** as much as possible.

FIGS. **18A** to **18J** illustrate a method of manufacturing an ultrasonic transducer according to another embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in FIG. **18A**, the piezoelectric bodies **222** having a flat plate shape may be prepared. As shown in FIG. **18B**, the upper and lower electrodes **223** and **224** may be provided on the top and bottom surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **222** to form the piezoelectric layer **220**.

As shown in FIG. **18C**, the acoustic matching layers **240** having a flat plate shape may be prepared. The acoustic matching layer **240** may include the two layers **241** and **242** having different acoustic impedances.

As shown in FIG. **18D**, the piezoelectric layer **220** may be bonded to the support structure **251**, and the acoustic matching layers **240** may be bonded to the top surface of the piezoelectric layer **220**. The support structure **251** may be formed of a conductive material.

As shown in FIG. **18E**, a block including the piezoelectric layer **220** and the acoustic matching layers **240** having flat plate shapes may be cut in a vertical direction at equal intervals. FIG. **18F** illustrates one of a plurality of divided sub-blocks **260**.

As shown in FIG. **18G**, an electrode pattern may be formed in a side surface of the sub-block **260**. In other words, the side electrodes **225** electrically connected to the upper electrode **223** of the piezoelectric bodies **222** may be formed in side surfaces of the piezoelectric bodies **222**. The side electrodes **225** formed in the side surfaces of the piezoelectric material **222** may be formed in such a way that heights of the side electrodes **225** are gradually decreased or increased as described above.

As shown in FIG. **18H**, a plurality of kerfs **262** may be formed in the sub-block **260** in a depth direction at equal intervals. The kerfs **262** may be formed in such a way that heights of the kerfs **262** may reach a predetermined position of the support structure **251**.

As shown in FIG. **18I**, the side electrode substrates **231** in which the wiring lines **2312** may be provided may be bonded to a surface of the sub-block **260** in which the side electrodes **225** may be formed.

As shown in FIG. **18J**, the sub-blocks **260** to which the side electrode substrates **231** may be bonded may be arranged to be fixed to a top surface of a supporting block **252**. The support structure **251** and the supporting block **252** together may form the rear surface supporting unit **250**. The support structure **251** and the supporting block **252** may be formed of the same material or different materials. The first and second connection substrates **235** and **236** (see FIG. **11**) may be bonded to side ends of the side electrode substrate **231**, thereby completing the manufacture of the ultrasonic transducer **210** as shown in FIG. **11**.

The ultrasonic transducer, the ultrasonic probe, and the ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus according to the above-described one or more embodiments have the following effects.

Firstly, electrical signals may be respectively applied to a plurality of piezoelectric elements via a side electrode, and thus an electric connecting structure via the side electrode

may be easily applied to a two-dimensional arrayed ultrasonic transducer, and further to a stacked structured ultrasonic transducer.

Secondly, when a single ultrasonic transducer is manufactured, a plurality of piezoelectric elements may be assembled in units of columns, and thus the piezoelectric elements may be tested in units of columns to decrease dispersion of piezoelectric characteristics, thereby possibly reducing a fluctuation in performance of the ultrasonic transducer.

While aspects of the present invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to differing embodiments thereof, it should be understood that these embodiments should be considered in a descriptive sense only and not for purposes of limitation. Descriptions of features or aspects within each embodiment should typically be considered as available for other similar features or aspects in the remaining embodiments. Suitable results may equally be achieved if the described techniques are performed in a different order and/or if components in a described system, architecture, device, or circuit are combined in a different manner and/or replaced or supplemented by other components or their equivalents.

Thus, although a few embodiments have been shown and described, with additional embodiments being equally available, it would be appreciated by those skilled in the art that changes may be made in these embodiments without departing from the principles and spirit of the invention, the scope of which is defined in the claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. An ultrasonic transducer comprising:

a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column;

individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the plurality of piezoelectric elements;

a plurality of side electrodes each extending from the individual electrodes along one side surface of a corresponding piezoelectric element among the plurality of piezoelectric elements; and

a side electrode substrate comprising a plurality of wiring lines bonded to the one side surface of the corresponding piezoelectric element among the plurality of piezoelectric elements and electrically connected to the plurality of side electrodes, respectively,

wherein the plurality of piezoelectric elements are arranged in a two-dimensional array to be spaced apart from one another in columns and lines, and a plurality of the side electrode substrates, including the side electrode substrate, are inserted into gaps between the columns of the plurality of piezoelectric elements, and wherein heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a first column are decreased in a lengthwise direction of the first column, and heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a second column adjacent to the first column are increased in the lengthwise direction of the second column.

2. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein the plurality of wiring lines of the side electrode substrate comprise first parts respectively facing the plurality of side electrodes, second parts extending toward one side ends of the side electrode substrate, and third parts exposed by the one side ends of the side electrode substrate.

3. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 2, wherein a substrate body of the side electrode substrate is formed of an anisotropic electroconductive material having an electroconductive property in a thickness direction and having an insulating

property in a surface direction, and the plurality of wiring lines of the side electrode substrate are provided in a surface opposite to a surface where the side electrode substrate meets the side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements.

4. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 2, wherein the substrate body of the side electrode substrate is formed of an electric insulating material, and the plurality of wiring lines of the side electrode substrate are provided in the surface where the substrate meets the side electrodes.

5. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein the plurality of wiring lines of the plurality of side electrode substrates comprise first parts respectively facing the plurality of side electrodes, second parts extending toward side ends of the plurality of side electrode substrates, and third parts exposed by the side ends of the plurality of side electrode substrates, and the side ends by which the third parts are exposed of a first side electrode substrate bonded to the piezoelectric elements of the first column are opposite to the side ends by which the third parts are exposed of a second side electrode substrate bonded to the piezoelectric elements of the second column.

6. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 5, further comprising a first connection substrate electrically connected to the exposed third parts of the first side electrode substrate and a second connection substrate electrically connected to the exposed third parts of the second side electrode substrate.

7. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein a substrate body of the side electrode substrate is formed of a sound absorbing material.

8. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein a substrate body of the side electrode substrate is formed of a flexible material.

9. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein the individual electrodes provided on the bottom surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements comprise signal electrodes, and the individual electrodes provided on the top surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements comprise common electrodes.

10. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 9, wherein the common electrodes further comprise upper electrode plates provided on top surfaces of each of the common electrodes, respectively, each of the upper electrode plates being commonly and electrically connected to each of the common electrodes, respectively.

11. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 10, further comprising an acoustic matching layer provided between the common electrodes and an upper electrode layer, the acoustic matching layer being formed of a conductive material or at least a portion of an outer surface of the acoustic matching layer being coated with a conductive material.

12. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein the individual electrodes provided on the top surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements comprise signal electrodes, and the individual electrodes provided on the bottom surfaces of each of the piezoelectric elements comprise common electrodes.

13. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 12, further comprising a rear surface supporting unit provided under the piezoelectric elements to support the piezoelectric elements, the rear surface supporting unit being formed of a conductive material and being electrically connected to the common electrodes.

14. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, further comprising an acoustic matching layer located above each of the piezoelectric elements.

15. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, further comprising a rear surface supporting unit provided under the piezoelectric elements to support the piezoelectric elements.

16. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 15, further comprising a plurality of kerfs formed in portions of the rear surface supporting unit to correspond to gaps between the piezoelectric elements.

17. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 15, wherein at least a portion of the rear surface supporting unit contacting the piezoelectric elements is formed of a sound absorbing material.

18. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 1, wherein a first part of each of the plurality of wiring lines of the side electrode substrate is in contact with and at least partially overlaps a portion of each side electrode.

19. An ultrasonic transducer comprising:

a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column;

individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the plurality of piezoelectric elements;

a plurality of side electrodes each extending from the individual electrodes along one side surface of a corresponding piezoelectric element among the plurality of piezoelectric elements; and

a side electrode substrate comprising a plurality of wiring lines bonded to the one side surface of the corresponding piezoelectric element among the plurality of piezoelectric elements and electrically connected to the plurality of side electrodes, respectively,

wherein the plurality of piezoelectric elements are arranged in a two-dimensional array to be spaced apart from one another in columns and lines, and a plurality of the side electrode substrates, including the side electrode substrate, are inserted into gaps between the columns of the plurality of piezoelectric elements, and

wherein heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the plurality of piezoelectric elements of all columns are decreased or increased in the same direction.

20. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 19, wherein the plurality of wiring lines of the plurality of side electrode substrates comprise first parts respectively facing the plurality of side electrodes, second parts extending toward one side ends of the side electrode substrate, and third parts exposed by the one side ends of the side electrode substrate, wherein the side ends by which the third parts are exposed of the plurality of side electrode substrates are arranged in the same direction.

21. The ultrasonic transducer of claim 20, further comprising one connection substrate electrically connected to the exposed third parts of the plurality of side electrode substrates.

22. An ultrasonic probe comprising:

an ultrasonic transducer; and

a housing accommodating the ultrasonic transducer, wherein the ultrasonic transducer comprises:

a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column;

individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the plurality of piezoelectric elements;

a plurality of side electrodes each extending from the individual electrodes along one side surface of a corresponding piezoelectric element among the plurality of piezoelectric elements; and

a side electrode substrate comprising a plurality of wiring lines bonded to the one side surface of the plurality of piezoelectric elements and electrically connected to the plurality of side electrodes, respectively,

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wherein the plurality of piezoelectric elements are arranged in a two-dimensional array to be spaced apart from one another in columns and lines, and a plurality of the side electrode substrates, including the side electrode substrate, are inserted into gaps between the columns of the plurality of piezoelectric elements, and

wherein heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a first column are decreased in a lengthwise direction of the first column, and heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a second column adjacent to the first column are increased in the lengthwise direction of the second column.

23. An ultrasound image diagnosis apparatus comprising: an ultrasonic probe comprising an ultrasonic transducer and a housing accommodating the ultrasonic transducer; and

a signal processor for generating an ultrasonic wave image based on an ultrasonic wave echo signal detected by the ultrasonic probe,

wherein the ultrasonic transducer comprises:

a plurality of piezoelectric elements arranged in at least one column;

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individual electrodes provided on at least one surface of top and bottom surfaces of each of the plurality of piezoelectric elements;

a plurality of side electrodes each extending from the individual electrodes along one side surface of a corresponding piezoelectric element among the plurality of piezoelectric elements; and

a side electrode substrate comprising a plurality of wiring lines bonded to the one side surface of the plurality of piezoelectric elements and electrically connected to the plurality of side electrodes, respectively,

wherein the plurality of piezoelectric elements are arranged in a two-dimensional array to be spaced apart from one another in columns and lines, and a plurality of the side electrode substrates, including the side electrode substrate, are inserted into gaps between the columns of the plurality of piezoelectric elements, and

wherein heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a first column are gradually decreased in a lengthwise direction of the first column, and heights of the plurality of side electrodes of the piezoelectric elements of a second column adjacent to the first column are gradually increased in the lengthwise direction of the second column.

* * * * *

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摘要(译)

超声波换能器，超声波探头和超声波图像诊断装置包括布置在至少一列中的多个压电元件；各个电极设置在每个压电元件的顶表面和底表面的至少一个表面上；侧电极从各个电极朝向压电元件的一个侧表面延伸；和包括配线的侧电极基板，所述配线连接到压电元件的一个侧表面并且分别电连接到侧电极。

