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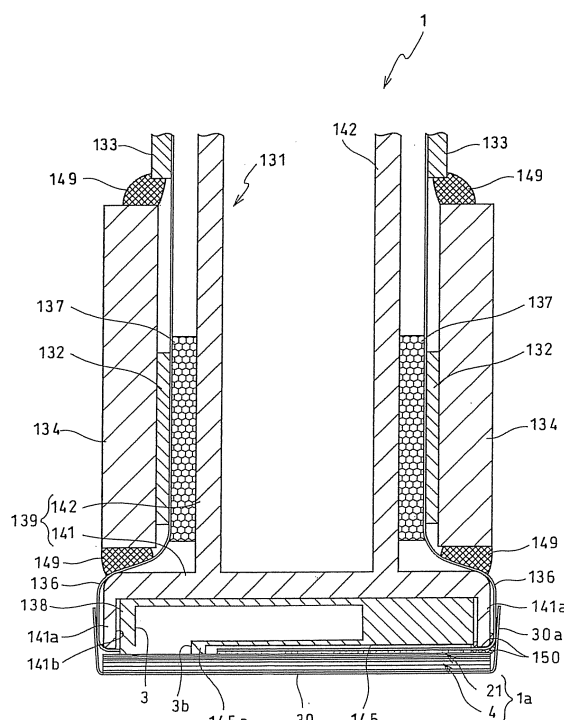
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(54) **Ink-jet head and ink-jet printer having ink-jet head**

(57) An ink-jet head includes a passage unit (4) comprising a plurality of pressure chambers (10) each connected with a nozzle (8) and arranged in a matrix in a plane to form a plurality of pressure chamber rows (11a, 11b) in a first direction (A) in the plane, and a plurality of common ink passages (5a) each extending along the first direction and communicating with the pressure chambers. The pressure chamber rows include first pressure chamber rows (11a) each constituted by pressure chambers (10a) each connected with a nozzle deviated on one side thereof with respect to a second direction crossing the first direction, and second pressure chamber rows (11b) each constituted by pressure chambers (10b) each connected with a nozzle deviated on the other side thereof with respect to the second direction, when viewing from a third direction perpendicular to the plane. Each of the common ink passages including at least a boundary region between one of the first pressure chamber rows and one of the second pressure chamber rows neighboring each other so that nozzles connected with the pressure chambers in the each pressure chamber rows face outward each other when viewing from the third direction, and each of the common ink passages not overlapping any of the nozzles.

FIG. 3



Description**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

1. Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to an ink-jet head for printing by ejecting ink onto a record medium, and to an ink-jet printer having the ink-jet head.

2. Description of Related Art

[0002] In an ink-jet printer, an ink-jet head distributes ink, which is supplied from an ink tank, to pulse pressure chambers. The ink-jet head selectively applies pressure to each pressure chamber to eject ink through a nozzle connected with each pressure chamber. As a means for selectively applying pulse pressure to the pressure chambers, an actuator unit or the like may be used in which ceramic piezoelectric sheets are laminated. The printing operations are carried out while reciprocating such a head at high speed in widthwise direction of the paper.

[0003] As for arrangement of pressure chambers in such an ink-jet head, there are one-dimensional arrangement in which pressure chambers are arranged in, e.g., one or two rows along the length of the head, and two-dimensional arrangement in which pressure chambers are arranged in a matrix along a surface of the head. To achieve high-resolution and high-speed printing demanded in recent years, two-dimensional arrangement of pressure chambers is more effective. As an example of ink-jet head in which pressure chambers are arranged in a matrix along a surface of the head, an ink-jet head is known in which a nozzle is disposed at the center of each pressure chamber in a view perpendicular to the head surface (see US Patent 5,757,400). In this case, when pulse pressure is applied to a pressure chamber, a pressure wave propagates in the pressure chamber perpendicularly to the head surface. Ink is then ejected through the corresponding nozzle disposed at the center of the pressure chamber in a view perpendicular to the head surface.

[0004] In the above-described construction in which a nozzle is disposed at the center of each pressure chamber in a view perpendicular to the head surface, however, when considering a case of supplying ink to pressure chambers arranged in a matrix, the width of a common ink passage for supplying ink may be restricted by each interval of nozzles corresponding to neighboring pressure chambers. This is because the common ink passage must be disposed so as not to overlap the nozzle at the center of each pressure chamber in a view perpendicular to the head surface. Besides, in this case, if nozzles are arranged at a high density to meet the demands of high-resolution and high-speed printing, it may restrict the width of the common ink passage. If the width of the common ink passage is thus restricted, the passage resistance of the common ink passage to ink is high and so smoothness of ink supply corresponding to the maximum ink ejection cycle can not be achieved.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] An object of the present invention is to provide an ink-jet head in which smoothness of ink supply can be achieved, and to provide an ink-jet printer having the ink-jet head.

[0006] According to a first aspect of the present invention provided is an ink-jet head including a passage unit comprising a plurality of pressure chambers each connected with a nozzle and arranged in a matrix in a plane to form a plurality of pressure chamber rows in a first direction in the plane, and a plurality of common ink passages each extending along the first direction and communicating with the pressure chambers. The pressure chamber rows include first pressure chamber rows each constituted by pressure chambers each connected with a nozzle deviated on one side thereof with respect to a second direction crossing the first direction, and second pressure chamber rows each constituted by pressure chambers each connected with a nozzle deviated on the other side thereof with respect to the second direction, when viewing from a third direction perpendicular to the plane. Each of the common ink passages includes at least a boundary region between one of the first pressure chamber rows and one of the second pressure chamber rows neighboring each other so that nozzles connected with the pressure chambers in the each pressure chamber rows face outward each other when viewing from the third direction. Each of the common ink passages does not overlap any of the nozzles.

[0007] According to a second aspect of the present invention provided is an ink-jet printer including an ink-jet head. The ink-jet head comprises a passage unit including a plurality of pressure chambers each connected with a nozzle and arranged in a matrix in a plane to form a plurality of pressure chamber rows in a first direction in the plane, and a plurality of common ink passages each extending along the first direction and communicating with the pressure chambers. The pressure chamber rows include first pressure chamber rows each constituted by pressure chambers each connected with a nozzle deviated on one side thereof with respect to a second direction crossing the first direction, and second pressure chamber rows each constituted by pressure chambers each connected with a nozzle deviated on the other side thereof with respect to the second direction, when viewing from a third direction perpendicular to the plane. Each

of the common ink passages includes at least a boundary region between one of the first pressure chamber rows and one of the second pressure chamber rows neighboring each other so that nozzles connected with the pressure chambers in the each pressure chamber rows face outward each other when viewing from the third direction. Each of the common ink passages does not overlap any of the nozzles.

[0008] In this construction, since each nozzle is not disposed at the center of the corresponding pressure chamber but deviated to one side of the pressure chamber when viewing from the third direction perpendicular to the surface, and each common ink passage is disposed so as to include the boundary region between the first and second pressure chamber rows in which nozzles are deviated to opposite sides to each other with respect to the first direction, the width of each common ink passage can be made large. Therefore, even when the thickness (depth) of each common ink passage in the above third direction is fixed, the passage resistance of the common ink passage to ink is low and smooth ink supply to each pressure chamber can be performed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Other and further objects, features and advantages of the invention will appear more fully from the following description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a general view of an ink-jet printer including ink-jet heads according an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of an ink-jet head according to the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a sectional view taken along line II-II in FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a plan view of a head main body included in the ink-jet head of FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is an enlarged view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and short dash line in FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is an enlarged view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and short dash line in FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a partial sectional view of the head main body of FIG. 4 taken along line III-III in FIG. 6;

FIG. 8 is an enlarged view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and two short dashes line in FIG. 5;

FIG. 9 is a partial exploded perspective view of the head main body of FIG. 4;

FIG. 10 is a lateral enlarged sectional view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and short dash line in FIG. 7;

FIG. 11 is a schematic view of a modification of arrangement of pressure chambers in a passage unit; and

FIG. 12 is a schematic view of another modification of arrangement of pressure chambers in the passage unit.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0010] FIG. 1 is a general view of an ink-jet printer including ink-jet heads according to an embodiment of the present invention. The ink-jet printer 101 as illustrated in FIG. 1 is a color ink-jet printer having four ink-jet heads 1. In this printer 101, a paper feed unit 111 and a paper discharge unit 112 are disposed in left and right portions of FIG. 1, respectively.

[0011] In the printer 101, a paper transfer path is provided extending from the paper feed unit 111 to the paper discharge unit 112. A pair of feed rollers 105a and 105b is disposed immediately downstream of the paper feed unit 111 for pinching and putting forward a paper as an image record medium. By the pair of feed rollers 105a and 105b, the paper is transferred from the left to the right in FIG. 1. In the middle of the paper transfer path, two belt rollers 106 and 107 and an endless transfer belt 108 are disposed. The transfer belt 108 is wound on the belt rollers 106 and 107 to extend between them. The outer face, i.e., the transfer face, of the transfer belt 108 has been treated with silicone. Thus, a paper fed through the pair of feed rollers 105a and 105b can be held on the transfer face of the transfer belt 108 by the adhesion of the face. In this state, the paper is transferred downstream (rightward) by driving one belt roller 106 to rotate clockwise in FIG. 1 (the direction indicated by an arrow 104).

[0012] Pressing members 109a and 109b are disposed at positions for feeding a paper onto the belt roller 106 and taking out the paper from the belt roller 106, respectively. Either of the pressing members 109a and 109b is for pressing the paper onto the transfer face of the transfer belt 108 so as to prevent the paper from separating from the transfer face of the transfer belt 108. Thus, the paper surely adheres to the transfer face.

[0013] A peeling device 110 is provided immediately downstream of the transfer belt 108 along the paper transfer path. The peeling device 110 peels off the paper, which has adhered to the transfer face of the transfer belt 108, from the transfer face to transfer the paper toward the rightward paper discharge unit 112.

[0014] Each of the four ink-jet heads 1 has, at its lower end, a head main body 1a. Each head main body 1a has a rectangular section. The head main bodies 1a are arranged close to each other with the longitudinal axis of each head main body 1a being perpendicular to the paper transfer direction (perpendicular to FIG. 1). That is, this printer 101 is a line type. The bottom of each of the four head main bodies 1a faces the paper transfer path. In the bottom of each head main body 1a, a number of nozzles are provided each having a small-diameter ink ejection port. The four head main bodies 1a eject ink of magenta, yellow, cyan, and black, respectively.

[0015] The head main bodies 1a are disposed such that a narrow clearance is formed between the lower face of each

head main body 1a and the transfer face of the transfer belt 108. The paper transfer path is formed within the clearance. In this construction, while a paper, which is being transferred by the transfer belt 108, passes immediately below the four head main bodies 1a in order, the respective color inks are ejected through the corresponding nozzles toward the upper face, i.e., the print face, of the paper to form a desired color image on the paper.

[0016] The ink-jet printer 101 is provided with a maintenance unit 117 for automatically carrying out maintenance of the ink-jet heads 1. The maintenance unit 117 includes four caps 116 for covering the lower faces of the four head main bodies 1a, and a not-illustrated purge system.

[0017] The maintenance unit 117 is at a position immediately below the paper feed unit 111 (withdrawal position) while the ink-jet printer 101 operates to print. When a predetermined condition is satisfied after finishing the printing operation (for example, when a state in which no printing operation is performed continues for a predetermined time period or when the printer 101 is powered off), the maintenance unit 117 moves to a position immediately below the four head main bodies 1a (cap position), where the maintenance unit 117 covers the lower faces of the head main bodies 1a with the respective caps 116 to prevent ink in the nozzles of the head main bodies 1a from being dried.

[0018] The belt rollers 106 and 107 and the transfer belt 108 are supported by a chassis 113. The chassis 113 is put on a cylindrical member 115 disposed under the chassis 113. The cylindrical member 115 is rotatable around a shaft 114 provided at a position deviating from the center of the cylindrical member 115. Thus, by rotating the shaft 114, the level of the uppermost portion of the cylindrical member 115 can be changed to move up or down the chassis 113 accordingly. When the maintenance unit 117 is moved from the withdrawal position to the cap position, the cylindrical member 115 must have been rotated at a predetermined angle in advance so as to move down the transfer belt 108 and the belt rollers 106 and 107 by a pertinent distance from the position illustrated in FIG. 1. A space for the movement of the maintenance unit 117 is thereby ensured.

[0019] In the region surrounded by the transfer belt 108, a nearly rectangular parallelepiped guide 121 (having its width substantially equal to that of the transfer belt 108) is disposed at an opposite position to the ink-jet heads 1. The guide 121 is in contact with the lower face of the upper part of the transfer belt 108 to support the upper part of the transfer belt 108 from the inside.

[0020] Next, the construction of each ink-jet head 1 according to this embodiment will be described in more detail. FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the ink-jet head 1. FIG. 3 is a sectional view taken along line II-II in FIG. 2. Referring to FIGS. 2 and 3, the ink-jet head 1 according to this embodiment includes a head main body 1a having a rectangular shape in a plan view and extending in one direction (main scanning direction), and a base portion 131 for supporting the head main body 1a. The base portion 131 supporting the head main body 1a further supports thereon driver ICs 132 for supplying driving signals to individual electrodes 35a and 35b (see FIG. 6 and FIG. 10), and substrates 133.

[0021] Referring to FIG. 2, the base portion 131 is made up of a base block 138 partially bonded to the upper face of the head main body 1a to support the head main body 1a, and a holder 139 bonded to the upper face of the base block 138 to support the base block 138. The base block 138 is a nearly rectangular parallelepiped member having substantially the same length of the head main body 1a. The base block 138 made of metal material such as stainless steel has a function as a light structure for reinforcing the holder 139. The holder 139 is made up of a holder main body 141 disposed near the head main body 1a, and a pair of holder support portions 142 each extending on the opposite side of the holder main body 141 to the head main body 1a. Each holder support portion 142 is a flat member. These holder support portions 142 extend along the longitudinal direction of the holder main body 141 and are disposed in parallel with each other at a predetermined interval.

[0022] Skirt portions 141a in a pair, protruding downward, are provided in both end portions of the holder main body 141a in a sub scanning direction (perpendicular to the main scanning direction). Either skirt portion 141a is formed through the length of the holder main body 141. As a result, in the lower portion of the holder main body 141, a nearly rectangular parallelepiped groove 141b is defined by the pair of skirt portions 141a. The base block 138 is received in the groove 141b. The upper surface of the base block 138 is bonded to the bottom of the groove 141b of the holder main body 141 with an adhesive. The thickness of the base block 138 is somewhat larger than the depth of the groove 141b of the holder main body 141. As a result, the lower end of the base block 138 protrudes downward beyond the skirt portions 141a.

[0023] Within the base block 138, as a passage for ink to be supplied to the head main body 1a, an ink reservoir 3 is formed as a nearly rectangular parallelepiped space (hollow region) extending along the longitudinal direction of the base block 138. In the lower face 145 of the base block 138, openings 3b (see FIG. 4) are formed each communicating with the ink reservoir 3. The ink reservoir 3 is connected through a not-illustrated supply tube with a not-illustrated main ink tank (ink supply source) within the printer main body. Thus, the ink reservoir 3 is suitably supplied with ink from the main ink tank.

[0024] In the lower face 145 of the base block 138, the vicinity of each opening 3b protrudes downward from the surrounding portion. The base block 138 is in contact with a passage unit 4 (see FIG. 3) of the head main body 1a at the only vicinity portion 145a of each opening 3b of the lower face 145. Thus, the region of the lower face 145 of the base block 138 other than the vicinity portion 145a of each opening 3b is distant from the head main body 1a. Actuator

units 21 are disposed within the distance.

[0025] To the outer side face of each holder support portion 142 of the holder 139, a driver IC 132 is fixed with an elastic member 137 such as a sponge being interposed between them. A heat sink 134 is disposed in close contact with the outer side face of the driver IC 132. The heat sink 134 is made of a nearly rectangular parallelepiped member for efficiently radiating heat generated in the driver IC 132. A flexible printed circuit (FPC) 136 as a power supply member is connected with the driver IC 132. The FPC 136 connected with the driver IC 132 is bonded to and electrically connected with the corresponding substrate 133 and the head main body 1a by soldering. The substrate 133 is disposed outside the FPC 136 above the driver IC 132 and the heat sink 134. The upper face of the heat sink 134 is bonded to the substrate 133 with a seal member 149. Also, the lower face of the heat sink 134 is bonded to the FPC 136 with a seal member 149.

[0026] Between the lower face of each skirt portion 141a of the holder main body 141 and the upper face of the passage unit 4, a seal member 150 is disposed to sandwich the FPC 136. The FPC 136 is fixed by the seal member 150 to the passage unit 4 and the holder main body 141. Therefore, even if the head main body 1a is elongated, the head main body 1a can be prevented from being bent, the interconnecting portion between each actuator unit and the FPC 136 can be prevented from receiving stress, and the FPC 136 can surely be held.

[0027] Referring to FIG. 2, in the vicinity of each lower corner of the ink-jet head 1 along the main scanning direction, six protruding portions 30a are disposed at regular intervals along the corresponding side wall of the ink-jet head 1. These protruding portions 30a are provided at both ends in the sub scanning direction of a nozzle plate 30 in the lowermost layer of the head main body 1a (see FIG. 7). The nozzle plate 30 is bent by about 90 degrees along the boundary line between each protruding portion 30a and the other portion. The protruding portions 30a are provided at positions corresponding to the vicinities of both ends of various papers to be used for printing. Each bent portion of the nozzle plate 30 has a shape not right-angled but rounded. This makes it hard to bring about clogging of a paper, i.e., jamming, which may occur because the leading edge of the paper, which has been transferred to approach the head 1, is stopped by the side face of the head 1.

[0028] FIG. 4 is a schematic plan view of the head main body 1a. In FIG. 4, an ink reservoir 3 formed in the base block 138 is imaginarily illustrated with a broken line. Referring to FIG. 4, the head main body 1a has a rectangular shape in the plan view extending in one direction (main scanning direction). The head main body 1a includes a passage unit 4 in which a large number of pressure chambers 10 and a large number of ink ejection ports 8 at the front ends of nozzles (as for both, see FIGS. 5, 6, and 7), as described later. Trapezoidal actuator units 21 arranged in two lines in a staggered shape are bonded onto the upper face of the passage unit 4. Each actuator unit 21 is disposed such that its parallel opposed sides (upper and lower sides) extend along the longitudinal direction of the passage unit 4. The oblique sides of each neighboring actuator units 21 overlap each other in the lateral direction of the passage unit 4.

[0029] The lower face of the passage unit 4 corresponding to the bonded region of each actuator unit 4 is made into an ink ejection region. In the surface of each ink ejection region, a large number of ink ejection ports 8 are arranged in a matrix, as described later. In the base block 138 disposed above the passage unit 4, an ink reservoir 3 is formed along the longitudinal direction of the base block 138. The ink reservoir 3 communicates with an ink tank (not illustrated) through an opening 3a provided at one end of the ink reservoir 3, so that the ink reservoir 3 is always filled up with ink. In the ink reservoir 3, pairs of openings 3b are provided in regions where no actuator unit 21 is present, so as to be arranged in a staggered shape along the longitudinal direction of the ink reservoir 3.

[0030] FIG. 5 is an enlarged view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and short dash line in FIG. 4. Referring to FIGS. 4 and 5, the ink reservoir 3 communicates through each opening 3b with a manifold channel 5 disposed under the opening 3b. Each opening 3b is provided with a filter (not illustrated) for catching dust and dirt contained in ink.

The front end portion of each manifold channel 5 branches into two sub-manifold channels 5a. Below a single one of the actuator unit 21, two sub-manifold channels 5a extend from each of the two openings 3b on both sides of the actuator unit 21 in the longitudinal direction of the ink-jet head 1. That is, below the single actuator unit 21, four sub-manifold channels 5a in total extend along the longitudinal direction of the ink-jet head 1. Each sub-manifold channel 5a functions as a common ink passage and it is filled up with ink supplied from the ink reservoir 3.

[0031] FIG. 6 is an enlarged view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and short dash line in FIG. 5. Either of FIGS. 5 and 6 is a vertical view of a plane in which many pressure chambers 10 are arranged in a matrix in the passage unit 4. Pressure chambers 10, apertures 12, nozzles 8, sub-manifold channels, etc., as components of the passage unit 4, are disposed at different levels from one another perpendicularly to FIGS. 5 and 6 (see FIG. 7).

[0032] The pressure chambers 10 are connected with nozzles (FIGS. 5 and 6 illustrates ink ejection ports 8 formed at the tip ends of the respective nozzles), respectively. The pressure chambers 10 are arranged along the surface of each trapezoidal ink ejection region illustrated in FIG. 5, in a matrix in two directions, i.e., an arrangement direction A (arrangement direction A) and an arrangement direction B (along a vertical oblique side of a parallelogrammic region 10x illustrated in FIG. 6). Each pressure chamber 10 has a nearly parallelogrammic shape (length: 900 μ m, width: 350 μ m) in a plan view whose corners are rounded. Each pressure chamber 10 is included within the corresponding one of parallelogrammic regions 10x arranged in a matrix. The parallelogrammic regions 10x are arranged in a matrix with neighboring each other without overlapping each other so that each parallelogrammic region 10x may have its sides in

common with those of other parallelogrammic regions 10x. The pressure chamber 10 in each parallelogrammic region 10x is so disposed as to have its center coinciding with the center of the parallelogrammic region 10x. As a result, the pressure chambers 10 are separated from one another. As illustrated in FIG. 7, one end of each pressure chamber 10 is connected with a nozzle and the other end is connected with a sub-manifold channel 5a as a common ink passage.

[0033] FIG. 6 illustrates pairs of individual electrodes 35a and 35b each overlapping the corresponding pressure chamber 10 in a plan view and having a shape in a plan view similar to that of the pressure chamber 10 and somewhat smaller than the pressure chamber 10.

[0034] The pressure chambers 10 arranged in a matrix constitute pressure chamber rows along the arrangement direction A (first direction) in FIG. 6. When viewing perpendicularly to FIG. 6 (third direction), the pressure chamber rows are classified into first and second pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b in accordance with the disposition of the nozzle connected with each pressure chamber 10. As for the pressure chambers 10 constituting each first pressure chamber row 11a, when viewing perpendicularly to FIG. 6 (third direction), the nozzles connected with the pressure chambers 10 and the ink ejection ports 8 formed at the tip ends of the respective nozzles are deviated upward in FIG. 6, with respect to the longer diagonal of each parallelogrammic region 10x (second direction) crossing the arrangement direction A. That is, as illustrated in FIG. 6, in each pressure chamber 10 constituting each first pressure chamber row 11a in this embodiment, the ink ejection port 8 is disposed at the upper end of the corresponding parallelogrammic region 10x. On the other hand, as for the pressure chambers 10 constituting each second pressure chamber row 11b, the nozzles connected with the pressure chambers 10 and the ink ejection ports 8 formed at the tip ends of the respective nozzles are deviated downward in FIG. 6, with respect to the second direction. That is, as illustrated in FIG. 6, in each pressure chamber 10 constituting each second pressure chamber row 11b in this embodiment, the ink ejection port 8 is disposed at the lower end of the corresponding parallelogrammic region 10x. Two first pressure chamber rows 11a and two second pressure chamber rows 11b are alternately arranged. The arrangement direction A (first direction) in FIG. 6 is along the length of the ink-jet head 1 and the arrangement direction B is along an oblique side of each parallelogrammic region 10x somewhat oblique to the width of the ink-jet head 1.

[0035] Each sub-manifold channel 5a, which functions as a common ink passage, extends in the arrangement direction A and communicates with pressure chambers 10 disposed on both sides of the sub-manifold channel 5a. When viewing perpendicularly to FIG. 6 (third direction), each sub-manifold channel 5a extends to include first and second pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b neighboring each other so that the nozzles and the ink ejection ports 8 at the tip ends of the respective nozzles may face outward of the sub-manifold channel 5a. The sub-manifold channel 5a extends not to overlap the nozzles and the ink ejection ports 8 at the tip ends of the respective nozzles. In order to increase the width of each sub-manifold channel 5a, each sub-manifold channel 5a preferably includes the most parts of the neighboring first and second pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b as long as the sub-manifold channel 5a does not overlap the nozzles and the ink ejection ports 8. That is, to smoothly supply ink to each pressure chamber 10 communicating with the sub-manifold channel 5a, the limit of the width of the sub-manifold channel 5a is preferably set near the one end of each pressure chamber 10 connected with the ink ejection port 8. By this, even when the thickness of each sub-manifold channel 5a in the above third direction (depth) is fixed, the passage resistance of the sub-manifold channel 5a to ink can be reduced.

[0036] FIG. 7 is a partial sectional view of the head main body 1a of FIG. 4. As apparent from FIG. 7, each ink ejection port 8 is formed at the tip end of a tapered nozzle. Between a pressure chamber 10 and a sub-manifold channel 5a, an aperture 12 extends substantially in parallel with the surface of the passage unit 4, like the pressure chamber 10. This aperture 12 is for restricting the ink flow to give the passage a suitable resistance, thereby achieving the stabilization of ink ejection. Each ink ejection port 8 communicates with a sub-manifold channel 5a through a pressure chamber 10 (length: 900 μm , width: 350 μm) and an aperture 12. Thus, within the ink-jet head 1 formed are ink passages 32 each extending from an ink tank to an ink ejection port 8 through an ink reservoir 3, a manifold channel 5, a sub-manifold channel 5a, an aperture 12, and a pressure chamber 10.

[0037] For example, when the pressure chamber 10 of FIG. 7 constitutes a first pressure chamber row 11a of FIG. 6, a nozzle connected with a pressure chamber 10 constituting a second pressure chamber row 11b is disposed on the right side of the sub-manifold channel 5a in FIG. 7.

[0038] When viewing perpendicularly to FIG. 6 (third direction), the aperture 12 communicating with a pressure chamber 10 is disposed so as to overlap another pressure chamber 10 neighboring that pressure chamber 10. A cause making this arrangement possible is that the aperture 12 is disposed on the sub-manifold channel 5a side of the pressure chamber 10 with respect to a direction perpendicular to FIG. 6 (third direction) and it is provided at the different level from the pressure chamber 10. Referring to FIG. 7, each of the pressure chamber 10, the aperture 12, and the sub-manifold channel 5a is formed within layered sheet members. When viewing from the above third direction, they are disposed so as to overlap one another.

[0039] In FIGS. 5 and 6, to make it easy to understand the drawings, the pressure chambers 10, the apertures 12, etc., are illustrated with solid lines though they should be illustrated with broken lines because they are below the actuator unit 21.

[0040] When the actuator unit 21 applies a pulse pressure to a pressure chamber and a pressure wave is thereby generated, the pressure wave to contribute ink ejection propagates in the pressure chamber 10 along the longer diagonal of the corresponding parallelogrammic region 10x (second direction). When the pressure wave propagation direction is perpendicular to the surface, the pressure chamber 10 is generally made into a shape in a plan view symmetrical with respect to the origin, such as a circle or a regular polygon. However, as in this embodiment, when the pressure wave propagating in the pressure chamber 10 in a specific direction along the surface of the passage unit 4 is utilized for ink ejection, the pressure chamber 10 is preferably made into a shape in a plan view slender in the pressure wave propagation direction because the ink ejection amount and ejection period are made easy to control by increasing the propagation time length of the pressure wave (Al: Acoustic Length).

[0041] In the plane of FIGS. 5 and 6, pressure chambers 10 are arranged within an ink ejection region in two directions, i.e., a direction along the length of the ink-jet head 1 (arrangement direction A) and a direction somewhat inclining from the width of the ink-jet head 1 (arrangement direction B). The arrangement directions A and B form an angle 'theta' somewhat smaller than the right angle. The ink ejection ports 8 are arranged at 50 dpi (dots per inch) in the arrangement direction A. On the other hand, the pressure chambers 10 are arranged in the arrangement direction B such that the ink ejection region corresponding to one actuator unit 21 may include twelve pressure chambers 10. The shift to the arrangement direction A due to the arrangement in which twelve pressure chambers 10 are arranged in the arrangement direction B, corresponds to one pressure chamber 10. Therefore, within the whole width of the ink-jet head 1, in a region of the interval between two ink ejection ports 8 neighboring each other in the arrangement direction A, there are twelve ink ejection ports 8. At both ends of each ink ejection region in the arrangement direction A (corresponding to an oblique side of the actuator unit 21), the above condition is satisfied by making a compensation relation to the ink ejection region corresponding to the opposite actuator unit 21 in the width of the ink-jet head 1. Therefore, in the ink-jet head 1 according to this embodiment, by ejecting ink droplets in order through a large number of ink ejection ports 8 arranged in the arrangement directions A and B with relative movement of a paper along the width of the ink-jet head 1, printing at 600 dpi in the main scanning direction can be performed.

[0042] Next, the construction of the passage unit 4 will be described in more detail with reference to FIG. 8. Referring to FIG. 8, pressure chambers 10 are arranged in lines in the arrangement direction A at predetermined intervals at 500 dpi. Twelve lines of pressure chambers 10 are arranged in the arrangement direction B. As the whole, the pressure chambers 10 are two-dimensionally arranged in the ink ejection region corresponding to one actuator unit 21.

[0043] The pressure chambers 10 are classified into two kinds, i.e., Pressure chambers 10a in each of which a nozzle is connected with the upper acute portion in FIG. 8, and pressure chambers 10b in each of which a nozzle is connected with the lower acute portion. Pressure chambers 10a and 10b are arranged in the arrangement direction A to form pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b, respectively. Referring to FIG. 8, in the ink ejection region corresponding to one actuator unit 21, from the lower side of FIG. 8, there are disposed two pressure chamber rows 11a and two pressure chamber rows 11b neighboring the upper side of the pressure chamber rows 11a. The four pressure chamber rows of the two pressure chamber rows 11a and the two pressure chamber rows 11b constitute a set of pressure chamber rows. Such a set of pressure chamber rows is repeatedly disposed three times from the lower side in the ink ejection region corresponding to one actuator unit 21. A straight line extending through the upper acute portion of each pressure chamber in each pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b crosses the lower oblique side of each pressure chamber in the pressure chamber row neighboring the upper side of that pressure chamber row.

[0044] As described above, when viewing perpendicularly to FIG. 8, two first pressure chamber rows 11a and two pressure chamber rows 11b, in which nozzles connected with pressure chambers 10 are disposed at different positions, are arranged alternately to neighbor each other. Consequently, as the whole, the pressure chambers 10 are arranged regularly. On the other hand, nozzles are arranged in a concentrated manner in a central region of each set of pressure chamber rows constituted by the above four pressure chamber rows. Therefore, in case that each four pressure chamber rows constitute a set of pressure chamber rows and such a set of pressure chamber rows is repeatedly disposed three times from the lower side as described above, there is formed a region where no nozzle exists, in the vicinity of the boundary between each neighboring sets of pressure chamber rows, i.e., on both sides of each set of pressure chamber rows constituted by four pressure chamber rows. Wide sub-manifold channels 5a extend there for supplying ink to the corresponding pressure chambers 10. In this embodiment, in the ink ejection region corresponding to one actuator unit 21, four wide sub-manifold channels 5a in total are arranged in the arrangement direction A, i.e., one on the lower side of FIG. 8, one between the lowermost set of pressure chamber rows and the second lowermost set of pressure chamber rows, and two on both sides of the uppermost set of pressure chamber rows.

[0045] Referring to FIG. 8, nozzles communicating with ink ejection ports 8 for ejecting ink are arranged in the arrangement direction A at regular intervals at 50 dpi to correspond to the respective pressure chambers 10 regularly arranged in the arrangement direction A. On the other hand, while twelve pressure chambers 10 are regularly arranged also in the arrangement direction B forming an angle 'theta' with the arrangement direction A, twelve nozzles corresponding to the twelve pressure chambers 10 include ones each communicating with the upper acute portion of the corresponding pressure chamber 10 and ones each communicating with the lower acute portion of the corresponding

pressure chamber 10, as a result, they are not regularly arranged in the arrangement direction B at regular intervals.

[0046] If all nozzles communicate with the same-side acute portions of the respective pressure chambers'10, the nozzles are regularly arranged also in the arrangement direction B at regular intervals. In this case, nozzles are arranged so as to shift in the arrangement direction A by a distance corresponding to 600 dpi as resolution upon printing per pressure chamber row from the lower side to the upper side of FIG. 8. Contrastingly in this embodiment, since four pressure chamber rows of two pressure chamber rows 11a and two pressure chamber rows 11b constitute a set of pressure chamber rows and such a set of pressure chamber rows is repeatedly disposed three times from the lower side, the shift of nozzle position in the arrangement direction A per pressure chamber row from the lower side to the upper side of FIG. 8 is not always the same.

[0047] In the ink-jet head 1 according to this embodiment, a band region R will be discussed that has a width (about 508.0 μm) corresponding to 50 dpi in the arrangement direction A and extends perpendicularly to the arrangement direction A. In this band region R, any of twelve pressure chamber rows includes only one nozzle. That is, when such a band region R is defined at an optional position in the ink ejection region corresponding to one actuator unit 21, twelve nozzles are always distributed in the band region R. The positions of points respectively obtained by projecting the twelve nozzles onto a straight line extending in the arrangement direction A are distant from each other by a distance corresponding to 600 dpi as resolution upon printing.

[0048] When the twelve nozzles included in one band region R are denoted by (1) to (12) in order from one whose projected image onto a straight line extending in the arrangement direction A is the leftmost, the twelve nozzles are arranged in the order of (1), (7), (2), (8), (5), (11), (6), (12), (9), (3), (10), and (4) from the lower side.

[0049] In the thus-constructed ink-jet head 1 according to this embodiment, by properly driving active layers in the actuator unit 21, a character, an figure, or the like, having a resolution of 600 dpi can be formed. That is, by selectively driving active layers corresponding to the twelve pressure chamber rows in order in accordance with the transfer of a print medium, a specific character or figure can be printed on the print medium.

[0050] By way of example, a case will be described wherein a straight line extending in the arrangement direction A is printed at a resolution of 600 dpi. First, a case will be briefly described wherein nozzles communicate with the same-side acute portions of pressure chambers 10. In this case, in accordance with transfer of a print medium, ink ejection starts from a nozzle in the lowermost pressure chamber row in FIG. 8. Ink ejection is then shifted upward with selecting a nozzle belonging to the upper neighboring pressure chamber row in order. Ink dots are thereby formed in order in the arrangement direction A with neighboring each other at 600 dpi. Finally, all the ink dots form a straight line extending in the arrangement direction A at a resolution of 600 dpi.

[0051] On the other hand, in this embodiment, ink ejection starts from a nozzle in the lowermost pressure chamber row 11a in FIG. 8, and ink ejection is then shifted upward with selecting a nozzle communicating with the upper neighboring pressure chamber row in order in accordance with transfer of a print medium. In this embodiment, however, since the positional shift of nozzles in the arrangement direction A per pressure chamber row from the lower side to the upper side is not always the same, ink dots formed in order in the arrangement direction A in accordance with the transfer of the print medium are not arranged at regular intervals at 600 dpi.

[0052] More specifically, as shown in FIG. 8, in accordance with the transfer of the print medium, ink is first ejected through a nozzle (1) communicating with the lowermost pressure chamber row 11a in FIG. 8 to form a dot row on the print medium at intervals corresponding to 50 dpi (about 508.0 μm). After this, as the print medium is transferred and the straight line formation position has reached the position of a nozzle (7) communicating with the second lowermost pressure chamber row 11a, ink is ejected through the nozzle (7). The second ink dot is thereby formed at a position shifted from the first formed dot position in the arrangement direction A by a distance of six times the interval corresponding to 600 dpi (about 42.3 μm) (about $42.3 \mu\text{m} \times 6 = \text{about } 254.0 \mu\text{m}$).

[0053] Next, as the print medium is further transferred and the straight line formation position has reached the position of a nozzle (2) communicating with the third lowermost pressure chamber row 11b, ink is ejected through the nozzle (2). The third ink dot is thereby formed at a position shifted from the first formed dot position in the arrangement direction A by a distance of the interval corresponding to 600 dpi (about 42.3 μm). As the print medium is further transferred and the straight line formation position has reached the position of a nozzle (8) communicating with the fourth lowermost pressure chamber row 11b, ink is ejected through the nozzle (8). The fourth ink dot is thereby formed at a position shifted from the first formed dot position in the arrangement direction A by a distance of seven times the interval corresponding to 600 dpi (about 42.3 μm) (about $42.3 \mu\text{m} \times 7 = \text{about } 296.3 \mu\text{m}$). As the print medium is further transferred and the straight line formation position has reached the position of a nozzle (5) communicating with the fifth lowermost pressure chamber row 11a, ink is ejected through the nozzle (5). The fifth ink dot is thereby formed at a position shifted from the first formed dot position in the arrangement direction A by a distance of four times the interval corresponding to 600 dpi (about 42.3 μm) (about $42.3 \mu\text{m} \times 4 = \text{about } 169.3 \mu\text{m}$).

[0054] After this, in the same manner, ink dots are formed with selecting nozzles communicating with pressure chambers 10 in order from the lower side to the upper side in FIG. 8. In this case, when the number of a nozzle in FIG. 8 is N, an ink dot is formed at a position shifted from the first formed dot position in the arrangement direction A by a distance

corresponding to (magnification $n = N - 1$) $\times$ (interval corresponding to 600 dpi). When the twelve nozzles have been finally selected, the gap between the ink dots to be formed by the nozzles (1) in the lowermost pressure chamber rows 11a in FIG. 8 at an interval corresponding to 50 dpi (about 508.0 μm) is filled up with eleven dots formed at intervals corresponding to 600 dpi (about 42.3 μm). Therefore, as the whole, a straight line extending in the arrangement direction A can be drawn at a resolution of 600 dpi.

[0055] FIG. 9 is a partial exploded view of the head main body 1a of FIG. 4. Referring to FIGS. 7 and 9, a principal portion on the bottom side of the ink-jet head 1 has a layered structure laminated with ten sheet materials in total, i.e., from the top, an actuator unit 21, a cavity plate 22, a base plate 23, an aperture plate 24, a supply plate 25, manifold plates 26, 27, and 28, a cover plate 29, and a nozzle plate 30. Of them, nine plates other than the actuator unit 21 constitute the passage unit 4.

[0056] As will be described later in detail, the actuator unit 21 is laminated with five piezoelectric sheets and provided with electrodes so that three of them may include layers to be active when an electric field is applied (hereinafter, simply referred to as "layer including active layers") and the remaining two layers may be inactive. The cavity plate 22 is made of metal, in which a large number of substantially rhombic openings are formed corresponding to the respective pressure chambers 10. The base plate 23 is made of metal, in which a communication hole between each pressure chamber 10 of the cavity plate 22 and the corresponding aperture 12, and a communication hole between the pressure chamber 10 and the corresponding ink ejection port 8 are formed. The aperture plate 24 is made of metal, in which, in addition to apertures 12, communication holes are formed for connecting each pressure chamber 10 of the cavity plate 22 with the corresponding ink ejection port 8. The supply plate 25 is made of metal, in which communication holes between each aperture 12 and the corresponding sub-manifold channel 5a and communication holes for connecting each pressure chamber 10 of the cavity plate 22 with the corresponding ink ejection port 8 are formed. Each of the manifold plates 26, 27, and 28 is made of metal, which defines an upper portion of each sub-manifold channel 5a and in which communication holes are formed for connecting each pressure chamber 10 of the cavity plate 22 with the corresponding ink ejection port 8. The cover plate 29 is made of metal, in which communication holes are formed for connecting each pressure chamber 10 of the cavity plate 22 with the corresponding ink ejection port 8. The nozzle plate 30 is made of metal, in which tapered ink ejection ports 8 each functioning as a nozzle are formed for the respective pressure chambers 10 of the cavity plate 22.

[0057] These ten plates 21 to 30 are put in layers with being positioned to each other to form such an ink passage 32 as illustrated in FIG. 7. The ink passage 32 first extends upward from the sub-manifold channel 5a, then extends horizontally in the aperture 12, then further extends upward, then again extends horizontally in the pressure chamber 10, then extends obliquely downward in a certain length to get apart from the aperture 12, and then extends vertically downward toward the ink ejection port 8.

[0058] Next, the construction of the actuator unit 21 will be described. FIG. 10 is a lateral enlarged sectional view of the region enclosed with an alternate long and short dash line in FIG. 7. Referring to FIG. 10, the actuator unit 21 includes five piezoelectric sheets 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45 having the same thickness of about 15 μm . These piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 are made into a continuous layered flat plate (continuous flat layers) that is so disposed as to extend over many pressure chambers 10 formed within one ink ejection region in the ink-jet head 1. Since the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 are disposed so as to extend over many pressure chambers 10 as the continuous flat layers, the individual electrodes 35a and 35b can be arranged at a high density by using, e.g., a screen printing technique. Therefore, also the pressure chambers 10 formed at positions corresponding to the individual electrodes 35a and 35b can be arranged at a high density. This makes it possible to print a high-resolution image. In this embodiment, each of the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 is made of a lead zirconate titanate (PZT)-base ceramic material having ferroelectricity.

[0059] Between the uppermost piezoelectric sheet 41 of the actuator unit 21 and the piezoelectric sheet 42 neighboring downward the piezoelectric sheet 41, an about 2 μm -thick common electrode 34a is interposed. The common electrode 34a is made of a single conductive sheet extending substantially in the whole region of the actuator unit 21. Also, between the piezoelectric sheet 43 neighboring downward the piezoelectric sheet 42 and the piezoelectric sheet 44 neighboring downward the piezoelectric sheet 43, an about 2 μm -thick common electrode 34b is interposed having the same shape as the common electrode 34a.

[0060] In a modification, many pairs of common electrodes 34a and 34b each having a shape larger than that of a pressure chamber 10 so that the projection image of each common electrode projected along the thickness of the common electrode may include the pressure chamber, may be provided for each pressure chamber 10. In another modification, many pairs of common electrodes 34a and 34b each having a shape somewhat smaller than that of a pressure chamber 10 so that the projection image of each common electrode projected along the thickness of the common electrode may be included in the pressure chamber, may be provided for each pressure chamber 10. Thus, the common electrode 34a or 34b may not always be a single conductive sheet formed on the whole of the face of a piezoelectric sheet. In the above modifications, however, all the common electrodes must be electrically connected with one another so that the portion corresponding to any pressure chamber 10 may be at the same potential.

[0061] Referring to FIG. 10, an about 1 μm -thick individual electrode 35a is formed on the upper face of the piezoelectric

sheet 41 at a position corresponding to the pressure chamber 10. The individual electrode 35a has a nearly rhombic shape (length: 850 μm , width: 250 μm) in a plan view similar to that of the pressure chamber 10, so that a projection image of the individual electrode 35a projected along the thickness of the individual electrode 35a is included in the corresponding pressure chamber 10 (see FIG. 6). Between the piezoelectric sheets 42 and 43, an about 2 μm -thick individual electrode 35b having the same shape as the individual electrode 35a in a plan view is interposed at a position corresponding to the individual electrode 35a. No electrode is provided between the piezoelectric sheet 44 and the piezoelectric sheet 45 neighboring downward the piezoelectric sheet 44, and on the lower face of the piezoelectric sheet 45.

Each of the electrodes 34a, 34b, 35a, and 35b is made of, e.g., an Ag-Pd-base metallic material.

[0062] The common electrodes 34a and 34b are grounded in a not-illustrated region. Thus, the common electrodes 34a and 34b are kept at the ground potential at a region corresponding to any pressure chamber 10. The individual electrodes 35a and 35b in each pair corresponding to a pressure chamber 10 are connected to a driver IC 132 through an FPC 136 including leads independent of another pair of individual electrodes so that the potential of each pair of individual electrodes can be controlled independently of that of another pair (see FIGS. 2 and 3). In this case, the individual electrodes 35a and 35b in each pair vertically arranged may be connected to the driver IC 132 through the same lead.

[0063] In the ink-jet head 1 according to this embodiment, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 are polarized in their thickness. Therefore, the individual electrodes 35a and 35b are set at a potential different from that of the common electrodes 34a and 34b to apply an electric field in the polarization, the portions of the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 to which the electric field has been applied works as active layers and the portions are ready to expand or contract in thickness, i.e., in layers, and to contract or expand perpendicularly to the thickness, i.e., in a plane, by the transversal piezoelectric effect. On the other hand, since the remaining two piezoelectric sheets 44 and 45 are inactive layers having no regions sandwiched by the individual electrodes 35a and 35b and the common electrodes 34a and 34b, they can not deform in their selves. That is, the actuator unit 21 has a so-called unimorph structure in which the upper (i.e., distant from the pressure chamber 10) three piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 are layers including active layers and the lower (i.e., near the pressure chamber 10) two piezoelectric sheets 44 and 45 are inactive layers.

[0064] Therefore, when the driver IC 132 is controlled so that an electric field is produced in the same direction as the polarization and the individual electrodes 35a and 35b are set at a positive or negative predetermined potential relative to the common electrodes 34a and 34b, active layers in the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 sandwiched by the individual electrodes 35a and 35b and the common electrodes 34a and 34b contract in a plane, while the piezoelectric sheets 44 and 45 do not contract in their selves. At this time, as illustrated in FIG. 10, the lowermost face of the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 is fixed to the upper face of partitions partitioning pressure chambers 10 formed in the cavity plate 22, as a result, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 deform into a convex shape toward the pressure chamber side by contracting in a plane by the transversal piezoelectric effect (unimorph deformation). Therefore, the volume of the pressure chamber 10 is decreased to raise the pressure of ink. The ink is thereby ejected through the ink ejection port 8. After this, when the individual electrodes 35a and 35b are returned to the original potential, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 return to the original flat shape and the pressure chamber 10 also returns to its original volume. Thus, the pressure chamber 10 sucks ink therein through the manifold channel 5.

[0065] In another driving method, all the individual electrodes 35a and 35b are set in advance at a different potential from that of the common electrodes 34a and 34b so that the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 deform into a convex shape toward the pressure chamber 10 side. When an ejecting request is issued, the corresponding pair of individual electrodes 35a and 35b is once set at the same potential as that of the common electrodes 34a and 34b. After this, at a predetermined timing, the pair of individual electrodes 35a and 35b is again set at the different potential from that of the common electrodes 34a and 34b. In this case, at the timing when the pair of individual electrodes 35a and 35b is set at the same potential as that of the common electrodes 34a and 34b, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 return to their original shapes. The corresponding pressure chamber 10 is thereby increased in volume from its initial state (the state that the potentials of both electrodes differ from each other), to suck ink from the manifold channel 5 into the pressure chamber 10. After this, at the timing when the pair of individual electrodes 35a and 35b is again set at the different potential from that of the common electrodes 34a and 34b, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 deform into a convex shape toward the pressure chamber 10. The volume of the pressure chamber 10 is thereby decreased and the pressure of ink in the pressure chamber 10 increases to eject ink.

[0066] In case that the polarization occurs in the reverse direction to the electric field applied to the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43, the active layers in the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 sandwiched by the individual electrodes 35a and 35b and the common electrodes 34a and 34b are ready to elongate perpendicularly to the polarization. As a result, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 deform into a concave shape toward the pressure chamber 10 by the transversal piezoelectric effect. Therefore, the volume of the pressure chamber 10 is increased to suck ink from the manifold channel 5. After this, when the individual electrodes 35a and 35b return to their original potential, the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 also return to their original flat shape. The pressure chamber 10 thereby returns to its original volume to eject ink through the ink ejection port 8.

[0067] As described above, in the ink-jet head 1 of this embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 6, when viewing perpendicularly to the surface of the passage unit 4 (third direction), the nozzle (the ink ejection port 8 at the tip end is illustrated in FIG. 6) connected with each pressure chamber 10 is not provided at the center of the pressure chamber 10 but deviated to one end. A sub-manifold channel 5a that functions as a common ink passage is disposed so as to include the boundary region between first and second pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b in which nozzles are deviated on the opposite sides with respect to the arrangement direction A.

Thus, the width of the sub-manifold channel 5a can be made large. Therefore, even when the thickness (depth) of the sub-manifold channel 5a in the above third direction is fixed, the passage resistance of the sub-manifold channel 5a to ink is low, and so ink supply to the pressure chamber 10 can smoothly be performed.

[0068] In addition, as illustrated in FIG. 7, the passage unit 4 includes apertures 12 extending substantially in parallel with the surface of the passage unit 4. Each pressure chamber 10 is connected with the corresponding sub-manifold channel 5a through an aperture 12. Thus, the number of sub-manifold channels 5a can be reduced. For example, in case that each pressure chamber 10 is connected directly with the corresponding sub-manifold channel 5a not through an aperture 12, the sub-manifold channel 5a must extend along each pressure chamber row 11a or 11b as illustrated in FIG. 6. However, as in this embodiment, by connecting each pressure chamber 10 with the corresponding sub-manifold channel 5a through an aperture 12, since ink supply is possible even if the pressure chamber 10 is somewhat distant from the sub-manifold channel 5a when viewing in the third direction perpendicular to the surface of the passage unit 4, the sub-manifold channel 5a need not be provided for each pressure chamber row 11a or 11b.

[0069] Further, as illustrated in FIG. 7, by providing the pressure chamber 10 and the aperture 12 at different levels perpendicularly to the surface of the passage unit 4 (third direction), the pressure chamber 10 can overlap the aperture 12 when viewing in the third direction. Thus, high integration of pressure chambers 10 is possible and high-resolution image formation can be realized with an ink-jet head 1 having a relatively small occupation area.

[0070] Further, as illustrated in FIG. 6, by alternately arranging first pressure chamber rows 11a and second pressure chamber rows 11b two by two, the number of sub-manifold channels 5a can be reduced in comparison with the case of the below-described modification. Besides, by disposing one sub-manifold channel 5a for each two pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b neighboring each other, since the width of the sub-manifold channel 5a can be made large, the passage resistance is lower and ink supply can smoothly be performed.

[0071] The advantage of increasing the width of each sub-manifold channel 5a with respect to the passage resistance will be explained in the following discussion. First, considering a sub-manifold channel in a rectangular section having a width a and a depth b , the passage resistance R to ink passing through the sub-manifold channel is given by the following expression (1):

$$R = 8 \cdot \mu \cdot l \cdot \frac{(a+b)^2}{(a \cdot b)^3} \quad \dots (1)$$

where μ : ink viscosity.

[0072] Next, in case that n sub-manifold channels each having a width of a/n (n : an integer of 2 or more) smaller than the width of the above-described sub-manifold channel are arranged in parallel so that the whole width is a , the passage resistance R' to ink passing through each sub-manifold channel is given by the following expression (2):

$$R' = 8 \cdot \mu \cdot l \cdot \frac{1}{n} \cdot \frac{\left(\frac{a}{n} + b\right)^2}{\left(\frac{a}{n} \cdot b\right)^3} \quad \dots (2)$$

[0073] The expressions (1) and (2) give the following expression (3):

$$\frac{R}{R'} = \frac{(a+b)^2}{(a+nb)^2} \quad \dots (3)$$

[0074] Since $R/R' < 1$ from the expression (3), when the whole passage width is fixed, it is understood that the passage resistance in case that a large number of sub-manifold channels each having a small width are provided is larger than that in case that a small number of sub-manifold channels each having a large width are provided. Inversely, considering the fact that a sub-manifold channel having a large width gives a low passage resistance to ink and so ink is easy to be supplied, in comparison with the case that a large number of sub-manifold channels each having a small width are provided for a predetermined number of pressure chambers and a predetermined length of pressure chamber row, in the case that a small number of sub-manifold channels each having a large width are provided, neither too much nor too less ink can be supplied even if the whole passage width is made small.

[0075] The width of each sub-manifold channel 5a can be determined within a range that neither too much nor too less ink can be supplied to each pressure chamber 10. In this embodiment, one sub-manifold channel 5a is disposed so as to extend near nozzles for each two pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b neighboring each other.

[0076] Besides, when viewing perpendicularly to the surface of the passage unit 4 (third direction), each sub-manifold channel 5a of this embodiment includes most parts of one first pressure chamber row 11a and one second pressure chamber row 11b neighboring each other so that the ink ejection ports 8 of the nozzles connected with the respective pressure chambers 10 face outward. Since the width of the sub-manifold channel 5a is thus increased within a range that the sub-manifold channel 5a does not overlap any nozzle and the ink ejection port 8 at the tip end of the nozzle, the passage resistance of the sub-manifold channel 5a can be lower to intend smooth ink supply.

[0077] In addition, since the pressure wave propagation direction in each pressure chamber 10 is substantially in parallel with the surface of the passage unit 4, ink ejection control utilizing AL is easy in comparison with a case wherein the propagation direction is perpendicular to the surface of the passage unit 4. In case of short AL, ink is generally ejected by so-called "fill after fire". In case of long AL as in this embodiment, however, utilizing reverse reflection of pressure wave, there is a margin in time for performing "fill before fire" (a method in which a voltage is applied in advance to all the individual electrodes 35a and 35b to decrease the volumes of all pressure chambers 10, the individual electrodes 35a and 35b of an only pressure chamber 10 to be used for ink ejection are relieved from the voltage to increase the volume of the pressure chamber 10, then a voltage is again applied to the individual electrodes 35a and 35b to decrease the volume of the pressure chamber 10, and thereby ejection pressure is efficiently applied to ink utilizing the pressure wave propagating in the pressure chamber 10), in which energy to be supplied is lower than that in "fill after fire". Thus, energy efficiency can be improved in comparison with the case that the pressure wave propagation direction is perpendicular to the surface of the pressure chamber 10.

[0078] Further, since the passage unit 4 is formed with nine sheet members 22 to 30 laminated each other and each having corresponding openings, the manufacture of the passage unit 4 is easy.

[0079] Further, in the head main body 1a of the ink-jet head 1, separate actuator units 21 corresponding to the respective ink ejection regions are bonded onto the passage unit 4 to be arranged along the length of the passage unit 4. Therefore, each of the actuator units 21 apt to be uneven in dimensional accuracy because they are formed by sintering or the like, can be positioned to the passage unit 4 independently from another actuator unit 21. Thus, even in case of a long head, the increase in shift of each actuator unit 21 from the accurate position on the passage unit 4 is restricted, and both can accurately be positioned to each other. Therefore, as to even an individual electrodes 35a and 35b relatively apart from a mark, the individual electrodes 35a and 35b can not considerably be shifted from the predetermined position to the corresponding pressure chamber 10. As a result, good ink ejection performance can be obtained and the manufacture yield of the ink-jet heads 1 is remarkably improved. On the other hand, differently from the above, if a long-shaped actuator unit 4 is made like the passage unit 4, the more the individual electrodes 35a and 35b are apart from the mark, the larger the shift of the individual electrodes 35a and 35b is from the predetermined position on the corresponding pressure chamber 10 in a plan view when the actuator unit 21 is laid over the passage unit 4. As a result, the ink ejection performance of a pressure chamber 10 relatively apart from the mark is deteriorated and thus the uniformity of the ink ejection performance in the ink-jet head 1 is not obtained.

[0080] Further, in the actuator unit 21, since the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 are sandwiched by the common electrodes 34a and 34b and the individual electrodes 35a and 35b, the volume of each pressure chamber 10 can easily be changed by the piezoelectric effect. Besides, since the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 45 are made into a continuous layered flat plate (continuous flat layers), the actuator unit 21 can easily be manufactured.

[0081] Further, the ink-jet head 1 has the actuator units 21 each having a unimorph structure in which the piezoelectric sheets 44 and 45 near each pressure chamber 10 are inactive and the piezoelectric sheets 41 to 43 distant from each pressure chamber 10 include active layers. Therefore, the change in volume of each pressure chamber 10 can be increased by the transversal piezoelectric effect. As a result, in comparison with an ink-jet head in which a layer including active portions is provided on the pressure chamber 10 side and a non-active layer is provided on the opposite side, lowering the voltage to be applied to the individual electrodes 35a and 35b and/or high integration of the pressure chambers 10 can be achieved. By lowering the voltage to be applied, the driver for driving the individual electrodes 35a and 35b can be made small in size and the cost can be held down. In addition, each pressure chamber 10 can be made small in size. Besides, even in case of a high integration of the pressure chambers 10, a sufficient amount of ink can be

ejected.

Thus, a decrease in size of the head 1 and a highly dense arrangement of printing dots can be realized.

[0082] Further, in the head main body 1a of the ink-jet head 1, each actuator unit 21 has a substantially trapezoidal shape. The actuator units 21 are arranged in two lines in a staggered shape so that the parallel opposed sides of each actuator unit 21 extend along the length of the passage unit 4, and the oblique sides of each neighboring actuator units 21 overlap each other in the width of the passage unit 4. Since the oblique sides of each neighboring actuator units 21 thus overlap each other, in the length of the ink-jet head 1, the pressure chambers 10 existing along the width of the passage unit 4 can compensate each other. As a result, with realizing high-resolution printing, a small-size ink-jet head 1 having a very narrow width can be realized.

[0083] The arrangement directions of pressure chambers 10 disposed in a matrix along the surface of the passage unit 4 are not limited to the arrangement directions A and B described in the above embodiment as far as they are along the surface of the passage unit 4. The arrangement directions may be various. By way of example, FIG. 11 illustrates a modification of arrangement of pressure chambers 10 in the passage unit 4. The modification of FIG. 11 differs from the embodiment of FIG. 6 in the angle 'theta' between the arrangement directions A and B. The angle 'theta' of FIG. 11 is smaller than that of FIG. 6. The modification of FIG. 11 differs from the embodiment of FIG. 6 also in the relation between the arrangement directions A and B and a direction along the longer diagonal of each rhombic region 10x. In the modification of FIG. 11, the diagonal direction and the arrangement direction A form a larger angle than the arrangement directions A and B, differently from the embodiment of FIG. 6.

[0084] Further, FIG. 12 illustrates another modification of arrangement of pressure chambers 10 in the passage unit 4, wherein one first pressure chamber row 11a and one second pressure chamber row 11b are alternately repeated. In the region between each neighboring pressure chambers 10 in the arrangement direction A constituting each first pressure chamber row 11a, a pressure chamber 10 constituting a second pressure chamber row 11b protrudes from the upper side of FIG. 12. In this region, a pressure chamber 10 constituting another second pressure chamber row 11b protrudes from the lower side of FIG. 12. Also, in the region between each neighboring pressure chambers 10 in the arrangement direction A constituting each second pressure chamber row 11a, pressure chambers 10 constituting first pressure chamber rows 11a protrude from the upper and lower sides of FIG. 12, respectively. Thus, in comparison with the above-described embodiment of FIG. 6, the width of each sub-manifold channel 15a is small. However, the width of each sub-manifold channel 15a is large in comparison with a case wherein no increase occurs in interval of ink ejection ports 8 for neighboring pressure chamber rows, such as a case wherein each pressure chamber row is constituted by pressure chambers 10 for each of which an ink ejection port 8 is deviated on one side along the longer diagonal of each rhombic region 10x, or a case wherein each pressure chamber row is constituted by pressure chambers 10 for each of which an ink ejection port 8 is disposed at the center of the pressure chamber 10. Therefore, the passage resistance of each sub-manifold channel 5a to ink is lowered and smooth ink supply to each pressure chamber 10 can be performed.

[0085] The region in which each pressure chamber 10 is included may not be rhombic but have another shape such as a parallelogram. Besides, the shape in a plan view of each pressure chamber 10 included in the region also may be changed into a proper shape such as a parallelogram. Further, each pressure chamber 10 may be slender along the pressure wave propagation direction though high integration of pressure chambers 10 can not be expected.

[0086] Besides, each pressure chamber 10 may communicate directly with the corresponding sub-manifold channel 5a not through an aperture 12 though this is not preferable from the viewpoint of ink ejection stabilization. Further, apertures 12 may be provided at the same level as pressure chambers 10 in the third direction perpendicular to the surface of the passage unit 4. In this case, however, since each pressure chamber 10 can not overlap any aperture 12 when viewing perpendicularly to the surface of the passage unit 4 (third direction), high integration of pressure chambers 10 can not be achieved.

[0087] Further, from the viewpoint of lowering the passage resistance, each sub-manifold channel 5a preferably includes the most parts of pressure chamber rows 11a and 11b neighboring each other. But, it suffices if each sub-manifold channel 5a includes a boundary region between those lines.

[0088] Further, the pressure wave propagation direction in each pressure chamber 10 may not be along a plane of the passage unit 4.

[0089] Further, the passage unit 4 may not be formed with laminated sheet members.

[0090] Further, the material of each of the piezoelectric sheets and electrodes is not limited to those described above, and it may be changed to another known material. Each of the inactive layers may be made of an insulating sheet other than a piezoelectric sheet. The number of layers including active layers, the number of inactive layers, etc., may be changed properly. For example, although piezoelectric sheets as layers including active layers included in an actuator unit 21 are put in three or five layers in the above-described embodiment, piezoelectric sheets may be put in seven or more layers. In this case, the numbers of individual and common electrodes may properly be changed in accordance with the number of layered piezoelectric sheets. Although each actuator unit 21 includes two layers of piezoelectric sheets as inactive layers in the above-described embodiment, each actuator unit 21 may include only one inactive layer. Alternatively, each actuator unit 21 may include three or more inactive layers as far as they do not hinder the expansion

or contraction deformation of the actuator unit 21. Although each actuator unit 21 of the above-described embodiment includes inactive layers on the pressure chamber side of layers including active layers, a layer or layers including active layers may be disposed on the pressure chamber 10 side of the inactive layers. Alternatively, no inactive layer may be provided. However, by providing the inactive layers 44 and 45 on the pressure chamber 10 side of the layers including active layers, it is expected to further improve the deformation efficiency of the actuator unit 21.

[0091] Further, although the common electrodes are kept at the ground potential in the above-described embodiment, this feature is not limitative. The common electrodes may be kept at any potential as far as the potential is in common to all pressure chambers 10.

[0092] Further, in the above-described embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 4, trapezoidal actuator units 21 are arranged in two lines in a staggered shape. But, each actuator unit may not always be trapezoidal. Besides, actuator units may be arranged in a single line along the length of the passage unit. Alternatively, actuator units may be arranged in three or more lines in a staggered shape. Further, not one actuator unit 21 is disposed to extend over pressure chambers 10 but one actuator unit 21 may be provided for each pressure chamber 10.

[0093] Further, a large number of common electrodes 34a and 34b may be formed for each pressure chamber 10 so that a projection image of the common electrodes in the thickness of the common electrodes includes a pressure chamber region or the projection image is included within the pressure chamber region. Thus, each of the common electrodes 34a and 34b may not always be made of a single conductive sheet provided in the substantially whole region of each actuator unit 21. In such a case, however, the parts of each common electrode must be electrically connected with one another so that all the parts corresponding to the respective pressure chambers 10 are at the same potential.

Claims

1. An ink-jet head (1) including a passage unit (4) comprising:

a plurality of pressure chambers (10) each connected with a nozzle (8) and arranged in a matrix in a plane to form a plurality of pressure chamber rows (11a, 11b) in a first direction (A) in said plane; and
a plurality of common ink passages (5a) extending along said first direction (A) and communicating with said pressure chambers (10),

wherein said pressure chamber rows (11a, 11b) include first pressure chamber rows (11a) each constituted by pressure chambers (10a) each connected with a nozzle (8) deviated on one side of the respective pressure chamber with respect to a second direction crossing said first direction (A), and second pressure chamber rows (11b) each constituted by pressure chambers (10b) each connected with a nozzle (8) deviated on the other side of the respective pressure chamber with respect to said second direction, when viewing from a third direction perpendicular to said plane,

each of said common ink passages (5a) includes at least a boundary region between one of said first pressure chamber rows (11a) and one of said second pressure chamber rows (11b) neighboring each other so that the nozzles (8) connected with the pressure chambers (10) in each of the first and second pressure chamber rows (11a, 11b) are disposed on different sides of a corresponding one of said common ink passages (5a) from each other when viewing from said third direction, said common ink passages (5a) not overlapping any of said nozzles (8),

said first pressure chamber rows (11a) and said second pressure chamber rows (11b) are alternately arranged two by two,

said ink-jet head (1) further includes a base block (138) including an ink reservoir (3) and an actuator unit (21) applying pressure to said pressure chambers (10), said actuator unit (21) being disposed between said base block (138) and said passage unit (4), and

a flexible printed circuit (136) is provided between said base block (138) and said actuator unit (21), connected to said actuator unit (21).

2. The ink-jet head according to claim 1,
wherein each of said common ink passage (5a) overlaps most part of the whole area of each of said pressure chambers (10) constituting a pair of neighboring first and second pressure chamber rows (11a, 11b) with respect to said third direction.

3. The ink-jet head according to claim 1 or 2,
wherein a line connecting a portion communicating with said nozzle (8) and a portion communicating with a corresponding one of the common ink passages (5a) in each of said pressure chambers (10) is substantially in parallel with said plane.

4. The ink-jet head according to one of claims 1 to 3,
wherein said passage unit (4) is formed with a plurality of sheet members (22-30) laminated to each other.

5. The ink-jet head according to one of claims 1 to 4,
wherein each of the pressure chambers (10) has a substantially parallelogrammic shape when viewing from the third direction.

6. An ink-jet printer including an ink-jet head, as claimed in one of claims 1 to 5.

7. An ink-jet head comprising:

a plurality of nozzles (8) for ejecting ink;
a plurality of pressure chamber columns each constituted by a plurality of pressure chambers (10) each having a substantially parallelogrammic shape in a plan view and arranged adjacent to each other, each of said pressure chambers (10) connected with one of said nozzles (8); and
first and second common ink passages (5a) disposed in parallel with each other so as to extend over said plurality of pressure chamber columns, said first and second common ink passages (5a) communicating with said pressure chambers (10),
wherein said pressure chamber columns comprise:
a first pressure chamber (10) communicating with said first common ink passage (5a) at its one acute portion and with a first nozzle (8) at its other acute portion;
a second pressure chamber (10) neighboring said first pressure chamber (10) on the side of said acute portion communicating with said first nozzle (8), said second pressure chamber (10) communicating with said first common ink passage (5a) at its one acute portion facing said first pressure chamber (10) and with a second nozzle (8) at its other acute portion;
a third pressure chamber (10) neighboring said second pressure chamber (10) on the side of said acute portion communicating with said second nozzle (8), said third pressure chamber (10) communicating with a third nozzle (8) at its one acute portion facing said second pressure chamber (10) and with said second common ink passage (5a) at its other acute portion; and
a fourth pressure chamber (10) neighboring said third pressure chamber (10) on the side of said acute portion communicating with said second common ink passage (5a), said fourth pressure chamber (10) communicating with a fourth nozzle (8) at its one acute portion facing said third pressure chamber (10) and with said second common ink passage (5a) at its other acute portion,
said first, second, third, and fourth nozzles (8) being disposed between said first and second common ink passages (5a) in a plane where said plurality of pressure chamber columns are formed,
wherein said ink-jet head (1) further includes a base block (138) including an ink reservoir (3) and an actuator unit (21) applying pressure to said pressure chambers (10), said actuator unit (21) being disposed between said base block (138) and said passage unit (4),
and wherein a flexible printed circuit (136) is provided between said base block (138) and said actuator unit (21), connected to said actuator unit (21).

8. The ink-jet head according to claim 7,
wherein an arrangement direction of said pressure chamber columns forms an acute angle with an extension direction (A) of said first and second common ink passages (5a), and neighboring projected lines of nozzles (8) onto a straight line along said extension direction (A) of said first and second common ink passages (5a) are at a predetermined interval.

9. The ink-jet head according to claim 8,
wherein said head comprises first and second pressure chamber groups each including a plurality of pressure chamber columns and disposed at an interval so as to overlap each other with respect to a direction perpendicular to said extension direction (A) of said first and second common ink passages (5a),
the number of pressure chambers (10) included in pressure chamber columns of each of said first and second pressure chamber groups in an overlapping portion is less than that in a non-overlapping portion, and the sum of pressure chambers (10) included in pressure chamber columns of said first and second pressure chamber groups in said overlapping portion is equal to the number of pressure chambers (10) included in pressure chamber columns in said non-overlapping portion.

10. An ink-jet head comprising:

a plurality of nozzles (8) for ejecting ink;
 a plurality of pressure chamber columns each constituted by a plurality of pressure chambers (10) each having a substantially parallelogrammic shape in a plan view and arranged adjacent to each other, each of said pressure chambers (10) connected with one of said nozzles (8); and
 5 first common ink passages (5a) disposed in parallel with each other so as to extend over said plurality of pressure chamber columns, said first common ink passages (5a) communicating with one of said pressure chambers (10), wherein said pressure chamber columns comprise:
 a first pressure chamber (10) communicating with a corresponding one of said first common ink passages (5a) at its one acute portion and with a first nozzle (8) at its other acute portion; and
 10 a second pressure chamber (10) neighboring said first pressure chamber (10) on the side of said acute portion communicating with said corresponding first common ink passage (5a), said second pressure chamber (10) communicating with said first common ink passage (5a) at its one acute portion facing said first pressure chamber (10) and with a second nozzle (8) at its other acute portion,
 15 wherein said first common ink passages (5a) are disposed between said first and second nozzles (8) in a plane where said plurality of pressure chamber columns are formed,
 wherein said ink-jet head (1) further includes a base block (138) including an ink reservoir (3) and an actuator unit (21) applying pressure to said pressure chambers (10), said actuator unit (21) being disposed between said base block (138) and said passage unit (4),
 20 and wherein a flexible printed circuit (136) is provided between said base block (138) and said actuator unit (21), connected to said actuator unit (21).

11. The ink-jet head according to claim 10,

wherein said head further comprises second common ink passages (5a) extending in parallel with said first common ink passages (5a), and

25 said pressure chamber columns further comprises:

a third pressure chamber (10) neighboring said second pressure chamber (10) on the side of said acute portion communicating with said second nozzle (8), said third pressure chamber (10) communicating with said first common ink passage (5a) at its one acute portion facing said second pressure chamber (10) and with a third
 30 nozzle (8) at its other acute portion; and
 a fourth pressure chamber (10) neighboring said third pressure chamber (10) on the side of said acute portion communicating with said third nozzle (8), said fourth pressure chamber (10) communicating with a fourth nozzle (8) at its one acute portion facing said third pressure chamber (10) and with a second common ink passage (5a) at its other acute portion.

12. The ink-jet head according to claim 11,

wherein an arrangement direction of said pressure chamber columns forms an acute angle with an extension direction (A) of said first and second common ink passages (5a), and neighboring projected lines of nozzles (8) onto a straight line along said extension direction (A) of said first and second common ink passages (5a) are at a predetermined
 40 interval.

13. An ink-jet head comprising:

a plurality of nozzles (8) for ejecting ink;
 45 a plurality of common ink passages (5a; 15a) extending in parallel with each other;
 a plurality of pressure chambers (10) each having a substantially parallelogrammic shape with corners rounded in a plan view, each of said pressure chambers (10) having its one end communicating with one of said nozzles (8) and its other end communicating with one of said common ink passages (5a; 15a);
 50 a plurality of parallelogrammic regions (10x) each having a substantially similar shape in a plan view to that of said pressure chambers (10) and including one of said pressure chambers (10), said parallelogrammic regions (10x) being arranged two-dimensionally; and
 an actuator unit (21) for generating pressure in one of said pressure chambers (10) so that ink supplied through one of said common ink passages (5a; 15a) is ejected through one of said nozzles (8), wherein:
 55 said plurality of parallelogrammic regions (10x) comprise a first parallelogrammic region having a first nozzle (8) at one acute portion, a second parallelogrammic region neighboring said first parallelogrammic region on the first nozzle side and having a second nozzle (8) at an acute portion on the opposite of the side facing said first parallelogrammic region, a third parallelogrammic region neighboring said second parallelogrammic region on the second nozzle side and having a third nozzle (8) at an acute portion on the side facing said second

parallelogrammic region, and a fourth parallelogrammic region neighboring said third parallelogrammic region on the side opposite to the third nozzle and having a fourth nozzle (8) at an acute portion on the side facing said third parallelogrammic region, wherein said first, second, third, and forth parallelogrammic regions are arranged neighboring each other in a direction at an acute angle with an extension direction (A) of said common ink passages (5a; 15a) so as to share one of its hypotenuses with each other;
 each of said common ink passages (5a; 15a) are disposed close to at least one of said first and fourth nozzles (8);
 said ink-jet head (1) further includes a base block (138) including an ink reservoir (3) and an actuator unit (21) applying pressure to said pressure chambers (10), said actuator unit (21) being disposed between said base block (138) and said passage unit (4); and
 a flexible printed circuit (136) is provided between said base block (138) and said actuator unit (21), connected to said actuator unit (21).

14. The ink-jet head according to claim 13,
 wherein projected lines of said first, second, third, and fourth nozzles (8) onto a straight line along said extension direction (A) of said common ink passages (5a; 15a) do not overlap each other, and the projected lines of said first and third nozzles (8) are at the same interval as the projected lines of said second and fourth nozzles (8).

15. The ink-jet head according to claim 13 or 14,
 wherein one or more parallelogrammic region groups are in a band region (R), said band region (R) having a predetermined width in said extension direction (A) of said common ink passages (5a; 15a) and extending along a direction perpendicular to said extension direction (A) of said common ink passages (5a; 15a), and neighboring projected lines of nozzles (8) belonging to each of said parallelogrammic region groups onto a straight line along said extension direction (A) of said common ink passages (5a; 15a) are at an interval corresponding to a resolution upon printing.

FIG. 1

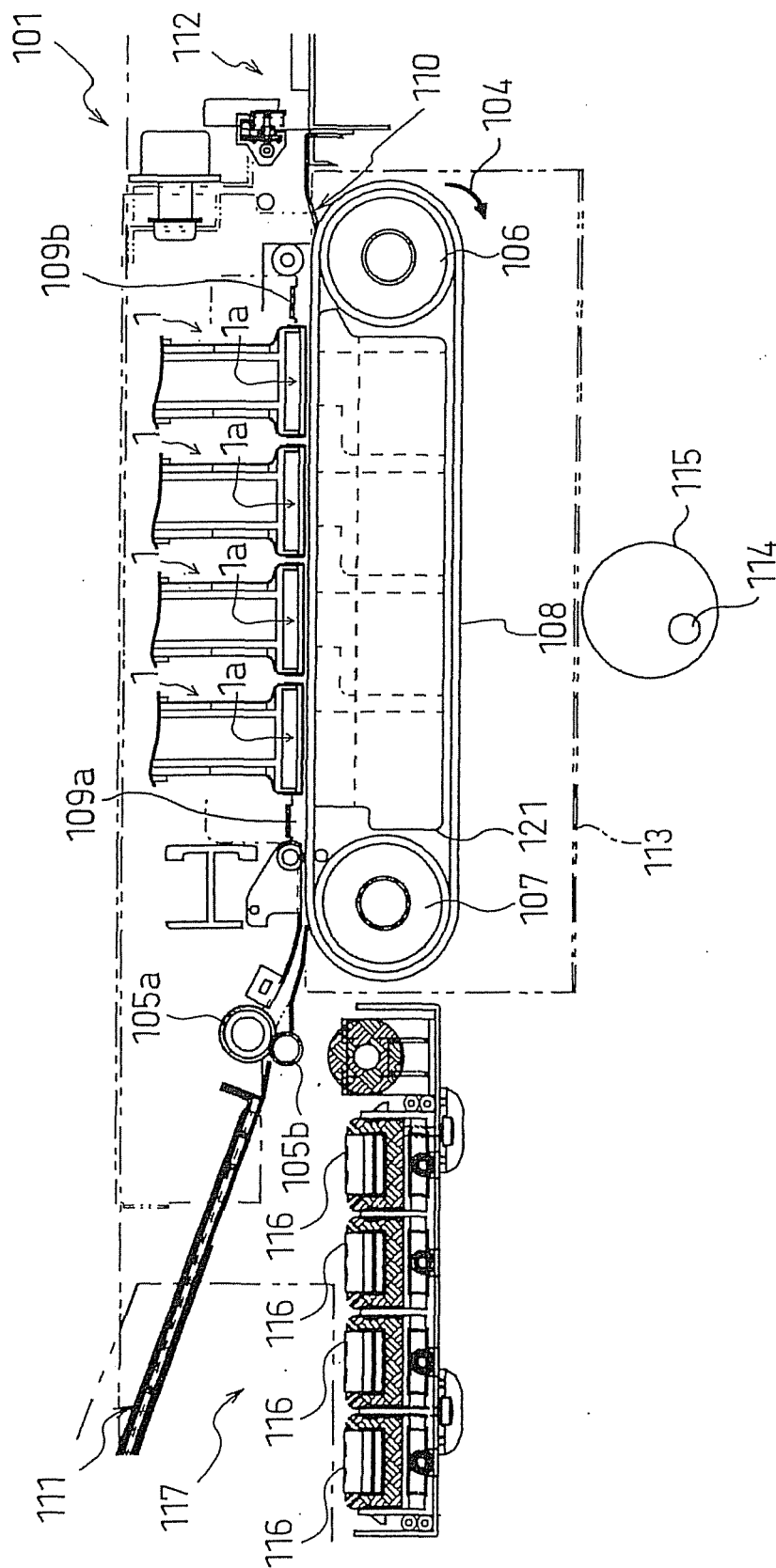


FIG. 2

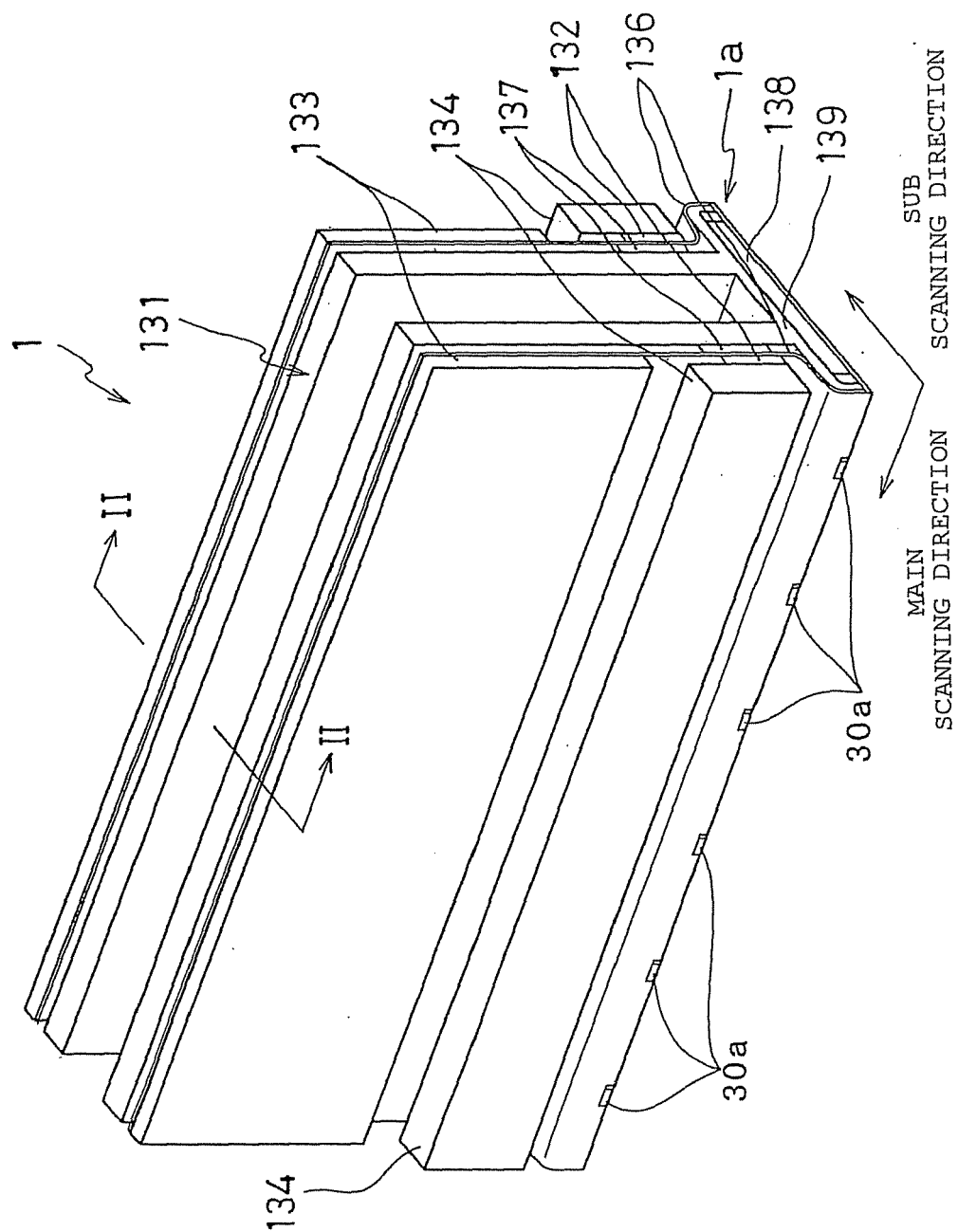


FIG. 3

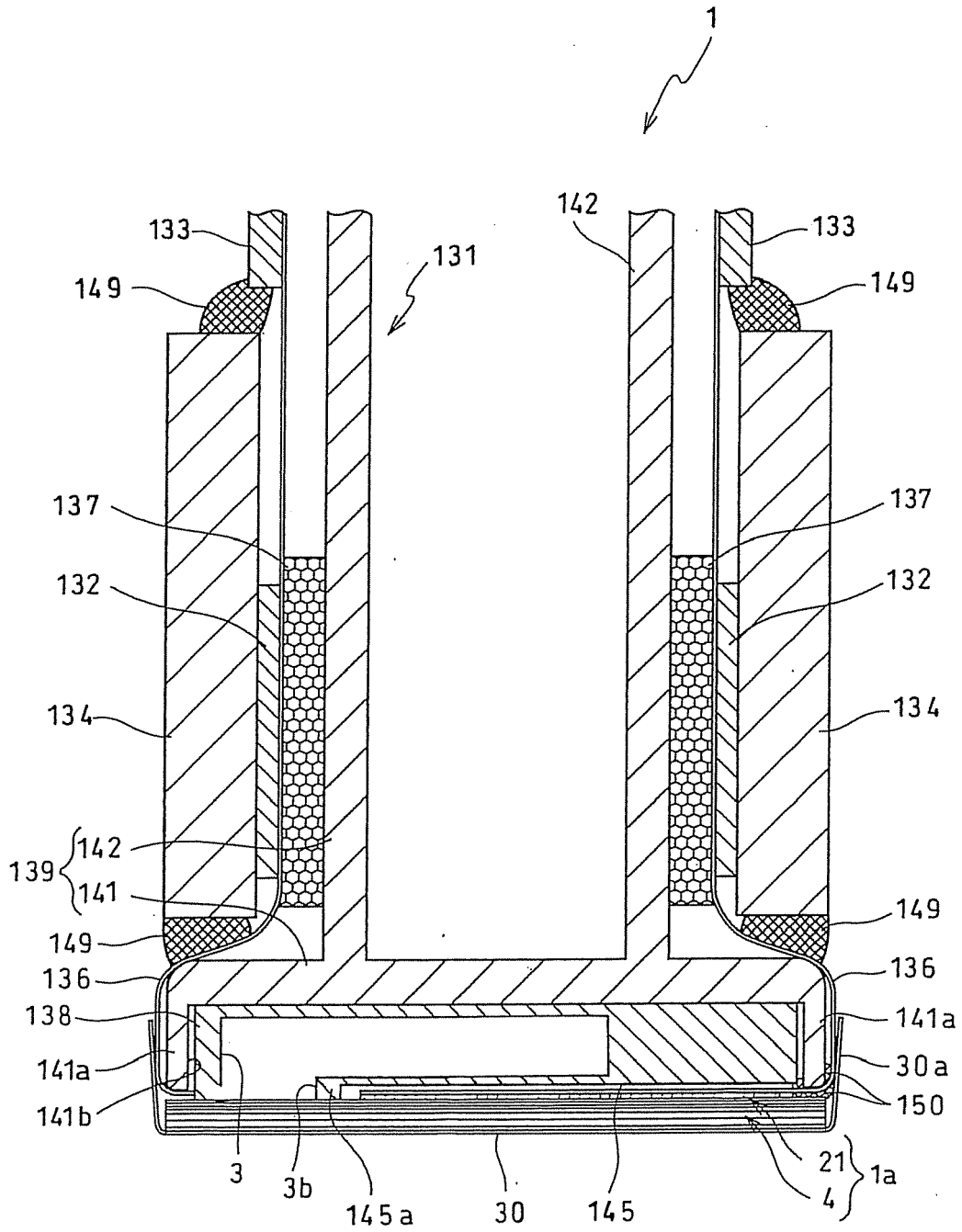


FIG. 4

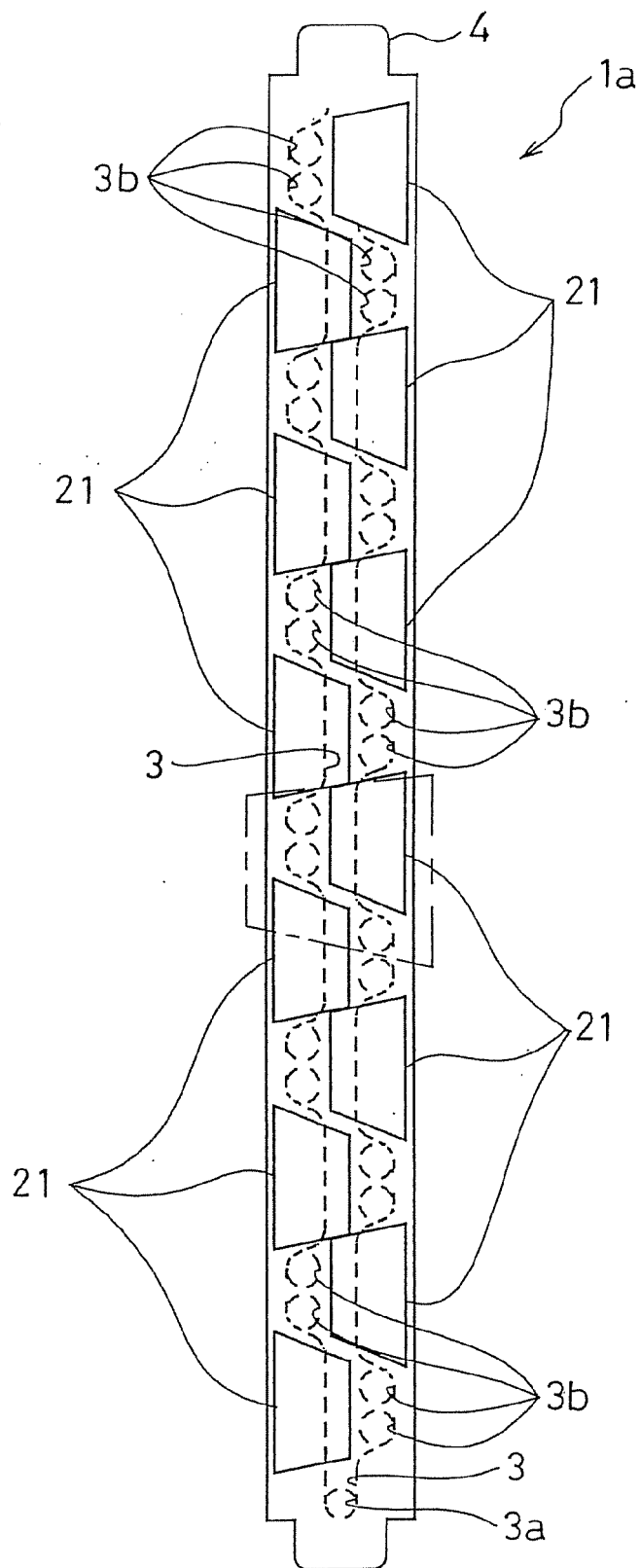


FIG. 5

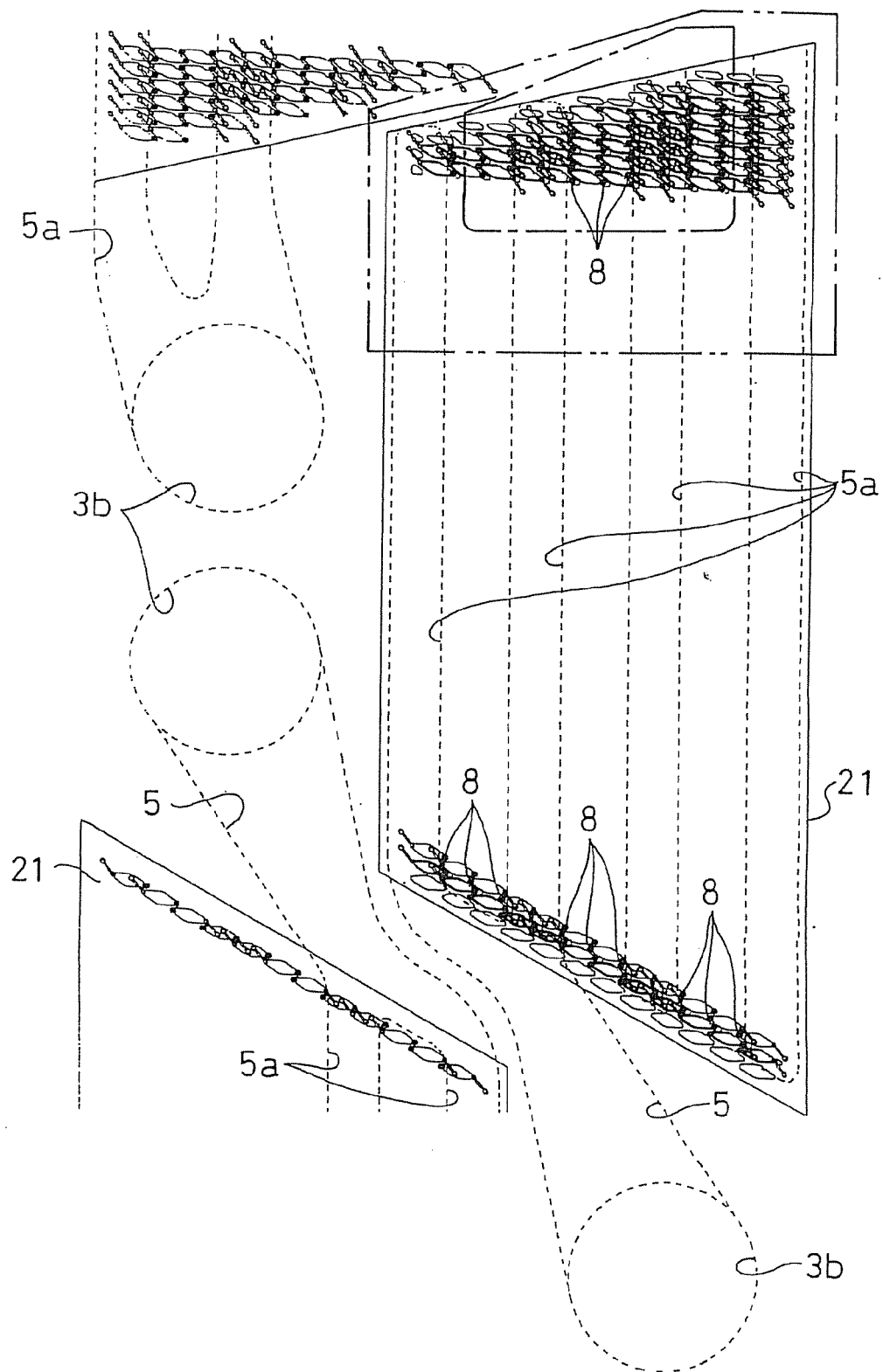


FIG.6

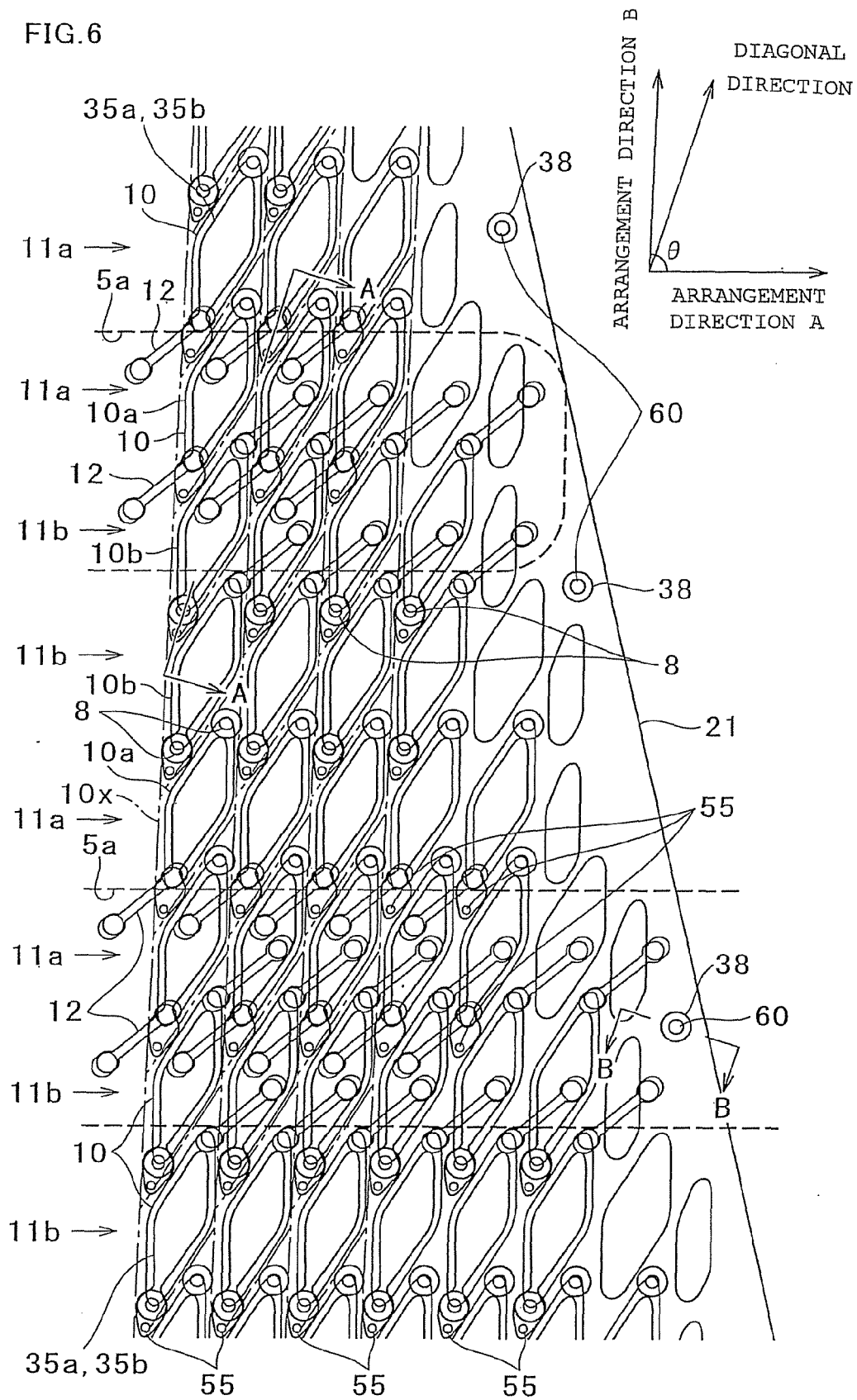


FIG. 7

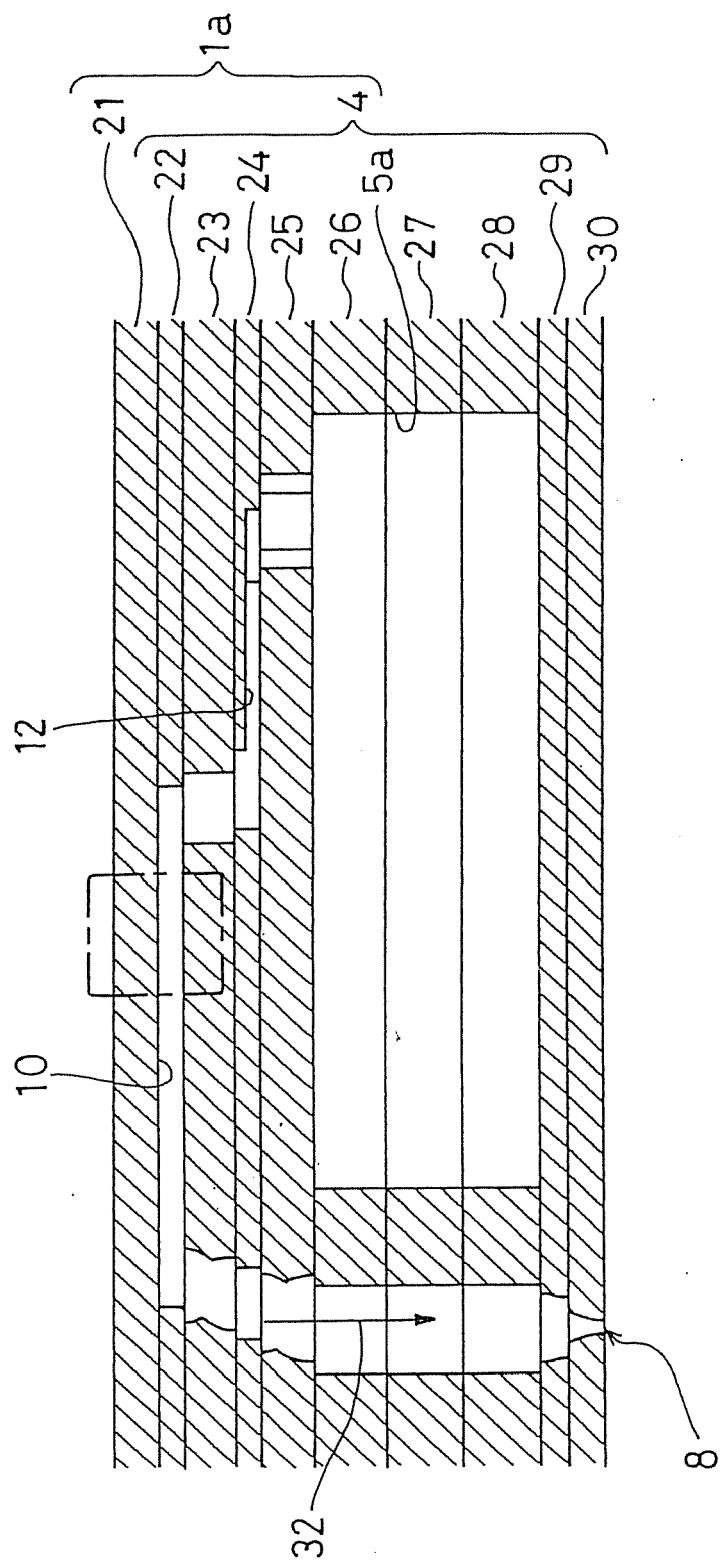


FIG.8

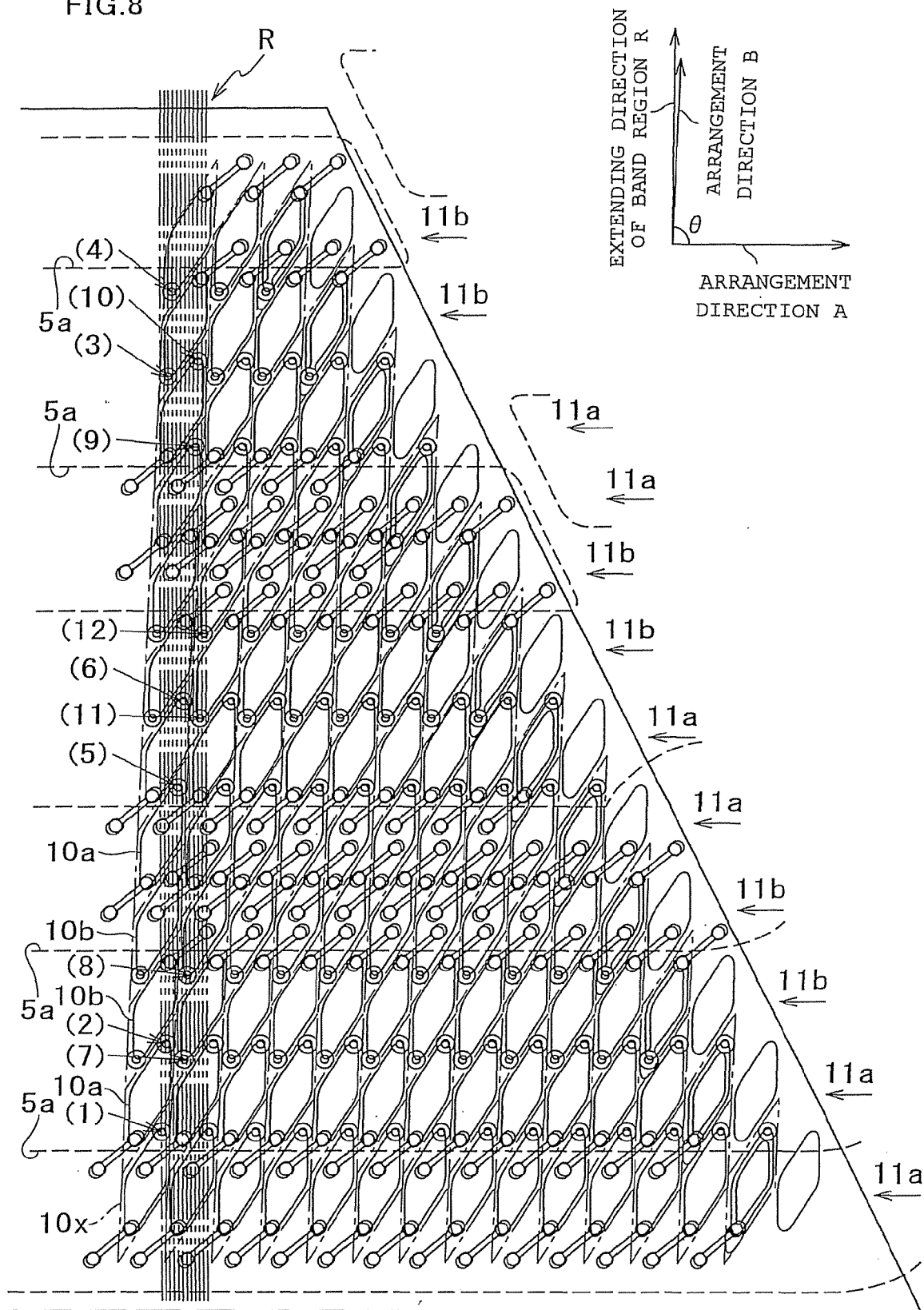


FIG. 9

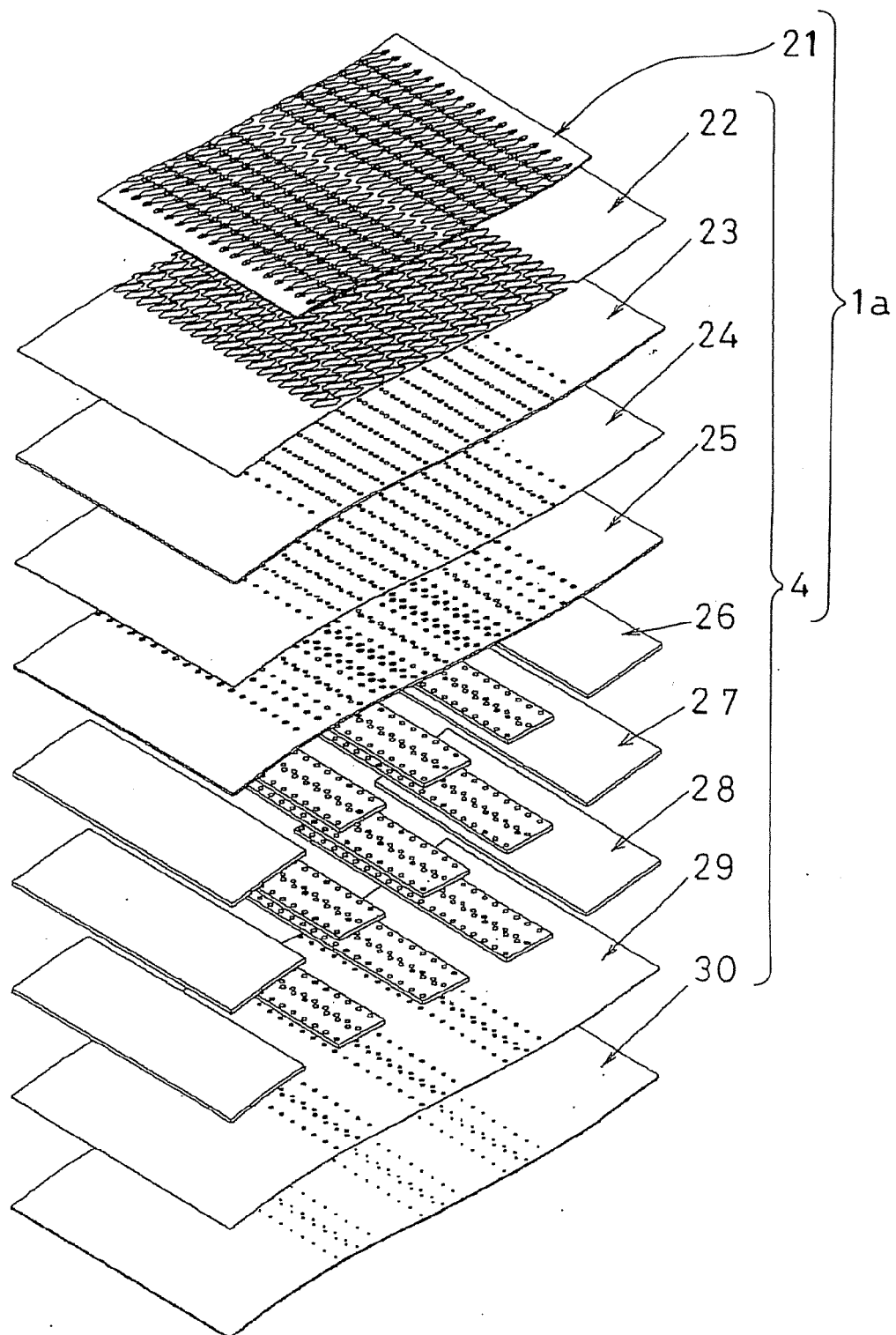


FIG. 10

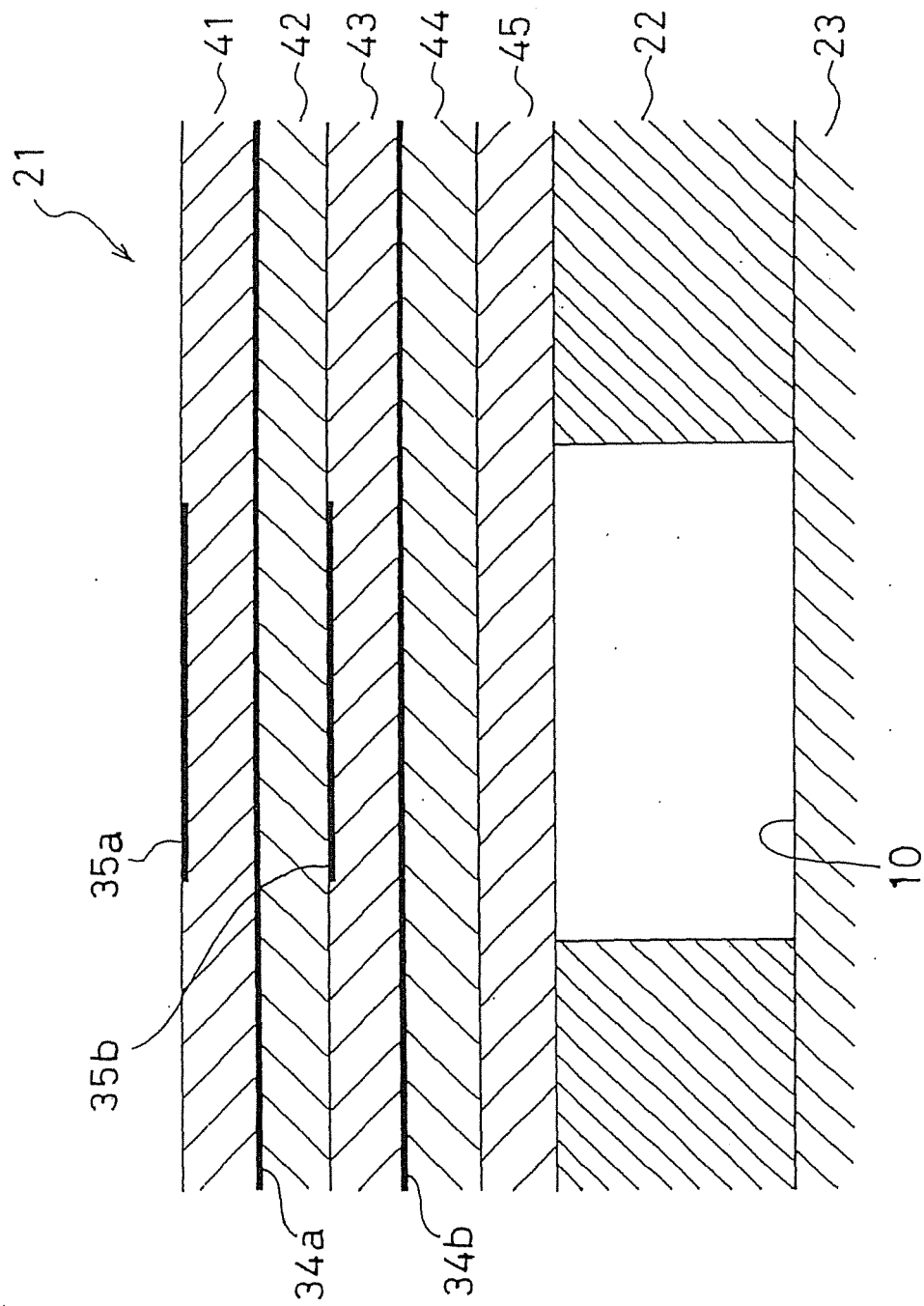


FIG. 11

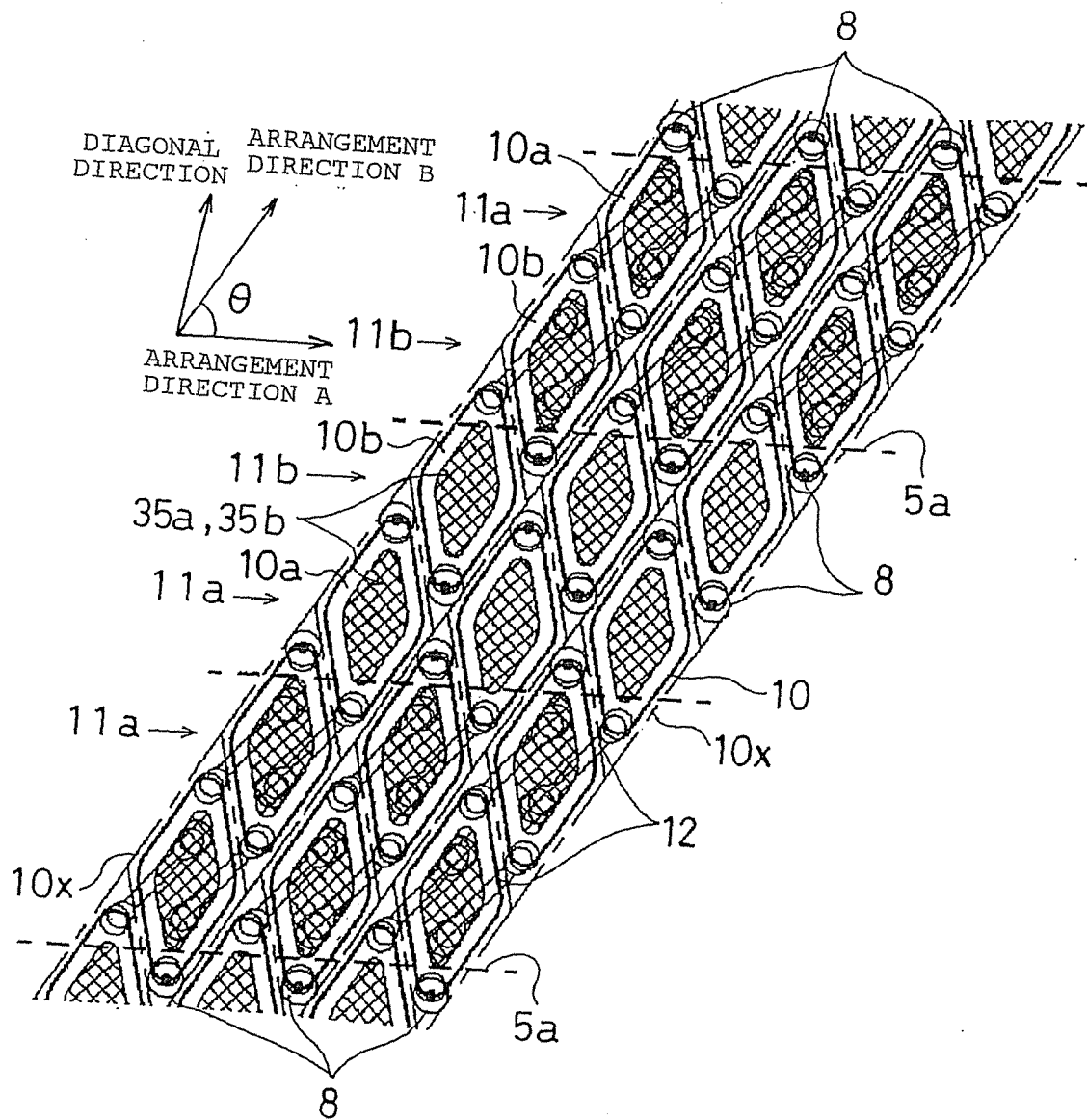
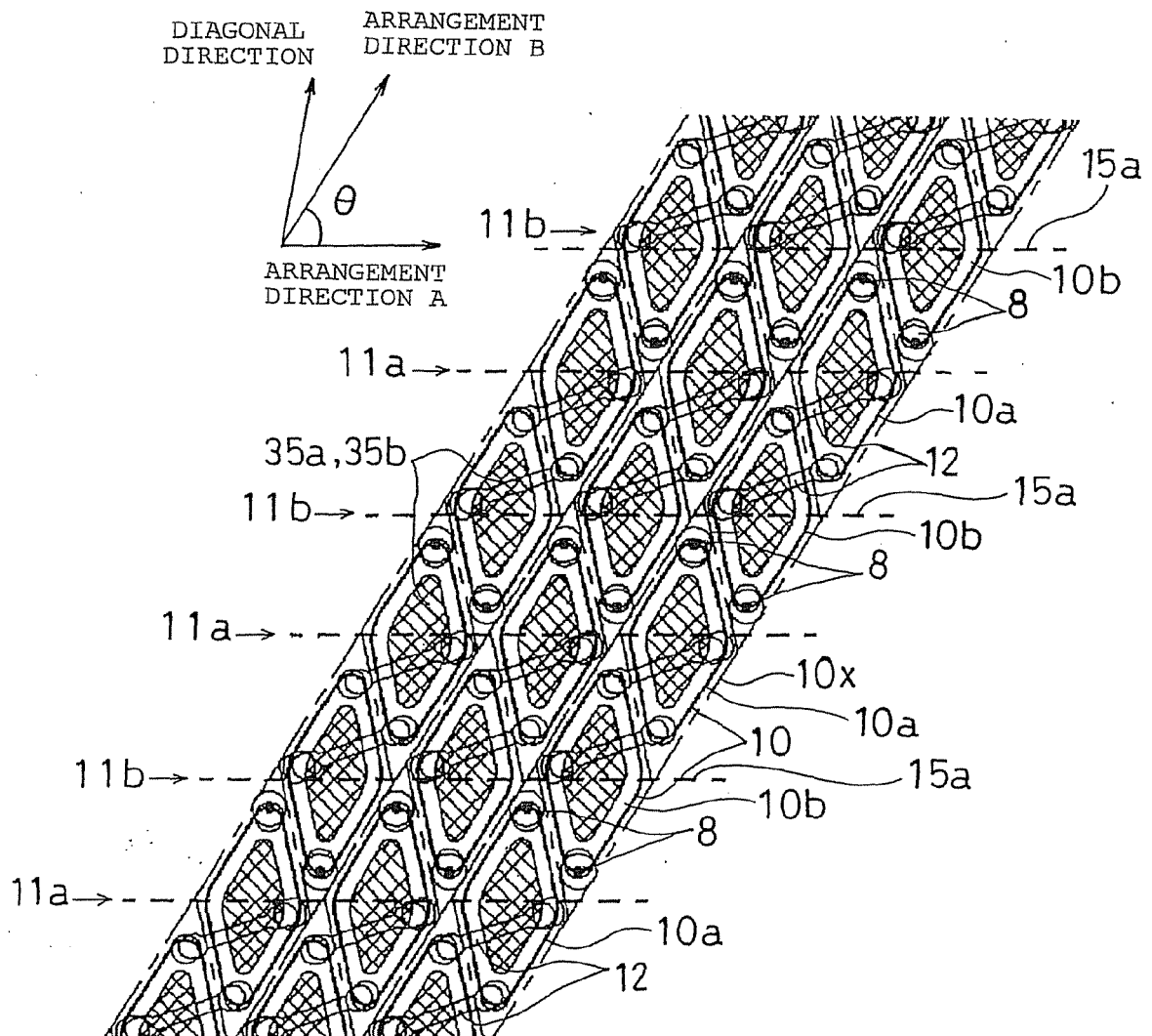


FIG. 12



REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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Patent documents cited in the description

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