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(54) **LINEAR MOTION MECHANISM FORMED INTEGRALLY**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A linear motion mechanism with precise linear motion has structural robustness and allows easy reduction in weight and size, simple production and easy operation. The linear motion mechanism includes: an elastic arrangement which is arranged to transform an input direction and an input displacement to an output direction and an output displacement, wherein the output direction is orthogonal to the input direction; an operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic arrangement in the input direction by the input displacement; and a movable member fixed to the elastic arrangement to move in the output direction by the output displacement.

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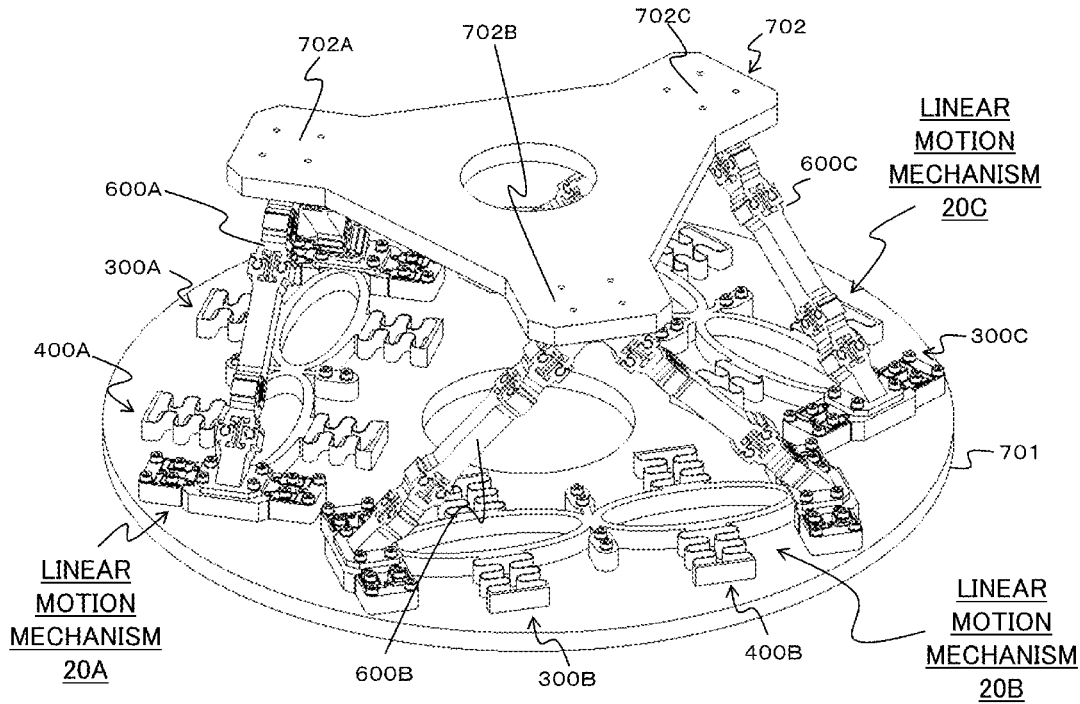
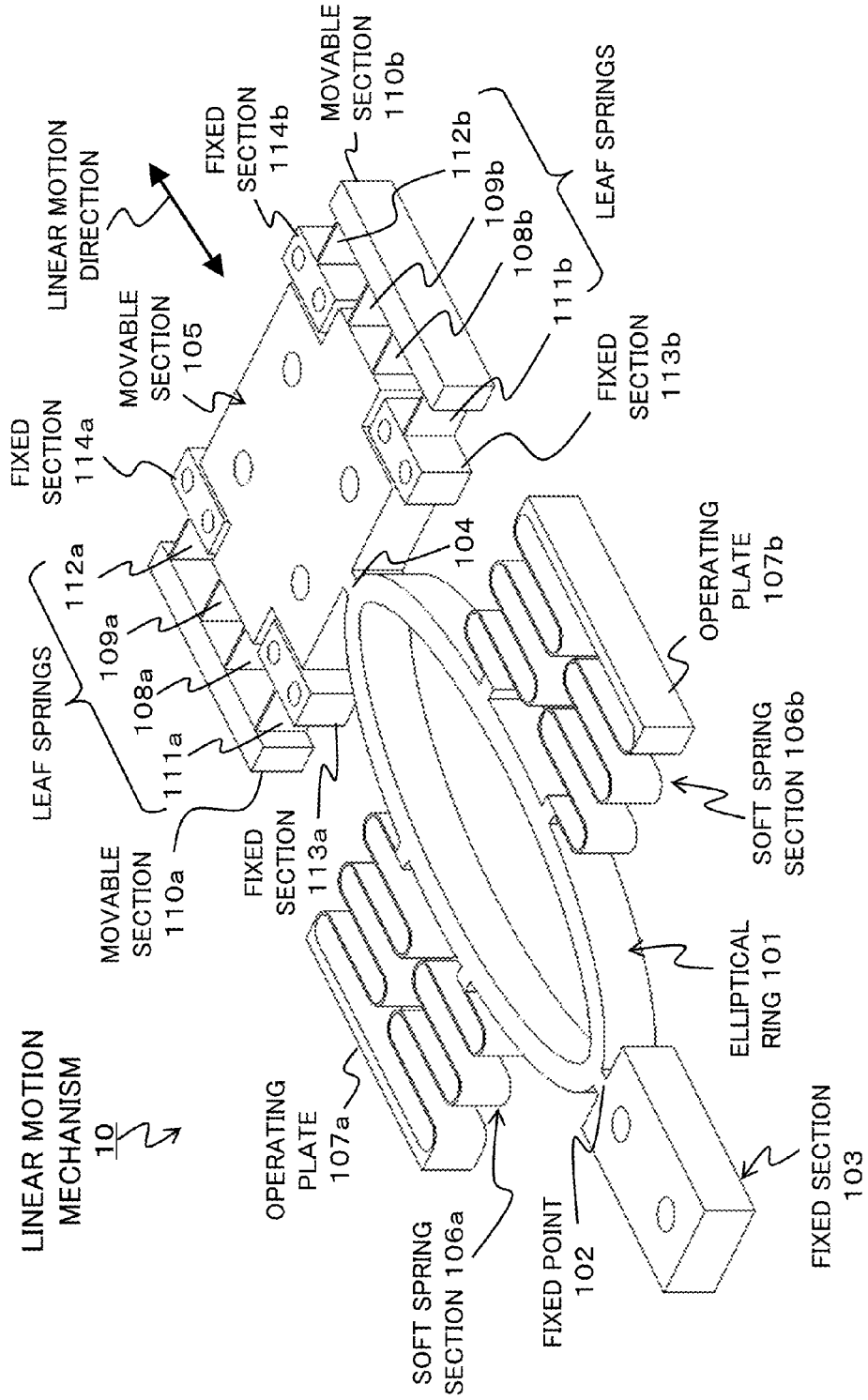


FIG. 1 FIRST EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENT



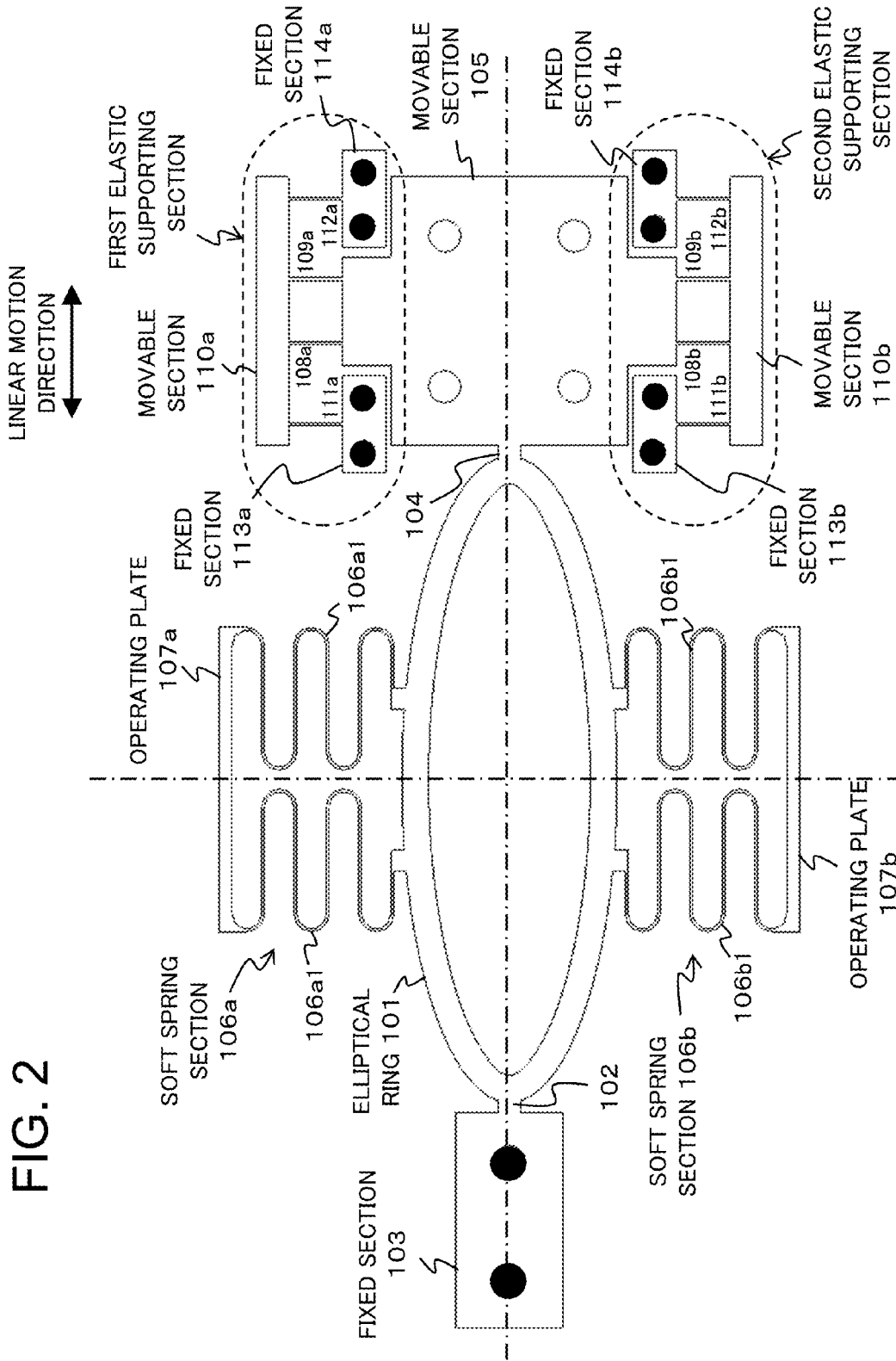
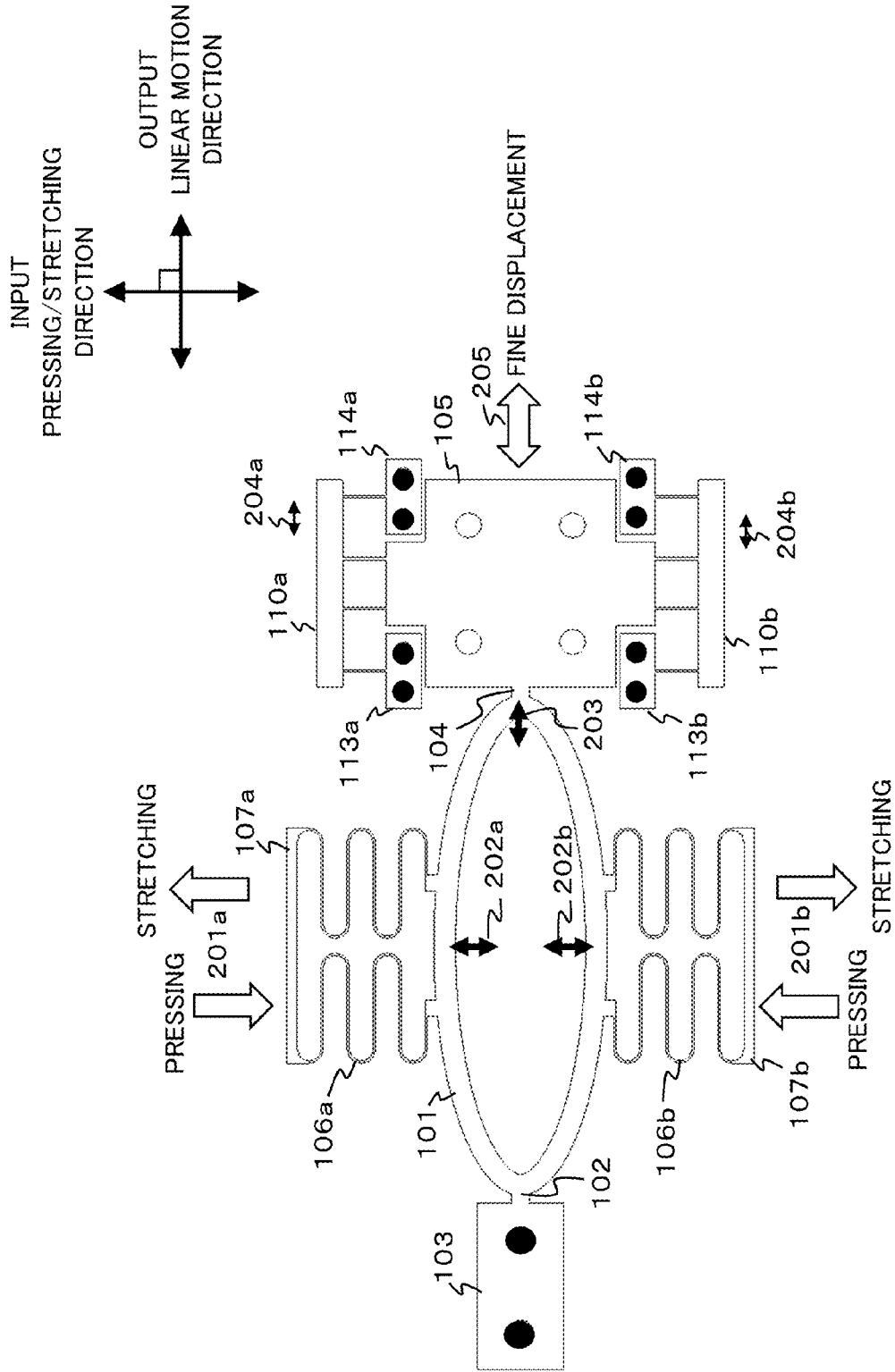


FIG. 3



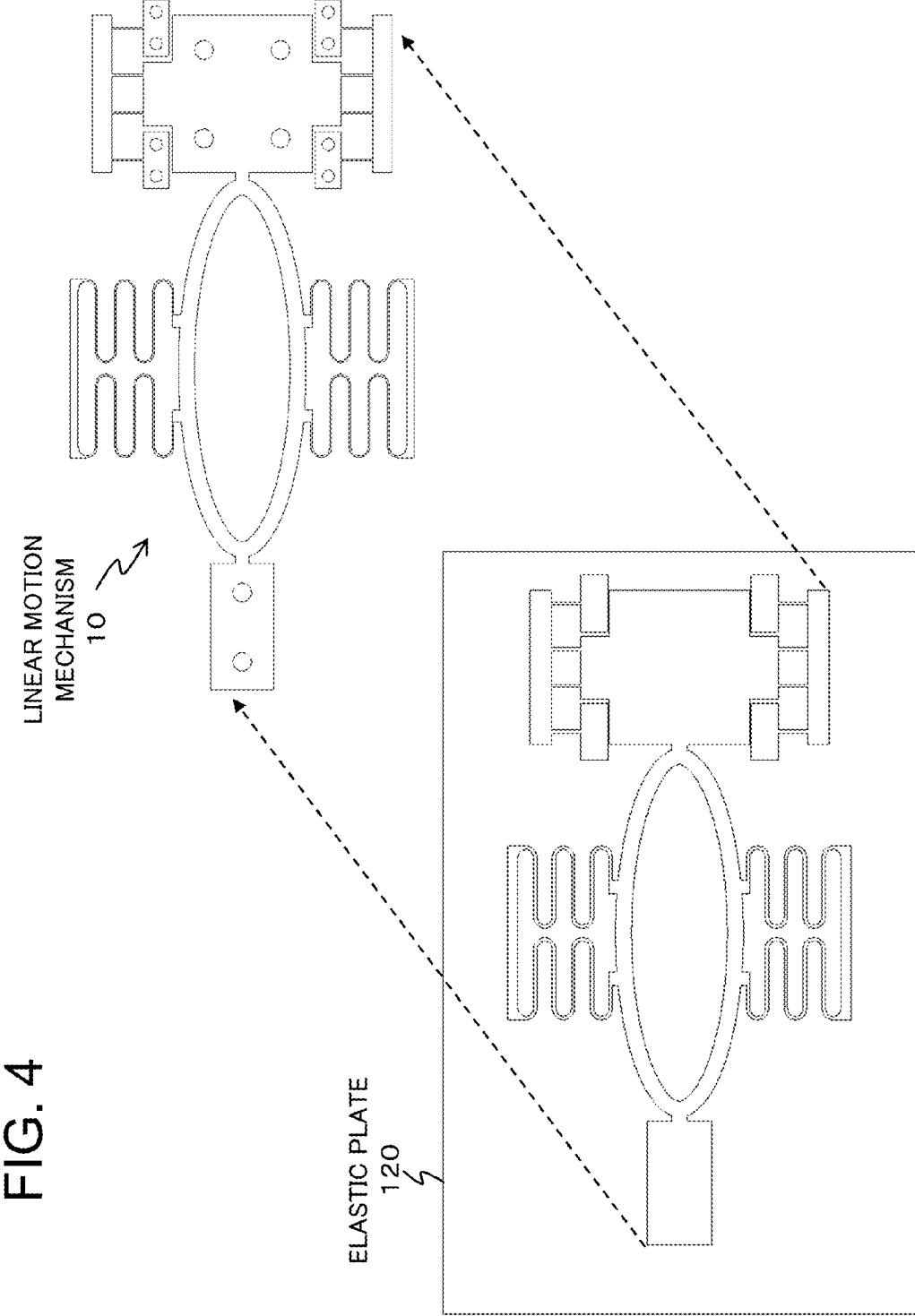


FIG. 4

FIG. 5 SECOND EXAMPLARY EMBODIMENT

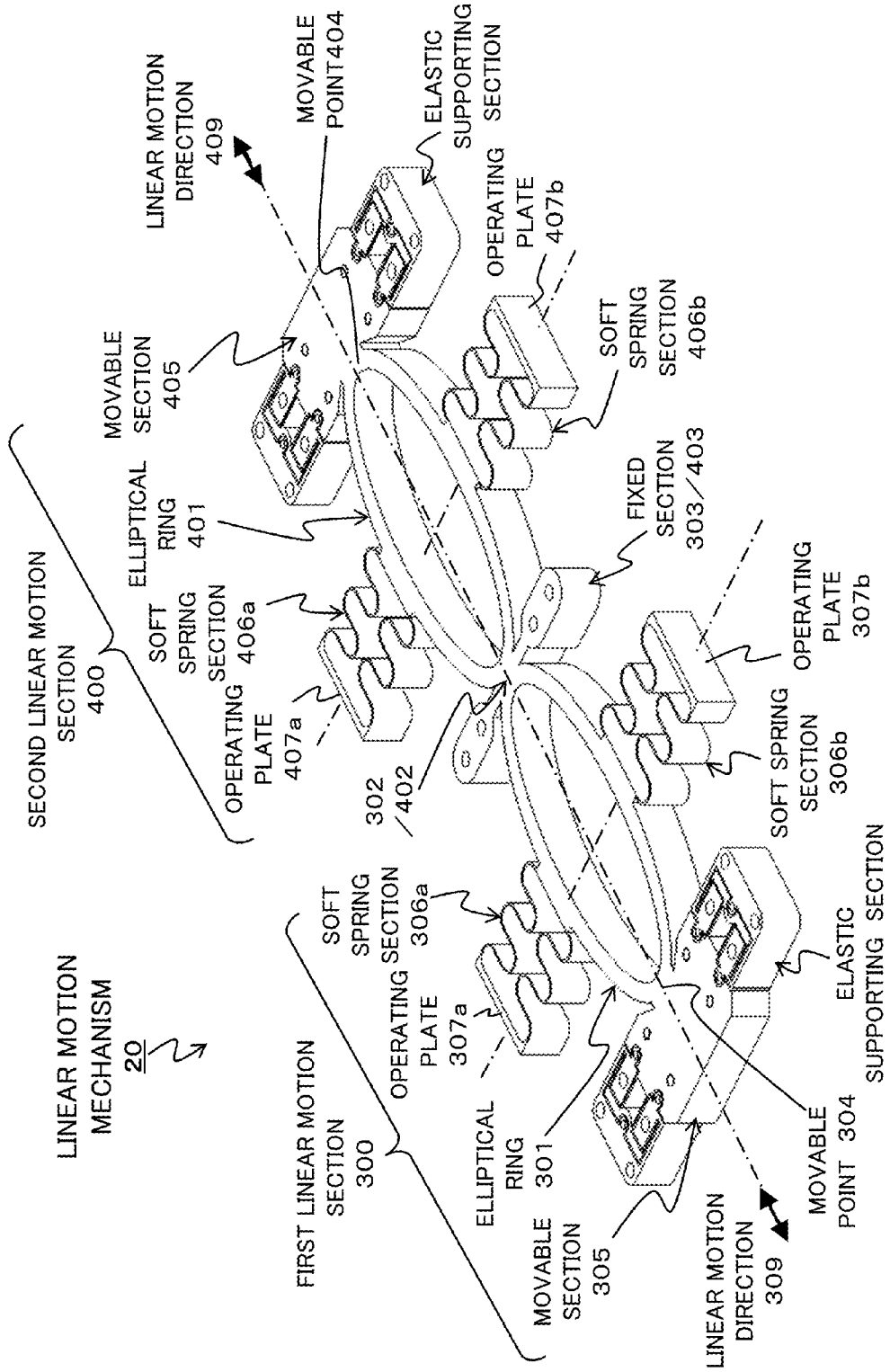


FIG. 6

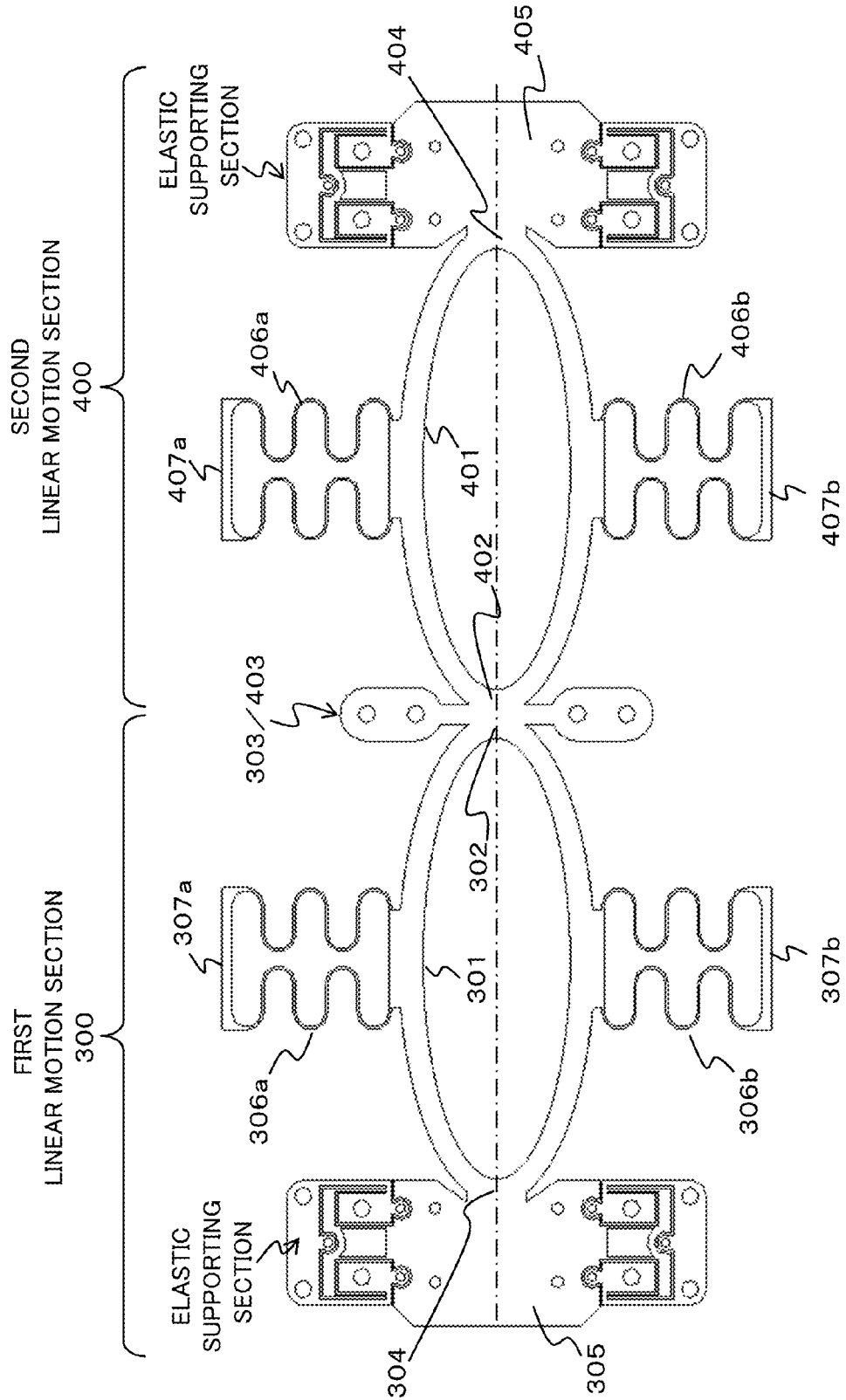


FIG. 7

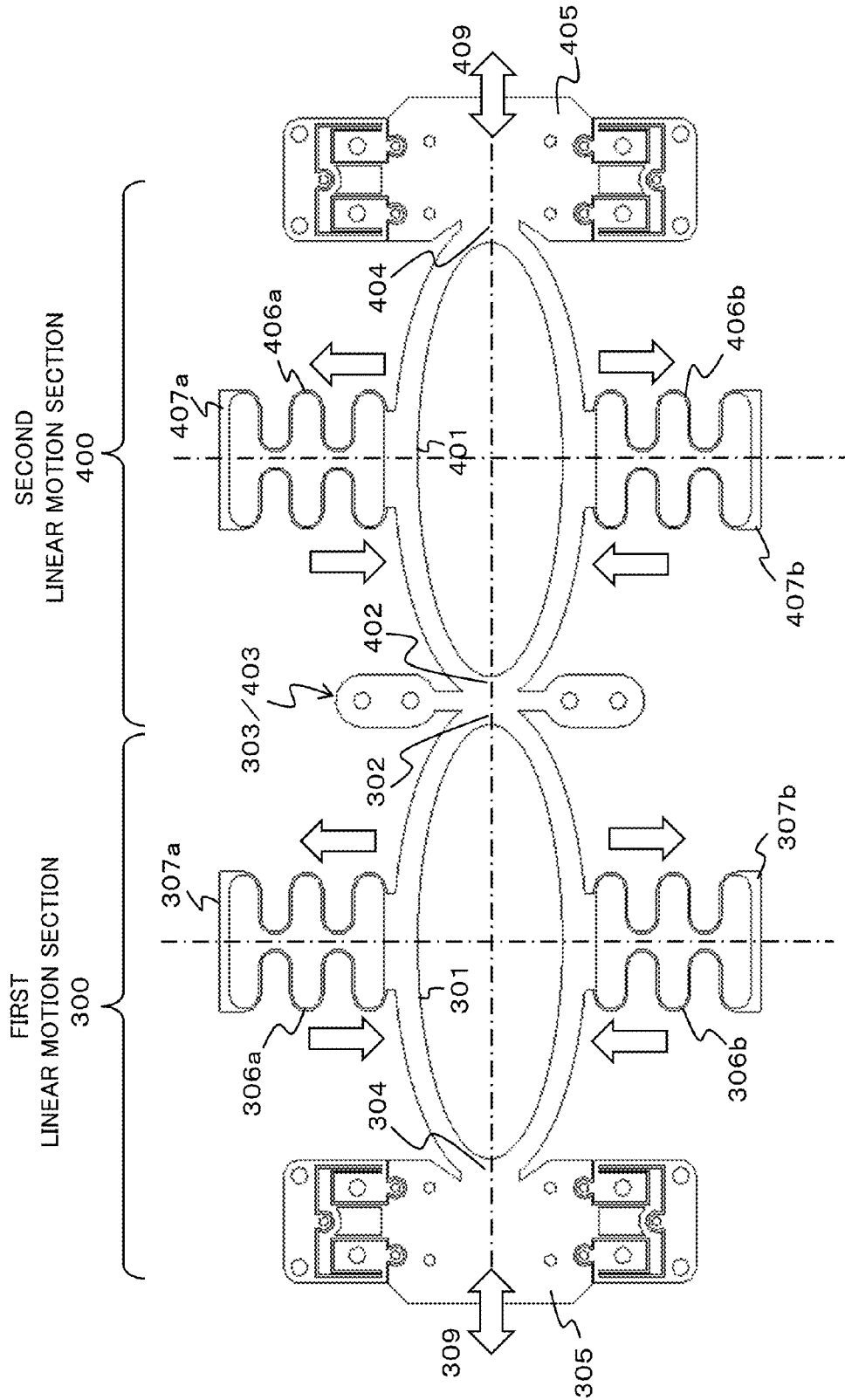


FIG. 8

FIRST APPLICATION

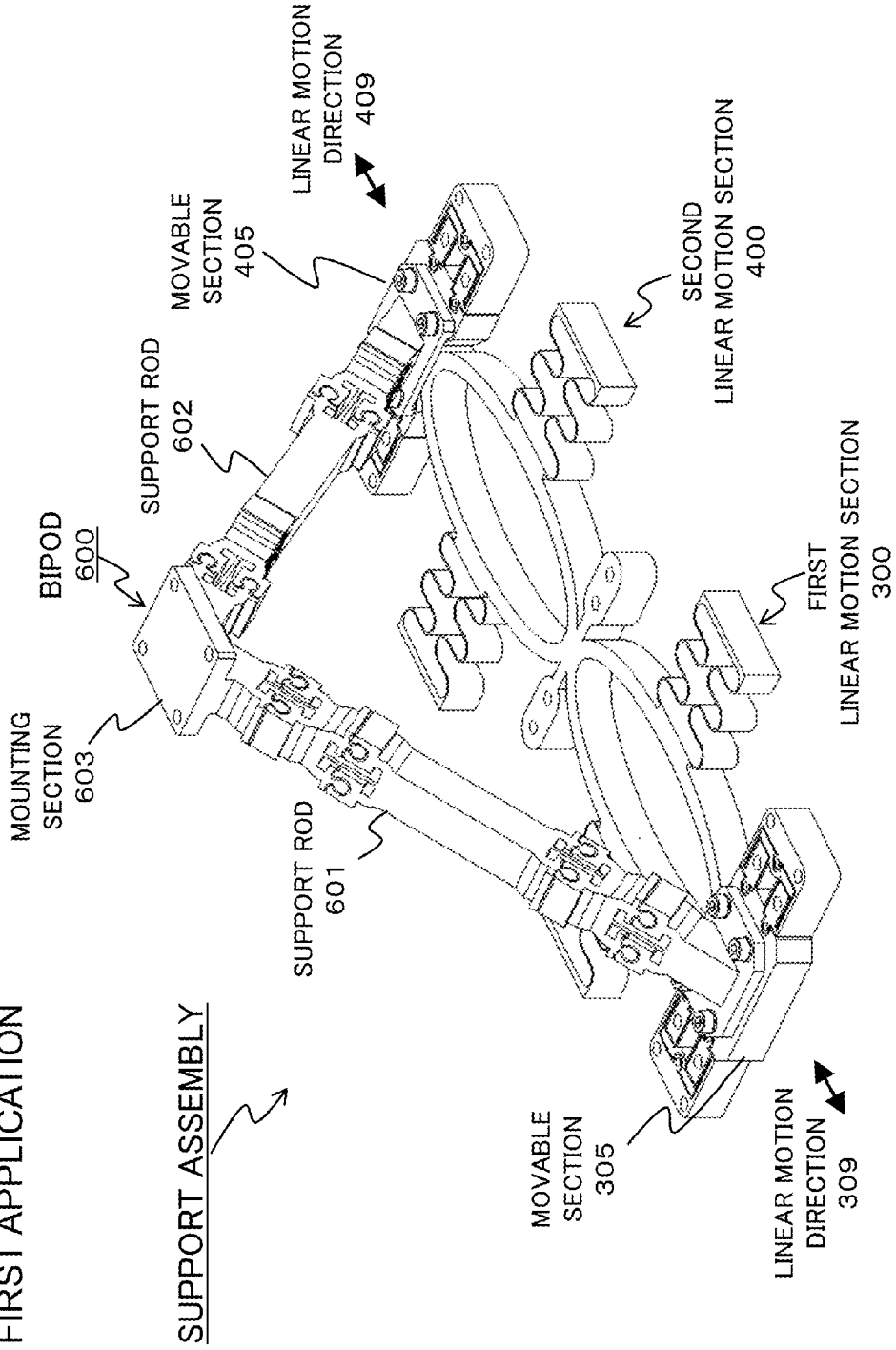


FIG. 9

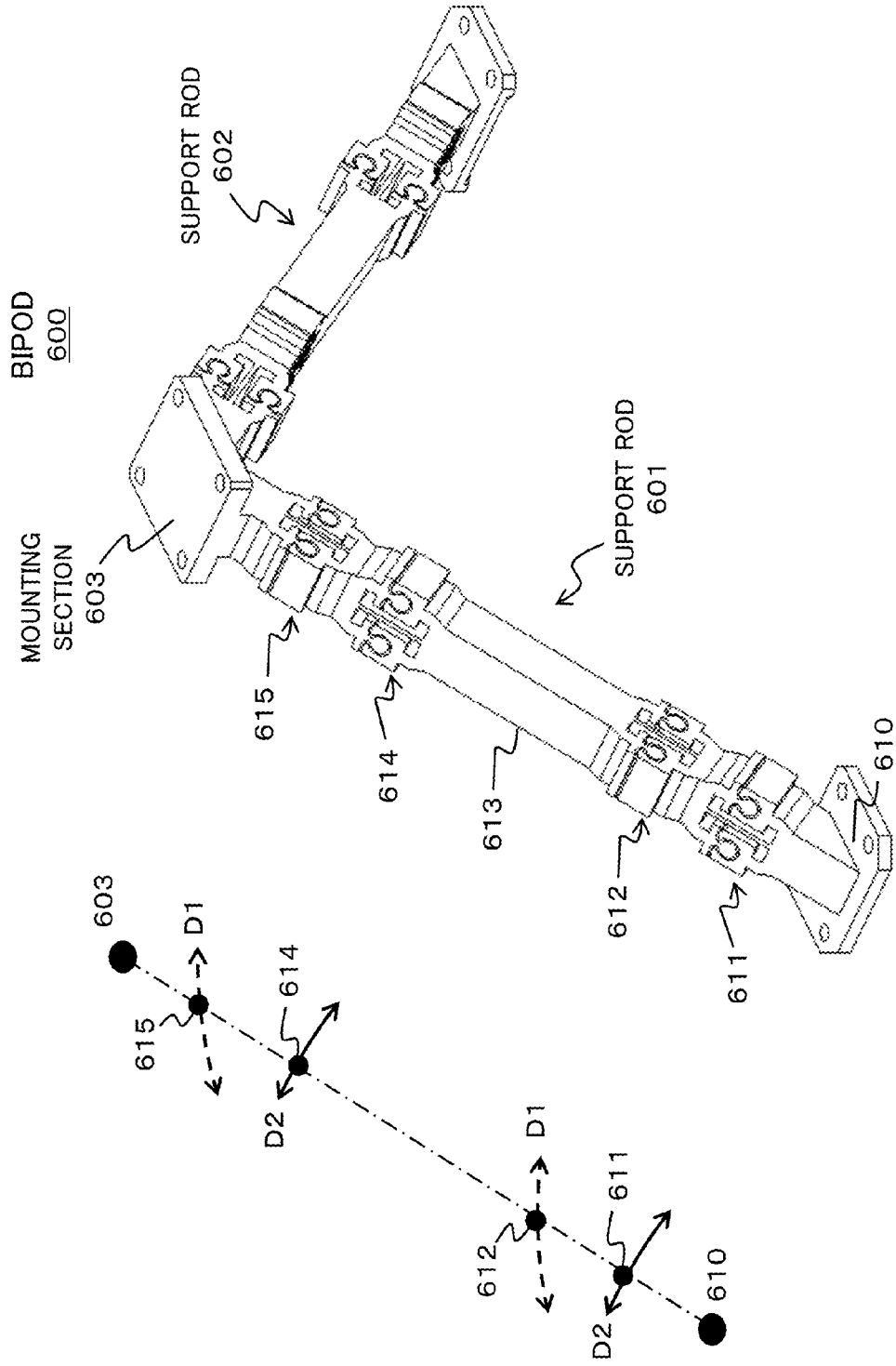


FIG. 10

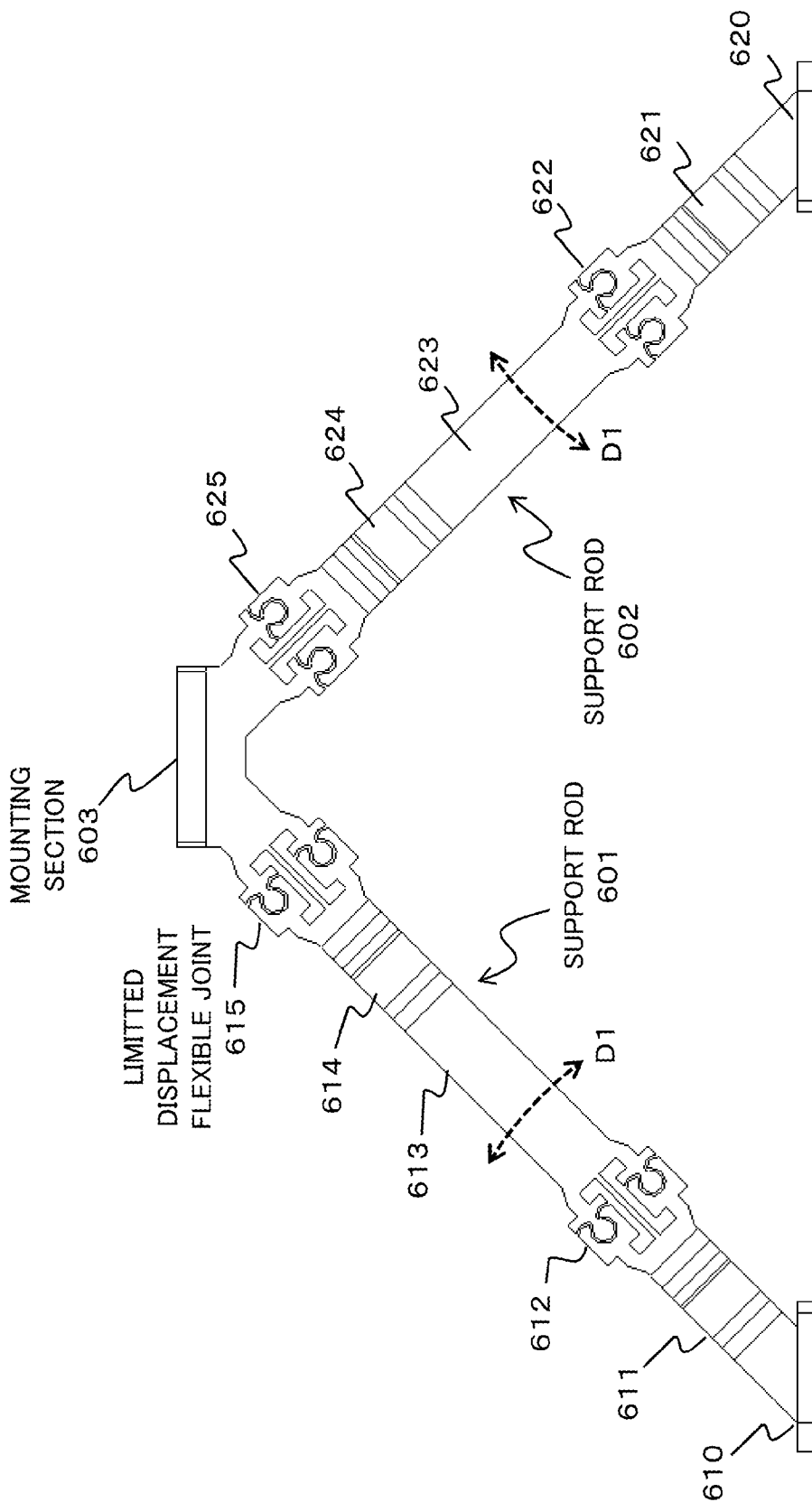


FIG. 11

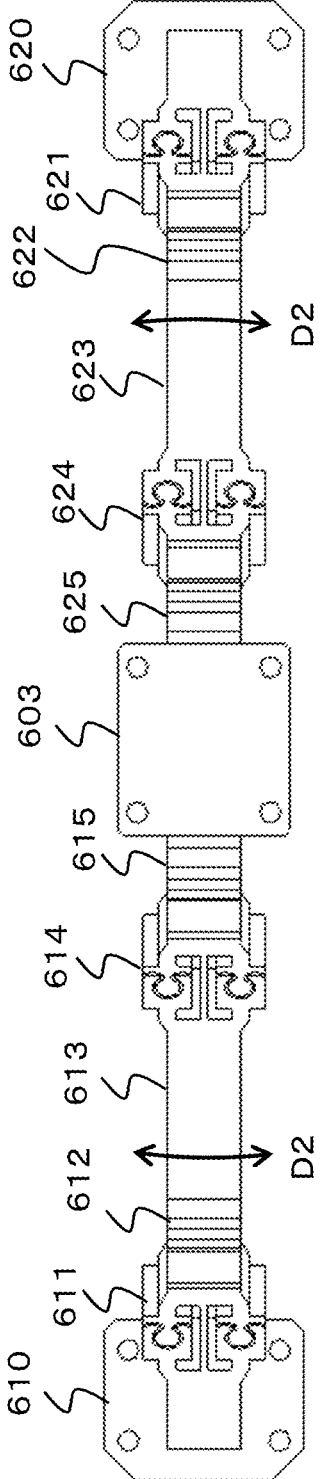


FIG. 12

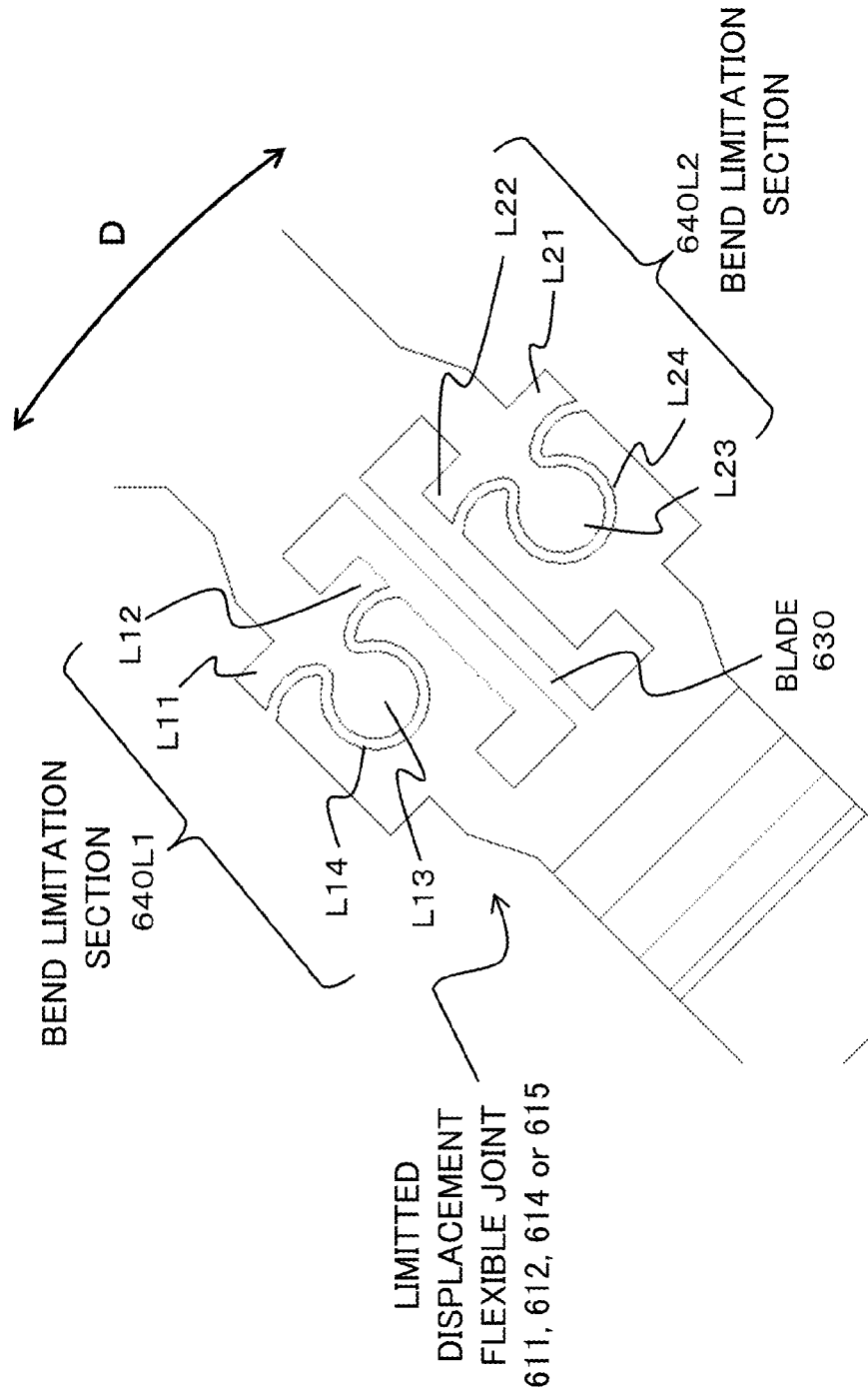


FIG. 13

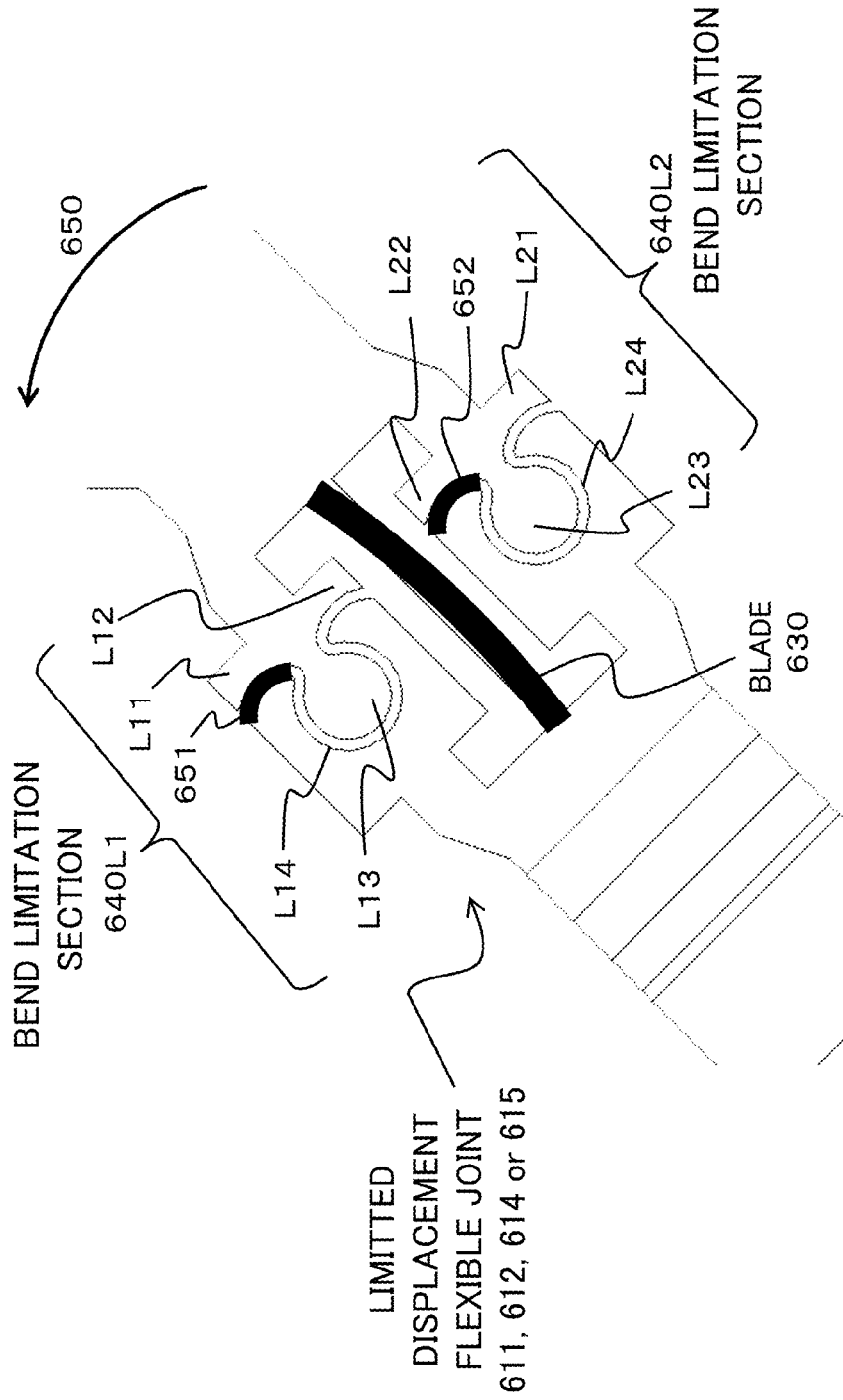


FIG. 14

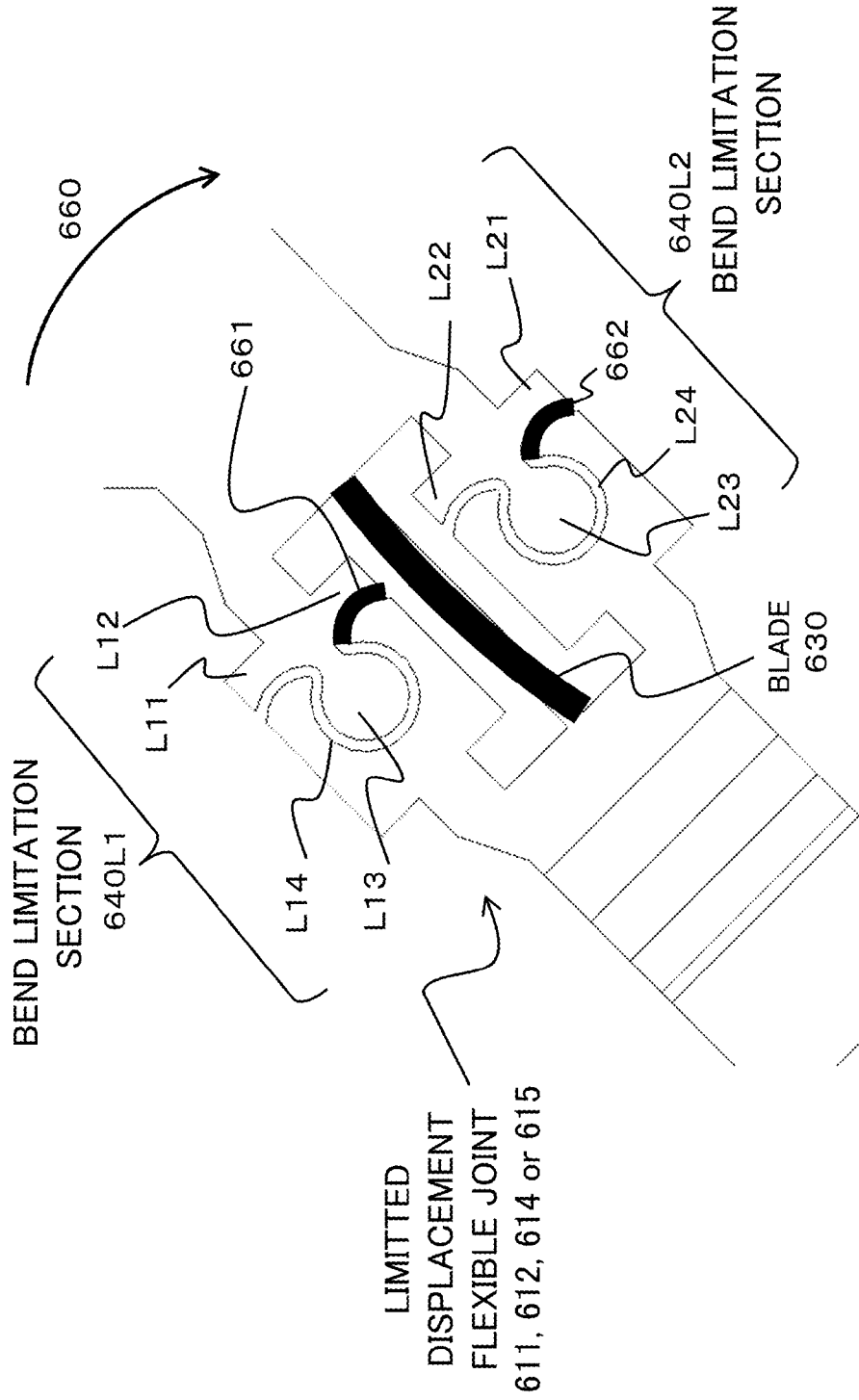


FIG. 15

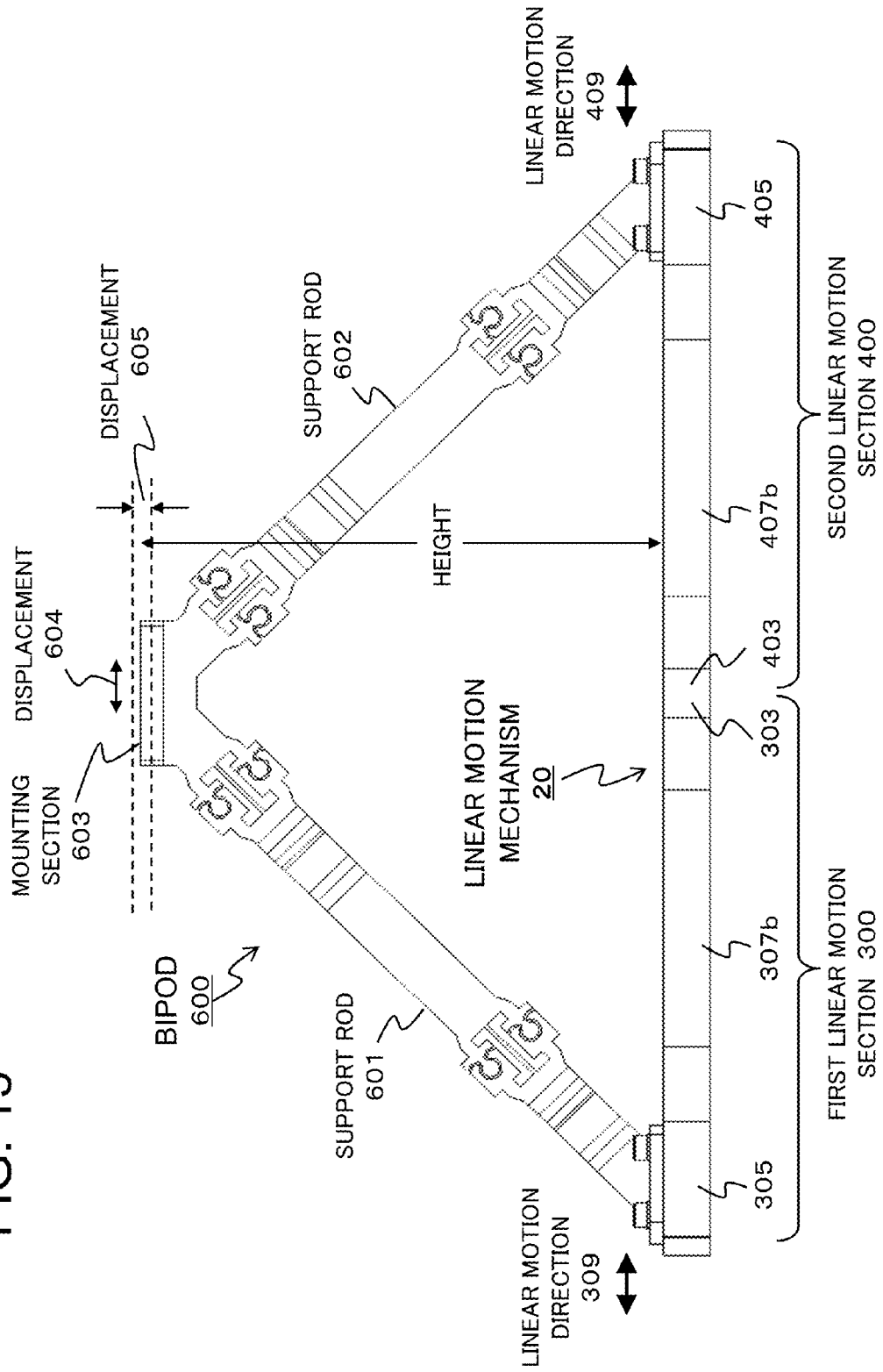


FIG. 16B

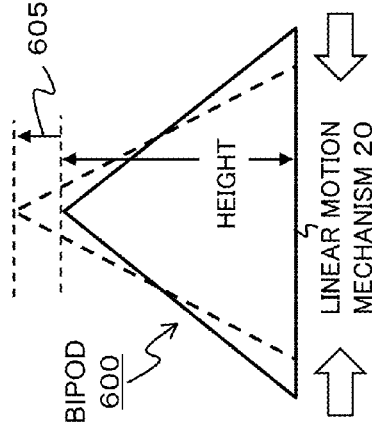


FIG. 16D

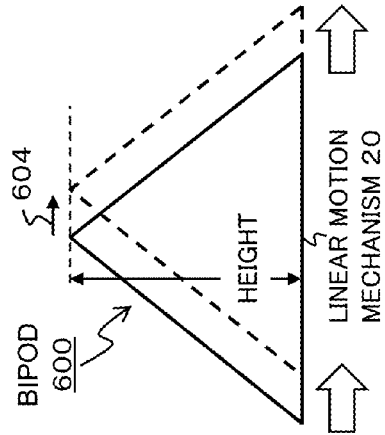


FIG. 16A

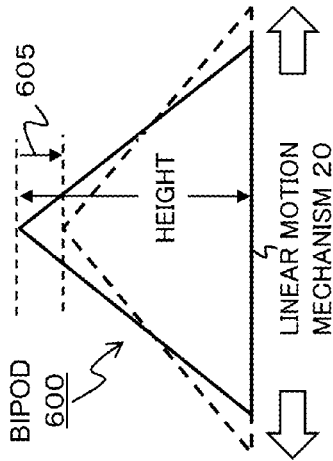


FIG. 16C

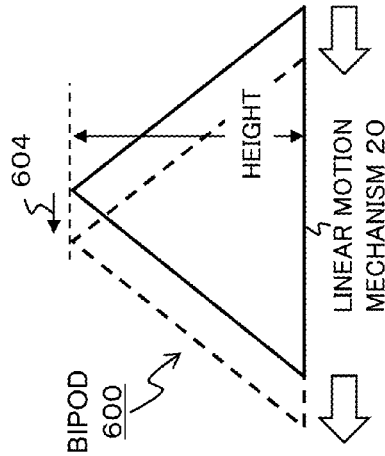


FIG. 17

SECOND APPLICATION

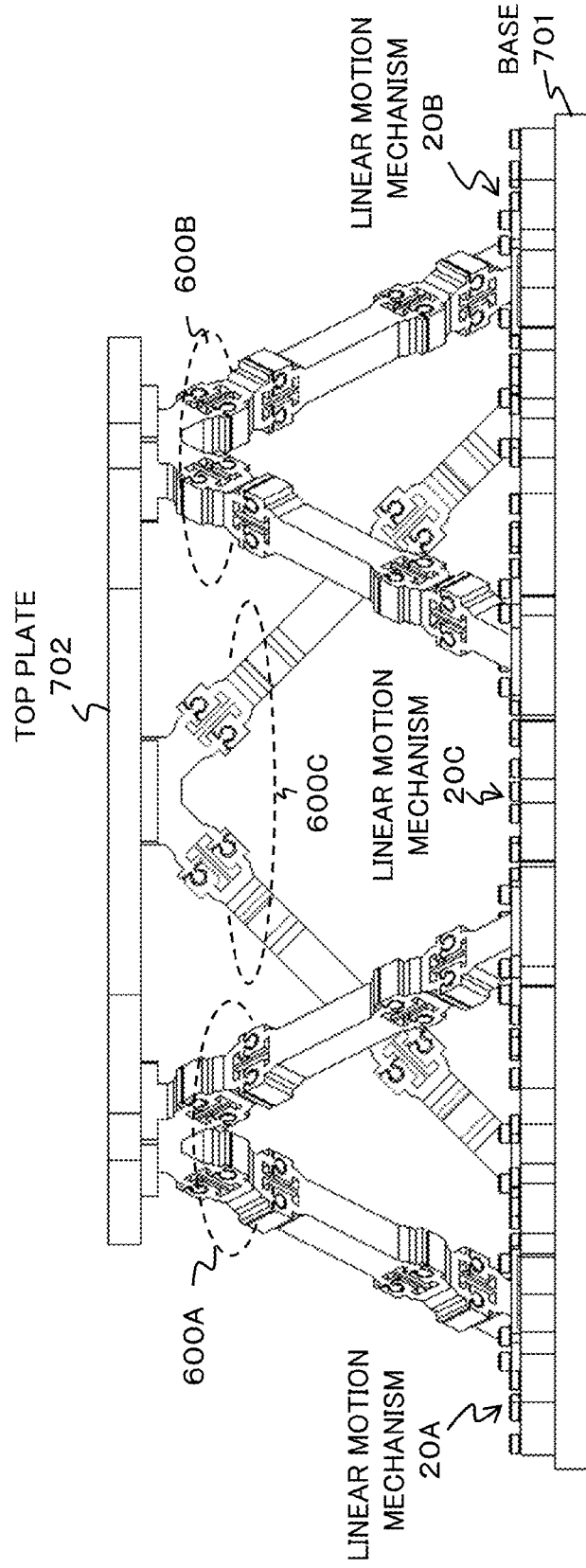
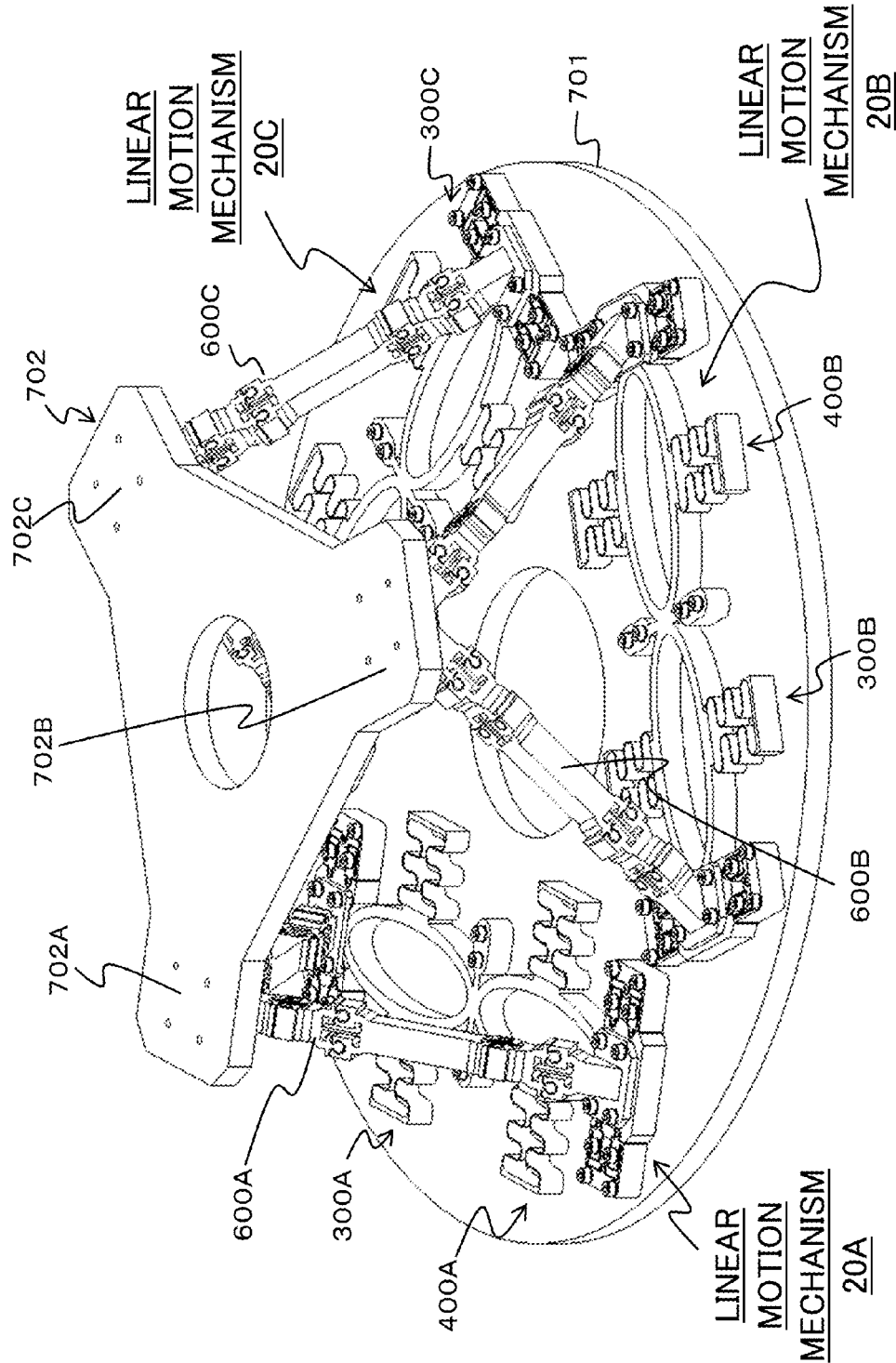
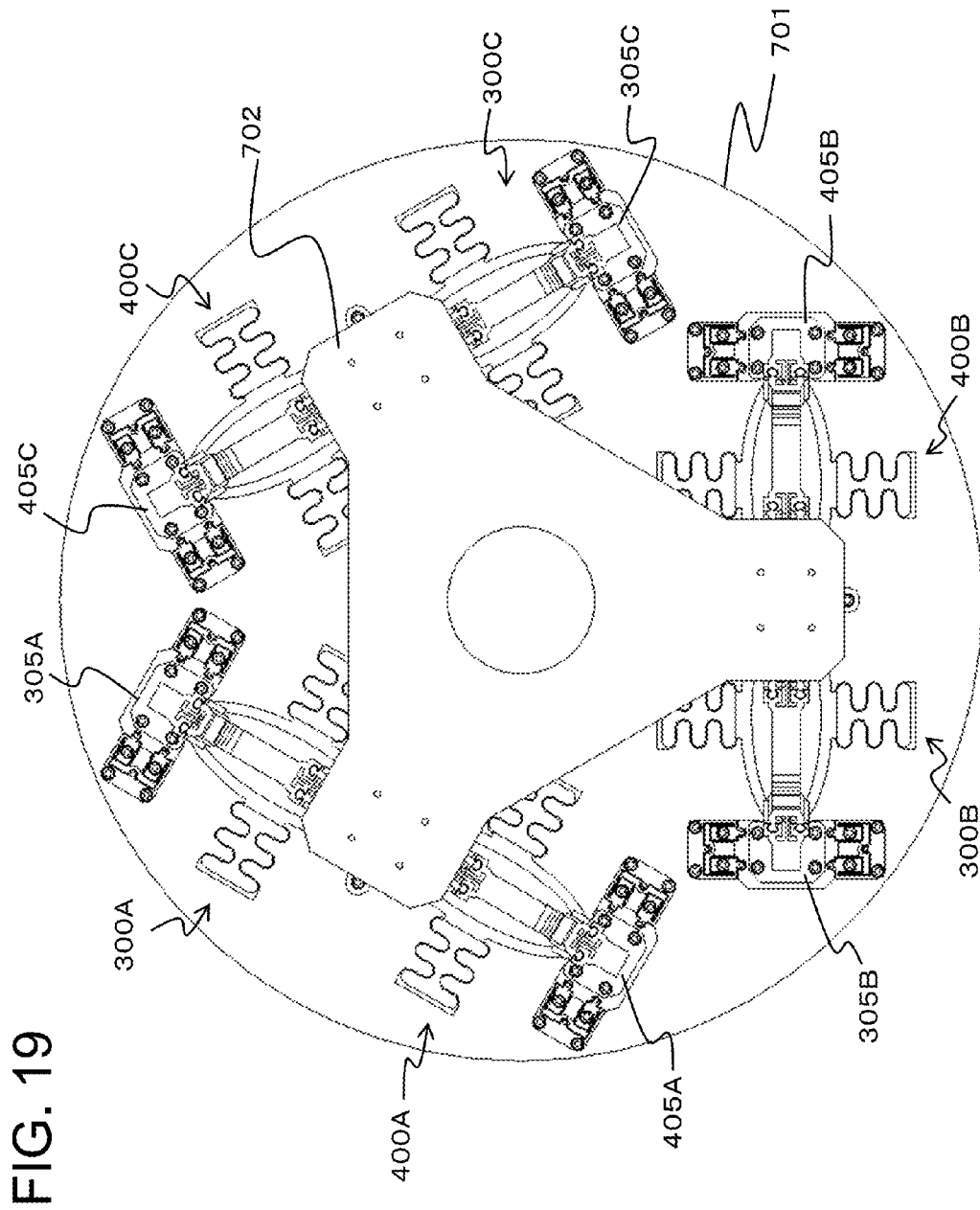


FIG. 18





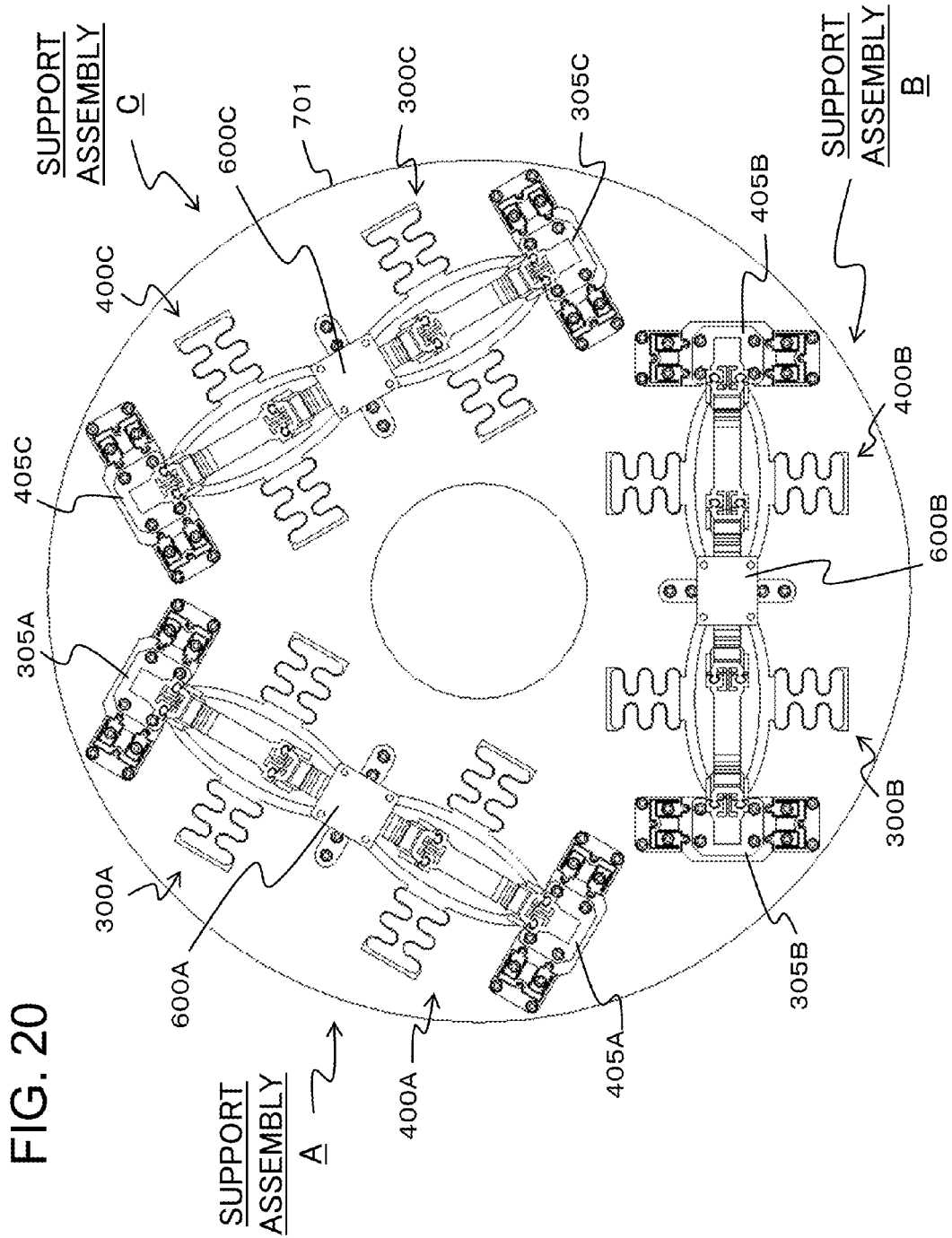


FIG. 21

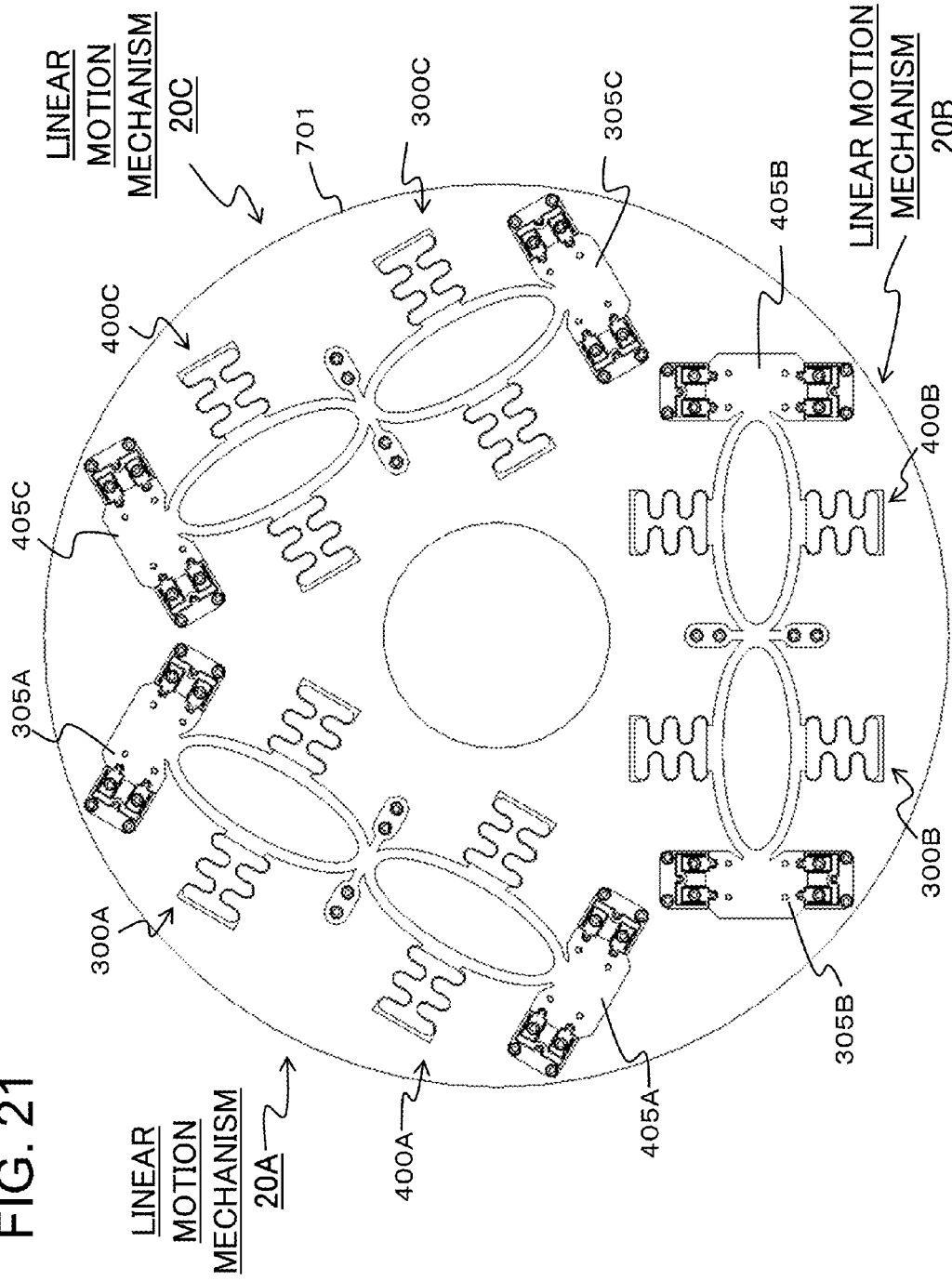
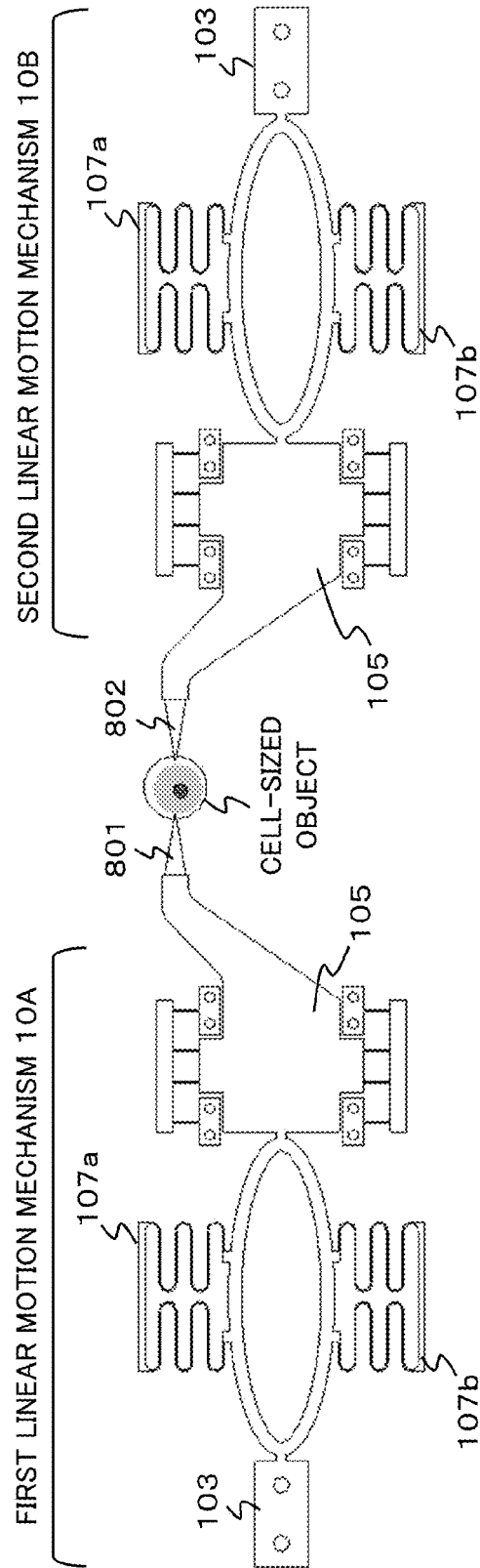


FIG. 22

THIRD APPLICATION



LINEAR MOTION MECHANISM FORMED INTEGRALLY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to a linear motion mechanism which uses the elasticity of springs.

[0003] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0004] With the increasing market demand for precision technology, a linear motion actuator providing high precision has become important for machinery requiring precise displacement such as multiple-degree-of-freedom displacement mechanism, micro-manipulator or the like. In most cases, such a fine linear motion actuator employs reduction gearing mechanism, which requires not only a plurality of parts such as different gears but also backlash adjustment of gears and other alignments during its assembly.

[0005] In order to eliminate the need of backlash adjustment and other alignments, there has been proposed a simplified linear motion mechanism using a combination of elastic plates to allow fine linear displacement (see Japanese Patent Unexamined Publication No. JP2003-075572). More specifically, two elastic plates are fixed to a fixed block at one ends and to a movable block at the other ends. The two elastic plates placed in parallel are connected by a curve elastic plate in the approximate shape of a letter H. The movable block is supported by an elastic plate orthogonal to a plane formed by the H-shaped elastic plates. The curve elastic plate is connected to the slider of a micrometer at the center thereof. Accordingly, extension or contraction of the slider causes the curve elastic plate to push or pull the parallel elastic plates in widening or narrowing directions, which linearly moves the movable block in the retracting or extending direction.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] However, the above-mentioned linear motion actuator using reduction gearing mechanism requires a plurality of parts, complicated assembly process and complicated adjustment operations. The above-mentioned linear motion mechanism using the elasticity of combined elastic plates has the spatial arrangement of a plurality of elastic plates, resulting in weakness in structural strength, which makes it difficult to achieve precise displacements. Accordingly, the existing techniques cannot achieve a light-weight, miniaturized and simply-manufactured linear motion mechanism providing high precision.

[0007] An object of the present invention is to provide a novel linear motion mechanism with precise linear motion, which has structural robustness and allows easy reduction in weight and size, simple production and easy operation.

[0008] According to the present invention, a linear motion mechanism includes: an elastic arrangement which is arranged to transform an input direction and an input displacement to an output direction and an output displacement, wherein the output direction is orthogonal to the input direction; a operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic arrangement in the input direction by the input displacement; and a movable member fixed to the elastic arrangement to move in the output direction by the output displacement.

[0009] According to the present invention, a linear motion mechanism includes: an elastic elliptical ring wherein one

end of its major axis is fixed and the other end is movable; a operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic elliptical ring in a direction of the minor axis of the elastic elliptical ring; a movable member fixed to the other end of the elastic elliptical ring; and an elastic support member which is arranged to elastically support the movable member.

[0010] According to the present invention, a linear motion mechanism includes: a first linear motion section; and a second linear motion section which is fixed to the first linear motion section at a common fixed point, wherein each of the first and second linear motion sections comprises: an elastic arrangement which is arranged to transform an input direction and an input displacement to an output direction and an output displacement, wherein the output direction is orthogonal to the input direction; a operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic arrangement in the input direction by the input displacement; and a movable member fixed to the elastic arrangement to move in the output direction by the output displacement, wherein the movable member of each of the first and second linear motion sections independently moves in the output direction of a corresponding linear motion section.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 is a perspective view illustrating a linear motion mechanism according to a first exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0012] FIG. 2 is a plan view illustrating the linear motion mechanism shown in FIG. 1.

[0013] FIG. 3 is a diagram showing an operation of the linear motion mechanism shown in FIG. 1.

[0014] FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram showing an example of the production process of a linear motion mechanism as shown in FIG. 1.

[0015] FIG. 5 is a perspective view illustrating a linear motion mechanism according to a second exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] FIG. 6 is a plan view illustrating the linear motion mechanism shown in FIG. 5.

[0017] FIG. 7 is a diagram showing an operation of the linear motion mechanism shown in FIG. 5.

[0018] FIG. 8 is a perspective view illustrating a first application of the linear motion mechanism according to the second exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a bipod employed in the first application as shown in FIG. 8.

[0020] FIG. 10 is a side view of the bipod as shown in FIG. 9.

[0021] FIG. 11 is a plan view of the bipod as shown in FIG. 9.

[0022] FIG. 12 is an enlarged side view of a limited-displacement flexible joint of the bipod as shown in FIG. 9.

[0023] FIG. 13 is an enlarged side view of the limited-displacement flexible joint as shown in FIG. 12 in the case of being curved in one direction.

[0024] FIG. 14 is an enlarged side view of the limited-displacement flexible joint as shown in FIG. 12 in the case of being curved in the other direction.

[0025] FIG. 15 is a side view of the first application as shown in FIG. 8.

[0026] FIGS. 16A-16D are a schematic side-view structure of the first application as shown in FIG. 8 for explaining operations of the first application.

[0027] FIG. 17 is a side view illustrating a hexapod mechanism as a second application of the linear motion mechanism according to the second exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0028] FIG. 18 is a perspective view illustrating the second application as shown in FIG. 17.

[0029] FIG. 19 is a plan view illustrating the second application as shown in FIG. 17.

[0030] FIG. 20 is a plan view illustrating the second application as shown in FIG. 17 in a state such that a mounting base has been removed.

[0031] FIG. 21 is a plan view illustrating the second application as shown in FIG. 17 in a state such that both a mounting base and all bipods have been removed.

[0032] FIG. 22 is a diagram illustrating the mechanical and electronic structure of a micro-manipulator as a third application of the linear motion mechanism according to the first exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

[0033] A linear motion mechanism is arranged to transform an input direction and an input displacement to an output direction orthogonal to the input direction and an output displacement smaller than the input displacement. The linear motion mechanism has a two-dimensional structure in which the input and output directions are provided on a plane. A ratio between the output displacement and the input displacement may be determined by spring constants of elastic members composing the linear motion mechanism.

[0034] More specifically, the linear motion mechanism may include an elliptical ring section, an operating section, a movable section and a support section which are made of elastic material and integrally formed. The elliptical ring section has a function of transforming the operating direction to the orthogonal direction with one end of the major axis thereof being fixed and the other end of the major axis being movable. The operating section is placed so as to press the elliptical ring section in the direction of the minor axis thereof. Accordingly, by the operating section pressing or stretching the elliptical ring section, the elliptical ring section is elastically deformed to linearly move the movable section along the major axis of the elliptical ring section.

[0035] It is preferable to provide an elastic supporting section on both sides of the movable section to ensure the linear motion of the movable section along the major axis of the elliptical ring section. The elastic supporting section may be composed of a plurality of leaf springs connecting the movable section on both sides to a fixed section. The elliptical ring section, the operating section and the elastic supporting section may have different spring constants so as to provide various speed reduction ratios. In order to obtain a desired speed reduction ratio, the operating section and the elastic supporting section may be provided with a lower spring constant (soft spring) and a higher spring constant (hard spring), respectively. Hereinafter, various exemplary embodiments of the present invention will be describe with references to figures.

1. First Exemplary Embodiment

1.1) Structure

[0036] Referring to FIGS. 1 and 2, a linear motion mechanism 10 according to the first exemplary embodiment

includes an elliptical ring 101 having a fixed point 102 connected to a fixed section 103 and a movable point 104 connected to a movable section 105. The fixed point 102 and the movable point 104 are both ends of the major axis of the elliptical ring 101.

[0037] The elliptical ring 101 has soft spring sections 106a and 106b which are fixed respectively to both sides of the elliptical ring 101 in the direction of the minor axis so that the elliptical ring 101 is sandwiched between the soft spring sections 106a and 106b. The respective ends of the soft spring sections 106a and 106b are provided with operating plates 107a and 107b. Preferably, the soft spring sections 106a and 106b have the same spring constant so as to press or stretch the elliptical ring 101 equally. In FIG. 1, the soft spring sections 106a and 106b are a bellows-like spring, which is merely an example.

[0038] Each of the soft spring sections 106a and 106b is preferably composed of two soft springs which are arranged in parallel with each other. More specifically, as shown in FIG. 2, the soft spring section 106a is composed of two soft springs 106a1 and 106a2, which are arranged in parallel and may be symmetric with respect to the minor axis of the elliptical ring 101. The soft spring section 106b is composed of two soft springs 106b1 and 106b2 in the same arrangement as the soft spring section 106a. This two-parallel-spring arrangement enables a self-alignment function with eliminating the effects of misalignment, allowing the movable section 105 to linearly move as intended without the need of pressing or stretching the operating plates 107a and 107b perpendicularly to their respective surfaces.

[0039] The movable section 105 is supported on both sides thereof by first and second elastic supporting sections to ensure linear motion along the major axis of the elliptical ring 101. One side of the movable section 105 is connected to a first elastic supporting section. More specifically, the movable section 105 is connected to a movable section 110a through two leaf springs 108a and 109a. The movable section 110a is further connected to fixed sections 113a and 114a through leaf springs 111a and 112a, respectively. In other words, the one side of the movable section 105 is connected to the fixed sections 113a and 114a through a first pair of leaf springs 108a and 109a and a second pair of leaf springs 111a and 112a. Similarly the other side of the movable section 105 is connected to the second elastic supporting section such that the movable section 105 is connected to the fixed sections 113b and 114b through a first pair of leaf springs 108b and 109b, a movable section 110b and a second pair of leaf springs 111b and 112b.

[0040] In this manner, both sides of the movable section 105 are supported by the first and second elastic supporting sections, respectively so that the movable section 105 stably move along the major axis of the elliptical ring 101 without swinging.

[0041] In addition, two corners on the one side of the movable section 105 are cut away so that the fixed sections 113a and 114a are partly placed within the cutaway portions, respectively. Similarly, two corners on the other side of the movable section 105 are cut away so that the fixed sections 113b and 114b are partly placed within the cutaway portions, respectively. Accordingly, the movable section 105 is movably sandwiched between the fixed sections 113a and 113b and between the fixed sections 114a and 114b, preventing the motion of the movable section 105 from excessive swinging from side to side and its excessive displacement in

the direction of the major axis of the elliptical ring **101** and therefore restricting the motion of the movable section **105** within a predetermined range.

[0042] As described already, the spring constants of a pair of the soft spring sections **106a** and **106b** and two pairs of the leaf springs **108a** and **109a** and the leaf springs **111a** and **112a** can be selected appropriately to obtain a desired speed reduction ratio. An operation of the linear motion mechanism **10** will be described.

1.2) Operation

[0043] Referring to FIG. 3, when the soft spring sections **106a** and **106b** are pressed or stretched in mutually opposite input directions **201a** and **201b**, the elliptical ring **101** is deformed as shown by arrows **202a**, **202b** and **203** such that the length of the minor axis is reduced or increased and the length of the major axis is increased or reduced. Since the fixed point **102** is prevented from moving, the movable point **104** moves in the direction **203**, causing the movable section **105** to slightly move in the output direction **205** while the movable sections **110a** and **110b** also slightly moving in the same directions **204a** and **204b**, respectively.

[0044] In this manner, by the soft springs **106a** and **106b** pressing or stretching the elliptical ring **101**, the elliptical ring **101** is elastically deformed to linearly move the movable section **105** along the major axis of the elliptical ring **101**. The input direction of the pressing/stretching is orthogonal to the output direction of linear motion of the movable section **105**. In the case where the spring constant of the soft spring sections **106a** and **106b** is lower than the spring constants of the elliptical ring **101** and the leaf springs **108a**, **109a**, **111a**, **112a**, **108b**, **109b**, **111b** and **112b**, the amount of input displacement applied to the soft spring sections **106a** and **106b** can be transformed to a desired amount of linear motion of the movable section **105**.

[0045] As described above, the linear motion mechanism **10** is allowed to operate on the same flat surface, resulting in enhanced miniaturization and structural strength as well as easy operation.

1.3) Production

[0046] As illustrated in FIG. 4, all sections **101-114** of the linear motion mechanism **10** may be formed integrally by cutting its plane structural shape from a single elastic plate **120** with a homogenous material having a predetermined thickness. Accordingly, the linear motion mechanism **10** has a two-dimensional structure with all sections **101-114** having the same thickness, allowing easy reduction in weight and size and simple production. Another technology such as injection molding, 3-dimensional printer or MEMS (Micro Electro Mechanical Systems) may be employed for production of the linear motion mechanism **10**.

1.4) Advantageous Effects

[0047] According to the first exemplary embodiment of the present invention, larger input displacement of the soft spring sections is transformed to smaller linear motion of the movable section according to a spring constant ratio. Accordingly, even whether the input displacement is applied to the soft spring sections with less precision, the linear motion mechanism can provide linear motion with greater precision. If the spring constant ratio is previously known, the amount of displacement of the movable section can be

calculated with precision by precisely measuring the input displacement of the soft springs without precisely measuring the displacement of the movable section. Accordingly, the first exemplary embodiment of the present invention can achieve nano-resolution motion of the movable section.

[0048] In addition, as described above, each section of the linear motion mechanism **10** moves due to the Nature of Motion through the monocoque design with homogenous materials and without any passages via sliding mechanisms, resulting in no potential motion losses and achieving the followings:

- i. Absolutely predictable and repeatable motions;
- ii. Precise motion without complex position sensors and close-loop servo control, therefore enabling an open-loop control;
- iii. Perfectly working in a wide temperature ranges, cryogenic to the upper 400° C. or even more;
- iv. Semi-permanent life without the need of considerations of the pressing/stretching mechanisms (input mechanisms);
- v. Zero particle and zero cross contamination; and
- vi. High resistance to corrosive conditions such as being submerged in the corrosive gases and liquid.

2. Second Exemplary Embodiment

2.1) Structure

[0049] As shown in FIGS. 5 and 6, a linear motion mechanism **20** according to the second exemplary embodiment is formed by a combination of first linear motion section **300** and second linear motion section **400**, each of which has the substantially same functional structure as the linear motion mechanism **10** as shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. The first linear motion section **300** and the second linear motion section **400** are arranged such that the major axes of the elliptical rings **301** and **401** are in alignment with each other. The first linear motion section **300** and the second linear motion section **400** have a common fixed section **303/403** corresponding to the fixed section **103** of the first exemplary embodiment. Accordingly, the linear motion mechanism **20** provides movable sections **305** and **405** respectively on its both sides.

[0050] More specifically, the first linear motion section **300** includes an elliptical ring **301** having a fixed point **302** connected to a fixed section **303** and a movable point **304** connected to a movable section **305**. The fixed point **302** and the movable point **304** are both ends of the major axis of the elliptical ring **301**.

[0051] The elliptical ring **301** has soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** which are connected on both sides of the elliptical ring **301** in the direction of the minor axis, respectively. The respective ends of the soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** are provided with operating plates **307a** and **307b**. Preferably, the soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** have the same spring constant so as to press or stretch the elliptical ring **301** equally. In FIG. 5, the soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** are a bellows-like spring, which is merely an example. Each of the soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** has the two-parallel-spring arrangement similar to the soft spring sections **106a** and **106b** of the first exemplary embodiment.

[0052] The movable section **305** is supported on both sides thereof by elastic supporting section to ensure linear motion along the major axis of the elliptical ring **301**. The elastic supporting section is similar to the first and second elastic supporting sections of the first exemplary embodiment and

therefore the detailed descriptions are omitted. Since the respective sides of the movable section **105** are supported by the elastic supporting section, the movable section **305** stably move along the major axis of the elliptical ring **301** without swinging.

[0053] As described already, the spring constants of a pair of the soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** and the elastic supporting section can be selected appropriately to obtain a desired speed reduction ratio.

[0054] The structure of the second linear motion section **400** is similar to that of the first linear motion section **300**. In brief, the second linear motion section **400** includes an elliptical ring **401** having a fixed point **402** connected to a fixed section **403** and a movable point **404** connected to a movable section **405**. The fixed point **402** and the movable point **404** are both ends of the major axis of the elliptical ring **401**. The elliptical ring **401** has soft spring sections **406a** and **406b** which are connected on both sides of the elliptical ring **401** in the direction of the minor axis, respectively. The respective ends of the soft spring sections **406a** and **406b** are provided with operating plates **407a** and **407b**. The movable section **405** is supported on both sides thereof by elastic supporting section to ensure linear motion along the major axis of the elliptical ring **401**.

2.2) Operation

[0055] As shown in FIG. 7, the operating plates **307a** and **307b** are operated in the opposite directions, causing the soft springs **306a** and **306b** concurrently to be pressed or stretched as mentioned in the first exemplary embodiment. Similarly, the operating plates **407a** and **407b** are operated in the same manner as, but independently of the operating plates **307a** and **307b**. Accordingly, when the soft spring sections **306a** and **306b** and the soft spring sections **406a** and **406b** are pressed or stretched, the elliptical rings **301** and **401** are deformed to move the movable sections **305** and **405** in the directions **309** and **409**, respectively.

[0056] In this manner, by the operating plates **307a** and **307b** and the operating plates **407a** and **407b** elastically deforming the elliptical rings **301** and **401**, respectively, the movable sections **305** and **405** are linearly moved along the major axis of the elliptical rings **301** and **401**.

[0057] The direction of pressing/stretching the soft spring sections is orthogonal to the direction of linear motion of the movable sections **305** and **405**. In the case where the spring constant of the soft spring sections **306a**, **306b**, **406a** and **406b** is lower than the spring constants of the elliptical rings **301** and **401** and the elastic supporting sections, the amount of input displacement applied to the soft springs **306a**, **306b**, **406a** and **406b** can be transformed to a desired amount of linear motion of the movable sections **305** and **405**. Accordingly, the linear motion mechanism **20** can provide the advantageous effects similar to the first exemplary embodiment.

2.3) Production

[0058] Similarly to the first exemplary embodiment as shown in FIG. 4, all sections of the linear motion mechanism **20** may be also formed integrally, for example, by cutting its plane structural shape from a single elastic plate having a predetermined thickness. Accordingly, it is possible to produce the linear motion mechanism **20** having a two-dimensional structure with all sections having the same thickness,

allowing easy reduction in weight and size and simple production. Another technology such as injection molding, 3-dimensional printer or MEMS (Micro Electro Mechanical Systems) may be employed for production of the linear motion mechanism **10**.

3. Applications

3.1) Adjustable Support Assembly

3.1.1) Structure

[0059] Referring to FIG. 8, a support assembly is composed of a bipod **600** and the linear motion mechanism **20** as described in the second exemplary embodiment. The bipod **600** has two support rods **601** and **602**, one ends of which are connected at a top provided with a support section **603** to form an upside-down V-shaped bipod. The other ends of the support rods **601** and **602** are fixed to the movable section **305** of the first linear motion section **300** and the movable section **405** of the second linear motion section **400**, respectively. The support rods **601** and **602** have the same structure. Hereinafter, the structure of the support rod **601** shown in FIGS. 9-11 will be described as an example.

3.1.2) Bipod

[0060] Referring to FIGS. 9-11, the support rod **601** is shaped like a leg including a fixed portion **610**, two limited-displacement flexible joints **611** and **612**, a relatively rigid rod **613**, and two limited-displacement flexible joints **614** and **615**. Each of the limited-displacement flexible joints **611**, **612**, **614** and **615** provides limited flexibility in a direction alternating between orthogonal flexible directions **D1** and **D2** with respect to the longitudinal axis of the support rod **601**. The flexible direction **D1** is a direction orthogonal to the support rod **601** in a plane formed by the support rods **601** and **602**, which is typically illustrated in FIG. 10. The flexible direction **D2** is a direction orthogonal to the plane formed by the support rods **601** and **602**, which is typically illustrated in FIG. 11. In the present example, the limited-displacement flexible joints **611** and **614** are allowed to curve in the direction **D2** while the limited-displacement flexible joints **612** and **615** are allowed to curve in the direction **D1**. Accordingly, the support rod **601** can freely curve in the directions **D1** and **D2**. Similarly, the support rod **602** is shaped like a leg including a fixed portion **620**, two limited-displacement flexible joints **621** and **622**, a relatively rigid rod **623**, and two limited-displacement flexible joints **624** and **625** and can freely curve in orthogonal flexible directions **D1** and **D2** with respect to the longitudinal axis of the support rod **602**.

[0061] However, each of the limited-displacement flexible joints **611**, **612**, **614**, **615**, **621**, **622**, **624** and **625** is designed to limit the degree of bending so as to prevent breakage of the joint. The detailed structure of a limited-displacement flexible joint will be described with references to FIGS. 12-14.

[0062] Referring to FIG. 12, the limited-displacement flexible joint is composed of a flexible blade **630** and a pair of bend limitation sections **640L1** and **640L2** which are provided on both sides of the flexible blade **630** in parallel to form a single joint. The flexible blade **630** provides flexibility as described above. Each of the bend limitation sections **640L1** and **640L2** is composed of two separate parts which are engaged with clearance to rotate around the axis

vertical to the paper surface (as indicated by D). More specifically, one of the parts (an upper part) of the bend limitation sections **640L1** is composed of a pair of outer stopper **L11** and inner stopper **L12** protruding from the upper part and a cylindrically shaped protrusion **L13** provided at the edge of the upper part. The other of the parts (a lower part) of the bend limitation sections **640L1** is composed of a cylindrically shaped recess **L14** which is rotatably engaged with the cylindrically shaped protrusion **L13**. The bend limitation sections **640L2** has the same structure as the bend limitation sections **640L1**. More specifically, one of the parts (an upper part) of the bend limitation sections **640L2** is composed of a pair of outer stopper **L21** and inner stopper **L22** protruding from the upper part and a cylindrically shaped protrusion **L23** provided at the edge of the upper part. The other of the parts (a lower part) of the bend limitation sections **640L2** is composed of a cylindrically shaped recess **L24** which is rotatably engaged with the cylindrically shaped protrusion **L23**.

[0063] As shown in FIG. 13, when the support rod bends in the direction **650**, the blade **630** also curve in the same direction **650**, rotating the upper parts of the bend limitation sections **640L1** and **640L2** with respect to their lower parts, respectively. The respective rotations cause the stoppers **L11** and **L22** to be contacted on one top edges of the cylindrically shaped recesses **L14** and **L24** as indicated by reference numerals **651** and **652**. Accordingly, the rotation of the upper part in the direction **650** is stopped tightly, preventing breakage of the blade **630**.

[0064] As shown in FIG. 14, when the support rod bends in the opposite direction **660**, the blade **630** also curve in the same direction **660**, rotating the upper parts of the bend limitation sections **640L1** and **640L2** with respect to the lower parts, respectively. The respective rotations cause the stoppers **L12** and **L21** to be contacted on the other top edges of the cylindrically shaped recesses **L14** and **L24** as indicated by reference numerals **661** and **662**. Accordingly, the rotation of the upper part in the direction **660** is also stopped tightly, preventing breakage of the blade **630**.

3.1.3) Operation

[0065] Referring to FIG. 15, the support assembly is assembled from the bipod **600** and the linear motion mechanism **20**. The support rods **601** and **602** are fixed to the movable section **305** of the first linear motion section **300** and the movable section **405** of the second linear motion section **400**, respectively. Accordingly, the support section **603** of the bipod **600** can be moved to an arbitrary position within a limited range on a plane formed by the support rods **601** and **602** depending on the respective directions and displacements of linear motion of the movable sections **305** and **405**.

[0066] As shown in FIG. 16A, when the operating plates **307a** and **307b** and the operating plates **407a** and **407b** press the elliptical rings **301** and **401** respectively so that the linear motion mechanism **20** moves the movable sections **305** and **405** by the same displacement in the mutually opposite directions broadening the distance between the movable sections **305** and **405**, the height of the bipod **600** with respect to the main surface of the linear motion mechanism **20** is reduced depending on the displacement of the movable sections **305** and **405** as indicated by displacement **605** perpendicular to the main surface of the linear motion mechanism **20**.

[0067] As shown in FIG. 16B, when the operating plates **307a** and **307b** and the operating plates **407a** and **407b** stretch the elliptical rings **301** and **401** respectively so that the linear motion mechanism **20** moves the movable sections **305** and **405** by the same displacement in the mutually opposite directions reducing the distance between the movable sections **305** and **405**, the height of the bipod **600** with respect to the main surface of the linear motion mechanism **20** is increased depending on the displacement of the movable sections **305** and **405** as indicated by displacement **605** perpendicular to the surface of the linear motion mechanism **20**.

[0068] As shown in FIGS. 16C and 16D, when the operating plates **307a** and **307b** press/stretch the elliptical rings **301** and the operating plates **407a** and **407b** stretch/press the elliptical rings **401** so that the linear motion mechanism **20** moves the movable sections **305** and **405** in the same direction by the same displacement, the bipod **600** is moved as it is in the same direction by the same displacement as indicated by displacement **604** parallel to the main surface of the linear motion mechanism **20**.

3.1.4) Production

[0069] The bipod **600** as structured above is made of elastic material with sufficient strength and may be formed integrally by using any technology such as injection molding, 3-dimensional printer or MEMS (Micro Electro Mechanical Systems).

3.2) Hexapod Arrangement

3.2.1) Structure

[0070] Referring to FIGS. 17-20, a hexapod arrangement having six degrees of freedom includes a base plate **701**, a top plate **702** and three support assemblies A, B and C, each of which is composed of the bipod (**600A**, **600B**, **600C**) and the linear motion mechanism (**20A**, **20B**, **20C**) as shown in FIG. 8. The support assemblies A, B and C are fixed and arranged on the base plate **701** with regular-triangular configuration as typically shown in FIG. 20. The top plate **702** is fixed to the support sections of the bipods **600A**, **600B** and **600C**. Accordingly, the top plate **702** is supported by three position-adjustable points.

[0071] As an example, the base plate **701** is circular and the top plate **702** is star-shaped. The top plate **702** may be formed of three legs **702A**, **702B** and **702C** joined at a center point with the angle between any two adjacent legs being 120 degrees. The three legs **702A**, **702B** and **702C** are supported respectively by the support assemblies A, B and C, as typically shown in FIG. 18. Needless to say, the top plate **702** may be circular. Further, the top plate **702** may be a mounted object requiring fine adjustment, such as optics (e.g. a mirror, prism or lens).

[0072] As described already, the linear motion mechanism **20A** includes the first and second linear motion sections **300A** and **400A** which are capable of moving the movable sections **305A** and **405A**, respectively. Accordingly, as shown in FIGS. 16A-16D, the support section **603A** of the bipod **600A** fixed on the linear motion mechanism **20A** can be moved to an arbitrary position within a limited range on a plane formed by the support rods **601A** and **602A** of the bipod **600A** depending on the respective directions and

displacements of linear motion of the movable sections 305A and 405A. It is the same with the linear motion mechanisms 20B and 20C.

3.2.2) Operation

[0073] Since the top plate 702 is supported by the support assemblies A, B and C, the position and/or inclination of the top plate 702 can be changed by independently controlling extension, retraction or parallel translation of linear motion of at least one of the linear motion mechanisms 20A, 20B and 20C. Hereinafter, typical operations of the hexapod arrangement will be described by referring to FIGS. 16A-16D and FIG. 18 as an example.

[0074] As shown in FIG. 16A, when the operating plates 307a and 307b and the operating plates 407a and 407b press the elliptical rings 301 and 401 respectively so that the linear motion mechanism 20 moves the movable sections 305 and 405 in the broadening directions, the height of a bipod 600 is reduced. As shown in FIG. 16B, when the operating plates 307a and 307b and the operating plates 407a and 407b stretch the elliptical rings 301 and 401 respectively so that the linear motion mechanism 20 moves the movable sections 305 and 405 in the reducing directions, the height of the bipod 600 is increased. As shown in FIGS. 16C and 16D, when the operating plates 307a and 307b press/stretch the elliptical rings 301 and the operating plates 407a and 407b stretch/press the elliptical rings 401 so that the linear motion mechanism 20 moves the movable sections 305 and 405 in the same direction by the same displacement, the bipod 600 performs parallel displacement. Accordingly, the top plate 702 can be freely moved in six directions by a combination of directions and displacements of motions provided by the respective linear motion mechanisms 20A, 20B and 20C.

[0075] It is assumed that the linear motion mechanisms 20B and 20C are not activated and only the linear motion mechanism 20A moves the movable sections 305A and 405A by the same displacement in the mutually opposite directions broadening the distance between the movable sections 305A and 405A. In this case, the height of the bipod 600A with respect to the main surface of the linear motion mechanism 20A is lowered, causing the top plate 702 to be inclined toward the leg 702A. Contrarily, when only the linear motion mechanism 20A moves the movable sections 305A and 405A by the same displacement in the mutually opposite directions reducing the distance between the movable sections 305A and 405A, the height of the bipod 600A with respect to the main surface of the linear motion mechanism 20A is increased, causing the top plate 702 to be inclined toward a center line between the legs 702B and 702C.

[0076] It is assumed that only the linear motion mechanism 20C is not activated and the linear motion mechanisms 20A and 20B are activated to move the corresponding movable sections by the same displacement in the mutually opposite directions broadening the distance between the corresponding movable sections. In this case, both of the heights of the bipods 600A and 600B are lowered, causing the top plate 702 to be inclined toward a center line between the legs 702A and 702B. Contrarily, when the linear motion mechanisms 20A and 20B are activated to move the corresponding movable sections by the same displacement in the mutually opposite directions reducing the distance between the corresponding movable sections, both of the heights of

the bipods 600A and 600B become higher, causing the top plate 702 to be inclined toward the leg 702C.

[0077] It is assumed that only the linear motion mechanism 20C is not activated and the linear motion mechanisms 20A and 20B are activated to move the corresponding movable sections by the same displacement in the same direction. In this case, the top plate 702 is moved and inclined toward a center line between the legs 702A and 702B.

[0078] It is assumed that all the linear motion mechanisms 20A, 20B and 20C are activated to move the corresponding movable sections by the same displacement in the same direction, the bipods 600a, 600B and 600C are rotated, causing the top plate 702 to be rotated in the same direction by the same displacement.

[0079] The hexapod arrangement can perform fine adjustment of the top plate 702 other than the above-mentioned operations by independently controlling the linear motion mechanisms 20A, 20B and 20C.

3.2.3) Advantageous Effects

[0080] As described already, according to the linear motion mechanism according to the first or second exemplary embodiment, larger input displacement of the soft spring sections is transformed to smaller linear motion of the movable section according to a spring constant ratio. Accordingly, even whether the input displacement is applied to the soft spring sections with less precision, the hexapod system employing the linear motion mechanisms can move the top plate with greater precision. If the spring constant ratio is previously known, the amount of displacement of the top plate can be calculated with precision by precisely measuring the input displacement without precisely measuring the displacement of the top plate.

3.3) Micro-Manipulator

[0081] Using MEMS technology, the linear motion mechanism according to the first or second exemplary embodiment can be easily miniaturized. Such a miniaturized linear motion mechanism can be preferably used as a movement reduction mechanism for a micromanipulator for manipulating cell-size objects under a microscope.

[0082] As illustrated in FIG. 21, a micromanipulator employs a pair of miniaturized linear motion mechanisms 10A and 10B according to the first exemplary embodiment. The movable sections 105 of the linear motion mechanisms 10A and 10B are provided with microtools 801 and 802, respectively, which are used to hold, cut or manipulate a cell-sized sample under a microscope.

[0083] The soft springs 104a and 104b of the linear motion mechanisms 10A and 10B are driven by drivers, respectively. A manipulator controller controls the microscope and drivers according to user's instructions through a monitor and an operation panel.

[0084] According to the linear motion mechanism according to the first or second exemplary embodiment, larger driven input displacement of the soft springs is transformed to smaller linear motion of the movable section according to a spring constant ratio. Accordingly, even whether the driven input displacement is applied to the soft spring sections with less precision, the micromanipulator employing the linear motion mechanisms can move the microtools with greater precision.

4. Other Applications

[0085] The present invention can be applied to high-precision measurement apparatus such as six-degree-of-freedom adjustment device which can be subject to various severe environments, such as aircrafts, spaceships and the like.

[0086] The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. The above-described exemplary embodiment and examples are therefore to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive, the scope of the invention being indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description, and all changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

1. A linear motion mechanism comprising:

- an elastic arrangement which is arranged to transform an input direction and an input displacement to an output direction and an output displacement, wherein the output direction is orthogonal to the input direction;
- an operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic arrangement in the input direction by the input displacement; and
- a movable member fixed to the elastic arrangement to move in the output direction by the output displacement.

2. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 1, wherein a ratio between the input and output displacements is determined by a combination of spring constants of the elastic arrangement and the operating member.

3. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 1, wherein the linear motion mechanism has a two-dimensional structure formed integrally.

4. A linear motion mechanism comprising:

- an elastic elliptical ring wherein one end of its major axis is fixed and the other end is movable;
- an operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic elliptical ring in a direction of the minor axis of the elastic elliptical ring;
- a movable member fixed to the other end of the elastic elliptical ring; and
- an elastic support member which is arranged to elastically support the movable member.

5. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 4, wherein the elastic support member restricts motion of the movable member to linear motion along the direction of the major axis.

6. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 4, wherein a ratio between a pressing displacement of the operating member and a linear motion displacement of the movable member is determined by a combination of spring constants of the elastic elliptical ring, the operating member and the elastic support member.

7. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 6, wherein the spring constant of the operating member is smaller than that of the elastic support member.

8. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 4, wherein the operating member includes a pair of spring sections which sandwiches the elastic elliptical ring therebetween in the direction of the minor axis.

9. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 4, wherein the elastic support member comprises a pair of support sections sandwiching the movable member therebetween through a plurality of leaf springs.

10. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 4, wherein the linear motion mechanism has a two-dimensional structure formed integrally.

11. A linear motion mechanism comprising:

- a first linear motion section; and
- a second linear motion section which is fixed to the first linear motion section at a common fixed point, wherein each of the first and second linear motion sections comprises:
 - an elastic arrangement which is arranged to transform an input direction and an input displacement to an output direction and an output displacement, wherein the output direction is orthogonal to the input direction;
 - an operating member which is arranged to deform the elastic arrangement in the input direction by the input displacement; and
 - a movable member fixed to the elastic arrangement to move in the output direction by the output displacement.

12. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 11, wherein the movable member of each of the first and second linear motion sections independently moves in the output direction of a corresponding linear motion section.

13. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 11, wherein a ratio between the input and output displacements is determined by a combination of spring constants of the elastic arrangement and the operating member.

14. The linear motion mechanism according to claim 11, wherein the linear motion mechanism has a two-dimensional structure formed integrally.

15. A linear motion method comprising:

- deforming an elastic arrangement in an input direction by an input displacement;
- transforming the input direction and the input displacement to an output direction and an output displacement, wherein the output direction is orthogonal to the input direction; and
- moving a movable member fixed to the elastic arrangement in the output direction by the output displacement.

16. The linear motion method according to claim 15, wherein a ratio between the input and output displacements is determined by a combination of spring constants of the elastic arrangement and the operating member.

17. A method for producing a linear motion mechanism according to claim 1, comprising:

- preparing an elastic plate having a predetermined thickness; and
- cutting the linear motion mechanism from the elastic plate.

18. A method for producing a linear motion mechanism according to claim 4, comprising:

- preparing an elastic plate having a predetermined thickness; and
- cutting the linear motion mechanism from the elastic plate.

19. A method for producing a linear motion mechanism according to claim 11, comprising:

- preparing an elastic plate having a predetermined thickness; and
- cutting the linear motion mechanism from the elastic plate.