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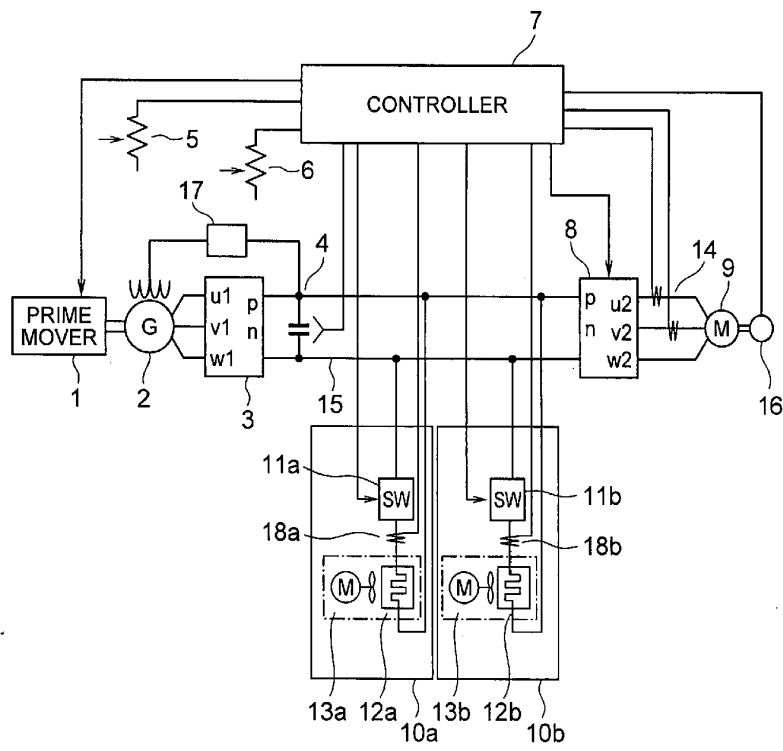
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A motor is driven with variable frequency AC power converted from DC power, and an AC output power from the motor is converted to DC. In the conversion, an electromotive force regenerated by the motor is consumed by a plurality of resistors. When the consumption of the electromotive force is impeded in any of systems including any of the plurality of resistors, the electromotive force is consumed by the systems including the remaining resistors. Even if a system including any of the plurality of resistors fails, the electromotive force can be consumed by the other systems including the remaining resistors, thus providing a reliable rheostatic brake.

FIG. 1



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COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

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INVENTION TITLE:

AC drive apparatus, vehicle control apparatus, and power conversion method and vehicle control method

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method of performing it known to me/us:-

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an AC drive apparatus, a vehicle control apparatus, a power conversion method, and a vehicle control method.

5 With the advance of power electronics, a vehicle drive system, for example, has increasingly employed an AC motor instead of a DC motor. In such a system which employs an AC motor, electric energy is supplied to the motor for use as motive energy upon
10 startup of the system, and a so-called rheostatic brake is employed for forcing the motor to operate as a generator upon braking such that electric energy generated thereby is consumed by a resistor to produce a braking force. Such a system is shown, For example,
15 in JP-A-6-46505.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

However, the foregoing system cannot produce the braking force if the rheostatic brake fails. While a mechanical brake is often provided together with an
20 electric brake to enable the production of a braking force by applying a friction force to an axil, the rheostatic brake tends to produce a larger braking force and requires less maintenance operations than the mechanical brake, so that the mechanical brake is used

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only during low-speed operations or for a final stop. Therefore, the rheostatic brake has been requested to improve the reliability. It is desirable to provide an AC drive apparatus which has a reliable rheostatic brake, a
5 vehicle control apparatus, a power conversion method, and a vehicle control method.

According to the present invention, there is provided an AC drive apparatus comprising:

10 a bidirectional converter for converting DC power to variable frequency AC power for driving a motor, and converting an AC output from said motor to DC; and

a plurality of electric brakes each including a resistor connected to said bidirectional converter to consume an electromotive force regenerated by said motor,
15 and a switch for connecting and disconnecting said resistor to and from said bidirectional converter;

wherein each resistor is cooled by a cooling fan provided for each resistor.

The present invention also provides a vehicle control
20 apparatus comprising:

a prime mover;
a generator mechanically connected to said prime mover;
a rectifier for rectifying an output of said generator
to DC;

25 a bidirectional converter connected to said rectifier;
a motor connected to said bidirectional converter, and having an output transmitted to wheels;

said bidirectional converter converting the rectified output to a variable frequency AC output power for driving
30 said motor, and converting an AC output power from said motor to DC power; and

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resistors, consuming the electromotive force by the remaining systems including the other resistors;

wherein each resistor is cooled by a cooling fan provided for each resistor.

5 More specifically, the AC drive apparatus has a plurality of rheostatic brakes, each brake is connected to DC section through a switch, and the DC section is configured between a rectifier of which power from a prime
10 motor and the bidirectional converter of which power from AC

According to embodiments of the present invention, the AC drive apparatus realized thereby comprises reliable electric brakes. More specifically, an electromotive force regenerated as DC power through the bidirectional converter
15 is consumed by a plurality of rheostatic

brakes to produce a braking force. Also, when some of the plurality of rheostatic brakes fails, the failed rheostatic brake is disconnected, such that a vehicle operator can still continues a vehicle decelerating operation, or can keep enough time to transit to a mechanical brake because an entire braking force is not lost, though the braking force becomes lower than when all the rheostatic brakes are sound. Generally, in recent years, a forced cooling scheme based on an electric fan is employed in the rheostatic brake with the intention of improving the utilization factor and reducing the size and weight. For this reason, opportunities of failure are increasing, so that the present invention is also effective as means which responds to the need for both the reduction in size and weight and the improvement in reliability.

Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following description of the embodiments of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block circuit diagram illustrating a method of implementing an AC drive system which comprises a prime mover as a power source, and a plurality of rheostatic brake circuits (First Embodiment);

Fig. 2 is a graph showing an exemplary AC

voltage control characteristic;

Fig. 3 is a graph showing an exemplary control characteristic of a DC voltage versus switch on/off duty;

5 Fig. 4 is a block circuit diagram illustrating a method of implementing an AC drive system which comprises a trolley as a power source, and a plurality of rheostatic brake circuits (Second Embodiment);

10 Fig. 5 is a block circuit diagram illustrating a method of implementing an AC drive system which comprises a prime mover and a trolley as power sources, and a plurality of rheostatic brake circuits (Third Embodiment); and

15 Figs. 6A, 6B, 6C are diagrams illustrating a cooling unit in detail.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

In the following, embodiments of the present invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in the order of a first to a third embodiment.

[First Embodiment]

An AC drive system of the present invention comprises a plurality of rheostatic brakes connected in parallel to achieve the object of avoiding a loss of an overall braking force due to a failure of a rheostatic brake. Fig. 1 illustrates the AC drive system

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according to a first embodiment of the present invention. An AC generator 2 (or called the "main generator 2," which is also applied to the following description) driven by a prime mover 1 feeds an AC
5 output to a rectifier 3. The rectifier 3 outputs a DC voltage which includes ripples reduced by a smoothing capacitor 4. For setting the DC voltage to a required value which is calculated by a controller 7, a field regulator 17 controls an exciting current of the
10 generator 2. This DC voltage is fed to a motor 9 through an bidirectional converter 8 which converts the DC voltage to an AC voltage at an arbitrary frequency. Output values of an output current detector 14 associated with the bidirectional converter 8 and a
15 speed detector 16 are fetched into a controller 7 which determines a switching state of the bidirectional converter 8 together with a motor output torque setting unit 5 and a voltage across a smoothing capacitor, and outputs a switching pulse to the bidirectional
20 converter 8. With these operations, a vehicle equipped with the AC drive system conducts acceleration/deceleration control.

When the vehicle is accelerated, a torque is determined based on an accelerator unit 5 trodden state
25 and output values of the current detector 14 associated with the bidirectional converter 8 and the speed detector 16. To provide the determined torque to the motor, the controller 7 controls the rotation speed of

the prime mover 1 by using the values of the output current detector 14, speed detector 16 and DC voltage detector 15 in a relationship as shown in Fig. 2. Likewise, to determine a switching state of the

5 bidirectional converter 8, the output values of the output current detector 14, the speed detector 16, the torque setting unit 5 and the voltage across the smoothing capacitor are supplied to the controller 7. Since the motor 9 generates an increasingly larger

10 torque as the bidirectional converter 8 supplies an AC current at a higher frequency, the vehicle is accelerated.

When the vehicle is decelerated, the motor 9 enters a regenerative mode to convert motive energy of

15 the vehicle to AC electric energy. This AC electric energy is converted to DC power by the bidirectional converter 8. In this event, a DC voltage outputted by the bidirectional converter 8 is controlled to a higher value than a DC voltage which is outputted by the

20 generator 2 through the rectifier 3. The controller 7 determines a time for which a resistor a 12a of an electric brake a 10a and a resistor b 12b of an electric brake b 10b are connected to a DC section, i.e., a duty in accordance with the values of the DC

25 voltage detector 15 and a braking force setting unit 6, as well as a difference between the two values. Switches 11a, 11b for connecting the resistors a 12a, b 12b to the DC section, which comprise semiconductor

devices or the like, start an on/off operation when the DC voltage value exceeds a set value a (2,000 volts by way of example), for example, as shown in Fig. 3, and repeat the on/off operation such that the DC voltage value falls within a set value b (3,000 volts by way of example). In this event, in a range of 100 to 2,000 volts, the switches 11a, 11b remain off.

Further, the on/off duty is increased as the DC voltage value is increased, and the on/off duty is set to 100 % when the DC voltage value reaches a set value b, for example, as shown in Fig. 3 (i.e., the switches 11a, 11b remain on).

The controller 7 detects currents passing through the resistors a, b by current detectors 18a and 18b, and calculate the power consumed by the resistors a, b such that the electric energy generated by the motor 9 is entirely consumed by the resistors a, b. With these operations, the vehicle equipped with the AC drive system is decelerated.

If one of the rheostatic brakes 10a, 10b fails during the decelerating operation, the electric energy generated by the motor 9 cannot be entirely consumed. Thus, if the same electric energy as that before the failure was continuously regenerated to the DC section, the DC voltage would continue to rise and eventually exceed the withstanding voltage level of each device, so that, for preventing this inconvenience, the regenerated energy must be limited.

Since the regenerated energy is limited by the capacity of a sound rheostatic brake, a conventional vehicle equipped only with a single rheostatic brake results in a temporary loss of an entire braking force. However, 5 the AC drive system according to the present invention illustrated in Fig. 1 comprises a plurality of rheostatic brakes, so that even if the electric brake 10a (also called the "rheostatic brake 10a") fails, the switch a is made inoperative, and the sound electric 10 brake 10b (also called the "rheostatic brake 10b") can continue the braking operation though the braking force is reduced to one-half as much as when the whole system is sound.

Referring now to Figs. 6A, 6B, 6C, a detailed 15 description will be given of the structure of a cooling unit composed of the resistor a (12a) and a cooling fan a (13a) (an area surrounded by a one-dot chain line within the electric brake 10a), and a cooling unit composed of the resistor b (12b) and a cooling fan b 20 (13b) (an area surrounded by a one-dot chain line within the electric brake 10b). Since the former cooling unit is substantially identical in configuration to the latter cooling unit, the following description will focus on the cooling unit composed of 25 the resistor a (12a) and cooling fan a (13a) in Fig. 1.

As illustrated in Fig. 6A, a housing comprises a cylinder housing and a square pillar housing connected thereto, both of which are made of

metal (preferably, a steel plate). The cooling fan a (13a) is stored in the cylindrical housing. The cooling fan a (13a) rotates to feed cooling air in a direction indicated by arrows in the figure. The cooling air passes through the square pillar housing, flowing as indicated by the right-hand arrow in the figure, and is emitted from the square pillar housing by an air blasting action of the cooling fan a (13a).

As illustrated in Fig. 6B, resistor elements 12a-1 - 12a-7, which make up the resistor a (12a), are arranged side by side within the square pillar housing in the air blasting direction. The cooling air fed by the cooling fan a (13a) sequentially cools down the resistor elements 12a-1 - 12a-7. Each of the resistor elements 12a-1 - 12a-7 is composed of an upper metal plate and a lower metal plate which are connected by four metal plates for example. Electric couplers are attached to both ends of the upper metal plate.

The foregoing electric couplers are electrically connected to each other to make up an electric circuit as illustrated in Fig. 6C.

Here, as illustrated in Fig. 6A, a temperature sensor 22a is mounted halfway in the cylindrical housing in the air passing direction. The temperature sensor 22a detects the temperature within the cylindrical housing to send a temperature signal to the controller 7. Also, a pressure sensor 23a is mounted near the rear end of the cylindrical housing in

the air passing direction. The pressure sensor 23a detects the pressure to find the fan working soundly near the exit of the cylindrical housing to send a pressure signal to the controller 7, so as to increase
5 reliability of the electric brake.

The controller 7 monitors the temperature signal and pressure signal, and determines an abnormal temperature or an abnormal pressure if one (or both) of these signals reaches a predetermined value or higher
10 to bring the switches 11a, 11b into a disconnected state. Alternatively, the controller 7 controls the switches 11a, 11b such that they remain off for a longer time in their on/off operations.

[Second Embodiment]

15 An AC drive system according to a second embodiment comprises a trolley which is substituted for the components of the first embodiment for connecting the AC output of the AC generator 2 driven by the prime mover 1 to the rectifier 3 to supply DC power in the
20 first embodiment. In a system which comprises a trolley 20 that does not have a capacity large enough to absorb regenerated power, a vehicle itself must consume the regenerated power. Therefore, when a braking force is required, the trolley is disconnected
25 from the AC drive system by a trolley connector 19 upon detection of a positive output from the braking force setting unit 6, in order to prevent the power from flowing from the trolley to the resistors 11a, 11b of

the rheostatic brakes 10a, 10b. In this way, the AC drive system of the second embodiment can perform similar operations to those of the first embodiment.

[Third Embodiment]

5 An AC drive system according to a third embodiment comprises both means for connecting the AC output of the AC generator 2 driven by the prime mover 1 to the rectifier 3 to supply DC power in the first embodiment, and means for supplying DC power by a
10 trolley 20 in the second embodiment. A special vehicle system such as an electric truck may be provided with the power through a trolley 20, but must operate even in a place where the trolley is not installed. Thus, the AC drive system continues to operate while
15 switching the power source by a trolley/motor switching unit 21 between the power generated by the prime mover 1 and the power supplied through the trolley 2. In this way, the AC drive system of the third embodiment can perform similar operations to those of the first
20 and second embodiments.

The configurations of the first to third embodiments can also be applied to an electric propeller ship which employs a grid resistor for a speed restraining operation.

25 It should be further understood by those skilled in the art that although the foregoing description has been made on embodiments of the invention, the invention is not limited thereto and

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various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit of the invention and the scope of the appended claims.

Throughout this specification and the claims which
5 follow, unless the context requires otherwise, the word "comprise", and variations such as "comprises" and "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or step or group of integers or steps but not the exclusion of any other integer or step or group of
10 integers or steps.

The reference in this specification to any prior publication (or information derived from it), or to any matter which is known, is not, and should not be taken as an acknowledgment or admission or any form of suggestion that
15 that prior publication (or information derived from it) or known matter forms part of the common general knowledge in the field of endeavour to which this specification relates.

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THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. An AC drive apparatus comprising:
 - a bidirectional converter for converting DC power to
5 variable frequency AC power for driving a motor, and
converting an AC output from said motor to DC; and
 - a plurality of electric brakes each including a
resistor connected to said bidirectional converter to
consume an electromotive force regenerated by said motor,
10 and a switch for connecting and disconnecting said resistor
to and from said bidirectional converter;
 - wherein each resistor is cooled by a cooling fan
provided for each resistor.
- 15 2. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
said bidirectional converter is connected to a trolley
system to prevent power from flowing into said trolley
system.
- 20 3. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 2, further
comprising means for connecting said bidirectional converter
to said trolley system and also to an output of a generator
through a rectifier, and for preventing the output of said
generator from flowing into said trolley system.
- 25 4. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
said bidirectional converter is connected to an output of a
generator through a rectifier.
- 30 5. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 4, wherein
said switch periodically turns on and off at a period which
is controlled on the basis of the regeneration state.

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6. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 5, wherein
said generator is driven by a prime mover, and said prime
mover is controlled for rotating speed based on an operating
5 condition of a vehicle.

7. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
said resistor is applied with a current when a voltage
associated with said converter increases beyond a
10 predetermined value.

8. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
said resistor is cooled down by a fan, and the operation of
said resistor is limited when the temperature or pressure of
15 cooling air rises to a predetermined level or higher.

9. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
duty which is time ratio for connecting to said DC concerned
with cycle in said switch, in accordance with comparison
20 between voltage value and setting value of said DC.

10. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 9, wherein
said duty is predetermined value in a first voltage range,
increases in accordance with DC voltage value in a second
25 voltage range, and a predetermined value larger than the
predetermined value in said first range in a third voltage
range.

11. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 9, wherein
30 said duty is considered as a predetermined value when
voltage value of said DC is within said first voltage range,
at least in a part of range said duty is increased in

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accordance with the voltage value of said DC so that it becomes larger than the duty of said first voltage range when voltage of said DC in a second voltage range which is larger than said first voltage range, and said duty is set
5 as a large predetermined value at least larger than any duty in said second voltage value when voltage value of said DC is within third voltage range which is larger than said second voltage range.

10 12. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said duty is continuous from said first voltage range to said second voltage range, or from said second voltage range to said third voltage range.

15 13. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said duty is set to "0" in said first voltage range.

14. An AC drive apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said duty is retained in a predetermined value in said third
20 voltage range.

15. A vehicle control apparatus comprising:
a prime mover;
a generator mechanically connected to said prime mover;
25 a rectifier for rectifying an output of said generator to DC;
a bidirectional converter connected to said rectifier;
a motor connected to said bidirectional converter, and having an output transmitted to wheels;
30 said bidirectional converter converting the rectified output to a variable frequency AC output power for driving

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said motor, and converting an AC output power from said motor to DC power; and

5 a plurality of electric brakes each including a resistor connected to said bidirectional converter to consume an electromotive force regenerated by said motor, and a switch for connecting and disconnecting said resistors to and from said bidirectional converter;

wherein each resistor is cooled by a cooling fan provided for each resistor.

10

16. A vehicle control apparatus according to claim 15, wherein said resistors are applied with a current when a voltage associated with said converter increases beyond a predetermined value.

15

17. A vehicle control apparatus according to claim 15, wherein said resistors are cooled down by a fan, and the operation of said resistor is limited when the temperature or pressure of cooling air rises to a predetermined level or

20 higher.

18. A power conversion method for converting DC power to variable frequency AC power for driving an electric motor and converting an AC output power from said motor to DC, said method comprising:

25

consuming an electromotive force regenerated by said motor by a plurality of resistors; and

when the consumption of the electromotive force is impeded in any of systems including any of said plurality of resistors consuming the electromotive force by the remaining systems including the other resistors;

30

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wherein each resistor is cooled by a cooling fan provided for each resistor.

19. A power conversion method according to claim 18,
5 further comprising:

starting to apply said resistors with a current when a voltage associated with said converter increases beyond a predetermined value.

10 20. A power conversion method according to claim 19, wherein said resistor is cooled down by a fan, and the operation of said resistors are limited when the temperature or pressure of cooling air rises to a predetermined level or higher.

15

21. A vehicle control method for generating electric power by a rotating force of a prime mover, converting the generated output to DC power, converting the DC power to variable frequency AC power for driving a motor and
20 converting an AC power output from said motor to DC power, and rotating wheels by a rotating force of said motor, said method comprising:

consuming an electromotive force regenerated by said motor by a plurality of resistors; and

25 when the consumption of the electromotive force is impeded in any of systems including any of said plurality of resistors, consuming the electromotive force by the remaining systems including the other resistors;

wherein each resistor is cooled by a cooling fan
30 provided for each resistor.

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22. A vehicle control method according to claim 21, further comprising:

starting to apply said resistors with a current when a voltage associated with said converter increases beyond a
5 predetermined value.

23. A vehicle control method according to claim 21, wherein said resistors are cooled down by a fan, and the operation of said resistors are limited when the temperature or
10 pressure of cooling air rises to a predetermined level or higher.

24. An apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

15

25. A method substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1

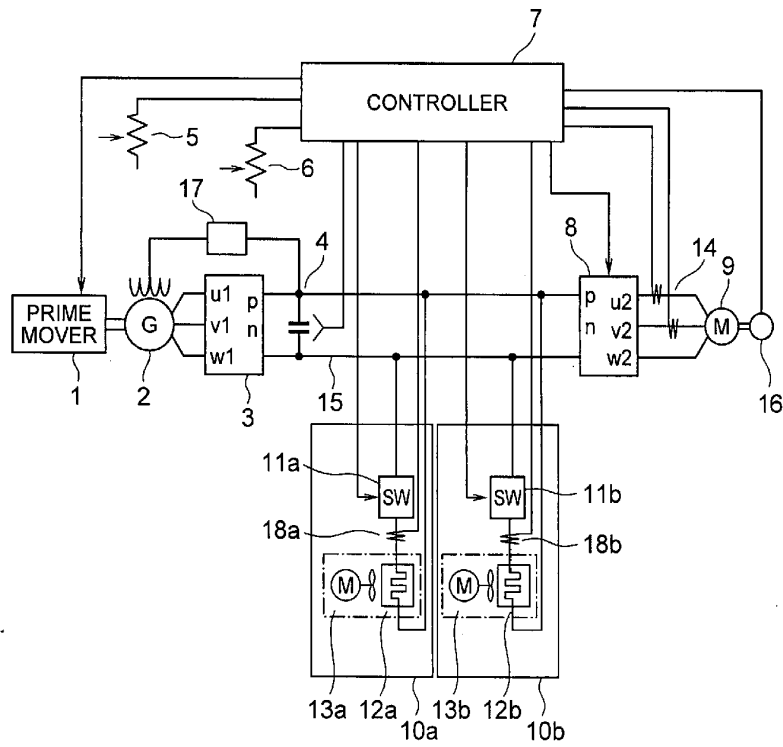


FIG. 2

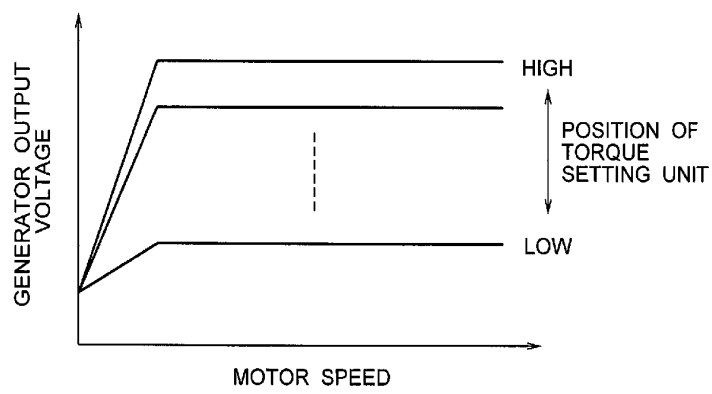


FIG. 3

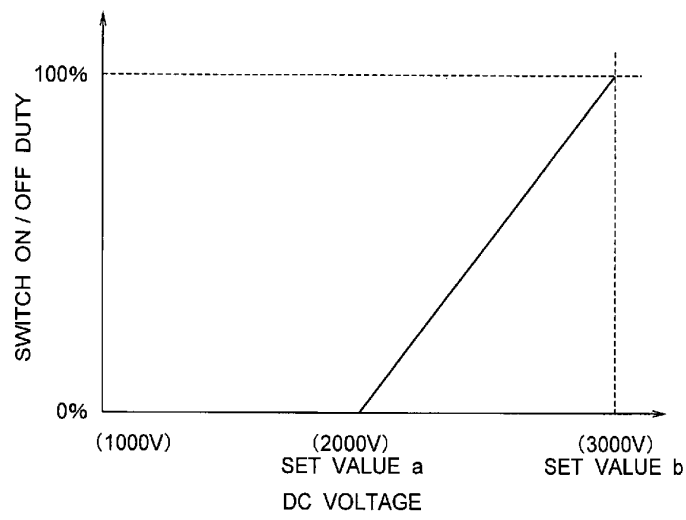


FIG. 4

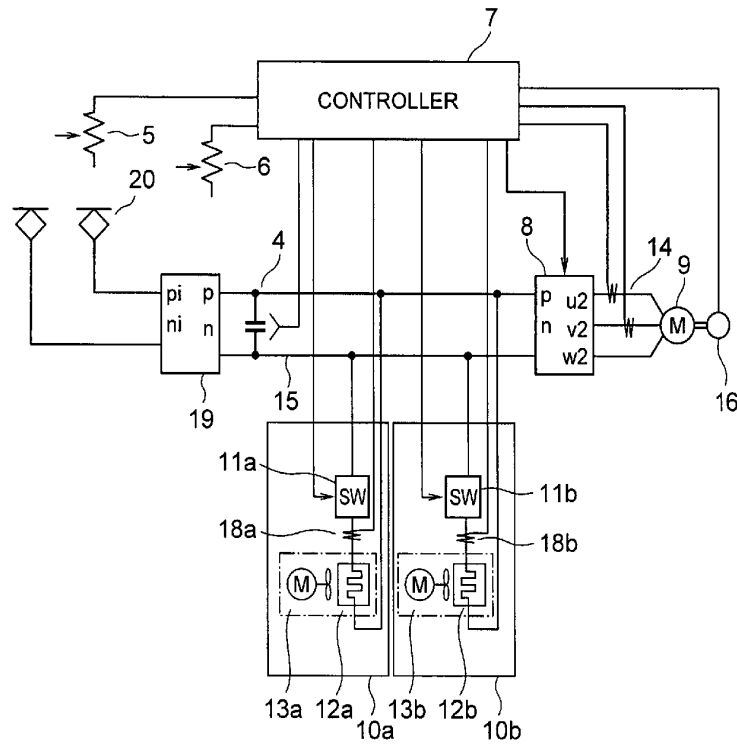


FIG. 5

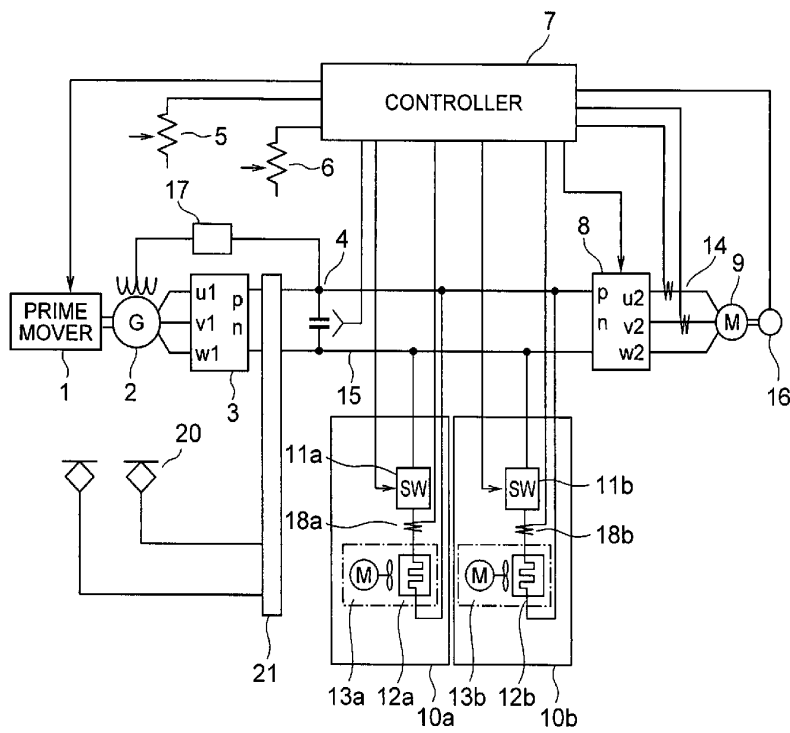


FIG. 6A

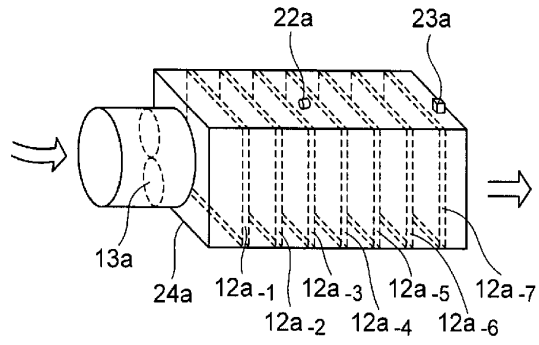


FIG. 6B

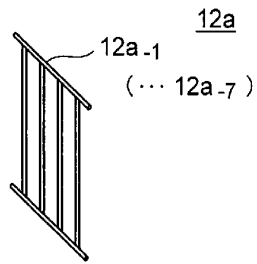


FIG. 6C

