

ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

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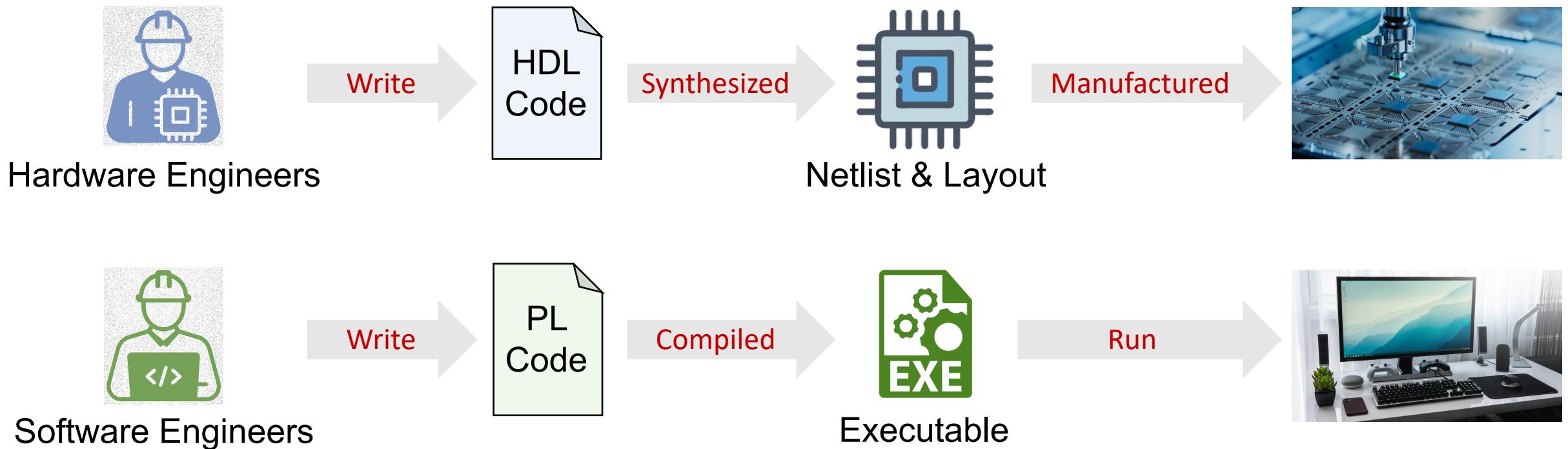


Chisel

DAC'12, 1.5K+ Citations

(Constructing Hardware in a Scala Embedded Language)

- A novel **hardware description language (HDL)** that enables agile chip development by leveraging modern PL features for productive design.





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*“Agile Chip Development: ... Small teams should be able to design chips, tailored for a specific domain or application. This will require that hardware design become much **more efficient**, and **more like modern software** design.”*

— John Hennessy & David Patterson

[Lecture for 2017 Turing Award](#)



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Academic
Practice
(Open-Source)



... ...

Industrial
Practice
(Commercial)



... ...

productive design is **NOT ENOUGH** for **agile chip development**

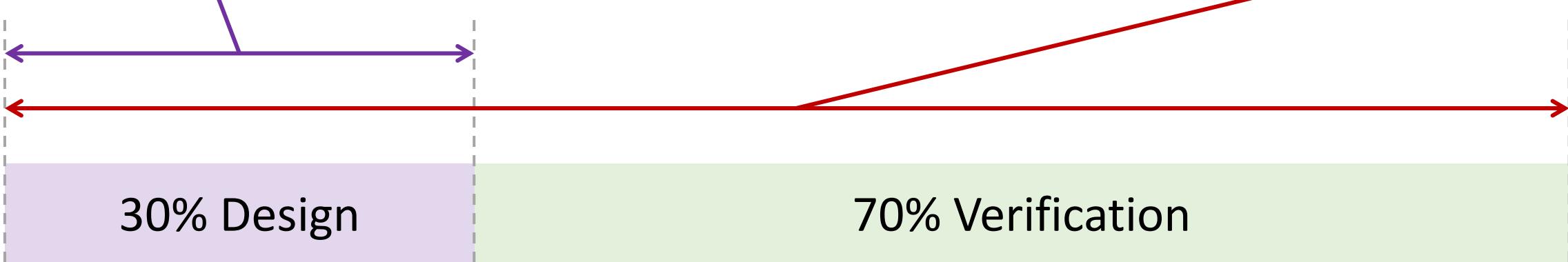
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productive design

is **NOT ENOUGH** for

agile chip development



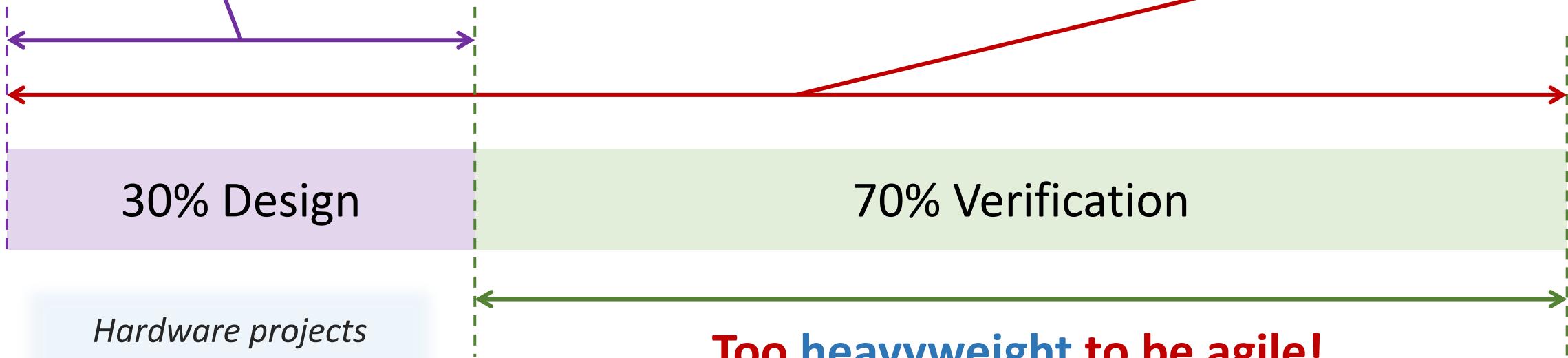
Hardware projects often employ **more verification engineers than design engineers**, and even require **designers** to devote nearly **half of their time to verification** tasks.

— according to [Siemens EDA's 2024 Global Industrial Study](#)

productive design

is NOT ENOUGH for

agile chip development



Too heavyweight to be agile!



productive design

is NOT ENOUGH for agile chip development

30% Design

70% Verification

Hardware projects often employ more verification engineers than design engineers, and even require designers to devote nearly half of their time to verification tasks.



lightweight verification

POPL'26

ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

ChiSA: **Static Analysis** for Lightweight Chisel Verification



Simulation

hours of simulation for
seconds of chip behavior

DAC'20 ISCA'16 ...



Heavyweight



Existing Work

Bounded Model Checking

well-known
state explosion problem

DATE'22 WOSET'21 ...

Theorem Proving

labor-intensive construction
of formal proofs

DAC'24 ...

Secure Type Systems

prohibitive
annotation burden

HASP'19 CCS'18 ...

ChiSA: **Static Analysis** for Lightweight Chisel Verification



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time

Heavyweight



manual effort

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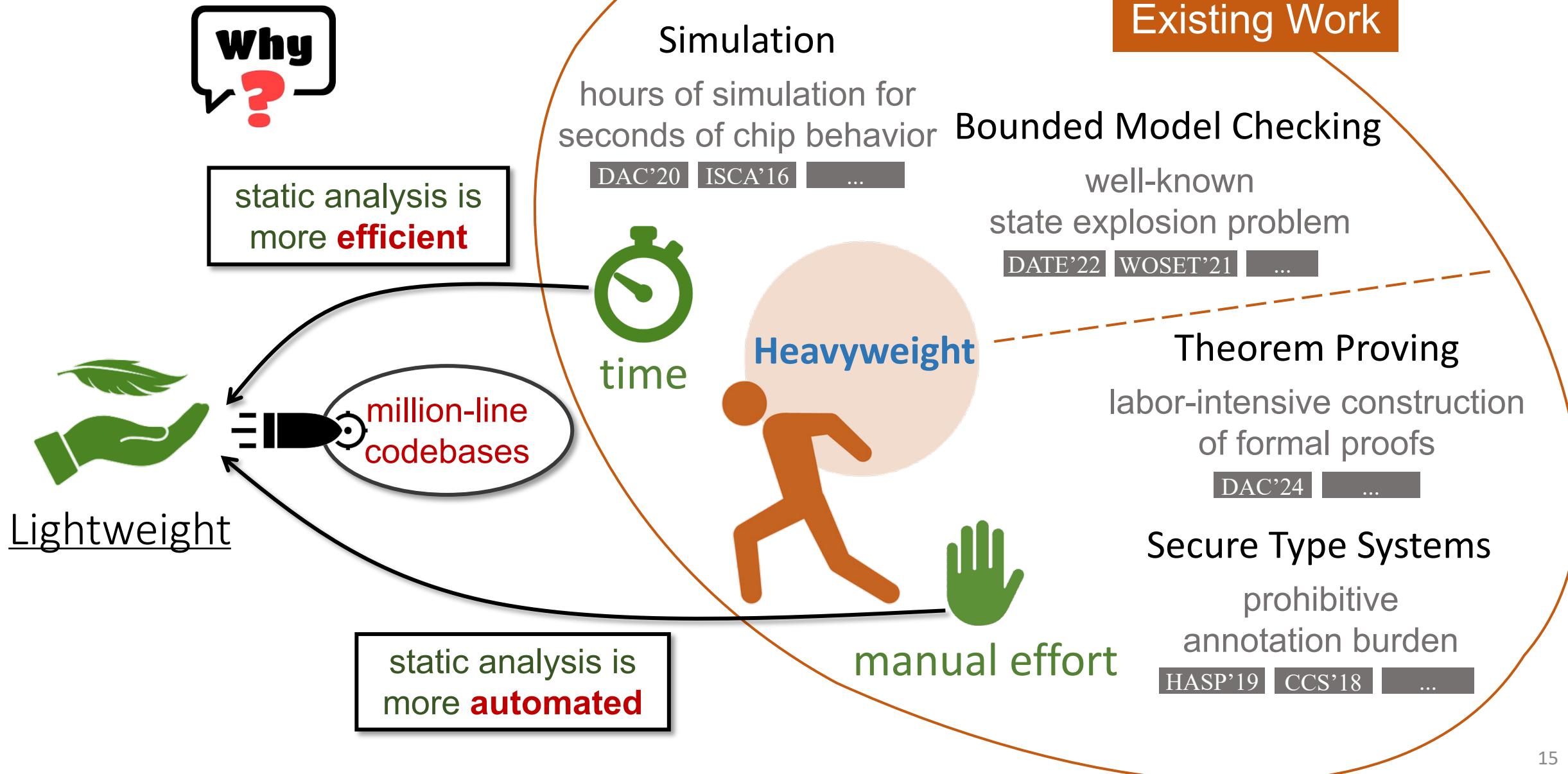
DAC'24 ...

Secure Type Systems

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ChiSA: **Static Analysis** for Lightweight Chisel Verification



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification



Applications

Chisel Bug Detection

(RQ1: ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking)

Chisel Security Analysis

(RQ2: ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems)

ChiSA

chisel static analyzer

HVFAs

Framework and Instances

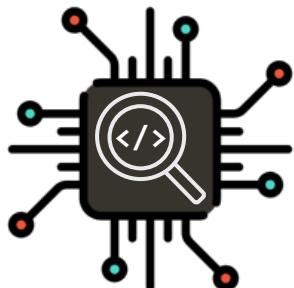
Chisel Analysis Infrastructures

(Reusable: front-end, IR, manager, etc.)

Proof of Concept Implementation



Theoretical Foundation



λ_C the essence of Chisel

circuit
structure

circuit
behavior

circuit
characteristics

λ_C
syntax

λ_C
semantics

λ_C
properties

HVFA

hardware value flow analysis

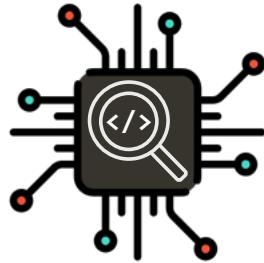
Inspired
by Software

mathematical roots
(lattice and fixed-point theory)

Customized
for Hardware

hardware-specificity
(synchronous, clock-driven, etc)

Properties
about: Soundness Precision Efficiency



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

Hardware-Specific
Intuition

1

Theoretical
Foundation



Evaluation
Summary



Applications



Proof of Concept
Implementation

Brief
Overview

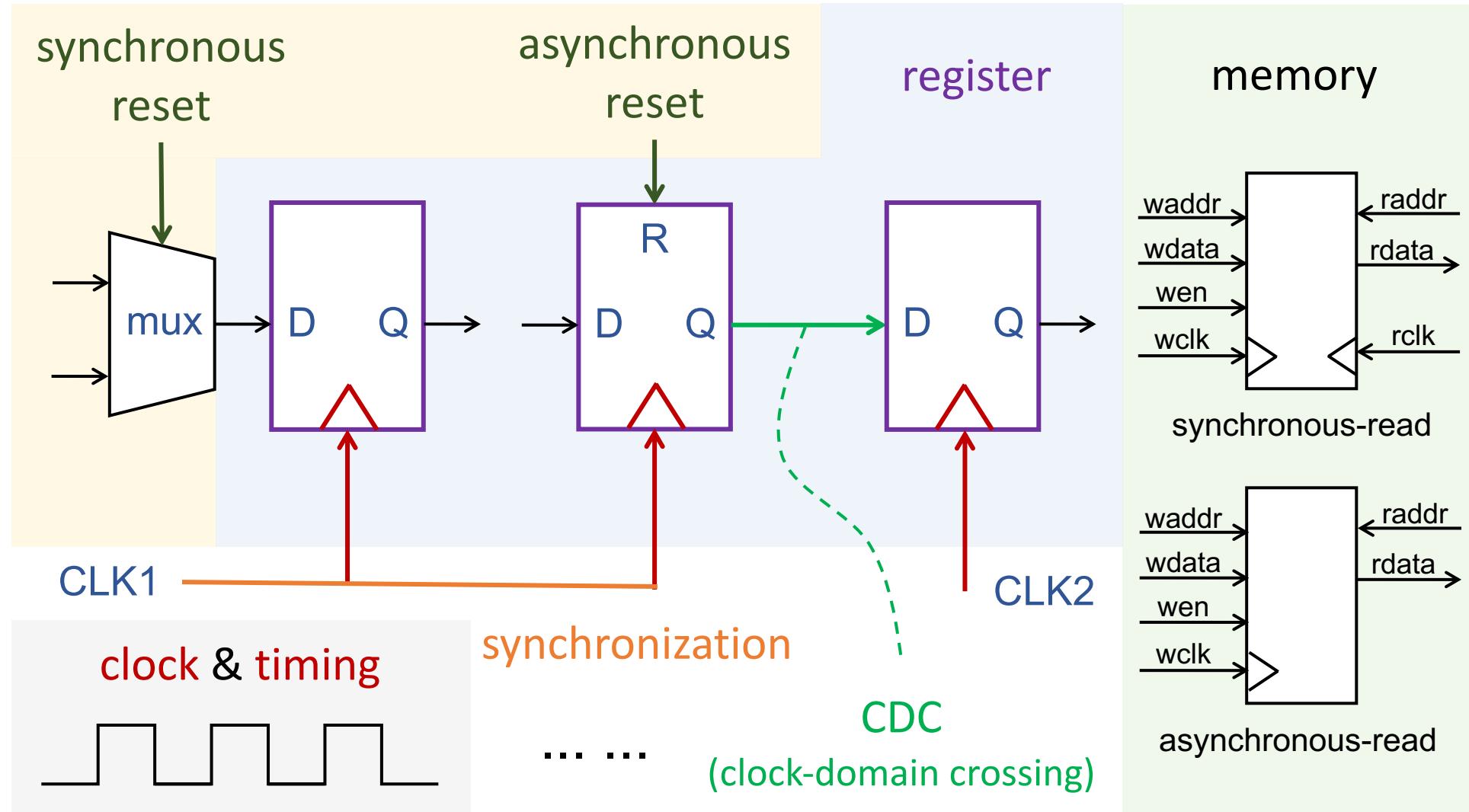
What is special about hardware programs?



Hardware-Specific
Intuition



Theoretical
Foundation



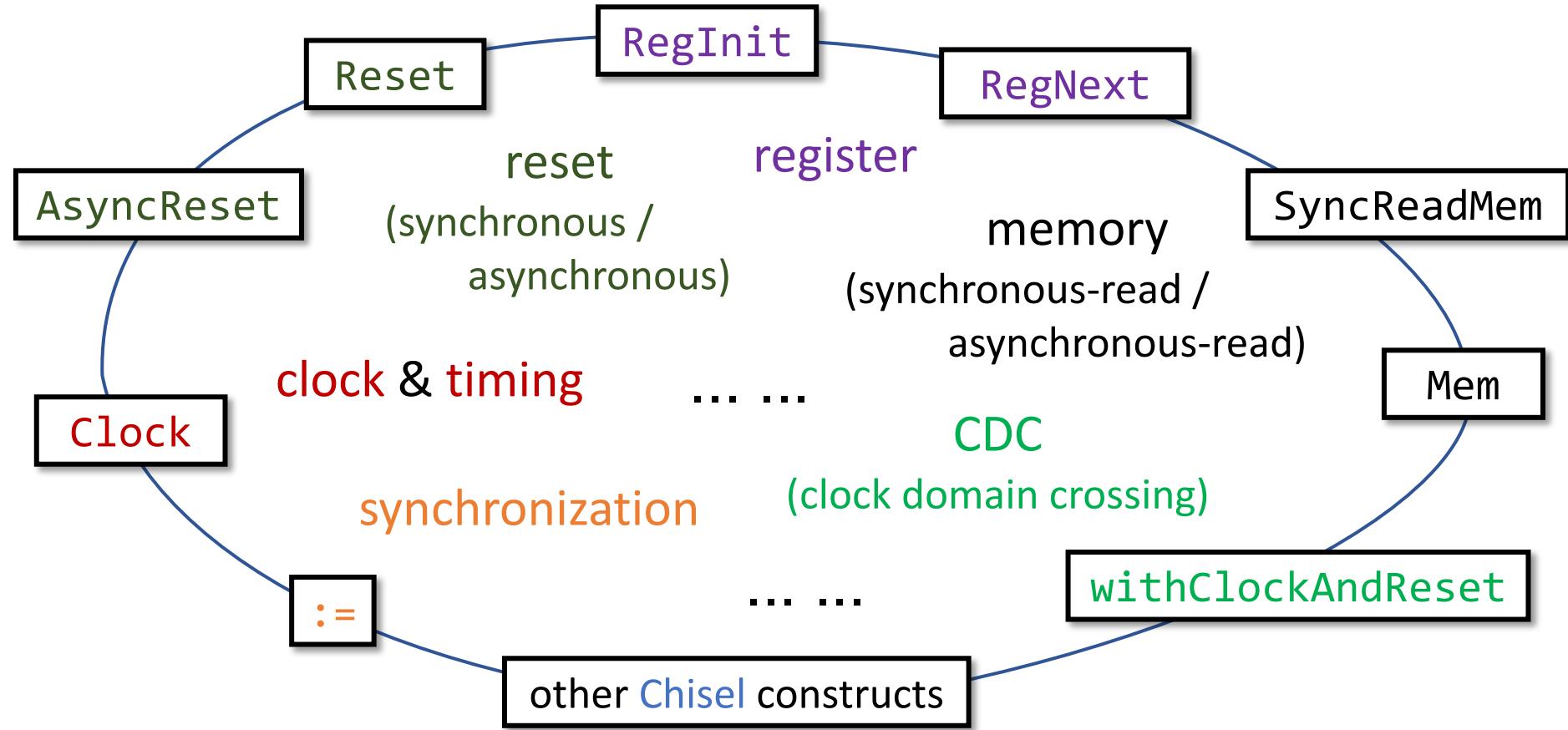
What is special about hardware programs?



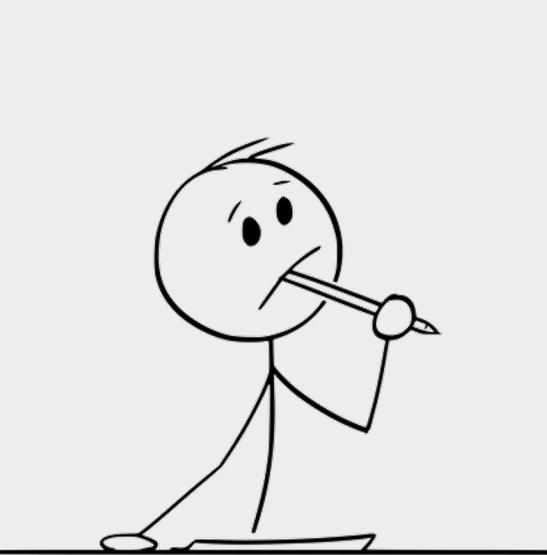
Hardware-Specific
Intuition



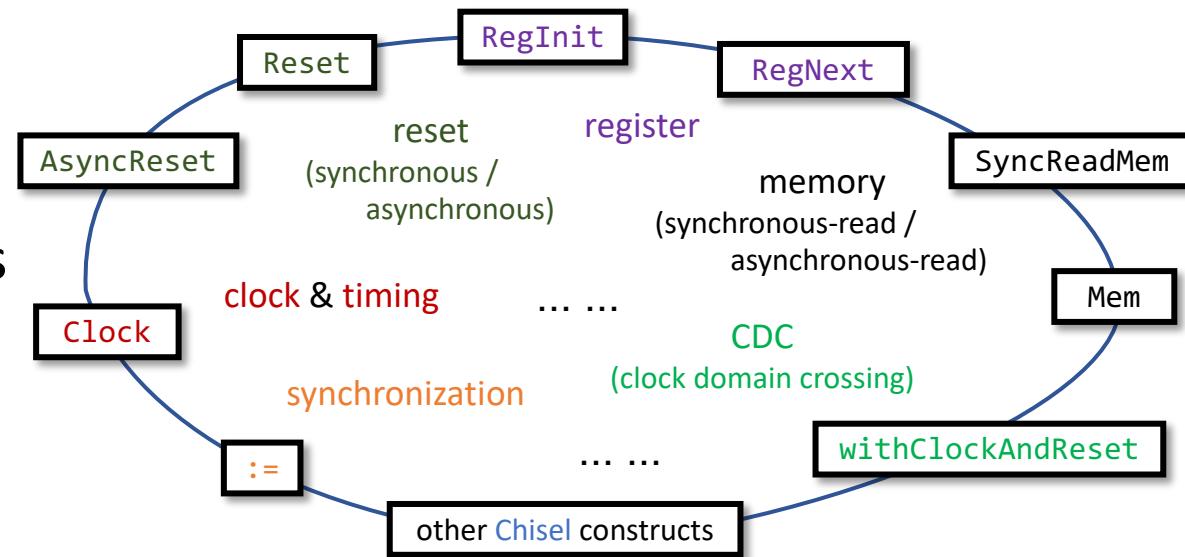
Theoretical
Foundation



Full of hardware-specific constructs uncommon in software.



Full of
hardware-specific constructs
uncommon in software.



How to characterize **dynamic hardware** behavior?

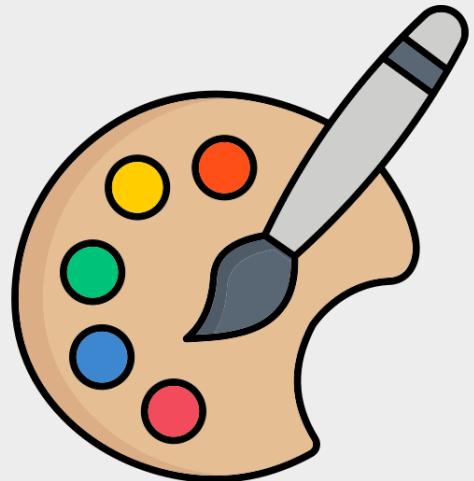
We introduce λ_C , the first calculus to capture the essence of Chisel, and prove meta-theorems about λ_C that faithfully reflect the physical reality.

How to statically **over-approximate hardware** behavior?

Based on λ_C , we define and formalize HVFA that takes care of hardware-specific semantics, and prove analysis-essential properties about it.

1
Theoretical
Foundation

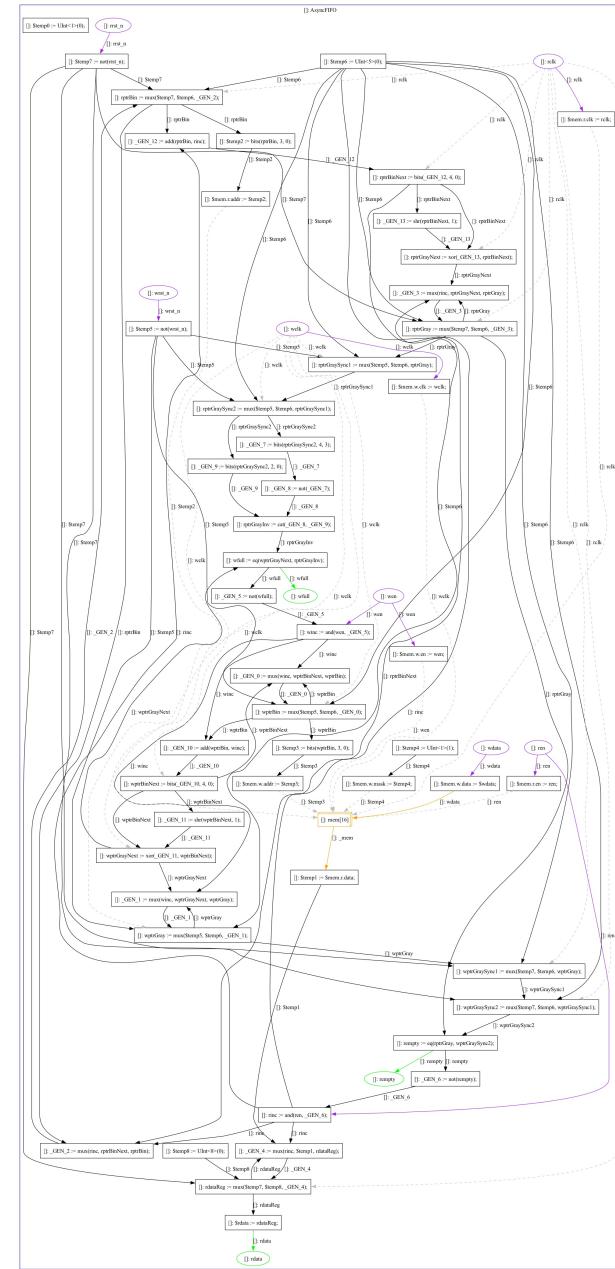
Theoretical Foundation: 14 (paper) + 6 (supplementary) pages of formal discussion.



Hardware-Specific Intuition



Theoretical Foundation



e.g., HVFG of an AsyncFIFO

Hardware Value Flow Graph (HVFG)

Nodes

Ports
(In/Out)

data

clock

reset

Statements
Connections

port
wire
register

Monitors

inspection
verification

Mocking
Entities

memory

black box

Edges

Value Flows

intra-module flow

inter-module flow

Control

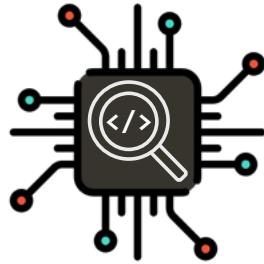
synchronization

...

reset

mux-switching

as a bonus!



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

Hardware-Specific
Intuition



Theoretical
Foundation



Evaluation
Summary

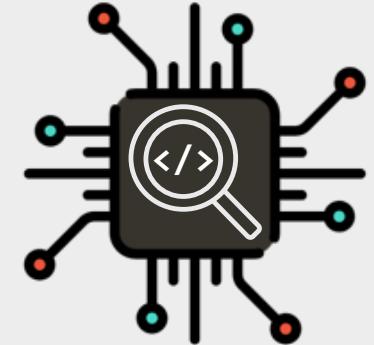


Applications



Proof of Concept
Implementation

Brief
Overview



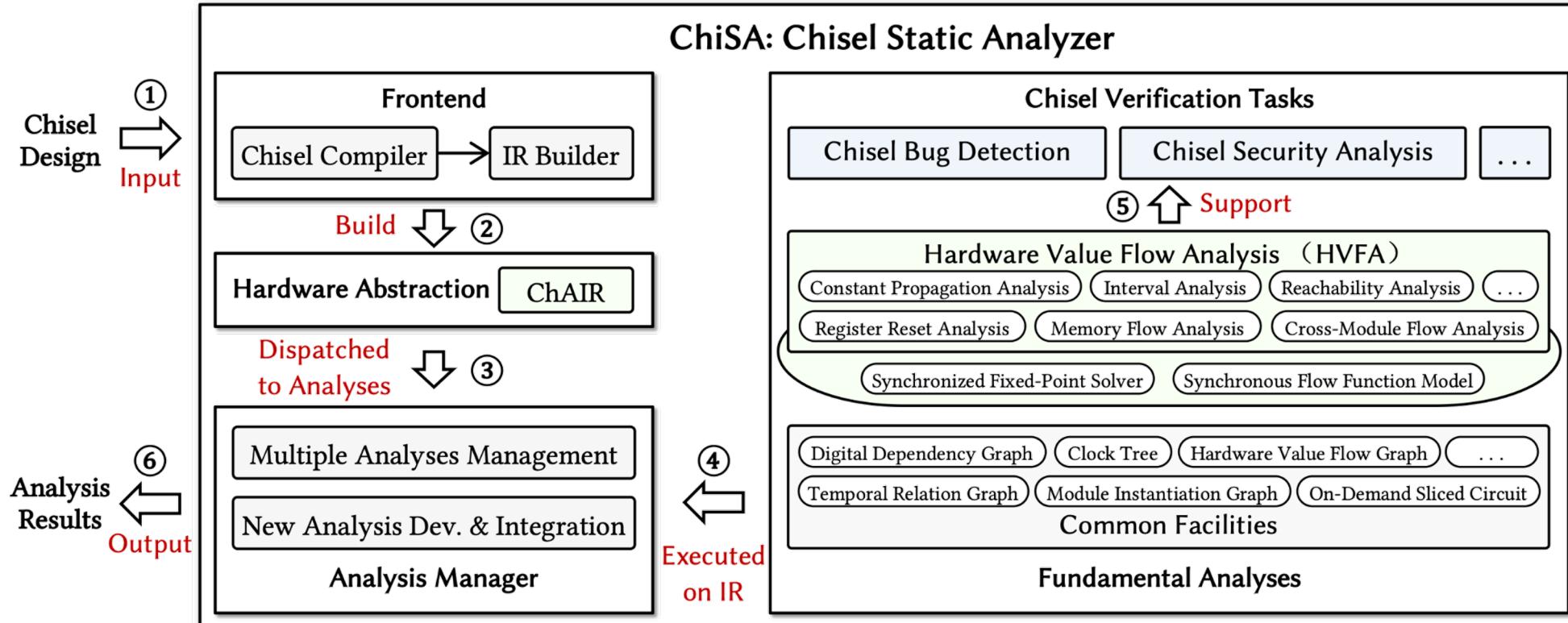
ChiSA

(Chisel Static Analyzer)

Brief Overview

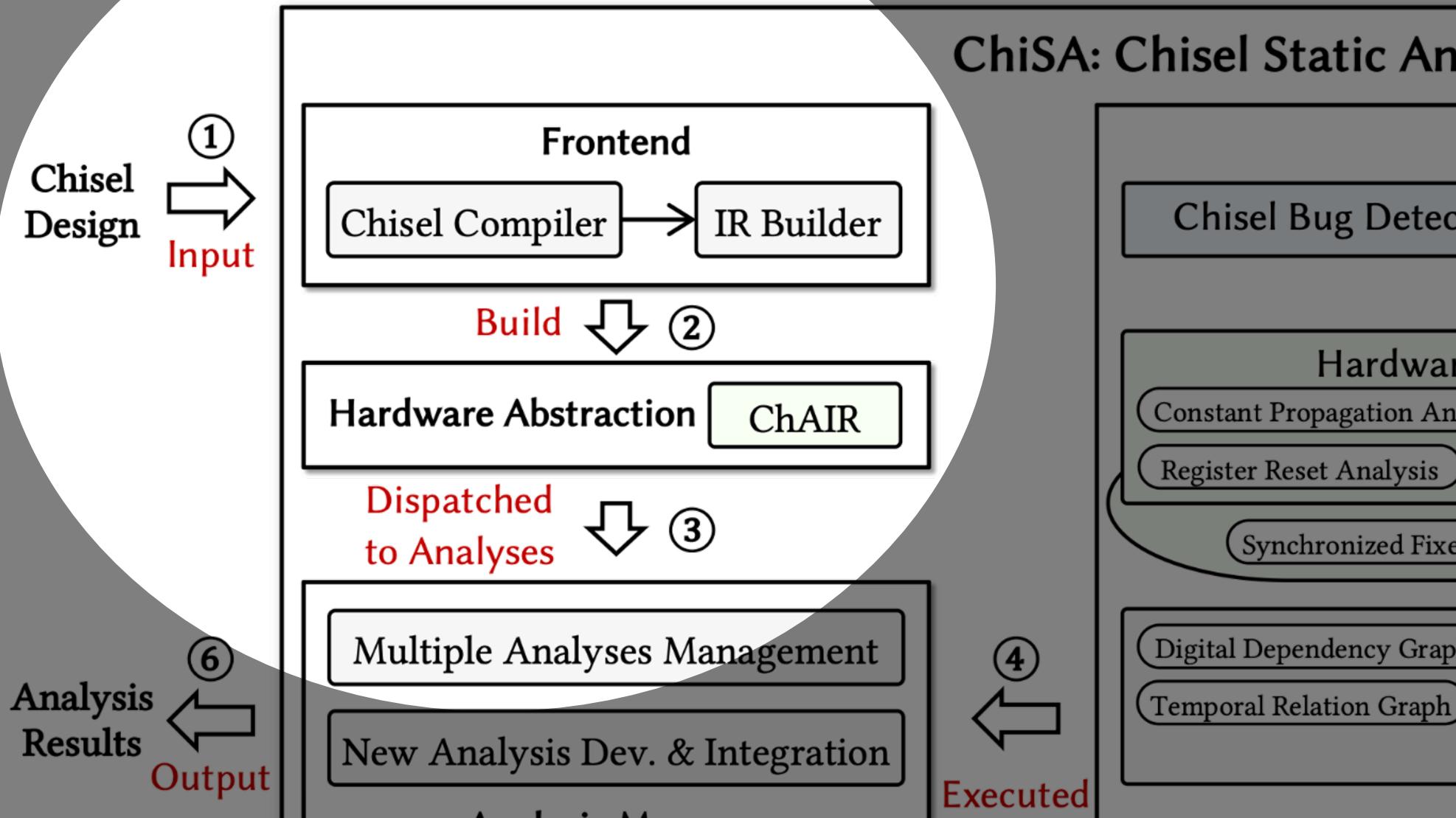


Proof of Concept
Implementation

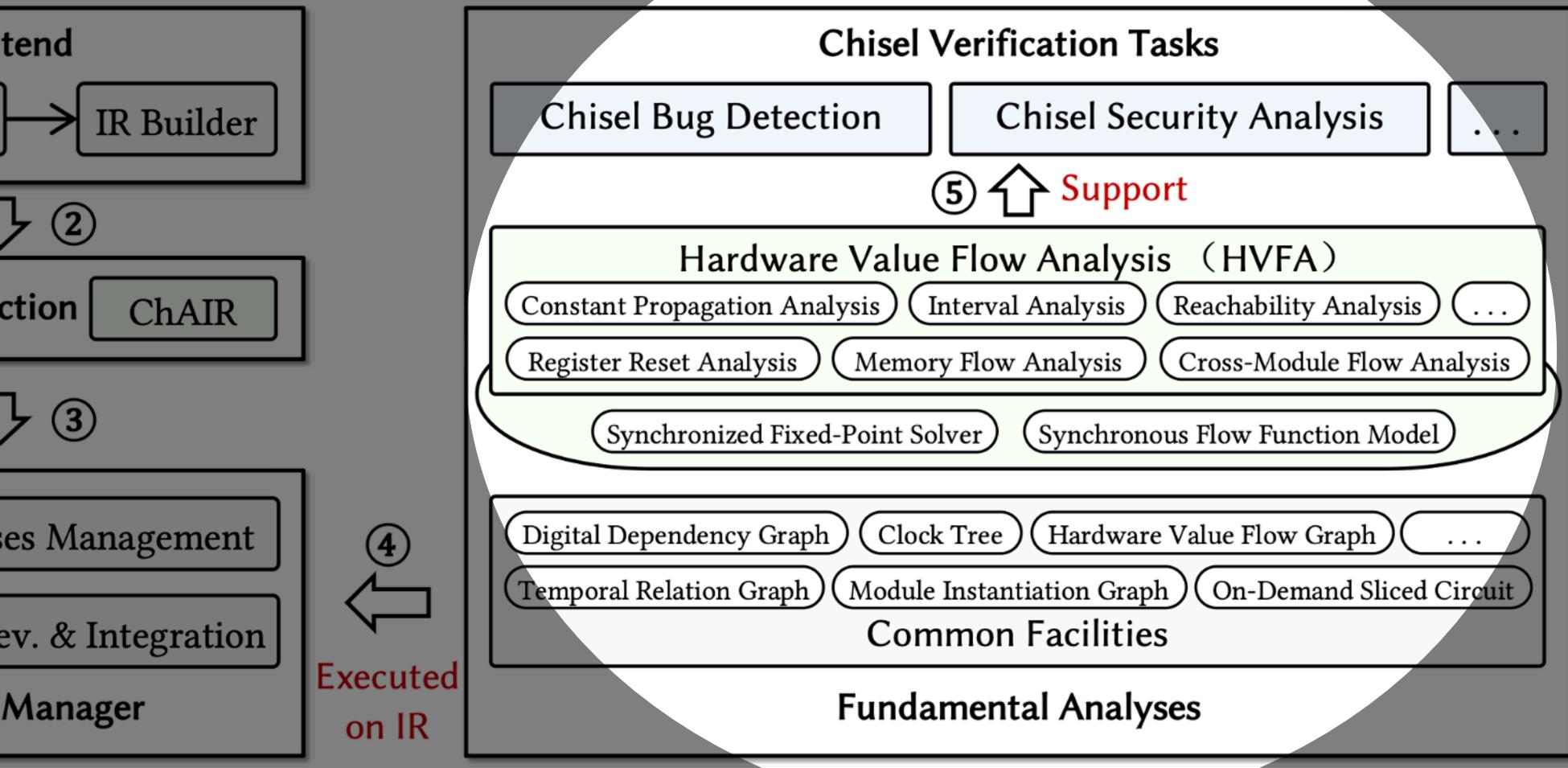


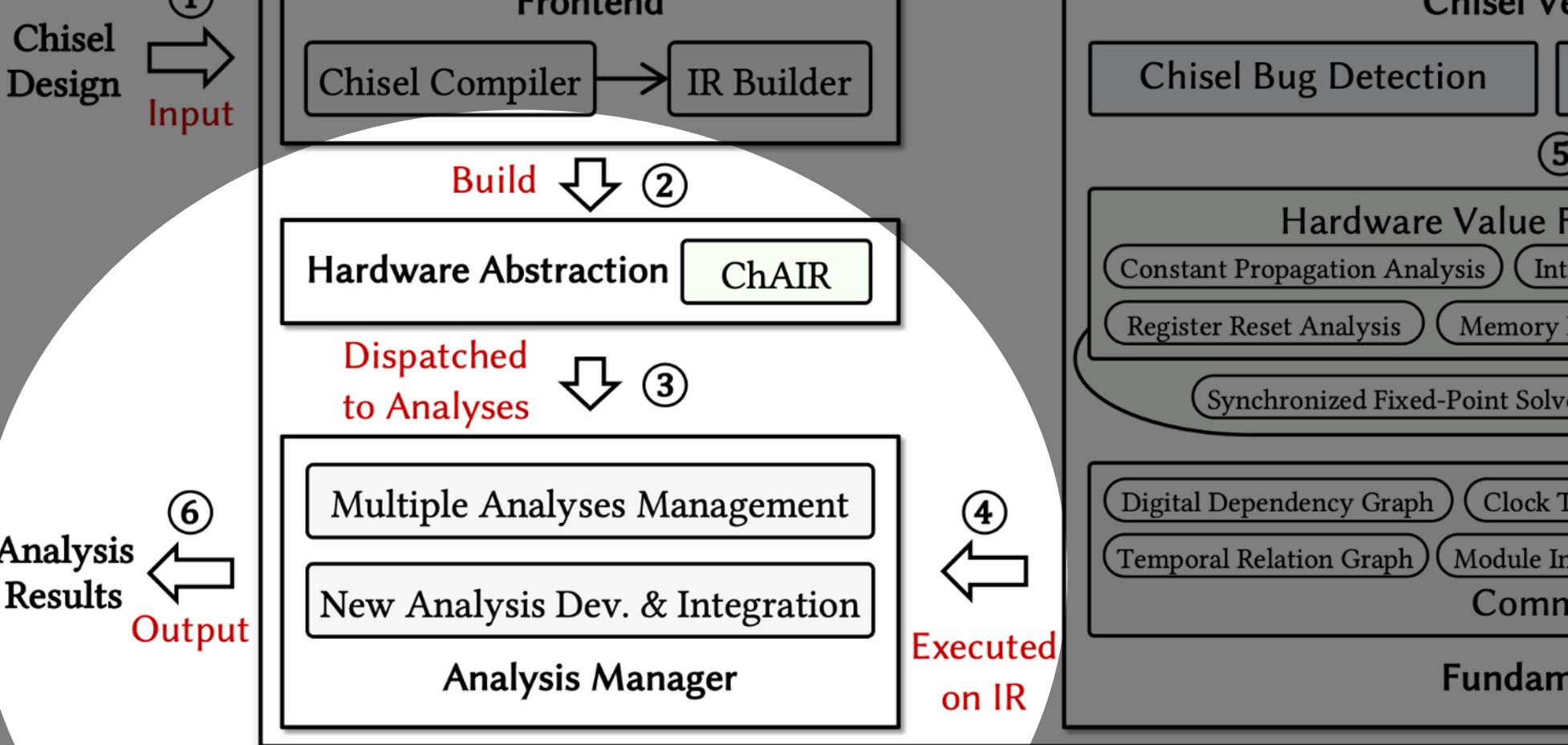
The architecture and end-to-end workflow of **ChiSA**.

ChiSA: Chisel Static Analysis



ChiSA: Chisel Static Analyzer



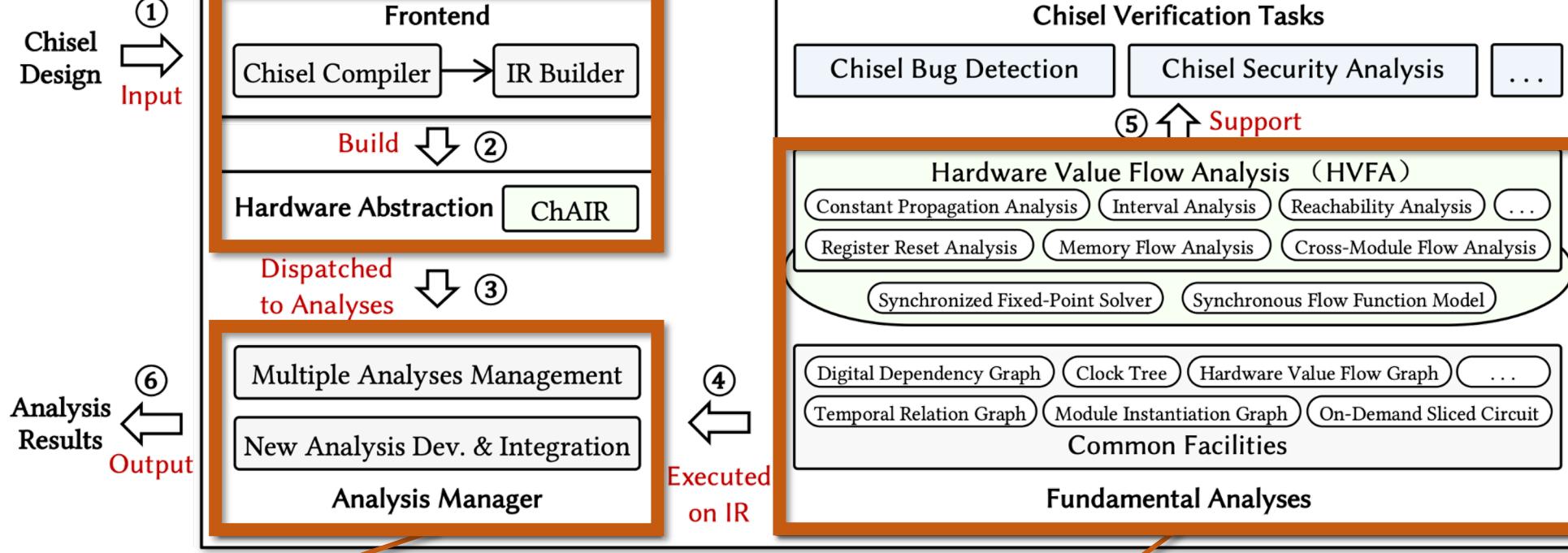
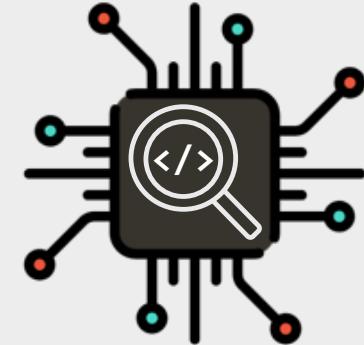


ChAIR

(Chisel Analysis Intermediate Representation)

- Structurally Simple (3AC, SSA, Linear)
- Semantically Expressive (for Chisel)

Reusable Infrastructures



Analysis Manager

(ease development and extension)

- Orchestrate existing analyses
- Integrate new analyses

Fundamental Analyses

- a reusable HVFA framework
- some general-purpose instances (e.g. intervals)
- graph representations for Chisel programs

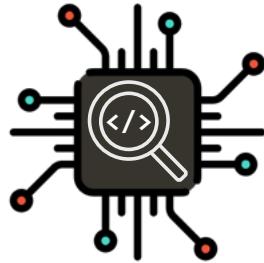
ChiSA

(Chisel Static Analyzer)

Brief Overview



Proof of Concept
Implementation



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

Hardware-Specific
Intuition



Theoretical
Foundation

Evaluation
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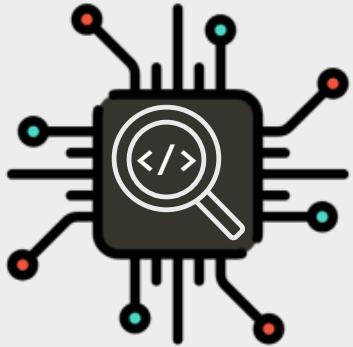


Applications



Proof of Concept
Implementation

Brief
Overview



In One Word

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA offers

produce **helpful** results

in terms of **time** and manual effort

an effective and significantly more lightweight approach

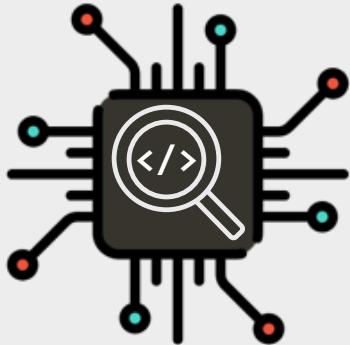
RQ1: hardware **bug** detection (e.g., identify **violable assertions**)

for representative Chisel verification tasks,

RQ2: hardware **security** analysis (e.g., detect **unintended information flows**)

especially on large and complex real-world designs.

ChiSABench: Chisel **Static Analysis** **Benchmark**



ChiSABench

Chisel
(Static Analysis)
Benchmark

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

Official Toolchain Tests	System on Chips	Deep Neural Network Accelerator
	Chisel3 (225K / 877)	Quasar (159K / 1)

XiangShan

(7.2M / 1)

Rocket

(560K / 2)

BOOM

(550K / 1)

Constellation

(5K / 1)

TrustHub

(1.1M / 25)

ChiselFlow

(657 / 18)

Sodor

(21K / 5)

IceNet

(237K / 1)

Hwacha

(553K / 1)

Security Benchmarks

Network on Chips

Vector Co-Processor

ChiSABench

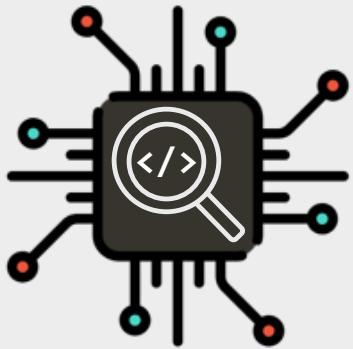
(LoC = 11.3M / #designs = 935)

out-of-the-box accessibility

(all pre-elaborated into standalone files)

diversity
(purpose, feature, scale)

real-world
(mostly popular projects)



RQ1

Hardware Bug Detection

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking

Static Assertion Analysis

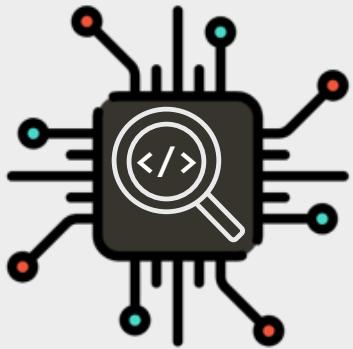
(Insight: approximate assertion violation conditions with interval and constant HVFA)



BMC SOTA

ChiselTest-BMC [[WOSET'21](#)]

Feature	Benchmark	LoC	ChiSA			ChiselTest-BMC		
			#Violable (#P-Validated)	#Crashes	Time (s)	#Violable (#P-Validated)	#Crashes	Time (s)
Small-Scale	Chisel3 (877 designs)	256 (on average)	25 (24)	0	3.1	139 (139)	72	2776.3
Real-World	XiangShan	7,176,167	28 (23)	0	145.3	Assumption Errors		
	Gemmini	632,327	8 (7)	0	10.7	Internal Errors		
	Rocket	560,405	13 (13)	0	9.6	Incomplete Errors & Internal Errors		
	Hwacha	553,087	7 (7)	0	10.8	Internal Errors		
	Boom	550,147	7 (3)	0	17.6	Incomplete Errors		
	IceNet	236,506	0 (0)	0	3.8	Incomplete Errors		
	Constellation	5,389	6 (3)	0	0.1	Incomplete Errors		
Total:		9,714,028	69 (56)	0	197.9	0 (0)	8	—



RQ1

Hardware
Bug Detection

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking

Static Assertion Analysis

(Insight: approximate assertion violation conditions with interval and constant HVFA)



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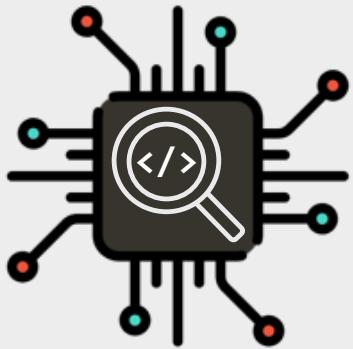
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	Xiang	7,176,167	29 (29)	0	145.9			Assumption Errors
	Gem5	1,000,000	10 (10)	0	145.9			Internal Errors
	Rococo	1,000,000	10 (10)	0	145.9			Incomplete Errors & Internal Errors
	HwBot	1,000,000	10 (10)	0	145.9			Internal Errors
	Boomerang	1,000,000	10 (10)	0	145.9			Incomplete Errors
	Iceberg	1,000,000	10 (10)	0	145.9			Incomplete Errors
Real-World	Constellation	5,389	6 (3)	0	0.1			Incomplete Errors
	Total:	9,714,028	69 (56)	0	197.9	0 (0)	8	—

ChiSA is Effective

(eight were recognized by developers
and scheduled for future fixes)





RQ1

Hardware
Bug Detection

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking

Static Assertion Analysis

(Insight: approximate assertion violation conditions with interval and constant HVFA)

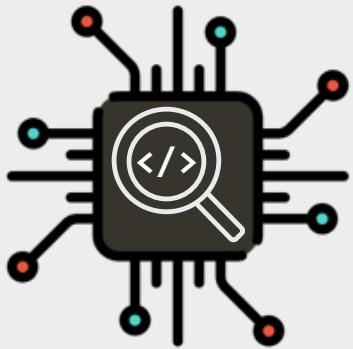


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Real-World	XiangSheng Gemm Rock Hwacc Boom IceNet Constellation	550,147 236,506 5,389	7 (3) 0 (0) 6 (3)	0 0 0	17.6 3.8 0.1	Assumption Errors Internal Errors Incomplete Errors & Internal Errors Internal Errors Incomplete Errors Incomplete Errors Incomplete Errors	0 (0)	—
	Total:	9,714,028	69 (56)	0	197.9	8	—	—

ChiSA is Lightweight
(finishes analysis for 9.7M+ LoC within 200s)



RQ1

Hardware
Bug Detection

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking

Static Assertion Analysis

(Insight: approximate assertion violation conditions with interval and constant HVFA)



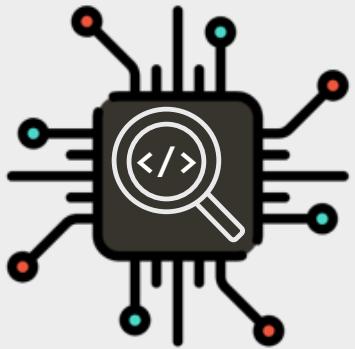
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	Gemmini	632,327	8 (7)	0	10.7		Internal Errors		
	Rocket	560,405	13 (13)	0	9.6		Incomplete Errors & Internal Errors		
	Hwacha	553,087	7 (7)	0	10.8		Internal Errors		
	Boom	550,147	7 (3)	0	17.6		Incomplete Errors		
	ILP32	226,591	0 (0)	0	0.9		Incomplete Errors		

ChiSA is **inapplicable** on large and complex real-world designs.
(all *crashed* with various errors)

8



RQ1

Hardware
Bug Detection

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking

Static Assertion Analysis

(Insight: approximate assertion violation conditions with interval and constant HVFA)

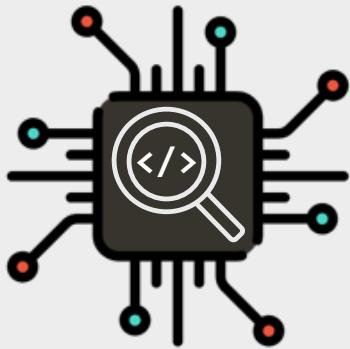


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	Gemmini	632,327	8 (7)	0	10.7	Internal Errors		
	Rocket	560,427	12 (12)	0	7.6	Timing Errors		
	Hwacha	553,000	10 (10)	0	7.1	Protocol Errors		
	Boom	550,100	10 (10)	0	7.1	Implementation Errors		
	IceNet	236,500	8 (8)	0	5.1	Resource Errors		
	Constellation	5,382	3 (3)	0	0.1	Implementation Errors		
Total:		9,714,028	69 (56)	0	197.9	0 (0)	8	—

ChiSA is significantly more lightweight than BMC.
(in terms of time: 3.1s vs 2776.3s)



RQ2

Hardware Security Analysis

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

Taint Analysis

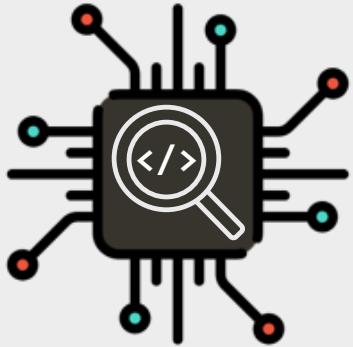
(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



STS SOTA

ChiselFlow [[CCS'18](#)]

Benchmark	#Designs × Function	LoC	ChiSA			ChiselFlow	
			#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	#Annotations (#Sources / #Sinks)	Time (s)	#Annotations (Type Labels)	Time (s)
ChiselFlow	18 × *	655	19 (1 / 0)	44 (25 / 19)	0.006	228	14.475
	19 × AES [85]	1,004,180	54 (0 / 0)	73 (19 / 54)	0.175	—	—
	3 × ISCAS89 [21]	143,440	3 (0 / 0)	6 (3 / 3)	0.435	—	—
	1 × PIC16F84 [65]	5,932	1 (0 / 0)	2 (1 / 1)	0.017	—	—
	2 × RSA [83]	2,302	2 (0 / 0)	4 (2 / 2)	0.005	—	—
Total:		1,155,854	60 (0 / 0)	85 (25 / 60)	0.632	—	—



RQ2

Hardware Security Analysis

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

Taint Analysis

(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



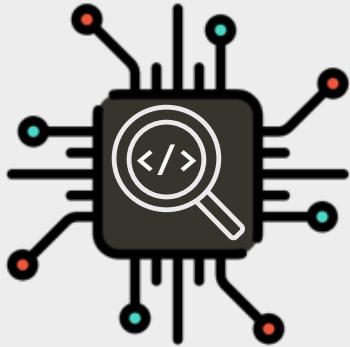
STS SOTA

ChiselFlow [CCS'18]

Benchmark	#Designs	LoC	ChiSA		ChiselFlow	
	× Function		#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	#Annotations (#Sources / #Sinks)	Time (s)	#Annotations (Type Labels)
ChiselFlow	18 × *	655	19 (1 / 0)	44 (25 / 19)	0.006	228
TrustHub	1,155,854		60 (0 / 0)	85 (25 / 60)	0.632	—

ChiSA is Effective

(identified **all vulnerabilities** with only 1 false positive)



RQ2

Hardware Security Analysis

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

Taint Analysis

(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



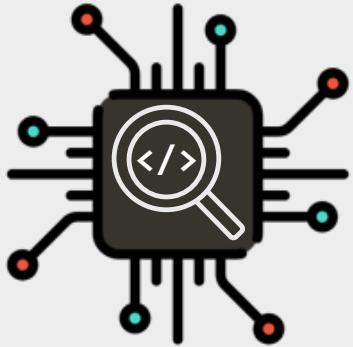
STS SOTA

ChiselFlow [CCS'18]

Benchmark	#Designs × Function	LoC	ChiSA			ChiselFlow	
			#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	#Annotations (#Sources / #Sinks)	Time (s)	#Annotations (Type Labels)	Time (s)
ChiselFlow							475
TrustHub	19 3 × 1 × PIC16F84 [65] 2 × RSA [83]	5,752 2,302	1 (0 / 0) 2 (0 / 0)	2 (1 / 1) 4 (2 / 2)	0.017 0.005	—	—
	Total:	1,155,854	60 (0 / 0)	85 (25 / 60)	0.632		

ChiSA is **Lightweight**

(finishes analysis for 1.1M LoC within 85 annotations and 0.632s)



RQ2

Hardware Security Analysis

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

Taint Analysis

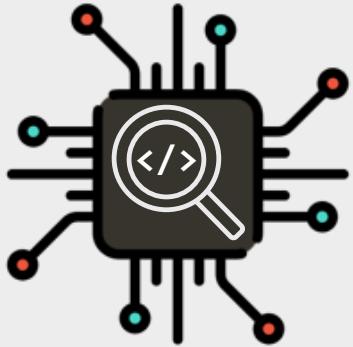
(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



STS SOTA

ChiselFlow [CCS'18]

Benchmark	#Designs × Function	LoC	ChiSA			ChiselFlow	
			#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	#Annotations (#Sources / #Sinks)	Time (s)	#Annotations (Type Labels)	Time (s)
ChiselFlow	18 × *	655	19 (1 / 0)	44 (25 / 19)	0.006	228	14.475
TrustHub	19 × AES [85]	1,004,180	Inapplicable It is prohibitive to <i>retrofit</i> a million-line-scale codebase with an annotation-intensive STS .				-
	3 × ISCAS89 [21]	143,440					-
	1 × PIC16F84 [65]	5,932					-
	2 × RSA [83]	2,302					-
	Total:	1,155,854					-



RQ2

Hardware Security Analysis

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

Taint Analysis

(directly use the **taint HVFA**)

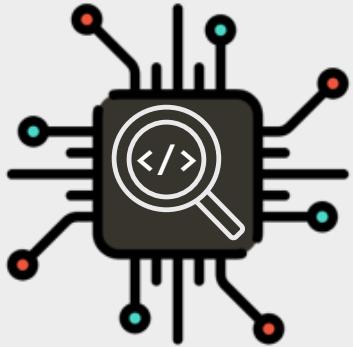


STS SOTA

ChiselFlow [CCS'18]

Benchmark	#Designs	LoC	ChiSA			ChiselFlow	
	× Function		#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	#Annotations (#Sources / #Sinks)	Time (s)	#Annotations (Type Labels)	Time (s)
ChiselFlow	18 × *	655	19 (1 / 0)	44 (25 / 19)	0.006	228	14.475
	19 × AES [85]	1,004	180	54 (0 / 0)	0.175		
	3 × ISCAS89 [21]	1		23 (19 / 54)			
	1 × PIC16F84 [65]						
TrustHub	2 × RSA [83]						
	Total:	1,155,854	60 (0 / 0)	85 (25 / 60)	0.632		

ChiSA is significantly more lightweight than STS.
(in terms of manual effort: 44 vs 228 annotations)



In One Word

Evaluation Summary



Applications

ChiSA offers

produce **helpful** results

in terms of **time** and manual effort

an effective and significantly more lightweight approach

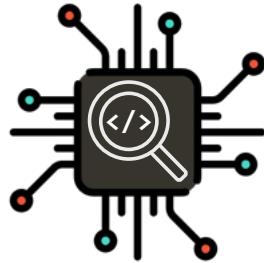
RQ1: hardware **bug** detection (e.g., identify **violable assertions**)

for representative Chisel verification tasks,

RQ2: hardware **security** analysis (e.g., detect **unintended information flows**)

especially on large and complex real-world designs.

ChiSABench: Chisel **Static Analysis** **Benchmark**



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

Hardware-Specific
Intuition



Theoretical
Foundation

Brief
Overview



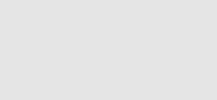
Proof of Concept
Implementation



Applications



Evaluation
Summary



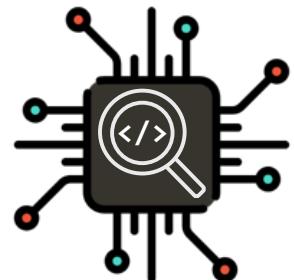
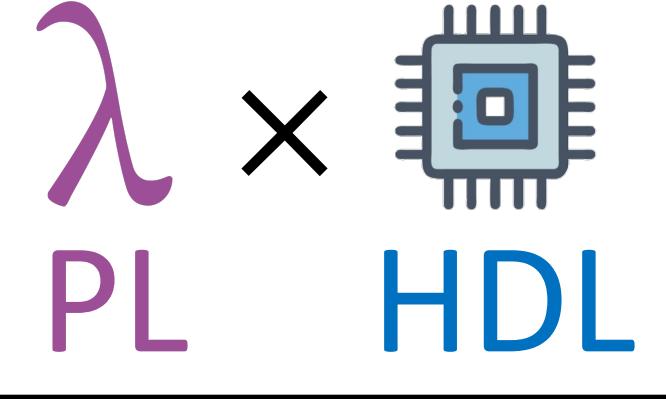


Research Opportunities

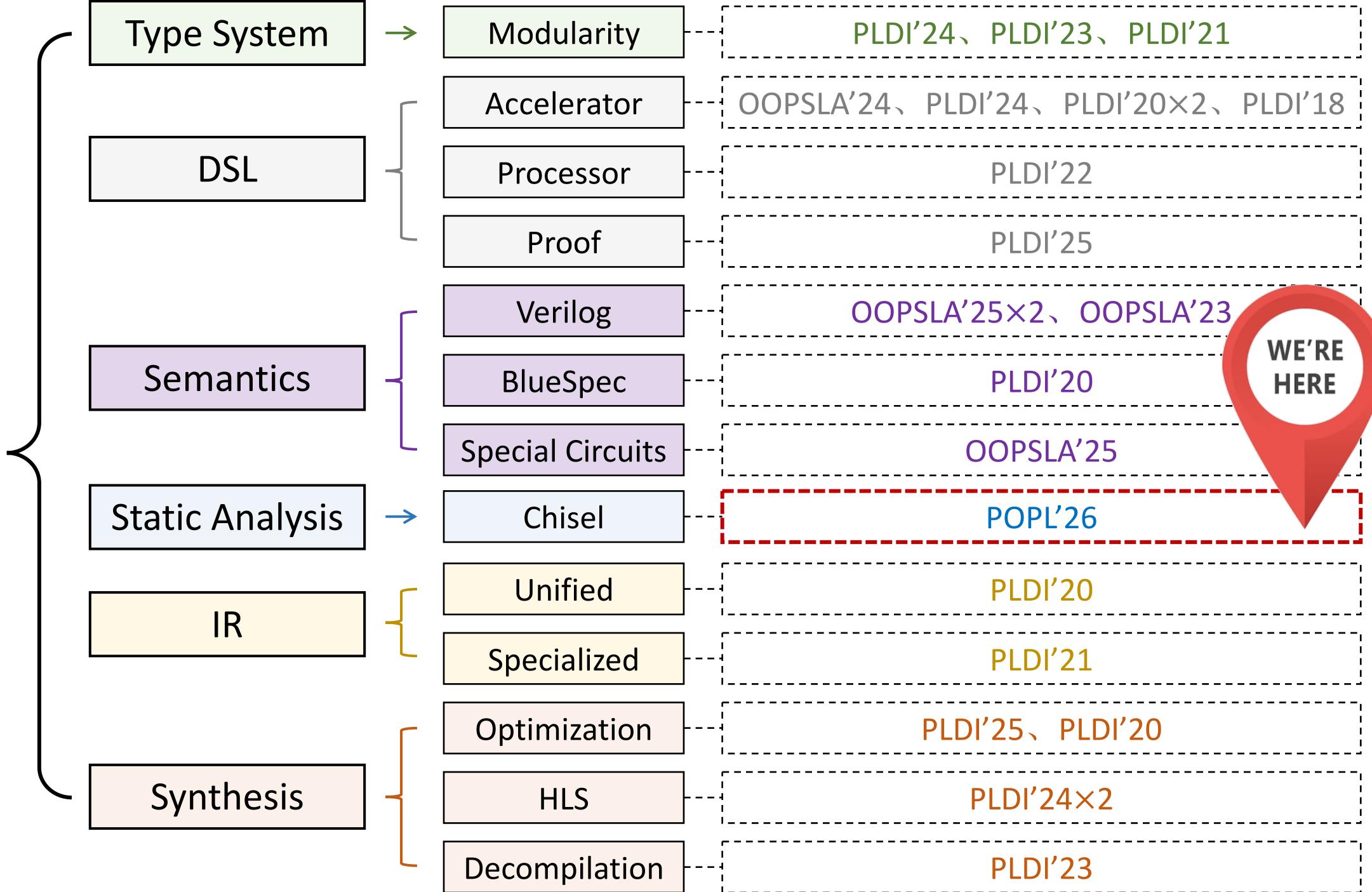
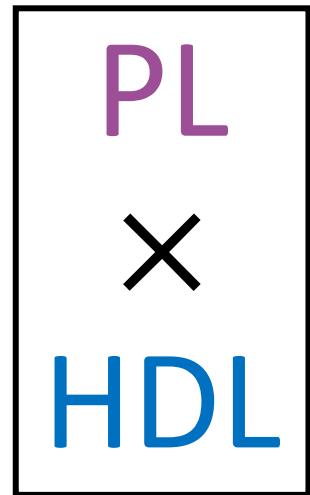
TODO :)



TODO :)



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification





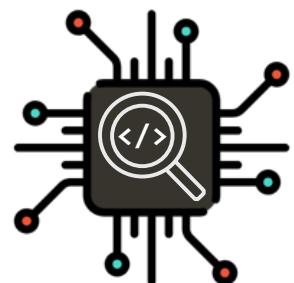
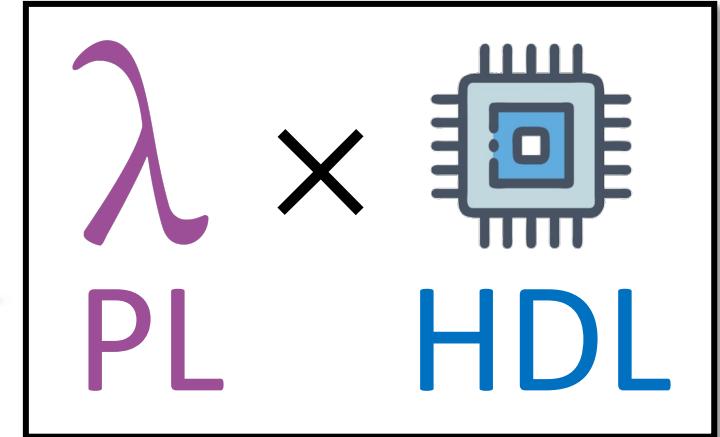
Research Opportunities

THANK
YOU

Jiacai Cui @ NJU, China



TODO :)



ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification