

ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

Jiacai Cui, Qinlin Chen, Zhongsheng Zhan, Tian Tan*, and Yue Li*



POPL 2026

le Couvent des
Jacobins

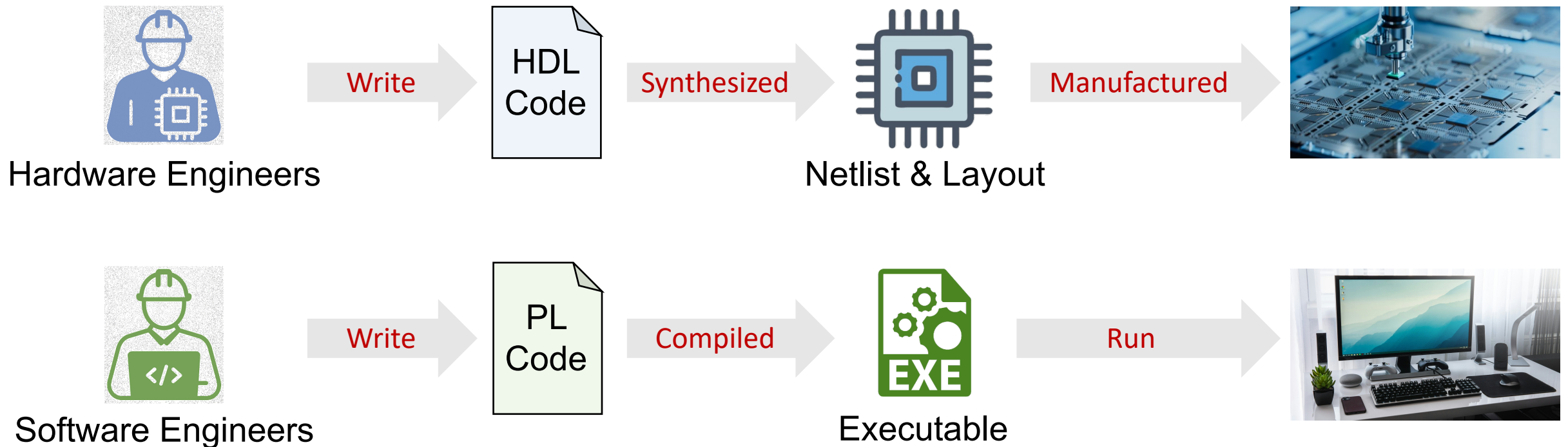


Chisel

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.





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.

***“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](#)



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**.

***“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](#)

Academic
Practice
(Open-Source)



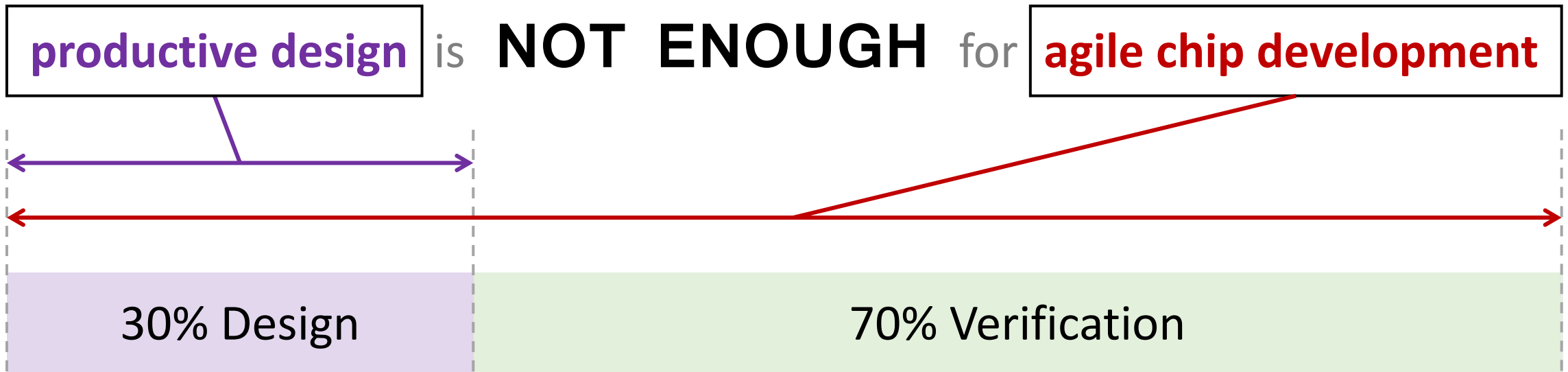
Industrial
Practice
(Commercial)



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

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

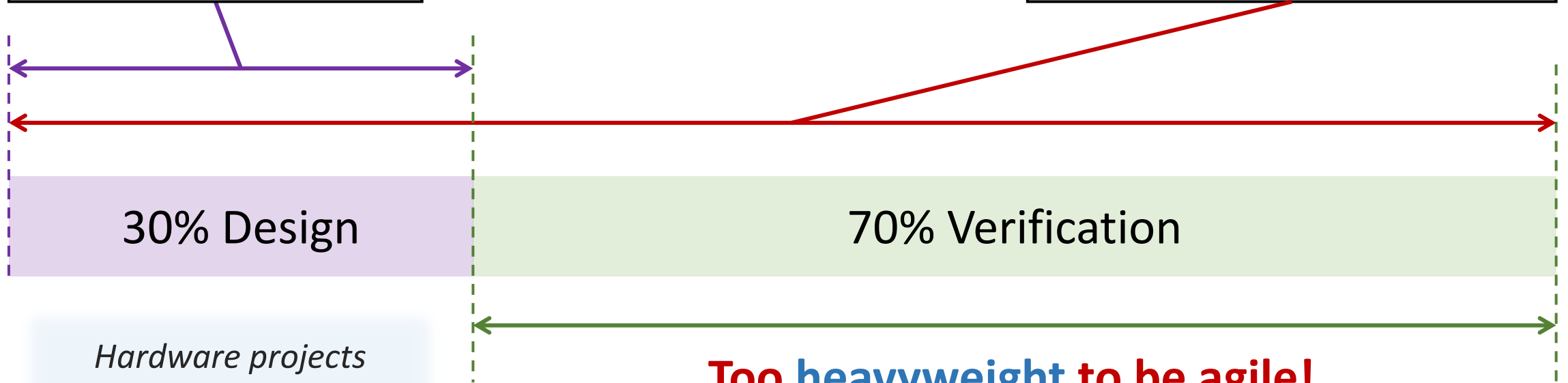




Hardware projects often employ **more verification engineers than design engineers**, and even require **designers** to devote nearly **half of their time to verification** tasks.

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

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

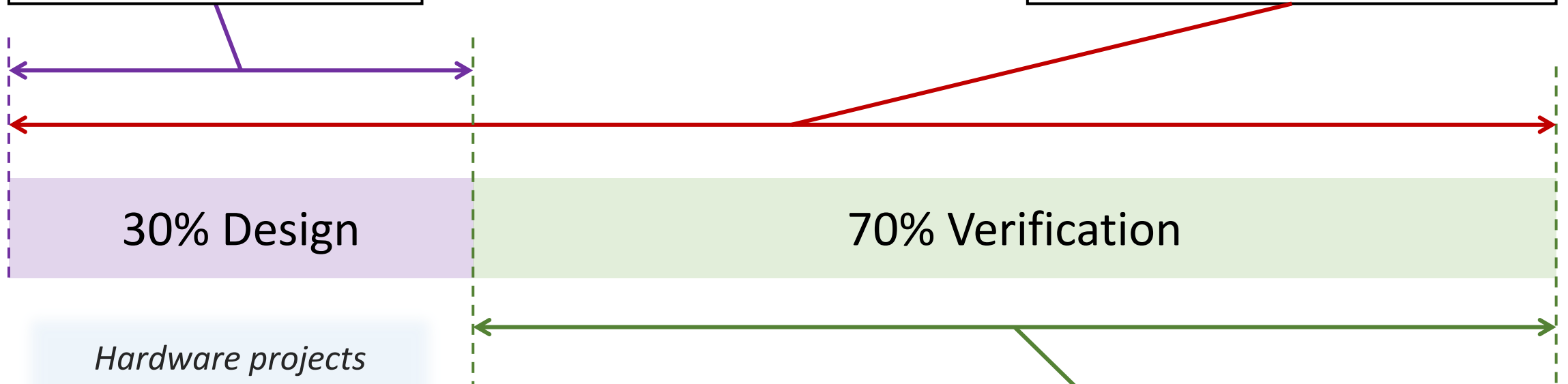


Hardware projects often employ **more verification engineers** than **design engineers**, and even require **designers** to devote nearly **half of their time** to **verification** tasks.

Too heavyweight to be agile!



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.



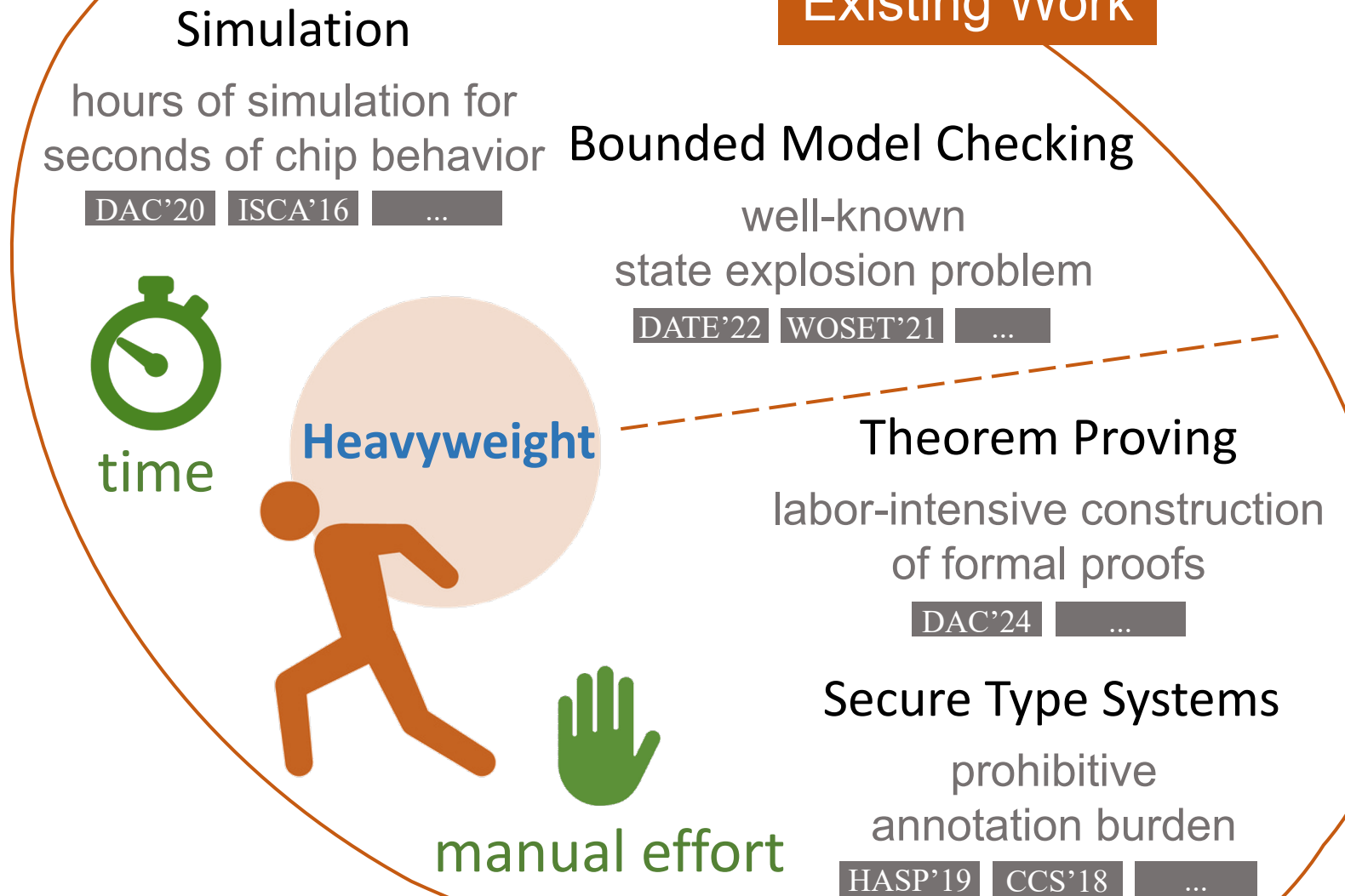
lightweight verification



POPL'26

ChiSA: Static Analysis for Lightweight Chisel Verification

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



manual effort

Existing Work

Bounded Model Checking

well-known
state explosion problem

DATE'22 WOSET'21 ...

Theorem Proving

labor-intensive construction
of formal proofs

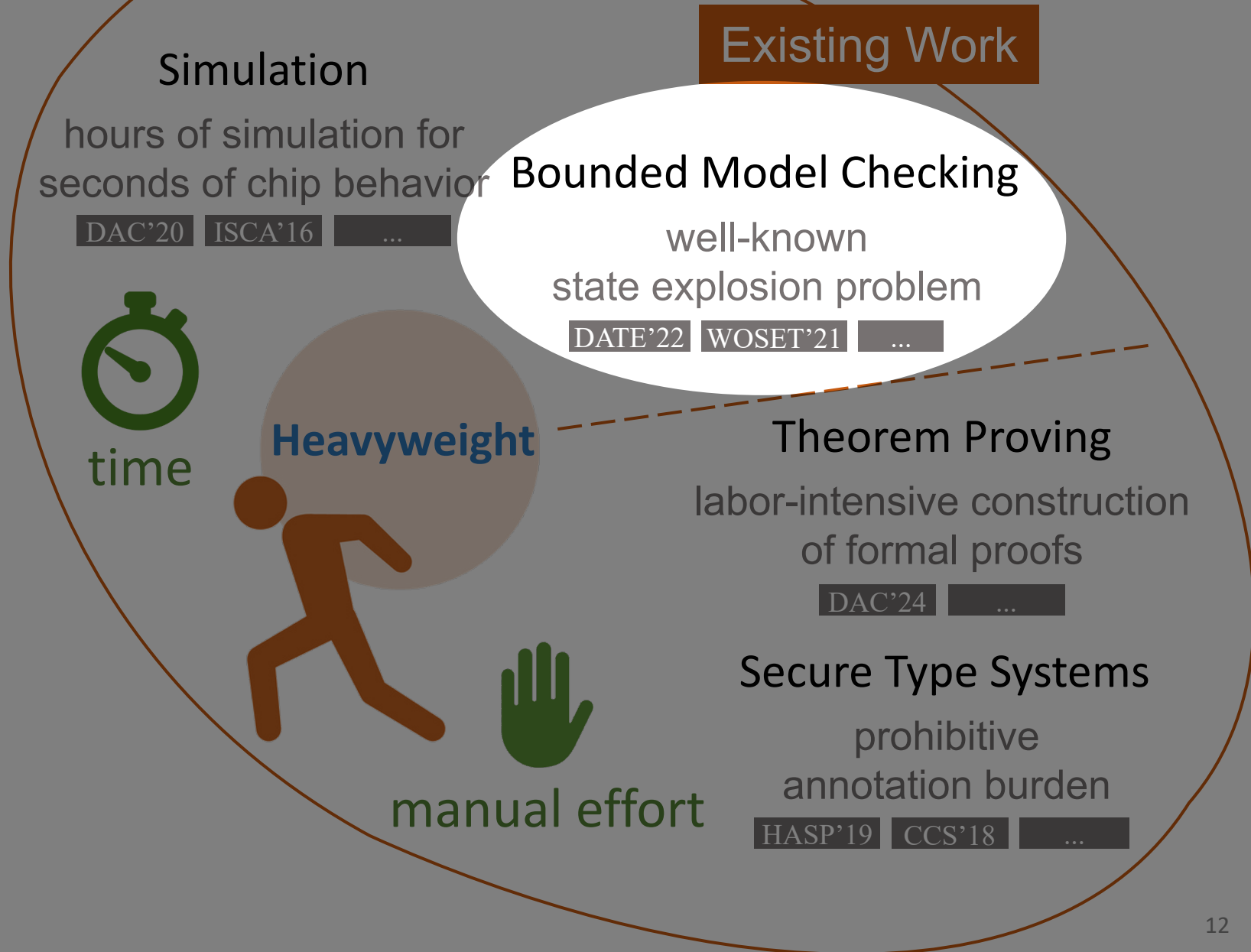
DAC'24 ...

Secure Type Systems

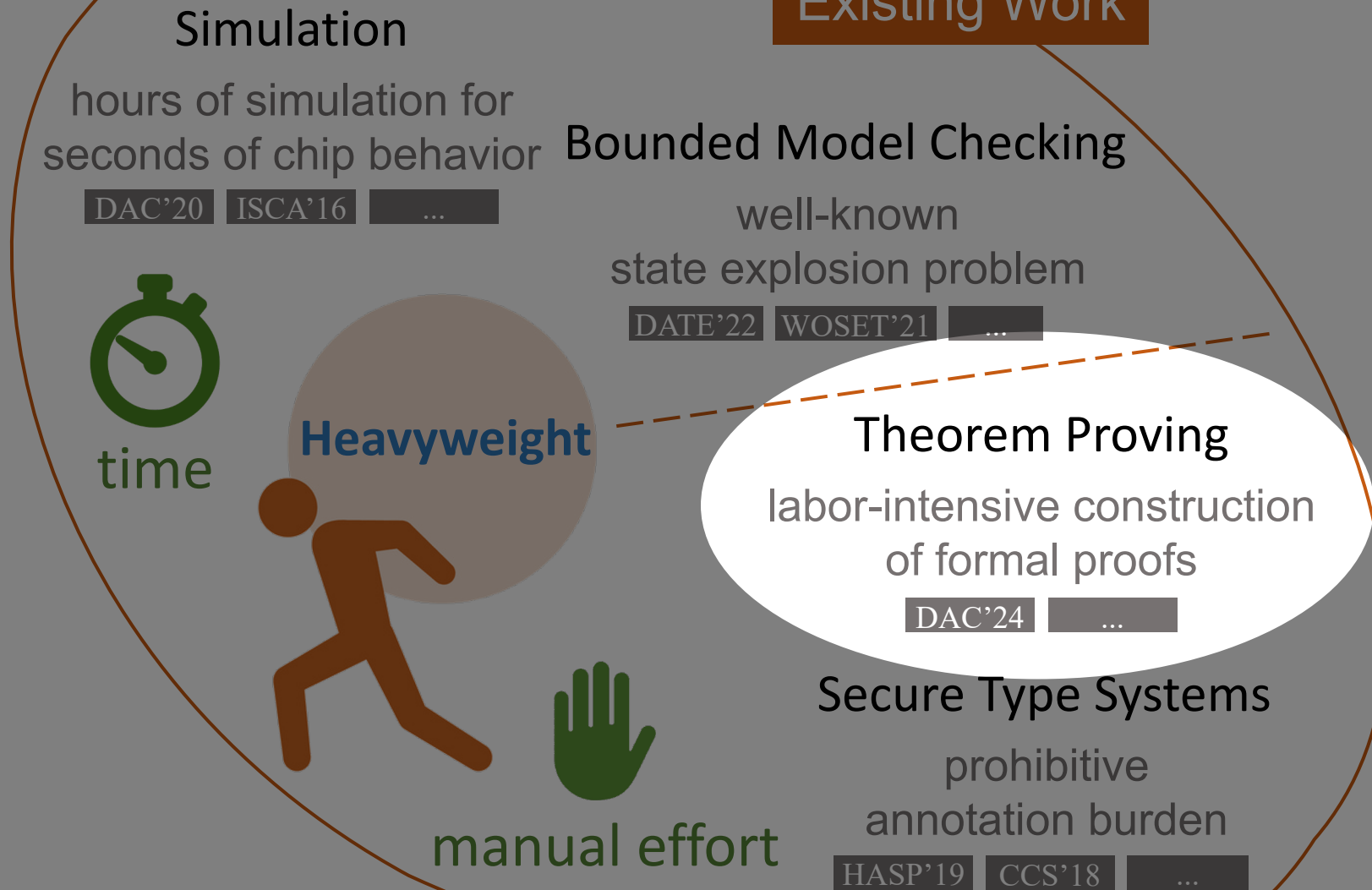
prohibitive
annotation burden

HASP'19 CCS'18 ...

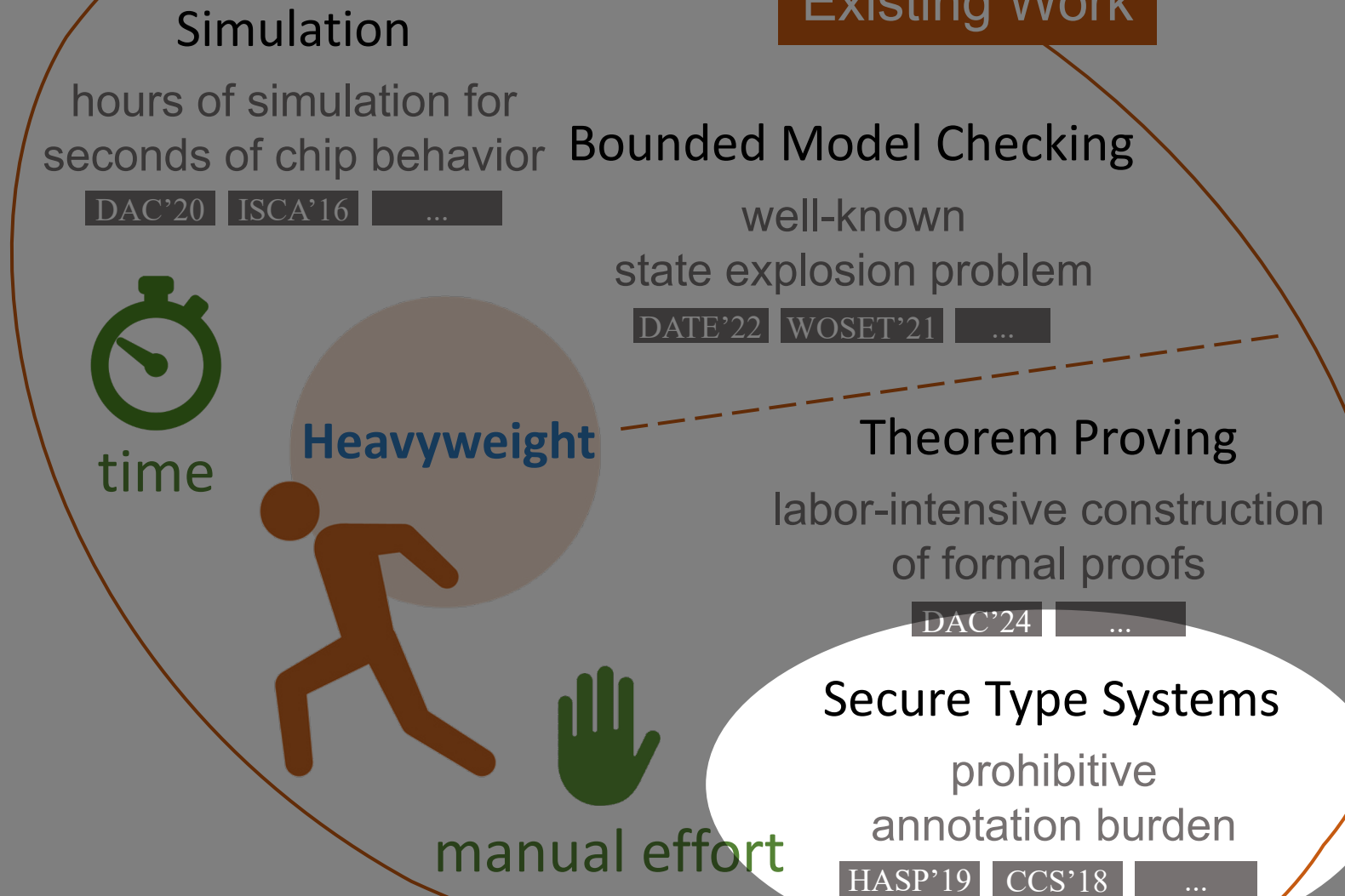
ChiSA: **Static Analysis** for Lightweight Chisel Verification



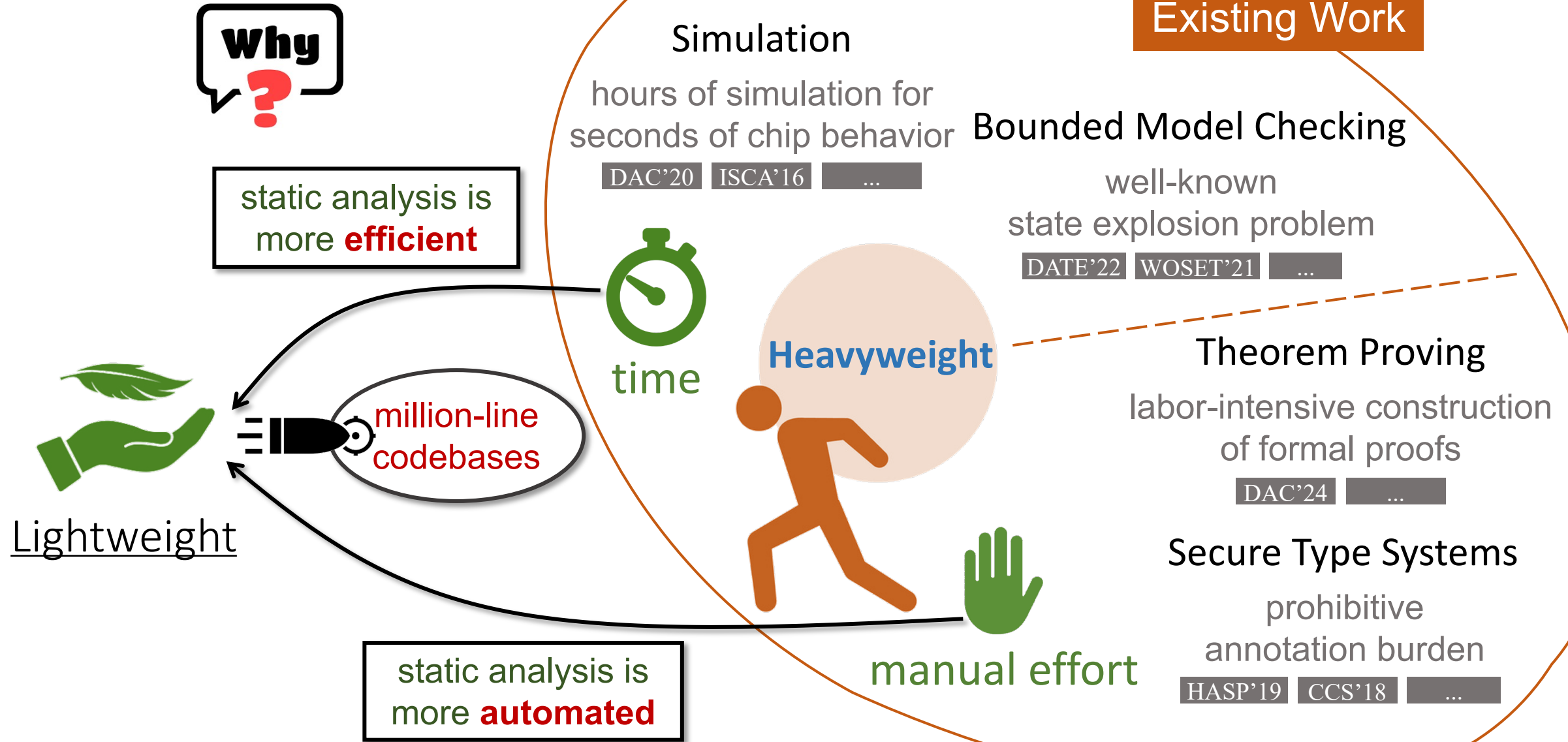
ChiSA: **Static Analysis** for Lightweight Chisel Verification



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



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

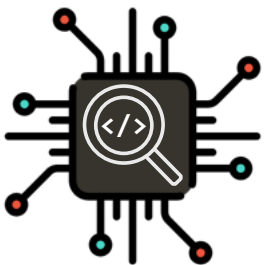
hardware-specificity
(synchronous, clock-driven, etc)

Properties
about:

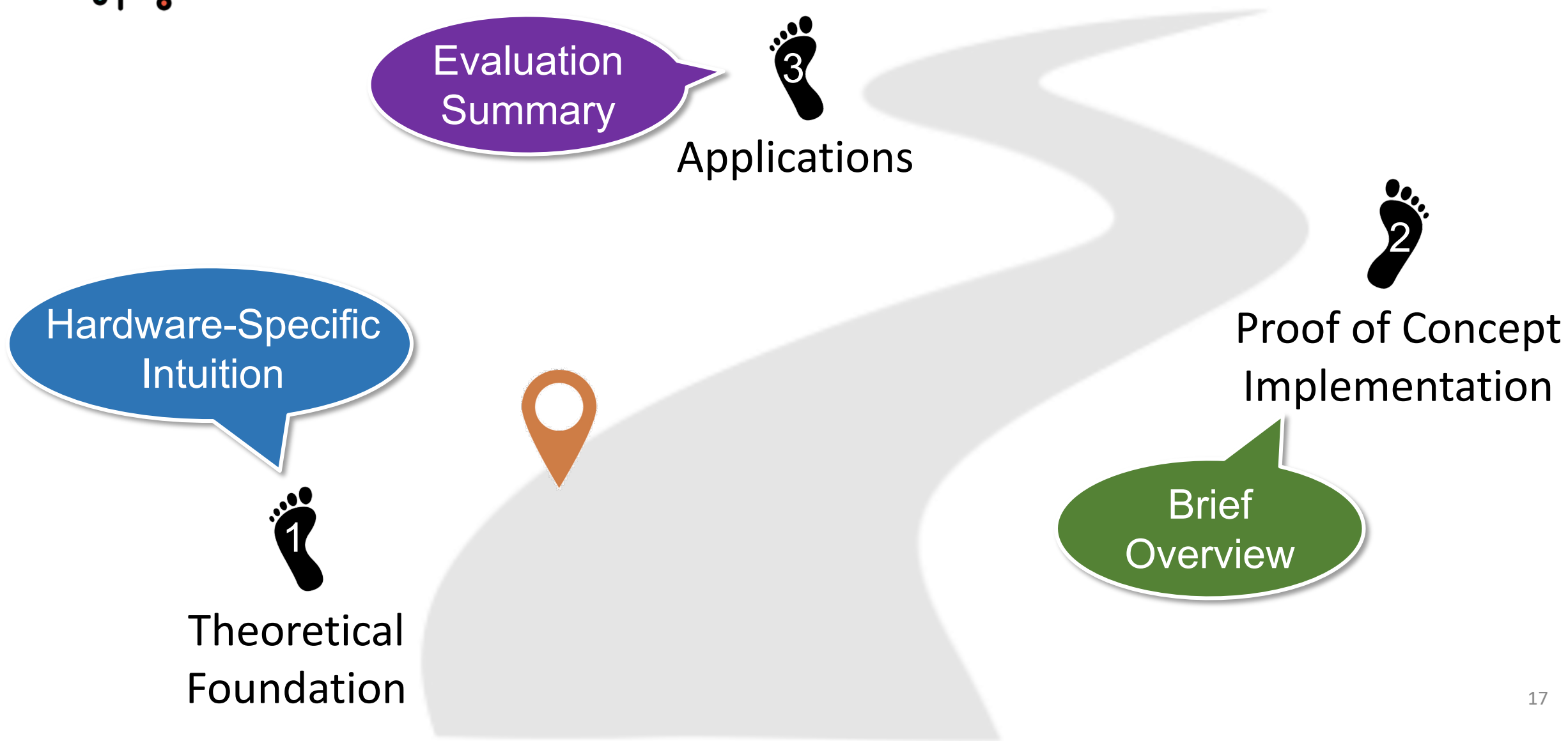
Soundness

Precision

Efficiency



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



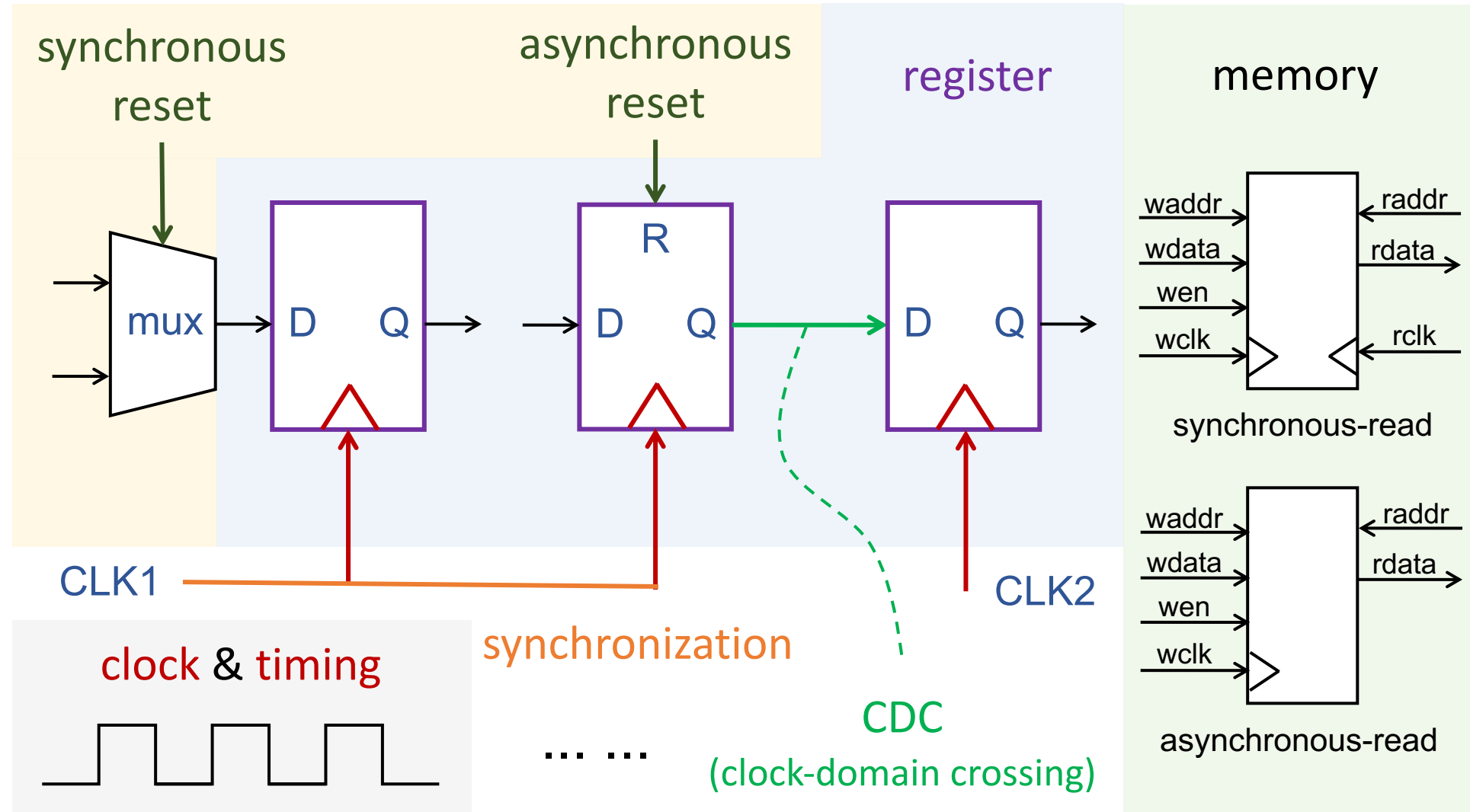
What is special about hardware programs?



Hardware-Specific
Intuition



Theoretical
Foundation



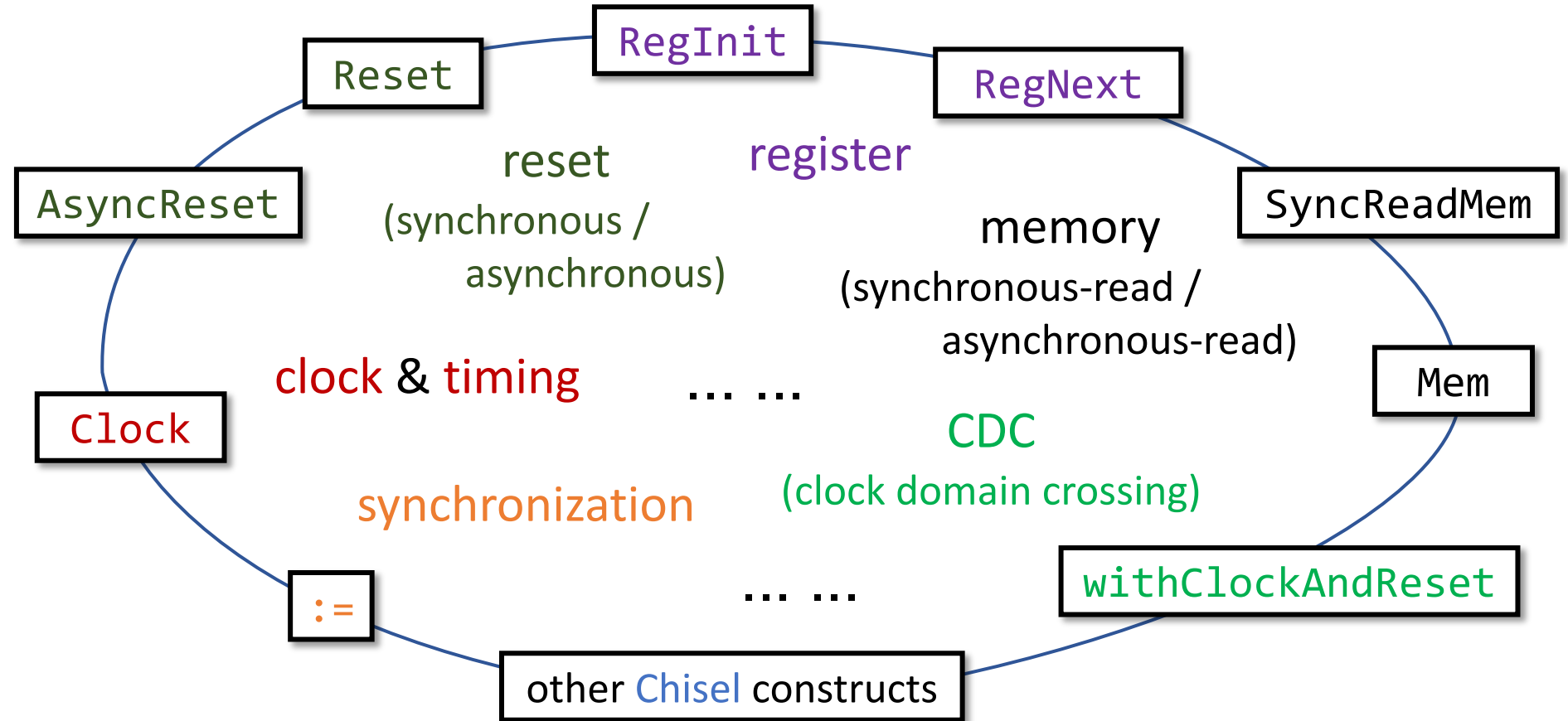


Hardware-Specific
Intuition

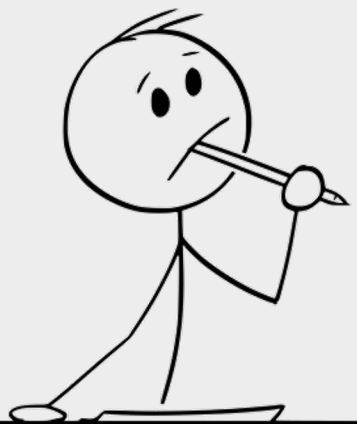


Theoretical
Foundation

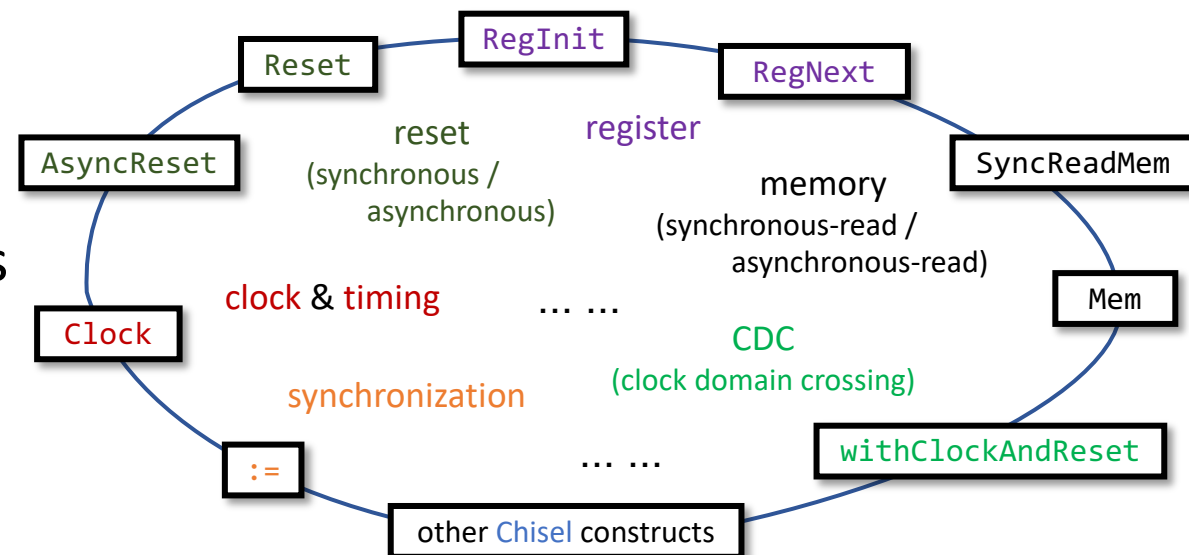
What is special about hardware programs?



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.

Hardware-Specific
Intuition



Theoretical
Foundation

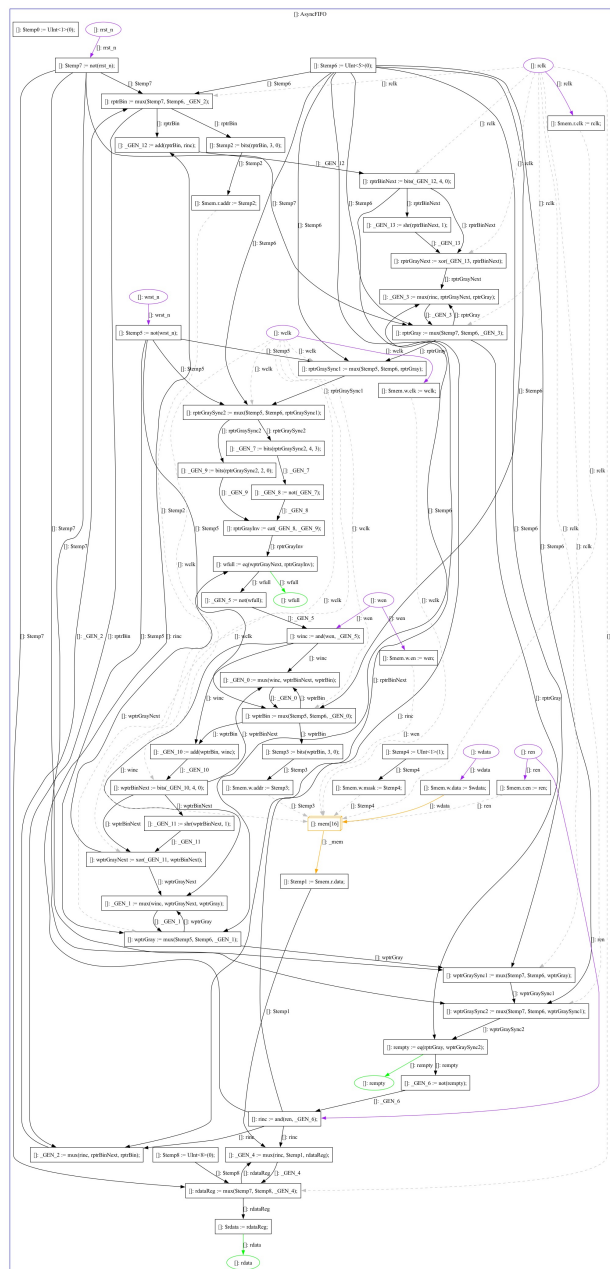
Theoretical Foundation: 14 (paper) + 6 (supplementary) pages of formal discussion.



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

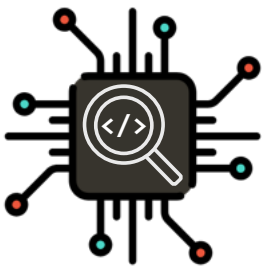
synchronization

...

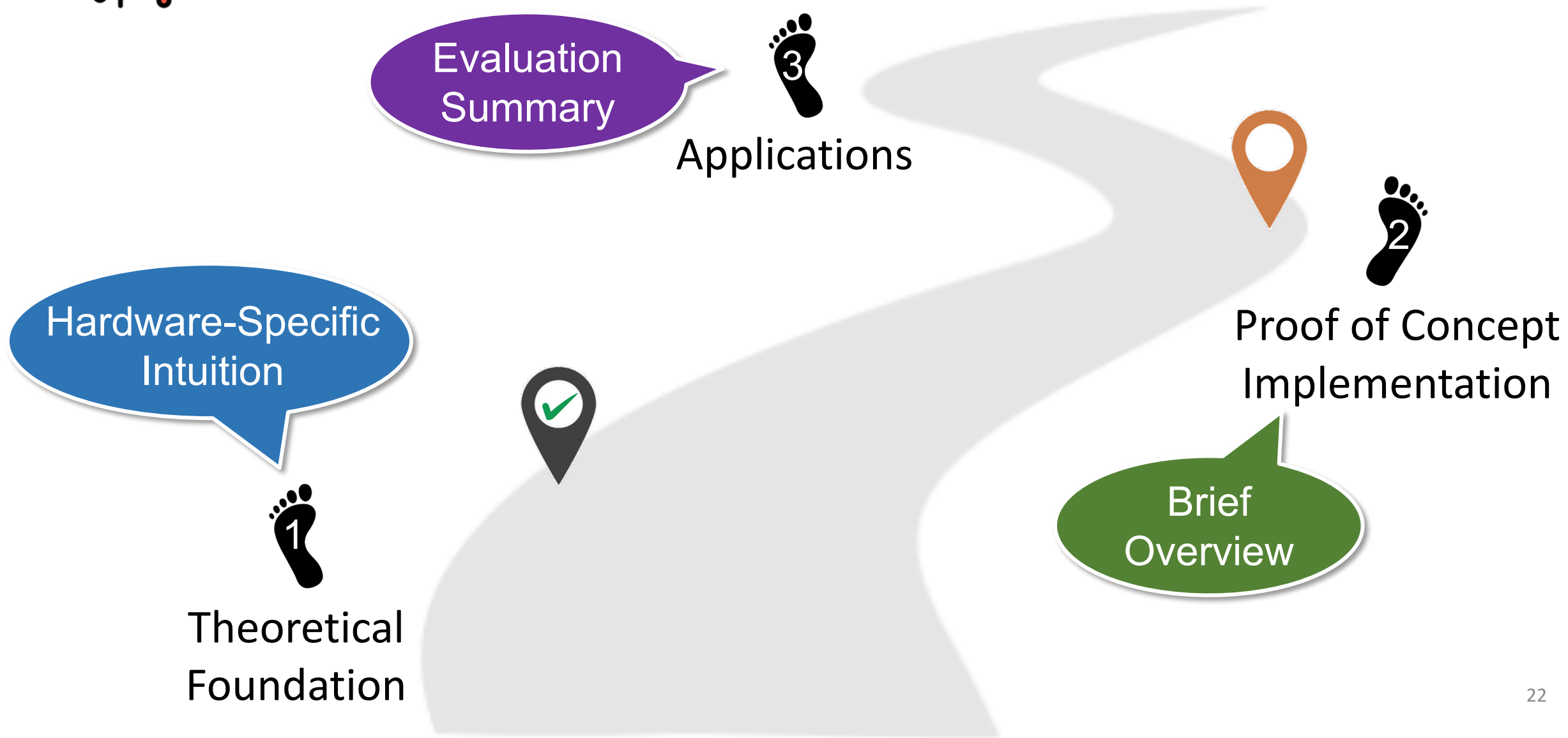
reset

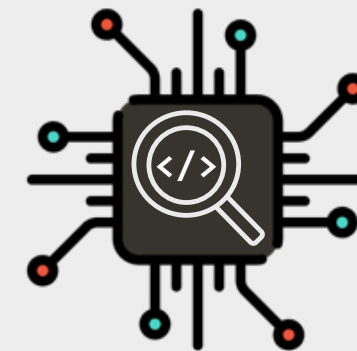
mux-switching

as a bonus!



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





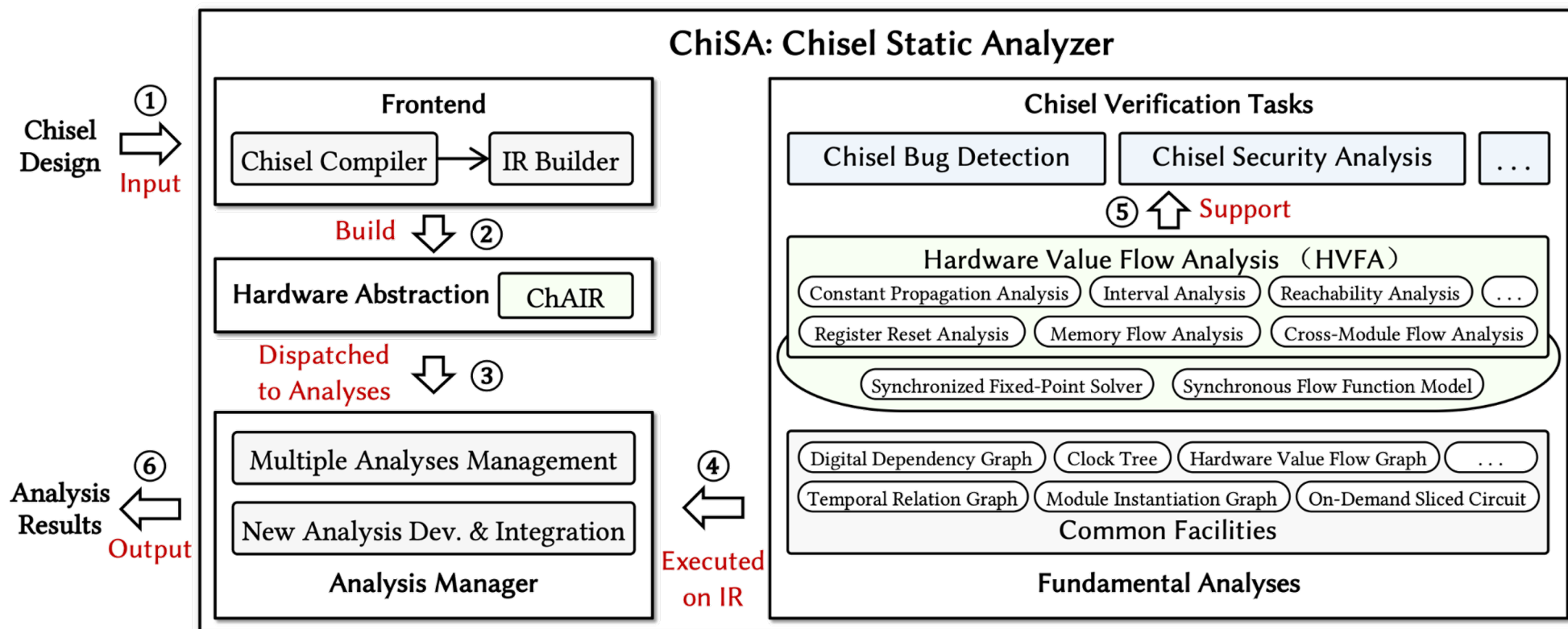
ChiSA

(Chisel Static Analyzer)

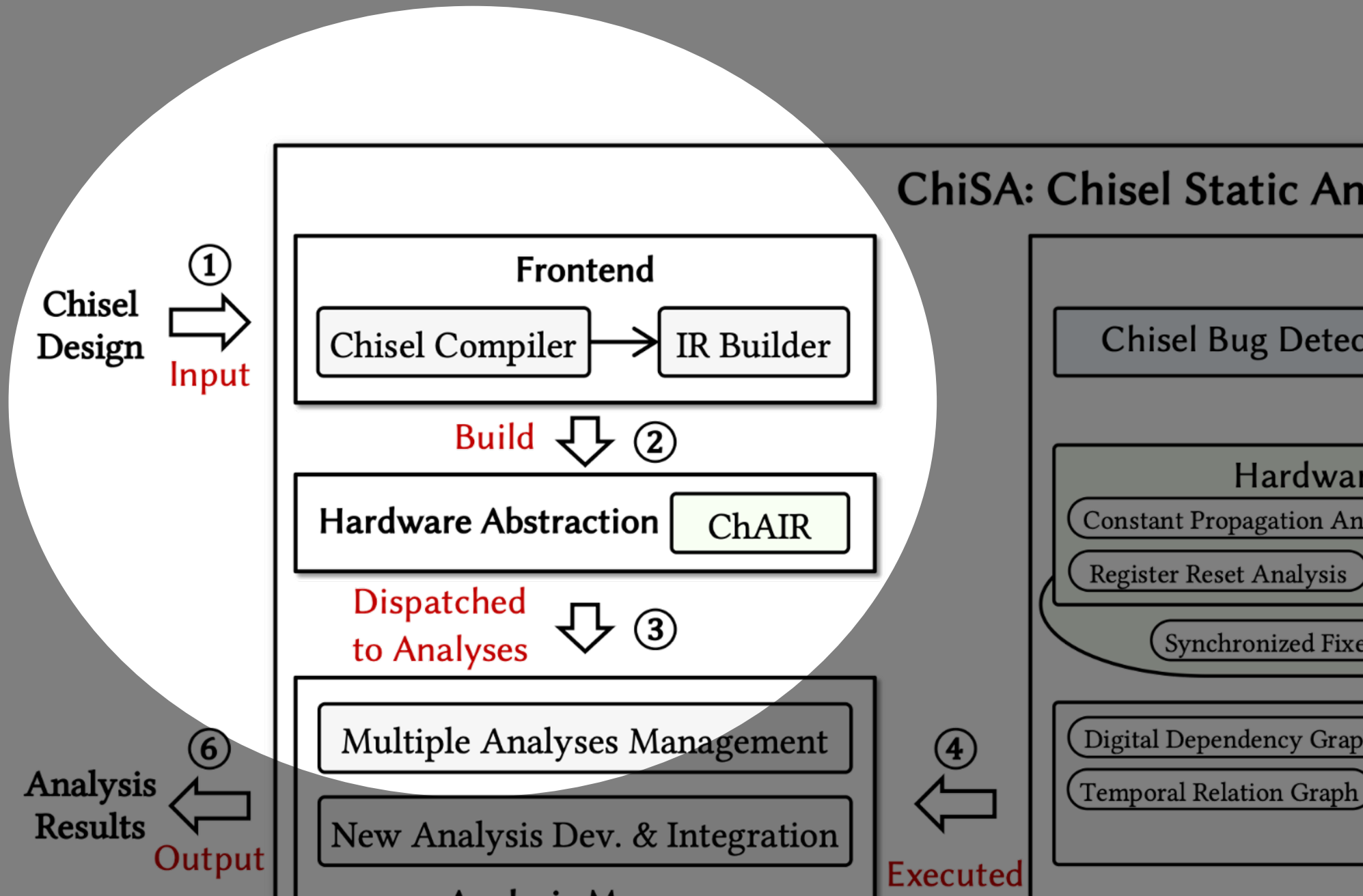
Brief Overview



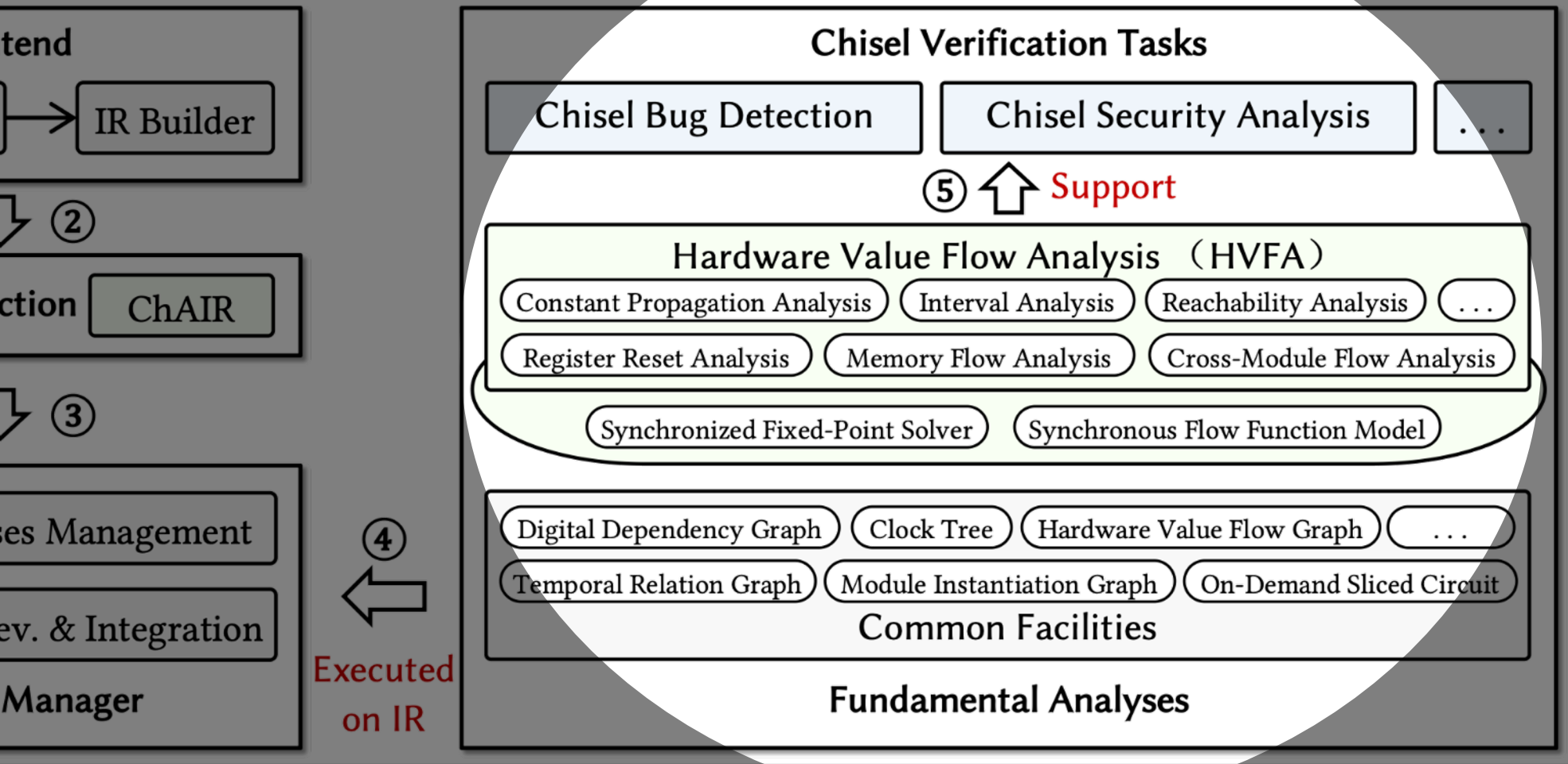
Proof of Concept
Implementation

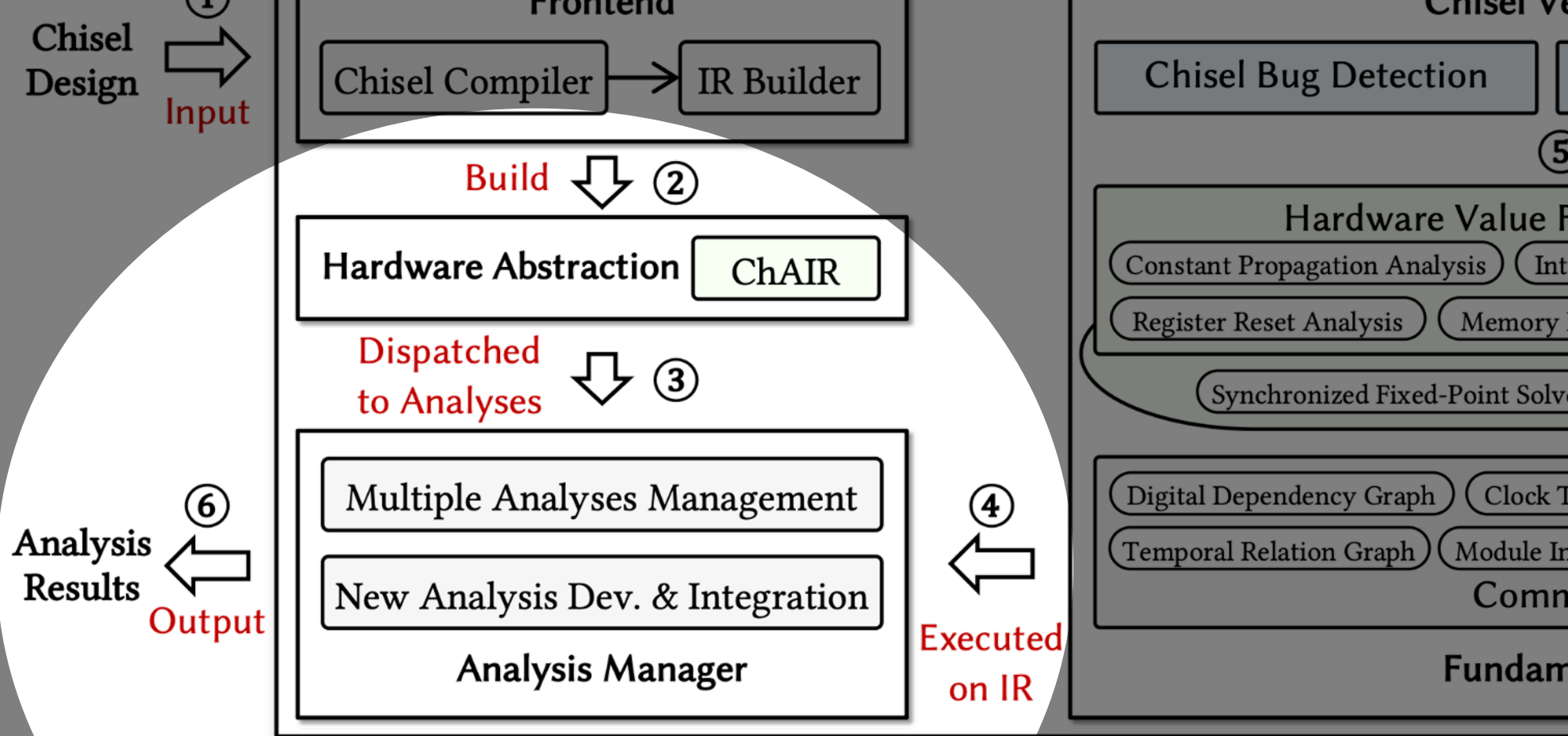


The architecture and end-to-end workflow of ChiSA.



ChiSA: Chisel Static Analyzer



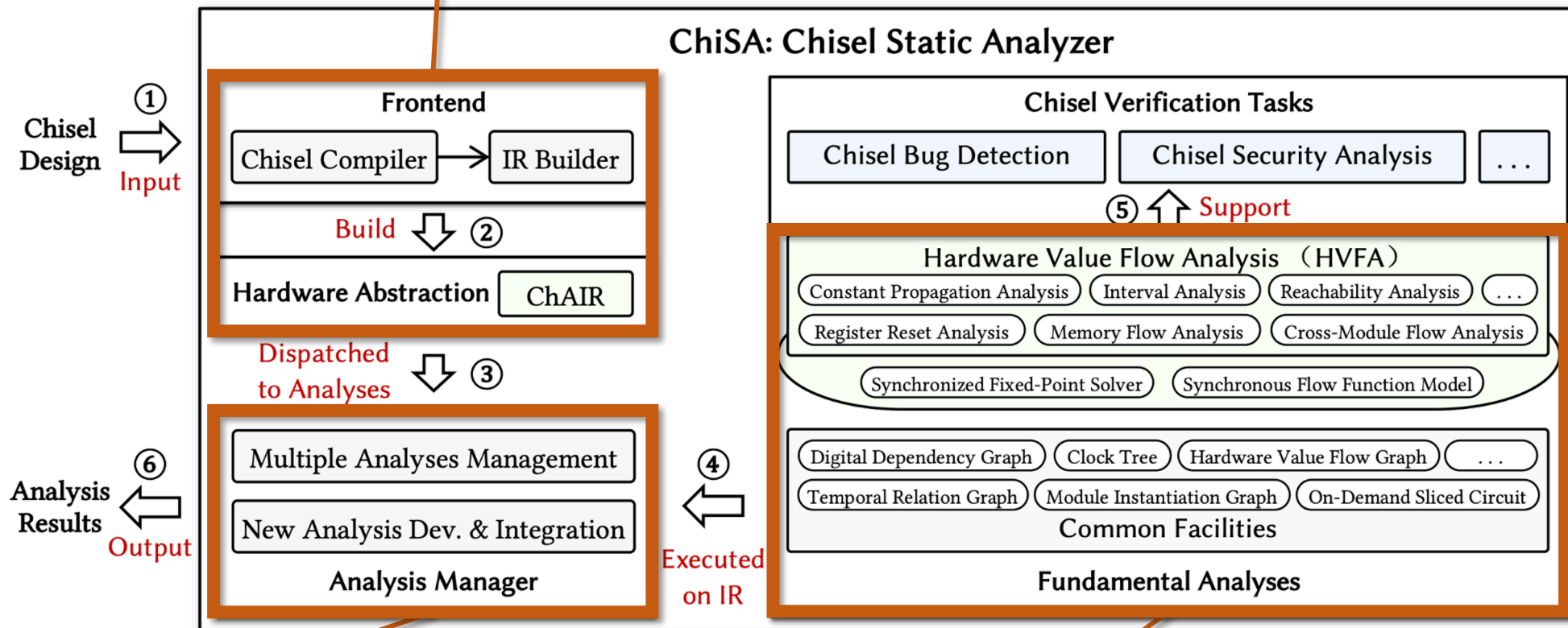


ChAIR

(Chisel Analysis Intermediate Representation)

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

Reusable Infrastructures



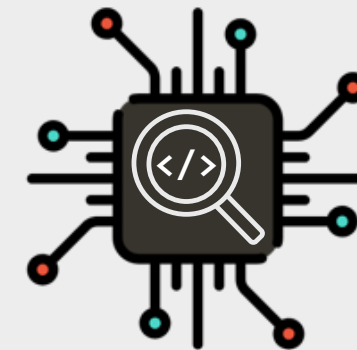
Analysis Manager

(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



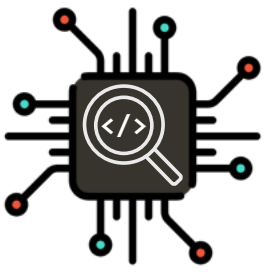
ChiSA

(Chisel Static Analyzer)

Brief Overview

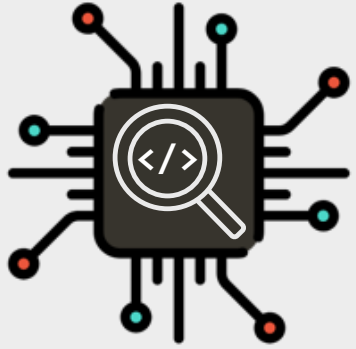


Proof of Concept
Implementation



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





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**)

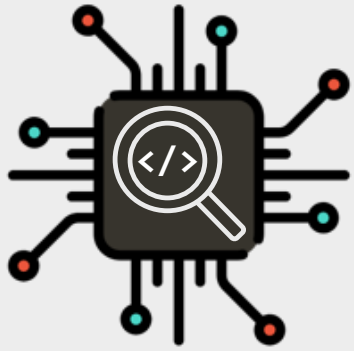
especially on **large and complex real-world designs**.

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

Evaluation
Summary



Applications



ChiSABench

Chisel
(Static Analysis)
Benchmark

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

Official
Toolchain
Tests

Chisel3
(225K / 877)

Quasar
(159K / 1)

RiscvMini
(2K / 1)

Gemmini
(632K / 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

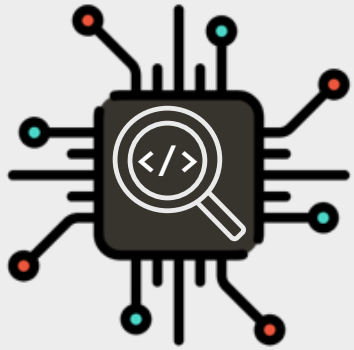
ChiSABench

(LoC = 11.3M / #designs = 935)

diversity
(purpose, feature, scale)

out-of-the-box accessibility
(all pre-elaborated into standalone files)

real-world
(mostly popular projects)



RQ1

Hardware
Bug Detection

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Bounded Model Checking

Static Assertion Analysis

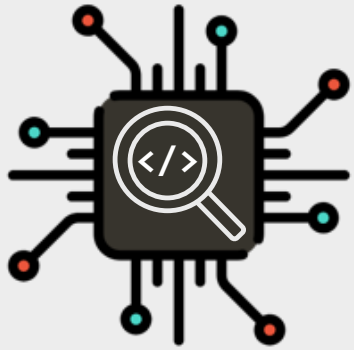
(*Insight: approximate assertion violation conditions with interval and constant HVFA*)



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**)



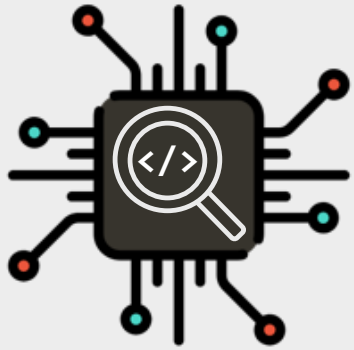
BMC SOTA

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	98 (92)	0	145.9	Assumption Errors		
	Gemini	1,176,167	98 (92)	0	145.9	Internal Errors		
	Rockwell	1,176,167	98 (92)	0	145.9	Incomplete Errors & Internal Errors		
	Hardware	1,176,167	98 (92)	0	145.9	Internal Errors		
	Booster	1,176,167	98 (92)	0	145.9	Incomplete Errors		
	Iceberg	1,176,167	98 (92)	0	145.9	Incomplete Errors		
	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**)

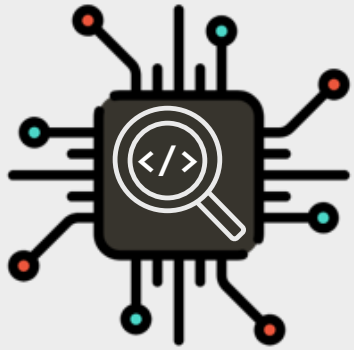


BMC SOTA

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					Assumption Errors		
	Gemmer					Internal Errors		
	Rockwell					Internal Errors & Internal Errors		
	Hwaccel					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	—

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*)

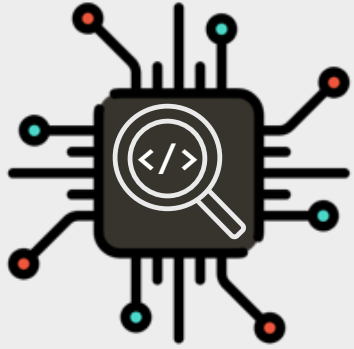


BMC SOTA

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
	XiangShan	7,176,167	28 (23)	0	145.3	Assumption Errors		
	Gemmini	632,327	8 (7)	0	10.7	Internal Errors		
Real-World	Rocket	560,457	18 (18)	0	1.7	Internal Errors		
	Hwacha	553,000	18 (18)	0	1.7	Internal Errors		
	Boom	550,100	18 (18)	0	1.7	Internal Errors		
	IceNet	236,500	18 (18)	0	1.7	Internal Errors		
	Constellation	5,380	18 (18)	0	1.7	Internal 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

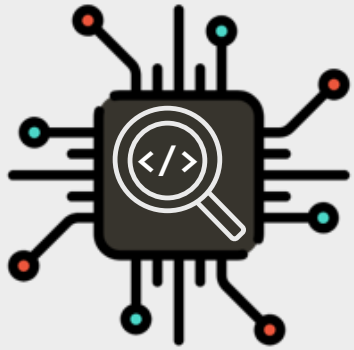
ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

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
TrustHub	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

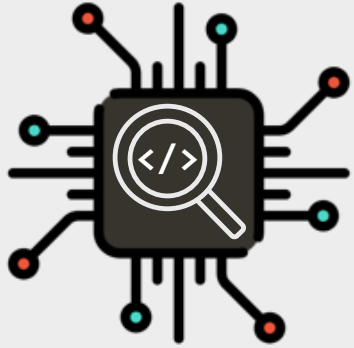
ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

Taint Analysis
(directly use the [taint HVFA](#))



STS SOTA
ChiselFlow [\[CCS'18\]](#)

Benchmark	#Designs × Function	LoC	#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	ChiSA		ChiselFlow	
				#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	ChiSA is Effective (identified all vulnerabilities with only 1 false positive)						
Total:		1,155,854	60 (0 / 0)	85 (25 / 60)	0.632		



RQ2

Hardware
Security Analysis

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

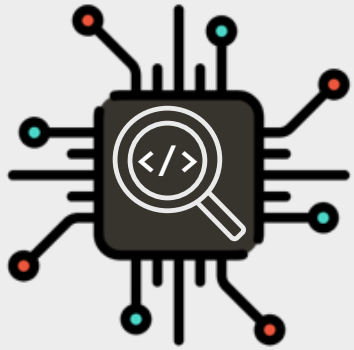
Taint Analysis
(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



STS SOTA
ChiselFlow [CCS'18]

Benchmark	#Designs × Function	LoC	ChiSA			ChiselFlow	
			#Vulnerabilities (#FP / #FN)	#Annotations (#Sources / #Sinks)	Time (s)	#Annotations (Type Labels)	Time (s)
ChiselFlow	19	3 × 10 ⁶	—	—	—	—	475
TrustHub	1 × PIC16F84 [65]	5,352	1 (0 / 0)	2 (1 / 1)	0.117	—	—
	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	—	—

ChiSA is **Lightweight**
(finishes analysis for **1.1M LoC** within **85** annotations and **0.632s**)



RQ2

Hardware
Security Analysis

Evaluation
Summary



Applications

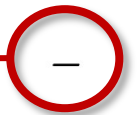
ChiSA vs. Secure Type Systems

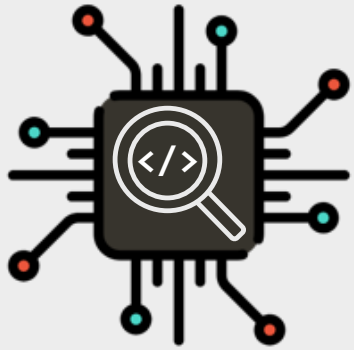
Taint Analysis
(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



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 <i>million-line-scale codebase</i> 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

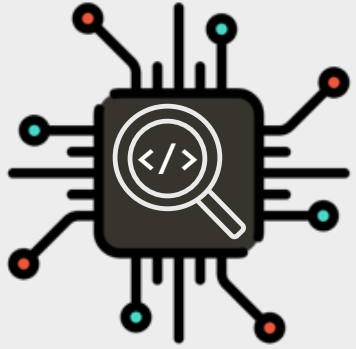
Taint Analysis
(directly use the **taint HVFA**)



STS SOTA
ChiselFlow [CCS'18]

Benchmark	#Designs × 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	54 (0 / 0)	53 (19 / 54)	0.175		
	3 × ISCAS89 [21]	1					
	1 × PIC16F84 [65]						
	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)



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**)

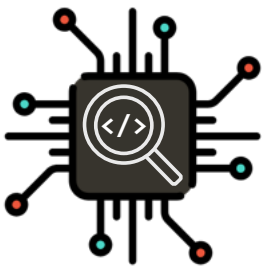
especially on **large and complex real-world designs**.

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

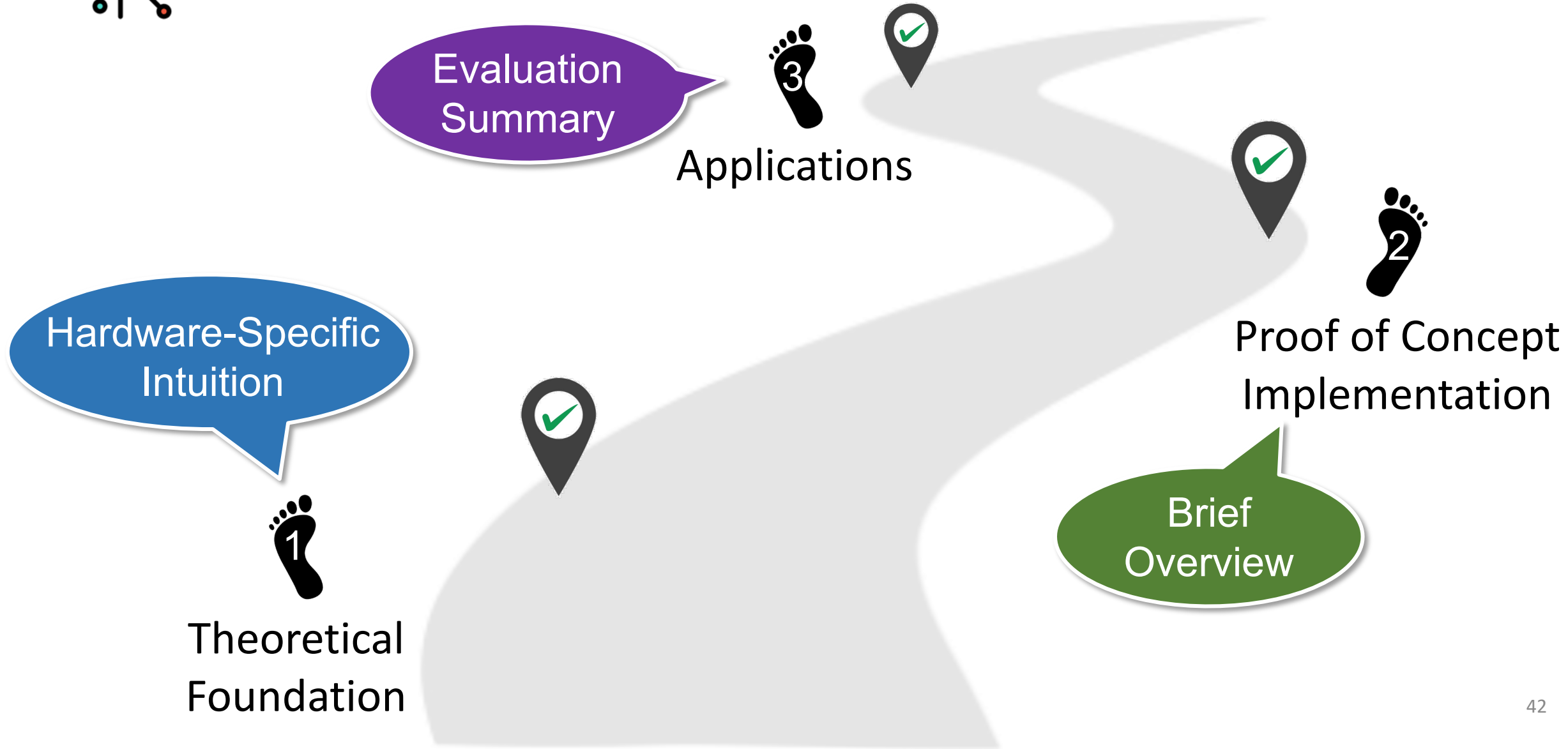
Evaluation
Summary



Applications

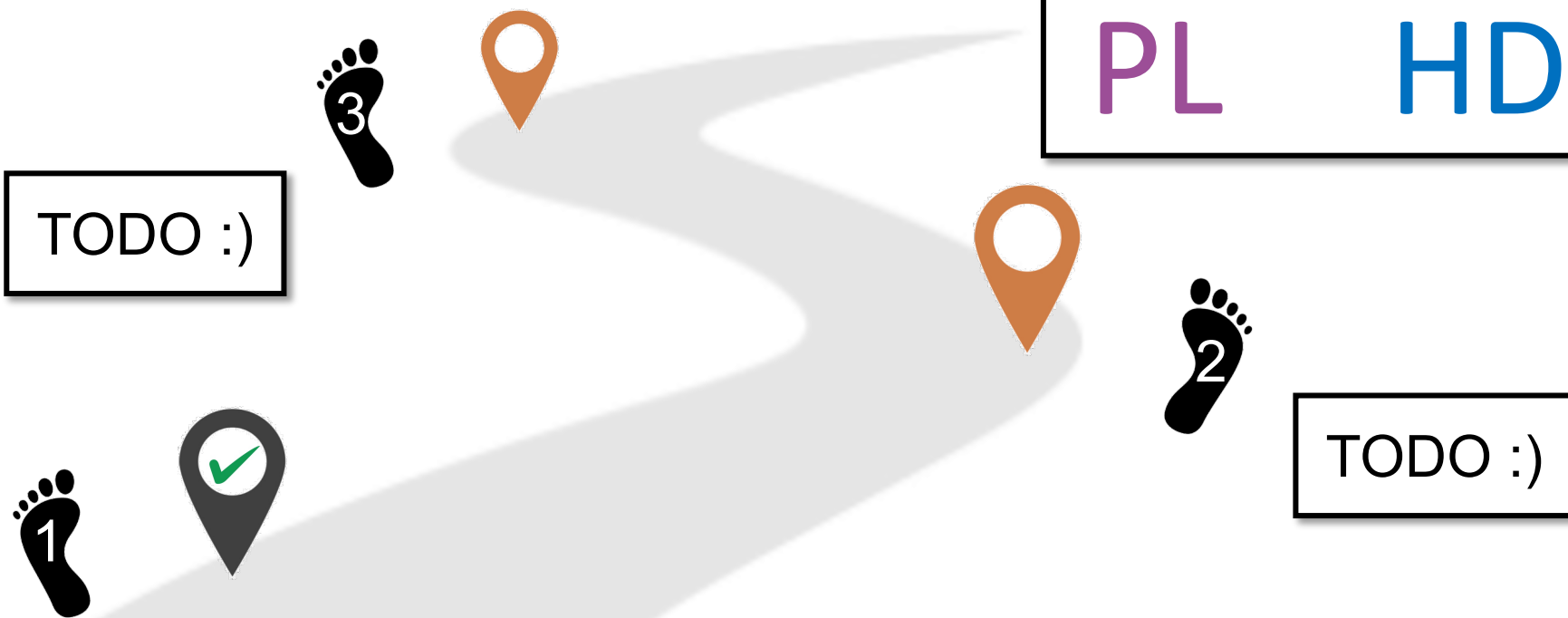


ChiSA: **Static Analysis** for Lightweight **Chisel Verification**



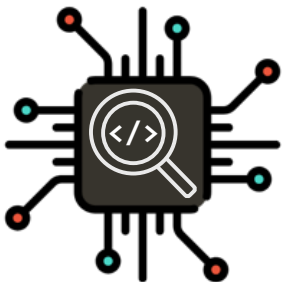


Research Opportunities



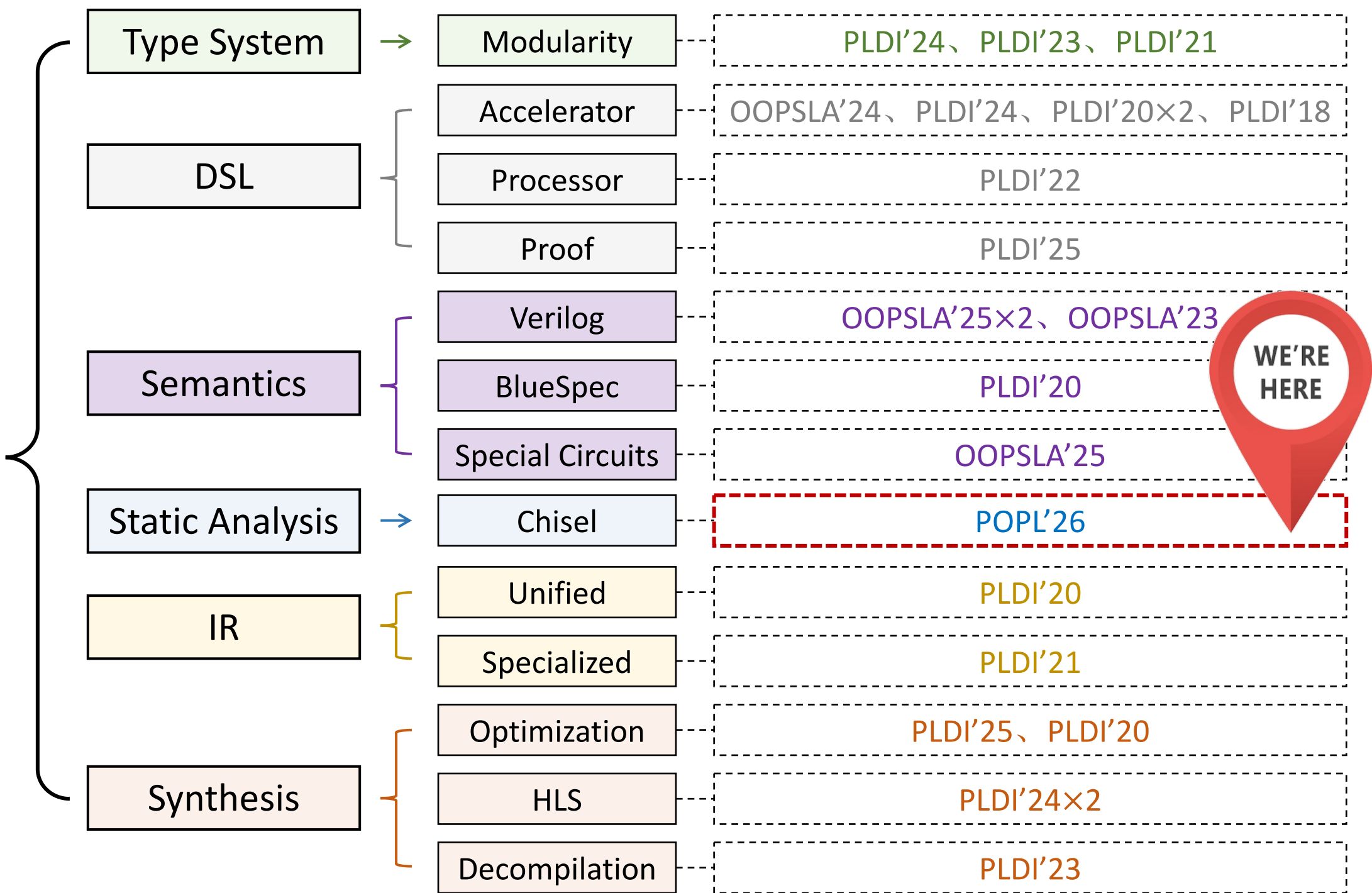
$$\lambda \times \text{CPU}$$

PL HDL



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

PL
×
HDL





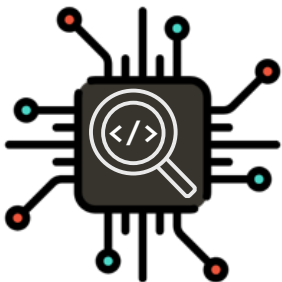
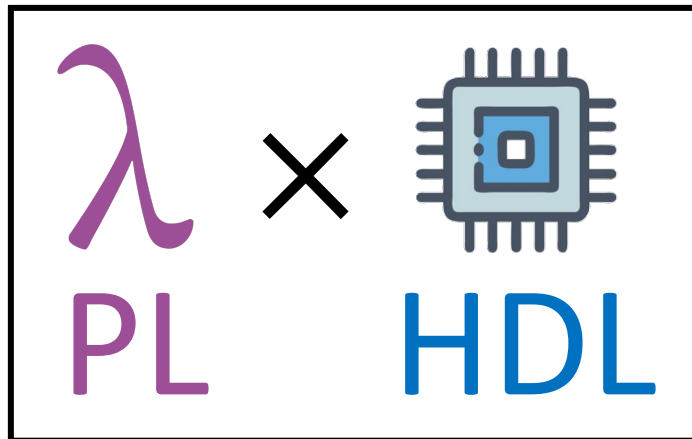
Research Opportunities

THANK
YOU

Jiacai Cui @ NJU, China



TODO :)



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