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DESIGN OF ASYNCHRONOUS PROCESSOR

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By

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
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Faculty : Engineering

There has been a resurgence of interest in asynchronous design recently. The renewed interest in asynchronous design results from its potential to address the problem faced by the synchronous design methodology. In asynchronous methodology, there is no global clock controlling the synchronization of a circuit; instead, the data communication between each functional unit is completed through local request-acknowledge handshake protocol.

The growth in demand of high performance portable systems has accelerated asynchronous logic design technique which can offers better performance and lower power consumption especially in the development of the asynchronous processor for mobile and portable application.

In this thesis, the design and verification of an 8-bit asynchronous pipelined processor is presented. The developed asynchronous processor is based on Harvard architecture and uses Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC) instruction set



architecture. 24 instructions are supported by the processor including register, memory, branch and jump operations. The processor has three-stage pipelining i.e. fetch, decode and execution pipeline. Micropipelines framework with 2-phase signalling protocol and bundled-data approach is employed in designing complex and powerful asynchronous control circuits for the processor. Very High Speed Integrated Circuit Hardware Description Language (VHDL) is used to design and construct all parts of the asynchronous processor. Simulation, synthesis and verification of the processor are carried out using MAX+PLUS II software.

The simulation results have demonstrated that the developed 8-bit asynchronous RISC processor is working correctly using current Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) technology. This processor employed 903 logic cells and has 6144 memory bits for instruction and data memory. Each of the processor subsystem can operates at different cycle time, thus enable an asynchronous processor achieving 11.95MHz average speed performance.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

REKABENTUK PEMROSES ASINKRONI

Oleh

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Baru-baru ini terdapat kebangkitan minat dalam dunia rekabentuk asinkroni. Pembaharuan minat ini adalah disebabkan oleh potensinya dalam mengatasi kepincangan yang dihadapi oleh perkaedahan rekabentuk segerak. Dalam perkaedahan asinkroni, tiada terdapat pemasa yang global bagi mengawal penyelarasan sesuatu litar; sebaliknya, komunikasi data antara unit kefungsiian dilakukan melalui protokol perjabatan tangan permintaan-pemberitahuan tempatan.

Perkembangan pesat dalam permintaan sistem mudah-alih yang berkeupayaan tinggi telah menyemarakkan lagi teknik rekabentuk logik asinkroni di mana ia boleh menawarkan keupayaan yang lebih baik dan menjimatkan penggunaan tenaga terutamanya dalam pembangunan pemproses asinkroni untuk applikasi mudah-alih.

Tesis ini membentangkan rekabentuk dan penentusahan pemproses saluran asinkroni 8-bit. Pemproses asinkroni yang dibina adalah berdasarkan senibena Harvard dan menggunakan set arahan RISC. Pemproses ini menyokong 24

pelaksanaan arahan yang merangkumi operasi pendaftaran, ingatan, cabang dan lompatan. Terdapat tiga saluran perhubungan dalam pemproses ini iaitu, saluran pengambilan, penyahkod dan pelaksanaan. Rangka “Micropipelines” dengan protokol isyarat dua-fasa dan pendekatan ikatan-data digunakan dalam merekabentuk litar kawalan asinkroni yang rumit dan berkeupayaan tinggi untuk pemproses. Semua bahagian pemproses asinkroni direkabentuk dan dibina menggunakan bahasa pengaturcaraan VHDL. Simulasi, sintesis dan penentuan pemproses ini dijalankan dengan bantuan perisian MAX+PLUS II.

Keputusan simulasi telah menunjukkan pemproses asinkroni 8-bit yang dibina dapat berfungsi dengan baik menggunakan teknologi FPGA yang terkini. Pemproses ini menggunakan sebanyak 903 sel logik dan 6144 bit ingatan untuk ingatan arahan dan data. Keupayaan setiap subsistem dalam pemproses beroperasi pada kitaran masa yang berlainan membolehkannya mencapai kelajuan purata 11.95MHz .

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALU	Arithmetic Logic Unit
ASIC	Application Specific Integrated Circuit
C	Carry
CAD	Computer Aided Design
CISC	Complex Instruction Set Computer
CMOS	Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductor
CPU	Central Processing Unit
DMEM	Data Memory
EDA	Electronic Design Automation
EDIF	Electronic Design Interchange Format
EXE	Execution Pipeline
FIFO	First In First Out Buffer
FPGA	Field Programmable Gate Arrays
HDL	Hardware Description Language
HIGH	Logic '1'
ID	Instruction Decode Pipeline
IEEE	Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
IF	Instruction Fetch Pipeline
IMEM	Instruction Memory
imm	Immediate operand
IR	Instruction Register
LOW	Logic '0'



LPM	Library of Parameterized Modules
LSB	Less Significant Bit
MSB	Most Significant Bit
N	Negative
OPCODE	Operation Code
PC	Program Counter
PDA	Personal Digital Assistants
RAM	Random Access Memory
rd	Destination Register Address
RISC	Reduced Instruction Set Computer
rs	First Register Source Address
rt	Second Register Source Address
RTL	Register Transfer Level
SNF	Timing Simulator Nelist File
SOC	System-On-Chip
SOF	SRAM Object File
SRAM	Static Random Access Memory
V	Overflow
VHDL	Very-High-Speed-Integrated-Circuit Hardware Description Language
VHSIC	Very High Speed Integrated Circuit
VITAL	VHDL Initiative Towards ASIC Libraries
VLSI	Very Large Scale Integration
WYSIWYG	What You See Is What You Get
Z	Zero

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Portable and mobile computing has become a new trend in today's electronic industry. With the increasing demand in high-performance portable systems such as notebooks, laptops, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and mobile phones, power consumption has suddenly become a hot issue and increasingly important factor in digital system design.

One of the most critical penetrations of these battery-powered portable equipments is the operating periods of the battery. Improving the energy density of the battery or reducing the power consumption of the system can be done in order to increase and extend the battery life. Since the progress rate in battery technology is slow, the alternative is to employ low power circuits design techniques to achieve longer battery life.

Most of the portable systems powered by batteries are performing tasks requiring increasing computational performance. For instance, PDAs demand a high-performance processor for functions such as handwriting and speech recognition. To complete this complex computational task, a higher clock speed is needed. However, increasing the clock rate will cause greater power consumption since clock distribution is responsible for large amounts of power usage. Power is dissipated when the transistors in the circuit change state on every clock cycle even if there is no useful work done in the circuit.

As VLSI feature size shrink to the 0.18-micron level and below, there has been a tendency to incorporate more functional units onto a single silicon die. Synchronous design methodology has reached its limitation where the clock distribution to all parts of the chip becomes increasingly difficult. Most of the design effort has been spent on designing the clock distribution scheme to overcome problem such as clock skew. Clock skew is a serious problem for the fastest CPU; witness DEC's Alpha, where more than a quarter of the silicon area is devoted to clock driver circuit (Pountain, D., 1993). Since the clock distribution is not scalable, the clock distribution network must be carefully redesigned each time.

This has lead to resurgence of interest in asynchronous logic design technique. Asynchronous circuits do not require global clocking; instead they rely on internally generated timing and use a communication protocol to allow data passing with other stages. They are also known as self-timed circuits because of the internally generated timing feature. Since there is no global clock in asynchronous circuits, clock skew problem can be avoided, silicon area can be saved and the most important is the power dissipation can be reduced.

Many academic research groups have been established to exploit the benefits of the asynchronous circuits by designing asynchronous processors. The most successful project is AMULET processor, a first commercial available asynchronous processor developed at the University of Manchester. This processor is mainly developed using full custom design, which needs a lot of time and effort.

Meanwhile, Field Programmable Gate Arrays (FPGA) has been used extensively in digital system design recently. The programmable chips serve for both quick prototyping and rapid time-to-market solutions in many applications. System design development using FPGA chips has promised a shorten time period compared to conventional Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) design cycle. Besides that, FPGA chips are getting cheaper with higher density gates. With the rapid development of FPGA technology beyond million gates, designing an asynchronous processor on FPGA becomes feasible.

Research Objective

The main objective of the work described in this thesis is to design and implement an 8-bit asynchronous Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC) pipelined processor using ALTERA FPGA chip. This processor employs two-phase transition signaling and bundled data approach which functions within the Micropipelines methodology. This work is carried out using Very High Speed Hardware Description Language (VHDL) for simulation and verification with the help of MAX+PLUS-II software.

Thesis Organization

The thesis is divided into 9 chapters. This chapter has presented an introduction to the growing concern of power consumption in digital system design, clock distribution problem in synchronous design and asynchronous design as a solution to these problems.



Chapter 2 to 4 gives a fundamental and essential background for the asynchronous processor design. Chapter 2 introduces the basic concepts of asynchronous logic. Micropipelines, a modular asynchronous design methodology is discussed in detail. Chapter 3 reviews the computer architecture tradeoff. Von Neumann, Harvard, CISC and RISC architectures are presented. In the last section of the chapter, recent built asynchronous processors are briefly described. Fundamental of VHDL language and the VHDL design flow are given in Chapter 4.

The scope of the project will be captured in four chapters, which is from chapter 5 to chapter 8. Chapter 5 discussed the methodology and the step taken using MAX+PLUS II development tools to accomplish this project. The design of basic building blocks for Micropipelines framework is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 detailed the 8-bit asynchronous RISC processor architecture. Each of the processor unit is presented. Chapter 8 discussed the result obtained from the simulation and significant findings during the development of the asynchronous RISC processor.

Finally, Chapter 9 summarized the conclusions drawn from the project presented in the thesis. Further work and possibilities are also introduced.

The Appendices contain the complete VHDL model of the 8-bit asynchronous RISC processor including Micropipelines event logic library and processor functional blocks.