

CIFER: A 12nm, 16mm², 22-Core SoC with a 1541 LUT6/mm², 1.92 MOPS/LUT, Fully Synthesizable, Cache-Coherent, Embedded FPGA

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Embedded FPGAs (eFPGA) are increasingly being used in SoCs, enabling post-silicon hardware specialization. Existing CPU-eFPGA SoCs have three deficiencies. First, their low core count hinders efficient execution of thread-level-parallel workloads. Second, non-coherent or partially coherent CPU-eFPGA integration inhibits dynamic, random memory sharing. Third, the use of full-custom circuits makes proprietary eFPGAs technology-dependent, inflexible in physical layout, and lacking architectural customizability.

CIFER is the world's first open-source, many-core, synthesizable, cache-coherent CPU-FPGA SoC. CIFER was designed in seven months during the pandemic by a team of graduate students and postdocs collaborating across two institutions, due in part to the use of many open-source projects, including OpenPiton, BYOC, PyMTL, PyOCN, Ariane, and PRGA. The 4×4mm² chip is fabricated in 12nm FinFET and targets intelligent edge devices such as robots and edge servers. CIFER addresses the aforementioned deficiencies with the following novelties: First, CIFER integrates parallel tiny-core clusters, OS-capable processors, and an eFPGA, enabling efficient execution of various workloads across the parallelism-specialization spectrum. Second, CIFER implements a heterogeneous, bi-directional cache coherence scheme, enabling low-latency, byte-granular data sharing between all the processors and the eFPGA. Third, the eFPGA is fully synthesizable with standard cells and off-the-shelf EDA tools.

Architecture: The CIFER architecture (Fig. 1) integrates a 2×4 mesh of tiles and an eFPGA into the distributed, coherent, OpenPiton P-Mesh cache system over three packet-switched, on-chip networks (OCN) designed with PyOCN. Each tile consists of a shard of the coherence system and one of the following: an Ariane core, a TinyCore cluster, or an eFPGA controller. Each coherence shard contains a private, 8KB, L2 cache and a 64KB slice of the shared, 512KB, last-level cache (LLC). Coherence between the L2s and the LLC is maintained in hardware with a directory-based MESI protocol.

Ariane is a Linux-capable, 64-bit, RISC-V processor with a 16KB L1 instruction cache (L1I), an 8KB L1 data cache (L1D), and a double-precision floating-point unit (FPU). Coherence between the L2 and Ariane's L1/L1D is maintained in hardware. Each TinyCore cluster contains six 32-bit, RISC-V cores organized into three pairs. Each core has a private, 4KB L1D, while each pair of cores share a 4KB L1I, an integer multiply-divide unit (MDU), and a single-precision FPU. TinyCore clusters use a MIMD execution model and a software coherence scheme, where cache flush and invalidation are managed in software. Sharing long-latency arithmetic units and reducing coherence hardware maximize computation density in each cluster.

eFPGA: The eFPGA (Fig. 2) has 6720 multi-mode, 6-input LUTs and 18 24Kbit, dual-port, block RAMs. Emulated accelerators can be built with an open-source, RTL-to-bitstream toolchain consisting of Yosys, VPR, and PRGA's bitstream assembler. The eFPGA is integrated with the system through two interfaces in the eFPGA controller: the control register interface allows the CPUs to access the eFPGA via memory-mapped I/O; the coherent memory interface is configurable at runtime to enable non-coherent, IO-coherent, or bidirectionally coherent memory accesses of the eFPGA. Atomic requests from the eFPGA are also supported, enabling low-overhead synchronization in user mode. The flexibly cache-coherent, fault-tolerant integration maximizes the programmability of the SoC.

The eFPGA contains two key novelties: First, the switch blocks implement a cycle-free connection pattern [1], facilitating automated, constraint-driven, area/timing optimization at the array level using off-the-shelf EDA tools. Compared to previous synthesizable FPGAs in which locally optimized blocks are tessellated in a predefined grid,

our approach narrows the LUT density, performance, and energy efficiency gaps between full-custom and synthesizable FPGAs down to 1.3×, 3.4×, and 2.1×, respectively (Fig. 5). Second, the configuration memory is organized as multiple single-bit sanchains interconnected via an 8-bit, packet-switched, 2D-mesh network and uses an analog, multi-source clock mesh running in the same clock domain as the CPUs. This enables fast and partial reconfiguration of the eFPGA at GHz clock frequency.

Evaluation: Fig. 3 shows our chip testing setup. Fig. 4 shows the maximum operating frequency (F_{max}) of each component across the range of functional supply voltages. Note that the eFPGA's F_{max} depends on the emulated design, and Fig. 4 shows the F_{max} of a 64-bit LFSR.

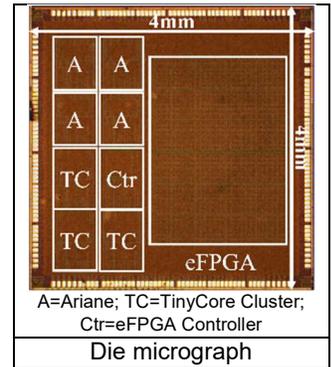
Fig. 5 compares CIFER with other state-of-the-art CPU-FPGA SoCs targeting the edge/IoT domain. The SoC runs up to 1195MHz at 1.1V. The CPUs' aggregate peak performance and energy efficiency are 15.54 GFLOPS at 1.1V and 53.18 GFLOPS/W at 0.7V (estimated power dissipation, excluding the eFPGA's configuration clock power based on post-layout power analysis), outperforming the next best SoC by 6.5× and 1.4×. The eFPGA achieves an area efficiency of 1541 LUT6/mm², outperforming the other synthesizable eFPGAs by 11.2×, and is only 1.3× worse than the best full-custom eFPGA. The eFPGA's peak performance (1.92 MOPS/LUT, 126MHz at 1.1V) and energy efficiency (148.1 GOPS/W at 0.7V) are measured with a 64-point FFT that reaches 97% utilization of the eFPGA. The 3.4× performance gap and the 2.1× energy efficiency gap between the best full-custom eFPGA and this work can be attributed to three factors: (1) CIFER is synthesized with standard cells; (2) our eFPGA has no hardware multiply-accumulate units; and (3) this work uses an open-source FPGA CAD toolchain. The last two rows show the peak memory bandwidth when the CPUs and the eFPGA (running at 10% of the CPU clock frequency) access shared memory in a random pattern. C→F shows the bandwidth when an Ariane core accesses data owned by the eFPGA's private cache, and F→C shows the opposite. Note that SMIV [5] implements the AXI4 ACP protocol that only supports I/O-coherence in which CPU accesses do not trigger cache invalidation on the eFPGA side.

Fig. 6 shows the throughput and energy efficiency gains by offloading four representative edge applications to their preferred compute unit. SORT and SHA-256 use eFPGA-emulated accelerators, while GEMM and JACOBI2D use the TinyCore clusters. The measured runtime includes all the control overhead, while the data transfer overhead is mitigated by overlapping compute with ad hoc, coherent memory accesses. To fairly compare the energy efficiency of individual components, full-chip idle power (static power and clock power) is excluded. At nominal voltage, the eFPGA outperforms the Ariane-only baseline by up to 9.29× in throughput and 10.62× in energy efficiency; the TinyCore clusters improve the performance and energy efficiency by up to 7.95× and 7.75×, respectively.

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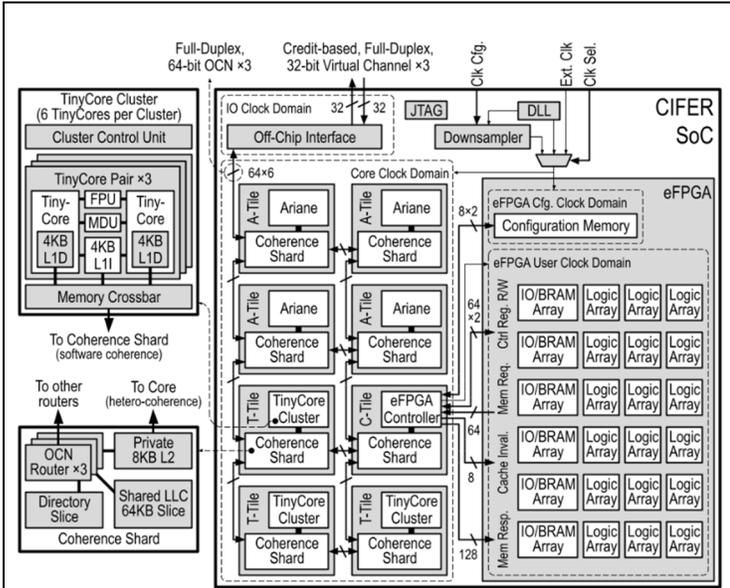


Fig. 1. SoC Architecture

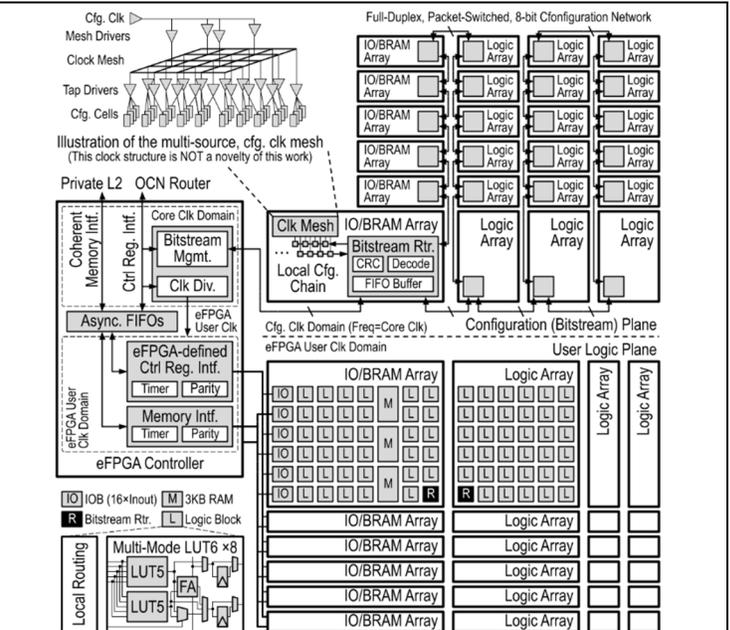


Fig. 2. eFPGA Architecture

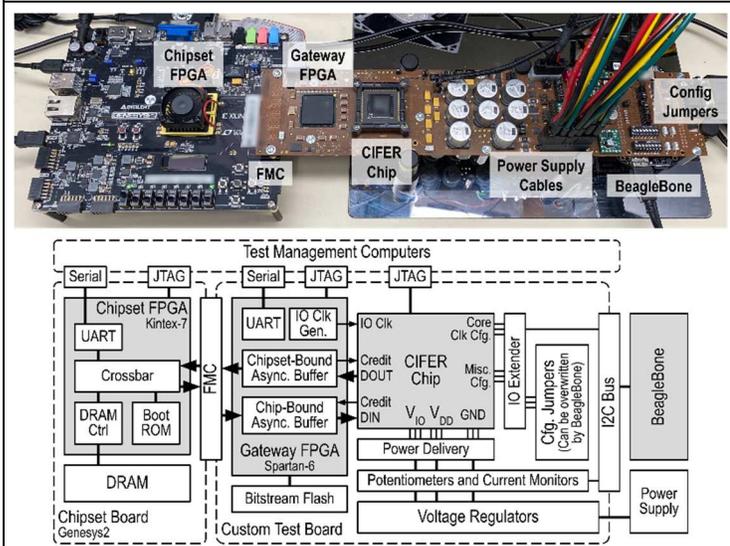


Fig. 3. Lab Evaluation Setup

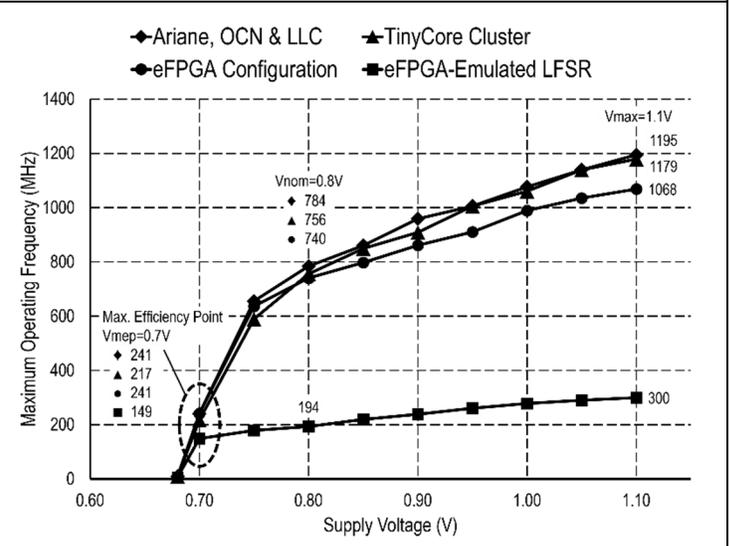
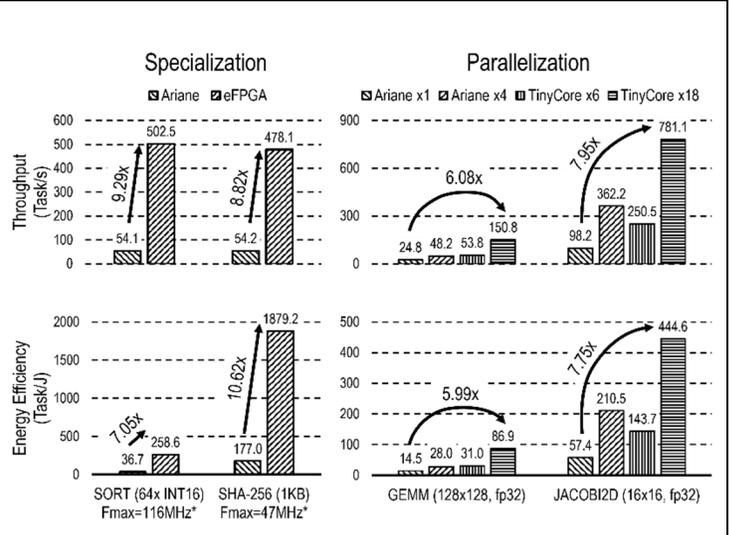


Fig. 4. Maximum Operating Frequency vs. Supply Voltage

	This Work	TCAS'20 [2]	ISSCC'19 [3]	TVLSI'21 [4]	JSSC'22 [5]	PolarFire [6]
Chip	Technology	12nm FinFET	90nm BCD	40nm CMOS + 39nm MRAM	22nm FD-SOI	18nm 28nm CMOS + 28nm SONOS
	Die Area (mm ²)	16	1.78	22.09	9	25
	Vnom (Vmin - Vmax)	0.8 (0.68-1.1)	1.2 (-)	-(1.1-1.3)	0.8 (0.5-0.8)	0.8 (0.5-1.05)
	Active Pwr (mW) Vnom	1792	1.2	5.34	24.95	918
Fmax (MHz) Vmax	1195	10	200	600	972	
Host	Core Type	4x Ariane	Ri5CY	Cortex-M0	Ri5CY	2x Cortex-A53
	ISA	RV64GC	RV32I	ARMv6-M	RV32IMFC	ARMv8-A
	CoreMark Score Vmax	7918	31.9	466	1914	6376
	Fmax	7584	-	-	-	7584
CPU	Core Type	18x TinyCore	-	-	-	-
	ISA	RV32IMAF	N/A	N/A	N/A	-
	Function	Parallel Compute	-	-	-	-
	CoreMark Score Vmax	19198	-	-	-	2265
Total	Peak GFLOPS Vmax	15.54	-	-	1.94	2.4
	Peak GFLOPS/W Vmep	6.63 [53.18]*	-	-	38.03	-
	Shared-Memory BW (MB/s) Vmax	201	-	-	-	-
eFPGA	IP	Synthesizable w/ Std. Cells	Synthesizable w/ Std. Cells	Unknown	Fully-Custom Hard Macro	Fully-Custom Hard Macro
	Min. Prog. Time (us)	239.4 - 1274.8	-	-	450	-
	LUT Type & Count	6720 LUT6	48 LUT6	1176 LUT6	6000 LUT4	8760 LUT6
	Density (LUT/mm ²)	1541	137	36	1505	1991
	Fmax (MHz) Vmax	300*	1.25	200	193	747
	MOPS/LUT Vmax	1.92 [†] (INT8)	-	-	0.02 (INT32)	6.45 (INT8)
GOPS/W Vmep	148.1* (INT8)	-	-	29.1 (INT32)	312.4 (INT8)	
Shared-Memory BW (MB/s) Vmax	C→F	201	-	-	-	-
	F→C	558	-	-	486	-

† Estimated power dissipation, excluding the eFPGA's configuration clock power based on post-layout power analysis
 ** Measured when the eFPGA emulates a 64-bit LFSR
 ‡ Measured when the eFPGA emulates an INT8-precision, complex, 64-point FFT
 * Measured power dissipation of the eFPGA's user clock domain

Fig. 5. Comparison to the State of the Art



* The CPUs, OCN, cache system, and the eFPGA controller run at full speed (740MHz at 0.8V). Fmax indicates the maximum operating frequency of the eFPGA-emulated design

Fig. 6. Performance and Efficiency Gains of Offloaded Benchmarks