An Effective Design for Hierarchical Test Generation Based on Strong Testability

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Abstract
Hierarchical test generation is an efficient method of test generation for VLSI circuits. In this paper, we study a test plan generation algorithm for hierarchical test based on strong testability. We propose a heuristic algorithm for finding a control forest requiring a small number of hold functions by improving an existing test plan generation algorithm based on strong testability. Experimental results show that the proposed algorithm is effective in reducing additional hold functions, i.e., reducing hardware overhead and delay penalty of datapaths.

Keywords. Hierarchical test generation, strong testability, datapath, test plan.

1. Introduction
Hierarchical test generation [1] refers to precomputing test sets for all of modules and justifying these test sets (test plan generation) at register-transfer level (RTL). This hierarchical test generation has several advantages over the full scan design-for-testability (DFT) method [2], which is widely applied to today’s designs. One is, not only the modules for which test sets are computed are relatively small compared to the whole circuit, but also if a module is the same as another, its test set can be shared with the other, and hence the computation time becomes small. Second, since the number of modules in an RTL circuit is smaller than that of logic gates that implement the modules, the computation time for the RTL justification (or test plan generation) can be reduced. Another advantage is the test application time. The test patterns to the modules are propagated by using existing datapaths, and accordingly multiple bits are propagated in parallel on the datapath. Moreover, this test generation method is fit for today’s VLSI design style such that designers describe circuits at RTL and derive logic level circuits by using logic synthesis.

However, the test plan generation is still an intractable problem as well as test generation for logic circuits, and therefore some circuits require large computation time for it. In order to solve it, several literatures presented design for hierarchical test generation and high-level synthesis for hierarchical test generation [3]-[7].

Wada et al. proposed strong testability [3] which is a property of datapaths for which test plans can be generated efficiently. If a datapath is strongly testable, its test plans can be generated independent of the precomputed test sets and their responses. Moreover, [3] presented an algorithm for generating test plans and determining DFTs. The algorithm (called previous algorithm here), however, was considered by giving priority to reducing its time complexity, and consequently additional hardware overhead tends to increase. Furthermore, the algorithm imposes a rigid condition concerning datapath structure, and hence, in order to apply it to practical circuits, further DFT overhead is required to satisfy the condition.

In this paper, we consider an improvement of the previous algorithm [3], which generates test plans and DFT for RTL datapaths based on strong testability. We focus on the control forest generation algorithm, which is a part of the previous algorithm, and improve it so that the number of hold functions in the generated control forest is reduced. First, we propose a heuristic algorithm for reducing the number of conflicts (the tail (primary input) of the path to an input of a module is identical to that of another input of the module, and their sequential depths are the same). The reduction of conflicts can decrease the number of hold functions required to avoid the conflicts. Furthermore, by expressing reconvergent paths without registers as strong conflict, the proposed algorithm can find proper control paths, even if given datapaths do not satisfy the above-mentioned condition for the previous algorithm. Next, we show an optional modification of the proposed heuristic algorithm so that the number of hold functions in the control forest is further reduced. Experimental results show that the proposed algorithm is effective in reducing additional hold functions, which contributes the reduction of hardware overhead and delay penalty of datapaths.

The remaining of this paper is organized as follows. Sect. 2 introduces the previous algorithm based on strong testability. Sect. 3 proposes our heuristic algorithm, which is for reducing conflicts, avoiding improper control paths, and sharing hold functions. Sect. 4 shows some experimental results, and Sect. 5 concludes this paper.

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2. DFT based on strong testability

Hierarchical test generation [1] for an RTL datapath consists mainly of two steps. In the first step, a test-pattern for each module (or element) composing the datapath is generated. Here, modules under the test generation in the first step are assumed to be combinational circuits, e.g., operational units (adders and multipliers) and multiplexers (MUXs). In the second step, for each module, the test-pattern generated in the first step and its response are justified, i.e., a test plan referring to a sequence of control signals that propagate the test-pattern from a primary input to the module and its response from the output of the module to a primary output.

Hierarchical test generation is a divide-and-conquer approach, and hence test generation for large circuits can be performed efficiently. However, test plan generation may consume much time for large datapaths. Strong testability [3] refers to a property of a datapath for which test plans can be generated efficiently independent of test-patterns obtained in the first step.

A datapath is said to be strongly testable if, for every module, the datapath satisfies the following two conditions: strong controllability and strong observability. The former is that any value can be propagated to each input of the module from a primary input and the latter is that any value of the output of the module can be propagated to a primary output. We can achieve 100% fault efficiency for a strongly testable datapath with a complete test set for each module.

In [3], the authors presented an algorithm (called the previous algorithm hereafter) for making a given RTL datapath strongly testable and for generating test plans for the strongly testable datapath. The algorithm consists mainly of the following three steps. (1) Generating a control forest: A control path from a primary input to each input of every module is determined. (2) Generating an observation forest: An observation path from the output of every module to a primary output is determined. (3) Determining DFT circuits: DFT circuits that implement the above-mentioned control and observation forests are inserted to the datapath.

DFT circuits achieve: (1) Hold function for a register: it can retain a value of the register during arbitrary clock cycles, and (2) Thru function for a module: it can propagate a value of an input to the output independent of values on the other inputs. Fig. 2 is a strongly testable datapath obtained by applying appropriate DFT circuits to the datapath in Fig. 1. In this figure, hold functions are added to registers r2, r3, r4 and r6, and two thurs are added to the left and right inputs of modules A1 and A2, respectively.

The previous algorithm does not generate a test plan for each module, but generates control and observation paths that are common to all the modules in the datapath, and hence the computation time can be reduced.

2.1. Control forest generation algorithm

This paper focuses on an algorithm for generating control forest, and hence we here give a brief explanation of the algorithm in the previous method. The previous control forest generation algorithm determines a path to each input of every module from a primary input (and as a result, a set of trees consisting of control paths, i.e., a forest is obtained.) A path from a primary input to an input of a module is implemented by adding thurs to the modules on the path. The algorithm performs based on breadth-first search in terms of sequential depth (the number of registers on a path), so that the sequential depth of control paths becomes small, i.e., it is a heuristic that aims to reduce the length (or test application time) of test plans. The breadth-first algorithm expands a search space from a register (or a primary input) to next (reachable) registers at one step.

Fig. 3 shows a control forest obtained by the previous algorithm for the datapath in Fig. 1. Note that this control forest results in the DFT circuits shown in Fig. 2. The digit on an input of a module denotes the sequential depth from a primary input on the control forest, and it corresponds to the number of clock cycles required to propagate a test-pattern to the input from the primary input. When for a module, the start primary input of the path to an input of the module is the same as that of another input, and the sequential depth of the path is equal to that of the other input in the control forest, different values cannot be applied to the two inputs of the module simultaneously. Such paths (and the module with the paths) are said to be conflicting. For example, modules m2, m3, m4, m6, m7 and A2 in Fig. 3 are conflicting. When a conflict occurs, at the third step of the (above-mentioned)
previous algorithm, a hold is added to a register on either of the two paths. As a result, different values can be applied to two inputs of the module from an identical primary input. In Fig. 3, the additional hold functions to registers r2, r3, r4 and r6 solve the conflicts for modules m2, m3, m4, m6, m7 and A2. For example, the conflict at module m2 is solved by the hold function for register r2. First, a test-pattern for the right input of module m2 is loaded into register r2 along the path \( \langle P1, A1, m1, m2 \rangle \) and register r2 is held, next a test-pattern for the left input of module m2 is loaded into register r1 from P1.

3. Heuristic algorithm for reducing hold functions

The previous DFT and test plan generation algorithm is effective and efficient for hierarchical test generation. The hardware overhead, however, is not always small, e.g., the control forests in Figures 4 and 5 require only two and one hold functions in the paths, respectively, while the control forest in Fig. 3 requires four hold functions.

Since the previous algorithm searches control paths according to sequential depth based on breadth-first search, it has a potential for frequent occurrence of conflicts. Consequently, additional hold functions result in excess. Here we consider a heuristic algorithm for generating a control forest without conflicts by improving the previous algorithm while keeping its efficiency.

3.1. Basic heuristic algorithm

The proposed algorithm is basically a breadth-first search algorithm based on sequential depth without backtracking, as well as [3]. When determining a thru from an input to the output of a module, it checks the conflicts that result from the thru. Note that the previous method determines thurs without any condition or checking. If a thru (a path from an input to the output) of a module results in no conflict at the modules connected from the module, it is determined. Otherwise, the thru is not determined at this time because another thru from a different input of the module may have no conflict in the subsequent search. If a module has no input without conflict, it selects the thru from the input such that the number of conflicts resulting from its thru is minimum.

[Heuristic algorithm for reducing conflicts]

1. Append all the inputs of all the modules connected from primary inputs to queues \( qreg \) and \( qwire \).
2. Take out an input \( e \) from \( qwire \) (if \( qwire \) is empty, from \( qreg \)). If either queue is empty, go to Step 4.
3. Let \( v \) be the module whose input is \( e \). Check whether the thru from \( e \) to the output of \( v \) causes a conflict at the modules \( u1, u2, \ldots \) connected from \( v \) (through some registers). Suppose a module \( u_i \) which is connected from \( v \) with an input \( e' \). If the path from a primary input to another input \( e'' \) of \( u_i \) is not determined, the conflict of \( e'' \) is regarded as don’t-care, and hence it is considered that \( e' \) is not conflicting with \( e'' \).
   (a) If there is no conflict, the thru from \( e \) is determined, and append all the inputs connected from the output of \( v \) to \( qreg \) and \( qwire \).
   (b) Otherwise, if all the inputs of module \( v \) are checked, and if every input of module \( v \) results in conflict, then (1) select the thru from the input such that the number of conflicts that occur at the modules connected from \( v \) is minimum. Or else, (2) append module \( v \) to a queue \( q\text{~suspend} \).

Then, go to Step 2.
4. If \( q\text{~suspend} \) is empty, the algorithm terminates. Otherwise, take out a module \( v \) from \( q\text{~suspend} \). If a thru of module \( v \) is not determined, let \( e \) be an input with the minimum number of conflicts, and go to Step 3.

This algorithm searches paths in breadth-first by means of two queues \( qwire \) and \( qreg \). At one step, it searches a path from an input \( e \) of a module (or a primary input) to an input \( e' \) of another module that are connected from the module. If the path \( (e, e') \) has no register, the head \( e' \) is appended to \( qwire \), or else \( e' \) is appended to \( qreg \).

We explain the algorithm using Fig. 1. There are three modules \( A1, m2 \) and \( m3 \) that are reachable from a primary input \( P1 \). Since the path to \( A1 \) from \( P1 \) has no register, the left input of \( A1 \) is appended to queue \( qwire \), while the left inputs of \( m2 \) and \( m3 \) are appended to queue \( qreg \) since the paths to \( m2 \) and \( m3 \) from \( P1 \) have registers (Step 1). The algorithm processes \( qwire \) first, and hence the left input
of module $A_1$ is taken out from $que_{wire}$ (Step 2). Next, to
determine the thru from the left input to the output of $A_1$,
it checks the conflicts that occur at the inputs of modules
that are reachable (or adjacent) from $A_1$ (Step 3). In this
example, there are three modules $m_1$, $m_3$, and $m_6$ that are
reachable from module $A_1$, and the inputs of module $m_3$ are
conflicting. Consequently, the thru from the right input of
$A_1$ to the output is not determined, and then module $A_1$ is
appended to $que_{suspend}$ (Step 3-(b)-(2)). After backing to
Step 2, since $que_{wire}$ becomes empty, module $m_2$ or $m_3$ is
taken out from $que_{reg}$ and the process continues.

In a subsequent process, a situation where all inputs of a
module are checked and every input of the module results
in conflict arises (Step 3-(b)). Fig. 6 shows the situation for
module $m_1$. In this example, since both inputs of $m_1$ are
conflicting, we select the thru from the input such that the
number of conflicts that occur at the modules connected from
$m_1$ is minimum (Step 3-(b)-(1)). If the left input of $m_1$ is
selected, one conflict occurs at module $m_5$. If the right input
of $m_1$ is selected, on the other hand, the number of conflicts
becomes two. Consequently, the left input to the output of
$m_1$ is selected as shown in Fig. 4.

When both queues $que_{wire}$ and $que_{reg}$ become empty, a
module $v$ at which a thru is suspended due to conflict is taken
out from $que_{suspend}$, and then the inputs of the modules
that are connected from module $v$ are appended to $que_{wire}$
and $que_{reg}$ (Step 4).

3.2. Avoiding improper control paths

In order to ensure a solution (or the test plans for all the
modules), in [3], the previous method forces a given datapath
to satisfy the following conditions.

Condition (Independent registers on reconvergent paths): For any pair of reconvergent paths, either path has its own
register, which is not on the other path. For example, two
reconvergent paths from $PI$ to $A_1$ exist in Fig. 1, and the right
path has a register $r_1$, which is not on the other path. □

In general, a datapath does not always satisfy this condi-
tion, i.e., for any pair of reconvergent paths, either path has
its own register. However, even if a datapath does not satisfy
the condition, the previous algorithm can happen to generate
a proper control forest for such a datapath (because the condi-
tion is sufficient for generating test plan generation). Here
we consider a heuristic for generating a proper control forest
for such a general datapath (i.e., avoiding an improper con-
trol forest that includes a pair of reconvergent paths such that
neither path has its own register).

Fig. 7 shows an example of cases where either of recon-
vergent paths from $PI$ to $A_3$ in a control forest has its own
register or not. In either case of (a) and (b), two conflicts oc-
cur at the inputs of $A_2$ and $A_3$. In case (a), the path from $PI$
to the left input of $A_3$ has its own register $r_1$, which is not on
the other path to the right input. On the other hand, in case
(b), either of paths to the left and right inputs of $A_3$ does not
have its own register, and therefore $A_3$ cannot be tested by
the control forest. If we are obliged to use this control paths
for testing $A_3$, extra DFT overhead is required, e.g. insertion
of a bypass register to either path, as shown in Fig. 7 (c).

In order to find such testable control paths, in our algo-
rithm, the number of conflicts by a reconvergent path without
its own register is regard as extremely large (e.g., a constant
which is larger than the total number of modules), so that
such improper paths as shown in Fig. 7 (b) are not selected.
This path selection is performed by the minimum conflict
thru selection at Step 3(b)-(1)).

3.3. Sharing hold registers

When a module is conflicting, the authors of [3] adopt a
rule that a hold function is added to a register directly con-
necting to the conflicting module. For example, when this
rule is applied to the control forest shown in Fig. 4, which is
derived by the above proposed algorithm, register $r_6$ and $r_3$
are severally required to have hold functions by conflicting
modules $m_5$ and $m_3$.

In general, there exists a case where one hold function re-
 solves several conflicts, i.e., one hold register is shared with
several conflicting modules. Hence, generating a control for-
est such that a hold function can be shared with several con-
flicting modules, we can reduce the number of hold registers.
For example, if we obtain the control forest in Fig. 5, the
three conflicting modules are resolved by hold register $r_1$.

To generate a control forest such that a hold register is
shared with as many conflicting modules as possible, we con-
sider an optional modification on the proposed heuristic
algorithm shown in Sect. 3.1.

Fig. 6 shows a situation where the thru of module $m_1$ is
about to be determined during the process of the proposed
algorithm, provided that register $r_1$ has already been decided
as hold register. Note that this situation occurs at Step 3-(b)
of the proposed algorithm. In this situation, we estimate the
number of extra hold registers, instead of the number of con-
flicting modules for the proposed algorithm shown in Sect.
3.1, for selecting each thru. If the thru from the right input is
selected, the conflicting modules are $m_2$ and $m_4$. To resolve
each conflict, module $m_2$ requires a hold function at register
$r_1$ or $r_2$ while module $m_4$ requires a hold function at register
$r_1$ or $r_4$. As a result, one register, $r_1$, is selected as a hold
register by resolving both conflicting modules. Since regist-
ner $r_1$ has already been a hold register, no extra hold register
is needed when the right thru is selected. Consequently, the
algorithm selects the thru from the right input to the output
of module $m_1$. The resultant control forest is shown in Fig. 5.
Note that the algorithm, described in Sect. 3.1, for selecting
thrus based on the number of conflicts selects the left input

![Figure 7. Proper and improper control paths. (a) Thru from the left at A1 (proper). (b) Thru from the right at A1 (improper). (c) Proper by inserting a bypass register.](image)
of m1, as mentioned above.

At the following third step (determining DFT circuits and generating test plans for all modules), the algorithm determines hold functions at registers shared by as many conflicting modules as possible, instead of registers directly connecting to conflicting modules[3].

4. Experimental Results

We implemented the proposed algorithm for generating control forests, and applied it to benchmark datapaths shown in Table 1. In this table, Columns ‘#PIs’, ‘#POs’, ‘#MUXes’, ‘#ops.’ and ‘#regs.’ denote the numbers of primary inputs, primary outputs, multiplexers, operational units and registers in each datapath, respectively. Note that all the benchmarks except GCD, 4thIIR and PAULIN do not satisfy the condition shown in Sect. 3.2, i.e., these have some pairs of reconvergent paths such that either of the paths does not have its own register.

Table 2 shows the experimental results. In this table, Row ‘[3]’ denotes the results obtained by the previous algorithm for control forests. Rows ‘ours’ and ‘ours+’ show the results obtained by the proposed algorithm without and with the modification shown in Sect. 3.3, respectively. Note that the avoidance of improper control path in Sect. 3.2 is always used. In ‘ours’, the algorithms for generating an observation forest and determining DFT circuits are the same as those in [3], while, in ‘ours+’, only the algorithm for generating an observation forest is the same as that in [3]. Note that the CPU time for the proposed method is almost the same as that for the previous one, and the time for each datapath is less than one second on a PC (PowerPC G4, 1.5GHz).

As shown in Column ‘#untests’, although benchmarks except GCD, 4thIIR and PAULIN do not satisfy the condition in Sect. 3.2 (concerned with reconvergent paths), both of the previous and proposed method could find proper solutions, i.e., Column ‘#untests’ is zero, for five benchmarks DP1, LWF1, LWF2, JWF1 and JWF2. Unfortunately, the proposed methods as well as the previous one cannot find proper control paths for RISC and DCT-F, however, the number of untested modules in RISC can be reduced by the proposed methods. From these results we can consider that our heuristics concerned with reconvergent paths is also effective in avoidance of improper control paths. Note that the number of untested modules corresponds to the number of bypass registers required for making the resultant control paths applicable, and accordingly its reduction has large impact on hardware overhead of datapaths. Furthermore, especially for RISC, the proposed algorithm can reduce the total length of the test plans, as shown in Column ‘plan len.’.

Table 3 shows hardware overhead for test plan generation. We assumed that a test controller is inserted between a data-path and a controller, as shown in Fig. 8, which is based on [4]. We checked the area size of the shaded parts: a plan generator and a multiplexer T-MUX for switching normal mode.
and test mode. This is because only the size of these parts directly depends on the DFT circuits inserted into a datapath. The plan generator, which can generate a test plan for a module specified by signal mod with a test-pattern specified by pat, is a counter-based FSM and it consists of a counter (ctr.) and a combinational circuits (TPG).

In Table 3, Column ‘ctr.’ denotes a size of the counter, and the columns under ‘Area’ denote the area size of TPG, T-MUX and the sum of them (total). TPG and T-MUX were designed by HDL and synthesized by Synopsys Design Compiler, and then the area sizes of them are calculated provided that the area size of an inverter is one. From Table 3, we can see that the counters of the plan generator require the same size for all the methods. Comparing the area size of TPG and T-MUX, the area size of the proposed method is equal to or smaller than that of the previous method for all circuits except for LWF1 and DCT-F. Especially for DP1, JWF2 and RISC, the proposed method is effective because it can reduce the number of hold functions controlled by the test plan generator, as shown in Table 2. Unfortunately, for 4thIIR, LWF2, JWF1, RISC, the area size of TPG and T-MUX for ‘ours+’ is larger than that for ‘ours’ owing to the increase in the size of the plan generator. This is because sharing hold registers makes the control for hold registers complicated, even though it is effective to reduce hardware overhead and delay penalty of datapaths.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we considered an improvement of an algorithm of test plan generation and DFT for RTL datapaths based on strong testability. We focused on the control forest generation algorithm that is a part of the previous test plan generation algorithm, and improved so as to (1) reduce the number of conflicts requiring hold functions in the generated control forest, (2) find control paths that require no (i.e., the paths are proper) or small number of extra DFTs such as bypass registers, even if given datapaths do not satisfy a condition for the previous algorithm, and (3) share a hold register among as many conflicting modules as possible. Experimental results show that the proposed algorithm, including the optional modification, is effective in reducing additional hold functions for strongly testable datapaths. This is effective in reducing the hardware overhead and the delay penalty of a datapath, as well as the hardware overhead for generating test plans.

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