

# Performance Balancing: Software-based On-chip Memory Management for Effective CMP Executions

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<https://hdl.handle.net/2324/18827>

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出版情報 : MEDEA2009, pp.28-34, 2009-09. ACM Press

バージョン :

権利関係 :

# Performance Balancing: Software-based On-chip Memory Management for Effective CMP Executions

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## ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the concept of *performance balancing*, and reports its performance impact on a Chip multiprocessor (CMP). Integrating multiple processor cores into a single chip, or CMPs, can achieve higher peak performance by means of exploiting thread level parallelism. However, the off-chip memory bandwidth which does not scale with the number of cores tends to limit the potential of CMPs. To solve this issue, the technique proposed in this paper attempts to make a good balance between computation and memorization. Unlike conventional parallel executions, this approach exploits some cores to improve the memory performance. These cores devote the on-chip memory hardware resources to the remaining cores executing the parallelized threads. In our evaluation, it is observed that our approach can achieve 31% of performance improvement compared to a conventional parallel execution model.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

D1.3 [PROGRAMMING TECHNIQUES]: Concurrent Programming — *parallel programming*

## General Terms

Performance, Management

## Keywords

Chip MultiProcessors, Scratchpad Memory, Parallel Execution, Memory-wall Problem

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating multiple processor cores into a single chip, or CMP, is a de-facto standard for high performance computing area. By exploiting thread level parallelism (or TLP), CMPs achieve high peak performance. Industry trends show that the number of cores in a chip will increase every process generation, so that improving efficiency of parallel executions becomes more important.

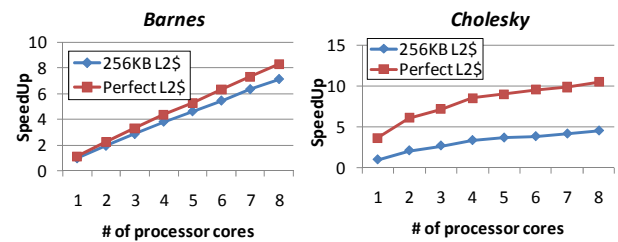


Figure 1: Impact of memory performance

Although the on-chip parallel processing is a promising way, CMPs cannot always achieve expected peak performance, especially for memory intensive applications. This is because the memory-wall problem becomes more serious in CMPs. In state-of-the-art CMP designs, the off-chip memory access latency is almost two orders of magnitude longer than one operation time (or clock cycle time) of processor cores. Moreover, due to I/O pin limitations, off-chip memory bandwidth does not scale with the number of cores. Figure 1 shows the performance improvement achieved by increasing the number of cores on a CMP. Here, we assume CMP models which have a 256KB realistic private L2 cache or ideal perfect L2 cache. The two benchmark programs from SPLASH-2 [14] were executed by using M5 cycle accurate CMP simulator [2]. For Barnes, the performance improvement is in almost proportional to the number of cores used. However, for Cholesky, it is clear that the CMP performance is limited by the inefficient memory system. As in the examples given above, in memory intensive programs, a conventional approach which attempts to exploit all cores to execute parallelized threads does not achieve high performance.

To solve the memory performance issue on CMPs, in this paper, we propose a parallel execution technique called *performance balancing*. In conventional approaches, all cores execute parallelized application threads to exploit TLP. On the other hand, our approach attempts to exploit some cores not only for executing parallelized threads but for improving memory performance. Our approach aims to improve the total performance by means of making a good balance between computing and memory performance. The contribution of this paper is as follows.

- The concept of performance balancing to improve the CMP performance is proposed. We focus on software-controllable on-chip memory architecture such as Cell Broadband Engine (Cell/B.E.) [9], and show a performance model to discuss the efficiency of our approach.

- We propose a software technique to realize the performance balancing on the targeted CMP. To improve the memory performance, we dare to throttle TLP, i.e. the parts of cores execute parallelized application threads. The other remaining cores release their on-chip memory to the executing cores. Our technique appropriately allocates these two types of cores with the aims of maximum total performance.
- We implement three benchmark programs to evaluate the efficiency of the proposed approach. As the results, it is observed that using five cores for execution and two cores for memory assist achieves 31% of performance improvement compared to the conventional parallel execution.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related work. Section 3 describes our proposed technique called performance balancing. Section 4 shows the evaluation results, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. RELATED WORK

There are many techniques to improve memory performance in CMPs. These techniques fall into the two main categories: hiding memory access time and reducing the number of off-chip memory accesses. Data prefetching technique is categorized into the first type and has been proposed by several researchers [3][7]. Cantin et al. [3] proposed *stealth prefetching* which reduces the number of invalidation of prefetched data for cache coherency. To obtain the information on other cores, prefetcher does not issue prefetch requests for the data to be held in other cores. This leads to reducing the number of extra broadcast originated from data prefetching. Ganusov et al. [7] proposed helper threads for improving memory performance. Executing the helper thread which emulates hardware prefetching can improve memory performance for another core. Their approach appears similar to our approach in improving memory performance using processor cores. While their approach improves the single-thread application performance using an idle core to execute helper thread, our approach focuses on improving parallel program performance using core to assist other cores instead of executing parallelized thread.

In another type of category, several approaches which reduce the number of off-chip memory accesses have been proposed. Cooperative cache [4] reduces cache misses with copying data to remote cache if cache memory has the data exclusively. This approach is needed to modify coherency protocol. To be effectively allocated data into, software-managed local memory (call scratchpad memory or SPM in this paper) can achieve high performance and low power compared to cache memory. However, at the same time, this allocation requires extra effort to coding source code. To solve this issue, many researchers have proposed allocation techniques which allocate effective data automatically into SPMs at compile time [1] [11][13]. In these techniques, the number of SPM accesses is maximized under certain conditions. These techniques can be categorized into two types by the difference of conditions: dynamic allocation [13] and static allocation [1][11]. While dynamic allocation replaces the data in

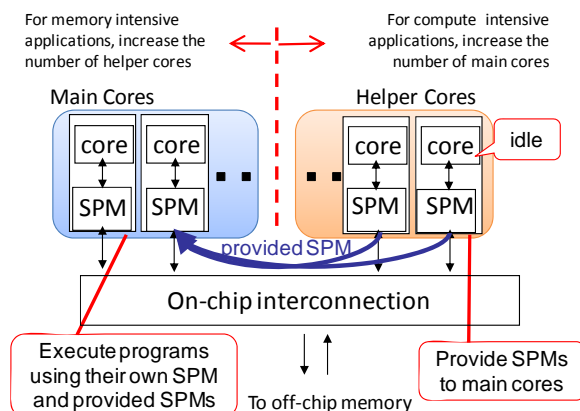


Figure 2: Concept of Performance Balancing

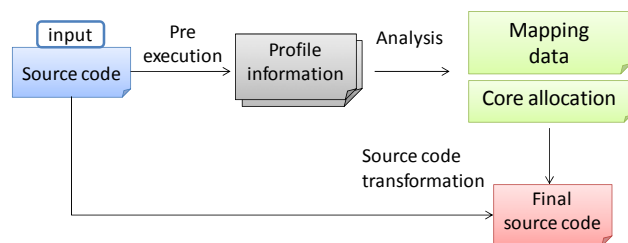


Figure 3: Workflow of Applying Performance Balancing

SPMs, while static allocation does not replace them during execution time. Dynamic allocation has an advantage over static allocation in memory performance. On the other hand, static allocation improves energy efficiency compared to dynamic allocation.

A few prior studies have already started to manage processor cores in response to changing the situation on CMPs. Increasing the number of processor cores can degrade parallel processing performance due to synchronization overhead, limitation of off-chip memory bandwidth, and so on. To solve this phenomenon, Suleman et al. [12] and Curtis-Maury et al. [6] proposed concurrency throttling which changes the number of execution cores considering the characteristics of program. In these approaches, the best number of execution cores is estimated using profile information at runtime, and then program is executed with the number of cores. While their approaches improve performance only if increasing the number of execution cores degrades performance, our approach can improve performance in this case due to improving memory performance to use remaining cores.

## 3. PERFORMANCE BALANCING

### 3.1 Processor Model

Figure 2 shows the CMP model targeted in this paper. Each core has SPM and these SPMs are connected an on-chip interconnection such as ring or shared bus. Memory accesses operate by DMA transfer except for access to own SPM. The

computation at the processor cores and the data transfer between the off-chip memory and SPM can be overlapped by using DMA controller.

### 3.2 Concept of Performance Balancing

For memory intensive programs, the conventional parallel execution method does not achieve high performance. In Figure 1, the six-core CMP with the perfect cache achieves higher performance than the eight-core CMP with 256KB private L2 caches. In other words, for the eight-core CMP, there is a possibility that best performance can be achieved by using the six cores for code execution and the two cores for memory performance improvement.

To improve the total performance of CMPs, we propose the concept of performance balancing. This approach attempts to exploit some cores for improving memory performance as shown in Figure 2. Here, we define the following terminology to help understanding our approach.

- Main core: It executes parallelized application threads, and can exploit the SPMs provided by the helper cores as a new level of on-chip memory hierarchy.
- Helper core: It does not execute application threads, but release own SPM to main cores.

The total number of cores implemented in a chip is a constant. Thus, increasing the number of helper cores means throttling TLP, resulting in lower computation performance. At the same time, since the main cores can exploit the SPMs provided by the helper cores, its memory performance is improved. Our approach attempts to decide the appropriate number of cores to be used as main and memory cores in order to maximize the CMP total performance.

Figure 3 shows the workflow to which performance balancing is applied. First, our approach samples profile information to execute a target program for estimating the program behavior. Next, analyzing the profile information, we estimate an optimal data allocation of helper cores' SPM and the best number of main/helper cores. Finally, using the information, the original source code is transformed to objective source code.

### 3.3 Performance Modeling

In this section we discuss the impact of our approach on CMP performance modeling execution time. Let  $T_{exe}(n)$  be the execution time with a perfect on-chip memory and  $T_{mem}(m, n)$  be the time of DMA transfer when there are  $n$  main cores and  $m$  helper cores. Then, the execution time of a main core  $T(m, n)$  can be approximated by the following s.

$$T(m, n) = T_{exe}(n) + T_{mem}(m, n) \quad (1)$$

$$T_{exe}(n) = \left\{ \frac{F}{n} + (1 - F) \right\} \times T_{exe}(1) \quad (2)$$

$$T_{mem}(m, n) = AC(n) \times AMAT(m, n) \quad (3)$$

$$AMAT(m, n) = HR_{SPMR}(m) \times AT_{SPM} + (1 - HR_{SPMR}(m)) \times AT_{main} \quad (4)$$

Let  $F$  be the time to execute the parallel part of the program with one main core.  $T_{mem}(m, n)$  represents the product of the

number of DMA transfers  $AC(n)$  and average DMA transfer time  $AMAT$ .  $AT_i$  means access time to memory component  $i$ , where  $i$  is SPM, or main memory. For example,  $AT_{SPM}$  represents access time to a remote SPM. The rate of SPM-to-SPM data transfers represents  $HR_{SPMR}(m)$  i.e., this term is division of the number of SPM-to-SPM data transfer and that of whole memory accesses.

Here we assume that DMA transfer is also parallelized based on  $F$ .  $AC(n)$  can be expressed by the following equation.

$$AC(n) = AC(1) \times \left( \frac{F}{n} + 1 - F \right) \quad (5)$$

Based on these equations, we discuss that our approach impacts on the CMP performance. We firstly focus on how the number of main cores impacts on CMP performance. If the number of main cores  $n$  is increased with that of helper cores  $m$  fixed,  $T_{mem}(m, n)$  and  $T_{exe}(n)$  are decreased. This is caused by increasing  $n$  reduces the load of computation and DMA transfer per a main core (see the Equation (2) and (5)). On the other hand, increasing the value of  $m$  with fixed that of  $n$  improves  $T_{mem}(m, n)$  due to enlarging  $HR_{SPMR}(m)$  in Equation (4). Increasing  $m$  or  $n$  causes the performance improvement, but the sum of  $m$  and  $n$  cannot exceed the all number of cores in the chip. Consequently, the value of  $m$  and  $n$  largely affects CMP performance and the optimal number of main and helper cores which achieves the maximum performance is depend on  $F$ ,  $AC(n)$ , and  $T_{exe}(1)$  which are varied with application program characteristic. Thus, it is important to specify the appropriate value of  $m$  and  $n$  with respect to each program. This way is explained at Section 3.4.

$HR_{SPMR}(m)$  is also changed by how effective data is loaded into the SPM of helper cores. Loading more data requested by main cores improves  $HR_{SPMR}(m)$ . We explain how to determine the data stored in SPM of helper cores in Section 3.5.

### 3.4 Prediction of Optimal Core Allocation

In our approach, program should be executed with the appropriate number of main/helper cores. The appropriate number of cores varies with characteristics of program, input set and machine configuration. Thus, we propose profile-based prediction technique for optimal core allocation.

First, our approach samples profile information to execute a program for estimating the program behavior. Next, we calculate execution time for each core combination based on the performance modeling. The optimal core allocation is estimated by choosing the best combination of cores to achieve best performance.

To calculate execution time with respect to each combination of cores, our approach uses the equations in Section 3.4. All terms except for access time to SPM and main memory are estimated using pre-execution information with one main core and no helper core. To measure  $F$ , *time function* is inserted at the begin and end of the parallel part in source code.  $F$  is calculated by the

difference of this time and whole execution time.  $AC(1)$  can be measured by performance counter.  $HR_{SPMR}(m)$  can be estimated by comparing the allocation data into the SPM of helper cores and DMA transfer trace. This is because mapping data for each number of helper cores are previously determined and the data targeted by DMA transfer are previously obtained.  $T_{exe}(1)$  can be obtained to assign  $(m,n) = (0,1)$  to Equation (1) since  $T(0,1)$  and  $T_{mem}(0,1)$  can be calculated.

### 3.5 Data Mapping to SPM of Helper Cores

In our approach, main cores use SPM of helper cores as the second hierarchical memory. If helper cores have the data demanded by the main core, the main core can obtain the data by high-speed SPM-to-SPM data transfer without accessing main memory. Consequently, loading more effective data in helper cores corresponds to more memory performance improvement in main cores. This section describes how to determine the data loaded into SPM of helper cores.

Our approach decides the data which is loaded into SPM in helper cores for the purpose that minimizes the number of main memory accesses. Helper cores do not reload other data during program execution. This kind of technique has been proposed in area of SPMs as static allocation [1][11]. To allocate optimal data into SPM, static allocation minimizes the number of main memory accesses in a single core processor on the condition not to reload the data. We apply the static allocation technique to allocate the data of helper cores' SPM. Static allocation is applied as follows. First, static allocation obtains memory access trace by pre-executing. Next, the number of memory accesses is counted to each interval of address based on the trace. Finally, the data are loaded into on-chip memory in decreasing order of counts of main memory accesses.

Note that our approach allocates statically data to SPMs of helper cores. Helper cores do not reload data dynamically even though this could be useful for long programs using the large amount of data. This is because frequently data reloading can cause performance degradation to increase synchronization overhead. Main cores must obtain the demanded data from helper cores or main memory to guarantee the expected behavior of program. If helper cores reload data into own SPM not to synchronize main cores, main core can obtain unexpected data. Using the unexpected data brings wrong behavior of program. Consequently, helper cores must synchronize main cores every time they replace the data. Also note that minimizing the number of main memory accesses does not correspond to maximizing the memory performance of main cores. Most processors to have SPMs can execute computation and DMA transfer at the same time. Processor core can continue computation during accessing to main memory. Consequently, there is no guarantee that stall time of cores is minimized in the case of minimizing the number of main memory accesses. The extensions to dynamic reloading and minimizing stall time are part of our future work.

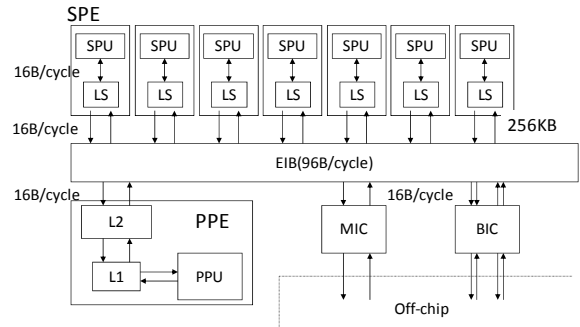


Figure 4: Cell/B.E. Processor Architecture

Table 1: Details of Executed workloads

Benchmark	Problem description	Input set
HIMENO	Poisson's equation	17x17x33(SSS), 33x33x65(SS), 65x65x129 (S)
Susan	Image processing	Large input
LU	LU decomposition	512x512, 1024x1024

Table 2: Access Time to Each Memory Module

Memory component	Access time [CC]
Remote LS ( $AT_{SPM}$ )	106+transfer size/8
Main memory ( $AT_{main}$ )	300+transfer size/4

## 4. EVALUATION

### 4.1 Experimental Setup

In order to clarify the efficiency of the proposed approach, we have evaluated the performance of a Cell B.E. processor. Figure 4 shows the microarchitecture of Cell/B.E. processor. Cell/B.E. has one PPE (PowerPC Processor Element) and eight SPEs (Synergistic Processor Elements) [9]. PPE which is general purpose processor assigns threads to SPEs and controls standard I/O. Each SPE has 256KB controllable on-chip memory call Local Store (LS). We apply our approach to SPEs without PPE. Since only seven SPEs are available on the Cell/B.E. chip, the maximum number of main cores is seven. Cell/B.E. accesses main memory or remote LSs with DMA transfer. The access time of DMA write does not vary where to access. Consequently, we allocate the data to minimize the read requests to main memory. Table 2 shows read access time to each module for performance modeling. We decided these values based on the reports [5], [10].

For the evaluation, we used *HIMENO* benchmark program [15], *Susan* in Mibench [8] and *LU* in SPLASH-2 [14]. These programs are modified for executing in Cell/B.E and are tuned for memory performance improvement. In *HIMENO* benchmark, there is a three dimension array, and the main function includes a four pipe loop. We parallelized at the second level loop and did

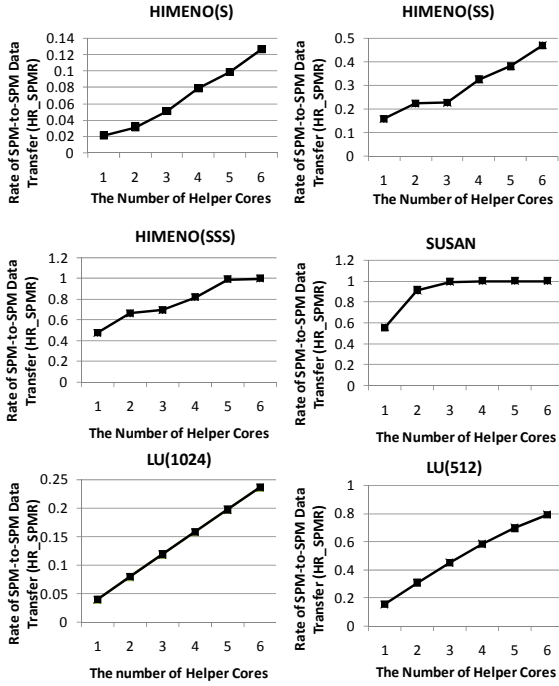


Figure 5: Rate of SPM-to-SPM data transfer (Read)

not adapt special code tuning except for double buffering. *Susan* has four steps of program, which are (1) *initialize*, (2) *edge reinforcement*, (3) *edge correction*, and (4) *stacking raw image*. We parallelized the part of (2) and (4). Since SPLASH-2 is parallelized benchmark program suite, we do not arrange algorithm in *LU*. The input set of benchmarks is shown in Table 1. We used -O3 as a compile option, and took the average execution time of 10 times.

We measure the real execution time of the following evaluation models.

- **CONV**: This is a conventional model which uses all of the cores to execute parallelized threads, i.e. the number of main cores is equal to seven.
- **PB-IDEAL**: This model is applied performance balancing with the optimal number of main/helper cores. The optimal core allocation is estimated by pre-execution of all combination of main/helper cores with the same input as the evaluated input.
- **PB-PREDICT**: This model is applied performance balancing with the predicted number of main/helper cores. The predicted number of main/helper cores is calculated by the method explained in Section 3.4. We use the same input size as the evaluated input size.

## 4.2 Reduction of Main Memory Accesses

Figure 5 illustrates the proportion of SPM-to-SPM data transfer counts to whole DMA transfer counts for each benchmark programs. The x-axis represents the number of helper cores and the other remaining cores are used as that of main cores. In this graph, the proportion of SPM-to-SPM data transfer is higher in

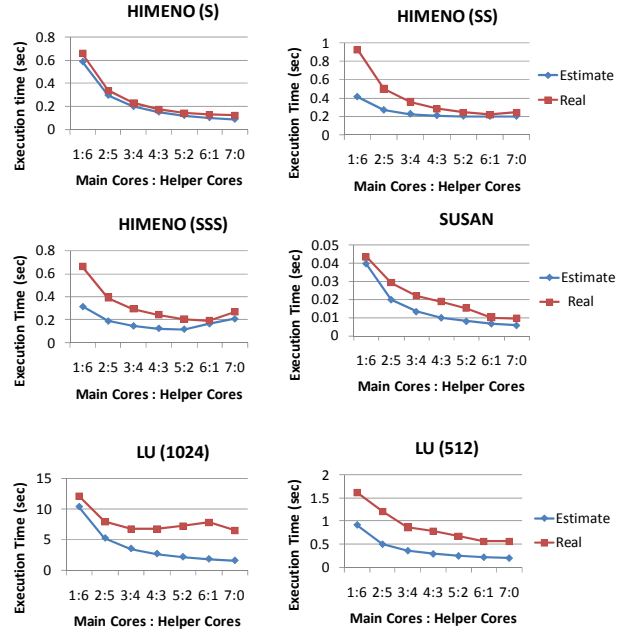


Figure 6: Execution Time Varying the Number of Cores

increasing the number of helper cores in all programs. This is because increasing the number of helper cores enlarges the capacity of on-chip memory available to main cores. Increasing the data capacity to be used as second hierarchical memory enlarges the rate of SPM-to-SPM transfer. Another important aspect of Figure 5 is that the rate of SPM-to-SPM transfer even in the same program and the same number of helper cores is quite different among the input size. This is because executing program with large input set increases the data capacity to be used during program execution. Our approach does not replace the data of helper cores after the data allocation for helper cores is determined. Consequently, the amount of data to be used in program execution affects largely the proportion of SPM-to-SPM data transfer rate.

## 4.3 Accuracy of Core Allocation

Figure 6 shows the execution time applying performance balancing as the number of main/helper cores varies. X-axis represents the number of main and helper cores. For example, 1:6 means one main core and six helper cores. *Estimate* of graph legends represents the execution time estimated by the performance modeling and *Real* represents the execution time of the real machine. For *Himeno (S)*, the estimated execution time matches the real execution time. For the others, these two kinds of time are quite different. This observation is not important for our approach, since the purpose of performance modeling is to predict the appropriate number of main and helper cores. Consequently, it is more important to predict the best number of main and helper cores to accurately model relative execution time. Looked at from this angle, our performance model works well. In *HIMENO (S)*, *HIMENO (SS)*, *Susan*, and *LU*, our approach can predict the best number of cores which achieves the highest performance. In the



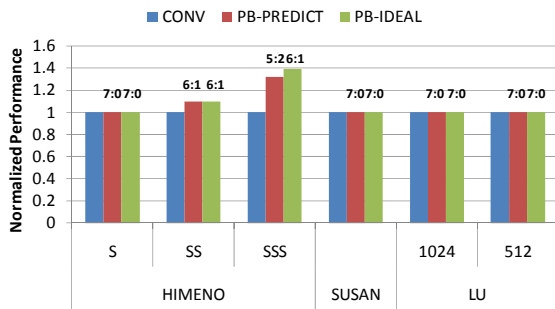


Figure 7: Performance Normalized with Conventional Approach

other programs, our approach estimates the second best number of cores.

#### 4.4 Performance

Figure 7 illustrates the performance of the three evaluation models normalized by the *CONV* model. X-axis is the name of benchmark programs and input size. The numerical character above the bars represents the ratio of the number of main cores/helper cores. For example, 6:1 means six main cores and one helper core. In *HIMENO* (SSS) and *HIMENO* (SS), performance balancing in optimal core allocation improves performance by 39% and 9%, respectively. This is because memory performance improvement exceeds computation performance degradation originated from decrease in the number of main cores. On the other hand, our approach improves 31% and 9% in *HIMENO* (SSS) and *HIMENO* (SS) in *PB-PREDICT*. This result shows that our prediction technique works well. In the others, our approach does not improve performance even with the best number of main and helper cores. This result demonstrates that conventional approach which executes programs with all cores is the best case. Even in these programs, our proposed technique does not degrade the performance to predict the best allocation of cores.

In almost all programs, performance balancing does not improve total performance. This is mainly because helper cores cannot improve higher memory performance than the degradation of computation performance in *HIMENO*(S) and *LU* (1024) which use large amount of data. Actually, in these programs, the effect of reducing the number of main memory accesses is small observed in Figure 5. To achieve high performance in these programs, it is necessary to effectively load important data into helper cores' LS such as the dynamic allocation technique. In *susan*, on the other hand, even though the largely number of main memory accesses is replace to SPM-to-SPM transfer, our approach does not improve the total performance. This is why memory performance is not performance bottleneck and performance scales in proportional to the number of cores.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

In many-core era, it is important to bring out potential performance in processor chip to operate processor cores concertedly. We have researched techniques of orchestrating processor cores in multicore systems for performance, energy, reliability, and so on. As part of this project, this paper proposes the parallel execution technique called performance balancing.

This approach exploits processor cores not only for executing parallelized threads, but also for improving memory performance considering the balance of memory and computation performance. Experimental results show up to 31% performance improvement to predict the appropriate number of main/helper cores.

For future work, we develop more effective method for data mapping to SPMs of helper cores such as replacing mapping data during program execution. We also evaluate energy on our approach adding benchmark programs.

#### 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our thanks to Semiconductor Technology Academic Research Center (STARC) for their support. We thank all members of the System LSI laboratory of Kyushu University for discussing at technical meetings.

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