Chinese Voice (ba/bei):

Mandarin Chinese ba and bei (long passive) display subtle Differential Argument Marking (DAM) properties where they preferentially select definite/referential nominal arguments as well as complex verbal predicates with strong transitivity (1b), object complementation (1c), aspect (1d), and multi-syllabic (1e), which strongly suggests that ba and bei are merged above little v and aspectual projections (Zou (1995), Li (2006)).

1a) sha-le huaidian / ba huaidian sha-le
kill-COMPL scoundrel BA scoundrel kill-COMPL

'(He) killed the scoundrel’ (definiteness operational in ba) (Li (1990:193))

1b) *ta ba na-difang likai-le / *ta bei ren kan-le
He BA that-place leave-ASP he BEI person see-ASP
(intended) 'He left that place.' (Li (2006:397)) / 'He was seen by someone.' (Chu (1973:442))

1c) qing ni ba shu fang *(r'ai zhuo-shang) / Zhangsan bei Lisi da *(henduo ci)
Please you BA book put at table-LOCALIZER Zhangsan BEI Lisi hit many times

'Please put the book *(on the table).' (Li (2006:392)) / 'Zhangsan is hit by Lisi *(many times).' (Feng (2012:117-118))

1d) ta ba nei ge fangzi gai-*(bao/le) / zhe-ge yusuan bei lifuyuan shu-*(le)
He BA that-CL house build-ASP this-CL budget BEI legislative council delete-ASP

'He built that house.' (Liu (1997:63)) / 'This budget was deleted by the legislative council.' (Chappell and Shi (2016:471))

1e) ba tamen *(bao/wei) / *ta bei ta taitai ma
BA them surround he BEI his wife scold

'surround them' (Feng (2002a:249)) / (intended) 'he is scolded by his wife.' (Chu (1973:441))

While most analyses posit movement of the nominal complement to account for its discourse properties (e.g. ba shu fang / bei Lisi da (1c)), Li (2006), Arcodia and Lemmolo (2014)), A’-movement is unlikely in ba and bei constructions since A’-movement to the internal left periphery would only explain the definiteness/referrality of the nominal complement and not the complex properties of the matrix verb phrase (1b-c), cf Li (2006:376)) and A-movement is ruled out by the Minimality of Spec-to-Spec movement within the cartographic projection of Light Verbs (Huang (1997), Lin (2001)) where the base-generated external argument (SpecPred) intervenes before the base-generated internal argument (SpecTrans) (Bowers (2002)) and the latter cannot cross over the former in being raised to an adjacent position to ba or to the specifier of bei, as argued by Li (2006) and Feng (2012). It is proposed here, therefore, that ba and bei instantiate Voice projections (Active and Passive respectively, place Kratzer (1996)), and while ba (Active) selects and re-actives a lower passive predicate headed by an affective marker gei (2a) (Tang (2001)), bei in turn re/actives ba (2b):

2a) yi ba huo jiu ba afang gong gei fei le
One CL fire then BA A-Fang palace PASS ruin SFP

'It took just one fire to ruin the palace of A. Fang.' (Chappell and Shi (2016:465-466), cf Tang (2001))

2b) ta bei pengyou ba yi-ge taitai gei pian zou le
He BEI friend BA one-CL wife PASS cheat away SFP

'He was cheated by his friend of one of his friends.' (Chen (2003:1173))

This cartography of Voice projections (Passive (bei) - Active (ba) – Affect (gei)) explains why the lower matrix verbal predicate (gei fei le (2a), gei pian zou le (2b)) cannot be bare but phraseal (1a-e) with an internal vP-structure (Kuo (2010)), and the complex verbal properties of ba and bei (1b-e) fall out from the fact that verb movement is obligatory for the licensing by Spec-Head agreement the arguments in the specifiers of these Voice heads (SpecAffect (afang gong (2a), yige taitai (2b)), SpecActive (pengyou (2b))). Furthermore, as Spec-to-Spec A-movement is prohibited by Minimality of movement (SpecBEI – SpecA – SpecGEI (t – SpecPred (t) – SpecTRANS (t) – SpecTRANS (t))) (Rizzi (1990)), it is argued here that ba and bei (and gei) are Applicative heads which not only permit external merge of coindexed arguments from their base-generated theta-positions in the lower vP (Feng (2002b:147-151, 2012:129-136), cf Pylkkänen (2002)) but also account for the fact that ba and bei often denote agentivity/volitionality and affectedness respectively which are characteristic of their lexical origins (ba ‘to take’, bei ‘to receive’) in historical serial verb constructions which semantically select agentive and patient-like subjects respectively and undergo restructuring (Pyeuraeba (1989), Feng (1990, 2002b)). Moreover, the argument-alternations in ba and bei constructions suggest extra projections between Tense and Asp ect) which differ from the Case-driven A-movement in the voice alternation in Western European languages (e.g. passivasive (Roberts (2006:170)) in being more semantically driven which not only captures the DAM properties in ba and bei constructions but also suggests two parallel Voice heads (Passive (bei)/Active (ba)) which conform with traditional analyses of ba and bei (Frei (1956), Wang (1959)).

(Selected) References:

