Chinese ba: new Voice head and Voice alternations:

Chinese ba displays complex empirical differential object marking (DOM) properties which elude a straightforward formal analysis (Li (2006:376)), since it is widely observed that ba selects definite/specfic objects which are thematically related to the second matrix verb (Zou (1995:59ff), Li (2006:413ff)) and the matrix verb must not be bare but display transitivity (1a), complementation (1b), aspect (1c), adverbal modification (1d), and multi-syllabicity (1e), which conforms to its diachronic formation as a ‘disposal’ marker where ba is used in conjunction with transitive/dynamic verb phrases at a more advanced stage rather than a bare verb in its earliest attestations (Feng (2002b), Peyraube (1989)).

1a) ‘ta ba na-difang likai-le
He BA that-place leave-ASP
‘He left that place.’ (Li (2006:397))

1b) qing ni ba shu fang *(zai zhuzi-shang)
Please you BA book put at table-LOCALIZER
‘Please put the book *(on the table.’ (Li (2006:392))

1c) ta ba nei ge fangzi gai-*le
He BA that-CL house build-ASP
‘He built that house.’ (Liu (1997:63))

1d) ni neng bu nengba shu *(zhengzhengqi-jie-de) fang
You can NEG can BA book tidy-ADV put
‘Can you put the books *(tidily?’ (Feng (2002a:248))

1e) ba tamen *(bao)*wei
BA them surround
‘surround them’ (Feng (2002a:249))

There are numerous movement analyses (Li (2006), Yeo (2015)) which seek to account for the definiteness of the preverbal object via A’-movement to the internal topic/focus projections (e.g. ba shu fang (1b)), ba nei-ge fangzi gai (1c), ba shu ... fang (1d)), ba tamen baowei (1e), cf Hsu (2008)) but fail to account for the complex verbal properties of the matrix verb (Li (2006:413-416)). In this paper, it is proposed that Chinese ba is a light verb (cf Huang (1997), Lin (2001)) which heads an Active Voice projection above the Passive Voice head which (re-)activises passive predicates, as supported by examples where ba precedes passive markers (e.g. gei):

2) yi ba huo jiu ba afang gong gei fei le
One CL. fire then BA A-Fang palace PASS ruin LE
‘It took just one fire to ruin the palace of A. Fang.’ (Chappell and Shi (2016:465-466))

From this double voice representation (Active – Passive), DOM properties follow, since the complement of ba (e.g. gei fei le (2)) is not a bare verbal predicate (VP) but a passivized predicate (PassP) whose verbal complement (here fei le) must be transitive/dynamic so as to be passivisable, which leads to its aspectual/transitivity/complementation/multi-syllabic properties above (1a-e)). Moreover, the preverbal object of ba (e.g. na defang (1a), shu (1b), nei ge fangzi (1c), shu (1d)), tamen (1e)), aFang gong (2)) is not presupposed by A’-movement to Top/Foc but by A-movement in passivisation (Feng (2002b:147-151, 2012:129-136)), which in turn suggests that the ba-subject (e.g. yi ba huo (2)) is also similarly (re-)merged in the specifier of ba (Active) and coindexed with the internal subject below so as to avoid violation of Minimality in Spec-to-Spec movement (cf Rizzi (1990)). This formal analysis of ba/bei, therefore, suggests two highly similar and parallel Voice projections (Active/Passive) which seem to operate on external (re-)merge and coindexation of arguments due to structural constraints in little v rather than internal merge (A-movement) of arguments as seen in Western languages (Roberts (1986:17ff)).

References: