DIACHRONY AND TYPOLOGY: 
THE CASE OF PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN CHINESE

HAOWEN JIANG

Rice University

1. INTRODUCTION. According to Xu (2006), the Chinese language is classified into four periods: (i) Old Chinese (11th century BC–1st century AD), (ii) Middle Chinese (1st–10th century AD), (iii) Modern Chinese (10th–20th century AD), and finally (iv) Contemporary Chinese (from 20th century AD up to the present). In Old Chinese, there is generally no morphosyntactic distinction between active and passive voice. However, a few morphosyntactically marked passive constructions do evolve out of some existent structures. In the literature (Xu 2006, Sun 1996, Wei 1994, Peyraube 1989, among others), four passive constructions in Old Chinese are frequently discussed, each of which hinges on a particular grapheme, namely, 於 YU, 為 WEI, 見 JIAN, and 被 BEI. In this paper, we shall investigate these four passive constructions from a diachronic and typological perspective.

First of all, some morphosyntactic characteristics of Old Chinese relevant to passive construction will be outlined, in particular 施受同辭 shishoutongci and 轉品 zhuangpin. Next, we sketch the historical developments of the four passive constructions that emerged in Old Chinese, by focusing on how they were recruited from existent constructions in the first place as well as why some of them came to disappear from the history of Chinese. Finally, to obtain a broader picture of passive construction across languages, we evaluate the four Chinese passive constructions against a typological work done by Heine and Kuteva (2002), with emphasis put on such parameters as of Agent marking and passive verbal marking.

2. MORPHOSYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OLD CHINESE. Before we investigate the diachronic developments of passive constructions in Chinese, it is necessary to outline some morphosyntactic characteristics of Old Chinese. Among them, two features are relevant to our current discussion here. One is that active voice and passive voice are oftentimes realized by the same morphosyntactic structure, and the only way to distinguish one from the other is to take the linguistic context into consideration. For example, the two clauses in (1) demonstrate the same “Subject-Predicate” Construction; however, the Subject in the first clause (i.e. zhi zhe ‘the wise’) is an Agent whereas that in the second (i.e. yu zhe ‘the foolish’) is a Patient.

1 For all the Chinese examples used here, the diacritics for tones are left out from the transliterations since our concern here is more about syntax. Besides, the original texts where these examples first occurred are given in parenthesis. In cases where they are drawn from a secondary source, the references are indicated as well. When the references are written in Chinese, the English glosses and translations provided here are of
(1) 故知者作法，而愚者制焉（商君書. 更法）

Thus wise NOM create law CONJ fool NOM control PART

‘Therefore, the wise create laws, but the foolish are controlled (by laws).’

(Shangjunshu, Gengfa, Y. Wang 2004: 124)

Due to this, the same verb in Old Chinese can be potentially interpreted as expressing active or passive voice, depending on the context. A good example comes from (2), where the verb 得 de ‘to obtain’ is used in two contiguous clauses. In the first clause, the Subject (i.e. 宋人 ‘a Song person’) is the one who obtains something while the Subject in the second clause (i.e. 兔 ‘rabbit’) is something that is obtained. This phenomenon is first termed by Yang (1978) as 施受同辭 shishoutongci, meaning that Agent and Patient are expressed by the same grapheme.

(2) 宋人…冀復得兔，兔不可復得（韓非子. 五蠹）

PN person hope again obtain rabbit rabbit NEG can again obtain

‘A Song person hoped to obtain a rabbit again, (but) rabbits could no longer be obtained again.’ (Hanfeizi, Wudu)

Another characteristic of Old Chinese is that grammatical categories of graphemes are versatile. In other words, a particular grapheme may change its original grammatical category, given appropriate context. Take the grapheme 水 shui for example. In most cases, 水 shui refers to a body of water, so it is a noun that denotes some entity, as in (3a).

(3a) 知者樂水，仁者樂山（論語. 雍也）

wise NOM enjoy water virtuous NOM enjoy mountain

‘The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills.’ (Lunyu, Yongyei)

However, 水 shui may also function as a verb, indicating some sort of action that involves water. It could mean either navigating in water (i.e. to swim) as in (3b), or covering something with a great amount of water (i.e. to blood) as in (3c).

(3b) 假舟楫者，非能水也，而絕江河（荀子. 勤學）

utilize boat NOM NEG can swim PART CONJ cross river

‘Those who ride on boats cannot swim, but (still can) cross rivers.’ (Xunzi, Quanxue)
In traditional rhetoric, this phenomenon is called 轉品 zhuanpin, meaning conversion of grammatical categories, and the use of nouns as verbs is one of the many common conversion types in Old Chinese.

3. DIACHRONIC DEVELOPMENTS OF PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS. In spite of the characteristic of 施受同辭 shishoutongci in Old Chinese, that is, active and passive voice sharing the same linguistic form, a few morphosyntactically marked passive constructions do evolve out of some existent structures. In the literature (Xu 2006, Sun 1996, Wei 1994, Peyraube 1989, among others), four passive constructions in Old Chinese are frequently discussed, each of which hinges on a particular grapheme, namely, 於 YU, 為 WEI, 見 JIAN, and 被 BEI.

First of all, 於 yu follows a verb and proceeds an Agent, thus forming the “V 於 YU A” Construction. In contrast, the other three graphemes all proceed a verb, constituting the “為 WEI V”, 見 JIAN V”, and “被 BEI V” Construction respectively. Moreover, while an Agent is permitted between 為 WEI or 被 BEI and a verb, it is prohibited between 見 JIAN and a verb. As a result, there are “為 WEI A V” and “被 BEI A V” Construction, but “見 JIAN A V” Construction is not possible. Following Wei (1994), we use the schematic designation “為 WEI V” as a cover term for both “為 WEI V” and “為 WEI A V” Construction. By the same token, “被 BEI V” is a cover term for both “被 BEI V” and “被 BEI A V” Construction.

There are two reasons, one historical and the other syntactic, why the two variants of “為 WEI V” or “被 BEI V” should be distinguished. Historically, “為 WEI A V” and “被 BEI A V” occurred later than “為 WEI V” and “被 BEI V” respectively (Wei 1994: 294). That is to say, Agent was initially not present in passive constructions until at later stages of their developments. Syntactically, on the other hand, the 為 WEI in “為 WEI V” Construction and the 被 BEI in “被 BEI V” Construction are auxiliaries that indicate passive voice whereas the 為 WEI in “為 WEI A V” Construction and the 被 BEI in “被 BEI A V” Construction are preposition-like coverbs that introduce Agent (cf. Peyraube 1989: 341).

In what follows, we will examine the diachronic developments of these four passive constructions, roughly in the order of their emergence in history.

3.1. “V 於 YU A” CONSTRUCTION. Of the four passive constructions discussed here, “V 於 YU A” Construction is the oldest, with its earliest occurrence dated back to Western Chou Dynasty (circa. 11th–8th century BC; Wei 1994: 296). A classic example of this construction is found in a passage from Mengzi (circa. 5th–3th century BC), as shown in (4), which illustrates a contrast between 治人 zhi ren and 治於人 zhi yu ren. The 人
ren ‘people’ in the first clause is Patient, or those who are governed in this case, while that in the second clause is Agent, or those who govern for that matter. The presence or absence of the grapheme 於 YU, which functions as a preposition, is what causes such a contrast.

(4) 労心者治人; 勞力者治於人 (孟子·滕文公上)

lao xin zhe zhi ren; lao li zhe zhi yu ren

‘Those who work with the intellect govern others; those who work with physical power are governed by others.’ (Mengzi, Duke Tengwen I, Sun 1996: 27)

Nevertheless, 於 YU is not a grapheme that exclusively marks Agent in passive construction. In fact, it marks arguments with diverse semantic roles, including Source (5a), Location (5b), Goal (5c), Time (5d), Recipient (5e), and Standard in comparative construction (5f). As Shi (2003: 345) points out, 於 YU is a multifunctional preposition which introduces almost every thematic role found in Old Chinese.

(5a) 青采出於藍 (史記.三王世家)

qing cai chu yu lan

‘Green is abstracted out of blue.’ (Shiji, Sanwangshijia)

(5b) 王立於沼上 (孟子.梁惠王上)

wang li yu zhao shang

‘The kind was standing over a pond.’ (Mengzi, King Lianghui I, Xu 2006: 82)

(5c) 河內兇，則移其民於河東 (孟子.梁惠王上)

he nei xiong, ze yi qi min yu he dong

‘If (the area) surrounded by the river suffers from calamities, (I) will move the people to the east of the river.’ (Mengzi, King Lianghui I, Xu 2006: 82)

(5d) 難乎免於今之世矣 (論語.雍也)

nan hu mian yu jin zhi shi yi

difficult PART avoid YU present MOD era PART

‘Alas, (this) is difficult to avoid in the present age.’ (Lunyu, Yongye)

(5e) 王之臣有託其妻子於其友而之楚遊者 (孟子.梁惠王下)

weng zhi chen you tuo qi qi zi yu yu er zhi Chu you zhe

‘(Suppose that) there was one of Your Majesty’s ministers who entrusted his wife and children to a friend and travelled to Chu.’ (Mengzi, King Lianghui II, Xu 2006: 83)
(5f) 冰，水為之而寒於水（荀子.勸學）

*bìng, shuǐ wéi zhī ěr hán yù shuǐ*

ice water make it CONJ cold YU water

'(As for) ice, water makes it but (it) is colder than water.' (*Xunzi, Quanxue*, Xu 2006: 82)

There are two views regarding the origin of **於** **YU**. Shi (2003) holds that it came from a postnominal case marker in early Old Chinese, which was then a SOV language as was Old Tibetan. As Old Chinese evolved, probably due to language contact, from SOV to SVO, the postnominal case marker also changed into a preposition. He cited evidence from 詩經 *Shijing* ‘The Book of Poetry’ (*circa.* 11th–8th century BC), where the “NP **於** YU V” Construction is found. Just like the complex form **於** **YU**, the simple form **於** **YU** co-occurs with diverse thematic roles. For instance, the argument before **於** **YU** can be the goal of motion (6a) or the time of an event (6b).

(6a) 申伯還南，謝于誠歸（詩經.大雅.崧高）

*Shēn bō huán nán, xiè yù chéng guī*

PN count go.back south PN YU sincere return

‘The count of Shen went back to the south, (and) made up his mind to return to Xie.’

(*Shijing, Daya, Songgao*, cited from Shi 2003: 343)

(6b) 三之日于耜，四之日舉趾（詩經.豳風.七月）

*san zhī rì yú sì, sì zhī rì jǔ zhǐ*

three MOD day YU fix.plough four MOD day lift toe

‘In the days of the third month (i.e. present-day January), they fix their ploughs. In the days of the fourth month (i.e. present-day February), they make their way to the fields (to plow).’ (*Shijing, Binfong, Qiyue*, cited from Shi 2003: 343)

On the other hand, Kuo (1997, 2005) and Mei (2004) both argue that **於** **YU** came from the motion verb **於** **YU** ‘to reach’ in early Old Chinese, even though their opinions differ with regard to whether this particular form has a Proto-Sino-Tibetan origin. They scrutinized 甲骨文 *jiaguwen* ‘Oracle Bone Scripts’ (*circa.* 14th–10th century BC), the earliest Chinese writing system, and proposed that the adpositional use of **於**/**於** **YU** originated in serial verb construction, where the erstwhile verb undergoes grammaticalization. To illustrate, the simple form **於** **YU** is obviously a verb in (7a). In serial verb construction, however, **於** **YU** is gradually reanalyzed as a preposition since it follows another verb and precedes a nominal, as shown in (7b). Subsequently, when the reanalysis is well-established, the “V **於** YU N” Construction is extended to accommodate verbs that are previously not permitted, as is the case in (7c), where **於** **YU** has completely lost its verbal meaning since it would otherwise be semantically incompatible with the verb 來 *lei* ‘to come’.

---

2 The simple form **於** **YU** is believed to be older than the complex form **於** **YU**. Starting from the Warring States (770–256 BC), people began to use them interchangeably in most cases (Sung 1996: 24).
Regardless of what its true origin may be, the grapheme 于/於 YU ceased to mark Agent in passive construction, starting from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). Peyraube (1989) suggests that responsible for the decline of 于/於 YU were two reasons. First, 于/於 YU was disfavored because it was ambiguous in the sense that it marked arguments with diverse semantic roles, as in (5) above. Second, while the primary pragmatic function of passive construction is “Agent defocusing” (see Shibatani 1985), 于/於 YU could not fulfill this function since it ought to be followed by Agent in passive construction, thus rendering the deletion of Agent impossible.

However, Wei (1994) finds it unconvincing to attribute the decline of 于/於 YU to its ambiguity, and offers another explanation from a diachronic perspective. According to him, the decline of 于/於 YU was due to the new syntactic structures that came about in Old Chinese during the Han Dynasty. Specifically, 于/於 YU in postverbal position lost its prepositional status, and its various functions were replaced by other prepositions or verbs. Moreover, only prepositional phrases that indicate Goal were permitted in the postverbal position, and those that indicate Source or Location were fronted to the preverbal position. After these major syntactic changes, the “V 于/於 YU A” Construction gradually disappeared from the history of Chinese.

3.2. “为 WEI X V” CONSTRUCTION. The emergence of the “为 WEI X V” Construction can be dated back to the beginning of the Warring State Period (circa. 5th–3rd century BC). The two variants of this construction, that is, “为 WEI V” and “为 WEI A V” Construction, are illustrated in (8).

(8a) 故恥为禽焉 (左傳.定公四年)

故恥為禽焉 (左傳.定公四年)

thus ashamed WEI capture PART

‘Thus, (he) was ashamed of being captured.’ (Zuo zhuan, Duke Ding 4th Year, Kang 2001: 95)
(8b) 不然，必為吳禽 (左傳.襄公二十五年)

\[\text{bu ran, bi wei Wu qin}\]
NEG DEM must WEI PN capture
‘Otherwise, (we) would definitely be captured by Wu.’ (Zuozhuan, Duke Xiang 25th Year, Kang 2001: 96)

It is generally believed that the passive use of \(\text{為} WEI\) originated from its function of being a semi-copula which has the meaning “to become”, as illustrated in (9).

(9) 化: 若蛙為鶉 (墨子.卷十.經說上)

\[\text{hua: ruo wa wei chun}\]
metamorphosis like frog become quail
‘Metamorphosis: for example, a frog becomes a quail.’ (Mozi, Vol.10, Jingshuo I)

The syntactic structure of \(\text{為鶉} \text{wei chun}\) is a verbal predicate plus a nominal, or simply a VN complex. However, how did this seemingly unrelated VN complex evolve into the “\(\text{為 WEI X V}\) Construction? As mentioned earlier, 轉品 \text{zhuangpin}, or conversion of grammatical categories, is a frequent phenomenon in Old Chinese. Due to this, the \(\text{禽 qin}\) in (8) refers to an act of capturing as well as a captive. In this regard, the \(\text{為 qin}\) in (8a) can be construed as either “to be captured” or “to become a captive”, the second interpretation being an instance of the VN complex, whereby \(\text{為 qin}\) illustrates the same syntactic structure as \(\text{為 chun}\). Likewise, the \(\text{為 Wu qin}\) in (8b) also allows for two interpretations, though this case is a bit more complex. In one interpretation, \text{為 Wu qin} constitutes a nominal phrase meaning “Wu’s captive”, so \(\text{為 Wu qin}\) is construed as either “to become a captive” or “to become Wu’s captive.” In the other interpretation, \(\text{為 qin}\) is viewed as a verb, so \(\text{為 Wu qin}\) is construed as “to be captured by Wu.” It is under this kind of reanalysis that the grapheme \(\text{為 WEI}\) started to mark Agent in passive construction.

It is true that the passive reading of \(\text{為 WEI}\) in (8) is emergent and not yet institutionalized, for its verbal meaning is still manifest. Nevertheless, towards the middle of the Warring State Period, the “\(\text{為 WEI X V}\) Construction became more entrenched, progressing from the reanalysis stage to the extension stage. Take (10) for example. First, unlike the \text{為 Wu qin} in (8b), 天下笑 \text{tianxia xiao} is not a constituent, so the \(\text{為} WEI\) in (10) cannot possibly be interpreted as a semi-copula. In other words, the only interpretation is \(\text{為天下}\text{tianxia xiao}\), but never \(\text{為} WEI\text{tianxia xiao}\). Second, compared with the Agent \text{為 Wu ‘Wu’ in (8b)}, the Agent 天下 \text{tianxia ‘world’} is more generic, which is a metonymy for people in the world.

(10) 吾恐其為天下笑 (莊子.徐無鬼)

\[\text{wu kong qi wei tianxia xiao}\]
1SG fear 3PRO WEI world laugh
‘I am afraid that he will be laughed at by (people in) the world.’ (Zhuangzi, Xuwugui, Kang 2001: 96)

When it comes to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), a new variant of the “為 WEI A V” Construction emerged, namely the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction, as illustrated in (11), where the grapheme 所 SUO is a relative pronoun that refers to Patient.

(11a) 漢軍卻，為楚所擠 (史記.項羽本紀)
    han jun que, wei chu suo ji
    Han troop retreat WEI PN SUO force
    ‘The troops of Han were forced by (the troops of) Chu to withdraw.’ (Shiji, Xiangyu benji, Sun 1996: 27)

(11b) 好憎人者，亦為人所憎 (說苑.談叢)
    hao zeng ren zhe yi wei ren suo zeng
    like detest people NOM also WEI people SUO detest
    ‘Those who like to detest others are also detested by others.’ (Shuoyan, Tancong)

Roughly about the same time as the “V 於 YU A” Construction declined, the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction took its place and became the dominant passive construction up until Six Dynasties (222 AD–589 AD). Wei (1994) identifies two possible reasons why the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction became out of trend. First, the grapheme 為 WEI started to function as a true copula in Six Dynasties; as a result, the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction became ambiguous between passive construction and cleft construction. Second, Patient pronouns were no longer allowed in the preverbal position, so the use of 所 SUO became less and less frequent. Therefore, since Six Dynasties the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction has been gradually put into disuse. In Contemporary Chinese, it is not used any more, except in some literary texts.

3.3. “見 JIAN V” CONSTRUCTION. Subsequent to the emergence of the “為 WEI X V” Construction, the “見 JIAN V” Construction also appeared on stage. Unlike the “為 WEI X V” Construction, however, the “見 JIAN V” Construction does not allow the presence of Agent. Hence, it is generally agreed that the grapheme 見 JIAN in this construction is a preverbal auxiliary that indicates passive voice of the verb, as shown in (12).

(12) 愛人者必見愛也，而惡人者必見惡也 (墨子.兼愛下)
    ai ren zhe bi jian ai ye, er wu ren zhe bi jian wu ye
    love other NOM must JIAN love PART but hate other NOM must JIAN hate PART
    ‘Those who love others will be loved, but those who hate others will be hated.’ (Mozi, Jianai II)

The semantic source of 見 JIAN is least controversial since its original meaning is “to see” in Old Chinese, as (13) shows, and this verbal meaning is still retained in Contemporary Chinese, as seen in (14), drawn from a novel written in the 1960s.
(13) 見兔而顧犬，未為晚也 (戰國策.楚策四)

\[\textit{jian} \text{ tu er gu quan, wei wei wan ye}\]

see rabbit CONJ look after dog NEG WEI late PART

‘It is not late to call for a hunting dog (to chase) a rabbit when (one) sees the rabbit.’

(\textit{Zhankuoce, Cuce IV})

(14) 一見了女生，就像群剛開叫的騷公雞 (白先勇《寂寞的十七歲》)

\[\textit{yi jian} \text{ le nusheng, jiu xiang qun gang kai jiao de sao gongji}\]

once see PFV girl EMP like group just start crow MOD flamboyant rooster

‘Upon seeing girls, (they) are like a group of flamboyant roosters that just start crowing.’ (\textit{Lonely Seventeen} by Bai Xianyong)

How then did a verb of seeing like \textit{jian} end up being an auxiliary that indicates passive voice? Here is the grammaticalization route suggested by Lian (2007). First, from the meaning “to see” derives the meaning “to meet” since meeting somebody is metonymically related with seeing somebody. In (15), for instance, Huafudu of Song not simply saw Kongfu’s wife, but accidentally met her on the road.

(15) 宋華父督見孔父之妻于路 (左傳.桓公元年)

\[\textit{Song Huafudu jian Kongfu zhi qi yu lu}\]

PN PN meet PN MOD wife YU road

‘Huafudu of Song met Kongfu’s wife on the road.’ (\textit{Zuozhuan, Duke Huan 1st Year}, cited from Lian 2007: 83)

Second, the subject of either “seeing” or “meeting” is an experiencer who passively receives some visual stimulus from the real world. When the event being experienced is undesirable, the verb of seeing/meeting tends to be associated with the adversity of the event in question, and thus turns out to bear the meaning of “suffering”, as is the case in (16).

(16) 民見凶饑則亡 (墨子.七患)

\[\textit{min jian xiong ji ze wang}\]

papulace suffer bad famine CONJ die

‘(If) the populace suffers from serious famine, (they) will die.’ (\textit{Mozi, Qihuan}, Lian 2007: 84)

Third, once \textit{jian} is associated with “suffering”, it is not surprising that the subject of \textit{jian} becomes more patient-like than agent-like. Consequently, this patient-likeness makes the subject \textit{jian} a perfect candidate for the subject in passive construction, as has been shown in (12) above.

As mentioned earlier, the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction emerged in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) and replaced the “V 於 YU A” Construction as the dominant passive construction. In fact, the “見 JIAN V” Construction was equally dominant in the Han Dynasty. There seemed to be a division of labor between the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V”
and “見 JIAN V” Construction (Wei 1994: 302). That is, when Agent was present, the former was used; when Agent was absent, the latter was used instead. Accordingly, it is not uncommon to find these two constructions occurring in the same passage, as shown in (17), one of Zhaoqi’s (108 AD–201 AD) annotations of Mengzi (circa. 5th–3rd century BC).

(17) 既不見輕賤，不為人所爾汝 (孟子.盡心下.趙歧注)

ji bu jian qinjian, bu wei ren suo erru
since NEG JIAN disrespect NEG WEI people SUO despise
‘Since (one’s moral conduct) is not disrespected, (one) is not despised by others.’
(Mengzi, Jinxin II, Zhaoqi’s Annotation, Wei 1994: 302)

The “見 JIAN V” Construction remained robust until the Eastern Jin Dynasty (316 AD–420 AD), when it was replaced by the “被 BEI X V” Construction. The main reason for its decline was, according to Wei (1994), due to the fact that this construction began to indicate active voice in the Wei-Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220 AD–589 AD). For example, the subject in (18), i.e. 君 jun ‘you’, is the Agent who attacked, rather than the Patient who was attacked, as would be the case in passive construction.

(18) 步有何過, 君前見攻之甚乎 (後漢書.張步傳)

Bu you he guo, jun qian jian gong zhi shen hu
PN have Q mistake 2SG earlier JIAN attack 3PRO hard PART
‘What mistakes has Bu made (so that) you attacked him so hard earlier?’
(Houhanshu, Biography of Zhangbu, Bu 2007: 80)

It is this ambiguity between active and passive voice that prevented people from using the “見 JIAN V” Construction when the passive meaning was intended. Eventually, the passive meaning of the “見 JIAN V” Construction completely disappeared from all written texts after the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

3.4. “被 BEI X V” CONSTRUCTION. Among other passive constructions, the “被 BEI X V” Construction is the last to emerge in the history of Chinese, with its two variants, namely “被 BEI V” and “被 BEI A V”, occurring in different periods of time. The earliest occurrence of the “被 BEI V” Construction can be traced back to the end of the Warring State Period (circa. 5th–3rd century BC), as shown in (19).

(19) 今兄弟被侵…知友被謗… (韓非子.五蠹)

jin xiongdi beiqin…zhi you bei ru...
now brother BEI attack know friend BEI insult
‘Now (one’s) brothers are charged…bosom friends are insulted…’ (Hanfeizi, Wudu, Sun 1996: 29)

The “被 BEI A V” Construction, however, did not occur until the Eastern Han Dynasty
(25 AD–220 AD). Later in Six Dynasties (222 AD–589 AD), it became quite popular, only second to the “為 WEI A 所 SUO V” Construction. An important development of this construction during this period is that the Agent introduced by 被 BEI can be either animate (19), as a typical Agent would be, or inanimate (20), in which case Instrument might be a more accurate term.

(19) 禰衡被魏武謫為鼓吏 (世說新語.言語)

*Miheng bei Wei Wu zhe wei gu li*

PN BEI PN PN demote become drum officer

‘Miheng was demoted as a drum officer by Emperor Wu of Wei.’ (Shishuoxinyu, Yanyu, G. Wang 1994: 46)

(20) 舉體如被刀刺 (顏氏家訓.歸心)

*ju ti ru bei dao ci*

entire body like BEI knife pierce

‘The entire body (felt) as if it were pierced by a knife.’ (Yanshi jiaxun, Guexin, Sun 1996: 32)

According to 說文解字 Shuowen Jiezi, an dictionary compiled in the early 2nd century AD, the original meaning of 被 BEI was “blanket, comforter”, as in (21). As a matter of fact, this nominal sense of 被 BEI is still retained in Contemporary Chinese, where 棉被 mian bei ‘cotton BEI’ refers to comforters or quilts.

(21) 被, 寢衣也 (說文解字)

*bei, qin yi ye*

BEI sleep covering PART

‘BEI means blanket.’ (Shuowen Jiezi, Sun 1996: 29)

Due to 轉品 zhuanpin, the grapheme 被 BEI was later used as a verb meaning “to wear”, as the following example shows.

(22) 及其為天子也, 被袚衣, 鼓琴 (孟子.盡心下)

*ji qi wei tianzi ye, bei zhen yi, gu qin*

when 3PRO become sovereign PART wear embroidered covering play zither

‘When (he) became sovereign, (he) wore embroidered robes (and) played the zither.’ (Mengzi, Jinxin II)

Since to wear something is to put something on one’s body, the wearer is in a way affected by what has been put onto his/her body (e.g. feeling warmer). As a result, the “被 BEI N” complex, where N can be any noun, was metaphorically extended to mean experiencing some effect brought about by the entity that the noun refers to, and the entity in question can be something benignant or malignant, as respectively shown in (23) and (24). In the first case, 被 BEI is better translated as “to receive” and as “to suffer” in the second. It is the effected sense of 被 BEI that made it recruited as a new candidate
for passive construction, whereby Patient is put on focus.

(23) 今有仁心仁聞而民不被其澤
   \textit{jin you ren xin ren wen er min bu bei qi ze}
   now \textbf{EXIST} benevolent heart benevolent reputation \textbf{CONJ} people \textbf{NEG} receive \textbf{3PRO} benefit
   ‘There are now (princes who have) benevolent hearts and a reputation for benevolence, while yet the people do not receive any benefits from them.’ (\textit{Mengzi, Lilou II})

(24) 申生孝而被殃
   \textit{Shensheng xiao er bei yang}
   PN \textbf{filial.piety CONJ suffer misfortune}
   ‘Shensheng has filial piety, but suffers from misfortune.’
   (\textit{Chuci, Qijian, Chenjiang}, G. Wang 1994: 46)

Although the “被 \textit{BEI X V}” Construction originated in the Warring State Period (circa. 5th–3rd century BC), its instances back then were still few and far between. Only when it replaced the “見 \textit{JIAN V}” Construction in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (316 AD–420 AD) did it begin to spread. In Six Dynasties (222 AD–589 AD), it became one of two dominant passive constructions, with the “為 \textit{WEI A SUO V}” Construction being the other. Afterwards, the “被 \textit{BEI X V}” Construction became the only passive construction in Sue-Tang Dynasty (581 AD–907 AD), thus completely replacing the “為 \textit{WEI A SUO V}” Construction. Consequently, among the four passive constructions discussed here, this BEI Construction is the only one that survives in Contemporary Chinese.

4. Chinese passive constructions in linguistic typology. After outlining the diachronic developments of passive constructions in Chinese, we proceed to contextualize them in a crosslinguistic typology of passive constructions. From a diachronic point view, passive constructions across languages differ with respect to at least two parameters: origin of Agent marking and origin of verbal marking. By examining sampling data from over 500 languages, Heine and Kuteva (2002) identify four origins of Agent marking, as in (25).

(25) a. Ablative Case: e.g. German, Bulgarian, Krongo, etc.
    b. Comitative Case: e.g. French, Swahili, Seychelles, etc.
    c. Locative Case: e.g. English, Japanese, Turkish, Albanian, etc.
    d. Concept of HAND: e.g. Coptic, Zande, etc.

The Agent marker \textbf{於 \textit{YU}} in the “\textit{V \textbf{於 \textit{YU A}}” Passive Construction obviously has a locative origin since it marks various local roles, including Source, Location, and Goal, as has been shown in (5), renumbered here as (26).
In addition, although the 為 WEI and 被 BEI in the “為 WEI A V” and “被 BEI A V” Construction also introduce Agent, they do not fit into the typology in (25). There may be a few reasons for this. First, the typology in (25) is a generalization over adjunct phrases headed by an adposition or affix that introduces Agent in passive construction; however, neither 為 WEI A nor 被 BEI A is an adjunct phrase. Second, 為 WEI and 被 BEI, as well as other preposition-like coverbs in Chinese, are in fact situated somewhere in a continuum of grammaticalization where verbs are on one extreme and adpositions on the other. Some other coverbs are illustrated in (27), which are taken from Yin (2004).

(27) Grapheme (Older) Verbal Meaning Coverb Meaning
- 把 BA to take hold of preverbal object marker
- 拿 NA to grasp with (instrumental)
- 給 GEI to give for, to
- 跟 GEN to follow with (comitative)
- 對 DUI to face to, toward
- 沿 YAN to go along along

Third, the fact that Agent can be either present in or absent from the “為 WEI X V” and “被 BEI X V” Construction shows that 為 WEI and 被 BEI, unlike the case markers in (25), are not in a constituent with Agent, and that they might be better treated in a typology of passive verbal marking.

As for the origin of verbal marking in passive construction, Heine and Kuteva (2002) enumerate nine types, as in (28).

(28) a. SEE-verb: e.g. French, Spanish, Italian, etc.
    b. SUFFER-verb: e.g. Vietnamese, Korean, etc.
    c. EAT-verb: e.g. Korean, Kharia, Jung, etc.
    d. GET-verb: e.g. Korean, Vietnamese, German, Welsh, etc.
    e. FALL-verb: e.g. Korean, Tamil, Tonga, etc.
First of all, the “見 JIAN V” Construction no doubt belongs to the SEE-verb type since 見 JIAN was both a verb of seeing and a verbal marking for passive voice, as has been shown in (13) and (12), renumbered here as (29). However, the passive marker did not directly arise from the verb of seeing, but was instead the result of a series of semantic change, as schematized in (30).

(29a)見兔而顧犬，未為晚也 （戰國策.楚策四）
   jian tu er gu quan, wei wei wan ye
   see rabbit CONJ look.after dog NEG WEI late PART
   ‘It is not late to call for a hunting dog (to chase) a rabbit when (one) sees the rabbit.’
   (Zhankuoce, Cuce IV)

(29b)愛人者必見愛也，而惡人者必見惡也 （墨子.兼愛下）
   ai ren zhe bi jian ai ye, er wu ren zhe bi jian wu je
   love other NOM must JIAN love PART but hate other NOM must JIAN hate PART
   ‘Those who love others will be loved, but those who hate others will be hated.’
   (Mozi, Jianai II)

(30) Semantic change of 見 JIAN:
SEE > MEET > SUFFER > passive marking on verbs

Next, the “被 BEI X V” Construction can be said to correspond to the SUFFER-verb type. While the verbal meaning of suffering was evident in Old Chinese as in (24), renumbered here as (31a), the sense of suffering is not necessarily involved in Contemporary Chinese, as in (31b).

(31a)申生孝而被殃 （楚辭.七諫.沉江）
   Shensheng xiao er bei yang
   PN filial.piety CONJ suffer misfortune
   ‘Shensheng has filial piety, but suffers from misfortune.’
   (Chuci, Qijian, Chenjiang, cited from G. Wang 1994: 46)

(31b)我親眼目睹了工藝被誤以為藝術 （中央研究院現代漢語標記語料庫）
   wuo qinyan mudu le gongyi bei wuyiwei yishu
   1SG personally witness PFV craft BEI mistake art
   ‘I personally witnessed (how) craft was mistaken for art.’ (Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Chinese)

As shown earlier, however, the ultimate origin of the BEI-passive is not the SUFFER-verb, but a nominal meaning “blanket” or “comforter”. The semantic change of 被 BEI is summarized in (32) below.
(32) **Semantic change of 被 BEI:**
BLANKET > WEAR > RECEIVE > SUFFER > passive marking on verbs

Finally, the “為 WEI X V” Construction may not seem to fit into the typology in (28) very well, but we can still argue that it comes closest to the GET-verb type since the passive maker 為 WEI derived from a resultative verb meaning “to become”, which is one of the typical senses of a GET-verb. For example, there is a functional correspondence between the resultative and passive use of GET in English and that of 為 WEI in Chinese, as illustrated below.

(33a) **Resultative:** Mary got wet.
(33b) **Passive:** Mary got fired.

(9) 化: 若蛙為鶉 (墨子.卷十.經說上)
   
   **hua: ruo wa wei chun**
   metamorphosis like frog become quail
   ‘Metamorphosis: for example, a frog becomes a quail.’ *(Mozi, Vol.10, Jingshuo I)*

(10) 吾恐其為天下笑 (莊子.徐無鬼)
   
   **wu kong qi wei tianxia xiao**
   1SG fear 3PRO WEI world laugh
   ‘I am afraid that he will be laughed at by (people in) the world.’ *(Zhuangzi, Xuwugui, cited from Kang 2001: 96)*

Overall, the typological status of the four passive constructions in Chinese is summarized as follows: (i) 於 YU is an Agent marker which has a locative origin, just like those in English, Japanese, Turkish, and Albanian; (ii) 見 JIAN is a passive marker on the verb which historically arises from a verb of seeing, on a par with French, Spanish, and Italian; (iii) 被 BEI X is a passive marker on the verb which historically arises from a verb of suffering (and ultimately from a noun referring to “blanket”), as is the case in Vietnamese and Korean; (iv) 為 WEI is a passive marker on the verb which historically arises from a resultative verb, which is similar to GET-verb type languages, such as Korean, Vietnamese, German, and Welsh.

5. **CONCLUSION.** In Old Chinese, there were four morphosyntactically marked passive constructions emerging out of some existing structures. The “V 於 YU A” Construction, where 於 YU is an Agent marker which has a locative origin, first occurred in the Western Chou Dynasty *(circa. 11th–8th century BC)* and then declined in the Han Dynasty *(206 BC–220 AD)* since some new syntactic structures caused 於 YU in the postverbal position to lose its prepositional status.

In the Warring State Period *(circa. 5th–3rd century BC)*, the “為 WEI X V”, “見 JIAN V”, and “被 BEI X V” Construction emerged on stage in turn. Later, the “為 WEI X V” Construction was put into disuse in Six Dynasties *(222 AD–589 AD)*, and so was the “見 JIAN V” Construction in the Eastern Jin Dynasty *(316 AD–420 AD)*, both in order to
reduce the ambiguity that would otherwise arise. The “被 BEI X V” Construction is the only passive construction that survives in Contemporary Chinese. What is common about 為 WEI, 見 JIAN, and 被 BEI is that each of them is a passive marker on the verb that historically derives from another verb, be it a verb of becoming, seeing, or suffering. Moreover, these three types of passive construction all evolved out of a [Verb Noun] complex, which was later on reanalyzed as an [Auxiliary Verb] complex when the original noun was conversed into a verb via 轉品 zhuanpin and the erstwhile verb was grammaticalized into a passive marker.
REFERENCES


WEI PEIQUAN 魏培泉. 1994. Guhanyu beidungshi de fazhan yu yanbian jizhi ‘The
development and derivation of passive constructions in Old Chinese’. *Chinese Languages and Linguistics* 2: 293-319.

