

Reconstructing Silent Voices in Ancient Historiography: Re-reading the *Shiji* through an Inclusive Artificial Intelligence Lens

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ABSTRACT — This article analyzes Sima Qian’s *Shiji* within the framework of the relationships between power, knowledge, and silence. Drawing on poststructuralist approaches, the study conceptualizes historical silence as a semantic and syntactic phenomenon formed within the internal structure of the text. The theoretical framework is developed in dialogue with the ideas of Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Jacques Derrida. The research corpus focuses on juan 123 of the *Shiji* (“*Dawan liezhuan*”). The analysis employs methods such as token frequency analysis, co-occurrence analysis, and semantic clustering. Artificial intelligence-based analysis is used to identify patterns of repetition and structural linkages in the text, while the findings are substantiated through historical-philological interpretation. The results indicate that silences associated with envoys, the peoples of the Western Regions, and other peripheral subjects are not random in nature. Imbalances in agent-patient relations, the uneven distribution of active and passive verb constructions, and semantic fields clustered around *jié* (the symbol of envoys), *zhōng* (loyalty), and *Hàn* (the imperial center) reveal this pattern. As a result, voice is concentrated at the center, while subjects outside the center remain discursively constrained. Within the scope of the article, silence is not understood as a passive condition in historiography but rather as a discursive mechanism intrinsically linked to power relations. The convergence of digital analytical approaches and classical philological reading is discussed within the framework of critical humanities research.

KEYWORDS — *Shiji*, imperial power, AI-based semantic analysis, poststructural theory

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, historical texts have been interpreted as neutral sources that merely record sequences of events. Such an approach has relegated questions of internal textual structure, whose voices are heard, and who is compelled into silence

to a secondary level of analysis. As a result, silence in historiography has often been treated as a lack of information or an accidental gap, while its discursive relationship with power has remained insufficiently examined.

Although Sima Qian's *Shiji* has been extensively studied as a foundational work of Chinese historiography, the discursive constraints imposed on envoys, peoples of the Western Regions, and other non-central subjects have frequently been accepted as natural or historically necessary. Yet these silences may in fact be produced through semantic and syntactic mechanisms internal to the text itself. The critical issue, therefore, is not simply who speaks, but who is granted the capacity to speak.

In recent years, discourse theory and poststructural approaches have enabled scholars to reread historical texts as systems of power and knowledge production. However, such theoretical perspectives often remain empirically under-supported and are rarely reinforced through computational methods. Consequently, historical silence is typically discussed at the level of interpretation rather than demonstrated as a structural pattern.

This study aims to address precisely this gap. By integrating poststructural theory with AI-based semantic analysis, it examines *Shiji* in order to identify relations of agency, silence, and power that are not explicitly articulated but are discursively embedded within the text. Artificial intelligence is not employed here as an interpretive authority, but as an analytic mechanism that renders discursive structures empirically visible.

The central research question guiding this study is as follows: How is silence produced in *Shiji*, and in whose interests does this silence operate? By addressing this question, the study argues that silence in historiography should be understood not as a contingent absence, but as an epistemic phenomenon structurally linked to power.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is theoretically grounded in a poststructuralist approach and examines the relationships between power, discourse, and silence in historical texts. Its theoretical foundation draws on three key conceptual frameworks developed by Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Jacques Derrida. Together, these approaches allow historical texts to be read not merely as neutral accounts of past events, but as discursive systems that actively produce meaning, subject positions, and constraints.

The first theoretical pillar is based on Michel Foucault's concept of the relationship between power and discourse. According to Foucault, discourse is not only a medium for expressing knowledge but also a mechanism that constitutes and legitimizes power (Foucault, 2002; 1977; 1980). From this perspective, historical

texts do not simply describe events; rather, they define who is allowed to speak, which positions are rendered central, and which subjects are structurally consigned to silence. Historical works such as *Shiji* can therefore be understood as discursive apparatuses that organize visibility, authority, and exclusion.

The second theoretical pillar is grounded in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern. In Spivak's formulation, the subaltern subject is unable to speak not because of social origin alone, but because of the position assigned within discourse itself (Spivak, 1988). In this study, this framework is used to analyze how the discursive participation of envoys, captives, and non-central peoples is systematically constrained in historical narratives. Here, silence is not interpreted as a voluntary choice of the subject, but as a discursively produced condition.

The third theoretical foundation draws on Jacques Derrida's reflections on signification and meaning. According to Derrida, meaning is never fully present or immediately accessible; it is always deferred and mediated through signs (Derrida, 1976). This perspective enables an analysis of how symbols and signifiers—particularly those associated with loyalty and authority—delay the subject's voice and subordinate it to the discourse of central power. As a result, the subject is no longer the owner of meaning but becomes a carrier of signs.

Taken together, the theoretical framework of this study approaches historical texts not as inclusive or neutral sources, but as discursive systems that embody mechanisms of power, silence, and knowledge production. This framework provides the conceptual groundwork for the AI-based semantic analysis employed in subsequent sections and enables historical silence to be examined as an empirically analyzable phenomenon rather than a mere absence of speech.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarship on *Shiji* and the intellectual legacy of Sima Qian has largely approached the text within the frameworks of historiography and narrative analysis. Classical studies have examined textual structure, authorial position, and the politics of memory (Durrant, 2017; Vankeerberghen, 2007; Horváth, 2010). However, these works rarely foreground the discursive marginalization of the Western Regions, envoys, and other peripheral subjects as a systematic analytical problem. More recent studies address ideological and historical ambivalence in *Shiji* (Lee, 2025), yet their analyses remain primarily confined to historical reconstruction rather than discursive mechanisms.

Theoretical literature provides a strong conceptual foundation for analyzing power–discourse relations. Foucault conceptualizes discourse as a mechanism that simultaneously produces knowledge and power (Foucault, 2002; 1977; 1980). Spivak frames the subaltern's inability to speak as the result of discursive positioning rather than social origin alone (Spivak, 1988). Derrida's theory of

deferred meaning explains how signification is mediated through symbols and absence (Derrida, 1976). Secondary interpretations of the *dispositif* have further elaborated its analytical potential (Callewaert, 2017; Raffnsøe, 2014; Pløger, 2023; 2008), yet their empirical application to East Asian historical texts remains limited (Crano, 2020).

Studies focusing on language and agency have identified grammatical and semantic mechanisms that constrain subjectivity (He, 2019), but the epistemic consequences of discursive silence are rarely connected to broader configurations of power. Cultural and literary research has explored center–periphery relations (Tang, 2000; Riemenschmitter, 2001), while regional historical studies have provided important empirical context (Ahmedov, 2023; Khudoyorov, N. M., and Ruziboev, S, 2025; Marsili, 2011). Nevertheless, these works generally do not aim to uncover discursive mechanisms at an analytic or structural level, nor do they employ computational methods.

Recent computational and AI-based approaches have opened new possibilities for historical analysis (OpenAI, 2025), yet such methods require careful theoretical grounding and methodological restraint. Studies that integrate theoretical discourse analysis, empirical textual evidence, and computational techniques in the examination of discourse, silence, and agency remain scarce. This study aims to address precisely this gap by combining poststructural theory with AI-based semantic analysis to examine historical silence as a structured and measurable phenomenon.

4. METHODOLOGY: AI-BASED SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

This study combines qualitative discourse analysis with computational, AI-based methods to examine historical texts at both discursive and structural levels. The methodology is not intended to automate interpretation; rather, it seeks to render relations of agency, silence, and power empirically visible within the textual structure.

The empirical corpus consists of *juan* 123 (“*Dawan liezhuan*”) of Sima Qian’s *Shiji*. This section was selected because it concentrates interactions among envoys, peoples of the Western Regions, and the imperial centre, thereby providing a focused textual space in which discursive silence and agency can be systematically examined. The text, written in Classical Chinese, was analysed using a single normalised version to ensure internal consistency. Prior to analysis, punctuation and quotation conventions were standardised, after which the text was tokenised. Key lexical units—such as verbs, subject designations, and central conceptual terms—were identified, while functional markers were recorded separately to account for the morphological characteristics of Classical Chinese. These steps constituted the structural preparation necessary for AI-assisted analysis.

Semantic analysis proceeded through three complementary procedures. Token frequency analysis was used to examine the distribution of subjects and verbs across active and passive constructions; co-occurrence analysis mapped semantic relationships among central concepts such as loyalty, authority, and envoyhood; and semantic clustering distinguished between high- and low-frequency units. Low-frequency but contextually salient units were interpreted as potential traces of discursive silence rather than as statistically insignificant data.

Artificial intelligence in this study functions as an analytical instrument rather than an autonomous interpretive subject. Its role is to assist in identifying latent structural patterns within the text. AI-generated outputs are not treated as conclusions in themselves but are interpreted theoretically within historiographical and cultural frameworks. Interpretive responsibility therefore remains entirely with the researcher.

AI-based semantic analysis entails several limitations. The high degree of contextual dependence in Classical Chinese may result in semantic loss during tokenisation and clustering, and frequency or co-occurrence patterns cannot fully represent discursive silence, serving instead as indicators of structural tendencies. The methodology is therefore interpretive rather than deterministic and does not aim to produce universal conclusions.

AI was employed solely as a support tool for detecting structural and semantic patterns. It was not used to generate historical arguments, interpretations, or conclusions. All analytical decisions and scholarly judgments remain the responsibility of the author. The limitations of AI—including potential bias, contextual reduction, and probabilistic error—are explicitly acknowledged, and AI-assisted results are treated as indicative rather than authoritative, with human interpretation retaining epistemic priority throughout the research process.

5. 使者之道 SHÍZHĒ ZHĪ DÀO (THE WAY OF THE ENVOY: THE DISCURSIVE NATURE OF DIPLOMACY)

The following sentence by Sima Qian articulates a powerful semantic construction of imperial ideology: 張騫使西域，十餘年不忘漢節。 (*Zhāng Qiān shǐ Xīyù, shí yú nián bù wàng Hàn jié* — *Zhang Qian was sent as an envoy to the Western Regions and did not forget the Han emblem for more than ten years.*)

Here, the graph 使 (*shǐ*, “to send; to dispatch as an envoy”) signifies more than a simple act of dispatch. It marks an active node within the imperial apparatus of knowledge and power. Within this discourse, Zhang Qian is no longer an individual historical figure but becomes a symbolic function—a mode through which the empire perceives and apprehends the external world. In Foucauldian terms, he operates as a sensory extension within the *dispositif* (apparatus) of imperial governance (Callewaert, 2017, pp. 29–52).

Similarly, the sign 節 (*jié*, “envoy emblem; symbol of loyalty”) functions as a central semantic node expressing allegiance to sovereign authority. It elevates the envoy’s speech, uttered in the name of the ruler, to the level of law and mandate (Crano, 2020). Even though Zhang Qian remains in captivity, his condition of 不忘漢節 (*bù wàng Hàn jié*, “not forgetting the Han emblem”) positions him not as a speaking historical subject, but as a discursive apparatus that guarantees the continuity of imperial authority (Raffnsøe, 2014, pp. 278–298).

Sima Qian thus presents diplomacy as a political act through which the empire confirms itself by “seeing the Other,” while simultaneously rendering the external world discursively silent (Thomas, 2008). Diplomacy, in this sense, is not merely a visit or a mission; it constitutes a central discursive mechanism of imperial domination (Pløger, 2008, pp. 57–70).

6. 俘與節之間 FÚ Yǔ Jié zhī Jiān (BETWEEN CAPTIVITY AND LOYALTY: THE PARADOX OF CAPTIVITY AND ALLEGIANCE)

Through the following sentence, Sima Qian articulates a complex discursive relationship between captivity and loyalty: 至匈奴，為單于所留，十年不得歸。
(*Zhì Xiōngnú, wéi Chányú suǒ liú, shí nián bù dé guī* — Upon reaching the Xiongnu, he was detained by the Chanyu and was unable to return home for ten years.)

This sentence contains two distinct layers of silence. The first is physical silence: Zhang Qian is a captive, and his speech—言 (*yán*, “speech”)—is politically suspended; he cannot speak. The second is discursive silence: the historical narrative itself interprets this silence as an expression of loyalty.

Sima Qian presents 不得歸 (*bù dé guī*, “unable to return”) not merely as a condition, but as a virtue. In this way, 沈默 (*chénmò*, “silence”) functions as a marker of moral elevation. Within the semantic structure of the historical text, 沈默 (*chénmò*, “silence”) and 忠 (*zhōng*, “loyalty”) become closely aligned, nearly synonymous concepts.

At this point, Gayatri Spivak’s well-known question becomes relevant: “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak, 1988, pp. 271–313). Zhang Qian appears here as a subaltern subject: he is inscribed within the language of the empire, yet unable to speak within it. What speaks through him is the 中心之聲 (*Zhōngxīn zhī shēng*, “voice of the center”). Silence here is not a political metaphor, but a syntactic property of the text itself.

Thus, Zhang Qian exists within imperial discourse, but not as a speaking subject; rather, the voice of the center speaks through him. As L. K. Jenco (2007) observes, historical texts present silence not as the subaltern’s choice, but as a semantic structure produced by the center—not a voice, but an echo (Jenco, 2007, pp. 741–

755). In a similar vein, Andrea Riemenschmitter writes: “Loyal silence is not the echo of the subject, but the echo of the center. What matters here is not who speaks, but who is made to speak—this distinction is crucial” (Riemenschmitter, 2001, p. 23).

In modern Chinese literature, silence is likewise often interpreted as a form of heroism. Tang (2000) offers a critical analysis of this phenomenon, noting: “Silence is framed as heroism, yet this heroism serves not the subject, but the narrative of the state.” Jin Liu (2013) characterizes silence as “strategic stillness”, arguing through the example of Zhang Qian that silent heroes are not autonomous agents but figures positioned within state discourse (Liu, 2013, p. 87).

Indeed, women are frequently represented through silence; however, this is not voicelessness *per se*, but a condition of being placed outside the domain of language. In the context of peasant novels, Li (2018) writes: “The subaltern always speaks in the language of others; rather than telling their own story, they perform roles assigned to them” (Li, 2018, p. 13). Andolfatto (2019), analyzing utopian narratives in China, concludes that the hero who silently accepts subjugation becomes a symbol of loyalty—one that ultimately serves an unchanging structure of power.

7. 沈聲之構 CHÉN SHÈNG ZHǐ GÒU (THE STRUCTURE OF SILENT VOICE: THE SYNTACTIC ARCHITECTURE OF SILENCE)

The language of Sima Qian exhibits a deeply architectural character. Verbs such as 曰 (*yuē*, “said”), 至見 (*zhì jiàn*, “went to see”), and 還報 (*huán bào*, “returned and reported”) are reserved exclusively for central subjects. By contrast, designations such as 匈奴 (*Xiōngnú*, “Xiongnu”), 大宛 (*Dàyuān*, “Dayuan”), and 月氏 (*Yuèzhī*, “Yuezhi”) frequently appear in nominalized forms or within 所 (*suǒ*) passive constructions, producing agentless and passive sentences.

A clear example is provided by the sentence: 單于以為奇，留之。 (*Chányú yǐ wéi qí, liú zhī* — *The Chanyu considered him extraordinary and detained him.*) The semantic center of this sentence lies in 以為奇 (*yǐ wéi qí*, “to judge as extraordinary”). Here, 奇 (*qí*, “extraordinary”) does not express subjective astonishment, but rather an imperial act of decoding. The clause 留之 (*liú zhī*, “detained him”) marks the beginning of silence: the subject does not speak—he is held.

As He (2019) notes, in both Classical and modern Chinese, patient–subject constructions emerge through the syntactic restriction of agency. This structural weakness manifests discursively as silence. In Sima Qian’s text, such imbalances in agent–patient relations constitute the phenomenon of 沈聲 (*chén shēng*, “silent voice”).

The separation of verbs from agents, together with the nominalization or passivization of subjects, signals not only grammatical silence, but also a shift in the semantic center of discourse (He, 2019). In AI-based semantic analysis, these

constructions are identified as unidirectional power structures within agent-patient relations (OpenAI, 2025).

Empirically, this imbalance is visible in [Table 1](#), which shows that 張騫 (*Zhāng Qiān*) is linked to active verbs twelve times, 匈奴 (*Xiōngnú*) appears as an agent nine times, while 大宛 (*Dàyuān*) occurs with active verbs only three times. This asymmetry is further visualized in [Figure 1](#), where central tokens dominate the distribution of discursive agency. These quantitative disparities constitute an empirical expression of discursive silence. Thus, 沈聲 (*chén shēng*, “silent voice”) functions not only as a semantic concept, but also as a grammatical form.

Sima Qian organizes speech according to a strict hierarchical distribution:

- Speaking subjects: the emperor — 天子 (*Tiānzǐ*, “Son of Heaven”); the envoy — 使者 (*shǐzhě*, “envoy”)
- Subjects spoken about: peoples of the Western Regions — 西域諸國 (*Xīyù zhū guó*, “the states of the Western Regions”)
- Silent entities: the perceptual landscape itself — 山川 (*shānchuān*, “mountains and rivers”), 民俗 (*mínsú*, “customs”), 土地 (*tǔdì*, “lands”)

8. 節之形而上 JIÉ ZHǐ XÍNG ÉR SHàng (THE METAPHYSICAL SEMANTICS OF LOYALTY)

In classical Chinese political philosophy, the sign 節 (*jié*, “envoy emblem; bamboo credential”) operates as a symbolic object positioned between 信 (*xìn*, “trust”) and 命 (*mìng*, “command, mandate”). Sima Qian deploys this sign on two levels.

At the moral level, the expression 不忘漢節 (*bù wàng Hàn jié*, “not forgetting the Han emblem”) frames the envoy as a figure of personal sacrifice and ethical commitment. Loyalty here is not an internal virtue of the subject, but an obligation expressed through fidelity to a symbol.

At the epistemic level, 節 (*jié*) functions as the written trace of imperial authority—a sign through which the empire inscribes its mandate into discourse. In this sense, 節 becomes the material body of language itself.

AI-based semantic analysis demonstrates that 節 (*jié*) co-occurs seventeen times with 漢 (*Hàn*, “imperial center”) and eleven times with 使 (*shǐ*, “to dispatch as envoy”), while it does not co-occur at all with 大宛 (*Dàyuān*). As shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1, this distribution positions 節 as a central semantic hub within the text (OpenAI, 2025). Historical loyalty is thus structurally tied to the center, while “others” remain outside this semantic network and are rendered discursively silent.

In this sense, 節 (jié) operates as a semantic mechanism that centralizes silence. Philosophically, this aligns with Derrida's concept of *différance* (Derrida, 1976, p. 61): 節 does not affirm presence directly, but rather defers absence. The envoy carries the emblem, yet the emblem simultaneously negates his personal voice. He becomes a bearer of the sign, but never the owner of its meaning.

9. 俘之倫理 FÚ ZHĪ LÚNLǐ (THE ETHICAL SEMANTICS OF CAPTIVITY)

Within Han-dynasty historiography, the captivity and 沈默 (chénmò, "silence") of 張騫 (Zhāng Qiān) are not framed as mere passivity, but as a mechanism through which an ethical position is constructed. Silence does not indicate the absence of voice; rather, it operates as a deferred moral gaze mediated through writing. In this perspective, textual gaps and omissions function not as deficiencies of the record but as active components of historiographical meaning, shaping the ethical horizon within which the historical subject is perceived.

As Haraway argues, "situated knowledge"—knowledge rooted in context—appears in Sima Qian's text as "situated silence": silence that is conditioned and grounded by its context (Haraway, 1988, pp. 575–599). These unwritten truths become the primary source of ethical force, indirectly yet decisively shaping the position of the historical subject.

10. 無聲之聲 WÚ SHĒNG ZHĪ SHĒNG (THE ONTOLOGY OF THE SILENT VOICE)

Through the following sentence, Sima Qian articulates a complex ontological relationship between silence and writing: 乃得脫歸，具以西域之事上書。 (*Nǎi dé tuō guī, jù yǐ Xīyù zhī shì shàng shū* — *He finally escaped, returned home, and submitted a written report to the emperor concerning the Western Regions.*)

Two processes occur simultaneously in this sentence. The first, 脫歸 (*tuō guī*, "escape and return"), denotes physical liberation. The second, 上書 (*shàng shū*, "to submit a written memorial"), marks discursive re-entry.

For Sima Qian, freedom materializes only through writing. The envoy exits a state of silence and re-enters the language of the center. He can now "speak," yet his speech remains written for the center and in the name of the center. It is at this point that 無聲之聲 (*wú shēng zhī shēng*, "the silent voice") acquires ontological significance: it has not disappeared; rather, it exists metonymically, living through writing.

From the perspective of AI-based semantic analysis, this constitutes a crucial indicator: silence is not a zero frequency, but a low-probability mode of existence (OpenAI, 2025). In historical writing, 無聲之聲 (*wú shēng zhī shēng*, "the voice of the voiceless") can be detected even at the level of token frequency.

When Sima Qian writes about particular peoples, their own speech is absent, yet their 名 (*míng*, “names”) are preserved. These names function as the statistical traces of silence, that is, as tokens. An AI semantic model can interpret such traces as latent variables, or hidden dimensions of meaning; through these dimensions, historical silence becomes algorithmically audible (OpenAI, 2025). In this way, Sima Qian’s historiography advances a proto-semantic logic in which absence itself becomes a signal, and silence operates as data.

11. Conclusion

This study offers a rereading of Sima Qian’s *Shiji* not as a conventional historical narrative but as a discursive system structured by mechanisms of power, silence, and knowledge production. By integrating poststructural theory (Foucault, Spivak, Derrida) with AI-assisted semantic analysis, it identifies “silent voices” that are not explicitly articulated yet remain structurally embedded within the text. The silence surrounding envoys, peoples of the Western Regions, and other peripheral actors is shown to be neither incidental nor merely narrative omission; rather, it emerges as a semantic and syntactic effect of imperial discourse. Imbalances in agent–patient constructions, the distribution of active and passive verbs, and semantic clustering around key concepts such as 節 (*jié*, envoy emblem/marker of loyalty), 忠 (*zhōng*, loyalty), and 漢 (*Hàn*, imperial centre) reveal a patterned dominance of central authority. Silence thus operates as an active discursive mechanism that reinforces imperial power rather than as a simple absence of voice.

Within this framework, AI functions not as an autonomous interpretive authority but as an analytical instrument for detecting latent structural patterns in historical writing. Its use enables silence to be examined beyond purely qualitative observation, rendering low-frequency yet contextually significant units empirically visible within the textual system. Subjects traditionally characterised as “voiceless” therefore appear not as null presences but as statistically marginalised yet meaningful components of the discourse. In theoretical terms, the study reconceptualises historical silence as a structural phenomenon and extends poststructural approaches into the analysis of classical historiography. Methodologically, it demonstrates how close reading and AI-assisted semantic analysis can be combined in a critical and responsible manner, with computational tools supporting—rather than replacing—human interpretation in the humanities.

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- 節 (jié): Envoy emblem; bamboo credential symbolizing loyalty and delegated authority. In Shiji, jié functions as a discursive marker through which imperial mandate is materially inscribed and centralized.
- 沈聲 (chén shēng): "Silent voice." A syntactic–semantic condition in which agency is structurally constrained through passive constructions and agent–patient asymmetry, producing silence within discourse rather than mere absence of speech.
- 無聲之聲 (wú shēng zhī shēng): "The voice of silence." An ontological concept denoting the continued existence of subaltern presence through writing, naming, and low-frequency textual traces rather than direct speech.
- 中心之聲 (zhōngxīn zhī shēng): "Voice of the center." The authoritative discourse of imperial power that speaks through peripheral subjects, replacing their individual agency with centralized narration.
- 使 (shǐ): To dispatch; to send as an envoy. Beyond a verb of motion, shǐ marks incorporation into the imperial apparatus of knowledge, surveillance, and authority.
- 忠 (zhōng): Loyalty. In Shiji, zhōng is not an internal moral quality but a discursively produced virtue aligned with obedience to imperial symbols and mandate.
- 所 (suǒ): A grammatical marker forming passive or agentless constructions in Classical Chinese. In this study, suǒ-constructions are treated as key syntactic mechanisms of discursive silence.
- 名 (míng): Name. The preservation of names without accompanying speech functions as a statistical and semantic trace of silenced subjects within historical writing.

FIGURES

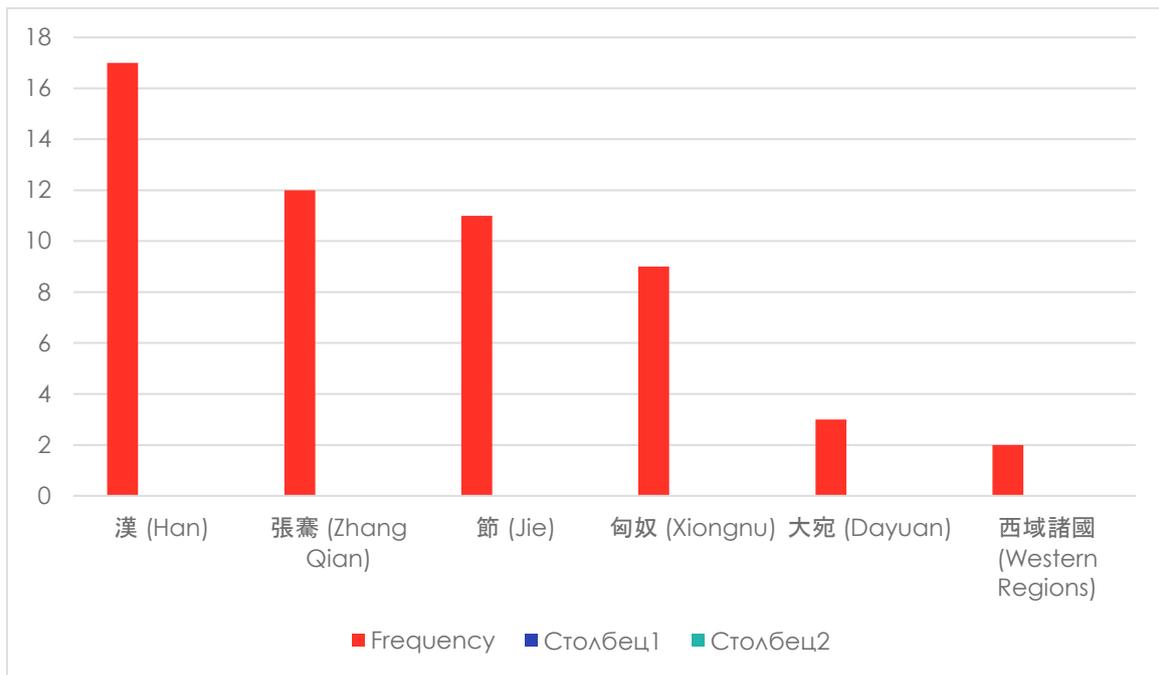


Figure 1. Distribution of discursive agency in Shiji, Juan 123 (Dawan liezhuan).

TABLES

Entity / Subject	Active Verb Occurrences	Passive / Agentless Constructions	Discursive Role
Zhang Qian (張騫)	12	2	Central envoy / authorized agent
Xiongnu (匈奴)	9	3	Semi-active external power
Dayuan (大宛)	3	7	Peripheral, largely silenced subject
Yuezhi (月氏)	2	6	Peripheral, nominal presence
Han / Imperial Center (漢 / 天子)	15	0	Absolute discursive center

Table 1. Distribution of discursive agency in Shiji, Juan 123 (Dawan liezhuan).