Chinese cleft construction has been discussed many times in linguistic literature, e.g. Teng (1979), Tang (1981, 1983), Huang (1982, 1988), Ross (1983), Chiu (1993), Shi (1994), and Simpson & Wu (1999). Most research on the *shi*...*de* construction has focused on discussion of the word *shi* or *de*, and the focus properties of such sentences. They also attempt to explain how the focus interpretation may be syntactically encoded. Previous research seldom investigates the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic differences caused by various types of focuses. This paper focuses on discussing the properties of the VP-focus structure which is compared and distinct from subject/adjunct-focus structures. The main discussion of this paper focuses on three topics: (i) subject-focus and adjunct-focus structures’ distinction from the VP-focus structure, (ii) four issues of the VP-focus structure, (iii) functions of contrast, emphasis and focus of the word *shi*.

Firstly, the focused element of *shi* should not be simply regarded as the element immediately following *shi*, especially when *shi* precedes a VP. Subject-focus and adjunct-focus structures display many syntactically and semantically different behaviors from VP-focus structures. To support the assumption that the VP-focus structure is distinguished from subject/adjunct-focus structures, eight points will be presented to demonstrate that VP focus behaves syntactically and pragmatically different from the other two focus structures, though their surface structures look similar. The eight points to distinguish subject/adjunct-focus from VP-focus structures are (1) the co-occurrence with sentence final *de*, (2) the co-occurrence with aspectual marker, (3) the focus scope, (4) the position of auxiliaries, (5) the alternative with postverbal *de*, (6) an exact answer to a wh-question, (7) the distinction between individual-level and stage-level predicates, (8) the support of English data.

Secondly, four main issues on VP-focus structure are discussed and analyzed, after the assumption that VP-focus structure is not affiliated with the group of subject-focus and adjunct-focus structures. They are (i) the comparison between the stage-level individual-level predicates, (ii) the analyses of sentences with a headless relative clause and sentences with truth-value affirmation, (iii) the comparison between *shi*...*de* and *shi*...*le* configurations, (iv) discussion of focus and emphasis. The first topic argues that different predicate types will affect the grammatical judgment of cleft sentences, like e.g. (1). An extra argument, the Davidsonian argument, is introduced and explains the distinction of cleft sentences with different
focus. The second topic considers different readings of VP-focus structure. The interpretations of VP-focus structures are separated into two subdivisions, sentences with a headless relative clause (*Zhangsan is a/the person that…*), and sentences to express truth-value affirmation (*It is true that…*), e.g. (2). The third issue discusses how sentences with *shi…de* differs from sentences with *shi…le* configuration, though they spell out similarly, like e.g. (3). The configuration with *shi…de* can be construed as a cleft structure and a headless relative clause, whereas *shi…le* cannot be interpreted as a cleft structure or a headless relative clause. Instead, the configuration *shi…le* is analyzed as an emphatic structure. The last issue is to explain that cleft sentences belong to focus structure, and distinguish information that sentences carry is focus or emphasis, like e.g. (4).

Lastly, because the word *shi* is a polysemy, it carries several meanings. In this paper, three of *shi*’s functions are discussed: focus, emphasis and contrast. What impels us to investigate *shi* is the function of focus and emphasis which are spelled out by similar syntactic structures. It is assumed in the paper that subject-focus and adjunct-focus sentences belong to the focus structure, namely cleft construction, while VP-focus sentences affiliate with the emphasis structure.

(1)  
(a) *Zhangsan shi chi pingguo de* (Stage-level predicate)  
    Zhangsan SHI eat apple DE  
    ‘*It was eating apples that Zhangsan did.’
(b) Zhangsan shi xihuan chi pingguo de (Individual-level predicate)  
    ‘*It is eating apples that Zhangsan likes to do.’

(2)  
(a) Zhangsan zhege ren shi hui bian de (Stage-level predicate)  
    Zhangsan this person SHI will change DE  
    (i) ‘Zhangsan is a person that will change.’
    (ii) ‘It is the case that Zhangsan will change.’
(b) ren shi hui bian de (Individual-level predicate)  
    (i) ‘Human beings are creatures that change.’
    (ii) ‘It is the case that people change.’

(3)  
(a) ta zuotian *shi* huilai le (VP-focus, *shi…le*)  
    he yesterday SHI come back Asp.  
    ‘It was the case that he came back yesterday.’
(b) *ta zuotian *shi* huilai de (VP-focus, *shi…de*)  
    ‘*It was coming back that he did yesterday.’

(4)  
wo shi bu xiang li ta  
    I SHI not want pay attention he  
    (i) ‘I DON’T want to pay attention to him.’
    (ii) ‘*It is not wanting to pay attention to him that I do.’