

EPISODE 280

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:20.2] AVH: Hey everybody, welcome to Paleo Magazine Radio. I'm your host, Asheigh. I hope you're doing fantastic today and the topic today, I don't think we've talked about it yet on a podcast, is tea. Which is of course one of the oldest and most popular beverages in the world but I feel like it sometimes gets maybe a bit of a bad rep here in north America because we just seem to value coffee a lot more. I'm guilty to that as well.

Perhaps, maybe because coffee generally has more caffeine and that's what we're really drinking it for and maybe just because with tea, there's just so many options, it can be overwhelming and brewing methods are complicated and there's so much ceremony to it. Which maybe people can like or not like but there's just so much going on with tea. It's actually really endlessly fascinating when you dig into it.

There's such a long history of using tea for its health benefits, from stress management to gut health and beyond and I don't know, I always feel like it's great when you can enjoy something that you're eating or drinking that's also medicine, right? Because usually, those two things don't overlap. Anyway, I asked the founder of a company called Pique Tea, his name is Simon Cheng to give us the lowdown on tea and where it comes from and why it's so awesome and all the ways it can be enjoyed and of course he talks a bit about his company and how they're really doing things a little bit differently.

They have put a very modern twist on a very old drink and they're taking all the work and inconvenience out of it for us, which is good because personally, one of the reasons I don't drink a lot of tea is because I'm just kind of too lazy to worry about every tea has like its exact, correct brewing temperature and how long you're supposed to let it steep and if you don't, it's going to make it bitter and its just so much work, right?

That's why I drink iced coffee, I just take it out of the fridge and pour it directly down my throat. But anyway, they figured out at Pique Tea a way to make tea super convenient for us but also have the best tasting and it still has all the good antioxidants and great health benefits. He's

talking about where tea originated thousands of years ago and how places where people drink a lot of tea tend to be places where people live longer.

There's a lot going on there and there's been a lot of research on it too. It's not just me telling you. I've been using Pique Tea's products, they have a Rishi product, like a Rishi tea that I've been using before bed because I really find that that helps me go to sleep for whatever reason, it just calms me right down and they had a really tasty ginger tea that I've been drinking iced during the days and look, I'm not going to give up my tea entirely because it's a joy in my life. But I'm starting to appreciate the awesomeness of tea.

So we're going to get into that but on that note, let me quickly shout out another delicious, paleo friendly company who is sponsoring the show.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

That is Birch Benders. You guys have probably already heard of them before, I'm a huge fan of theirs, I've been using their products for a very long time, I wrote a feature on their company for Paleo Magazine and if you follow me on Instagram, @themusclemaven, I posted my stories quite a bit actually, I'm probably eating their pancakes too much. But they're really good.

Anyway, they make these pre-made pancake mixes. All you have to do is add water and I swear I'm not blowing smoke, really, these taste as good or better than regular pancakes. This is not a – this tastes good for a healthy version kind of situation, they're actually just full on amazing. Like fluffy, delicious pancakes and they have other versions that you can buy, I think they have like a protein infused, I think they have a keto one. But they have two paleo versions, they've got a regular and a banana bread, which is also very good.

They're made with almond, coconut, cassava flour, they're sweetened with monk fruit and these guys are blowing up, they're a relatively new company but I'm really proud that a good quality, paleo product is making it hugely mainstream, you can buy their stuff at Whole Foods, Target, Walmart, all around the country but why do that when you can get them online for 20% off with a discount code I'm about to provide to you. Yes, you smart folks are going to get 20% off if you go to birchvendors.com and uses the code 'PaleoMag20'. I highly recommend these guys.

That's my wisdom of the day, now, on to my super interesting chat with Simon Cheng all about tea.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:04:35.4] SC: I'm Simon Cheng, I'm the founder and CEO of Pique Tea. Pique is really a product and a company that was born out of my personal health journey, I'd be happy to tell you a little bit about how came on to this path if you'd like?

[0:04:48.1] AVH: Yeah, that would be great.

[0:04:49.0] SC: I grew up in Hong Kong, you know, many people may not know this but Hong Kong actually has the number one rate of longevity for women in the world. So women in Hong Kong live to the longest ages of anywhere, of any country and this is quite remarkable because you know, Hong Kong, it's a very high stress place, you know, it's a financial center, there's very little kind of outdoor space. And people do little exercise and so you know, I'd like to attribute it to genes as well as diet.

But anyways, that's where I grew up. Tea was always a big part of my life as well as the use of many kind of medicinal plants in our everyday diets so whether it's like soups or different vegetables during meals, there's generally like a lot of different medicinal plants in the kind of daily diet. Not like going to see the doctor but like basically anything you eat has medicinal plants in it.

And then, I moved to the US when I was in my teens. Eventually went to Harvard University for college and I'd say pretty much the minute that I set foot in the US, life got very hectic, very busy, you know, very intensely focused on competing in this race. What I've now come to realize was really just a rat race. But certainly, graduating from school I was caught up in the whole concept of getting the right job that paid the most money, that everyone else wanted to get into and so I ended up in the hedge fund industry for about eight years.

I was in finance for about a total of 10 years and during those 10 years, there was really kind of a huge toll that has taken on my body which I was never truly aware of or cognizant about. Every year I would get multiple sort of respiratory infections. Whether it's in my sinus or my throat or my chest.

Constantly on at least one, possibly two to three, courses of antibiotics every year. You know, never really occurred to me that I had to change my lifestyle. Simply because the doctor never told me that, right? It's like you know, I was kind of taught when I was growing up that if there's something wrong with you, you know, you go see the doctor and he's going to give you a bunch of medicine and tell you what to do and you're going to be fine after that.

Over the 10 years, I never changed my lifestyle, just kind of drinking three double espressos a day, burning the kettle at both ends and really just kind of living life without a great deal of fulfillment and personal attention to my personal health. And then, eventually both my lungs collapsed. You know I had to get staples in both lungs and again, the doctor said, "This is a congenital –

[0:07:07.6] AVH: How did that happen?

[0:07:10.0] SC: You know, the doctor told me, he's like, "Hey, this is a congenital defect, it happens to people and you know, you're one of the unlucky ones," and with kind of Asian males that are actually skinny, that can happen that you know, tall, skinny –

[0:07:21.6] AVH: Yeah, I just got to interrupt because this is a crazy part of the story, was there a specific event where it occurred? Was this or was it like you were just kind of experienced a lot of discomfort and you went to the hospital. How did that happen?

[0:07:33.9] SC: I was just experiencing discomfort, I mean, literally, the first time it happened, I was working and I was like, you know, this is very uncomfortable and I said, you know, it was like so uncomfortable, I couldn't focus anymore. So went to sleep and I woke up in the middle of the night and I wasn't able to breathe, I couldn't even stand up straight because it was so painful.

I called 911 and basically got myself into the emergency room and you know, you know, they diagnosed me with a collapsed lung. Then it happened again a couple of years later, so on both sides, I had to get staples. They had to staple up the holes where of my lung had burst and so it's called spontaneous, it just happens, right? Nothing exacerbated it. It was pretty slow onset.

You know, even then, nothing struck me as being out of the ordinary with my life because it's always kind of like this explanation, it's like it's congenital. Of course it was also a respiratory illness, there was like some sort of correlation and then when I turned 30, I was in business school and my doctor told me that I had sleep apnea and at this point, I was in Stanford which I thought was a wonderful medical institution and they recommended surgery and they said you know, you're young, you have your love life to think about, you don't want to be using a kind of a sleeping aid and you're going to recover so fast and this is like very simple thing like with a very high rate of success. 85% rate success.

You know, of course I was brought up to listen to the doctor so I did, I did the surgery and it was a complete disaster. So my sleep score actually was worse after it because they created so much scar tissue and then I had started an internship. Shortly after the surgery, during the summer and my jaw started swelling a little bit more every day and I called up the doctor, at this point I was in Shanghai. Called up the doctor in Palo Alto and I said, "Hey, you know, there's something happening."

He said, "Oh no, it's possible that your jaw bone might be infected, and I said, "Jaw bone? You didn't tell me you're doing anything to my jaw bone." They're like, "Well, you know, actually, when we said we weren't kind of moving your tongue out of the way so you could open up the airways, we actually drilled a hole in your jaw bone and we cut a hole in it and took that piece of bone and pulled it out so that you know, it's attached to a tendon to your tongue so through that process, we moved your tongue and then put a screw in it."

[0:09:41.5] AVH: Jeez.

[0:09:42.3] SC: You know, I was just kind of blown away.

[0:09:44.4] AVH: They hadn't told you that ahead of time?

[0:09:46.6] SC: They did not tell me that they were doing that, you know, all the pieces kind of clicked into place because I was like, you know, after the surgery, I had to go to ICU and I was like, you know, ICU seems a bit intense for just removing a bunch of soft tissue and then when my friends saw me, I remember the look of horror on their faces when they saw like the size that my head had swollen into.

It's so inexplicable, you know? I was like you know, this is so bizarre. And they were just kind of like, "Wow, what have you done to yourself," you know? I was like well, you know, they just removed a bunch of soft tissue and you know, cutting a hole in the jaw bone kind of explained everything, right? The pain, the swelling, the bleeding, it's just crazy. I actually had to quit my internship and go back to California, where they opened it up, removed the screw, cleaned it out and then they couldn't identify what bug had caused the infection.

They put me on broad-spectrum antibiotics for two and a half months. That I had to self-administer through a catheter that went into my heart valve and that for me was really kind of the final straw, Ashleigh. At the age of 30, I was like, "Wow, you know, I've been through three major operations," this last one was actually completely discretionary. They didn't even have to do it. The doctors pretty much hustled me and conned me into doing this thing and this is at Stanford by the way. 10 years later, we now realize that that operation has like 25% success rate.

[0:11:03.6] AVH: Could you have like sued these guys? This seems like it was really, grossly, I don't know if negligent is the word but I mean, even their lack of communication and doing things that they hadn't told you they were going to do, I mean, what was the sort of aftermath of this?

[0:11:17.3] SC: Yeah, I did talk to a lawyer, they said that listen, this is something that you probably could do, not because of the infection. But possibly because of the communication and the outcome and so forth. Infections happen all the time in hospitals but they said that you know, this would probably take a great deal of time, it would literally like having a job.

At that point, I was like graduating from business school, really wasn't something that I wanted to kind of dedicate my time to doing. I never pursued that route. But you know, definitely, I think it was something that was plausible, let's put it that way.

[0:11:47.5] AVH: Crazy, okay.

[0:11:49.4] SC: Yeah, then, you know, after that, it was just kind of like wow, it brought into question everything that I had ever done for my health and even like the very concept of what it meant to be healthy. It was the shift from like okay, it's like not getting sick to actually becoming truly healthy, which is like not even getting near getting sick, right?

I basically spent a year after that, going around, really trying to understand different alternative approaches to health. Different types of traditional Chinese medicine, meditation, very powerful forms of breath work, which I learned that called Qigong meditation. It's kind of like a health meditation that's based on a very old Chinese tradition. I got into tai-chi and I literally travelled around the world like finding different plant doctors, tai chi masters, meditation masters to go and work with to be healed by them. But also really kind of learn their art but I became so passionate and inspired by all this. Completely changed my life.

I haven't taken antibiotics in like 12 years now. On that journey, I actually went to Yunnan province which is next to Tibet in western China and it's the birth place of tea. It's actually where tea was first discovered 5,000 years ago. The oldest living tree there, that tea tree is 3,200 years old, I actually have a photo with it. Anyone who ever makes a purchase of Pique will actually get an email from me, thanking them with a picture of me in that tree.

[0:13:11.0] AVH: 3,200 years old?

[0:13:12.7] SC: Yeah, it's huge, it's like you know, it's probably like 20, 30 feet and I was amazed because actually, the natives there have this incredible relationship with tea and they found a way to extract all of the medicinal and flavor compounds in the tea from that region into a paste which they call tea paste or [INAUDIBLE 0:13:34.5]. That's a direct translation.

It was a very primitive method, they would basically take the tea, after it was dried and they would brew it in this huge kind of iron pots, this in villages, right? Or a fire wood. After extracting everything, they would throw out the leaves and just keep boiling it till all the water had evaporated and there was like a sticky paste left behind almost like a resin.

They would scrape it up and portion it out and they would either eat it or dissolve it in water. This is what fueled them when they went on kind of multi-day treks from one village to the next at that point, very few roads when this stuff was invented. and so getting a message across to your neighbor in the next village would literally be like a three-day hike.

This is what kept them going and help them kind of withstand the elements and when I saw it, I was like, "Wow, this is pretty ingenious," you know? I was very into tea already and I said, "This could help a lot of people unlock the benefits of tea without having to go through the cumbersome brewing process." We basically innovated upon that tea paste and removed all of the heat from the extraction process and came up with our tea crystals, which is a completely cold brew, low temperature extracted, water soluble extract of any sort of medicinal plant compounds.

If you take any plant and dry it and you take that dried plant and brew it, you're going to be able to extract stuff out of it. That's like the water soluble compounds that are in medicinal plants. And so they basically able to get all of those things out with minimal loss and disruption to anything, even flavor and to this form, so that you can take it and you can dissolve it in cold or hot water so it's super convenient.

We triple toxin screen it for pesticides, toxic mold and heavy metal. So it's super pure, you know, if you're drinking anything for health benefits or drinking anything every day, you really want it to be from a very pure source. Then the third thing is because of the low temperature extraction, we're able to preserve a much higher concentration of active ingredients like medicinal compounds, like polyphenols or the catechins, the theaflavins, you know, the L-theanine, all these incredible medicinal compounds in teas. As well as other medicinal herbs like ginger, hibiscus, rooibos, mushroom, you know, we have like 20 something products now.

I think because of that, I think Pique has you know, become probably the most doctor recommended tea out there. Certainly at least in the paleo community and then our community of health experts and health gurus. I think it's really because of the convenience, the purity and the efficacy just makes it very easy to recommend. Everyone knows tea is good for you and people are normally hard pressed. Everyone has a favorite brand or like some favorite blend or kind of flavor but you know, just having a brand that's like easy and pure and tested and kind of transparent, that's just been great for the market and great for all our influencers.

[0:16:25.4] AVH: Well, Simon, that's a crazy story that I did not know. I mean, it's funny because the people that I talk to who have started incredible companies that are doing really good things for people, so often, it comes from either a desire for something because there was a lack in the marketplace or from frankly a catastrophic or pretty bad health issue that they were trying to overcome, personally. And found something and so I want to share this with the world and this seems like that's really a direction that you went.

I think it's pretty amazing and I'd like to talk a little bit more about the process and the health benefits because as you said, everybody knows tea is healthy, all of us are still chugging our coffee in the morning. Which has its health benefits too but there's so many different types of tea, such a sort of intricate and layered — there's like a whole culture around different teas and how and when they can be used and what for and it's really fun and interesting to sort of delve into it.

I'd love to talk a little bit more about — first of all, you said, you have like 20 something products and you guys were very generous, sent me some to try and it's super exciting because, the cool thing, people may not know about your products and I don't know actually if you offer them in different ways. But you offer them in like single serving packs, right? Little packets with single serving packs inside.

It's so convenient because I take a handful of these with me when I travel and again, I'm generally more of a coffee person, just full transparency. But when I'm on a plane, I'm always trying to drink more, so I don't get dehydrated and gross from all the travel and I don't want to drink any of the tea or the coffee that the airplane's going to give me, generally.

I can buy my water or have my water and I can bring these little single serving sticks of all these different delicious teas and I can use those. It's just so convenient and so awesome and the other thing that I like about the way you make it and maybe you can speak to the processing a bit, is that if you're not like a tea aficionado, you can over brew or over steep, you can make them a little strong, they can get a little bitter, whatever.

It's always just sort of like the perfect flavor level so can you talk about how you process it so that it's obviously retaining all of the good health benefits but also like the best taste too.

[0:18:31.4] SC: Yes, definitely. The way that we make the tea crystals is we take the raw materials so it can be, you know, we have a large range of different teas, black teas, green teas, oolong tea. We have herbals like ginger, hibiscus, rooibos, we have medicinal mushrooms. Every sort of plant requires a different type of brewing extraction process, right?

Mushrooms, for example, require very high heat, a white tea or a green tea would require much less heat. Some teas, you know, don't require any heat at all. According to the different plant that we're dealing with, the raw material, we have a different protocol and this is basically accomplished with tea masters as well as extraction experts. And some of it is based on just simply using the pallet, you know, tasting the teas and others is based on using laboratories for doing third party active ingredient testing.

There's like a process to figuring out the optimal brewing time and methodology for each raw material. I mean, it's basically time and temperature, right? Because we use lower temperatures across the board, generally, the brew time gets extended by a lot. You know, some teas we brew up to eight hours to gently extract everything out of them using a low temperature. That's the first step is basically like, you know, the brewing process, right? Low temperature brewing for long periods of time. And then after you have this kind of potent tea brew, you remove the leaves, the leaves are used for composting or recycled for biofuel.

You have this very concentrated tea brew and the next step is how do you remove the water from that brew, okay? This involves a combination of — it's a proprietary process but it involves a combination of filtration as well as very low temperature drying or dehydration. If you for

example take water up to Mount Everest and you try to boil it, you'll notice that there will be a rapid amount of evaporation but the water doesn't really get hot, right?

That's simply because of the air pressure, right? Differences in air pressure will have varying effects on boiling point of water. You can actually get a lot of evaporation without causing a lot of heat. In this process, we're able to eliminate all of the water and what you have left behind are these very pure tea crystals, it's basically just simply the dissolvable solids, the soluble compounds that were in those plants to begin with.

Something that we pay a great attention to is the flavor of our teas, you know, we make products that are really meant to be enjoyable as well as well as beneficial, right? We don't believe in making teas that taste horrible but have like miraculous health properties because nobody is going to drink them on a regular basis. The whole concept behind tea drinking is that you know, it has to be a pleasurable experience and that's one of the reasons we won three gold medals as the 2018 Global Tea Championships, we're the only company in history that has ever won three gold medals in one sitting and this is out of three submissions, right?

This was in a competition against all of the best teas produced from all around the world. It's an international competition. I think this is a huge testament to the taste profile of our plant beverages and then obviously, the active ingredients are all third party tested. Now, tea is probably like the most studied super food in the world, right? Because tea is the second most drank beverage in the world after water. If you look at China, India, Japan, most of the Middle East and many parts of Europe, everyone drinks tea on multiple occasions during the day.

In China, India, People probably drink tea like instead of water, in Japan as well. You can imagine there's been a ton of studies done and every single study without fail will have a recommendation for how much tea you need to drink to experience the observed health benefits, right? You know, I polled a large number of tea drinkers and my toxin presentations and what not in the US and most people that think that they're tea drinkers don't actually drink enough tea to experience the health benefits. Even if you go to the Harvard School of Public Health.

These are the guys that brought us the ban on trans fats, has done all the research on the harmful effects of sugar. They actually have a recommendation for how much tea you should drink and, you know, it's basically three or more cups a day. Now, how many people drink three or more cups of tea a day, if you include everybody and then you think about the tea drinkers, you know, how many people drink three or more cups a day, it's very few, it's a miniscule number of people.

I think part of the reason for that is because of the cultural differences. In America, you don't get to find tea in any restaurant or in any home. You know, in Hong Kong in the office there is actually a tea gentleman or a tea lady that comes around all the desk filling your cup with tea throughout the day. You know you walk into anyone's home in Korea or Japan, the first thing you do is serve you a cup of tea. In any restaurant, you eat and tea is served, right?

[0:23:15.9] AVH: That is so civilized. I wish offices around here had tea people passing out tea at all times. It is so nice.

[0:23:22.4] SC: Yeah, you know it is just like a really wonderful added perk that's like, "Hey, this is the nod to like taking care of your health," right? It is the very simple perk.

[0:23:30.8] AVH: I also didn't know that there were world global tea championships. So I am learning like so much in this conversation.

[0:23:37.9] SC: Yeah and so I think one of the main issues is like the very poor quality of tea that is inside a teabag. In the US, there is the culture of teabags, you know there is the culture of bottled tea and tea bags. Because making tea is troublesome. It is a pain and it does take a lot of time. If you were to brew water and steep a teabag, that's 10 minutes already, right? And then you got to wait for it to cool to drink it. So that is 15 minutes to drink a cup of tea, right?

And most people will forget about it and over steep their teabag, then their tea tastes terrible and you don't know where to put the teabag. They throw it in a bin and it stains everything or you put it on a plate and it just drips out. It is like a terrible experience, right? And then you probably have under brewed or over brewed tea and what is the likelihood that you are going to do that again and again and that's the minimum to do it three times.

And so Pique just eliminates all of that complication and the hassle and the inconsistencies. With every packet, you get the perfectly brewed tea according to tea masters and everyone can be their own tea master. And I think that that's the key to really unlocking the very powerful health benefits that tea has become recognized for. I mean certainly with our customer base and our influencers. The kind of three areas that we see people most using our tea for are for intermittent fasting, gut health and stress management.

And so if you look at intermittent fasting, first of all, fasting as you probably know is thousands of years old. It is a religious practice. Muslims do it, Buddhists do it, Christians do it, it is very engrained in religious doctrine where there are periods of time that you fast, right? And now we are understanding the signs and the health benefits of it. And the funny thing is that in most of these cultures, tea has really gone hand in hand with that whole process of helping you have a less stressful, craving ridden fasting experience.

And you know, I think one of the interesting things about tea is that there are studies done where catechins have been identified as being beneficial to reducing the hunger hormone, which is ghrelin. So this is something that Dr. Jason Fung talks about. The catechins in tea actually help reduce hunger pangs, right? That is the number one reason people fail in their intermittent fasting is like they break their fast too early. And I think in the area of gut health, this is another super interesting area of research now.

It is still very emerging, very cutting edge, most of the studies have been done on animals and in a lot of mice that have been fed high amounts of tea they have noticed a significant decrease in harmful bugs. So the pathogens that are related to issues like obesity and they have noticed a higher number of bugs that are related to weight management, right? So one of the interesting things about tea is that it is an anti-microbial and what we've noticed and at least in animal studies is that is actually able to reduce the number of bad bugs and increase the number of good bugs.

So you know, eliminating a symptom called disbiosis, which is the imbalance of gut flora or at least supporting the healthier gut flora. And then as far as the stress management goes but this monks have been pretty much living hand in hand with tea for centuries, right? If you go into any

monastery, people care little about what they are wearing, what they're eating, their living conditions but they are never without tea and there is a reason for that and it's because tea has a compound and it's called L-theanine, that's is an amino acid and it is actually been shown to increase alpha activity in the brain.

And alpha activity is basically the prelude, it is the preceding activity to meditation or the deep meditative state, right? And so it is actually very conducive when you have a caffeine, which is a stimulant as well as L-theanine, which is something that is very calming. It has a sedative effect. The combination of these two things puts you in this state of calm alertness, which is not just a state you want to be in when you are meditating. It is arguably the state you want to be in at all times during the day. Whether you are playing with your kids or you're giving the presentation of your lifetime or engaged in that very important work meeting. You want to be calm and you want to be alert.

[0:27:49.6] AVH: I love L-theanine. There is actually, I'm sorry in this conversation I keep bringing up coffee because I do like tea as well. But they've even started coming out with some L-theanine infused coffees, just for that reason because it not only produces a calming effect when you are drinking tea or just taking the supplement on its own but it can offset some of the jittery side effects of too much caffeine. I actually take L-theanine at night to calm down. I found it a really effective supplement but where are you sourcing your tea?

[0:28:22.6] SC: Yeah, so before I jump to that you know L-theanine is — the only naturally occurring source of L-theanine is actually tea. So it has not been identified in any other compound. So it is interesting that people are combining it with coffee. Obviously I would recommend just drinking tea. You know, L-theanine, if you were to isolate it and extract it and turn into a supplement, you know I am not a huge fan of isolates. I always believe in having whole compounds.

Coffee is obviously an amazing whole food, right? And all of the compounds in there are meant to be there and it's obviously has its own health benefits and the same thing goes for tea. The L-theanine, the catechins, the caffeine, those are all the naturally occurring compounds but as far as our sourcing goes we source from all over the world. It includes Africa, Germany, Japan, China, really there is a large number of places we get our plants from, Russia.

And in each case, we do like to work with small family owned farms and a lot of the cases, we've actually been to visit the farms. We write some blog articles about them. Our most recent trip was to Japan, where we source our matcha from. We have a product called The Sun Goddess Matcha. So this is actually a product that is quadruple toxin screen, some addition to the heavy metals, toxic mold and pesticides, we also screen for radioactive isotopes.

A lot of people are concerned about foods from Japan because of the radioactive fallout from the meltdown they had after the tsunami. And we're always very hesitant to launch a matcha partially because of that and partially because it is actually very difficult to get organic products and tea from Japan. So all the plots of land there are very closely spaced together. The space efficiency and utilization is very, very high. Those of you that have been in Japan can understand that.

It is very much a part of the culture. The problem that that has created is that if your neighboring farm or a farm four plots away uses pesticides, the wind will actually create this drift of the pesticide to your farms essentially tainting all of your products as well. And so there are very few organic farms and we happen to have found one in Kagoshima. It is in the southernmost part of the Japanese archipelago.

So Japan is a chain of islands and it is this long chain and at the bottom, you have Okinawa, which is the famous blue zone and next to that you have Kagoshima where our matcha is from and because our matcha is actually grown in the mountains, it is actually at a much cooler temperature. So naturally insects don't like to go there. They are very few insects and the only form of pest control that people use there is they simply just peel off — so they will collect whatever tea that they want during the harvest.

So these are typically the tender baby shoots of the tea plant so they will pluck all of those and then whenever they are not in harvest season and there are little shoots sprouting out, they will just pluck them off, right? And the insects only like to eat the tender shoots because the leaves are too thick and too fibrous for them to eat and that's all they have to do to get rid of the insects. You know imagine that and because it is in the mountains there is no drift.

And so we have this incredible organic matcha from this very, very pristine region that we also test for radioactive isotopes.

[0:31:33.2] AVH: I have a question about that because one thing that is interesting about the processing of Pique Tea, which I didn't know, is that I assumed that it was similar to the way matcha is processed in that it is not about steeping the tea leaves. It is about actually powdering the tea leaves, which is what matcha is. It is like the whole leaf brewed into water. But you explained that that's not what it is. It is a more interesting process but is your matcha traditional matcha where it is actually the tea leaves?

[0:32:03.0] SC: Yes, so I should actually qualify that. You are asking such great technical questions Ashleigh. You must have a degree in them in chemistry or –

[0:32:09.2] AVH: I am just a nerd that's all.

[0:32:10.3] SC: Okay, well I love to nerd out. So this is a perfect interview. So we actually do have products where we use ground up plants and our matcha is one of them. So we initially launched with all tea crystals. They were all this water extraction process but then we came to slowly realize as we diversified our product portfolio that, hey, you know what? Actually not every single plant needs to be extracted using our process.

Some plants are actually better off being powderized. Matcha being a very prominent one because the only reason we want to extract is for convenience as well as the ease of purity testing, right? Well, of course the efficacy and in some cases, you know having powderized plants meet all three of those criteria and matcha is one in our mushrooms for example, we use a combination of powdered mushrooms as well as Reishi and Chaga.

So we use a combination of extract as well as the powders and this is to reach different taste as well as active ingredient parameters. So in each plant raw material, we are really thinking hard about what is the best presentation for this to achieve the benefit as well as the taste parameters of delivering excellent tea product.

[0:33:24.6] AVH: And for your mushroom blends, are they basically just sort of a powdered supplement that you would add to a smoothie or a drink or your baking or something like that or are those meant to be consumed on their own?

[0:33:37.4] SC: Yeah, so they are meant to be consumed on their own you know in line with all of our other teas, these teas are formulated according to traditional Chinese medicine formulas and one of the important parameters is that they taste amazing. You know our Reishi Calm Elixir is the ideal thing to drink when you've gone home from work or you're just chilling or you've had dinner and you're relaxing or enjoying the evening. It is almost like a dessert.

So it has Reishi, Goji berry, jujube date. So Goji berry and jujube date are kind of sweet and it also has a monk fruit in it. And this is a deliberate contrasts to the Reishi mushroom, which is quite a bitter compound and so when you combine the bitterness of the Reishi with these very light, slightly fruity, slightly berry-ish flavors, you get this very delicious almost dessert like drink. That is perfect for calming and you know obviously, this is also made according to a medicinal thought process.

So all of these different sorts of plants have their own medicinal benefits and they work together, almost like an orchestra would work together. So it is like cooking, right? If you take a piece of chicken breast and you stick it in the oven, it is not going to be a great outcome, right? But then when you use oil or you use seasoning and salt and pepper and whatever spices you want that's when the thing really comes to life. And that is how a lot of PCM formulas are created. So it's not just in terms of the flavor but also the combination of the health benefits work together to achieve a singular goal.

[0:35:12.9] AVH: I'm going to have to try that Reishi calming blend because that sounds real good and besides L-theanine, that's actually one of the only other things that I usually incorporate in my nighttime routine to chill out. Because I frankly do not need more caffeine in my life. But I need things to help me calm down at the end of the day and I've tried different Reishi blends and that is why I ask you because yeah, usually if you are putting the straight powdered mushroom on its own not so great.

But if you can find a nice healthy, calming mix that makes it more palatable without making it less healthy I mean that is the ideal.

[0:35:46.0] SC: Yeah, so I am going to send you our matcha, as well as our Reishi, I don't know if you got these in the mail but I think those would be the two that would be amazing for you. A lot of people don't feel like they got enough of an energy kick from tea and a lot of it has to do with when you drink different teas, at what times during the day. And so we have a whole protocol that we recommend to people where they start the day with black tea and then you slowly shift down the color gradient as the day progresses.

So black tea has the caffeine that hits you the fastest and the hardest right? And it is also very good in the mornings because it is a fermented tea. It is much better for your gut health and then during the afternoon, you have this matcha that has a much longer lasting energy. It is time release caffeine. So it just tides you through the afternoon and keeps you nice and relaxed but I am going to send you the matcha because I think it would be really interesting for you to try it after your lunch hour maybe in lieu of a coffee –

[0:36:41.5] AVH: Yeah that is very exciting because I'd like to try some different ones. The ones you got me I think I have already tried. There is a green tea, lemon or something that was really good. I got an Earl Grey that was really nice because I actually usually prefer drinking my tea iced or its English breakfast. I think it was English breakfast that you gave me. And it is really nice but yeah, I am excited about those other ones.

What is the most popular product that you have so far? What is the one that everybody is really excited about?

[0:37:09.1] SC: We have different rankings on different channels and so I think on Amazon our green teas are definitely the most popular. I am not sure if it is Jasmin or matcha or the mint green tea but typically the green teas do very well.

[0:37:22.8] AVH: Mint green tea that is the one I've been drinking, yeah.

[0:37:25.1] SC: Yeah, the mint green tea and I would say that we're also in Whole Foods. I think the green tea tends to do best in Whole Foods as well and then online, our fasting tea tends to do very well. So we have a partnership with Jason Fung for our fasting teas. And you know those tend to do very well but it also changes month by month. You know it is sometimes the hotter months people like different things cooler months, different things and obviously it depends a lot on our campaigns as well.

But you know overall, we have an oolong tea that's amazing. It is definitely rising in the ranks. You know we often recommend oolong to people that only have one tea that they drink because it is semi-fermented. It is a mix between black tea and green tea and so if you are ever stuck on a desert island and you can only bring one tea that is the one you want.

[0:38:10.1] AVH: That is a good practical tip. What is your dessert island tea I like that that's good.

[0:38:13.9] SC: Yeah, exactly.

[0:38:15.4] AVH: All right, so I think we are coming close to the end here. This has been very, very informative. I've learned actually a lot about tea than I expected to, it is very cool. I think maybe one of the things that folks should take from this is that you have a ton of offerings and you can learn all about the different kinds and when they're best taken and when they'll do the best and what they do for you and all the health benefits and all that stuff and you can go to the website and you offer a lot about that information there, right?

[0:38:42.0] SC: Yes, definitely. So you know, we have a blog and we have a website. I definitely encourage people to join us there. We also offer health challenges. So we have the fasting challenge, a gut health challenge as well as a medicinal breath work challenge, which I lead personally. These are all free to our community and our customers. They typically feature pretty big time affiliates or influencers that come and really just you know answer questions and be helpful and address our community.

And we have a special offer as well. If you visit piquetea.life/paleomag, you'd be able to get 15% off with a \$60 or higher purchase. Again the URL is piquetea.life/paleomag and you can get 15% off.

[0:39:32.0] AVH: Awesome and we'll put that in the show notes. We make sure that everybody has access to that and can use it and it is a great idea. It is easy to spend that much money just because you have so many great offerings and they also make great gifts for people too. Because they're pretty, they are so convenient, there is so many like you said, there is so many different types for whatever people are into like whatever tea people like and the season and all that kind of stuff.

It's perfect so yeah, people listening you should definitely check it out. Go get some. Simon, tell me — just to wrap up from the story that you told me at the beginning of the show, how is your health doing and how are you feeling and how are you living and focusing on your health on a daily basis these days?

[0:40:12.5] SC: Yeah, so I have never felt better in spite of working much longer hours than I ever have before, you know Pique is three and a half years old and there was Ben Horowitz said that you know starting a business involves an inhuman amount of work and sometimes it certainly feels like that but I have never felt better in my life and I haven't taken antibiotics for 12 years. My sleep score, which I recently got tested for has improved by 50%, in spite of me having aged by 10 years.

And so it's quite a remarkable situation that I really attribute this to two things. The first one being the incorporation of plants and medicinal plants into my life every day. It is basically through all the different types of means that I can hydrate myself. You know almost every sip of liquid I take into my body involves some sort of medicinal plant and then the second thing is really the breath work, medicinal breath work that I do.

So I meditate every single morning and do different sorts of Qigong exercises. And it's been incredible and I am just so happy and I am so fulfilled. I think you know the third thing is really the fulfillment that I get from what we do and being able to help other people makes a huge difference as well.

[0:41:22.7] AVH: Absolutely. I mean it's so cool that is full circle. You were looking for something to make yourself feel better. You ended up finding something that is making so many other people feel better and in the process, you found a career and a job and a purpose that is amazing and fulfilling even though you are working way harder, you are enjoying it and you're doing good things. So it is pretty awesome. You touched on something pretty important I think.

[0:41:48.7] SC: Yes, definitely.

[0:41:50.0] AVH: That's awesome. Well, thank you Simon so much for taking the time and teaching us a little bit and like we said, we'll put that link in the show notes, so that everyone can go and buy some Pique Tea. I look forward to trying all of the flavors and letting you know how it goes.

[0:42:03.7] SC: Okay, awesome. Well thank you so much Ashleigh for your time, this opportunity. It's been really wonderful and you know I look forward to chatting again soon.

[0:42:11.8] AVH: Awesome, thanks Simon.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:42:17.7] AVH: All right that's it folks. Thanks for listening. Thank you to Birch Benders Pancakery, what a cute word that is, pancakery, for giving us a 20% discount on their pre-made paleo pancake mixes. Head to birchbenders.com, use the code "PaleoMag20" and stock up.

Do it, it's a smart idea and please join me next week. I am talking with an integrated dietician and performance coach. Her name is Esther Blum and she helps women sort out their hormones, get healthier, lose weight, generally crush life and I feel like we can never have too many people in the world doing that.

So I hope you join me and learn a little something and if you liked this episode, please share it on social media for me. You can tag @paleomagazine. You can tag me @themuscle Maven. I respond to most people and I love to see people enjoying the podcast and sharing it and

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[OUTRO]

[0:43:28.3] AVH: The intro music for Paleo Magazine Radio is a song called Stronger performed by Alter Ego and I hope you love it.

[END]