

## Michael Chow, celebrity restaurateur, reveals how he suffered racist bullying

Michael Chow, the world famous restaurateur, today reveals the racism he has suffered since coming to England as a teenager.



Mr Chow buys the glasses from Cutler and Gross and they are now sold by the opticians as 'Mr Chow spectacles' Photo: REX FEATURES

By Adam Lusher

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The Shanghai-born 72-year-old has seen his Knightsbridge, Beverly Hills, New York and Miami restaurants patronised by everyone from the Beatles to Andy Warhol, via Ingrid Bergman and Federico Fellini.

Yet he tells The Sunday Telegraph's Seven magazine that he resorted to wearing his trademark tortoiseshell glasses to ward off racists.

"When I first came to England I realised that two things could let you off the hook race-wise: Eccentricity and fame. For that reason I call them my 'anti-racism' glasses, because people look at the glasses more than me, so the Chinese part begins to disappear."

He buys the glasses from Cutler and Gross, whose Knightsbridge store is behind his restaurant, and they are now sold by the opticians as "Mr Chow spectacles".

Chow was born into a well-known theatrical family. His father Zhou Xinfang, who was later imprisoned and tortured during the Cultural Revolution, was China's most famous actor and a leading figure at the Peking Opera at Shanghai.

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[Mr Chow: interview \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/8681058/Mr-Chow-interview.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/8681058/Mr-Chow-interview.html)

[A desire to be cared about \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4716107/A-desire-to-be-cared-about.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4716107/A-desire-to-be-cared-about.html)

[Oliver Pritchett: Another view \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3633801/Another-view.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3633801/Another-view.html)

[Steve Coogan interview \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8109790/Steve-Coogan-interview.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8109790/Steve-Coogan-interview.html)

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As Mao tightened his grip on China, the 13 year-old Chow was sent to Wenlock Edge boarding school in Shropshire for his safety and education.

Chow says he was bullied at school because of his race.

"Of course. I was Chinese: I was there to be bullied. But life's a funny thing because sometimes, no matter how hard the memories, you still manage to feel nostalgic about them. Mostly bitter, with a drop of sweet."

He opened his first Mr Chow restaurant in a converted curry house in Knightsbridge, London, in 1968. The waiters were Italian and there were no chopsticks.

"It was like telling people that the world was square," Chow recalls.

Before long Frank Sinatra, Federico Fellini and Jeanne Moreau were dropping in, and the Beatles were regulars. Chow recalls Paul McCartney coming in for lunch and "finger strumming a new tune called Back in the USSR out on the table."

In 1974 he opened his Beverly Hills restaurant. Clint Eastwood and Eartha Kitt, the singer, came to the launch. Anjelica Huston and Jack Nicholson became regulars. Barbra Streisand was introduced to her future husband, James Brolin, the actor, at the restaurant in 1996.

The Midtown New York restaurant opened in 1979 and attracted the pop artist Andy Warhol and John Lennon.

Chow now shares a Beverly Hills mansion with Eva, 54, his Korean-born wife of 20 years. Despite his success, however, he says he is not immune to racist slights.

"Actually, I collect them, alongside portraits and ice buckets and the opening scenes of movies."

He also deplores critics' ignorance of Chinese food: "What you find is that most critics don't study Chinese food in the way that they study French wine, so their only reference is casual food like takeaways."

Chow claims that the use of the word 'Chinatown' is abusive, even if few Chinese point this out.

He says: "Particularly in England, people still use it, and yet you would never say 'Chinaman', would you? That's like using the 'N' word."

As well as facing racism, Chow has also suffered the loss of family members in China. He never saw his parents again after leaving for boarding school. His brother was also imprisoned and tortured in the Cultural Revolution, and his mother died, suffering illness and exhaustion.

His second marriage, to the model Bettina Lutz in 1973, fell apart. She later became the first prominent heterosexual woman to contract HIV, dying of Aids in 1992.

He says that writing an autobiographical screenplay, which he has just completed, helped provide catharsis.

"There are things I'm pretty cool with now. When you write about things, you come out thinking it's a movie – that it has nothing to do with you."

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