New Year celebrations enter global mainstream

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Lunar New Year celebrations, exported around the world by Chinese miners, sailors and workers in the 19th century, expanded during the 20th century as Chinese communities developed vibrant Chinatowns in major cities. Now, as millions of Chinese and non-Chinese alike celebrated the Year of the Dog over the weekend, Chinese New Year has moved from Chinatown to Downtown.  
It was impossible to move in some parts of central London on Sunday as hundreds of thousands of people watched lion and dragon dances, parades and performances marking the start of the Year of the Dog.  
The celebrations, which organizers said were the largest outside of Asia, started with a parade that featured 50 Chinese dragon and lion dance teams making their way from Trafalgar Square, through London’s West End to Chinatown.  
Similar celebrations have become popular around the world, with grand events being organized to attract the Chinese community as well as mainstream society.  
In London, stage performances began at noon in Trafalgar Square, with firecrackers heralding the start of the celebrations. Pop-up shops and restaurants surrounded the square, offering visitors authentic and diverse regional Chinese food and the chance to buy traditional souvenirs and colorful decorations.  
This year’s celebrations had the theme of “Celebrating the ‘Golden Era’ for UK-China Relations”, referencing a phrase that became popular during President Xi Jinping’s state visit to the UK in 2015.  
Londoner Andy Leung has been involved in the city’s Chinese New Year celebrations for several years, as a performer and producer, and watched them grow.  
“When I got involved it was still a community event, run by and purely for the Chinese community,” he said. “It wasn’t purposely put on to attract tourists.”  
But it has grown over the years, moving to Trafalgar Square. This year’s event was expected to attract 200,000 people.  
“We have more major London companies and city officials and offices involved, making it the huge event it is now,” Leung said.

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