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Author(s)	Vincent Canby
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(The Men Who Tread On The Tiger's Tail) (JAPANESE)

Brandon Films release of Toho Co. production. Features Hanshiro Iwai, Susumu Fujita, Kenichi Enomoto, Denjiro Okochi. Directed and written by Akira Kurosawa; camera, Takeo Ito; sound, Keiji Hasebe; music, Tadashi Iitatori. At Little Carnegie Theatre, N.Y., Jan. 19, '60. Running time, 60 MINS.

This is the kind of picture that needs quite a few program notes to give it meaning, but if the art house exhibitor goes to that trouble, his efforts will not be wasted. Discriminating audiences, properly briefed, should find much of interest in this re-working of an old Kabuki tale, banned first by the Japanese war government in 1945 and then again by the Occupation powers in 1946. The Japanese themselves didn't see it until 1953, and the picture only now is reaching the U. S. as part of Brandon-Films' package of nine Japanese imports.

"The Men Who Tread on The Tiger's Tail," one of the earliest directorial efforts of Akira ("Rashomon") Kurosawa to reach this side, was commissioned by the war-time Japanese government as a propaganda piece aimed at extolling the old conception of feudalism and obedience. Story, a favorite Japanese legend, concerns a 12th Century lord who is forced to flee his territory with only six dedicated retainers to guard him.

Kurosawa, however, supplemented this story of classic heroism and devotion by introducing a low comedy servant. Latter bounces through the solemn proceedings ridiculing and satirizing militarists held so near and dear. For this reason, film was banned the first time. Occupation authorities, in turn, saw none of the humor and promptly banned it as being pro-feudal.

For the present-day U.S. audience, film offers a unique opportunity to see a Kabuki type of drama (a highly stylized presentation in which dance and song are used to move the plot along) translated in screen terms. Satirical or not, it also evokes a quaintly attractive mood of long ago and far away.

Seen in principal roles are Hanshiro Iwai, as the hunted lord; Susumu Fujita, as a magistrate who allows the lord to escape when he understands the extent to which Iwai's retainers will go to protect their leader; Kenichi Enomoto, as the low comedy character; and Denjiro Okochi, as the sage chief of the lord's retainers.

Production values and camera work are not spectacular, but quite adequate, especially considering the fact that when film was in production almost all of the Japanese homeland was being subjected to a daily drubbing by the U.S. Air Force. Anby.

Var: Jan. 27, 1960.