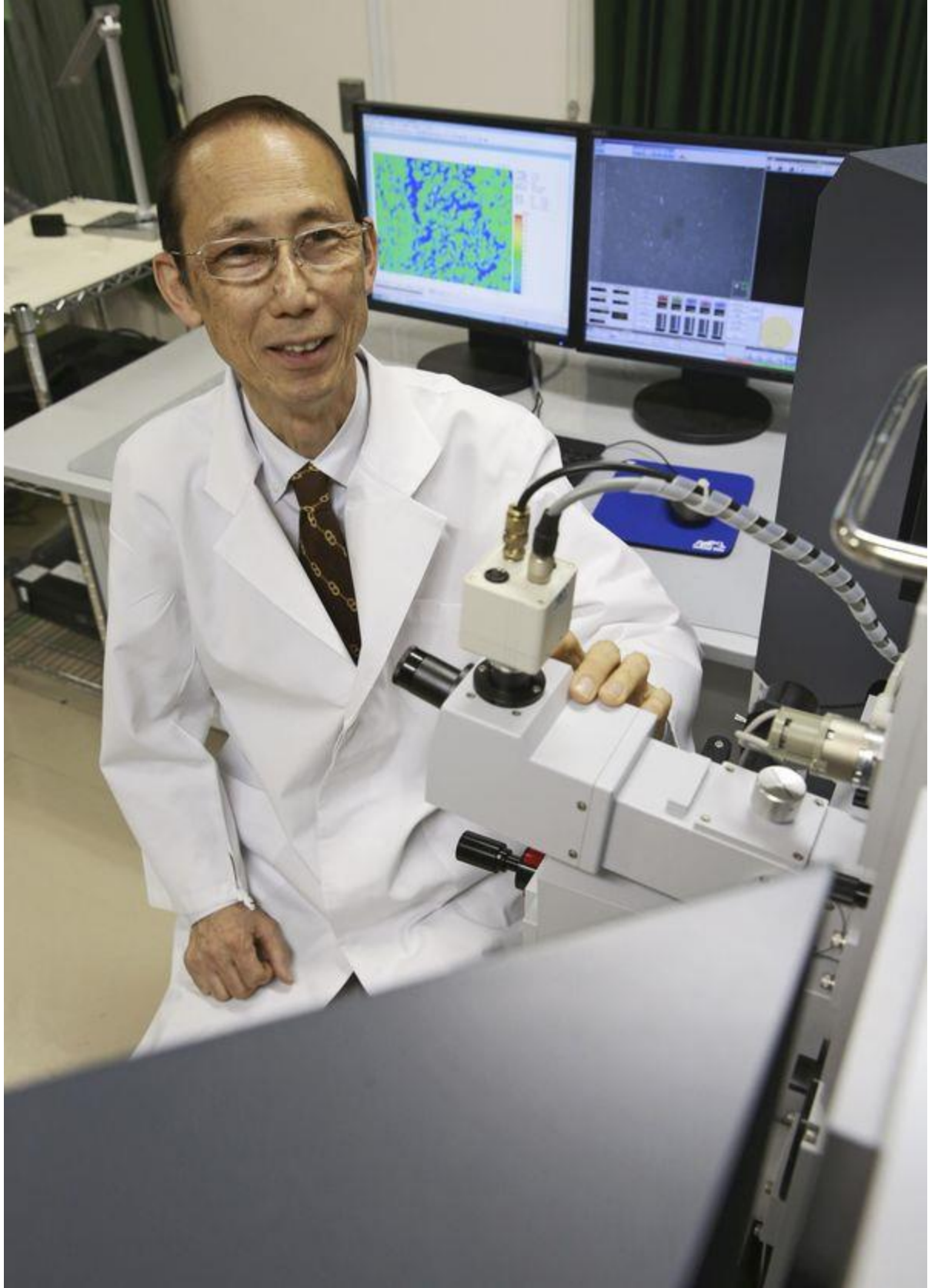


Redeeming lives of Fukushima's irradiated animals

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Manabu Fukumoto

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By Kunio Kobinata / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer
In the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, much remains unknown about the long-term health effects of the radioactive substances released.

Seeking answers, Tohoku University Prof. Manabu Fukumoto has been examining the blood and other factors of slaughtered cattle and wild animals caught by hunters mainly within a 20-kilometer radius of the plant.

Over a four-year period, 300 cows, 60 pigs and 200 Japanese monkeys were checked. "Studying animals that lived in areas with high levels of radioactive material will help shed light on how radiation affects people," Fukumoto said. "In fact, they provide us with a wealth of information."

Fukumoto discovered that cesium levels in the organs of calves were 1.5 times higher than in those of their mothers. "Calves are known to have excellent metabolism, but it was a surprise to learn that radiation could accumulate so easily," the 64-year-old professor said. "We have to pinpoint the cause."

Eggs and sperm will be harvested from such cows for in vitro fertilization. Resulting offspring will then be screened for irregularities in their DNA.

The professor is a pathologist who studied the effects of internal radiation exposure on people who had ingested radioactive substances. After the Fukushima accident, his wife was struck with grief when the government started slaughtering cattle. "If anyone can ensure their deaths weren't in vain, I know it's you," she told him.

Since he was nearing 65, the professor had been contemplating retirement. "I felt I had to prove my mettle as a Japanese researcher," Fukumoto explained.

No longer spending all day peering through microscopes, he now strives to gather samples around the nuclear plant. The professor was convinced that "this is the quickest way to resolve questions regarding long-term radiation exposure."

Using the sample collection and data he has amassed, Fukumoto plans to build an archive on animals exposed to radiation from the Fukushima disaster for the next generation.

"I'm all about being a zoologist now," Fukumoto said with conviction. [Speech](#)