Use of the Word “Ren” in Association with Nails

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In materials on the purchase and sale of nails dating from the ancient period and the Middle Ages there are mentions of “san-ren-kugi” (three ren of nails) and “nana-sun-ni-ren” (two ren of seven sun nails). This paper discusses the use of the word ren used in association with nails as a numeral classifier for nails and as a name for nails. From the 10th century the word ren was used as a counter for a unit of 20 nails, and from the 15th century on it has been used as a name for nails. In about the 15th century, the number of ren of nails that could be bought for a 100 mon was used as the name for those nails. And since this name derived from the price of nails, the same name was used even though the nails may have had varying dimensions or been of different types. It is thought that nails which went by the name ren were distributed in 20-nail lots. In the second half of the 16th century, nails that were called ren came to be distributed under the name tsutsumi (packet). Then, in the Edo period, they were handled in lots called wa (bundle), and the number of ren in one wa of nails was used as the name for those nails. The changes in the way in which the word ren has been used in association with nails allows us to discover the standardization that occurred in the number of nails contained in one lot and the growth that took place in the consumption and distribution of nails.