The Working Group on Humanities and Social Sciences is one of the largest, most active and academically diverse working groups within the HeKKSaGOn Alliance. Its core objective is to facilitate the training of the next generation of transcultural graduate students in the humanities and social science disciplines with a regional focus on Asia and Europe. We have succeeded in initiating a lively and accelerated exchange at all stages of people’s academic career and in setting up joint binational graduate training facilities in the form of bilateral joint M.A. and double Ph.D. degrees programs or joint supervision arrangements. We are at the very forefront of international educational cooperation between German and Japanese universities in terms of scale, scope and institutional innovation. We have started out as a group centered in Japanese Studies at Heidelberg University cooperating with our colleagues at the Graduate Schools of Letters at Japanese HeKKSaGOn Alliance partners. We now also cooperate with Graduate Schools of Law (Tohoku) and Graduate Schools of Economics (Kyoto) as well as several HeKKSaGOn university research institutes in Humanities (Kyoto) and Area Studies (Tohoku, Kyoto). On recent occasions we also had participants from Göttingen and Karlsruhe at the HeKKSaGOn meetings that means all six universities are fully represented.

Within the broad cross-faculty framework of the working group, smaller groups of scholars explore common research themes in more depth at separate workshops or conferences. Among the recurrent and prominent themes emerging into informal networks are Asian and Transcultural Studies, Global History and Japan, Translation Theory, Migration in Comparative Perspective, Gender and Aging Society, State and Religion, Philosophy and History of Ideas, Technology and Culture as well as advanced training in research methods like reading handwritten Japanese paleographic sources (Kuzushi-ji).

In recognition of the fact that Karlsruhe University is known as one of Germany’s preeminent institutions of Science and Technology, the Humanities and Social Sciences section in consultation with the local organizer we decided to choose a topic for the next meeting in Karlsruhe that studies the role of technologies. As the nuclear disaster at Fukushima has shown, the technocratic treatment of technologies in isolation from a larger context can have significant repercussion in today’s world. So we aim to embed technologies into a social and cultural context to understand what technologies are, how they are formed and what they are used for. The tentative title of the working group is “Technology, Culture and Society” and we will precede the general section meeting with a pre-conference workshop exploring technologies in a historical context entitled “Technologies of Empire,” which will also include excellent scholars from outside the HeKKSaGOn Alliance.