

## THE DIGITAL BOOK OF DEEDS IN THE SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are expanding the potential applications of these technologies across various domains of social life. As this diversity increases, the individual and societal impacts of AI are also growing significantly. The AI supported Social Credit System (SCS) which implemented in China is taking existing surveillance over individuals, institutions, and states to a more advanced level. The phenomenon of surveillance has manifested itself throughout human history. Since ancient times, there have been beliefs that a divine power constantly monitors human actions. Today, a human-adapted form of this belief is exemplified by the "SCS" implemented in China. The interplay between society, technology, and science paves the way for new research and inquiry areas in light of recent developments. Particularly, advancements in digital technologies, AI, and their derivatives are increasingly being incorporated into the subjects of inquiry within the sociology of religion. The aim of this study is to provide a metaphorical definition based on the similarities between the SCS, supported by digital technologies such as AI, and the concept of the "book of deeds" embedded in cultural structures. In the current study, qualitative research methods such as comparison and literature review were used and document analysis was used to support this methodology. The comparative method and literature review technique were employed in this study. The concepts of the surveillance society and the SCS are discussed, followed by an analysis of the similarities between the functioning of the SCS and the book of deeds systems. This study is expected to offer a significant perspective that bridges modern technology and religious beliefs.

**Keywords:** AI, Surveillance Society, Social Credit System, Book of Deeds, Metaphor

## GÖZETİM TOPLUMUNUN DİJİTAL AMEL DEFTERİ

### ÖZET

Yapay zeka (YZ) teknolojilerindeki ilerlemeler, söz konusu teknolojilerin sosyal yaşamın farklı alanlarındaki kullanım olanaklarını arttırmaktadır. Bu çeşitlilik arttıkça, YZ'nın bireysel ve toplumsal etkileri de giderek büyümektedir. Çin'de uygulamaya konulan ve YZ ile desteklenen sosyal kredi sistemi (SKS), bireyler, kurumlar ve devletler üzerindeki mevcut gözetimi daha da ileri bir boyuta taşımaktadır. Gözetim olgusu, insanlık tarihi boyunca kendini göstermiştir. Kadim dönemlerden itibaren, ilahi bir gücün insanları sürekli denetlediğine dair inançlar mevcut olmuştur. Günümüzde ise bu inancın insan eliyle uyarlanmış bir formu, Çin'de uygulanan "SKS" örneğiyle kendini göstermektedir. Toplum, teknoloji ve bilimin karşılıklı etkileşimi, yeni gelişmeler ışığında yeni araştırma ve sorgulama alanlarının ortaya çıkmasına zemin hazırlamaktadır. Özellikle dijital teknolojiler, YZ ve bu teknolojinin türevleri ile ilgili gelişmelerin, din sosyolojisinin sorgulama konularına dahil edildiği görülmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, YZ gibi dijital teknolojilerle desteklenen SKS'yi anlama ve açıklama çabası kapsamında, kültürel yapı içinde yer alan "amel defteri" kavramıyla bağlantı kurarak, iki olgu arasındaki benzerliklere dayanan metaforik bir tanımlama sunmaktır. Mevcut çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden karşılaştırma ve literatür taramasından yararlanılmış ve bu yöntemi desteklemek için doküman analizi kullanılmıştır. Mevcut çalışmada karşılaştırma yöntemi ve literatür tarama tekniği kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada, gözetim toplumu ve SKS kavramlarına değinilmiş; sonrasında, SKS'nin işleyişi ile amel defteri sistemlerinin işleyişi arasındaki benzerlikler ortaya konulmuştur. Bu çalışmanın, modern teknoloji ile dini inançlar arasında köprü işlevi gören önemli bir perspektif sunduğu düşünülmektedir.

**Keywords:** YZ, Gözetim Toplumu, Sosyal Kredi Sistemi, Amel Defteri, Metafor

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## INTRODUCTION

As the effects of the digital revolution remain, individuals' lives are increasingly being managed by smart technologies (Rieder & Voelker, 2020). Each day, computers, algorithms, sensors, and software are gaining control over regulatory mechanisms. These technological systems play a decisive role in organizing daily life and influencing individuals' decision-making processes. For instance, their impact is observable in areas such as consumption preferences, media consumption, reading habits, judicial processes, and access to education. Consequently, it is argued that modern society is equipped with intelligent digital technologies that shape and guide both its collective and individual future (Rieder & Voelker, 2020).

Surveillance, a central feature of modernity with various applications, is a widespread phenomenon experienced by individuals in their daily lives; even individuals living ordinary lives in advanced societies cannot escape surveillance (Lyon, 2014a). Furthermore, digital technologies such as AI are used to collect, store, process, and circulate data. Accordingly, researchers define contemporary societies as surveillance societies (Girlando, 2017, p. 23). One of the systems emerging in today's surveillance societies is the Social Credit System (SCS). Initially based on financial and commercial applications, this system which implemented in China, has expanded over time to address societal issues rooted in distrust at all levels of Chinese society (Locker, 2018). The SCS is designed not only as a monitoring and sanction mechanism for individuals and companies violating national regulations but also as a predictive tool to identify undesirable behaviors before their occurrence (Donnelly, 2023). China's national SCS, planned for implementation in 2020 (Wang, 2020), aims to build a "culture of sincerity" or, in other words, an "honest mindset" within society (Cheang, 2017). In essence, the SCS is intended to serve a regulatory and supervisory function within the social structure, creating a self-regulatory mechanism within society without the need for direct state intervention. The system monitors the behavior of individuals and businesses, applying specific sanctions in cases of non-compliance. Its social dimension fosters a mechanism for internal discipline and mutual encouragement among individuals, who monitor and surveil each other to ensure adherence to societal norms. This highlights the critical role of collaboration between technology and individuals in maintaining social order (Creemers, 2018). In this context, the SCS can be seen as using information technology and social cooperation to indirectly fulfill the state's role in monitoring society and establishing a moral order (Creemers, 2018). The Chinese government is striving to build this trust in society through policies addressing both material and moral values. Similar systems, albeit on a smaller scale and under different names, are being implemented in other countries. Examples include Australia's ParentsNext program under its social welfare system, India's Aadhaar identification program (Donnelly, 2023), Italy's Smart Citizen Wallet in some cities (Rosano, 2022), and Germany's SCHUFA system used in housing rentals, purchases, and credit applications (Donnelly, 2023).

Within the triad of science, society, and technology, digital advancements such as AI and robotics are opening new areas of inquiry for secular techno-societies. As the social impacts of AI and its derivatives grow, the study of these technologies is expanding to include the sociology of religion, giving rise to research exploring the social and religious dimensions of the relationship between human societies and AI (Kimura, 2017). A review of the literature reveals various theological approaches to the phenomenon of surveillance. For example, a concept equivalent to panoptic surveillance can be found in the Jewish conception of God. An omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent transcendent power can be likened to a being observing individuals from the pinnacle of a panoptic tower (Strassberg, 2003). Religious texts often depict the world as God's laboratory, where God tests and sometimes ensnares His creations (Strassberg, 2003). When analyzed from a religious perspective, the panopticon concept highlights parallels between the God-surveillance relationship and the ideas of the panopticon and the church (Whitaker, 1999).

Metaphorical concepts have been developed and used in literature to depict the interaction between technology and religion, both of which influence social structures. Metaphor is created by establishing a relationship with existing concepts in the mind in order to understand or explain a new phenomenon.

In this way, it helps to make sense of concepts and facts (Uyan Dur, 2016, p. 124). In this context, Bentham's panopticon represents a secular parody of God's omniscience. In the panopticon, the observers or surveillants, like God, are invisible (Bayhan, 2013, p. 120). Surveillance is sometimes described as viewing the world through God's eyes (Lyon, 2014a). This understanding is explained by the notion that the massive surveillance capacities of 21st-century technological systems possess godlike qualities (Lyon, 2014a). Theological metaphors developed around surveillance often associate the act of surveillance with the "Eye of God in the Sky." This metaphor, derived from biblical narratives of God's omniscience, takes on a more secular meaning in the context of technology, drawing attention to its worldly implications (Lyon, 2014a, p. 31). In other words, the "Eye of God in the Sky" metaphor has lost its spiritual significance and has become a concept expressing the control and regulation exerted by technology. Surveillance systems, in the secular realm, signify the existence of norms related to crime and punishment, accompanied by a fear of external moral authority and its sanctions for non-compliance. In the religious domain, similar norms tied to sin and punishment exist, along with a fear of a supernatural moral authority. In both cases, the fear of sanctions is expected to ensure individuals' adherence to norms (Strassberg, 2003). Another metaphor gaining attention in the literature is that of "algorithmic gods." Human societies, while planning for the future, consider potential developments. In this process, society is becoming increasingly data-driven and regulated by software systems, leading to the emergence of a society governed by the commands of "algorithmic gods" (Rieder & Voelker, 2020). This metaphor underscores the power of AI and algorithms to shape human lives, implying that technology has become a dominant authority guiding individual behavior.

The relationship between AI, robots, and religion has been examined from theological, anthropological, and eschatological perspectives in various studies. Ethical and philosophical debates are being conducted on religious robots. The development of AI and robotics has had significant impacts on social structures, giving rise to new intellectual fields and topics of discussion such as post-humanism, post-panopticon, secular and divine surveillance, omniscipicon, machine apotheosis, theomorphic robots, and the SCS. These developments raise different intellectual and philosophical questions at the intersection of technology and religion. As these technologies become integrated into social life, new research is being initiated to explore the relationship between religion, society, and technology (Kimura, 2017, p. 2). Within the scope of this study, the operational mechanism of the SCS, supported by AI systems, is evaluated from a faith-based perspective. While discussing the SCS, an interreligious viewpoint is touched upon, but the focus is primarily on the perspective within Islamic belief. In this context, each component of the studies examined in the literature review, such as title, theoretical/conceptual framework, and discussion, was analyzed (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012) and the general framework of the research was drawn. Then, the selected document (Qur'an) was examined through document analysis and a comparison was made between the concepts of "book of deeds" and "SCS" in the Qur'an. In the study, the concepts of surveillance and surveillance society are first explained, and then a detailed examination is made on what the social credit system is and how this system works. SCS cannot be explained with a single surveillance model. Since the operation of SCS is multi-layered and complex, it can be said that it is similar to different types of surveillance in different aspects. In particular, it overlaps with the panopticon due to centralized surveillance and discipline; the superpanopticon due to the fact that everyone is constantly monitored and is data-oriented; and the banopticon due to the scoring of individuals according to certain criteria. It can be said that SCS has a hybrid structure that includes these forms of surveillance. Subsequently, the similarities between the SCS and the concept of the "book of deeds" in Islamic belief are analyzed, and a metaphor is proposed. Examining the SCS from a faith-based perspective is expected to contribute to a better understanding of its effects on society and spirituality.

## **SURVEILLANCE AND THE SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY**

Surveillance is the process of collecting information about individuals or objects, storing this information, and monitoring the activities of the relevant entities (Whitaker, 1999, p. 40). In this context, architectural structures such as prisons play a significant role in monitoring individuals (Whitaker, 1999, p. 40). In his work on the birth of the prison, Michel Foucault conceptualizes the "panopticon" not merely as a specific building design but also as a schema of a power mechanism

which is a technological-political figure (as cited in Whitaker, 1999). Initially developed to correct undesirable behaviors, panoptic prison surveillance gradually spread to areas such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces, creating a widespread surveillance system in modern society (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). The image of the panopticon lies at the center of contemporary surveillance debates (Whitaker, 1999). The concept of the panopticon was first introduced as an idea by Jeremy Bentham and later examined by Foucault. Over time, this concept which initially designed for a factory but later adapted as a prison model, became a powerful image in modern thought (Acemoğlu & Johnson, 2023, p. 12). In the 18th century, Bentham described the panoptic prison design using the metaphor of the "Eye of God" due to its ability to "see without being seen" (Veryy, 2021). Bentham's panopticon design for prisons features a circular structure with isolated cells, making it impossible for one prisoner to see or hear others. At the center of the panopticon is a watchtower that allows a guard to observe all cells simultaneously. Prisoners cannot see the guard and are never certain whether they are being watched. However, the guard can see all the prisoners. The aim of this design is to make prisoners believe that they are constantly under surveillance, encouraging them to behave as if they are being watched at all times, even in the absence of actual monitoring (Acemoğlu & Johnson, 2023; Whitaker, 1999; Strassberg, 2003). Prisoners live according to the norms set by the prison and know that they will be punished for disobedience if they violate these norms. This awareness creates a constant state of fear (Strassberg, 2003). In essence, the panopticon functions like a theater, where what is staged is not constant surveillance itself but the illusion of being under surveillance (Whitaker, 1999).

Foucault noted that surveillance mechanisms which initially developed for exceptional cases in the 18th and 19th centuries, were gradually generalized and transformed into a widespread control system, giving rise to what he termed the "Disciplinary Society" (Whitaker, 1999, p. 51). The assembly line, which developed in the late stages of the Industrial Revolution, brought with it a form of production in which workers' movements were constantly recorded and monitored. The smallest movements of the workers on the assembly line were noted to avoid disruptions in the production process and to increase labor efficiency (Whitaker, 1999). Employers and factory owners even used their power to build social areas such as schools, swimming pools and churches around the factory. Thus, the family lives of workers were also monitored and shaped by employers (Burawoy, 1985). The panopticon, through administrative authorities, expanded the control and discipline mechanisms which initially implemented in specialized closed institutions, eventually transforming into a structure that disciplines the entire society (Whitaker, 1999, p. 51). Foucault emphasized that surveillance was no longer confined to limited areas but had spread more broadly, becoming an integral part of individuals' daily lives (Strassberg, 2003). Deleuze (1992) also put forward similar views and drew attention to the fact that surveillance is an open and continuously operating system with the expression "control society". *'The conception of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant (whether animal in a reserve or human in a corporation, as with an electronic collar), is not necessarily one of science fiction'* (Deleuze 1992: 7), indicates that surveillance is carried out in every area, outside of closed spaces, and is being restructured to keep up with the digital age.

In the context of the surveillance society, the term "surveillance" is often associated with cameras and Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) footage. However, non-visual, or virtual, surveillance has gained greater significance today. Data processed through computer-assisted software and statistical analyses produce far more surveillance material than visual images from cameras (Lyon, 2014a, p. 23). In this regard, it can be said that surveillance is constantly evolving and being restructured in certain ways. Different types of data are collected and used in new forms (van Dijck, 2014). With the structural transformation that surveillance has undergone (Okmeydan 2017), the concepts of post-panopticon, synopticon, superpanopticon, omnipticon and banopticon have been developed on the concept of panopticon. Societies have now experienced a transformation from the panopticon (Bauman, 2000), a primitive form of surveillance in traditional small communities where deviations from social norms are detected and reacted to, technological tools are not used and face-to-face interactions are based, to the post-panopticon. Since the panopticon was inadequate to explain current surveillance practices, the concept of post-panopticon, which encompasses complex, mutual and digital forms of surveillance, has been replaced. Post-panopticon is used to describe forms of surveillance that go beyond the classical



panopticon (Boyne, 2000). Although post-panopticon is used to describe today's surveillance, the discipline, constant monitoring and control of the panoptic surveillance concept continues. It just manifests itself in different ways within new cultures and conditions (Boyne, 2000). The concept of synopticon, which is the exact opposite of panopticon, means that the more follows the less (Okmeydan 2017). In other words, in the synopticon, the majority of the society observes the lives of a small number of people (Öztürk, 2013). Superpanopticon surveillance, unlike synopticon, refers to decentralized, pervasive, and digital forms of surveillance. This understanding of surveillance involves monitoring individuals anytime and anywhere through AI-supported digital network systems and platforms such as social media, mobile applications, and internet services (Badenhoop, 2021). Omnipanopticon surveillance, which goes beyond surveillance concepts such as panopticon, synopticon and superpanopticon, is a type of surveillance in which everyone watches everyone or the majority watches the majority. In this model, individuals are not only passive consumers, but also producers and followers of data (Jurgenson, 2011). Big data is obtained through digital surveillance, where the data resulting from the social actions of individuals are monitored, collected and analyzed through technological infrastructures (Lyon, 2014b). The processing of this data within the scope of surveillance has also revealed the banopticon mechanism. In the banopticon, data such as individuals' consumption behaviors, credit card expenses, debts, and interests are recorded and individuals are classified as useful and not useful. Some sanctions are applied to unreliable individuals in the system (Balci & Kocaman 2022).

AI and related technologies are becoming increasingly pervasive and integrated into every aspect of human life. This has led human societies to confront the impacts of these technologies, transforming individuals' personal and social lives in various ways (Borenstein & Howard, 2021). Employers can secretly and unexpectedly monitor employees' performance and behavior. For example, data obtained from an employee's activities on social media platforms can lead to disadvantages in the hiring process. Local governments can use facial recognition technology to identify individuals in public spaces (Borenstein & Howard, 2021). The phenomenon of social media has contributed to the strengthening of state surveillance and serves as a source of vast amounts of data used for commerce and security purposes. The social activities of ordinary users are collected as data, subjected to quantitative analysis, and classified, enabling real-time monitoring and surveillance applications (Lyon, 2014b). Today, surveillance practices are diversifying and becoming easier to implement. The integration of AI and related technologies has fundamentally altered and expanded the dynamics of the surveillance society. Individuals are constantly under surveillance while commuting, traveling on public transport, making phone calls, browsing social media, shopping with credit cards, or watching movies. This demonstrates the pervasive and uninterrupted impact of modern surveillance technologies on individuals' daily activities.

## **THE SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM**

The SCS, a social governance program (Creemers, 2018), is a scoring system implemented in China. This system has attracted the attention of researchers and studies have been carried out on it with increasing interest in recent years (Yu et al., 2015; Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018; Bach, 2020; Ding & Zhong, 2020; Jiang, 2020; Wu & Zhang 2023). The SCS operates as a feedback mechanism encompassing economic, social, and political behaviors. It not only assesses whether actions are legally compliant but also considers moral values in applying rewards or penalties to actors (Creemers, 2018). The philosophical foundation of the SCS is based on the premise that the state should go beyond being merely a legal authority, instead promote social morality and shape society using scientific methods. In Chinese tradition, there is a strong connection between morality and authority, with the belief that "Heaven" grants power to just rulers while withdrawing it from unjust ones (Creemers, 2018). According to the "Mandate of Heaven" doctrine, an ancient deity or divine power, known as Heaven, selects an individual to rule on its behalf. The ruler has a moral obligation to use this power for the well-being of the people. However, if the ruler abuses this power, the state faces significant calamities, and the ruler loses the right to govern (Cartwright, 2017). Signs indicating a ruler's loss of legitimacy included invasions by foreign forces, droughts, famines, floods, and earthquakes. These disasters were perceived as expressions of Heaven's discontent and considered a form of divine punishment

(Szczepanski, 2019). Confucian moral teachings hold a significant place in the SCS within Chinese tradition. Lessons designed to promote Confucian ethics in schools and rural areas are regarded as fundamental elements of the system (Creemers, 2018). The philosophical underpinnings of the SCS can be traced to this ideological framework, emphasizing the promotion of "sincerity" (*chengxin*) and "trustworthiness" (*yongxin*). The SCS gained importance during a period marked by increased corruption due to weak central leadership and greater local government autonomy. It was initiated during Hu Jintao's second term and accelerated under Xi Jinping's leadership (Brown & Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2018).

The Chinese government initially introduced the SCS to enhance the market economy. Trust is a crucial element for the healthy functioning of markets, and a lack of trust was identified as a significant issue in China. The SCS first appeared on the high-level political agenda during the 16th Party Congress in 2002, when then-General Secretary Jiang Zemin presented a Political Report calling for its establishment as part of efforts to modernize the market system (Creemers, 2018). The SCS, which is linked to economic governance, is a mechanism that measures the financial reliability of individuals and institutions, such as the FICO score used in the USA (Creemers, 2018), and also creates performative effects. Economic models not only reflect "what is" but also construct "what is happening" (Lukács, 1922: 204). Similarly, it can be said that SCS does not only observe or develop discourse but also shapes or constructs the order. Austin (1962) distinguished between constative and performative expressions and stated that language not only represents the situation but also creates this situation. Performative is constructing and transforming reality beyond a means-ends center where outcomes depend on resources (Vignieri & Grippi 2024). Discourses construct realities as well as describe them. In other words, systems or practices not only describe but also perform what is intended (Callon 2007). The FICO score evaluates consumers based on timely debt payments, outstanding balances, and credit history (Citron & Pasquale, 2014). The SCS appears to have drawn inspiration from this type of scoring system (Chen, Lin & Liu, 2018). In SCS, "trustworthy person" or "good citizen" is not just an evaluation expression; the desired identity is achieved by the system by encouraging the individual to act according to the rules of the system or to get high scores. In addition, as desired behavioral patterns are approved, they become more widespread (Ferraro et al. 2005). In this context, the system in question is becoming widespread as it is accepted. As can be seen, economic or other systems are active structures because they create a performative effect, and these systems do not only measure but also direct behavior (MacKenzie, 2006).

In China's 11th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development in 2006, the acceleration of SCS construction was discussed. This plan highlighted the need to digitize and integrate information not only related to financial credit but also tax payments, contract breaches, and product quality. Additionally, it included efforts to compile this information into a unified database (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018, p. 8). This development indicates that the concept and scope of social credit began to extend beyond traditional financial credit. A major motivation behind these efforts was public complaints regarding widespread "trust violations" in society, such as food safety scandals, asset concealment to evade taxes, and non-compliance with court rulings. These issues emphasized the need to assess individuals and businesses not only financially but also in terms of ethical and social responsibility (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018, p. 9). Consequently, the demand for constructing a credit system to encourage honesty within society became evident (Creemers, 2018).

The connection between the SCS and social governance began at the local level. In certain regions, communities with high credit scores were awarded honorary titles such as "credit town" or "credit community" (Creemers, 2018). This practice aimed to reward well-performing local communities and promote social responsibility awareness. In 2007, the State Council of China established an interministerial joint conference responsible for systematically addressing the development of the SCS. The first tangible outcome of this initiative was a pilot program launched in 2010 in Suining, a city in Jiangsu Province. Under the "Mass Credit Program" each citizen was initially assigned 1,000 points, which were deducted in cases of undesirable behavior (Bachulska, 2020, pp. 15-16). For instance, a conviction for drunk driving resulted in a 50-point deduction, having a child without a family planning permit led to a 35-point deduction, and failure to repay debts incurred a 30 to 50-point penalty. Lost

points could be regained within two to five years, depending on the severity of the violation and compliance with regulations (Creemers, 2018). As part of the SCS, citizens were categorized into four groups—A, B, C, and D—based on their scores. The A-class represented individuals with the highest scores, granting them preferential access to certain benefits (Von Bloomberg, 2018, p. 92). This pilot program was compared to the "Good Citizen Cards" issued by Japan during its occupation of China in World War II, leading to considerable debate. Although the pilot project concluded, some of its features persisted in subsequent programs initiated after 2014, guiding the long-term development of the national SCS (Bachulska, 2020). In 2014, the State Council of China published a draft outlining the scope, implementation methods, and timeline for the SCS, aiming for full implementation by 2020 (Jili, 2019). This draft served as a foundational document, setting objectives such as establishing a legal and regulatory framework for the SCS, constructing credit review and monitoring mechanisms, promoting a market based on credit services, and completing reward-punishment mechanisms. The plan also addressed systematic methods for recording credit-related data, centralizing and localizing databases, ensuring public access to credit reports, and fostering information-sharing processes to prevent data isolation in bureaucracy. A key component of this plan was the merit-based reward-punishment system using red and blacklists, where individuals and stakeholders were evaluated based on established criteria. Those demonstrating high merit were rewarded, while underperformers faced penalties (Creemers, 2018).

### **Social Credit System and Information Technologies**

The SCS implemented in China can be defined as a collection of databases used to monitor individuals, businesses, and government institutions within the country (State Council, 2014). AI plays a crucial role in China's social credit scoring system, and utilization of this technology is considered a critical factor in enhancing the system's effectiveness (Borenstein & Howard, 2021). In China, streets, stations, airports, schools, and hospitals are monitored through cameras, and it is also known that internet data is tracked and utilized (Lyon, 2014a). The Chinese government contributes to the functioning of the SCS by monitoring the behavior of its citizens both in physical environments and online spaces (Donnelly, 2023). By leveraging information technologies, the Chinese government has developed systems that enable the collection, storage, processing, sharing, and utilization of data (Creemers, 2018) and has integrated AI into this system (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018, p. 26). With advancements in AI technologies, the collection of personal data and the processing of this data through advanced algorithms have become possible (Elie, 2022). China holds the highest number of CCTV surveillance systems globally (Impiombato, Lau, & Gyhn, 2023). The country has deployed an extensive network of over 200 million cameras, facilitating the implementation of AI-powered facial recognition technology (Donnelly, 2023). The widespread use of Internet of Things (IoT) devices allows for detailed tracking of individuals' movements, and the data obtained is utilized as input for applications such as the SCS (Ahmed, 2017). Additionally, as the development of digital technologies, individuals' online communications, conversations, and biometric data are systematically collected for surveillance purposes (Liu, 2019). This has significant implications for analyzing social behavior and strengthening control mechanisms. The data supporting the SCS is obtained from various sources. This data is collected from different platforms such as public spaces, mobile applications, facial recognition cameras, and social media networks (Raphaël & Xi, 2019).

The operation of the SCS consists of data collection, sharing, labeling, and the application of sanctions. This process systematically analyzes and evaluates individuals' online and offline behaviors, enabling the creation of profiles based on specific criteria and the enforcement of sanctions when necessary (Zhang, 2020). During the data collection phase, personalized data is stored using 18-digit identification codes assigned to individuals and businesses to detect disruptive behaviors. This unique code assigned to each individual and business is referred to as the "Social Credit Unified Code (SC Unicode)" (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018, p. 11). This system, based on the assigned identification number, collects, analyzes, and ultimately enforces sanctions in the form of penalties and rewards (Chorzempa, Triolo, & Sacks, 2018, p. 2). If individuals engage in behaviors that violate social norms, they may be placed on a "blacklist" along with their names and social credit scores. Conversely, individuals who exhibit behaviors that align with social norms and support social trust and order, are included on the

"red list" (Cho, 2020). The period for removal from the blacklist ranges from two to five years, depending on factors such as the severity of the offense and whether the individual has made sufficient efforts for rehabilitation (Donnelly, 2023). Individuals on the red list are granted various privileges that directly impact their daily lives (Donnelly, 2023). Those on the blacklist face restrictions in economic, social, and employment sectors. Specifically, individuals on the blacklist can only make accommodation reservations at certain hotels and encounter various limitations and difficulties when applying for jobs in the public service sector (Heng & Colum, 2016). Additionally, blacklisted individuals are restricted from employment in industries such as pharmaceuticals, food, banking, and state-owned enterprises (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018, p. 30). Since the implementation of the blacklist system, 4.9 million airline passengers and more than 1.6 million train passengers have been prevented from traveling, illustrating the impact of the SCS on individuals' freedom of movement (O'Meara, 2016).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Advancements in information technologies generate various effects on individuals, evoking both admiration and concern. It has been noted that advanced technologies, particularly AI, are sometimes attributed to sacred qualities and elevated to divine status by certain individuals (Geraci, 2007). Research on AI and religion has been increasing, with a growing focus on analyzing the relationship between AI and religious thought (Andriansyah, 2023). The responses of humans to intelligent machines reveal that these technologies are sometimes elevated to a divine status. This phenomenon, which manifests as the attribution of sacred qualities to AI and robots, is referred to in the literature as "machine apotheosis" (Geraci, 2007). In this context, various academic studies have been conducted from theological and religious perspectives on AI and robots. These studies examine how AI is related to religious thought and how it is evaluated from theological perspectives. Discussions on the relationship between robots and religion are widespread in the literature (DeBaets, 2012; Kimura, 2017; Balle & Ess, 2020; Cheong, 2020; Ahmed & La, 2021; Löffler et al., 2021; Trovato et al., 2021; Nord et al., 2023) with metaphorical definitions being commonly used in this context. Thus, it is necessary to analyze the SCS, which is supported by digital technologies, from different perspectives and to engage in discussions on this topic. Such an examination is essential for understanding the impact of digital technologies on social structures. Additionally, research in the field of sociology of religion is needed in this regard. Therefore, this study aims to provide a metaphorical definition based on the similarities between the SCS and the concept of the "Book of Deeds" in religious and cultural contexts. Therefore, this study aims to provide a metaphorical definition based on the similarities between the two phenomena by establishing a connection with the concept of "book of deeds" in the cultural structure, within the scope of the effort to understand and explain the SCS experienced by today's society, which is described as a surveillance society (Girlando, 2017).

In the current study, literature which is a qualitative research method that allows systematic examination of information and resources review (Hoepfl, 1997) and the document analysis technique to support this method were used. Document analysis can be used alone or to complement other managements (Morgan 2022). Document refers to versatile material that includes visual sources such as videos and photographs, as well as documents consisting of texts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The number of documents used in document analysis may vary depending on the research question and the research process (Morgan 2022). When selecting a document, attention is paid to the document's realism (originality), reliability, representational adequacy and meaning factors (Kridel 2015; Flick 2018). If progress is made with the selected document or documents and a theme can be developed, and more data gives the same themes or is insufficient to develop a theme, it shows that the existing data is sufficient and content appropriate to the themes is written (Morgan 2022:73). In other words, when the relevant themes are repeated, the analysis has reached saturation (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012). When creating themes in document analysis, a reflexive approach is adopted in which the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as the source and the coding process is flexible (Morgan 2022). In this context, a scan was conducted on documents such as academic articles and reports written about SCS. Existing information on the subject was compiled and gaps in the field of research were identified. Document analysis was carried out at the textual level in order to learn basic information and identify relevant



verses regarding the sections of the documents related to the book of deeds of the holy text of the Quran. The discourses in the verses were analyzed to reveal key concepts or themes. The themes or variations thereof were used as the titles of paragraphs and sections (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012). The comparative method, which enables an evaluation of the structural and functional similarities between the SCS and the "Book of Deeds" concept, has been utilized to reveal their connection. This method facilitates comparison between different phenomena, highlighting similarities and drawing conclusions (Top & Yiğit, 2013). In this context, the SCS has been compared with the concept of the "Book of Deeds" in Islamic belief. By approaching the SCS within a religious paradigm, this study attempts to establish a metaphor by analyzing the contextual relationship between the SCS and the "Book of Deeds." This research is significant as it contributes specifically to the field, provides a different perspective on the topic, enriches the discussion through the proposed metaphor, and serves as a reference for future studies on social credit applications in Muslim societies.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM AND THE BOOK OF DEEDS

This section examines the SCS based on the principles of the Book of Deeds in Islamic belief and highlights their similarities. The word "amal" (deed) appears in the Qur'an more than 300 times. In Islamic literature, it is referenced as a genre of books known as "amal-yewm wa'l-layla" (Dönmez, 1991, p.20). The Book of Deeds, mentioned in the Qur'an under the names "kitab" and "suhuf," is also referred to as "Kitab al-A'mal" or "Sahifat al-A'mal." According to Qur'anic exegeses, these terms denote a record in which a person's life is accounted for in writing. The Qur'an states that individuals' beliefs and actions in this world will be recorded in this book and handed to them after death (Kılavuz, 1991, p. 20). A relevant Qur'anic verse states: *"And [for] every person We have imposed his fate upon his neck, and We will produce for him on the Day of Resurrection a record which he will encounter spread open. Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant."* (Isra, 17/13-14)". According to Islamic teachings, the Book of Deeds serves as a comprehensive record of every action, both good and evil, performed by individuals, similar to a surveillance recording to be used for accountability in the afterlife (Çicek, 2019). However, the concept of a record of deeds is not unique to Islam. Other religious traditions also hold beliefs regarding posthumous judgment based on earthly actions. In Christianity, it is believed that individuals will have their own books and will be judged accordingly, with those not listed in the "Book of Life" condemned to eternal fire (McHugh, 1910; Metropolit, 2012, p. 44). Similarly, Judaism contains a system of moral accountability known as *mitzvot*, a set of 613 commandments in the Torah that Jewish individuals must observe in addition to the Ten Commandments to attain paradise (Wikipedia, 2023). According to belief of reincarnation, which is named in different ways, it is believed that the soul of the dead comes to life again in a different body, and even if there is no direct belief in the afterlife, it is seen that there is a reference to life after death. In such traditions, the soul continues its journey through multiple existences until it achieves purification, implying that rebirth functions as a form of atonement or punishment within the framework of spiritual evolution (Tasdemir, 2017, p.249-254). This idea aligns with a symbolic reward-and-punishment system, mirroring the dualistic heaven-and-hell construct found in other religious doctrines.

**Continuity of Surveillance and Recording:** To comprehend the relationship between SCS and the Book of Deeds, both phenomena must be analyzed concurrently. Both systems operate based on the presence of an observer (a recording system or divine accountability) and the observed (individual actions). Thus, an unavoidable and continuous surveillance mechanism is a defining characteristic of both. This structural similarity indicates that through persistent monitoring and recording of actions, a regulatory and supervisory mechanism is established to ensure compliance with both social norms and moral values. The parallel between the digital oversight mechanisms employed by SCS and the faith-based accountability of the Book of Deeds suggests the existence of a shared control paradigm in regulating individual behavior. In a surveillance society, individuals experience monitoring at various levels through different mechanisms, making it nearly impossible to escape these processes. In other words, surveillance is a universal practice encompassing all individuals without exception (Lyon, 2014a). Every action individuals take through their mobile phones is continuously recorded and

monitored by numerous companies. This practice of surveillance is not limited to ordinary citizens but extends to all sectors of society, including high-ranking officials such as the President of the United States (Thomson & Warzel, 2019). In contemporary life, nearly every activity such as walking on the street, speaking on the phone, shopping, or browsing the internet is monitored and recorded by various oversight mechanisms, including SCS. In Islamic belief, it is held that God sees everything and that no one can escape divine observation. The Qur'anic verse from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:233) states: "...and know that Allah is Seeing of what you". Similarly, another verse states: "Indeed, Allah knows the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is Seeing of what you do (Hujurat 489/18)." Another verse emphasizes the documentation of deeds: "This, Our record, speaks about you in truth. Indeed, We were having transcribed whatever you used to do. (Jathiyah 45/29)". "...The weight of an atom, in the sky or on earth, is not hidden from the knowledge of your Lord (Yunus 10/61)." Islamic belief holds that God has assigned angels to observe human actions and record them in the Book of Deeds. This is reflected in the following Qur'anic verses: "Over you are angels who record your deeds. They know whatever you do (Infitar, 82/10-12)." "Man does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared [to record] (Qaf, 50:18)" the verses mention the existence of angels who are always with people and record everything that is done (Çiçek, 2019). Thus, in the concept of the Book of Deeds, the act of surveillance operates in tandem with the process of recording, ensuring a continuous and uninterrupted system of oversight. In the modern digital era, SCS functions similarly by continuously monitoring individuals' actions through mobile phones, internet activities, and daily transactions which in fact are recorded by numerous corporations. It is claimed that no one can escape this surveillance. Likewise, in Islamic belief, God sees everything and assigns angels to monitor and record human actions in the Book of Deeds. This belief reinforces the idea that no one can escape divine scrutiny. In both systems, the universality and inevitability of surveillance emerge as fundamental principles. Through digital technologies, individuals in SCS are constantly monitored, while in Islamic belief, individuals are evaluated within a framework of absolute divine oversight and an uninterrupted record-keeping process maintained by angels.

**Inalterability and Irrefutability:** There is a parallel between the data recording and scoring processes of SCS and the concept of the "Book of Deeds" in Islam. In the SCS, it is not possible to object to recorded data, scoring processes, or results, as algorithms directly monitor and record individuals' actions. However, this process contains uncertainties, particularly in data analysis (Citron & Pasquale, 2014). Similarly, in the belief regarding the Book of Deeds, it is held that individuals' actions are recorded completely and precisely. At the time of judgment, no one will be able to object to or deny these records, as all actions will be clearly and definitively revealed (Çelik, 2011, p. 88). In the SCS, individuals have minimal ability to intervene in the scores and results produced by the system. This indicates that people have limited opportunities to contest the consequences of their actions. Likewise, in the concept of the Book of Deeds, every action performed throughout an individual's life is recorded, and at the final judgment, no one can provide a defense or raise an objection. This belief is based on the absolute nature of divine justice and the notion that everything is fully known by God. In this context, it can be argued that the principles of recording and irrefutability in both the Book of Deeds and the SCS share similar foundations.

**Recording Agents:** Personal data collected in the SCS is processed by algorithms (Elie, 2022). People carry these algorithms with them by using mobile phones, computers, and tablets. From this perspective, in Islamic belief, angels accompany individuals and record their actions in the Book of Deeds. The Qur'an states: "Over you are angels who record your deeds. They know whatever you do (Infitar, 82/10-12)." Another verse states: "When the two receivers receive, seated on the right and on the left (When the two receiving angels receive his deeds: one sitting on his right, and the other seated on his left) (Qaf, 50:17)". The term "sitting" in Surah Qaf signifies "observing," referring to the angels who monitor individuals' actions (Çelik, 2011, p.103). These angels, known as Kiraman Katibin or Hafaza (Çelik, 2011, p. 90), are believed to be two in number, positioned on the right and left of a person. The angel on the right records good deeds, while the one on the left records bad deeds (Çelik, 2011, p. 104). In both systems, recording agents are present and remain close to individuals: in the SCS, this role is undertaken by algorithms, whereas in the Book of Deeds, it is fulfilled by angels. This reveals two key similarities: first, the presence of recording agents in both systems, and second, their

proximity to individuals. However, while the recording agents in the SCS (i.e., algorithms) possess tangible and empirical characteristics, those in the Book of Deeds (i.e., angels) have intangible and supernatural attributes. Additionally, the recording processes in the SCS are concrete and empirical, whereas the concept of the Book of Deeds is abstract in nature.

**Symbolism and Categorization:** As mentioned earlier, Kiraman Katibin angels are believed to be positioned on both the right and left sides of an individual, with the right-side angels recording good actions and the left-side angels recording bad actions. In the Qur'an, the way the Book of Deeds is handed over symbolizes categorization. Those who receive their records in their right hands are referred to as "ashabu'l-yamin," whereas those who receive them from the left or behind are called "ashabu'l-shimal" (Çiçek, 2019). The Qur'an states: *"So as for he who is given his record in his right hand, he will say, 'Here, read my record!' (Al-Haqqah, 69/19)".* Another verse describes: *"The companions of the right - what are the companions of the right? (And the People of the Right: who are the People of the Right? Their rank and status with Allah is indeed, great!) (Al-Waqi'a, 56/27)."* Conversely, *"But as for he who is given his record in his left hand, he will say, 'Oh, I wish I had not been given my record (Al-Haqqah, 69/25)".* *"And the companions of the left - what are the companions of the left? (As for the People of the Left: who are the People of the Left? Their state and outcome is indeed, very bad) (Al-Waqi'a, 56/41)".* The term "ashabu'l-shimal" represents those who break their covenant with God, engage in wrongdoing, and receive their Book of Deeds in their left hands. In contrast, "ashabu'l-yamin" represents those who uphold their covenant with God, perform righteous deeds, fulfill their social responsibilities, and receive their Book of Deeds in their right hands (Aytekin, 1991, p. 470-472). As is known, the SCS employs blacklists and red lists. Individuals who maintain social order and exhibit positive behaviors are placed on "red lists," whereas those who disrupt order and display negative behaviors are placed on "blacklists" (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018, p. 13). The symbolic classifications in Islamic eschatological narratives bear resemblance to the categorization mechanisms employed in the SCS. According to the Islamic perspective, the way the Book of Deeds is handed over indicates a classification based on individuals' actions in the world. Those who perform good deeds and uphold their covenant with God are classified as "ashabu'l-yamin," while those who act wickedly and break their covenant with God are referred to as "ashabu'l-shimal." This distinction represents the symbolic reflection of a reward and punishment system in the afterlife. According to the SCS, individuals' social behaviors are recorded, and those who exhibit positive behavior are placed on red lists, whereas those with negative behavior are placed on blacklists.

Another relevant aspect of his context is that in SCS, individuals are categorized based on their scores, ranging from A to D. An "A" rating denotes the highest score, whereas a "D" rating signifies the lowest. Individuals with high scores receive incentives such as discounts on loans and easier access to healthcare, while those with low scores are subjected to certain sanctions (Lee, 2017). Evaluation criteria include voluntary blood donation and being recognized as a diligent worker (Donnelly, 2023). In Islam, people are classified based on their beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles. Faith-based classifications include "kafir" (disbeliever), "mushrik" (polytheist), "munafiq" (hypocrite), and "Ahl al-Kitab" (People of the Book), whereas action-based classifications include "fasiq" (sinner), "mujrim" (criminal), "mufsid" (corrupter), "musrif" (extravagant), "mufteri" (slanderer), "zalim" (oppressor), and "kazib" (liar) (Aslan, 2017, p.206-219). This classification system in Islam demonstrates similarities with the SCS's approach to categorizing individuals' behavior. Both systems classify individuals based on their attitudes and actions and implement reward and punishment mechanisms accordingly. In other words, both are systems that evaluate individuals' behaviors and regulate their consequences accordingly.

**The Impact on Behavioral Consequences:** Religion addresses the issue of moral sanctions by assuming the existence of a God who implements a mechanism of posthumous punishment or reward. However, in the panopticon framework, there is no need for belief in an afterlife to enforce sanctions; all monitoring and punishment processes occur within the real world. In the panoptic design, prisoners believe that they are constantly being watched, which instills a fear of punishment and leads them to internalize the rules (Whitaker, 1999, p. 50). In the SCS, individuals are placed on red or black lists based on their actions and are rewarded or punished accordingly. This aims to establish social trust and



maintain order (Chen, Lin, & Liu, 2018). Penalties in the SCS include restricted access to certain universities or schools, travel bans, employment barriers, and similar measures. Conversely, individuals on the red list are granted various privileges that affect their daily lives (Donnelly, 2023). In Islamic belief, the concept of the book of deeds emphasizes that individuals will be rewarded or punished in the afterlife based on their good or bad actions in this world (Çelik, 2011, p. 101). A relevant Quranic verse states: *“That Day, the people will depart separated [into categories] to be shown [the result of] their deeds. So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it (Zalzalah 99/6-7-8)”*. Those who receive their book of deeds in their right hand (ashābu'l-yamīn) are described as the ones destined for Heaven. These individuals, having done good deeds in the world, will be rewarded in the afterlife with a blissful life in Heaven, depicted as a place with “lush cherry trees, layered banana fruits, flowing waters, endless fruits, and perpetual shade” (Aytekin, 1991, p. 472). On the other hand, those who receive their book of deeds in their left hand (ashābu'l-shimāl) will be punished in Hell, described in various ways. A related verse states: *“Whoever does a wrong will be recompensed for it, and he will not find besides Allah a protector or a helper (Nisa 4/123)”*, emphasizing that anyone who performs evil deeds will face consequences (İyibilgin, 2020, p. 12). In Islamic teachings, the recording of good and evil deeds in the book of deeds is decisive in the final reckoning in the afterlife. Those given their book in their right hand are rewarded, while those given it in their left hand are punished. Quranic verses emphasize that even the smallest good or evil deed will be accounted for. In the SCS, individuals on the black or red lists experience specific privileges or restrictions in their social and economic lives. The creation of red (rewarded) and black (punished) lists based on the scoring system aims to ensure social trust and order. In this context, both systems reward or punish individuals based on the consequences of their actions in daily life. In other words, both systems aim to shape behavior through a form of accountability and the resulting rewards or punishments. While the SCS uses economic, social, and educational sanctions to encourage individuals to act in ways that maintain social order, Islamic belief relies on spiritual accountability, the concept of the afterlife, and divine justice to guide individuals toward righteousness both in this world and the hereafter.

**Individual Responsibility and Personal Evaluation of Actions:** Parallelism can be asserted when the relationship between the SCS and the individual responsibility understanding of the book of deeds is examined. In both systems, individuals are held accountable for their actions, and the evaluation criteria are independent of their innate socio-economic status. Unlike traditional societal structures where responsibility is often attributed to the family unit, in the SCS, responsibility for individuals' actions is directly assigned to them. In this system, individuals are personally accountable for the consequences of their behavior, and the evaluation process is based on their individual actions. In other words, the scoring of individuals in the SCS is determined by their personal behavior rather than their inherited or assigned socio-economic status. In this context, the SCS establishes an evaluation mechanism that focuses on individuals' personal actions rather than their family background (Liu, 2019, p. 30). In Islamic belief, every individual will be held accountable for their own deeds, and the rewards or punishments they receive will be determined based on the record of their actions in the book of deeds (Karaman, 2017, p. 15-20). A relevant Quranic verse states: *“And [for] every person We have imposed his fate upon his neck, and We will produce for him on the Day of Resurrection a record which he will encounter spread open. [It will be said], ‘Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant’ (Al Isra, 17/13-14).”* As seen here, the responsibility for every action is placed on the individual, emphasizing that the accountability for one's deeds belongs solely to the person (İyibilgin, 2020). Another verse highlights this principle: *“Say, ‘Is it other than Allah I should desire as a lord while He is the Lord of all things? And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. Then to your Lord is your return, and He will inform you concerning that over which you used to differ’ (Anam, 6/164)”*. *“That no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. And that there is not for man except that [good] for which he strives (Najm, 53/38-39)”*, indicating that individuals are only responsible for their own actions. In Islamic belief, neither lineage nor belonging to a particular group exempts a person from accountability or sin. Even religious scholars, who guide others in matters of faith, are not immune to sin (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu, 2022). This understanding forms the basis of individual responsibility, asserting that individuals are judged solely based on the consequences of their own actions, independent of their



inherited status or family background. In the SCS, the fact that individuals are evaluated without considering their familial or innate socio-economic conditions demonstrates the system's aim for fairness. A similar principle applies in the Islamic concept of the book of deeds; worldly status, wealth, or social position have no bearing on the reckoning in the afterlife. Everyone is judged solely based on their deeds and intentions. Thus, it can be said that the principle of equality is upheld in ensuring spiritual justice.

**Initial State and Changes in Scoring:** In the SCS, all citizens are initially granted equal points, and these points are subsequently reduced if anti-social behaviors such as bribery or drunk driving are detected (Dehaas, 2018). Similarly, in Islamic belief, there is a principle that "no one is born sinful" (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu, 2022), which indicates that all individuals are considered equally innocent from birth. Each person is believed to have a record that begins at birth, and two angels are assigned to record their good and bad deeds (İyibilgin, 2020, p. 56). In other words, according to Islamic belief, every individual is considered sinless at birth. Thus, it is understood that every individual's record of deeds starts clean. Throughout a person's life, their good and bad deeds are recorded, and the final judgment is based solely on their actions. The fact that all citizens in the SCS start with equal points theoretically indicates that everyone begins under equal conditions. The system increases or decreases individuals' points based on their behavior in society. In this context, Islamic belief also holds that every individual is born sinless, and their deeds (actions) throughout life are recorded as either good or bad. It can be said that both systems ensure that all individuals start under equal conditions (equal scoring). In the SCS, all citizens are initially given the same score, while in Islamic belief, every individual is considered sinless at birth, forming the basis of a fair evaluation process. However, in both systems, individuals face different outcomes over time based on their actions, highlighting individual responsibility as a determining factor. In this sense, the initial equality transforms into an evaluation mechanism shaped by the individual's own behavior over time.

**Purification:** The evaluation of individuals based on their past actions and their potential reintegration is a feature present in both the SCS and Islamic belief. In the SCS, individuals who engage in negative behavior are blacklisted and can be removed from the list after two to five years, depending on the severity of the offense and the individual's efforts to rectify their behavior (Donnelly, 2023). In other words, the duration of being removed from the blacklist in the SCS varies based on the seriousness of the offense and the individual's efforts to make amends. In Islamic belief, bad deeds recorded in the book of deeds can be erased or forgiven through sincere repentance. *"The repentance accepted by Allah is only for those who do wrong in ignorance [or carelessness] and then repent soon after. It is those to whom Allah will turn in forgiveness, and Allah is ever Knowing and Wise (Nisa 4/17)"*. The Quran emphasizes that the door to repentance is always open for sinners. Repentance, from the perspective of the believer, involves recognizing one's sins, feeling remorse, turning to Allah, and seeking forgiveness. If repentance is sincere, the individual's punishment in the afterlife may be reduced. However, if the sin involves the rights of others, repentance alone does not erase the punishment (İyibilgin, 2020, p. 41). Both systems provide individuals with the opportunity to correct their mistakes. In other words, both systems offer individuals the chance to make amends within their respective contexts, but the criteria for removing or forgiving penalties require a balance between maintaining social security and justice and the individual's spiritual transformation. In the SCS, the process of being removed from the blacklist allows individuals to regain their reputation by conforming to social norms, while in Islamic belief, repentance enables individuals to undergo spiritual purification through sincere remorse and self-evaluation.

**Motivational and Regulatory Effects:** As previously mentioned, the SCS is based on a reward and punishment mechanism (Liu, 2019, p. 22). In this system, individuals are evaluated based on the points they receive as a result of their actions and are classified as "good or bad citizens" (Raphaël & Xi, 2019). In the SCS, actions that benefit society, such as blood donation, volunteer work, organ donation, and being a model employee, earn individuals higher scores. Conversely, negative behaviors such as delaying credit payments, failing to pay bills on time, violating traffic rules, or being convicted of a crime result in a reduction of points. This evaluation is updated monthly, and individuals are classified as "model citizens" or "unreliable citizens" (Jiangsu, 2019). In Islamic belief, actions that benefit

society are considered virtuous and are believed to earn individuals greater rewards, as clearly stated in Quranic verses and hadiths. Some deeds are even believed to continue earning rewards after death. Those who teach beneficial knowledge, contribute to intellectual heritage, establish social service foundations, build community kitchens, bridges, mosques, and other public utilities are considered righteous servants and are recognized for their socially beneficial deeds (Çelik, 2020, p. 171). In this context, it can be said that being a "good citizen" in the SCS aligns with the concept of being a "good servant" in the book of deeds. In Islamic belief, virtuous behaviors such as charity and generosity are positively reflected in the book of deeds and encourage individuals to engage in good deeds. Similarly, in the SCS, such virtuous behaviors are rewarded through scoring, encouraging individuals to engage in socially beneficial actions. Both systems can be said to motivate individuals to exhibit positive social behaviors. In other words, both systems aim to maintain social order and highlight reliable citizens by rewarding certain behaviors, while the book of deeds also aims to strengthen individuals' spiritual development and belief in the afterlife. In this context, it is important to emphasize that the criteria in the SCS are more objective, calculable, and observable, whereas in the book of deeds, value judgments are based on religious texts, cultural beliefs, and spiritual experiences. In summary, being a good citizen (conforming to social order, responsible behavior) and being a good servant (adherence to spiritual values, earning good deeds) can be seen as complementary, parallel processes. Both approaches encourage individuals to act responsibly and virtuously, but the effects and contexts of this encouragement occur in different dimensions.

Ultimately, although both systems are similar in terms of recording actions and imposing sanctions based on individuals' behavior, there are differences due to some features. First of all, while the Book of Deeds in Islamic teachings is a metaphysical record, the record in the SCS is worldly. In other words, the recording mechanism of the SCS is technological materials such as algorithms and cameras; the Book of Deeds is the divine will. While a person's beliefs and morals are questioned in the Book of Deeds, public behavior is questioned in the SCS. In SCS, the individual sees the basis on which the evaluation is made and is expressed in numbers, which is transparent. However, in the Book of Deeds, the evaluation belongs to the divine will, even the individual himself cannot know this and it does not have a numerical equivalent. The results of the records kept in the SCS are available to the individual, whereas only the divine will has the results of the records in the Book of Deeds. While the results are instantaneous in the SCS, they are postponed until after the person dies in the Book of Deeds. While the sanctions in the SCS are worldly, such as travel restrictions, they are otherworldly in the book of deeds.

## CONCLUSION

Societies or communities have experienced different variations of the surveillance phenomenon throughout history. Depending on the source, surveillance is sometimes provided by a divine power, sometimes by a holy spirit, and sometimes by human-centered authorities. Surveillance carried out by humans is concrete and provable, but surveillance carried out by spiritual powers belonging to the dimension of faith is abstract and unprovable. Surveillance society refers to the social structure in which information about people subject to surveillance is collected and recorded. In the early days, surveillance was carried out physically, from top to bottom, from a center such as the panopticon. Today, with technological developments and digitalization, it has become commonplace, spreading to every area of social life. In the surveillance society, surveillance has become more complex and widespread, evolving into mutual monitoring. Everyone watches each other, and even people voluntarily exhibit themselves in digital environments. With the opportunities offered by technology, individuals' every movement, such as their shopping movements, mobile phone calls, social media sharing, and internet browsing, are constantly monitored and recorded without any time or place limitation. As a result of these structural transformations in Surveillance, different variants such as synopticon, superpanopticon, omnipicon and banopticon have emerged. The SCS is essentially panopticon, and some aspects of its operation bear traces of superpanopticon and banopticon. There is an asymmetric surveillance in SCS, like in the panopticon. The logic of the panopticon is seen in SCS, where the government or authorities control the society with continuous and systematic surveillance and discipline individuals with rewards and punishments (Okmeydan, 2017). This understanding is also seen in the operation of the Deed Book. SCS works using various surveillance tools and big data analysis and gives plus or minus points according to the behavior of the people. Scoring results may

deprive individuals of some rights in public spaces. Similarly, in the functioning of the Book of Deeds, people are distinguished and labeled as believers and non-believers according to the records kept, and as a result, it is stated that the belief in the afterlife may deprive them of the blessing of heaven. When these two phenomena are evaluated from this perspective, they overlap with the banopticon logic. The fact that everyone is constantly monitored in the SCS and that surveillance is data-driven with digital technologies shows that the level of compatibility with the superpanopticon is high.

As a contemporary phenomenon of the surveillance society, the SCS uses technological infrastructure to monitor, evaluate, and guide individuals' behavior. Evolving and diversifying technologies interact with all components of societal structures, including religious beliefs and practices. In this context, more comprehensive research is needed to better understand the effects of the interaction between religion and technology. Digital systems such as AI, robots, and algorithms are increasingly becoming the focus of sociology of religion research, and studies in this field provide an important area for understanding the relationship between technology and religion. In this study, the SCS is examined from the perspective of the book of deeds in Islamic belief. In other words, the book of deeds, which records individuals' actions in this world and is believed to determine their fate in the afterlife, is compared to the SCS, which records individuals' actions and determines their consequences in this world. In this context, qualitative research methods such as comparison and literature review were used for the study. Document analysis technique was used to support this methodology. Attention was paid to selecting documents that represent the subject.

One similarity between the SCS and the book of deeds is the presence of the observer and the observed, and the other is the existence of rewards and punishments based on actions. It can be asserted that SCS has the potential to impact individuals' freedoms and privacy, creating a controlling mechanism over individual behavior. Similarly, the constant awareness of being watched in Islamic belief creates a controlling mechanism over individuals' behavior, encouraging them to perform virtuous deeds. Both systems are based on the assumption that all individuals' actions are systematically recorded and that no one can escape this process. Both modern and religious systems share similarities in monitoring, recording, and categorizing individuals' behavior. In Islamic tradition, the concepts of "ashābu'l-yemīn" and "ashābu'l-shimāl" symbolize the consequences of individuals' actions in the afterlife, while in the SCS, black and red lists represent the consequences of social behavior in this world. This similarity shows that both systems aim to maintain social order and ensure moral responsibility. However, it is also important to note that these systems differ in their contexts, motivations, and methods of implementation. Nevertheless, the parallel between the two phenomena lies in the monitoring of individuals' behavior and these behaviors are responded within a structured framework.

Both the SCS and the Book of Deeds operate through mechanisms of reward and punishment based on the evaluation of individuals' behavior. While the SCS applies worldly sanctions by placing individuals on red and black lists to maintain social order and trust, the concept of the Book of Deeds in Islamic belief symbolizes the divine justice that rewards or punishes individuals' actions in the afterlife. Both approaches emphasize that individuals' behavior will be subject to social and divine evaluation, shaping their lives accordingly. This similarity highlights that the systematic evaluation of human behavior, whether in a worldly or spiritual context, aims to maintain social order and strengthen individual responsibility. In short, in the SCS, individuals' behavior is shaped by the sanctions or rewards they receive, while in the Book of Deeds, individuals' behavior is shaped by the divine rewards and punishments they will face after death. Both systems provide a normative framework that guides individuals within certain rules. When the similarities between these two systems are examined, it becomes clear that individuals' actions are objectively recorded, and an unappealable accountability mechanism operates based on these records. In the SCS, individuals are evaluated by algorithms and subjected to judgment, while in the Book of Deeds, this evaluation occurs within the framework of divine order. In both systems, individuals reach a final outcome based on their actions. However, while the lack of clarity in the analysis and interpretation phase of the SCS leads to criticism regarding transparency and justice, in the Book of Deeds, this is grounded in the belief in divine wisdom and

justice. In both cases, however, the consequences of individuals' actions are seen as indisputable and unchangeable.

The SCS and the Book of Deeds in Islamic belief share similar foundations in terms of the principle of individual responsibility. In both systems, it is emphasized that individuals are judged solely based on their own actions, independent of their familial or socio-economic background. The SCS records individuals' voluntary actions and scores them to maintain social order. Similarly, in Islamic belief, individuals' voluntary actions are recorded, and it is believed that they will be justly rewarded or punished in the afterlife based on these actions. This similarity highlights that both approaches prioritize fundamental values such as justice, equality, and individual responsibility. While the SCS encourages individuals to be "good citizens" by scoring their behavior to ensure social order and harmony, the Book of Deeds emphasizes the goal of being a "good servant" by recording individuals' voluntary actions and rewarding them with spiritual merits. Both systems differ in their methods and areas of application. The SCS aims to maintain social order through modern administrative practices, while the Book of Deeds functions as an accounting system that regulates individuals' spiritual lives within a framework of moral and religious values. In this context, it can be said that the concepts of being a good servant (spiritual goodness) and being a good citizen (social goodness) serve similar purposes but differ in their methods of implementation and the value systems they are based on. In conclusion, both systems strive to encourage individuals to exhibit virtuous behavior.

The recording of individuals' actions, the establishment of accountability, the perception of constant surveillance, and the application of reward and punishment mechanisms based on behavior are fundamental elements that indicate common thematic structures between the SCS and the book of deeds in Islamic belief. In this context, in today's surveillance society, the SCS functions as a "digital book of deeds" in a metaphorical sense, operating in the digital realm and continuously monitoring individuals' behavior. In other words, the SCS can be interpreted as a contemporary reflection of the Book of Deeds. The idea that technological algorithms function as a kind of digital "Book of Deeds" opens the door to new ethical and philosophical debates, making this topic worthy of in-depth research. Additionally, metaphorical studies on the SCS could be conducted with different groups.



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