



**Ben Orlove, Ellen Wiegandt and Brian H. Luckman
(eds), *Darkening Peaks. Glacier Retreat, Science, and
Society***

Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2008

Bernard Debarbieux



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- 1 An interesting scientific symposium took place in Wengen (CH) in October 2004. Many specialists of various disciplines and from various regions of the world gathered for one of the very few international meetings willing to adopt a general analysis of glaciers, with both natural and social scopes. This book is released 4 years later with many presentations given there.
- 2 The book contains very different contributions. One can find factual information on glaciers at the world scale; since the book leaves aside ice-sheets in Antarctica and Greenland, it intends to cover about 680 000 km² (or 5% of the world total) of glacierized areas, most of them being in mountain regions. Some regional presentation are given for the Cascades, the Alps, Norway, the Kilimandjaro, New Zealand. However for factual information, it is more useful for the reader to go to the World Glacier Monitoring Database (WGMS) and recent report of assessments published by them¹.
- 3 The book gives also useful insights on scientific knowledge, past (Haeberli) and present (Knubel, Greenwood and Wiegandt). It also provides a good overview of the various manifestations and consequences of glacier retreat, at various scales (local, regional, national, etc.). It recalls the pace of the retreat, its various modes and causes (global

warming, changes in precipitation, ice melting, rock avalanches and other glacial disasters, etc.). Last but not least, it gathers a very valuable, because even less common, set of observations on social and cultural relations to glaciers. Some chapters focus on the mythical or emblematic role of glaciers in Ecuador (Rhoades and al for Mama Cotacachi), and in the Cascades range (Wolf and Orlove for Mt Shasta); Wiegandt and Lugon propose an analysis of long-term change of social and economic relations to glaciers for the Swiss Valais; and many others provide an overview of the main social impacts of the glacier retreat : changes in water resources and uses (Corripio and al. for the Aconcagua-Loma Larga region), in tourism attractivity and activities (Smiraglia and al. For the Vedretta Piana and Miage glaciers in Italy) ; increase number of natural hazards and disasters ; the challenge on local identities, cultural traditions, and international relations (Luterbacher and al for Central Asia); the various, and sometimes competing, forms of collective and institutional adaptation (Agrawala for Nepal, Carey for Central Peru).

NOTES

1. One of the most recent , written for a very wide audience, has been released by UNEP, *Global Glacier Changes : facts and figures*, 2008.
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