

# Loyola celebrates the life of R. Keith Schoppa, Ph.D., professor emeritus of history

July 11, 2022 | By Rita Buettner



R. Keith Schoppa, Ph.D., the Edward and Catherine Doehler Professor of History *emeritus*, passed away on June 27, 2022. He was 78.

Schoppa, who taught at Loyola from 1998-2014, played an important role in shaping the University's transition toward a more inclusive, global view of history and economics.

"Keith used his position as the Doehler Chair and as a historian of China to insist that Loyola begin to diversify and pay attention to the rest of the world outside North America and western Europe," said Thomas Pegram, Ph.D., professor *emeritus* of history. "Keith also was a passionate teacher who drew students in with his enthusiasm."

Along with Elizabeth Schmidt, Ph.D., professor *emerita* of history, Schoppa led an effort to incorporate diversity more intentionally into the curriculum.

Schmidt was the chair of the history department during the 1997-98 academic year when the department was searching for a new endowed chair, and she recalls how excited the department was to hire Schoppa. Schoppa was a professor of history at his *alma mater*, Valparaiso University, and already had a reputation as an esteemed scholar.

"The candidate pool was top-notch, including winners of national book awards in their field," Schmidt said. "However, Keith stood out even among those whose strengths were in both undergraduate teaching and scholarship—both of which are at the core of Loyola's mission."

Schoppa came to Loyola looking for a more active community of scholars, which he found and invested in, working to build a strong scholarly community within the department by establishing faculty talks on works in progress.

Over the course of Schoppa's career, he published more than a dozen books, including *In a Sea of Bitterness: Refugees During the Sino-Japanese War*, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History*, *Song Full of Tears*, *Twentieth Century China: A History in Documents*, and *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History*. Among his many awards over the years was the Joseph Levenson Prize for the best book in post-1900 Chinese history, sponsored by the Association for Asian Studies, which he received for *Blood Road: The Mystery of Shen Dingyi in Revolutionary China*. The publishers of his books included Oxford University Press, Harvard University Press, and Yale University Press.

Schoppa earned a B.A. from Valparaiso University, an M.A. from the University of Hawaii, and a Ph.D. in Modern Chinese History from the University of Michigan.

"His scholarship explored the social and cultural history of China through an intensive study of Zhejiang Province," Pegram said. "His study of refugees in Zhejiang Province during World War II won praise as a deeply moving and pioneering work on an understudied period in Chinese history."

In addition to his impeccable reputation as a scholar and academic, Schoppa was an extremely popular teacher whose courses filled quickly each semester. Before coming to Loyola, he had received the Distinguished Teaching Award from Valparaiso in 1990 and was named the Indiana Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1994. At Loyola, he received the Nachbar Award in recognition of Outstanding Scholarly Achievement in the Humanities from the Center for the Humanities.

At Loyola, he taught a range of courses, from a survey in modern China to surveys in modern Japan and East Asia. His course, "The Vietnam War through Film and Literature," always had a long waiting list. The students who were lucky enough to get into the class were typically seniors.

"Although Keith as the Doehler Chair could have taught only advanced students, he wanted to reach as many students as possible and requested a mix of classes as his roster," said Katherine Stern Brennan, Ph.D., associate professor emerita of history. "He inspired students to think beyond the stereotypes of Chinese individuals that they might have had coming into college. His ability to capture students' attention and inspire them to work harder made him a role model for all of us, his colleagues. I remember the passion Keith brought to the classroom and the joy he had when students began to understand the enormity of Chinese history."

Brennan regularly invited Schoppa to visit her “History Methods” class as a guest lecturer to introduce the students to Chinese characters and to teach them how proper pronunciation altered the meaning of each character.

“He would then proceed to explain some of the basic historical facts about the history of China in a way that left students spellbound,” she said. “Keith understood the importance of reciprocity in teaching—he listened intently to his students and engaged them in discussions no matter what their interests were in China. He inspired all his students with his stories of the complexities of doing research in China. Students began to think seriously about government restrictions of documents and to appreciate how carefully Keith had to negotiate to access material. Keith admired the Chinese people but had a clear way of presenting the reality of present-day Chinese politics in ways that brought home to the students the differences between democracy and an authoritarian political system.”

Schoppa will also be remembered for the exquisite gourmet meals he and his wife, Beth, prepared for colleagues and their families at their home in Towson, Maryland.

#### **Arrangements**

##### **Visitation**

Immanuel Lutheran Church  
1700 Monticello Park Drive  
Valparaiso, Indiana  
Aug. 13, 2022  
10-11 a.m.

##### **Memorial Service**

Immanuel Lutheran Church  
1700 Monticello Park Drive  
Valparaiso, Indiana  
Aug. 13, 2022  
11 a.m.

A memorial event will be held at a later date at Divinity Lutheran Church in Towson, Maryland.

An online obituary is available through the [Gunderson Funeral Home site](#).

## **Media Relations Contact**

If you are a member of the media and have questions about this story, please contact Molly Robey at [mkrobey@loyola.edu](mailto:mkrobey@loyola.edu).