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# Avatar Martial Arts Styles

By Rachael Kvapil, eHow Contributor

"Avatar: The Last Airbender" (the animated television series and corresponding live-action movie) is about a boy attempting to master control over the four elements so he can save the world. Each element identifies a population of people: Air Nomads, Water Tribes, the Earth Kingdom and the Fire Nation. In each nation, a select few develop abilities to control their primary element through "bending." In the live-action movie, director M. Night Shyamalan selected different martial arts styles for each bending style: Baguazhang, Tai Chi, Hung Gar and Northern Shaolin.

## Airbenders

The protagonist Ang is the only character capable of air bending. He uses Baguazhang, a style based on the circular movements of the upper body while walking a circular path. Attacks are "open palm" versus the "closed fist" used by other Kung Fu styles such as Hung Gar and Northern Shaolin. Body spinning, turning and directional changes are common characteristics to this style. Adaptability to the changing situation is a major focus of Baguazhang practitioners. The goal is to defeat the opponent with skill instead of force.

## Waterbenders

Ang's traveling companion Katara controls water through a series of movements that are less boisterous but requires the same amount of energy. Tai Chi movements used by waterbenders are more rooted than the other styles, and slow fluidity is used to relax mind and body. Practitioners focus on pulling Yin and Yang together into one power source. Tai Chi resembles Kung Fu when used in combat, which is why it is listed as an official martial art.

## Earthbenders

Earthbenders use Hung Gar, a southern Shaolin fighting style that focuses on economy of movement. Attacks and defense occur simultaneously. This style is physically demanding and requires a great amount of endurance. Hung Gar is most famous for implementing the five animal styles: dragon, tiger, leopard, snake and crane. Southern Shaolin uses lower stances and is considered more grounded than its northern counterpart. Practitioners say the differences formed from different terrains in the north and south of China.

## Firebenders

The antagonist Zuko uses Northern Shaolin to control fire. Northern Shaolin focuses on fluidity and dynamism to build powerful attacks. While Southern Shaolin uses low stances, Northern Shaolin is famous for its high kicks, long closed-fist punches and acrobatic spin kicks. This style is used to train in weapon fighting more than the other three styles; primarily the staff, broadsword, spear and straight sword. Practitioners develop precise hand attacks that are swift and efficient.

## Resources

- [All Martial Arts: History of Martial Arts: Tai Chi Chuan](#)
- [Some Thoughts on Northern and Southern Kung Fu, a Brief History of Shaolin, and ...](#)