A vast alluvial fan blossoms across the desolate landscape between the Kunlun and Altun mountains that form the southern border of the Taklimakan Desert in China’s Xinjiang province. The river appears electric blue as it runs out of the mountains at the bottom right corner of the scene and then fans out into scores of intricate, braided channels that disappear into the desert. Dry channels (the river’s former paths?) appear as silvery etchings at lower right. The scene was acquired by the ASTER instrument on NASA’s Terra satellite on May 2, 2002.

— Earth as Art II image series, USGS EROS Data Center Satellite Systems Branch (http://edc.usgs.gov/)